The world is hardly ever what it seems.

We have seen our heroes fight monsters, gods, titans, and even the very Earth itself.
But, there were rules and procedures to be followed.
A clear defined path to victory.

Now the enemy has no limits, no safeties, no restraints.
Or

Mortals aren’t as blind and powerless as the gods seem to think...

Notes

This will be told in a series of different view points. Most will be from characters we all know in love, but every now and then their will be an OC POV

The format should be one medium to long chapter, followed by a short chapter.

This is my first fic, so this will most likely be a little rough grammatically in the beginning, but I will get better!
At least stay for the plot! I promise it will be not be boring ;)}
Atlas Shrugged.

Which given the situation, was a pretty impressive feat. Forced to once again hold up the long dead corpse of his grandfather, whom just so happened to be the divine incarnation of the sky.

What was even worse was he was holding him up by his severed nether regions. If Atlas ever saw Kronos again, he would have to question his uncle on why he chose to wound his father there of all places. His grandfather was huge, which was to be expected of the sky, but his father and his brothers managed to hold their father down while Kronos used the first weapon to commit the first murder. Atlas knew for a fact that Kronos could have slit his father’s throat, but no, he had to go for his distinguished gentleman with two bags.

Atlas laughed at that.

He had learned that particular saying from some of his mortal minions during his brief parole during the second Titan war. Mortals were far more interesting now than they were two-thousand years ago. Before they cowered in huts, afraid of the world around them; now they were erecting structures that touched the sky, developed ways to communicate instantly with one another from anywhere on Gaea, and alter the very world around them to whatever suited them.

Atlas was very interested to see what mortals would be capable of by the next cycle.

“I don’t see what so funny, Fat-las,” called a voice, snapping Atlas back to the present.

Atlas looked down near his feet, to look the Roman demigod in the eye. Ever since the end of the second Titan war, Romans had been stationed to guard him and what remained of the throne, to ensure that no one would be able to free him. The demigod was small, even by demigod standards, but she carried herself with pride, and always looked eager to attack him. Her features were obscured by the armor she wore, but even if she wasn’t covered head to toe in armor, He wouldn’t bother to notice any of her features. She was after all, only a fool who fancied herself clever.

“I was merely thinking about whose bed your mother would be in tonight, daughter of Venus,” he shot back, dryly. “Perhaps another unknowing mortal who just so happens to make some kind of sweet she fancies. That was the reason you were conceived, was it not?”

The demigod raised her spear with a guttural roar and began to charge at him.

This was easier than the time he tricked Herakles to take his burden. Sure he had been then tricked by Herakles almost immediately, but unlike most titans he learned from his mistakes. If she got close enough, he could drop his father, roll, and she would be forced to carry the weight of the world. He knew there were three other demigods stationed nearby, but they would pose no threat to the titan’s general.

He was struggling to keep his face neutral. If he so much as grinned she would be made aware of his intentions.

Five yards.

Four yards.
Three yards. Atlas must have really hit a sore spot to enrage her this much.

Two yards.

“Yes!” He cried, unable to hide his excitement anymore. “Come little demigod, let us grapple until the end,” he taunted.

An arrow suddenly lodged itself in the ground in front of the angry child, snapping her out of her rage.

“That’s enough,” ordered another demigod. This one was a bit on the heavy side, and always smelled of that horrible artificial cherry beverage the Romans enjoyed so much. “One more step, and he would have been escaped while you were stuck holding up the night sky.”

The son of Bacchus waddled over to his fallen arrow and yanked it from the ground. He turned to face the daughter of Venus.

“Report back to the barracks, you’re done here. When your assignment ends here, expect a transfer and a demotion,” slurred the brat of Bacchus. “At least,” he quickly added.

The daughter of Venus shrunk down, gave a brief salute, and then departed.

The son of Bacchus turned looked up at Atlas, “That won’t happen again.”

Atlas laughed. “If I recall correctly, there are to be two demigods stationed near me at all times. Is that correct?”

“yes, that is correct.”

“Then why is it, whenever you are on guard duty, you will disappear from your post, only for you to come back with your lips stained red and smelling of that horrible beverage?”

The son of Bacchus shifted uncomfortably.

Atlas roared. “You are quick to blame others for their lack of discipline, when you hardly have any yourself! If you were in my army, you would have been flayed alive! Not for your failures, but for blaming others for your shortcomings!”

“Well then, I guess it’s a good thing I’ll never be in your army,” replied the son of Bacchus as he moved away from the imprisoned titan.

Weeks passed uneventfully since his near escape.
There were always two Romans stationed near him; one to his left and the other to the right. Each carried a ram’s horn, which were to be blown if Atlas showed any sign that he might be able to escape. The guards were on twelve hour shifts, with them switching at dawn and dusk.

The only real change Atlas observed was that the son of Bacchus, Dakota he was called, no longer snuck off to enjoy his fruity beverages. However, that only lasted for around two weeks before he returned to his old ways.

Having guards around him all the time added a new level of torture to the titan. Before, the trapped titan rarely had any mortal visitors, which allowed him to revert to his divine form. While in his divine form he became a being of pure thought and energy, and while he still would have been bound to his task his mind would be allowed to wander. In his mind’s eye he could visit his children.

Atlas grimaced at the though.

His children.

He knew he deserved worse than his current state. He had been blinded by rage, which lead him to his greatest regret.

Zoe.

“Hey there big guy. You ready for another boring day?”

The daughter of Venus had been replaced with a daughter of Mercury a week after the incident. Everyday since her arrival she had greeted the titan at the start of her watch, and then bid him farewell at the end. While she may have been lacking in discipline, he could respect her for her courtesy.

“I don’t know why you try to talk to him Veronica,” sighed the pudgy spawn of Bacchus. “He never responds, and if he were I am sure it would only be a taunt. Titans think they are better than us, and would sooner see us crushed underfoot than acknowledge us.”

“You might be right but, my mother always told me that kindness costs nothing but, buys a great deal,” replied the female. She then stuck her tongue out at the son of Bacchus and made a most unflattering noise. The mannerisms demigods adapted from the mortals were fascinating.

Atlas adjusted his hold on the sky, his bonds briefly tightening before they realized he was not attempting an escape. “Your mother is a wise woman then,” sighed the titan.

The daughter of Mercury’s body went rigid. She slowly turned in place, her eyes wide as she looked up. “Thank thank you sir,” she spat out, before quickly turning back to her post.

“And you there,” spat the titan turning his head to look at the son of Bacchus. “You know nothing of titans. When we ruled, the divine and mortal were separate. We did not interfere with them and they did not interfere with us! It was the gods who blurred the lines and demanded tribute,” sneered the titan.
“Yeah, yeah whatever,” said the son of Bacchus, while he was cleaning his ear with his little finger. “I’m sure it was a golden age.”

Atlas knew he would have a better conversation with the corpse of his father, then he would have with the pudgy one. When he looked at the daughter of Mercury though he saw something new, something he could use.

Curiosity.

The plan was simple. He would engage the female when she initiated conversation, wait for the red food dye kid to chastise him, then he would respond with something no primordial, titan, or god ever told before, the truth. If the plan worked eventually the daughter of Mercury’s curiosity would get the better of her, and she would come with questions, which he would happily answer.

There was another saying he heard from the mortals during the second titan war that fit his current situation perfectly.

_The truth will set you free._

“And I bet the titans never harmed anyone.”

“The only titan to intentionally harm a mortal life was Kronos, and he was a twisted monster. He was our leader and we had to follow him. Haven’t you ever received orders form your superiors that you have regretted to perform?”

“I am sure your justice system was fair.”

“Like any system it had its flaws. It may have demanded heavy punishment, but it was consistent. I can say with certainty and pride that we never punished a rape victim by turning them into a snake monster.”
“The hunters of Diana never takes anyone that doesn’t wish to join them.”

“As much as it pains me to insult such a close relation of mine, Diana’s intentions are far from pure. Yes, she only accepts those who wish to join, but how many are old enough to actually know what they are consenting to? Remember: Diana swore to be forever pure of men, but that vow said nothing of the fairer sex.”

It was roughly two months after the initial conversation that the daughter of Mercury approached him. The worthless son of Bacchus had left his post two hours into their shift, and if the noises coming from the nearby bushes were any hint, he was fast asleep.

She took a tentative step forward, before she removed her helmet, revealing short blonde hair. She set her helm on ground by her feet, before she sat herself down. “How do I know what you have been saying is the truth?”

Atlas smiled, “I swear on the river Styx, that everything I tell you is completely true.”

The world went still and then the sound of thunder exploded from the sky.

Her eyes widened, “Are you trying to escape?”

“Yes.”

“Would you seek revenge on the gods and their children if you were to be freed?”

“Only if they attacked me first. However, if I were to be freed I would have to knock out your fellow brothers and sisters in arms so I could make a clean escape. I would also dye your partner’s skin with that disgusting smelling drink he is so fond of.”

She let out a quick laugh before she became serious again, “Would you take me with you?”

Atlas was completely caught off guard by the question. He never considered that she may have wanted to escape with him. In hindsight it should have been expected, after all Romans were not kind to traitors. He could use her to act as a recruiter for his new army, she could even help him ascertain some equipment that he could not create. “I would be happy to take you.”

An ear-to-to ear grin appeared on the daughter of, no, Veronica’s face, “What do I need to do?”

The next phase of the plan was simple. First, Veronica would obtain a small sample of essence of siren, which thankfully was a common staple of Roman first aid kits.

Essence of Siren, when used in low dosages, acted as a sedative. The medic administering the
dosage would tell the patient that they were experiencing no pain, and through the power of suggestion the pain would disappear. In a pure undiluted form, it was more powerful than charm speak. Where charm speak was restricted to what the recipient wanted to do, essence of siren had no such limits.

Essence of Siren, a product of Trident Industries! Fitting that a son of Poseidon would aid in his escape.

Second, Veronica would slip the potent potable into the son of Bacchus’s thermos of artificially flavored, red dye number nine infused, beverage.

Third, three hours into the shift, which would allow the essence of siren to be in Dakota’s bloodstream for approximately two and a half hours, Atlas would order the son of Bacchus to take the his burden.

Fourth and the most critical step, Atlas would do some stretches and attempt to remove the creak from his neck. A creak which was caused by the crushing weight of his father’s one remaining ball.

Fifth, Veronica and himself would LITERALLY skip down the mountain, Veronica would most likely have to ride piggyback.

And once they had escaped, Atlas would seek out a therapist to help him work out his issues with his father.

Everything was going according to plan. Veronica had successfully performed her role to perfection. They were two hours into their shift and the son of Bacchus was drooling all over himself, his only purpose in life right now was to await his orders. If Atlas did not know better, he would be laughing.

Veronica removed her helmet and body armor, and grabbed a knapsack she had hidden in the nearby bushes. “Do you think we can do it now? The sun has already been down for an hour, and the other two guards should be asleep in the barracks.”

Atlas smiled at her, a real genuine smile. “I suppose so.” He adjusted his hold, hopefully for the last time, feeling his bonds tighten and then relax. “Son of Bacchus,” he called.

Dakota straightened to attention in response to the Titan’s voice.

“You will come and willing take the weight of the sky from me,” commanded Atlas.

Dakota turned and slowly approached the Titan general.

“Come one, we don’t have all day! Speed it up,” boomed the titan.

Just when Dakota began to move faster, the silence of the mountain top was broken by three cracks. Red mist erupted from The son of Bacchus’s chest along with bits of his armor. Dakota fell to his knees, then collapsed to the ground.

Atlas turned to face Veronica and screamed, “You dare betray me?! After all I have revealed to you!
“Now settle down there partner, I can assure you that the little lady had nothing to do with that young man’s sudden departure,” cried a deep smooth voice.

Veronica had already drawn her weapon, and was raising her shield when two figures clad in black jumped from the bushes and threw her to the ground. Each figure were wearing some strange multi-lensed goggles. One held her head to the ground, while the other quickly worked to bind her legs and hands behind her back.

Soon more figures emerged from the surrounding area, all were clad in the same uniform with the same strange goggles.

One stepped forward, and yanked Veronica off the ground by her short hair. “You know little lady, if we had been a couple seconds later, you would have prevented us from completing our mission,” laughed the figure. “I mean really what are the odds of you trying to spring this big ‘ol brute here on the same night we were set to attack? Seems like the angels are smiling down upon us from way on up there,” he laughed. The figure then dropped Veronica with a thud.

“Who are you? Are you Greek?” roared the Titan.

“Who I am and who we are of no importance to you really. Not at this time anyway. Greek, no, well I mean Charlie’s wife’s grandma was from Athens but, I find myself under the impression you mean not mortal, which I can assure we are all one hundred percent, factory certified, human,” drawled the figure.

The wheels of Atlas’s mind began to spin. These were mortals. Normal mortals at that. Not a drop of the divine flowed through their veins. If they were mortal though how could they get here though? The Mist should prevent any mortals from even finding this place. Wait, the strange goggles they wore, that was surely why they could see through the Mist.

Maybe these were a division of the mortals he used during the second titan war. Maybe they had come to free him! Loyal to their general until the very end like all good soldiers are! To bad they threw a monkey wrench into his plans by killing the boy. They could not use Veronica as the boy’s replacement as she had made Atlas swear on the river Styx that no such thing would occur. There were however, two sleeping demigods nearby that could be used instead. “I had hoped that I still had loyal men out there! Release that girl, for she is your sister in arms! There are two more sleeping demigods that can be used in the place of the boy you killed.”

The leader tilted his head slightly, then replied “A couple things about that. One that boy ain’t quite dead, so Charlie.” He snapped his fingers and one of the men, it was safe to assume it was Charlie, marched over to the still form of the son of Bacchus and squeezed off a couple shots into his head.

“Two, we killed one of those brats, and well let’s just say he isn’t going to be able to walk again, let alone feed himself. Well I mean, I guess you can use a straw without hands,” shrugged the leader. “And finally, we don’t work for you but, I tell you what partners, we are going make sure as shit that you will work for us.”
TO: MIKE TANGO ECHO

PRIORITY: URGENT

CLASSIFICATION: TOP SECRET

FROM: GOLF TANGO SIERRA

MISSION REPORT: KING OF THE HILL

PERSONNEL: NO INJURIES

DGs: TWO DEAD, TWO PRISONERS

TITAN: SECURED

PRIMORDIAL: DEAD

Let me start off by saying, I understand why we need all the cloak and dagger, Double O Seven, spy games shit, but as a guy who just figured out how to sync his phone with his car, I am often confused. Before I was recruited “Quantum Encryption” was something I only heard of in Star Trek.

But as I said, I understand the need for it. We are fighting against an enemy that can perform billions of calculations faster than I can blink. All the while the same enemy can take whatever form they please, and are capable of creation or destruction in an instant.

Look at me, even on paper I’m rambling, back to the matter at hand.

We arrived shortly before sundown, and quickly ascended to the peak of the mountain. Near the top we saw that blasted dragon and those strange girls, but as you theorized the paid no attention to any of us little old humans. Apparently we don’t register as a threat.

The peak was covered in ruins of what appeared to have been a palace, or a museum I don’t know or care, that’s for the research team to decide. Within the ruins we located a makeshift barracks that contained two sleeping DGs. One began to stir we administered an injection of lead into the cranium. I can sound smart too, eh? Half the team stayed behind to prepare the subjects for transport. Even with a gag we could hear the poor bastard scream as our medics gave an in field amputation, or four.
I’m honestly surprised that the sounds did not alert the remaining skeleton crew to our presence.

We made it to the top just in time to witness quite the little show. Apparently old MapQuest had somehow convinced one of his guards to help him escape. The girl had drugged her partner turning him to some kind of drooling zombie (side note: are zombies real?).

Thankfully we got the zombie in down in time (Charlie performed the head shot and the double tap, lucky SOB). The traitorous guard (referred to from now on as DG:VM) we secured, and as instructed have her constantly looking at the big guy. We severed both of her Achilles heels, ACLs, and for good measure severed her Deltoids. Don’t worry, the medics stabilized her before we strapped her into that chair. I take it, you watched *A Clockwork Orange* at some point in your life?

I was skeptical when you explained about the Law of Observation. That, if a DG is not present, then any higher order being can more less go nuclear. I’m still not fully on board with the idea though. We managed to extract information from DG:VM that the big ape swore on that river to never cause her harm. I have taken the liberty to prioritize her survival.

We managed to secure the mountain by the following dawn. By noon most of our defenses were placed, Sharp shooters stationed to shoot all incoming wild life, mine fields, automated turrets, and of course your field antennas, and here I thought the days of bunny ears were long gone.

The research teams arrived by nightfall along with the labs and living quarters. Let me tell you, those are some grade A egg heads you got there, within two hour they managed to isolate a signal or frequency. (I’m not a science guy) that can break down the cellular structure of any DG with prolonged exposure. We only had two test subject to work with, but so far it seems that the DGs without a human mother have more immediate violent effects.

Well that about wraps it up. The egg heads want flesh samples from the big guy, and I am more than happy to oblige.

One last thing though.

When the time comes, I want to be the one to slay that fucking dragon.

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GOLF TANGO SIERRA

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Chapter End Notes

Now you see what I meant by alternating short chapters.

P.S. It's only going to get worse from here.
First Period: Home Room

The academy’s intercom came alive with the high pitched voice of the headmistress, “Good morning ladies! I have exciting news!

Annabeth fought the urge to roll her eyes. It was a humid Monday morning, and her in opinion it was far to early to have to listen the falsetto coming through the ancient intercom system. Maybe if she had not been out late the night before with Percy, her mood would been better.

Percy had taken her to the Central Park Zoo as a last minute date. They had stared together in awe at the newborn elephant, held hands as the strolled through the reptile house, and laughed at the antics of the orangutans. Seaweed-brain had even gotten one of the orangutans to mimic him, making kissing motions with his lips. They had shared a coke, thankfully not blue, outside the penguin exhibit. It was both romantic and cost effective, something any true daughter of Athena could appreciate.

It had been an amazing time, until the cyclops appeared.

In hindsight she should have known better, it had been more less a baby. A six-and-a-half feet tall baby but, a baby none the less.

It had somehow managed to sneak up on both of them on their way home from the zoo. It had erupted form a storm drain and tackled Percy into a nearby alley. Percy had just enough warning to push her out of the way from the lumbering oaf’s tackle; the same could not be said for seaweed-brain. Percy’s head had connected with the corner of one of the many dumpsters in the alley, knocking him out cold.

Before the Gaea, Percy was next to impossible to knock out. This was clearly a result of spending to much time with Jason.

Apparently, Percy’s impact with the dumpster had given him a small laceration above his eye. Fun fact: wounds above the eye line bleed profusely. So when Annabeth and into the alley, and saw a cyclops sitting on her boyfriend, who was laying in a puddle of his own blood, she did the only rational thing: she unsheathed her new dagger from her ankle.

“Play!” shrieked the cyclops, while clapping its huge meaty hands.

It was play time all right. Annabeth charged and buried her dagger deep between the cyclops’s shoulder blades. It cried out in anguish as it turned to dust.

Annabeth did not bother to retrieve her dagger, instead she rushed to Percy’s side. She was relieved
to see that he was still breathing. After checking for any life threatening injuries, relieved to see there were none, she began to gently slap her seaweed-brain’s cheek to try to rouse him.

Eventually the son of Poseidon groaned, “Wise girl? Why are you hitting me?”

Panic turned to relief, and she hugged her boyfriend like her life depended on it. “Don’t ever do that again Seaweed-brain,” She cried. “I thought I lost you to a runty cyclops!”

Percy’s eyes widened, “Runty cyclops?”

“Yeah! It jumped out of the storm drain, and you pushed me out of the way.”

Percy’s eyes practically popped out of their sockets, “Oh gods, Mikey!”

Annabeth stared at him in confusion, “Mikey? Who’s Mikey?”

“The cyclops! Gods Annabeth, he’s just a baby! He found me a couple weeks back, scared out of his mind. Tyson is supposed to come and take him to my dad’s this week,” he explained, while looking around the dark alley. “Where is he? Did you scare him off?”

Annabeth couldn’t look Percy in the eye any more, instead turning her gaze to now amazingly interesting shoes. “Percy, I.”

“He must have went back down into the sewers,” interrupted Percy, while pushed himself up off the ground. He walked over to the ruined drain and yelled down, “Hey Mikey, it’s okay! Annabeth is a friend! Come on-”

Percy never got a chance to finish as Annabeth cried, “He’s dead Percy. I killed him.”

Percy went rigid, he stood straighter than Annabeth had ever seen him do before. “O,” was all he said.

With that he grabbed her by the hand and walked her back to her dorm. He said goodnight and left. This was the first time since they had started dating that Percy didn’t kiss her goodbye. Annabeth cried herself to sleep that night.

Applause broke out around her, bringing her back to the present.

“I can here your excited from here,” laughed the headmistress. “It is generosity such as this that allows our beloved academy to give you every opportunity to succeed in life! Once again let’s give our thanks to Big Apple Island!”

More applause.

Annabeth turned to the girl on her right, “What happened? I zoned out.”

The girl, Tiffany if she remembered correctly, was bouncing up and down in her seat, “Some big company came in over the weekend and installed all kinds of new networking stuff! Each student will be issued their own brand new laptop AND tablet!”

Annabeth couldn’t help it this time, she rolled her eyes and huffed, “Mortals.”
“Would anyone care to tell me the names of the Lovers of Achilles?” asked Ms. Woodley. “How about you Ms. Chase? You are usually right on top of things when it comes to mythology.”

It was true, but that was because Annabeth had the advantage of being surrounded by it her whole life. Was it fair to call it mythology though when she interacted with immortal beings on a near daily basis?

“I’m sorry Ms. Woodley. I just have a bit of a headache,” she replied. It was true, since the end of first period her head had begun to hurt. She wrote it off as a side effect of crying all night. “The lover of Achilles? That would be Briseis.”

“Tsk. I’m sorry I can only give you half credit for that answer. I said lovers. Plural,” replied Woodley. The elderly teacher then shrugged her shoulders. “I guess ten years ago you would have received full credit, but we live in an age were all forms of love are tolerated,” she explained. “Just like the sixties,” she smiled, lost in a memory from long ago.

The classroom entered an awkward silence as the teacher continued to reminisce.

Annabeth cleared her throat to bring the instructor back to the present, “Ms. Woodley, what do you mean by lovers?”

Ms. Woodley jumped, “What was that dear?”

“You were explaining Achilles had more than one lover. What was her name?”

“She was a he my dear,” answered the former hippie with a grin. “Achilles had a male lover known as Patroclus. He is a prominent figure in the Iliad but, many modern translations down play his role as lover to one of apprentice.”

Annabeth’s mind drifted back to the end of the war with Gaea. It had been such a relief that Nico admitted to no longer having feelings for Percy. And of course coming to terms with himself, that was good too, amazing even. She had known that the son of Hades fancied Percy since the labyrinth incident years ago, and for a time she considered him to be her greatest threat when it came to getting seaweed-brain’s attention. Percy was loyal, so loyal that it was his fatal flaw, she knew that Percy blamed himself for the loss of Bianca.

Gods, he blamed himself for all of Nico’s messed up life. Thankfully the son of Hades didn’t know how to express himself. Instead trying to be friendly with Percy, he pushed him away.

All’s fair in love and war.

Now Nico was dating Will Solace, which meant that he was not over Percy as much as he claimed. Percy and Will had very similar personalities. Both came across as goofy idiots, but when times got tough they became deadly serious. Percy in battle, Will treating the wounded. Both also had a strong bond with their mothers, and when it came to someone they loved they could be so gentle and caring.

“I really need to apologize to Percy,” she sighed.
“What was that, my dear?”

“Just saying how lucky Briseis must have been,” the words leaving her mouth before she realized what she was saying.

“Young lady, you wouldn’t know what do do with them,” laughed Ms. Woodley. “Now me on the other hand, I could show those two things that would make their heads explode.”

The entire class groaned in disgust.

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*Fourth Period: Home Economics*

The only reason Annabeth took Home Ec, was that Percy had agreed to take it as well at Goode. Percy had reasoned that since next year they would be living together in New Rome, they should learn how to run a household. Annabeth had been impressed by his foresight. Sure they knew how to survive on the road, but did they know how to make a budget, balance a checkbook, or cook something that didn’t involve a pre-made mix? If she was honest with herself, the cupcake she gave seaweed-brain on his sixteenth birthday was a disaster to make, and tasted a bit like ash.

Usually she enjoyed the class, which had been surprising discovery, but her headache had only increased in severity as the day progressed. If it did not let up soon, she would have to go see the academy’s nurse.

“Hey there hero!” cried a familiar voice.

A small brunette sat down next to her at their designated work station, leaning her crutches against the wall behind them. The girl’s name was Abby, and was the local guardian and Annabeth’s dorm neighbor. Annabeth was sure that her mother had placed Abby there to make sure her and Percy didn’t get too… cozy with each other.

“You look a bit pale,” observed the satyress. “You feeling okay?”

Annabeth sighed. “I have a splitting headache.”

Abby brayed, “Maybe you’re about to give birth.” Abby’s eyes widened at the realization of what she just said, “please tell me that’s not the case.”

“Gross! Gods no,” she replied aghast. “I didn’t sleep well last night, Seaweed-brain and I kind of got into a fight,” she admitted.

“I know some Olympians that would be happy to hear that,” Abby teased.

“Shut up,” laughed Annabeth as she gently pushed the satyress away.

“Don’t worry honey, you and old kelp-head are made for each other. It is completely normal to have arguments. Hades take me, Me and my husband used to have them weekly when we were kids,” she laughed.
Annabeth smiled. “Hey Abby, can you do me a solid?”

“What do you need kid?”

“Can you do the lab for me today? This headache has me out of it.”

Abby smirked. “I thought daughters of Athena always had a plan?”

“They do. Mine is rest my head on table while you do… whatever it is we are supposed to do.”

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**Sixth Period: Physical Education**

“Heads up Chase!” someone shouted just as a white ball connected with Annabeth’s forehead.

Annabeth could hardly stand anymore, let alone play volleyball. In the last two hours her headache had escalated to a migraine, then to a whole new level of hurt. She was sweating excessively and her vision was started to blur. She wasn’t even sure how she managed to change into her gym clothes.

The coach’s whistle blew, which almost made Annabeth fall to the ground in agony.

The coach walked over, “Are you okay, Chase? You seem really out of it.” The coach’s eyes went wide. “Jesus Christ,” she swore. The whistle was blown again, which made Annabeth whimper. “Alright Ladies! I want you all to change and go straight to the library. I’m going to escort Chase her to the nurse.”

Annabeth began to protest. “I’m fine coach, just over tired,” she assured. “I don’t need to see the nurse over a rubber ball.”

The coach grimaced. “Chase, you are far from fine. Do you want me to carry you?”

Annabeth didn’t understand why the coach was so worried. If she could maybe sit on the bleachers for awhile, she was sure she would be just fine. She rubbed her eyes, hoping to refocus her vision. Her fingers felt sticky, she looked down.

*Blood.*

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**Sixth Period: Nurse’s office**

Despite her insistence, the coach carried her to the nurse’s office.

The regular nurse was away due to a family emergency but, the substitute nurse seemed nice enough.
She appeared to be in her early thirties, her honey blonde hair tied in a loose ponytail, and was wearing black scrubs.

She reminded Annabeth of a possible child of Will and Nico. If such a thing were possible for demigods.

The nurse quickly examined Annabeth and explained to the coach that her symptoms were the result of a virus that was making its rounds in the schools. The nurse said that since New York was a melting pot, there were bound to be diseases in the schools beyond the common cold. She told the coach that they would alert Mr. Chase of his daughter’s condition and then call for an ambulance to take her downtown for a more thorough examination, and get Annabeth a prescription for her ailment.

The coach let out a sigh of relief, told Annabeth to get better, and ran off to the library to retrieve her students. One cannot leave thirty teenage girls alone for too long without some form of trouble happening.

The nurse, Ms. Coughlin Annabeth learned, went into her backroom to make the necessary phone calls. Before she left, she told Annabeth to lie down on the examination table. It would take some time for an ambulance to get there.

Ms. Coughlin emerged from the back room after a couple minutes. “Honey, is there anyone at school you want us to tell about your departure? Chances are they are going to want to keep you overnight at the hospital for observation.”

Annabeth slowly sat up to look Ms. Coughlin in the eye. “Please tell my Home Ec partner, Abby Pine. She’ll know who else to tell.”

The nurse chewed on her lip while she wrote the name down, “Abby Pine, that’s the girl with the crutches correct? I know it’s rude, but that really narrows down who you’re talking about.”

“Yeah, that’s her.”

“Thank you,” replied the nurse as she continued to scribble down notes on her chart. “You know, Abby’s medical record is surprisingly bare. In her record it has no mention of why she needs crutches.”

Annabeth frowned, “Isn’t telling me this a breach of doctor-patient confidentiality?”

“I’m sorry,” sighed the nurse. “It’s just that this is my first solo-posting, and the first thing they tell you to do is familiarize yourself with the at risk students. If something happens to her, I might know how to stabilize her.”

That seemed perfectly reasonable to Annabeth. “I’m sorry, but I can’t help you. I don’t know myself,” which was true, she had no idea what Abby’s cover story was. If she gave out the wrong information, it could but Abby at risk.

Ms. Coughlin smiled, “That’s okay honey.” She walked over to her desk, opened a drawer, and removed a box. “It will be awhile before someone shows up. Why don’t you an I try to figure out the rubber band loom my idiot boyfriend got me for my birthday?”

Annabeth perked up at the mention of the loom. She may not have used one since Rome, but as a child of Athena she was sure this would provide an adequate distraction. “Your boyfriend’s an idiot too?”
A deep laugh escaped from the nurse. “Oh honey, all men are idiots when it comes to relationships. What’s his name?”

“Percy,” she replied. “I’m also pretty sure I got sick because I was upset about him last night,” admitted the daughter of Athena.

“Stress has been proven to lower the immune system,” confirmed the nurse. She handed over the loom to Annabeth along with a plastic bag full of neon rubber bands. “Your eyes seem have stopped bleeding, why don’t you try to make some friendship bracelets? Maybe give one to your man?” smirked the elder woman.

Annabeth was feeling better. She had been slowly feeling better since she arrived in the office. She dug through the bag, removing any blue or green bands to use. She could give the bracelet to Percy when she apologized to him.

"Honey, do you mind if I play some music while we wait?"

“What kind?”

“Classical. Schubert’s Die Forelle.”

“Die for Ellie?”

“No,” laughed the nurse. “Die Forelle. It’s German for The Trout.”

“Sure go ahead.” The name Schubert sounded familiar, probably a demigod. A composer as well, most likely a son of Apollo.

Ms. Coughlin began to adjust a small stereo she kept behind her desk, until a soothing melody filled the room.

Annabeth was struggling with the loom. Struggling was an understatement. She hadn’t even placed a single rubber band yet. Her hands would freeze up anytime they got near the plastic loom. No matter how hard she struggled, she made no headway. To make matters worse, her headache was coming back in full force. She did not know if the music was the blame or the excessive noises Ms. Coughlin was making with her mouse and keyboard.

Click.

Annabeth set the blue rubber band down. Maybe if he used the neon green instead, she would find inspiration.

Click.
No, the neon green was not helping.

_Click_.

Annabeth was getting warmer. Did Ms. Coughlin turn the heat up when she wasn’t looking?

_Click_.

Why couldn’t she work with this stupid toy? She had made a bridge in Rome! In the dark too!

_Click_.

Annabeth snarled at the toy. The clicking made it impossible to focus.

_Click_.

“Stay calm,” she told herself. The room was starting to spin.

_Click_.

Annabeth fell off the examination table.

_Click_.

Ms. Coughlin stood up from behind her desk, and walked over to Annabeth. Her face shown no concern. “Seven percent, huh? I was expecting a lot more but, I suppose that is good news then,” she shrugged.

“What?” whispered Annabeth before she lost consciousness.
Chapter End Notes

Oh my.
Mission Report II

Chapter Notes

First, I would like to thank those who gave kudos, means a lot to a new writer.

Second, I will edit the chapters as I go. How is it you can read it thirty times and don't notice a mistake until you post it?

Witchcraft clearly.

TO: MIKE TANGO ECHO

PRIORITY: URGENT

CLASSIFICATION: SECRET

FROM: MIKE LIMA FOXTROT

MISSION REPORT: DIE FORELLE

You were correct once again. When we first started searching for DGs in the school systems, we searched for students who met the following criteria:

1. DGs must have missed excessive amounts of school.
2. DGs were prone to unexplained accidents.
3. DGs must come from single parent families.

While these criteria are still useful, the results lead us to numerous false positives. With the new information we obtained from DG:VM, which was also independently verified by DG:CD, we were able to zero in on DGs. We now have added the following criteria:

4. DGs suffer from Dyslexia and either ADHD or ADD.
5. DGs are generally anti-social.
6. DGs typically do not own any form of electrical device beyond a simple calculator.
7. DGs typically switch schools on a yearly basis.

In New York alone these new criteria narrowed the results down to two-hundred possible matches. However DG:VM gave us one final piece of information that changed everything.
DGs are often monitored by so-called “Guardians”. Guardians tend to disguise themselves by appearing as students that require crutches or wheel chairs to be mobile. This applies only to East coast DGs.

When we searched with all eight criteria, two-hundred became fifty. We then read the results to DG:VM and DG:CD, looking for any sign that the names were familiar to them. They reacted to several names, but one name had a stronger reaction than others. Even T:A reacted to the name, Annabeth Chase, referred to hereafter as DG:AA.

We learned from DG:VM that DG:AA was a leader of the Eastern species of DG. DG:AA was even seen as a hero even by the Western DG.

We contacted the private school DG:AA was attending, and informed them that one of our dummy corporations was donating a new network along with new computers and tablets for the entire student body.

I myself have to admit it was pretty ingenious of the engineers to combine the signal generator with the WI-FI cards. You managed to weaponize the populace without them knowing, that is amazing.

By Sunday evening the school became the world’s largest trap. A trap with 95 GB/s download speed.

Two agents were stationed at the school, one acted as a technician, while the other replaced the school’s nurse. The system was kept offline until the target could be verified.

DG:AA arrived at 07:45, its eyes blood shot. We learned from one of our agents that it had apparently had an argument with its boyfriend the night before.

I don’t know what sickens me more; that it could procreate with one of its own kind or some poor victim.

At 08:00 the system was activated with an initial strength of one percent. The signal strength was incremented by one percent every fifty minutes to coincide with the ending of each period.

At approximately 13:00, one of the school’s athletics instructors carried DG:AA into the nurse’s office. DG:AA was bleeding from its orbitals, fevered, and incoherent. The agent followed her orders and shut the system down to observe the recovery rate.

The agent bluffed that DG:AA was experiencing a viral infection that was making its way through the surrounding schools. This put the athletics instructor at ease, and she quickly departed.

The agent then gave DG:AA a small loom and instructed it to make a simple bracelet. It managed to separate all the blue and green bands from the bag it was provided with.

From the information provided by DG:VM, DG:AA is an offspring of G:AM, which should allow it to access G:AM’s knowledge and abilities. However, it was observed to be unable to even place a single band.

It is too early to tell for certain but, once subjected to the signal, they may be permanently cut off from their source. We can cripple any threat with simple transceiver.

The agent then began to increase the signal strength until DG:AA collapsed. The agent reported that at seven percent she collapsed and passed out at eight percent.

Additional agents arrived disguised as EMTs, who proceeded to take DG:AA to a secure facility.
To ensure no loose ends, the agent alerted the Guardian to DG:AA’s alleged illness in private, while the remaining agent set the signal to maximum strength.

When a Guardian dies, they apparently become flora.

This was quickly incinerated, along with its clothing.

As I write this, DG:AA is being prepped for surgery. I wish you would allow us to extract information from it but, by tagging and releasing it, it will in time lead us back to the nest.

One last thing.

While the contacts may not be as good as the goggles, they make infiltration so much easier.

MIKE LIMA FOXTROT

Chapter End Notes

Thoughts? Theories? Love? Hate? I

Let me know what you think!
Chapter Notes

Trigger Warning: let's see here. There's blood, death, broken bones, crying, and did I mention death?

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Percy hadn’t felt this low since smelly Gabe had been in his life. Some people would probably say he just had a “case of the Mondays”.

First he had totally blown off wise-girl the night before. He hadn’t meant to of course, he had just been in a state of shock.

It had taken him weeks to save up the money required to fund a trip to the zoo. Eighteen dollars per ticket, another twenty for food, fifty for souvenirs, plus travel expenses!

Percy frowned. When did he start thinking so much about money? Home Ec was seriously messing with his head. He hoped he wasn’t growing into the kind of adult who complained about kids touching the thermostat or leaving the lights on.

He chuckled.

Annabeth would make sure he didn’t become like that. He was positive.

His frown returned.

Annabeth. As much as he loved her, and yes he did love her, sometimes she jumped into battle mode a little too quick. Could he blame her though? After the life they’ve had?

Fighting monsters since they were ten, even younger for Annabeth. Given dangerous tasks by their absent-at-best-parents.

Percy please go to hell and find the sparkler of destiny.

Percy, would you please help me find one of my back up dancers? I’m not asking, I’m telling you.

Percy, we’re going to hide while you go kill your great-grandmother.

Percy, Percy, Percy!

For all-powerful gods, they really depended on the young adult market.

Wait, did he just go full ADHD in his own mind? Maybe his mom was right, maybe he should get a new prescription; at least for the rest of the school year.

His brow furrowed.

School. Despite all his hard work (with Paul and Annabeth’s help) his grades were dangerously low in all of his classes. The exception being Home Ec, but as they say, the exception proves the rule. If he didn’t get his grades up, he wouldn’t be living with Annabeth next year.
Biology just made no sense. Besides, didn’t Chiron and Mr. D. tell him the first day of camp that mortal science was all a bunch of nonsense anyway?

Algebra II could have been taught in German and he would still know the same amount. Naughta.

Paul had told him to take Current Events, explaining that it was a blow off class for most seniors. Key word being most. It was hard to keep up with the world, when even touching a phone could summon a herd of flesh eating horses. That only happened once. The second time it was a griffin. He was forced to use newspapers to complete his weekly assignments, but his dyslexia liked to make the articles blur together. Apparently the president did not win an award for the best cherry pie at the state fair.

World History was okay, just way to many written reports. Sure, he had to remind himself to not use the information he learned at camp. It would be awkward trying to explain that WWII was caused by in-fighting among the children of the gods. Sometimes he wondered how the Romans, Egyptians and Norse fit into all of that but, it hurt to think about too much.

College Prep should have been easy. Half of the semester they had been discussing Greek mythology. He lived it on a daily basis for gods’ sake!

If Study Hall was graded, he was sure he would fail that too. The monitor was always telling him to quiet down or to stop fidgeting.

Home Ec though, he took to like a son of Poseidon to water. Maybe it was because he thought it was useful information or maybe it was because it as something Annabeth and him were doing together.

The real reason was it was helping him achieve his dream, a dream of a family. A life with Annabeth, kids, and a house with a picket fence. His variation of the American dream.

Gods! He did it again! Way to be a seaweed-brain.

His date with Annabeth, focus on that.

He needed to apologize to her. She most likely thought that he was mad at her. He was just trying to think of a way to explain to Tyson where his new friend had gone. Tyson really needed to be around kids his own age, and Mikey would have made a great friend.

Okay, sure Mikey would eventually reform and come back from Tartarus, but that could take years.

He was also afraid of how his dad would take it.

His dad didn’t disapprove of their relationship, but he didn’t exactly approve of it either. They had enough trouble with Annabeth’s parents already.

Yes, parents, plural.

Mr. Chase did the typical protective father shtick. Before school started, Mr. Chase had flown Annabeth and him out to California to “catch up”. Everything had been great until their last night there, when Mr. Chase had asked Percy to come into his study. Alone. Mr. Chase then showed Percy his extensive collection of WWI bayonets (for a new paper he assured) and asked about Percy’s intentions with Annabeth. When they were done, Mr. Chase clapped his hand on Percy’s shoulder and explained there were places he could hide his body that even the gods could never find him.

Good times.
Athena though was worse, but far more subtle. Owls followed him wherever he went. There was even one that looked into his bedroom window every night. For hours. Owls are also not the cleanest animals either, Paul was starting to get upset with waking up to fresh owl droppings on his car.

With the constant surveillance Annabeth and his relationship was kind of stuck.

Snap.

Snap.

Percy jumped in his seat, his algebra teacher’s fingers inches from his face.

“Mr. Jackson, please stay after class. We need to talk.”

Despite his best efforts, Percy was unsuccessful in his attempt to sneak out with the class when the bell rang. Which was why he was seated in his desk, with his algebra teacher sitting backwards in the chair in front of him. He was trying, and failing, to come across as the “hip” teacher.

“You wanted to see me sir?”

His teacher sighed and rubbed his temples, “Percy, besides working with Mr. Blofis, I consider him to be a close friend.”

Percy stiffened in his chair. This was not going to be good.

“He brags about you did you know what?”

Percy did not know that, “No, sir.”

His teacher smiled, which made his red mustache curl up. “And why shouldn’t he? You’re a good kid. Trust me when you taught as long as I have you know these things. You’re the star of the swim team, you go out of your way to help others even if it gets you into trouble.”

Percy smiled, he didn’t know the half of it.

“Paul considers you to be his own flesh and blood. Now with your sister on the way, all we ever here about is how such a great big brother you will be.”

No one gave Percy this many compliments without them being followed with bad news, the exceptions being his mom and Annabeth.

His teacher let out a sigh. “Percy, I honestly hate to say this. Truly, I do. I graded last week’s exam and well, you didn’t pass. I crunched the numbers but, even if you got a perfect on the final, there’s
no way you can pass.”

Have you ever really wanted something for Christmas, only to not get it? That’s how Percy felt but, he also found Santa dead under the tree.

“Sir, there has got to be something I can do! Some extra credit? I could stay for even more tutoring! I could wash your car?”, Percy pleaded.

“I’m sorry son, there’s nothing I can do. I can’t break Goode’s policy.”

“But sir, I have to go to college this fall! I already have an apartment set up for me and Annabeth!”

“Who says you can’t go this fall? If you come to summer school, and you’ll be good to go!”

For most people summer school was an option. Percy knew that it wasn’t for him. Late August to early May was reserved for school but, the summer months were on the gods’s time.

Annabeth was going to be so disappointed.

"Hey cheer up! It’s not the end of the world! I am going to do a favor though!”

“What’s that?”, muttered the son of Poseidon.

“I know you have swim meet tonight, so I’m not going to alert the office about your grades yet.”

Dejected, the son of Poseidon got out from his desk, uttered a quick thanks to his teacher, and left. He did not feel like swimming.

How could this day get any worse?

The one time Percy took the Mist for granted and it failed him. Not only did it fail him, it pointed, laughed at him, and then proceeded to mug him.

After the disaster that was Algebra II, Percy had just coasted through the day. He would be back there next year, what did it matter now?

He did go to the swim meet, he couldn’t just shrug off prior commitments, he wasn’t raised that way.

At the swim meet is where the Fates decided that his life was till to happy.

Percy just went through the motions, back and forth down his lane, mostly relying on his abilities to make the water move him. He placed first in every event.

That had been his big mistake. Usually he would only let himself win one or two events but he hadn’t been paying attention.

After his fifth win, the other coaches demanded to see tapes. To mortal eyes it looked like Percy was barely even trying, and wasn’t even out of breath when he exited the pool. The coaches cried foul, and even his own coach admitted something was off.
They took Percy back into the locker room and grilled him for answers.

Did he use steroids? Testosterone injections? Human growth hormone? Had he been blood doping?

Percy denied every accusation.

One of the officials noticed Percy’s Roman brand, and suggested that he could hide any needle marks by injecting himself there.

Percy vehemently denied that.

Eventually a decision was reached that a blood sample would be taken and that Percy would be suspended from the swim team until the results came back.

*Great.*

By the time Percy had been allowed to leave, the word had already spread about his alleged cheating. His teammates wouldn’t look him in the eye, their parents shook their heads disapprovingly, and worst of all his parents had notified.

He knew his mom and Paul would understand but, he knew he was in for a talk about proper usage of his powers at some point in the future.

*Great squared.*

“Hey mom, Paul, I’m home,” announced Percy as he entered the apartment. He quickly deposited his house key and wallet into the little blue basket his mom had placed by the door. He walked into the kitchen and threw the mail onto the counter, followed by grabbing a bottle of water from the fridge.

No response. They must have been in the nursery; likely making Paul rearrange the furniture for the Nth time. See he knew algebra!

There was a strange odor permeating throughout the apartment. It was familiar, he just couldn’t place it.

“Hey mom did you get a new candle?,” asked the son of Poseidon as he flipped through the channels to find the game. “Because it really stinks! It smells familiar though, what is it?!“

Still no response.

Percy turned the TV off. “Mom?” he cried.

Nada.
Percy stood up from the couch while pulling Riptide from his pocket. He popped Riptide’s cap off with his thumb, with the cap landing under the TV stand. He could always get it later, or just wait for the blade to revert back.

He slowly walked down the hallway. His sister’s nursery was the last door on the right; closest to his parents’ room, while being as far away from the bathroom and Percy’s room as possible. Teenage boys can make a lot of noise trying to get to the bathroom at night. Fine, teenage boys are just loud in general.

He slowly opened the door to the nursery, with Riptide at the ready.

No.

There on the floor, surrounded by a pool of their own blood was his mom and Paul.

He rushed over to his mom, not caring about the blood as he fell to the floor. He turned his mom’s face to him and he retched.

Her face, her kind, beautiful face, was smashed in. Her skin was cold to the touch and a mix of black, blue and red.

“Come on Mom,” Percy pleaded. “It will be okay, we’ll get you to a hospital, everything will be alright. You’ll see!” Tears were streaming down his face.

Something connected with Percy’s back, knocking him completely to the ground.

“Hate to break it to you kid,” sneered a familiar voice, “but she’s dead.”

Another blow to Percy’s back.

“She’s been dead for about an hour. That schmo too.”

A kick to the ribs. This time though he was able to look up. “No,” choked the son of Poseidon, “you’re dead. Mom turned you to stone.”

Gabe Ugiano sneered down at the boy. “I don’t know what that whore did to me, but there was nothing but darkness. I don’t know how long I was there but, it had to be awhile. You’ve grown.”

Percy growled, “Fuck you!”

“Well it looks like you did learn something from me,” laughed the short balding man. “You know it wasn’t hard to track you guys down.” Another kick. “Your whore of a mother ordered all her appliances from my former employer.” Another blow from the blunt object. “Sure there was a lot of strange looks when I walked in, but thankfully they never removed me from the system. Looked up her shipping address with her account number, and well here I am.”

Percy readied himself to roll away from his former step-father. Gabe was slower than he remembered, that or Percy had gotten faster. Mix of both hopefully. Gabe lifted the bloodied piece of lumber over his head, so that was what he was using, and Percy saw his chance. He pushed himself up off the ground with as much force as he could muster, while using one hand to slash at the
It was a clean arc, connecting with Gabe’s gut and exiting just below his neck.

Gabe cocked his head, “What the fuck did you think you were going to do with that feather duster? Tickle me until I begged for mercy?”

Gabe swung the wooden post like he was a New York Yankee trying to hit a homer. The faux-bat connected with Percy’s right arm, knocking Riptide out of his grasp, and shattering his Humerus.

Percy cried out in agony.

“Well kid, I would say it’s been fun, but that would make me a liar.”

Percy may have single-handedly fought off the army of Kronos, engaged said titan in combat, and waged war with the earth herself; he had never been more afraid in his life. He had to get out of there. For Annabeth.

Gabe readied for another swing.

Percy tackled the balding man with his left shoulder, knocking the fat man over. Percy rushed down the hallway, grabbed his wallet and the keys to the Prius, and ran out of the apartment. He could hear Gabe yelling after him but, he couldn’t understand what he was saying nor did he care to.

He threw himself into the Prius, struggled to get the keys into the ignition with his left hand, and took off like a bat out of Hades.

If Gabe suddenly returning didn’t point to trouble on Olympus, then he didn’t know what did.

He got on the highway heading to camp, and turned the car’s cruise control on.

He mourned the loss of his family all the way to camp.

Chapter End Notes

And the band plays on.

We are five chapters in and the death count is at five!

Those are rookie numbers! really got to up those numbers!

When I finished this chapter i noticed that i used the rule of three. What a happy coincidence!

I don't want to spoil anything but for those who are reading and worried, there will be a lull in the graphic violence.

I did tag this with "road trips" after all.

Please give me your thoughts, opinions, theories on why HE is back.

kudos and comments make me happy, and might lead to a happier outcome for our heroes.
This turned out longer than I planned, but I fell in love with the character.

TO: COBRA FUCKING COMMANDER
FROM: YOUR MOTHER
ATTACHMENTS: DG.zip, NI.zip, Suitcase.zip, TT.zip,

Are you fucking kidding me?
I mean come on are you for real?

You have me not only develop the world’s first quantum computer, make it user friendly, actualize and implement theoretical encryption models, and yet you still want reports to be written like this is some kind of spy agency?

I don’t think you understand what you asked for. When you use quantum encryption it is literally, not figuratively, impossible to copy the information. The very act of reading anything encoded in the quantum state changes the state. In other words, if someone was to try and eavesdrop on us, we would know instantly.

Know your tools.

Anyway, let’s get straight to the point with the most pressing issue.

Rashid is a tool.

Yes, he isolated a frequency that really does a number on DGs, but he did not press forward.

I understand that he and his team are currently located on top of the mountain with limited resources. But come on! George would be more than happy to have our people fly in more equipment.

After going over Rashid’s findings, I realized that he overlooked a major point. He was so obsessed with finding a way to neutralize the signals that DGs are fed, that he forgot to locate the source of their normal signals.

You are allowing this idiot access to a budget that has more figures than there are particles in the observable universe and he doesn’t think to maybe try to locate the origin?

You are so lucky you have me.

I mean sure, I was technically being expelled when you approached me, but I would have bounced
I’ve already sent the specs for my new “Titan Tracker” to our manufacturing division. The prototype I built in my garage indicated that the origin is somewhere in the Northeast. We already knew that but, it doesn’t hurt to verify. The TTs have variable settings that allow them to search for either DGs, Gs, or Ts. I saw no reason to add function for Ps, as well, they are everywhere. More details in TT.zip.

What else did I want to talk you about?

Oh, yeah!

Rashid is an idiot.

When I was little, my parents bought my brother and I matching RC cars.

The exact same color too, I don’t know if my parents were trying to prevent arguments or were just lazy, doesn’t matter now.

Anyway, for us to play together, the cars and controllers had to be set to different radio channels. If however one us didn’t change the frequency on the controller, the car would be receiving two differing sets of instructions, causing the car to just jerk around or do nothing at all.

My brother would get so mad when I did that to him.

Why did I bring up toy cars?

Because DGs operate on the same idea.

Thanks to a now steady of supply of test subjects, I’ve been able to prove that DGs operate with a bicameral mind.

Oh, what’s that you say?

The idea of the bicameral mind was suggested by Julian Jayes in his 1976 book The Origin of Consciousness in the breakdown of the Bicameral Mind.

A mouthful, I know.

The idea is that long ago ancient man’s mind worked differently than they do today One part of the mind would “speak” while the other part listened to its instructions. Jayes believed that ancient people thought that these “voices” were the gods of old. He went on to suggest that this explained why there were so many gods, because everyone had their own.

As the song goes: everyone had their own personal Jesus.

The idea was quickly rejected by his peers in the psychology community.

It did however attract the interest of those in the artificial intelligence community. They believed the model could be used to create an intelligent program. The hope was that they could feed the program responses to external stimuli, which the program would then store that information for future use. The end goal was that eventually the program would no longer need the voice of God.

DGs are constantly receiving new orders. It’s a continuous signal, so when Rashid’s signal is applied they turn into my brother’s RC car.
Most of the time the normal signal is telling the DGs to be on standby, but if those old journals are accurate then during times of duress a DG will send a request for orders, and will hopefully get authorization to tap into a Gs power.

I hypothesize that the reason DGs have various attention disorders is so they can pick out threats in advance. If a threat is seen, they consciously or unconsciously, it is unknown at this time, the DG is able to send a request.

The dyslexia is anyone’s guess. If we were dealing purely with the Northeastern DGs I’d wager it was to read ancient Greek. But when you take into account the DGs on the West coast and the DGs in Boston, I have no clue. Seems like cheap plot device that was forgotten.

Anyway, we were able to locate the DGs method of communication with all the new subjects at our disposal.

From: “Waaah, please don't hurt me mister! I don’t know what you’re talking about!”

To: “I’ll never talk!”

They think I care. I’m not there to pick their brain. Well, not in that way.

Exploratory surgery discovered a small bundle of nerves located on the C1 vertebra. Looks a bit like a Vivaldi antenna. More technical details can be found in DG.zip.

With this information I was able to cobble together a neural interface that would block the natural signal while allowing my custom signal to pass through.

I guess what I’m trying to say is, we can control these things with a simple surgery and a signal generator.

That’s right: mind control.

I had one of the test subjects hitting itself for hours.

That says a lot about me doesn’t it?

This should give you a warm fuzzy feeling. You can do to them what they did to, well you know.

DG:AA is being prepped for surgery again to receive the NI.

Why wait for it to go back to the nest when we can tell it to?

And now for the last item of business.

The yield and package size you requested is impossible.

Impossible that is, for anyone but me.

I thought you told me this job would be challenging?

By the way, I’m all for excessive but this seems like a little overkill to take out a tree.”

Whatever,
And the band played on.

Next chapter should be Nico.

Don't worry it will be a parade of rainbows and unicorns.

Hades is driving the float.

And Lester is in charge of confetti!
Chapter Notes

Warning: this chapter contains some references to bullying. Nothing specific or graphic, the topic just comes up.
Also mentions of blood.

First let me tell you this chapter is a ray of sunshine.
You get to see Nico and Jason being bros.
A little bit of Will and Nico.
Chiron being useless as usual. (What was the point of him by BoO?)
Mentions of more bro-ing with Percy.
it’s a bro-fest!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A year ago if someone would have told Nico he would be living at camp, he would have laughed.
If someone had told him he would be happy at camp he would have called them insane.
But, here he was: at camp and happy.
It was such a strange foreign feeling, happiness.
He owed Jason, Reyna, Percy, and Will so much.
Jason was the first to show Nico that it was okay to be what he is. Jason had never stopped being his friend, even after things had settled down following the war.
That Surprised Nico.
Nico knew that people would say anything depending on the situation, yet Jason remained an ever loyal and supportive friend.

Whenever Jason came back to camp from his recruitment duties, he would crash in Nico’s cabin. A perk of being the son of Jupiter he guessed, because otherwise Nico wasn’t allowed to be alone with guys. Sometimes Nico would shadow travel them to McDonalds for a Mcflurry or a burger. The two would stay up late and chat about Jason’s recruitment efforts, how things were with Piper, Will, each of the seven, and comics.

Comics were an inexpensive hobby the two could share. Despite being the son of the god of wealth, Hades’ allowance policies were pretty cheap; Zeus was worse though. Once a month, Nico would travel to a nearby comic shop, purchase three or four issues, and read them. Jason would do the same while he traveled. Then when Jason returned to camp they would swap issues and discuss.

Jason really was the best.
Reyna had become a surrogate big sister. She would never replace Bianca but, then again maybe that was a good thing. From being with Reyna, Nico had been forced to admit Bianca wasn’t the best sister. He had to admit to himself that she had abandoned him.

Reyna now frequently called him for advice or assistance with issues in New Rome. They were a great team on and off the battlefield.

After the news of Nico’s confession to Percy, Reyna had offered to make him disappear. Permanently.

Nico had refused of course, he and the son of Poseidon were on good terms now.

Percy.

A couple days after his confession to Percy, the son of Poseidon had approach him and trapped him in a bear hug. Percy apologized until he was blue in the face about any pain he had caused him. That if he knew about Nico’s feeling he would have been more considerate and would have toned down the PDA with Annabeth.

That meant a lot to Nico.

He had hugged Percy back and in turn apologized to him for being so cold to him.

They both left with tears streaming down their faces.

Nico had thought that would have been the end of it, but he was wrong.

About every other week, Percy would IM him to invite him up to New York to hang out. Sometimes it was to a movie; sometimes with Annabeth, sometimes without. Percy had insisted that he teach Nico to board-skate or whatever it was called, and all that resulted from that was a very sore, very crabby son of Hades, and a laughing son of Poseidon.

Percy was also part of the comic exchange albeit not as much. Mrs. Blofis and Annabeth refused to let Percy read comics if his grades were in the toilet. That was about every other week.

The one thing Percy actually wanted to read and they forbid him from it.

Nico could see himself falling for him again. Not the hero but, the real Percy Jackson.

Thankfully he had Will though.

Will had made the biggest impact though.

Will was his boyfriend which, still felt wrong in his mouth but, it got less so every time he said it.

During Nico’s forced stay in the infirmary, Will had been so kind to him. The son of Apollo would recite funny limericks to him, have Nico help him cut band-aids while they chatted, and learned more about one another. By the end of his stay, Nico had been reluctant to leave, he wanted to continue to get to know the son of Apollo. Will had sensed the frustration coming from the him, and to Nico’s disbelief, asked him out.

Nico happily accepted.

Life was turning around.
“Look all I’m saying is that Percy would definitely be Hawkeye,” argued the son of Jupiter as he deflected the blow from Nico’s Stygian iron sword.

The two were sparing in the arena and discussing which Marvel hero each of their friends were.

Nico returned to a defensive stance, “No way! Percy is Spider-man! You’ve heard how he taunts when he fights!”

Jason began to circle around the son of Hades. “True, but Percy is accident prone, oblivious to the world around him, and has to pet every dog he sees,” countered Jason, as he lunged at Nico.

Nico rolled to avoid the hit. “Accident prone? that’s rich coming from you of all people.”

Jason blew a raspberry.

“Real mature Grace. Change of subject, who do you think I would be?” He asked.

“You would also be Hawkeye,” replied the son of Jupiter with a shrug.

Nico lunged at the blond and Stygian iron met imperial gold. “We agreed that we couldn’t use the same hero twice,” he grunted.

Jason was trying to push him back but the younger demigod was an even match. “I didn’t mean Hawk-guy,” grunted back the son of Jupiter. “I mean Hawkeye Kate!”

Knowing that force alone wasn’t going to win, Nico jumped back, causing Jason to fall forward. Nico then held the tip of his sword to Jason’s neck. “Round two: goes to Nico.” He offered Jason his hand, which the blond gladly accepted. He pulled Jason up and helped dust the dirt off of Jason’s back. “Explain to me why I’m Kate Bishop?”

“Easy, you’re every bit as good, some say even better than Hawk-guy. Like Kate, if you weren’t there to save Hawkeye he would have been dead by the end of the first issue. Also, you tend to make quips of your own, just dryer,” explained the son of Jupiter.

“Remind me why I’m friends with a sap like you Grace,” deflected Nico. A light blush spreading across his face. “Shouldn’t Annabeth be Kate then by that logic?”

“No Annabeth is Tony Stark. She works better with machines than she does people,” Jason laughed.

“No by that logic then Leo should be Tony Stark!”

“Leo is also Tony Stark,” answered Jason.

“We just had this discussion! No repeats!”

“I didn’t repeat. Leo is Ultimate Tony Stark,” countered the blond.


Jason wrapped an arm around Nico’s shoulders. “No you don’t. Now let’s go get some lunch, I promised Will that I would make sure you ate something.
Nico groaned.

“So hear anything from your father lately?” Asked the son of Jupiter between bites.

Gone were the days of the Jason who lead by example; well in table manners department anyway. Whenever Jason returned to camp from his “priestly” duties, he tended to eat his weight three times over. When you lived life on the road and had to rely on gods that could be described as fickle at best for your next meal, you tended to want a few extra calories in your system.

It made perfect sense to Nico, but he could tell Will wasn’t pleased.

Nico sighed and pushed grape around his plate, “He wants me to start going to school. Says no son of his going to go through life without at least a doctorate.”

“I actually think that’s a great idea, the school that is. Ouch on the doctorate though,” said Jason before taking a huge bite from a brownie.

“You only think so because you don’t have to go,” Nico sighed, “and I don’t think a brownie contains a lot of nutrients.”

“Lay off me, they’re my favorite,” Jason snapped. “Seriously though, it’s important to get an education. You can’t go on quests all your life.” Jason paused to swallow another bite. “Even in New Rome people get jobs in the mortal world. Some even choose to go to college outside of New Rome, it’s dangerous, but if your passionate about something you have to follow it.”

Nico sighed, he supposed Jason was right. “I’m still years away from college. Gods, I would be a freshman, and that’s if I had been going to school before!”

“There is no shame in being the world’s oldest seventh grader,” teased the son of Jupiter.

Nico didn’t respond.

Jason frowned, “What is really bothering you? You know you can talk to me, right?”

Nico hesitated before he mumbled something under his breath.

“What was that? I’m sorry I can’t read lips, even with glasses.”

“I said what if they find out, I’m you know,” answered Nico as he gestured to himself.

“No,” sighed Nico, “Yes. Kind of. Will told them off the other day. I also think he’s been slipping laxatives into their brownies, so they’ve been preoccupied.”
Jason gently set his brownie down as if it would explode from any sudden movement. “That reminds me, you have to read Young Avengers. Trust me, you’ll love Billy and Teddy.”

That night Nico Sat between Will and Jason at the bonfire. They sang as loud and obnoxiously as possible.

Chiron had frowned at the three, but with everything the three did for the camp, he couldn’t really say anything to them

As the night went on, Will had grabbed Nico’s hand and began to gently rub soothing circles in his palm.

Eventually all the campers had been ordered to go to their cabins for the night. Will, the proper gentleman he was, walked Nico to his cabin.

Jason had rushed ahead of the couple to give them a few moments of privacy.

At cabin thirteen’s door, Will kissed Nico goodnight, then slowly departed looking over his shoulder at Nico until he was out of sight.

Nico stepped in and quietly closed the door, then toed off his shoes.

Jason was sitting on one of the empty beds, thumbing through an atlas before looking up at Nico. “Oh, are you two done? I thought he was going to eat your face. It was like watching two seals fighting over a grape.”

Nico threw his shoe at Jason.

Nico was awoken by some kind of commotion going on outside.

He got out of bed, pulled on his jeans, and retrieved his missing shoe from the other side of what had been Jason’s bunk.

Jason had already departed for his next negotiation before sun up. This time he was after Disciplina, roman goddess of discipline. She was sure to be a huge fan of the new Jason Grace.

Jason was at least kind enough to clean up his bunk though, always a plus.

He stumbled his way outside while trying to put on his shoes.

A large crowd was gathering near the border of camp near Thalia’s tree.

Nico ran to the mob, then shadow traveled to get to the front.
Will and several other children of Apollo were crouching over someone. Will occasionally barking out orders.

The son of Hades walked over to his boyfriend to see if there was anything he could do to help.

He stopped dead in his tracks when he saw who Will was examining.

Percy.

He was covered in blood, his skin was gray, and his right arm was bent at a funny angle.

“What happened?” Nico choked.

Will turned to him, “We don’t know. One of the patrols found him like this. He must have been here all night though. He’s in shock.”

Nico swallowed. “What can I do?”

“Grab the other end of the stretcher, we need to get him to the infirmary three hours ago.”

Nico nodded.

Will gave Nico a reassuring smile. “He’ll be fine. He’s too stubborn to die. Besides, Annabeth would kill him.”

Nico forced a smile, and silently prayed to the gods that Will was right.

It had been two days since Percy arrived and he still hadn’t woke up.

The Apollo cabin had managed to properly set his arm and put it in plaster cast. They had dripped nectar into his mouth every couple hours.

They had removed his clothing (Nico left the room for that) and were both shocked and relieved to discover the blood was not from the hero of Olympus.

Nico and Will had been trying to contact Annabeth but none of the IMs were ever completed. Nico had even shadow traveled Will to a nearby service station to try and reach Annabeth on her “secret” cellular phone. It’s not a secret when you tell everyone you have it Annabeth. Nico’s dad even knew about it, and for some reason had her in something called his “top five”.

They had found Percy’s car parked on the side of the road near the camp. The driver’s seat had been covered in blood as well, which meant that Percy had somehow drove to camp with a broken arm.

Percy, what happened?
It was three days after Percy’s arrival when a daughter of Hermes came rushing into the infirmary waving a mortal newspaper around.

On the front page the headline read: *Troubled high school senior wanted in connection with gruesome double homicide*, under that was a picture of Percy holding one of his swimming medals.

The article went on to say how a neighbor had heard strange noises coming from the Blofis apartment and had called the authorities. The authorities searched the apartment and discovered the bodies of Paul and Sally, along with the suspected murder weapon. When they learned of an absent teenage son they began to search for him. Further investigation revealed that the day of the murder, the boy had been informed he would have to take summer classes and had been suspended from his swimming team on allegations of substance abuse. Authorities also discovered a history of trouble at previous schools. They speculated that an argument broke out with his parents and the boy snapped.

Nico felt like someone had punched him in the gut.

Sally and Paul couldn’t be dead. They had always been so welcoming to Nico, and when they had learned about his coming out, Sally had hugged him and kissed him senseless telling him how brave he was and how proud she was of him. It had been awkward to say the least; it didn’t help that Percy had stood there laughing.

Sally couldn’t be dead, she just couldn’t…

And if Nico was sure of one thing, Percy would never hurt his family.

*Right?*

By the fourth day word had spread around camp, thanks to impart of the Hermes and Aphrodite cabins.

It was common knowledge now that Percy and Annabeth had been trapped in Tartarus near the end of the second giant war.

It was even known what Percy had done to save Annabeth.

Nico had been having lunch with Will when the Stolls walked by talking about how Percy must have finally snapped, and that they had seen this coming now for years.

It was a good thing they were by the infirmary because by the time Nico was finished, you couldn’t tell the siblings apart.

When Nico had finished, he fled to the forest, and sat down and cried until Will found him.
“Hail the conquering hero!”, the crowd chanted.

Nico was sitting on his father’s throne, which was located on the top of a skull shaped float. His father was driving, smiling ear-to-ear.

Will was steering his father’s chariot above the crowds, while Apollo was throwing confetti and tinker tape down on the crowd.

Nico felt a hand on his shoulder and looked up to see Percy smiling at him.

Nico awoke with a jolt.

“Okay, no more comics before bed,” he sighed. “That way too weird.”

He looked over to his skull and crossbones alarm clock.

5:30 am.

He knew he wasn’t going to fall back asleep after that, so he decided to get dressed, and go check on Percy.

He hoped he wouldn’t find Will asleep at his desk.

Again.

He stepped into the shadows, and disappeared without a sound.

Chapter End Notes

I hope that wasn't too out of character, but I always imagined that once Nico was in a stable environment he would start to become relaxed with time.

Jason, Nico, and Percy like comics because there not as many words for their dyslexia to really mess with them. After all comics are like 99% dialogue.

Nico gets an allowance of $100 a month. Jason gets $50 but he uses most of it for travel equipment. Poor Percy has a chore wheel during the school year, the best he did was $35 one months.

Jason enjoys Hawkeye, namely Matt Fraction's run. Nico likes Ant-man. And Percy likes whatever the other two give him. Sally will confiscate Percy's comics, while Annabeth shreds them.
The Stolls aren't bad people here, they just take jokes too far, or don't know when to stop.

Thoughts? Suggestions?

Let me know!

I'd love to hear from all of you!
Annabeth

Chapter Notes

Contains mentions of canon typical violence, head injuries, and vomiting.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Annabeth had no idea where she was or how she got there.

She had awoken feeling incredibly groggy, with every inch of her body screaming in agony.

The daughter of wisdom slowly pushed herself off the ground. When she was finally upright, her stomach decided that it needed to empty itself. Now.

Annabeth threw up the contents of her stomach and wiped her mouth off with her arm.

When the world stopped spinning, she took notice of her surroundings for the first time.

She was at a rest stop. Around her were the already dissolving remains of four telekhines, her dagger lodged in the back of the largest one.

She felt her head for any sign of injury and hissed in pain when her fingers connected with a large bump on her left temple.

That might explain the memory loss, she thought.

Something was still off though.

Why would she stab like that? That was a good way for the weapon to get stuck.

She couldn’t ponder the curiosity further when a series of images and screams assaulted her.

First was a picture of camp, followed by images of Thalia’s tree.

She couldn’t make out what her mother was saying only understanding about every third word.

*Tree.*

*Danger.*

*Help.*

*Need you.*

As quickly as it had started it stopped.

Annabeth gingerly rubbed her head trying to soothe the pain caused from the sudden assault.
That had been strange.

Her mother had sounded so desperate.

All Annabeth knew was that she needed to get to Thalia’s tree.

She took a few more shaky breaths, and pulled her dagger from the glimmering dust that had once been a telkhine.

She found a newspaper vending machine in the shelter of the rest stop. The date on the papers said it was Friday.

Friday? The last thing she remembered was Home Ec with Abby, and that was on Monday.

Was this how Percy felt when he had awoke after Hera had abducted him? Well similar anyway, she just couldn’t remember the last week.

Annabeth looked at a laminated map that was attached to a log podium. The map indicated that she was about ten miles North of camp.

A bit of a walk, but she had walked further. Back with Luke and Thalia it hadn’t been unusual for the trio to walk forty miles a day. She may have missed Luke and Thalia, but she didn’t miss the constant travel.

She used her dagger to break the lock on a Coke vending machine and took several bottles of water.

She could answer to the Coca Cola company later.

She emptied one bottle on her head, used another to rinse her mouth out, and pocketed another for the trip.

She did a couple stretches, then starting walking down the road.

Chapter End Notes

I made an obscure reference.

Did anyone spot it?

Kudos and comments are appreciated.
Nico

Chapter Notes

Tonight:

Will eats a sandwich.

Nico wears a funny Hat.

Percy continues his impression of Jason.

Also, Solangelo fluff, hospital inventory, Annabeth's deepest secret, and Nico is just done.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Nico emerged from the shadows next to Percy’s cot.

He was breaking so many rules doing this, but Percy was his friend, and wouldn’t Percy do the same for him?

Nico grabbed the chair from Will’s work station and rolled it next to the son of Poseidon. Percy was tossing and turning in his sleep, which was a big relief for the son of Hades. Percy had been in a catatonic state since his arrival at camp, to see him moving at all was a good sign.

Nico noticed that Percy was glistening with sweat, his hair plastered to his forehead. The son of Hades retrieved a wash cloth from the supply closet and ran it under cold water. He wrang out the towel to remove any excess water. Returning to Percy, he began to wipe the sweat off of Percy’s head, while whispering that everything would be alright.

Percy relaxed into Nico’s touch.

Nico continued to tend to Percy until well after sun rise.

Will was the first camper to enter the infirmary that morning, which wasn’t unusual, being the son of Apollo and all. He walked up behind Nico and kissed the back of the son of Hades’ head, and let out a sigh of contentment.

“How’s our patient doing Dr. Di Angelo?”, asked the blond.

Nico looked up and smiled at his boyfriend, “He should wake up soon. He was pretty restless when I came in. He’s got a bit of a fever though.”

“That’s to be expected given what happened,” sighed Will, “but that’s nothing a little nectar and rest can’t fix.”

Nico nodded in agreement.

“So what time did you sneak in here?”

Nico shrunk in his seat, he did not need another lecture from Will about how important it was to get a
proper night’s rest, or how he shouldn’t go around breaking camp rules. “Around five thirty…."

“Nico,” began Will.

“No! It’s not my fault your father was throwing confetti at me!”

Will looked at Nico like he had grown a second head.

Nico spent the rest of the morning help Will take stock of the infirmary’s inventory. Thankfully since most of camp was away for the school year, very little supplies needed to be ordered. There were some items unaccounted for though; eight squares of ambrosia, two gallons of nectar, five boxes of paperclips, and six yards of gauze. If Nico was a betting man, he would place all his money on the Hermes cabin being responsible for the missing supplies.

A few campers came in during the morning sporting various burns or cuts that needed Will’s attention. Will insisted that Nico observe him to learn how to properly treat the various injuries. Nico would never be able to heal a wound with a hymn, but Will said it was important for everyone to know basic first aid. Especially his Italian doctor.

Nico had waited until Will was done with his patient before smacking him upside the head.

Shortly after noon, Nico shadow traveled to a nearby Arby’s and picked up the two of them lunch; a smokehouse brisket for Will, an order of mozzarella sticks for Nico, and they shared a large curly fry and drink. Will may preach about how important it was to maintain a healthy balanced diet, but that all went out the window when good barbecue was involved; and until McDonald’s started to offer good barbecue Nico had to settle for Arby’s to ease his fast food cravings (Will didn’t know about the late night trips to McDonald’s with Jason).

Nico had just plucked the last fry from Will’s hand when he caught the still sleeping form of the son of Poseidon from the corner of his eye. His appetite vanished and he handed the curly spud back to the son of Apollo.

“Where is she?” asked Nico.

Will finished swallowing his fry before asking, “Where’s who?”

“Annabeth,” answered the son of Hades, “It’s been almost a week and no one can reach her.”

Will shrugged, “you know how she gets about school. When she has a test nothing else matters.”

Nico frowned, “that isn’t right.”

“I never said it was.”

Nico looked over at Percy’s sleeping form. This wasn’t right. Annabeth needed to be here for him, if something like this had happened to Will they would have to drag Nico away. If Annabeth couldn’t even spare one minute to answer a single IM or even return one, then Percy deserved better. Working towards a better future is a good thing, but not if you ignored the present.
Will rubbed his temple and let out a sigh. “You’re going to go get her, aren’t you?”

Nico nodded in the affirmative, “I have to.”

Another sigh from Will. “At least go change into something warmer and go ask my siblings for my "comfy" hat. They’ll know what I’m talking about.”

He smiled and leaned in to kiss Will. “Thanks,” he smiled.

Nico was almost out the door when Will called out, “Wait!”

He skidded to a halt, “what?”

“Do you want me to pack you a snack?”

“Oh my gods Will...”

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Nico’s attitude may have improved at camp but when it came to New York, he was back to square one. He absolutely hated crowds. He always felt like all eyes were on him, and for once he was not being paranoid.

Will’s “comfy” hat was a crocheted abomination in the shape of the sun. The body of the hat was bright yellow while the “coronas” were bright orange.

Maybe it was time to introduce Will to his father, thought the son of Hades with a smirk. That seemed fair.

Nico quickly located Annabeth’s boarding school and hurried in off the busy street, thankful to get away from the gawkers. He was greeted by an elderly receptionist who informed him he needed to sign in if he wished to visit, and that the student would be told to report to the main lobby. The receptionist went on to explain that since this was an all girls school, students were forbidden to be alone with the opposite sex while on campus.

Nico scoffed. Yeah, he was a real lady killer. He could not be trusted to be alone with the opposite sex.

It did give Nico a warm fuzzy feeling to know that Percy and Annabeth had the same restrictions he and Will had. Most likely worse realized the son of Hades; Sally and Paul most likely had their own rules when Annabeth came over.

A knot formed in Nico’s stomach: Sally and Paul.

Thankfully the receptionist informed him that someone would be down shortly, interrupting what was bound to be a horrible chain of thoughts.

Wait did she say “someone”, not “she”?  

Nico was about to ask her what she meant but, she was already answering her phone.
The son of Hades started to pace in the lobby, admiring the intricate wood carvings on the trophy cases. He didn’t see any trophies with Annabeth’s name but there were several trophies for academic success with this year’s date on them, each with various students’ names. That was probably eating Annabeth alive.

Will had told him about a witch from Larry Hotter(?) that perfectly described Annabeth to the T. Maybe Will was right, maybe he should start learning more about popular culture. But wasn’t that what the comics were for?

“Why was it getting so hot in here?”, whispered the son of Hades. He removed the ridiculous hat from his head, his hair now messier than usual. Great hat Will!

“Mr. Di Angelo?” asked a soft voice, interrupting his internal rant.

Nico turned in place to see a short plump woman in pink scrubs. Will had tried make him wear a similar color once. Keyword: once. “Yes that’s me,” he answered with a smile, offering his hand for her to shake.

She happily accepted his hand, complimented his manners, and introduced herself as Ms. Jennings. “I don’t mean to come across as rude, but I was expecting Annabeth.”

“That’s why I’m here. Ms. Chase was admitted into a hospital earlier this week,” explained the nurse.

Nico tugged at his collar, stupid sweaters. “Is she alright? Well I mean she’s in the hospital so I know she’s not, but I guess what I mean is she going to be okay?”, the son of Hades babbled.

Ms. Jennings nodded, “She’ll be fine. I wasn’t here when it happened, out of town for a family emergency, but my replacement took care of her.”

Well that was a relief. “Can you tell me which hospital?”

The nurse shook her head, “I’m sorry honey, only parents or legal guardians are allowed to that information.”

Nico felt a headache coming on. “Can you give me her dad’s number then?”

Again the nurse responded in the negative. “Family only dear.”

Nico rubbed his temples, great Percy is unconscious and wanted for murder, while Annabeth had apparently fell of the face of the earth.

“Honey are you not feeling well?”, asked the nurse. “You’ve grown three shades paler since we started talking, and you are sweating up a storm.”

“I’m fine,” the son of Hades assured her. “Just a little headache.”

“If you say so dear. Why don’t you go home and get some rest,” she suggested.

“I think I will,” he agreed.

He said his goodbyes, put Will’s ridiculous hat back on, and left the building.

He made it to the street corner before he emptied the contents of his stomach on the pavement. Arby’s did not taste as nearly good coming up as it did going down.
Nico sat down on a park bench that overlooked a rather large fountain.

The fountain looked vaguely familiar too. He was pretty sure it had been used in the opening of a television show Percy had forced him and Jason to watch. *Buddies*? That sounded right. While Percy had laughed at the show almost non-stop, Jason and Nico had maybe only understood every third joke. It was after the third episode that Percy noticed that the other two thirds of sons of the big three weren’t having nearly as much fun. Percy then got up from the couch and placed a small record in a sliding tray, and something called the *The Three Stooges* came on the screen.

That had been something all three had been able to appreciate equally.

Sally and Paul had walked in on the three boys slapping and poking each other in the eyes. Sally just rolled her eyes and went into her bedroom, while Paul gave the boys a thumbs up for their taste in humor.

That had been a great day.

Nico rested his head in his hands. It seemed that the further away he got from the school the better he felt. Maybe the school had some kind of mold that he was allergic to, or one of those security systems that emitted a pitch that only kids could hear. Nico frowned. It was highly unlikely to be the later, it would seem counter intuitive for a school to use something that could potentially harm its students.

Nico took stock of the current situation. Percy was unconscious and wanted by the mortal police for the death of his parents and Annabeth was in one of over sixty hospitals spread through out the boroughs of New York City. He hoped this wasn’t the start of a quest.

“Son of Hades we need to talk,” said a cool female voice.

*Oh gods damn it.*

“Lady Athena, why have you graced me with your presence?,” asked the son of Hades without looking up.

Nico felt the goddess sit down beside him. “I have a request for you.”

Athena conjured a small notepad and pen in her hands, and began to sketch the fountain. Annabeth was definitely her daughter. “I need you to search my favored daughter’s quarters for any signs of where she went,” she explained.

Wow did she really just say “favored daughter”? Nico briefly wondered how she referred to her other children. Sure his dad had said Bianca had been his favorite, but he had later apologized, explaining he had said that out of anger. Hades had then awkwardly embraced his son; it was made
awkward by fact Nico’s face had been pressed against the face of one of the many souls that composed his father wardrobe.

“What was that spawn of Hades?”, she asked without looking away from her work.

“Nothing lady Athena,” he quickly assured. “Wait, do you not know where Annabeth is?”

“Of course I do”, she scoffed. “I just need you to verify it.”

So that was no.

“The school nurse told me Annabeth had been taken to a hospital, that she had fallen ill,” explained the son of Hades. “She couldn’t tell me which hospital, but she did say a parent could request that information.”

“I requested that Frederick not list me on any of my daughter’s paperwork.”

“May I ask why?” questioned a now confused son of Hades.

Athena’s face twisted into a scowl. “I refuse to be referred to as “Mrs. Chase”.”

Nico frowned. Right the whole eternal virgin thing. Did it really count at this point anymore? The Athena cabin was the third most crowded cabin, following the Hermes and Ares cabins. By her logic that meant Nico would also be a virgin for the rest of his life, and he couldn’t have kids.

“Care to elaborate on that?” She asked. She had set her notepad aside and was glaring daggers at the Italian.

“I was just thinking that I don’t know which dorm is Annabeth’s,” he lied.

Athena placed a finger on Nico’s brow. “Don’t worry, I’ll send you there.”

Nico’s stomach churned as the world fell out from under him.

He seriously hoped that someday soon, Athena would encounter someone with a dirty mind; there was no protection for that.

Nico landed with a thud on what he assumed was Annabeth’s bed, the ceiling only inches from his face.

Each dorm room was built for two. The room was bilateral, a desk and cabinet were tucked away under a loft style bunk bed, near the entrance to the room was an armoire, the only natural light coming in from a small barred window in the back of the room. One half of the room was a complete pigsty though, it must have driven the ever prim daughter of Athena insane to stay with such a slob.

It would have annoyed Nico, that’s for certain. After living more or less on the road for a couple years, Nico had become obsessed with keeping his living accommodations immaculate. Something which Percy and Jason endlessly roasted him about. Sometimes Jason would toss a crumpled piece of paper on to the floor of cabin thirteen and would time how long it took before Nico cracked and picked up the piece of trash. The record was one minute thirty-two seconds.
Nico climbed down from the bunk and started searching the desk for anything that could tell him where Annabeth was located; a note, or even an address book that had Mr. Chase’s phone number in it. That way he could just call and ask which hospital she was at. It was probably some Christian affiliated hospital, the gods tended to stay away from those for “reasons” as his father had explained to him.

The only problem was that none of the stuff looked like it belonged to Annabeth. When he looked at the peg board he understood why, this wasn’t Annabeth’s stuff, which meant…

Great, now he had to search through piles of clutter. Nico rubbed his head feeling another headache coming on. The good news though was Nico finally had something on the daughter of Athena.

“More like wisdom’s favored hoarder.” Nico frowned; he’d work on it.

Nico began his search for answers on Annabeth’s peg board. There were numerous pictures pinned to the wall. There were pictures of her standing behind Chiron, in his chair of course, a picture of what he assumed was her dad, stepmother, and mortal half-siblings, numerous pictures of her and Percy, and even one with Nico that had been taken on Percy’s sixteenth birthday. Nico was touched by that, he was the only camper besides herself and Percy on the wall.

He next turned his search to the mounds of clutter on her desk. Books on architecture, Norse mythology, algebra, and a variety of other topics were thrown about. Curiously there was a picture of Tom Hiddleston with the word “Loki?” written in Annabeth’s handwriting wedged in the mythology book.

Finding nothing more of interest, Nico turned his attention to the desk drawers. In the top he found her cellular phone but its battery was dead.

Nico tugged at his sweater, gods why was this school so hot?

In the bottom drawer he found a half eaten apple.

Nico swore. “Gods Annabeth! Do you want ants? Because that’s how you get ants!”, he cried. He grabbed what he thought was a blue handkerchief from Annabeth’s bed to remove the apple. It wasn’t until he set down the apple-handkerchief combo that he realized his mistake.

What he grabbed wasn’t a handkerchief, but a pair of Annabeth’s underwear.


For some reason Nico had been unable to shadow travel out of the school, which meant he had to sneak out the old fashioned way.

It wasn’t until he safely out of the school that he realized Athena never told him were to report his findings.

He decided to try the fountain.
“It’s rude to make assumptions Mr. Di Angelo.”

Athena sat at the same park bench, this time wearing a dark grey suit, and using a stylus on some kind of tablet.

“I apologize lady Athena, I just did not know where else to go,” explained the son of Hades as he sat down next to the goddess.

“Well it was your fault then for not thinking to ask. Lucky for you I am generous with my time,” she replied curtly.

Nico let out a long sigh. “I found nothing out of the ordinary.”

“I figured you would find as much.”

The son of Hades sighed again. Then why did she send him in the first place? “The only thing of interest was that your daughter is extremely untidy,” he quipped.

“Genius often requires a chaotic environment to thrive,” she answered, as if she was talking down to a child. “Obsessing over the cleanliness of one’s environment often indicates deep insecurities.”

This is stupid thought Nico. He stood up and politely bowed to the goddess and began to walk away only to stop. “There was one interesting thing I found though.”

For the first time since his arrival Athena looked up from her tablet. “Oh? And what might that be?”

“Your daughter wears blue underwear,” he explained.

“What’s so interesting about that?”

“Percy’s favorite color is blue,” replied the son of Hades before he shadow traveled back to camp, leaving behind an infuriated goddess.

Nico appeared just outside the infirmary. Will didn’t like it when he would pop directly inside. He explained that you could never be sure what was going on inside the infirmary and he didn’t want Nico to interrupt a delicate medical treatment. That made sense to Nico, and most days he was more than happy to comply.

Today was not one of them though.

“Hey death breathe!” cried Clarisse. “Nice Hat!”

Nico stalked into the infirmary.

Will was at his desk doing some paperwork when he noticed Nico. His face lit up with a million-watt
“Hey!” he cried. “You wore my comfy hat!”

Seeing Will’s smile, Nico decided he must never let Will know how much he despised the crocheted affront to the gods. “It’s my comfy hat now,” pouted the son of Hades.

Somehow Will’s smile grew even brighter.

Stupid children of Apollo with their ability to light up the room.

Will’s smile disappeared though when he noticed Nico was alone. “I take it you couldn’t find her?”

“Well yes and no,” answered the Italian. “More no than yes.”

Will looked at him. A confused look on his face.

Nico let out another sigh. He had been doing that a lot today. “The school’s nurse told me that Annabeth had been hospitalized at the beginning of the week. Some kind of bug going around.”

“One of the many joys of going to school.”

“Says the future doctor.”

Will blushed, “Touche.”

“Anyway we know she’s in a hospital.”

“But the nurse wouldn’t tell you which one,” finished the blond.

“Yup.”

Nico then proceeded to Will about the rest of his day, leaving out some of the embarrassing bits.

“You’re most likely right about there being mold. Most of those old building are in desperate need of a deep cleaning,” explained the son of Apollo. “But when you combine a sanitation staff that is only paid minimum wage, and a bunch of kids, forget it. Becomes too impractical to keep everything that clean.”


“And Annabeth being a total pig? That is amazing I wish you could have got a picture! My cabin could use it as blackmail when she does inspection! It’s a bit hypocritical that she demands such high standards from the rest of us when she can’t even throw out an apple!”

“And why would I let the Apollo cabin have MY blackmail?” asked the son of Hades.

Will leaned in so close, Nico thought he was going to kiss him. “Well I’ve heard you’ve got yourself a cute boyfriend over there,” whispered the son of Apollo.

Nico turned scarlet. Nico then cracked a sly smile. “Who said he was cute?”

Nico then jumped up from his chair and ran while Will gave chase.
It was just after sundown when a son of Demeter ran into the infirmary. Nico had been helping Will close up the infirmary for the night when the out of breathe kid skidded to a halt in front of them.

“Will,” huffed the kid. “They found Annabeth.” He paused for another breath. “She’s by Thalia’s tree, but something is wrong with her. She won’t let anyone near her, and well, she’s just speaking nonsense.”

Will frowned at the news, and partially at how out of shape the camper was, and went and grabbed a first aid kit from behind his desk.

The three were almost out the door when they heard Percy groaning in his sleep.

Will stopped in his tracks and turned to Nico. “Why don’t you stay and tend to him. If he wakes up it would do him good for the first person he sees is a friend.”

Nico nodded in agreement, and jogged over to Percy.

The son of Poseidon was tossing in his sleep again, but thankfully when Nico held his hand to Percy’s forehead he felt no fever.

To err on the side of caution, Nico went and got another wet washcloth.

He had just finished wiping off the slumbering son of Poseidon’s head when Nico was blinded by a flash of light.

A sound of ten thousand thunderbolts filled the night sky.

Going purely on instinct, Nico opened up the shadows and pushed Percy through. He was almost through himself when a wave of pure heat hit him, propelling him through the shadows.

Chapter End Notes

And the band plays on.

O look what started out as a really fluffy chapter ended with, well, a bang!

I like Annabeth, really I do, I just wanted her to have more flaws than just being prideful.

Nico is kind of a young Sterling Archer to me. Nico also still struggles with modern concepts and technology.

Every man alive loves the three stooges, that is a fact!

The next chapter will be from a POV that is rarely seen. I think I've only ever seen it used three times myself.

Feel free to guess in the comments. If you guess right, I won't tell you until the next chapter is out, but you'll have bragging rights.

and as always please give me your thoughts, theories, recipes for potato salad, in the comments, and if you like story leave a kudos.
Until next time, stay classy.
Dionysus reassembled himself on the ashes that had been the big house only moments ago. He did make some changes to his mortal shell though, opting to look more like Curtis Armstrong. This new form should make him look less approachable to the brats under his protection.

Well, *were* under his protection he corrected himself.

He surveyed the destruction around him. The world would have been monochrome if not for the few fires that burned throughout the remains of what had once been Camp Half-Blood.

There wasn’t a structure left standing, even the stone slab that made up the foundation of the dining pavilion had shattered into a million little pieces.

The once lush fields whose harvest paid for the camp’s mortal expenses were nothing but smoldering ash now.

Dionysus frowned. Those fields had been his one source of joy in this gods forsaken dump. That and his kids he had to remind himself. Looking back he should have thought of his kids first, then fields. Wait the council was first. Wait no, the kids. Okay so it was his kids first, then the council, and then the fields. Nailed it. It was a little known fact that Dionysus was the most caring of all the Olympians when it came to the half bloods, and he prided himself on that fact.

He was one amazing caring god.

He continued to survey the damage around him.

The forest that was inside the camp’s borders was dead. Many of the trees had been uprooted, some were snapped into pieces, and many were charred. All that remained of the smaller forms of plant life were the ashes that were raining down from the sky.

Great, he would have to hear about this from Demeter, Persephone, and Artemis for the next century or so.

The lake wasn’t any better. The once thriving aquatic life that had inhabited the lake was now floating belly up. The previously crystal clear waters were now black with ash. The surface of the lake was covered in various debris; trees, chariots, corpses, that kind of stuff.

The world around him was eerily quiet, the only sound being the crackling of flames. There were no longer any campers laughing, naiads gossiping, or satyrs playing their woodland instruments.
Dionysus ripped one.

“Thank Zeus, I’ve been holding that in for twenty years now!” he exclaimed to the charred world while fanning his back side.

Feeling relieved, Dionysus began recall the events leading up to the destruction of the world around him.

The morning had started off normal enough. Some campers had been caught sneaking around past curfew the previous night so he had issued their punishments; one week of giving him foot rubs. They should have been flattered to receive such an honor, but demigods were a strange lot. You could lead a chimera to water but that didn’t mean it would tickle the naiad.

Shortly after that his kid, #1356, had joined him on the big house’s deck where Dionysus had attempted to teach him Blackjack. It was a wasted endeavor though. Who hits on nineteen? #1356 departed shortly before the midday meal.

While everyone was occupied eating, He had tried to transform a bottle of water into a bottle of Chateau de Chassilier. He had been so close to! The liquid had just turned a shade darker, when everything snapped back to normal. Not for the first time, Dionysus considered converting to Catholicism. As far as he knew, every Sunday they would gather at a church and eat some kind of cracker and drink wine. Those sounded like his kind of mortals! Well, them and the Italians.

Speaking of Italians, that son of Hades: Maya Angelou, had left camp shortly after that. He supposed he should have gone after the kid, as was his job/punishment, but whatever.

After that he had walked into the woods for a meeting with the council. The satyrs complained about how the mortals were destroying the environment, that the fauns needed to be deported back to the ancient lands, and the ever rising cost of prosthetic feet. In other words: same shit, different millennium. The mortals were due for another mass die off, the fauns would soon be forgotten, and the satyrs should use wheel chairs as their disguise like Chiron did.

After the meeting he returned to the big house for a well deserved nap, he had worked hard so he deserved as much. He woke up when he felt the Hades kid return. That kid was spending a lot of time in the infirmary. Chiron had mentioned something about that, but he had just smiled and agreed with whatever the centaur suggested.

Following that he and Chiron had sat on the porch and played poker. He may have used the Mist to obscure that from the demigods. If they looked at the pair they would appear to be playing pinochle.

There had been some kind of commotion at the camp’s border, but that had been a daily occurrence now for the last five years.

And then the world had exploded.

Okay, so walking through the events of the day had not helped.

So he had two theories now.

The first was that the cumulative hangover from millennia of hard drinking had finally caught up with him. So powerful was the hangover that not only had it torn himself asunder, but the very world around him.

Oh, how he had pleaded with Zeus to not cut him off cold turkey! Because of king of Olympus’s pettiness most of the gods children were dead. It would take poor Chiron at least a week to pull
himself together! Both literally and figuratively, if the smoldering hoof he was standing on was any indication.

“Ugh,” shuddered the god as he kicked the hoof away.

Okay the hangover thing was unlikely, it had only happened once before back in 1908.

What was far more likely was that the demigods blew themselves up.

*Again.*

Demigods, especially the spawn of Hephaestus, liked to meddle with things beyond their understanding.

In Rome it had been Greek fire, ironic he supposed. That event lead to the great fire of Rome, where Nero was blamed.

Wasn’t Nero still around? And wasn’t Apollo battling him or something? Or had he dreamed that? Not important.

After that, it had been decided to keep two groups of demigods active and separated to ensure there was always enough demigods on hand.

Although it had been fun working to refill the ranks.

After Rome had been the Great London Fire. They still weren’t entirely sure what caused that one. It had been hard to sleep during that with all the screaming going on.

Then there had been the American Civil war, where the two camps finally met each other. That had happened on Ares/Mars watch, and while he swore he had nothing to do with it. Everyone knew better though and it had been decided that Ares/Mars was never to be left alone with the camps again.

The 1906 San Francisco earthquake followed that. A son of Neptune had been trying to impress a daughter of Jupiter and had lost control. Neptune would go on to deny that of course and even changed some records to favor his son.

Then there was the incident in 1972. The camp hadn’t been damaged thankfully.

Gas leaks: the silent killer.

That brought him to now. If he wagered a guess, it would be that the son of Hephaestus was showing off to his new girlfriend, the newly freed Calypso, and something went sideways.

Of course if Calypso was there she should have reformed by now. Unless she chose to die with her “beloved”. She was dramatic like that, and her stay on that island had only made it worse.

Dionysus sighed, it wasn’t doing anyone any good for him to just stand there in the ashes. He would have to return to Olympus and report what had happened. As if they didn’t already know… Aphrodite’s gossip mill was faster than Hermes.

He shifted the remains of the big house and brought Seymour up from debris. Unlike everything else at camp, demigods included, Seymour was irreplaceable! It was a good thing Dionysus had the foresight to enchant him to be fireproof!

He had just finished dusting off Seymour, when mortal vehicles drove over hills that surrounded the
camp. They were soon followed by several mortal flying machines, not the fixed wing things, the ones that spun around.

Right, that tree was dead. That meant mortals could not only find the place but get in as well. These were most likely mortal law enforcement, coming to investigate why three hundred plus acres of forest had suddenly been turned to ash.

He would have to use the “yeti mind trick” on them and send them on their way; the Mist would return soon to hide the camp again.

Four of the wheeled mortal vehicles surrounded him. Mortals wearing black armor and strange glasses exited the vehicles and leveled their weapons at the god of wine.

One however, walked right up to Dionysus and looked the god over. “Dionysus I assume,” stated the mortal with southern drawl.

Dionysus frowned. Well this is certainly new.

“Was not expecting you to look like Booger from Revenge of the Nerds,” shrugged the mortal.

Well this mortal at least had taste if he recognized the greatest actor of century.

The god looked up at the mortal. “I’m afraid you have me at a disadvantage here. You know me, but I have no idea who you are.”

The mortal laughed. “Christ almighty! You even sound like him partner!”

The god of wine cleared his throat.

The mortal stopped laughing, “Oh right, you can call me George.” The mortal then shrugged, “Not that it really matters.” Then faster than a man can blink the mortal punched the god in the nose.

Dionysus dropped like a ton of bricks. “What the fuck!” he cried as he covered his nose with his hands trying to ease the pain. This mortal had no idea who he was messing with! He would know soon enough when he spent the rest of pathetic mortal life as a dolphin! Or Seymour’s new butt!

The god attempted to summon his power and threw his arms out at George. Necessary, no. Fun, yes. “Feel my wrath mortal!” cried the god.

Nothing happened. Not even a single blow hole.

“I said, feel my wrath!” he cried, throwing his hands out again.

Again nothing. The only thing that changed was that some of the mortals were laughing now.

“I swear this has never happened before, just ask my wife.”

The mortals howled with laughter.

The one known as George crouched down to Dionysus’s level. “You haven’t figured it out yet have you?” The mortal then wiped his index finger under the god’s nose, and then showed the god his blood covered finger.

Red blood.

Dionysus felt something he hadn’t truly experienced in years: fear.
Why had he chosen Curtis Armstrong of all people! He should’ve chosen Stallone, Schwarzenegger, or even Seagal for Zeus’s sake! All of them were intimidating! Every other god’s mortal form looked, well god-like. But no! He had to be different!

The god did the only thing he could think of now: he threw Seymour as hard as he can.

“Run Seymour!” cried the god. “Go get help!”

Seymour of course, was only a head so he only went as far as Dionysus threw him; about five feet. The mortals were laughing their collective asses off.

George once again punched the now apparently-mortal-god in the nose.

“Stop doing that!” he cried.

“No can do partner,” George laughed. “You see I’m supposed to hand you over to R&D when they arrive, so I’m going to have my fun with you while I can. You see, I’ve already slain a dragon, which is impressive to us normal folk. Unfortunately, that’s probably something your kind does a lot of.”

Another punch.

“But how many people can say they beat the shit out of a “god” with their bare hands? I reckon that’s impressive no matter who you are.”

Another punch. Seriously, what was this guy’s hang up with his nose?

“The way I see it partner, by the time all this is over, not only will I get to deliver justice, but I’m going to be a god damn legend.”

This time a mortal came up from behind the god and smashed the back of his head with the stock of his gun.

The last thing Dionysus saw before he passed out was Seymour using his tongue to drag himself across the ground.

Chapter End Notes

So the death toll is now over a hundred.

hundreds if you count the various creatures that cohabited with the demigods of Camp Half Blood.

This was honestly my favorite chapter to write so far. The original plan was this chapter was maybe going to be about 500 words or so, but that quickly multiplied.

It was dark but also in my opinion, pretty humorous.

If you liked what you read leave a kudos if you feel like it.

Drop a comment too. Let me know what you think, how you think i’m doing, or what you think is going to happen.
Thanks for reading.
Percy

Chapter Summary

Tonight:

A flashback

Percy works to become a good friend,

Nico makes the perfect Slurpee,

and the two confuse each other about Captain America movies

Another fluff chapter, before stuff

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It wasn’t the first time Percy had woke up in the crushing embrace of the son of Hades. On the contrary, this was about a monthly occurrence now.

Percy just honestly didn’t care, Nico felt good against him, and the son of Poseidon passed back out.

Percy had kept his word after Tartarus and had worked to become a better friend; the kind of friend Nico deserved. They were both sons of the big three, they should’ve been best friends from the start! But between Nico being mislead by Minos and then Hades, Percy had been hesitant to trust the guy. After the fall of Kronos though things had improved between them, at least for awhile anyway. Shortly after Percy’s sixteenth birthday Nico had begun to pull away from him.

It made sense looking back now though. He and Annabeth had been in what his mom called the “honeymoon” phase of their relationship, so of course Nico wouldn’t have wanted to be around that.

Looking back now, Percy had done nothing to repair his friendship with the young son of Hades. He had been so caught up in everything that was Annabeth that he let Nico slip into the shadows. Uh, metaphorically, that is.

Then quickly followed the headache that was Gaea.

He had “met” Nico at Camp Jupiter, with Percy only knowing his name and Annabeth’s. The least the ambassador of Pluto could have done was give him a clue to, well everything.
Dick move bro.

So when Percy had finally regained his memories of course he wanted to throttle the Italian.

The rest of the war had been a repeat of the previous. Percy would lose trust in Nico, Percy would hurt Nico by emotionally, etc…

Then Nico had pulled the rug from under Percy’s feet when he revealed admitting to having feelings for the son of Poseidon.

He had not seen that coming.

Annabeth claimed she knew, but Percy secretly believed that she was just saying that.

And what had that high five been about? He had later asked Nico about it, and he admitted to being as clueless as Percy.

Percy at first was awkward around the son of Nico, and honestly had avoided him until he could come to terms with the revelation.

But one day, he manned up, and invited Nico to visit him in New York.

It had been one of best decisions Percy had ever made!

Nico’s lack of experience with the mortal world meant Percy had to explain the finer things in life to the Italian: like skateboarding. Or as the time displaced demigod called it: board-skating. It was now Percy’s sworn duty to ensure Nico was a well rounded individual!

The first time Nico had visited had been the best though.

They had been in Manhattan one lazy Saturday morning, Percy was taking Nico to try the best Slurpees in the world. It would also be Nico’s first Slurpee and Percy was actually a little jealous; how luck was it that not only was Nico going to try the best Slurpee anywhere, but it was also going to be his first?!

He had been explaining the Do’s and Dont’s of Slurpee flavors and he had thought the son of Hades was right behind him.

“You never mix the Cola with any fruit flavors,” explained the son of Poseidon. “The only exceptions being cherry and blue raspberry. Note I said blue raspberry, red is out of the question. Got that Neeks?”

No response.

“I said, you got that Neeks?”

Nothing. Nico may have hated crowds but he would at least acknowledge the son of Poseidon.

Percy looked back to see the son of Hades about a thirty feet behind him, looking into a window display. Percy walked against the current of people, apologizing every now then, until he was next to Nico.
“Hey Neeks, something catch your eye?” Percy looked into the window that had enthralled Nico; it was a comic shop. The window was covered advertisements for different comics, there was a table with various game pieces displayed, but the centerpiece of the display was a life-sized Captain America statue. “You like Captain America Neeks?”

The son of Hades nodded. “My mother bought me the first issue when we came to America. I didn’t know he was still around.”

Percy shrugged, “Yeah, but lately he’s gotten extremely popular, what with the movies and all.”

“She took me and Bianca to see it,” he explained.

Percy frowned. That couldn’t be right the first movie only came out a few years ago. “Do you want to go in and look around?”

Nico perked up. “Would that be okay?”

Percy smiled, “sure thing buddy. It’s your day too.”

Nico smiled and rushed into the store.

For the first time in years, Percy saw the Nico di Angelo he had first encountered at Westover Hall.

It had been amazing to watch Nico scurry this way and that in the shop, pulling out various issues, and occasionally asking Percy if he knew anything about a particular superhero. Nico had even asked him who Spider-man was, which confused the son of the sea.

Hadn’t Nico quoted him once?

It looked like there was going to be some trouble, when the mortal working behind the counter asked how Nico was going to pay for the mountain of comics the son of Hades had placed in front of said employee. The mortal must have had issues with customers deciding not to purchase the merchandise, leaving the mortal to replace everything.

Nico had just shrugged and pulled a a wad of wrinkled hundred dollar bills from one of his jean’s pockets.

*What the shit Neeks?*

The mortal’s attitude instantly improved, and he even asked if there was anything he could do to help the son of Hades.

Nico had shrugged and told him to “ring him up”.

Percy chuckled at Nico’s outdated vernacular.

Nico had then spun around, grabbed the few comics Percy had decided to get from his hands, and put them in the mountain of comics. The action had caught Percy off guard. No one had ever bought something for Percy before outside of his birthday: not even Annabeth.
Nico had lugged the huge box of comics all the way to the Slurpee shop, which was just a convenience store, sporting the largest smile Percy had ever seen on the son of Hades.

The younger boy had a really nice smile and Percy was going to make sure the world knew it.

Percy had got a large coke-blue raspberry Slurpee. Nico was a bit more creative with his flavor choices; a melon-cherry-mango-orange monstrosity.

The son of Hades at first stared at the strange semi-frozen beverage with apprehension. He tentatively wrapped his lips around the straw and took a small sip.

Nico’s pupils tripled in size. Any previous reservations had been washed away by the sugary beverage. Nico began to suck down his fruity concoction as fast as his straw would allow him to.

Percy looked like the cat who ate the canary, a devious smile spread across his face, which he tried to hide behind his straw. It was only a matter of time.

Suddenly the younger demigod clutched his own head between his hands and wailed.

Percy almost choked to death as he laughed at the inexperienced demigod. “And that my dear Nico, is called a brain freeze,” he explained.

“Who in their right mind would do that to themselves willing?” Nico asked, his hands gesturing wildly at his cup.

Percy laughed. “Your supposed to drink it slowly,” he explained.

“You could have said that before,” growled Nico as he glared at the older boy. “Dick.”

Percy laughed until he couldn’t breathe. Apparently the son of Hades was learning something from Percy.

After Percy had caught his breath, the two began to walk back to Percy’s home. A comfortable silence fell between the two demigods, punctuated only by the occasional slurp.

Percy’s eyes darted over to the son of Hades. He hated to admit it but, he was curious about how his younger friend’s Slurpee tasted. That particular flavor combination had never even occurred to the son of Poseidon.

But how to steal a taste?

Then Percy’s eyes drifted back to his own drink.

Of course!

Percy stopped in his tracks and held out his drink to the his friend. “Here try mine,” he offered.

Nico’s eyes widened and his face turned bright red. His eyes darted back and forth between Percy and the offered cup.

Crap, did I just make this awkward?
“Neeks it’s okay, friends share drinks all the time,” Percy assured him. “How about I try yours too? Make it an even trade?” He then shook his cup to emphasize that it was okay.

Nico hesitantly leaned forward and took a small sip from the offered cup. He then licked his lips with his now blue tongue. “It’s okay,” he said with a shrug.

Percy then lunged forward and snatched Nico’s Slurpee from his hands. “My turn now,” he explained before taking a sip.

_Gods of Olympus!_

It was the best Slurpee he ever had!

The mango complimented the orange perfectly, the cherry provided a little bit of tartness, and the melon provided a smooth aftertaste. There was also a hint of something else though, something with a kind of earthy taste. Whatever it was

He greedily continued to drink from his friend’s cup until said friend wrestled it away from the son of Poseidon.

“Hey! You said a drink!” cried the younger demigod. “Not the whole thing!”

Percy laughed at Nico, who was now trying to shield his cup with his box of comics.

“Nico, from now on you are in charge of choosing the Slurpee flavors,” cried Percy, as he wrapped an arm around Nico’s shoulders. “You have a rare gift my friend! A rare gift!”

They walked like that the rest of the way to Percy’s apartment; Nico under Percy’s arm.

They had spent the rest of the night in Percy’s room.

Percy had even been allowed to close the door, something which he was forbidden to do with Annabeth. With the door closed, it had allowed the two teens to be a little louder.

They sat on Percy’s bed and began to sort through Nico’s purchases, while talking about various things.

“How was Annabeth doing?”, Nico asked while making a pile of only Captain America comics.

“Okay. How about Will?”, Percy replied throwing an issue of _Civil War_ into the events pile.

“Always busy but, good. I can’t believe you’ve seen _Captain America_, its got to be like eighty years old now.”

“It’s only like five tops,” answered Percy, “and the sequel only came out like two years ago. I totally did not see Bucky coming back.”

Nico looked at him like he was crazy. “Who the hell is Bucky?” he asked. One hundred percent serious.
Apparently, there had been a series of black and white movies when Nico was younger. Percy had only known about the new movies.

Percy had decided then and there that the next time Nico came over, they were going to marathon every Marvel movie Percy could find.

Nico had smiled at that, Percy not realizing that Nico was just happy there was going to be a next time.

By the time they had sorted through all of Nico’s stuff, it was well past midnight. The original plan had been for Nico to sleep in a sleeping bag he had brought from camp, but the floor bedroom floor was now covered with comics.

“You can sleep with me Neeks,” said the son of Poseidon, already getting under the covers.

Nico looked like a dear caught in headlights.

Crap, I broke Nico.

“No it’s fine, I’ll just pop back to camp,” he stammered, unable to look Percy in the eyes.

Percy rolled his eyes. “Nico, you’re too tired. Just come lie down.”

“But...”

Percy got up from the bed and walked over to Nico, careful to avoid any comics. “Nico, I trust you.”

“But,” muttered the younger teen, looking everywhere but at Percy.

“I trust you with my life, you’re my best friend.”

Nico looked up at Percy for the first time and nodded.

Percy then grabbed his wrist and lead him back to the bed.

That night Percy had woken to find himself wrapped in Nico’s embrace.
He saw how at peace the son of Hades looked, so he didn’t bother to wake him.

He wasn’t hurting anybody.

Besides, the night was cold.

Chapter End Notes

Well wasn't that fluffy?

The next couple chapters will most likely be short, mission reports, transcripts, and the like.

If you like the story leave a kudos, a comment. or both!

Thanks for reading!
Correspondence II

Chapter Notes

Tonight:

We continue to see how cocky engineers are.

And that engineers have no idea how to talk to people.

Or write emails for that matter...

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

TO: MIKE TANGO ECHO
FROM: PAPA TANGO WHISKEY

Okay, you are most likely angry with me.

You asked for a bomb that could level around twenty acres, while still small enough to hide inside the chest cavity.

By the way: very El Cid.

What you got was a bomb with a blast yield of over forty-four kilotons. Which let me remind you, was over twice as powerful as the atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki.

If anything you should be praising me for going above and beyond the call of duty.

Anyway, I’ll explain how the thing worked that way you can appreciate my genius.

We know that “the Mist”, what a stupid name, generally blocks any signals from entering the Eastern DG’s nest.

I used this to our advantage though.

I designed the bomb’s detonator to be based on location. We were able to get a rough location of the nest from various DGs via persuasive methods. Using this acquired information I set up a couple parameters that if meant, would trigger the blast.

1: If carrier is within the geographic constraints.

And

2: If the bomb’s embedded GPS had not lost its connection.

Don’t worry, I had George’s team set up GPS signal boosters in the surrounding area so no
premature detonations would occur.

Prior to the blast, the package would emit a pulse that would disrupt all DG connections.

Then finally, BOOM!

You’re probably not laughing at that.

You even fail to fully appreciate my comedic genius.

Also, I am aware you had wanted to to capture some DGs at the nest, and yes it is pretty hard to do when they are atomized.

But in chess isn’t it to the advantage to remove the other player’s pawns from the board?

At least I think it is.

Chess is for old timers like yourself.

Besides, the mission objective was met.

G:DB was successfully taken without injury or loss of life for our guys.

Queue confetti.

And it was all thanks to my fairy-day cages.

In science it’s crucial to have punny names for your creations.

It operates on the same principle as a Faraday cage, just better: energy cannot enter or exit from the cage.

Also its not a physical cage, making it far more convenient and portable.

You’ve heard from GOLF TANGO SIERRA capturing G:DB went.

I do wish that GOLF TANGO SIERRA wasn’t so rough with my toys!

He almost killed it.

Oh well.

It’s only a matter of time now before I figure out how to control the G.

Once I can do that we can wipe out the Western Nest.

Love,

Brian.

HA! You thought I as going to use my call sign! :P
Chapter End Notes

And the band played on.

Thanks for all the kudos and comments!
Liked what you read? leave a kudos.
Questions? Theories? Recipes you want to share? Leave a comment :)
Percy

Chapter Summary

Warnings: mentions and descriptions of burns

Tonight:
Percy watches Nico's impression of Jason,
Percy goes streaking,
and Percy hates hospitals.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was mid-day when Percy finally awoke. His body was cold, stiff, and sore; while his right arm was throbbing. It wasn’t until he raised the arm in question to his face did he realize it was in a cast.

“Well that explains that”, muttered the son of Poseidon. When he tried to sit up, he noticed a weight on his chest. He lifted his head up, with his neck muscles screaming in protest, to find the son of Hades collapsed on top of him.

What happened?

Percy used his good arm to push the slumbering son of Hades off him.

Nico took in a ragged breath, then screamed in ear spitting agony when his back hit the ground.

Percy was instantly up and crouching over the son of Hades, despite every cell of his body protesting. Wide awake now, the son of Poseidon noticed that Nico’s clothing was singed, his forearms red and blistered. The son of Hades’ face was twisted in a horrible grimace; tears rolling down his cheeks.

For the first time Percy noticed they were in a small clearing in some timber, a fresh blanket of snow covering the ground. The son of Poseidon was barefoot and wearing only a hospital gown.

Not the best way to wake up, but I’ve had worse. At least I know who I am.

Nico was still whimpering in agony; his back arching away from the cold earth.

Percy gingerly rolled the younger demigod over, hoping that it would relieve his friend in some way.

He retched at what he saw.

Most of the back of Nico’s shirt had been burned away, revealing a mix of charred skin and huge angry bleeding blisters.

“Okay, don’t panic,” said the older teen, “what would wise-girl do in this situation?”

First she would do was assess the situation, he realized. They were in the middle of the woods, it was cold, and he couldn’t see any structures or roads nearby. Nico was unconscious with at least
second degree burns, while Percy was more or less exposed to the elements.

Second, she would make a plan. As much as it pained Percy to admit it, he needed to take care of himself first if both of them were to get out of this mess. He ripped the sleeves off of his gown and wrapped them around his feet as makeshift shoes; frostbite would’ve set in faster in his toes than anywhere else on his body.

Nico was going to be a problem though.

Percy needed to take the son of Hades with him, but if he wasn’t careful he would just end up making thing worse for his friend. He didn’t have any ambrosia or nectar, so healing him was out of the question.

Well maybe not entirely out of the question.

Back at school it had been required for all students to take a four week long first aid class. Percy may not have remembered much from it, but he remembered that one of the first steps to treating a burn was to immerse the burnt area in cool water.

With his good arm, Percy scooped up a handful of snow and held it to his mouth. He breathed on the snow until it started to return to its natural liquid state. He then called on his powers, feeling the familiar pull in his gut, and commanded the water to slowly cover Nico’s back. Nico’s face momentarily twisted in pain, but it was quickly replaced by a look of contentment.

The next part was going to suck with an arm in a cast. Percy crouched down as low as he could and slowly worked sliding Nico up his back.

With Nico now safely piggybacked onto his back, Percy began to walk North.

Okay, so maybe trying to carry Nico, while using his powers to soothe said demigod, and while nursing a broken arm was maybe not a plan Annabeth would have approved.

Maybe.

The son of Poseidon carefully set the smaller boy down, noticing him wince when his back bent. The sound Nico made when Percy stopped controlling the water on his back was heartbreaking. Percy knew he needed to find help soon. The water may have been soothing Nico, but if he kept it up in the cold weather, Nico would get hypothermia. Percy wasn’t in much better shape either; the hospital gown offered little to no warmth, his toes were starting to turn blue, and every step he took felt as if he was walking on pins and needles.

Percy’s teeth chattered. “You know this would be so easy if you were awake buddy,” Percy told the unconscious Italian. “Just POOF! Right into the shadows and we could be at my place. Mom could make us some hot chocolate, Annabeth would be sitting on the floor doing her homework, and you and I would lounge on the couch, not a care in the world.” The son of Poseidon hugged his own body. “A snow mobile, dirt bike, heck Neeks, I’d settle for a pair of ice skates right about now.”

And then it hit him harder than a bitch slap from Briares.
“Neeks you are a genius!” cried the son of Poseidon. Percy focused on the snow melting under his feet and willed it to stick to his soles, then he focused on making the water roll. He jerked forward and almost fell on his back, but this would work! Once again he gently lifted Nico and positioned the younger teen so he was resting on Percy’s back. “Hold on bud, we’ll get help.”

The two the sped off through the forest, Percy whooping all the way.

It wasn’t long until Percy found a road, but there had been a casualty during the impromptu cross country trip. While speeding over the drifts, a tree branch had snagged on Percy’s hospital gown, tearing the garment from his body.

In other words, the only clothing Percy had on were the sleeves he wore on his freezing feet.

“I don’t take this the wrong way but, please don’t wake up right now,” Percy said to the unconscious teen on his back, “You almost passed out when we shared a drink so you’d probably die if you saw me now.”

Percy eventually encountered a sign indicating a town, “Spring Valley”, was only ten miles ahead of them, and that there was a hospital somewhere there.

He carried Nico across a small bridge, up a hill, and saw a blue sign with an “H” next to an arrow that pointed to their right. There was only a bit little of traffic but, those who saw the strange duo stopped and stared.

The hospital, called Saint Margaret’s, was a small hospital by any standards and was a located at the bottom of a valley. Percy slid to a stop before carrying Nico into the emergency entrance. The nurse sitting behind the reception desk at first jumped at the sight of the naked teen but, instantly became professional when she noticed the unconscious teen on his back, and how blue Percy was. She immediately called for assistance and three more nurses rushed out from various rooms. Three of the nurses helped take Nico off his back and gently set the son of Hades on his side on a stretcher. The remaining nurse took Percy into a separate room, gave Percy yet another hospital gown and blanket, and began to take Percy’s vitals.

The nurse, a thin elderly woman, named Mary if the name tag was right, began to ask Percy a questions. “What’s your name?”, she asked, while shining a light into his eyes.

“Percy Jackson,” he answered while trying not to blink.

She paused for a moment, a strange look crossed her face, but it disappeared almost instantly. She wrote down his name on a chart, then proceeded with the examination. “Do you know where you are?” she asked, while taking his temperature.

Percy hesitated, trying to remember what the sign had said. “Spring Valley. I think?”

The nurse removed the thermometer and frowned at the results. “Nothing to be alarmed about, but you’re a bit on the cool side,” she explained. She frowned, “that’s to be expected, what with you walking around in your birthday suit in this weather.”
Percy shrunk away from the imposing four-and-a-half foot tall elderly woman.

She sighed and then continued to write down Percy’s results. “Yes, this is Spring Valley but, do you know what state this is?”

Percy cursed internally. The last thing he remembered was getting suspended from the swim team; he had no idea why he had been wearing a hospital gown, why he was in some wooded area with an unconscious di Angelo, or why said di Angelo was injured. He reasoned that he had been attacked by some kind of monster (typical), had been taken to a hospital (that’s new), and then camp had sent Nico to pick him up, but they had been ambushed as they had shadow traveled. Which brought Percy to his current problem: he had no idea where they had landed. He decided to take a shot in the dark and answered, “New York.”

Mary’s eyes narrowed, “Honey, this is Illinois.”

“I meant that,” lied the son of Poseidon, “I’m just having a hard time thinking straight.”

“I didn’t see any signs of a concussion but, I’ll let the doctor know you are showing signs of confusion.”

Percy let out a sigh of relief.

“Now I need you to lean forward honey,” she said as she walked over to a supply cabinet and removed a stethoscope. “I need to listen to your lungs for fluid.”

Percy did as he was instructed and followed Mary’s orders as she told him to breathe in and out. As the examination continued, Percy’s thoughts turned to Nico. Percy’s didn’t know a whole lot about burns other than what he had learned in school, but he knew Nico’s were bad; and judging by the sounds coming into his room from the hallway the staff must have thought they were bad too. “When can I see Nico?” he asked, when the ice cold stethoscope had finally been put away.

“Who?” she asked, then she realized who the son of Poseidon meant. “You can see him after a doctor sees you and your friend has been stabilized.”

“But with if.”

Mary held a hand up to cut off Percy. “If thing were to start to go bad, someone would come and get you.” Percy frowned at the thought. Mary placed a reassuring hand on his shoulder and looked him in the eyes, “I’ve been working with these people for over twenty years, I have faith in them, and the Lord, that they’ll save your friend.”

Percy gave a small smile, “Thanks.”

Mary picked up his chart again. “Now can you tell me what happened? How your friend came in covered in burns and why you were as naked as the day you were born?”

Percy blushed with embarrassment. “Err, well the thing is I don’t really remember,” he answered, his eyes looking everywhere but at the nurse. He shoes were particularly interesting, they had hot pink soles. “You see, um, ah, I woke up like this in the middle of some woods, Nico was on top of me,” Mary’s eyes widened, “NO! Not like that! I mean he was passed out, and he was already hurt.”

“And that’s all you can remember?” the nurse asked, as she glared at the teen.

Percy held up his hands to shield himself from the deadly glare. “I swear!”
The nurse let out a sigh of frustration, before she looked the son of Poseidon straight in the eye, and asked, “Son, I want you to answer me honestly.” Percy gulped. “Have you been smoking the mary-joe-wanna?”

Despite Percy’s many insistences that he had not taken any drugs, alcohol, or “mary-joe-wanna”, the nurse had ordered drug test for him. Thankfully though, the test would not be administered until an on-call doctor examined him and gave the go-ahead. Mary had called another nurse into the examination room, handed Percy’s chart over, and told them to run his information into the computer.

Time dragged on, which is never a good thing for an ADHD teen, let alone a demigod. Percy had tried to play with a blood pressure cuff, only to have it gently slapped from his hand by Mary. He then began to kick his dangling legs, but that too grew boring. He tried to reach for the stethoscope, only to have his hand swatted by Mary once again.

The nurse sighed and massaged her temples. “What are you? Twelve?”

Percy pouted at the accusation. “I’m eighteen,” he muttered under his breath. He pulled his knees up to his chest and rested his chin on them. “It’s not my fault I have ADHD.”

The elderly woman must have felt bad for him, as she once again put a reassuring hand on his shoulder. “I’m sorry,” she said. “How about this: If you promise to behave, I’ll go check on you’re friend Nicky.”

“Nico,” Percy corrected her.

“Nico,” she smiled. “Does that sound like a good deal?”

Percy nodded in approval and the older woman left him alone.

This sucked.

He needed to IM someone at camp to tell them about his and Nico’s current predicament, that way they could send out some pegasi to retrieve them. Oh, and clothes; his ass had been exposed way too much today.

There was a utility faucet in the room but, he had no drachmas to pay for the call; see: lack of clothing. Fleecy wasn’t even an option anymore, as he may have abused the privilege by calling Annabeth every night. Percy thought maybe Nico might have a couple in his jeans, what with his strange ability to pull money seemingly out of his ass. Maybe there was a river naiad around that could relay a message for him or-

“Hey there! Hi there! Ho ho ho there!” greeted a short, heavy, bald man in a lab coat as he entered the room; interrupting Percy’s train of thought. The doctor (Percy assumed), sat on a stool and rolled over so he was sitting in front of the son of Poseidon. “So I’m Dr. Faber, and I hear you gave the staff quite a shock,” he told Percy with a smile. “It’s not often that we get a naked kid carrying in another kid with first and second degree burns.”
Percy’s eyes widened. “Is Nico going to be okay? Is he awake? Can I go see him?”

Dr. Faber’s smile grew even wider. “Well ignoring bad grammar, the answers to your questions in
order are: yes, no, and yes,” he explained. “A more detailed answer is,” he continued, “Your friend
will be fine but, we are going to keep him under observation for at least a couple days. The burns on
your friend are very troubling.”

Percy gulped.

“Most of them are regular burns but, some of them appear to be radiation burns.” The doctor shook
his head, as if he was disagreeing with his own words. “We might have a couple case of radiation
burns a year, but those are usually a side effect of radiation treatments for cancer patients. The
severity of your friend’s burns are something else entirely.” The doctor let out a sigh of frustration.
“So now I need your help Mr. Jackson.”

Percy let his legs hang from the table again and looked the short man straight in the eye. “I’ll do
anything doc! Just tell me what to do!”

Dr. Faber smiled, clearly impressed by the boy’s eagerness to help his friend. “Sorry to disappoint
you, but it’s nothing that exciting,” he said while rummaging through a manila folder, pulling out
several pieces of paper. “First I need you to fill out these forms for your friend.” The doctor
shrugged. “Nothing big, just name, birthday, parent’s names, contact numbers, that kind of stuff,” he
explained, before handing Percy a clipboard and pen. The doctor then stood up from his stool and
gathered his materials. “I’m also going to agree with Mary’s diagnosis, just listening to you breathe it
sounds like you have a case of walking pneumonia. After your drug test, I suggest you gt plenty of
bed rest and avoid strenuous activity for at least a week,” he said before walking out the door.

Percy looked down at the forms he had been handed.

Parent’s name?

Contact numbers?

Birthday?

“Fuck me,” sighed the son of Poseidon, realizing that he still wasn’t the friend he promised to be.

Chapter End Notes

Remember how I said this was a dark fic?

Just a heads up, next chapter is going to be really rough.
Clarisse

Chapter Summary

Warning: minor homophobia, torture, abuse, death, and a lot of things that are just terrible.

Chapter Notes

This was supposed to be shorter but, things escalated quickly.

If you are squeamish, when you find the AN:;, that's where you will want to stop.

You have been warned.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

As a child of war there are things that are expected of you. For one, you are to be in great shape; no love handles allowed in cabin V. A child of Ares is expected to rush into battle whenever the opportunity presents itself, consequences be damned. Once in a fight your only options are victory or death. Retreating and surrendering are for pussy cabins, like Athena or Apollo.

Which is why Clarisse was currently fighting a battle she knew she could not win.

Yesterday had started off so well for the head of cabin V ….

Breakfast had been her favorite: Bacon, eggs, and a those little french fruit tarts Silena had introduced her to. As she sat with her siblings, Chris had jogged up to table and asked her to spar with him after breakfast. Chris was such a romantic.

It had been an easy victory, what if Chris being a flower child and all but, how many boyfriends would willingly get their ass kicked by girlfriends? Chris had even managed to get in a few hits this time, making it an even sweeter victory.

After sparring, Clarisse had helped Chris back to his cabin to sleep off his ass whoop’n. Before Chris went inside, she spun him around and pulled him in for a kiss; her way of thanking him for a great date. Several of Chris’s siblings laughed at the display of affection, but were quickly silenced when Clarisse gave them one of her patent pending death glares. Chris began to apologize for his sibling’s immature behavior. Clarisse just smiled, before she shoved him into the cabin and told him she would see him at the bonfire. There may or may not have been threat in there about what would happen if he was late.

At lunch, Coach Hedge literally jumped onto the Ares cabin’s table, roundhoused kicked one of her younger half-brothers, and then asked if Clarisse would mind watching Chuck for a few days.

Who could say no after that?

Chuck was awesome! She was his big sister and it was her job to make sure he didn’t grow up to be
like the other pussy satyrs. She and coach had it all figured out when it came to raising the young satyr. Instead of *Sesame Street* or *Baby Einstein*, Chuck would watch *Walker, Texas Ranger* and *Gunsmoke*. Instead of classical music, Chuck would listen to *John Wayne—America, Why I Love Her*. It had also been decided that instead of playing a pan flute or reed pipes like other satyrs, Chuck would play electric guitar.

Mellie wasn’t exactly thrilled with all of that but, Coach assured Clarisse that his wife would come around. It was also why Coach insisted she was his son’s primary babysitter, to make sure his precious kid was raised the right way.

After Clarisse accepted, the coach pulled out a wad of mortal money from his running short and handed it the daughter of war; for kid-sitting he explained. He then explained that he had to fly out to California in several hours to check on Tristan McClean (still stuck as his life coach), his (annoying in Clarisse’s opinion) daughter, and check in with Mellie (who Clarisse was secretly fond of). He couldn’t take Chuck along, because he and Mellie hadn’t taken care of his mortal paperwork yet. The coach thanked her, told her to pick Chuck up at two, roundhoused the same kid again, and hurried off to gather his things.

“What the fuck was that for?” asked the now black and blue son of Ares. “That really fucking hurt!”

Clarisse rolled her eyes at her sibling. “Are you saying that a goat managed to hurt a son of Ares?” she goaded, the easiest way to make an Ares camper drop an issue was to challenge their pride. “What would dad say? Do you want to go to the infirmary?” she prodded.

“No!” cried her younger half-brother. “I don’t like being around those Hades and Apollo guys. I would rather get kicked again than walk in on those two freaks,” he explained, a mixture of disgust and discomfort twisting his black and blue face.

Clarisse shrugged, it wasn’t like she disagreed.

Picking up the kid had been a breeze, no tears or anything; the kid loved his older sister.

Coach was dressed in his traditional mortal disguise: a Boston Red Sox cap, gray sweat pants, a matching gray sweat shirt, a pair of old Nike’s, and his silver whistle hanging from his neck. He handed Clarisse Chuck’s camouflaged diaper bag to her along with a few Tom Clancy novels that she was to read to Chuck before bed; funny voices were required. Coach picked up his kid and tossed him into the air, which Chuck bleated at, and was caught a moment later and was engulfed in a goat-hug. Hedge told Chuck to behave himself and to only kill ninjas while he was away. He set the kid down, thanked Clarisse once more, and ran to the camp border.

After dropping off the baby equipment at her bunk, she let her little brother run around camp, cardio
is important for a growing goat.

For a kid who couldn’t form a sentence yet, he could sure run!

Chuck had been running towards the woods when she spotted the Ghost Queen appear out of nowhere in front of the infirmary wearing some stupid bright orange and yellow hat. As she ran after chuck she called out to the Ghost Queen, “Hey death breath! Nice hat!”

She didn’t see how the son of Hades reacted, probably sulking like normal, as she had ran into the woods to chase the baby satyr. Chuck was easily thirty yards in front of her and the gap was only growing. “Okay Mr. Chuck why don’t you come back here,” she cried. “We can go read a chapter of The Hunt For Red October!”

The baby satyr cooed at her suggestions but he just threw has arms up, ran even faster, and even jumped over a few fallen trees in a single bound.

Clarisse pumped her legs as fast as hard as she could just to keep Chuck in her field of vision. “Kid, you are going to be a parkour pro by the time you can feed yourself!” She huffed. “Like seriously, you are going to be able to take out half of my siblings with just your legs!” She had never been prouder.

They had just made it to a clearing she had never seen before, when the kid just stopped. Clarisse had almost crashed into the little guy but managed to roll to her left at the last moment.

She rolled onto her back and tried to catch her breath. “Mr. Chuck let’s not do that again,” she panted. Apparently she really needed to do more cardio if she was having a hard time chasing after a baby. “How about we go back to the cabin now; you can eat a nice tin can, and I can try to bring my heart rate down.”

Chuck ignored her completely. Usually he would at least babble at her when she talked to him but, he was staring off into the direction they had just come from.

Clarisse frowned. “Is something wrong kid?” She asked. “Need to go to the bathroom?”

She was about to ask him some more questions when suddenly air around them seemed to have been electrified. It felt like the time she had accidentally let Maimer’s tip connect with her helmet: a thousand volts surging through her temples.

Her vision became blurry, but she managed to snap out of it when she heard her brother wailing. She pushed herself off the ground and scooped Chuck up into her arms. “Shh Shh, it’s alright,” she assured the flailing infant. “It’s probably one of the Hephaestus wimp’s inventions malfunctioning.” She hugged the kid tighter to her body and began to rub his back. “Don’t worry your big sister will make sure that their heads are impaled on cabin V’s roof. Nobody makes my Mr. Chuck cry without answering to me.”

Her reassurances/death threats were cut short when suddenly the world in front of them was cast in a blinding white light. As her eyes readjusted for the second time in under a minute, a deafening roar came from the direction of camp.

“Oh you machine humping motherfuckers!” she screamed as she clutched Chuck even harder to her chest. She ran as fast as she could in the opposite direction of camp, ignoring the burning in her legs and the protest of her lungs. She could feel the air behind her start to get warmer, but there was no place to take shelter. She continued to run even though her back was starting to heat up.

Then she saw it, their salvation, a large boulder protruding from the earth. She leapt over the boulder
with moves that would impress even the most avid parkour enthusiast, and used her body to shield Chuck from the incoming blast.

AN: *Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch'intrate*

It was around noon when Clarisse regained consciousness. The small satyr that she had shielded was fidgeting beneath her, bleating in protest about how his big sister was smothering him. Clarisse slowly sat up and hissed at how her back burned. She turned to look at her back the best she could, her shirt was intact, but the heat from blast must have given her a slight burn. No worse than a bad sunburn, she thought. She helped Chuck up to his hooves, before she herself stood up. She began to stretch her stiff and sore muscles, the kid staring at her in awe.

Chuck attempted to copy her but, all he could really do was wave his arms over his head. “Bwah!” he laughed, clearly pleased in his efforts.

Clarisse smiled at the kid, “That’s right. It’s important to always stretch properly.” After she had worked the general stiffness from her body, she removed a bronze bracelet that Chris had gotten her for their third anniversary. She held the bracelet in the palm of her hand before she began to slowly squeeze it. Almost instantly, the bracelet transformed into her now favored spear, Nightshade. Clarisse wasn’t usually one for jewelry but, Chris knew what she liked.

Nightshade was a bit different compared to Clarisse’s previous weapons. Its shaft was composed entirely of celestial bronze, measured six foot from the tip of the blade to the end of the shaft, and between the blade and the shaft was a crossbar, which insured that the blade would never go to deep into a foe. What made it truly unique though, was its blade. It was composed of celestial bronze but, it was not a solid. It was porous, and within the center was mixture of herbs that when introduced to the bloodstream killed in minutes. Chris had worked so hard to make this for Clarisse, he had told her, spending weeks with his siblings and the Hephaestus kids.

Clarisse grunted, the Hephaestus cabin had a lot to answer for judging by the state of the forest around her.

The sun was obscured by clouds of black ash, the once lush forest that had surrounded them the day before was now full of kindling husks, any signs of animal life were nonexistent. The only sound to be heard was her own breathing, and the sound of ash lowly falling to the earth; that is if you ignored the antsy baby satyr at her side.

“All right little guy, let’s get back to camp,” she said as she scooped up the kid and deposited him on her shoulders. The weight on her shoulders definitely stung but, she was a daughter of Ares, this was nothing.

Walking back to camp took a little longer than anticipated: Chuck had to use the little ass-kickers
room, which Clarisse had not been prepared for. How could something so small make such a huge mess?

Chuck had thankfully fallen asleep on her shoulders before they got to what used to be Camp Half-Blood. Whatever the Hephaestus cabin had done had completely demolished the place. None of the structures were left standing, from the camp shop to the pegasi stables, all that remained was smoldering debris. The once picturesque lake, was as black as the soot, the white sandy beaches, had been turned to millions of shards of glass.

A knot formed in Clarisse’s stomach, there was no way anyone survived whatever happened. If the blast didn’t kill them, the heat would have vaporized them.

Which contradicted what the daughter of Ares was currently witnessing, the necropolis that had been the camp was swarming with activity. There were people in hazmat suits digging through the wreckage, some would on appear to find something of interest, and then place what they found in large evidence bags. There was a scrawny red haired guy in a lab coat, in his early twenties if she had to guess, barking out orders to the people in hazmat suits. There were dozens of men and women wearing black combat gear, and what appeared to be night vision goggles, all of them carried assault rifles at the ready

Clarisse’s first thought was that these were mortal law enforcement. It made sense, the Mist could only hide so much, and she doubted it could hide a large explosion. The Hazmats were most likely part of some kind of crime scene investigation unit, looking for evidence to figure out what had happened. Her idea sounded good, as long you didn’t think to hard about it. It fell apart though when she really looked at the intruders. None of them, the CSI or SWAT team, had any markings on their uniforms to identify them. Usually law enforcement would attempt to block off the area to prevent bystanders from interfering with the crime scene. No effort had been made at the ruins of camp, no roadblocks, police tape, not even an orange traffic cone. Whoever these guys were, if they were even human, were definitely not here to help.

“Okay, I need to get this sleeping sack of potatoes away from here,” she whispered under her breath. “Olympus is the closest,” she mused. “I can IM the coach, and tell him to get his hairy ass to Olympus to get Mr. Chuck.” She stabbed NightShade into the earth, and re-positioned the snoozing satyr on her shoulders.

A twig snapped behind her, breaking the silence.

Clarisse quickly grabbed her spear and spun around and got into a battle position. Five men stood there, four of them covered head-to-toe in the black combat gear, their weapons trained on her. The fifth man, was wearing black and white combat fatigues opposed to the combat gear, his tan skin was weathered with age, his salt and pepper hair was cut to military regulation, he sported mutton chops with a mustache, but his most striking feature was his eyes. His eyes were gray, but unlike the stormy gray that was common to the Athena cabin, they were lifeless. There was no emotion, no love, no joy, not even rage.

The dead-eyed man crossed him arms and smiled. “Looks like the little partner is all tuckered out,” he whispered. “Now why don’t you come with us, and we can get you somewhere safe.”

Clarisse only gripped Nightshade harder.

Dead-eye frowned. “Looks like we have to do this the hard way,” he sighed with a shrug. He looked to his men and then nodded his head towards Clarisse, “Take them alive.”

Before the dead-eye’s goons could even move, Clarisse was already jabbing Nightshade at Dead-
eye’s chest with all her might. Nightshade’s tip easily passed through Dead-eye’s chest, and Clarisse grinned wickedly, that was until the cross bar passed through and she fell flat on her face.

The fall jarred Chuck awake. Not knowing what was going on, surrounded by strange men, with loud noises around him, he did what any small child would do: he started to cry.

Clarisse quickly jumped back up on her feet, dodging a blow from the butt of a gun. She readjusted the crying satyr, now holding him against her chest.

So, her enemies were mortals, which rendered Nightshade mostly useless. Not entirely, only mostly. Celestial bronze was useless against mortals, as it passed right through them as if they were illusions. However, Celestial bronze worked just fine on inorganic materials. She adjusted her hold on Nightshade, and held Chuck closer.

Dead-eye grinned and clapped his hands, “Little girl, you’ve got guts, I’ll give you that. But just give up. You’re weapon is useless and you’re holding a kid, you aren’t going to win this fight.” He shook his head slowly. “Just surrender.”

Clarisse began to laugh uncontrollably, Chuck looking up at his big sister as if she was crazy. Her? A daughter of Ares, head of cabin V, surrender? That was the funniest thing she had ever heard! “Sorry,” she laughed. “My dad wouldn’t be happy if I did that. Surrender is a word that is absent in the vocabulary of all sons and daughters of Ares.” She hanged her grip on Nightshade, moving her hand closer to the tip of the spear.

Dead-eye grimaced, “War, huh?” He made a few hand gestures, and his cronies rushed her.

Clarisse was ready for them though. She swung Nightshade at the closest goon’s gun with all her might, and succeeded in knocking it from their hands. She somersaulted to the fallen weapon, grabbed it, spun around and aimed it at her assailants. They hesitated for a moment but, then started to rush her again. She pulled the trigger and a spray of bullets erupted from the barrel. In front of her, the world started to explode, dirt flew as bullets hit earth, charred bark splintered from the dead trees, and thankfully some of torrent of hot lead found the their mark and buried themselves into the men in black.

None of them fell though. The four goons began to pat themselves were the bullets had hit them, checking for injuries.

Dead-eye rolled his eyes, “I told ya’ll, the new ammo is made of the same shit as their weapons.” He pulled a revolver from its holster on his hip. “It don’t do shit for dick against normal folk but, it really packs a wallop against freaks.” Faster than Clarisse could blink, Dead-eye rushed her and ripped Chuck from her arms. He wrapped on arm around Chuck’s neck, and with his other arm held his revolver against the squirming satyr’s temple. “Now, Don’t you move or I splatter this abominations brains all over the place.” He cocked the revolver’s hammer, to emphasize the situation.

Despite every fiber of her being telling to fight, Clarisse threw the gun down in front of her, and put her hands behind her head. Some things were more important than fighting.

One of dead-eye’s goons slammed the butt of their gun to the back of her head, knocking her out.
Clarisse awoke to find herself in chains. Her wrists were chained together with the ends of the chains tied to the hitch of a black SUV. Her ankles were in a similar state, but tied to a different black SUV. The vehicles were far enough apart that she was being suspended above the ground. She looked around and found herself surrounded by the black clad forces, along with the red headed lab coat, and dead-eye who had changed into his black combat gear.

Dead-eye was the first to notice that she was awake. He grabbed her by her chin and made her look at him. “Wakey wakey, eggs and bakey,” he taunted.

Lab-coat face palmed. “Holy fuck, could you be any lamer?”

Without turning from Clarisse, Dead-eye flipped off the red head.

“Real mature,” lab-coat pouted. “Aren’t you like forty years my senior?”

Dead-eye was examining Clarisse’s face for something, turning it this way and that. “If that’s the case, then you should show some respect for your elders than partner.” He smiled at Clarisse, “Ain’t that right little girl?”

Clarisse hocked a loogie straight into his eye. “Fuck off,” she growled.

Dead-eye wiped the offending liquid from his face, while lab-coat roared with laughter. “Now that wasn’t very nice, Chelsea,” Dead-eye said disapprovingly. He sighed, then punched Clarisse in the nose.

She could feel the blood begin to trickle from her nose. “My name’s not Chelsea,” she grunted, “Its Clarisse!”

Dead-eye turned to lab-coat, “I told you that Revenge of The Nerds fucker couldn’t be trusted for information.”

Lab-coat shrugged. “So he got a name wrong. We don’t need him for his information, just the information we can get from him,” lab-coat explained.

Dead-eye grunted in acknowledgement.

Clarisse spit out some blood that had drained into her mouth. “What have you done with Chuck? Who the fuck are you?!” she demanded.

“One thing at a time,” said Dead-eye. “We really don’t have to answer any of your questions but, I’m feeling generous.” He stood up and gestured to lab-coat. “This here is Perci-”

“Brian,” interrupted lab-coat. “My name is Brian, or you can call me a genius”

“How about I call you an asshole? Would that work for you?” spit Clarisse, as she began to struggle against her bonds.

It was Dead-eye’s turn to laugh at his colleague. Brian walked up and kicked Clarisse in the gut. “O, I am going to have all kinds of fun with you later,” he said darkly.

Dead-eye regained his composure. “Anyway,” he continued. “Before that bit of levity I was introducing ourselves. He’s Brian and you can call me George.”

“George is such a creative name,” muttered Brian. “Must have taken the old man years to think of that one.”
George ignored his younger coworker. “Now you and I are going to have a little chat, since we share something in common: War.” George gestured to someone Clarisse couldn’t see. Soon a small table was rolled in between her and George, on it was strapped the missing baby satyr. “I believe this also answers your other question.” A look of disgust twisted his face. “Chuck? You name these fucking things?”

Clarisse stayed silent at the taunt.

George smiled, “Oh good! Now I get to explain how this conversation will work!” He crouched down and pulled a large Bowie knife from his boot. He stood back up and slowly traced the blade on the baby Satyr’s stomach. “Every time you don’t answer a question, or if I think you’re lying I’m going to hurt your little pet here.”

Clarisse’s face blanched, and she began to struggle even harder against her restraints.

Brian walked up and kicked her again. “I wouldn’t waste my energy if I were you,” he said, “Those are pure steel, you are not breaking out of those.”

George cleared his throat to bring attention back to him. “First question!” he exclaimed. “Is it true that any man on the losing side of a war owes your father their soul when they die?”

The daughter of Ares frowned. It was true but, why did this sadistic bastard want to know? How did he even know that in the first place? “Where did you hear that from?” she grunted out, spitting out more blood from her mouth.

George smiled. He grabbed the squirming kid’s left arm, placed one hand on Chuck’s upper arm, and the other his other hand on Chuck’s forearm. With one quick motion he snapped Chuck’s arm, the sound of bones breaking was immediately followed by the toddler screaming in agony.

Brian covered his ears to try to muffle the wailing. “Jesus Christ!” he screamed. “You should have gagged the little monster first!”

George removed one his his black gloves and shoved it into the kid’s mouth. He looked at Brian and uttered a quick apology. He then trained his focus back to Clarisse. “I said you had to answer my questions, this isn’t Jeopardy,” he chided.

Clarisse looked mournfully at the small Satyr, who was trying to thrash against his restraints. “Yes it’s true! Just let him go! He’s just a baby you sick fuck!” she pleaded.

George continued to smile. “That’s more like it. Now question number two! Is it true that you demigods worm your way into politics?” He picked up his Bowie knife again and held it against Chuck’s right calve.

Clarisse had heard the stories that George Washington had been a son of Athena but, she was unaware of any other specifics. Sure they had been told repeatedly that World War Two had been started by children of the Big Three, but no names had ever been given. “I don’t know!” she cried.

“You hesitated for a second there, which makes me believe you do know something,” George chided. He let out a sigh. “You would think she would care for her little pet here, but as stated in the rules I am required to hurt him if I doubt any of her answers.” He grabbed the little satyr’s left hoof with one hand, raised his knife from Chuck’s calve, then brought it down with all of his might. George removed the knife from the satyr and inspected the blade for any sign of damage. “Now let’s try that question again,” he stated calmly. “Have any of your filth ever wormed there way into politics?”
Clarisse didn’t hesitate this time. Her father be damned, she would do anything to save her brother. “George Washington!” she cried. “George Washington was a son of Athena! I don’t know if there are more recent ones!”

Brian frowned. “Fuck he was my favorite president,” he pouted. “Looks like Andrew Jackson is number one now!” he cheered, shrugging off his previous disappointment.

George thought for a moment, before accepting her answer. He looked at his red headed partner, “Makes sense that they would keep the younger DGs from knowing. Lowers the risk of exposure and would increase compliance with the older DGs.”

Brian nodded in agreement. “I bet that oompa loompa in there now is a DG. It would explain how he managed to win too. If the old man is right, he would be ideal for their needs.”

“My think’n exactly” agreed George.

Clarisse had no idea what they were talking about, nor did she care. All that matter was that her little brother wasn’t thrashing around as much, his eyes were closed, and his breathing was shallow and ragged. She had to save Chuck, even if it cost her her life. She began curl in on herself, trying to slip her bonds.

Brian laughed. “It’s cute that she’s still trying.”

“Alright time for the last question, you answer it and you and your little friend are free to go,” George explained. He sheathed his Bowie knife back in his boot, only to remove his revolver from its holster. He then reached into his chest pocket and pulled out a folded piece of paper and handed it to Brian, then gestured at Clarisse.

Brian unfolded the piece of paper and then held it in front of her face. It was a photo faded with age. It showed what appeared to be a much younger George holding a small preteen girl, her hair long and blonde. They sat in front of a Christmas tree, each wearing matching red sweaters. George’s eyes weren’t dead like they were now but had bright and alive, with a hint of mischief that was common to the Hermes cabin.

“That was, is,” George corrected himself, “my daughter, PB” He placed the revolver’s barrel on Chuck’s chest, just above where his heart was. “I was drafted shortly after that picture was taken, spent the next ten years in a god forsaken jungle fighting for a cause I didn’t believe in. Six of those years I was in a cage, living off the rats that were foolish enough to come too close.” George sighed. “The only thing that kept me going was the thought of my PB.” For a brief moment he relaxed the barrel from the small satyr’s chest. “When I finally got home, I found that my daughter, my rock, had disappeared without a trace.” His grip on his revolver firmed again. “Apparently shortly before she disappeared here had been this strange group of girls, calling themselves “the hunters”, had been seen talking to my little girl.” He shrugged. “At first I thought it was nothing, but then as the years passed I heard similar stories from around the country. Young girls with bows approaching other girls, only for all of them to disappear shortly after.”

“Stop fucking monologing,” cried Brian in frustration. “Just ask your damn question already! I have to get back to New York and finish the fucking mousetrap!”

George cocked the revolver’s hammer back. “Have you seen my PB?”

Clarisse examined the picture. The girl looked familiar, but then again she had a very generic look to her. She wasn’t exactly best friends with the Hunters of Artemis, in fact she actively tried to avoid them when they were at camp, they were a bunch of show boats and men haters. “I don’t know!”
she cried. “I honestly don’t! I don’t know everyone in the hunters! I try to avoid them!” She prayed to her father and every other god and goddess she could think of to help Chuck, to make George accept her answer as truth, to let him go.

George looked her up and down, and then let out a sigh. “I believe you.”

Clarisse let out the breath she didn’t know she had been holding. At least they would be released now.

George pulled the revolver’s trigger, and a sound of thunder filled the world around them. The little satyr’s body spasmed before going completely limp.

She screamed in agony. “You sick fucker!” she cried, tears rolling down her face. “You said you would let us go!”

George nodded. “I said I would release you both,” he agreed. “And I have released you pet from this mortal coil,” he explained as if it was the simplest thing to understand. “I’m sure he’s in a better place now, he’s probably already eating his favorite grass or what not.” He holstered his gun, approached Clarisse, and once again grabbed her by her chin. “I’m going to let you in on a little secret before I release you,” he whispered. “By engaging in war, you’ve already lost. There is no winning in war, only loss. Your father is one of the greatest enemies of mankind. He can stir the hatred in our hearts, make us tear each other to shreds, only to have us all as his slaves when we leave this earth.” He let go of her face, stood up, and turned away. He made a quick gesture with his hands, and the two SUVs hummed to life. “I can’t accept that, I’ve seen too many people die, mark my words I will save them from your father and all his ilk.”

The two SUVs began to pull away from each other.

Chapter End Notes

so yeah... that happened.

Just to clarify Clarisse isn't a full blown homophobe, she's just uncomfortable around them and her Ares really shows.
Percy

Chapter Summary

Tonight:

Percy learns about hospital insurance policies,
Percy takes a drug test,
and Percy has several unexpected visitors.

Chapter Notes

No warnings this time, another light chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The drug test had been one of the most humiliating things Percy had ever experienced in his life.

First, a rather large Hispanic nurse, named Fabian, had handed him the sample cup. Fabian explained that the son of Poseidon had to fill the cup up to a line marked on the cup in, to little and they would have to try again, to much and that was just going to be a disgusting mess for everybody. Fabian then left the room, only to return seconds later with a wheel chair, and told Percy to hop in.

“I can walk just fine,” protested the son of Poseidon. He had carried Nico gods knows how many miles to get here! In his birthday suit too!

Fabian shrugged, “I believe ya bro, just hospital policy.” He moved the wheel chair closer to the table Percy was sitting on. “Don’t want you to slip and sue us.”

Percy hopped down from the table, and sat in the chair. Fabian then bent down and lowered the footrests for Percy. Percy placed his feet on the molded plastic, a shiver went up his spine, and his teeth chattered. “Zeus’s sandals! Those are freezing!”

Fabian laughed, his gut jiggling like Jello. “You think that’s bad? The old school metal ones were brutal!” He then reached down, getting a little to close for Percy’s comfort and released the brakes. “Now hold on! We’re going on an adventure!”

The “adventure” ended at a single stall unisex bathroom that was maybe fifty feet from the examination room Percy had been in. For the entirety of the twenty second trip the large man had made airplane noises, like Percy was some kind of small child. Okay, he actually enjoyed it, but still, what kind of person does that?

Fabian bent down and latched the wheel chair’s brakes, then moved to the footrests. “Could you move your feet please?” he asked. Percy did as instructed, placing his bare feet on the ice cold floor, and Fabian quickly flipped up the footrests. “All right now, you still got that sample cup?”

Percy held out cup and shook it to emphasize that, yes he did still have the cup, and he let out an
exasperated “Yes.”

Fabian smiled, clearly enjoying Percy’s discomfort at the entire situation. “All right then! I need you to go on in there, and fill that bad boy up to the line.”

Percy pushed himself out of the chair, while the large nurse gripped the chair’s handles tighter, despite the brakes being latched. He walked into the bathroom and really wished that someone had given him some socks or something to cover his feet, not that the bathroom was dirty, it just wasn’t a place he would want to be barefoot. He placed the sample cup on the small sink that occupied the corner of the room, and turned around and began to close the door. Fabian’s large hand slammed the door wide open before it had a chance to fully close. Percy nearly jumped out of his skin, something many a monster and god had hoped to do to the hero of Olympus, apparently all they needed was a six foot tall ripped Hispanic guy in hot pink scrubs to slam a door. Who knew? “What the fuck!” Percy shrieked.

Fabian face turned beet red, realizing he had scared the daylights out of the son of Poseidon. “Uh, sorry about that,” said the large man, rubbing the back of his head in embarrassment. “I may have forgotten to mention that I need to make sure that you actually fill the cup.”

Percy frowned. “Really?”

“Yup,” answered the nurse, popping the p.

“Why?”

Fabian crossed his arms across his chest. “Got to make sure that you didn’t smuggle in a sample, or have someone else fill the cup for you bro,” he explained.

Percy rolled his eyes, this was insane. “How would I sneak in anything?” asked the son of Poseidon, while gesturing to the hospital gown he was currently wearing. “And, this is a single bathroom, there is barely enough room for me, let alone someone else,” he continued while gesturing to the small bathroom that surrounded him.

“Just turn around and do your business.” The nurse hung his head low and let out a sigh, “trust me, I do not want to see your junk.”

Percy huffed in annoyance, turned his back to the nurse, grabbed he sample cup from the sink, and began to hike his gown up. “Poseidon give me strength,” he muttered under his breath.

Much to Percy’s disappointment, Fabian instructed him to leave the filled sample cup on the sink. Percy had been looking forward to handing the foul smelling cup over to the man, that way it would have made the situation more awkward for the large man than it was for the son of Poseidon.

Percy had once again been instructed to sit in the wheel chair. Fabian repeated the process of lowering the footrests and releasing the brakes, all of which was way to invasive to Percy’s personal space bubble. In the few minutes Percy had been in the restroom the plastic footrests had returned to their ice cold state.
Percy would take an Algebra test over a drug test any day of the week.

When they returned to the examination room Percy found that he had company.

Two officers in full uniform stood opposite from the examination table. One was easily six foot nine, his white blond hair was crew cut, his eyes were hidden behind a pair of aviator sunglasses. The other was maybe five foot four on a good day, his head was shaved with the exception of a thick brown mustache, he also shared his partner’s love of aviators.

The shorter one was the first to approach Percy, who suddenly felt trapped in the wheelchair. The mustached man looked at a piece of paper in his hand. “Are you Perseus,” he stopped, flipped up his glasses, and squinted at the paper, “middle-name-not-important Jackson, son of one Sally Blofis?

“Real smooth there Bill,” chuckled the blond officer.

“Yes,” squeaked the son of Poseidon. A sense of dread settled over him. His mom had always told him to not be afraid of the cops, and he never was, just something was wrong, they were here to see him.

The blond cop stepped forward and cleared his throat. “I’m afraid you have to come with us, you are wanted for questioning about the deaths of Paul and Sally Blofis, and their unborn child.”

Percy felt like the world had been pulled from underneath him. No, there was no way his parents and sister were dead, this was a mistake, it had to be!

Percy was about to tell them they were mistaken, everything came rushing back to him. Coming home, finding his parents beaten beyond recognition, laying in pools of their own blood. Of smelly Gabe cold-cocking him, the ensuing fight. Of Percy fleeing for his life. The only thing Percy could do was choke out a sob.

Fabian placed his large hands on Percy’s shoulders and gave them a reassuring squeeze. “I’m sure this is all a big misunderstanding little bro.” He gave another squeeze. “Just go with the nice officers and get this all cleared up, then you can come back and get your friend.”

Percy wiped his eyes on his forearm, and tried to smile at the large man. When he tried to stand though his legs gave out from beneath him. Instantly Fabian and the Bill were on him to help him up. Once they were sure he could stand on his own, Bill started to read him his rights, but Percy didn’t hear a single word of it.

His parents were dead, everything else no longer mattered.

The two officers were walking him out, apparently if you were in handcuffs you didn’t need a
wheelchair. The handcuffs had been hard to get on, what with the cast on Percy’s arm, but they had somehow managed. Fabian and Mary had offered to walk with them but, the officers had said that wasn’t allowed. Not that any of it mattered to Percy, he was stuck in his own world, reliving a nightmare he wished only existed in his dreams.

The blond officer, who’s name he still did not know or even care to know, grabbed Percy’s shoulder to stop him, somewhat snapping Percy back to reality. The clean shaven cop put on a fake smile, “We’ll get you some real clothes soon, we tend to carry a few things in case we pick up some streakers.”

Percy nodded and started following Bill again.

They had made it to a small waiting room that was next to an exit. The room was a depressing beige, containing around six chairs, with a couple of end tables covered in old magazine, the only source of light came from an exposed humming fluorescent light bulb on the ceiling. The only people in the room besides himself and the officers were a small black haired child with his left arm in a cast who was staring intensely at the other occupant, a large man in a midnight black suit, his head hidden behind an old issue of *Time* magazine.

The trio had stopped there so the two officers could debate whether or not it was okay for Bill to run out and drive the squad car to the pick them up.

Bill had been arguing that Dilan (so that was his name) could easily take the son of Poseidon if he got out of hand and that Percy had been compliant the entire time, when a familiar chill crept up Percy’s spine. Dilan had just said it was against regulations, when the two officers just collapsed where they stood.

Percy started to crouch down to check the two cops when a familiar voice spoke. “Don’t worry I only knocked them out.” Percy turned around to see the lord of the underworld removing the magazine that had hid his face, the kid sitting next to Hades had nearly popped his eyes out of their sockets. “Why is it that it’s always you? Hmm?” he asked. “And why is it that whenever you are involved my children are always hurt? Physically and emotionally,” he added.

Before he could continue with his interrogation/rant he was interrupted by a dripping sound and the smell of asparagus. Hades looked down at his feet to see a slowly spreading pool of urine, then looked at the terrified child. “Oh for mother’s sake,” he groaned before burying his face in his hands. The lord of the dead slowly got up from the uncomfortable chair, then wiped off his leather shoes on the same chair. He looked absolutely livid, like he was only a moment away from smiting the kid, but he took a deep breath and muttered something in Italian. He looked at the scared child, pointed at him, and said, “September 15th, 2052”.

He then walked over to Percy beckoned him to follow.
Questions, comments, theories? Please leave a comment :)

“They shouldn’t be called the fields of Asphodel if you are not at least growing one kind of crop in them,” droned Demeter, as she scooped yet another large helping of mushroom barley onto his plate. “All I’m suggesting is you look into planting something down here.”

Hades frowned at his plate. This was the fifth time this week his sister/mother-in-law had dropped by unannounced with dinner for the three of them, it was also the third time in a row she had brought mushroom barley. He glanced over to his beautiful wife, his rose, his only reason for not throwing his accursed sister into the pits of Tartarus, to find her trying to hide her amusement at the situation. “And what would you propose we plant? Hmm?” questioned the lord of underworld, “The last time I checked, plants require sunlight to grow, a commodity which the underworld lacks.”

Demeter gave a short wave with the tongs in her hand, as if deflecting the question. “There are numerous fungi that thrive in caves,” she answered as if it was the most obvious thing in the world, “besides, mortals have made incredible advances in breeding hardier crops. Why just the other day I read about a potato that be grown on the ocean floor! Isn’t that something?”

Hades rolled his eyes, reminded himself for the Nth time that she was his mother-in-law, and therefore could not be dunked in the Lethe, no matter how tempting it seemed. “Well it sounds like my barnacle-brained brother will give Idaho a run for their money,” he quipped.

Apparently that was the straw that broke the camel’s proverbial back, as Persephone choked out a guffaw before leaving the room.

Demeter arched an eyebrow at her exiting daughter. “Such a strange child,” she mused, “must have come down with something.” She then glared at her son-in-law. “Lack of sunlight is not good for the immune system.”

Thankfully, before Hades had a chance to tear into his mother-in-law, he felt that his urgent attention was needed at the judgment pavilion. He got up from the black marble table, and summoned his cloak of lost souls; after all, one must always look professional at the work place. “My thanks for the meal dear sister,” he said with a small bow. “It has inspired me greatly.”
Demeter appeared puzzled by his words. “I appreciate your kind words, but how has it inspired you?”

“From now on every soul in the field of punishment shall eat this slop for every meal,” he answered, before disappearing in swirling darkness.

It was exceedingly rare that the tribunal would require the lord of the underworld’s presence. Generally, he was called upon if the soul in question was at a state of balance, they had committed terrible sins, while still displaying great virtue. While most would assume the answer would be to send the soul to the fields of Asphodel, but to many that would be a cheap way out.

Take for example Alfred Nobel, a brilliant chemist and philanthropist. He invented dynamite as a safer alternative for nitroglycerin, but mortals perverted its original purpose and expanded its use to include warfare. For many years Dr. Nobel profited immensely from his invention, until he found a French newspaper that had wrongly reported his death. His obituary condemned him for his invention for all the suffering it had caused mankind and went on to say that the world was a better place without him. Horrified by these accusations, Nobel spent the rest of his life trying to make the world a better place by funding scientific research that would benefit all of mankind. On his deathbed he left his fortune in a trust fund and every year a committee would award a cash prize in numerous areas of the arts and sciences to those who had contributed to the peaceful advancement of mankind.

At his judgment the question had been raised as to why he had not acted sooner, and instead had waited until later in life to atone for his actions. Another judge, Minos if Hades recalled correctly, had argued that his creation of the Nobel Peace Prize would continue to benefit the world long after his death. The debate had raged and eventually Hades had been called in. Hades had ruled that since the original purpose of dynamite had not been one of malice and that his actions to atone would echo throughout the ages, he would be allowed to enter Elysium.

So you can imagine Hades’s surprise to find that the reason he had been called was to judge one Annabeth Chase.

The lord of the dead would freely admit that he wasn’t a fan of the daughter of Athena, what with her strutting through the underworld, making a fool of his beloved guard dog, and immediately pinning the blame on him for stealing his brother’s master bolt. Not to mention all the emotional pain she had put his son through… If she had known of Nico’s affections, then why had she continued to display her affection for that accursed son of Poseidon while Nico was around? Why didn’t she talk to him about it? It pained Hades to watch his only son experience that kind of heartache, sure he was getting better now, but how much of the damage done would be permanent?

However, he would acknowledge that she had helped save the modern Greco-Roman world on two occasions, almost perishing on several occasions, thus making her worthy in his eyes of Elysium if not the Isles Of The Blest.

So why had he been called away from his beloved family? He cast his gaze at the judges that were currently acting as the tribunal: David Bowie, Buddy Holly, Prince, and Keith Richards.

The lord of the dead did a double take. He pointed at the old, but still very much alive rock star. “What are you doing here?” he asked. “How did you get here? You’re not even dead!”
The rock god took a drag from his cigarette before reclining in his chair. “I go where I please,” he replied, while a strange powerful aura began to emit from his being. “You would do well to remember that mate.” He took one last drag of his cigarette before flicking it at the god of the underworld, the strange aura suddenly gone.

“Riiight,” was all Hades could respond with. Apparently the guitarist had ascended to divinity, which actually answered a lot of questions. Regaining his original train of thought, he addressed his three chosen judges plus one British rock star. “Why have you summoned me for what should be an open and shut case with a trip to Elysium.”

“Thank you lord Hades,” chirped the blonde daughter of Athena, clearly pleased by his words.

“Stay out of this girl,” sneered Hades, before returning his attention to the council of musicians.

Bowie was the first to answer. He stood up and gave a shallow but respectful bow to his king. “This little blonde twat just blew up that summer camp, killing most of the Greek demigods,” explained the heterochromic musician, gesturing to the blonde in question. “We’re going to be backed up for days because of her.”

“We don’t know for sure if it was intentional or not lord Hades,” interjected Buddy Holly, while adjusting his glasses. “If it was intentional, then her previous heroics are negated earning her a one way ticket to the fields of punishment.”

“Wasn’t your trip to Minnesota one way Holly?” asked Prince, a small smirk on his lips.

“It takes more than a remark from a man in women’s clothing to get under my skin.”

“Enough!” roared the lord of the dead. He did not have the time or patience for this kind of juvenile behavior. “What of my son? Is he here?”

The three judges began to look through the mountains of paperwork in front of them, but Keith Richards let out chuckle. “Your son is fine,” he answered while pulling out a pack of cigarettes from his vest pocket. “He was one of the only two that escaped.”

That put Hades at ease. Sure a lot of kids just died apparently, but they weren’t his kids. “He escaped with his boyfriend didn’t he?”

"Actually lord Hades, I’m here too,” squeaked a voice.
Hades looked behind the daughter of Athena to see that, yes, Will Solace was next in line to be judged. Hades rubbed his temples. Great, there goes all of Nico’s progress, which meant Hades had to go read more of those horrendous parenting books. The lord of the underworld gestured to the son of Apollo and said, “This one goes immediately to Elysium and is to be given special privilege to allow him to visit my son.”

The blond boy timidly raised his hand. “Actually lord Hades, I’m going to choose rebirth.”

Hades arched an eyebrow at the boy.

The boy sighed, “it wouldn’t be healthy, physically or mentally, for him to be down here for me. He deserves to live a real life.”

Hades couldn’t help but crack a smile, the son of Apollo was right and clearly was thinking in Nico’s best interest. He shrunk down to mortal size and placed a fatherly hand on the boy’s shoulder. “I shouldn’t do this, but do you want me to tell my son anything?”
“Could you tell Percy that I love him for me?” interrupted the daughter of Athena, killing the moment, which was impressive considering their current location.

“It is most unwise to interrupt one who will decide their fate,” hissed the lord of the dead.

The daughter of Athena squeaked out an apology.

He returned his attention to the son of Apollo and attempted to give a reassuring smile. “As I was saying before I was so rudely interrupted,” he threw a glare at Annabeth, “Is there anything you wish me to tell Nico?”

“Just tell him to take care of my comfy hat,” answered the son of Apollo, a single ghostly tear trailing down his cheek.

Someone from behind them clapped their hands, ending the moment.

Hades turned to see Bowie standing there, his hands clasped together. “Right, that was a touching moment an all, but let’s get back to the matter at hand my lord,” said the experimental musician with a sardonic smile. He gestured to the daughter of Athena. “Whether or not it was this Disney princess’s intention to kill scores of children.”

Hades frowned. He should have not been summoned for something trivial like this, when all the tribunal had to do was look through the girl’s memories, it was standard procedure after all. “Why have you not simple looked through her memories? I know you and Mr. Nelson are new to your positions, but Mr. Holly should have informed you about procedure.”

It was apparently Mr. Holly’s turn to interrupt the lord of the underworld, “That’s kind of the real reason we called you here.”

"Explain."

Buddy Holly flipped a switch in his chair’s armrest, causing the wall behind the council to slide open, revealing a huge monitor. Displayed on the monitor were flashes on the girl’s life; her first encounter with the daughter of Zeus and the son of Hermes, spiders scurrying out from her closet, her first kiss, and a thousand other memories. There was something seriously wrong though, the last week of her life on Earth was missing. “As you can see lord Hades, she is missing the last moments of her life. While there is no evidence that it was her long term goal to kill, we can’t rule out that it wasn’t a spur of the moment decision,” explained the bespectacled rock star. “She could have intentionally wiped her mind prior to the crime in hopes of escaping retribution.”

Hades turned to the daughter of Athena, “Well girl, what is the last thing you remember?”

Stormy gray eyes met with his pitch black eyes, “I woke up Monday morning and went to class, then I was here.”

Hades sighed, that was certainly less than useless. There was something off about this whole situation. Scores of demigods dead and he hadn’t felt their souls enter his realm? Camp Half-Blood seemingly destroyed and not a single missive from Olympus? This Annabeth Chase missing only the last week of her memories? There was no potion, talisman, or any other sort of magical trinket that could erase only small portions of memories. Rewrite them? Yes, Hera had done plenty of that in the last war against Gaea. This would require further investigation.

Hades was interrupted from his thoughts by the son of Apollo. “My lord, I was closest to Annabeth when everything went down. She had no weapon on her body, she looked pretty beat up, and she definitely wasn’t acting like herself. She was running around Thalia’s tree, talking about her mother
and just rambling like a mad woman. I had just managed to subdue her when she literally exploded, next thing I now I’m in some waiting room.”

“Thank you for your words William.” Hades let out a long sigh before addressing his judges. “Until further notice, all demigods who died at Camp Half-Blood will be allowed to enter Elysium, unless they meet the requirement for the Isles Of The Blest.” The three judges and Keith Richards nodded in understanding. Hades was about to leave when he noticed a certain son of Hephaestus near the front of the queue. “Ah Mr. Valdez,” called out the lord of the underworld, a smirk on his face. “I see Asclepius’s potion didn’t go to waste.”

Leo didn’t say anything, instead opting to flip-off the god instead.

When his presence was no longer required, Hades traveled to the border of what had once been Camp Half-Blood. Years ago, the gods had ruled that no god would be allowed to enter the camp’s borders without permission from the Olympians. However, there was an exception to that rule. In the event that the camp was destroyed, any god or goddess was allowed access to the grounds to attend to their departed children’s needs or to collect a token of remembrance.

Which why Hades was puzzled to find himself alone. He wasn’t physically alone, there appeared to be some mortals sifting through the ruins, but there was nothing divine, not even Hestia. It was all quite alarming.

His first thought was that maybe the camp’s barrier had malfunctioned and was not allowing access to the gods yet. He hesitantly began to push his left hand through were the barrier should start. He met no resistance, not even a tingle, from the barrier. Hades let out a sigh of relief, while the barrier wouldn’t have destroyed him, it would have hurt, not to mention he would have been summoned to Olympus to answer for his “crimes”.

Suddenly his arm felt as if it was being torn from his body. He watched in a state of horror and awe as his very essence was being pulled from his arm, leaving it mortal. He struggled to release his arm from his invisible assailant, but with one great tug he was free. He examined his arm, it looked fine, but it felt disconnected, like a phantom limb. His power eventually worked its way back into his arm, but this was something new. For a brief instant, his arm was completely mortal.

A million possibilities coursed through his mind on who or what could be behind, let alone capable of a such a feat. His father? No he wouldn’t be back for at least another seventy years. The same could be said for Gaea. Perhaps his youngest brother. Zeus had turned Poseidon and Apollo mortal on several occasions in the past, but that had required the Olympians blessing to work. Besides, what would his brother gain by wiping out the guard dogs of Olympus? This would require further contemplation, and most likely his son’s assistance.

He stepped into the shadows and vanished.
Nico was thankfully alive, but he wasn’t in what the lord of the underworld would call good health.

Hades had arrived at the small town hospital his son was recovering in wearing, in his opinion, a fashionable pin stripe suit. He had walked up to the front desk and asked where his son was, and that yes he was Hades di Angelo. The nurse at the front desk was relieved and asked Hades to fill out his son’s paperwork. Apparently whomever had brought him in had filled out Nico’s information with worthless information. Hades took the offered clipboard and took it to a seat in a rather small and uncomfortable waiting room. He quickly filled out the paperwork with information that would not raise any suspicion, before taking a glance at the original form. The handwriting was sloppy and all over the page, whoever filled it out was clearly mentally deficient.

Some notable gems were:

Date of Birth: some time in the 1940s

Age: 70...ish?

Blood Type: The universal one. I’m not sure so that should be safe.

Last four digits of social security number: He’s pretty old, so 0013?

Hades returned the updated information to the nurse, an older woman named Mary, she looked through the paperwork, and quickly entered the data into her computer.

“Excuse me madam, could you tell me what happened to my son and how he ended up here?” asked the lord of the underworld.

Mary looked up from her monitor a puzzled look on her face. “Oh you don’t know? He’s got some pretty severe burns, mostly on his back, and is severely dehydrated. He’ll be fine though, the doctors cleaned him up and are running some IVs so he’ll be able to leave in a few days,” she assured. “He was carried by a friend of his late this afternoon. His friend was as naked as the day he was born, must have been one crazy party,” she laughed.

A feeling of unease settled over the god. The strange entrance, the sloppy paperwork, Keith Richards saying Nico escaped with a friend; there were only two possibilities left with the son of Apollo out of the picture. Hades cleared his throat, “You couldn’t by chance tell me his friend’s name?”

The nurse shook her head slowly. “I’m sorry sir, it would be a breach of patient doctor confidentiality.”

Hades did his best to hide his frustration. While Zeus or Jupiter in this case was his least favorite brother, he greatly preferred his son to the alternative. “Could you maybe describe him for me?”

Mary chewed on her lip for a moment in thought, before shrugging her shoulders. “I don’t see why not. Let’s see he was a bit older than your son.”

Well that certainly narrowed thing down, thought the lord of the dead.

“Really tan skin.

Still not helpful.

“Had a swimmer’s build.”
No.

“Black hair.”

No No.

“Had what the kid’s would call a “skater vibe” to him.”

No No No.

“And these amazing sea green eyes, I’ve never seen such beautiful eyes before.”

Motherfucker! Let Kronos come and devour him again!

“Are you alright there sir? You look a little paler.”

Hades sighed in defeat. “Just take me to my son if you would please.” Why were the Fates so cruel? What had he done to deserve Perseus Jackson in his immortal life…

It hurt Hades to see his only son like this, back covered in burns, IV in his hand, his body covered in a thin layer sweat, and was struggling against some unseen foe in his sleep. Thankfully, Mary had left the two of them alone after escorting Hades to the boy’s room, giving Hades a rare opportunity to be alone with his child.

Hades brushed the hair from Nico’s face and his son eased into his touch. Nico looked so much like his mother when he was asleep, so much like his beloved Maria.

He had honestly loved Maria, and it hurt knowing he would never see her again. He had lied to Nico when he had told him that he was forbidden from seeing her spirit. No, the truth was she wasn’t in the underworld, she was somewhere else, somewhere beyond even his reach. After Hades had failed to protect her from Zeus’s wrath, it had taken a legion of gods to stop him from searching the other pantheons for his lost love.

For over half a century Hades had entered deep depression. He rarely attended any of the functions on Olympus, he ignored his darling Persephone, and basically threw himself into his work. Anything to ease the pain.

And then the great prophecy began, and he was able to pull Nico and Bianca from the Lotus Casino. However instead of cherishing his children, he kept them at arm’s length, which he immediately regretted. Bianca had perished shortly after joining those accursed hunters, and Nico was left alone to fend for himself.

“Mmmm,” Nico mewed in his sleep, snapping Hades back to the present.

“Life is too short to live in the past, even for an immortal,” mused the god, slowly running his fingers through his son’s hair.

He fished a flask of Nectar from his suit jacket pocket, dripped a few drops into Nico’s open mouth, and then took a swig of the godly beverage himself. It tasted like the first pomegranate he shared
with Persephone all those millennia ago mixed with espresso he had been drinking when he first saw Maria.

“How about I go grab your idiot cousin and we can all get out of here?” he asked his sleeping son, a fond smile gracing his lips. He ran his hand once more through his son’s hair before turning to leave, only to spot a hideous knitted sun colored hat placed on the table near the room’s entrance.

His smile turned into a frown. “This must be the hat in question,” he said while examining the woolen abomination. He put the hat down and spared another glance at his sleeping son. “You will find your solace my child,” he whispered before leaving the room.

Jackson looked terrible, so it was hard to find the demigod’s situation amusing. Hard, but not impossible.

The young son of Poseidon was in handcuffs and was being escorted out of the hospital by two mortal lawmen. Hades had simply used his power to knock out the two mortals, a simple feat for any immortal.

The son of Poseidon was crouching down to check the condition of his captors when Hades decided to make his presence known. “Why is it always you? Hmm?” asked the lord of the dead. “And why is it that whenever you are involved my children are always hurt? Physically and emotionally,” he added thinking of his son upstairs. He threw the ancient copy of *Time* magazine he had been skimming through onto the end table next to him. He was about to continue his rant when his right shoe felt oddly *wet*, then a familiar odor assaulted his nose. Asparagus, another vegetable Demeter had been force feeding him as of late.

Hades looked down to see a puddle of urine slowly forming around his feet. Apparently the young mortal he had sat next had an idea of what Hades truly was, a common trait in all mortal children that they eventually grew out of.

“Oh for mother’s sake!” he groaned before burying his face in his hands. His shoes were custom made Italian leather! God of wealth or not, they would be expensive to replace, not to mention he would have to schedule an appointment to get his measurements! Enzo would be livid to hear what happened to the shoes he had so painstakingly crafted.

Hades stood and tried to wipe off as much of the offending liquid as he could on the chair he had been sitting in. The little punk had ruined not only ruined his shoes, but also killed his image! You could bet the son of Poseidon would tell his father all about this! He would be a laughing stock on Olympus.

Hades was about to cast the kid into Tartarus, but he stopped for two reasons. The first, it was just a child, he hadn’t intended to do any harm. The second, this was technically holy ground, so he was forbidden to do any permanent damage.

He regained his composure and decided to have a bit of fun with the mortal instead. The kid obviously had an idea to what he really was, but that didn’t mean he knew what he was capable of. “September 15th, 2052,” he cried while pointing at the child. That meaningless date would haunt the
mortal for years.

Hades walked over to the son of Poseidon and gestured for him to follow.

“No,” said the son of Poseidon, in a barely audible voice.

“What was that?” asked the lord of the underworld, arcing an eyebrow. It was only then that Hades got a look at Jackson’s eyes. What had once been seas of blue and green, were now shattered glass. Something had happened, something that had broken the hero of Olympus.

“I said no!” cried the broken teen, as he thrashed wildly, trying to break out of his handcuffs. “Where the fuck were you when they needed you?

Hades could hear the pipes in the walls around them groan.

“I bend over backwards for years! Saving you all time and time again only for you to completely ignore the one thing I care about!”

The lights began to flicker around them. Hades looked to the kid that had pissed himself and cried, “Kid you might want to get out of here or you won’t have to worry about 2052!”

The kid nodded in understanding and ran out of hospital with his one good arm covering his head.

The son of Poseidon continued to rage, his wrists were bleeding were the cuffs were digging into his skin.

Hades held his hands in front of him to show he meant no harm. “Look kid, I’m sorry about your girlfriend. About your camp. I was the first to find out I’m sure my brother will swing by soon, and you and him can go bond over some smoke salmon or something, but until then why don’t you come with me, we’ll go get Nico and I can take you somewhere safe.”

Apparently that had been the wrong thing to say. Jackson went rigid, his eyes grew impossibly wide. “What did you say about Annabeth?”

“Don’t worry she made Elysium, she-” Hades didn’t get a chance to finish, as he was suddenly, and quite violently, pushed through the floor of the hospital and embedded into the earth by a torrent of water. Well at the rate things were going, Hades was just going to have to buy a whole new wardrobe…

“Give them back!” screamed the son of Poseidon, before slamming another torrent of water into the waterlogged god. “Give me back Annabeth!”

Another blow.

“Give me back Paul!”

Another hit.

“Give me back my mom!”

Another blow, but this time a little weaker.

“Give me back my sister,” he cried before collapsing to his knees, all his energy used up. The son of Poseidon began to shake as tears streamed down his face.

As Hades removed himself from the hospital’s foundation he realized what the boy had been saying.
The Raven haired teen hadn’t been aware of the death of his lover or the destruction of the camp. No, he had been mourning the loss of his family, of his world.

Hades snapped a few broken bones back in place before he approached the boy. He should be angry, he should smite the boy were he sat hunched over, but unlike other gods he knew what grief made people do. He knelt down in front of the crying boy, and used his power to remove the handcuffs. The boy's arms fell lifelessly to his sides.

Jackson looked straight into the god’s eyes. He hoarsely whispered, "Why didn’t my father protect them?" Before throwing himself onto the god's shoulder, sobbing uncontrollably.

Hades didn’t know how to act at first about the sudden physical contact. Hades then slowly began to wrap his arms around the grieving boy. When he felt that the son of Poseidon wasn’t going to push him away, he embraced the boy even tighter.

Hades would begrudgingly admit he owed this boy, so the least he could was this.

They had stayed that way for a long time. Hades had to use his fear powers to keep mortals away from the water damaged area.

He would make sure that his brother reimburse the mortals for the damage his son had caused. Maybe even make him pay for his new shoes and suit.

He helped Jackson to his feet, and began to escort him to Nico’s room.

The trip wasn’t awkward, but there was a cloud that hung above them. Why wouldn’t there be? The poor kid had lost his family, his first love, and almost all of his friends in a short period of time.

Hades’ thoughts turned to his son. He wondered how Nico would handle everything? Nico had been returning to his old self, but now he had lost almost as much as the Jackson kid. Hades would have to keep an eye on his son just to be safe, it was far to soon for Nico to call the underworld his permanent home. He would have to inform his barnacle-brained brother to do the same with his son, but something in Hades’s gut said Poseidon wouldn’t be attentive as Hades would be.

Speak of the Devil, and he shall appear; isn’t that how the Christian saying goes? Hades mused, as the pair entered Nico’s room. There leaning against the wall was his younger brother, a straw hat pulled down over his eyes, sporting a hideous pink Hawaiin shirt, cargo shorts, and sandals with socks. The son of Jupiter was sitting next to the sleeping form of Nico, wearing what appeared to be a prep school uniform, white buttoned up shirt, red tie, blue dress pants, and a matching blue jacket thrown haphazardly in the corner of the room.

Poseidon raised his hat, and flashed his son a bright smile. “Percy long time no see!” boomed the sea god. “How’s Sally?”

Hades facepalmed. Hard.

Instantly Jackson was on his father, torrents of water erupted from the walls, and pushed the pair through several walls.
The son of Jupiter looked at Hades, a mix of confusion and horror on his face.

Hades sighed, and walked over and picked up his sleeping son. “Grace if you would kindly grab Nico’s things, I believe the hospital is about to be evacuated.”

Jason nodded in understanding.

Chapter End Notes

This was a really fun chapter to write.

I've always thought that Hades was the only god to really care for his children, he just has a hard time showing it.

Just to clarify, Sally and Paul are not in the underworld, they went someplace else. Where? That's up to you.

One of my biggest issues with the series was how in the very first book we saw that death had honestly little consequence. When you take away the unknown, death loses its edge. Which is why I decided to have it so that the gods couldn't control were mortals went, with the exception of their children.

Liked what you read? Leave a kudos!

Questions, concerns, theories, praise? Leave a comment!

Thanks for reading!

Oh! one last thing! Next Chapter will be Jason. we get to see how things went with Disciplina!
Chapter Summary

Warnings: implied torture, gore, blood, non-consensual touching, attempted rape.

Tonight:

Jason goes to "school",

Disciplina is really just the worst,

and an impromptu family reunion.

Chapter Notes

Wow I can't believe this story has so many hits already!

Thank you all for your support!

The trip from Camp Half-Blood to Kingsport, Massachusetts, where Disciplina dwelled was uneventful.

He had woke up early Tuesday morning, picked up his mess in Nico’s cabin, stole a couple comics from Nico’s stash, double-checked his equipment, and jumped into the van Argus had waiting. The ride to Grand Central Station was silent and awkward.

Truth be told, Jason had always been a little freaked out by Argus. Which set of eyes was he supposed to look at? Was he supposed to shake his hand, or would that irritate the eyes on the palm of the servant of Hera? How did shoes work for him?

To prevent himself from completely freaking out, Jason pulled a pen and a pad of paper from his backpack, and began to write letters to Piper. The letters were something they had started soon after Jason began traveling. Many of the minor gods disliked the idea of Jason IMing in their territory, thinking that he may relaying information to other rival gods, but apparently every one was fine with him writing letters as long he didn’t use Hermes express. So every couple months, Jason would go to the nearest post office and purchase a book of stamps.

Apparently the motto for the United States Postal Service assured delivery even with paranoid schizophrenic mythological deities. Who knew?

Most times he would write about his current objective, how their friends were doing, or just random thoughts that popped into the son of Jupiter’s mind. Other times, he would try to be romantic, but those often ended up sounding like something an eighteenth century explorer would write; never start
a letter with “My dearest Piper”. Piper had responded in kind by calling him a total nerd.

Jason had just finished sticking the Captain America stamp on the envelope when the van came to a stop. He gathered his things, gave Argus a quick bow of thanks (hand shaking issue avoided), and jumped out of the van.

He made his way into the station, careful to avoid the various creatures that called the station home. He maneuvered his way through the crowds and stood in the queue for the manned ticket kiosk.

Sure the automated ticket kiosks were infinitely quicker, but for a demigod they were also infinitely more dangerous. The one and only time he had used one, he had been sure to check his surroundings before he even got near the touch display. His finger had just made contact with plastic when no less than five dracaenae bum rushed him from behind. Jason had been able to take them out with a little lightning, but in the process he completely fried the ticket kiosk. Even with the Mist, that one had been hard to explain to the surrounding mortals.

When it was finally his turn to purchase his ticket, He found that the man sitting behind the window looked like the Italian-American version of Mr. D. The doppelganger was just as portly as the Greek god, even had the same blood-shot eyes, he was wearing a blue Hawaiian shirt, a gold chain hung from around his neck, and his greasy black hair was slicked back. Jason quickly purchased his ticket from the strange man and got out there as quickly as possible; he had been really creeped out by psuedo-Mr. D.

When he felt he was far enough away, he found an empty bench and sat down. He placed his ticket into his wallet, a frayed brown leather thing Piper had gotten him as gift.

Wallet in hand, his thoughts turned to his girlfriend. He would say Piper was incredible, but that would be a massive understatement. She could go from this sweet, albeit mischievous, angel to warrior goddess faster than bolt of lightning, and still look amazing. She could appear to be at home in any surrounding; from the red carpet premieres with her father, to camping with Jason in a rest stop, Piper was never out of place.

Which made Jason feel out of place besides her. She was Piper Mclean, daughter of A-list actor Tristan Mclean, who was Hollywood royalty. Sure Mr. Mclean had been nothing but welcoming of Jason, and had even said he was thankful that Piper had found a nice, normal, boy her age, but how long would normal be good enough for Piper? And what would happen when he found out Jason was more or less a high school drop-out? That Jason was almost always traveling and would most certainly be for the rest of his time on Earth.

Jason regretted become the Pontifex Maximus, it had been promise he had made without realizing the ramifications. Percy and Annabeth had plans for college, Leo and Calypso were going to open a garage, and Hazel and Frank were going to figure it out together. But what about him and Piper? He was stuck with trying to keep the peace among the gods for the rest of his life, a herculean task for sure that would require most of his time. There was no way he would ask Piper to join him, it wasn’t fair to her. Piper deserved so much better than him, gods he couldn’t even give her the attention deserved!

Jason sighed. Someday Piper would leave him, and it would be for the best. For the time being though he would cherish every moment they had together.

The station intercom system announced that Jason’s train was pulling into the station in five minutes. Jason took a deep breath to collect himself, tried to clean his glasses on his jacket, gathered his things, and headed to his platform.
To get to Kingsport, Jason had to switch trains in Boston to one that would take him to Ipswich, then once in Ipswich, Jason had to walk fifteen miles north to the seaside village of Kingsport.

The only way Jason could describe Kingsport would be: scary beyond all reason. The seaside village was built into a cliff face. A heavy mist hung over the town that practically blocked out the sun, and combined with the village’s location, made it look like the village just faded into oblivion. The buildings were all old and decrepit, some where even covered in the bones of various long dead sea creatures, something that only really freaked out the son of Jupiter. The few people he could see moving through the mist were all hunched over and wearing thick woolen jackets and scarves that covered their faces. He would even swear on the river Styx that some of the people were hissing.

What was truly frightening though lied just east of the town.

There was an almost unnatural rock formation jutting from where the land met the sea. If Jason squinted it almost looked like the rock formation known as Zeus’s thumb back at camp, just bigger and composed of some kind of black porous rock. On top of the formation sat a small stone cottage. It looked quite a bit like Hagrid’s hut, that is if Hagrid had decided to neglect it for a hundred plus years. The mist that covered the surrounding area stopped right at the front door of cottage in a most unnerving way. Jason had no idea why the little cottage bothered him so, but he knew he should avoid it at all cost.

Jason had just adjusted the strap on his shoulder and began to walk towards the dark village, when a short yellow school bus whipped past him, mere inches from him, before executing a perfect handbrake turn.

The bus’s doors hissed open to reveal what Jason could only describe as a terrible old man behind the wheel. His face was marred from age, he was missing his right eye, and for whatever reason had decided to not cover the wound. He wore a black stocking cap, with a matching black seaman’s jacket, and on top of that a bright orange safety vest. He looked at Jason expectantly with his one eye before screaming, “Grrrrrr!”

“Easy there Pappi!” called a voice from the back of the small bus.

In a matter of moments two girls around Jason’s age had exited the short bus. They both were wearing some kind of school uniform that consisted of light blue pans with a matching jacket, a white button up shirt, and a red tie. The two may have dressed alike but that was where any similarities ended.

The first girl was perhaps a year or two older than Jason, if her height was anything to go by. Her short hair was an unnatural lipstick red and had clearly been styled by her bed. Her uniform was wrinkled up and had what appeared to hot sauce stains on her jacket.

While the red head looked like she had just crawled out of bed, the other girl radiated order. She was about a head taller than Jason. Her uniform looked as if it had just come back from the cleaners, her shirt was so white it actually hurt Jason’s eyes to look at it. Her hair was long, straight, and midnight black, with not a loose strand to be found. She wore thick black framed glasses, and right under the rim of the glasses on her left cheek was a small mole, that Jason had a hard time not staring at.
The red head stuck out her hand for Jason, before making introductions. “Hi there! I’m Lisa, and that,” she gestured with her other hand at the other girl, “is Allison.”

“Mistress Allison,” corrected the intimidating woman.

Allison’s cheeks flushed with color. “Sorry, Mistress Allison.”

Allison nodded her approval.

Jason pulled himself together, while their arrival had been unexpected, he could not afford to make a bad first impression, especially if a Roman goddess was involved. As much as it pained him to do so, he let his Roman instincts take hold, he stood straighter, squared his shoulders, and wiped any and all emotion from his face. He took Lisa’s hand and gave a firm handshake and introduced himself, “I am Jason Grace, son of Jupiter, former praetor of the first legion, and current Pontifex Maximus for the gods.”

Apparently he had said something funny as Lisa had doubled over laughing, while Allison rolled her eyes.

“Oh geeze kid,” laughed the red head. “No need to put a stick up your ass, why don’t you go back to being the perplexed golden retriever you were a minute ago.”

Jason blushed in embarrassment. This wasn’t the first time that comparison had been made, in fact Piper had done so on numerous occasions.

“I’m Jason Grace! I’m the son of Jupiter!” Lisa mocked.

Jason frowned, this was not a good start to any form of negotiations. It then dawned on the blond that he did not know how these three were related to Disciplina, let alone what they were. “Excuse me, but how are you related to Lady Disciplina?” asked the son of Jupiter, a bit more timid than he would have liked. “What are you? Are you her servants? Children?”

Allison rubbed her forehead with her hand. “Jupiter’s sandals, you can’t just ask what someone is Grace.”

Well if this situation went any further South he would hit Tartarus. Jason regained his composure, “I apologize for my bluntness. I’m not used to any sort of welcome party in my duties.”

There was a blur of red and then Lisa’s left arm was wrapped around his shoulders, while the other was ruffling his hair. “No need to apologize,” Lisa laughed. “Mistress Allison just likes to give people a hard time!”

Lisa was about to answers his questions when the terrible old man on the bus growled at the trio.

“We can answer your questions on the ride back to the academy,” Allison explained. “Papi says we need to get as far from Kingsport ASAP.”

Jason was confused. “I was told Kingsport was were Lady Disciplina resided, are we not going to her palace?”

Allison shook her head. “First of all it’s Mistress Disciplina. Second, Kingsport is only the closest village to her residence. Third,” Allison shuddered, “even most of the Olympians avoid Kingsport.” She clapped her hands together, “Now let’s get on the bus and get out of here.”
Jason had stared down the Trojan sea monster, fought the titan Krios, fought off an army of monsters while freeing Juno, and had even went to war with the very Earth itself, but he had never experienced something so terrifying as the terrible old man’s driving.

Although both Lisa and Allison swore that the terrible old man, or Papi as the girls called him, was one-hundred percent mortal, Jason wasn’t convinced. How could any mortal make a school bus achieve such speed? Jason couldn’t stomach looking out the vehicle’s windows, everything was a blur, like when the Millennium Falcon used its hyperdrive. Every time the little bus hit so much as a pebble, Jason would fly out of his seat and hit his head on the roof of the bus.

Lisa was explaining that Mistress Disciplina ran a boarding school, where any man, woman, or creature was allowed to attend, as long they were willing to be disciplined. Perhaps that should have concerned the former praetor, but he was too busy watching Papi driving and praying for the gods to spare his life.

The bus driver from Hell had the accelerator to the floor, but if his body language was anything to go by, he was trying to push it through the floor. It was at this time that Jason noticed that the stick shift had a silver skull shaped knob on top of it, which for some reason only made the situation worse.

Allison was trying to explain to him that each student was paired with another student. One student would be an apprentice, while the other would be a master or mistress. The role wasn’t determined by age, but by personality. She went on to say Allison was her apprentice and that Jason would be joining the two until he was done with negotiations.

The only thing that caught Jason attention, albeit momentarily, was when Lisa explained that she was a mortal from Hoboken and that Allison was an empousa. Jason had never personally met an empousai, but Percy had told him tales of Kelli, the evil cheerleader. Jason spared a quick glance at the spectacled girl, but he didn’t see a donkey or bronze leg. She also definitely did not have flaming hair either.

It was at this time that the bus hit some kind of bump, which sent the vehicle flipping end over end. As the short bus flipped, Jason was suspended in air, and not by his powers. It was like those airplanes the astronauts used to simulate zero gravity, something Jason no longer wished to do. Jason could hear Papi growling in the driver’s seat, the old man spun the steering wheel and then slammed on the parking brake. Instantly Jason was flying out of the school bus’s door, only to land safely in a grassy field.

Jason had never been more thankful for solid ground in his life, going as far as to kiss it.

“I wouldn’t do that Grace,” called Lisa, “that was just sprayed this morning.”

Jason looked back at the bus to see his new classmates calmly getting off the bus as if nothing had happened.

“Anyway,” Lisa continued, “welcome to Pompeii Prep!”

For the first time Jason noticed he was crouched before a huge neoclassical mansion, that looked a lot like Xavier’s School for Gifted Youngsters. “Guess I’m an X-man now,” he mused.

Lisa helped him up off the ground, only to slug him in the shoulder. “Nerd,” she teased. “Now let’s
“I can’t share a room with you!” Jason protested. Apparently the student mentor relationship required them to share the same room, something Jason was deeply uncomfortable with. Sure in New Rome the barracks were unisex, but now that he was with Piper it felt like he was cheating on her. It didn’t help matters the he kept catching the two girls staring at him with weird expressions on their faces.

“Rules are rules,” Lisa sang.

“But I’m a guy and you’re a,” Jason gestured to his new classmates.

“The lady doth protest too much,” the red head said in a Shakespearean accent.

Allison grabbed Lisa by her tie. “That’s enough out of you,” hissed the raven haired girl. She then turned to Jason. “This is not up for debate. You will stay in this room,” she ordered. “Unless.”

Jason gulped. “Unless what?”

“Unless you think you’ll behave like your father, O son of Jupiter,” Allison answered smugly.

If the empousa had been trying to get under his skin, she had succeeded with surgical precision. Jason knew the stories of his father’s many… indiscretions, and it was a great source of shame for the teen. From what he could remember of his time at Camp Jupiter before becoming praetor, people had been leery to be alone with him.

Like father like son, they had whispered behind his back.

So to prove them wrong Jason had worked hard to become praetor, throwing himself at any quest that he could. Even after becoming praetor though, people still continued to talk about him, just not as much. This was just another challenge he would have to overcome.

“No. This will be just fine.”

Jason hardly slept that night.

Since he was only their temporarily, he had been given a scratchy cot to sleep on that was most likely older than Uranus. The blanket they had supplied him with was half eaten by moths, while the other half was covered in stains that he wished not to think about.

Mistress Allison had woke them up at dawn. While Jason had jumped out of bed and was ready in under ten minutes, Lisa required more coercing.
“I don’t wanna,” grumbled the red head into her pillow.

Mistress Allison frowned at the disheveled sight before her. “Do I need to discipline you apprentice?”

In a blur of speed that put Mercury to shame, Lisa was out of bed and dressed in the same uniform she wore the day before. “There will be no need for that mistress!”

A feeling of unease settled over Jason. What was that about? All he knew was he would have to follow any rules to the letter if punishments were as bad as Lisa acted.


While most of what he had seen of the school looked like it came from the X-men, the cafeteria looked like it was stolen from Hogwarts. The trio stood in a cavernous stone room, the ceilings were vaulted and easily thirty feet high. Huge fire places flanked the room, each mantle depicted scenes from Roman history. Four columns of tables and benches took up the center of the room, the tables were painted gold, while the benches were purple. Lined along the back wall of was the largest selection of food the Pontifex Maximus had ever seen, and his mouth was watering.

Mistress Allison led them to one end of the smorgasbord where trays, plates, and other eating utensils were kept.

Lisa was the first to start filling her tray, taking an absurd amount of bacon and scrambled eggs, only to cover them in sausage gravy. Mistress Allison by contrast only took a single pomegranate, which reminded Jason of his best friend. If things didn’t work out with Will, maybe he could try to set up Nico with her. After all they already had so much in common, he mused.

Jason was about to fill his plate, when he was suddenly hit by revelation: this was a test.

Disciplina was most likely watching his every move, judging him, seeing if he was worthy of her time. Being the Roman goddess of discipline, she was going to judge Jason on his conduct and self control. His two roommates were obviously clues. Lisa was a walking, talking, disorganized disaster, who lived on impulse. While, Mistress Allison was her polar opposite, organized and disciplined.

Jason would have to follow Mistress Allison’s example he was going to successfully negotiate with the goddess.

The son of Jupiter stared longingly at the mountains of food, before taking a single red apple.

After their morning meal, he was led outside to the school’s track.
“Here at Pompeii Prep, there are no teachers,” explained the empousa. “It is entirely up to the students whether they pass or fail. At the beginning each semester student’s are given a list of topics they are to educate themselves on, and at the end of the semester the headmistress will administer a series of tests on each topic.”

“That sounds actually kind of nice,” said the son of Jupiter. “I mean in the real world no one is there to guide you every step of the way, right?”

“Eh,” said Lisa with a shrug.

“Today we, and by that I mean you two,” said Mistress Allison as she pointed at the blond and red head, “will be working on physical fitness. So I want you two to go change, and then run laps until I say otherwise.”

Lisa grabbed Jason by the hand and pulled him into what Jason thought was tool shed, but was actually a locker room. Once inside, Lisa handed Jason a pair of red running shorts and a white T-shirt. Before Jason had a chance to process what was even happening, the red head was stripping down to her underwear.

Jason averted his gaze, his cheeks flushed. “I really wish you wouldn’t do that.”

“Oh? Do you see something you like?” asked his classmate, smiling judging by the sound of her voice.

Jason was redder than the cattle of Apollo. “No! I mean I. I have a girlfriend and well,” stammered the son of Jupiter.

Lisa laughed. “A girlfriend you say? Well what a coincidence, I have one of those too!”

Jason spun around to look at the girl. “Pardon?”

Lisa’s expression hardened. “I have a girlfriend,” she repeated, stressing each syllable. “Is that going to be a problem for you, son of Jupiter?”

“No!” cried Jason, shaking his head violently. “My best friend has a boyfriend!”

Lisa returned to her normal bubbly disposition, any discomfort completely gone. “Well that’s nice,” she smiled. “Now hurry up and get dressed, you don’t want to keep the mistress waiting.”

Jason nodded, and quickly disrobed.

True to Mistress Allison’s word, he and Lisa ran laps around the track, and that was just fine with Jason. It gave him a chance to think.

When had he started referring to Nico as his best friend? Wasn’t Leo supposed to be his best friend? Not that a person couldn’t have more than one best friend, but it didn’t feel right to say Leo was his best friend. Hades, he would even rank Percy higher than Leo now that he thought about it.

He hated to admit it, but he knew why he wasn’t as close to Leo as he was over a year ago, Calypso.
Jason had nothing against Calypso, she was an amazing individual, it was the what Leo had done to rescue her. Leo had lied to everyone, sort of faked his death, only to reappear out of the blue like nothing had happened. Even after his return, Leo was still distant, refusing to leave his bunker without Calypso.

Percy had explained to Jason that Leo had broken the number one rule of the bro code: bros before hoes. Jason had at first been offended by Percy’s vulgar terminology for Calypso, but Percy calmed him down and explained what it meant. Apparently mortal men were not supposed to ignore their other male friends for a woman, the exceptions being family and wives. And in a strange way that had made a lot of sense to the son of Jupiter.

Then there was Nico, his unexpected best friend. After Croatia Jason had tried to build trust between himself and the slightly younger son of Hades, but he would have never have guessed what it would become. After defeating Gaia and repairing the damages at camp, the two began to hang out. They would spar in the arena, Nico would adjust Jason’s glasses, they would help Will in the infirmary, Nico would clean Jason’s glasses, they would go to the campfire together, and Nico would always help Jason find his glasses.

Jason frowned.

He really need to thank the son of Hades for mothering him.

The two boys really became close when Nico returned from a trip to Percy’s with what could only be described as a crate of Marvel comics. Nico had insisted that Jason read them, something the son of Jupiter had been reluctant to do given his dyslexia, but Nico had been persistent. After Jason had finished a volume of Captain America, he wanted to hug the son of Hades, but he knew Nico still wasn’t comfortable with physical contact.

Jason would never admit it, but he related to Steve Rogers on almost a spiritual level. Here was a guy who did what was right, not for glory or any personal gain, but because it was the right thing to do. Steve didn’t want to be a hero, he would rather be an artist, but he set aside dreams for the greater good. And wasn’t that what Jason had been doing for his entire life?

“On your left!” Lisa cried as she lapped him, snapping him back to the present.

Jason smiled. What did it matter that he and Leo weren’t a close as they had been? Jason had Nico now, and he was pretty sure the son of Hades would always place bros before hoes.

They had been running for over six hours and Jason couldn’t feel his legs anymore.

Years of drilling at Camp Jupiter had taught Jason to pace himself, so he was able to maintain a constant speed without tiring himself out, but even that has its limits.

Lisa on the other hand, had ran like a mad woman, and ran out of energy hours ago. She was currently hobbling slower than continental drift around the track.

Jason spared a glance at Mistress Allison, who was currently sitting on some bleachers, filing her nails. This was clearly another test, this time of endurance. He was certain all he had to do was be the
last one standing, and judging by Lisa’s labored breathing, he wouldn’t have to wait much longer.

Jason had just lapped Lisa for the fifth time, when the red head collapsed.

Instantly Mistress Allison was on top of the panting student. “Did I say you could stop, apprentice?” she snarled.

Lisa rolled onto her back, her face red from overexertion. “No Mistress,” she half panted half whined.

Mistress Allison pulled her up onto her feet. “Then you better keep running,” she snarled.

Jason had moved too far away to hear the rest of the conversation, but he did see Lisa take a step forward, only to fall over again. He couldn’t understand what the raven haired empousa was saying, but it sounded threatening.

As he approached the pair again, he saw that the empousa was holding the mortal up by her shirt, both looked absolutely livid. Just as Jason slowed to a stop to see if he could defuse the situation, Lisa spat in the empousai’s face.

“I see you need to be disciplined,” said the empousa, her voice eerily calm. She dropped the mortal girl before wiping her face off with her hand, she then turned to the son of Jupiter. “Apprentice Grace, you will continue to run laps until sundown, then you will clean yourself, and return to our room. Do you understand?”

Jason nodded. “Where are you going?” he asked in earnest.

The raven haired girl crouched down and pulled Lisa up by her collar. “Apprentice Lisa needs to be disciplined,” she said before disappearing with Lisa in a ball of flame.

Jason had never been so exhausted in his life, but he didn’t dare complain.

He wasn’t sure how he made it back to his shared room, let alone showered and changed. He collapsed onto his cot, no longer caring about how itchy it was or the mysterious stains it contained. Right now, that cot was the most comfortable thing in the universe.

Within a matter of moments, sleep took him.

Jason was awoken by the sounds of someone sobbing. He grabbed his glasses that he had accidentally fallen asleep on (Nico would not be happy), and scanned his immediate surroundings.

Mistress Allison was fast asleep in her bead, snoring ever so slightly, apparently she had returned while Jason was asleep.

Lisa’s bed was empty, but he saw her standing by the doorway, her back turned to him, her shoulders shaking.
Jason slowly pushed himself out of his cot. When his feet touched the cold floor, he hissed in pain. He limped over to the crying red head, each step felt like he was walking on broken glass. “Hey are you okay?” he whispered.

When she didn’t respond, Jason tapped her shoulder. Maybe she hadn’t heard him?

She practically jumped out of her skin, and she spun around to face the former praetor. She had her hands clamped to her mouth, her hands covered in blood. Her face was covered in bruises and lacerations, her left eye was swollen shut.


Lisa nodded, but Jason didn’t believe her. He had seen a son of Mercury get trampled by a cyclopes and Lisa still looked worse.

He led Lisa to her bed, and helped her sit down. “Tell me what happened. I want to help in any way I can,” he beseeched.

Lisa shook her head, her hands still clamped to her mouth.

“Please tell me what happened. I can get you out of here!”

Lisa looked away, then looked Jason in the eye. She removed her hands from her mouth and opened wide, a stream of blood flowed from her mouth.

Her tongue had been cut out.

Jason nearly passed out from the sight. “Grab your things. We are getting out of here.”

Lisa grabbed Jason hand as he stood up. She shook her head violently at him, then pointed at the sleeping empousa.

Jason glared at the still sleeping form of the monster in disguise. “If she tries to stop us, I’ll handle it,” he snarled.

Lisa once again shook her head violently, and gestured wildly at Allison.

“You want to take her with us?”

Lisa shook her head again. She then climbed into her bed and mimed sleeping.

Jason was confused. “You want to stay?”

Lisa sat up and nodded with a huge grin, blood still pouring from her mouth.

“Are you sure?”

Lisa jumped up and kissed his forehead, which both grossed him out and made him blush.

Jason sighed, “alright if your sure.”

The red head smiled, and climbed back into her bed.

Jason did the same, but he refused to fall asleep.
“Wakey wakey, eggs and bakey,” Lisa whispered into the sleeping son of Jupiter’s ear.

Jason fell out of of cot in terror, letting out a very undignified shriek. He looked Lisa over and saw that she had somehow miraculously healed overnight. Her face was once again perfect, not even a blemish marred it, and judging by the fact she could talk her tongue must have been restored. “How are you, last night, blood,” babbled the blond.

“Eh I got better,” she explained with a shrug, as if nothing had happened.

Jason pushed himself off the dorm’s floor, his eyes as wide as saucers. “What happened?”

The red head shrugged again, “I misbehaved, Mistress Allison disciplined me. Happens pretty frequently.”

Jason’s jaw dropped. How could this girl act like having her tongue ripped out was completely normal?

She slugged Jason’s shoulder. “Come on, get dressed, breakfast is waiting, and so is another day of running laps,” she said with a smile.

Jason gulped, his legs were still sore from the day before, he prayed that he could outlast the red head.

Thursday had played out exactly like Wednesday. They had ran laps, this time Jason was even slower, but Lisa still collapsed first, Mistress Allison had ordered Lisa to get up, and Lisa had spat on her student mentor. They then disappeared in a ball of flame, leaving Jason alone to run laps until sun down.

He limped his way back to the dorm, somehow showered, and collapsed in his cot, only for the red head to wake him up again with her sobbing.

This time instead of her tongue, Lisa’s right eye and been ripped out.

Jason had offered to escape with her, but Lisa had refused, saying this was her home, and it wasn’t what it seemed. Which perplexed the son of Jupiter to no end.

She kissed his forehead, and then shooed him off to bed.
Friday was even worse.

Lisa once again woke him up, her wounds from the previous night gone. He joined Lisa and Allison for breakfast, where he would grab a single piece of fruit. They then went to the track were he and Lisa were to run laps, well in his case limp, as his legs were refusing to cooperate.

Instead of spitting, Lisa decided to change it up and slapped the raven haired empousa.

Jason dragged himself to the dormitory, took a shower while he laid sprawled out on the shower floor, praying to the gods to make the pain in his legs stop.

After his shower, he dragged himself into his cot, passed out only to be awoken a few hours later by Lisa’s return.

Tonight she was missing her left arm, the one she used to slap the empousa, and her tongue.

Jason’s pleas to leave once again were brushed off by red head, she kissed his forehead, and shooed him off to his cot.

Jason thought he knew what fear felt like, he really did, but as Lisa lapped him, he knew she would outlast him today. He tried to reassure himself that as long as he didn’t behave like his red headed roommate, he would be fine.

But he had no proof to support that theory, it was just something he said to comfort himself.

“On your left,” Lisa laughed as she passed him.

If Jason had the strength, he would have ran and sacked the red headed annoyance. He tried to think of his friends, his family really, as a way to motivate him to keep moving. He could imagine Piper cheering him on from the sidelines, Nico yelling at him to run faster, while Will would look at his boyfriend in embarrassment. Percy would be giving him a thumbs up, while making out with Annabeth, who would also be giving him a thumbs up. Leo would be behind the bleachers with Calypso, but at least he would be there. Frank would be quietly cheering, while Hazel would be fanning herself as she watched her friends unbecoming behavior.

Jason smiled before his knees buckled, he didn’t even register the impact when he hit the ground.

“Uh oh! Looks like someone is in trouble,” Lisa called out from the other side of the track.

He felt Mistress Allison heave him off the ground by his collar. She looked him in the eye with a sinister smile. “Mistress Disciplina will see you know,” she whispered before they were engulfed in flame.
The next thing Jason knew, he was sitting in an overstuffed arm chair in a dark office. The walls were lined with book cases, containing texts on law, punishment, child psychology, sexuality, and a rainbow of other subjects. The wall he was facing had a window, but the shades were drawn, casting the room in shadow. In front of him was a large mahogany desk, with a stuffed eagle engaged in combat with a stuffed owl on one corner. Behind the desk was a black high backed chair, currently facing the window.

“Well, well, well,” crooned a silky smooth voice, “if it isn’t Jason Grace, son of Jupiter, leader of the seven, Pontifex Maximus.”

Jason sat straighter in his chair, ignoring his body’s exhaustion.

“You are unique compared to your siblings,” continued the voice. “All of your siblings could not be trusted to share a room with the opposite sex, without… incident.”

Jason frowned.

“But you must be commended for your discipline,” praised the voice. The chair swiveled around, revealing someone Jason was quite familiar with.

“Piper?” rasped the son of Jupiter.

“No, you silly boy. I am Disciplina,” laughed the goddess. She stood up from her chair, only to crawl up onto her desk. She was wearing a form fitting blouse that highlighted Piper’s/the goddess’s curves, she had on a black miniskirt that left little to Jason’s teenage imagination. She wore fishnet stockings on her long shapely legs that ended in stilettos.

Besides her voice, and the way she dressed, there was one thing that screamed that this was not his girlfriend: her eyes. While Piper’s eyes were a kaleidoscope of colors, Disciplina’s eye were an unnerving solid gold.

The goddess gently lifted Jason’s chin with her fingers so that he was looking in her eyes. “It’s been far too long since I’ve had a man worthy of my praise.”

Jason gulped. This was going in a direction he had never anticipated.

“Most give up, others get angry and lash out,” she sighed, “and so they must be punished.”

“Is that what you do to Lisa? Punish her?”

The goddess tilted her head in confusion before laughing. “Oh no, dear hero! That’s all Allison’s doing.”

“What?”

The goddess ran her fingers through Jason’s hair. “Those two have a unique relationship, a bit kinky for even my taste, but to each their own,” she said with a small shrug.

Jason furrowed his brow. “Wait, Allison is Lisa’s girlfriend?!”

“Mistress Allison,” corrected the goddess. “Titles, much like names, have great power.”

She started to dangle one of her heels, and Jason found he couldn’t look away.

“But yes, those two are a couple,” confirmed the goddess. “An odd couple, but a couple none the less.”
Jason’s eyes were still on the goddess’s bouncing foot. “Why would Lisa put up with that kind of abuse though?”

Disciplina smirked. “Oh baby, she begs for Allison to do that.”

Jason looked the goddess in the eyes. “What?”

“That’s their thing. Lisa likes to be tortured and Allison likes to torture,” the goddess smirked. “I merely provide them with a place to do so safely.”

“How kind of you, Mistress Disciplina,” Jason praised, trying to get further on the goddess’s good side. Hopefully he could get her to agree to be at service to Olympus, and he could return to camp.

The goddess kicked off her heels, and rested her feet on Jason’s lap. “That’s enough about them, now let’s talk about you,” she said with a suggestive smile.

Jason mind was screaming at him that this was not Piper, and honestly he was not comfortable with the goddess touching him. However, his body had no such problems.

“You intrigue me Jason Grace,” the goddess said while running one of her feet on his thighs. “You seek freedom, but yet you throw yourself into situations that require discipline. You lead, but you yearn to follow.” She removed her feet, and climbed down from her desk, only to circle behind the son of Jupiter. “You are a walking contradiction,” purred the goddess as she began to massage Jason’s aching shoulders.

“Piper I don’t feel comfortable with this,” Jason blurted before realizing what he said.

Thankfully the goddess only laughed, other goddess would have blasted him for comparing them to a mortal. “Don’t worry sparky,” Jason’s heart soared at the familiar pet name. “You’ll feel more than comfortable when I’m done with you,” she purred in his ear.

Suddenly Jason found himself on a heart shaped bed, and he was in the Pompeii Prep uniform.

“Now let me reward you, handsome,” Disciplina chuckled, appearing in front of him, wearing nothing but purple and gold lingerie.

Jason scrambled back as far as he could. “Reward me? For what?” he cried.

The Piper impostor crawled slowly towards the blond. “For being showing amazing discipline of course,” she said as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. “Instead of giving up, you pushed yourself until your body could no longer function. When presented with the opportunity to indulge, you only took what was required.” She grabbed Jason by his ankles and pulled him to her. She leaned in and whispered into his ear, “Traits I find irresistible in a man.”

Jason once again scurried as far away from the goddess as he could. “That’s nice, but I’m only sixteen, and I really, really, don’t feel comfortable right now.”

Disciplina grabbed him by his tie and pulled him back to her. She then climbed on top of him and licked his ear lobe. “You are absolutely adorable,” she purred. “Sixteen? In the old days you would already be married and have a kid by now.”

“Funny how things change,” he said with a forced laugh, all the while trying to wiggle out from under the golden eyed goddess. “You know what we could do instead? We could talk about how you could better worshiped by demigods.”
“Baby, you’ll be worshiping me for the rest of your life when I’m done with you,” she said before nibbling on his earlobe.

Jason had enough. He wasn’t like his father, he wasn’t like his siblings, He would never cheat on Piper, willingly or otherwise. “No means no!” he cried as he shoved the goddess off of him.

The goddess fell off the bed, only to reappear instantly, laying next to Jason. “This is going to happen whether you want it to or not,” she sighed.

The bed’s headboard sprang to life and wrapped itself around the son of Jupiter’s wrist, while straps appeared around his ankles. She climbed over Jason only to straddle his hips. “Don’t worry, everyone’s nervous their first time,” she laughed. “Most people aren’t so lucky to have someone so experience or beautiful to guide them.”

Jason tried to struggle, but his bonds were too strong.

Disciplina snapped her fingers and Jason found himself suddenly without clothes. Her eyes hungrily looked over his body. “You are definitely your father’s son,” she smirked.

What the Hades did that mean?!

“Don’t worry about your performance,” she purred into his ear. “Everyone’s terrible their first time, but we’ll have plenty of time to improve your performance.”

Jason gulped. So this was how it was going to happen? Against his will, by some crazy goddess with no hope of escape or rescue. Was this the Fate’s way of balancing the scales for his father’s past deeds? He started to cry.

“Most people don’t cry until after their done,” laughed the goddess, as she started to grind her hips against Jason.

“Somebody help me!” screamed the son of Jupiter.

The goddess frowned at Jason, before she dragged her fingernails down his chest, leaving a trail of blood. “Now there is no need for that. You would think I’m doing something horrible to you.”

“Help!”

“No that’s enough out of you! You will accept my generous gift and you will-”

The goddess never got a chance to finish as she was suddenly blown off of Jason by a blast of pure energy.

“Dad?” Jason asked before he even looked at his savior.

“No,” boomed a familiar voice, “but close, I am your uncle.”

Jason looked to see Poseidon, god of the seas standing next to the bed. His golden trident was aimed at were the Roman goddess had been but moments before. “Lord Poseidon!” he cried, before realizing he was bound and naked in front of the one of the three most powerful gods of Olympus. Jason did his best to cover himself by crossing his legs.

Jason’s embarrassment apparently amused Percy’s dad, as he let out a tidal wave of laughter. “It’s nothing I haven’t seen before Jason. What do you think we wore inside of our father’s stomach?” Poseidon raised his outstretched trident, pumped it, and what appeared to be a shell casing popped
out of the trident’s staff. He then waved the trident over Jason.

Instantly Jason was wearing his Pompeii Prep uniform, and his limbs were no longer restrained. “Thank you lord Poseidon,” said the son of Jupiter as he climbed off the bed, his body still stiff and sore. “Thank you, in more ways than one.”

The sea god itched his ear. “Think nothing of it,” he shrugged. “I was over visiting my old friend Nodens in Kingsport when I heard your cries of help. You being my boy’s friend, and of course a hero of Olympus, I was obligated to help,” he smiled.

The sea god went to put a hand on Jason’s shoulder, but Jason jumped back before physical contact was made. “Err, sorry, just don’t want to be touched right now lord Poseidon.”

The Olympian gave Jason a sympathetic smile. “Don’t worry about it catfish, and please call me Don.”

“Oh… Don.” The name felt weird on Jason’s tongue, but if that’s what the god wanted to be addressed as, Jason would do as he was told.

Poseidon nodded his approval. The god then started to scratch the back of his head, “I was also kind of looking for you.”

Jason frowned, of course there was going to be some kind of string attached to his rescue. “Oh for what lord, er, Don?”

The sea god jammed his trident into the floor, before he cracked his knuckles. “First off, my son Tyson has been missing for around three days now. Then I noticed my oldest brother, your uncle Hades, is currently with his son and Percy in central Illinois.”

“What?”

“Which is really out of character for my brother, I swear that man actively avoids sunlight, so that means something must be brewing. I tried to contact your father, but all of my messages never went through, even on my shell phone!”

“What?”

“So If Hades has Percy, I figured it was only logical to find you, granted logic isn’t my strong suit,” shrugged the god wearing a pink Hawaiian shirt. “So what do you say? Ready to go to the Midwest?”

“Uh, sure?” answered Jason, who had no clue what the senior seaweed-brain was talking about. “How do we get there? Do you evaporate us or something?”

Poseidon laughed. “No, no. I take it you know Papi?”

Jason nearly passed out.

The trip from Kingsport, Massachusetts to Spring Valley Illinois took less than an hour. The gas
mileage that short school bus got was unreal. Papi had swerved around traffic like it was standing still, which at the speed they were traveling, it pretty much was.

Once again, Papi flipped the bus, only to send Jason and Poseidon flying into the hospital Nico and Percy were allegedly at. Poseidon was laughing like a dolphin and clapping his hands, while Jason was trying to not lose his lunch. The terrible old man chucked an empty soda can at Jason’s head, and screamed “GRRRRRR” before the bus shot off out of sight.

Poseidon stood up and brushed himself off. “Papi is a funny guy,” he chuckled.

“Yeah, he’s hilarious,” said Jason, his voice dripping with sarcasm, as he rubbed his aching head, thankful that he had not been knocked unconscious.

Again.

Poseidon pulled a straw hat from thin air, and placed it on his head. “Well kid, let’s go find our family.”

While Poseidon had insisted on searching the hospital until they found their family, but Jason had managed get Nico’s location from a huge guy named Fabian

When they got to Nico’s room, Jason ripped off his jacket and threw it in the corner of the room, while Poseidon quietly leaned against a wall.

Jason’s heart broke when he looked at his cousin. Nico was laying on his side, IVs in his hands, and his back. Dear gods, his back. It was covered in burns and blisters of various sizes, some of his skin was charred black. “What happened Neeks?” he whispered.

Jason pulled a chair from the corner of the room to Nico’s bedside. He sat down and held Nico’s hand in his own. “It will be okay,” he said, mostly to reassure himself.

“Percy long time no see!” boomed the sea god. “How’s Sally?”

Jason turned just in time to see Hades facepalm, really hard too judging by the the sound it made. Percy, who had been standing behind the lord of dead, wearing a hospital gown like Nico’s, rushed his father. Water exploded from the walls and pushed the father and son through several walls.

Jason turned to his uncle, in hopes of some kind of explanation.

Hades just sighed, and walked over and picked up his unconscious son. “Grace,” he said, his voice eerily calm, “would you kindly grab Nico’s things, I believe the hospital is about to be evacuated.”

Jason just nodded.

_What is going on?!_

This was hands down the worst day of his life.
Things got really dark there didn’t they?

Oddly enough that hadn't originally been my intention, but as I wrote it felt like these topics needed to be brought up.

I believe Jason will regret his decision to become Pontifex Maximus, and that it will become an issue between him and Piper.

Realistically, people would judge Jason based on his father's actions. King of the gods or not. I've seen it happen, so I figured Jason could use it as motivation.

There were many literary references in this chapter, and I'm interested to hear how many people noticed them.

Fun fact though, Papi was based on a real life bus driver I knew, combined with a character from a short story.

The real Papi once managed to get a school bus up to 120 mph, to get us to game on time.

Good times... Terrifying, but good times.

If you liked the story, leave a kudos.

Questions, theories, "I can't believe you did that"s, cookie recipes, etc, leave a comment

Until next time, thanks for reading :)
Chapter Summary

Tonight:
We meet a previously unseen character,
some details about the organization are brought to light,
and all you can eat shrimp.

Chapter Notes

No warnings tonight, another easy chapter.

“So many people here, so many tragedies…”, he thought as he surveyed the room.

He tightened his grip on his cane and made his way though the sea of cocktail dresses and suits. Some people would offer to shake his hand, others offer their thanks, a few women even kissed his cheek. He of course would thank them for attending this little soiree, before continuing his journey across the room.

He spotted George in the corner of the room, ever the social butterfly. Their eyes briefly made contact, and George gave him a half-hearted salute. George was a great asset, but a pitiful man. Then again who wouldn’t be? How many people know the horrors of war and losing a child? Perhaps when all this was over, George could find some kind of peace.

A nice young waiter tapped his shoulder and offered him his choice of champagne or water. As much he would love to indulge, he wasn’t the young man he had been, and it was a long drive home. The waiter handed him a bottle of water, Fiji, according to the label. He held the bottle in his hand and chuckled, folks would believe anything.

His lips pursed, that was the heart of the problem, wasn’t it?

He brushed aside the troubling thought. Tonight was a rare chance to celebrate, and his people needed to see him in a good mood.

He continued his way across the floor, only to see the young scholar, Percival, err Brian, trying, and failing to flirt with some attractive young women. The boy was unparalleled in any subject he put his mind to, except when it came to people. Apparently the young scholar said something to offend the ladies, as they threw their drinks into the boy’s face, before they stormed off. He cracked a smile, maybe someday the kid would learn to control his ego.

By the look of things, Morgan, wearing what he would consider a scandalous open backed dress, was chatting with Galahad and Tristan. No doubt comparing notes on the Asgardians and
Olympians. He looked around for any sign of Mordred, surely his Egyptian expert would want to join in.

Alas, Mordred was engaged in conversation with Kay. He supposed they could all compare notes at a later date.

Finally, he reached his destination, a leather arm chair that overlooked the New York skyline. He slowly sat down, his joints creaking as he went. When he was settled he gazed out the window the same way he did since he first came to America, many years ago.

The old city had changed profoundly in seventy years. Buildings climbed ever higher into the heavens, the night sky was being pushed back by artificial light, and where once there had been silence, now hummed around the clock with life.

Its beauty took his breath away.

But like all good things, it had a dark side, and he was staring right at it. The Empire State Building, home to some of mankind’s greatest sins.

“Hey you’re that guy in the funny hat my mom talks to on the computer!” cried a little blonde haired, blue-eyed girl, bringing him back down to earth. “Where’s your hat mister?”

He smiled at the little girl. She was adorable, she had a big red bow in her golden hair, and had on a white dress, making her look like a little princess. “Oh, I didn’t feel like wearing it today.”

“How come?”

“I was afraid a big old bird was going to swoop down and take it right off my head!” he laughed. “They do that you know!”

The little girl laughed, “No they don’t!”

“They most certainly do young lady,” he lied, unable to keep the smile off his face. “And if you’re not careful a bird might come and steal your bow!”

He pretended to swipe at her bow, which sent the little girl running away, squealing in delight.

He heard someone walk up behind him.

“Never would have thought you were good with kids,” George grunted.

“There are many things you don’t know about me,” he answered. “Then again, that could be said about anyone,” he mused, as he turned to face the grizzled veteran. “Was there something you needed?”

George jerked his head over to a small podium on the other side of the room. “It’s almost time for you to give your speech.”

“Dear me, is it that late already?”

“It’s six PM,” George grunted.

“When you get to be my age, you’re in bed by seven,” he laughed. He slowly pushed himself out of the leather chair, and used his cane to steady himself. “Make sure that any and all children are removed from the room. We are here to save children, not scare them.”
Public speaking wasn’t exactly his strong suit, but he was one of the few people who enjoyed doing it. He gently tapped the microphone, and the room went silent, all eyes on him.

He cleared his throat.

“Good evening my friends, I hope you are all having a pleasant time. I know I am, I’ve been filling my pockets with cocktail shrimp.” He flipped out his jacket pockets, and a couple dozen shrimp fell on the floor.

The room erupted with laughter. It was an old gag, but an effective one.

“I look out among the crowd and see so many new faces, which fills me with both hope and sorrow. Hope because we are now a united front. Sorrow because we are all hear because we have lost something dear to us.”

He took a sip from his overpriced bottled water.

“Sixty years ago it was myself and a handful of people, trying to find a way to save the world. We were naive then. We believed that we could change our enemies through peaceful means. We flooded the market with books, movies, television shows, and radio shows that depicted the enemy as kind, noble, honest beings. How else does one combat an idea?”

There was a murmur throughout the crowd.

“As time passed, our numbers slowly grew, which allowed us to collect information on a larger scale. Who would’ve have guessed that the world’s governments are corrupt?”

“Anyone with half a brain!” cried a voice from the crowd.

He laughed along with the rest of the room. “You got me there,” he laughed as he wagged his finger at the audience. “But if you would’ve told anyone that the offspring of creatures from myth were running the world, they would’ve locked you up!”

He let out a long sigh. “It was alarming of course, but we still lacked the knowledge, let alone the resources, to do anything put try to alter the public perception.”

He then slammed his fist down on the podium, startling several people. “And then, almost three years ago now, that horrifying beast exploded out of Mount Saint Helens. How many innocents died from monster? Dozens? Hundreds? How many more were injured?”

He gestured at the audience. “And that’s when many of you found us, or vice versa. You saw through the lies and saw what was really happening. Here we try to support each other, here you can find other who understand your pain, your suffering. Here we can help you avenge your loved ones.”

He pulled a remote with a single red button on it from his pocket, and held it so the audience could see it. “This is our answer. This is the result of hard work and luck. Last year our friends in Italy uncovered the remains of a mysterious bronze laptop from a sinkhole in Rome. Our dear Percival—”
“Brian!” cried the red head.

“Brian, managed to recover data that leveled the playing field, so to speak. He found designs for special lenses that allowed anyone to see through the illusion known as the Mist. With these lenses we were able to locate the great titan Atlas, the fallen primordial Ouranos, and numerous demigods.”

He pressed the remote’s sole button. “From them our engineers were able to develop weapons to use against our foes. Guns, bombs, mind control, even a way to render them temporarily powerless. The greatest accomplishment though, I just activated. An inescapable trap, that also destroys any creature that tries to get in. We used a similar model in a high school a week ago to capture ourselves a Trojan horse.”

He could hear Morgan laugh from the back of the room. She had been proud of her accomplishment in capturing DG:AA.

“Now, if everyone would kindly look out the windows and look above the empire state building.”

The entire room gasped.

There floating above the grand old building, was Olympus, visible for all to see.

“Now all the world can see through the lies. The Mist has been removed from the entirety of New York, and soon we will expand our operations to Boston, then to Berkeley, and finally the entire country. There will be panic of course, but we will be there to help with the transition. The real work begins now.”

“Now, I want you all to give thanks to our host, who so kindly allowed us to use his building for our little gathering. Please give a round of applause to Richard Edward Dare!”

The room exploded in thunderous applause.

George was kind enough to walk him out to his waiting limo.

“You didn’t tell them everything,” grunted the veteran as he opened the limo’s door.

He slowly climbed into the limo, before turning to George. “I told them what they needed to know, my story isn’t important to the cause.”

George slammed the door, and his driver pulled away from the curb.

Chapter End Notes

This was fun to write.

We got to meet a new character, but we know next to nothing about him.
Liked hat you read? Leave a kudos!

Questions, theories, just want to chat? Then leave a comment!

Until next time, thanks for reading!
Nico hissed in pain when he awoke.

It felt like the skin on his back was two sizes to small, and on top of that, it was on fire.

“Easy now,” said a familiar voice, “Let me help you up.”

Nico opened his eyes to see the ever smiling son of Jupiter offer him his hand. He blinked few times, his eyes adjusting to the light, before taking Jason’s hand. Nico winced in pain as Jason slowly pulled him up into a sitting position. Before he had a chance to adjust himself, there was a hand holding a bar of ambrosia in his face.

“Here,” said his father, “eat this.”

Nico took the bar from his father’s hand and ate it. A warm feeling spread throughout his body, as he tasted fresh pomegranate seeds, blue birthday cake, and McDonald’s fries. His back no longer felt as tight, but he still felt like there was a camp fire burning on it.

“Even with nectar and ambrosia it will take a week or two to heal properly,” explained the lord of the underworld.

He took a few deep breathes before he tried to adjust to a more comfortable position. Once the pain reduced to something more tolerable, he truly looked at his family for the first time.

Both Jason and his father were soaking wet. Jason was wearing some kind of school uniform, and if Nico was honest, it suited him. He frowned when he noticed Jason’s glasses were bent, great he would have to fix those now. Besides looking like he had just fought a tidal wave (and lost) there was something off about Jason. Jason was keeping his distance from the son of Hades, and his eyes would dart from side to side, as if looking for something to jump out and grab him. Maybe things with Disciplina hadn’t gone smooth and he had been forced to flee?

His father looked absolutely done with everything. His hair was a ruffled mess, his suit was shredded in places, the left sleeve was missing, and everywhere else was covered in dirt. Nico knew how
much his father took pride in his wardrobe, having everything custom made by only the finest craftsmen, so he knew the loss of a suit would eat on him. His father offered him a warm smile when he noticed that Nico was looking at him, Hades then pointed to the sky above them.

Nico’s jaw dropped when he looked up. There was Percy and Lord Poseidon, each held aloft by twin water spouts. Percy let out a primal scream and rushed to intercept his father. Poseidon avoided the attack by releasing the water spouts, allowing him to fall out of the way, only to summon the spouts again before he impacted the parking lot below. This only further angered the raven haired teen, who responded by having a hand composed of water throw a pick-up truck at the king of the sea.

“He’s getting creative now,” Hades chuckled. “This would be the ideal situation for some popcorn.”

Nico frowned at his father.

“I’m only joking, we both know Jackson doesn’t have an ounce of creativity in his body.”

Nico upgraded from a frown to a glare.

“Alright, I know he’s your friend,” sighed the lord of the dead, “and all those books say I should respect your friends.”

“What books?” Jason asked, confusion written all over his face.

“Never you mind,” Hades spat.

Nico once again turned his attention to the battle raging above them. Poseidon had placed a protective bubble around himself, while his son was continuing to hurl vehicles at him.

Nico raised his hands in surrender. “Okay couple of questions. One,” he pointed to Percy and Poseidon, “What is that all about? Did the third great prophecy get revealed? Two,” he gestured to the surrounding area, “Where are we?”

Hades looked away from him and asked, “What is the last thing you remember?”

Nico chewed his lip and thought back. He remembered Percy being brought into the infirmary, all bloodied with a broken arm. Then he remembers going to New York to look for suspiciously absent daughter of Athena, meeting said pain in the neck goddess in the park, and then heading back to camp. There was Annabeth’s horrible dorm, then he returned to camp without success, and then…

“Will,” he choked out.

Some kid had ran into the infirmary, told them that Annabeth was by Thalia’s tree, and was acting strange. Will had told Nico to stay behind and take care of Percy, and then he had felt Will and dozens of other campers die.

“He’s gone,” he said, his mouth suddenly dry.

Instantly Hades hugged Nico against his chest and began to stroke Nico’s hair. “It’s alright my son. Mourning is part of life.”

It was the first time in many years that Nico felt safe in his father’s arms. Since leaving the Lotus any physical contact with his father had felt awkward and forced, but at that moment it felt like the most natural thing in the world, a son finding comfort in his father.
He stayed like that for a while, until his father gently pushed him away. At first Nico thought the lord of the dead was pushing him away because he had overstayed his welcome, but when he looked into his father’s black eyes he knew that wasn’t the case.

Hades tried to speak, only to stop, a look of uncertainty on his face. The lord of the underworld took a breath before he began to speak. “I saw William before he judged.”

“Is he,” Nico began before his father held up a hand to silence him.

“He had nothing to worry about,” his father continued. “I let all those who fell at Camp Half-Blood go to Elysium. Perhaps in my old age I’m becoming something of a softie,” he said with a shrug.

“That’s great! I could go visit him, I could,” Nico didn’t finish, as he saw his father turn away.

“He chose rebirth.”

Nico felt like the world had been pulled out from under him. Rebirth? Why would he do that? Didn’t Will know what that meant? Nico was a son of Hades, he could come and go from the underworld as he pleased, and he could visit with Will anytime he wanted! “Maybe there’s still time to stop him,” Nico cried. “Maybe I can explain to him that I could visit him at any time, we could still be together we could,” he stopped talking when he saw the look on his father’s face.

“That’s why he chose rebirth, my son,” Hades sighed. “He didn’t want you to spend your life in the underworld.”

Nico couldn’t breathe, it felt like a pair of icy hands were squeezing his heart and lungs. The skeletal butterflies in his stomach stopped flapping. “He doesn’t know what he’s talking about,” snapped the son of Hades.

“I think he does Nico,” said his father, pity in his eyes. “He wants you to live your life. To not spend your days hung up on the ghosts of your past.”

Nico was about to protest that he didn’t get caught up in the past, but he knew it was a lie. How many years had he spent mourning his sister? How long had he lived in self-loathing about his feelings for Percy? Nico couldn’t look at his father anymore, so he hung his head in surrender.

Nico felt his father pat his head. “I actually have a message for you from William.”

Nico perked up at the news, and looked at his father expectantly.

“Grace would you mind handing Nico that… thing.”

Jason pulled out Will’s comfy hat from his pants pocket and carefully handed it to Nico.

Nico took it from the son of Jupiter and held it as if it was made of delicate glass. This was all he had left in the world of Will.

“He wanted to you have that,” continued his father. “He said he wanted you to take care of it.”

Nico turned the hat over in his hands, examining every detail. He then held it against his chest and let out a strangled sob. He could do this. He would honor Will’s last wishes, as stupid as they seemed, but wasn’t that just like Will? Will was never dramatic about anything, and always acted like a dork to make the son of Hades smile. Yeah, he could do this, and gods help the fool who tried to come between Nico and Will’s comfy hat.
He used his arm to wipe away the tears from his eyes, he then took a deep breath to steady his nerves. “That’s enough mourning for now,” he said, determination in every word. “We have to stop those two before they kill someone,” he said, gesturing to the battling father and son above them.

“Why are they even fighting?” Jason asked, clearly bewildered by the clash. “Poseidon says two words to Percy, and then they’re crashing through walls.”

Hades cleared his throat. “It seems young Perseus does not handle grief well.”

Jason looked at the god in confusion. “Grief?”

Then Nico remembered the news about Percy’s parents. Sally and Paul had been murdered, a thought that still deeply upset the son of Hades. To make things worse, Sally had been pregnant with Percy’s little sister. “Annabeth is dead as well, isn’t she?”

Hades only nodded in the affirmative.

“Oh, time out for one second,” Jason cried, making a ‘T’ with his hands. “What do you mean “as well”? I get camp was attacked, but I am still lost over here.”

“Sally and Paul are dead Jason,” answered Nico, his voice just above a whisper.

“What? How?”

“I don’t know,” Nico sighed. “The day you left camp, a patrol found Percy unconscious at the border. A day or so later news had reached camp that Paul and Sally were found dead in their apartment.”

All color drained from Jason’s face. Jason had known the Blofis family the shortest, but Nico knew he felt like Sally and Paul were his adoptive parents. The same could be said for Nico too. Hades, any demigod who met Sally instantly felt like they were family. “And Annabeth, she died in the attack?”

“Grace,” Hades said somberly. “Everyone who was at camp died. It wasn’t an attack, it was a slaughter.”

Jason fell to the ground and cradled his head in his arms. “Leo. Calypso. Clarisse. Clovis,” Jason continued to name the fallen demigods.

Nico pushed himself off the ground, ignoring the burning pain from his back, he walked over to Jason and pushed the blond’s head back by pushing on his forehead with his index finger. “Grace, we all feel like crap right now, some of us more than others,” Nico used his free hand to gesture at Percy. “Right now, you and I need to stop or friend from leveling the place. Can you help me?”

Jason continued to stare at the son of Hades, before nodding.

Nico offered Jason his hand, which the latter gladly accepted, and pulled himself off the ground. Nico grimaced in pain as he helped his friend up. Maybe pulling people up with an injured back wasn’t his best idea.

“What’s the plan death-breath?”

Nico frowned at his “best friend”. “Well I was thinking you could fly me up there and we can try to reason with him, but now I’m thinking I’ll just hack you into pieces and toss them at Percy.”
Hades laughed. “It’s times like this that make me proud to be a father.”

Jason frowned at Nico, “Ha ha ha, but seriously? You want me to carry you up there? Look at them! They are throwing cars at each other now!”

“You could always hit them with a bolt of lightning Grace,” suggested the lord of the dead. “Problem solved.”

“Dad,” Nico warned.

“Wait,” interrupted Jason. “Lord Hades why aren’t you doing anything?”

Hades hesitated, “Jackson and I, have… an understanding. Besides, my salt encrusted brother could end this if he wanted to.”

Nico rolled his eyes, “Which we don’t.” Gods, why was it so hard to get people to do anything? In the last two wars he had been more-or-less on his own, free to do as he pleased. Anytime he had worked with others, there were always discussions on what the best course of action was, what the risks were, what could go wrong, blah, blah, blah. Okay, sure he would admit that on occasion he may have needed help, the jar sprang to mind, but he had still like a ninety-five percent success rating. “Now come on Jason, fly me up there.”

Jason looked at Nico expectantly.

Nico sighed, “Please.”

“That’s better,” smiled Jason. Jason then scooped Nico up into his arms, and Nico definitely did not squeak in surprise. “Hold on Lois, this could get bumpy.”

Nico was going to threaten Jason, but Jason had to abruptly dive down to avoid a mint green Prius that had been hurled by the lord of the seas. “Hey! We’re flying here!” Nico screamed at his uncle.

“Sorry!” called out Poseidon.

It took them far longer than Nico would have expected to reach Percy. They had needed to avoid flying vehicles, whips made of water, golf ball sized hail, and even a squid, which Nico assumed was Poseidon’s doing.

“Percy!” Nico cried over the sound of raging water.

The son of Poseidon paid no attention to his friends, too busy focusing on trying to destroy his father.

“Percy! I know how you feel!”

That got Percy’s attention. “No you don’t!” he sneered. “No one does!” Percy then encased himself in a bubble as Poseidon sent a torrent of water at his son.

“Really Percy? No one knows how you feel?” seethed the son of Hades. “No one else has ever lost someone they loved before? You’re the only one? Golly, it must be so hard to be you!”

Jason looked uncomfortable. “Nico, I don’t think you should be provoking him,” he whispered.

Nico ignored his friend and continued his verbal assault. “What about my family Percy? I barely even remember my mother! I had my mind wiped, and unlike you it still hasn’t fully returned! You should know what it’s like to reach for a memory only for it to slip away! Unlike you I couldn’t make more memories with my mother!”
“Neeks I really think you should stop,” Jason begged. “Or he’s going to throw an ambulance or something at us.”

Nico brushed aside the blond’s fears. What Jason didn’t see was that the water around Percy wasn’t moving as fast, that his attacks were slowing. “What about Bianca Percy? Or have you forgotten about her?” Nico felt guilty bringing up his sister, but he knew it still bothered Percy. “Even when I die I’ll never see her again. She’s gone forever, the only other person who could relate to me, and she left me.”

“What about Hazel?” the son of Poseidon asked, the anger seemingly sapped from his body.

Nico sighed. “I love Hazel, I really do, but it’s not the same. We’re siblings, but we have no memories together. We may be blood, but we have little in common.”

“I lost Annabeth, Nico. All of my dreams are shattered,” Percy rasped.

Nico gave Percy a sympathetic smile. “I lost Will, Percy. I really lost him. He chose rebirth just like Bianca. Everyone I love ends up leaving me for good. At least Annabeth is waiting for you in Elysium.”

“It hurts.”

“I know it does Percy. It hurts worse than anything else.”

Tears started pouring from Percy’s eyes. “When will it stop?”

Nico sighed. “It doesn’t Percy. Bianca’s death still hurts from the moment I open my eyes in the morning until the time I close them for the night.”

Percy choked and looked like he was about to fall, but he managed to regain control of the twin water spouts. “How?”

“How do I do it? I just do,” he shrugged. “It was hard, and I wanted to give in so many times. Besides, there was this stupid son of Poseidon that I had to make sure didn’t die,” Nico smirked.

Tears were still streaming down Percy’s face, but he managed to give Nico a half-hearted smile.

Nico was about to ask Percy to stop his fight and come back down to earth, when a stray blast of water from Poseidon’s trident knocked the son of Hades from Jason’s grip.

Nico flailed in desperation as he plummeted to the earth. This was what Icarus experienced after he flew to close to the sun? As he plummeted he saw Jason chasing after him, but unless the blond superman sped up he wasn’t going to catch him in time. He thought he saw his father on the ground below, running around with his arms outstretched, as if he thought he was going to catch the falling Italian.

He was maybe ten feet from the ground, when he was suddenly snatched from the jaws of death. His first thought was that Jason had been the one to catch him, but when he looked he saw the familiar green eyes and messy black hair of one Percy Jackson.

Percy landed next to the lord of the underworld and carefully set Nico down. Jason landed a few moments later, panic stricken and out of breath.

Nico looked up at his savior and smiled. “You always got to be the hero don’t you?”
That got a small blush from the son of Poseidon, before he returned to a depressed state.

“I’m sorry!” Poseidon cried as he touched down, his shirt ripped, parts of his beard ripped out, and his left eye blackened. “That was meant for Percy!” The lord of the sea’s eyes widened as he realized what he said. “Not like that! I mean, you know.”

Percy didn’t respond, he just stood there, trapped in his own little world of misery.

It was the lord of the underworld’s turn to speak. “Brother, if you ever so much as roll your eyes at my son ever again, I will drain all of your domain into the pits of Tartarus!”

“Duly noted,” gulped the bruised god. “But could someone explain to me what is happening? Why are you here with my son brother? Why did he attack me?”

So Nico and Hades filled in the god, Jason would join in when he could, but mostly remained silent. They told him of Percy showing up at camp, the missing daughter of Athena, the destruction of Camp Half-Blood, and the death of Sally and Paul.

A single salty tear rolled down Poseidon’s cheek. “Sally,” he whispered. “She was a one of a kind woman.” He looked over to his son, a mix of sorrow and pity on his face. “My poor son. It’s no wonder he attacked me when I mentioned her.”

Jason’s brow furrowed. “Wait, how come neither of you knew about the attack? I thought camp was always being watched? I mean, you can’t even say a thing about my father without the sky rumbling.”

Now it was Nico who was confused. Jason brought up a good point, at camp most of the rules were written along the lines to please the gods. Gods didn’t like it when their children sat with the children of other gods at meals, the gods would strike you down for saying something they didn’t like. Gods, Nico even had to get written approval from his father so that Jason was allowed to sleep over in his cabin!

“Great questions Grace,” praised Hades. “Most of us, with the exception of your father,” he looked at Jason, who in turn shrunk away, “don’t actively pay attention to the goings on of the two camps.” Hades paused, “Well some many of the goddesses watch the Aphrodite cabin to get their fill on drama.”

Jason nodded, “That actually explains a lot. Like how every week something goes missing, so Piper has to deal with all these petty arguments.”

“Anyway,” continued Hades, “something is still wrong about this whole scenario. Anytime an attack happens, we should feel it. I felt nothing, the only reason I found out was because I was called to assist judging the souls of the fallen. Even stranger is, Dionysus was nowhere to be found.”

Nico rolled his eyes, how sad was it the Mr. D. was supposed to notify the gods of something so important. Nico wouldn’t trust that old drunk with an unopened bottle. “Did you try the bar?”

Hades gave a warning look to his son. “Nico, I expect more from you. Such sarcasm is beneath you.”

Nico averted his eyes and rubbed one arm. “Sorry father,” he apologized. He looked over to see Jason smiling at him, obviously amused by seeing Nico like this. Nico responded by slugging Jason in the arm, making the son of Jupiter let out a satisfying yelp of pain.

Hades smiled at his son before continuing his story. “After I cleared up the issue in judgment, I made
my way to the border of Camp Half-Blood. Usually gods are forbidden to enter, but in emergency cases such as this, we are free to come and go as we please. I will admit I was… hesitant to cross the border.”

“You were afraid weren’t you?” Poseidon laughed, slapping his brother on the back.

Hades ignored his younger brother. “When my arm crossed the border something happened that I cannot explain. Something that honestly shakes me to the core.”

Nico was uneasy now. His father, lord of the dead, demon king, master of shadows, admitting he was afraid? Even during the Titan and Giant wars he never admitted he was afraid, he never even looked uneasy. “What happened?”

“It felt like my very essence was being ripped from my body, and it tried to pull me further in. It took all my strength to rip my arm free, but when I did, my arm was completely mortal for a time.”

Poseidon snorted. “And they say I tell fishing stories. I’m sure the border was still active and you just got spooked.”

“I know what I felt!” snarled the god of the underworld. “It was like my arm separate from my being! If you don’t believe me why don’t you go and try it for yourself! Maybe you should stick your fat head in so you can really see what it’s like!”

The two gods were at each other’s throats now, and if someone didn’t distract them this place would turn into a warzone… again. Nico looked to Percy first for help, but he had a thousand yard stare. Jason wasn’t much better, nervously looking back and forth at the two gods. How he managed as Pontifex Maximus, Nico would never know. “Looks like it’s up to me again,” sighed the young son of Hades. He looked around for anything that might be worthy of distraction, when he spotted several mortal emergency vehicles pulling into the ruined Hospital’s parking lot. “Father, lord Poseidon, I think it would be best if we all take our leave. I don’t think the Mist could hide lord Poseidon’s fight with Percy, let alone a fight between the two of you.”

The two gods looked around, then stepped away from each other.

“Smart boy you got there Hades,” grumbled Poseidon.

“He does me proud,” agreed Hades. “Now before we head anywhere I believe a change of attire is in order.”

Nico groaned, sometimes his father could be such a diva. “Father you look fine, if you remove your jacket you’ll look as good as new.”

Jason tapped his shoulder. “Uh Neeks, he isn’t talking about himself,” whispered the son of Jupiter. “You might want to take a look at what you’re wearing.”

Nico looked down at himself for the first time, and realized he was wearing a hospital gown. It was then that Nico realized that the back was open, exposing him for all the world to see. He tried to reach back and tie it up, but when the fabric touched his back, blinding hot pain shot throughout his body.

“I would’ve thought you would have noticed a breeze by now, or you know be freezing,” said the son of Jupiter with a smirk.

“If I had my sword right now, I’d run you through Grace,” hissed the son of Hades.
Poseidon cleared his throat. “You know, when I found you Jason you were wearing a lot less Jason.”

Jason turned bone white, and latched his mouth shut.

Nico stared at his friend, concern on his face. That wasn’t how Jason acted when he was embarrassed. When Jason was embarrassed, he would awkwardly stammer, look around, and wring his hands. Something had happened, and Nico would find out what it was, but for now he needed clothes. “Father, a little help please.”

Hades snapped his fingers, and instantly Nico found himself in a new outfit. He now had on a baggy black sweater, a pair of dark blue jeans, black snow boots, and on his head was Will’s hat. The black sweater must have been enchanted as it felt soothing on Nico’s injured back. Nico bowed his head, “Thank you sir.”

“You’re welcome,” replied his father. Hades then turned to Poseidon, “You want me to do your son, or should I?”

“No, no. I’ve got him,” assured the lord of the sea. He snapped his fingers, a bit louder than Hades, and instantly Percy was wearing the exact same outfit as his father.

Nico could tell instantly Percy was upset. His back had straightened, his pupils dilated, and his breathing sounded heavy and forced.

“No offense lord Poseidon, but I think Percy needs something a bit different.” Nico then turned to his father, “Would you?”

At first Nico feared his father wouldn’t, and he would have to beg, but to his surprise and relief the god snapped his fingers. “Don’t you ever say I’ve never done anything for your friends,” his father sighed.

Percy was no longer dressed in the unwanted items of a Hawaiian yard sale, instead he was dressed in simple black slacks, a black dress shirt, and a nice black jacket that was similar to Jason’s.

It wasn’t Percy’s usually style, but he could certainly pull it off, thought the son of Hades. Percy rarely put any thought into his appearance, opting to grab whatever was closest to him when he woke up. Usually a wrinkled camp T-shirt and the pants he wore the day before. Sally had once told Nico that if she didn’t force Percy to do his laundry, Percy would wear the same clothes for over a week.

To think he had had a crush on that?

While Percy did look quite dapper in his new clothes, Nico felt like something was off. Percy’s expression was no longer one of anger, but one of resignation. His posture wasn’t rigid, but now slouched. Then it hit the son of Hades. “Blue,” he said. “They need to be blue.”

“I beg your pardon?” his father asked.

“Percy’s clothes. They need to be blue,” Nico explained. “Could you please turn them blue father? It’s his favorite color.”

Hades gave Nico a scandalized look. “Blue?”

“What’s wrong with blue?” asked the lord of the seas. “Blue is a fine color! Ninety percent of my realm has something blue.”
“That’s the problem,” cried Hades, “It’s your color!”

“How about navy blue?” Nico asked, interrupting his father and uncle, preventing another petty argument. “It’s kind of the middle ground for you two?”

Hades looked at Nico unconvinced, while Poseidon was nodding in approval.

Nico sighed, why was even the simplest of requests a herculean endeavor? “Please father. Just look at Percy, he doesn’t need any more darkness in his life, give him a little color. Please?”

Hades looked the son of Poseidon up and down, before snapping his fingers. “This never leaves the five of us,” grunted the death god.

“Thank you father,” Nico smiled. His father may come across as a grump, but he was really a big softie, a trait Nico regrettably shared. “See, he looks happier already.”

“Good! Great!” cried Jason, panic in his voice. “Can we please get out of here?”

Before anyone could respond to the son of Jupiter, Hades was blown away by a hail-fire of ears of corn.

“How dare you?!” cried a voice that still haunted Nico’s dreams.

A six foot tall ear of corn, sprouted from the ground in the middle of the assembled group. Its husk rolled down to reveal Nico’s aunt/step-grandmother, the goddess Demeter.

Nico paled at the sight of the harvest goddess. While Percy and the other’s thought Nico was uneasy around her because of his numerous transformations to plants, the truth was far worse. Nico could handle the punishments the goddess dished out, no it was her care that frightened him. She would make Nico work at her various farms to “build character” as she called it, which consisted of hard labor from sun up to sun down. She would force Nico to eat homemade meals that consisted entirely of grains and vegetables, with not a burger or pomegranate in sight. The worst thing though was her idea that she would hug the son of Hades. Nico shuddered at the thought.

“FIRST YOU TAKE MY DAUGHTER, AND NOW YOU TRY TO KEEP ME DOWN THERE?!” the goddess screamed, watermelon vines erupting from the frozen earth, wrapping around the ankles of the lord of the dead.

With a quick gesture of his hands, his father reduced the vines to ash. “What are you babbling on about now, you insufferable old hag?” his father cried, while dodging a barrage of pumpkins.

Nico was about to go aid his father when a hand grasped his shoulder, causing Nico to hiss in agony.

“Oh sorry!” his uncle apologized. “I swear I have the memory of a gold fish.” Poseidon then gestured to a nearby hilltop. “On the bus ride here I saw an ice cream shop up there.”

“How?!” Jason asked in disbelief.

The lord of the seas continued as if he hadn’t heard his nephew, “I was thinking we could all go get something while those two,” Poseidon wiggled his fingers at his father and aunt, “sort things out.”

Nico looked at his uncle in confusion. “Ice cream? It’s February, who eats ice cream in February?”

Percy’s dad laughed liked a dolphin. “Loads of people! Why even Zeus enjoys a little strawberry after our winter solstice gatherings.”
Nico had a hard time picturing that. The image of the king of the gods eating an ice cream cone was just… wrong. “I thank you for the offer lord Posei-“

“Call me Don.”

“Don,” Jason shrugged at Nico, “but I think I should stay and assist my father.”

“I don’t think being turned into a corn stock will be of much aid Nico,” laughed the sea god.

Nico’s eyes bugged, “You know about that?”

Poseidon chuckled. “Demeter loves to tell that story. Never shuts up about it really.”

Nico liked to think that he wasn’t a violent person, but at the moment he really hoped his father killed the goddess. He hoped he killed her, then fed her remains to Cerberus, then took what came out of multi-headed dog and threw them into Tartarus. “Is that a fact?” he asked, his voice cracking.

Poseidon nodded before walking away and wrapping an arm around Jason. “Now let’s get our little school in motion and go get some refreshing frozen dairy.”

Jason looked back at Nico, panic in his eyes. “Help me,” mouthed the son of Jupiter.

Nico let out a long sigh. His life was weird and only getting weirder by the minute.

He looked over to Percy, who was now wearing an outfit similar to his own: Navy blue jeans, matching sweater, and a black stocking cap on his head. It was definitely an improvement over the tattered hospital gown he had been wearing before, not that it had made Nico uncomfortable, nope not at all. Sadly though, Percy still looked like a train wreck, his eyes which had been as ever changing as the sea, now looked like stagnant pools. Percy’s once tan skin was ghastly pale, Nico had raised zombies that looked livelier. It was absolutely painful to see his former-hero-turned-best-friend so shattered.

Nico pushed aside those thoughts. Percy didn’t need pity, he needed understanding. He needed a friend.

The son of Hades took a few tentative steps towards his friend. “Percy?” he asked. Nico was rewarded by Percy looking up at Nico. “Jason and,” he stopped himself from mentioning Poseidon, “Jason and I are going to go get ice cream, it would make me happy if you came too.”

Percy looked away.

“My treat?”

That got a small reaction from the son of Poseidon, looking back at Nico now.

“Come on Percy, let’s go,” he grabbed the former praetor’s hand lead the two of them up the hill Poseidon and Jason had climbed.

As he pulled his friend, Nico thought back to all the times Percy had tried pull him out of his misery. He had pushed back against Percy’s attempts at friendship so many times, but the son of Poseidon never gave up on Nico. Now it was Nico’s turn to help Percy overcome his suffering.

Will would want him to.
“What do you mean you don’t accept sand dollars?”

Nico and Percy had found the little ice cream stand, only to find Poseidon arguing with the young girl behind the counter. Jason was covering his face in embarrassment.

Nico gripped Percy’s hand tighter and pulled the son of Poseidon behind him as he jogged up to the window. “Sorry about my uncle, he’s always playing these weird jokes no one gets,” Nico told the girl behind the counter, offering her the best smile he could muster.

The girl just looked at Nico with a bored expression. “Whatever. Are you going to order something too?”

“Uh.” Nico looked at the menu above the counter and was immediately overwhelmed. Shakes, sundaes, cones, frostees, malts, bostons, daiquiris, and a legion of other items that Nico had no idea what they were. “Do you have anything with pomegranate?”

The girl tapped her fingers on the counter. “This is a Dairy Freeze, not a Whole Foods.”

“Fine, I’ll take a small strawberry sundae.”

The girl wrote down Nico’s order on a pad of paper, then looked back up at him. “What about your boyfriend?”

For a brief moment, Nico thought that he would turn around and see Will, but that hope was quickly dashed when he realized he was still holding Percy’s hand. “He’s not my boyfriend.”

“Whatever. He want anything?”

Nico looked over at Percy, but realized that he wasn’t going to get a response from his friend. He glanced back up the menu and immediately spotted something Percy would love.

“One large blueberry shake please.”

So as it turned out, blueberry shakes are purple, not blue as Nico had hoped. However, Percy did take a few small sips from it, which Nico thought was his way of showing he appreciated the gesture.

“The ocean will always be indebted to you nephew,” said Poseidon, who was pointing at Nico with the spoon from his sea salt caramel sundae. “I will never forget that when the sea was in trouble, it was the heir of the underworld who came to my aid.”

Jason laughed. “That is a really weird and complex way to say he spotted you five bucks.”

Poseidon glared at the blond. “I didn’t see you offering any help Jason.”

Nico rolled his eyes, Jason was going to get himself killed if he didn’t learn to speak with a bit more tact. “It was nothing really,” he assured them. “I was going to get Percy’s anyway, so what’s two more people?”
Jason drank down the last of his banana shake, then slammed the paper cup onto the picnic table the four sat at. “Yeah thanks, Neeks. I spent the last of my allowance on my train tickets.”

Nico wrapped his arms around himself and tried to stop his teeth from chattering, eating ice cream, outside, in the evening, in the middle of February was not a good idea. “How did that turn out anyway? Is Disciplina a firm supporter of Olympus now?”

Jason avoided Nico’s eyes, and all color drained from his face. “We’ll talk about it later.”

“Oh look there they are!” cried the voice of Demeter. “I told you I saw them head this way.”

Nico turned to see his father and pseudo-grandmother walk up to their table. Demeter had her grey hair up in a messy bun, with green ear muffs on. She wore a Carhartt jacket, thick green mittens hid her hands. She looked like the typical farmer’s wife.

Nico cringed at the state of his father though. His father’s once immaculate suit was covered in smashed pumpkins and watermelons. His right sleeve was torn off, and vines hung limply from his right wrist. An ear of corn was tangled in his long black hair. His father’s left eye was swollen shut, and he was pretty sure that he was missing one of his front teeth.

Hades sat down across from Nico and took Percy’s shake. He held the shake to his swollen eye and let out a sigh of relief.

Nico looked over to Percy to see if the theft had upset him, but the son of Poseidon was staring down at the picnic table. Gods, it seemed that everyone around him (with the exceptions of Poseidon and Demeter) were in some state of shock. His father looked defeated, literally and figuratively. Nico didn’t know what was wrong with Jason, but the blond was acting skittish and was actively avoiding any physical contact. Then there was Percy, the twice savior of Olympus, the one-half of camp’s golden couple, and one of his best friends, was now a broken husk of his former self. Nico swore that he would set aside his own pain until he could help his family get through theirs. That’s what Will would want him to do. Right?

“I hate to tempt the fates,” Hades sighed, snapping Nico from his thought. “And everyone sitting at this table know what cruel witches they can be.”

Nico nodded, while everyone around him murmured in agreement.

“But I believe the news my lovely sister Demeter so kindly informed me of, is as bad as it can get.”

Nico gulped, it wasn’t like his father to tempt fate like that.

Jason raised his hand. “What happened?”

His father frowned at Jason. “Put your hand down Grace, this isn’t high school.”

Jason chuckled in embarrassment and slowly put his hand back down on the picnic table.

“I will let my beautiful and loving sister break the news to you,” said Hades. “Lady Demeter if you please.”

The goddess of the harvest perked up at the mention of her name. “Thank you son-in-law,” she nodded at Hades. “And Poseidon it has been far too long since we’ve had a chance to talk outside of work! How’s dear Amphitrite? Is she still scrapbooking? Oh tell her we need to get together! I see young Perseus has grown into a fine young man! He looks a bit pale though… You should try getting more carrots into his diet.”
Nico listened to the goddess’s mindless chatter for another five minutes before his father cleared his throat. That woman could make a titan throw itself in Tartarus to escape her chatter.

“Oh sorry! Anyway, I had finished putting away the leftovers form a dinner I had made for the three of us. Hades, my daughter, and myself that is,” she quickly added. “I was feeling a little miffed, as my only son-in-law had insulted my cooking and then disappeared in a puff of smoke. Can you believe it? I slave over a hot oven only to be insulted!”

“No,” gasped Poseidon. “He did no such thing!”

“But he did!” cried the goddess.

Nico and Jason exchanged looks. Clearly Nico had hit his head somewhere, as there was no way two Olympians were discussing his father’s table manners. Then again, it was Poseidon and Demeter, who had the intelligence of a gold fish and a pea brain respectively. Nico could understand why his father avoided socializing if this was what was entailed.

“Sister, please focus,” his father begged.

“So, I have my Tupperware in hand and I try to go to Olympus, only to be,” she stopped and tapped her index finger to her chin. “Blocked? Yes, blocked is a good word. At first I thought I just did it wrong, but after trying for over four hours I knew something was wrong.”

Nico’s jaw dropped. Four hours? She had been trying the same thing over and over again for hours and was expecting a different result? That was the definition of insanity! What was wrong with this woman?

“It was that point I decided to try a different approach.”

“Naturally,” agreed the god of the seas.

“I have a farm in upstate New York that is only a hop, skip, and a jump from Olympus. I was allowed to go there, and after I fed the hogs I tried to get into the city proper.”

Nico nodded to himself. Feed the hogs, it seems she has her priorities straight.

“The closest I could get was ten miles outside the city. I tried to walk the rest of the way, but there was some kind of… Force? Barrier? Yes, barrier prevented me from going any further. It felt like it was trying to suck the very life out of me,” she explained with a shudder. “It was the scariest thing I’ve ever felt in my immortal life, like it was apart my very essence.”

Nico saw his dad glare at Poseidon in a see I told you so way.

“So naturally I put two and two together. Sucking the life out of me? Preventing me from entering Olympus? Only one god would do something like that. My son-in-law Hades!” She jumped up from the picnic table and pointed accusingly at the god of the underworld.

Poseidon gasped. Shocked at the accusation.

His father rolled his eyes. “Poseidon we already know it wasn’t me. It’s never me and it never will be me. Agatha Christie here just likes to jump to conclusions that involve me being the culprit.

Nico chuckled at his father. Agatha Christie, he understood that reference!

Demeter continued on with her tale, ignoring her brothers. “So I rolled up my sleeves, came here,
and kicked his ass.” She quickly covered her mouth with her hand, shock written all over her face. “I’m sorry about my language boys. You young gentlemen shouldn’t be exposed to such vile language.”

*If only she knew,* Nico thought. Percy had the mouth of a sailor. He himself could swear with the best of them in four languages. He bit his lip though when he thought about Jason. Come to think of it he couldn’t recall a time where Jason said anything stronger than “Butthole”.

“Oh yes, you certainly kicked my ass,” his father supplied. His voice may have been dripping with sarcasm, but his physical appearance told another story. “I tried to explain to her that I had no idea what she was talking about, but she kept assaulting me with produce.”

“Carrots also make great projectiles.”

“Riiiiiight,” said the god of the underworld, clearly done with his sister. “It wasn’t until we crashed into a waiting room with a still working television that she believed me.”

Now it was his turn to be confused. “Father what does a television have to with anything.”

Hades removed the blueberry shake from his eye and looked around the table. “Because my son, there on the screen, floating high above the New York City skyline was Mount Olympus, for all the world to see.”

Chapter End Notes

Another fun chapter to write! I know we really didn't get into Nico's head too much, but Jason really needs a break and Percy is well... you know...

I should mention that Hades, Poseidon, and Demeter will be important characters in this story. There will be more chapters from Hades's POV and you will actually get to see suave, charming, bad-ass Hades, as opposed to the sarcastic so-done-with-everything god you saw here. I don't want to spoil anything, but I will say they all grow closer as they struggle.

Nico, poor sweet Nico. He doesn't know what he's getting himself into by trying to help Percy. He's in for a lot of pain, on top of trying to cope with the loss of Will. No, Nico and Percy are not getting together immediately. It's going to be awhile before they get there.

Jason is trying his best to hide his problems, but Nico can see through his friend's act, something that makes Jason even more uncomfortable. Jason will be the next demigod Pov, three chapters from now.

The next two chapters will be from the "villain's" POV. Each will be really just horrible....

Next chapter will be a check up on what's going on Mount Tamalpais.

The chapter after that will be from Brian's POV, an Oh boy I am pulling out all the stops for that one! I've been planning it for ages!
Like what you read? Leave a kudos! (please)

Thoughts, theories, feeling chatty? Leave a comment! I'd love to hear from all of you lovely people!
Chapter Summary

Warnings: Gore, death, dismemberment, graphic imagery

Tonight:

Card games to kill the boredom of two security guards,

A PJO/HoO version of The Cabin In The Woods,

and several guest appearances!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It don’t matter what you are guarding, it’s a boring tedious job. Be it a museum, a bank, the crown jewels, even an immortal being straight out of mythology, it was incredibly boring.

Grummore took another sip of coffee from his “#1 dad” mug, then glanced back at the wall of monitors. There were thirty monitors that each rotated through ten different security cameras, for a grand total of three-hundred different points of view. Honestly, Grummore thought it was all a bit overkill, but George had insisted on top of the line security and defenses. Electric fencing, land mines, trip wires, automated turrets, and a whole variety of equipment that would make any Bond villain envious. Not to mention the things they kept in the cages, those things gave him the chills.

Grummore instinctively reached for his holstered gun when he heard the trailer’s door creak open. The others may have thought he was a bit jumpy, but he would be the one who was never caught off guard.

He relaxed when he saw it was only his partner, Pellinore, entering the trailer, breakfast in hand. Pellinore was few years older than himself, tufts of white hair peaked out from under his helmet, there were more lines on his dark face, and his brown eyes were perpetually bloodshot.

“If that T:A doesn’t quit its hollering, I’m going to give that gorilla something to holler about,” Pellinore huffed as the old man handed one of the breakfast sandwiches to Grummore. “We were out of bacon, so its sausage,” the old man added, before taking a bite of his own breakfast.

The two sat down at their shared desk and ate their breakfast while running system diagnostics, filling out status updates, really any busy work they could do to make the shift go faster.

“He relax.”

“Just be thankful we don’t have to listen to the DGs crying anymore,” Grummore said, as he finished the last bite of his sandwich.

The old man looked at him in confusion before registering what he had just said. “Oh yeah,” he agreed. “They looked and sounded just like kids. God above, why are such creatures even allowed to exist?”

He shrugged at his partner’s question. It didn’t matter to him that they existed, all that matters is that
they are eliminated. “At least we only have to worry about T:A and DG:VM now.”

“Pity that the other two died from infection, I still think the research team could’ve learned more from them.”

“Well at least you managed to stop their screaming,” he shrugged. “That benefitted the both of us greatly.”

Pellinore chuckled. “Now if only I had some socks big enough to stuff that behemoth’s mouth with.”

The day passed uneventfully, as they all did since the research team left. He and Pellinore made their rounds every hour, one would always stay behind though in the trailer. After lunch they had cracked out a deck of cards and played a few games of poker, they had used some cookies he had found in his desk for chips.

As it stood Pellinore was set to win it all, the man had the face of the Sphinx. Completely unreadable.

He looked down at his hand, and tried not to frown. A pair of twos, and he couldn’t bluff to save his life. “I fold!” he yelled as he threw his cards onto the desk.

The elderly man smiled, and dragged the last of the cookies to his side of the desk. “Don’t feel bad Grummore,” he chuckled. “You can’t beat years of experience.”

“Is that what you call all those wrinkles?”

Pellinore frowned. “I was going to share with you, but I think I’ll just hoard my winnings to myself.”

They both glared at each other, before busting out in laughter. Any job could be bearable if you were surrounded by good people.

Their merriment was cut short though when the proximity alarm went off, the room began bathed in flashing red light and a siren blared over the speaker.

“Christ almighty! Turn that blasted thing off!” Pellinore cried over the siren, his hands clamped over his ears.

Grummore reached over and flipped a few switches on the security console, killing the lights and the noise.

Each of the thirty monitors displayed the same thing: a group of six DGs attempted to make their way to the top of the mountain.

Pellinore whistled. “Oh boy, would you look at that?”

“Look at what?” asked Grummore. He knew his partner wasn’t just talking about the six invading DGs, there was something more.

Pellinore typed a few commands into his keyboard, and the display zoomed in on one of the DGs. It was tall muscular male, possibly Asian if the HD cameras were to be believed. He carried a bow on his back, and was holding hands with a much smaller girl with cinnamon colored hair.
“The markings on his arm,” Pellinore pointed at the screen with a pen. “Those are the markings of one of their leaders. A praetor.”

That got his attention. For the last two weeks the automated turrets had been shooting down one to two giant eagles a day, apparently not only had high command decided to send an actual force, but one of their leaders as well. “Pellinore, have you ever seen the movie The Cabin In The Woods?”

The older man smiled. “Why yes, yes I have.”

“Okay so, if they go left at the fork, I get to choose the monster, while if they right it’s your choice?” the older man asked.

“That’s correct,” Grummore responded as he nodded.

“And each DG is worth one point, but that praetor is worth two.”

“You got it.”

The two guards were currently watching the DGs walk up mountain path. The goal of their little game was to see who could kill the most DGs, while allowing them to get as close to the top of the mountain as possible. Sure they could take them out at any time, but where was the fun in that?

“Look look!” Pellinore cried, bouncing in his seat while rapidly tapping Grummore’s shoulder. “They’re at the fork!”

“Right! Right! Right!” Grummore chanted. He really wanted to unleash the captive gorgons on them.

On the monitors, the six stood at the fork and were most likely discussing which way to take. It really didn’t matter as each path ended at the top of the mountain, just that the left path was longer and went through a valley, while the right more direct and went through the forest. The praetor, looked at the girl he had been holding hands with earlier and then scratched his head.

Pellinore chuckled. “That one may be the leader, but that girl has him whipped.”

“Some things are universal.”

The praetor turned and addressed his troops, and they saluted before they went down the left path.

“Yes!” Pellinore cheered, pumping his fist in the air.

“You dumb bastard!” screamed the younger guard.

“Today is just not your day,” his partner laughed as he began to tap away on his tablet.

“What did you choose?”

“Chimera,” the old man answered. “I’ve always been curious about that goat head. I mean I get the leopard head up front, and the snake-headed tail make sense, but what the heck is with that goat head on the side?”
Grummore furrowed his brow. “That is actually a really good question.”

“Well we’re about to find out, look.”

About a dozen meters behind the DGs the earth slid open, and three ferocious looking Chimera jumped out. At first Grummore was worried that the three hodge-podge beasts were going to tear each other apart, but they seemed to have caught the scent of the DGs and began to pursue their prey.

“Oh this is going to be good!”

The beasts were apparently quite noisy, as the DGs spun around well before the chimera arrived. The DGs got close to each other and used their shields to create a wall around themselves. The chimeras began to slowly circle around their prey, before they each stood equidistance from one another.

“What are they doing?” Grummore asked, more to himself than Pellinore.

The old man smiled, “just watch.”

The three leopard mouths opened wide like a snake, and great billows of flame washed over DGs. The DGs in response huddled closer to each other, with the leader dropping his shield and standing in the center.

“Some leader, can’t even keep hold of his shield,” Pellinore scoffed.

The Chimeras stopped their fiery assault, and began to circle once again. The praetor was talking to his troops, clearly explaining some kind of plan, when one of the chimera broke from the pack. It ran at the formation, but before it connected with the bronze shield it turned sideways and let the ram’s head delivery a devastating blow.

“So that’s what it’s for!”

The blow had knock the DG off of its feet, and instantly the chimera was pulling the flailing DG away. The other two joined in and began to rip the trooper to shreds. One of the chimera’s snake heads bit off the DG’s left ear, while another’s leopard head tore the poor thing’s throat out.

The gruesome sight though was mostly ignored by the two guards, as the praetor morphed into a large black dragon.

“Holy shit! Can they all do that?” Grummore cried.

“I don’t think so, or George would’ve had some trouble!”

The dragon lifted one chimera off the ground with one of its huge front claws, while it captured another in its massive jaws. The remaining DGs broke formation and began to attack the lone chimera with their spears.

“It’s a pity none of that will work,” the older guard chuckled. “They got some real moxie too.”

“What do you mean that won’t work? The have a dragon!”

Pellinore crossed his arms and shook his head. “According to myth, the chimera was only slain by pouring molten lead down their throats, as their hides are impervious.”

The DGs seemed to understand this too, as the one girl began to seemingly pull bars of metal from
the very earth around them. She waited until the Chimera the DGs were fighting to open its mount, before tossing a bar in. The creature’s own flame was its undoing.

The girl repeated this process two more times before the dragon reverted back to his human form. The five remaining DGs knelt in front of their fallen comrade, before taking a tablet that hung around his neck, and gathering his weapons.

“I believe the score is Pellinore one, Grummore zip.”

Grummore rolled his eyes. “Yeah, Yeah, but next it’s my turn.”

The DGs were almost a quarter of the way up the mountain when Grummore decided to have his fun.

He rapidly typed a series of commands into the console, and a grid appeared on the screen in front of him.

“Watch and learn,” he laughed before typing a few more commands.

The DGs had just crossed a small wooden bridge when the Cyclops emerged behind them. A big brute, with scars all over his body, his large blue eye was beginning to go foggy from age. It let out a roar before chasing after the five remaining DGs.

Pellinore looked at him in disbelief. “Really? A Cyclops? Not just a Cyclops but a geriatric one at that?”

Now it was Grummore’s turn to smile. “The Cyclops is just to speed them along. Look.”

The monitors showed that the DGs were now in path deep in the woods. The Praetor and his girl were lagging behind the other three, dangerously close to Cyclops. The praetor lifted the girl onto his back as he transformed into a huge grizzly bear.

Grummore began a five second count down on his fingers.

“What are you doing?”

Pellinore was answered when the three leading DGs stepped onto the active landmines. Instantly the explosions ripped the DGs to shreds. Two of them were killed instantly while one was thrown back, its legs blown off at the knee.

The praetor-bear managed to stop before it went into the active mines, and quickly spun around to confront the approaching Cyclops.

“Time to fuck with their heads,” Grummore said as he tapped several of the grid’s squares on his tablet.

The Cyclops was now only thirty feet away from the bear and its girlfriend, it scooped up the legless DG and ate it in one bite, blood dripping down its double chin. It within twenty feet before it stepped on one of the recently activated mines.

Pellinore looked over at Grummore, “Clever, making them think they’re all active like that.”
Grummore reclined in his chair and cradled his head on his arms. “Yup, they ought to be crapping themselves right about now.” He let out a yawn and closed his eyes. “Even if they did move, I activated a random pattern, so it’s only a matter of time now. Game. Grummore.”

“I wouldn’t be so sure about that, look.”

Grummore opened one eye, on the screen the small girl was holding her arms wide and slowly turning on top of the bear. “Okay, so she went crazy, that’s to be expected given the situation.”

The bear crouched down, as if it was getting ready to make mad dash across the mine field. The girl on its back then flung her arms wide, and the land mines were ripped from the ground.

“What the Fuck?” Grummore screamed as he fell out of his chair.

Pellinore was dying of laughter. “Little sista’s got some moves!”

Grummore climbed off the floor and picked up his chair, before sitting down again.

“I do believe the score is Grummore three, and one for myself,” chuckled the older man. “The praetor is still in play as its little friend. If I get the both of them, then the game is mine.”

Grummore groaned. This was really not his day.

Much to his annoyance, Pellinore wouldn’t tell him anything about his next move other than it was going to be an extravaganza. The older gentleman was alternating between furiously tapping away on his tablet and furiously typing in commands on the console.

“If he could turn into a dragon, why couldn’t he just fly up to the top?” Grummore asked.

“Because the automatic air defenses would shoot it out of the sky,” answered the grey old man, not looking up from his tablet.

“Well he wouldn’t know that,” he countered. “This thing is supposed to be a leader and he couldn’t even think that?”

“Well they had been sending those eagles for the last couple weeks, maybe they realized they were being shot down.”

“Could be, but I just have this gut feeling that the praetor is the kind of guy who misses obvious solutions.”

“The same could be said about us all.” Pellinore typed in one last command. “And we are now ready for the greatest show on earth.”

Grummore checked the progress of the DGs. It was a little after two in the afternoon and they were now almost to the top of the mountain, having passed the charred remains of the garden and the dragon’s head that George had impaled on a pike, some time ago. “Good, any closer and I would have to activate the signal generator. And that would be no fun at all.”

Pellinore grunted in agreement.
That had been one of the rules to their little game, no instantly killing the DGs, unless they were dangerously close to the top of the mountain.

On the screens, the two remaining DGs were cautiously working their way up the mountain path. The praetor had his bow out with an arrow nocked, while the girl held a sword in one hand while using her strange abilities to search for landmines with the other hand.

“I’m actually surprised that they didn’t retreat after the loss of their friends,” Grummore admitted.

“They’ve continued because of their friends.”

He shrugged. He liked Pellinore and all, but he couldn’t see himself risking his life to avenge the old man. Then again, he had joined this organization to avenge the death of someone he loved, so maybe the idea wasn’t so farfetched.

“And here we go,” the old man said as he pushed a button on the console. One by one, the wall of monitors switched to aerial views, with a targeting reticle locked onto the two remaining DGs.

He looked at Pellinore incredulously. “The drones? Really?”

“Who doesn’t love fireworks?”

Apparently the drones weren’t the only thing the old man had planned. From the top of the path, no less than a dozen midnight black hell hounds came hurdling towards the DGs. Meanwhile, scores of telkhines scampered up from the bottom of the path.

He whistled at his friend’s impressive display. “Land, sea, and air huh?”

“Oohrah!” cried the older man, chest puffed out in pride. “I figure these bastards killed enough of my brothers, so let’s even the score.”

“I think you’re going to win this, old man.”

“Only a miracle could save them now,” the old man chuckled, leaning back into his chair.

The monsters were closing in on the two DGs, the praetor had transformed into an elephant, while the girl was pulling up the earth around them into barriers.

Pellinore stroked his beard, “not a bad strategy. Funneling your enemies into a narrow pass. Very Spartan.”

The first of the telkhines had reached the two DGs, only to be picked up by the elephant and pummeled into the earth. As the first telkhine took its final breath, two more took its place, while the hell hounds were trying to jump on the elephant’s back.

The elephant shrank back into the praetor, but was quickly replaced by a gorilla. The great ape grabbed two of the hell hounds by their necks, and smashed them into a group of four telkhines. The girl had managed to raise the earth underneath the remaining hell hounds, impaling them.

Pellinore leaned forward in his chair. “Those two are a cut above the rest, I’ll give them that. If we didn’t have the drones there, I’d even be worried.” The old man grabbed his tablet from the console, and gave the screen a few quick taps. The targeting reticles on every screen turned red, and a five second countdown appeared in the upper left corner of every screen. “Kind of anticlimactic don’t you think?”
The countdown timer hit zero, and every screen was obscured by the billows of smoke released from every drone’s twin rockets.

“Switch to thermals!” he barked, causing Pellinore to hastily type in the command.

The monitors became a mix of green, yellow, orange, and red. While the rocket trails were still hot, obscuring much of the view, they were at least able to make out the shapes of the DGs and the remaining creatures. They could see the outline of the girl tapping on the ape’s back, before it turned back into its normal state of being. The girl then either covered her head with her arms, or was doing one of those old fashioned whistles where you put both your little fingers in your mouth. Grummore was positive it was former, the later made no sense.

Moments before the explosives were to impact, a red blur streaked across the screen, momentarily stopped to allow the DGs to climb on it, then ran down the path blowing through the remaining telkhines.

Pellinore dropped his tablet, just as explosions rocked the mountain path. “What in the blue hell was that?”

Grummore was already springing into action. “Don’t know, don’t care!” he cried, frantically activating the mountain top’s defenses. He looked over to see Pellinore still staring at the moments, jaw hanging open. “Stop trying to collect flies, and activate the signal generator!”

The old man managed to collect himself, picked up his fallen tablet, and tapped in the simple command to activate the signal generator.

In the event that the mountain top was about to be compromised, they were to follow emergency protocol. First, they were to activate the signal generator which would kill anything smaller than a G in terms of power. Second, they were to upload any sensitive data to the main server, then purge the local server. Thankfully when the research team left, they took all their data with them. Third, they were to destroy any samples or specimens on site. Each creature had a bomb implanted in them in the even the signal failed to eliminate them. The only exception was DG:VM who was to be kept alive to keep T:A from going critical. Finally, they were to call for backup and/or extraction.

He was just about to commence the data transfer when Pellinore stopped him. “What do you think you’re doing?!” he snapped at the older man.

“It’s gone,” explained the older man, gesturing towards the wall of displays.

“Of course it’s gone! That’s the problem!” Was this old man getting senile now?

“No! I mean look at the feeds! The damn thing went down the mountain, not up it.” The older man tapped on his tablet a few times, and several of the monitors displayed a snap shot of the mysterious blur.

Grummore examined each image closely, before coming to the conclusion that his friend was right. The thing had left the mountain.

The two looked at each other and laughed at their own foolishness.

After they had stopped laughing, Pellinore took out his tablet and deactivated the signal generator. “Don’t want to waste any more energy than necessary,” the old man explained.
“You know,” the old man said while looking at his cards, “I almost won our little game.”

Grummore rolled his eyes. “Almost only counts in horseshoes and hand grenades.”

The hoary man laughed. “You got any threes?”

“Go fish.”

Without anything to gamble with, poker was pointless. The sun had set a little over two hours ago, and the two of them had decided to play the classic game of Go Fish. It was really just another way to pass the time, but after the excitement earlier in the day, their little card game seemed extra dull.

“I’m just saying there was interference,” grumbled the old man as he drew a card.

“No, what you’re saying is I won and you lost,” Grummore smirked. “Got any fives?”

“Bah!” cried the old man, throwing Grummore the five of clubs.

He smiled at the one remaining card in his hand, the Jack of Spades. Maybe his luck had changed for the better. “You know, we never did discuss what the prize was for our little game.”

Pellinore sighed, “No, I guess we didn’t. Got any fours?”

“Go fish.” The old man grumbled as he was forced to take yet another card. “How about you take my next patrol. Nothing major, but it saves me the hassle of leaving the trailer. Any jacks?”

The old man threw his hand on the table and cried, “Bah! You win!”

“And?”

“I’ll take your patrol! Making a poor decrepit old man go out into the cold. Shameful!”

Grummore laughed at his partner’s complaining. “First of all, I know what your take home is. You my friend are far from poor. Second, I’ve seen you work out, nothing decrepit about you. Third and finally, we’re in California. The only thing cold around here is the fridge.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Pellinore grumbled, as he strapped on his helmet. He then checked his side arm, followed by checking his coms. “I’ll be back in twenty,” he sighed, as he placed his goggles on and walked out the door.

Grummore halfheartedly waved. “Have fun.”

It had been over an hour since his partner had left, and Grummore was beginning to worry. The old man had done something like this before, having opted to use the restroom on his way back from patrol. Maybe it was from the excitement earlier in the day, but something felt wrong.

He typed a few commands into the security console, changing the security feeds to the one’s closest to path the old man used. Nothing looked out of the normal, aside the fact his partner was nowhere to be found. He picked up his radio and squeezed the button side, “Pellinore you out there? Over.”
No response.

“Don’t be a sore loser. Over.”

Nothing.

Now he was getting angry. “I swear to all that is holy if you are messing with me!” He took a deep breath. “Over!”

When Pellinore didn’t respond, Grummore began to follow the emergency protocols. He activated the signal generator, purged the system of any data, eliminated any specimens they had remaining, and started the emergency broadcast. If this turned out to be some kind of sick joke on behalf of his partner, then they were going to be in a world of trouble when reinforcements arrived. “Come on man, last chance! Over.” He begged into the radio.

He looked back at the wall of displays, only to notice that one of the feeds had been lost. He tried to restore the feed from the console, but the diagnostics report indicated it was a hardware failure.

Grummore gasped, “What the fuck?”

One by one each feed was lost, blue screens replacing the picturesque mountain views, until only feed that displayed immediately outside the trailer’s door remained.

“Fucking horror movies,” he growled, as he strapped on his helmet and goggles. He grabbed a few extra magazines for his gun and tucked them into his flap jacket. He drew his side arm and chambered a round, before kicking open the trailer door.

The setting sun cast the Titan ruins in long dark shadows, giving the area an otherworldly appearance. It was eerily silent as well, the imprisoned titan and demigod not wailing in agony, the only sound to be heard was Grummore’s own pulse.

He took a cautious step forward and slowly scanned the surrounding area. “Pellinore!” he called out, somewhere between a whisper and a shout, “I swear I will pistol whip you if this is all some kind of joke!”

Crash!

He spun around on his heels and leveled his gun at the darkness in front of him. “Show yourself!” he called into the darkness.

Something tapped his shoulder from behind him, causing him to nearly jump out of his skin. He spun around and fired his weapon into the darkness.

“Shit,” he hissed at his rookie behavior.

He chambered another round, and stepped forward only to stumble on something. He managed to catch himself before he fell. He nudged the foreign object with his foot, causing it to roll in front of him.

He carefully crouched down to examine the obstacle, only to jump back in fright.

“Jesus Christ!” he screamed into the night sky.

The object that he had tripped on was Pellinore’s severed head. Its ears had been cut off, its tongue removed, and his eyes ripped out.
“Even he can’t save you now,” answered a strange, albeit familiar voice. It sounded like a young girl’s voice with a man’s deep voice echoing behind it. “And with everything you’ve done, I don’t think he would even try.”

“Show yourself!” Grummore shouted, trying and failing to hide the fear in his voice.

There was a deep throaty chuckle. “If you say so.”

There was a blur of motion and Grummore’s hand fell to the ground. The guard held the bloody stumps of his arms to his face and screamed in fear and pain.

“Quit your crying, you did far worse to us.” The area in front of the disarmed guard was illuminated by a golden light, and what was once DG:VM stood in front of Grummore, a predatory smile on her lips.

She now only passed for human at a distance now, her bare feet had what appeared to be talons growing from them, a strange gold glow emanated from the surgical scars that marred her body, the area above her left forearm appeared to be disintegrating into gold powder, and this oddity was also present on her calves.

All that paled in comparison to her eyes though. Where there had once been sky blue orbs, golden flames erupted from the empty sockets.

“Oh do you like what we’ve done with our hair?” it laughed, running a hand through her blonde locks.

Grummore was feeling dizzy, and it was becoming harder and harder to focus. “How?” he choked out.

It cocked its head. “Good question! Somehow I was able to slip my bonds, but since you mortals had all but destroyed our physical forms, we had to work together.”

Grummore collapsed to the ground, and took in ragged breaths.

“There is a problem with our little arrangement though,” it frowned. “A mortal form cannot contain the power of a titan. Well, at least not for long anyway.”

It picked up the fallen guard by his neck with one hand. His vision was blurred, all he could see was the golden flames.

“Thankfully, with mortal bodies you can swap out parts with relative ease.”

Grummore screamed as he felt his body being torn asunder, cell by cell.

Chapter End Notes

Did you think I was going to kill Frazel?

Little old me? :)

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Chapter End Notes

Did you think I was going to kill Frazel?

Little old me? :)
Pellinore and Grummore are two of my favorite characters from "The Once and Future King"
If you are any kind of fan of modern literature, then you must read it, as it laid the foundation down for all that followed.

Oh hey! Veronica and Atlas are back!
Are they going to be main characters?
No, but they are kind of important in some future events...

Next chapter is everyone's favorite psychopathic ginger engineer: Brian!
YAY!!!!!

Have strong feelings about what you just read? Leave a kudos please!

Thoughts, theories, praise, criticism, or just feeling chatty? Please leave a comment!

Comments and Kudos are like vitamins for me!

Until next time, thanks for reading!

Ya'll are just amazing!
Brian

Chapter Summary

Tonight: The sacking of New Rome

Chapter Notes

Warnings: Blood, gore, death.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

If Brian ever found the guy who decided to place the entrance to Camp Jupiter inside a tunnel, he would make them beg for the sweet release of death.

“Oh yeah! Let’s totally put it in a tunnel! We’re only in California, where the temperature is only five degrees hotter than the surface of the sun! Oh what’s that? The humidity? Don’t you just love feeling your balls boil in your shorts?” he ranted as he walked through the dimly lit tunnel.

He really regretted walking, but it wasn’t like the camp had a parking lot for his rented Prius.

Brian stopped in his tracks. “Wait just one second now.”

The information the captured DGs had so kindly volunteered, indicated that this nest had a large adult population as opposed to the northeastern nest. Many of these adults even held jobs among humans, which meant that they had to have some kind of means of transport.

“If there’s some kind of bus stop, I will just lose it.”

He pulled his phone out from the back pocket of his shorts and checked the time.

Eleven thirty.

His timing was perfect, as was everything he did, by the time he arrived at the nest, most of the population would be eating their midday meal, leaving him free to do as he pleased.

“Speaking of lunch,” he smiled. About one hundred feet away from him stood two DGs, one boy, one girl. They were each carrying a spear and shield, and were wearing some kind of goofy looking leather armor. The red head cracked his knuckles, “time to earn my Oscar.”

He ran towards the DGs like a mad man, arms flailing in the air as he screamed at the top of his lungs. His screaming had startled the two DGs, but they were quick to recover, as they raised their shields and lowered their spears.

“Enchilada is after me!” he cried as he ran for cover behind the two idiots.

The girl looked at him with a confused look. “Enchilada? You mean Echidna?”
“Yeah, sure that.”

The two both turned to look at him, though both still on guard.

“I mean, yeah! That horrible creature! It has eighteen arms, three heads, one of which looks like Paul Blart, and three sets of leathery wings!”

The boy frowned at him. “That doesn’t sound like Echidna…”

“Well whatever it was it’s gone now and it’s all thanks to you,” the red head said, offering them his best smile.

The two lowered their weapons, but were still on guard. “Who are you?” the girl asked.

“I am Brian Bender, son of Artemis,” he said while pointing at the torn purple camp shirt he had pilfered from one of his test subjects.

That had apparently been the wrong thing to say as the two now pointed their weapons at him.

“Diana doesn’t have any children. She swore to be an eternal maiden,” the girl said.

“I’m adopted?” the engineer suggested, slowly backing away from the spear heads.

“Who are you really?” the boy asked, pressing his spear into Brian’s stomach.

Brian let out a long exaggerated sigh. “Alright you got me,” he said throwing his hands up. “My name is Brian Bender, and I’m not the adopted son of Diana, I’m the unwanted son of Apollo.”

“Unwanted?” the girl repeated.

Brian scratched the back of his head. “Yeah, see my mom didn’t like any of Apollo’s advances, refusing him at every turn, but you know how gods can be when they don’t like what they’re hearing. Well, here I am unwanted by either parent.”

The story was true, it just wasn’t Brian’s. In fact, Apollo topped the hypothetical list for most hated god in the organization, followed by Ares in a close second.

“Oh,” said the boy, lowering his spear. “Wow.”

“Yeah,” Brian sighed.

“Well at least you’re home now,” the girl offered with smile.

Brian returned her smile. He was so brilliant, and they were all so very dumb. “I guess you’re right.”

“Here, let me get that for you.” The boy walked to the door and opened it for the ginger engineer.

Brian pulled his phone from shorts, “before I go in, would you guys mind taking a selfie with me?”

“You have a phone?!” the girl asked, her eyes wide with wonder.

“Yeah, the Greek camp figured out how to make them! I managed to get one of the first! This things can do things you wouldn’t believe!” Brian exclaimed, holding the phone above his head as if it were some kind of miracle. “Here come stand on either side of me!”

The two DGs leaned their spears and shields against the tunnel wall and took their helmets. They
then rather awkwardly grouped around the arrogant engineer and stared at the black rubber encased phone.

“Alright! Say your prayers!”

Before the two DGs could ask what he meant, he pressed the red icon on the phone’s screen. Instantly the two DGs crumpled to the ground like rag dolls.

Brian kicked the girl in her kidneys. “Dead before they hit the ground. Lovely,” he smiled.

He picked up the boy’s helmet and stuffed it into his backpack; a token to commemorate his first theatrical performance.

Most people would be overwhelmed by the sight that laid before the engineer: a roman barracks to the south, a field of battle, complete siege weaponry, elephants, and even a fortress lied to the East. Beyond that though, a little to the Southeast was a magnificent Roman city, looking as if it had just been built.

However, Brian was not most people. He was currently standing on the stone bridge that allowed safe passage over the Little Tiber, relieving himself in said sacred river.

“Have gun will travel read the card of a man!” The red head sang at the top of his lungs. “A knight without armor in a savage land!”

“Hey! Hey you can’t do that!” cried an agitated voice from behind.

Annoyed that someone had interrupted his fun, he turned around and let the rest of his stream hit the perpetrator.

“What is wrong with you?” cried the fawn as it jumped out of the foul smelling stream.

He zipped up his fly before replying, “Nothing, just felt nature calling.”

The satyr, a girl if certain mammalian traits were to be believed, began ring the yellow fluid from her shirt. “That was incredibly rude! I should report you for what you did! Desecrated the sacred river and urinated on a girl! I’m going to report you unless,” she trailed off.

The red head arched an eyebrow, “Unless what?”

“You pay for my silence,” she said, holding her filthy palm out to him.

“Oh, okay.” he began to rifle through his shorts, really hamming it up, before removing his phone. “This ought to do it!”

“What’s that?” the fawn asked, not knowing what a smart phone was.

“It’s a magic box that grants wishes. Here let me give you a demonstration,” he explained. “I wish you would stop talking to me.”
He pressed a skull icon on the screen, and instantly the fawn had collapsed into a pile of dirt, with a single red rose growing from it.

He frowned at the flower. How disgusting was it that these creature’s corpses could be lying in plain sight, a potentially dangerous biohazard in the works. He crushed the rose with the heel of his boot.

As he made his way across the bridge he saw some children playing along the river. They must have felt him staring as they turned and started waving.

“Ha ha, I’m going to kill you all,” he laughed while waving back at the unsuspecting DGs.

Instead of following the path that would require him to pass through the military encampment, Brian cut across the grassy fields and made a beeline for New Rome. Sure some of the fawns and other creatures had been curious and or suspicious, but that’s what his phone was for.

“Among other things,” he thought with a wicked smile.

When the he felt he was close enough to the city, he pulled out his aviators from his backpack and put them on. The DGs had said the city was protected by the Roman god Terminus, or G:T, and its reach extended around the city to an imaginary perimeter called the Pomerian Line.

Or was it the Pomeranian Line?

Anyway, G:T could allegedly sense when weapons were being brought into the city, a big no-no, and could teleport to the offender.

This had presented a serious challenge to the engineer, how could he sneak a weapon inside without G:T noticing? The northeastern group had no such protector, aside from a barrier that kept creatures at bay and cloaked the nest from human eyes. For that Brian had simply placed explosives inside a captured DG, commanded it to return home, and then waited for the fireworks.

It wasn’t until they had captured and experimented on G:DB, that Brian had a realization. They didn’t need to sneak a weapon in, the weapon was already there, waiting to be utilized.

He removed the prototype signal gun he had made in his garage from his backpack, and took a few timid steps forward. He was never wrong about anything, but dealing with an obscure mythological figure made him nervous.

Only slightly though.

He had moved roughly ten feet from his original position, when there was a smell of ozone, followed by a blinding white light, and a large resounding “crack”.

When his eyes refocused in front of him stood the a marble figure of a man, glaring at him. When the DGs told Brian that G:T was a living marble statue, he had expected Michelangelo’s David. Not David’s head and torso on a pedestal.

“And just what do you think you’re doing?” the bust inquired. “Hmm?”

Brian shrugged, “not much, just going to go get a something to drink.” Which was technically true, after he finished dealing with the god, he was going to get something to drink in the city before he...
had his fun.

“Nuh uh! You can’t enter New Rome with a weapon! Especially a gun!” Terminus barked, giving Brian the evil eye.

“But it’s not a gun, it’s a signal generator,” Brian explained, as he aimed the weapon at the god.

“A signal... what now? Then why does it look like a weapon?”

“Compact shape, Easy to hold, Familiar design, take your pick. Besides is there any rule that says things can’t be weapon shaped?”

The marble god opened his mouth only to close it again. His face scrunched up as if in deep thought. “No, I guess there isn’t a rule against that,” the god smiled. “Good use of creative thinking! What’s your name friend?”

“Brian,” the red head answered as he squeezed the trigger, “And I’m not your friend, guy.”

Instantly, G:T was rendered immobile.

Brian removed his backpack and began to search through it until he found what he was looking for: a small bronze and gold cylinder three inches in length with a one inch diameter. He took the metal cylinder and shoved it into the god’s open mouth. The red head then pulled out his phone and began to tap away on the touch screen.

“Have you ever heard of the Golem of Prague?” he asked, without looking up from his phone. “I don’t expect an answer, since well, you can’t do anything at the moment,” he explained, momentarily glancing up at the stationary god. “You see a long time ago, the Jews in Prague were being harassed and persecuted, which is like ninety percent of their history,” the red head paused. “Come to think of it, you Roman guys liked to have your way with them too, didn’t you?” He shrugged, “anyway, fearing for the safety of his people, a great Rabbi constructed a giant made of clay. Using magic, because apparently God’s chosen people are magical, the rabbi brought clay colossus to life by carving the word “emet”, which means “truth”, into its forehead and inserting a small scroll of paper into its mouth.”

Brian withdrew a small pocket knife from his pocket with one hand, while placing his phone in his other pocket with the other.

“For a time, the golem did its job and protected the ghetto and all were happy.” The engineer unfolded one of the knife’s thicker blades. “But like all Frankenstein stories, it ends in tragedy. You see, in order for the golem to function correctly, the scroll had to be removed on the Sabbath so the golem could rest. Well one Friday night, the rabbi forgot to, and the golem went haywire. It rampaged through the ghetto, an unstoppable clay juggernaut of destruction; until the rabbi wiped away the first “e” of emet from the golem’s brow. While emet means “truth”, “met” means “death.” The golem dropped to the ground dead, no longer a protector, just a pile of lifeless clay.”

Brian carefully jumped onto the god’s pedestal and began to carve into the marble forehead.

“You see, you are the golem, the city is your ghetto, and I am the demon who made the rabbi forget his duty,” he smirked.

The red head blew the dust off of his new toy’s forehead. There on the god’s forehead was carved “MET” and Brian couldn’t help but smile at his art. He carefully put away his pocket knife, before jumping back down to the ground.
“The connection should be synced now,” he said to no one in particular. He pulled out his phone once again and launched an app he had prepared in advance. He held his phone in front of his face and said, “Okay Terminate-us, swallow.”

Without a microseconds hesitation, the marble bust gulped down the cylinder. The god made a face of disgust. “Blah!” it spat. “What in Caesar’s salad did you do to me? And Terminate-us? Really?”

Brian frowned, he didn’t like his toys lippy. “Okay Terminate-us, shut your mouth and don’t speak unless I give you permission.”

The god’s lips slapped shut with an audible crack.

Brian sat down on the grassy field and looked over his newest toy. It was disappointing really, when he had been told of a living statue, he had at least expected it to have arms and legs, not a bust that sits in a university library. But, if there was one thing he learned from G:DB, Gs could change themselves to whatever form they please, or in this case whatever form he pleased.

“Okay Terminate-us, give yourself some arms and legs!”

The smell of ozone filled the air around them and the earth immediately around them began to rumble. The god lifted from the ground and hung in midair. Chunks of earth began to float from the ground and began to attach themselves to the god’s shoulders and hips.

Brian snapped a few pictures.

When the last chunk of earth floated into place, the earthen limbs began to glow red hot. Any plant life that had been attached to the earth was quickly incinerated.

Brian scrambled back as fast as he could to get away from the blazing inferno. “Dick!” he cried at the glowing god.

When at last the glowing ceased, the god stood with a new set of arms and legs, making his new toy well over eight feet tall. Thankfully, the statue had the common sense to remove its pedestal and the decency to make itself a pair of clay pants.

Okay, sure Brian would admit the brown limbs clashed horribly with the marble body, but that was something that could be fixed at a later time.

“Not bad Terminate-us. Not bad at all,” he said approvingly of his toy’s work. He stood up off the ground, brushed off his clothes, and gathered up his things. “Come along now Terminate-us, I’m very thirsty and we have an appointment to keep.” He started to walk towards New Rome, when he realized his toy wasn’t following him.

He turned to look at his toy. “I see we are going to have to this the hard way,” he sighed. He pulled out his phone and spoke into the microphone, “Okay Terminate-us, you will do whatever I tell you to do, when I tell you to, and without question.” He slipped the phone back into his pocket. “Now let’s go for a stroll,” he ordered.

He smiled when he heard the golem follow.
“You would think these people have never seen a statue walk through town before,” Brian mused.

Despite the city’s architectural style, it definitely felt like a college town. There were little cafes and boutiques lining the streets. People were performing on street corners while the people passing by through change into the performer’s cups. The population also seemed to be entirely composed of younger people, sure there was a few middle aged couples here and there, but they were hardly worth mentioning. Yes, New Rome was very much a city for the young.

And Brian absolutely loathed it.

While many people look back to their college years as their glory days, Brian looked back with contempt. He had gone with the sole intent of finding people who could understand him, people who not only questioned why, but why not? Nope, he had been surrounded by idiots whose only concern was when the next party was and who was going to get the beer. Any mentor he had hoped to find in the professors was quickly dashed, all they cared about was their own research and avoiding any extra interactions with their students at all costs.

It had been two and a half years of hell to get his bachelors.

His masters hadn’t gone any better and while working on his doctorate he had given up on academia altogether. He had decided to follow his own rules, but no one understood his genius and he had been thrown out. If the fools would have let him continue his work, there would be no more disease!

But then, the old man approached him. The old man told him some unbelievable stories, but gave him an offer he would have to be insane to refuse.

“I really hate this place,” he growled, his teeth clenched.

He spotted a small coffee shop called “Ceres’ Coffee”, and decided he could really use a drink.

He got off the street and turned to the coffee shop’s entrance, knocking over a kid in the process. He opened the purple door and got in line. The place was okay he guessed. A typical little café with a several booths along the edge of the room, with small tables in the center of the room. The counter was in the back, and the front of the place had huge picture windows to let in the sunlight.

What was really strange to the engineer though was there wasn’t a single electronic device in sight, with the exception of the appliances behind the counter. No smart phones, no tablets, no laptops, not a desktop that weird old men carry in. How did these things function in the modern world?

He noticed he was fifth in line and debated killing the DGs in front of him, but decided against it. Who would make him his drink if they were all dead? He pulled out his phone and loaded up *Marvel Future Fight* and began his daily challenges. Today, he used his asgardian team composed of Thor, Loki, and The Enchantress, the ultimate team in his humble opinion.

He had just finished his daily missions, when it was his turn to order.

The barista, a youth with a pierced lip and tattoos covering his neck, smiled at him and said,” Welcome to Ceres’ Coffee! I hope you are having a bountiful day! What can I get you?”

Brian leaned against the counter, and tried to hide his annoyance with the perky barista. “I’ll have a Grande iced coffee, dealer’s choice on the brew, with a shot of vanilla, shot of mocha, and a shot of caramel.”
The barista frowned at him.

“Did you get all that…” he glanced at the name tag pinned on the barista’s apron, “Steven?”

The barista cringed. “I’m sorry sir, but we don’t do iced coffee.”

“What?”

The barista’s perkiness returned in full force as he explained, “Here at Ceres’ Coffee, we only make brew the finest of beans and only serve drinks that honor the nature of the bean.”

Brian tapped his fingers on the counter in rapid succession, staring blankly at Steven. “Is that a fact?”

“Yes sir,” the barista nodded enthusiastically.

Brian ran his hands over his face, and then let out a sigh. He scratched his temple with his index finger and ever so casually said, “Terminate-us, crush this guy’s head.”

Before the poor guy had a chance to even comprehend what Brian had said, the front of the shop exploded into bit of glass, wood, and marble as the titanic form of G:T rushed in and smashed the barista’s head between its earthen hands. Blood and brain splattered the surrounding area, and to the engineer’s dismay, his shirt.

“Terminate-us looks what you did!” he cried, pointing the mess the golem had made on his shirt. “Do you know how hard it was to find a DG that was my size? I’m lanky!”

The DGs around him did not seem to care about the state of his shirt. Some were screaming, some were trying to scramble their way out of the shop’s ruined front, while others hid under their tables.

Brian sighed at the chaotic scene. It had originally been his intention to find someplace comfortable before he began the assault. But no! Steven wouldn’t make him iced coffee! It’s California! It’s hot! Iced coffee should be a given!

Brian crawled over the remains of the counter and began to fix himself his own drink. There was a freezer in the back, so there was ice somewhere. “Alright Terminate-us listen up,” he said as he pulled a Styrofoam cup out from below the counter. “Your new orders, in order from most important to least are as follows: protect me from all threats, both seen and unseen. Do not allow anyone to enter or leave the city. Herd the people to the Senate. Kill anything that tries to stop you.” He looked around the ruined counter for the vanilla, only to notice a clearly pregnant DG hiding in the corner. “Oh yeah! Kill anyone younger than…. let’s say…. Twelve?” He looked over to the woman and gave her a wolfish smile. “And kill any of the pregnant ones. I won’t be needing those,” he explained as he added a second shot of caramel. Hey, he was celebrating. He deserved a second pump.

At first he thought maybe he had asked too much of Terminate-us, some of those order almost required him to be at multiple places at once, but the golem gave a solemn nod and turned towards the woman. The golem rushed forward and stomped on the cowering woman, popping her like a zit.

A human sized, blood filled, zit.

The room filled with the now familiar smell of ozone and his toy disappeared in a flash of white light.

Honestly, he quite thankful he had his aviators on. Not only did they allow him to see passed the Mist and several other spectrums, they still served their original function of protecting his eyes.
Brian casually sipped his coffee as he sat on a bench and watched the chaos unfold around him.

People were frantically trying to escape the wrath of their former protector, who was popping in and out of existence throughout the city. The marble golem never disappeared for more than five seconds before returning to check on his master.

The god was currently on the same street as him, currently preventing people from leaving the city limits, while herding them west, towards the senate house.

Terminate-us had just spun around a young woman, a bit too gently for Brian’s taste, when his toy was assaulted by some nut-job using a curtain rod as a spear. The god gave the guy a look that said *Really?*, before backhanding him through a storefront.

Brian got up from the bench and tossed his now empty cup into a nearby recycling bin. He may be somewhat immoral and unethical, but he cared about the environment!

He gathered up his belongings and began to follow the DGs as they fled towards the western side of the city where the senate house sat.

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Brian was bored.

He had thought that the destruction and chaos caused by his newest toy would hold his attention for at least the rest of the day, but he was wrong.

*He hated* being wrong.

He had tried to blend into the fleeing masses, but after being pushed around and manhandled, he had decided enough was enough, and killed them all with a single pulse from his phone. Sure it was still a hassle to step over the recently deceased, but it was significantly better than being tossed around like a rag doll.

As he made his way to the senate house, he stopped now and then to do a little shopping. He wasn’t one for shopping, but it was something to do and the DGs were practically giving away their inventory. He snagged a set of pencils, a ruler, and a sketchpad from an office supply store and placed them in his backpack for later. From a boutique he acquired a purple baseball cap with the letters “SPQR” embroidered in gold on the front; he placed the cap on his head at a slight angle.

He caught his reflection in one of the few non-shattered windows left, and smiled at the sight. In his humble opinion he not only looked inconspicuous, but downright sexy too. “Looking good Brian,” he laughed, as he gave himself double finger guns, which are the best of guns. “Don’t I look good
Terminate-us?"

The enslaved god appeared behind him and gave him two thumbs up, before disappearing once again.

Brian smiled at his toy’s compliance. It had been a huge challenge to figure out how to control the DGs, let alone the Gs. For DGs all it required was a minor surgery and a constant connection to their handler, while Gs required a transceiver that could phase in and out of existence with the Gs. At first they could only send ideas and images, which limited the complexity of tasks they could be given. He may have stretched the truth to the old man initially about how much control they had, but when DG:AA successfully carried the bomb into the eastern nest no one complained.

A lot had changed in the following weeks though. George’s team has delivered to him G:DB on a silver platter. G:DB, that fat waste of space, had allowed him to take his research to the next level. Gs could convert energy into mass and vice versa without any sort of entropy, which shouldn’t be possible. Gs could also seemingly pull in energy from nothing, but he knew that was absurd. Nothing could violate the first law of thermodynamics! His current hypothesis was they could tap into vacuum energy, which if he could replicate would start an energy revolution.

Morgan had called his ideas absurd, and lectured him about ghosts, gobbling, and all that other fairytale bull crap that she believed. Considering she was looking for an entrance “the underworld”, an absurd notion really, he disregarded her words as soon as they entered his head.

Okay, sure he had seen what many people would describe as ghosts wandering around city, but a quick blast from his phone or signal gun made them poof out of existence. Maybe he had also sang the *Ghostbusters* theme song while doing it. Who wouldn’t?

He readjusted his backpack’s strap over his shoulder and continued on to the senate, and judging by all the noise the DGs were starting to fight back.

“This should be interesting,” he laughed.

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Brian watched the Romans struggle against the fallen god from a small secluded park near the senate house. The park bench he currently occupied was situated far enough back that it hid him from the view of the romans, but still allowed him to witness the carnage.

His hopes of catching the DGs completely off-guard hadn’t exactly panned out, but they clearly fighting a losing battle.

Around the grand marble building barricades had been hastily constructed from overturned carts, various pieces of furniture, really anything large and heavy that they could get their hands on. Much to Brian’s amusement he spotted a rubber duck on top one of the barricades, clearly someone was a smartass.

Guards were aiding the fleeing citizens into the senate, calling out promises of safety and protection, which Brian had to laugh it. These poor creatures were fighting against their former protector, a being who could be anywhere it wanted on a whim, and yet they still had the audacity to believe that they shall overcome. It was both enduring and sickening to the engineer.

While the citizenry were being led into the building, wooden crates were being carried out by armor
clad DGs. When the crates were set down, the soldiers went to work with crowbars, opening the crates to reveal caches of weaponry. More troops rushed forward and armed themselves for battle.

Brian let out whistle, “So much for a weapons free community, right Terminate-us?”

The golem briefly appeared before him and looked genuinely enraged. Perhaps he hadn’t know about the weapon caches? Maybe now the golem wouldn’t hesitate to slay his former charges, what with this betrayal of trust.

“We are under attack, our families in mortal danger, and this is as fast as you can move?” barked a tall Latina girl. She was the only one who looked as if she hadn’t been caught off guard, wearing golden armor underneath a purple toga, a bronze cloak draped over her back, sword in hand.

“Reyna we’re going as fast as we can!” cried back one of the DGs carrying a weapons crate.

“Then go as fast as someone else then!” Reyna cried.

Brian clapped his hands, he liked her.

Terminate-us had apparently decided to make his presence known, as he exploded through one of the barriers, sending bits of debris flying through the air. His stone arms went from brown to a white hot in a matter of seconds, the god then rushed forward and grabbed a roman in each hand and began to crush them. The captured DGs screamed while the smell of burning flesh filled the air.

“Form up!” Reyna cried, sword held high.

“But praetor, we haven’t found the shields yet!” cried one of the younger troops.

“Then I suggest you continue to search for them. Until then,” she adjusted the straps on her cloak, “I will be the only shield we need. Romans form up!”

A chill ran down Brian’s back. He didn’t know much about this Reyna, but the way she commanded her people was terrifying.

As Terminate-us dropped the charred remains of the two demigods, ten roman soldiers armed with imperial gold swords got into phalanx formation behind the praetor. Reyna made a simple hand gesture and the romans rushed forward. The praetor rushed the fallen god head on, while the other ten flanked around either side.

“A pincer maneuver, how very…” Brian rolled his eyes, “roman.”

Reyna was a purple and gold blur of motion. Whenever one of her troops struck the stone god, she would strike from the opposite angle, keeping the god’s attention fully focused on her. Somehow she was dodging all the god’s blows and evading the god’s grasping hands.

“If he so much as touches you, it’s over,” the praetor cried as she parried a blow from the city’s former protector.

“No offense ma’am, but way to point out the obvious,” grunted a huskier guy as he attempted to swipe at Terminate-us’s earthen ankles.

Brian was starting to get pissed as the fight was starting to look like a bunch of kids swinging wildly at a piñata. Brian pulled out his phone and spoke into the microphone, “Okay Terminate-us, burst into flame, teleport, I don’t know laser eyes or some shit! Just don’t sit there and get pummeled.” Jesus, did he have to do everything?
The former guardian knelt down and crossed his arms over his chest.

“Looks like we got him!” whooped one of the DGs.

The air around the kneeling figure began to shimmer as the god’s entire body began to glow a fiery red.

Reyna was the first to notice the change and yelled “Fall back!”, as she wrapped her cloak around herself.

Eight of the defenders began their retreat, while two continued their assault; striking the god repeatedly, hoping to somehow disable their former ally.

Just as the praetor was about to repeat her orders, Terminate-us jumped up and hurled his arms wide open. A wave of intense heat exploded from the god, incinerating the two foolish demigods into towers of bone and ash. The wave had mostly dissipated by the time it reached the other nine, but some of their clothes were slightly smoldering. However Reyna’s cloak and by extension Reyna emerged unharmed, not even a single hair had fallen loose from her long braid.

Brian looked on from his park bench at the praetor, a thousand different possibilities entered his mind on what kind material could withstand heat like that while still being light enough to make a cloak out of. When this was over he would be sure to collect it from the girl’s corpse, the potential applications for something like that made his mouth water.

The romans had finished extinguishing their smoldering clothes, when the marble god blinked out of the physical plane.

“Form up!” Reyna cried. “Don’t let him catch us separated!”

The eight began to converge towards their leader, only for Terminate-us to reappear in front of the slowest one. With one quick motion of his arm, the god severed the boy’s torso from his hips; each piece cauterized by the intense heat that radiated from the god’s hand. The god disappeared again, only to reappear and grab the head of the sundered soldier, and crush it with one stony hand.

Brian was laughing like a mad man at the scene that had just played out. He had thought a move like that was only possible in anime! “Eat my heart out Dio Brando!”

“You bastard!” cried one of the eight remaining defenders, rushing forward to attack her former friend.

“Barbara no! We need to stick together,” cried the praetor, her words falling on deaf ears.

Before the enraged roman could swing her sword at the marble colossus, in a sudden rush of movement, the girl was hanging limply in the air, impaled through the chest by the god’s left arm.

“Man I really wish I had some popcorn!” the engineer laughed from his hiding place.

Terminate-us rolled the torso at the seven, causing them to scatter like some kind of twisted bowling. They didn’t remain scattered long though, quickly regrouping around the fierce praetor.

“Focus on his left leg!” Reyna barked. “If we can break it off, it will slow him down, maybe even by us some time until reinforcements arrive.”

One of the defenders let out a sardonic chuckle. “It would be pretty peachy if Zhang and Levesque showed up right about now.”
“Zhang could turn into a rhino and impale this guy, while Levesque could cut him up with diamonds,” laughed another.

“Honestly, I’d be happy to see anyone with some kind of abilities show up,” Another chimed in. “Heck, I’d be happy to see a Vulcan legacy with a grenade launcher.”

Reyna huffed. “You want power? I’ll give you power!”

Brian adjusted the settings on his aviators when he noticed a strange aura around the praetor. By the looks of it, Reyna was channeling her own energy into the others. This girl was just full of surprises! “Terminate-us I want you to capture her alive!” he ordered. “Do you understand me? Alive. I don’t care about the others, but take her alive!”

The demigods had once again surrounded the corrupted god, and were attacking him with greater fervor than before. The god tried to teleport behind his attackers, only to have his blows intercepted by the praetor, who was using her cloak as a shield.

They continued to push the god back, and soon cracks were forming all over the golem’s body. The god’s super-heated body had only made his form brittle, thus more susceptible to attacks.

“Keep at it!” ordered Reyna, with the smallest hint of glee in her voice.

Terminate-us knelt down and crossed his arms once again, readying himself for another attack.

“Focus on the leg now with all you’ve got! This is our chance!” yelled the praetor.

Brian watched as even more energy flowed from the armored leader. While everyone else’s attacks were speeding up, hers were beginning to slow. That must be the tradeoff for such an ability; you could lend others strength at the cost of your own. Maybe he could adjust it so that took its power source from the same source that fueled the Gs.

He was interrupted from his thoughts when he heard a large shattering sound. He looked on to see that the DGs had succeeded in severing the golem’s left leg from his body, knocking him to the ground. Brian rifled through his backpack until he pulled out an experimental pulse grenade he had made. “Do I have to do everything around here?” he muttered as he pulled the grenade’s pin. Of course it had to have a pin, you have to respect the classics.

“Focus on his head now!” the praetor called as the engineer casually tossed the grenade into the skirmish.

The moment it touched the ground, the grenade detonated. There was no explosion, no shrapnel, no light, or sound to be had, instead an invisible pulse was emitted that stunned the DGs. George has asked him to design them for him as favor without ever giving any reason, but it was something interesting, and they were clearly useful.

“Terminate-us stop fooling around and kill them,” the red head barked into his phone. “Except Reyna of course, she needs to be taken alive.”

The marble sidewalk under the god heaved up and formed into a new white leg. The golem pushed itself up and grabbed two of the stunned romans by their heads. He used the two DGs as clubs and pummeled the remaining into bloody pulps. Terminate-us then threw the remains of his fleshy weapons aside and stalked toward the immobilized praetor.

Brian wondered what could be going through the girl’s head. Was it fear for her life, grief over the loss of her friends and comrades, anger at her so called gods for allowing such a thing to happen, or
was it some combination of the former? Maybe he was humanizing her too much, perhaps DGs were incapable of truly experiencing human emotion. He would have to ask her, maybe he could even whip up some sort of test that compared a normal human’s emotions to that of the DG’s bicameral mind!

The enslaved god grabbed the stunned Reyna by her arm and crushed it. The pain must have been enough to return the praetor to her senses, as she howled in agony. Terminate-us roughly lifted her off the ground, while the young woman used her only functioning arm to wildly swing her golden blade at the colossus. Annoyed by the praetor’s further attempts to injure him, the golem grabbed the girl’s free arm.

Before the former guardian could further maim the praetor, a golden blur rushed in from the East, and faster than the eye could process, Terminate-us was sprawled out on the ground while a golden horse with two riders took his place.

If Brian would have had a drink at the time he surely would have spit it out. “Who the fuck are these assholes?!” he yelled, quickly covering his mouth when he realized he had been a bit too loud.

The two riders dismounted from the golden steed, the smaller of the two, a young girl with cinnamon hair carrying Reyna in her arms. An impressive, if awkward, feat considering her small size compared to the Latin girl’s stature.

“Hazel, help Reyna,” said the other rider, a tall muscular teen with Asian features. “Arion and I got this.”

The smaller girl nodded at him before saying, “Be careful Frank.”

“I always am,” he said with a smile before morphing into a dragon and rushing towards the injured god.

Brian’s lips were pursed as he watched the scene in front of him. He had known about the praetor Frank Zhang’s ability to shape shift from the captured DGs, but to actually see it was another thing altogether. Then throw in a golden horse that could move at unheard of speeds and Brian was just done. Yes he wanted to capture Zhang, it had actually been on the to-do list he had made, but now this was all just getting too silly.

The black dragon that was Frank Zhang and the horse, Arion, were alternating attacks. Frank would unleash a torrent of flame, then Arion would either rear up on its hind legs and crush one of the god’s limbs or kick the god with its hind legs.

The attacks were incredibly effective as by the time Terminate-us was able to regenerate one part of his body, two more limbs were destroyed.

The dragon picked up the crippled god and flew into the air, before flying back down to the earth and dropping the marble golem. As the god pushed himself up with his one remaining arm, the golden horse kicked him through a several buildings.

Brian sighed as he fished out two more pulse grenades from his backpack and pulled the pins out with his teeth. Terminate-us had been so promising too, but now he was getting his ass handed to him by the cast of *My Little Pony*. Applejack was especially bringing the pain, all that apple-bucking had given her killer legs. He rolled the grenades towards the horse and dragon and watched as the two stopped in their tracks. The black dragon that had been hovering above ground, crashed to the ground with an earthshaking *Thud*.
“Frank!” Hazel cried as she ran over to the collapsed dragon.

Okay, he may have forgotten all about her.…. 

The golem had just managed to assemble a new pair of legs, when the petite girl began her assault. The ground around the god seemed to liquify, pulling him down until only his head was visible.

“You were our friend!” Hazel roared, all around her precious gemstones were pushing their way up through the marble walk ways. “It was your duty to protect us!” Gemstones shot from the ground at the imprisoned god like a machine gun. One hit even managed to shatter the former guardian’s nose. “Why would you do this Terminus? Why?” Hazel asked, her anger changing to sorrow. Her million dollar assault ceased as she approached her former friend. 

She knelt down in front of the god and placed her hands on either side of his face. She looked the god in the eye, as if she was looking for answers in his white orbs.

She whispered something to the god that Brian couldn’t hear and for a brief moment he thought she would somehow free his golem. The power of love, friendship, or some other kind of sentimental bull crap that always seems to work in the movies.

Terminate-us gave the girl a sad smile, as if saying he wasn’t the one in control, before one his arms erupted from the earth.

Before the golem could grab Hazel, a golden blur knocked the girl out of the way. Instead of Hazel, the former guardian had one of Arion’s hind legs in his stony grip. With one quick motion the god ripped the beast’s leg off at the knee, only to use the amputated limb to impale the equine through the chest.

The horse fell over with a pain filled whinny; blood and spittle foaming from its mouth.

Instantly Hazel was crouching over Arion, trying to comfort the dying beast by whispering reassurances and saying what a brave and loyal friend he was. As she did this, she pulled her imperial gold sword from her belt, and held it above equine’s heart. With one quick motion, Hazel forever silenced her friend.

The air around Brian seemed to have dropped ten degrees in a matter of moments and the shadows seemed to grow darker and longer.

An unnatural silence settled over the battle as Hazel stared down the marble god, who had just freed himself from his dirt prison. Frank had managed to recover, made his way over, and stood next to Hazel in all his scaly glory. In a moment that seemed to last an eternity, the three combatants didn’t make a single move.

The moment ended abruptly when Terminate-us started to charge at the two legionnaires. Frank intercepted the god halfway, tackling the god to the earth, and releasing a torrent of flame in the god’s face. Hazel summoned more gemstones while simultaneously commanding the earth to swallow the god. The golem tried to slam his fists repeatedly into the side of the dragon, only for gemstones to slice the arm off at the elbow.

It wasn’t until he heard the approach of the elephant accompanied by the shouts of dozens of roman troops did Brian begin to doubt his newest toy’s ability to win this fight.

Hazel and Frank continued their assault as reinforcements came into view. The former god of boundaries was reduced back down to a head and torso, just as Brian had found him. This wasn’t enough for Hazel, as she continued to pull up more gemstones and slicing the god into smaller and
Brian hastily pulled his phone from his pockets as the first troopers came into view, some of them even eying him suspiciously. He swiped through his phone until he found the icon he was looking for: a bottle of wine with a skull on the label. He quickly opened the app and spoke into the device. “Okay D-man, protect me and aid Terminate-us. Incapacitate all DGs with weapons in the immediate area!” yelled the red head in panic.

The earth shook as grape vines exploded from the ground. The vines wrapped around every soldier in the area and lifted them high into the air. A portly bearded man appeared next to Terminate-us and pulled the wounded colossus from the earth. Frank and Hazel were ensnared as well, the vines wrapped tightly around the dragon’s snout.

Brian climbed out of the park bench and stretched before walking to his two favorite creations. He smiled as he saw the looks of fear on the DGs faces be replaced by ones of confusion. The engineer gave a deep bow towards the bulk of the captured forces.

“Please allow me to introduce myself,” the red head said with a smirk. “I’m a man of wealth and taste.” He smiled at his two toys before continuing, “And what’s puzzling you is the nature of my game.”

It was only later, after locking up the newly captured DGs in the senate, did Brian realize that Reyna was not among them. He wasn’t worried though, the girl’s arm had been destroyed. There was no way she could have gotten far, he would just have one of his toys go retrieve her after they had finished corraling the remaining DGs.

What Brian didn’t know was that he was being watched by a pair of flaming gold eyes.

Chapter End Notes

Brian is honestly the worst character, and even with his background story none of you lovely readers will feel any sympathy for him. Interestingly enough though, a lot of his character is based from the worst aspects of my engineer friends.

Next chapter will be from Jason’s POV. We will get to see how our favorite trio is doing, as well as how the world is handling the sudden appearance of Olympus. It won't be a horrible chapter in terms of content, but it will still have some dark moments.

Have feelings about what you just read? Please leave a kudos then!

Thoughts, theories, feedback, peer reviews, or just feeling chatty? Please leave a comment!
I’d love to hear from all of you! Tell me what you think so far!

And as always, thanks for reading.

See you later space cowboy.
**Chapter Summary**

Warning: If you made it this far you know what to expect by now...

Tonight:

Jason drives a tractor,

Nico is an awesome homemaker,

and Jason may not be as together as he wants Nico to believe...

**Chapter Notes**

Wow guys over 1k views?!

Thank you all so much!

I hope my little story continues to entertain you all until the very end!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Honestly Jason had no idea why Nico hated farming so much. Sure he had to wake up early, but he got to spend the day working with animals, operating heavy machinery, and he was getting paid to do it!

For a little over two weeks now Nico, Percy, and himself had been staying at one of Demeter’s farms. The one they currently occupied had the classic white two story farm house, a couple of red barns, and four corn silos. The farm was mostly used to grow soy beans and corn during the warmer months, but Demeter apparently also kept a few chickens and pigs around to make the place seem livelier.

Jason had been a bit disappointed when he learned there were no milk cows around, as he secretly always wanted to try milking a cow, but Nico had been quick to scold him. Apparently the son of Hades had a beef with milk cows.

Jason hovered above the chicken pen, sprinkling handfuls of corn to the flightless birds below. As he performed the simple chore he thought back to the strange conversation that resulted in the three demigods residing in the middle of nowhere.

After Hades had dropped the bombshell that Olympus was not only inaccessible, but visible to the mortal world, the conversation quickly turned into speculating who was responsible.

Poseidon had suggested that it was Kronos, rising from the ashes to do battle once more. Hades had quickly shot that idea down, saying it would be at least one hundred years before their father could reassemble his mind. Demeter supported the god of the underworld’s conclusion, stating that their
father may have lurked in the shadows before, but he could be quite theatrical when it came to making his move.

Jason had thought that destroying Camp Half-Blood and making a floating city appear above the New York City skyline was quite theatrical, but what did he know?

Demeter had barely uttered the name Gaea when everyone, but Percy, rejected the possibility. The first primordial had been laid to rest by Leo, Piper, and himself less than a year ago, there was no way she could have woken up and reassembled herself in that short amount of time.

Nico asked if it was possible that the culprit could be Tartarus, saying that since he was the last remaining primordial it could be a power grab. No one challenged him on the idea, but no one supported it either. Truth be told there wasn’t much known about Tartarus, other than he had been created by Gaea and he was the father to most of the giants.

Wanting to contribute Jason suggested that maybe it was Chaos, as everything seemed a bit chaotic. Everyone at the table groaned at the unintended pun. In a display of Father-son unity, Hades and Nico smacked the back of his head.

Jason hated to admit it, but he really missed having a prophecy to guide him, a sentiment everyone at the table reluctantly agreed with. Yeah sure the prophecies were always vague and grim, but at least they provided some place to start and somewhat tell them what to expect.

The three remaining Olympians then decided that they themselves would figure out who or what was responsible, which if Jason was being honest was a nice change of pace. Hades was going to question the recently deceased as well as some mortal friends (that last one caught both him and Nico off guard), Poseidon was going to monitor his domain and check in with the other pantheons (again, caught off guard), and Demeter was going to search the spaces in between.

Jason then brought up the important topic of where he and his cousins were going to stay now Camp Half-Blood was now a crater. He had assumed it would be back off to Camp Jupiter and Poseidon had suggested as much, but surprisingly Demeter had protested the idea.

She said that if Camp Half-Blood could be wiped out with such ease, then Camp Jupiter would just as susceptible, or as she put it: don’t put all your eggs in one basket.

Nico had been quick to argue that the other camp was the best place for them, that Camp Jupiter needed to be warned of the impending danger.

Poseidon took Demeter’s side, but said he would make sure the other camp was made aware of the fate of Camp Half-Blood.

Hades had said he was glad they had all agreed on a course of action, but that still left the demigods without a place to stay.

Nico opened his mouth to speak, but a raised eyebrow from his father stopped Nico from uttering a single syllable. Jason knew that Nico was going to suggest the underworld, but as much he liked the son of Hades, he really did not want to go down there before his time. Not to mention that Nico would try to search for Will. And who knew what Percy would do…

The lord of the seas said as much as would he love to host them, his wife would not allow such a thing. And by thing he meant Percy. This was also okay with Jason, as he did not feel comfortable under the sea. Contrary to popular belief, it is not better down where it is wetter.

That’s when Demeter suggested that they could stay at one of her farms, one of which was relatively
close by. The goddess’s only condition was that the three of them had to help out around the place. Hades, Poseidon, and himself said that sounded fair, Nico visibly paled, and Percy just sat there.

So that’s how Jason found himself sharing a room with Nico and Percy on a small farm near Mendota, Illinois, home to the nation’s annual sweet corn festival (which is apparently a thing).

“Jason!” Nico cried from front porch. “Breakfast is ready!”

“Be right there!” he called back, as he set back down on the frozen earth.

Jason sat down at the kitchen’s small oak table to bacon, eggs, toast with jam, and buttermilk pancakes.

“Gods Neeks! I don’t know when or where you learned to cook, but this is amazing!” Jason praised as he filled up his plate with delicious breakfast foods.

“You’re just saying that Grace,” Nico deflected, as he slowly sat down in the chair across from Jason, his face momentarily twisting in pain.

Jason frowned at his friend. For some unknown reason nectar and ambrosia wasn’t working as it should on the son of Hades, leaving him to recover from his burns naturally. The biggest problem with that was Nico was too stubborn to actually rest. Instead the younger boy was doing all the cooking, cleaning, and laundry for the three of them. Originally Nico had even tried to help with the farm work, but Jason had put his foot down. Now Jason wished he knew how Will had gotten Nico to actually stay in bed for three days. Okay he actually did know, but he wondered if there was another, less romance filled, way.

Jason swallowed a mouthful of bacon. “No I’m not,” he countered, pointing his fork at the Italian. “Every meal you’ve cooked since we’ve gotten here has been five stars. Seriously, I will never be able to eat another pancake that is not made by you.” He then shoved half a syrup coated pancake in his mouth to emphasize his point.

“Thanks,” the son of Hades mumbled, his cheeks flushed. “How’s everything going outside?” he asked as he took a slice of bacon off of Jason’s plate.

“Really Neeks? There’s an entire platter of Bacon in front of you and you have to steal mine?” Nico stuck his tongue out at the son of Jupiter, before taking a bite of the crispy strip of pork. “It tastes better off of your plate,” he said with a shrug.

“It’s going fine I guess. All the animals are fed and this afternoon I’m going to use the tractor to shovel the snow from the drive,” he answered before shoveling more of Nico’s amazing cooking into his mouth.

“Maybe I can convince Percy to help,” Nico casually suggested as he refilled Jason’s orange juice.

There it was, the elephant in the room: Percy Jackson.

Ever since they had arrived, Percy hadn’t said a single word, hadn’t gotten out of bed, or so much as
acknowledged him and Nico. Heck, he hadn’t even bathed! Do you know how bad a room shared by three teenage boys smell? Bad. Do you know what’s like when one of them doesn’t bathe? Near vomit inducing.

“Yeah, that would be nice,” Jason nodded with a fake smile. He felt bad for Percy, he really did. He couldn’t fathom the amount of pain the son of Poseidon was going through, but it was killing Jason watching Nico trying to help Percy. Every day from the time Nico got up to the time that he fell asleep, the son of Hades was doing everything in his power to help Percy. “Are those blue pancakes on the stove?"

“Yeah,” the son of Hades answered with a smile. “Sally told me one time that she did this for Percy whenever she made pancakes. You know Percy and his blue food.” Nico’s smile disappeared. “I hope he’ll eat them this time.”

“He doesn’t know what he’s missing Neeks,” he assured the younger boy. Jason stood up from table and put his plate in the kitchen sink. “I’m going to go see if there’s anything on TV for a bit, then I’ll go get the tractor ready. Care to join?”

The son of Hades looked at him puzzled, “With the tractor?”

Jason rolled his eyes. “Yes, I want you to help me with your bad back."

“Sarcasm doesn’t suit you Grace.”

“You’re right, you’re sarcastic enough for the both of us,” Jason laughed as he walked out of the room. He briefly wondered if seaweed-brain was contagious, because Nico seemed to be catching it.

Jason seriously loved to operate the tractor! How many people could say that the first vehicle they drove was a John Deere 2440 with optional front end loader? Not many people he’d bet. Plus, this thing sure as Hades beat Percy’s Prius any day of the week (as long as speed wasn’t involved). The only downside was that the green machine had no cab to block the icy winter winds, but hey, he was the Son of Jupiter he could make the winds go around him!

Okay, he was reluctant to admit that it had been a little bit intimidating having Demeter showing him how to properly operate the machine. The goddess of the harvest had more or less taught Jason how to drive, a skill that most kids his age learned from their parents, but then Jason was not most kids.

He couldn’t picture his father climbing into the passenger’s seat of a little hatchback and instructing him on the rules of the road, that just wasn’t his father. His father would either wonder why he just didn’t order someone else to drive him around, or he would zap Jason for every mistake he made.

Yeah, he was not doing that.

He briefly wondered if Hera was any better, but that seemed even worse than his father. Hera wanted everything to be perfect in her family, so Jason’s driving skills would be included. Hands at ten and two Jason, not nine and two.

His sister was out of the question. After all, she wasn’t even old enough to drive.

Maybe intimidating hadn’t been the right word for Demeter. After all, she had never said or did
anything that made Jason feel like he had upset her. On the contrary, she had only laughed off all of mistakes at the beginning, saying everyone had to start somewhere.

The “somewhere” in question had actually been the frozen field to the north of the farm. After Demeter drove the tractor out to the field, she made Jason drive while she floated next to him, explaining what the various levers and knobs did.

When he finally put the tractor in gear, he accidently took off to fast, throwing a mix of snow and dirt into the air. Jason had been terrified, thinking that the damage to the field would offend the goddess, let alone the fact she had been covered in dirt. To his surprise (and relief) the portly goddess brushed off the dirt, and ruffled Jason’s hair with a laugh.

“Everyone’s got to start somewhere,” she had told him. “And no one is exempt from a little mess along the way.”

And that had been the worst it got; no pointed looks, no criticism, and no threats! The rest of the day had been great once Jason got over his discomfort. Demeter taught him how to use the loader, how to properly prime the engine, check the oil, and even showed him how to change the tractors’ huge rear tires.

When the goddess of the harvest had decided Jason knew enough, she tossed him another set of keys; this time to an old beat up white Ford Bronco that had been sitting in front of one of the barns. She told him that since he know how to operate a Deere, a pickup would be a walk in the park. He had of course tried to refuse the keys, saying he didn’t even have a license. Once again Demeter ruffled his short blond hair. She explained to him that in rural areas people his age have already been driving for several years already, and as long as he didn’t do anything stupid no one would question it if he drove the Bronco every now and then.

In other words: Jason had two vehicles to Percy’s one and he didn’t even have a license yet!

He dumped the last bucket of snow onto a pile he had made near the pig pen. The pile he hoped would act as a wind break for any of the snouted animals that dared to exit the barn, also he hoped he could convince Nico to help him hollow it out into an awesome snow fort. He parked the tractor next to the pile and jumped down from the seat. As he approached the house he could see Nico, wearing Will’s awesome sun themed stocking cap, struggling to use a plastic snow shovel to scrape the thin layer of snow that covered the house’s wooden front porch.

Jason had to bite his tongue to stop himself from laughing at the son of Hades. He may have figured out why his best friend hated working with Demeter: Nico was incredibly uncoordinated with tools. He watched in a mixture of amusement and astonishment as the son of Hades was struggling to properly use the snow shovel. Nico would push the shovel along the porch, snow accumulating on the blade. When the son of Hades thought there was enough snow on the shovel, he would then quickly lift the shovel, only to have most of the snow hit him in the face. Jason watched this happen four more times before he remembered that Nico was still recovering and that the quick jerking motion he was doing was definitely not good for his back.

Jason ran up to the snow covered son of Hades and grabbed the shovel from his hands.

“Hey!” Nico protested, folding his arms over his chest.

“No like this,” explained Jason. He didn’t fill the shovel up as much as Nico and instead of throwing it over his shoulder, he only lifted the shovel a foot off the ground and emptied the snow off to the side. “You won’t tire out as fast and your back will thank you,” he said with a smile, before offering the shovel back to Nico.
“I think you need to show me how to do it a few more times,” the son of Hades said with a small smirk. “Besides, how do you know how to shovel snow? You’ve lived most of your life in California, last time I checked not a whole lot of snowfall at Camp Jupiter.”

“Hannibal’s quarters required frequent cleaning,” Jason explained as he continued to shovel.

“What does that have to do with-” Nico’s eyes went wide when he realized what the son of Jupiter had meant. “Oh! Oh gods! That’s disgusting!” he cried, his face twisted in disgust.

Jason smiled. “Everyone’s got to start somewhere, and no one’s exempt from a little mess along the way.”

Nico groaned. “She told you that. Didn’t she?”

Jason nodded as he removed the last of the snow from the porch. “I don’t understand why you don’t like her, compared to ninety percent of the goddesses I’ve dealt with she is the nicest one by far.” He shuddered as thoughts of Disciplina entered his mind. Hopefully Nico would think he was just shivering from the cold.

“She turned me into a flower Grace!” he cried, throwing his arms wide.

“And what were you doing when you got turned into a flower?” Jason asked, raising an eyebrow.

Nico turned away from Jason and muttered something.

“What was that?”

“I may have said farming was stupid, just in not so nice terms,” the son of Hades answered, still not looking at Jason.

“And why did you say that?”

Nico sighed. “Bianca.”

With that single word Jason knew to stop his line of questioning. It had become an unspoken agreement between the two boys that whenever the son of Hades uttered his deceased sister’s name Jason would leave him be. It was more than just his sister though, it represented all the pain in Nico’s life; the isolation, the self-loathing, the fear of his secret being brought to light, and so much more pain that someone their age, demigod or not, should ever have to experience.

The two boys just stood there, a tense silence between them. Jason awkwardly spun the snow shovel on its blade, while Nico looked everywhere but at the son of Jupiter.

Jason was the first to break the silence. “So, Percy didn’t want to help? I told you he was Hawkeye; lazy until the action starts,” Jason offered with forced laugh.

Nico looked down at his boot clad feet. “He… never really responded. He didn’t even eat the blue pancakes I made him.” The son of Hades sighed. “I’m worried about him Jason. I need to help him, but I don’t know how.”

Jason scooped up some snow from the porch’s railing and threw it at the son of Hades. Nico looked at him like he had just been slapped in the face. Jason ran and jumped over the railing, scooping up more snow along the way. “First of all, you don’t need to help him Neeks,” he tossed another snowball, this time hitting the son of Hades on his left arm.
“What are you doing Grace?” Nico hissed while brushing the snow off him.

Jason tossed two more snow balls. “From what I’ve heard from the both of you, this is how Percy tried to help you,” he called out while hiding behind a telephone pole. He hoped Nico would catch on to what he was trying to do.

“I don’t remember Percy ever throwing snowballs at me,” Nico huffed, while grabbing a handful of snow himself.

Jason tossed another snowball, this time nailing Nico in his face. “No, but he always tried get you to laugh, to smile, to goof around, to- “ He was cut off when a snowball hit him in the face, knocking his glasses from his face.

Nico was next to him in an instant. “Oh gods! I’m sorry! They’re not broken are they? I’ll buy you a new pair!”

Jason rolled his eyes and pushed Nico onto the ground, before flopping down onto the ground next to the shocked boy. He put his glasses on, they were a little bent now but nothing that couldn’t be bent back into place. “Geez Nico, you need to learn how to relax a little. For the next fifteen minutes I’m going to be Jason Grace and you’re going to be Nico di Angelo, two friends who are enjoying a day out in the snow.” He turned his head to look at Nico. “You think you can do that?”

Nico nodded, a genuine smile on his lips.

The proposed fifteen minutes turned into over an hour of winter fun. The two teens entered the house soaking wet, cold, and exhausted; but both were laughing like mad men. They both scampered down the basement stairs, their boots leaving behind puddles of water and snow with each step. The two demi-gods made their way to the laundry room, which was really just the northwest corner of the basement where the washer and dryer sat behind an ivy green curtain. Jason was the first to shed off the wet winter clothing, throwing it all into the old dryer. Nico couldn’t move as fast as Jason, struggling to remove his heavy black coat without wincing.

“Here let me,” Jason said as he helped his younger friend with his jacket. He took the heavy jacket and tossed it in the dryer along with his own snow pants and coat. “You should probably take off your pants.”

“What?!” Nico gasped, his eyes as wide and his cheeks burning red.

“Take off your pants, they’re soaking wet Neeks,” Jason shrugged. Sometimes he wondered what went through his friend’s head. “Throw them in the dryer and we would have a full load.”

“Oh, okay.” Nico nodded as he removed his belt and slid off his black jeans, revealing a pair of black boxers with a pattern of green and white skulls.

Jason couldn’t help but chuckle. “Aren’t those a little colorful for you?”

Nico gave him a murderous look as the son of Hades threw a dryer sheet into the machine. “For that I’m going to shower first,” he said as he turned the dryer on.

Jason rolled his eyes, “Whatever.” He watched as Nico climbed up the stairs, his pale white legs
disappearing from sight as the boy entered the kitchen.

Jason leaned against the washing machine and began to stretch his arms. The tractor was awesome, but the one downside it had was it vibrated nonstop, leaving him sore for the rest of the day. He decided that when Nico was done with his shower that he was going to take a nice long hot bath. He loved baths, the bath houses of New Rome were one of the few things that he missed about his old life. Camp Half-Blood may have been more relaxed than the roman camp, but seriously shower stalls? Group shower stalls on top of it! At least with the bath houses you weren’t on full display for all the world to see; plus everyone at the bath house wrapped a towel around their waist.

Jason may give Nico a hard time for his modesty, but truth be told Jason wasn’t all that comfortable around people either. Sure he could walk around in just a t-shirt and a pair of boxers, but anything less than that was scandalous. His roommates at Pompeii Prep, Lisa and Allison, had been mistaken about his discomfort. He wasn’t bothered by seeing them, on the contrary he was uncomfortable with them seeing him.

“JASON!” Nico shrieked from somewhere upstairs.

Jason flew up the stairs, literally, slightly thankful that something had happened to stop his mind from continuing down the dark rabbit hole that was his time at Pompeii Prep. The wind that propelled him through the kitchen blew several pictures off the wall as he rounded the corner into the main hallway. He flew straight up the stairway and landed outside the bathroom door. He pushed open the dark wood door and gasped at the scene before him: Nico kneeling in front of the bathtub, his arms covered in blood. “What happened?” he choked.

Nico violently shook his head. “No it’s not mine! It’s Percy’s!”

It was only then that Jason noticed Riptide laying on the floor, its bronze blade covered in blood. Jason forced himself to take another step into the bathroom. There in the clawfoot bathtub sat the son of Poseidon, up to his neck in a mixture of blood and water.

“Help me get him out!” the son of Hades cried, as he tried to pull Percy out of the tub.

“What happened?” he rasped, unable to move from the spot.

Nico had somehow managed to pull Percy out of the tub and lay him on the bathroom floor, a pool of red spread out from beneath the oldest demigod. “He slit his wrists!”

“Why would he…” Jason trailed off. He knew Percy was depressed over the loss of his family, but was he feeling that bad that this was his answer? Didn’t he realize how his this would hurt everyone? Didn’t he understand that his actions were irreversible? Didn’t he realize how much he and Nico would miss him? He was one of his best friends for god’s sake! He was the only person besides Nico who knew the pressures of being a son of one of the big three. He was Percy Jackson, the son of Poseidon with a contagious smile and not a selfish bone in his body.

“Jason, there’s some nectar and bandages in the medicine cabinet.”

“Huh?”

“Grab the nectar and bandages from the cabinet!” Nico cried, as he desperately held pressure on the son of Poseidon’s wrists.

Jason walked over to the cabinet in a daze, honestly he wasn’t sure how he was able to see anything through the red haze that settled over everything. He must not have been quick enough for Nico, as the small teen jumped up and grabbed the medical supplied from his hands. He watched as Nico
poured the nectar onto Percy’s wrists, then gentle rubbed the liquid into the open wounds, and then slowly wrap the cloth bandages around the wound.

Something in Jason snapped when he caught Nico’s eye. Nico’s eyes were red and puffy, with tears threatening to fall. “You bastard,” he snarled. The son of Hades looked at him in disbelief, but at the moment he didn’t care, Percy needed to hear this. “You selfish asshole! Where do you get the balls to do this?” he spat, as he crouched over the still form of the son of Poseidon. “It’s always about you isn’t it? I don’t give a crap what they say your fatal flaw is! All you do is hurt Nico!”

“Jason,” Nico warned.

Jason glared at Nico with such intensity that even Thanatos would flee. “We get it, you lost your family, but how do you think this makes us feel? You didn’t even spare us a single thought before you did this, didn’t you? You say you’re our friend, but that’s just a lie isn’t it!”

“Jason.”

“No Nico, fuck him!” Jason thundered. “He doesn’t care about us! All he cares about is that delusion he has of living a normal life with Annabeth! Now that that’s gone, he’s got nothing to live for!”

“Jason!” snapped the son of Hades. The room’s temperature dropped about ten degrees and the light began to flicker.

Maybe if Jason wasn’t so upset he would’ve stopped, but he continued to scream at the unconscious older boy. “All you’ve done since we’ve got here is stay in bed feeling bad for yourself, while me and Nico have been busting our asses to keep this place running!” While Nico may have been chilling the room, Jason was charging the air. “Nico, who’s back is fucked up! Nico who has been doing all the cooking and cleaning, bringing you amazing meals, only for you to turn them down like a spoiled fucking brat!” Jason was seething with rage, the muscles in his back were painfully tight. “Nico, who has been taking care of your dumb ass for the last three fucking years! The same Nico who you couldn’t spare a moment of time for! The same Nico who went to hell for you! If you want to fucking die, then go right ahead! I won’t miss you at all!”

This time Nico didn’t bother to say a word, instead the son of Hades shot up and caught Jason’s chin with a vicious uppercut. Jason staggered backwards; tiny storm clouds dancing in front of his eyes. “Get out,” said the son of Hades in an eerily calm voice.

Jason looked at his best friend in shock as he rubbed his aching jaw.

“Get out.”

Jason didn’t need to be told twice. The blond quickly exited the bathroom, only to have the door slam behind him.

The son of Jupiter was sprawled out on the old ivy green loveseat that occupied the center of the living room. With one hand he had the TV’s remote and absentely flipped through the channels, while the other hand held a bag of frozen peas to his aching jaw.
Jason felt terrible in every sense of the word. He couldn’t believe he had went off like that on Percy. There was no need for that, his friend was hurting worse than he had thought and Jason had decided to act like a jackass. But, a very real part of him was still angry at the older teen for continually hurting Nico, whether he knew he was or not.

Since they had arrived at the farm, Nico had been acting like a mother hen; trying to do everything he could to keep the two older demigods happy. But what about his own happiness? Jason knew that Nico was hurting more than he let on, a fact proven by hearing the younger boy crying in his sleep, occasionally calling out for Will. He knew he needed to talk to Nico, but he if he did the son of Hades would try to make Jason talk about what was bothering him; and he wasn’t ready for that. Not yet.

He settled on watching the news, throwing the remote onto the wood coffee table in front of him. Olympus was the only topic anyone talked about anymore, but no one knew what it was or what to do about it. Some people thought it was some kind of alien spaceship, and the History Channel was more than happy to play some show called *Ancient Aliens* around the clock. Others thought it was some big marketing gimmick for the upcoming Tristan Mclean movie adaption of *The Iliad*.

Jason pushed down any emotions and thoughts that came with the name Mclean; he didn’t want to think about her yet.

Amazingly enough, the United States government had told the people that the matter would clear itself up on its own in due time, saying there was no reason to be alarmed. Jason had been confused as to why they would say such a thing. In the movies wasn’t it the government’s first response to call the army in? However, when Jason caught the briefest of glimpses at the speaker’s forearm, he understood perfectly: the demigods in the government were trying to hide the existence of Olympus. And when they said it would disappear soon, they were hoping that other demigods would once again save the day. Man, were they in for a surprise.

Tonight though, some blonde anchorwoman was interviewing some old guy who was apparently a renowned philanthropist and titan of the tech industry. Jason didn’t catch the guy’s name, but he seemed like nice guy. The old guy stood up when the anchorwoman entered the room, and gave her a slight bow. They first exchanged the necessary pleasantries that were typical of the interview process, but then the old guy pulled a coin out from behind his ear and proceeded to do the cheesiest magic tricks as the two talked. He explained that his company was going to launch an investigation into the mysterious floating city above New York, as he pulled a series of colored handkerchiefs from his sleeves. The anchorwoman tried to get him to elaborate further on the research group, but he said that wasn’t important. What he wanted to talk about was his success so far in donating new computers to every school in the state of New York, adding that soon every school on the east coast would be receiving similar donations. Then to Jason’s amazement, he pulled out a poster board seemingly from his wallet. On the poster board was a phone number for the charity, and he said that any school that called that number would be placed in a queue for the new equipment.

“Jason?”

Jason looked to the room’s entrance to see Nico standing there. His hair was more of a mess than usual and his eyes were bloodshot and puffy. Jason grabbed he remote off the coffee table and turned the television off. He then sat up and patted the cushion next to him, signaling for Nico to sit next to him.

The Son of Hades slowly walked over to the couch, his bare feet padding silently through the old yellow shag carpet. He sat next to Jason, but left a noticeable gap between them.

Jason gulped and removed the bag of peas from his jaw. “Is he okay?”

Jason wasn’t sure how to respond to that; it was great that Percy was going to live, but would the son of Poseidon ever be okay again? “That’s good.”


Jason flinched. He knew what he had said and he knew he could never unsay them. Percy may not have heard him, but Nico sure as Hades did. “I was out of line.”

“You think?” snarled the son of Hades.

“I,” he stopped himself. “I don’t know what came over me Neeks.”

“Don’t call me that.”

Ouch. Jason knew he was really in trouble. “I just. I can’t.” He knew that there was nothing he could say to justify his actions, all he could do was own up to them. “I’m so tired Nico. I’m so tired of seeing you get hurt because of him.” Nico opened his mouth, but Jason cut him off. “He does Nico. Since we got here you have waited on him hand and foot, only for him to brush you off. I get it, he’s miserable, but so were you when we first met.” Jason took a deep breath. “But there’s a big difference between the two of you: no matter how bad you felt you continued on.” Jason collapsed back into the cushions. “I don’t know what I’m saying, I guess I just felt that I needed to protect you.”

There was a long pause before Nico spoke. “First off, I don’t need you or anyone else for that matter saving me. I’m not some kind of damsel in distress. Second, the only reason Percy hurts me is because I let him. He thinks he’s lost everything Jason, and in a way he has.” The son of hades joined Jason in leaning back into the loveseat. “I’m trying to show him people still care about him, that we still care.” He rubbed his eyes. “I’m not going to lie to you, it does hurt to see him like this, but why wouldn’t it? I’m fighting for Percy the same way you’re fighting for me.”

Jason sank into the cushions, suddenly feeling like even worse. “Oh.”

“Jason, you’re a great friend. My best friend. So if you want to help me, then help Percy.”

“I can do that,” he nodded to the son of Hades. “Are we good?”

Nico sighed. “Yeah we’re good,” he said as he pushed himself up off the loveseat. “Now I have to go lock up any sharp objects, and remove all the pockets from Percy’s clothes.” Jason must have looked confused because Nico laughed at him. “Riptide. His sword. Magically reappears in his pocket as a pen.”

“Kind of forgot about that. Need any help? Do you want any help?” the blond asked as he pushed himself forward, escaping the overstuffed cushions.

Nico gave him a small smile in response. “No thanks. You’ve worked hard today farmboy.” And with that Nico left the room.

Jason grabbed the remote and turned the television back on. He hoped the magic old guy was still on.
After he had his fill of the cheesy philanthropist, Jason decided to call it a night. He floated up the staircase and went into the bathroom to clean up for the night, and was surprised to see that the son of Hades had apparently cleaned up the mess, the smell of bleach was still heavy in the air. He took a quick shower (he was too tired for a bath now) and changed into the only pair of night clothes he had: a white t-shirt and a pair of flannel pajama pants. He brushed his teeth and even flossed; all a part of the agreement he had made with Hygieia, goddess of health.

When he walked into their shared room, he was surprised to see Nico sitting on the edge of Percy’s bed, running his hand through the older boy’s hair and quietly humming a tune that Jason couldn’t quite place.

“Hey,” he cautiously greeted.

Nico turned to face him. He stopped humming, but continued to stroke Percy’s hair. “Hey.”

“Is he okay?” Jason asked as he climbed into his sleeping bag on the floor. How unfair was it that he did all the heavy work and he had to sleep on the floor?

“He was having a nightmare,” the son of hades answered, his voice almost a whisper. “Will told me that physical contact helps and well, Bianca used to hum that for me.”

“He would be proud of you. You know that right?” he told the son of Hades as he adjusted his own pillow. He meant it too; Will would be grinning ear-to-ear if he saw how Nico was caring for the two of them. The son of Apollo would probably also never shut up about it either.

He heard Nico sniff, then watched as the small boy’s body shook. “I wish I would’ve have treated him better. I was too cold to him,” the son of Hades sobbed. “He deserved so much better.”

“Hey now, don’t talk about yourself like that.” Jason grabbed the younger boy’s wrist and gently pulled him to the floor next to him. “You two were amazing together! Do you think Will would’ve let you treat him badly? The same Will who placed Butch into a headlock for mocking his scrubs?”

Nico let out a small chuckle. “No.”

Jason pulled Nico down so that he was lying next to him. “Will wouldn’t have had you any other way. He wanted you Nico di Angelo and don’t you forget it.” He poked Nico in the chest every other word. No one got to speak ill of Nico on Jason’s watch, not even Nico!

“Then why did he leave me?” the son of Hades whispered.

“He didn’t Nico. He wanted you to live your life, and he knew you couldn’t do that if you stayed in the underworld. As impossible as it sounds right now, he want you to move on. He wants you grow as a person, he wants you to go to school, get a job, fall in love, raise kids, all that sentimental crap that the Apollo kids always wrote poems and sang about.”

“I don’t know if I can Jay.”

Jason wrapped his arms around the shaking boy. “No one’s expecting you to move on immediately. Take as long as you need. I’ll be here every step of the way.” Nico actually snuggled into Jason’s embrace, resting his head on Jason’s chest.

No more words were said that night, but as Jason heard Nico’s sobbing give way to the sounds of a peaceful slumber, he knew Nico would be alright.
He covered Nico with his sleeping bag, and closed his eyes.

Sleep followed soon after.

Chapter End Notes

Before I started this fic I searched for a place that I could picture Demeter calling home. After a few days of searching I found Mendota, IL which is located in the middle of nowhere. It has a large canning facility, it's surrounded by fields, and is pretty far removed from any major city. In other words the perfect place for the harvest goddess to make her home and to hide three demigods.

Now we've reached a point in the story where everyone can catch their breath. That's right: no more horror for awhile. Nico, Jason, And Percy will be licking their wounds, helping the gods determine who their enemy is, and well I got a little bit of a surprise in store for everyone :)

The next chapter will be from Nico's POV. There will be some angst, but it should mostly be fluffy.

Have strong feelings about what you just read? Leave a kudos!

Questions, theories, feel like chatting, etc... Leave a comment!

Kudos and comments are vitamins for Bob!

Until next time, thanks for reading!
Farmers were clearly masochists. No one in their right mind would willingly get up at such ungodly hours unless they liked to feel pain. Jason got him up at five in the morning. Every. Single. Day. If he still had his stygian iron sword he would have run Jason through by now.

Nico rubbed his eyes and looked at the Garfield clock that hung on the kitchen wall.

Six O’clock.

He was cutting it close, but he should be able to finish making breakfast by seven. Not that there was any deadline for when breakfast had to be served, but considering his idiotic blond friend got up at four, it didn’t seem right to make him wait long for breakfast.

He stalked over to the ancient fridge and pulled out the last of the eggs, a loaf of white bread, and the milk. He deposited the collected items on the kitchen counter, which was ivy green like almost other surface in the house, and walked over to the stove and turned the burner off that had been cooking the sausage.

He pulled out a large mixing bowl and a casserole dish from the cabinets beneath the counter. He set the mixing bowl on the counter, only to pick up the loaf of bread again.

Carrying the casserole dish and the loaf of bread he walked over to the kitchen table, where Percy currently sat.

A little over a week had passed since he had discovered Percy in the bathtub and Nico was determined to keep the son of Poseidon alive and on his way to well. That night Nico had confiscated any sharp objects and locked them away in a kitchen drawer. It wouldn’t stop the older
teen, but Nico hoped he would be able to hear Percy if he tried to force it open. The son of Hades may have gone a little overboard when he removed all the pockets from the son of Poseidon’s clothes, but how else was he going to stop him from getting Riptide?

He sat the dish and bread in front of his friend, seemingly startling the older teen. “Percy, I need you to take the bread, tear it into little pieces, and put it in the dish,” he told the dazed teen. “And while you do that I’ll start on the eggs.” Nico went back to the eggs and bowl on the counter and began to fill the mixing bowl with the eggs, discarding the shells onto a paper towel.

From the corner of his eye he was glad to see that Percy was doing as he was told. At first the son of Poseidon was almost hesitant to rip up the bread, but to Nico’s delight Percy began to really go to town on the bread, tearing the loaf into hundreds of little pieces.

“When you’re done with that, gently pat the bread down into the pan,” he explained as he added the last egg into the bowl. “There’s a frying pan full of crumbled pork sausage on the stove, if you would please, take the sausage and pour it over the bread.” Nico opened the utensils drawer and pulled out a fork and began to beat the eggs; a whisk would be better, but the fork would take up less room in the wash. He wasn’t lazy, he was just working smarter.

Percy slowly got up from his chair and Nico couldn’t help but notice how Percy winced when he pushed himself up using armrests. Nico resisted the urge to frown at Percy’s condition. In the three weeks since they had arrived at Demeter’s farm, Percy had lost an alarming amount of weight. Percy had always wore baggier clothes, but now Nico wasn’t even sure how they stayed on him. If it wasn’t for Nico making the son of Poseidon eat something, Percy would have starved to death by now. Still it wasn’t healthy for someone to eat so little.

There was an irony there that Nico wouldn’t admit.

Percy’s usual tan skin had lost most of its color. And his eyes, gods his eyes, once as beautiful and ever changing as the sea, had lost all of their luster and life. Percy had once told Nico about the ghoulish disguises he and Annabeth had used in Tartarus, and while Nico had never seen them, he couldn’t help but think this is what Percy had looked like.

“Don’t worry about the grease Perce, just pour it all in,” he said, as he stirred some milk into the beaten eggs.

Percy did as he was instructed and dumped the pan of sausage onto the shredded bread. Then without any prompting Percy used the spatula to spread the greasy pork around. Nico smiled, it wasn’t much but it was an improvement. When Percy finished, Nico emptied the mixing bowl onto the mixture of bread and sausage. “Percy, grab the cheese from the fridge.” He deposited the mixing bowl in the sink and filled it with water. “The shredded stuff,” he added as an afterthought, as he washed his hands off. He heard the fridge door open followed by the sound of food being moved around. He heard the fridge shut as he toweled off his hands. “Just dump the whole bag on top, unless you don’t like cheese Perce.”

When he turned around he saw that Percy had done as instructed, the bag of cheese sat empty on the kitchen table with its contents spread all over the messy looking casserole. Percy must have thought the same thing as he was wrinkling his nose as he looked at it. Nico grabbed the dish and put it into the already preheated oven. “Trust me, this will may look bad now, but it’s going to be awesome,” he assured.

Nico looked at the clock again. Ten after six.

It would take anywhere from forty-five minutes to an hour for the casserole to bake, which was close
enough to his goal of seven O’clock. He sat down at the table, careful as to not aggravate his back. No one had any idea why the nectar and ambrosia wasn’t working on him as well as it used to. The only theory came from Demeter, and of course it was vegetable related. He may not eat a whole lot, but since he started dating Will, the blond had made him at least improve his diet.

Love was eating broccoli without cheese, when a McDonald’s was only seconds away.

No way in Tartarus was he malnourished.

Not anymore.

Because of Will.

He felt the familiar twisting in his stomach and his eyes starting to water. He needed to distract himself.

Will would not want him to be like this.

Time to start up a one-sided conversation with Percy, who was sitting across from him. The son of Poseidon seemed to be watching the small black and white television that sat on top of the fridge, but if you looked closely, you would notice his eyes were glazed over. He was somewhere else entirely, somewhere Nico needed to bring Percy back from. “I’ve been remembering more of my past before the Lotus, did I tell you that Percy?”

Percy looked at him, but he didn’t nod or anything. Honestly, Jules Albert was livelier than Percy.

“Father lived with us. Not on the weekends, not alternating weeks, nope he lived with the three of us full time. He would eat breakfast with us in the morning then go off to work, then return home before dinner. Me and Bianca even knew he was a god!” Nico laughed. “We just thought that everyone had a god for a father.”

Percy gave Nico a halfhearted smile. It wasn’t much, but Nico would take it.

“One time mother had gotten ill, nothing life threatening but enough to keep her in bed all day. So father stayed home that day to take care of us, mostly just to keep us out of mother’s hair. He handled breakfast easily enough, he got us Wheaties which had just came out. They tasted just as bad then as they do now, but we thought we were really something eating them. Lunch went okay, he made us some ham sandwiches using the leftovers from the previous night.” Nico paused and leaned back into his chair, a large smile on his face. “Dinner though, was a complete disaster.”

Percy leaned forward. Story time was having the desired effect on the son of Poseidon.

“Mother had bought a chicken to bake along with some potatoes and carrots. Mother was trying to get us used to American food unlike most immigrants at the time who still ate the same foods when they arrived,” he explained, unaware that he was becoming more animated as he spoke. “Contrary to what you guys think, I do not know how to make a lot of Italian dishes.”

Percy frowned at him.

Nico pointed at Percy. “Don’t deny it Perseus, how long ago was it that you asked me for an Alfredo recipe because and I quote: You are Italian, it’s in your blood Neeks.”

Percy shrank into his seat, refusing to look at Nico.

“Anyway, the chicken and vegetables were supposed to be put in the oven that morning and were to
cook all day. Father had forgotten this, most likely Bianca or I had distracted him. About two hours before dinner, father finally remembers. He’s in the kitchen throwing everything into the pan. The chicken’s legs were still tied together, the potatoes were unwashed, and he didn’t peel or remove the crowns from the carrots.”

Percy looked at him confused.

“You’ve never heard that before? The crown of carrot? I guess you would call them the carrot tops now? Does that make sense?”

Percy nodded slightly.

Nico’s smile grew. This was most responsive Percy had been in weeks! “Father was smart enough to know that increasing the heat is never a good idea to reduce cooking time. Unfortunately, he decided to use some kind of magic to cook it instead. I was like four or five at the time so I have no idea what he was actually trying to do, but all of a sudden there was the chicken running around the kitchen.”

Nico laughed at the memory. He laughed so hard that his back started to hurt, but he continued anyway. Pain is nothing compared to joy. “Bianca started to cry, Father was swearing in a mix of Latin, Greek, English, and Italian, and I just sat there amazed at what was unfolding.”

The son of Hades smiled at the memory. When his mother had found out about the new words Nico had picked up from his Father, Hades had slept on the couch for a week. Percy didn’t need to know all of that; his father needed to keep some of his dignity after all. “I swear Father forgot he was a god, because instead of snapping his fingers, hurling a fireball, or sending it down to the underworld; he grabs the meat cleaver and begins to chase the undead chicken around the kitchen!”

Nico stood from his chair and began to move around the kitchen, trying to recreate his father’s antics. “He managed to corner the chicken, cleaver still in hand.” He stalked up to Percy, imaginary cleaver in hand. “Just when he was about to chop the thing in half, the bird throws a potato at him!” he cried, as he fell back onto the floor. The pain in his back was suddenly insignificant compared to the joy he felt.

Percy chuckled, the first noise he had made in weeks. It was short and raspy, but damn it, it was beautiful to Nico!

Percy stood up, the first time he had moved from his chair in weeks. “The potato must have made him remember that he was a god, because instantly the bird was turned into a pile of ash. Father stood there breathing heavily, glaring at the pile of ashes that was supposed to have been our dinner. Picture it: The three of us were standing in a kitchen like this, older appliances though, Bianca is crying, I’m bouncing up and down begging him to do it again, and father is just realizing that he has ruined dinner. We ended up eating pomegranates that night, it was also the first time I ever had one.”

The two sat there in silence, just enjoying each other’s company. Well Nico was enjoying Percy’s, he wasn’t sure if the same was true for the son of Poseidon. Nico was going to mark this morning as a win. He got Percy out of bed, Percy had helped out with breakfast, and had been engaged in their conversation, no matter how one-sided it had been. It was still alarming to Nico that Percy hadn’t spoken since the incident at the hospital, but he didn’t want to press the issue. People handled grief differently, maybe this was how Percy grieved? All he could do was be there for Percy, remind him that he still had Nico.

Wasn’t that what Percy had done for him?

The timer on the oven went off, its shrill chirping disrupting the peaceful atmosphere. Nico heaved himself from the wooden chair and walked to the oven. He hit the off button with a little more force than necessary, but it was satisfying to shut that thing up. He opened the oven door slightly and peeked in at the casserole, the cheese was melted and there was no bubbling. He fully opened the
door, then put on two oven mitts, which looked like ears of corn, the thumbs a green piece of husk. He pulled the sausage and egg casserole from the oven with both hands and used his hip to close the oven door in one fluid motion.

He would never admit it, but the kitchen was where he was in his element. As his memories returned, he remembered that his mother had been an avid cook, and he was a momma’s boy. Bianca had been a daddy’s girl, so that balanced out nicely as far as his parents were concerned. His mother had shown him how to make what she considered the basics: pancakes, waffles, various casseroles, noodles from scratch, pot roast, spare rib, stews, soups, and so much more that it could fill a cook book. Before Jason had been so amazed at his cooking, Nico had assumed everyone could cook like he did.

He set the heavy casserole dish on the counter and removed the tacky oven mitts. He grabbed the spatula that he had used for the sausage and began to cut the casserole into squares. Besides being simple to make and requiring few ingredients, it was soft enough that it could be cut with a spoon if need be.

A loud “THUD” from behind nearly made Nico drop the spatula. He spun around, expecting the worst, only to see that Percy was setting the table. He must have set one of the plates down a little too hard. Nico didn’t say anything, he just returned to cutting the casserole. When he finished, he had Percy carry over the plates so that Nico could put a piece on each plate.

“Sit down and eat Perce. I’ll call Jason in.”

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“Neeks, that may have been the best meal I’ve ever eaten,” praised the son of Jupiter.

Nico wasn’t going to argue with Jason, considering he ate literally half of the casserole. He figured that if all the ingredients had been distributed evenly throughout the casserole then Jason had ate half a loaf of bread, half a dozen eggs, and half a pound of sausage. “You’re going to get fat Jason.”

“Body shaming Nico? I thought you were above such things? I guess I shall have to tell your dad tonight,” said the blond, pretending to be hurt by his words.

Nico was confused. He had never heard of body shaming before, but he was pretty sure he knew what it meant. What really confused him though was the comment about his father. “What are you going to IM him to snitch on me?” he huffed, crossing his arms.

By the look on the blond’s face it was his turn to be confused. “Why would I do that? Him, Poseidon, and Demeter are still coming over for our weekly dinner slash meeting tonight right?”

Nico’s stomach dropped to Tartarus and his lungs felt as if they were being squeezed by Hercules. It was Friday and he had somehow gotten his days mixed up.

When they had first arrived at Demeter’s farm the six of them had agreed that every Friday the gods would come and share any information they had learned, then the six would discuss what the next steps should be. After the first discussion Demeter had requested that they should make it into a family dinner as well. Poseidon and Jason were quick to support Demeter’s idea, but he and his father groaned at the idea. With the vote being three to two (Percy was considered unfit to vote) the motion passed. Jason had then volunteered Nico to make the meal.
Typical. The house of Hades getting screwed over again.

“You okay there Neeks?” Jason asked, waving his hand in front of Nico’s face.

Nico exploded from his chair and violently opened the fridge. Half a gallon of milk, a bag of string cheese, and a half drank bottle of Coke were the sole contents of the icebox. He had known while making breakfast that their supplies were critically low, but he had foolishly hoped that the fridge had refilled itself since then. He was going to ask Jason to drive the three of them to a grocer today, maybe even make a day of it, and by that he meant find a McDonalds. Now though they had a rapidly approaching deadline of seven o’clock in the evening.

He looked up at the Garfield clock. Its usual bored expression now seemed to be mocking him. Eight thirty-five. The son of Hades let loose a string of profanity that would have earned him a bar of soap in his mouth if his mother would have heard it. “We need to go get groceries,” he told Jason, trying to regain his composure.

“Sure,” Jason shrugged as he took the mostly untouched piece of casserole from Percy’s plate and placed it on his own. “Demeter told me that there’s a Walmart and something called a Sullivan’s in a town nearby called Princeton.” Jason took his fork and began to stuff his face once again.

“Fine. Great.” he said, barely paying attention. He searching frantically for his other shoe, while trying to put on the other shoe, hopping around the kitchen.

“Mow down reeks. Eve got to meed de dogs worst,” Jason choked out, his mouth full of food.

“What?” He called out as he crawled under the table searching for his shoe.

He heard Jason swallow then clear his throat. “Sorry. I said, slow down Neeks I’ve got to feed the hogs first.” Nico heard the blond beat his chest. He most likely swallowed something wrong. “We can go this afternoon.”

“Forget about the pigs Jason,” Nico hissed. “We have to go now!” He found his other shoe behind the garbage bin. How it got there was anyone’s guess. He didn’t bother to untie his show, opting to slip it on to save time. He looked over at Percy and realized that the son of Poseidon was only in a T-shirt and a pair of shorts. Great now he had to get Percy ready too! “Percy go get dressed!” he barked, causing the raven haired teen to flinch. Nico heard the blond beat his chest. He most likely swallowed something wrong. “We can go this afternoon.”

To Nico’s delight Percy returned the smile and ran from the room. The sound of his bare feet running up the stairs filled the house.

“You sure it’s a good idea for him to be on his own?” the son of Jupiter asked as he laced up his boots.

Nico huffed. Things between Jason and Percy had been tense since they arrived and it had only gotten worse since they had found Percy in the tub. Before that Jason had been somewhat passive aggressive towards Percy, but Nico had just written that off as Jason being tired from doing most of the heavy lifting around the farm. Now though Jason would hardly acknowledge the son of Poseidon’s presence, yet if forced to Jason acted as if he was walking on eggshells.

“It’s only been a week Neeks. He shouldn’t be left alone for any period of time.”

Nico held his tongue. This wasn’t the Jason he knew. Something had happened during his visit with
Disciplina that Jason refused to talk about, and whatever it was was making him act different. Jason was trying to act normal around him, but Nico was more observant than Jason gave him credit. He noticed that Jason tensed up if anyone touched him, but he was okay if he initiated physical contact. The former praetor was also spending more and more of his time alone, often going out of his way to do unnecessary work around the farm.

There was no sane reason for Jason to paint the chicken coop in thirty degree weather.

"Why do we need to go now anyway?" Jason asked as he zipped up his coat.

Nico sighed. Of course Jason would change the subject to avoid any potential arguments. "It takes time to make a meal fit for them. They may be friendly to us now, but you of all people should know how quickly that can change." He wasn’t worried about his father, considering he had caught him on more than one occasion eating McDonalds, but the other two were a different story. As long as Nico included enough greens in the meal Demeter would be content, but so far she had been in a good mood. Poseidon made Nico nervous. This was the god whose mood could change without a moment’s notice, a god who prevented Odysseus from returning home for ten years. The same god who sent hurricane Katrina to destroy New Orleans because some college kid threw up on him at Mardi Gras. Was it acceptable to serve him seafood? Or did he consider it a form on cannibalism? Would he be offended if he didn’t serve seafood? Gods he wished Percy could offer some tips for handling his dad, but Percy wasn’t in a good place right now.

“I guess you have a point.”

Nico rolled his eyes. “You think?”

Percy scampered back into the room. He had on socks and shoes, but he was still wearing his shorts.

Well they weren’t going to be outside for long and they really needed to get moving. “Close enough. Grab your coat Percy and let’s go.”

Thirty-five minutes.

Thirty-five freaking minutes to get from the farm to the nearest town with a grocery store.

Thirty-five minutes wedged between Percy and Jason in a seat built to hold two.

Thirty-five minutes in a crappy white truck whose AC was stuck permanently on.

“So which is it Neek, Walmart or Sullivan’s?” Jason asked as they sat at the stoplight. The blond’s elbow poking Nico in the ribs.

Nico tried to pull Will’s hat down more, but it was already as low as it would go. He despised the cold. No, he hated the cold. Everyone assumed that as the son of Hades he would have preferred the cold, the whole chill of the grave stereotype. Seriously, didn’t people realize that the further down you went the warmer it got? “Jason I don’t care,” he answered, teeth chattering.

The light turned green and Jason turned left towards the two competing stores, which were
conveniently located across from one another. “Well if you need to pick up things other than groceries it would be better to go to Walmart I’ve heard.”

“Fine we’ll go to Walmart,” he chattered. Nico looked at Percy enviously. The son of Poseidon was wearing a light jacket and shorts, but he wasn’t shivering in the slightest! If this was another perk for being the son of Poseidon Nico was going to scream.

“Yeah, but Demeter told me Sullivan’s has better quality.”

“Then we’ll go to Sullivan’s.” Seriously, why was this so hard?

“Yeah, but if we need to get stuff at Walmart one of us would have to stay out in the truck to watch the groceries.”

“Fine. We’ll go to Walmart.”

“But-“

Nico clapped his hand over Jason’s mouth. “Jason. Listen to me very carefully,” Nico growled. “I am freezing my ass off. You know how much I hate the cold. Right now I am not above cutting you open and crawling inside your corpse for warmth. Now when I remove my hand, you are going to decide where we are going. Do you understand?”

Jason nodded.

“Good boy.” Nico removed his hand and patted Jason on the head. “Where are we going?”

Jason’s voice cracked, “Walmart!”

“Sounds good Grace,” Nico smiled, as he wrapped his arms around himself.

“Hey Nico?” Jason asked, as he turned into the parking lot.

“Yes Jason?”

“Jesus Christ!” Jason swore as they pulled into a parking space.

Nico shrugged. “Sorry, you know how much I hate the cold.”

“Still though.”

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So this is Walmart, thought the son of Hades.

Despite being on his own for the last few years Nico had never been to a so called superstore, opting instead to get his food from either fast food places or convenience stores. As for clothing he would find donation bins when he could or go to a second hand store. Even after repairing his relationship with his father and deciding to stay at camp, there were no places like this near him. New York was
all smaller stores as was the state of California it seemed.

“Let’s grab a cart,” he told the other two as he pulled a rubber band from his coat pocket. He pulled his long black hair back into a messy pony tail and held it together with the rubber band. He did this when he needed to concentrate, and judging by the look of wonder displayed on Jason’s face, he would have to be on his A-game.

The pony tail had been Will’s idea. One day Nico had been trying to help out in the infirmary, but every time he bent down his hair would get in his eyes. Will, without any prompt had grabbed a rubber band from his desk, walked up behind him, and grabbed his hair. Nico had nearly jumped out of his skin at the unexpected tug on his hair, but his boyfriend had already finished before he could react. Nico was about to tell him off, but the son of Apollo had held a mirror in front of Nico and said he looked cute. With those few words, the working pony tail had been born.

Honestly Nico would have preferred a haircut, but if Will said it looked good he was going to keep it.

Something pushed him from behind and a yelp escaped from his lips. He turned around and saw Jason, slouched down on a shopping cart, a huge Cheshire grin on his face.

“Someone’s caught in a daydream,” the blond chuckled.

Nico yanked the cart out from under Jason, causing the former praetor to fall forward. Sadly, he managed to catch himself before he hit the floor. “Shut up Grace.” He grabbed the cart’s handle and gestured for Percy to follow.

The place was huge, almost overwhelmingly so. The sign that hung above them indicated the groceries were to the left, electronics were straight ahead, the pharmacy to the right, and about a dozen other categories with various directions were listed as well.

“Temple Hill could fit inside of here,” Jason said in awe. “Where do we start?”

“We came here for food,” he said matter-of-factly. “Everything else can wait until next time.” He turned the cart left and began to walk.

“Neeks,” Jason said for the twentieth time in the last five minutes. “There are twenty-two check outs. Why do they need twenty-two check out if only two are open?”

They still hadn’t reached the groceries yet. Not because the walk was that long, no, but because a certain son of Jupiter had to stop them to point out something trivial.

First it had been a large bin filled with boxes of candy. Yes Jason you can get some.

Then to point out that each checkout lane had a cooler full of soda. You can get one when we are done Jason.

Then they had to stop at an end cap with Pillow Pets. He was about to tell Jason no, but Percy grabbed a panda and began to carry it around. Yes you can get one too Jason. No it can’t be a
panda. Because I’m trying to prevent a fight Jason. It’s called “Parenting”.

“Uh, Neeks?”

Nico spun around to face the son of Jupiter. “WHAT?!” he snapped, earning himself a disapproving look from an old woman passing by. “What Jason? What could possibly be so important now? Is it that they have a hair salon? Or how about the photographer? What could be so important?”

Jason pointed over Nico’s shoulder. “Gorgons.”

Nico’s jaw dropped. “What?”

“Gorgons,” answered Jason. The blond held his hands to his forehead and began to wiggle his fingers. “You know, the women with snakes for hair, mouths with tusks, that sort of thing.”

Nico face palmed. He was surrounded by sea-weed brains and air heads. “I know what a gorgon is Grace, I meant where.”

Jason pulled out his sword from his coat pocket. Poseidon had placed an enchantment on it similar to Riptide’s that allowed it to shrink down and fit in Jason’s pocket. “One’s at register twenty-two and one is heading towards Percy.”

Nico spun around and pulled out his Stygian Iron sword from his pocket and rushed towards Percy. His heart couldn’t decide if it had stopped or if it was going one-hundred miles a second. Somehow Percy had wandered off ahead of them. Probably during Jason’s numerous childlike interruptions.

Maybe if his system hadn’t been full of adrenaline and if he hadn’t had been irritated by a certain blond, Nico would have noticed that the gorgon wasn’t attacking Percy. Instead he tackled the viper haired woman to the floor. Nico climbed on top of her and placed his forearm on her neck, effectively pinning her to the ground. He raised his sword with his free arm and was about to swing it down, when Percy stopped him by grabbing his arm.

He looked up from the gorgon and looked at Percy. The son of Poseidon slowly shook his head before letting go of his arm. “You don’t want me to hurt her?” he asked.

The son of Poseidon nodded, but then his eyes glazed back over. Percy was in his own little world once again.

The gorgon underneath him began to wildly tap his arm. He looked down and saw that the gorgon’s face was a lovely shade of blue. “Oh, sorry!” he apologized as he removed his arm from her windpipe and climbed off of her.

“UHHHHHHH!” gasped the gorgon, before she began to cough. When she stopped coughing, she ran a hand through her hair of black vipers and glared at Nico. “Hmm! That was rude! I’m just trying to talk to an old friend! Wasn’t like I was trying to sign him up for a Walmart credit card!”

Now Nico was even more confused. “Old friend?”

The snake woman pushed herself off the floor and began to brush off her navy blue vest. “We met last year. Sure my sister and I were trying to kill him-”

Nico level his sword to her neck.

“But he was a nice young man,” she quickly added. “And with Gaea gone we’ve got no reason to fight him.” She adjusted her name tag, Euryale was written in big bold black lettering.
“That’s the spirit Euryale!” hissed a voice behind him. “If you keep that kind of attitude you’ll be giving me a run for employee of the month!”

Nico turned his head enough to see behind him, but still keep Euryale in sight. Another gorgon, this one smaller and pudgier, was walking towards the three of them. Jason was trailing behind her, a ridiculous grin on his face and a gift card in hand.

Jason waved the gift card in front of Nico’s face. “Look Nico! She gave me a twenty-five dollar gift card for not killing her!”

“And he signed up for a Walmart credit card!” squealed the smaller gorgon. “Now he gets cashback every time he uses it!”

An amazing thing happened next. Nico and Eurydale caught each other’s eyes and they both knew what the other was thinking: they were surrounded by idiots. To think, demigod and monster sharing a common annoyance. Just imagine what they could achieve if they built off of that.

Nico sighed, “I know I’m going to regret it, but how much cash back?”

“One percent!” Jason said, clearly proud of his “accomplishment”.

“And he’s been approved for a one thousand dollar limit!”

“So let me get this straight, and stop me if I’m wrong. If you reach your limit of one-thousand dollars you’ll get ten dollars.”

The son of Jupiter’s eyes widened. “Uh. Let me think.” Jason began to do math with his fingers.

Nico sighed and returned his sword to its miniature state. “Jason one percent of one-thousand is ten.”

Gods, how come so many demigods failed at basic mathematics? He knew dyslexia and ADHD was an issue, but you would think by their age they would have figured out their own strategies for learning. He turned to the two gorgons. “Okay give me one reason why I shouldn’t destroy your souls with my stygian steel,” he commanded.

“Because I’m in the running to make employee of the month for six months in a row?” the smaller one, Stheno offered.

“Because we aren’t looking to start any kind of trouble,” Euryale hissed.

He quickly looked at his two friends. Percy was back by their cart, lost in his own thoughts, while Jason was repeatedly smacking his forehead with the palm of his hand. They were okay. “Explain.”

“Look kid,” Euryale huffed. “After we pulled ourselves together following the battle at Camp Jupiter, my sister and I decided we were done with all of this BS. We moved here, to the middle of nowhere U.S.A and took up honest jobs. There’s no gods, giants, or primordials here to boss us around and up until now no demigods either.”

“We just want to be left alone,” explained Stheno. “Maybe find our sister.”

Nico crossed his arms. He was still skeptical about their claims. “Then why were you going after Percy?”

“I wasn’t going after him,” Euryale scoffed. “I was explaining our situation to him and then you come and jump me!”
Now he felt bad, but how was he supposed to know what her intentions were? It wasn’t like friendly monsters were a common occurrence. “Um, sorry?”

“You should be sorry, but I can understand why you would do it. We do not have the best track record when it comes to interacting with demigods.”

“I have the best sales record though!” beamed Stheno.

Euryale took a deep breath, causing air to whistle past her tusks. “How’s this? To seal a truce, when you three are done shopping, come and find us and we will use our employee discounts on your bill. Does that sound good?”

“Sounds better than the deal I got,” Jason pouted.

“Yeah. Yeah that will work,” Nico agreed.

After the incident with the gorgons and ensuring Jason that he wasn’t a total idiot, the three finally made it to the groceries.

They were standing in the produce section looking at the lettuce selection. There were of course the standard head of lettuce, but then there were numerous types of precut lettuce in bags. Romaine, iceberg, garden, Caesar, and several other that Nico felt a little overwhelmed. Who needed this many types of lettuce?

“Just grab the head of lettuce Neeks,” Jason suggested. “I think Demeter would be happier with something that hasn’t been processed already.”

“That… That actually makes a lot of sense,” he agreed. He grabbed the freshest looking head and set it gently into the cart. ‘We’ll grab a cucumber and a nice big onion. We can grab some vinegar and a few other things so I can make a nice dressing, that way we can start out with a simple, but nice salad tonight.”

“That sounds good,” Jason smiled. “I’m sure Demeter will appreciate that. What else are you thinking of serving?”

“Well, if they have some decent salmon I can puree that with some cream cheese and serve it on crackers. That way if Poseidon does eat fish it’s there, and if he doesn’t, well it’s only a minor thing.” He hoped.

“Sounds like something they would serve at one of those fancy parties Piper drags me too,” Jason chuckled.

This was the first time Jason had mentioned Piper by name in weeks, Nico noted. He grabbed two small cucumbers and placed them in the cart. “Have you called her yet?” He mentally cursed as the words left his mouth. Too blunt di Angelo, too blunt.

Jason rubbed the back of his neck. The blond’s discomfort could be seen from space and possibly the blind. “Well…”
“Well what?” He asked as he pushed the cart towards the fresh fruit. *Damn, no pomegranates.*

“I just don’t want to uh, upset her.”

Now under normal circumstances, well normal for demigods anyway, that might be a passable excuse. But with Camp Half-Blood a smoldering crater, the major gods trapped on Olympus, and no one knowing what was going on: Piper’s feelings shouldn’t even be a factor. “Uh huh.” He grabbed a bag of oranges, with Jason being out in the cold all day he needed to keep his body rich with vitamin C. “You sure that’s the only reason?”

“Hey look! They have caramel tip for apples!” Jason cried as he jogged away from him and Percy.

Nico shook his head. How could he help Jason if he didn’t know what was wrong?

As they made their way down the snack food aisle, Nico wondered if he had in fact died and had been sent to the fields of punishment.

Jason was behaving like a small child. Running to and fro, returning with boxes of sugary or salty junk and pestering Nico if he could get it.

Jason ran up to the cart carrying a box of Twinkies. “They have banana flavored Twinkies! We have to get them!”

“Fine.”

Jason beamed and tossed the radiation proof sponge cakes into the cart, before running off again.

Nico sighed. He was too young to be raising children. Wasn’t there supposed to be a few more steps that he was missing? “Percy, if there’s anything you want here just grab it.”

Percy smiled at him, but didn’t leave his side.

Well at least one of his kids was turning out fine.

By the time they got in line to check out, they had two shopping carts overflowing with groceries plus a few toiletries. This was supposed to last them for a couple weeks, but considering that the junk food outnumbered the food Nico picked up for actual meals three to one, the son of Hades wouldn’t be surprised if they would be back next week.

“Percy are you sure you don’t want anything else besides that pillow pet?” Nico asked. “It doesn’t have to be food. Air-head got those comic bundles,” he said tilting his head towards Jason.
“Thanks Neeks, I’ll remember that when you ask to borrow them.”

Nico ignored Jason. Jason knew he was more or less messing with him.

Percy started to shake his head no, but then his eyes widened and he ran off towards the pharmacy.

“You think it’s a good idea to let him go off alone Neeks?” Jason asked.

Nico knew Jason wasn’t worried about Percy running into any monsters, but rather what he might do if he was left alone. Nico sighed as he began to put items on the conveyer belt. “We have to give him some space Jason. I know, I know I was hovering over him there for a while, but I think it was a onetime thing Jay.”

“How can you be sure?”

“I can’t,” he shrugged. “But we’ll never know unless we give him a chance.” He picked up a case of soda and let out a hiss of pain.

Jason was instantly next to him and took the soda from him. “Ah crap! I’m sorry Neeks! I forgot about your back! Are you okay? Here let me get all this, it’s mostly my junk anyway.” He shooed Nico away to the second cart, taking over Nico’s job of placing everything onto Stheno’s conveyer.

That was fine by Nico. He slouched over the cart and tried to find a comfortable position to ease his now burning back. What would he give for some of the Apollo cabin’s burn ointment right about now, or even for the nectar and ambrosia to work.

Jason had just finished unloading the first cart when Percy returned carrying a small box in his right hand. The son of Poseidon gently sat the box down in front of Nico, then grabbed his panda, and walked away from him and Jason.

“What did he get?” asked the son of Jupiter, holding up the three gallons of milk for Stheno to scan.

Nico picked up the small box and looked it over. “Oh Perseus,” he sighed, pitying the son of Poseidon.

“What is it?”

“Gray hair dye.” He knew that Jason wouldn’t understand the significance of it, after all Percy’s tuft of gray hair had mostly disappeared before the giant war. But Nico knew how Percy had held up the sky to save Annabeth and how the gray hair had become something that brought Annabeth and Percy closer together.

He had even been Jealous of it.

Chapter End Notes

Originally this chapter was going to end after the big family dinner, but after 7K words I decided to split it in two.

We continue to see that Jason isn’t really coping well. He refuses to talk about Piper and
his time with Disciplina, often deflecting or changing the subject.

Percy is slowly getting better, but he still isn't talking and is spending most of his time lost in his thoughts.

Nico is trying, but unfortunately by focusing on the two he isn't allowing himself to properly grieve. I always pegged Nico as a mama's boy, and there's nothing wrong with that.
It's just that he is such a caring person, and as we saw in Titan's Curse he was a ball of energy. I think if he preferred Hades more he would have been far more serious.

I also began to show that Nico is somewhat reverting back to how we first met him. He will never be that way entirely, but he will become more animated depending on the situation. him acting out the story for Percy was an example of this.

Next chapter will be Nico and after that we will have some surprises :)
Also these slice of life chapter will continue for awhile. Sort of the calm before the storm.

Like what you just read? Leave a kudos!

Questions, comments, want to know the recipe for Nico's egg and sausage casserole (yes it's real), or anything else? Leave a comment!

Please, kudos and comments are like cocaine for me!

Until next time, thanks for reading!
Chapter Summary

Warnings: None!

Tonight:

Nico has the strangest family dinner,

Nico is oblivious to Demeter's efforts to apologize,

Percy and Nico continue to bond,

and Nico's inner nerd escapes!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

He should’ve killed the gorgons.

He should have cut off Euryale’s head and used her vipers to strangle Stheno!

What kind of idiot puts canned goods and bread in the same bag? A dead one that’s who!

“Relax Nico,” Jason chuckled as he filled the cupboards with that horrible canned pasta he had to have. “Just use the bread to make another one of those amazing casseroles you made this morning.”

He shot the blond a pointed look. “That’s not the point,” he snapped. “When I purchase something I expect that it should at the very least make it out of the store.”

Jason snorted, a goofy grin covered his face.

“What?”

“You get really animated when you get upset,” the blond laughed. He began to rapidly move his arms around, making exaggerated motions with his hands. “It’s like you talk with your hands. Each syllable has a corresponding gesture.”

“I do-“ He stopped himself, noticing that he had pointed at Jason before placing his other hand on his hip. He felt his face heat up. He turned away from his annoying friend and busied himself with removing everything from the cheap plastic bags.

Jason howled with laughter behind him.
After putting the groceries away and feeding Percy and Jason a quick lunch, Nico set to work on making dinner while Jason went outside to continue the never ending list of chores.

Once again he had Percy sitting at the kitchen table. The raven haired teen was currently resting his head on his new pillow pet, one eye watching the small television that sat on top of the fridge. In the son of Poseidon’s clenched hand was the box of hair dye. Nico honestly wasn’t sure if it was a good idea to let Percy dye his hair. On one hand he was trying to keep a constant reminder of Annabeth, but on the other it seemed like such a minor thing to change. After all, wasn’t he keeping Will’s hat for the same reasons?

“We can try to dye your hair after dinner tonight. Does that sound good Perce?”

The son of Poseidon nodded his head without lifting it up from his panda, wiping it across the table in the process.

Nico bit his lip to stop himself from laughing. He knew Percy was hurting, but sometimes his moping was funny. Sometimes even cute. He pulled out a package of frozen rolls and opened the bag. “I’ve never dyed hair before,” he explained as he counted out twenty-four pieces of the pre-cut dough. “Do you want to dye your entire head, or just some of it?” He knew what Percy wanted to do, but maybe he could coax the older boy into talking. He placed the frozen balls into a greased pan and covered it with a hand towel. They would have to thaw and rise before they could be put into the oven. Hopefully six hours was enough time.

Percy lifted his head, the pillow pet momentarily stuck to his face. He then grabbed the tuft of black hair that until very recently had been a mix of gray and white. When he was satisfied that Nico understood what he wanted, he returned his head to the table.

“I’ve never dyed hair before,” he added, trying to keep Percy engaged. “It wasn’t really a thing when I was little and well, the last couple years it wasn’t exactly the first thing on my mind.”

Percy’s body tensed up, before seemingly deflating.

Nico cursed internally at himself. Stupid! Stupid! Stupid! He hadn’t meant for it to sound like that. He and Percy were good now, they had cleared the air, and they were best friends for Olympus’s sake! And normally they were good, but with Percy feeling so depressed, it seemed Percy was looking for any reason to beat himself up.

He set the smoked salmon he had just pulled from the fridge onto the counter and then crouched down next to the sulking son of Poseidon. “Hey now, I don’t want to see none of that!” he chided, while gently patting Percy’s back. “Percy look at me,” he ordered.

The raven haired boy sat up and looked him in the eye with a sad smile.

“I’m passed it Perce. I moved on and I want you to move on from it too.” He gently squeezed Percy’s shoulder. “You did nothing wrong Percy. You got that?”

Percy slowly nodded, but Nico could tell he didn’t really mean it.

Nico sighed, something he had been doing a lot lately. “If I had been a little more forthcoming then maybe I wouldn’t have been so miserable. Heck, the only clue I ever gave you was when I asked if you had a girlfriend, and let’s be honest that was a pretty shitty clue.” He gave Percy a sincere smile and squeezed his shoulder one more time before standing up again.

Percy looked a little better, which wasn’t very much, but it was something.
“Why don’t you help me with dinner Percy?” he asked as he pulled out the food processor from a cabinet next to the fridge. “You can make you salmon spread. Cream cheese and salmon blended together. It doesn’t get much simpler than that.”

Percy looked hesitant.

“You can make it blue?”

With that the son of Poseidon got up from his chair and walked over to him. Nico couldn’t help but smile for two reasons. One, Percy looked genuinely happy at the prospect of blue food. And two, if Poseidon didn’t like the salmon spread, it was unlikely Poseidon would smite his favorite son.

And people thought Annabeth was a master strategist.

Demeter was the first to arrive, much to Nico’s annoyance.

The goddess had just appeared at the kitchen table, thumbing through a farmer’s almanac. Her sudden appearance had startled him to the point that he almost dropped the pot of boiling potatoes he was carrying. He managed to keep his composure and dumped the boiling water down the sink.

“Are those Idaho grown?” the goddess asked with a small smirk on her face.

“Yes ma’am,” he answered. While Demeter was often long winded and could drone on seemingly for hours about anything, she preferred her answers short and to the point. Yet another example of the hypocrisy that are the gods of Olympus. Nico used a fork to stab the soften potatoes and place them back into their pot.

The portly goddess stood up from table and examined his work. “Hmm, most of the skin is peeled off, but you left just enough so that it would be noticeable after you mash them,” she hummed. “You are going to mash them right?”

Nico tossed a stick of butter into the pot and added a dollop of sour cream. “That was my intent.” He really did not like being alone with her. As he pulled out the mixer from one of the drawers, he mentally debated whether or not he should bring Percy back into the room to serve as a buffer.

“Well I’m sure they’ll be delicious.”

“If you-“ It took the Italian a moment to process what the portly woman had said. Did she just compliment him? “What did you just say?”

The goddess of the harvest smirked at him. “I said: I’m sure they will be delicious, Nico.”

Criticism he could handle from the goddess, compliments though were an alien concept. “Um, thanks?”

“You’re quite welcome!” beamed the goddess.

An awkward silence fell over the room. This had been the longest he had been alone with the woman without some kind of argument breaking out. He went to work blending the contents of the
pot, but he felt her eyes on him. He should really go get Percy.

“I think our Mr. Grace is taking to farm work like a duck to water. Don’t you agree?”

He couldn’t be content with the awkward silence could he? Now she was trying to have a conversation with him! “I guess so?” he shrugged.

She nodded her head, a smug smile on her face. “Working on a farm is an acquired taste. Some people love it, as Jason seems to, while others find it boring or too labor intensive.”

“You can say that again,” he thought, as he poured the potatoes into a large serving bowl.

“It’s definitely not for everyone,” she sighed. “And as much as I wish that wasn’t true, I have to respect those who dislike it.”

Nico didn’t know how to respond to the goddess. Perhaps this was some kind of trick, gods were known to trick mortals to their doom. “That’s your decision ma’am.” It was the only thing he could think to say that didn’t have him agreeing or disagreeing with her.

Her face fell, clearly that had not been the answer she was looking for. She shook her head, then ruffled his hair with her hand, causing a surprised yelp to escape from his lips. He gave her his best death glare, but she only laughed. “Is Jason outside?”

“Yes,” he grumbled as he rubbed his head. Gods, it felt like she was going to rip his scalp off.

“Well I suppose I better go inspect his work,” the goddess said. “Maybe I can give him more responsibilities!” She cried as she walked out into the snow.

Nico shrugged at the goddess’s strange behavior and continued with his dinner preparations.

His father and Poseidon arrived shortly before dinner was to be served.

The lord of the underworld as usual was dressed for business, wearing a black slacks and a black button up with silver cufflinks under a black overcoat. He wiped off his expensive looking shoes (of which Nico was grateful for) and hung up his coat and hat before entering the kitchen and giving his only son a one armed hug.

The lord of the sea on the other hand, looked as if he had just woken up from being passed out on the beach for the last three days. He was wearing flip-flops, well one anyway, his neon orange short were covered in sand, and his lime green Hawaiian shirt was ripped open. He dusted his short off in the kitchen, at which the son of Hades cringed at the thought of cleaning it up, and then leaned his trident against the coat rack.

The three gods made their way to the dining room and sat down on one side of the mahogany dining table that occupied the center of the room. The three demigods began to bring in the various dishes Nico had made for the meal; a garden salad, mashed potatoes, baked chicken, stuffing, and of course Percy’s blue salmon spread. The latter dish was met with a look of confusion and disgust from the lord of the dead before Nico explained what it was.
When at last all the food was brought out, he and Jason began to fill everyone’s plates while Percy sat down across from the lord of the seas. Poseidon tried to make small talk with his son, but he stopped when he realized Percy wasn’t going to respond. Neither of the two kelp-heads seemed to be angry with each other, Percy was just out of it again and Poseidon just looked at his son with a mix of pity and sorrow as he eyed the bandages on Percy’s wrists.

With everyone served, Nico and Jason sat down, and all six began to eat. Thankfully, any awkwardness about eating with the gods was gone after the first week. The first week Jason had tried to dump half his plate onto the lord of the underworld’s plate as an “offering”, which the god had said was appreciated, but definitely unnecessary given the circumstances. Honestly, Nico couldn’t say Jason had been stupid, as he had been only moments away from doing the same thing.

As they ate, small conversations broke out amongst the six. Jason and Demeter discussed what the son of Jupiter had accomplished around the farm and what still needed to be done. His father asked him about his injuries: was the ambrosia and nectar still not working, do I need to set up an appointment with a mortal doctor for you, and you’re not over working yourself, are you? To which Nico assured him that, with the exception of the ambrosia and nectar, everything was fine.

Nico couldn’t help but find the whole situation foreign, yet familiar, and sorely missed. Here he was sitting with three Olympian gods and the two most powerful demigods of their time, but it was surprisingly easy to overlook those details and think of them as family.

His crazy family.

After everyone had ate their fill and the dishes had been cleared from the table, they began their weekly discussion.

“We have some good news for a change,” his father told them. “It would appear Artemis was outside of Olympus before the event.”

“However,” Demeter interjected. “She’s refusing to meet with us.”

His father’s brow furrowed. “She most likely thinks this is a coup against her father.”

“She always was a daddy’s girl,” Poseidon sighed.

“I can see how she drew that conclusion though,” Demeter said. “The only major gods not trapped are her uncles, one of which put her father in chains.”

“That was one time!” Poseidon snapped. “And he was being a complete arse!”

Hades rolled his eyes. “And as we all know he changed his ways and now volunteers at children’s hospitals on Saturdays.”

Demeter glared at her two brothers before continuing. “And myself, who from her viewpoint sees me firmly allied with my son-in-law.”

“So what can we do?” Jason asked. His hand half raised.
Nico joined his father at rolling his eyes at the son of Jupiter. Seriously, where did he pick up the whole raising his hand thing?

“Unless you can swap out that Y-chromosome for an X Grace, there’s not much you can do,” sighed the lord of the underworld.

“But I’m her brother!” Jason protested. “Well half-brother, but maybe if I went and talked to her, explained the situation, she would join us. Besides Thalia would have my back.”

Nico snorted. If Jason thought Thalia would openly support him against her own matron, then Nico had some lovely beach front property in Tartarus to sell him. “I hate to burst your bubble Grace, but Thalia would sooner put an arrow in your back than go against Artemis.”

Jason deflated.

Sometimes Nico forgot that he wasn’t the only one with family issues. That Jason yearned for a relationship with a sister that couldn’t care less about him. “I’m sorry Jay,” Nico apologized. “I can be a little blunt at times.”

“It’s okay,” Jason sighed. “So what do we do then?”

“Well I’ll go talk to the girl!” Demeter said as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. “She hates men, especially these two.” She gestured to her brothers. “And even if she thinks I’m plotting with them, or some such nonsense, I should be able to at least get an audience with her before she starts with the arrows.”

“That still leaves the issue of actually finding her,” Hades reminded them.

“She’s the goddess of the hunt. We’re only going to find her if she wants to be found,” Poseidon said stroking his beard.

“So we wait and hope for the best,” Nico sighed. This was just typical, Olympus in danger and the gods decide to blame each other. This was what; the third time the world was in danger in the last five years? He looked at Percy from the corner of his eye. The son of Poseidon was slouched forward in his chair, his head hanging down. There was no way Percy was capable of any heroics in his current state.

“I wouldn’t say that,” Demeter chuckled, gaining the full attention of everyone at the table except Percy. “Only thirty percent of the Earth’s land surface is desert, of the remaining seventy percent thirty percent is forest and fifty percent is arable,” the goddess said with a wicked smile.

“What are you babbling about?” his father sighed as he massaged his temples.

At first he had been confused as well at what the harvest goddess was talking about, but then it clicked. “You’re going to use plants to find Artemis!” he cried out, earning him weird looks from Jason, Poseidon, and his father. His face flushed in embarrassment. “I mean- is that what you’re planning?” he asked trying to regain his normal icy composure.

Instantly the goddess was behind him and began to ruffle his hair, once again causing him to yelp in surprise. “That is exactly what I plan to do!” she beamed at him. “I have plants all over the world monitoring things for me! It’s the ultimate surveillance system!”

“It’s just like your figure’s effect in *Mythomagic*! Demeter’s blessing! When Demeter is summoned, two plant tokens are special summoned to your opponent’s side of the field, and as long as they are on the field your opponent can’t play any face down cards!” He cried.
“Careful Neeks, your nerd is showing,” Jason teased.

Nico surveyed the room. His father was cradling his head in his hands, Poseidon was clearly trying not to laugh, Jason was laughing, and Demeter looked at him with pride. Percy though was looking at him with a soft smile and a small glimmer in his eyes. Nico sat back down in his chair, which was odd because he didn’t remember standing up. “I- I’m sorry?”

“There is nothing to be sorry about,” laughed the portly goddess, once again ruffling his hair to his annoyance.

Hades cleared his throat, drawing everyone’s attention to him. “Well if all goes well we’ll have another major goddess on our side as well the hunters.”

“We may still be in the dark, but at least we are not alone,” Demeter said.

“Exactly,” agreed his father. “Poseidon do you have any news this week?”

Nico knew his father was only asking to be polite. The lord of the seas hadn’t contributed anything since they had started these weekly meetings, citing that none of his undersea contacts were aware of the surface world. This of course drove the lord of the underworld and everyone else present insane.

“Yes I do,” the lord of the seas smugly said. “I found out where Harpocrates is.”

Demeter and Hades gasped at the sea god’s statement. Hades jaw had even dropped open.

“Who’s Harpocrates?” asked the son of Jupiter.

“Nico would you care to inform Grace or should I?” his father asked.

“Harpocrates is the Greek god of secrets. That’s really all I know,” he shrugged. Back when he collected *Mythomagic* figures and cards, Harpocrates had been one of the rarest and most powerful figures. Rumor said that only four Harpocrates figures were ever made and that his effect almost guaranteed victory. So naturally when one of his classmates at Westover Hall managed to get one, Nico traded his classmate one month’s worth of dessert for it. His effect was great: your opponent had to show you their hand and they couldn’t play any cards facedown, but his attack and defense were laughably low.

“Well then you know as much as we do,” his father sighed. “Which bares the question how did you of all people find him?”

“I didn’t find him, I found out where he is. Big difference,” explained Poseidon, either ignoring the insult or not understanding it. “As for the how, that’s not important. All you need to know is he is living in Alexandria, Minnesota.”

“So what’s the next step?” Jason asked. “And why is this god so important?”

“Because he would know who’s responsible for everything,” Nico guessed. “But he keeps secrets, not tell them.”

“Correct on the first part nephew,” boomed the sea god. “But Harpocrates has to be paid to keep secrets. When Aphrodite first joined the council and began her um… extramarital relationships she gave Eros a rose that he in turn gave to Harpocrates to keep everything under wraps.”

Aphrodite and Eros, Nico’s two favorite gods mentioned in the same sentence. If this god was working with them then he wanted no part of this. “He must not be very good at his job then,” Nico
scoffed. “Everyone knows about Aphrodite’s loyalty issues.”

“Actually my son he is very good at his job,” his father interjected. “The only reason everyone knows about Aphrodite is she stopped paying him. When she stopped paying, she made the mistake of also insulting him.”

“Oh my, I remember what happened next!” laughed Demeter.

“Thank the Fates Hephaestus was down in his forge during that broadcast!” roared the lord of the seas, clutching his sides.

“What happened?” Nico asked. He had never seen any god act like this before. Even his own father was grinning.

“Harpocrates responded by hijacking Olympus TV and for over an hour sat on a stool reading off the names of everyone Aphrodite had slept with,” his father laughed. “Aphrodite didn’t show her face in public for over a hundred years after that!”

“And Harpocrates hasn’t been seen since,” Poseidon sighed. “We do know he is alive though. He fled Olympus before Aphrodite’s minions could get him. Pity too, he used to write the sports column.”

“It’s never been the same,” agreed the lord of the underworld.

“So how do we get him to help us?” Jason asked. Once again raising his hand.

Poseidon gestured for Jason to put his hand down. “I was getting to that Jason. We make an offering. Demeter and myself will take care of the physical offering,” he explained, his focus shifting to Jason. “But I’ll need your assistance Jason with the rest.”

Jason gulped. “I’ll do what I can sir.”

Nico suppressed a groan. This was typical of Jason, and Percy for that matter, to just jump into a situation without knowing what to expect. “What does he have to do?” he asked for his friend.

“Jason’s existence was a closely kept secret, something that Harpocrates would absolutely love to know all about. That and Jason needs to tell his deepest darkest secrets to him.” Poseidon shrugged as if it wasn’t anything major.

“Come again?” Jason choked.

“I’m not going to force you Jason,” Poseidon sighed. “But I think it would do you some good if you got everything off your chest.”

Before Jason had a chance to speak, Nico sprang from his seat and snarled at the god. “He doesn’t need to tell anyone anything!” he snarled. He crossed the room and jabbed a finger into the god’s hairy chest. “It’s his choice and his choice alone on whether he wants to tell anyone anything!” he hissed. Memories of Croatia and his humiliation at the hands of Eros fueled his rage. “You say you’re not going to force him, but that’s just you manipulated him!”

“Nico…” his father warned.

Nico ignored his father and continued on with his rant. “You don’t know what it’s like to-“

“I’ll do it,” Jason interrupted.
“That’s right he don’t have to- wait? What?”

“I said I’ll do it,” Jason repeated, this time his voice resolute. “A very brave person I know once had to do the same for me. I think I can do the same.”

-----------------------------------------------------

Poseidon and Demeter left shortly after Jason volunteered. Poseidon explained that he would be back in two weeks’ time to pick up Jason for their trip to Harpocrates, while Demeter said she was going to begin her search for Artemis.

“Before I go I have an announcement of my own,” Hades said as he stood from the table. “It has come to my attention that two of you are sorely lacking in your education.”

“He isn’t,” Nico thought as his stomach knotted itself.

“So after much deliberation and some bribery, I’ve enrolled the three of you into the local high school.”

Nico felt like he was going to throw up. School? At a time like this? In rural America? Nico didn’t know a lot about the modern education system, but from what he had heard from Percy and other campers it was a terrible thing. Top that off with him being gay, it was his worst nightmare. “But we can’t go!” he protested. “What if you need us? What if something happens?”

His father sighed. “Something is always going to happen my son, that is the tragic life of a demigod.”

“But Percy is still wanted!”

“Thus the bribery,” his father shrugged as he summoned his coat. “Perseus and Jason will be attending the same school as you. It would do the three of you good to have some sense of normalcy.”

Nico huffed. “Nothing in my life has ever been normal.”

“My point exactly! I want you to have a future outside of all this.” He gestured absently. His father sighed, before resting his hands on Nico’s shoulders. “I just want what’s best for you my son. If I could I would protect you from everything this world has thrown at you and then some, but I can’t. Even with all my godly powers I can’t. So please help me by helping yourself.”

“But-“

“No buts Nico,” he chided. “I’ll be back Tuesday morning to take the three of you for placement testing. I know Jackson is technically a senior, but apparently it’s the school’s policy.” He squeezed Nico’s shoulders one last time, before disappearing into the shadows.

Nico didn’t bother to look at Percy or Jason, instead he ran upstairs and locked himself in their room.
Nico wasn’t sure how long he had been laying in his bed when someone gently knocked on the door.

He slowly crawled out of bed and wiped his eyes with his arm. He didn’t want Jason to see him like this. Crying like a little kid about going to school. “I’m coming Jason,” he choked out. He unlocked the door and opened it, expecting to see the blond. Probably with his arms folded and pity in his eyes. However, instead of the son of Jupiter, it was the son of Poseidon who he now faced. “Percy?”

The son of Poseidon pushed a small box into his hand.

Nico looked at the box and realized it was the gray hair dye. “What-“ He then remembered that he had promised Percy that he would help him dye his hair after dinner. “Are you sure you want to do it tonight?”

The son of Poseidon briefly nodded before walking away from him.

Nico followed after the older teen, who lead them to the kitchen. The first thing that Nico noticed was that the dishes had all been washed and were currently drying on a towel someone had set on the counter. He then noticed that there was a chair positioned in front of the sink with a folded towel on the seat. “Did you wash the dishes Perce?”

The raven haired teen shrugged, as if to say it was not a big deal.

“Well thank you.” He didn’t know why, but for some reason the idea of Percy cleaning up for him made him feel slightly better.

Percy smirked at him, before removing the towel from the chair and taking a seat.

Nico’s stomach briefly fluttered at Percy’s smirk, but he was quick to push that feeling down. “Let’s get started,” he stuttered. He removed the contents from the box and set them on the counter next to the sink: a pair of plastic gloves, a tube marked “dye”, another tube labeled “developer”, and a small plastic tray. He briefly read aloud the instructions for the both of them, then read them one more time just to be safe. “It says this stuff stains easily Perce, maybe we should do this in the bathroom instead,” he suggested.

The son of Poseidon shook his head before walking away from him.

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The son of Poseidon shook his head before shedding his shirt and tossing it unceremoniously on the wooden floor.

“Oh, okay,” Nico gulped. He had seen Percy shirtless dozens of times, but it never got any less awkward for the son of Hades. Even now with Percy’s sudden weight loss and paling skin, Nico still felt flushed. He tried to busy himself by putting on the provided gloves and mixing the dye and developer in the plastic tray. “Could you hold out the hair you wanted to dye Perce?” he asked as if he didn’t already know.

Percy obliged and grabbed the strands of hair for Nico.

Nico poured some of the smelly mixture from the plastic tray into his hand and spread it over his palm with his thumb. He then grabbed Percy’s hair and began to massage the dye into his friend’s silky soft hair. Nico tried to avoid looking at Percy in the eye, but he failed with every attempt. His mouth felt dry and his stomach was twisting itself into knots. “I- I think this is good,” he said, taking a step back from his friend. “I’ll set the timer on the oven. The box says fifteen minutes. I’ll just go
do that. Like now,” he said, the words seemingly falling from his mouth.

For the next fifteen minutes he busied himself by putting away the rest of the dishes, but he felt as if Percy was watching his every move. When the timer finally beeped, Nico nearly jumped out of his skin. He had Percy bend over the sink as he ran warm water over the son of Poseidon’s head. When he felt that the water had washed most of the dye away he began to run his hands through the older boy’s hair, washing out any of the remaining dye. He had thought Percy’s hair was soft when he had been wearing gloves, but without them it was almost indescribable. His hair was so soft and smooth, he wished he could get a pillow made out of it.

“All right Perce, I think that should do it,” he said as he turned off the water. He grabbed the towel Percy had set out and gently patted the older boy’s head until he was certain it wouldn’t drip all over the kitchen floor.

Percy stood up and shook his head like he was a dog, sending water all over the room, but mostly at the son of Hades.

Nico ignored Percy’s juvenile antics and focused on the now gray streak of hair on his friend’s head. To most people they would say it looked exactly like it had after Percy had saved Annabeth from Atlas, but Nico knew better. It was a little darker than before and a bit thicker as well. For his first time dyeing anyone’s hair he thought he did a pretty good job.

Percy surprised him by wrapping his arms around him and lifting him off the ground in a bear hug, before setting him down and dashing out of the room.

“He’s such a seaweed-brain,” Nico muttered, his face as red as a tomato.

That night Nico couldn’t sleep.

The weird feelings that had he had briefly felt in the kitchen made him feel as if he somehow dishonoring Will. He knew they were meaningless, just the result of teenage hormones, but why did it hurt so much?

Chapter End Notes

That's right! Our trio is going to high school!

I've got some unexpected twists in store for you dear reader :)
In case you are wondering, yes Demeter was trying to make amends with Nico, but he didn't understand her. At dinner though I wanted to show that Demeter does like Nico and she was genuinely proud of him for understanding her plan.

Hades isn't embarrassed by Nico's nerdiness, let me just nip that in the butt. What he was fretting was that when they first met after the Lotus, all Nico would talk about was Percy and Mythomagic. Hades was a fan of neither.

Speaking of Mythomagic, I'm going to describe it as Yu-Gi-Oh! with figures as well as cards. That way I can actually give details on what each card does and base them off of real cards.

Harpocrates is a character I hope you will love. I gave some clues as to who I based his personality on in this chapter, and I'll be super impressed if any of you guess it. :)

Let's see we had some very minor Percico feels there, only to have Nico experience soul crushing guilt :)

Like what you read? Leave a kudos!

Thoughts, questions, theories, suggestions, you want to know any of Nico's recipes? Don't hesitate to leave a comment!

Kudos and comments are like vitamins for me!

Until next time, thank you all for reading and I hope to hear from all of you!
Piper

Chapter Summary

Tonight:

Piper attends a movie premiere,

Piper has her first interview,

and she discovers the awesomeness that is Korean Tofu Tacos.

With special guest appearances!

Chapter Notes

Warning: This chapter contains some racist comments.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Piper couldn’t decide if she was furious, worried, or somewhere in between.

“Ms. Mclean!” called out a short balding man with a camera. “Would you mind posing for a picture?”

Piper suppressed a sigh, placed her hands on her hips, and gave the man a huge fake smile. An instant later and she was nearly blinded by the flash of over ten cameras.

“Thanks sweetie!” said the man, giving her a thumbs up.

She absolutely hated going to premiers with her dad. She hated the loud noise and the flashing lights of the camera, she hated the fake attention seeking people that clung to her dad, and above all else she hated the constant harassment of the paparazzi. The only reason she had agreed to come to this one was the fact that Jason had wanted to see the movie and had said he would go with her.

Which brought her back to her conflicting emotions. It had been a little over a month since she had last received any form of contact from her boyfriend. The last she had heard from him directly was in the form of a letter. He wrote that he was on his way to meet with the goddess Disciplina, that he wasn’t sure how long it would take, and of course that he missed her every waking moment.

Sparky was cheesy like that.

After two weeks and no response from anyone: Jason, Nico, Annabeth, even Reyna, she was beginning to worry. She had gone as far to get a ride to Camp Jupiter, but was turned away by the guards on duty, saying something about war games. And then Olympus appeared above New York for all the world to see. She wanted to fly to New York, but Coach Hedge and Mellie had stopped her.
Coach had reminded her that she had told her father she was going to the premiere with him and he would be so disappointed if she were to not only bail, but to leave the state.

Leave it to coach to take her on a guilt trip.

Mellie then explained that they were flying back to New York tonight to bring Chuck back with them, and that they would be more than happy to check on Jason’s status.

“Ms. Mclean! Ms. Mclean! Would you mind answering a few questions?” cried a short blonde woman, jumping up and down with a microphone in hand. She had way too much makeup on, enough that even Drew would tell her to take it down a notch, but she looked nice enough.

“Uh, sure?” she answered. She stepped off the red carpet to allow the people behind to go around and also get closer to the reporter.

“Oh thank you so Ms. Mclean!” she gushed. “I promise to keep this short. After all, I wouldn’t want you to miss a second of your father’s newest movie!”

“Thanks?”

The woman smiled and waved for a man with a camera to come over. “Alright let’s start simple: who are you wearing?”

Piper looked at herself, she was wearing a new pair of loose fitting jeans, a pair of tan Carhartt boots, and an olive-green T-shirt. Just because she was attending this thing didn’t mean she was going to step out of her comfort zone. “Uh, my closet, I guess?” she said into the microphone in the woman’s outstretched hand.

The woman smiled. “Well you look wonderful! Not many people can pull off “Goodwill chic.””

“Thanks?” It sounded like a backhanded compliment, and it probably was, but she decided to play it off for her dad’s sake. He didn’t need any negative press because of her. She had caused enough of that before going to Camp Half-Blood.

“Next question. People out there are dying to know if you are seeing anyone. Surely the only daughter of Tristan Mclean has a special someone?”

Piper frowned. “I don’t want to answer that,” she blurted out. It wasn’t that she was embarrassed about Jason or anything like that. If she told people she was seeing someone, then reporters would be actively looking for her and someone, potentially ruining any chance of her and Jason going out alone.

“Oh come now,” the woman laughed. “Surely there’s someone! A pretty young thing like yourself must break the hearts of young men on a daily basis. Maybe even some ladies too,” she added with a sly smile.

Piper suppressed a groan. She would never intentionally break anyone’s heart. She had worked hard to repair the Aphrodite Cabin’s reputation after Drew’s takeover. No one deserved to have their heart played with. However, she would admit that she had turned down a few offers, and she knew that had caused some heartache. “I guess so,” she shrugged. “But I’ve never intentionally hurt anyone!” she added quickly.

The woman frowned, obviously unhappy with her answer. She ran a hand through her long blonde hair before replacing her frown with another forced smile. “Let’s change topics shall we? Why don’t you tell us all about your father’s new movie: Warcraft: Rise of the Alliance.”
Piper let out a sigh of relief. This was something she could talk about comfortably. “Well I guess it takes place a few months after the first movie,” At least that’s what her dad told her. “The kingdom of Strongwind.”

“Stormwind.”

“Sorry, Stormwind from the first movie has fallen to the Horde, and now the remaining kingdoms must work with the dwarves and elves if they want to save their world.”

“That sounds incredibly! Now tell us about your father’s role? I hear he’s very important!”

Honestly Piper didn’t know much more than what Jason had drilled into her.

Shortly after the end of the second Giant war, her dad had allowed her to invite Jason to stay with them a couple days. Things were great, her dad and Jason got along just fine. It was funny how they both said the other was very down to earth. One night the three of them gathered in the living room to watch a movie for the so called weekly family night, which was odd because Piper had never recalled them having a weekly family night. Her dad popped a movie into their home theatre and explained that he was going to star in the sequel to this movie and possible another one as well. The movie, *Warcraft*, was okay… Piper thought it was the typical fantasy movie that movie studios pushed out since the success of *Lord of the Rings*, but Jason had apparently never seen anything like it. After the credits rolled he began to assault her dad with an endless barrage of questions.

She knew Jason was a dork when they met, but he was also apparently a repressed nerd.

“Uh, he plays a paladin, which is like a holy warrior, named Turalyon. He was a priest before, but now he is being forced to not only fight, but to lead his people as well.”

“Sounds interesting! A warrior! Wow! That must have required your father to get into incredible shape!”

“I guess so.” She knew that her dad had increased his daily workout, but to her he hadn’t really changed that much.

“There wouldn’t happen to be any scenes of him without a shirt would there?”

“First, Gross. Second, no.” Seriously, did people not understand that she was his daughter? 

“That’s a shame,” she tsked. “Back to his workout. I’m sure it was quite rigorous. Would you agree?”

“I think so,” she shrugged. She knew so. Her dad ran five miles every morning, worked out at the gym for four hours, then ran two more miles before bed. Her dad was in better shape than most demigods, which was saying something.

“That must be quite stressful! Being forced to maintain a certain image,” the reporter said. Her smile growing even wider.

“Sure?” Piper knew this woman was after something, but she couldn’t tell where her questions were heading.

“And your father recently hired a new life coach. What was his name again?”

“Coach Gleeson Hedge?”
“Would you care to refute the rumors that your father is an alcoholic and has hired Hedge to help him quit his drinking?”

“What?!"

“Finally a reaction! Is he violent? Do you find him passed out on the floor?”

“What? No! He’s never had a drink in his life!” That was true. Her father had never touched a drop of alcohol in his life. Before he was famous, when they were living with her grandpa, he had sat down with her one day and told her how alcohol was a poison to her people. That it made people give up on hope, that it split families apart, and killed many innocent people whether they were drinking or not. They made a promise that they both would never drink, and Piper intended to keep that promise.

“Oh come now! Your name is Mclean! Irish and Native American? You may as well be named Budweiser,” the reporter laughed cruelly.

Piper’s hands clenched into fists. Normally she was against knowingly using her charmspeak on mortals, but right now she was willing to make an exception. She raised her fist to strike the reporter and felt the familiar sensation that accompanied her charmspeak fill her throat. “Why don’t you take that microphone and shove it up your-“

Before she could finish, someone grabbed her wrist and spun her around, momentarily dazing her.

“There you are,” chuckled a deep voice. “I’ve been looking everywhere for you.”

When the world stopped spinning on Piper, she looked up to see the familiar, albeit intimidating, face of her dad’s friend and costar: Jason Momoa.

“We better get going, Tristan is looking for you,” he laughed as he let go of her wrist.

“But I was interviewing her!” the blonde reporter protested.

“I heard what you said,” snarled the imposing actor. “If Piper wasn’t present I’d lay your ass out.”

“Oh you can pretend I’m not here,” piper quipped, as she rubbed her now sore wrist. “Please don’t stop on my account.”

Before the reporter had a chance to reply, Momoa swatted the camera from her camera man’s hands, only to crush it beneath his foot. “Come on Piper. You’re done here,” he said before walking down the red carpet, Piper trailing behind him.

They made it inside the lavish theatre before the actor pulled her off to the side.

He stared at her with a mixture of anger and concern, occasionally opening his mouth to say something only to quickly shut it. Finally he let out a sigh and muttered a few profanities before addressing her. “You okay kid?”

“Yeah, just-“
“Pissed off? Offended? Feel like crying?” he offered with a small smirk.

“Just the first two. Tears aren’t going to change anything.”

The older man laughed. “As long as you know that. Now tell me, why the fuck are you even here? Your old man isn’t the type to drag his kids with him to these fucking things.”

Now it was Piper’s turn to sigh. “I may have begged him to take me…”

“Jesus kid, I thought you had more sense than to want to get involved in this shit.”

“No it’s not like that!” she protested. And it was the truth, she had no intention of being a famous anything. Between her father and being one of the seven, she had her more than her fair share of fame. “My boyfriend wanted to see this, so I asked my dad to take us.”

“Young boyfriend?” the actor asked, his brow furrowed in confusion. “You mean that white-boy?”

Piper scowled. She knew the man meant nothing bad by the comment, but now it didn’t seem so innocent.

When her dad had first met Jason, well after his memory wipe, her dad had thought it would be funny to intimidate Jason. The problem was her dad was the least intimidating man alive, so he called Momoa to back him up. When Jason had arrived from the airport the two older men had been waiting for him in the front yard. While her dad interrogated Jason, Aqua-drogo was throwing tomahawks at a straw target. When her dad had finished his questioning, Momoa walked up behind Jason and said, “You got that white-boy?”

“Crap,” he groaned, realizing what he said. “I’m sorry. Dick move on my part.” He wouldn’t look her in the eye, instead focusing on her boots as if they held all the answers to life’s questions.

“It’s okay,” she sighed. “Just doesn’t seem funny anymore after that.”

“You’re right,” he agreed. “Now let’s go find Tristan. He’s probably starting to think I abducted you or some shit.” He offered his arm for her to take, which she was more than happy to. The actor may be rather imposing, have the mouth of Arion, and seriously needed to comb his long hair, but really he was just as much a teddy bear as Frank.

“Aqua-drogo?”

“Hmm?”

“Please don’t tell my dad about… you know.”

“No problem.”

After Aqua-drogo escorted her to her dad (which was really unnecessary), her stomach began to growl.

Now if this was a standard night out at the movies she would just go to the concession stand and buy
herself her usual movie snack of Milk Duds and a large blue raspberry ICEE. Sadly though she was at premiere, which meant the stand was closed. White dresses and blue ICEEs don’t mix, was what her dad had once told her.

Her stomach rumbled loud enough that it caused the stuffy people around her to stare at her. *Thanks stomach! It’s not like these are important people whose very opinion can affect my dad’s career! So go ahead be as loud as you want!*

Her stomach must not understand sarcasm, so it took her inner monologue at face value and rumbled louder than before.

“Are you alright there Pipes?” her dad asked, one eyebrow arched.

Piper felt her face flush. *I’ve never been more embarrassed in my life!* She screamed internally. “Just hungry,” she laughed, trying to hide her embarrassment.

“I saw some servers walking around with some kind of tofu roll. Why don’t you go try to snag us a few?”

She nodded and quickly began her search for her soy based savior.

*These things are freaking incredible!* Piper thought as she happily munched on the tiny Korean tofu tacos. After her first bite she had cleared the server’s tray, filling her arms with the zesty appetizers. *Dad is going to love these!* She awkwardly lowered her head and snatched the closest taco up with her teeth, earning her a few stares and a few more disgusted looks. *Whatever! I’m just making the best out of a bad situation.*

“Now see Morgan that is a girl who knows how to have a good time!” someone laughed from behind her.

Piper slowly turned around to see who was talking about her, careful not to drop any her food.

In any other place on the planet the two she saw would be an incredibly strange pair, but this being Hollywood they fit right in. It was a little old man and a strikingly beautiful woman who was at least forty years his junior. The old man looked to be at least in his eighties and was leaning heavily on a solid black walking stick. He was wearing the standard black tux that every man wore to swanky events, but what set him apart from everyone present was he was wearing a Chicago Cubs baseball hat.

The woman though was striking in every sense of the word. While she wore the typical black cocktail dress that everyone woman has, her amazing figure filled it out in ways that would make women weep in jealousy. She wore her hair loose, letting the long midnight black hair cascade over her shoulders and frame her beautiful face. But what really made her stand out was the multitude of tattoos that seemed to cover every inch of visible skin. The designs ranged from simple geometric patterns on her shoulders, to serpents that wrapped around her arms, their scaly heads on the back of her hands.

The woman looked Piper up and down, making Piper feel uncomfortable for the first time in her
choice in wardrobe, and then smirked. “I think you’re right sir,” she laughed, her voice as smooth as silk and as sweet as honey.

_Holy crap If I wasn’t with Jason I would totally try to get with her! Sorry Annabeth, looks like you’ve dropped to second on my list…_

“Oh dear, where are my manners!” the old man cried as he hobbled closer to Piper. “We been talking about you and we haven’t even the courtesy to introduce ourselves! What would my mother say?” He offered Piper his wrinkled hand before realizing that her arms were full of food.

Piper blushed as the old man howled with laughter, before she too began to laugh. The old man may have looked frail, but he apparently had an amazing set of lungs as he laughed long after Piper had stopped to catch her breath.

When the old man finally stopped laughing Piper noticed a beeping noise coming from the old man. He rolled up his sleeve and frowned at what Piper thought was a digital watch. His smile quickly fell away and was replaced by a scowl.

“What was your name again my dear?” he asked, his voice lacking all emotion.

“Piper Mclean.”

He looked over to the woman who in turn nodded. “You wouldn’t happen to be the daughter of Tristan Mclean?”

She suddenly felt uncomfortable around the weird couple and began to look for her dad. “Uh yeah. Now it was nice meeting… whoever you are, but I got to go. Bye!”

“Stop,” the woman said.

Before Piper could move a single step her body locked up. She knew what it felt like to have someone use charmspeak on her, Medea and Drew being the main offenders, but this was something else entirely. Charmspeak required that the victim at least on some level wanted to follow the given instructions. Piper had no intention of staying anywhere near these people, but for some reason she couldn’t move.

_Fuck! Fuck! Double Fuck!_

“Would everyone else be so kind enough to go and take their seats?” the woman asked.

Piper watched in a mixture of awe and horror as everyone in the lobby stopped what they were doing and silently marched into the awaiting theatre. _Why did I leave Katoptris at home? What was I thinking?_

The woman walked over and cupped Piper’s face, giving her a predatory grin. “Now you are going to answer all of my boss’s questions with a one-hundred percent honesty. Do you understand?”

“Yes.”

The old man hobbled over to her and looked her in the eye. “You are Tristan Mclean’s daughter?”


“Are you a demigod?”

Despite being unable to move by some woman’s magical voice, the question was still a surprise to
her. If these two were monsters they would have revealed their true forms by now. Maybe they’re leftovers from Gaea’s army? “Yes,” she answered, unable to stop herself.

“Are you Greek, Roman, Norsk, Egyptian, or something else?”

“Greek.” Let’s file that list of choices away for later brain. Now is not the time to have an existential crisis.

“Who is your godly parent then?”

“Aphrodite.”

“Well that would explain your beauty,” he said with a small, but genuine smile. “Now for the important questions. Did your father know your mother was a goddess?”

“No.”

“Does he know what she is now?”

“No.”

The old man hung his head and tsked. “That poor man. Probably thinks he lost the love of his life. Spends his free time wondering whatever happened to his daughter’s mother.”

Piper felt her stomach knot up in a mixture of anger and guilt. Anger because that was exactly what her mother did to her father, and guilt because Piper had every opportunity to tell him the truth.

“I believe I’m done with her Morgan. Let’s allow the girl to have one more happy night with her father,” he sighed before he walked into the theater leaving the two women alone.

Morgan smiled and Piper swore that her tattoos were pulsing with a dark green aura. “When I go and join my boss, you will forget this entire conversation and they you even met the two of us. You will join your father in theater and have one of the best nights of your life.”

Piper blinked and founder herself standing in the hallway all by herself. Where did everyone go? She readjusted the tofu tacos in her arms, which felt far colder than they did a moment ago and rushed into the theater.

Suddenly, she couldn’t wait to watch the movie with her dad. Maybe when the movie was over she would write to Jason and spoil everything for him!

That would teach him, she thought with a wicked smirk as she scarfed down another taco.

Chapter End Notes

Hey everyone!
Hope you have all been enjoying my little (long) story so far!

Let's get down to business.

The reporter that was such a b*tch to our girl Piper was based on several reporters. I've seen interviews that start off pleasant enough, but then quickly turn sexist or racist.

I pretty much wanted to have Piper have an excuse to tell someone to shove something up their ass, and let's be honest here. Haven't we all wished that?

Jason Momoa, that man is simultaneously a teddy bear and a grizzly bear. I was watching a video of him drinking beer and throwing axes when I realized he should be the one to intervene. (In case anyone's wondering I cast him as Teron Gorefiend in Warcraft 2)

Piper is of course worried sick about Jason, but between coach Hedge, Mellie, and Annabeth's stories of Percy's adventures, she figures this is something normal. Well for a demigod at least...

Speaking of Hedge and Mellie...
They are dead.
Killed by the organization's signal as their plane landed in New York.

You're also probably asking why the villains were present at the movie premiere. Two reasons.
1) They were in town to check on the status of Camp Jupiter.
2) The old man loves fantasy movies.

Morgan is a character that has been mentioned several times in the past and we are just now really meeting her in person. Her background is actually very similar to a character from HoO. Points if you can figure out who!

Next chapter will be a short update on our villains, then after that is our adorable Nico! Our poor boy has been through so much, but he is really struggling now with the prospect of school :( But boy do I have some surprises in store for you and him!
*Evil Laughter*

Like what you just read? Please leave a kudos!

Thoughts, theories, criticisms, praise, fanboy/girl squee's you want to share? Please leave a comment!

Kudos and Comments are fuel for me!

Until next time,

Thank you all so much for reading!
Correspondence III

Chapter Summary

While the demigods play house, things at Camp Jupiter and beyond are only getting worse...

Chapter Notes

Warning: mentions of torture/experimentation, suggestions of rape, and gore.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

TO: GOLF TANGO SIERRA
FROM: PAPA TANGO WHISKEY

George you ignorant slut…

I can’t believe you didn’t come see my new playground with Morgan and the old man. I had soooo much to show you!

Like my newest pet, G:T. Or as I affectionately call him: Terminate-us.

You should see him and the wine guy play together! Sometimes I toss them a DG and let them play tug-of-war with it! It’s absolutely adorable! Incredibly blood, but still adorable!

My team and I have so far successfully implanted 65% of the captured DGs with my neural interface and they are currently being used to assist us and to make it look like the nest is still normal. There was a minor issue in the beginning of the guards not allowing any DGs inside, but this was quickly rectified with a software patch.

Repairs and modifications to the nest are well underway and we are almost ready to receive further samples. The state house, coliseum, and the numerous temples will allow us to store more samples than ever before!

Maybe when this is all over we can open a zoo?

Speaking of samples and storage that was pretty fucked up about what happened to Grummore and Pellinore right? All they found of Pellinore was his head and a puddle of blood? Jesus, I can’t imagine what could do that to a man. Really sucks that T:A won’t talk to us. Him being the only witness and all…

Well, they ain’t getting any deader!

Back to business.
I looked over your request and, yeah that seems possible. I know you’re disappointed that we can’t kill Gs (yet), but what you’re suggesting isn’t much different than what I did to Terminate-us and the wino. I can whip up some cylinders and a delivery system in… let’s say a week?

I really wish you would reconsider your plan though. I know you have a full hate-on for G:AD, but wouldn’t it be better if you controlled it like Terminate-us? Think of it, the one thing you hate in this world being forced to do whatever you say. And hey, when you’re not using it, just send it to some third world prison and let the inmates run a damn train on it.

After all, from what I’ve heard it prefers the appearance of a young girl.

Now, did you receive the list I sent you? Feel free to capture more than the numbers I have listed, the old man wants his Fourth of July bash to be one for the history books. After all, the more “fireworks” we got, the larger our display will be.

One last thing!

Remember DG:FM? He’s one of the praetors and a shape shifter if that helps to jog your shell-shocked memory. Well the team in Boston managed to snag their own shape shifter as it was trying to escape that crappy hotel. So Rashid and I got to thinking how these things can turn into any animal or creature they want to and we got curious if it was only a cosmetic change or something more. That led us to think about how some creatures are capable of re-growing limbs.

Yeah, you see where this is going.

The first tests were simple, we coaxed them into turning into earth worms, and then cut off a small portion. DG:FM was a trooper and regrew the missing piece in a little over a day, but in a surprise twist the Valkyrie morphed back to her standard form and died on the table.

Yeah, Rashid’s team cut off its head like the dumbasses they are.

From that initial experiment we can conclude two things.

DG:FM does a complete transformation and gains all the traits of its new shape.

The Valkyrie merely changes shape and does not gain any abilities or traits.

Exciting stuff right?

Now If you would excuse me, I have to go amputee a limb or two on DG:FM to see if it can regrow them when it changes into an animal form. I love my job!

TTFN!

Ta ta for now!

-Brian

Chapter End Notes

Wow.
Um... poor Frank and Sam.

I'm not expecting any kudos for that one!

Anyway, if you have been paying attention you will see where things are going to (finally) intersect.

One important thing to remember when reading this:

Two people with a common goal can accomplish many things.  
Two people with a common enemy... can accomplish even more....

If you liked what you read, please please please leave a kudos!

Questions, thoughts, theories, etc? Leave a comment!

If I get enough kudos and comments maybe your favorite character will be spared!

As always, thanks for reading! you guys are the best!

Almost forgot!  
Next chapter is Nico!  
Get ready for some feels!
Nico

Chapter Summary

Warnings: Depictions of homophobia in the media.

Tonight:

Jason has the brilliant idea to watch television to learn about high school,

Nico really doesn't like what he sees,

and fluff!

Chapter Notes

Hey if you are reading this you are awesome! It's people like you who I write for!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Nico sat between Jason and Percy on the love-seat, trying to absorb as much information as possible from the television before him.

They, well he and Jason, had been watching any show they could find that was about high school, since Percy still wasn’t talking and they needed to know what to expect. Which was apparently Tartarus on Earth if any of the shows they watched were even remotely accurate. Love triangles, pregnancies, and violence seemed to be the norm for American schools.

Nico glanced over at the son of Poseidon, who was casually flipping through an issue of Ant-Man.

*How can he be so calm? Is he used to this? Did Percy deal with this stuff every day?* Nico gulped and returned his attention to the screen before him.

Currently a boy around Jason’s age was waiting for his crush on the school’s stage. This type of thing happened in every show they had watched, but what made him pay close attention was that the boy’s crush was the captain of the football team. Nico held his breath when the other boy walked on to the stage. The two stared at each other momentarily, before the captain pulled the boy into his embrace.

Nico’s heart soared at the sight. *Maybe things won’t be so bad.*

The smaller boy wrapped his arms around the much larger boy and tried to pull them even closer together.

*Just like me and Will,* he thought with a bittersweet smile.

The two had finally separated when the much larger boy leaned in for what Nico thought was a kiss. The smaller boy clearly thought the same and leaned in as well, but just as they were about the kiss,
the larger boy pulled away and punched the other in the gut. The smaller boy fell to the ground and stared at his crush in confusion.

“You should’ve stayed in the closet,” the larger boy spat, before kicking the other in the gut.

If Nico’s heart was soaring before, now it was free falling into Tartarus.

His mouth suddenly felt dry and he couldn’t seem to remember how to breathe. He stood up from the couch, earning him a worried look from Jason and Percy.

His mouth had forgotten how to form words, so he gave the two a small wave before leaving the room.

He made his way upstairs to the bathroom and latched the door behind him. He went to the sink and splashed some water on his face. He looked in the mirror that hung above the marble sink and took in a ragged breath.

He didn’t like what he saw looking back at him in the mirror. The boy in the mirror was far too short, too skinny, and far too pale. He looked nothing like boys on the television, they were all tall, muscular, and tan.

Sure Percy and Jason didn’t look exactly like them either, but they would probably fit right in. Everyone loved Percy and Jason wherever they went.

He was just an afterthought.

*But that’s not what’s bothering you is it Nico?* He sank down to the floor and brought his knees to his chest.

He knew that what he was wasn’t the norm. He thought that he had accepted that even. Percy, Jason, Leo, Frank, Annabeth, Piper, Reyna, and even Hazel had been so happy for him when he finally opened up about his feelings. Then there was Will who he shared the best months of his life with. Will who always knew how to make him smile, even if he didn’t want to. Now though he was beginning to think everything had been one giant fluke.

*I lived in a fantasy world. A world with nymphs, pegasi, and the delusion that people could accept me.*

His body trembled and he pulled his knees in tighter, trying and failing to fight back the tears in his eyes.

*Stop it! You are the son of Hades! The ghost king! You need to stop being selfish and help Jason and Percy! That’s what Will would want you to do!*

He managed to take a deep breath and thought he was going to pull it together when another thought entered his mind. *Will was a fluke. Will was your only chance at love and he’s gone now. He was everything you ever wanted and he’s gone now. Gone forever.*

The weeks of pent up emotions rushed out of him in one primal scream. He rolled onto his side, curled up into the fetal position. This time he didn’t even try to hold back his tears.

Memories of Will filled his mind. Their first date. Their first kiss. Even their first fight and their make-up. The once sweet memories now made it feel as if someone was stabbing him in the heart.

That was it.
There would be no more chances of love and happiness for him.

He was alone again.

He let out another agonizing scream just as the bathroom door flew open, the door hitting the wall with a loud *THUD*. Through blurry eyes he watched as two figures rushed in and crouched over his small form.

“Neeks are you okay? What happened?” Jason asked, his voice laced with panic.

*Everything*, he wanted to say, but all that came out was strangled sob. *I can’t even talk. I’m so pathetic.*

“I knew I should’ve turned the channel,” mumbled the son of Jupiter.

He felt two arms lift him up bridal style. He thought briefly about resisting the sudden physical contact, but it felt good to be held. Nico adjusted his position and laid his head on what he assumed was Jason’s shoulder, but when he smelled ocean mist he knew it was Percy who had him.

“Percy where are you going?” Jason called out.

Maybe if he had been in the right frame of mind he would have been concerned that he was seemingly being abducted by the son of Poseidon, but right now it didn’t matter. He clutched onto Percy’s shirt tighter and tried to bury his head further into the older boy’s shoulder.

Percy didn’t carry him too far before he was set down on something warm and soft. He used the back of his arm to wipe the tears from his eyes. He looked around to realize that Percy set him down on his own bed. He watched through teary eyes as the son of Poseidon crawled into the bed with him and positioned himself behind him. When Nico felt Percy’s arm wrap around his waist, he once again burst out sobbing.

“Percy where are you- Percy what are you doing?” Jason asked as he entered their room, clearly confused at the sight before him.

Percy tried to remove his arm, but Nico grabbed it and held it in place. He needed this, he needed the physical contact with someone. Even if it was just for a while.

Percy must have realized his arm was no longer his own, as Nico felt him jerking his head at Jason. The blond didn’t say anything in response, but a moment later Nico felt the mattress sink and Jason was laying on his side watching him with a sad smile.

“It’s okay Nico,” the older boy whispered. “It will all be okay. We got you.”

*But I’m supposed to have you now.*

The three of them laid there until he finally managed to calm himself.

When his breathing finally slowed, Percy got up from the bed and left the room only to return with a glass of water. The son of Poseidon pulled Nico up into a sitting position and gave him the glass of water. He emptied the glass in a couple gulps and handed the glass back to the raven haired teen, who in turn set the glass on the dresser before sitting down next to him.
“Do you want to talk about?” Jason asked as he gently rubbed his back.

“What’s there to talk about,” he scoffed.

Jason may have frowned, but Percy punched the son of Hades in the shoulder.

“Ow!” he cried, as he rubbed his now sore shoulder. “What was that for?”

Percy gave him a pointed look that said: don’t try it Neeks. You need to talk about it.

“Fine,” he groaned. “I’m… I’m scared okay? I’m fucking terrified! I haven’t been to a school since I’ve met Percy and now I’ve got to go to High School of all things!” His breathing picked up and he dug his fingernails into his palms. “I don’t look like any of those guys on television,” he sighed. “I’m short, scrawny, and creepy compared to them who are tall, strong, and handsome.”

“Nico. You are not short and scrawny, and you’re definitely not creepy. You’re the nicest most selfless guy I’ve ever known! For years you were putting aside your feelings to keep this moron over here alive!” Jason shouted.

Percy nodded enthusiastically in agreement.

“And you’re not short or scrawny! You’re fifteen Neeks! Before Hera abducted me I had just gone through a growth spurt. Hades, what did Percy look like when he was your age? And be honest with yourself, what did he really look like?”

He looked at the son of Poseidon sitting next to him and tried to picture him as he was during the labyrinth fiasco. He remembered meeting Percy at the ranch. How he had to look up at his former crush to look him in the eye. Okay, he still did, but the height gap had lessened considerably. He felt his heart briefly flutter, but he pushed aside the unwanted emotions. They would only obscure the truth. He thought of Percy standing next to the little tourist vehicle and realized that Percy couldn’t have been much taller than himself back then. He remembered that Percy’s voice would sometimes crack in the middle of a sentence, that the older boy had several zits on his face, and that he definitely wasn’t as muscular as the guys on the television.

He was like me.

He wiped the last tears from his eyes and a managed a small smile. “He looked like the ass-end of a satyr.”

Jason and Percy smiled, but the raven haired teen slugged him in the arm once again.

“Ow! Fuck Percy!” he cried as he rubbed his sore arm. “This is going to bruise!”

“See,” said the son of Jupiter as he nudged their shoulders together. “No one looks like that in real life Neeks. They’re actors. They’re supposed to look good. You should see what Piper’s dad has to go through to look the way he does! He uses those weird mud masks and puts cucumbers on his eyes like the Aphrodite girls!”

Nico smiled at that, and Percy began to rub circles on his back.

“What else is bothering you?”

“Nothing,” he snapped defensively.

The blond raised an eyebrow and Percy pulled back his fist for another assault.
“Fine! Just stop hitting me!” He hung his head down and let out a sigh. *I can’t believe I’m doing this….* He buried his face in his hands and said “I don’t want to be alone.”

“What was that?” the blond asked.

Nico lifted his head back up and looked straight ahead to avoid looking at his friends. “I don’t want to be alone.” Any trace of the happiness he felt a moment ago was gone, instead a sense of dread permeated within him.

The two older boys looked at him in confusion.

Jason set his hand on his shoulder and gave it a reassuring squeeze. “We’ll be right there with you. Heck, we’ll probably have most of our classes together. You’ll probably be sick of us after the first week! You’ll-“

“That’s not what I mean!” he snapped as he jerked his shoulder from the blond’s grasp.

“Oh.”

*Of course that’s all he can say! He still has Piper!* He balled his hands into fists and tried to fight back another set of tears.

“Nico we talked about this after Percy’s…. accident.” The blond cringed, but Percy was too focused on him to pay attention to the son of Jupiter. “Will didn’t leave you. He just thought it was best for the both of you if-“

“I know!” he cried. “I know” he repeated. “I just- I just can’t go back to being alone again.” He took in a ragged, shaky breath. “I don’t want to go back to having no one to love. No one to love me.”

*But that’s all there is for me.*

Percy carefully grabbed his left hand and rubbed the back of Nico’s clenched fist with his thumb. Nico unclenched his fist and Percy intertwined their fingers and gave him a reassuring squeeze.

“Nico I promise you will find someone again. I swear it on the river Styx.” Jason paused and waited for the typical crash of thunder to seal the promise, but it never came. “I know it’s not the same, but I love you like a brother. I love Nico di Angelo. I can say it all day if you want, from sun up to sun down!”

Nico fought hard to keep himself from smiling, but it was a losing battle, one that he lost with a chuckle.

“That’s better,” the son of Jupiter laughed. “You’re going to find some amazing guy who is going to sweep you off your feet.”

“Jason that expression was old even when I was born,” he laughed.

“You would know, you living fossil.” Jason said with a smile.

Nico turned to Percy and gave his former crush a reassuring smile and squeezed his hand. “Thanks guys. I’m sorry I’m so weak. I’m supposed to be taking care of you, not the other way around.”

Apparently it was Beat-the-crap-out-of-Nico-day because Jason punched him in his other shoulder.

“I told you before: no one gets to run you down. Not even you. You are the strongest person I know and I’m willing to bet it’s the same for Percy.”
The raven haired teen gave Nico’s hand a little squeeze and nodded.

“We’re- we’re all a little messed up right now Neeks,” Jason sighed. “And considering everything that has happened in the last month you’re doing an amazing job keeping us afloat.”

“Are you ever going to tell me what happened with Disciplina?”

Jason turned away from him and let out another sigh. “I’ll tell you after I get back from Harpocrates. I- it needs to be kept a secret for now.”

The three of them sat on edge of the bed in an uncomfortable silence. Jason was still rubbing his back and Percy was still holding his hand.

Tomorrow we go take our placement exams. Then sometime after that we actually start school. Nico sighed and look at his family. We’ll have to start worrying about homework and school events on top of our current problems. I can’t let our last night end like this. He let go of Percy’s hand, slid back onto his bed, and grabbed a pillow.

“What are you-“

Before Jason could finish, Nico slammed the heavy feather pillow against the back of the blond’s head.

Percy laughed and gave Nico a high-five.

Jason grabbed the two pillows from his sleeping bag and tossed one to Percy. The older boy snatched the pillow mid-air and looked between the two boys with a wolfish grin on his face.


Oh hell no Grace! While Jason was trying to form an alliance with Percy, Nico jumped to Percy’s bed and grabbed another pillow. “Percy I’ve been your friend the longest! Plus he’s a Roman! Greeks stick with Greeks!”

Jason turned to face him and arched an eyebrow. “I feel like there’s a racial component to that and I-“

The son of Jupiter didn’t get a chance to finish as Percy slammed his pillow on the back of Jason’s head.

Nico couldn’t help but laugh as the blond fell forward with a look of surprise and betrayal on his face. “Percy never lets me down when it counts!” Mostly.

Jason grabbed Percy by the ankle and yanked him to the floor. Instantly Jason was on top of the older boy and began to beat him with his pillow.

Nico smiled as the two older boys wrestled on the floor, each getting a few hits in with their pillows before the other would gain the upper hand again. I’m still terrified of what the future holds, but as long as I have these idiots with me I know I’ll be fine. He gripped his pillow tighter and swung it against Jason’s back. “Don’t worry Percy I’ll save you!” He laughed.

“Why am I even friends with you guys?”
Nico laid back on his bed sweaty and completely out of breath, with Percy and Jason on either side of him in similar states of exhaustion. His back was killing him now, but he was too tired to care.

“I don’t think Demeter’s going to be happy about the state of her pillows guys,” huffed the son of Jupiter.

“You’re probably right.” He lifted his head slightly and surveyed the damage they had caused.

One of the lamps that occupied the stand between Percy and his beds had fallen to the floor, but thankfully remained unbroken. Jason’s sleeping bag was currently hung haphazardly over the bedroom door with a large tear down the side. The closet door had a hole in it from when Jason tripped Percy headfirst into flimsy door. On top of all that, Percy’s pillow had ripped when it snagged on Jason’s glasses, covering the room in feathers.

Well there are worse things than being turned into corn....

“We better clean this place up.” Jason tried to stand up, but his legs gave out and he plopped back down in the bed. “Later. Much, much later.”

Nico yawned. “Yeah. We’ll get it later. Right Perce?” He turned his head and found that the son of Poseidon was fast asleep. He even had a puddle of drool forming beneath his cheek.

“Is he asleep?” Jason yawned.

Nico closed his eyes. “It would appear that way.”

“He may be a seaweed-brain, but he sometimes he gets these brilliant ideas.”

He felt Jason adjust himself to get comfortable in the crowded bed and within moments the blond’s breathing slowed. With the sounds of the two older boys sleeping peacefully on either side of him, he quickly joined them.

Nico jolted awake when he felt something grab his foot. He scurried back against the headboard, kicking the still sleeping forms of Jason and Percy. He franticly looked for his sword in his panicked state, only to realize it was still downstairs in the living room.

“A simple Good morning father, would have sufficed.”

He felt a moment of relief when he realized it was only his father. It quickly passed though when he realized that his father had just found him sharing a bed with two other boys. Boys who were only wearing boxers and a T-shirt. “Er… this isn’t what it looks like?” he offered.

His father raised one dark eyebrow. “Oh? And what does this look like?”

“Nothing?”
The lord of the dead chuckled. “So if it looks like nothing, but it isn’t nothing then what pray tell is it?”

_I fucked up! Abort! Abort! “I- Er-“_

His father held up his hand and instantly he stopped talking. “The room is covered in the remains of a feather pillow, furniture is knocked haphazardly out of place, and there’s a hole in the closet door. Either you boys got a bit carried away last night, or I need to start coming to you for advice.”

Nico let out a small laugh, but one stern look from his father made him latch his mouth shut.

“T’m inclined to believe it’s the former rather than the later.”

He let out a sigh of relief. At least his dad didn’t jump to conclusions like most gods. Or parents for that matter.

“However,” his father continued. “You will fix all the damages you caused and whatever needs to be replaced will be paid with your allowance. Does that sound fair?”

“Yes father.” This could have been so much worse. _How much does a door cost anyway? Like fifty dollars? “That sounds fair.”_

Hades snapped his fingers. “Damn, I’m losing my touch then,” he said with a smile, before he ruffled Nico’s hair.

_What is with these people and my hair recently?_

“Now get these two… bums up and get ready. Demeter is downstairs making you all breakfast and we have to be at the school in two hours.”

Nico felt his stomach knot up. _Fuck…_.

Chapter End Notes

Well that was an emotional roller coaster wasn’t it?

High school shows are a ton of bull. You either got endless drama or endless fluff. I’ve yet to see a show that details how nothing ever happens...

Poor Nico, the show they were watching managed to hit all of his insecurities. Thankfully Jason and Percy got his back!

Sometimes to get a bro out of a funk, ten another bro will beat the crap out of them. It’s the bro code!

It would be so easy to turn this into a perjasico fic at this point. I’m actually considering it, and I wouldn’t have to change much.

Hades is a good dad.
He found the whole situation amusing, other than he got to see Percy and Jason in their boxers.
He does like to see Nico squirm though (I think we all do).

Next chapter is up in the air for POV.
It could be the continuation of this, or a couple other events that are going on simultaneously.
Several chapters from now we will have Jason and Poseidon’s most excellent road trip (I am super excited for that one).

Do you have any kind of feelings from what you just read? Leave a kudos!

Questions, theories, ideas, cookie recipes, or just feeling chatty? Leave a comment!

Kudos and comments are like milk and honey to me!

Until next time, thank you so much for reading!
You're beautiful babe!
“Now make sure you boys eat your fill,” Demeter said as she slid a whole wheat pancake onto his plate. “Your brain can’t function properly on an empty stomach.”

“Oh? Is that why our youngest brother is such an air-head?” his father joked as he read a copy of *The New York Times*. “To think all of the problems he caused could have been prevented with a morning meal.”

Demeter swatted the back of the lord of the dead’s head with the plastic spatula in her hand. “Don’t talk about the boy’s father when he’s sitting right there!”

Jason swallowed down the half a pancake he had shoved in his mouth. “It’s fine ma’am. I’ve uh… heard a lot worse.”

Nico looked down at the pancake before him and frowned. Sometimes I forget that Jason has to put up with so much because of who is father is. But then again, I think the three of us all have that weight on our shoulders to some extent. He thought of how Poseidon’s uncontrolled lust was responsible for the creation of Medusa and how his rage had kept Odysseus at sea for ten years. At least his own father hadn’t really done anything too terrible besides kidnapping Persephone, and Nico had a feeling that story wasn’t entirely true.

“Grace knows I mean know harm,” his father mumbled as he rubbed the back of his head, his paper clenched up in his other fist. “Besides the man clearly did something right, he made Jason after all.”

Demeter huffed as she placed three more pancakes on Jason’s plate. “Jason made Jason,” the harvest goddess said before ruffling the former praetor’s short hair. “Our brother played no part in making Jason the kind, sweet, caring young man he is today.”

He laughed as Jason’s face turned bright red. Jason responded by kicking him in the shin under the table.

“Ow! Fuck Grace!” he hissed.

“Language Nico,” his father chided, without looking up from his paper. “That sort of language is not
tolerated in the classroom.”

*Thanks for the reminded*… He took one more bite of his pancake (for a grand total of two) and tried to distract himself from the sense of impending doom he felt. He looked over at Percy, who was absentedly pushing a piece of pancake around his plate. Percy was doing much better in Nico’s opinion, but the older boy still wasn’t eating much as he used to. “Those would be better if they were blue, wouldn’t they?” he asked the raven haired teen with a chuckle.

Percy shrugged and continued to play with his food.

He looked Percy over to make sure that the son of Poseidon was wearing clothing that was both school and weather appropriate. He didn’t want a repeat of Percy wearing shorts in February. The older boy was wearing a loose fitting pair of black jeans and a simple black T-shirt. It was somewhat strange to him to see Percy without his camp necklace, but that had been next to Percy’s bed in the infirmary and was most likely lost forever.

Before he could reflect on all the irreplaceable personal items that the three of them had lost with the destruction of Camp Half-Blood, he noticed Percy’s wrists.

They were still wrapped in bandages.

“Shit.”

“What did I say just say not two minutes ago Nico?” his father grunted from behind his paper.

He flinched at his father’s warning, but still had his eyes locked on Percy’s bandaged wrists. “Sorry father, just getting it out of my system.” He stood up from the table and walked into the hallway. “Perce could you come here? I need your help with something.”

“What do you need Neeks? I can help,” Jason cried from the kitchen.

Nico rolled his eyes. “Is your name Percy?”

“No…”

“Then you can’t help. I need a son of Poseidon for this!”

Apparently that had been the wrong thing to say as his father decided to chime in. “What do you need a son of Poseidon for? Did you break something? I swear to Rhea that if you broke a pipe I will- “

“What pipe? Did someone break a water line?” Demeter cried from somewhere in the house.

*Gods of Olympus*… The son of Hades buried his face in his hands in frustration and took a deep breath. “There is nothing wrong with the pipes lady Demeter! I just need Percy to come here before we leave.” He was reward with the squeak of a chair sliding across the kitchen’s tile floor. Nico smirked when he saw the taller boy enter the hallway, but it quickly disappeared when he remembered why he called for Percy. “Let’s go up to our room.”

Percy shrugged and followed him up to their shared room in silence. He gestured for Percy to sit on his bed, before he closed the door behind them. The son of Poseidon flopped down on Nico’s bed and looked at him expectantly.

*How do I say this? Hey Percy remember how you slit your wrists a couple week ago? Well anyway you might want to cover up those bandages or people are going to think you’re a freak like me.*
Okay? He let out a long sigh. *What would Will say? He would probably be really professional and kind.* “Perce, uh, do you feel comfortable wearing that shirt?” he blurted out.

Percy brow furrowed in confusion.

*Wow Nico! You’re as smooth as Valentino!* “I mean do you want people to see you like that?”

Percy looked down at his shirt, before looking at Nico once more. More confused than before.

Nico fought back the urge to snap at the older boy and instead calmly said, “Your wrists Percy. I’m talking about your wrists.”

A look of realization crossed the raven haired boy’s face, before he just smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

That was not the reaction Nico had expected at all. He thought Percy would’ve been embarrassed or angry about him bringing up his self-inflicted injuries, not this strange nonchalance. “You- you don’t care?” he asked in a mixture of disbelief and confusion.

Percy shrugged and stood up from Nico’s bed. The older boy crossed the room and gave the younger a one armed hug. When he pulled away he smirked at Nico as if to say: don’t worry.

It took a moment for Nico to process everything that had just happened. *What is he thinking? Doesn’t he care what people will think when they see him? They’ll think he’s strange!* “Percy don’t you care what people will think when they see you?”

Percy rubbed his chin with one hand as if he were thinking deeply, before he shook his head.

“Smart ass.”

“Nico! Jackson! We are leaving in five!” his father called from downstairs. “Do not be late!”

Percy rolled his eyes and went to turn and leave the room, when Nico grabbed his wrist.

“Wait Percy. There’s something I actually do need your help with,” Nico sighed. “Will you please try your best today?”

Once again, Percy looked confused at his question.

“I mean, when we take our tests would you please try your best?” He had been worrying about this for the last few days now. He knew Percy didn’t like school and was always seemingly on the edge of failing all of his classes, but he knew the only reason Percy hadn’t dropped out before was because he didn’t want to disappoint Sally and Annabeth. Now though with no one to disappoint, Nico worried his best friend would just give up and quit. “We really need you to be there Percy. Jason and I don’t have a whole lot of experience interacting with mortals on a daily basis. I was at Westover for a couple months and all Jason has are fake memories. So today could you please take this test seriously?” He smiled shyly at Percy. “We- I really need you there.”

Percy seemed to hesitate for a fraction of a second before he smiled back at him and nodded.

“Thanks Percy. You’re the best.” He then noticed that he still was holding Percy’s wrist. He dropped it like it was Annabeth’s underwear and tried to hide his blush.

“Nico! Jackson! Down here! Now!” his father shouted.

Before he could respond, Percy grabbed him by the hand and pulled him out of the room.
“Lord Hades?” Jason asked. “You never did tell us what high school we would be attending or gave us a cover story for that matter.”

The four of them were in his father’s black Cadillac, Demeter had thankfully stayed back at the farm to do Jason’s chores for him. His father was driving, which was a slight shock for Nico. He figured Jules Albert would have chauffeured them, but Hades had insisted that he drive his son to his first day of school. Jason had laughed at his embarrassment, but before Nico could even so much as glare at the son of Jupiter, Percy punched the blond in the shoulder.

“LaMoille Community High School,” the lord of the dead answered as the car hit yet another pothole down the gravel road. “It’s not my first choice, but the only private schools in the area are off limits.” The lord of the dead cringed as a piece of loose gravel hit the Cadillac’s windshield.

“I thought we would be going to Mendota? Isn’t that the closest town?” the blond asked from the back seat.

“Technically LaMoille is the closest and Demeter’s farm falls into the school’s zoning.”

Now Nico was confused. He had never heard of LaMoille and had never even seen a town or city that was nearby. Granted he had only left the farm once before, but surely he would have remembered seeing another town along the way. “How big is this place?” he asked.

Hades sighed. “The town has maybe five hundred souls on a good day. The school has around eighty students.”

“In each class?” He thought back to his brief stay at Westover. The school boasted a student body of around two hundred students, and been rather claustrophobic. He could only imagine what it would be like to have over three hundred juvenile delinquents around him.

“No. Eighty students total,” his father corrected.

“Eighty? That’s like twenty kids per year?” What is this place? A one room schoolhouse?

“Small class sizes improve student-teacher interaction and result in better grades,” his father explained. “And I expect As.” He turned around from the driver’s seat to look the three of them in the eye. “From all of you.”

“Yes sir,” Jason gulped.

“As for your second question Grace, I am Azreal di Angelo, CEO of DOA records, Nico is of course my son, and you and Jackson are my wards.”

“Cool, I’ve always wanted to be Robin. When do we start protecting Gotham?” Jason snickered.

Nico and Percy chuckled, while the lord of the dead rolled his eyes.
“This is… not what I expected,” the son of Jupiter said. Confusion written all over his face.

The school was unlike any Nico had ever seen. While Westover had been a grand gothic style campus, LaMoille was decidedly not. It was a simple two story brick building built into the side of a hill, with a large stone staircase at the main entrance. Behind the school in a little valley was a large patch of open land containing a football and track field, a small green house, and several set of bleachers built into the hillside.

What was truly strange though was the parking lot. Most of the television shows Nico and Jason had watched depicted the school parking lot as the place where students showed off their brand new expensive vehicles their parents had bought them. This lot was the complete opposite of that. It mostly consisted of rusted out cars, jacked-up pickup trucks, and even a couple of tractors.

Nico hummed in agreement. “I think we wasted our time Grace,” he said as he climbed out of the black Cadillac.

“Come along now,” his father said as he slammed the driver’s door. “It’s two minutes until eight and we are expected at eight.” The lord of the dead headed for the large set of stairs and began to climb them two at a time.

Nico groaned. He is way too excited for this. He’s acting like he’s excited to get rid of us…. His thoughts were interrupted when he felt two arms wrap around his shoulders. One was Percy’s and the other was of course Jason’s.

“Well Neeks, it looks like our dad is set on embarrassing us,” Jason chuckled.

Nico smiled. “Yeah. I guess he is.”

“Jason you said real students don’t look like the ones on the television,” he hissed at the blond. Jason chuckled and rubbed the back of his neck. “Yeah, well they don’t. These guys are just-“

“Laistrygonian giants,” he finished.

The three of demigods stood together near the school’s main entrance while Hades was talking to an ancient receptionist. The school appeared to have one main hallway and one small offshoot that lead to the stairway to the lower level. The problem with having only one hallway was every student seemed to be looking right at them.

And what students they were! The smallest guy Nico had seen so far was almost six feet tall and had to weigh at least two hundred pounds of pure muscle. The women on the other hand all reminded the young son of Hades of Reyna, all of them beautiful but tough.

“They’re farmers Neeks. They’ve been working hard since they could walk,” Jason whispered in his ear.

“I’ll remember that when they’re grinding your bones into flour,” he hissed. I could just shadow travel out of here right now. I could go to Venice and wait for this whole thing to blow over. I could
get a job taking tourists around on a gondola. He thought he had a sound plan until he looked over at Percy.

He couldn’t leave his friends. Not when the three of them were all that remained of Camp Half-Blood. I wonder how Hazel is doing.

“Alright boys,” his father said interrupting his thoughts of Hazel. “This is your new vice-principal Mr.-“

“Ziggler, but most people call me Mr. Z,” said a rather tall, muscular man that he was just now noticing. Nico stared in awe, wondering how the man in front of him could possibly be vice principal. The shows he watched with Jason and Percy always depicted administrators as short fat bald men who wore ugly suits.

This guys was none of those things.

He was tall and muscular, with thick brown hair that was slicked back, and deep penetrated blue eyes. Instead of a suit and tie, he wore black athletic shorts with a matching black Under Armor T-shirt.

The vice-principal held out his hand and said in his deep voice, “It’s nice to meet you all.”

Jason grabbed his hand and shook it. “It’s nice to meet you too. I’m Jason, this is Percy, and the drooling Italian here is Nico.”

His jaw fell open as he stared at his now former best friend in horror. Did he just out me? It felt like his chest was being crushed by serpent and he struggled to breathe. He slowly turned to look at the man, who he was sure would be disgusted by him.

“Yeah, I’m usually groggy in the morning myself,” the man laughed. “Now if you three would follow me down to the library, where we set up a nice quiet area for the three of you.”

What?

“Mr. di Angelo, you can pick them up around noon,” Ziggler quickly added.

With that his father bid them farewell (which really embarrassed him) and the three began to follow the athletic administrator. As they weaved their way around the students that were mingling in the hall before class, Nico tried his best to ignore the dread he felt and the stares from his would be classmates as they walked by.

It’s because we’re new. That’s why they’re staring. They don’t know, he assured himself.

“So besides being your vice principal, I’m also the school’s history teacher and athletics director,” Mr. Z explained as he held the door open to the small library for the three of them. “I really recommend taking at least one class with me. In World History we’re starting World War Two soon so we’ll be watching Saving Private Ryan for a week.”

He directed the three of them to separate tables that each had a test booklet and a sheet of paper to fill in their answers. Nico vaguely remembered taken a test like this at Westover and how he was disappointed that when he had finally filled in his answers the dots didn’t make a pattern or hidden image.

Nico sat at the middle table with Percy to his left and Jason to his right. Percy looked bored, while Jason looked strangely pale.
“Alright shall we get started?” the history teacher asked as he sat down at a table that overlooked the three of them. He reclined back in the wooden chair and placed his feet on the table and wrapped his hands behind his head. “Pretty standard procedure here. You’ll have three hours to finish this test which is composed of questions about English, Mathematics, Science, and Reading comprehension.”

His stomach clenched and he could swear on the river Styx that he heard Jason and Percy gulp.

“Each section is weighted differently with math having the greatest weight. You have been provided with an appropriate calculator that lacks graphing capabilities.”

What does that even mean?

“If you don’t know the answer to a problem do not leave it blank. There is no penalty for guessing,” the teacher paused. “How would we even know? That makes no damn sense… Oops! Sorry about the language,” he chuckled. “Each section is composed of multiple questions that increase in difficulty as you progress. In other words, don’t panic if you’re getting to the end and sounds way over your head.”

This does not bode well. For any of us…

“I’ll be watching you take the test to ensure that no cheating takes place. Not that it could be done really. Each test is different, so chances are if you copy your brother’s you’re going to crash and burn.” He lowered one arm and checked his watch. “It’s currently eight fifteen and you will have three hours to finish. Any questions before we begin?”

Jason timidly raised his hand.

“Yes, uh Jason was it?”

The blond nodded. “When will get our results?”

“Good question. I’ll throw your answer sheets into the Scantron, so we’ll discuss them with your dad before you guys leave.” The older man shrugged. “We’ll get you placed and signed up for classes. Does that answer your question?”

Jason nodded. “Yeah. Thanks.”

“No problem. Alright you may begin.”

Nico thought the reading portion of the exam was a joke. All he had to do was read a short story and then answer a few questions about what he had just read. There should be no reason why anyone would struggle with that.

Sure, his dyslexia would start to act up, but he had learned a few tricks over the years to help overcome it. He found that if he changed the orientation of the paper every few minutes it would stop the letters from moving around too much. If it got too much he would rotate the paper completely, forcing him to read it upside down. It took a little extra time to read, but it was still faster than struggling through letters doing the hokey pokey.
He felt a tinge of pride as he filled in his last answer. “Alright science. Let’s see what you got,” he whispered to himself.

Science passed almost as fast and easy as reading.

It was very similar to reading, but the questions would ask about what could be concluded by observation and what reasonable assumptions could be made.

A population of rare African crickets that only eats a certain plant was observed to double its population every thirty days. However, it was also observed that each generation was smaller in size than the previous. What could be a possible reason for the decrease in size?

A) An increase in predators are eating the crickets before they reach maturity.

B) Deforestation has reduced the size of their habitat.

C) There is a limited food supply for an ever growing population.

D) All of the above.

He quickly scratched out the first two choices. The brief statement made no mention of predators or deforestation, so those two choices were purely speculative.

It has to be C. The problem mentioned they only ate one plant, so if there is a limited food supply and an ever increasing population that means each bug would be forced to eat less. And since I eliminated the first two choices that means D is out as well.

He filled in his choice and moved on to the next question.

English had never been his subject. He could honestly say he didn’t know a preposition from a predicate. After all, he was just a simple farmer from Connecticut.

He chuckled silently at his own joke. He was a poet, and he didn’t even realize it.

Thankfully he could understand many of the finer points of the English language. Seventy plus years in the Lotus had exposed him to numerous people who all had different ways of speaking.

And then there was Mythomagic. A children’s game that was so overly complicated that one almost needed a law degree to understand it. Years of arguing about what a card or figurine’s effect meant gave him an almost Faustian way of manipulated words to suit his needs.
John needs to prepare the proper dosage of morphine for a patient who weighs 300lbs. If the recommended dosage of morphine is 3mL per 50lbs, how much morphine should John give to his patient?

A) 8lbs

B) 500mL

C) 150mL

D) 18mL

Nico marked D immediately.

This was something he actually had experience with!

When he had first started helping Will in the infirmary, his then future boyfriend had taught him how to calculate the appropriate dosages of the various mortal drugs that were used. He had done this so often that the calculations were almost second nature to him now.

He said a silent thank you to Will and turned the page.

True to Ziggler’s word, the test did get harder.

He was on the last problem and it seemed impossible at first glance.

A Slurpee is flowing out the bottom of a cup at a constant rate of 0.1 cm$^3$/s. The cup is in the shape of a right circular cone. The height of the cup is 12 cm and the cup (when full) holds a total of 36π cm$^3$ of Slurpee. Determine the rate at which the height of the remaining Slurpee changes at the instant there are exactly 8π cm$^3$ of Slurpee remaining in the cup. The volume of a right cylinder is $V = (\pi/3)*(r^2)*h$. Please show all your work.

Unlike every other problem this one had no choices to choose from. Instead, he was given a blank sheet of paper with the equation for volume at the top.

Alright don’t panic. This isn’t impossible, just… difficult. Let’s start by writing down what we know for sure. The volume of the cone is 36 and the height is 12. That’s two out of three values for the equation. It would probably be a good idea to find what the radius of the cone is…

He did the mental math to find the missing radius, completely ignoring the calculator. He had briefly tried to use it on some of the earlier problems, but he felt that it was slowing him down too much. He double checked his results and concluded that the radius was 3 cm.

Okay the problem says that the height is changing from the leak and so is the volume. The radius appears to be a constant. He scratched the back of his head, thinking hard on what to do next. The cone is a trick! I need to think of this as two triangles! One that is the full size of the cup and one that is changing with the leak.
He thought back to the time he accidently summoned the ghost of Sir Isaac Newton and the many lectures he had to endure until he had figured out how to send the ghost back down to the underworld.

*The triangles are similar! There’s now a new radius and height, but they’re proportional to the old values!*

He hastily scribbled down: \( r/3 = h/12 \), then simplified it to \( r = h/4 \).

*Okay I know the radius and height are going to changing as the volume decreases. The problem is asking me for the change in height at a certain volume. So, I guess I should substitute radius for height.*

He wrote down \( V = \left(\frac{\pi}{3}\right)h^2 \cdot h \), then simplified the equation down to \( V = \left(\frac{\pi}{48}\right)h^3 \).

*Okay, that will give me the volume at a certain height, or vice versa. But that doesn’t tell me the change. Time has to come into this somewhere right?*

He looked back at the problem and realized he had overlooked a given value. The problem wanted to find the change in height when the cup had 8 cm\(^3\) of Slurpee left. He quickly rearranged his equation to solve for height instead of volume. He groaned when he realized he would have to deal with a cubed root, those were always a pain to do. When he evaluated for height while the volume was 8, he got:

\[ h = 7.2685 \]

He thought long and hard to Newton’s torturous lectures and realized that what the old English windbag had been blabbering on about was exactly what he needed. *He called it the derivative, I think. It finds the rate of change of something. So here I’m going to want to find it with respect to time, and I’m working with volume and height.*

He rewrote his original equation of \( V = \left(\frac{\pi}{48}\right)h^3 \) and racked his brain for the notation the physicist had used.

*There was a d, and then a dt for time. Also there was that simple rule for this, multiply the equation by the exponent on h and then decrease the value of the exponent by one. Yeah, that sounds right…*

\[ \frac{dV}{dt} = \left(\frac{\pi}{16}\right)h^2 \cdot \frac{dh}{dt} \]

Then reworked it again to:

\[ \frac{dh}{dt} = \frac{16 \cdot \frac{dV}{dt}}{\pi \cdot h^2} \]

*I think I’ve got this!* He then replaced \( h \) with the value he had calculated before.

\[ \frac{dh}{dt} = \frac{16 \cdot -0.1}{165.974} \]

*They told me that the change in volume in the problem, and it’s loosing Slurpee so that should mean its negative. So \( \frac{dV}{dt} \) is equal to -0.1. So…*

\[ \frac{dh}{dt} = (16 \cdot -0.1)/(165.974) \]

*Which reduces down to…*

\[ \frac{Dh}{dt} = -0.00964 \]
He circled his answer multiple times. He felt so proud of himself! Who would have thought that summoning the wrong ghost would help him later on in life?

He stood up from the table and startled everyone around him. As he walked up to the now asleep vice-principal, from the corner of his eye he saw Jason looking at him with confusion written all over his face.

He gently set the paper in front of his future teacher and cleared his throat. “Um sir? I finished.”

The fit man lurched forward in his chair, almost falling over in the process. “Huh what?” He rubbed his eyes and looked at the clock on the wall. “Wow still got an half an hour left. Sure you don’t want to look it over Nick?”

“Nico.”

“Oh, sorry. Still you sure you want to hand this in?” he asked as he set his feet back down on the floor.

Nico shrugged. He had double checked every problem as he went, so what was the point of doing it again? “I’m sure.”

“Okay. Feel free to use the restroom, grab a book to read, or just take a nap until the other two are done.”

Percy was the second to finish with five minutes to spare.

Jason meanwhile had used every minute and Ziggler had to almost wrestle the test away from the blond when time was up.

The three of them, plus his father, now sat in the vice-principal’s office waiting for the test results. Percy looked bored out of his mind and kept playing with the zipper on his jacket. Jason though was sweating profusely and had a thousand yard stare, while muttering “They’re going to send me back to kindergarten” over and over again.

Nico though was actually anxious to see his results. He felt that he had done well enough. He was fifteen which meant he should be freshman and he felt that he had done well enough to be placed there.

The door to the small office opened and Mr. Z stepped in carrying a small envelope in hand. He sat down in the chair behind his desk, and plopped his feet up. “Alright you guys ready for this?”

“I’m very interested to see how they did,” said the lord of the dead as he looked his son in the eye.

Ziggler smiled. “Oh I think you’ll be pretty happy with the results.” He removed a sheet of paper from the envelope in his hand. “Alright in no particular order here…”

Nico sat forward, his foot was bouncing off the floor faster than Hermes.

“Alright let’s see here… Mr. Jackson! You scored a bit low on English and math, average on reading, and a little bit above average on science.” He clicked his tongue. “I see no reason why you shouldn’t be a senior. I can’t wait to see you at graduation.”
Percy shrugged and gave the older man a thumbs up.

“Doesn’t talk much does he?” Ziggler chuckled. “Alright next is… Mr. Grace! Slightly below average on English, but everything else falls with the acceptable range for a Junior. Looks like you’re stuck with me here for another year,” he laughed.

“You mean I’m not going back to kindergarten?” the blond asked. His eyes as wide as saucers.

Ziggler’s brow furrowed and he shook his head. “No. Why would you even think that?”

“Uh, test anxiety I guess?” Jason awkwardly chuckled, before staring down at his own feet.

“Well I guess we know who is next then, don’t we?” the teacher asked as he wiggled his eyebrows at Nico.

“This one is actually interesting.”

Nico felt as if his stomach and heart had swapped places, as if they were in some kind of exchange program. I thought I did well! Oh gods! They’re going to send me off to someplace horrible!

“Now calm down, it’s nothing bad.”

“It better not be,” his father grumbled next to him.

“I had to run this by Obendorf, our math teacher, twice. See, usually students only get the first fifteen or so problems of the math section right before they start to go downhill.”

Nico gulped.

“After problem twenty kids rarely get a question correct unless by luck. Your son here answered all fifty problems correctly.”

All eyes turned to him. His father and Percy were wearing matching smirks, and Jason’s jaw was on the floor.

“No offense, but I thought that maybe you were just extremely lucky. Like sold-your-soul-to-the-devil kind of lucky. After all, you barely touched your calculator. But then I saw that you wrote your work down for all the problems in the test booklet and the last problem. Kid, you scored a perfect in math.”

He swallowed. “What?”

“I said you did perfect. The last five problems on this test were advanced calculus problems, well beyond what a freshman or even a senior would be expected to know.”

“So I’m good at math?”

“Well yeah, but here’s the other thing: you scored perfectly in the other three sections as well.”

“So?”

“Kid, I don’t know what we can honestly offer you here. So if you’re dad allows it, I see no reason why you shouldn’t have a senior standing.” He smiled at Nico. “Looks like I’ll be seeing you at graduation this year. That is if your father agrees.”

The four of them looked at the god of the underworld, eagerly awaiting his decision.
At first his father smiled like a cat who had just eaten a canary. Then he jumped up from his seat, fists raised in the air. “Of course I’m going to consent!” he laughed maniacally. “Now I can finally tell my brothers to suck my –“

Chapter End Notes

So yeah, Nico's really smart.
I've kind of been hinting at that for awhile now.
It's always been my head canon that Nico has learned more than most demigods and people. He has a lot of life experience from living on his own, he's learned a lot from working with Will, and the souls of the underworld are always trying to chat with him about topics they loved in life, so naturally things have rubbed off on him.

Hades is ecstatic at this news.
Now he can brag that not only was his son instrumental in two wars, but is brilliant in the mortal world as well.
Also he now has even more motivation to free Olympus.

Would anyone care to guess why Percy didn't cover up his bandages?
It's definitely something Percy would do :)

Maybe I'm too cruel to Jason.
His ordeal with Disciplina, his upcoming trip with Poseidon, and now test anxiety.
Maybe he deserves a break.... NAH!!!

Okay, we've had some fluff/slice of life stuff for a couple chapters now, time for some horrors!
Up next we have several events going on simultaneously, so I'm not sure what order I'm going to post them in.
So expect to see either Piper, Hades, or a familiar face next....

Did you have some feelings about what you just read? Please leave a kudos!

Questions, concerns, praise, cookie recipes, futile attempts to save a someone's life?
Leave a comment!

Kudos and comments are like fine wine to me!

So until next time,
Thank you all for reading! You're beautiful babe!
The sun had just begun to set for the East coast, when the lord of the dead stepped out of the shadows into a deserted scrap yard.

*Well, nearly deserted.*

Before him stood a tall figure wrapped in a canvas tarp huddled over a small fire in a rusted barrel.

He cleared his throat to alert the other of his presence before he approached the fire. The figure before him could possibly have the answers he desperately seeked to who or what was behind the attacks on his pantheon. The problem was though they were strictly forbidden from interacting with one another by the fates themselves.

“You know we’re not supposed to meet, oh lord of the dead,” the cloaked figure chuckled. “It’s against the rules.”

“I was under the impression you didn’t follow the rules,” he shot back.

“Oh no, I was always the obedient one. I just liked to point out the flaws. Use the occasional loophole to my advantage. That sort of thing.” The figure gave a raspy laugh. “You know, mischief.”

“Your mischief resulted in a blind man murdering another,” he responded with an even voice.

“Oh we all had a good laugh at that!” The figure paused and cocked its head to the side. “Well I did anyway. In fact I still am!” The figure bent over and laughed like a hyena.

It takes a lot for something to make him feel uneasy. Typhon escaping, Gaea rising, and Demeter threatening to move to the underworld full time were his top three, but now this short exchange had him on guard.

“I haven’t laughed that hard in over a month. Now why don’t you throw something on the fire and tell me the reason why you’re tempting your fates by being here.”

Feeling a bit snarky, he conjured up a thick wad of hundreds and tossed them into the hungry fire. It briefly flared up, illuminating the figures scarred face. “I think you need some chap stick.”

“Ha ha ha! Like I haven’t heard that one a million times already.”
He couldn’t help but smirk. “The reason I’m here is very simple: tell me what happened.”

“And why should I do that?”

With speed that would impress even Hermes, he grabbed the figure by its collar and slammed it into a stack of old rusted cars. “Because this is bigger than one pantheon! Whatever is causing this is only going to increase in power the longer we do nothing!”

The figure seemed to consider his words for a moment before it nodded. “I guess you have a point there death-breath. After all, this is seriously setting back Ragnarok.”

“I’m glad we’ve reached an understanding. Loki.” He released the Norse god of lies from his grip, dropping him to the cold muddy earth.

“I’m glad too,” croaked the Jotun as he rubbed his neck. “I suppose the best place to start would be the beginning.”

He rolled his eyes. He did not understand why most gods needed to state the obvious. “That would be nice.”

The silver-tongued god pushed himself up from the ground and brushed himself off. “I had just managed to send this beautiful reflection you see before you up Yggdrasil, with the purpose of tricking that Chase brat—”

“Annabeth Chase?” he blurted out.

“Who? No, Magnus. You got a Chase too in Greek town?”

“We did.”

“Huh, must be a common name,” the god shrugged. “Now where was I before I was so rudely interrupted? Oh yes! I was going to get under that Kurt Cobain looking brat’s skin and have him and my treacherous daughter lead an army of giants to Asgard’s borders.”

“And that didn’t work out.”

The norsk through his arms wide, releasing the canvas tarp form his body. “You think?!”

In the dim light of the fire Hades got his first real look at the god. His hair may have been a dirty blond at one point, but now it was just dirty. His hair was caked with mud and bits and pieces of garbage had woven themselves into his locks. He had noticed the god’s disgusting lips earlier, but he hadn’t noticed the almost chemical like burns that lined his angular face.

“I had planned to show up outside that tacky hotel and lure the boy outside. I was actually even going to try something new: I was going to be direct to indirectly achieve my goal. You follow me?”

“Not really, and I don’t think I really care to.”

“No one appreciates my art,” Loki pouted. “Before that though there was this mortal woman in the suburbs that was in dire need of my attention.”

Hades rolled his eyes. “Some things are universal I guess.”

“Oh like you are any better! How many hundreds of children have you had over the millennia?”

Hades clenched his fists. He hated when people questioned his fidelity. Unlike most of his kind he
could control his urges. Unlike most he could actually name all of his children. “I’ve had five children. Three of which were born in the last one hundred years.”

“Terrible with women huh?”

“Just get on with your story.”

The god of lies stuck out his tongue before continuing. “So after she made me a lovely breakfast in bed, I decided since that it was a lovely day, and since Sigyn was really on point with the venom bucket, I’d walk into Boston proper.”

“But you couldn’t. Could you?”

“Felt like I was being flayed alive. Worst pain I’ve ever felt in all of my lives. My first thought was that of course old one-eye had used his runes to make some kind of barrier to keep me out.”

Like any sane, rational being would do.

“Two thing though made me drop that conclusion real fast. Like Babe Ruth hitting a homer fast.”

Now he had his full attention. “Oh?”

“First off, I couldn’t feel myself anymore. No matter what I do I am bound to that accursed rock, while my beloved Sigyn tries to stop the serpent’s venom from dripping on my face.” He gestured to the burns that marred his face. “But I couldn’t, and still can’t, feel that part of me anymore. I am cut off from my beautiful self! I can’t shape shift or even change my gender anymore! Do you know what it’s like to be stuck in the same body day after day?!”

He shrugged. “I’m comfortable with the skin I’m in.”

“Well I’m not! I am a creature of change! This is driving me mad!”

“I thought you were already mad?”

“Touché,” the homeless god chuckled, his previous outburst seemingly forgotten. “Now for the second reason I know Odin wasn’t behind it is a dead giveaway: Yggdrasil is dying.”

Now that is interesting. As far as he could tell, Olympus was for the most part fine. No gods could go in or seemingly come out, but judging by the mortal news footage it was fine. But why would a tree-Oh! Of course!

“You can barely see it anymore!” the trickster groaned. “Granted, you had to know how to see it, but now all you can is stars! STARS!” The god fell to the ground and clutched his head screaming. “This wasn’t how it was supposed to end!”

“But who did this?” he asked, trying to keep the conversation on track.

The vagrant god ignored him and continued to rock back and forth on the ground. “I was to have my moment of triumph! My beautiful boy was to devour Odin! Thor and my serpent were to kill each other! Where is the fire?! Where is-”

Growing tired of the god’s shrieking, Hades slapped the god across the face. This is turning into another dead end…

The god clutched its jaw. “Thanks, I needed that. I think you knocked a molar loose though,” Loki chuckled. “Maybe this is a good thing. A new start. It’s Ragnarok without the death of me or my
children. Well the important ones anyway.”

“Come again?”

Loki stood up and held his hands over the fire. “I can still feel Jormungandr and Fenrir out there. Who knows, my bonds slipped somewhat so maybe Fenrir’s will as well! And without Thor, Jormungandr has nothing to fear anymore! We can have our own little family reunion! Ragnarok without consequence!”

If Hades wasn’t feeling uneasy before, he was now. Two forces of destruction potentially left unchecked? No, that’s impossible. Nature wouldn’t allow such an imbalance. But no matter how he tried to rationalize it, he was still worried. “I’ll ask again: who did this?”

Loki picked up the tattered tarp and wrapped it around his shoulders again. “Huh? Oh! I have no clue. The Egyptians, the Aztecs, Keith Richards? All seem just as equally likely and just as equally unlikely.” The god smirked and looked him in the eye. “Or maybe it was you.”

“Like I haven’t heard that one before,” he scoffed. Is my reputation really that bad? Do I need a public relations department now? He thought of the legions of lawyers that were currently being tortured in the underworld. Perhaps now was the time to put them to work…

“Or maybe it was the Njords in a last ditch effort to save themselves. Honestly though, which is something I’d thought I’d never actually mean, it could be anyone.” The silver tongued god shrugged.

Hades sighed and threw another wad of cash into the fire. “I thank you for your time Loki. This has been most… enlightening.”

Loki bowed deeply, with one hand on his chest. “It was my pleasure Lord Hades.”

Hades stepped back from the fire and into the shadows, only to reappear in his private study.

He sat down at his new onyx desk and pondered what he had learned. Nothing. Absolutely Nothing. Every major pantheon that called North America home was facing the same crisis. Their children were either disappearing or being ruthlessly exterminated and their major gods were cut off from the outside world.

It seemed that Poseidon, Demeter, Artemis, himself, and now Loki were the only major gods that were still free. But with Loki merely an echo of his real self, it was only the Greeks who had any form of major power to keep the lesser gods in order.

More or less.

He liked to pride himself on knowing that the gods and goddesses of the underworld were completely loyal to him. Demeter as much as he hated to admit it, also did a fine job keeping the nature deities in line.

Poseidon on the other hand…

It was no secret that his younger brother was in a constant struggle to maintain order in his realm. The man couldn’t even remember the names of all his godly children and he was expected to keep everything ship shape? His brother would blame his conflict with Oceanus during the Titan war as the root of his troubles, but when Kronos reappeared every hundred years or so, you would think he would learn to adapt by now.
This is a nightmare. How are the three of us going to maintain the natural order?

He pushed aside those thoughts for now and focused on the day’s events.

My son skipped not one, but almost four years of schooling. He reclined back in his overstuffed chair and chuckled. How many gods can say that about their children? Athena has had several that have skipped a grade, but never multiple at once. Zeus’ kids tend to be all muscle and no brain, Jason being the exception that proves the rule. And if it wasn’t for Poseidon’s spawn’s ability to breathe underwater, they would have all drowned in the rain.

He opened a drawer in his desk and pulled out an old photograph. The edges were worn and the paper was turning yellow with age, but it was his most prized possession: the only photo of him, Maria, Bianca, and Nico together as a family.

Maria, you would be so proud of our little bambino.

Chapter End Notes

A short, but important chapter.
Lots of clues, but no answers. (As is my way)

Ah Loki, it seems fitting that he’s now a homeless bum on the outskirts of Boston. Maybe if you treated your baby mamas better you would have a place to stay. Or just not be a dick to Randolph for gods know how many years.

We got to see family man Hades again!
I had actually not planned that, it just kinda happened :)
The good news is we will see more of that in the future!
Yay fluff and stuff!

Got some bad news for you guys though....
Next chapter is Piper.
You'll get to see what going on with her on the same night that our boys took their exams.
Who knows what will happen?
*evil laugh*

Did you like what you just read? Leave a kudos then!

Thoughts, questions, observations, cookie recipes, just feeling lonely? Leave a comment!

Kudos and comments are the only things that keep the demons in me at bay!

Well until next time,
Thanks for reading! You guys are amazing!
Chapter Summary

Warnings: canon(ish) violence, death

Tonight:

Piper has a chill day.

The Princess Bride is always the perfect movie.

Veggie pizza!

Chapter Notes

Hey guys!

Thanks for all the kudos and comments! I love hearing from you guys!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There were many perks to being home schooled and having an ever busy movie star for a father.

For one thing, having an aura as an instructor lead to many interesting lessons. How cool was it that Mellie could actually show her how the jet-stream worked? Or that she could actually show Piper the step-by-step process on how snowflakes formed?

Or if coach was in town, he would spar with her for hours on end so that she wouldn’t be rusty when she went back to camp for the summer. Who knew that the old goat was actually proficient at kung fu? Like roundhouse kicks and chopping through plywood proficient!

But all that paled in comparison to when she had the house all to herself. Where no one was around to tell her what to do or how to behave. The most glorious of days when she could walk around without pants!

“This is absolutely the best,” she sighed in contentment. “This is Elysium. No this is better than Elysium because I’m pretty sure pants are required down there,” she said to no one in particular. “I’ll have to talk to Nico about that. Maybe he can get me like pass from his dad.”

She was currently sprawled out on her favorite couch in the living room, an old, beaten-down, brown leather couch that was one of the few things they had taken from Grandpa Tom’s place. She had one arm tucked comfortably behind her head, while the other was hanging off the couch clutching the remote for the TV.

“I did absolutely nothing today, and it feels sooo good,” she purred as she stretched out. She made sure Katoptris was within reach before she flicked on the massive TV. When she had first been told the stories of monsters popping out of electronic devices, she had been skeptical at best. But after
hearing it from multiple campers in both camps, she always made sure to have her dagger handy at home.

She waited a few tense seconds before she decided that a gorgon wasn’t going to jump out and scare her, before she began to flip through the channels.

Nothing on HBO, Starz, Showtime, or Cinemax? Am I going to have to switch over to Netflix? She lifted her head and spotted the PS3 controller that she used for her streaming purposes was on the other side of the couch.

I’ve gone too far to turn back now. Farewell old friend!

She spent the next couple minutes absentmindedly searching for something to watch before she stumbled upon The Princess Bride.

She pumped her fist in the air. “Yes!”

Thankfully she hadn’t missed much. Currently Westley was scaling the Cliffs of Insanity in pursuit of his one true love, Buttercup. Inigo Montoya (who may have been her first crush) was offering to toss down a rope, and was promising not to kill Westley before he got to the top.

I wonder if Jason would do that for me, she wondered. Well of course he would try, but Sparky doesn’t exactly have the best track record for staying awake in times of crisis… Realistically I’d end up saving myself and him.

She smirked.

I don’t need no man to save me.

Piper bolted straight up on the couch. “Huh? What?” she asked as she rubbed the drool off the side of her face with her arm. She looked around and realized she must have fallen asleep at some point during the movie.

She stood up from Grandpa Tom’s couch and yawned while stretching. As she cracked her neck (It feels so good! Who cares what Solace says!), she looked outside and saw that she must have been asleep for some time. The sun had set hours ago, and what passed for the night sky in Los Angeles had settled over the valley.

I think I’ll grab a piece of cold pizza from the fridge and then this daughter of Aphrodite is going to bed.

She scooped up her dagger from the coffee table and twirled it around as she made her way to the kitchen.
She was making her way back to her room carrying a slice of veggie pizza in her teeth, a bag of carrot sticks under one arm, a two liter of Mountain Dew under the other, and a jar of jalapeno humus in hand, when she noticed something strange out of the corner of her eye.

“Rut da wreck?” she murmured over the slice of pizza.

There on the hallway wall was one of the numerous LCD security consoles that filled the house. What caught her attention was the normally green LED was blinking red. She took a step closer and noticed that “SYSTEM DISARMED” was scrolling slowly across the display.

Now Piper imagined that most people would write this off as them forgetting to turn on the system or that the system was undergoing some kind of maintenance, but Piper knew better.

After an incident with a deranged fan a couple years ago, her dad had gone out and bought the best security system on the market.

A system that would re-arm itself every hour.

A system that when upgrading would call for a team of trained security guards to watch over the house until it finished.

A system that Piper set off at least twice a day.

“Rat Raint rood....” Her father had drilled into her that if there was ever even the possibility of a home intruder that she should get into the panic room that was hidden inside her closet. She readjusted the food she was carrying and made a mad dash for her room.

*I am not going to wait for the cops on an empty stomach!*

When she rounded the corner into her room, she skidded to an immediate stop.

*Oh, this isn’t good…*

There standing in the middle of her room, was what she assumed was a man dressed in full black tactical combat gear with an automatic weapon aimed at her chest.

*Of course dad would get the gun nut for a stalker.* She spat out the slice of cold pizza and gave the man(?) her best smile. *My charm speak worked on that car salesman, so it should work here.*

“Hey there handsome! You must be looking for my dad! Why don’t you sit down and wait for him to get home,” she poured her charm speak into every syllable.

The militarized stalker stayed where he stood.

“I said: Why don’t you sit down and wait.”

This time the figure responded by removing one hand from his weapon and tapping the side of his helmet, then doing the universal gesture for “I can’t hear you”.

*Oh shit…*

So here she was, in her room with a murderous stalker, her arms full of food, and she wasn’t wearing any pants.

*I regret nothing.*
She tossed the humus at her would-be killer’s head, which it thankfully connected with, smearing the delicious dip all over the guy’s goggles. She quickly followed with the Mountain Dew which knocked the guy off balance.

Taking advantage of the situation, she dropped the rest of her food and hightailed it out of there.

*I’ll go to Mr. Nugent’s! He’s got bigger guns than this guy!*

She made it to the master staircase when the world felt *wrong*. She was halfway down the staircase, but she seemed to not be making any progress. No matter how many steps she ran down she was always at the halfway point.

“Hello there Piper,” said a smooth silky voice.

At the bottom of the staircase stood an absolutely gorgeous raven haired woman. She was wearing combat gear like the guy she had left upstairs, but along the sleeves and legs pieces of fabric were cut out, exposing a generous amount of tattooed skin.

*Okay, she was not there a moment ago!*

“You don’t remember me, but we met last week,” she said as she raised a hand to her face to inspect her nails.

“That’s nice an all scary lady, but I got to go!” she cried as she jumped to her feet and took off for the main door. She threw open the grand French doors, only to see two more armed men. She promptly slammed the door shut and ran back into the main hall.

“We aren’t going to hurt you,” the woman said, who was now floating above the staircase. “When I realized what you were capable of I convinced my boss to keep you alive.” She then said something under her breath that Piper was pretty sure was: for now.

Piper took a left at the living room, heading towards Mellie’s room. Mellie had a private patio that she could use to escape to—where?

*Even if those guys are mortals, that lady is clearly some kind monster! Even if those other guys are monsters, I’m not bringing a knife to a gun fight!*

“I should’ve taken the shotgun!” she shouted in frustration, as she skidded into the aura’s room. “Oh for fucks sake!” There reclined on the bed reading a magazine, was the witch bitch.

“This is just getting silly,” she sighed, turning a page in one of Mellie’s parenting magazines. “There’s an awful lot of new parenting books here. Are you expecting?” she asked, one perfect eyebrow raised.

“Ew! Gods no!” Piper spat. She slowly pulled Katoptris from her waistband and readied herself to lunge at the woman.

“That isn’t going to work. I may have been a follower of Hecate, but I’m still mortal,” the woman sighed as she tore a coupon from one of the pages.
“That’s just what you’d say if it would work!”

“Oh maybe I said that to make you think that it would work because otherwise you’d think it wouldn’t work when really it would work.” The woman locked eyes with Piper, a small smile on her lips.

Piper scratched her head. “Wait, what?”

The raven haired beauty rolled her eyes and snapped her fingers. Instantly Katoptris was in her hands.

“Give that back,” Piper snarled, her voice once again dripping with charm speak.

“Oh shut it,” the woman sighed. She then held one arm under the dagger’s tip. “Watch.” She slammed the dagger down, and Piper flinched before she noticed that the blade had passed harmlessly through the woman. “See? No effect!”

Okay so my weapon is useless and so is my charm speak. Looks like there’s only one thing to do…

“Bye!” she cried as ran head first into the sliding glass doors. There was a momentary resistance, but then she felt the glass shatter around her into a million little pieces, slicing her as she went through. She ignored the pain of the tiny flecks of glass that embedded themselves into the soles of her feet.

She leapt over the small hedges that separated the patio from the rest of yard and took off in a dead sprint. She did her best to ignore the pain of the tiny flecks of glass that had embedded themselves into the soles of her feet, but it still slowed her down.

She was almost to the rear gate when three more combat ready figures stepped out of the shadows, each with their guns trained on her.

This is suicide, but it’s all I’ve got!

Instead of running away like before, she pumped her legs even faster. Then right before she impacted with the guard she lowered herself and tackled the wannabe SWAT guy’s legs, knocking him to the ground.

The blow may have staggered her too, but she didn’t stop running. She was only a few yards away from the gate, when the first shots rang out from behind her.

Shit! Please be storm troopers! Please be storm troopers! She thought as she covered her head with her arms.

When she got to the gate she made herself as small a target a possible as she frantically entered her pass code.

0… 7… 0… 1…

She was awarded by the sound of the gate’s lock clicking open and the LED blinking from red to green. She threw the wrought iron gate open and ran out into the middle of the street, praying that her gun-nut of a neighbor was home.

But like before on the staircase, no matter how fast she ran, the distance stayed constant.

Oh not this shit again!

“Well I think this has gone on long enough,” her mysterious magical stalker sighed, as she appeared
out of nowhere.

Piper stopped running in place. It was worthless to expend what little energy she had left on a Sisyphean task.

Stay calm. This is just like when Khione attacked the Argo. I just need to distract them until I can think of something...

Piper threw her hands in the air and hung her head. “You’re right,” she sighed. “But I got to know, who are you guys? Are you like remnants of Gaea’s forces? Because in case you haven’t heard, she’s taking a dirt nap.”

“Who we are is of no importance,” the woman sighed, as three of the armed guards surrounded Piper. The woman made a few sharp gestures with her hands and two of the guards grabbed Piper’s arms. The one to her left removed some zip ties from a pouch on its hip and zipped her wrists together.

“Oh come on,” she protested. “You got me tied up! What harm would there be in telling me who-OOF!” Her line of questioning was brutally interrupted when the guard who zip tied her slammed the stock of his gun into her stomach. She collapsed to her knees with a wheeze.

Okay, new plan: don’t throw up.

The woman walked over to her and removed her fingerless gloves, revealing ivory skin with snake head tattoos on the back of her hands. She lifted Piper’s chin with two fingers and tsked. “You are a pretty thing. It’s really a shame what that psychotic ginger will do to you.” She removed her fingers and pushed Piper backwards; her head slamming into the pavement. She did a few more gestures and the guards nodded in responses.

Piper blinked a few times to try to clear the spots from her vision. “Lady, I’m beginning to think you’re a bit of a bitch,” she hissed.

The woman gave a mirthless chuckle before she slammed her boot down on Piper’s jaw.

Piper spat out what she was sure was molar. “You know what? You have just confirmed my hypothesis: you’re a bitch.”

“Maybe you should stop talking while you’re ahead?” she suggested.

Before Piper could respond the sound of an engine filled the silent street. A second later, a pair of headlights turned the corner.

“Ah, that must be our ride. I hope you don’t mind riding next to me.”

The vehicle, some kind of black SUV if Piper’s eyes were to be believed, didn’t slow as it approached the five of them. In fact, it seemed to be accelerating.

The mysterious woman removed a radio from a pocket on her flap jacket. “Charlemagne slow down. Over.” She paused for a second waiting for a response. “Charlemagne, slow down!”

“Lady I think you better move,” Piper laughed with a bloody grin. Sure she would probably be hit too, but if it meant taking these assholes out with her, she was just fine with that.

The woman sneered at Piper and threw her long black hair over her shoulder. She turned to face the speeding SUV and Piper could swear that the serpent tattoos on her hands seemed to glow.
The SUV swerved at the last possible second, avoiding Piper and her female captor, but slamming into the three armored guards. The three went flying through the air and each landed and did not move.

The woman dropped her arms and approached the vehicle. “What the fuck Charlemagne! You made me sacrifice three of our-“

The passenger door flew open, a blur of blinding gold light shot out and collided with the tattooed woman. The woman went flying through the air from the impact, only for the blur to follow and collide with her again.

A second later, the driver’s door opened and out stepped the last person Piper expected to see.

“Reyna?” she gasped. She was seriously wondering if she had gotten a concussion when she hit the pavement. The Latina was out of her standard legion garb, instead wearing a pair of jeans and the most hideous tie-dyed purple and green blouse she had ever seen.

She definitely knew she was concussed though when she noticed Reyna’s right arm. *Well, lack of an arm.*

The praetor’s right arm was missing from the shoulder down.

“Reyna what happened?”

The older girl crouched down and with her one remaining arm pulled her to her feet. “They’ll be time for stories later Mclean.” She pulled out a small dagger from a sheath on her hip and cut Piper’s hands free. “Get in the car we got to go.”

Apparently she had not responded fast enough to her orders, because the daughter of Bellona grabbed Piper by shoulder and pushed her into the car.

“Veronica! Atlas!” her savior called out into the night. “Be at the rendezvous in thirty!” She then hopped back into the still running SUV and they took off into the night.

*I don’t think tonight can get any weirder…*

---

*I was wrong. Very, very wrong. It got so much weirder!*

She and Reyna had been parked behind a derelict gas station for around fifteen minutes when something heavy landed on the roof of the SUV with a resounding *THUD.*

“That must be them,” the praetor said absently as she held the down the button that opened the sunroof.

Before Piper could ask what the one-armed praetor was talking about, something dropped down from the sunroof into the back seat of the SUV.

*Holy shit it’s the bride of Frankenstein!*

She wasn’t sure if it was human, monster, or something in between. It was definitely female though, she could tell that much. She had blonde hair that was tied up in a messy pony tail, she had on a
tattered sports bra with a matching and equally tattered pair of shorts.

And that’s where the normalcy ended.

Her skin was a patch work of different colored skin and scars, like some sort of mad surgeon had decided to practice his quilting with skin grafts. Her skin though seemed to be only temporary as it was burning off into flakes of golden ash. Instead of fingernails and toe nails, she had razor sharp talons that reminded Piper of the harpies who patrolled Camp Half-Blood at night for errant campers.

All of that was shocking in its own right, but her eyes, or lack thereof, were unlike anything Piper had ever seen. In place of eyes, were two golden flames, burning like miniature stars.

“It’s rude to stare girl,” the girl said in a strange voice. It was like a young girl was being echoed by a much larger man. “You’re making Veronica feel self-conscious.”

“Piper this is Veronica Werld and Atlas,” Reyna said as she started the vehicle. “Veronica and Atlas, this is Piper Mclean. One of the seven”

“It’s really nice to meet you,” Piper said with a forced smile,” but I have to ask this now.” She took a deep breath. “WHAT THE FUCK IS GOING ON? WHO THE FUCK WERE THOSE ASSHOLES? WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR ARM? WHO THE FUCK IS THIS? WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU? AND WHERE THE FUCK ARE WE GOING?” she took another breath. “That is, if you don’t mind answering all that.”

“Real lady like there Mclean,” huffed the praetor, as she turned the SUV onto the street. “We’re heading to Seattle. It’s a long drive and we’ll answer all of your questions.”

“What’s in Seattle?” she asked.

“Her sister,” Veronica/Atlas chimed in from the back.

A look of pure determination came over Reyna’s face. “And an army.”

Chapter End Notes

Some of you were worried for a minute there, weren't you?

I hope Piper isn't too OOC, but it's always been in my head that she's the closest thing to a female Percy we got.

Tristan having Piper home-schooled just felt right, and Piper is totally the type of girl who loves to be comfortable (as does everyone).
The images of Mellie and Hedge helping Piper with her studies is awesome to me.

I mean come on, you know coach had Chuck Norris Movie Marathon days!

We got to see Morgan again, even if she was never addressed by name.
We even got an iota of back story for her!
Much like Hazel's mom Morgan is a witch, but unlike Hazel's mom she went so much further...
Hey Reyna's back!
She even lost some weight!
*dodges rotten fruit*
And she made friends!

While the guys are stuck in the middle of nowhere playing house (for now), our strong ladies won't have it as easy....

Next chapter is: a surprise!!!

Hey! Did you like what you just read? Leave a kudos!

Questions, concerns, theories, brownie recipes, just feeling chatty? Leave a comment!

Kudos and comments make the voices in my head stop!

You guys are the best!
Thanks for reading!
He always shook before a mission.

Doctors, psychiatrists, and even a shaman had told him it was brought on by a mixture of fear, anxiety, and just a dash of PTSD.

But what do they know?

The truth though was that he was like a race horse at the starting gate: eager to start so he could get his reward.

He tried to steady himself by checking over his gear for the tenth time in the last fifteen minutes.

Four extra clips, two battery packs, two pulse grenades, one fragmentation grenade, and my boots are tied.

He ran the diagnostics on his helmet and watched as one-by-one all systems winked from yellow to green. He recalibrated the iris tracking reticule and sent out a ready check to his team. He only had to wait a few moments before four status LEDs blinked green twice.

This is it. I can feel it! Just hold on a little longer PB, Daddy’s coming!

After Percival, or Brian as he liked to be called, captured the western nest, research teams had discovered hundreds of years’ worth of records. Most of it was trivial things like tax records, census reports, security reports; things to be expected of a small community. However there were also detailed documentation of military strategies, profiles on various monsters, the addresses of DGs who
lived off site, and of course the locations of allies.

So when he heard that there was a group of female worshippers of G:AD operating out of a warehouse in Georgia, he was the first to volunteer to lead a team down to take them out.

Which was why he was currently standing in a semi-trailer on a Tuesday night surrounded by four of his best men. They weren’t the only ones though, besides the truck they were in there were six other trucks currently getting into position all around the warehouse’s loading docks.

He gently lurched forward when he felt the trailer connect with the platform.

He once again issued a ready check to his men and waited for Bors, Ywain, Dagonet, and Geraint to respond back.

_God these are stupid code names._

The four LEDs once again flashed green twice.

He pulled out the small detonator that controlled the charges that were set on the trailer doors. He held up his hand and began a count down with his fingers.

5…
4…
3…
2…
1…

He closed his fist and hit the detonator. There as a slight POP followed by the doors crashing to the ground with a thunderous roar.

Bors ran to the front of the trailer to take point. Bors crouched down and did a slow sweep with his M-16 in hand, before signaling that it was clear. Geraint and Ywain hustled up to the mouth of the trailer just as Bors set foot on the loading dock.

Just as Geraint and Ywain set foot off the trailer, there was a sharp whistling noise and a moment later Bors fell over with an arrow sticking out his neck.

“Get to cover!” he roared. He pumped his legs as fast as he could. If he didn’t get out of the trailer it would be like shooting fish in a barrel.

And he was the fish.

Geraint and Ywain raised their guns and began to fire off a few short bursts at something above them, as they strafed to the left.

He exited the trailer and had to blink to allow his eyes to adjust from the darkness of the trailer to the overwhelming light of the warehouse. He looked above to see what the two were shooting at and spied that there was a catwalk above them.

_But where are-_  

An arrow pierced the ground beneath his feet.
“Find cover!” he repeated as he scurried over to a forklift. He crouched down and aimed searched the catwalk for their assailants.

“I guess the cakewalk had to end sometime, eh boss?” Dagonet chuckled as she slid next to him.

“Shut up and help me find them,” he grunted. *Seriously who talks during a firefight?*

He darting his eyes to the left of his HUD and blinked twice. There was a brief flicker before and the world around him changed to various hues of blues, yellows, oranges, and reds. *THERMAL IMAGINING ACTIVATE* flashed briefly across the HUD.

He slowly peeked around the side of the forklift and looked to the catwalk above. There, crouched in a corner were three figures. One of the figures sprang up and drew back one arm while extending the other. A half-second later he heard Geraint scream just as the figure crouched back down.

A mixture of excitement and fear overcame him as one word entered his mind.

“Hunters,” he whispered.

He shoved aside his personal feelings and focused on the problem at hand. He squeezed the trigger and watched as a trail of red erupted from the barrel of his weapon and raced to its target. The hunter had just stood up to fire another arrow when the bullet found its target: her head.

A dazzling display of red erupted from the back of her head, only to quickly fade to orange, then yellow, and finally nothing; like a firework of death.

The girl fell over the catwalk’s railing as one of her comrades reached out to grab her. The girl’s body fell to the ground just as three more shots echoed throughout the loading dock. The hunter that had tried to help her friend was now falling through the air as well.

The third hunter though had not been hit and must’ve known it was a losing battle. Her red figure leapt up and ran down the catwalk, avoiding the red streaks from his team’s weapons with amazing agility.

George exited from his cover followed closely by Dagonet. He let loose four short bursts from his rifle, but the huntress avoided every shot. Just as Dagonet fired a shot the girl had disappeared behind a heavy iron door.

“Fuck,” he hissed, as he switched off the thermal imaging. “Status report now,” he barked into the helmet’s integrated radio. Dagonet’s and Ywain’s LEDs flashed green, Geraint’s flashed yellow, and Bors remained inactive as expected. “Geraint, you going to make it?” he asked, while swapping out the nearly spent clip for a fresh one.

“Little cunt managed to shoot me behind the knee,” Geraint’s voice crackled over the radio. “Fifty pounds of ballistic plate and Kevlar and they manage to hit where we aren’t covered!”

He ignored his comrade’s whining and walked over to the corpses of the two hunters splayed out on the floor. He crouched down and rolled the corpse of girl he had shot so that she was facing up. He felt himself smile when he saw that his bullet had found its mark between the hunter’s eyes. He was a little confused though by the rest of what he saw though.

This was no girl, this had been a woman. A young woman, perhaps in her mid-twenties, but a woman none the less. He had been searching for the Hunters of Artemis for most of his life now, and everything he had been able to learn said they were *young girls*, not women. *Maybe the older ones work in the background. Or perhaps these aren’t the hunter.* His stomach dropped at the thought. *If...*
the intel was wrong I will skin the fucking researcher who reported this.

He stood back up and ordered his team to move.

To say they were experiencing resistance from the hunters was an understatement, a massive fucking understatement.

After leaving the loading dock they entered the warehouse proper, a massive maze of steel shelving, cardboard, and deadly traps.

Geraint had decided to take point. They had bandaged him up as best they could, but the arrowhead had shredded muscle and ligament, leaving him limping. Their pace was slow, but there was safety in numbers, something that the hunters knew as well.

They were slowly making their way down an aisle, Geraint looking ahead, Dagonet behind, and Ywain and himself scanning the shelves above for any movement, when the first trap was sprung.

Geraint screamed in terror as he was swept off his feet and yanked into the darkness above by a snare trap. It didn’t stay dark above them for long though, as two bronze dragon heads popped out of boxes on either side of the flailing Geraint, their mouths opened and jets of green flame erupted from their mechanical maws. Geraint’s screams intensified for a brief moment, before his body went limp. The dragon heads closed their maws and retreated back into their cardboard homes.

“Christ almighty,” Dagonet gasped.

“Watch your step,” was the only thing he could say. “I’ll take point.”

They hadn’t gone much farther when the lights went out.

“Oh, that ain’t good,” Ywain grumbled over the radio.

“Switch to night vision and keep your mouth shut,” he barked. He selected the moon shaped icon on his HUD and the world around him was displayed in an unsettling mixture of greens. It didn’t help that they were they were in the toy section of the warehouse, various stuffed animals and dolls lined the shelves, with one of them occasionally playing a prerecorded laugh.

They stalked onward, careful to avoid any more snare traps.

They had just turned a corner when the first arrow flew inches past his head.

“That was a warning,” a female voice called out of the darkness. “Next time we won’t miss.”
“I’ve got you’re balls in my sights,” another hunter called out.

“Cassie, did you seriously just say that?” another snickered. “You’ve got their balls in sight?”

“Shut it Carmen! You know what I meant!”

“What, that you want their balls?”

While the hunters were bickering he slowly reached for one of the pulse grenades on his belt. He could see that the three women were standing on top of the shelves, all three with arrows nocked in their bows.

“Cassie! Carmen! Both of you shut it! This is not the time or the-“

He pushed the button down on the grenade’s cylindrical body and tossed it up as high as he could. The silver cylinder arced in the air towards the three bickering women, but just before it started to fall two of the hunters let loose their arrows on the grenade. In a masterful display of marksmanship, the arrows knocked the cylinder to the opposite shelf and pinned it against a box marked “Cyclopean Safety Goggles”.

“That was pretty rude you know,” one of the hunters called out, as she nocked another arrow. “Now-“

She never got a chance to finish, as the pulse grenade let out a slight chirp, and the three women fell from the warehouse shelving onto the cement floors below, impacting with a bone breaking SNAP.

He exhaled the breath he didn’t know he had been holding. He raised his fist in the air, signaling that Ywain and Dagonet stay where they were. George took a few cautious steps towards the fallen hunters and slowly crouched over the nearest one.

_This one’s a bit younger than the ones we encountered at the docks._

He rolled up her blood soaked sleeves and looked for the brand that would indicate if she was a Western DG, but found nothing. He stood up and checked the remaining hunters as well, but found nothing.

He signaled for the other two to follow as he felt his stomach knot.

_Fuck._

He was pretty fucking sure they weren’t in Georgia anymore.

The further they went into the sprawling warehouse, the stranger things got. Common household items soon gave way to ancient weaponry, magic potions, and even caged beasts; one of which he was sure was a yeti. To accommodate the new items the shelving got higher and higher as it went, it was so high now that even with the magnification on his HUD he couldn’t see the top.

The once plain cement floor had changed to intricate and beautiful tiled mosaics depicting scenes straight from mythology and some he didn’t know. Currently they were walking on what looked like
a woman turning pirates into guinea pigs.

Then there was the issue with the time. According to their mission clock they had been inside the warehouse for three hours, but he knew they had been inside for far longer than that.

“This is pretty fucked up guys,” Dagonet’s voice sounded over the radio.

“Right? And is anyone else worried that we haven’t heard from the others since EVER?” Ywain responded.

_I thought I was working with professionals…_ He signaled for them to stop and he spun around to face his team. “Both of you need to shut your mouths! If you keep talking they’re—“

The warehouse lights flickered back to life.

George instinctively tried to shield his eyes from the blinding light, but it was too little too late. Night vision is a wonderful thing, but was an even greater liability when used indoors. Any punk kid with a flashlight could take down even the most battle hardened veteran.

When the pain finally stopped, he cautiously opened one eye. When he wasn’t blinded he let out a sigh of relief. _Good. The kid included the failsafe I asked for._

His celebration was cut short when he heard the unmistakably sound of a bow string being drawn taut. Without a single moment of hesitation, he dropped his rifle so that it hung from its strap and rushed forward and grabbed his remaining team by their collars and dragged them behind him as fast as he possibly could. He raced forward, trying to find a corner or some large object they could use for cover, but as they seen before the environment seemed to change moment-to-moment.

“There should’ve been a corner right here!” he huffed as he continued to drag his comrades behind him.

Then he saw it, their salvation: a solitary door maybe fifty yards away. It may as well have been miles away though when he heard the hunters release their arrows. He tried to strafe left to avoid the projectiles, but one arrow managed to hit his upper back. “Oof,” he groaned as he nearly lost his balance. Thankfully the arrow had connected with the metal plate in his vest, preventing any injury worse than a wicked bruise.

Just as he heard the next salvo of arrows being drawn, they made it to the door, which had a small sign hanging above it that he think read: _Break Room._ George didn’t even bother to try the knob, instead using the built up momentum to tackle the door open. The door gave way and he threw the three of them on the ground just as the more arrows whizzed by over-head.

He jumped back to his feet and slammed the broken door shut. He then sank down to the floor and tried to catch his breath. _If this shit goes any further south, we’re going to hit Antarctica._

His radio crackled to life. “Hey George, you might want to look up,” Ywain said.

“What now- Oh.”
They weren’t in a break room as he had originally thought. Oh no, they were in the break-up room, which was a complete and utter shit show. No less than twenty cages lined the walls (and one vending machine), each containing anywhere from six to ten boys and men, the youngest looks to be twelve tops and the oldest were older than himself. All of them were malnourished, their ribs threatening to pierce their damn near translucent skin, and many of them had signs of horrific torture.

“Jesus H. Christ,” Dagonet gasped. She crouched down in front of one of the cages that contained mostly younger boys. “They’re all wearing collars.” She stuck a hand through the bars, only for the boys to scurry as far away as possible. “We got to get them out of here.”

“One step ahead of you,” Ywain cried as he slammed the stock of his rifle into a cage’s door.

“Wait, stop!” George barked.

Ywain stopped his pounding, his gun still in mid-swing, and turned to George and cocked his head. “Why?” he asked.

He let out a frustrated sigh. “In case you haven’t been paying attention, we’ve been encountering trap after bloody trap for hours now that we’ve lost two of our comrades to! So maybe partner, you should stop and fucking think before you do anything reckless!”

“What are you saying? That we should leave them hear?” Dagonet growled. “Most of these guys don’t look like they’re older than twenty! They’re fucking kids George!”

He held his hands up. “I’m not saying that at all,” he said calmly, trying to ease the tension. “We just need to check who’s human—” he pulled one of his remaining pulse grenades from his belt. “And who’s not.”

“That never even crossed my mind,” Dagonet sighed, looking at the small children huddled together in their own mess.

“And that’s why George is the boss Jenny,” Ywain laughed.

He walked down the hall and repeatedly smacked the pulse grenade one with one, the vibrations creating a loud ringing getting everyone’s attention. “Alright listen and listen closely, because I’m only going to repeat this once.” He held up the silver death dealer for all to see. “For some of you this is your savior! For some of you it’s your end!”

There was an incomprehensible sound of murmuring coming from the cages, and the few men that hadn’t tried to distance themselves from his team joined the rest of their fellow prisoners in the back of the cages.

“Do not worry and do not feel pity for those who will have died!” He started to pace up and down the hall. “For they are no different than you captors! They are monsters in the guise of your fellow man! They some of them may have seemed like they were your friends, but I guarantee you partners, they have been working against you.”

Some of the smaller children began to cry and some of the older captives tried to comfort them. Some of the others started to look at each other with skeptical eyes.

“I can tell you this though! If your still standing in three seconds,” he pressed the grenade’s button, “We’re going to let you out, arm you, and partners, you can get the sweet revenge that I know so many of you desperately crave.”
The signal pulse killed five in all.

Thankfully of those dead, none of them were children.

The three of them quickly went to work freeing the remaining prisoners. It took a little bit of effort to break the locks, but Ywain was thankfully as big as a bear and was popping the locks three times faster than him or Dagonet.

“How many do we got?” he asked a she watched the poor bastards shuffle out one by one. He grimaced as he saw one little boy, his hair caked with what he hoped was mud, his skin was pale and covered in hideous red sores. The kid was a walking corpse.

“About a hundred and twenty boss-man,” Ywain grunted as he pried a steel rod from a cage and handed it to one of the former captives.

“Ninety of which are old enough to fight,” Dagonet added, as she carefully took off a collar from one of the smaller children, revealing angry red skin. Dagonet hissed. “Does anyone have some disinfectant?”

“Sorry partner, I didn’t think we’d be liberating Belsens today,” George quipped, giving his combat knife to a boy around fourteen years old.

“Belsens?” Dagonet asked.

Before he could respond Ywain did for him. “Belsens. Prison camp from world war two. Real fucked up shit.”

“Well why didn’t he say like Buchenwalds?”

“You know about Buchenwalds but you don’t know about Belsens?” George asked incredulously. Was it just him or was the education system seriously lacking in this country? Why pack when he was in grade school he had to memorize the names and correct spellings of four camps to pass his third grade social studies class. Then again, the war was a lot fresher in everyone’s mind back then… Fuck I hate getting old.

He cleared his throat and hollered loud enough for all of his new “troops” to hear him. “Alright listen up! My team’s original mission was to come in here and kill the Hunters of Artemis while liberating those who were captured! We did not anticipate finding the lot of you! So as of right now our new goal is to escape this warehouse of horrors and get you people to safety! When we remove the barricade from the door, my team will toss out every grenade we got and spray and pray! Then we are all going to run like hell for the exit! Any questions?”

One of the older boys near the back raised his hand.

“Yes, you in the back!”

“Who are what are the Hunters of Artemis?” he asked, and a chorus of agreement followed.

“The Hunters of Artemis,” said Ywain as he ripped another bar off the cells. “The crazy chicks who have kept you guys captive? How do you not know this?”
“No, no, no! The Amazons are our captors!” one of the middle aged men called out. “They worship Artemis or Diana, but they don’t call themselves… whatever it is you called them.”

“What?” George felt his stomach drop. Was this just another wild goose chase? Another dead end? Would he ever find his daughter? He tried to push those thoughts aside, but was unable to suppress his anger. He marched to the room’s only entrance and began to fling aside the random furniture and objects his team had used to construct the make-shift barricade. “Well don’t just stand there!” he barked. “The faster we get this down the faster we can leave!”

“Alright partners. On three. Three!”

George wasn’t foolish enough to announce his actually plan aloud. What kind of idiot would say he was going to open the door?

The rat-a-tat of the three M-16’s were muffled by the sheer amount of bodies, as their magic metal bullets ripped through the flimsy pressed wood door that stood between them and the warehouse proper. He felt his lips curl into a wolfish grin when he heard screaming come from the other side of the splintered door.

Dagonet and Ywain ceased firing and primed two pulse grenades and tossed them through the gaping hole as he slammed a fresh clip into his rifle.

“Get a move on partners!” he cried as he rushed through the splintered remains. The grenades went off just as he crossed the threshold, causing a score of Amazons to crumple to the ground. He spared a glance back and saw that the former captives were rushing out in droves. Some stopped over the bodies of the dead Amazons and began to beat them with whatever bits of scrap they had been armed with. “Keep moving!” he yelled back. “Don’t waste your energy on the dead!”

He continued to sprint and fired off a couple rounds as two more amazons jumped down from above. His goal wasn’t to hit them, but rather to stop them from firing at them. As the girls were too busy dodging bullets and a shoe (he wasn’t sure where that came from) their former boyfriends swarmed them. Two of the men grabbed one of the girls and held her to the ground, while the young boy who George had given his knife too stabbed her repeatedly in the chest.

The other Amazon was perhaps worse off. She was knocked to the ground and her limbs were brutally beaten with steel rods that had made up the cages in the break-up room. She cried out in agony as her limbs were being broken before one of the boys had the decency to stab her through the eye, silencing her forever.

He grabbed the kid who had his knife by the elbow and drug him off the bloody corpse. “Come on lil partner, they’ll be more as we go!”

And he was right.
They encountered perhaps another dozen Amazon warriors as they fought their way back to the loading docks. They had lost a few men here and there, but he was proud that most of the deaths were the result of the older slaves (Because that’s what they were) sacrificing themselves to shield the children.

He frowned.

The Amazons had realized that their current strategy wasn’t working against the three of them and their horde of ex-boyfriends. Now the women were using guerilla tactics: striking fast and then retreating. If they were even seen at all.

Which was just fine by George. The hit-and-run tactics had allowed them to cover tremendous ground. “Dagonet, Ywain, how we holding up back there?” he asked over the radio.

“Just peachy boss-man!” Ywain responded, with the sound of gunfire in the background. “Just taking care of a few stragglers back here!”

“This what I imagine running a kindergarten is like!” Dagonet laughed over the radio. “Making sure these kids keep moving and not stopping to play in the blood and the guts… So yeah, just like a kindergarten.”

George chuckled. “Good to hear that! We’re almost out of here partners! Yee-haw!” He ran through the double doors that connected the warehouse to the docks and skidded to an immediate halt.

There in front of him, armed with swords, spears, bows, and a variety of other weapons, were no less than forty Amazons.

“Drop your weapons and surrender now and we’ll let you live!” One of the Amazons yelled. “Maybe we’ll even let you work in the sporting goods section!” The Amazons laughed as if that was the funniest thing they had ever heard.

“Sorry ladies, that ain’t going to happen,” he smirked, as the horde of former slaves rushed through the doors behind him.

What followed next could only be described as chaos.

The Amazons were quick to fire a volley of arrows into the oncoming masses, causing many to fall over dead, while others were crushed under foot. The army of women tried to hold back the horde while the archers readied another salvo, but they were forced to take up their swords as the male mass pushed their way through.

Dagonet, Ywain, and himself fired their rifles into the masses. It was a strange feeling to pull the trigger without worrying about friendly fire. The special metals that the DGs used to construct their weapons passed through humans as if they weren’t even there, while utterly destroying non-organic materials and DGs with ease. The three of them slowly backed away to avoid standing in the ever expanding pool of blood that was covering the loading dock floor.

Several of the Amazons had the same idea and scurried back to the edge of the docks. They had abandoned their weapons in favor of some the steel rods many of their former slaves were armed with.

“Alright everyone stand down!” George yelled over the chaos. The men stopped what they were doing, but did not take their eyes off of their prey for a moment. He casually strolled over to the few remaining girls, five in all, and removed his helmet. He scratched his temple with one gloved finger. “Well partners, looks like this rodeo is just about over.”
The girls sneered at him, one even going as far as taking a swing at him.

He held up his hands. “Easy now! Now as I see it you have two option right now.” He held up on finger. “One: you throw down your weapons and surrender. I have several burning questions that I need answered and I will personally make sure you are released to Camp Jupiter.” He held up a second finger. “Two: you can keep your weapons and I’ll let these fine gentlemen have their way with you; and judging by that blood thirsty look on their face they are not going to wine and dine ya.” He crossed his arms. “Now what’s it going to be ladies?”

The Amazons dropped their makeshift weapons.

Chapter End Notes

It always bothered me that the Amazons used their "boyfriends" as workers. They wore collars and orange jumpsuits? Really? Didn't like three of Hazel's POVs talk about how the Romans had slaves back in the old days, but there wasn't much fuss raised about what the amazons were doing? And what happened if the guy decided that he didn't want to be in a relationship anymore?

Thus the idea of the "break-up room" was born!

George is an interesting character for me to write. He is a man of many faces. He behaves differently around everyone. Around Brian is he gruff and to the point, with the old man he is a bit antisocial, and around his victims he puts on this almost cowboy like persona. Part of this behavior is related to his motivation, which was partially brought up in chapter 14. He was a young single father who was somehow drafted into the Vietnam war, were he was held prisoner for a number of years. When he finally got home, he discovered that his daughter, the only thing that kept him going, had disappeared with a group of mysterious girls called the hunters. Since then he has spent every waking moment looking for her.

I guess this chapter was my attempt to show that there is different degrees of good and evil on each side of this conflict, just like in real life.

Next chapter we'll see a return to the fluff! As for the POV, you'll just have to wait and see!

Did you like what you just read? Please leave a kudos!

Thoughts, criticism, theories, corrections, or you just want to say something at all? Leave a comment! I love to hear from ya'll!

Well until next time, thanks for reading! You guys are the best!
“Come on Leo! Let Clovis have some! Hey! I saw that Malcolm!”

It was Wednesday morning, just mere hours before he started his first day of school, and he was floating above the pigpen making sure that each pig got some of leftovers from the night before. He had decided to name the pigs a few nights prior when he got tired of just calling them all pig. Each pig had a different personality so he tried to name them accordingly. Clovis was the biggest and spent most of his time sleeping. Leo had to have been the runt of the litter, as he was the smallest and he was always sticking his snout where it didn’t belong. Malcolm was perhaps the most well-mannered pig, but he kind of blended into the background. Then there was Jake, Travis, Connor, Drew, and Clarisse.

“No, no, no!” he yelled as he swooped down to stop Leo from sticking his head through a small hole in the barn’s siding. He grabbed the pig and set it down at the opposite end of the enclosure. “You better not do that today or you’re going to be waiting a long time to get unstuck!” he warned the pig.

“He only does that because he knows you’ll give him attention,” Demeter’s voice called out from behind him. “Pigs are as smart as dogs and even make great pets.”

He floated down to the ground and gave the goddess a slight bow. “Lady Demeter, what are you doing here?” he asked. Is she upset about how I treat the animals? Or am I doing something wrong?

Her lips curved up into a soft smile. “I’m just taking a small break from my search for Artemis. So I thought I should make sure my number one farm hand is ready for his first day of high school. So are you?”
Well it’s *not my first day of high school*, he thought with a frown. “I think so ma’am. Lord Hades bought us school supplies and new clothes last night,” he said as he gestured to the new blue jeans and purple T-shirt he was wearing underneath the old denim jacket he had found in one of the barns.

“Oh I’ve heard all about yesterday,” the goddess groaned.

After they had learned that Nico was some kind of genius, the lord of the dead had been just a little bit… excited. Hades’ outburst had made everyone’s in the office jaw drop, and the god was literally shaking with excitement. Mr. Z had thankfully not questioned the situation and instead gave the three of them a blank class schedule and then a timesheet for each class that also included what each required class was for each year. The vice principal then ushered the raving god out of the small office so the three of them could fill their schedules in private (well mostly so Nico could have privacy, his dad was already talking about colleges and acceptable majors). When they were sure Hades was out of ear shot, Nico told them that they shouldn’t take all the same classes, which really meant: do not leave Percy alone. So for the next ten minutes, Percy would write down a class and Nico would copy him. Thankfully, there was only one class Nico couldn’t be with Percy: Physical Education. Jason was pretty dang sure there wasn’t a conflict there. There was no way Neeks even knew what Java Programming was let alone that he was required to take it. After they had handed in copies of their individual schedules to Mr. Z., Hades had taken them out to dinner (Nico’s choice) and shopping for school supplied and clothes at the nearest mall; a forty minute trip that would have taken longer if the god of the underworld had obeyed the posted speed limits.

“I take it Lord Hades is pretty happy with Nico,” Jason chuckled.

The harvest goddess crossed her arms. “It’s all he’s been talking about for the last twelve hours. Poor Persephone can’t have a single conversation with the man without it turning into how great Nico is,” she said. “Not that it isn’t great,” she quickly added. “He is a nice young man and he deserves so much after what we’ve put him through.” She paused. “You all do.”

“Well I’d like you to stop with the “Lady”. I think we’ve worked together enough now to drop the titles.” She snapped her fingers and a wallet appeared in his wallet appeared in her hand. “Now you’ve been working hard for the last… mmm… let’s call it a month shall we? Now I know I said you had to work hard to use my place, but that was when I thought it would be the three of you working together.” Jason started to protest that Nico has been helping, but the goddess held up one hand to silence him. “With the exception of the housework, you’ve been on your own doing the work of three men.” What Jason could only describe as a wad of cash appeared in her other hand. “For someone your age the typical rate is fifteen dollars an hour, but I’m going to pay you twenty. You’ve been working roughly eight hours a day, seven days a week for a month.” She shook the wad of cash in front of his face and he was pretty sure he saw Benjamin Franklin. “If you do the math that works out to almost four and a half thousand green ones.” She unrolled the bills and stuffed them into his wallet. “And that is what I am paying you.”

Jason’s jaw dropped. That was the most anyone had ever given him in his life by a long shot. “I- I can’t accept that Lady-“ she glared at him. “I mean Demeter. It’s too much. I was just doing what was fair.”

She snapped her fingers and he felt the now bulging wallet in his back pocket. “As am I,” she smiled, before ruffling his hair. “Now don’t go spending it all in one place! But, please use it on things you want.” She ruffled his hair once more. “I would recommend a haircut though. You’re starting to look like Perseus.”
He tugged at the blond locks that hung just above his glasses. “Yeah, I think you’re right.”

Jason wasn’t quite sure what he was expecting when he walked back into the house, but Nico trying to comb Percy’s hair was definitely not it.

“What are you doing Neeks?” he asked. He knew the answer, but he wanted to hear what the small Italian had to say.

The son of Hades set the comb down and glared at Percy’s hair as it sprang back to its natural messy state. “We only get one chance at a first impression Jace. And people are quick to judge you based on your appearance…”

Percy deflated in his chair.

Jason tried not to feel pity for the younger boy. He knew that Nico had it rough when he first went to Camp Half-Blood. The kid’s in the Hermes, Ares, and Aphrodite cabins had been quick to prey on the temporally displaced demigod, insulting him based on the clothes he wore, his small frame, and interests.

_I can’t argue with him about first impressions, but I can confuse him._

“Yeah, I guess you’re right Nico,” he scratched his temple sheepishly. “But wouldn’t it make sense to be yourself?”

The son of Hades raised one eyebrow and the son of Poseidon furrowed his brow.

“I mean, we’re going to be seeing these people five days a week- if we don’t have demigod stuff- wouldn’t it be lying if we went there all dressed up only to stop the next day?”

Percy must have figured out his plan because the older teen began to smile as Nico considered Jason’s words.

“I guess that makes sense,” Nico sighed. “Alright Percy, you’re free. Go put your shoes on and grab your bag.”

Percy nodded and scampered out of the kitchen and up the stairs.

Nico shook his head and grabbed a black hoodie he had purchased the previous night that had been hanging off the back of the chair that Percy has just sat at. As Nico pulled on his hoodie, Jason couldn’t help but poke the younger boy’s side. He couldn’t help put grin when his friend let out a high pitched yelp and jumped away, almost crashing into the kitchen table.

“What the fuck Jason!” the son of Hades hissed, as he wrapped his arms around his sides.

“Are you- Are you ticklish?” he asked. It had never occurred to him before that his best friend might be ticklish! It seemed so out of character for him, but so in character at the same time. _I can use this to distract him when he starts to get down!_

“No!” he denied, but his arms were still wrapped out himself.

“Really?” Jason took a step forward and the son of Hades jumped backwards. “Then why are you
moving away from me?”

“Jason if you take one more step I swear I will castrate you!” the small boy hissed as he backed into the kitchen counter.

“Oh don’t be that way Neeks!” he laughed as he took another step toward the son of Hades while wiggling his fingers. “I’m sure Will enjoyed."

Just then Percy walked back into the kitchen carrying his book bag. A confused look appeared on Percy’s face, and Jason realized that this would be a weird scene to walk into: Nico backed into the kitchen sink, while he was looming over the boy wiggling his fingers with a mad gleam in his eyes.

“Oh hey Perce!” Nico called out. “Do you have everything?”

Percy nodded and slung the bag over his shoulder.

“Good.” The son of Hades then turned to him. “And we will continue this conversation never.” Nico then walked away from him and grabbed his own Captain America bag. “We better get moving if we don’t want to be late.”

“Yeah,” Jason shrugged. He patted his pockets to make sure he had the keys to the Bronco and his pleasantly plump wallet. Satisfied that they were where they were supposed to be, he grabbed his Hawkeye-purple bag and followed after his cousins.

There hadn’t been anytime to talk to any of his new mortal classmates when they had arrived at school. They had been told the day before to report to the office when they got there, where they would be assigned their lockers and given an escort if need be.

They were taken to their lockers (which were all thankfully next to each other) by the school’s janitor who went by the name Vern. Vern was definitely something, but Jason couldn’t figure out what. He was a large pot-bellied man, with thinning gray hair, and he reeked of what Jason assumed was alcohol. Vern handed them each a small slip of paper with their locker combinations on it, grunted, and left them alone.

Percy and Nico were quick to open their lockers and stow their bags, and each taking a notebook and a few pencils (Nico observed Percy doing this, so the Italian copied him).

Jason on the other hand couldn’t get his locker to open. No matter what he did the lock refused to release. Eventually Nico tried, but it refused to budge for him as well. Jason was about ready to head to the office and ask for a new locker, when a huge meaty fist slammed into the locker just above his head.

“You have to hit it just above the lock for it to release,” explained the owner of the fist, a huge guy of interminable age, sporting a long red beard and a camouflage T-shirt. The guy then pulled the locked door and it popped open. “Just like that.”

Before Jason had a chance to thank him, the guy walked away and into a nearby classroom.
The bell rang and the three of them scurried off in search of their classrooms.

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First period: Art

This is only fifty percent of what I expected.

The art room was located on the lower level the school, next to the small cafeteria. It was a large open room with the walls painted with a variety of murals: a picturesque lake surrounded by a forest and mountains, a herd of colorful horses that seemed to be made out of wind (he really liked that one), the 1985 Chicago Bears team, and then a wide variety of random colorful shapes. The desks were arranged in the shape of a large “C” with a small table sitting in the middle.

Off to one side was the teacher’s desk and its owner.

“You must be one of the new guys,” the teacher, said as he stood up from his desk and shook Jason’s hand. He was a younger guy, probably in his late twenties. He was short, shorter than Nico even, with a shaved head and a goatee. “I’m Mr. Sonders,” he said as he squeezed his hand.

“I’m Jason. Jason Grace.”

“Well it’s nice to meet you Grace,” Sonders smiled. He led Jason over to one of the vacant desks and pulled out the chair for him. “Alright you mooks,” the teacher cried getting the rest of the classes attention, five other guys in total. “As if you didn’t already know, we have a new student! This is Jason Grace and he is a-“

“Junior.”

“A junior and will be joining us starting today. Now why don’t you introduce yourselves and then we can get started with the important stuff.” He patted Jason’s shoulder before returning to his desk.

The other guys had a silent conversation amongst themselves, before one guy wearing a Confederate flag shirt spoke up. “I’m Bill, that’s Earl,” he gestured to a huge guy with red hair who nodded at Jason. “Mike, Payton, and Whitey,” he finished.

“Alright that’s good for now,” Mr. Sonders said from behind his desk. “You will get acquainted with each other as time goes on. Now let’s get started.” He held up what Jason thought was a piece of black paper. “We’re going to start scratch boards.” He held up another board and Jason’s eye widened in awe: the black had been scratched away revealing a silver foil underneath, and the black and silver looked like Olympus. “What you do is quite simple: first you need to find a picture you want to use and print out a black and white version. Then you will cover the back of the print out with chalk. Next, you will carefully tape the picture to the board. You guys with me so far?”

The six of them answered in the affirmative.

“Okay, good. Then you need trace every line on the picture, this will transfer the chalk onto the board. When that’s done, remove the picture and get one of these.” Sonders held up what looked like
A pencil with an old fashioned ink pen tip. “This is where the fun begins! If something in the picture shows up as black, you leave the board unscratched. If it is white, you scratch that area clean. For the shades in between, you take off little pieces. Think you guys can handle that?”

The others nodded and Jason was quick to follow. *That actually sounds like fun!*

“Alright, uh- Earl you can use the computer first to find something you want to scratch.” The short man pointed to a lonely computer in the corner of the room. “Alright, now that’s done let’s start the important stuff. Bill if you would?”

The guy who had introduced himself as Bill, reached behind him and turned on an old radio. The art room was then filled with the sound of classic rock. *“Nice! Metallica!”* Bill grinned.

“Right?” asked the art teacher. “How are you’re guys’ brackets holding up after last night?”

An overweight guy with short red hair, who Bill introduced as Mike, was the first to answer. “Duke killed me. I’m freaking done!”

“That’s what you get for thinking Illinois had a chance,” Bill laughed.

*What are they talking about? Brackets?*

Apparently Mr. Sonders had noticed his confusion. “You don’t follow basketball Grace?”

Oh! Jason tapped his fingers on his desk. “I’ve been a bit… preoccupied lately to give it the attention it deserves.” It wasn’t a total lie. He did like to play basketball, but he never really had the opportunity to watch it continuously. Sure Percy had invited Nico and him to watch a game at his house a few times, but their collective ADHD would kick in and they would do something else.

“Yeah, I imagine moving has been pretty hectic.”

The rest of the class passed pretty uneventfully. They managed to get two more people on the computer in the fifty minute period, but most of the class was spent listening to classic rock and discussing sports. The other guys were nice enough, but they seemed a bit hesitant to really converse with him. Sure they had asked where he was from, where he was living (they knew exactly where he was), and other general questions. He also learned that Mr. Sonders was the school’s football coach and that he did have a degree in education and art, which somehow surprised Jason.

When the bell rang, Jason was actually a bit sad to go.

*Second Period: College Prep*

“Why don’t you introduce yourself and say a few things about yourself,” the English teacher suggested. She was an older woman, late fifties if Jason had to guess. She had long brown hair with a few streaks of gray that hung on her shoulders. She was wearing a black sweater that was covered
with cat hair and was about three sizes too big for her small frame.

“Okay. Sure.” Jason gulped. The name part is easy, but what do I say? Hi! My name is Jason Grace! I like comics and my dad is the Roman god Jupiter! Nice to meet you! He cleared his throat and turned to address the class. “Hi, uh- My name is Jason Grace and I like to read comics in my free time?” He hadn’t meant for it to come out as a question, but for some reason all the women staring at him made him feel deeply uncomfortable.

Did he forget to mention that he was the only guy in the class? Because he was, and they were blonde and staring at him… Like he was some piece of meat.

“Oh, now why don’t you find a seat and we can get started,” the English teacher said.

I really should have paid attention when she introduced herself. He walked to the back of the small room, and sat down in the only free desk. He opened his notebook and wrote the date in the margin: March fifteenth. Oh that is an omen if I ever saw one!

“Can any of you ladies- or Jason, tell me the significance of today’s date?” the older woman asked. No one raised a hand or made any other indication that they were going to answer the question. “Anyone?”

Well might as well make a good impression. He raised his hand and some of the girls around him giggled.

“Yes Jason?”

“It’s the ides of March,” he answered, feeling quite proud of himself.

“Good job! Would you care to elaborate on that?”

Once again all eyes were on him. The girl to the right of him even winked at him! “Uh, it was the day Julius Caesar was assassinated in the senate.”

“Excellent! And that brings us into our next module: Julius Caesar by William Shakespeare!” The teacher turned her back to the class and began to write down notes on the blackboard while continuing to lecture the class.

He started to copy the notes from the board, occasionally needed to stop to decipher the teacher’s handwriting, or more common to figure out what his dyslexia was obscuring. Most of what he copied down he knew already; the key players of the conspiracy, their motivations, locations, etc. All of this he had learned from his time at Camp Jupiter. This should be an easy A!

He had just turned to a new page in his notebook, when the girl sitting to his left kicked him in the leg. “Ow!”

“Shh!” the girl hissed at him, while the others around them silently laughed.

“What?” he whispered, as he rubbed his now aching leg. Why couldn’t she have passed me a note instead of resorting to physical violence? His mind then drifted back to when Reyna had started to show interest in him. He had thought those bruises would never heal…

“My name’s Kelsey,” she whispered.

“Nice to meet you?”
“Nice to meet you too. What’s your favorite comic?”

Jason had not been expecting that question at all. Maybe Kelsey could be someone he could talk comics with outside of Nico and Percy. “Well, I really liked Matt Fraction’s *Hawkeye*. He really made him a relatable guy, I mean—”

“Wow, that’s awesome,” the blonde interrupted. “Where are you from?”

That was actually a good question. Hades had given them a rough backstory to use, but they had never discussed where they were from. Nico still had a slight accent, so people would believe he was from Italy, and Percy (if he would start to speak again) had the classic New Yorker manner of talking. But, from listening to Percy’s storied, DOA Records was in California and Hades said they were his wards. “I’m originally from California. Around Berkley.” *Not a lie at all! Originally was the keyword there.*

Kelsey’s eyes lit up. “Oh wow! California? I’ve always wanted to go there! Do you know how to surf? I bet you do! You totally have a surfer’s body!”

“I don’t know how to surf. Never had the time to even try it,” he blushed. It was true. Between being raised by wolves, rising through the ranks of the legion, and doing the bidding of the gods, he never had time to really enjoy himself. *Piper would argue I never even had time to find myself either.*

“Well that’s a damn shame.”

He sighed. “Yeah. Yeah, I guess it is.”

“So are you single?” she asked, her face turning red.

“No,” he answered without a moment’s hesitation.

Maybe he had misunderstood her intentions, but he doubted it. He didn’t respond to anyone, but the teacher for the rest of the period. When the bell rang he was the first one out of the room.

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*Third Period: Environmental Science*

*I wonder if Nico can sense this?* He wondered as he watched the young teacher, Mr. Fitz, drop the body of a freshly shot deer onto a large table covered in newspaper.

“Today I’m going to show you how to butcher a freshly killed, hey you’re new,” he said pointing at Jason with one bloody finger. “Deer.”

“You shot it before school didn’t you Mr. Fitz?” chuckled one of his classmates.

“I did no such thing,” he said while wiping his blood covered hands in his shirt. “I had this planned since the beginning of the semester.”

“The syllabus says we were going to learn how to identify common animal tracks,” another guy said,
causing the rest of the class to laugh.

The teacher threw his hands up in surrender. “Alright, you caught me! I shot it this morning and it needs to be butchered ASAP. Now if you guys and gals help me, I’ll send Matt down to the kitchen for some butter and we can use the Bunsen burners to fry up some deer loin. That sound good?”

The class cheered, and Jason wondered what kind of class he had signed up for…

Fourth Period: Information Processing

Why do I have a feeling that if I walked into a classroom anywhere else covered in blood and smelling of garlic, the cops would be called?

But, when he walked into the school’s computer lab in said state, his instructor, Mrs. Carol, didn’t even raise an eyebrow. Exhausted and a bit nauseated (he definitely ate way too much), he didn’t even bother to formally introduce himself to the elderly woman, and just sat down in an open chair in the back of the lab.

“Fitz shot a deer I take it?” asked a guy with dark brown hair and was easily a foot taller than Jason.

“Yeah. Did the blood give it away?”

“Nah, the whole school smelled like garlic. Plus I saw him dragging in a garbage bag this morning. So either he shot a deer or he finally snapped.”

Jason laughed.


He grabbed Charlie’s hand with his own. “Jason Grace. Nice to meet you.”

“Likewise.” Charlie leaned back in his chair and looked at Mrs. Carol, who was passing out printouts to the rest of the class. “Has anyone explained to you how this class works?”

Jason shrugged. “Well the description says we learn how to write memos, letters, and do a little bit of Excel.” Whatever that is.

“Yeah that’s what supposed to happen, but I’m guessing no one explained what really happens,” Charlie said as he pulled a small black rectangle from his back pocket. “Just wait until Carol hands out our assignment,” he said using air quotes on the last word.

Jason couldn’t deny that he was curious about what Charlie was talking about. He wondered if Mrs. Carol had narcolepsy and would fall asleep, allowing them to sneak out of class. Or if when the teacher shut the door a disco ball would descend from the ceiling and it turned into some kind of secret dance club. Or maybe they do something within the realm of possibility Grace, he chastised himself.

He didn’t have to wait long for Mrs. Carol to hand out the assignment. He flipped through the packet of papers and saw that is was literal step-by-step instructions on how to write a memo, and what it
should it should say. Jason was glad to see that it even contained detailed illustrations for each step of
the process. In other words: even the most technologically challenged demigod would find this easy.
“This looks really easy,” he told Charlie.

“Yes, and it’s about to be even easier,” chuckled the other boy. Charlie stuck the small black
rectangle into Jason’s computer and commandeered his mouse. He moved the mouse around some
menus and clicked rapidly on an icon. Instantly the assignment that they were just assigned appeared
on his screen. “And there you go.”

“Isn’t that cheating?”

“Yup,” Charlie shrugged, as if giving him his assignment wasn’t an issue. “Now for class to really
begin.” Jason was about to protest about how this was unethical, wrong, and maybe even illegal, but
Charlie had once again took control of his house and clicked on a few different icons.

“Seriously this isn’t-“ Jason silenced himself when the computer screen momentarily turned black
and then the words World of Warcraft: Legion appeared on the screen, along with a whole slew of
awesome looking creatures and eerie green fires. There’s a game! The last time he had visited Piper,
the two of them had watched Warcraft and he had fallen in love with it. In his opinion it may have
been the greatest movie ever made! Fantasy creatures, knights, magic, and invaders from another
world? Sign him up!

“You ever play?”

Jason shook his head. “No.”

Charlie chuckled. “Well then, let’s get you started.” He reached over and hit a key on Jason’s
keyboard.

The screen changed once again, this time a there was a column of what appeared to be names on the
right side of the screen. The rest of the screen however was occupied by a sprawling prairie with
several huts in the background, in the forefront though stood what Jason could only describe as a
friendly looking minotaur wearing plate armor and wielding a massive sword and shield. “Wow,”
was all he could say.

“That’s Holymilk,” Charlie chuckled. “For now just hit enter so you can meet the rest of us.”

“Um, okay.” Jason searched the keyboard before finding the “enter” key. He tapped it once and
instantly he found Holymilk standing in the middle of some kind of primitive city. He figured out
how to move the bovine around with his keyboard and began to explore the city. There were
hundreds of other people playing it seemed, all playing different creatures and wearing different
types of armor. A lot of people were even flying through the air, riding gryphons, dragons, even
helicopters! “This is awesome,” he whispered in awe.

“Yup,” agreed the other boy. “This is what we all do every day during this class.”

“All of you?” Jason asked as he looked around at the other twelve students in the room. He noticed
that Charlie seemed to be telling the truth; every other screen that he could see had the game running.
Some people were in the city like him, while others looked to be in more exotic locations.

“Welcome to the world of Warcraft. I think you’re going to like it here.”
Lunch

Jason clutched onto his “homework” like it was the most important thing in the world.

Just before the bell had rang for lunch, Charlie had given him a player’s manual for “WoW” as he had called it, and told Jason to read through it and pick out what kind of character he wanted to make for himself. Needless to say, but he had a feeling Information Processing was going to be his favorite class.

He barreled down the steps with the rest of his class heading to the lunch line, but stopped when he saw Percy and Nico off to one side. Percy was rubbing circles on the smaller back, and was offering Nico his best smile. Nico looked okay form where Jason stood, but he knew better than anyone that the smaller boy could hide his feelings better than anyone.

“Hey Nico, Percy, how’s it going?” he asked.

“Just cracker jack,” Nico huffed as Percy frowned at him.

Now it was Jason’s turn to frown. “Is everything okay? Is someone giving you a hard time?” So far the people Jason had met ranged from distant to friendly, but he’d only met maybe half the school so far, so it was very possible that the son of Hades had encountered a bully. If that was the case though, he was pretty sure Percy would’ve beaten the Hades out of said bully. Percy was a good friend like that.

“No, just a bit… overwhelmed.” The son of Hades visibly deflated. “It’s just so claustrophobic here, and everyone has just been asking about us nonstop.”

Jason bit his lip as he realized what Nico must be going through. Sometimes Jason forgot that Nico had gone through Tartarus alone only to be trapped inside a vase where he nearly suffocated. So Nico feeling crowded was definitely not going to trigger any pleasant memories. “Once everyone has gotten a chance to meet you, they’ll stop bothering you in a few days,” he reassured his friend. “Who knows, maybe you’ll make some new friends and forget me and old kelp-head here.”

Percy shot Jason a glare, while Nico’s lips twitched into the barest of smiles. “I don’t think I could ever replace you two.”

“You just aren’t looking hard enough,” he laughed. “Now, let’s get in line for what people have assured me are amazing chicken nuggets.”

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The lunch room was… interesting.

With such a small student body there was only eight tables, and of those only five were in use. It looked to Jason like the seating was by gender rather than by any kind of social status. Three tables
were solely occupied by girls, some of which he recognized, while the other two tables were the
guys.

Charlie and a few of the guys from art class and info processing spotted him and waved at him to
come and sit with them. He was going to go join them, but a certain grumpy Italian plowed past him
followed by a raven haired teen, and the two sat down at an empty table away from anyone else.
Jason shrugged at his new acquaintances and friends apologetically before joining his cousins.

He sat down across from Nico and took a bite from one of his chicken nuggets. **Wow! These are
good!** He popped the rest of the meaty morsel into his mouse and unrolled the napkin that contained
his fork and spoon. He grabbed his spoon and shoveled some of the mash potatoes on his plate into
his mouth. “Neeks have you tried this yet? It’s pretty tasty!”

Nico glared at him.

“I mean, it’s not as good as your cooking, but for two dollars it’s really good!”

“I’m not hungry.”

Jason set his spoon down. “Come on Nico you need to eat something. What would Wi-“

Nico slammed his fist onto the table. “Don’t you say that name!” he hissed.

Okay, he is way more upset than I thought he was. “Sorry Nico. That was a bit of a low blow…”

Nico continued to glare at him for another moment, before hanging his head and sighing. “I should
be the one apologizing Jay. I’m just not used to all of this.”

“If you want we can talk about it when we get home,” he offered as he stole two nuggets off the son
of Hades’ plate.

“Yeah okay. We mi-“

Nico was cut off by the sound of a lunch tray slamming onto the table next to Jason. He would’ve
liked to say that he hadn’t nearly jumped out of his skin, but Jason generally always tried to tell the
truth. Jason looked up the see the guy who had helped him open his locker standing over them.

“Good afternoon ya’ll” the bearded teen cried as he flopped down into the metal folding chair.
“Please allow me to introduce myself,” he said while stroking his red beard. “My name is Samuel
Adams Lovejoy.” He offered his hand to Jason, and Jason hesitantly shook it.

Something is wrong here. “I’m Jason and this is-“

“Percy and Nico,” Sam finished. “I share a class with them.”

“Oh. Um, not to be rude, but it there a reason you came over here Sam?”

“Honestly yes. You see we were a bit concerned that you fellas didn’t come and sit with us. Is
everything okay?”

“Just dandy,” Nico growled as he stabbed a green bean with his work.

“That’s good,” Sam nodded. “We were afraid we scared you small guys off.”

Jason chuckled nervously. “No, we’re fine.”
“Well glad to hear it!” Sam then leaned in over the table. “The guys also sent me over here to ask a few lot a few personal questions,” he whispered.

Jason stomach twisted, and suddenly he regretted eating the chicken nuggets and the fried deer meat. *Why do I get the feeling he’s not talking about shoe size?*

“You guys are from California right?”

“Jason is form there, but for the last couple years he’s been with us in New York,” Nico explained. Sam nodded. “Okay, that’s cool. Any of you guys ever play on any teams?”

“Percy was on the swim team. He even made it to state,” Nico said, beaming with pride.

“That’s pretty cool! What about the rest of you?”

“I never really had time for any extracurricular activities,” Jason sighed. *This guy is just circling us like a shark. I wish he would just ask what he really wants to know…*

“And you?” he asked Nico.

“I was… homeschooled before this.”

“Dang, here I was hoping one of you were star basketball players. Our teams could really use one,” he laughed. “One last question.”

*And here it comes…*

“Are any of you… you know, gay?”

Through years of dealing with petty gods and goddesses, Jason had learned to control his reactions. He slowly darted his eyes over to the ambassador of Pluto. Nico’s face appeared calm, but his eyes were full of fear and rage, and Jason was worried that if he gripped his fork any tighter, it palms would start to bleed.


“I don’t know is it?” Sam asked, as he popped two whole chicken nuggets into his mouth.

Jason wasn’t sure how to respond to the question. Not that he didn’t know about his orientation, but how his answer would be taken by the son of Hades. If he answered first, Nico might take it as him setting him up. If he waited for Nico to answer first, it might seem like he was pushing his friend to answer. *I’m between a rock and a hard place…*

“I’m straight,” Nico answered.

*Oh Neeks…* He wished his friend was more comfortable with who he was, but he could understand why he lied. “Me too,” he sighed.

“What about you?” Sam asked while pointed at Percy with a nugget. “You got any sugar in your tank?”

*Percy will just shake his head, and everything will be fan-flipping-tastic. We’ll be known as the three str-

Percy nodded.
WTF PERCY?!

That wasn't in the script, was it? *flips through the script* IT ISN'T PERCY!

Right now I can picture two possible responses you could be having right now:
1. You're rolling your eyes and think I've done this to get to the Percico faster
2. you're jaw is gaping, and you're trying to figure out wtf just happened and what will happen.

I can safely say it is not #1. Please recall Percy's actions from the last couple chapters and I think you'll understand what Percy is trying to do, int his own seaweed-brain way :)

But, how will Nico handle this?

Alright that's enough of that, let's talk about Jason.
Jason and Demeter relationship (not that kind) will continue to develop as the story unfolds. Right now, Demeter is the only woman/goddess he feels comfortable around after the incident with Disciplina. That's also why he was so quick to shut Kelsey down in class. Right now the prospect of romance or any form of intimacy terrifies him.

I think we all know Jason would totally take Art, since he's more or less Steve Rodgers Jr. We will get to see artistic!Jason as time passes because it will be important in his character development. He didn't really interact with his classmates because everyone was a little bit shy, plus who is social in the morning?

I don't know why but I freaking love nerdy!Jason. It just seems like something he would get into once he settled at CHB. At CJ he just never had a chance to be anything other than the son of Jupiter so he never got to figure out what he likes. So now we have Jason who likes comic books and fantasy movies.

Let's see next chapter will pick off where we left off, but from Nico's POV. So that should be fun!

Hey! Did you like what you just read? Leave a kudos!

Thoughts, ideas, theories, smut, etc... read a comment!

Kudos an comments make me jiggle!

Also question for you guys: what kind of race and class should Jason choose for his Warcraft character? Also what should its name be?
Best character will be chosen so you get bragging rights! yay!

Well until next time, thanks for reading!
You're the best!
The son of Hades didn’t know who he wanted to hit first: this “Sam” or Percy.

He knew the moment the guy sat down something was up. His questions had started innocent enough, but the guy had some kind of gleam in his eye that he was after something. So when he had dropped the question, Nico wasn’t surprised. Angry, yes. Surprised, no.

He knew that eventually he would be faced with a moment like this, and after watching those terrible television shows a few nights back he had already decided on his course of action: he was going to lie through his teeth.

Was it cowardly? Maybe, but the truth was he didn’t plan on staying here for long. At most he would stay until graduation, which was only a few short months away. As a demigod though it was highly unlikely that they would be staying at Demeter’s that long. Something always came up.

Besides, Will was still too fresh to even think about finding someone new. Yes, he was worried that he would never find someone else, but he believed Jason and Percy’s reassurances that he would find someone again.

Percy…

What did the son of Poseidon think he was doing? He just nodded and went back to eating his lunch like it was no big deal! Why would he lie about that? Didn’t he know how big a deal it was to be gay? Was this some kind of joke to him?

Am I some kind of joke to him?

“Wait, for real?” the red bearded stranger asked, his eyes bulging from their sockets. “You really are gay?”

Percy dipped one of his chicken nuggets into his mashed potatoes before nodding yet again.
“Is that a problem?” Nico growled. He hadn’t meant to say anything, it just slipped out before he could stop himself.

Percy set down his spoon and glared at the redheaded stranger, daring him to say something.

The large redhead looked at the three of them quizzically a moment before shaking his head. “No, not a problem at all,” he chuckled, as he set down his fork. The potbellied boy turned around in his chair, smiling like a man possessed. “Hey Aaron! Looks like you might have a prom date!” he yelled across the small cafeteria.

Nico’s fork clattered onto his plate. “What?” he gasped. There is no way I heard that correctly.

Then a loud whooping filled the cafeteria, as all the boys on one side of the room suddenly sprang up from their chairs and began to pat another redheaded boy on the back. The redhead, Aaron he figured, hung his head down, clearly embarrassed by his classmates’ display.

“Oh that’s Aaron, he my younger brother, and well, he’s gay,” Sam explained before shoveling mashed potatoes into his mouth. “We’re a small community and he there isn’t anyone else around for him to get to know. Then you guys come here from California and well, I hate to stereotype, but I was kind of hoping one of you could potentially be more than friends with him.”

“So you think just because… Percy’s gay,” it felt as if someone had stuck an icicle into his heart saying those words, “that he’ll just date your brother?!” his hands were clenched into fists. “That’s not how it works! They have to have stuff in common! Just like anyone else!” he growled. Jason looked like he was going to say something, but he shut him up with a pointed look.

Sam waved absently. “Of course I know that Nick!”

“Nico.”

“Sorry,” the redhead apologized. “But I thought I could at least point him in the right direction if possible.” He pointed his fork at Percy. “And if you have a boyfriend back where you’re from don’t worry about it. Someone who understands can make a world of difference.” With that the large teen stood up from the table and grabbed his now empty tray. “Give it some thought, introduce yourself, and welcome to LaMoille. Maybe tomorrow you guys would be willing to sit with the rest of us?”

“Yeah, sounds good to me,” Jason answered before Nico could respond.

“Cool, I’ll see you guys around,” Sam said, waving as he left the trio.

“He seems nice,” Jason offered, obviously trying to ease the tension. “A little weird, but nice. Right Percy?”

Percy nodded before he tossed his last nugget in the air and caught it with his mouth, swallowing it whole.

“Percy,” he said, keeping his voice as calm as possible. “We need to talk. Now.” He stood up from his chair and grabbed Percy by his shoulder, yanking the older boy out his chair. Percy actually yelped in surprise to his sudden departure, the first sound he had made in over a month, but right now Nico couldn’t care less. He more-or-less dragged the son of Poseidon through the cafeteria, earning the looks of everyone around them, then up the narrow staircase, and finally into the men’s restroom. He let go of the raven haired teen’s shoulder and told him to stay with a glare that could scare a primordial. He quickly surveyed the bathroom to make sure the two of them were alone.

After checking both stalls for people that might overhear them and satisfied that they were indeed
alone, he forcefully shoved Percy against the tiled wall. Before the son of Poseidon could react, Nico grabbed the older boy by his shirt and pulled him down so his eyes were level with his own. “What the fuck was that Perseus?” he growled.

Percy’s eyes went wide with fear. He knew if Nico was using his given name he was in trouble.

Nico pulled harder on the shirt, dragging the boy lower. “Was that some kind of joke to you? Did you think it was funny to say that you’re,” he swallowed. “Like me?” His voice momentarily lost its fury.

Percy wildly shook his head in protest.

“Then why did you do it then Percy?” he snarled. “What if, gods forbid, that kid started to like you? Then what? Are you going to play along? Or are you going to reject him?

Percy violently shook his head no.

“If what that shaved orangutan said is true then that kid might be desperate for some kind of connection.” There was a small voice in the back of his head telling him why he was so upset and he wished it would mind its own business. He felt the anger leave his body leaving him feeling exhausted. “I don’t know why you did that Perce, but you shouldn’t lie about things like that. You could be leading someone on and it’s only going to end with someone getting hurt.” He said almost in a whisper. He let go of the son of Poseidon’s shirt and frowned when he saw that he had stretched out the thing. His father would not be happy that Percy had ruined a shirt in little under a day. “Why did you do it Percy?”

Percy smiled softly at him before he gently grabbed Nico by the shoulders. He led him over to one of the faucets and pointed to the mirror.

“What?” Nico asked as he looked in the mirror. It was just an ordinary mirror, covered in handprints and some streaks of substances unknown that he didn’t want know. Behind the grime was their reflections staring back at them; his in a black oversized hoodie, face in a twisted into a scowl, and Percy’s, with his hands still on his shoulders and his chin almost resting on Nico’s head. “I don’t get it?”

Percy released his grip and with one hand gestured to his other wrist.

Nico face twisted further at the sight of the scars across Percy’s wrist. Nectar and Ambrosia may heal wounds quickly, but they don’t always prevent scaring as was the case with Percy. This morning for some reason Percy had decided to take the bandages off, a decision which Nico was wary of. He was concerned that people would stare at the scaring and avoid the son of Poseidon, a concern that was well founded.

All morning their classmates would take one look at Percy and decide that Nico was the one they should talk to. No one would directly ask Nico about it, but they all tried to hint that they wanted to know. By the end of third period he had been overwhelmed by all the attention he was receiving and was tired of answering the same questions over and over again.

“Percy I still don’t get it,” he sighed. *This would be so much easier if he would just speak again. I miss hearing his voice...* 

The older boy scratches his temple before he steps between him and the mirror. Percy placed his hands on his hips and puffed out his chest. He then acting like someone or something was hitting him and danced around Nico as is he was...
“You’re protecting me?” It made a strange kind of sense to the son of Hades. Nico knew he was a bit different from everyone else; he was on the small side, liked dark clothing, had a pale complexion, and really didn’t like to socialize with people beyond a small group of friends. Then there was the matter of being a son of Hades and his preferences. If people were confronted with the choice of Percy, Jason, or himself, of course they would choose them over him.

But this wasn’t the same old Percy anymore. The older boy had lost quite a bit of weight in the last month and with him refusing to come out of their room for the first couple weeks his once golden skin was only a few shades darker than his own. Then there was Percy’s scarred wrists, anyone who laid eyes on the scarred flesh would know immediately their origin. Sprinkle on the belief that Percy was a selective mute and gay and you had yourself one messed up guy.

In other words, someone that made Nico look normal and well adjusted.

Percy responded with his probably-should-be-trademarked-by-now-grin and nodded slightly.

A mixture of emotions settled over him: anger, confusion, and gratitude. He was grateful that Percy had understood of all his fears about starting school and had decided to take all potential negative attention onto himself. He was confused as to why Percy felt the need to do something this big and potentially dangerous for him. He was angry at the son of Poseidon because he was not some delicate princess that needed to be saved. Although it is flattering...

He let out a deep breath and looked into the son of Poseidon’s brilliant green eyes. He couldn’t be mad at Percy for trying to protect him, not after the emotional break downs he himself had been having recently. And if Percy felt the need to be a hero again, wasn’t that another sign that he was doing better? Or does it mean he’s completely off his rocker? He hoped not. “You didn’t have to do all this!” he snapped, making Percy flinch. He took a step forward and wrapped his arms around the older boy in a gentle embrace. “But thanks Perce. It really means a lot that you did this.” He felt Percy’s arms wrap around him and it felt right; all of his anger and anxieties fell away in the gentle embrace of the older boy.

Nico had stayed in Percy’s embrace until Senor Jackson (The Spanish teacher and of no relation to Percy) walked into the restroom. He paid no mind to the two of them and walked past them into one of the vacant stalls. When certain biological noises echoed from the stall, the moment the two boys had shared was beyond over; it had been shot in the back of the head and had its soul dragged into the depths of Tartarus.

Nico released Percy from his embrace and jerked his head for the older boy to follow him. They exited the bathroom and took their sweet time walking down the school’s main hallway to the gym. Earlier his Home Economics teacher had informed the two of them that during the lunch period the gym was open for students to “hang out” in until the period was over.

The gym itself was pretty underwhelming when compared to the ones Nico had seen on television. It had a full size basketball court that covered the length of the gym, flanked by ancient wooden bleachers that pulled out of the wall. On the far end of gym was the school’s stage which had its red curtains drawn, concealing the stage from view.
“Hey Percy! Nico! Over here!” Jason called from the top row of one set of bleachers. The blond was standing with a group of guys and girls that were watching something with intense interest. “I think you’ll want to see this Nico!”

Nico looked at Percy and the older boy shrugged as if to say “might as well see what the fuss is.” They climbed the bleachers, Percy with his longer gait was first to the top, while Nico had to watch his balance with each row. A growth spurt would be greatly appreciated anytime now! He thought as he pushed his way through the crowd that smelled of way too much Axe cologne. Oh that is interesting.

Apparently the crowd had gathered to watch a boy and girl play a game of Mythomagic.

“What do you think Nico?” Jason whispered in his ear. He could actually hear the smirk in Jason’s voice.

“I don’t know anything about it,” he answered. It was a complete and utter lie. He quickly scanned each of the player’s fields. The girl, a tall lanky blonde named Chelsea that was in Nico and Percy’s Anatomy class, clearly had the advantage over the guy. Her monster zones were filled with high leveled gods and titans, and her magic and trap zone was loaded with facedown cards. The boy on the other hand had only a lonely satyr on the field.

“Are you sure?” Jason asked as he tried to get a peek at the guy’s hand.

“Not my thing anymore Jayce,” he scoffed as he moved to stand behind the duelist. His hand was a mess of nearly useless spell and artifact cards, but there was something that caught Nico’s eye: Ariadne’s String. The artifact card was a staple in any Mythomagic deck, it allowed the player to add any one card from their deck to their hand in exchange for discarding two cards from their hand.

Nico looked back at the lonely satyr figurine and realized that there was one card that could potentially change the outcome of the game: Pandemonium. Pandemonium was a spell card that worked for Pan or any satyr card; if used while Pan was on the field it destroyed all other cards and figures on the field, which was the reason Pan was banned from competitive play (not that he had ever abused it back in the Lotus against the other kids). However, if it was used when a regular satyr was on the field, it simple returned all of your opponent’s card and figures back to their hand for one turn before returning on the next.

“Alright, your turn Tate,” Chelsea said.

The boy, Tate, furrowed his brow as he drew a card from his deck: Persephone. He felt his eyebrow involuntarily switch at the sight of the newly drawn card. I hate to admit it, but my step-mother is exactly what this guy needs if he wants to win. He watched as Tate’s hand hovered over his cards, and prayed that the guy had Pandemonium and knew to use it.

The boy threw his cards down. “I forfeit.”

“What?!” Nico cried in disbelief. “Let me see your deck!” Before the brunette had a chance to respond, Nico swiped the guy’s deck and thumbed through the cards at speeds that would impress Hermes. Come on! Come on! He has to- YES! “Here let me show you how to do it!” The guy stared at him in confusion, with his mouth agape. “Move,” he commanded as he pushed the idiot out of the way. “Here let me show you what to do.” He picked up the boys hand and sat down across from the blonde. “First play Ariadne’s String,” he explained showing the card to everyone around him. He tossed the card in the graveyard along with two useless cards form his hand, and pulled out Pandemonium from the deck. He handed the deck to Chelsea to shuffle as was customary to ensure that there was no foul play. “Next play Pandemonium, which send her entire field back her hand, and since it’s a spell speed two she can’t activate anything in her back row in response to this.”
Chelsea frowned as she picked up all her cards and set the figurines off to the side. “Now I’ll sacrifice this satyr to summon Persephone to the field. By discarding the rest of my hand, I can activate her effect, which allows me to put one flower token on every open space on Chelsea’s side of the field. Since every zone is open, each zone gets a flower token, which mean—“

“I can’t play anything,” the blonde groaned, throwing her cards to the ground.

“Which means my goddess can pick off the rest of her health at my convenience,” he laughed. He looked around at all the people gathered around him and his eyes widened as he realized what he just did. “Or something like that…’’ he chuckled, before he gingerly handed Tate’s card back to him. *I can’t believe I just did that!*

“And you don’t know anything about it,” Jason said with a knowing smile, that was mirrored on Percy. The group all laughed.

“I don’t” he insisted, snatching Jason’s glasses off his face. They were absolutely filthy, covered in fingerprints and what looked like gravy. He used his hoodie to gently clean the lenses before handing them back to the son of Jupiter. Someone tapped his shoulder and he spun around to see Chelsea smiling at him.

“For someone who doesn’t know anything, you sure know a lot,’’ she said with a soft smile. “Would you like to play with us in the future? We could definitely use some new blood in our little league.”

“He’d love to,’’ Jason said before he could turn her down. “He just needs to get some new equipment. We lost it in the move.”

He was going to protest that he didn’t play Mythomagic anymore, that it was a game for children, but Percy shot him a glare that Nico didn’t know Percy was capable of. The message was clear though: *You’re going to play with them. And you’re going to have fun with them.*

Nico gulped. “Sounds fun.” *What have I gotten myself into?*

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*Fifth Period: Study Hall*

Study hall was held in the same small library where the three of them had taken their placement tests the day before. It was monitored by an older woman with black hair with a few streaks of gray, named Mrs. Deal, and she was the biggest person Nico had ever seen in his life. As she explained the few rules for the period (no food, you can talk, but be considerate of others working, and you must be doing something productive) Nico was terrified that the steel bolts on her chair would be sheared off at any moment from the tremendous pressure they must be under. Or worse that her tight pink muumuu would tear. Percy seemed to have to same fear, as he cringed with every movement the rotund woman made.

*If that fabric gives out, Percy would become gay in an instant.*

When the bearded woman was satisfied that they knew the rules, the two found a table to themselves
and sat with their backs to Mrs. Deal (a safety precaution). Nico opened up his anatomy text book, an ancient thing covered in markings and stains from years of disuse, opened his notebook to a blank page, and began to copy the assigned vocabulary words down.

He was halfway through *dendrite* when he noticed that the son of Poseidon was just sitting there, doing nothing. *Oh that is not going to fly with me!* He gently kicked Percy’s foot, gaining the green eyed boy’s attention. “Perseus. We are in the same classes, which means we have the same homework,” he half whispered. “So why don’t you and I get this done now so we have less to do when we get home?”

Percy frowned, but grabbed his notebook and a pencil and set them on the worn wooden table. He opened his notebook with an exaggerated flip.

Nico slid the textbook over so that the two of them could share it, and he went back to work. This time he was halfway through *Axiom* when he noticed that something was off. He looked over at his former crush and rolled his eyes. Instead of copying definitions, the son of Poseidon was drawing pegasi in the margins of his notebook.

*Oh for the love of the gods...* “Percy, it’s not that bad. We just copy ten definitions and we’re done. It’ll take us fifteen minutes tops!”

Percy crossed his arms and stuck his lower lip out, pouting like a small child.

*Is this what Sally had to deal with? This might explain a few things....* “Percy if you don’t do your homework, I’ll- I’ll lock up all the comics!” That’s what Sally did when his grades were in the decline.

Percy didn’t pick up his pencil, instead he continued to pout.

*Okay threats aren’t working... Bribery?* “I’ll make us blue pancakes tonight if you do your homework now?” He hadn’t meant for it to come out as a question, but halfway through he lost confidence in his bribe.

Percy seemed to consider it for a moment, before shaking his head.

“How about blue pancakes and blue bacon.” He was lying out his ass. He didn’t know if blue bacon was even possible, but it was something original.

Percy instantly nodded, picked up his pencil, and began to rapidly scribble what linguist would hesitantly call words onto the pegasi covered paper.

“Good boy.”

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*Sixth Period: World History*

Apparently Percy and Jason had been sold by Mr. Z’s pitch on taking one of his classes. World History was the only class the three of them shared together, and truth be told Nico was looking...
forward to it as well.

The vice-principal had said that they would be starting World War Two sometime in the next week, which meant everything covered after that would be all new to him. He was completely ignorant about what had occurred during his stay in the Lotus, but he really wanted to be able to fill in the gaps in his knowledge base. He has heard that after the war, Russia and American had something called a “cold war”, then there was some small wars in Asia, and they had cured Polio, which was one less thing to worry about.

“Well if it isn’t the Three Stooges,” the handsome (he did not think that) teacher said as they entered the room.

Nico felt his cheeks heat up as Mr. Ziggler gave them a two fingered salute.

“Grab some chair, and we’ll begin momentarily.” Mr. Z. said as he set his feet up on his desk.

Nico noticed that the room was a bit nicer than the other classrooms he had been in so far. Instead of blackboards, pristine white boards covered three of the walls. Different maps of continents, countries, and the whole world were taped to the ceiling, which Nico thought was a bit strange. The desk seemed to be new or at least well maintained; they lacked any markings or carvings and seemed to be devoid of gum.

The three of them sat in the front row and each opened their notebooks.

“You guys won’t be needing those today,” Ziggler yawned from his chair. The athletic teacher stretched and stood up from his chair. “I think this is about everybody,” he said, surveying the room. It was the first class Nico had that had more than ten people in it. “Before we really delve into my favorite subject, and my favorite movie-,” some of the students chuckled, “we’re going to do a bit of map work.” Ziggler walked over to a small cupboard and pulled out the largest box of colored pencils Nico had ever seen. “So, on my desk you’ll find the maps and the instructions for what the legend should look like. We’ll do this the rest of the week and Monday we can start the movie. Alright get in your little groups, gossip, blah blah blah, and have fun.”

Nico looked at Jason and Percy, and they had a silent conversation. Percy would go get their assignment while he and Jason moved their desks together. It was really interesting to the son of Hades that their combat skills could have so many real world applications.

“Oh and guy.” Mr. Z called out from his desk. “If haven’t heard, which I strongly doubt, we have new students. Nico di Angelo, Jason Grace, and Perseus Jackson. Make sure you include them in your discussions.”

Nico decided that the assignment was pretty simple, but definitely time consuming. They were each given a black and white map of Europe with a black legend on the side. On another sheet of paper they were given a list of things to add to the map and what color they should be; Patton’s march through Italy was to be green, the D-day invasion to be purple, etc…

“This is actually kind of relaxing,” Jason said as he drew yellow X’s on his map to represent the Maginot Line. “I didn’t think I would get to color outside of art class.”
“How is that by the way?” Nico asked as he craned his neck to see Jason’s map. He thought Jason’s placement was a little too messy as some of the Line on Jason’s paper crossed from France into Germany.

Jason shrugged. “It’s... not what I expected.”

“What were you expecting? Also I found Nuremburg.” He drew a small blue star on the German city.

“It’s- Gah! Move you head Percy!” the blond pushed the son of Poseidon away from Nico’s paper so he could see the star. “We apparently listen to classic rock and talk sports. Oh and we do some art.”

“That’s... interesting.” *This whole place is not what any of us expected. Well, maybe Percy expected this, but he isn’t saying anything.*

“Hey did anyone find the Maginot Line?” a girl called from the back of the room.

Jason’s hand shot up with lightning speed. “I got it up here Chelsea.”

Oh great...

The blonde freckled girl that he had played against less than two hours ago skipped, *literally skipped*, over to them, paper in hand. “Hey Nico,” she said with a small wave. “You guys got the Line?”

Nico pointed to the yellow X’s on his map. *Please go away. By all mercy of the gods, please, please, please, go away.* One look at Jason though and he knew his prayers would not be answered. Okay, he knew Olympus was out of commissions, but he still had hope!

“So you, Chelsea, what kind of cards do you use in your deck?” the blond asked, with a malicious gleam in his eyes.

The blonde hastily copied Nico’s map before handing hers to him. “See if there’s anything I got that you don’t,” she explained. “As for my deck? Uh well I’m a sucker for the classics, so it’s an Olympian-Titan hybrid.”

Nico scoffed as he copied the few items from the blonde’s map that he was missing.

“And what’s so bad about that?” she asked, folding her arms and sending him a death glare.

“Yeah Nico, what’s so bad about that?” Jason asked, trying his hardest not to laugh.

*If I kill him, me and Percy can handle everything on the farm and when we finally free Olympus I’ll tell thunder pants that Jason died an embarrassing death fighting a lone hellhound pup.* He smiled wickedly at the blond, causing him to shrink into his seat, before turning his attention to the other blonde. “Just that you’d be easy prey for any deck that uses any cards from the newer expansions. The *Asgard Ascending* expansion alone would destroy you before your second turn.”

“Well it’s a good thing I only run class *monsters* you short little-”

“Woah! Woah! Woah!” Ziggler called from his desk. “I have zero clue what you guys are talking about, but why don’t we change topics before we say something we’re going to regret. Like, what do you guys think the thing floating above New York is? My money’s on government experiment gone awry. Chelsea, tell them what you think it is.”
The blonde stared at her feet as if they were the most interesting thing in the world. “I think it’s Mount Olympus,” she sighed. “What do think it is?”

“I think you’re right.”

Chelsea beamed at him.

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Seventh Period: Java Coding

Nico had no idea why a class about coffee and ciphers would be held in a computer lab, but if it got him out of P.E. with Percy, it could be held in the boiler room for all he cared. In the months following the Giant War, he had gotten more comfortable around Percy, even being able to stay in the same room as the green eyed teen when he was only wearing a t-shirt and boxers with only the minimal of discomfort on his part. But potentially seeing his former crush naked was too much for him. So here he was.

“You must be Nico,” a frail grey haired woman said. “I’m Mrs. Carol,” she said, offering her his hand to shake.

He took her hand and briefly shook it. What is with these people and shaking hands? “Yeah, it’s nice to meet you,” he said with a forced smile.

“It’s nice to meet you too,” she smiled. Nico did his best to ignore the light ringing in his ears and the all too familiar pulling sensation in his stomach that told him this woman didn’t have much time left in the world of the living. “I’ll give you a brief idea on how this class works. It’s self-taught, meaning that you are in charge of not only doing your assignments, but also teaching yourself all the relevant material. When you complete an assignment, just wave me over and I’ll grade it for you.” She pulled out a rather thick white textbook and a folder bulging with stapled packets of papers. “Since you started late in the semester I’m going to waive the last five assignments for you.”

With that he thanks her and searched the small computer lab for a place to sit. He frowned when he spotted Chelsea sitting off to one side with a free chair next her. His frown turned into a grimace when she saw him and tried to wave him over. He pretended not to see her and walked to the back corner of the room, taking a seat that was as far away from anyone else as possible in the cramped room.

This was the first time he had been without Percy or Jason in a little over a month and he used the opportunity to reflect.

First there was the attack on Camp Half-Blood that had wiped out his home and most of his loved ones. Will was gone forever and the only reminder that he had of him was the silly sun hat that was currently in his hoodie’s pocket and the memories he had of what he thought was the love of his life. His hand worked his way into his pocket and he squeezed the comfy hat. I swear on all that is and all that will be, that I will kill the bastards responsible for Will’s death.
His thoughts turned to Camp Jupiter and through the associative property, Hazel and Reyna. He wished that he could just shadow travel and talk to his sisters about everything that was happening, but his father had made him promise that he would do no such thing until given permission. *I’m sure they’re fine. After all, Percy’s dad is supposed to be watching over Camp Jupiter. If anything bad were to happen he would call us in to assist.*

Then he thought of Percy and Jason.

Nico understood why the son of Poseidon had tried to end his life. He really did. Percy had lost almost his entire world. How many years had Sally been Percy’s anchor? How did it feel to find a place where you not only belonged, but also thrived there and was loved by all? What was it like to spend nearly half of his life with the girl he loved more than anything else? What was it like to lose it all in a blink of an eye? How could anyone be expected to process all the information and pain without resorting to suicide? Jason thought Percy had been selfish and cowardly when they found him in the tub, but not Nico. Suicide can be many things. Desperate. Sensible. Noble. Tragic. Gods, even the ultimate exercise of free will. But cowardly? Selfish? Never. And he was a son of Hades; he knew all about death. Besides, after he had nursed Percy back to health, the older boy seemed to be slowly returning to his old self. Maybe he just needed to see if he still had some control in his life?

It was weird, but he was actually more concerned about Jason than he was about Percy. Percy was honest about his misery, while Jason was pretending everything was fine, but Nico had noticed how “fine” he actually was. The son of Jupiter always tried to initiate any physical contact now, otherwise he would flinch ever so slightly if someone touched him first. The blond also spent an alarming amount of time alone outside, but when he came inside he would put on a huge fake smile and try to do anything and everything. The most alarming thing about Jason Nico had only discovered today: Jason was actively avoiding any and all contact with women. At lunch hour Jason would reposition himself on the bleachers if a girl got too close. At first Nico had thought maybe that was the blond’s way of being polite, but after World History that was disproven. When Chelsea came over Jason actually leaned away from her, it was subtle but it was there. He even had slid his desk slightly when his lean would have become noticeable if he leaned any further. *All that on top of not even talking about Piper anymore…* Something had happened while Jason with Disciplina, and Nico was starting to get a rough idea of what might have happened, and he prayed he was wrong.

He let out a pent up sigh and turned his attention to the folder packed with papers. He opened the folder and took out the first packet of paper, excited to try his hand at decoding messages. His excitement quickly turned into anxiety as he skimmed the first packet. *Okay, the first assignment uses the computer. No big deal you can figure it out.* He grabbed the second assignment and saw it still involved using a computer. He grabbed the third, fourth, fifth, and after skimming them he knew he was in deep trouble.

He groaned. “This has nothing to do with coffee at all…”

Chapter End Notes

Percy, you’re a beautiful idiot. Don’t ever change.
(Even if Nico wants to strangle you)

And now we know why Percy has been behaving like he has been for the last several chapters.
After Nico’s breakdown after watching those crappy TV shows, Percy decided he
would do everything he could to make sure Nico didn't experience any kind of problems in school. In his mind Nico deserves to have a good time in school (and I think we all agree). So, Percy took off his bandages for all the world to see his choices and "told" the school that he was gay. If they were to respond negatively to that, then Percy would take the abuse for Nico. He really does deeply care for the son of Hades, just it's not romantic (yet)

We are going to see more Mythomagic games in the future and more of Chelsea. She's impressed with Nico's skills and will begrudgingly admit h might be better than her. She's kind of going to be the Chris to his Jason, although Nico will be reluctant to call her his friend. (she'll also help Nico with his coffee class hehehe)

Also we are going to see more of Nico studying with Percy more. That's more important than you think.

Alright! did you like what you just read (even in the slightest)? Leave a kudos! Thoughts, questions, concerns, praise, tips, tricks, etc? Leave a comment!

Kudos and comments will restore world order!

Next chapter will be Piper! yay! I wonder how she's doing with Reyna, Atlas, and Veronica....

Well until next time, you guys are all amazing people and I thank you from the bottom of my heart for all the feedback and even just reading this fic in general!

<3
Chapter Summary

Tonight:

Piper, Reyna, Veronica, and Atlas begin their journey to Seattle.

Even with one arm Reyna is a bad ass.

Veronica knows how to pick board games.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“So let me get this straight,” Piper said as she pulled yet another piece of glass from her left foot. “In the middle of February a group of mortals attacked the ruins of the former titan palace and did horrible unspeakable things to the both of you.”

“Correct,” answered the titan general from the backseat.

“You really could’ve left out the last part though…,” Veronica added.

Piper ignored the decaying demigod and continued her train of thought. “Then two weeks ago you sent Frank and Hazel to investigate the lack of communication.”

“Yup,” Reyna said, popping the “p”.

“That same day New Rome was attacked by Terminus--“

“Whom I will kill,” the praetor sneered, as she changed lanes.

“Who you will kill, only for the remaining population to be held captive by the same group of mortals. All the while Olympus is just floating above the Empire State Building for all the world to see. Does that sound right?”

“More or less,” Atlas grunted.

“Ignoring some of the finer details, you got it Mclean,” Reyna answered.

Piper considered everything for a moment before shrugging. “Sure why not. Should have seen this coming.”

The three of them, or four of them if you counted Veronica and Atlas individually, had been driving for over twelve hours, a duration of time which Piper thought should have put them close to their intended destination.

But no, we have to zigzag across the state like we were the ball in Pong!

Piper had first noticed that Reyna had stopped driving North early in the morning, and when she asked the moody praetor about it, she had snapped at her and said it was so they would be harder to
track. This seemed counter intuitive to the daughter of Aphrodite, as wouldn’t that make them more likely to be seen? She had tried to reason with Reyna, but was quickly rebuked. So for the rest of the night time hours, Piper tried to clean herself up as best as possible using some wet-wipes and a few bandages she found in the SUV’s glove box. Needless to say she didn’t accomplish much. She was still removing small shards of glass from her entire body, but mostly from her feet.

“Someone did see it coming,” Reyna sighed as she used her knees to steer the vehicle while reaching for a cup of cold coffee with her one remaining arm.

“Wait, what?” she asked incredulously. *I was joking! No one could have saw this coming! I mean they can’t even see our world!* A sobering realization settled over her.

Reyna took a gulp of the gas station swill that passed as coffee and grimaced at the taste. She set the Styrofoam cup down and resumed steering with her hand. “Back in the sixties, one of the praetors was worried about the threat of invasion and to put it bluntly: nuclear holocaust. She also wanted to modernize our weaponry and tactics, but you see how that went,” the praetor said with a mirthless chuckle.

“Using first century tactics in twenty-first century is foolish and reckless,” Atlas growled from the backseat. “The last time I was free even I updated my strategies! I employed mortal mercenaries, fitted the creatures with the latest in mortal technologies—“

“And you still got stuck holding up the sky again,” Reyna said, glaring at the titan/demigod through the rear view mirror. “Veronica, next time he starts up with what he did again, shut him up. That’s an order.”

Veronica seemed to hesitate a moment before she said “yes, ma’am” with a nod.

Piper had only just met the girl less than twelve hours ago, but she noticed that the girl had a strange hesitance when it came to the praetor. She was a bit shy (probably because her flesh was disintegrating and she had fire for eyes) but, she was very friendly to Piper. So friendly that Piper couldn’t help but pity her. She was a fourteen year old girl, who was held captive and subjugated to horrific torture and experimentation at the hands of their new enemies, who only managed to escape by hosting the former titan general in her body; a move which was literally killing her.

*And I thought I had it rough that I have to share a cabin with Drew.*

“So wait, why didn’t they modernize?” she asked.

“The same reason why nothing get done in this country: no one wants higher taxes.” Reyna scoffed. “They did make a few changes though that were necessary and within budget. They updated the sewers and installed a few bunkers. Not enough for the entire population, but room enough for the senate, the praetors, and a few dozen soldiers. Thank the gods for that.”

Piper cringed at the Latina’s bitter words. Reyna and the others had told her that after Terminus had crushed her arm, Veronica and Atlas had managed to sneak in during the chaos that ensued and managed to secret the praetor away in one of the bunkers. There, Veronica had tried her best to tend to the praetor’s injuries, but her arm was beyond saving. So to save Reyna, Veronica/Atlas used their powers to burn the arm off at the shoulder. While she was conscious and without anything to lessen the pain. To stop herself from biting her tongue off, the bad-ass that is Reyna bit down on her blade until there were visible indents of her teeth. “Sounds like *Fallout 4,*” she awkwardly chuckled.

Reyna glared at her in a way that told her attempt at humor was not appreciated. “The senate also approved for several offsite storage depots where weapons, armor, and basic supplies would be
stored in the event of an emergency.”

Wait a tick!

“Uh we wouldn’t happen to be near one of those would we? Or even pass by one on our way to Seattle would we?”

The exhausted praetor shook her head. “We don’t have time. We already wasted so much time waiting for me to recover and saving you. We have to get the Amazons and possibly the hunters to help us take back New Rome.”

Okay, wow. I know my place on her priorities list. She threw her head back and let out a frustrated groan. “Reyna, I’m still bleeding in a few place, I have enough glass in me to make a window, and I’m not wearing any pants. So unless you happen to have a first aid kit and a spare pair of leggings, we need to stop somewhere.”

The driver opened her mouth, but quickly closed it, then said, “There’s a rain poncho in the-“

“I’m not wearing a damn poncho Reyna!” Piper snapped. She drummed her fingers on the dash to calm herself. “Look Reyna,” she sighed. “I get it. You want to save your people and you want to save them fast; and that’s good. Shows you’re a good leader and all that jazz. But, we need to take care of ourselves before we can do anything to help. So how about we go to one of these storage depots or whatever and stock up on nectar, ambrosia, weapons, and pants. Then when I can be in public without being arrested for public indecency I can contact my dad and have him wire us some money, because I’m pretty sure you spent your last dime filling this gas guzzler up.”

The praetor considered her words in silence. Piper thought for sure that the headstrong woman would refuse, but was pleasantly surprised when she nodded her head. “Alright. Fine! Next stop Visalia.”

“Woot! Thanks Rey-Rey!” Piper cheered. Maybe this trip won’t be so bad after all!

“Call me that again and I’ll kill you.”

Or not….

“This place is a dump,” Reyna said.

“It is not, it’s- it’s just in a transition right now,” Piper said trying to reassure everyone (including herself).

“Yeah all the drug dealers are transitioning to better neighborhoods,” chuckled Atlas from the backseat.

They were currently driving through what people would politely call a low income neighborhood on the outskirts of Visalia, searching for the alleged supply depot. Reyna had informed them that each depot was hidden in plain sight, for example: one of them was located directly under the giant “H” in the Hollywood sign, while another was hidden in a hollowed out sequoia tree in one of the state parks.
“Any idea what we’re supposed to be looking for here? Like a dumpster on fire, a house with bars on the windows, or that homeless guy’s shopping cart?” Piper asked, as she hit the door locks. *This is what I get for not wearing pants.*

“I saw another rat,” the titan general cried. “Maybe we need to start slicing their stomachs open!”

“I will not harm an innocent animal general!” Veronica protested, her eyes burning brighter.

Piper took note of how Veronica addressed the Titan that she was sharing her body with. *General? That’s a bit strange.*

The two-souls-one-body being continued to argue aloud in the back of the SUV and Piper honestly wondered if they were doing it for their own amusement. Surely they had like some kind of telepathic link or something right? Hadn’t Annabeth told her that Luke had been taking orders from Kronos while said Titan inhabited his body?

In a way though it was interesting to observe the pair and Piper was beginning to notice little things about the titan-demigod hybrid. For one thing, their voice changed depending on who was in control. If Veronica was talking, what Piper assumed was the girl’s normal speaking voice was heard first followed by the Titan’s deep voice like some kind of false echo. It was the opposite for Atlas though, his deep baritone was heard first followed by the echo of a young girl. Either way, It creeped the hell out of Piper. Piper also thought she noticed that when the two would switch over control, their eyes would momentarily dim before they flared back to life.

The praetor, who obviously had enough of the bickering, slammed her foot down onto the brake pedal, bringing the car to a screeching halt, and Piper slamming against her seatbelt.

*Don’t worry about me Reyna! I’m already low on blood so the bruises won’t look so bad!*

“Would you two please be quiet!” Reyna screamed as she spun around in her seat to face the bickering duo. “Atlas you’re a millennia old titan general! Veronica, you’re a member of the legion! Now I expect both of you to act like it!”

“I merely suggested that we kill the vermin in jest,” the titan huffed. “Not my fault none of you share my sense of humor.”

“It’s disgusting!”

Piper tuned out the argument and rested her head on her hand as she gazed out the window. *Yup, this is how I pictured my week going. Some psychotic mortals and a witch trying to kill me followed by a torturous road trip with my boyfriend’s ex and Frankenstein’s monster. As the others continued to argue, she decided to at least be somewhat productive and scan her surroundings for anything that could be the Roman storage depot. Okay, we’re in a rundown neighborhood, they hid these things in plain sight, and they were built by the Romans who lack any sense of humility.*

“It’s that faded purple house over there,” she announced to the surprise of everyone.

Reyna released Veronica from her grasp and spun around back around into her chair. “How do you know?”

“It looks like it’s the oldest house on the street, it’s a faded purple, and it looks like the stairs were painted gold at one point,” Piper explained.

The praetor shook her head. “No, that’s just a coincidence. It wouldn’t be that obvious. Romans are masters of subtlety.”
Piper groaned. “No they are not. Less than a year ago your people rode on giant eagles to try and track us down, then you drove the legion across country in a fleet of black SUVs to commit a freaking genocide. Oh and let’s not mention that blonde freak Octavian had a flatbed carry medieval weaponry across the country for all the world to see.”

“Alright! Fine! We’ll take a look!”

After being stuck sitting in a car for twelve hours, it felt absolutely amazing to get out and stretch. She could almost ignore the few glass slivers in her bare feet. *Almost.*

Reyna, the expert of efficiency that she is, parked the black SUV on the lawn instead of the crumbling drive way to quote: “save time”. Now the three of them were standing on the tiny violet house’s front porch, waiting for the praetor to tell them what to do next.

“Aren’t you worried about being seen?” Veronica asked, her flaming eyes flickering, which Piper assumed meant she was looking her over.

The daughter of Aphrodite shrugged. “I’m not exactly thrilled with the idea of being seen, but I’m not really worried about it. I mean I’m in boxers, so they should look like shorts from a distance.”

*How many times have I walked out to get the mail dressed like this anyway? And I should be only a few minutes away from pants!*

“The door’s locked,” Reyna said, interrupting their important conversation.

“So just use your sword and break the lock or a window,” she suggested. *Come on Reyna you shouldn’t be this dense…*

Reyna went to cross her arms out of reflex, but sighed when she was unable to. “There are two good reasons why we can’t do that. One, if this isn’t the depot then we just damaged someone’s house. Two, if this is the depot they would have rigged this place with gods knows what kind of traps.”

“Hey I’ve got this then!” Veronica cried, jumping between Reyna and the door. She tapped the lock with one of her clawed fingers and there was an audible *click* and the door slowly swung open.

Piper cocked her head to the side. “How did you do that?”

*And can you please teach me to do that!*

“Daughter of Mercury,” shrugged the hybrid.

Reyna glared at the girl with one arched eyebrow. “When you joined the legion you said you had no abilities…”

“I didn’t! I don’t! Fusing with Atlas has I guess jump started any latent abilities a child of Mercury might have!” The girl absently rubbed her patchwork arms. “If I could open locks with a touch before, I would have used it before now.”

Atlas chuckled.

*Well that’s not fucking ominous!* Piper decided that something needed to be done to break the tension between the two Romans. “Well that’s a pretty handy ability to have!” she laughed as she wrapped
one arm around the patchwork girl. She was surprised to find that the girl was hot, like on the point of combustion hot. *I guess that explains the disintegrating*... She led the blonde through the open doorway, with Reyna trailing (and grumbling) behind them. “These two guys I know, Travis and Connor Stoll, would absolutely love you!”

Maybe if she hadn’t needed to defuse the tension between Reyna and Veronica, Piper would have noticed that the house they had just entered was just a shell of a building.

Maybe she would have noticed that the windows had bars on the inside of them that were somehow invisible from the outside.

Maybe she would have seen the trapdoor they had just stepped on.

So when the door opened beneath their feet, all Piper could think about was how tired she was of always being the one to defuse situations.

―

“Is everyone all right,” Reyna groaned as she pushed herself off the daughter of Aphrodite.

Piper coughed before responding, “I think my organs are pancaked now, but yeah, I’m good.” She slowly rolled herself onto her stomach before she timidly pushed herself up. Veronica, who landed on her feet, offered one taloned hand to her, which she readily accepted.

She looked up at the shaft they had just fallen through and estimated it was at least a hundred feet to the surface. *How the hell did we survive that?!* She then noticed that they were standing in front of giant vault door, with eight foot tall golden legionnaires on either side. “Welcome to vault ex-ex,” she joked.

The other two looked at her with puzzled expressions.

“`It’s a vault door and it’s Roman themed and… you know what forget it,” she sighed. *Seriously, how hard is it to keep up with the culture?*

Reyna approached the vault door and two torched flared to life above the door, casting the room in an eerie glow. The praetor examined the door then placed her hand on the giant combination lock on the center and began to spin the dial this way and that. “Four number sequence, so it should be-,” she twisted the dial once more and there was a loud *click* followed by the *hiss* of ancient hydraulics coming to life as the door lifted into the ceiling. “Zero-four-two-one,” the older girl smirked, placing her one hand on her hip.

“What’s that mean?” she asked.

“April twenty-first, the day when Rome was founded,” explained the praetor.

“That’s pretty cool and all Reyna, but why didn’t you just have Veronica do her finger voodoo?” Piper asked, wiggling her fingers to emphasize.

“We can’t have her have all the fun can we?” The praetor smirked before disappearing into the open vault.
“Did- did Reyna just tell a joke?” Piper asked incredulously. “I mean it was terrible, but I think that’s to be expected!”

Veronica/Atlas just shrugged and followed the praetor into the vault.

The interior of the vault wasn’t anything amazing. It was just a large room filled to the brim with crates of supplies and weapon racks, with a few purple banners with SPQR in golden font hanging on the walls.

“Grab what you need so we can get on the road again,” The praetor grumbled as she sat down on a dusty crate marked office supplies.

“All I need are some clothes and it probably wouldn’t be a bad idea to grab a new weapon and food,” the daughter of Aphrodite explained as she began to search the room.

It appeared to Piper that the Romans had some pretty strange ideas on what they considered to be essential in the event of a world ending crisis. There were of course the traditional staples of food, water, and clothing, but then there were crates marked rubber ducks, crayons, mustache wax, and dozens of other odd things that in her opinion were not needed. She had just managed to find a box of first aid kits, which mercifully contained tweezers (Looks like I’ll be able to pull the glass out now!) when she noticed that there was at least eight crates with the word condoms stamped in red on the side of each crate.

I would have never guessed Romans were so horny! She chuckled to herself. Granted I really only know Frank, Hazel, Jason, and Reyna, but three out of four of them get flustered when they receive a hug... She felt her lips twist up in Cheshire smile. “Hey Reyna!” she cried out, “Are you horny?!”

There was a loud thud, which Piper assumed with great satisfaction was Reyna falling off the crate, followed by Reyna yelping, and Veronica/Atlas laughing their collective ass off. “What the fuck Mclean?!”

Even if she kills me here it was worth it. Soooo worth it! “It’s a legitimate question! I’m staring at a mountain of condoms back here! You Romans are apparently really horny bastards!”

She could hear the praetor grumble something followed by, her yelling out, “Just get your shit and let’s go!”

It had actually been a lot easier to get into the depot than it had been to get out. Apparently the Roman engineers and architects had forgot to add an exit, which left them trying to scale the concrete walls up and back up through the trap door. Thankfully, they had found some rope in the depot and Veronica/Atlas was able to use their ludicrous speed and Titan strength to literally run up the wall. Reyna was the first to climb up while she was left to tie the rope around the crate of goods they had gathered.
Piper felt pretty great wearing her new bellbottoms and Maryjane’s. Sure the denim jeans were for men and a size too big, but Piper would sooner fight a Giant in a bareknuckle brawl than wear the mom jeans she had found in the depot. She also really liked the new switchblade she had found for herself. Sure it was only steel, but considering they were likely to be fighting mortals in the near future, she needed a weapon that worked and could be easily concealed.

She climbed onto the top of the crate and gave the rope two quick tugs before calling out, “Okay! Hit it!” She heard the SUV start and a moment later she and the crate began their ascent up the shaft. When she got to the top, she jumped off the crate and stood next to the hybrid to avoid the crate. “So did you two find anything on our little shopping trip?” She could plainly see the two curved blades in each of their clawed hands, but it didn’t hurt to strike up a conversation.

They held out the two blades. “Two scimitars,” the titan said, as he gave them a twirl. “Great weapon when used on horseback, or just moving really fast.”

“That’s cool,” Piper nodded. “You really need to watch Game of Thrones, I think you’ll like the Dothraki. What about you Veronica? Get anything good?”

Their eyes flickered, and Veronica shrugged. “A few camp T-shirts, jeans, socks, shoes, and a few board games.”

“There were board games?”

Veronica nodded. “Yeah next to the crate of silver dollars. I grabbed Connect Four, Operation, Battleship, and a deck of cards. I also made sure to burn every copy of Monopoly….”

Piper laughed. “I knew there was a reason I liked you. We cannot allow future generations to suffer!”

“Would you three quit your gossiping and help me load this crate!” Reyna yelled. “Or are you going to make the one-armed girl do all the work?!”

“We better go help our fearless leader before she has a conniption.”

“I’ll have a large order of fries and a small strawberry shake,” she told the greasy guy behind the counter.

“Don’t forget Veronica wanted twenty chicken nuggets,” the praetor sighed.

After loading up the crate, aka Veronica/Atlas lifting it with one hand, Reyna’s stomach began to growl. Instead of admitting that she was hungry, the one-armed praetor denied it and ordered them all into the black SUV. They drove north for three hours, the growling increasing in frequency and volume, before Piper resorted to charm speaking the older girl into stopping at a McDonald’s.

Veronica had since changed in the back of the vehicle into the traditional Roman outfit of a purple T-shirt and jeans, while adding sunglasses and gloves to her look. When they entered the restaurant the hybrid told them what she wanted and then quickly walked away and sat a booth at the back as far away from other people as possible.

“And a twenty piece nugget aaaaaand a large chocolate shake,” she added with a smile.
“Piper she didn’t say anything about a shake,” Reyna hissed in her ear.

*Oh Jesus Christ…* “Everyone likes shakes Arellano! It’s a thank you for doing all the heavy lifting!”
*That and she could really use some comforting.* “Why don’t you go sit down with her and I’ll bring the food out when it’s ready.” She handed the guy behind the counter one of the ancient twenty dollar bills they had found in the depot with a smile as the praetor huffed and walked away.

The guy told her it would be about a five minute wait for her food, so she decided to busy herself by watching the news on the large flat screen TV that hung on a nearby wall. A blonde reporter (*because they only come in blonde and Anderson Cooper*) was sitting behind a desk on one half of the screen while the other half was showing what looked like a warehouse with dozens of squad cars and emergency vehicles surrounding it, the screen then transitioned to the Amazon logo and Piper suddenly lost her appetite.

She walked closer to the television and listened to the reporter’s voice. “-keep you up to date on the developing story in Georgia. Early this morning a group of concerned citizens broke into the Amazon distribution center and uncovered evidence that the fortune five hundred company has been using slaves.” The screen transitioned again to a large man with salt and pepper hair wearing what looked like SWAT gear being handcuffed and placed in a squad car. “The leader of the incursion, a man who at this time is unidentified, has been taken into custody for trespassing and several counts of murder, but the freed men and much of the public have rallied behind him. Considering the horrible conditions and the ages of some of the former captives, it is highly likely he will be released. The CEO of Big Apple Island-“

“Miss your food is ready,” the cashier called out, startling Piper.

“Um could you place that in a to-go bag? Something has just come up.”

Chapter End Notes

Oh boy, if Reyna was in a hurry before, just imagine her now.

So know you see why this fic has the "road trip" tag. We're going to be checking up on the girls from time to time, as they will learn somethings that or trio of dorks won't. Will the two groups meet up? Who knows :)

In this chapter interactions between everyone is a bit forced, which i think is to be expected given the company. Reyna and Piper have the whole Jason thing between them, it's not a big issue, but it still makes situations awkward. Remember Veronica was going to set Atlas free, so although Reyna doesn't know that Veronica does not like the praetor, and we will talk more about that in the future. Piper and Veronica are weird around each other because, well, they are more or less strangers and one of them is now something horrifying. As for Atlas, he's kind of the elephant in the room.

I always wondered what the Camps did about the cold war. We know CHB has a bunker for sure, but what about CJ? Considering it is in California which in all likelihood was the first place to get hit by Soviet missiles in the event of actual war, it would make sense they would have a more elaborate plan. The plan was for the legion to live underground until it was safe to emerge, at which point they would establish a
new Roman empire. Sadly though the Senate didn't want to spend money to update the legion's weaponry. So good luck taking over with spears and arrows guys!

As some of you have probably guessed, Reyna is not in the right frame of mind right now. She is obsessed with saving everyone at CJ, even at the cost of her own life. Piper is going to have to be the voice of reason for the group. A role, she is not looking forward to.

We also saw that Piper is the pop culture expert of the group. I mean it makes sense, she grew up surrounded by pop culture! I always liked the idea that her and Percy were bros because they had the best understanding of the mortal world and they could make references that only the other would get. They are kind of an OTP without the romance.

Hey! did you like what you just read? like even the tiniest bit? Leave a kudos! Thoughts, theories, reactions, praise, concerns, etc? Leave a comment!

Kudos and comments keep me limber!

Well thanks for reading! You guys are awesome!
Next chapter will be a check up at Camp Jupiter... So that should be a happy time!
Chapter Summary

Warnings: you know what to expect....

Tonight:

The mysterious old man inspects Camp Jupiter.

We see some familiar faces....

Chapter Notes

Thanks for all the kind comments, kudos, bookmarks, etc! It really motivated me to write this chapter faster!

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He couldn’t help but stare in awe at the temples that surrounded him. Dozens of temples each different from the last; one was covered with precious metals and gemstones, one appeared to be made out of clockwork with the temple’s shape changing every hour, another was simply four columns, a roof, and a statue. It boggled his mind that this had been concealed from the rest of the world and until a short time ago each temple received worshipers regularly.

One could argue that they still do…

Since his chief of research and development had single-handedly captured the DG city, massive and expensive alterations were being made every day. The first thing they had done was convert many of the temples into acceptable holding cells for the captured population. It didn’t take much to alter the temples of Mars, Pluto, and the like into holding cells, the construction teams had simply erected additional temporary walls composed of ballistic glass and electrified wires.

He passed by the temple of Ceres and momentarily glanced inside the entrance and grimaced at what he saw. Dozens of DGs were packed inside the small building, with hardly enough room to breathe let alone move around. Their faces were pale and sunken, their clothes were little more than dirty rags at this point which exposed their malnourished bodies.

“This is different, this is retribution,” he told himself as he shuffled towards his destination: the temple of Jupiter. I will see to it that they do get better rations and more room. We need them in fighting shape after all.

“Hey boss man! You’re a bit early!” called out the ginger engineer as he exited the temple, flanked by his two pets. He was wearing a blood stained lab coat over a pair of green scrubs, and oddly enough the enslaved gods were wearing scrubs too. He could understanding G:DB, but G:T was a
walking marble statue. “I wasn’t expecting you for another half hour!”

He arched an eyebrow at the young man. “That would make me fifteen minutes late.”

“Yeah, you old timers are always running late,” Brian shrugged, not realizing (or not caring) how rude he was being. “It’s been awhile since you were last here, let me show you what we, and by that I mean I, have been working on.” He clapped his hands in excitement. “Come along!”

While the rest of the temples were allowed to be reduced to a state of squalor, the temple of Jupiter’s conditions had been improved. Every entrance had hermetically sealed doors that required ID badges to enter. Once inside, one had to be patted down by a team of elite security guards (he was of course excused from this) and then X-rayed for any possibility of implants (his artificial hip was interesting to see on the monitors). Then when security had cleared someone, they were escorted to a locker room and given clean scrubs and a cap to wear.

He couldn’t help but think the arrogant engineer had arranged it so that he received pink scrubs. *He does have the juvenile mindset, but the jokes on him: I happen to like pink. That reminds me, I need to make sure the New York locations have canopies installed in time for the parade. We wouldn’t want people to have no place to go in the event it gets rained out.*

He finished dressing and balled his suit up and threw it into the locker he had been provided for his belongings; he kept the cane though. As much as it pained him to admit it, he needed it to walk long distances anymore. He exited the small locker room and was once again greeted by Brian.

“There you are! I was just about to send Terminate-us in there to see if you died. Come along now, I’m quite proud of what we’ve turned this place into.”

He trailed after the engineer and kept a wary eye on the two Gs. He trusted the engineer’s technical prowess, but they were still the enemy. “Have you made any progress on figuring out how to kill a G?”

The engineer frowned, telling him all he needed to know before he even said a word. “No. We’ve done everything short of nuking them and they just pop back into existence like nothing ever happened.”

He smiled a bit, despite the terrible news. Brian was always eager to take credit for accomplishments, but was quick to use the word “we” when things were less than successful. “Pity.”

They turned down a small hallway and entered the temple proper. The only evidence that they were in a temple was the domed ceiling painted to look like the heavens above, any other iconography had been stripped away and replaced by a sterile environment one would find in a surgical theater.

“Pretty great huh?” Brian asked as he gazed at the scene in front of him. Perhaps three dozen field surgery theatres had been set up throughout the temple. Each surgery was separated by clear plastic walls and each were stocked with the latest in surgical equipment. Cat walks had been set up that ran the length and width of the massive room, with members of security patrolling above and glancing into each cubicle as they passed by overhead.
Some of the rooms were even in use. Teams of surgeons were operating on DGs who were lying face down on stainless steel tables, their wrists, ankles, and heads secured with straps attached to the tables. One cubicle near him was in the middle of an operation, the DG’s neck had been sliced open and spread out as a technician carefully set a small cube on one of the exposed vertebrae.

“Are they sedated?” he gasped out.

Brian looked at him with a mix of disgust and confusion. “No, why would we do that? Their just filthy animals.”

“Even vets use anesthesia!” he snapped at the young man. He then noticed that he was rubbing his own wrist and quickly stopped and tried to compose himself. “My apologies I just don’t like the sounds of animals in pain.”

The ginger shrugged. “Whatever. Anyway we got teams working twelve hours a day to outfit each captured DG with my neural interfaces. While initially we were only seeing fifty percent success rate, I’ve managed to bring that up to a ninety-five-point-three success rate. Even with the new shipments, I will easily meet my deadline,” he said with a smile, that frankly unnerved him. “Looks like George will miss the fun; what with him going to serve a dime.”

“I posted his bail this morning;” he said as he watched two members of security drag a kicking and screaming DG into one of the vacant theaters. “Between the army of lawyers and the testimonies of the freed men he’ll never have to set foot in court. He’ll be a national hero.”

“Ah, America! Where money talks and bullshit walks!” the engineer laughed as he slapped G:DB on the back. The enslaved god briefly grunted, but did nothing further. “Well now, if you follow me I can show you two very promising weapons and we can get out of these awful scrubs.”

After changing out of his scrubs, he was escorted by Brian, his two pets, and a team of five men from security to the impressive marble coliseum to the south of the city.

Along the way he observed several teams of modified DGs being controlled by their handlers in the open grassy fields that surrounded the city. Some groups were simply performing basic calisthenics or running, while others were being trained in modern warfare. Targets had been set up so the DGs could practice their aim, while the DGs who were further along in their conditioning ran through obstacle courses that were meant to simulate real city streets.

Of course the training wasn’t actually for the DGs, but rather for their handlers.

Although I imagine controlling one of them isn’t much different than playing one of those violent video games…

He was escorted into the coliseum’s sandy arena where a team of technicians sat at one end, all with their own laptops and headsets, while at the other end stood two figures. They were DGs that much he was sure of. One was a rather tall in shape Asian male, who was missing his left arm; the other was a petite girl with cinnamon hair.

Brian wrapped his arms around the two and pulled them together, their heads connected with a loud Smack, but the two didn’t display any signs of discomfort or pain. “These two are the crown jewels of DGs! These are the infamous DGs FM and HP!”
“So these are the two that almost took down G:T? I must say I was expecting… more.” He looked
the two docile DGs over and couldn’t believe that these two children had the power to not only fight
a god, but would have succeeded if not for the intervention of G:DB. “The girl looks like she should
be coloring!”

The redhead shrugged and released the two DGs, who stood back into their original position. “Eh,
they’re all child soldiers. We’re just using them for good. Well our definition of good.” Brian
frowned. “I always hated ethics. They just hold the world back.” He clapped his hands together
and gave him his best smile (it was definitely creepy). “How about a demonstration?”

Before he had a chance to respond, G:T picked him up and carried him over to the technicians. “Put
me down you- you- earthen colossus!” The marble god set him down into a folding chair and patted
him gently on the head, before disappearing into thin air. He glared at Brian who was doubled over
in laughter. “You told it to do that didn’t you?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about. Maybe it just has a thing about helping senior citizens?”
Brian clapped his hands again. “Alright boys! Let’s show the boss man what he’s paying for!” The
team of technicians began to type furiously, while a few barked out orders every now and then.
“While they’re setting up, let me tell you about my latest findings on these two,” the ginger engineer
said as he dragged a chair next to him. “So the typical DG is fifty percent human and fifty percent
energy. Well these two are way outside that range! The male, DG:FM, is around twenty percent
human, but from Canadian health records this crazy kanuk was closer to forty-five percent human
only a few short years ago. This got me curious so I did a little research. According to the meticulous
records these guys kept and some footage we managed to obtain from Europe, this guy was a short
fat piece of shit up until last July. So either puberty hit him like truck or the G’s modified him. My
money’s on the later considering his new profile.”

“Fascinating. Any idea why the drastic change?”

Brian shrugged. “My best guess is the G’s wanted him to fit the typical “hero” mold. You can’t save
the world if you’re short and have rolls,” he laughed. “Anyway onto DG:HP, there’s a got to be an
interesting story to that one. We tried to figure out where exactly it’s from, but it was like a ghost or
something, there is no record of it living anywhere for the last twenty years.”

He looked at the girl again. “Twenty years? She can’t be a day over fifteen.”

“That was my initial thought too, but considering every other DG has at the very least a birth
certificate and a social security number, I dug a bit deeper. I used a facial recognition algorithm of my
own design to search for it among missing children reports, social services, medical records, pretty
much anything that can be found on a computer. There were two matches, and this is where it gets
pretty fucked up: they’re both before 1950.”

“Surely they were just false positives.”

Brian frowned. “I don’t make mistakes,” he halfway growled. “The first result came from some
Catholic school down in Louisiana, and there it was: Hazel Levesque. The other result was a missing
persons report from Alaska a couple years later with the same name and face.”

“You’re telling me that she’s almost as old as me?!” he cried. What I wouldn’t give to stay young. It
would guarantee I would see this to the very end.

“She could be older though! We’re completely in the dark on what’s happening with her. As far as
we can tell its cells are aging and they do die. I would like to have its telomerase examined, but we
don’t have the equipment-“
“You’ll have what you need by the end of the week. Just give your list of what you need to acquisitions. This has far too much potential to leave unexplored.”

“Yeah. I thought you’d see it my way,” then engineer said with a satisfied grin. “My hypothesis makes more sense than Morgan’s half-brained idea.”

That got his attention. It was no secret that Brian and Morgan were constantly at odds with one another. The ginger was a man of science, while Morgan was well… a witch. He thought that eventually the two would have learned to avoid each other like responsible adults, but the engineer was always going out of his way to ask for her opinion only to then taunt her. He wondered if perhaps Brian had a crush on the raven haired beauty. “What was her theory?”

The engineer stuck his little finger into his ear and twisted it around. “Nothing to bat-shit crazy… Just that it came back from the dead.” He removed his finger and flicked a rather large and disgusting hunk of ear wax towards the scrambling team of engineers. “Totally plausible theory. Happens every day.”

He quirked an eyebrow at the young man. “Up until a couple years ago you thought all of this,” he absently gestured to his surroundings. “Ancient gods, demigods, monsters, hidden cities; all this was purely in the realm of fantasy until you met me. Would it really be so hard to believe that the dead could walk the earth again?” If only I could control who could return.

The young man looked like he was ready to strike him. “Whatever,” he huffed.

“Sirs, we are ready to give a demonstration,” called one of the engineers sitting in front of laptop as he strapped on a headset.

“Oh thank the universe!” Brian sighed. The ginger hopped up from his chair and took his position behind the engineering team. “Alright boys and girls! Let’s start with DG:FM!” He looked at his boss. “What’s your favorite animal?”

“I’ve always been partial to the Platypus,” he shrugged. They always look so cute and cuddly! Pity they are poisonous…

Brian looked at him like he had grown a second head before turning his attention back to his team. “Alright, you heard the man! Let’s give him a… platypus…” the lead engineer muttered something under his breath as the rest of the team began to enter commands into their individual computers while occasional speaking into their headsets.

Then a funny thing happened: DG:FM seemed to just disappear. He leaned forward in his chair and squinted. Don’t tell me I need glasses now… eighty plus years of perfect eyesight for them to go out now. Then he saw a small object where DG:FM had been standing, and it seemed to be coming towards them. Within a few seconds he was staring face to face with a small three-legged platypus. “Oh my! This is incredible!” he laughed as he gently stroked the mammal’s bill. The platypus that was DG:FM scurried onto his lap and curled up like one would expect of a lap dog. “I may require this one accompany everywhere I go now!” he laughed with delight as he petted the creature’s rump.

“We can arrange that if you really want it, but wouldn’t it be better to have it transform into a grizzly or a dragon and have it help in our little show?” Brian asked.

“I suppose your right,” he sighed. He picked up his favorite animal and gently set it on the ground, where it promptly scurried back to its original position and transformed back to its normal form. “What about the girl? Your reports said she could manipulate the earth itself?”
“DG:HP can do a lot more than that. It can seemingly alter the state of any element.” He pulled out the largest diamond he had ever seen from his lab coat. “I had it create this on one of my initial tests with the neural interface. I’ve got it to the point where it can create multiple diamonds at once, each of them twice the size of the Hope Diamond.” He turned back to his team. “Give the old man a weapons demonstration.”

DG:HP jerked as if she had just been hit by ten-thousand volts of electricity; her eyes as wide as saucers and her back arching. She momentarily sagged forward before correcting her posture. She lifted her right arm and the earth around her exploded as an assortment of gemstones, each the size of a baseball, sprung up like new growth. She then turned away from DG:FM and dropped her arm to her side. Instantly the gems launched out of the ground and embedded themselves into the coliseum wall. However the gems didn’t stop there; instead they started to rotate in place and began to burrow through the wall.

“What do you think?” his chief engineer asked with a smug smile.

He looked at the damaged wall just as it collapsed into a pile of rubble. “I think that little lady is the devil in disguise.”

It had been a long day, far too long for someone his age, but he did what had to be done.

After the little display at the coliseum Brian had told him the progress of some if the new defense systems that were in development, including the ones George had requested for his eventually confrontation with the goddess of the hunt and her minions.

After that he met up with the research team who were converting the Roman archives to a digital format and had stumbled onto some information that they figured he needed to be informed of immediately. They had found census reports of all known Roman demigods and their locations, as well as several documents that confirmed the identities of several senators and congressmen who were demigods or legacies. It wasn’t a surprise considering they were the same people were trying to block the organization and his company’s plans to modify the nation’s cell towers. It was really only a matter of time and money before he got his way. You promise the public something for free and you’re a hero while those who oppose it are viewed as villains. He picked up that little piece of information from Julius Caesar.

After that he met had several conference calls with the Nordic team, the European branch, and the ever persistent Mr. Dare. The first two were just weekly updates and were over in less than an hour. Mr. Dare on the other hand had kept him on the phone for well over two hours asking when his people could “cure” his daughter, when could Brian have a look at his daughter, was it safe to leave the country. An endless stream of questions that he only put up with to use the red head’s influence. He didn’t tell the man that it would probably be in everyone’s best interest if his daughter, Rachel, was kept far away from the engineer. He would find out soon enough.

Now though he had one last stop before he retired to the villa they had set aside for him for the night. This stop though was not scheduled, but one of his own choosing. He walked into the Praetor’s office which had been converted to a makeshift burn ward of sorts. He pushed aside the plastic curtains and felt revitalized as the pure oxygen entered his system.

*I feel like a man in his seventies!*
He sat down in a chair besides the lone hospital bed and groaned as his bones creaked and popped.
“My dear, what have they done to you?”

In the bed in a medically induced coma was what remained of Morgan. Gone was her beautiful
midnight black hair and her illustrated porcelain skin, all of which had seemingly burnt off. Her right
hand was missing and her left legs had been burnt off to just below her knee.

It was a blessing and a curse that she was still alive. In his humble opinion, it was a curse. The deal
she had made with Hecate granted her abilities and powers that were frankly frightening, but the cost
was high. After a period of time she would become a slave to the goddess for all eternity.

“And even death cannot help you,” he sighed. “But I can.”

He settled back into his chair and closed his eyes. Her powers would heal her in time and how he
pitied the poor soul who would feel her wrath.

Chapter End Notes

The old man is an interesting character to write. He believes everything he and the
organization is doing will make the world a better place. And in a way, he is right.
We've seen in the books that the monsters do in fact go after normal people. We know
from mythology that the gods have in fact on many occasions targeted mortals
*cough* Zeus and Poseidon *cough*
It's just that he is going to the extremes and he believes (or tells himself) that this is the
right way to do things.

We also saw that he does somewhat acknowledge that the demigods are people. He
rarely calls them "it" instead saying their gender.
We will learn more about him as the story unfolds, including his code name, name, and
motivations.

Oh Brian, you are the worst monster the demigods have ever faced. He's smart,
cunningly, manipulative, and lacks any sense of decency and compassion.
Yes, he is the one who is in charge of the Demigod's living conditions, and all he cares
about is that they live. He had them fed enough so that they won't starve to death and
has their cages cleaned out weekly. We wouldn't want any DG's to die from unsanitary
conditions now do we?
He surrounded himself with Terminus and Dionysus as his body guards and silent yes-
men. Don't worry though! he treats them worse than the demigods!

Awhile back some of you were scared Frank and Hazel were going to die in a couple
chapters.
Your wishes have been granted!
They are not dead!
No!
The dead are the lucky ones....

Yeah, Morgan wasn't going to die in the background. she's going to come back with a
vengeance....
He did you like what you just read (probably not)? Leave a kudos!

Thoughts, theories, "how could you do that"s? Leave a comment! I love hearing from you all!

Next chapter will be Piper again!
We need to see how Reyna is handling the news...
Then we'll be back to our trio!
yay!

Well until next time, thanks for reading!
You guys rule!
Piper

Chapter Summary

Warnings: Blood, above canon typical violence, terrible jokes

Tonight:

Board games!

Sing-a-longs!

The obligatory Blues Brothers reference!

A touching reunion of two sisters!

Chapter Notes

Two chapters in one week? You guys are spoiled :P

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Piper had told Reyna about what was going on with the Amazons, she had expected the praetor to fly into a fit of rage. To scream, to growl, to slam her fist into the wall, to really do anything really. Instead the older girl calmly told her and Veronica to use the restroom and get back into the SUV. Which Piper figured was pretty considerate of Reyna.

Once they got into the vehicle and onto the highway though Piper realized that Reyna was not fine. They drove in silence with the tension growing with every passing mile. Reyna’s hand was gripping the wheel so tight that she was actually bleeding. She tried to turn the radio on, but before her hand even touched the knob she felt a... force around her, that felt like someone was holding a knife to her throat.

Okay. Reyna does not like music. Remember that, as it may save your life!

They continued like that for another two hours before Piper had enough. She unbuckled her seat belt (and received a pointed look from the Latina) and shimmied her way over the center counsel to sit in the back with Atlas and Veronica. Surely they would be better company than the uber pissed off praetor. “Watch it!” she cried as she flopped down next to the demigod/titan. “You said you brought some board games?”

They nodded.

Piper smiled, “Well then let’s crack them out!”
She dropped the red piece into the slot and laughed. “I win again!” she cheered.

“What? Where?” the titan general fumed.

“There! Diagonally!” she said pointing to the lower left corner. “Looks like that put it at Atlas: zero, Piper McAwesome: ten!”

The titan didn’t say anything, as he clenched their taloned hands and their golden flaming eyes flared like a blowtorch. “I don’t know why I agreed to this- this pathetic excuse for a children’s game!”

“You get pretty excited when you get three in a row,” she smirked.

“Let’s play a different game. It isn’t fair to play a two player game when there are three present.”

“Fine,” She sighed. *Gods, he is such a sore loser…* she turned around and began to search the open crate of supplies that occupied the back of the vehicle. She pushed aside the extra clothes, weapons, dehydrated food, and condoms (*Yeah, remember to place those in Reyna’s boots later.*), before she found the stack of board games Veronica had procured for them. “How about *Candy Land*?” she asked while holding the ancient cardboard box up for the other two to see.

“How about you stop obstructing my rear view mirror,” Reyna huffed from the driver’s seat.

Piper rolled her eyes. “Sorry Rey!” *Not my fault your sister got caught running a modern day slave trade.*

“What is this *Candy Land* about?” The titan asked.

“How?” *Who asks what *Candy Land* is about? It’s pretty self-explanatory.* “You choose a figure and then you draw cards which have a color on them and you move your piece to that color. First person to get to the end of the board becomes king or queen of Candy Land, I guess.”

“Yes! I will rule this Candy Land!” Atlas laughed maniacally.

After Atlas lost an improbable number of times, it was decided that they were done with board games for a while. Possibly forever.

So after that Piper tried to get to know the titan general and the daughter of Mercury, and it went relatively well.

Atlas was a pretty open book. He told them about what it was like growing up with the earth as your mother and the sky for your father (*And Annabeth and Percy complain about a lack of privacy!*). Apparently Gaea hadn’t always been pure evil, that she had once been very kind and only through years of what he described as an abusive relationship with his father did she end up being the monster that she was. It surprised her greatly that Atlas said that it was better she was dead and that he could now focus on what she had been.

It was pretty sweet actually.
The titan then talked about his role in the first titan war, and all that followed, which confused Piper greatly. He told them how rapidly the world had changed each time he was freed and how it made sense to him that the mortal world would eventually declare war on the divine.

He wouldn’t talk about his family though, but Piper told him how Calypso was finally free and living happily with Leo, which surprised him. He didn’t say anything about whether he approved of the relationship, instead saying he had lost all right to be part of his daughter’s life. Under normal circumstance Piper would agree with this sentiment, but seeing how dejected he looked and how tired his voice sounded, she thought maybe she could arrange for them to meet (without Leo of course, that idiot would start the next Titan war.)

Veronica required a bit more coaxing to get her to open up about herself, but eventually she got some basic background information on the younger demigod. She was fourteen and it wasn’t until almost two years that she learned that she was a demigod. Before that, she lived on a small farm in rural Iowa with her mother and grandparents. Her mother was the postmaster for the local post office and was very dedicated to her job; which was probably why her father had been attracted to her. Her grandparents were good, simple people that had spoiled their only granddaughter rotten. The blonde was hesitant to mention that her family were pacifists, to which Reyna scoffed at. Veronica said that she didn’t want to join the legion, but being that she was a Roman it was that or be branded a deserter.

The titanic duo then quickly changed the subject and wanted to know about her. Apparently there had been A LOT of gossip and misinformation about her at Camp Jupiter. Some gems included: that she had used her charm speak to bewitch Jason away from Reyna, that she was seeing both Leo and Annabeth on the side (gross, Leo is like my little brother! Annabeth wouldn’t be bad though…), and that she was a kleptomaniac. She quickly corrected this allegations and said she only stole precious things: like the hearts of innocent maidens. That got a blush and a chuckle out of who she hoped was Veronica.

The back and forth continued like that for a couple hours before Veronica stumped her.

“So how did you guys know you were the seven?” Veronica asked seemingly out of the blue.

“What do you mean?” Piper asked as she kicked her shoes off.

“I mean, every other prophecy is given to a specific person or persons right? At Camp Jupiter three members of the legion would visit the augur and get a prophecy, and it sounds like it’s the same idea at Camp Half Blood.”

“Yeah?”

“But the great prophecies were given before trouble even started. Sure the first prophecy was vague, but it specified that it would be a child of the big three. Right?”

“Right?” Piper wasn’t sure where the daughter of Mercury was going with this, but it certainly wasn’t good.

The blonde began to pick at her talons. “Well it mentions seven demigods, but only two are really defined, praetor Grace and your friend Leo, but the remaining five are undefined. So how did the rest of you know you were the seven?”

Piper opened her mouth to respond, then closed it. Holy crap, that’s actually a good question!

“I mean it sounds like Reyna and that Nico kid contributed just as much as you guys.”
Reyna adjusted the rear view mirror so that she could better observe the conversation. *Thanks Rey! This isn’t awkward enough!*

She sat and thought about it for a while before reaching a conclusion. “Well I think it had to do with the preliminary quests. Jason, Leo, and me freed Hera and fought a giant and Gaea’s forces. Percy, Frank, and Hazel went to Alaska to free Thanatos and also encountered the same bullshit we did.”

“That’s only six.”

_Well shit, now she knows I suck ass at math._ “Well Annabeth had to find the giant statue of her mom, so the camps could be united.”

“And Nico and I were the ones to left to do the heavy lifting,” Reyna shot back.

“And it was greatly appreciated.”

Reyna’s eyes narrowed in the mirror. “Nico almost died dragging that over-sized lawn ornament back.”

“Annabeth fell into Tartarus to secure it.”

“Nico also went through Tartarus. Alone.”

“Annabeth—“

“Nico brought Hazel back, set aside his feelings for Percy repeatedly, lead the five of you to the doors of death, and was forced to out himself for the sake of the mission,” Reyna snarled.

Piper didn’t respond. She forgot how protective Reyna was of the son of Hades. Plus she couldn’t really argue in Annabeth’s favor anymore. If being one of the seven was based on deeds, then Nico had Annabeth beat in that department by a mile.

She then remembered something Hera had said during her first quest, that the seven would be the most powerful demigods of all time. If that was the case, then Annabeth was the odd man out, while Nico fit the criteria perfectly.

She rested her head against the window. She had a lot to think about.

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Things had been going surprisingly well during their trip. That was until Reyna took a wrong turn, followed by another at Redding. So instead of following the coastal roads as initially planned, they would be driving east through Oregon and would have to loop back west once they hit Ontario.

No one bothered to confront Reyna about her mistakes as the girl in question still looked quite upset and for some reason she was sweating up a storm despite the AC being on full blast.

Since she hadn’t slept the previous night and the trip was going to take a few more hours than originally planned, she reclined her seat back and tried to get some much needed sleep.
Piper was jolted awake when the first stymphalian bird collided with the hood of the SUV. “What the fuck was that?” she cried.

“Just our luck running out,” Reyna growled as she swerved to avoid another bird. “Atlas! Veronica! Do you think you two could provide us with a little cover?” It wasn’t really a question though as she was already opening the sunroof for the two of them.

“We suppose,” they sighed as they leapt from their seat through the opening in the roof.

Piper slid over in the seat to get a better look out the windshield and gulped at what she saw. Hundreds, if not thousands of the bronze birds were circling around them. Every now and then one of the birds would break formation and try to hit the car. “Maybe we should stop and take cover somewhere?”

Reyna jerked the wheel hard to the left to avoid another barrage from the metallic avians. “If we stop, we’re dead,” she said through gritted teeth. “The best we can do is hope that they don’t break the windshield and that those two up there can scare them off!”

Just then there was the sound of something wet splattering on the hood of the car. Oh don’t tell me that’s-

The piles of bird excrement began to sizzle and within moments ate holes through the hood. I forgot they had acid poop… How did we beat these guys again? That’s right! She jumped back into the passenger’s seat, accidently bumping into the one-armed praetor, and turned on the stereo.

“Now is hardly the time for music!” Reyna cried as one of the birds collided with the windshield, the glass cracking into a thousand pieces, but thankfully holding.

She cranked the volume up as far it could go and began to roll the windows down.

“Are you insane?!” Reyna shouted over the classic nineties music.

“Yes! But that’s beside the point!” Piper shouted back. “They hate loud noises! It’s how Hercules beat them! Plus Annabeth and Percy used this trick a couple years ago!”

The music seemed to be helping, as many of the birds began to fly away, but not enough. The birds did seem more hesitant now to directly strike the vehicle. This allowed for Veronica and Atlas to go on the offensive, as suddenly a wall of flame erupted in front of them, scorching hundreds of the metal beasts.

“Holy fuck! She can do that?” Piper asked over the sounds of Nirvana’s come as you are.

Reyna changed lanes to avoid running over the knifelike feathers. “I guess! I think that’s more of a Titan thing than a child of Mercury thing!”

“Hey! As long as it’s on our side, it can be a Santa Clause thing!”

Just when she thought the battle was going their way, the birds that had fled returned, and they began to dive bomb the SUV with their acidic droppings. Crap! Everyone loves Nirvana!

Atlas and Veronica dropped back through the sunroof, their clothes smoldering, from the dung or their own boy heat Piper was unsure of. “We can’t stand up there anymore! It’s too slick and it burns like crazy!” Veronica cried as she ripped off her smoldering shirt while kicking off her dissolving
“Great! We’re either going to be melted or pecked to death!” Reyna screamed over the loud music, while swerving all over the road in hopes of avoiding the metallic flock.

Piper rapidly flipped through the radio stations hoping for something terrible, like Dean Martin, or Nickelback. Of course the one time they don’t play something crappy is during a life or death situation! She continued to search as the avians became more aggressive; colliding into the doors and tires in a suicidal attempt to stop them. Come on! Come on! There’s got to be- YES!!!! If this don’t do it, nothing will!

It was a song that everyone loved because it was so bad. One that everyone knows the words to, but they are not sure how they know them. The speakers erupted with the unforgettable voice of Biz Markie:

“Have you ever met a girl that you tried to date
But a year to make love she wanted you to wait
Let me tell ya a story of my sit-u-ation
I was talking to this girl from the U.S. nation.”

There was a chorus of pain-filled squawks from outside and most of the bronze flock flew away in a panicked frenzy.

“It’s working!” Piper laughed. If I ever meet him, I will kiss that beautiful tone deaf man!

“There’s still too many though!” Reyna cried over the technically-music.

“We need to sing then!”

The one-armed praetor looked Piper as if she had grown a second head. “What?”

“Sing!” she ignored the glare the older girl was throwing her way and began to sing as loud and obnoxiously as possible. “You! You got what I need! But you say he’s just a friend! And you say he’s just a friend, Oh baby! Come on you guys!”

Veronica was the first to join in, her voice combined with Atlas’s made the song sound even worse. As they sang Piper wondered what could possibly be going through the titan’s mind. Probably that we’re insane…. “So I took blah-blah’s word for it at this time! I thought just havin’ a friend couldn’t be no crime!” They sang together in nowhere near perfect harmony.

Finally Reyna relented with a heavy sigh, and joined in. “Forget about that, let’s go into the story! About a girl named blah-blah-blah that adored me!”

The stymphalian birds apparently couldn’t handle the combined onslaught and fled as fast as possible.
About half an hour later the smoldering SUV pulled to a stop in a small mom-and-pop gas station. They had continued to sing long after the bronze birds had fled and even after the song had ended.

Their vehicle, which had already had massive dents from running over three people, looked like it had driven through a battlefield. The passenger side of the windshield was cracked, as was the driver’s window. The hood and a good portion of the roof had numerous holes in them ranging from the size of a quarter to the size of a baseball. The driver’s side headlight was busted and that side’s front tire was completely flat. All things considered, that was pretty good by demigod standards.

All of them were out of breath and panting heavily. Piper hadn’t sang that long since Athens, but unlike last time, this was weirdly fun. She looked over at the latina, who was slouched over the steering wheel and was looking a bit pale and sweeter than before.

“What?” rasped Reyna, barely lifting her head up.

For some reason, that imagine caused Piper to absolutely loose it. She began to laugh to the point that tears were streaming down her face. Veronica soon joined in as well, and once again Reyna joined in last. They laughed liked hyenas for a good ten minutes before they settled down.

*We are so f*cked!*

---

After a quick tire change and a fuel up, they were back on the road.

The mood in the car had lightened up significantly to the point that Piper felt like she could safely include Reyna in their conversations. The praetor allowed for them to have the radio on, but under the threat that if Biz Markie came on again, Reyna would rip out the stereo with her bare hand.

Reyna was intense like that…

Piper’s only immediate concern now was why Reyna was sweating so profusely. The girl had the air conditioning blowing on her, but it seemed to have little effect. She supposed that Veronica and Atlas did put off a lot of heat and since they were sitting directly behind the praetor maybe they were negating the AC?

---

It was dusk and they had just passed through Ontario when the unmistakable red and blue lights of a squad car flashed behind them.

“How fast were you going Reyna?” Piper asked as she hastily put her seatbelt on.

“Fast enough,” the praetor grumbled as she looked into the rearview mirror.

They continued on for another mile or so before Piper realized Reyna had no intention of pulling
over. “Um, Reyna. You’re supposed to pull over when the cops are after you.”

“I can outrun them.”

Piper sighed. “No. Reyna. Just no.” I’m sure dad is freaking out already, so why not add a high speed chase to his anxiety. “Just pull over.”

“I don’t have my license,” the brunette grumbled, as she hit the turn signal. “I never got one.”

Veronica stuck her head up front between the two of them. “Uh, on top of that this thing is technically stolen…”

Piper felt her stomach drop. “Wait, what?!?”

“She’s not wrong. We took this from those mortals,” Reyna sighed as she put the damaged SUV in park.

Piper pinched the bridge of her nose and took a deep breath. I promised myself I wouldn’t do this, but since Thelma and Louise committed grand theft auto what choice do I have? “Okay! Just let me do all the talking.”

They waited a couple very tense minutes until the officer, a man with a bushy white mustache that would but Coran Hieronymus Wimbleton Smythe’s to shame, rapt on Reyna’s window with his flashlight. Reyna rolled the window down and gave the officer her best smile (I’ve seen friendlier smiles on crocodiles). “Is there a problem officer?”

The officer shined his flashlight into the vehicle, momentarily blinding the occupants, before addressing the Reyna. “You could say that,” he grumbled. The man’s eyes momentarily widened when he noticed that Reyna only had one arm.

Pity. Good. I can use that. The daughter of Aphrodite thought.

The officer cleared his throat and recomposed himself. “Young lady, you don’t have any taillights, your muffler is dragging on the asphalt, you don’t have any mirrors, you’re missing your right headlight, and do you have any idea how fast you were going?”

“Seventy?”

“One-hundred-and-thirty-five.”

“Oh.”

“The speed limit is seventy. You were doing almost double!” The officer shouted. “Look I’m going to need to see your license and registra-“

“We’re sorry officer!” Piper cried, her voice shaky and her eyes beginning to water. “Please don’t call our parents!” She was sobbing now, tears streaming down her face.

“Young lady, I’m afraid it’s a little too late for that,” the officer tsked. “Now. License and registration please.”

“We’re not even supposed to be out of the ward!” She spun around in her seat as far the seat belt would let her and glared at Veronica. “You!” she spat. “This is all your fault! Let’s sneak out! I’ve never gone on a road trip before and it’s on my bucket list!” she said in a mocking tone.

“Wait, what? Ward?” the officer asked, clearly confused.
“We snuck out of the pediatric ward, and then this one,” she gestured to Reyna with her thumb, “Decided that she wanted to drive once in her life before she is unable to. So we found this clunker and decided to go for a joy ride.” She covered her face with her hands and began to shake uncontrollably. “I don’t feel good. I just want to go back.”

“Woah! Wait one minute here!” the officer cried. “You’re telling me you three snuck out a hospital to take a joyride?”

Piper nodded and hoped the other two were smart enough to go along with her story. “I just want to go back,” she sobbed. “I missed my last dose and my body is really hurting.” She removed her hands from her face and looked at the officer pleadingly. “Please let us go! I promise we’ll go right back!”

The mustached officer bit his lip. 

Gotcha. She sniffled once more before summoning her charm speak. “Please just let us go.”

The words seemed to visible shake the officer who blinked in confusion for a couple seconds before a sad smile graced his face. “Alright,” he sighed. “Just head back and try to keep this rig under eighty. Now you ladies have a nice night.” He tipped his hat and with that he walked back to his waiting squad car. The three of them waiting a few tense minutes until squad car’s lights turned off and he pulled away.

Reyna was the first to speak. “What the fuck was that?” she asked, eyes wide.

“Did- did you just say we were sick kids?” Veronica asked, Atlas chuckling in the background. “That’s messed up.”

“Did your dad teach you to act?” Reyna asked, still in shock.

Piper let out a long drawn out sigh. “No. No he did not.” And he would be ashamed if he saw that little performance. She looked out the passenger window, not wanting to face her friends. “I picked it up from Drew. She would give make up these sob stories that would get people feeling sorry for her, then she would use that pity as fuel for her charm speak to get what she wanted.” She rested her head against the window. “I promised myself I wouldn’t do that.” She felt something warm on her shoulder, and she turned to see both Reyna and Veronica had their hands resting on her.

“What you just did potentially saved lives Mclean,” Reyna said with soft smile. “Sometimes you have to do things your uncomfortable with for the greater good.”

Piper smiled back, but it was forced. But what happens when you no longer feel uncomfortable doing it?

Piper woke up and wiped the drool off her chin.

Sometime in the night she had fallen asleep against the window, and she was sure the side of her face was red from having her face pressed against the glass. The last thing she had remembered was they had crossed the Oregon-Washington border in the early hours of the morning and she had been bummed that Reyna wouldn’t stop in Walla Walla, Washington so she could get a postcard to send
to Jason. Sure I haven’t heard from him in forever, but I got to believe he’s fine. Plus, he would totally be amused by that name!

“Where are we?” She yawned, as she stretched as much as possible in the confined space of the passenger’s seat. Her back audibly cracked and she moaned in pleasure. Yeah, that’s the stuff.

“We’re here princess,” Reyna grunted.

“Great! I can’t wait to get out and stretch my legs!”

“There’s a problem though.”

She didn’t need Reyna to tell her what the problem as it was clear as day to the daughter of Aphrodite: The Amazon campus entrance was blocked by hundreds, if not thousands of protesters. They were a diverse group though composed of all ages, races, backgrounds. She saw kids around her age with signs condemning slavery. She saw several rainbow flags being flown by men and women with sayings such as “Love trumps hate”, “We are all equal”, and “It’s prime time we were all equal”.

Then there were the groups that no one wanted to see. Ever. There were men wearing white robes and hoods, and other men wearing brown shirts with red arm bands. Their red, white, and black banners, made Piper simultaneously pissed off and sick to her stomach at the same time.

This is like the start of a bad joke: A Native American, a Latina, and a cheetah-spotted-girl, pull up to a rally.

“Veronica and Atlas are currently looking for an alternate entrance, but I doubt there is one,” Reyna sighed, resting her sweating brow on the steering wheel. She looked worse than she did the night before and Piper was beginning to think something was seriously wrong with her.

Piper glared at the assembled groups. Fuck it. “There’s an entrance right there.”

Reyna lifted her head and stared at her quizzically. “Piper. We can’t just drive through them. They’re people for god’s sake.”

Piper pointed to the right where the hate-groups were gathered. “Those, are not people.”

Reyna looked at the assembly and then back at her, a wicked smile on her face. “Really?”

Piper reclined back in her chair and stuck her arms behind her head. “I hate Illinois Nazis.”

“How do you know they’re from Illinois?” Reyna asked as she shifted the car into gear.

She sighed. “It’s a reference Reyna. Just- Just drive.” Am I the only demigod who watches movies?

About one-hundred pairs of eyes widened in fear when Reyna revved the engine.

“Do you know what you three just did?!” Hylla screamed as she slammed her fists down on her sleek white desk. “Attempted vehicular manslaughter!”
I would’ve gone with almost made the world a better place, but that is also technically true.

Apparently the Fates had decreed that everyone in Reyna’s way would be fast enough to avoid getting pancaked, which in Piper’s opinion was a damn shame. After entering the campus, they made a beeline to the main entrance, ditched the car, and made a mad dash into the main building where they were greeted with swords held to their throats and bows aimed at their knees.

It had been a tense one-sided standoff that was only made worse when Atlas and Veronica came crashing through the windows all fire and fury. The titan-demigod was literally covered in golden flames from head to toe, which also somehow extended to their twin blades. It was simultaneously beautiful and terrifying to the daughter of Aphrodite.

Thankfully before things got out of hand, Hylla appeared and ordered the Amazons to lower their weapons. They were then escorted to her office, a pure white room with glass walls, where the older Ramirez-Arellano began to scream at them.

Well mostly Reyna. I’m just here for the ride I guess.

The Amazon queen and CEO sank into her desk chair and massaged her temples. “We have cameras on us twenty-four-seven and federal officials climbing up my ass since the incident in Georgia. This was the last thing I need right now.”

Piper snorted as she thought of some little government man trying to crawl into Hylla’s impressive booty.

The CEO glared at her. “Is something funny?”

“Just the vivid imagery ma’am.”

“Well I’m glad someone is finding this funny!” she roared before slamming her head onto her desk. The older demigod looked like crap. She had bags under her eyes that put the ones Nico used to have to shame. Her hair at one point had been fixed into a ponytail, but most of it had worked its way out. She was wearing what had once been an amazing white dress, but it was now covered in the stains of a thousand cups of coffee. She lifted her head off her desk and looked at Reyna. “What do you want Reyna?”

So am I the only one that notices that she’s missing an arm? I’d like to think if one of my half-siblings showed up at my door missing a limb I’d be concerned about that first and foremost.

“Camp Jupiter has fallen. I need your and the Amazons help to take it back.”

Straight to the point. That's our Reyna.

Hylla sat back in her chair and frowned. “I’m afraid that’s impossible at this time.” Reyna started to protest, but Hylla held up her hand to silence her. “I would love to. After your assistance with helping me take the throne, I am forever indebted to Camp Jupiter.”

Piper threw her head back and groaned. “I’m sensing a “but”.”

The Queen of the Amazons smiled at her. “But, if you weren’t aware, we’re having some problems of our own right now. The public has been made aware of some of our questionable labor methods and all our facilities are in danger. Two additional facilities have already been attacked, and we are scrambling to get our people to safety.”

Please leave the room so I can have some words with my dear sister.”

*Oh shit…. She grabbed Veronica’s clawed hand and escorted the younger girl out of the office. They sat down on a small bench just across from the office. Fortunately for the sisters the office was soundproof. Unfortunately the transparent walls allowed for the three of them to watch the two exchange heated words. As the seconds turned to minutes the sisters’ body language became more aggressive.

They watched in silence as Reyna smacked one of the chairs aside and leaned across the desk and yelled in her sister’s face. The Amazon queen did not take kindly to the invasion of her personal bubble and threw a handful of wadded up paper in the Praetor’s face.

“This is getting very… interesting,” Atlas chuckled.

Piper should’ve have told the titan off, but the truth was she was just as transfixed on the sister’s fight. *This is some Jerry Springer stuff right here! Also it’s kind of hot…*

Reyna used her one arm to slap her sister’s computer off her desk, to which she responded with a slap across the face.

*Oh shit! All I need is some popcorn and this would be perfect!* 

Sadly, Hylla noticed the three of them watching their catfight. The older Latina flicked a switch that was built into her desk and the glass walls lost their transparency.

“Well that was fun while it lasted,” The titan chuckled as they jumped to their feet.

“Where are you going?”

“I thought I saw a vending machine back there. Last time I was free I tried these little round sweets with M’s stamped on them and I was-“

The titan was cut off when the two Ramirez-Arellano sisters crashed through glass wall, a million pieces of glass raining down on the pair. Reyna was on top of her sister, holding her down with her one hand wrapped around her throat.

Atlas and Veronica sat back down on the bench and crossed their legs and arms. Their golden flaming eyes burning slightly brighter. “Pity she only has the one arm. She could really do some damage right now.”

Reyna apparently didn’t think so, as she slammed her head into her sister’s face.

Piper reflexively covered her mouth with her hands and winced. *I think I felt that.*

While Reyna was temporarily dazed, Hylla turned her head to the side and spat out a mixture of blood and teeth before slamming her fist into Reyna’s gut. Reyna fell on her side and instantly the CEO of Amazon was straddling her and delivering one devastating blow after another.

“Do you think we should stop them?” Veronica asked.

Piper shook her head. The two were so enraged that she wasn’t sure if they could differentiate friend from foe. *They’re fine. Everything’s fine!*

Hylla got in a few more hits before Reyna somehow bucked her sister off of her, before rolling away. Both girls got to their shaky feet. Both were panting heavily and covered in mixture of sweat
and each other’s blood. There wasn’t enough bleach in the world to remove the blood stains from Hylla’s formerly-white dress.

The sister’s looked at each other. Hylla spat out another tooth and Reyna wiped the blood from her chin. Then without warning they each roared and charged each other. When they were perhaps two feet apart, they bent their necks back only to slam their head forward, connected with a painful Thud. The two sisters stumbled for a moment before falling onto their backs.

“Are they- Are they dead?” Veronica asked, her voice just louder than a whisper.

Piper just sat there, too stunned to answer. She was afraid that if she got up and checked, the two would be dead.

“Piper?”

Piper was just about to get up and check, or so she told herself, when Hylla started to laugh. It started as chuckle, but soon blossomed into full blown, bat shit crazy, laughter. Soon, Reyna started to laugh too, just as intense as her older sister.

What the actual fuck!

They both pushed themselves up off the blood and glass covered floor and embraced each other.

“It’s been far too long little sister,” Hylla laughed as she lifted the praetor into the air. “Thanks for calling me out on my shit.”

Reyna released her sister and actually blushed. Well Piper thought she blushed; the blood made it hard to tell. “You needed your fat ass kicked! You said you were going to abolish that slavery bullshit!”

“I was! I am! It’s just there’s a lot more political and economic-“ Reyna growled and Hylla shut her mouth. “Yeah, you’re right.”

Piper hated to interrupt the weird ass bonding moment, but there was still an important issue to clarify. “So are you going to help us?”

Hylla shook her head. “I want to, but I have to put the needs of my people first. When everything cools down I’ll do whatever you need.” She clapped her hands together. “Until then, you are more than welcome to stay here as long you want. Take whatever you want, plan your next move, whatever. Does that sound good Reyna? Reyna?”

The praetor gave a thumbs up before collapsing onto the floor.

Instantly Hylla was at her side. “Something’s wrong with her!”

“Well you did just beat the living shit out of each other,” the daughter of Aphrodite suggested.

“She’s been through worse. This was nothing compared to when we lived together on Circe’s island.” She put her hand on the unconscious praetor’s head and immediately withdrew it. “She’s burning up!” She then began to check the praetor’s body for anything wrong and when she rolled back the sleeve of the missing arm Piper almost vomited.

The shoulder was gangrenous. The flesh was various shades of black and green, with yellow pus leaking from several sores just above the site of amputation.
Hylla recoiled and covered her mouth. “How could she even walk with something like this?”

“She’s been using her mother’s gifts,” Atlas chuckled. “I wondered how long she could keep it up. Persistent little thing.”

“Wait! You know she was like this!” Piper cried, gesturing to her injured friend. “Why didn’t you tell anyone?”

The titan general shrugged. “Something to kill the boredom.”

Piper punched the Titan in the nose, and felt quite satisfied when she felt the bones underneath shatter.

She would apologize to Veronica later.

Chapter End Notes

You! You got what I neeeeed!

God, I love that terrible song.

Okay, so as you can tell I was always skeptical about the identities of the seven. It was just bam! Annabeth is the seventh at the start of MoA. Yes she got a prophecy, but it was old and not really specified for her. The other six I could understand they kind of proved themselves when they took on a giant. Really I felt like Reyna or Nico was the true seventh. Even though that was going to be a plot twist in BoO. (that book was awful on every level)

I love Piper. She's definitely a fun character. Okay sure, it sounds like at times i'm making her bi, but i've always thought children of Aphrodite were more open and honest. No she's not going to leave Jason for Reyna or Veronica. That I can assure you. That would be in terrible taste.

When I first started planning this story some of the earliest scenes I imagined were Piper and Reyna singing terrible music in a big SUV. Over time I flushed out and gave them a reason for why they would be singing that made sense with respects to their character. I also had idea of Piper playing board games with someone in while Reyna is mad as hell behind the driver's wheel.

Drew making up BS sob stories to make people more susceptible to her charm speak is soooo in character for her. It is also something Piper would never want to do, thus her feeling like crap and wondering is she is a good person after the using her charm speak on the cop. Yes I know she stole a car in the book, but that was different and before she knew what she was doing.

Reyna and Hylla's reunion was fun! We have two very strong women going through hell right now. Both are trying to protect their people and both are messing up each other's plans. Both haven't been sleeping well so there was a short fuse.

Hey did you like what you just read? Then Leave a kudos!
Thoughts, theories, praise, suggetions, etc? Leave a comment!

I love hearing from you guys! your feedback is greatly appreciated and used!

Next chapter will be Jason! He's finally heading to Minnesota with Poseidon! So that should be fun...

Well until next time! Thanks for reading! You are amazing!
Jason

Chapter Summary

Warnings: drug use, mentions of sexual abuse.

Tonight:

Jason eats crappy pancakes.

Poseidon is a creep.

Harpocrates is a pretty weird guy.

Yetis!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

“And I want you to try and call me every night,” The son of Hades added to his already lengthy list of requirements.

It was early Saturday morning, the sun was still hours away from cresting over the horizon, and the morning frost still covered the farm. Even though Jason was now an early riser, this was far too early for him, let alone the small demigod before him. Nico was standing barefoot on the frosty wooden porch with his blanket wrapped around him, his long dark hair even messier than usual.

“Yes, mom,” he chuckled, earning him a pointed glare from the son of Hades. The glare had no effect on him though. How could it though when the younger demigod looked so small with the large comforter draped over him?

“Yes, mom?” the son of Hades asked, his voice soft and full of sincerity.

He looked into the small boy’s eyes and knew that he couldn’t deny him. “I’ll do my best Neeks.”

Suddenly Jason was wrapped in the embrace of the son of Hades, the black comforter in a pile at their feet. “Come home soon Jay. It’s not going to be the same without you,” Nico murmured into his neck.

It’s funny how he’s the only one who doesn’t make me jump.

“I wish I could get a picture of this, he’s like a sleepy koala! “Yeah, it’s in my book bag next to the snacks you made for me.”

There was a loud thud which made the two of them jump involuntarily. He laughed nervously when
he noticed that he was floating about a foot off the ground with Nico still wrapped in his arms.

“Come on Grace!” the sea god called from a baby blue Cadillac convertible parked in the driveway. “We want to get in the current before rush hour!”

“He means the road,” Demeter sighed as she climbed the steps onto the porch. “The man is utterly lost on all things not related to the sea or horses.” The older women smiled fondly at the two demigods as she sat down on an old wooden rocking chair.

Nico, having apparently realized he was still wrapped around Jason, jumped from his arms. The younger demigod then picked up his blanket, wrapped it around himself, and moved away from him, with a scowl on his face.

Demeter didn’t say anything about her nephew’s behavior, but her cheeks turned a shade darker. “I really wish he would let you drive Jason, but he’s as persistent as the tides. So please keep an eye on him.” The smile faded from her face and her eyes took on a steely look. “And if for whatever reason the mortal law pulls you over: run, fly, do anything to get away. Don’t worry about Poseidon, take care of yourself.”

Jason gulped. “Does this have to do with the offering for Harpocrates?”

When Poseidon had pulled into the driveway, he had popped the drunk of the car, and hopped over the driver’s door to meet the harvest goddess who was lugging a large suitcase. When Jason had approached to offer his assistance the two Olympians had sent him back to the porch.

The goddess looked away and sighed. “Yes.”

Before he could question the goddess further, Poseidon honked the Cadillac’s horn. “Come on Jason! We’re going to miss the tide at this rate!”

He looked at Nico apologetically. He hated to leave what he was slowly starting to consider his home, even for the shortest amount of time, but he knew he had to. He needed to know who was responsible for the death of his friends, his family, and how he could stop them. Even if I have to relive the past. “I better get going,” he said as he swung his book bag over his shoulder. “I’ll see you Monday morning at the latest Neeks.” Before he stepped off the porch, he realized he needed to do once last important thing. He spun around and grabbed Nico into a bear hug before the son of Hades could react. “No matter what, remember Percy and I love you Neeks,” he whispered into the boy’s ear. He set his best friend down and ran to the awaiting vehicle before Nico could respond.

If there was one thing Jason was sure of, it was that Poseidon had learned to drive from Papi. From the moment Poseidon put the car in reverse, his foot never left the accelerator.

Currently they were near the Illinois-Wisconsin border and Jason was struggling to use his abilities, hold a flashlight with his neck, and work a particularly hard algebra problem. No, he wasn’t foolish enough to be fighting monsters and do his homework at the same time, but rather the god of the seas insisted they traveled with the top down. So for Jason not to lose his homework and freeze to death, he was controlling the winds so that they passed around him with a width berth.

So I have two equations with two unknowns…. He racked his brain trying to remember how Nico
had shown him how to work these kind of problems.

“So… how’s school?” the bearded god asked him as he swerved in and out of traffic.

He closed his notebook and tucked his pencil into the metal spiral. “I like it,” he shrugged. “New people, I get to improve upon myself, and get a chance to figure out what I want to do with the rest of my life.” *Plus I get to play World of Warcraft every day!*

“Oh?” Percy’s father asked, raising one bushy eyebrow. “I thought you were going to be the new pontiff?”

“I am, but I don’t want that to be all I do.” He paused and took a breath. “I’ve been doing a lot of thinking about this lately. I think Percy and Annabeth had the right idea. To try and grow out of everything, to become part of the real world. I-I want some sense of normalcy. No more abductions, no more trying to please all the gods, no leaving my family for unknown lengths of time with little to no contact.” He held his hand outside the car and let the wind pass over it, feeling the push of the wind and his muscles work to keep his hand in place. “I will always be there to protect my home, but I want to be able to leave it.” He resumed control of the air and his hand was free to move without opposition.

“I think that’s fair,” was all the god said before returning his full attention back to the road.

It was at around six in the morning when they stopped in Madison for breakfast.

Poseidon chose some truck-stop diner that was packed full of people despite the early hour. The god of sea walked over to the long chrome covered counter that separated the kitchen from the public and flopped down on one of the vacant stools. Jason tried to sit so that there was one stool between the pair, but the sea god picked him up by the nape of his neck and deposited him on the seat next to him, before handing him an old beat up menu.

“I hope they have salmon,” the god muttered as he opened the menu.

Jason did the same with his and tried not to be grossed out by the fact the pages were sticking together. *Pancakes? Strawberry waffles? Crepes? It all sounds good, but I know it isn’t going to be as good as Nico’s.* Since they had started staying at Demeter’s farm, the young son of Hades had cooked every single one of their meals, and the boy was a freaking genius in the kitchen. Everything he made tasted like Elysium and it was to the point everything else tasted like lackluster. When the three of them went to McDonalds a few weeks back Jason was shocked to find the fast food had lost all of its appeal.

“Hey there honey, how ya doing?” asked a tired voice, surprising him causing him to drop his menu on the counter. He looked up, his face red with embarrassment, at the waitress, a tired looking brunette around his age.

“I’m good fine,” he answered, the words falling from his mouth.

She laughed softly as she sat glasses of ice water in front of him and Poseidon. “I get a lot of “goods” and a lot of “fines” but not many “good fines”,” she chuckled. “Now what can I get you two gentlemen to drink?” she asked, removing a small notepad and pen from her blue apron.
The god of the sea spoke before Jason had a chance to respond. “I’ll have salt water with a just a little bit of krill.”

“And I’ll have a glass of chocolate milk.”

“One large chocolate milk,” the waitress smirked, “and a glass of tap water coming right up.” She tucked the notepad back into her apron and walked away.

He continued to skim through the menu before settling on pancakes, he wasn’t particularly hungry anyway.

He let his mind wander to thoughts on his first full week of school. Art was a pretty laid back class, what with the daily sports discussions; plus his scratchboard was really coming along well. Environmental science was only a rehash of the survival skills he had learned from the legion and Lupa, but it dealt more with theory than experience. Algebra II was a bit of a struggle, but with Nico willing to sit down with him and Percy every night to help the two of them it was slowly starting to make sense. And of course PE was pretty cool, minus the horrible awkwardness he felt in the locker room.

College Prep though was incredibly stressful, not that the work was hard, but because he felt so uncomfortable being surrounded by women. His classmates were nice enough and he got along with them fine outside the classroom, but in there he was on edge. It always felt like they were watching him.

Thank the gods for Information Processing though. All his stress seemed to melt away the second he sat down at his computer and clicked “play” on the World of Warcraft launcher. He was still new to it all and had to ask Chris or his other classmates for help or to clarify some lore, but he loved every moment he spent in Azeroth. He hadn’t created his own character yet, instead using other people’s “toons” to figure out what class he would like to make his own. Shamans control lightning and the wind, but that feels a little too on the nose, maybe a paladin? He had only tried four of eleven classes so far, so there was no hurry.

“Here’s your water and milk,” the waitress said as she set down two frosted glasses in front of them. She then rested her chin on her hand in front of him. “Now, what can I get you… honey?”

“I’ll have the fish sticks with a side of fries,” the sea god said as he folded his menu.

The waitress looked at Poseidon skeptically. “It’s a bit early for that, don’t you think?”

The bearded god shook his head, “It’s never too early for fish!”

To her credit the waitress didn’t roll her eyes, instead writing down the god’s order on her notepad, before turning to him. “And what about you?”

“The pancakes,” he shrugged as he handed her his menu. She wrote down his order and handed the little slip of paper to the cook, who could be heard cursing the fact someone had ordered fish sticks so early in the morning.

The waitress came back, and sat on the vacant stool next to him. “Soooo,” the waitress drawled as she looked him over, “you from around here or just stopping by?”

“Just passing through,” is what he wanted to say, but what came out was, “Passing just.” He wanted to slam his head onto the counter and knock himself out. Why can’t I just answer one questions without freaking out?
The waitress giggled. “I’m going to take that as your passing through.” She leaned back against the counter and smiled at him. “I’m Cassandra, what’s your name?”

“Nico- Jason! My name is Jason!” he shouted. He heard Poseidon trying (and failing) to not laugh next to him. *Yup. Dad’s going to hear about this…*

If Casandra was weirded out by his strange behavior she didn’t show it. Instead, she told him about herself; things like: how long she’d been working at the diner, that she took the job to help pay for her college, and that she wanted to major in electrical engineering.

At first he barely spoke, but as time passed he found it easier to talk to her, and he was actually having a good time talking to her. He told her that he was traveling with his uncle to visit a distant relative (*technically true*), that he was a currently a junior, and some other random tidbits of information that she seemed interested to know.

Even when their food was done (*these pancakes taste like sand!*), Cassandra continued to chat with him. He asked her if she was going to get in trouble for ignoring everyone else, but she said she was on her break and that Enrique owed her a couple favors.

Eventually though she did have to get back to work, and left him alone with Poseidon to finish their breakfast.

He had just finished choking down the last bit of pancake when the lord of the seas said, “She likes you.”

“What? No, she’s just friendly is all,” he protested as he put all his garbage on his plate.

The god’s eyes narrowed. “She sat next to you for twenty minutes ignoring everyone else. Don’t tell me you’re as oblivious as Percy! I mean you were flirting right back at her! Sure you were floundering at first, but I think you’d make your father proud,” the god said, pointing his fork at Jason’s face.

He scanned the small dinner for Cassandra and saw her taking an elderly couple order. “I was not! I was just being friendly!” Suddenly he wanted out of the diner as fast as possible. He felt like he was trapped and that the walls were closing in around him. He pushed himself off the stool and ran out the door into the cool morning air.

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He was leaning against Poseidon’s Cadillac trying to catch his breath, when said sea god found him.

The bearded god stood next to him in silence for a few moments before he broke the silence with an awkward chuckle. “So they don’t accept pieces of eight or sand dollars, and they really want their money,” the god said while scratching the back of his head. “Do you think you could get it?”

They stood there in silence for another moment before Jason sighed. “Yeah. I got it.” He pushed himself off the convertible and slowly walked back to the diner. *It’s nothing. Even if she does like you it’s not like before. She’s just a girl. Nothing is going to happen.*

“And take your time!” Poseidon called out. “Don’t let your uncle stop you from having a good time! I was your age once too! Granted I was in my father’s stomach, but the feelings were the same!”
He tuned out the sea god and pushed open the diner door. *It’s fine! You’re Jason Grace! Praetor! One of the seven! Slayer of the Trojan sea monster! You can handle talking to some random girl!* He walked over to the register and pulled out his wallet while he waited for service.

As the Fates would decree it, or because there was only four people working, Cassandra was the one to wait on him. “Oh hey! You’re back!” she beamed. “You just kind of took off there and your uncle is one strange guy! He tried to pay your bill with like a gold pirate coin and we do not accept those,” she laughed as she punched in their bill. “That would be ten-seventy-seven please.”

He pulled out a twenty from his wallet and handed it to her, his hand shaking violently in the exchange. “Keep-keep the change,” he stuttered.

Cassandra smiled, “thanks. It’s greatly appreciated!”

“You’re welcome,” he said as he turned to leave.

“Wait!” she called as she grabbed his arm. He nearly jumped out of his skin at the unwanted physical contact, but the waitress didn’t seem to notice. “Um, I hate to do this, but could you help me carry in a case of canned fruit from my car?”

He wanted to say no, but the look she gave him made it impossible. He was a member of the legion, it was second nature by now to help anyone in need no matter how trivial it may have seem. “Yeah, sure.” Her smile grew and she led him by the hand through the small diner and out the back door to the employee parking lot.

When they got to what he assumed was her car, a small red Toyota, the young woman removed her apron and began to take off her earrings. “We kind of have to hurry,” she said, as she opened the back door to the small car.

“Yeah, looks like you were starting to get a crowd in there.” He walked over to the open door and was confused when he saw that there was no boxes for him to carry. “Hey there’s noth-“ He was cut off when he was pushed from behind into the car. As he rolled himself over, Cassandra climbed on top of him. “Hey-“

He was silenced when she smashed their lips together.

They rode in complete silence until the Wisconsin-Minnesota border, when Poseidon decided to speak.

“So did you have fun?” inquired the god, giving Jason a knowing smile.

He wanted to yell at the god, to scream, to holler, and to punch him in his smug face. No he did not have fun. After Cassandra had kissed him he had shoved the girl off him and had a full blown panic attack. He felt so embarrassed that he had cried in front of the girl, who had been apologizing non-stop until he settled down enough that he could breathe again. She said she thought he knew what was happening and that she never meant to cause him any distress, that she thought they could just have a little bit of fun and then they’d never have to see each other again. He in turn apologized for scaring her, and explained that he had a girlfriend and that he was currently going through some
“stuff”. After that he walked back to the waiting god, who couldn’t stop smiling at him. “No,” he said with a glare that he hoped could match Nico’s intensity.

The sea god chuckled. “I’m sorry to hear that. They can’t all be great though. Some are just, well, dead fish.”

“No-“

“Oh she cried didn’t she?” the Hawaiian shirt clad god asked as he stroked his beard. “She looked like a crier. Criers are the worst.”

“No she was-“

The lord of the continued talking, ignoring his nephew, “Sally, as much as I loved her, was a crier. I remember it like it was yesterday, I had just picked her up in this beautiful creature,“ he knocked on the wood paneled dash, “And I took her to Montauk for a weekend getaway.” Suddenly the car began to smell of ocean breeze and the god took a deep breath. “We spent most of the time on the water, but on the second night of our stay we parked on the beach, dropped the top down, and watched the stars. One thing lead to another and, well, Percy was conceived right there in the back seat. She cried when we were finished and she cried a few weeks later when she learned she was pregnant.”

Jason resisted the urge to scream and throw himself into traffic. I never needed to know any of that. Ever. And that’s the kind of knowledge even the Lethe can’t erase. “We didn’t do anything,” he said, turning away from the god. “And I didn’t want to anyway.”

“That’s nonsense! You are my brother’s son!” Poseidon laughed. “If there’s one thing children of Zeus and Jupiter have is their father’s sex drive! Any child of my brothers or myself really!”

“Well I don’t!” he snapped. “And frankly I don’t think Percy and Nico are like that either!”

“Well I don’t know much about Hades’ boy, but Percy would have gotten bored with the Athena girl-“

He slammed his fist onto the dash, sparks flying when his hand came in contact with the chrome trim. “Annabeth! Her name was Annabeth!” He growled through clenched teeth. “I may not always be happy with Percy, but I know he would NEVER leave her or hurt her!”

For a moment it looked like the god was going to kill him, but then he burst out laughing. “Maybe you didn’t get your dad’s libido, but you definitely got his temper!”

Jason sank back into his seat, all fire and fury disappearing as fast as it appeared, leaving him feeling quite ill.

It was midday when they arrived at the outskirts of Alexandria and Jason was amazed to see all the Viking themed statues and displays around the small city.

“Alexandria, named after the Greek city in Egypt, has a strong tribal presence, and most of its population is descended from Norwegian immigrants,” Poseidon explained as he turned the Cadillac off the highway onto a dirt road. “It’s a melting pot of cultures just like the whole state.”
“So is this where Asgard is located?” Jason asked, as the city gave way to dense forest. *It would be pretty cool to meet Thor. I bet he looks just like he does in the comics!*

Poseidon laughed so hard his stomach jiggled. “No, No. The entrance to Asgard is in Boston. Well, was anyway…”

Jason was going to ask more about the mysterious other pantheons that the three rarely talked openly about, but he was stopped by Poseidon throwing on the park brake and sliding the boat-of-a-car to a screeching stop.

When the dust settled and Jason removed the metric ton of dirt from his glasses, he saw that they were parked some distance away from an old beaten up log cabin, with no less than ten cars and trucks in various states of disrepair spread out the unkempt lawn. There were signs posted everywhere too, some warning against trespassing, no soliciting, and one for a yard sale strangely enough. *There is no way this is where a god lives.*

“Yup this is just how I imagined it,” Poseidon huffed as he opened the driver’s door. “He was always a bit of a slob.”

Jason undid his seatbelt and flew straight up out of the vehicle. It felt good to get out and stretch, being trapped in the baby-blue convertible and being stressed out really tensed his body up. He set down next to his uncle and awaiting orders; after all, he was the leader of this quest. “So what do we-“

He was cut off as the sound of gunfire killed the silence and the driver’s side mirror exploded in a mix of glass and chrome. He dove to the ground, pulled out his sword from pocket, and made it grow to full size, while Poseidon sat next to him and summoned his trident.

“I see you, you shrimp dicked fucker!” a gruff voice called out from the cabin, before another gunshot rang out.

“Harpocrates!” The sea god called out while still crouching behind the vehicle. “We’re here as friends! We need your help!” he tapped Jason’s shoulder. “Go get the offering out of the trunk,” he whispered.

Jason nodded and carefully began to scoot his way to the rear of the vehicle.

“Do you think I’m fucking daft?” The god of secrets called out, before another round of gunfire went off, this time the taking out the convertible’s windshield. “Poseidon and a son of old-thunder-fuck just so happen to pay me a visit? Bullshit!”

That’s actually a really accurate description of my dad.

Jason was at the edge of the convertible now, and he cautiously poked his head up. There on the cabin’s rotting porch stood the strangest god Jason had ever seen. Harpocrates was a tall lanky middle aged looking man, with maybe three stands of hair left that he tried to work as a comb over. He wore golf shoes that were an unearthly bright white, with Bermuda shorts, and white socks that went up to his knees. His chest was covered by a badly stained tank top and an open red and gold colored Hawaiian shirt that was three sizes too big. He had on thick green lensed glasses and a broken cigarette hung limply from his mouth. While he may appeared comical, in his hands he was carrying a giant hunting rifle with a large scope and laser sight.

He must have spotted him as suddenly the god swung the rifle towards him and fired off a round, Jason just managed to duck in time. “Still making the demigods do your dirty work, eh Don?” the
god shouted as he pulled out several rounds from shirt pocket and began to reload his weapon.

Posiedon stood up from his hiding place and shot a torrent of water from his trident at the minor god. “Now Jason!” he cried while tossing him the keys. He then grabbed the trident with both hands and increased the intensity of his watery assault.

Jason circled to the back of the car and fumbled with the keys as he tried to find the right one to open the trunk with. Finally, he managed to get one to fit and quickly through the trunk open, grabbed the bulging suitcase, and tossed it in the air.

“Oh no you don’t you manatee of a man!” the strangely dressed god shouted, as he aimed his rifle at the free falling suitcase. Just as Poseidon grabbed the handle, a shot rang out and the suitcase exploded open.

“What the-?” It took Jason a moment to piece together what he was seeing. A shower of white powder, an entire rainbows of pills, bags of some kind of green plant, and various other containers rained down around them.

“There goes your offering dumbass!” Poseidon growled as he shot a torrent of boiling sea water at the minor god. The sea god dismissed his trident, dropped to his knees and began to scoop the illegal pharmaceuticals into the remains of the suitcase. “Jason help me pick this stuff up!”

Jason didn’t move a muscle, he just stood there with his mouth gaping. That’s what his offering was? Alcohol, pills, and illegal drugs? So that’s why Demeter was so worried… He felt used. If for some reason someone would have saw the illegal collection he could’ve been in deep trouble. He was sixteen going on seventeen; the odds were good that he would’ve been tried as an adult for this kind of transgression. This is too much. He collapsed back onto the ground and continued to stare as Percy’s dad rooted through the dirt picking the scattered remnants.

When he felt a wet hand clap his back he looked up to see the god of secrets looking down at him, soaking wet but somehow the broken cigarette still dangling out of his mouth. “Sorry about trying to kill you,” he said through clenched teeth. “When you’re in my line of work it’s your natural default to assume the worst.” He lifted Jason up with one hand and patted the dirt off of him. “Now come inside so we can talk.”

If Jason thought the outside was as bad as it could get, he was sorely mistaken. The inside looked like a bomb had exploded, and judging from the numerous weapons hanging on the walls it was a very real possibility. The floor was obscured by layers of bottles and cans, and Jason’s shoes stuck with every step.

“No you understand the golf shoes!” the god grunted as they worked their way through hallway jam packed with litter and weaponry. “Watch your step,” the balding god cried as he stepped up onto a pile of trash and into the main room.

Jason didn’t try to mimic the man’s Billy goat like climbing, and instead opted to float up and into the room. He felt his eyes widen and jaw drop. “Is that?”

Sitting on an old beaten up couch was what Jason first thought was a man in an expense Chewbacca costume, but the longer he stared it, the less Wookie-like it looked and his certainty that it was not a costume grew. The creature was easily nine foot tall, was an easy six hundred pounds of muscle and
hair, and its bare feet were almost as long as Jason’s arms.

“Yes that’s a yeti,” Harpocrates said through clenched teeth. “And he won’t pay his god damned rent!” He picked up an empty can of beer and tossed it at the hairy beast, who in turn through a can right back. “Oh I should have never took you in! You free loading ape wannabe!” he cried as another can zoomed by his head.

Jason watched in awe as the two continued to argue; well the god was arguing and the yeti was grunting and growling. He briefly wondered if this was real. Perhaps when the suitcase exploded I got exposed. When he looked up and saw the god was standing on a coffee table flipping off the Himalayan wild man with both hands, he knew that this was his reality.

“Go out and get a job damn you!” the god sneered as he jumped off the table. The yeti waved him off and Jason watched as a vein on the god’s temple throbbed.

Well better do what I do best: distractions. “Where would a yeti even get a job?” he asked.

“The D-M-fucking-V,” Harpocrates roared. “It’s the only place that will hire creatures that are too weird to live and too rare to die.” The god brushed several pounds of garbage off the couch next to the yeti and gestured for Jason to sit down, which he gracefully accepted (but was cringing internally). Seemingly satisfied with the seating arrangements, the minor god flopped down onto beanbag chair that occupied the space across from the couch.

“So I imagine this isn’t a social visit,” the god sighed, pulling a pack of cigarettes from his shirt pocket and swapping out the limp, waterlogged one in his mouth for a new one. “And I bet I know exactly what you want to know.”

“You’re right,” Poseidon said as he climbed into the garbage filled room, carrying the remaining offering in his arms. The bearded god cleared the trash off the coffee table with one arm and dumped the illegal substances all over it. “Here’s your offering,” he picked up a baggie filled with some kind of leaves, “Freshly picked from Demeter’s private garden.”

Harpocrates in a display of Hermes-like speed, jumped up from his beanbag, snatched the baggie, stuck his nose in the bag, and inhaled deeply. “It’s been far too long!” He inhaled again. “I believe this alone is a sufficient offering, but the rest is greatly appreciated.”

Jason perked up at that. Sounds like I won’t have to do my part! He had been dreading this encounter since Poseidon had first announced this quest. If it had been required he would have divulged any number of secrets to make sure his friends and Camp Jupiter was kept safe, but he feared that if he talked about his encounter with the goddess of discipline, he would have to relive it. Again. “So you’ll help us?”

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“Huh? What? Oh, yes, yes,” the minor god said as he resealed the bag and tucked it into his back pocket. “But first you must complete a quest of the utmost of importance.”

That relief he felt a mere moment ago? Gone. He swallowed hard, but otherwise kept his composure as he rose from the couch. “What must I do Lord Harpocrates?” Minor gods and goddesses loved when you used titles.

The god removed his cigarette and stamped it out on a discarded can and frowned. “This quest is of the utmost importance. The fate of Olympus, neigh! The world! Rides on this! Do you think you can handle it son of Jupiter?”

Jason stood straighter and puffed his chest out, his roman instincts taking over. “I can handle
anything.”

The god of secrets chuckled darkly. “That’s what they all say.” The Yeti grunted in what Jason assumed was agreement.

“I can do it.”

“Excellent.” The god pulled a wad of loose bills from his back pocket and shoved them into Jason’s hands. “Go the convenience store and pick us up some snacks! A shit ton of snacks! Like a god damn diabetes inducing amount! By the time you get back you’re going to have two very hungry gods and a yeti to deal with!”

Wait, what?

Apparently he wasn’t moving fast enough, as the god pushed him out of the room. “Did I fucking stutter man? Move that beautiful blond ass! food! Now! Go!

The next thing Jason knew was he standing next to the bullet-ridden Cadillac, the wad of cash still clenched in his fist. He wasn’t sure what was happening, but he had a feeling that before all of this was done he would miss the days of simply fighting monsters.

“And don’t you dare show you face back here again unless you come baring Twinkies!”

Harpocrates voice rang out from the cabin.

He nodded to no one, and started to fly back to civilization. I was always an errand boy for the gods, but this is getting ridiculous!

He returned back to cabin around an hour later, carrying bags upon bags of junk food.

The convenience store was a bit farther away than he remembered, so by the time he got there he had to sit down and catch his breath. Then once inside he made a beeline for the food and grabbed: four boxes of Twinkies, two boxes of Swiss Rolls, three bags of potato chips, two bags of pork rinds, a whole galaxy of multicolored sugar filled candies, a pint of chocolate milk, a six pack of Red Bull, and a dozen Slim Jims. If I’m getting locked into a serious junk food collection, then I’m going to push it as far I can, he told himself as the clerk looked at him funny, as he scanned the mountain of junk food.

He landed on the rickety porch and used the wind to open the screen door for him. Once inside he started to float again and made his way back to the living room, careful to avoid any and all filth.

“I’m back,” Jason announced as he entered the room. “Did you know they have cotton candy twink…ies?”

The room was filled with a noxious smelling smoke that obscured the ceiling like tiny storm clouds. Poseidon was passed out on the floor, while the yeti was crouched over him drawing all over the unconscious god’s face with a permanent marker.

“What’s going on?”

Suddenly an arm wrapped around his neck and pulled him down to ground level. “Oh thank the…
well us, you’re back!” Harpocrates shouted in his ear. He grabbed a box of Twinkies that had fallen on the floor and tore it open with his teeth. “Your dear fishy uncle and I partook in that lovely offering you provided,” he gestured to the now empty suitcase. "He's a bit of a light weight, that one."

Jason didn’t know much about drugs beyond what he had learned from Camp Jupiter’s strict policies and the various TV shows he had been watching the last couple weeks, but he was sure that the contents of the offering would kill a mortal man eight times over. But these are gods, the rules never apply to them. Then something occurred to him. “Did- did the yeti do anything?”

“Good gods man!” The foul smelling god gasped. “Don’t you know you can’t give a yeti coke? They have addictive personalities! Why this hairy son of a bitch is already addicted to online poker, why would we add another crippling addiction!”

The yeti turned from his doodling and nodded sadly at them.

The god pulled Jason in even closer and whispered in his ear, “Also you can’t use them to smuggle anything either. You ever see what happens when twelve condoms of coke pop in a yeti’s stomach? A god damn massacre.” The good shook his head slowly. "Those poor fucking orphans."

He let go of Jason and slapped him on the back, sending the rest of the junk food tumbling to the ground. The balding god then walked over to the still form of Poseidon and kicked him in the gut, to which the god didn’t even stir. “Good. We can talk now. He'll be unconscious for at least another six hours. Or days....”

The god snapped his fingers and instantly the beanbag chair slid over to the side, revealing a hidden ladder. The god stepped onto the ladder and slid down into the dark abyss.

And there it is! The usual weirdness. As he began his descent down, he was surprised to find that he had actually missed the craziness.

The shaft lead to into a small room, with every surface covered in stainless steel, the only other feature was a large vault-type door opposite to the ladder.

“Behind this door lies all my records,” the god said, as he leaned against the door. “Every god, goddess, monster, titan, giant, and primordial would kill to be where you are right now.”

Jason tilted his head. “Why?”

Harpocrates stood up, and began to pace the small room, stooped over with his arms behind his back. “The minute God crapped out the third cave man, a conspiracy was hatched against one of them! Do you understand me?”

“No…. I understand Nico’s computer class more than what this nut job is screaming about.

The god scratched his chin in deep thought. “I am the god of secrets, conspiracies, and schemes; as such I know everything that people don’t want other people to know. As long as there have been people-“

“There have been secrets,” Jason finished. Then it all clicked into place. “Which means you know-“
“Everyone’s weaknesses. And internet history.” The god chuckled.

“Woah.” *This guy is like Batman! If Batman lived in squalor and with a yeti…*

“Now I know that you came up here with old fish-breath to determine who is responsible for the destruction of Camp Half Blood and why Olympus is cut off from the rest of the world,” the golf shoe wearing god said while lighting yet another cigarette. “And I’m willing to help,” he took a drag from his cigarette, “for a price.”

He should have been used to this by now: helping gods out only for them to demand more for them to help, but it still frustrated him to no end. Surely the offering and the food run had to cover the cost of one little secret? Didn’t this lunatic know that everyone was in danger? He knew he would never get anywhere arguing with him though, so he steeled himself once more. “What’s the price?” he asked, already knowing the answer.

For the first time since he arrived, the god removed his sunglasses, revealing a pair of electric blue eyes. “A secret for a secret. That’s the price everyone must pay to enter the vault.”

Jason sighed, “Let me guess, it costs a secret to leave the vault as well?” *Yeah, I’m not that stupid. Not falling for that trick… again.*

“What? No! That’s the most ignorant thing I’ve ever heard! And I’ve lived on Olympus!” The god massaged his temples and rolled his eyes. “Look, I’m going to enter the vault. You tell the door something about yourself you’ve never told anyone and it will open for you. I will wait one hour and not a single god damn moment more for you! You’re either in there or you’re not!” the god shrieked before disappearing in a cloud of smoke.

“I hate pumpkin pie,” Jason told the imposing metal door.

The door stood motionless, and he had a feeling that if it could talk (*which honestly is kind of disappointing, when am I going to encounter a Beauty and the Beast type castle?*) it would be laughing at him. Probably pointing at him as well…

He was sitting cross-legged in front of the imposing door, trying any of the few secrets he had. He knew the type of secret Harpocrates wanted, but he wasn’t ready to admit it even to himself. How could he possibly muster up the courage in sixty minutes, when he had been grappling with it for almost two months now?

He sighed and leaned back onto the cool reflective floor and rested his head on his arms. “I stole one of Percy’s T-shirts and made it look like Connor was responsible.” In a strange way though getting all of this minor stuff off his chest was making him feel better.

*Maybe… I don’t need to admit it. Just tell my story.*

“After the second war with the Giants, I promised the gods that I would take up the mantle of Pontiff. I didn’t really want to, but it was something someone had to do. See, the gods had been mistreating and ignoring the minor gods for ages, which lead to many of the minor gods siding with Gaea. So yeah, as pontiff it was my job to travel around and get the minor gods to come to an agreement so that they would be allies once again with Olympus,” He paused. “And it sucked. Like I would rather get impaled over and over again than have to deal with one more whining goddess. It
effected all my relationships almost entirely for the worse.”

He stood up and began to pace like he had seen Harpocrates do only a few minutes prior. “Piper and I were already trying to make a long distance relationship work, and being out of contact for unknown lengths of time did not help at all. Sure the letters were nice, and it was something special for the both of us, but it didn’t replace being with her.” He started to walk on air, commanding the winds to keep him up. “Then Leo, who we all thought was dead, shows up with Calypso and suddenly he’s far too busy to hang out anymore. I mean we were inseparable on the Argo II, then he just tosses me aside for the first girl who gives him the time of day. Who does that?!”

Jason was too busy ranting to notice that a single click came from deep within the vault door.

“The only relationships that didn’t go to hell, were with Nico and Percy! Nico somehow replaced Leo as my best friend to the point I can’t imagine seeing him every day! He allowed me to more or less move into his cabin with him so I didn’t have to be alone with that terrifying statue of my father! Who by the way, I hate more with each passing day! Meanwhile, Percy is the only guy who keeps us connected to the outside world! He invited me and Nico to his place every other weekend to hang out! No gods! No monsters! Just three guys hanging out like guys our age should be doing! It made me realize that I’m not Greek either! That I just want a normal life!”

The door clicked again.

“Then-then everything went wrong. I got a summons from Disciplina, who wanted to discuss terms for her to support Olympus. So I travel to the middle of nowhere Massachusetts, where I got a bus ride from a man who thinks the laws of physics are just suggestions, met an empousa with control issues, and a mortal girl with no sense of self-preservation! For a week I starved myself and ran until my feet bled to prove myself worthy of meeting the psychotic goddess, who let me remind you, summoned me, while dealing with a couple with serious issues!”

He leaned his back against the cool metal wall and slid to the ground. “Then just when things look like they’re going good, things of course go bad!” He slammed his fist on the floor and began to shake. “She tied me up!” He cried. “She tied me up like some kind of animal!” he was crying now, tears streaming down his face, eyes blurring. “She said- she was rewarding me, but I didn’t want it! She looked just like Piper! Why would she do that?! I told her to stop! I begged her to, but she wouldn’t stop! And my body! Why would it do that?!” He slammed his fist repeatedly into the wall, leaving large dents in the metal. “And then Poseidon shows up and he treats it like it’s some kind of joke!”

He slid onto the floor and leaned his head against the wall, his tears expended. “And now I don’t like to be around women. They just-just send me back there. I relive that event every time I’m left alone with a woman. It’s not fair.” He sighed. “It’s not fair that she’s going to get off free while I’m messed up probably for life.” He gulped. “I’m terrified of what’s going to happen when I see Piper again.”

Suddenly there was a deep rumbling and the vault door’s latch spun on its own. The door swung open to reveal a wrought iron gate, which slowly lifted into the ceiling. Behind that, was a door in the shape of a hexagon composed of five separate sections; they too slid into the wall. Behind that was a grid of lasers that slowly winked off one-by-one. The lasers gave way to giant head made of stone that looked like Harpocrates, it opened its mouth and disappeared, revealing yet another door.

The sequence of doors went on for what Jason thought was eternity until at last the last door opened revealing the god of secrets standing with his back turned to him in a pitch black room.

“Oh good, you made it,” the god said with his jaw clenched. He checked his wrist watch and grunted. “With thirty seconds to spare. Not bad kid, not bad!”
Jason pushed himself up off the cold floor and removed his glasses. “You heard all that didn’t you? Are you happy now?” He asked while wiping his eyes with his arm.

The god laughed, a deep throaty chuckle. “I have no idea what you’re talking about.” He took a step forward into the dark and suddenly Jason was blinded by a flash of a thousand lights exploding to life. When he could see again, Jason gasped.

In front of them was the largest room Jason had ever seen, but it still looked crowded. The cavernous room was filled with filing cabinets and bookshelves that extended from the floor to the ceiling that he couldn’t even see. There were papers and folders flying between the cabinets, occasionally opening a drawer and depositing themselves. The walls were covered with various maps, pictures, and newspaper clippings, with spider webs of string connecting them together.

“Welcome to the Library of Alexandria. The secret one!” The god snapped his fingers and a red convertible similar to Poseidon’s pulled up in front of them. The god jumped into the driver’s seat and looked to Jason. “Well? Get in.”

He now believed that gods just did not know how to drive. Before Jason had even a chance to sit down, Harpocrates, or Harpo as he told Jason to call him, had his foot glued to the accelerator. Jason watched in awe as thousands of filing cabinets and bookshelves whizzed by them as they drove through the massive library.

“You like it?” the god asked. “I managed to secret her away before you old man burnt it to the ground. Jokes on him though, I replaced it with your father’s pornography collection! You're old man has some weird fetishes.”

Way too much information! But it was definitely impressive. Both the library and the god’s feat. “Sir, I hate to ask, but where are we going?”

The god looked at him from the corner of his eye while digging through the glove compartment for something. “To your father’s wing of course! Ah there it is!” the bald god said pulling out a flyswatter from the compartment and holding above his head as if it was some kind of legendary weapon.

“My father’s what?”

“His wing! That man has so many secrets I had to add onto the place! It was a real bitch to find a construction crew to make it too!”

“How far are we from it?”

The god started to swat some papers that were flying above them. “God damn winged spawns of Satan! Eh? Oh! We’ve been in it for the last fifteen minutes! We just have to go back! Almost to the beginning! Winged IRS bloodsucking sons of bitches!” the god yelled desperately flailing the flyswatter around.

Jason looked around him and paled. All these files were his father’s secrets? How many of them were good? How many were bad? He thought of his own secrets and realized that a great many of
them fell into the latter category. It seemed like every time he was just coming to terms with his father, the Fates would sneak up and gank him. World of Warcraft is definitely having an impact on my vocabulary, he mused.

They drove for another ten or so minutes, before the god slammed onto the brakes; thankfully not sending him flying out. “We’re here,” the god announced as he jumped out of the convertible. Jason followed closely behind as the god swatted more flying files out of the air. He was confused by the god’s actions as none of the papers had shown any hostility at all, but who knew what was going through Harpocrates’ head.

Drugs. That's what's going through his head.

Eventually they reached a corner of the library where a single bulging folder sat on a golden pedestal, illuminated by a single spot light from somewhere above. “This is the only secret in the entire place that I don’t know in it’s entirety. A secret that I’ve spent the last century of isolation trying to uncover, but I trust me when I say this is why everything is happening. When you understand what I’m about to tell you, then I will tell you who is behind the attacks. Are you ready?”

Jason nodded. This is it. The entire reason for this trip. This will change the tide of this one-sided war.

Harpocrates picked up the folder and removed two pictures for Jason to see. One was a picture of his father as depicted on a piece of ancient pottery, while the other was of the Fates. “Like everything else in our little pantheon, it all started with your father.”

Jason sighed. “You know at this point, I expect it anymore.”

The god chuckled. “You’re smarter than most then. Anyway this all started millennia ago with the death of Pan. Zeus, or Jupiter as he was known as then was rapidly losing worshipers to the God of the Covenant to the east, diminishing our strength.” The god returned the photos and took out another one, this one showing temples being burned. “Your father tried everything to maintain his status, he even ordered he assassination of the Christ, and you see how well that worked out for him,” the god chuckled. “When the news came that Pan had died that sent your father over the edge. Fearing that he would be next, he went to the Fates. They confirmed his fears that the age of the gods was near its end, as it should’ve been. No king rules forever and nothing lasts forever. All that jazz!”

“But it has,” Jason interrupted. “You all have been moving place to place, changing with the times and culture.”

Harpocrates scoffed. “It wasn’t always like that. If it was, then the world would have a lot more gods and monsters running around. Anyway, fearing the inevitable he convinced the Fates to alter the loom.” The god scratched his chin. “Your father for all his faults, is quite the ladies man and smooth talker. He played Clotho’s youth and naivete, appealed to Lachesis’ mercy, and manipulated Atropos by using her own sense of mortality against her. So a deal was made: the Fates would “loop” time back to the beginning. Anyone and anything that was alive during Zeus’s life would be reborn again and again.”

Jason felt the blood drain from his face as he realized what the god was saying: Kronos, Gaea, the titans, the giants, everything would never truly die. He had always hoped that eventually all the monsters and Titans would fade over time. But now he knew they would just keep coming back. No matter what they did.

Wait a second though... “Wait hold on! What about the the creatures like Medusa? She faded!”
“That’s what they said about her sisters,” the god grunted. “And I believe you see them every week now right? You even got a fancy credit card from one of them right?” The god laughed long and deep.

Well I guess everyone knows about that. Great…

“So here we are, every hundred or so years history repeats itself. Your grandfather rises, Gaea awakens, and all you demigods are kept in the dark.” The god hung his head down and tsked. “Damn shame too, so many lives lost. All of them believing they died saving Olympus. A damn shame.”

Jason clenched his fists. For awhile now the Hades, Demeter, and Poseidon had been hinting at previous wars with Gaea and the titans, but this was too much. They knew that everything was inevitable and they still allowed their own children to fight? To Die? “Yeah. Yeah it is,” Jason said through clenched teeth.

“The problem is though, I have no idea what your father promised the Fates in exchange for this never ending nightmare we call life. I’ve scoured the world looking for answers, reading through the journals of your brothers and sisters looking for any hint of the deal, but as far as I know only your old man, the Fates, you, and myself even know that the damn thing even exists.” He handed Jason the folder, who was surprised by its heavy weight. “Take that with you. Maybe you can find something I’ve overlooked. Just don’t let the gods know it exists. Understand?”

Jason nodded, eyes wide.

“Now, on to the real reason you came here. Who is responsible.” The snapped his fingers and a photograph appeared in his hand. It was a black and white photo of a smiling boy, who looked to be around Nico’s age. He had his arm wrapped around another boy, who looked a bit like Percy albeit shorter and with neater hair, and the two were smiling ear-to-ear at he camera. Harpocrates pointed a finger at the first boy. “That is Jeremiah Aarons. One of the rare mortals who can see through the Mist in its entirety. For almost seventy years now he has been collecting other mortals with similar gifts who all have a bone to pick with the gods. That is the only known picture of him as he dropped off the face of the fucking Earth not long after, but I know it is him. Just call it a hunch.”

But he’s just a mortal. How can a mortal do any of this? Even if he can see through the Mist and has gathered others that can as well, there’s just no way. He was a demigod and the thought of actually fighting a god was beyond his comprehension. He took the picture and tucked it securely into the folder.

The god snapped his fingers once more, this time nothing appeared. “I almost forgot! Since you admitted that you hate pumpkin pie, you un-American bastard, I owe you one last favor,” The god smirked. “Blubber boy up there hasn’t been doing a good job lately. Camp Jupiter has fallen.”

With that the god snapped his fingers and Jason’s world went dark.

Chapter End Notes

I'll write these tomorrow, it's late :)

Did you like what you just read? Leave a kudos!
Thoughts, theories, WTFs, just feeling chatty? Leave a comment!

I love hearing from all of you!

Next chapter will be either Hades or Nico. Simultaneous events and all that :)

Demeter

Chapter Summary

Warnings: Violence and terrible jokes

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much for making it this far!
I love hearing from you guys!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I still think it was a bad idea for Jason to accompany our brother alone,” she repeated for the umpteenth time that day.

Her son-in-law didn’t say anything at first, busying himself with checking his cufflinks. When at last he finished with his fussing, he turned to her, all dark and serious, “Grace will be just fine. He’s proven himself time and time again. Besides, Harpocrates always seemed to be a level-headed god. Which is a wonder in of itself.” The god got out of their car and handed the keys to a pleasant looking young man.

I’m not worried about Harpocrates. I’m worried about our brother with the hair-trigger temper! Sadly though she knew the son of Jupiter was more-or-less on his own, the second he had crossed into Minnesota she could no longer feel his or her brother’s presence.

It was strange though that she felt so protective of the young son of Jupiter, after all up until quite recently she had many demigod children. So what makes him so special? It was a question she had been asking herself a lot lately. Was it because he was a good worker? That he had a great deal of patience when dealing with the animals? There were dozens of possibilities, but one always sprang to mind.

He’s eager.

Yes it was true that all her children were interested and gifted in all things plants, but they were born that way. Jason on the other hand had no real reason to be interested, he was doing everything because he wanted to, and that made a big difference. In a strange way he reminded her of Persephone when she was his age.

Let’s not dwell on how long ago that was…

Like all gods and goddesses, Persephone had not known her calling immediately. For years she had watched as her daughter struggled to find her place, and despite all her failures, she never stopped trying. When she was young Persephone would often accompany her and help with whatever task needed to be performed, and not once did the girl ever complain. No not her daughter, who didn’t care if her beautiful dresses got ruined from mud and dirt, always eager to learn something new and help out. Just like Jason. Persephone had always been such a wonderful child.
Until she started seeing Hades…

She looked over to her son-in-law, who was busy exchanging pleasantries with the valet. As much as it pained her to admit it, Hades was a good man. Yes, he was a bit of a downer, had a dark sense of humor, and at times seemed to take delight in annoying her, but he was good to her daughter. And what more could a mother want? She almost felt bad starting those stories about him abducting Persephone.

“Well are you just going to sit there all day like a tree, or are you going to help?” the lord of the underworld called out.

Almost.

“I’m coming!” she shouted back, as she climbed out of Hades’ tiny sports car. She knew that as the god of wealth Hades had a certain appearance to keep, but why did he have to have such tiny cars? It was situations like this that made her regret taking the form of a middle aged woman. Or at least a thin one!

When at last she was free of the tiny sports car she brushed her clothes off and took in her surroundings. They were at the main entrance to a massive resort called The Coyote’s Den. Statues of various wildlife lined the walkway to the doors, which were in turn flanked by two gigantic coyote statues with mismatched colored eyes. One was posed as if it was ready to pounce on approaching guests as if they were its prey, while the other was curled into itself, with a small smirk and mischief in its false eyes. The main buildings looked to be constructed of some kind of red stone, but to a discerning eye one would notice it was some kind of vinyl. The resort’s lawn was covered in lush, green, grass; a beautiful and unnatural contrast to the stark Utah desert that surrounded them.

“This is oddly appropriate,” she mused to herself as she joined her brother at the doors. Two mortal bellhops held the doors open for them as they approached, they even bowed as they entered, which was a nice touch. She shivered involuntarily as her mortal form transitioned from the hot dry heat of the outdoors, to the cool air conditioned environment. She grimaced. She was one of the few gods that disliked air conditioning, a trait that Aphrodite always chided her about when the annoying goddess came to gossip.

“Indeed,” her brother grunted as they made their way over to the front desk, weaving in and out of families of mortals spread throughout the massive log cabin themed great hall.

“Welcome to the Coyote’s Den family resort,” the receptionist, a young native girl with long dark hair, said with a forced smile. “How can I help you? Do you and your wife need a room?”

Her son-in-law’s jaw dropped. “My- my what?” he stuttered.

She couldn’t help but snicker as her brother lost his usual calm and collected demeanor. It was interesting that the young woman made that assumption, Hades was dressed to the nines, while she was wearing her work clothes: overalls, a flannel shirt, and an old beat up denim jacket.

Collecting himself, Hades leaned against the counter and gave her what passed as a smile for the lord of the underworld. “That’s my-“ he paused for the briefest of moments, “mother-in-law, and we do not require a room.” A look of disgust crossed his face and he brushed a spec of dirt off his sleeve that was imperceivable to mortal eyes.

He is such a neat freak… You’d think he was the god of Clorox with the way he and his son carry on.
Satisfied that he was clean, his smile returned. “We’re here to see-,” he pulled out a rumpled piece of paper from his suit pocket. “Really?” he asked no one, before he hung his head and sighed. “Wile E. Coyote.”

This time she couldn’t stop herself and burst out laughing. She didn’t know if she was laughing at the absurd name, the done-with-it look on her brother’s face, or a combination of the two. “We’re here to show him the latest products ACME has to offer.” She may be an immortal goddess, but even she liked to watch cartoons every now and then.

The receptionist had obviously heard these jokes before, but she continued to give them her best customer-service-smile. “And may I ask who wishes to speak to Mr. Coyote?”

“Hades and Demeter,” Hades answered, rapping his knuckles on the counter. “He’ll know who it is. We’re old friends.”

_Hold, yes. Friends only if it’s opposite day._ Honestly she was surprised they hadn’t been attacked the second their car rolled out of the shadows into the parking lot.

“Thank you. It’ll be just a moment.” The receptionist picked up a phone and pressed a few buttons. “Yes. Sir, you have a two guests. Uh huh. An older couple. Said to tell you they were Hades and Demi Moore.” At the mention of Hades and her incorrect name, the phone’s speaker exploded with what she assumed were questions, before the voice on the other end settled down. The young woman hung up the phone and returned her attention to the two gods. “Mr. Coyote will see you now.”

As the receptionist led them throughout the resort, Demeter couldn’t help but think how wrong the place felt. At first she had thought it was because they were in another pantheon’s territory uninvited and most likely unwelcome, but that wasn’t it. The place didn’t seem to be enchanted like the _Lotus_, but there was some kind of magic in the air.

The place seemed to be impossibly large, with each hallway a different theme from the last. Currently they were in some kind of deep jungle with real vegetation, which impressed her. As she passed by the plants told her how great everything was and how lucky they were to be under the Nation’s care.

_I wonder if they actually think that or if they are being told to say that…_

“You feel it too, don’t you?” Hades whispered next to her. “The wrongness.”

She didn’t say anything, instead focusing on _everything_ around her. The plants were real, the dry wall was cracking in places, the ambient air temperature and humidity was accurate, a child in the room to her left was flipping through a coloring book, and there were 101,356 seeds of various plants in the immediate area.

_But what is wrong?_

“Here we are,” the receptionist said as she opened a non-descript door.

Hades handed the young woman a rather generous tip and thanked her, before she closed the door behind them, leaving them in a rather ornate office.
They had transitioned from an African jungle hallway to an American Southwestern themed office. The walls were murals depicting the vast open desert, with the Rocky Mountains just visible to the West. The floor was covered in Coyote skin rugs, all of which looked as if they were still alive, and that it looked like they were ready to jump up at the slightest provocation.

At the opposite end of the office sat a desk made from a wooden barrel on its side with slab of oak on top, and behind that desk sat a man reclining in his chair with his black cowboy boots propped up on the desk. He was an astonishingly thin man with a wrinkled blue three-piece suit. His face was hidden behind his ten-gallon hat which he must have pulled down, but she could see his shoulder length grey hair that hung wild and free.

“Well, well, well,” the man chuckled, before removing his hat. The god’s face was may have appeared youthful, but his red eyes lupine eyes showed centuries of pain and anguish. “If it isn’t my cousins from the east!” He removed his feet from his desk and leaned forward; a wicked grin on his face. “What a great surprise! How can I be at your humble service?” he asked, his voice sickeningly sweet.

She sat down in one of the chairs across from the god and Hades sat down a moment later.

*Ever the gentleman.*

“Coyote,” Hades nodded. “I think you know why we’re here.”

Coyote barked. “Lovely! You’ve come to say you’re leaving these here United States and returning it to its rightful people!” He slapped the desk, and laughed. “I knew you folks would come around! Sure it took you awhile, but what’s a few centuries between *family.*”

Hades raised his hand to interject, but the lupine god continued his speech.

“I mean the Asgardians were civil enough; kept a colony here for a while, but they kept it small and we respected that. There was room enough for us all. Then the Spanish came a few centuries later. Sure you guys had your kids almost wipe out our cousins to the south, but hey, no one likes human sacrifice.”

“That’s not-“

“Oh but it is!” Coyote growled, slamming his hands on his desk. “Columbus, Cortez, Pizarro; all Roman demigods! And how do Romans defend themselves?” he stroked his thick bushy grey mustache as if he was in deep thought. “Oh! That’s right! They conquer!”

“That was a different time! Things were different! We were different.” Demeter protested. *This is going as well as I thought it would.*

The lupine god’s red eyes briefly flared, before returning to normal. “Yes. I suppose you’re right ma’am. It was a different time,” he chuckled. “But what about that son of Athena? Jackson? I suppose that was a different time as well?”

Neither she nor Hades said anything. There were some things that were inexcusable and could never be forgiven. And never should.

*We should have stood up to Zeus. But every time we tried before it always made things worse.* She knew she was trying to rationalize her past behavior on how she could allow such a dark chapter of history unfold.

Coyote seemed to be enjoying their discomfort. “And we, the Nation, were powerless to help,” he
sighed. “You unleashed the Mist that obscured us from mortal eyes. Ya’ll made it look like we abandoned our people.” He looked at one of the murals wistfully. “And so they abandoned us,” he said, his voice just above a whisper.

They all sat there in an uncomfortable silence, until Coyote clapped his hands, his smile returning. “But you’ve come to make things right! Right?”

“Well, erm,” she coughed, feeling incredibly awkward. “You see, the thing is—“

“We need your help,” Hades finished for her.

Coyote raised an eyebrow, his grin growing even wider. “Help? The great gods of Olympus need my help? Things must be pretty bad if you need this savage’s help.”

Hades began to fill in the trickster on what was going on, much to her dismay.

*The man does not know when he’s being messed with…*

She let herself wander as her son-in-law and Coyote continued their little back and forth on the state of Olympus and if the Nation had any similar issues. She allowed her mind to “split” into several different instances: one to continue her search for her elusive niece, one to pay attention to the conversation, one to probe Coyote’s being, and several dozen more to perform her godly duties; including getting the minor gods and goddesses back in line.

It felt good to tap into a fraction of her true self. Since her fight with Hades, she had not allowed herself to perform more than one task at a time; something most divine beings would consider torture. But in these uncertain times it made sense to stay focused.

It was having an interesting effect on her as well one of her realized. She was growing more concerned about the demigods under her roof, because she could now understand how they viewed the world.

*Maybe it’s too soon to assume that though… They’ve been like this since the day they were born. I’ve only been like that for two months.*

She checked in with an elder berry bush in Indiana that had called for her attention. It reported that it thought one of the hunters had stepped on it a few days prior, but the evidence was inconclusive.

Hades and Coyote were now glaring at each other now, but it was nothing to be concerned about. Just two stubborn men who refused to compromise.

*Men…*

On another plane, she interacted with Coyote. Like her, the trickster was currently dividing his attention among numerous tasks. She followed several to their ends and observed the man in his natural state. He was currently refereeing a high school basketball game; and was playing favorites. Another was sitting in a rocking chair feeding an infant a bottle and humming a nameless tune; she wasn’t sure if the child was his or even a demigod. On a lonely stretch of highway he was helping an elderly woman change a tire, while telling her tales of days gone by. In a small cramped trailer he was teaching a young wide-eyed boy how to throw his voice to trick his sister.

Intrigued she followed a few more.

In the back of a bar he was hustling a gang of bikers out of a small fortune, the trick shots he was performing were not winning him any friends. In a dry gully he took his animal form and drug a half-
eaten carcass to a mother and her pups, the mother unable to hunt after having its leg caught in a trap. In a small town he stood in the shadows and yelped every time a bitter old man was on the precipice of sleep, which amused two toddlers watching from a nearby house.

It was strange to witness a god mingling with mortals like that, but it wasn’t unheard of. Back when the world was young she herself would help farmers in their fields bring in their crops, turn the earth, and even had watched the children too young to work in the fields yet. Now though she only did those things for herself, and the only time she interacting with mortals was when she needed their assistance, or a particularly able mortal caught her eye.

*When did that change? When did our relationship turn so one-sided?*

She pushed those thoughts aside and returned her full attention to the conversation that was slowly turning into a full blown argument.

“Why should I apologize for *The Lone Ranger*?” Hades spat, his left eye twitching ever so slightly. “He wasn’t even real! None of the actors were even demigods!” He was standing now, leaning over the desk his face inches from smirking trickster.

*Men…*

She really didn’t want to have to fight her way out of this, so she decided to both interrupt the fight and stroke their egos.

“Oh my, what lovely rugs! They remind me of those lovely hellhound rugs you have in your study!” she exclaimed. Some would find this degrading, but a women can easily control any man, god or not, by feeding them compliments and letting them think they were smarter.

The two men looked at her and blinked in confusion for an instant, before returning to their seats.

“Oh yes,” Coyote chuckled, as he played with his mustache. “They took me a long time to acquire, but they really tie the room together don’t you think?”

“Oh yes!” *Idiots.* “Oh no! I appear to have deviated away from business,” she gasped. “I believe we were discussing if you have had any similar occurrences in The Nation?”

“I believe we were,” Coyote nodded. “And I believe I said I wasn’t going to divulge anything without a little incentive.”

Hades sank back into his chair, folding his arms. “I’m not apologizing for any fictional characters. That’s just absurd!” the god of the underworld pouted.

She lightly slapped Hades on the shoulder, and offered her best smile to their host. “I’m sure we can come to some arrangement that’s agreeable for both parties?”

Coyote tapped his fingers against his desk and twisted his mustache. He tilted his head to the side and squinted one eye, before slamming his hand down. “Do you know why the Milky Way looks the way it does?”

She shook her head. Each pantheon had their own stories, and each one was true. To a point.

“Ya see, one night Black God was putting the stars in the sky, making constellations that represented our stories, but he was just so damned slow. We had a feast to get to, but he refused to pick up the pace. So, the good friend that I am, I picked up all the stars that he hadn’t placed yet and tossed them into the sky. Thus, the Milky Way!”
Hades huffed. “What does that have to do with anything?”

Coyote narrowed his eyes at her son-in-law. “Imagine my surprise a couple years back to find that that little psychopath Artemis rearranged a few of them to make a new constellation.”

“Well, if they were random, does it really matter?” she asked.

Coyote reclined back into his chair and let out a deep breath. “That would be fine,” he said. “But see the thing is she moved some of Blackie’s stars. And he isn’t around anymore. Seems like a slap in the face to vandalize the work of someone no longer here.”

Hades sat up in his chair a bit straighter wearing a small frown. “I see your point.” He turned to look at her. “I don’t see a reason why we can’t change them back?”

*It’s not like there’s anything really at stake here besides upsetting Artemis… And considering she hates us at the moment anyway….*

“You tell us what you know, and we’ll set the night sky back to how it was.” She stood up and offered her hand to Coyote, who in turn stood up and took her hand in his own.

“It’s a deal,” the thin god chuckled, before returning to his seat.

“Now tell us what you know,” Hades grunted.

When Coyote smiled, she knew they had been played. “I know that for round-a-bout two months now our demigods and the like have been working their asses off removing you monsters from our land. I know that they’ve been coming from the every damn direction: North, South, East, West, Up, and Down; and they are terrified.” He stood up from his desk and began to slowly circle the office. “I know that the council believes this is you declaring war on us.”

*What?*!

He held up his hand, to keep them calm. “I know that they believe they can only go on the defensive. They’ll get a real kick knowing that Olympus really is out of the picture,” he chuckled. “I also know that if I bring in two major gods I’ll get some major brownie points. Possibly enough to get a date with Sedna.”

She and Hades were already on the move when Coyote turned into his lupine form; a massive beast with grey fur and teeth as large as corncobs. “I would be lying if I said I would regret this,” he snarled. “But why don’t you make it easy on yourselves and climb into my belly? I imagine it would feel just like home for you two!” he cried as he jumped toward Hades, his jaws stretching to to devour the god whole.

*I don’t think so!*

She commanded every nearby seed and plant to grow, dumping her power into the usual slow process. Faster than one can blink, dozens of tendrils erupted from the floor and grabbed Coyote mid-jump. “No one gets to hurt my son-in-law but my daughter!”

Hades stood there looking at her as if she had just grown a second head.

“Well don’t just stand there with your jaw gaping! Get us out of here!”

He nodded and she felt the now all too familiar feel of cold shadows pulling them in, but before they were completely enveloped, the shadows dispersed.
“What?” Hades gasped, trying once again to summon the shadows, this time even less successful. “What did you do?” he growled.

Coyote howled with laughter. “You think we weren’t prepared for you?” The god whistled, which was pretty impressive considering he was a coyote. “Rise and shine everyone! Time to earn your pay!”

Oh dear…

The coyote skin rugs that she complimented earlier? The ones that looked alive? They began to stir. One by one they rose to their feet and began to snarl. Some though began to change their shape into something that wasn’t quite wolf and wasn’t quite human.

“Skin-walkers.” She grabbed her brother by the wrist and pulled him out of the office back into the jungle hallway as she urged more seeds to grow.

“You can’t run or hide!” she heard Coyote howl behind them. “We went full Disney World with this place!”

“What does that even mean?!” Hades panted from behind.

She didn’t have to answer him as the exotic plants around them began to morph into more terrifying animal forms.

As they made their way down the hall, she managed to slow the transformation from plant to beast. Hades in turn was making the earth heave up behind them, occasionally impaling one or two of the pursuing creatures.

“Am I the only one that pictured this exact scenario?” the lord of the underworld scoffed as they rounded another corner.

Why do men feel the compulsion to try to be witty in dire situations?

In front of them, five skin-walkers tried to block the only exit. Hades managed to shatter one’s skull with a well aimed pebble that had been in the carpet, while she grew a giant cactus behind the beasts and made it shoot its needles into their hides. They let out a horrifying shriek before collapsing to the floor writhing in agony.

“I had forgotten you were actually quite capable,” Hades chuckled as they ran past the creatures.

She had the cactus shoot a few needles into his ass.

They made to the great hall before Coyote appeared again.

He stood up on his hind legs and grunted as he turned back into his human form. “I got to say you did not disappoint! Some of my people are going to need some time to recover!” He pointed to her, and shook his head with a grin on his face. “You are my kind of lady! I saw how you grew that watermelon seed in Tommy’s stomach until he burst! That’s funny!”
“If you know what we can do, why don’t you let us go?” she spat. “You got a sunflower seed in your front teeth! Just imagine what I can do with that!”

Coyote’s hand flew to his mouth, desperately feeling around for a seed that wasn’t there. “Oh. Oh!” he laughed. “You got a sense of humor! If it wasn’t forbidden to interact with other pantheons I’d love to take you out some time madame.”

“If you let us pass, I’m sure we could ignore that little rule.” Just got to keep him talking.

Coyote stroked his mustache before shaking his head. “Sorry ma’am, but I’m trying to get approval for a theme-park and if I bring you two in I’m sure they’ll start to see things my way.” He let out a sharp whistle and dozens of skin-walkers poured in from every entrance, while others gave up their decorative forms in the great hall to join them. “Why don’t you just-”

The trickster didn’t get a chance to finish as the floor beneath his feet collapsed as thick tendrils of grass burst their way in from every possible entrance.

“Well done. Son-in-law,” she said, patting his shoulder.

He shrugged and dusted his shoulder off. “It was a good plan, by a good sister.”

As they had ran, she asked the lord of the underworld to burst every water line in the resort. Now normally Poseidon would be the ideal sibling to accomplish this, Hades was just as capable in the desert. Ordering the long dead sea-life to use their fossilized bodies to bore holes into the lines. The water would then soak the earth and allowing her to expend less energy to grow the resort’s unnatural green lawns to unnatural lengths.

Hades offered her his arm, which she gladly linked with her own. They walked to the parking lot and found his car.

As they drove, she pondered the ramifications of what they had just learned. The monsters were fleeing from something in all directions to territories where they were forbidden to go. The Nation had seen this as a sign of war, but thankfully were on the defensive.

As long as the boys stay out of their territory, they don’t need to know about them.

Chapter End Notes

Hey guess what? I lied!

I told you this would be a Hades or Nico chapter, but you got Demeter! And she's one awesome lady. She's interesting to write. From previous chapters she seems to be this kind of absent-minded grandmother who is only competent with plants and Jason. I always liked the idea that she LIVES to mess with Hades. After all, he took her daughter from her! I also liked the idea that he really didn't kidnap her, so much as run away together and elope with Persephone. Demeter did not take too kindly to that...

Coyote is probably the most well known native american god. In some tales he's a hero, others a villain, and sometimes that grey area in-between. He's a trickster and is one one of the gods who liked to hang around with mortals (and not just to take a new lover). I
didn't get into it that much this chapter, but running a resort it right up his alley. Tricking people with cheap props and decorations into thinking they are having fun for an exuberant amount of money? Sign him up! The staff (and a lot of the decorations) are his followers: the skin-walkers. Legend says that skin-walkers are "dark witches" who can take the form of any person, animal, or object; the most common form being a coyote or coyote-like monster. They're pretty cool.

Okay, The Nation. They are the remaining gods of the various Native American tribes who have come together to protect themselves and their people. Unlike the Greeks or Romans, they are more hands on and will work in tandem with their children to protect their interests. Another difference is they rarely kill monsters, since there are so few left. They go out and set aside areas for them to thrive and hopefully regain their former numbers.

The Nation is governed by a council that has both gods, demigods, and the occasional mortal as equal members. Everyone gets a say, and everyone pulls their weight. If a woman needs a babysitter it is not unusual for a member of the nation to intervene. Their people may not be able to see their true selves anymore, but the Nation believes that by spending time with the young and telling them their stories the Mist may fade from their eyes.

In short: they're good people.

Yeah, anyone else ever notice the books never really talk about the dark points in history? Or if they do it's the mortal's fault? I'm not buying it!

Doesn't it make loads of sense that the colonizing of America was a war? Yes the gods couldn't be directly involved, but we know the demigods are above certain laws. Are we expected to believe that the gods already here just gave up their land? I've never really seen anyone else talk about this before and it's such a good plot!

Hey! did you like what you just read? Leave a kudos!
Thoughts, theories, outrage, recipes, etc? Leave a comment!
I love hearing from you guys!

Next chapter will be Nico, and it will be fluff!

Thanks for reading! Until next time, remember: you're awesome no matter who you are!
Chapter Summary

Warnings: talk of suicide.

Tonight:

Nico decided Percy needs a day off.

Fluff ensues.

Chapter Notes

Wow guys! the kudos, comments, and hits are coming in faster and faster with every chapter!

Thank you all so much!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He wrapped the comforter around himself tighter as he watched the taillights disappear in the distance. He looked over to where Demeter was a moment before and was relieved to see the goddess had disappeared as well. He lingered on the porch for a few more minutes, admiring the night sky through half laden eyes, before his bare feet grew too cold.

Still half-asleep, he made his way back into the house, making sure to wipe his feet before entering the house proper, and looked at the Garfield clock that hung on the kitchen wall, and frowned.

This hour can’t possibly exist, he thought as he stifled a yawn. It was strange, this had only been his first full week of school and he could already empathize with the orange lasagna eating cat; he too hated Mondays.

As he filled a glass of water from the kitchen faucet, his mind drifted to thoughts about school. School wasn’t terrible, but it wasn’t great either. Their classmates still looked at Percy and him a bit more than what he was comfortable with, but Jason was right: they were losing interest.

There were exceptions though.

He had apparently made an unwanted friend for life out of Chelsea, as the blonde was at his side almost as much as Percy. It also didn’t help that she was in most of their classes, drawbacks of a small school he guessed. They spent most of their time together bickering or playing Myathomagic, which was fine, she even brought her entire collection one day which would have made him envious when he was younger.

Nope. It’s a kid’s game. Just a way to pass the time. What does it matter if she has the phantom rare Kronos card and limited edition Zeus figurine with wine chalice? I’m just getting back into the game to pass the time.
He was also reluctant to admit he needed the girl’s assistance when it came to any and all things computer related. He understood the ideas and concepts (so far) on how to write a program, he was even starting to pull ahead of his classmates, but anything that the book took as common knowledge required the blonde’s assistance. When the book said to open up something called a points-power presentation he had sat staring at the screen for half the class period before Chelsea noticed he needed help.

*I can humor her in exchange for her help.*

The other exception was Aaron, or as he liked to think of him: Percy’s annoying shadow.

It seemed the entire school was hell-bent on setting the red-head up with Percy, and it was really getting on his nerves. He couldn’t imagine what was going through Percy’s head about the whole situation.

Between every class there was Aaron waiting for Percy.

Every lunch period, there was Aaron.

Every day walking to the truck, there was Aaron.

He could swear on the river Styx that every time Percy went to the restroom, Aaron was there waiting. Not that Nico followed Percy to the restroom that would be creepy.

At first Nico had felt bad for the kid, as he had been there as well. But there was a big difference between him and Aaron: he was never open about his feelings. While he had kept his feelings for the son of Poseidon a secret and behaved in such a way that Percy thought he hated him, the red-head was constantly flirting with Percy.

*It’s sickening really.*

And of course Percy is too nice to openly turn down the guy (which with him not talking probably didn’t help matters), instead the older boy would occasionally smile and nod at whatever the boy was saying, but most of the time Percy trailed behind Nico and feigned interest in watching him and Chelsea play *Mythomagic*.

He finished his glass of water and set the glass upside in the sink. It was too late (*Or was it early?*) to keep thinking about school. It was the weekend now and he was entitled to sleep in.

“Mooooom!” a voice he had longed to hear screamed in terror from the upstairs, shattering the nocturnal silence.

Instantly Nico was wide-awake, his heart pounding and adrenaline pumping into his system. He dropped the blanket from his shoulders and stepped into the shadows, only to reappear a moment later in their room.

“MOOOM!” Percy wailed. The older teen was thrashing violently in his bed, tears streaming down his face as he took in ragged breaths.

Nico rushed to his side and tried to stop the boy from thrashing, only to receive a fist to his eye, knocking him to the floor. Undeterred, he stood back up and grabbed the son of Poseidon by the shoulders. “Percy! Wake up!” he cried, shaking the older boy.

Percy’s eyes flew wide open, revealing now bloodshot dull green Nico was growing accustomed to seeing. He continued to thrash around for a moment, before realizing where he was. He looked at
Nico strangely, before he busted out sobbing again, and wrapped his arms around the son of Hades.

Nico tensed up, but it passed and he returned the son of Poseidon’s embrace. He adjusted himself to a more comfortable sitting position on the bed, and began to gently rub slow circles into his friend’s back. It was something Bianca used to do for him when he had bad days at Westover and it always seemed to calm him down. “It’s okay Percy,” he whispered, as the son of Poseidon drew in a ragged breath. “You’re fine. I got you.”

They stayed like that for a time, wrapped around one another. The older boy finding some comfort in the boy he had hurt so many times in the past, both knowingly and unknowingly.

When Percy had stopped crying and his body had stopped trembling, Nico decided it was time for them to talk. “Percy?” he asked, still holding the son of Poseidon. “Wha- What happened to Sally?” he winced as the words left his mouth.

Percy slowly unwrapped himself from him and sat up in the bed, his legs still covered by the black quilt he used for a blanket. The son of Poseidon looked away from him and began to absently pick at a loose piece of string on the quilt.


He watched Percy’s shoulders tense for the briefest of moments, but the son of Poseidon continued to pull on the loose thread.

“Percy I know you can talk, you were screaming for Sally in your sleep.”

The older raven-haired teen slowly turned to face him, his eyes pools of sadness. He bit his lip, then opened his mouth to say something before clenching it shut again. He offered Nico an apologetic look, then seemed to deflate.

No. He’s not going back. Nico grabbed the older boy’s face and turned it so he was facing him, startling the hero of Olympus. “Perseus. I know it hurts, but you have to talk to us about it. It isn’t doing you any good keeping this bottled up. I swear on the river Styx and every other gods damned river that it helps to talk about it.” He thought back to the numerous conversations he had with Will, Reyna, Jason, and even Percy about the loss of his sister, mother, and his entire life really. It was hard at first, but as Will had promised it got easier with time, he started to come to terms with things, and even started to feel better. “Please talk to me Percy. I-I miss hearing your voice.” He was glad they were in the dark, as he knew he was blushing by how hot his cheeks felt.

He let go of the boy’s face and waited in silence.

Minutes passed and most people would have given up by then, but he would never give up on Percy. Percy pulled the blanket off himself, revealing his Batman boxers and long shapely legs (not that Nico noticed that), and slowly turned to the son of Hades. He took a deep breath and with ragged hoarse voice croaked out a single word. “Gabe.”

“Gabe?” he asked, brow furrowed in confusion. Then it clicked: Gabe. Smelly Gabe, Percy’s first stepfather, the one Sally had married to protect Percy from his heritage. The one who Percy had once confided to him that he knew Gabe beat Sally. “What does he have to do with it?”

The son of Poseidon sniffled and wiped his eyes, he was on the edge of breaking down completely again. But Percy managed to get ahold of himself. “He killed them,” he gasped.

“What?” It was hard for the son of Hades to process what Percy was telling him. He thought Sally had used Medusa’s head to turn Gabe into a statue. A statue that she had then sold to fund a new
start for her and Percy. “How?” he asked, his mouth suddenly dry. “I thought you said Sally turned him to stone?”

Percy started to shake. “She did,” he whispered. “But he came back. He came back and killed them all; Paul, my mom, and Estelle.” At the last name Percy broke down again.

Instantly Nico wrapped his arms around the older boy and began to rub his back and whisper words of encouragement. He knew Percy was going to have a little sister, but he didn’t know Sally and Paul had picked out a name already. The fact that there was now a name made everything feel so much worse. When it was just “the baby” or “my sister” it was an abstract, but adding a name made it seem more real, more painful. “I’m so sorry Percy,” he choked.

“They’re gone Nico,” Percy sobbed into his shoulder. “It isn’t fair,” he choked. “They weren’t supposed to be part of this. They were supposed to be there.”

“Shhhhh,” Nico breathed in his ear, while continuing to pat his friend’s back.

“And Annabeth,” he cried. “We were all going out to California this summer to help her move in. It was going to be our first family vacation.” Percy pulled him closer and he could feel the older boy’s fingernails digging into his skin through his shirt. “I hate it!” Percy shrieked. “I hate everything,” he said, his voice quivering. “I hate the Gabe, the gods, and most of all I hate myself. It should’ve been me.”

“Don’t say that Percy,” the son of Hades said, ignoring Percy’s painful grip. “I promise the pain will lessen with time, you just have to keep moving.” No matter how impossible it seems.

“I’m tired of pushing. That’s all I’ve done for almost half of my life now,” he sighed into Nico’s shoulder. “I wish I was never born. If I wasn’t born everyone would still be alive,” he said, his voice devoid of all emotion. “I wish you would’ve let me die.”

In one quick motion, Nico pushed the older boy off of him and with his right fist punched Percy in the face, his knuckles cracked when they connected with his nose. Blood began to gush out of Percy’s nose as his hands flew up to catch the blood.

“Don’t you ever fucking say that again!” hissed the son of Hades.

“You-” Percy was cut off as the shorter boy took another swing at him.

“What would Annabeth say if she heard you saying that shit?” Percy opened his mouth, but shut it when he saw the look Nico was giving him. “What would Paul say? What would your mom say?”

The son of Poseidon couldn’t look at him anymore.

Fuck. Nico grabbed a handful of tissues off of their nightstand and handed them to Percy with a sigh. “I get it Perce. You know I do. It fucking sucks.” He felt like he was rambling, but he continued anyway. “We’ve both lost everything Percy.” He leaned back onto the bed and tucked his hands behind his head. “You feel empty right. But there’s something trying to devour you from the inside out. The worst part is some days you feel good and then you feel fucking terrible because, how dare you feel anything but sorrow and anger; right?” he turned his head slightly to look at the son of Poseidon.

Percy took a deep, shuddering breath and said, “Yeah.”

“Welcome to my life for the last few years,” he huffed. “But like I said, it gets a little easier everyday Percy. You just have to give it a chance.”
“And not hide from your feelings and make everyone think you hate them,” the young man huffed, blood still dripping from his nose.

“Fuck you Percy,” he chuckled as he brought his knees up to his chest. He pushed his legs out and used the momentum to jump off the bed, landing gracefully on his feet. “Now let’s get cleaned up,” he said while offering Percy his hand.

The son of Poseidon chuckled and grabbed his hand.

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I broke his nose.

That thought replayed over and over again in his mind, preventing the young son of Hades from returning to sleep. He hadn’t meant to hurt Percy, just show him how stupid he was being.

He rolled over in his bed to look at the sleeping form of Percy. The older teen was peacefully asleep with his back to him, his head resting on his stuffed panda toy. After setting his nose and eating a square of ambrosia, Percy gave a forced laugh and said it was okay and that he had a lot of practice of making sure blood didn’t hit the ground.

That was a terrible joke even for Percy.

Percy then had grabbed him by the shoulders and spun him around to face the bathroom mirror. Apparently that random fist to the eye had left him with a considerable black eye. Percy, ever graceful and tactful, broke off a square of ambrosia and shoved it into his mouth by surprise. He didn’t know if the ambrosia stuffed in his mouth showed that Percy cared, that it was payback for the broken nose, or some weird combination.

He went with the latter and the two chewed in silence. He noticed that Percy was chewing slowly with a pained look on his face. It didn’t take a genius to figure out why; every bite, every flavor was reminding Percy of everything that he had lost.

Whatever god thought it was a good idea to tie the taste of nectar and ambrosia to memories was a fucking asshole.

After that they had returned to their respective beds and settled down for the remainder of the night. Percy, exhausted from his nightmares and crying, had fallen asleep in moments.

But, here Nico was some hours later still awake.

Percy was doing better, he knew it; he could feel it in his core. He was zoning out less and less, he more-or-less paid attention at school, he helped him out with the household chores, and now he was talking again.

Which meant he was in a dangerous and fragile state. After the Titan war Nico had thought he was okay, he and Percy were on good terms, even if the son of Poseidon had started dating Annabeth, his dad was proud of him for his part in the war, and he thought he was welcome at camp.

Of course he was wrong.
Every time Percy and Annabeth held hands was like a kick to the gut, every hug a slap to the face, and every kiss felt like someone was stabbing his heart with an icicle. His dad was still awkward and didn’t really know how to deal with him, which made him feel like he was unwanted. And the other campers avoided him after the Stolls and Aphrodite cabin spread some vicious rumors about children of Hades.

So he left. To wallow in his own misery.

He made a fist and slammed it down on his mattress. *No! I’m not going to let Percy end up like me!* *He just needs to be reminded people care about him!*

A plan began to take shape in Nico’s mind, as he finally began to doze off to sleep.

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He added a few drops of blue food coloring to the steaming bowl of oatmeal and mixed it until the normally drab breakfast food was a lovely shade of azure blue. Satisfied with his creation, he set the spoon in the sink and then gingerly set the steaming bowl onto a small tray he had found tucked away in the pantry.

“Percy’s going to love this!” he thought, a small smiling gracing his tired face.

Breakfast in bed was sure to make the son of Poseidon happy. After all, it made him happy.

He could vaguely remember a time when he was very young, he had been sick and forced to stay in bed. To make him feel better his mother and Bianca had walked into his room carrying a small tray with a bowl of hot cereal, a glass of fresh squeezed orange juice, and a banana, a rare treat back then. He couldn’t remember much more about that day other than despite feeling sick he felt like a king.

Then there was his time trapped in infirmary with Will. The first morning Will had brought him breakfast in bed, and since his future boyfriend had no idea what he liked, the tray was full of everything camp had to offer (and even a few things that probably required assistance from the Hermes cabin to obtain). He had felt terrible when he only ate an apple, but the gesture really touched him.

He laughed at the memory. *Poor Will had to carry all that food back to the dining pavilion.*

It still hurt to think that Will was gone and he knew it always would, but like he told Percy: everyday got a little easier. He was trying to live a life that Will would approve of, and right now that meant making sure his friends were taken care of.

He inspected his work one last time; blue oatmeal, blue orange juice (lots of experimentation to achieve that), two pieces of buttered toast, four perfectly crisp strips of bacon, and two eggs cooked over-easy. Satisfied that everything was in its proper place and nothing was touching, he carefully picked up the heavy tray and stepped into the shadows.

A moment later he stepped out of the shadows into their room. He walked over to the foot of Percy’s bed and watched the sleeping boy for a moment. He was sprawled out on the bed, one arm and leg hanging off the side, his quilt only covering his other leg, and the sheet next to his head was wet with drool. It wasn’t a pretty sight, but it was somehow enduring to the son of Hades.

He almost didn’t want to wake the older boy. But considering that his eye was still black and blue,
the ambrosia still apparently not effecting him like it used to, he could have some revenge by making Percy wake up before nine.

“Hey Percy,” he whispered, making sure he was out of the older boy’s reach. “Perrrcy.”

The son of Poseidon stirred slightly, muttering nonsense before rolling face first into the pool of drool.

Nico cringed at the sight. *That is absolutely disgusting!* “Percy, it’s time to get up.”

Percy grabbed his panda and covered his head with it. “I don’t want to go to school today!” he said, his voice muffled beneath the toy.

Nico rolled his eyes and set the tray down on his own bed. Taking a page from his father’s book, he grabbed Percy’s big toe. The son of Poseidon’s reaction was similar to his own, Percy shot straight up and backed himself into the corner, his eyes wide with fear and confusion.

He couldn’t help but laugh at the older teen’s panicked look. *Now I see why dad thought this was funny. I’ll have to do that to Jason!* He retrieved the tray of breakfast foods from his bed and held it out for Percy. “Relax Percy, I made you breakfast!”

The son of Poseidon slowly came out of his corner, confusion written on his face. “What?”

“I. Made. You. Breakfast,” he said holding out the tray out even further.

Percy settled back into his bed and crossed his legs, before taking the tray. He looked at it for a moment before giving him a small smile, that *did not* make his heart flutter ever so slightly. “Is that blue orange juice?” he asked picking up the frosted glass. “How did you do that?” he asked, holding up the glass to the light.

He shrugged his shoulders. “I made a deal with a spirit,” he said nonchalantly. The truth was it was a matter of trial and error with food coloring, but after a gallons worth of juice later he perfected the mixture.

“I can never tell if you’re joking Neeks,” Percy said before taking a small sip. He smacked his lips, and must have decided it was fit for consumption as he then drained the glass in one gulp. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and let out a sigh on contentment. “Not bad death-breath, nice spread we got here,” chuckled the son of Poseidon. He then set the empty glass down on their nightstand, then gestured for him to take a seat.

Nico climbed onto the bed and sat across from Percy, happy that Percy appreciated his efforts. He watched as Percy drank the oatmeal down. He wanted to tell the son of Poseidon to use a spoon like a civilized human being, but he held his tongue.

“You rake the rest racon!” Percy grunted, a piece of bacon jettisoning from his mouth and hitting Nico’s arm.

“Er, thanks,” he replied as he brushed off the half-chewed pork product. “Sorry about your nose Percy,” he added.

The son of Poseidon looked up at him, a piece of toast protruding from his mouth. “Rut?” He inhaled the toast and then rubbed his nose. “No harm no foul Neeks,” he laughed. “The ambrosia fixed it while I slept.” His eyes widened. “Oh crap!” he cried as he grabbed his nose with both hands. “Did it heal right? Please tell me I don’t look like Owen Wilson!”
“I don’t know who that is Percy,” he sighed. “But It looks the same as it always has.”

“Whew,” Percy chuckled. “That guy’s nose gives me nightmares. Also I need to add *Wedding Crashers* to the list of movies you and Jason need to watch. Also, by the looks of it I should be apologizing to you.”

He reached out to touch his eye, but he swatting the older boy’s hand away. “Don’t touch it dick.”

They continued to talk as Percy ate his breakfast, and in a way it was just like before everything went to Tartarus. But, one look in Percy’s eyes told Nico that Percy was not as fine as he appeared, that although he was talking again, this was at least partially an act. That was Percy though, always needing to be the hero, to show everyone that he was always in control, that-

*He’s full of crap.*

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When Percy had finished his breakfast he thanked the son of Hades as Nico took the tray and set it on their nightstand.

“Get dressed Percy we need to go get some supplies,” he lied as he pulled on a pair of black tube socks.

Percy, who had been reclining on his bed against the wall threw his head back and groaned. “Ugh! I hate freaking Walmart! And I hate that freaking truck!”

Nico hid his smile by turning his back to the son of Poseidon and making his bed. They weren’t going for groceries or anything like that. No, Nico was planning a nice stress free day, a fun day, the kind him and Percy used to have on the weekends. “We’re not taking the truck,” he shrugged.

He couldn’t see Percy, but he imagined the green-eyed teen was trying to process what that meant. “Shadow travel? Are you sure your strong enough Neeks?”

“We’re not going far sea- Percy,” he caught himself before he uttered Annabeth’s nickname of choice for her boyfriend. It was true that after waking up in the hospital his ability to shadow travel had been severely limited, but now it was slowly coming back. He estimated he could do fifty mile jumps at a time, which was far more than they needed for his plans. “Now get dressed.”

“Are you going to stay and watch?” the son of Poseidon chuckled, and by the tone of his voice Nico assumed he was wiggling his eyebrows suggestively.

He spun around and tossed Jason’s *Pillow Pet* at Percy’s head.

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As they emerged from the shadows he raised a hand to his head to check if Will’s comfy hat was still there. It was the only thing he had left of his boyfriend and he would be devastated if he lost it.
They were standing in a small park that sat between a laundry mat and some kind of law firm. Calling it a park was a stretch though, as it only had several benches and some bushes, with a stature of a woman playing a violin standing in the center tall and proud. It was close to his destination though if the street signs were to be believed.

Percy looked around and frowned. “Uh Nico, I think you missed. This doesn’t look like Princeton.”

“That’s because it’s not,” he said as he began walking through the slushy mix of ice and snow. He could feel the cold water start to leak into his shoes and he now understood why everyone in the area wore boots.

Percy caught up with him easily, much to his chagrin. He hated being short. “Then shouldn’t we, you know, try again?” Percy asked, walking backwards in front of him.

He pulled his hands up into his jacket sleeves and crossed his arms. “Nope.” He eyed Percy’s bare legs with a mixture of envy and anger. How Percy could go out in the cool March weather wearing only shorts and a light jacket was beyond him. “We’re going some place new.”

That had been the wrong thing to say as for the next fifteen minutes Percy continued to pester him, asking where they were going, why they were going, and pretty much anything a five year old child would ask on a continuous loop.

When he finally saw the sign for the shop he was looking for he thought he could relate to the stories of Moses leading his people to the promised land. He just hoped he got to enjoy it unlike Moses. “We’re here.” Finally….

They were in front of a little shop with the words *Metropolis Comics and Collectibles* written in neon lights. The windows were packed full of different cardboard standees of various superheroes, and he was happy to see *Captain America* was among them.

“A comic shop? When-how did you find out about this place?” Percy asked, his head cocked to the side, brow furrowed in confusion.

“Chelsea told me,” he said as he opened the screen door for Percy. “She’s good for something.”

“Yeah, she’s pretty eager to *please* you Neeks,” Percy chuckled as he walked into the shop.

*What does that mean?*

The shop smelled of old paper, body odor, and cat piss. The comics were in racks to the right side of the store, while the rest of the store was devoted to various card and board games. In the back, a heavy set man sat behind a glass case petting a calico cat with one hand and reading one of those backwards magma books Chelsea had told him about; If he had to guess that was the source of the two unpleasant smells.

Needless to say, this was not how he imagined this stop going, but Percy didn’t seem to mind. The son of Poseidon was currently looking through a stack of *Ant-Man*, occasionally pulling out an issue and tucking it under his arm, a small smile on his face.
He on the other hand, was searching through the collected editions for some *Hawkeye* comics for Jason. If Percy was getting something, then by the rules of parenting that meant Jason needed to get something too to avoid a fight.

“I hope you two are planning on buying those!” the clerk called out from the back. “This isn’t a library!”

*I hope you weren’t planning to live past fifty.* He walked to the back of the store and set a couple hundred dollar bills in front of the man, who did in fact have terrible body odor. “Just tell us if it it looks like we’re going over. There’s plenty more where that came from,” Nico said, his voice oozing with smugness. As he walked back to the collected issues he heard Percy chuckle, and that made him chuckle as well.

*We’re going to get kicked out.*

They in fact were not kicked out. No, they were now preferred customers.

Currently there were five Benjamin Jeffersons sitting on the counter as the heavyset man tallied up their total and packed away the mountain of comics into numerous black bags.

“I think I can go on a vacation now!” the clerk chuckled as he stuffed a bag full of all eight issues of *Death Vigil*, an independent comic Nico had discovered on accident that he thought looked good. “Wisconsin Dells here I come!”

“That’s…. nice,” Nico lied. He honestly just wanted out of that place and the first thing he was going to do was take a hot shower and scrub his skin raw with steel wool. “Percy, is there anything else you want?” he called out.

Percy was looking into a glass case at the other end of the store, face pressed against the glass. “Maybe? Could you come here?”

“Sure thing?” He jogged over to Percy and was caught off guard by what the son of Poseidon was looking at.

Inside the glass case was an assortment of individual *Mythomagic* figurines, packs, starter sets, structure decks, and even a tutorial DVD. It was actually a pretty nice collection too, they had the rare bloody Fenrir variant figure, with severed hand in mouth.

“What do you think?” Percy asked.

“What?”

“Do you think you could teach me to play? I’ve been watching you, Chelsea, and that Tate kid for the last week and I kind of want to play with you guys,” Percy said, his cheeks turning ever so slightly redder. “I mean, if that’s not a problem! I totally understand if you don’t want to!”

“Problem? No! Gods no Percy!” he cried. “Of course I’ll teach you how to play!” At those words ten year old Nico was cheering. Percy being interested in *Mythomagic* and coming to him for help had been the start of many dreams and fantasies of the son of Hades. “I mean- yeah that would be cool. That way we could have an even number at lunch. Do you know what kind of deck you want to
“Anything but Greek or Roman,” Percy said, his expression hardening. He snapped out of it and stuttered, “I mean- Uh. Yeah?”

Nico laughed deeply. He forgot how much he liked to see Percy confused. “Well, I guess if you’re going to be playing now I could start to actually care about the game,” he said while looking at the contents of the case. *Fuck it! What do the kids say? Yo-yo?* “Hey!” he yelled at the clerk, “We’re going to take everything in this cabinet!”

There was an inhuman shriek of ecstasy and the sound of a large man falling from his stool.

After they left the comic shop, arms full of loot, they shadow traveled back home and dropped off their purchases in their room, before shadow traveling to a nearby McDonald's.

They didn’t eat much. Percy getting a happy meal, and Nico a medium order of fries. Neither finished their food, and neither asked the other why. Somehow they had both gained a new understanding about the other.

Nico listened as Percy talked about how different everything at LaMoille was compared to Goode. He talked about how weird it was that their classes usually had less than twenty people in them and how the teachers actually knew each student. How he had no idea how he managed to maintain his senior status, as he was going to have to repeat another year at Goode. He talked about how things seemed to be easier now that Nico was tutoring him everyday after school and that he knew he would never pass pre-calc without his help.

“All, don’t think I didn’t notice you copying my classes Neeks,” he added, waving a french fry in his face like how an old man shakes his cane at hooligans. “That’s why I signed up for that horrible, horrible class. To make sure you weren’t wasting your time man.”

It was nice to fall back to the old dynamic. Percy doing most of the talking for the two of them while he mostly just sat and listened.

“And don’t get me started on Aaron! I fucked up there big time!”

After lunch they returned to the farm to do Jason’s afternoon chores.

Feeding the animals was actually pretty easy when every creature would cower in fear in the corner the second he walked into the pen.

Percy really enjoyed collecting the eggs from the hen house.

“Hey Nico!” he called out, egg basket in hand. “Guess what?”
“What?”

“What but!” Percy laughed.

He didn’t get it, but he laughed too.

That evening Nico packed two bags while Percy was watching the coverage about the Amazons on the news. He felt bad for Reyna, what with her sister being in charge of the Amazons, but he still held a grudge against Artemis and all of her followers. If they got caught by mortals using slaves then that was on them. Mortals were blind and helpless to anything related to the divine, so some Amazon had messed up big time.

He walked into the living room and tossed one of the bags to Percy. “We got one more place to go tonight Percy,” he said.

“Cool,” was all Percy said as he jumped off the love-seat and offered Nico his hand.

He took Percy’s hand in his own, his stomach doing a small flip for some reason as the shadows swallowed them.

They emerged in a locker room that smelled strongly of chlorine and Axe body spray.

Nico began to unpack his bag, pulling out a white beach towel, a white t-shirt, and a pair of black swimming trunks with little skulls on them. “Chelsea told me about this place. Only place for miles that’s not a hotel with a heated pool.” he said as he rounded the corner, to give them both some privacy to change.

“You don’t have to go away Nico,” Percy said, his voice quiet and a bit unsure.

He pretended not to hear the son of Poseidon, as he stripped down and dressed himself. It’s easier this way he told himself as he pulled the t-shirt over his head. “Are you ready Percy?” he asked as he threw the towel over his shoulder.

Percy stepped around the corner a little too fast in Nico’s opinion. “Yeah.” The swim trunks he had bought for Percy were similar to his own, but instead of black they were a dark blue. Percy had also neglected the shirt he packed him, opting to go shirtless. He was still paler than he was before, but the color was slowly returning and his frame was also starting to fill out again.

Nico swallowed and jerked his head for Percy to follow.

They found the exit to the locker room and followed several signs to the pool, an Olympic sized thing that Percy ran and jumped into.
Nico sat his towel on a chair and walked over and sat down the edge of the pool, dipping his feet in the warm waters. He slowly kicked his feet and enjoyed feeling the soothing sensation of the water flowing between his toes. He watched the son of Poseidon play in his element, doing flips underwater, then rising to the top on a torrent of water that sent him flying into the air only to reenter the water without so much as a splash.

Seeing Percy happy made him happy, which was how it had been since the met all those years ago. Even with Will he smiled a bit more when Percy was with them. He was proud that he had managed to keep this man shaped porpoise alive through not one, but two wars and numerous quests.

“Aren’t you going to come in?” Percy asked, surfacing next to him, startling him from his thoughts.

“I’m fine Perseus,” he said, waving Percy off. “I’m fine right here.”

“Oh come on Neeks!” Percy whined, before splashing his legs.

Nico recoiled at the sudden chill. “Hey! See if I give you a ride home!”

“Please Nico?” Percy begged, doing his best impression of a baby seal.

“No Percy, I’m content to stay right here.”

Percy narrowed his eyes. “You don’t know how to swim do you?”

Shit. “I can swim just fine. I just don’t want to right now. Now go do more flips and dolphin stuff.”

Percy eyed him suspiciously, but turned his back to him. “Okay Nico,” he said while paddling away. “I guess you wouldn’t mind if I did…. This!” He grabbed Nico by the ankle and yanked.

Contrary to what Percy believed happened, Nico did not shriek like a little girl. “What the shit Percy!” He cried as he scurried back onto the tiled floor. “Don’t fucking do that!” he screamed, glaring daggers at the son of Poseidon.

Percy threw his head back and laughed. “You don’t know how to swim! I knew it!” Then Percy’s face paled. “Wait. You don’t know how to swim? But Will was taking you on canoe rides! And you weren’t wearing a life jacket! What the hell Neeks, that’s dangerous!”

“Oh yeah, because nothing says romance like a bright orange foam vest,” Nico spat. “Besides, Will would’ve saved me if something happened!”

Percy used his powers to send a small wave at Nico, soaking him to the bone. “Wrong Nico! You can’t make assumptions like that when lives are involved! What if Will got knocked out like Jason? What then?”

“Then I would hope a handsome merman would save me.”


He crawled back to the edge of the pool. “Sorry Percy.”

“It’s okay,” the son of Poseidon sighed. Then the hyper active puppy that is Percy Jackson, perked up. “Hey let me teach you how to swim!”

“That’s fine Per-”

“Nah man, we’ll do ti right here in the shallows! If you stand on your tip toes your head would be
above water man!” Percy beamed.

Knowing that this wasn’t an argument he wasn’t going to win, Nico braced himself and slid into the pool, tensing up when the cool water hit some rather sensitive areas. “There are you happy?” He asked, teeth chattering. *Fuck this. Fuck it long. Fuck it hard.*

“Almost,” Percy chuckled as he swam up to him. “Now let’s get started.”

---

After several hours of Percy’s training, Nico was the master of the doggy paddle and floating on his back.

“You’re doing great bud!” Percy cheered as Nico slowly swam in a circle.

“This isn’t so bad,” he groused. “I can see its appeal.”

Percy chuckled. “That’s Nico-ese for you love it.” He swam up to Nico and grabbed the oy by the waist.

“Hey! What are you doing! Put me down!” Nico protested, thrashing around, splashing water everywhere.

“Level two starts now,” Percy said as he swam them out to the deep end of the pool.

“Level one was just fine Percy!” He shrieked still thrashing wildly.

Percy adjusted his grip and re-positioned the younger teen so that they were face-to-face. “I just want you to float here on your own.”

“Don’t you dare fucking let go of me Perseus! Or I swear you’ll be living in a haunted house tonight!”

“Hey, trust me. I’m not going to let anything happen to you,” he whispered, a small gin on his face. “Trust me. I mean, I trust you with my life.”

The words sent Nico back to the first night he had stayed with Percy. The night he had filled Percy’s room with comic books. The night they had shared a bed. “Okay,” he nodded. He could trust Percy. He always did.

Percy grinned, his white teeth flashing in the moonlight. “Okay, I’m going to let you go on the count of three. I just want you to float. Ready?”

Nico nodded. *I can do this. I can do this.*

“Three!” Percy cried, releasing his hold on the boy.

*I can’t do this! I can’t do this!* He wildly kicked his legs and splashed his arms. He went under for a split second and swallowed a mouthful of chlorinated water. He surfaced and coughed violently.

“Come on you can do this Neeks. I believe in you.”

A strange thing happened then. Nico calmed down, his legs no longer kicked wildly, and his arms
stopped thrashing and instead began to move in slow circles.

“You’re doing it!” Percy cheered.

He looked at himself and then at Percy who was smiling like a madman, and he imagined he was smiling the same.

“Alright, let’s get you back to the shallows. Come here,” the son of Poseidon said, holding his arms out.

Nico swam into Percy’s arms and wrapped his own around the older teen’s neck. He looked into Percy’s eyes and saw a tiny spark of… something.

“I’m so proud of you Nico!” Percy chuckled.

“Thanks,” Nico blushed. He looked at Percy’s hair, the gray streak he had dyed was plastered to his forehead. His lips were curled up in his usual grin, and he could feel Percy’s warm breath.

“You did so good,” Percy whispered, pulling him closer.

“Sure,” he said. His eyes never leaving Percy’s lips.

“Yeah,” Percy said, resting his forehead against Nico’s.

Percy did not swim him back to the shallows as he said he would, instead they floated there in each others arms, slowly spinning in the calm waters.

He honestly didn’t know who started it, but it was easily the best kiss of his life.

Chapter End Notes

;) 

You've been patient so there's a taste.

So now that we had fluff, it's time once again for horrible things to happen! Yay!

I have a couple major events coming up, that will make the fall of Camp Jupiter look tame.

Hey!
Did you like what you just read? Leave a kudos!
Thoughts, theories, recipes, comments in general? Leave a Comment!
I love feed back from you guys and gals!

Next chapter is Jason!

Until next time, thanks for reading!
Tonight:

Jason wakes up with his memories intact.
Yetis are gambling fiends.
Poseidon is still out of it.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Jason was glad to wake up with all of his memories intact.

However, he was not happy to see the face of a seven-hundred pound yeti, just inches away from his own.

“Zeus’s sandals!” he shrieked, which startled the yeti.

The hairy beast stumbled backwards and fell onto the coffee table, flattening it like a pancake. The yeti, now startled and in pain, began to rub its backside and howl.

“What in the name of the name of J. Edgar Hoover is going on in here?” The god of secrets cried as he climbed into the cluttered room carrying a tray of canned baked beans. “Ah you broke the bjursta!” the god screamed when he noticed the flattened table. The balding god whipped one of the cans at the wild-man, who in turn began to howl even louder. “Good going you brainless baboon! Now I have to go back to that socialist conspiracy they call a furniture store!”

Jason watched the two bicker back and forth, the longer it went on the less it made sense and the more his head hurt. A part of him wanted to ignore the two and tend to the god of the seas, who was still passed out on the floor, but years of drilling had told him to never turn his back to a fight.

“No I will not get you meatballs you-you great ape!” Harpocrates screamed.

Jason sighed. “Uh, I hate to interrupt,” he said as he stretched out his arms, “but, what time is it?”

The minor god and yeti stopped yelling at each other and looked at him with confused faces. Apparently they had forgotten he was there. Harpocrates swapped the tray of beans to his other hand and looked at his watch. “Noon,” he said through clenched teeth.

“Noon?” he repeated, his stomach dropping. “How?”

The balding god looked away. “I may have been a little-,” he coughed, “inebriated down in you-know-where which may have led to some technical difficulties teleporting you.”

Jason’s eyes widened.
“Nothing to worry about, just a minor hiccup that temporarily separated your soul from body, easy fix really,” the god grunted, shifting the tray once again. “Just left you exhausted. Besides it’s not like I did an Apollo,” the god shrugged.

“What does that mean?” he asked, trying to take his mind off the fact the god had by definition killed him and brought him back to life. I guess I unknowingly pulled a Leo…

The god laughed deeply, almost swallowing his unlit cigarette. “Ever hear about spontaneous human combustion?”

Jason nodded. The stuff he watched on the *History Channel* rarely had anything to do with history it seemed.

“That’s what happens when Apollo gets a little tipsy and tries to have a little fun. He gives them the power of the sun if you know what I mean,” the god of secrets chuckled. He then grabbed a can of beans off the tray and handed it to the son of Jupiter. “Here, I imagine your head hurts. Drink the juice, it helps.”

He hesitantly took the offered can, trying his best to hide his disgust. “Thanks?”

The god grabbed the other can from his tray and knocked it against Jason’s before biting down on the edge of the can. The god then began to suck the liquid out of the can through his teeth with a disgusting slurping noise. The god finished and wiped the brown liquid that had leaked on to chin with his arm. “Drink up, the sugar and protein will help with your head!”

Jason looked into his can and tried not to vomit when he noticed the strange white bean floating at the top. “Uh…”

“Well what’s wrong? Drink up!” the god barked.

He continued to stare at the can of cold beans in his hand, the very thought of slurping the bean juice through his teeth made him want to heave. “No tha-”

“No thanks?” the god yelled, discarding the tray and getting in Jason’s face. “What do you think you’re too good for my hospitality? Hmm? Do you think you’re better than a god?!” As Harpocrates questioned him, his cigarette ignited seemingly on its own accord.

The things I do for Olympus…

He did his best to steel himself, closing his eyes and telling himself he was going to enjoy a brownie-batter blizzard. He brought the can to hips lips and copied the god, biting down on the edge of the can and sucking the brown liquid through his teeth. He knew the taste wasn’t going to be unpleasant, he liked baked beans, but he tended to eat them hot. The sensation of the liquid running through his teeth was enough to make him squirm, the feeling of beans settled against his lips was strange and unwelcome.

He stopped when he felt no more liquid sift through his teeth. He removed the can and quickly clenched his jaw shut, to avoid angering the god by vomiting up his “gift”.

When at last he thought his stomach wouldn’t betray him he opened his eyes to see Harpocrates and the yeti staring at him; the god smiling ear-to-ear and the yeti frowning.

“I told you he’d do it,” the god smirked, elbowing the wild-man in gut. “Now pay up.”

The yeti grunted and groaned before reaching into its fur and removing a black billfold. It removed a
wad of wrinkled cash and slapped them into the god’s outstretched hand, before grunting and leaving the room.

“Told you that he had a gambling problem,” the god chuckled as he straightened the cash. “Really should get him some counseling, but this funds my gambling problem.” He raised one eyebrow at Jason, “Don’t get hooked kid, it’s a vicious cycle.”

“Wait! You made me drink that, for a bet!” Jason yelled, throwing the can down, its contents spilling onto the already filthy covered floor. This was the last straw, he was tired of being used by the gods, and to them he was just a tool to be used or a fool to entertain them. If even half of what the nut-job of a god had told him was true, then the gods had not only been doing this since the dawn of time, but they also kept making the same mistakes over and over never changing, never learning.

*That is it!*

He pulled his sword from his pocket, intending to do something stupid and reckless for once (and possibly the only time) in his life.

Before the sword grew to its normal size he felt cold metal pressed against his temple.

“I’d drop that if I were you,” Harpocrates said as he cocked back the hammer on the large silver handgun.

Jason did as he was told, dropping the sword onto a pile of old *Sports Illustrateds*. The anger that has been coursing through his system a moment ago was now replaced by fear.

*I’m sorry Piper. I’m sorry Nico. I’m sorry Demeter. I messed up.*

Harpocrates removed the gun from his head and tucked the massive thing into the waistband of his cargo shorts. The god took a long drag of his cigarette and sighed. “You’re a sorry bastard, you know that right?”

Jason hung his head. “Yeah.”

*Why did I freak out over something stupid like that? That’s not me.*

“I know I just tricked you into drinking the liquid from a can of beans, but let me give you some advice: live for yourself. Stop bending over backwards for whatever the god-of-the-week is.” The god collapsed onto the floor and crossed his legs. “I didn’t leave Olympus because I pissed off that gaping-hole-of-a-goddess Aphrodite. I made up my mind to leave long before that.”

“Why did you leave then? Was it because of Zeus? The deal he made with the Fates?”

“Nah,” the god chuckled before stubbing out his cigarette on a moldy pizza box. “I mean Mr. Overcompensating was a factor, but so was every other so called major god!” he grunted. Harpocrates pulled out a red and white crumpled pack of cigarettes and popped on the cancer sticks into his mouth. “I left to find myself. To get away from the pettiness that is Olympus. Did you know that the only thing I enjoyed doing, besides getting intoxicated, was writing my sports column?” A thick scrapbook appeared in the god’s hands and he offered the book to Jason.

Jason took the offered book and opened it, doing his best to catch the loose newspaper clippings that fell out. The first page had a newspaper clipping with the heading “*Supreme* Abdul-Jabbar Leads the Lakers to Nike!” The article had a picture the basketball player standing next to Harpocrates, but instead of being bald the god had a giant black afro.

Curious, Jason turned the page.
This time the article was titled *Cassius Clay “Sculpts” The Competition!* This time the god of secrets was standing across from the boxer, both with fists raised against each other, but with smiles on their faces.

He continued through the scrapbook, every page more amazing than the last. There were even a picture of Harpocrates sporting a giant handlebar mustache with Babe Ruth. By the end of the book there pictures of medieval tapestries depicting knights jousting with Harpocrates sitting with the nobility.

Before then Jason had never truly realized what it meant to be immortal, to be present to all major events that have happened and those that were yet to come. He then thought of what the god of secrets had told him down in the library, that the gods were repeating history on an endless loop, forced to relive the same battles and events over and over until the end of time.

He wasn’t sure if he pitied or envied the gods now.

“Impressive right?” the god asked as he took the scrapbook back. “I no longer use my name or take pictures with the athletes so that I remain hidden, but it’s the only thing that gives this worthless existence of mine meaning.” The scrapbook disappeared in a cloud of white smoke. “What were we talking about again?” the god asked stroking his chin. “Oh? Yes! Yes! You’re a sorry bastard and why I left Olympus!” Harpocrates jumped to his feet and stared at the unconscious form of Poseidon. “Don’t live your life devoted to us kid, break away. There have been hundreds of demigods who have tried to seal the rifts on that god forsaken mountain top and no one has ever come close to succeeding.”

“But-“

“You can’t kid. Like a said before, the moment god crapped out the third cave man, a conspiracy was hatched against one of them. As long as there are gods or mortals, there will be conflict in the world. Just sit back, take care of your loved ones, and enjoy the ride. You understand me?”

“Yeah,” he answered, but truthfully he was quite confused. The god seemed to drift from topic to the next without any transition, but he understood the last part and he thought that was the important bit. “Loved ones before all else.”

“Smart lad,” the god laughed. “But your math homework is wrong.”

“How did-“

“I hid the you-know-what in your backpack, and I may have taken a glance at your school work,” the golf shoed god shrugged. “Remember: don’t let any of the gods see that thing. No matter how much you trust them, no matter how friendly or loving they may seem, they are not to see it. Understand?”

“Yes sir.”

“Good!” the god cried, clapping his hands together. “Now let’s get you on the road! Yeti! Get your eight foot asthmatic ass back in here!”
Harpocrates and the yeti carried out the unconscious god of the sea and tossed him like a bag of trash into the back of the shot up blue convertible. As they said their goodbyes the yeti crushed him with a massive bear hug and Harpocrates gave him a box of the cotton candy *Twinkies* he had bought them the night before and a fake driver’s license.

“In case those gestapo-federales-KGB-sons-of-bitches stop you!” the god had grunted. “Also according to that you’re twenty-three and Samoan.” He slapped Jason on the back and laughed deeply.

Jason thanked the two for their help and the valuable information and jumped into the car and drove off.

Jason generally liked to drive.

He liked the sensation of the engine revving, the wind on his face (Percy and Nico hated it when he rolled down the window in the truck), he liked the overall sense of control he had, and pretending to lose control to scare the crap out if Nico.

But at the moment, alone with his thoughts, it seemed like some kind of cruel torture.

His mind was jumping between thoughts of Disciplina, the folder of information that was tucked in his backpack, that Poseidon had failed to keep his promise of watching his former home, his overreaction at Harpocrates’ place, and that he had failed to call Nico the night before.

For the sake of his sanity he tried to focus on the folder and Nico.

He knew Nico would understand that he couldn’t call, it was standard demigod protocol that something always happened to even the simplest of plans. The worst Nico would do to him was probably slug him in the shoulder.

He was more worried about Nico being alone with the unstable son of Poseidon.

He didn’t like leaving Nico alone with Percy, which was crazy really, Nico could handle the son of Poseidon with ease if push came to shove. The problem was though, could Nico handle it on the emotional level? He knew deep down that Nico no longer had any strong feelings for Percy, but those feelings definitely left scars.

*I still can’t look at Reyna without feeling guilty*...

It hurt to watch Percy be reduced to a shell of his former self, and he couldn’t imagine what Nico, who had actually known him for far longer than himself, felt.

He pushed his foot down on the accelerator a bit more, causing the convertible to speed up slightly above the speed limit.

*And now with him and Percy practically joined at the hip, there is no way this is going to end well*...
He had just crossed into Illinois when his curiosity got the better of him.

Jason had been thinking about the mysterious photograph of the man who Harpocrates believed was responsible for the destruction of his home and the deaths of his friends.

He slowed the car down to a crawl and reached over to the passenger’s seat and unzipped his bag. He glanced in the rearview mirror and saw that the Poseidon was still down for the count, not even breathing; if he wasn’t a god then Jason would’ve worried.

He carefully felt around inside the bag, while making sure to keep both eyes on the road, until he felt the hard edge of his math book. Jason pulled out the beaten old thing and flipped it open to see Harpocrates’s folder tucked between the pages. On top of it was the photograph he wanted to see.

Jason gingerly picked up the photo and held it up to his face and frowned.

_They look like just a couple of guys_, Jason thought as he squinted, trying to absorb every detail of the photograph. The background behind the two boy’s was blurred and faded with age, but Jason thought he could make out what looked like telephone poles or fence posts. The boy, who Harpocrates said was Jeremiah Aarons, had his hair cut to the point that it almost looked shaved and was wearing some kind of simple outfit.

_Military service? Nah, he looks to be around Nico’s age. This other guy looks old enough though._

He examined the guy Jeremiah had his arm wrapped around. His hair was thick and dark like Percy’s, but was combed to the side, he had a big goofy grin on his face, and his eyes were lit up with joy. The Percy clone was wearing a white tank top, some pants that looked a size or two too big for him, and something around his neck.

_Brothers?_

He flipped the photo around and saw someone had written _Jeremiah and Arthur_ in big loopy cursive handwriting. Under that, Jason could make out the number four, but everything after that was smeared and faded.

_Well that’s a name to a face at least._

He flipped the photo around again. Even if the guy could see through the Mist and was aware of the gods, what would make him go to war against the gods? What would make him think he even had a chance at winning? How did he recruit people to help him? Why did he look so familiar?

He put everything away, making sure it was exactly as he had found it and returned his attention to the road. He knew one way or another, his questions would soon be answered.

Chapter End Notes

Jason is kind of... twitchy at the moment.

He just had to relive the worst moment of his life and ten minutes later some crazy god
is making him do stupid crap for a bet?  
Nope!  
Jason is getting closer and closer to just calling it quits. He likes his new life, his new friends, he even likes doing farm work.

There were some pretty big clues in this chapter for A LOT of things, and they may not be what you think they are :)

Did you like what you just read? Leave a kudos!  
Thoughts, theories, questions, song lyrics? Leave a comment!

I love hearing from you guys! Don't hesitate to ask or say anything!

Next chapter is Hades, and we're going in hot! Lock and Load people!

Until next time I want you to know you are all beautiful people with amazing souls!
Chapter Summary

Warnings: Blood and gore

Tonight:

It begins.

Chapter Notes

Two chapters this weekend, because you guys are awesome ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

He exited the shadows at the tunnel entrance to Camp Jupiter, quickly followed by Demeter and the boys. With hardly a thought he reduced the two sentries to ash and bone; it was great stress relief.

“Father,” Nico squeaked, crouched over one pile of ex-demigod. “Don’t you think we should verify Harpocrates’s claims before we start… turning people to ash?”

He ignored his son and walked through the entrance, he was not taking the news very well.

_That walking porpoise had one job! One simple job! Watch over Camp Jupiter! And he couldn’t even do that!_

When Jason returned with Poseidon passed out, he was upset. When Jason told them everything was the work of a mortal, he was angry. But when Jason told them Camp Jupiter had been attacked, well he was absolutely livid.

He liked to think he kept his cool though in front of the boys, as instead of throwing his useless brother into Tartarus, he merely summoned his sword and stabbed him through the heart. It didn’t kill the god, but it would take him some time to recover from that.

_I don’t know if I’m mad at his failure or that I trusted him with Hazel’s safety._

No one spoke as they walked, Demeter was looking at everyone with a worried expression, Grace was watching their backs, sword in hand, Nico was glancing at Jackson, and Jackson was staring at Nico. He wasn’t sure what was going on between Jackson and his son, but right now it didn’t matter.

_This ends now._

When they crossed the Little Tiber, he held up his hand, bringing everyone to an abrupt halt. “Boys, find Hazel,” He said his voice devoid of all emotion. “Demeter and I will provide an ample distraction.”
He didn’t wait for any response, instead he marched towards New Rome.

*How long has it been since I’ve walked down these street?* The god wondered to himself. *Twenty, Fifty, one-hundred years?*

It was irrelevant though. The marble buildings, cobblestone streets, the trimmed hedges, all could be replaced.

His daughter could not.

He conjured his helmet, the dark metal cool against his skin. His suit transformed into his battle regalia, the souls of the dead screaming in silent agony as they formed his cloak. His sword, a forbidden gift from his wife, appeared sheathed at his side.

“A little warning would have been nice,” Demeter groaned from behind him, “that fear aura almost made me take off.”

*I would’ve wore it to every dinner if I had known that.*

She stepped in front him, one hand on her hips, the other grasping a giant celestial bronze scythe. “So what do we do now?”

He grinned. “Like I said, we get their attention.” He stomped one foot on the ground, and a massive fissure opened up in the street, devouring several small buildings. From the fissure dozens of skeletons clawed their way out, all armed with various weapons that had been forged in the underworld.

“Stygian Iron? The goddess asked, one eyebrow raised. “It’s troubling enough that you gave Nico a blade of that accursed metal, but a whole army?”

“Purely for defensive purposes,” he said as he sank another row of buildings into the earth.

“If you say so,” she sighed. She then grasped her scythe with both hands and swung it in an arc before her. Half a second later, the *Roman Times* office split into two pieces before being reduced to dust.

“Now where, did you acquire that?” he asked, rather envious of the agricultural tool.

“This old thing?” the goddess shrugged. “Hephaestus made it for me before Aphrodite showed up.” She sighed. “Looking back I probably should have gone out with him. He was so nice and he deserved so much better than her, but I was young and had eyes for Poseidon.”

“I did not need to know that,” he groaned as he watched several of his skeletal soldiers light a book shop on fire.
The chaos continued for a time, the two gods leveling street after street, trying to draw out any kind of response.

“T’m beginning to think that no one is here,” Demeter grunted as she pulled a library down into the earth with hundreds of vines. “Can you feel anyone?”

“Yes.” But that’s not entirely true now is it?

Since they had arrived, he had been feeling flashes of life sporadically, but they would disappear just as fast as they had appeared.

Almost like they are being hidden...

Even when the two sentries he had reduced to ash were invisible to him, something that had never happened before. At the moment he could only feel Nico, Percy, and Jason if he actively focused on them.

“They’re here. I know-“Before he could finish his sentence a massive marble hand grabbed his head and slammed him into the earth. It didn’t stop there though, he was then lifted back up and thrown into the pile of rubble that had been the public library moments ago.

“Hades!” Demeter shrieked in the distance.

The helm of darkness, his most powerful weapon, was now crushed against his skull, blinding him. The pain was excruciating as he desperately tried to claw off the helmet through the gore. He felt the same hand grasp his ankle, crushing it before flinging his body into the air like a Frisbee. Just as he felt himself begin to descend back down the earth, something impacted his stomach with the force of a speeding train, sending him crashing back down to the ground, the impact shattering his spine.

Over the countless centuries, and more battles than he cared to recall, he had never been sucker punched or wounded like that before.

And frankly, he did not like it.

He divided his being into multiple parts: one that worked to mend his body, one to handle the pain, one to monitor the boys, and one to warn Persephone that things were far worse than previously thought.

Hades managed to pry the helmet off, which allowed for his head to reform and his eyes to grow back. Just as his sight returned a giant marble foot was coming down to crush his chest, he rolled over just in time to avoid it.

His spine snapped and legs snapped back into their proper places and he pushed himself up off the ground. There standing before him was the last god the lord of the underworld expected to see.

“Terminus?”

The protector of New Rome looked quite different than the last time he had seen him. For one thing, he had limbs now, but his body was covered in graffiti and the word death was carved into his forehead.

“Why did you betray us?” Hades snarled as he unsheathed his sword. He launched himself at the D-list god and hit the god with a flurry of slashes. Terminus drew into himself, going on the defensive, he shielded his face with his arms, the words Brian rulz written on his left arm in what appeared to be black permanent marker. “It doesn’t matter!” Hades spat as he embedded the black blade into the fallen god’s chest, gold ichor flowing from the wound.
Suddenly the night sky was lit up as dozens of flood lights came to life around the city.

“Well, well, well, what do we have hear?” a voice laughed over hidden speakers. “Two new toys for me to play with! Well golly-gee-willikers and their two big ones two!” From the rubble around him, numerous drones flew up and converged around the two gods, shiny small searchlights on them. “Before all of you going back to reenacting those old kaiju movies, let me get a good look at you.”

One of the drones flew towards his face, but he backhanded it to the ground.

“Dude! What the fuck!” the voice screamed. “You try to be nice, and they fucking walk all over ya,” the voice tsked. “Get ‘em Terminat-us!”

The god of boundaries stood up and ripped the black sword from his chest, before placing one hand over the wound. The hand began to glow and Hades could feel the intense heat radiating from it. When Terminus removed his hand the wound was gone, not even a crack remained on his marble torso.

*Well I did not see that coming*, Hades thought as he dodged a quick jab. He rolled forward, past the minor god, and scooped up his sword. He sent out a distress call to his troops, who began to scurry back aid their master.

“Well. Are those fucking skeletons?! How the fuck does that work?”

*That is getting annoying*. Hades concentrated on finding several small stones, then shot them at the drones, reducing them to scrap. “Let’s go rock-of-ages!” he cried as he launched himself at the uptight minor god. Terminus tried to grab his blade, but at the last second he fell into the shadows only to reappear behind the stone god. He plunged his sword at the base of its neck as he commanded the earth to swallow up the rogue god.

Terminus desperately tried to pull the sword from his neck with one hand, while trying to free himself from the ground with the other, while the skeletons began hack at the god without mercy, pieces of stone covered in ichor falling to the ground.

“Oh for fuck’s sake!” the annoying voice cried as another group of drones hovered over him. “You and fat ass over there are fucking worthless!” A small hatch on the bottom of every drone opened and what looked like a small satellite dish snapped out. “This may hurt a bit, and if i’m being honest I hope it does.”

Hades fell to his knees as he was overwhelmed with pain. All of his other selves were *gone*, and no matter how hard he tried he couldn’t split himself anymore. The pain was just like what he felt at the ruins of Camp Half-Blood, and he could feel himself growing weaker and weaker with each passing moment. He watched in horror as all the skeletons he had summoned collapsed into piles, some even turning to dust.

With the last piece of power that he could command, he launched a femur into the air and had it fly around like a boomerang to take out the drones. The pain stopped and he collapsed onto all fours, taking ragged breaths. *What the fuck was that*, he thought, eyes wild with fear. He tried to feel out for Demeter, but found himself lacking in that ability. He tried again, but this time searching for his son. The result was the same. He pushed himself up, but fell back to the ground instantly.

It was at that moment that Terminus managed to free himself from his earthy prison. The minor god exploded out of the dirt, spraying Hades with dirt and bone. The stone giant then reached behind its head and with both hands ripped the sword free. With one glowing hand Terminus healed his wound.
and glared at Hades.

“Oh. That’s right. You’re still here,” Hades groaned as he tried to stand on his shaking legs. “Joy.”

The minor god looked at the sword, then wound his arm back before pitching the black blade into the night sky.

“That was a gift from my wife!” Hades yelled as he began to hobble away from his enemy. “You’ll have to answer to her about that!”

Apparently Terminus did not like any of his witty banter, as the god’s body burst into white flames as he began to charge a him.

“Rhea,” Hades squeaked before he was tackled by the two-ton god. He felt his ribs collapse, the bones piercing his lungs. The intense heat washed over him as it charred his flesh into ash.

The Fates must have been feeling generous as he found just enough strength to call the shadows to his aid, disappearing from Terminus’s grasp only to reappear under a pile of rubble that was just big enough for him. He focused what little energy he had left to mend himself.

*I let my emotions get the better of me.*

*Again.*

Maybe Persephone was right; maybe he did rush into things without thinking sometimes. But this was his daughter, (well Pluto’s daughter, but that was just semantics) he was her father and that meant he had to protect her. He despised how he had to watch as Hazel and Nico were forced to take part in the great prophecy, unable to actively assist them unless he wanted to be cast into Tartarus for eternity. It wasn’t fair that his children were forced to do something that had been dozen of times before and he was only allowed to appear to them at predetermined times to offer them cryptic clues or a little bit of praise.

The endless cycle of war was why he rarely had children. As the god of the underworld he knew better than most that everything was born to die, but mortals had free will, while demigods were slaves to fate.

He ribs reassembled themselves and his lungs began to fill with air again, his breathing was labored but it beat not breathing at all.

*New plan: Find Demeter and the boys, get out of here, and return with all the minor gods we can find.*

When he felt like he could move without wanting to cry, a new sensation for him, he began to crawl out of the rubble, careful to avoid bringing it down on top of him. When he got out to the street, the very same one he had ripped asunder, he found a piece of lumber and used it as a walking stick to help keep himself upright.

Whatever those drones had done to him had rendered him practically mortal now after recovering from Terminus’s crushing blow. Unlike at Camp Half Blood, he couldn’t feel his powers returning to him, instead they were diminishing with each passing moment.
He made it to the edge of the city before he caught sight of Demeter.

The goddess of the harvest and law was fighting a foe he couldn’t see; slicing the air with her scythe and sprouting hedges to separate her from her unseen foe.

He wasn’t in any condition to fight, but he hoped that he could use what little power he had to give his sister the upper hand.

As he made his way over to the battle he started to notice that something was off. For every plant that the goddess grew, vines would spring up and wrap around them, then rip them from the earth.

**Vines? Terminus has no power over plant life.**

Then he saw him: Dionysus. The Olympian was ghostly pale, and looked as if he had dropped a considerable amount of weight since Hades had last seen him. His once pudgy red face was now gaunt and sunken, his colorful wardrobe had been replaced with a black jumpsuit, similar to the one’s Hades distributed in the fields of punishment.

“I never did like that drunk,” he coughed as he discarded his makeshift crutch and did his best to run towards the battle.

He watched as the two gods clashed, Demeter using her scythe to slice the god of madness to pieces, only for the god to use grape vines to patch his wounds. The harvest goddess then tried to counter the vines with her own, opting to use watermelons instead, the melons would grow to preposterous sizes before exploding, covering Dionysus in its remains. She then used the opportunity to get in close and lopped off his left leg.

**Now’s my chance!** He shadow traveled across the remaining distance stood on the fallen god’s chest as he used the last of his energy to radiate pure entropy, and vines the wine god tried to summon withered instantly.

“Demeter! Find the boys!” He shouted. “Get them to safety!”

“Your sacrifice will always be remembered” she said as she sliced off Dionysus’s remaining limbs.

“What? No! Come back for me too you idiot!” He screamed as he fell to his knees. “Hurry!” He wasn’t sure how much longer he could keep the Olympian bound, but he was positive it wasn’t going to be long. Ten seconds tops.

“I’ll be back faster than two shakes of a lamb-” Terminus appeared behind her and slammed her face into the ground, before igniting his arms. Demeter thrashed and tried to swing her scythe at her assailant as her head was being incinerated.

“Wow! You two are really something!” the annoying voice laughed as more drones flew around them. “I had poor Terminate-us scouring the city looked for you and you show up to help your lady-friend!”

Terminus was now on top of Demeter, one hand pinning her to the ground while he wailed on her with the other flaming fist.

Hades tried to help her by splitting his efforts, trying to decay both rogue gods simultaneously. The flames on Terminus’s arms dimmed slightly and his blows slowed down, but at the same time Dionysus was recovering faster. “Come on you old hag!” He shouted. “Get up! Save the boys!”
“Ah how sweet,” the voice taunted. “You have pet names for her! Generally I call my girlfriends “honey” or “babe”, but I guess “old hag” works too.”

*I will find that mortal and rip out his vocal chords!*

With one final burst he managed to stop Terminus’s assault, the stone god temporarily reduced to nothing more than a statue. “You’re nothing compared to the eldest son of Kronos,” Hades chuckled as he felt the vines wrap around his throat. He was spent, every ounce of strength he had was gone, he couldn’t even find the energy to struggle as he felt the vines constrict.

“Ah fuck! What the fuck did you do to Terminate-us?” The voice shouted as one of the drones flew mere inches from his face. “Oh well, we’ll just hit her once and she’ll be as helpless as you. You’ll both make lovely additions to my collection.”

The drones then hovered over Demeter’s still body, and like before a small dish unfolded from within. Instantly Demeter screamed in agony as her body twisted and her back arched, as if trying to get away from some unseen malevolent force.

“This is turning out to be a great night!” the voice laughed. “I mean sure, I owe Morgan an apology after witnessing those spooky scary skeletons, but hey I can admit when I’m wrong!”

*So this is how the story of Hades ends. Choked to death by a grape vine while watching his sister writhe in agony. Somehow that’s oddly… fitting…*

Just as he was about to lose consciousness (another first for him) He saw his son appear from the shadows. Nico rushed the god of wine and sliced his stomach open, golden ichor and organs spilling onto the field.

“Who the fuck is this asshole?! Terminate-us! Stop doing your Rodan impression and do something you fucking over-sized lawn ornament!”

Without loosing momentum, his son slashed the vines that bound him. “Come on dad,” his son said as helped him to his feet.

“Terminate-us! Fuck!”

He tried to walk, but in the end Nico ended up dragging him over to Demeter. Nico then set him down and ran to the harvest goddess’s squirming form. As Nico stepped under the drones he seemed to flinch, but he pressed on and dragged Demeter under her shoulders, before pulling her over to him. The drones scurried to get back over them, but Nico grabbed him and Demeter and pulled them into the shadows.

"FUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUC!

Just before he lost consciousness he couldn’t help but think that he had never been more proud of his son.

Chapter End Notes

That could've went better...

Hades handled the news about Camp Jupiter rather well I think. I mean, I would impale
the person who was responsible for my child's safety.
Pity though that Poseidon could have turned the tide (ha!)

Another reason for the failure was that Hades has severely underestimated what the mortals are capable of, something he won't do again. He thought he and Demeter would just walk in, put on a show, smite some people, while the guys grabbed Hazel. He never expected to encounter Terminus or Dionysus, and he certainly never expected to have the god slapped out of him...

This event is far from over, as we have to see what's happening with everyone.

Speaking of which next chapter will be.... PERCY!!!!
*queue confetti*
The son of Poseidon returns after a lengthy absence and boy does he have A LOT of things going through his head ;)

Hey did you like what you just read? (probably not) Leave kudos!
Thoughts, theories, corny jokes? Leave a comment!
I love hearing from you guys! Always make my day!

Until next time, you're beautiful babe!
His head was clearly not in the right place to be running through the streets of New Rome looking for his friends.

For some time now his thoughts had been focused exclusively on his family and Annabeth, but now he had something else eating at him.

“I kissed Nico,” the son of Poseidon groaned as he ran down a side alley, careful to avoid making any noise.

Nico didn’t kiss him, no he kissed Nico.

And it felt right.

As they had floated there, arms around each other, he couldn’t help but notice the way Nico’s long dark hair was plastered to his forehead, how the boy’s skin seemed to glow in the moonlight, how light he felt, and just how happy he looked just to be there with him.

He thought of how Nico had been with him since that terrible day at the hospital, always trying to coax him out of his shell. How the son of Hades was so patient and kind with him, even after he had slit his wrists. So what if he removed all the pockets from his clothes? It seemed reasonable when you took Riptide into account.

So, in the heat of the moment, he had bridged the small distance between them and kissed his best friend. It started slow, almost chaste, but they found a rhythm and soon he was desperately kissing the son of Hades as if his life depended on it. It felt and tasted radically different kissing Nico than it did with Annabeth, but it wasn’t a bad kind of different, like Nico was chocolate to Annabeth’s strawberry.

“That is a terrible analogy,” he groaned as he darted out from the alley to a small side street. He knew Frank and Hazel had gotten an apartment somewhere nearby, but he couldn’t remember exactly where.

He tended to let Annabeth handle those kinds of details.
His stomach twisted then collapsed in on itself at the thought of his girlfriend.

*What would she think about all this? Oh gods, what would mom think about this?* He imagined them standing before him, arms crossed, glaring at him with disapproval. They were gone for less than two months and he was already locking lips with the first willing person?

He stopped in the middle of the street and let out a frustrated cry.

He hated himself. He hated himself because if he had never been born his mom wouldn’t have had to marry Gabe, she wouldn’t have been abused for all those years. If he hadn’t been born she would’ve been able to go to school and wouldn’t have had to work those terrible hours at low paying jobs. She probably would’ve still married Paul and Estelle would have had the chance to grow up in a loving family.

If he had never been born someone else would’ve been the hero of Olympus and Annabeth would’ve lived a nice normal life at camp. If he hadn’t been there, Annabeth probably would’ve been able to convince Luke to come back to their side, and they probably would’ve gotten together.

*That had been what they wanted right? I was just thrown in the way to make everyone’s life miserable.*

Then there was Nico, who’s every tragedy could be traced back to him. If there wasn’t a great prophecy then Zeus wouldn’t have killed his mother and he wouldn’t have had to live in a casino for the next seventy years. Even if that still happened, then at least Bianca would still be alive. If he hadn’t met Percy then the son of Hades wouldn’t have suffered in silence watching him and Annabeth.

*He and Will would’ve have probably gotten together sooner.*

When he got to another dark alley he rested his head against the dirty brick wall and took a deep breath. He was tired of these constant mood swings and the self-loathing. He just wanted everything to go back to how it was, but he knew that was impossible. All he could do was follow Nico’s advice and take it one day at a time.

“Hey did you hear that?” a man’s voice called out.

“The angst filled scream of a teenager trying process the complexities of life?” a woman’s voice chuckled.

“Yeah… That,” the man agreed. “We better check it out.”

*Ah crap.* Percy carefully peaked around the corner and saw four armed men walking down the street. They were all wearing black combat gear that made them look a SWAT team and all of them had some kind of automatic rifle with flashlights attached. He ducked back around the corner just as one of beams of light panned over.

He looked down at *Riptide*, the bronze blade glinting in the moonlight, and frowned. He had brought a sword to a gunfight; a sword that passed through mortals as if they weren’t even there.

*This is a massive design flaw!* He tried to picture how a fight would play out: he could rush out and try to disarm one of them while commanding the waters in the sewers below to burst out and wash them away, but the odds of him getting shot were way too high for his liking.

*But if I die, I could be with Annabeth in Elysium. They’d think I’d gone out like a hero.*
He shook the thought from his head. He was resolved to stay alive until he set things right.

*So fighting is out of the question...* he turned to walk further down the alley and had a sudden realization: it was a dead end.

He ran down the alley and tried to climb the back wall, but was unable to get a good grip. “Stupid Romans and their need for perfection,” he grumbled as he looked for anything that could help him. The side walls were just as smooth as the back walls and there wasn’t any downspouts or low hanging gutters to climb either.

“Did you seriously just check under that bench?” A voice called, closer than it was before.

The only thing available in the alley was a flattened cardboard box, and he concocted the dumbest idea he had ever had. He carefully grabbed the flattened box and assembled it as quickly and quietly as possible. Once assembled he set it on its side and crawled in, pulling his knees to his chest and tucking his head between his knees, and waited.

He held his breath when the beam from a flashlight illuminated the alley.

“I think it came from down here!” the woman’s voice called out.

“And what? They’re hiding in that box? Please that only works if you’re Solid Snake,” a man chuckled.

“Better safe than sorry.”

A single shot echoed through the alley.

Percy bit his hand to keep from screaming, the bullet had ripped through the flimsy cardboard and grazed his cheek. It was a burning stinging pain, but he had felt worse.

“Something’s in there,” the woman said. “That box should have went flying!”

He reached out for the water that was flowing through the sewers underneath, and urged it *up.*

The ground began to shake, a massive crack appeared on the back wall of the alley, and he could hear buildings collapse into piles of rubble.

“Do you guys feel that?” someone yelled.

“Shit! We’re under attack!”

“Fall back to the pens!”

It wasn’t until he released his control on the water did he realize he wasn’t the one who made the earth shake.

He stayed in his box for a good fifteen minutes before he dared to crawl out. The short amount of time in the confined space had left his muscles cramped. It was also hard to crawl out with his now
wounded hand, having bitten it so hard it was bleeding.

“Ow. Ow. Ow,” he groaned as he stood up. “You know I really miss monsters. They talked, boasted, threatened to kill me, then they died. It was a good system,” he sighed. “Great. I’m talking to myself now…”

He went to wipe the blood from his cheek and flinched at the touch. He limped out of the alley and used Riptide as a mirror to assess the damage.

“Ah come on!”

The bullet had nicked his left earlobe and left him with a serious gash that was easily five inches long. The wound was bleeding profusely, but he knew it was nothing to be concerned about. If there was one thing he had learned from shaving: any cut to the face bled like crazy.

He ripped a small chunk of cloth from his shirt and urged some clean water up from the sewers. He had figured out how to remove particles from water after drinking some of the nasty well water at the farm.

“See Jason? I help out, I keep the water clean,” he scoffed as he dipped the piece of fabric into the small spring. He then tenderly began to clean the blood from his face as he continued to search for Frank and Hazel’s apartment.

It was depressing to see the once lively demigod city crumbling and devoid of life. New Rome had become a shining beacon of hope for him and now it was gone. This was the place where he and Annabeth were supposed to live after high school, they were going get their degrees here (well Annabeth was, but he would try), and he thought they’d even grow old together here.

He could still picture it, the two of them moving into an apartment together, probably with Frank, Hazel, Jason, Piper, Leo, and Calypso living nearby. Heck, Will and Nico too when they were older. They’d spend the summer at Camp Half Blood, teaching the younger demigods everything they needed to know to survive, and then spend the rest of year in New Rome.

*But that’s impossible now.*

He wanted to scream, to cry, to just rip something apart, but last time had been too close of a call.

The earth shook again he heard something explode off in the distance. He hoped it was Hades and Demeter causing a distraction, but he couldn’t help but worry about Nico.

Also Jason.

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It was by sheer luck he found Hazel and Frank’s apartment building.

He had been walking down a small street in the residential section of New Rome, when out of nowhere Demeter came crashing through several houses; the wreckage filling the street. His path obstructed, he backtracked and turned down a street he had neglected earlier.

But as he made his way down it, he started to recognize things. The small book shop Annabeth had once spent a whole day in, the ice cream shop he, Nico, Jason, and Reyna chugged milkshakes to
see who was the fastest (there were no winners, only brain freezes), and the fountain with the fat cherubs pissing where Calypso thought she could drink from, to the shock of everyone (although it was incredibly hot and after that Leo had to go “adjust his pants”).

Letting his memories guide him, he found the three-story marble apartment complex that Hazel and Frank called home. He knew it was a long shot that they were in there, but he had to keep believing they were okay.

He used *Riptide* to pry the door open, even in New Rome people locked their doors. The inside of the building was trashed, walls had giant holes in them, people’s various belongings were scattered throughout the halls, and he even thought he saw a hand coming out of dark doorway, but he tried to ignore it.

He made his way to the top floor, Frank and Hazel more or less had the best apartment in the city (perks of being a praetor he sadly found out after resigning). He remembered helping them move in and how amazing the place was. It had four bedrooms, and a bathroom with a whirlpool tub, a very large kitchen, and the main room had a huge window that you could practically see all of New Rome through. He had told Frank that if he didn’t fly to the senate everyday then he was wasting an awesome opportunity.

Annabeth had slapped him upside the head for that.

Women did just not appreciate his brilliant ideas.

When he got to the top floor he carefully crept to the apartment’s solitary door. A big part of him wanted to knock, the result of his mom drilling manners into his head for years, but he shoved the ridiculous thought aside.

*There is like a zero percent chance anyone is in there.*

He tried to handle, but found it was locked. So once again he was forced to use *Riptide* as a pry bar, jamming the blade between the door and its frame, before putting his weight against the hilt. This door took a bit more effort to open than the one into the building, which made him happy knowing that his two friends had secured their home.

*But locks can’t keep everything out. Gabe got in.*

He pushed those thoughts aside and stepped into the apartment. Unlike the rest of the building everything seemed to be in place. The furniture was in their proper places, there was no litter on the floor (*Neatness must be a child of Hades thing*), and in the kitchen Hazel had her drawings displayed proudly on the fridge, including one of all of them together with the Argo II floating in the background. He grabbed that drawing as well as a few others and carefully folded them before stuffing them into his back pocket.

*Nico and Hades will want these.*

Although he was positive that he was alone, he decided to continue his search just in case Hazel was hiding or asleep.

The bedrooms were empty, the beds were made and a fine layer of dust had settled over everything. The bathroom was the same, but the toilet seat was up; which would have definitely gotten Frank in trouble if Hazel saw. The laundry room was empty, aside from a bunch of black and camouflaged clothing that was neatly folded on top of the dryer.

Only when he went back to the dining room did he notice that something was off.
Sitting on the table was a large dollhouse, not one of the plastic Barbie kinds his mom was always staring at whenever they went shopping, but one made out of wood, and judging by the tools and brushes laid out on the table, it was handmade. It looked a bit like the house from *The Addams Family* to him, but instead of dingy and spooky, it was painted white with red tiles. It had three levels with a tower in the front, all the window panes were made of real glass which was really impressive when he saw the tiny greenhouse attached to one side.

Just as he was about to walk around and look inside the doll house something slammed into the back of his head and he fell to the floor.

“Hey there partner,” a deep voice drawled, “didn’t your mom ever teach you to knock?”

The world went black.

There was a part of Percy that wished he hadn’t woke up.

While unconscious he wasn’t aware of anything. Annabeth, his family, or forcing himself on the son of Hades, all of that pain was gone in the sweet embrace of the unknown. The conscious world though held all that pain, and apparently much more.

“My fucking head,” he groaned as he squeezed his eyes shut. His head felt as if it was throbbing and the base of his neck felt stiff.

“Good. You’re awake,” a deep voice said.

Percy’s eyes snapped open as he remembered what had happened. He was sitting in a chair at Hazel and Frank’s dining room table across from a bear of a man. The guy may have been sitting down, but Percy bet if he was standing he would be well over six feet tall. His shoulders were huge, and Percy wondered if at some point if the guy had played professional football. He was wearing beige combat fatigues and his salt-and-pepper hair was cut to military standard: short and neat.

Percy would have been terrified of the guy, but all he could do was laugh.

The guy was currently holding some kind of smart phone inches from his face while he was adjusting a pair of reading glasses and squinting at the screen.

“Having some technical difficulties there gramps?”

“One second,” the bear grunted as he tapped the screen a few times with his thumb. “You would think that bastard would have made this simpler to- Ah! There!” He cried before tucking the phone into his shirt pocket.

Percy cringed as his head started to hurt worse than it did moments ago. *Probably just from him screaming. I wonder if this is what a hangover feels like…*

The two stared at each other in silence for a rather uncomfortable amount of time, before the man picked a small wooden chair from the inside the dollhouse and sighed. “This is a gift for my daughter.”

“That’s… nice?” Percy said, confused by what that had to do with oh…anything! *At least I’m not*
The graying man spun the tiny piece of furniture around in his hand, before smiling and setting it back in the house. “Before I was drafted-“ He stopped and made a face as if he had just tasted something disgusting. “I promised PB, my daughter, a dollhouse. A lifetime later I’m finally getting around to it.”

“Drafted?” Percy didn’t know much about military history other than who the good guys were and who were the bad guys, but he was pretty sure the last draft was for the Vietnam War. “I think your daughter might be a little old for a dollhouse. Maybe you should get her like a car or just take your grandkids for a few days or something.”

Something flashed in the old guys lifeless gray eyes. Anger, sorrow, pain; Percy wasn’t sure which. The old guy leaned back in his chair, the old wood squeaking from the shift in weight. “She’s a hunter.”

“Oh! Oh…” Percy gasped as he realized the guy was referring to the hunters of Artemis. “Look… ah-“

“George.”

“George. Wait, George? Really?”

“What’s wrong with that?” the bear-of-a-man asked as he leaned forward.

“Nothing!” he cried, raising his hands in surrender. “Just not used to having to fight guys with names I pronounce right immediately. Kind of nice really.”

George chuckled and leaned back into his chair. “I know what that’s like. Vietnam was a bitch in that regard.” He scratched his chin, which looked as if it had been shaved recently. “What makes you think we’re going to fight?”

“Because this is always how it goes,” he sighed. “We talk, we laugh, I start to think you got the short end of the stick in life, you reveal that you’re an asshole, you attack first, and then through a mixture of luck and skill I turn you into dust.”

“Sound tedious,” George hummed.

“You have no idea.”

The old guy hummed for a moment before leaning forward, the chair squeaking causing Percy to cringe again. “Well how about we just skip the pleasantries and get to it then?” George asked, rapping his knuckles on the table.

“What, and miss your monologue on how the gods have fucked you over?!” Percy asked, holding one hand to his chest feigning shock. “There are standards and procedures that must be followed!”

The truth was he was actually trying to by himself some time now. Since he had woken up he had been trying to grab the water around him and use it the blast the guy away, but for some reason the water refused his call. At first he thought it was because he was disorientated from the blow to his head, but now he was starting to get worried.

“Standards and procedures huh?” George asked, stroking his chin. “You sound just like my old CO.”
“Yup, no fighting can occur without at least ten minutes of banter, witty or otherwise,” He awkwardly chuckled as he desperately called out for even the tiniest drop of water. He knew _Riptide_ would be worthless, as the blade would pass harmless through him, and he also knew he would lose to the guy in a brawl. The only advantages he had were his powers and maybe speed. “And by my count we still have six or so minutes left.”

The bear-of-a-man smiled and leaned back into his chair, the squeaking aggravating Percy’s throbbing skull. “Well then, how about we take turn asking questions.”

“Yeah, sure. Sounds good,” he said absently as he continued to strain for even a single drop of moisture. _What the fuck? Is this because of Hades stabbing my dad? Or did he decide to cut me off?_ The thought of Poseidon cutting him off would have been laughable before everything went to hell, but now… Now it seemed well within the realm of possibility.

He hated his father now, and he let him now it every opportunity he got. From trying to rip his head off at the hospital, to flipping him off the night before Jason left, he wanted his father to know he was done with him. After all, he was responsible for the death of his family.

_Probably not the best idea I’ve ever had… Of course he would cut me off._

“What do you know about the Hunters of Artemis?” George asked, snapping him back to the present.

“They’re a group of girls from all walks of life who have been granted immortality by Artemis. They generally hate everything with a Y-chromosome,” he shrugged. _If I play dumb and tell him the basics, I won’t give away anything important. That’s what Annabeth would do! “My turn. Are you responsible for the destruction of Camp Half Blood?”_

The old guy picked up another piece of tiny furniture, a small lamp, and held it to his eye for inspection. “Sorry partner,” he shrugged, “that was the old man and the research team’s doing. I was stuck babysitting Atlas.” He then reached into his shirt pocket, pulled out a folded up photograph, and handed it to Percy. “Have you ever seen that girl?”

Percy took the photograph and carefully unfolded it. He felt that if he ripped it, it would be the last thing he would ever do. The picture was of George and a young blonde girl that Percy was sure was his daughter. The two were seated in front of a Christmas tree, both wearing matching ugly red Christmas sweater, the kind his mom would force him and Paul to wear. They both looked so happy that it was hard to believe the man seated before him was the same guy.

“Well?”

Percy looked at the girl again, wracking his mind for any recollection of ever meeting the girl.

_Wait._

He had seen her. She was one of the huntresses that had saved him, Nico, and Bianca at Westover Hall. She had looked a bit older, which seemed possible if the picture was taken well before she disappeared. He didn’t really know her, only seeing her around camp when the hunters had stayed at camp.

He took a deep breath and looked George in his cold gray eyes. “Yeah. Yeah, I’ve seen her. As far as I know she’s still with the hunters.”

A look of relief crossed the old man’s face and then the guy’s eyes started to water. He hung his head and shook it, a big goofy grin on his face. “I knew it! I knew it! I knew it,” George chanted as
if it was his mantra.

Percy cleared his throat to get the guy’s attention. “My turn. Were you responsible—“

Before Percy could finish asking his question, in a burst of speed that should have been impossible for such a large guy, George pulled a knife from a holster on his hip and brought it down, burying the knife in the son of Poseidon’s hand, and pinning it to the table.

Percy tried to scream, but only a gasp escaped his mouth. On pure instinct with his free hand he reached into his coat pocket for *Riptide*, pulling out the bronze blade and uncapping it in one motion. He swung the blade at George’s head, the magic metal passing harmlessly through his flesh, but sending his reading glasses flying. As he finished his desperate slash, George grabbed his arm and slammed it down on the table; *Riptide* was sent flying across the room only to embed itself in a portrait of Frank’s grandmother.

“Didn’t- Didn’t your mother ever tell you not to hit a guy with glasses?” George grunted as he held Percy’s arm down.

“Fuck you!” He screamed as he tried to pull his arm free. He tried to slam his head into George’s but the old veteran had been prepared for that. With one giant hand he slammed Percy’s head to the table. “Fuck you!” he screamed, trying to kick his way free.

*Why the fuck aren’t my powers working!*

There was a sickening tearing sound and a sudden sharp pain in what had been his free hand. He screamed in agony when he tried to free either of his now pinned hands. He screamed again when George kicked his legs out from under him, causing him to fall back into his chair, the sudden shift doing more damage to his hands.

“Time was up,” the man chuckled as he returned to his seat.

Percy could give the guy credit for one thing: he was very tidy.

As the pools of blood grew around his impaled hands, the grizzled veteran had popped into the kitchen only to return with a roll of paper towels. The graying man tore a handful of paper towels off the roll and blotted the blood up, then used more to line the table to prevent dark liquid from dripping on the floor.

The large man drug his chair around so he was seated inches from Percy. “What’s your name?” he asked as he pulled out yet another large knife.

“Fuck you!” Percy hissed as he struggled to free himself, doing even more damage to his hands. He thought about trying to use his teeth to remove the blades from his hands, but he had a sneaking suspicion that he would end up losing his teeth if he tried. He did not want his head slammed against the table again, it hurt enough as is.

“Fuck you, huh? Popular name around these parts,” the sadist laughed.
Percy sneered at him before spitting in the guy’s face. It served two purposes; the obvious insult and to be used as a weapon. He did his best to ignore the intense pain and focused everything he had on to try using the glob of Percy to run up the guy’s nose. It wasn’t his best plan…

Unfortunately all that happened was George wiped the spit from his face then quickly jabbed his knife into Percy’s calf.

“Fuck!” Percy screamed as he felt the knife being pulled from his leg. “What the fuck is wrong with you?!”

He didn’t get an answer, instead the veteran reached down and grabbed Percy’s ankle. “You’ll appreciate this,” the man grumbled as he pressed the sharp blade against his ankle.

There was a tearing noise followed by the feeling of his Achilles tendon rolling up inside his calf. He screamed in agony before vomiting on himself. He redoubled his effort to free himself, no longer caring about damaging his hands further.

“Yeah, I vomited too the first time my Achilles was severed,” George chuckled as he reached for Percy’s arm. He grabbed Percy by the elbow and turned his forearm to him. “These brands are a liability.” With his other hand he used the blood covered blade to trace the small trident on his forearm. “I knew who you were the moment I saw this. Mr. Jackson.” He felt the blade sink into his skin and tear his flesh as his captor continued to trace the trident. “Powers include aquakinesis, geokinesis, and limited zoolingualism.” He patted his shirt pocket. “Without this you’d wipe the floor with me.”

Exhaustion was setting in Percy was losing the will to fight. His body was wracked with pain and he couldn’t hold a coherent thought. He slumped forward in his chair and started to cry.

“Cheer up partner. It will all be over soon,” his captor said as he pulled the blade from Percy’s arm. “Let me just remove this and then I’ll end it for ya. Sound good?” He placed the blade’s edge just above the tip of the trident. “If you thought you were hurting before-“ He pressed the blade down and pushed the blade down the son of Poseidon’s arm, severing skin from connective tissue, “you thought wrong.”

Percy’s head slammed down on the table into a pool of his own blood as his mouth stretched wide as a blood curdling scream rushed out of his mouth.

“Don’t worry partner,” the man sighed as he pressed the blade against Percy’s throat, “It’s all over now.”

“I don’t think so!” an angelic voice called out as a small black form tackled George to the ground. Percy strained to turn his head and look at the fight that was taking place mere inches from him.

“Nico?” he shakily asked.

The son of Hades was currently straddling the old guy, in one hand he had the knife that George had been using a moment ago and he was viciously stabbing the guy in the chest repeatedly. George wildly lashed out at the son of Hades, but Nico evaded every blow and continued to mutilate the guy.

Soon, George stopped fighting back and Nico got up and rushed over to him.

“It’s okay Percy!” he cried. “It’s okay.” Nico grabbed the knife that was currently pinning his left hand to the table. “This is going to hurt,” Nico whispered as he ripped the knife free.
Too exhausted to scream or even react to yet another new pain, he just continued to cry.

“I’m so sorry Percy,” Nico said and if Percy wasn’t mistaken it sounded like he was crying as well. “Just… Just hang on,” he murmured softly as he removed the last of the knives.

“Neeks…”

“Shhh, don’t talk Percy.” Nico whispered as he carefully helped him up. Nico ducked under his left arm and leaned him against his small frame, careful to not let him put any weight on his dangling foot. “We’ll get you home Percy.”

He tucked his head into the crook of Nico’s neck and shook uncontrollably.

“Let it all out Percy,” Nico said as he carefully hugged him.

Just as the shadows opened for them, he planted a small tender kiss on the son of Hades’ cheek, before he passed out.

He could sort his feelings out later.

Chapter End Notes

Ummmmm… Wow?
Like I seriously might be a psychopath….

Anyway, there was the long awaited return of Percy! Yay!

As you can see he’s a bit confused and out of it. He trying to come to terms with the death of his family, Annabeth, and the loss of a future he had wanted for years and was finally in reach. Right now he can’t decide if he wants to keep living or not. Well after everything that just happened it’s probably the latter at the moment. But then there’s Nico!

Nico who has been his constant companion through all of this. Nico who has shown nothing but patience with him. Nico who just the other day went out of his way to make Percy have a great day. The same Nico who he had kissed in the pool. It would seem their roles have swapped wouldn’t it? :)

Hey did you like what you just read?
Leave a kudos!

Thought, theories, or just need to vent?
Leave a comment!

I love hearing from all of you! Even if it's just a "keep it up!"

Well thank all you beautiful people who made it this far. You’re awesome!

Next chapter is Jason!

I hope all of you have a better time than Percy!
Jason

Chapter Summary

Warnings: unethical surgical procedures
Tonight:
Jason returns to his former home to look for Hazel.
Jason gets a new toy.
Jason has the weirdest encounter.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Jason almost didn’t see the drones in the dark of the night.
He was flying from rooftop to rooftop, making his way to the senate, when no less than a dozen of the aerial units zoomed past his head. Just as the last one was about to collide with his head, he let the wind release him, sending him into a freefall only to call on them again just before he impacted the pavement below.

“They must be heading for Demeter and Hades,” he muttered to himself as he continued on his way.

Shortly after he, Nico, and Percy decided to split up to look for Hazel, the gods began their attack. Whole streets were shaken to rumble, others were upheaved by massive roots sprouting from the earth. All he could do was watch with a heavy heart as the only home he had known for years crumbled before his eyes. When Hades said they’d provide a distraction, he didn’t think they meant leveling his childhood home, but he pressed on.

New Rome could be rebuilt, his friends could not.

He carefully flew in the shadows to avoid being spotted by the mortals that were patrolling the streets. He never thought he would see heavily armed men and women patrolling the streets of New Rome. After all, the city had Terminus to protect everyone. But apparently the god of boundaries had been unable to prevent the city from being taken.

He set down in a small park that overlooked the senate, and carefully crept close to a group of guards that were sitting around small table under a street light. They were all chatting quite loudly and seemed to have their guard down, which was strange considering he could still hear Hades and Demeter leveling street after street.

“God these things are hot as Hell,” one of the guards complained as they removed their helmet,
setting it on the table.

“You should really keep that on Kev,” another said as it flipped the visor on its helmet up. “We are currently under attack.”

“Pfft, the egg-heads got that under control,” the first guard said, while adjusting a strap on his arm. “The statue and wine guy will handle that.”

Statue? Wine guy? Jason inched closer to hear better.

“But what about those skeletons Dagonet reported?” Another guard asked, this one holding its rifle at the ready, their body rigid.

“What about ‘em? You heard what happened,” the guard hefted up his rifle and gestured towards a small black cylinder that was fixed to the barrel, “one pulse from this and they crumble to dust.”

Jason didn’t know much about firearms other than what he had learned from comics and television, but he was pretty positive that small cylinder was something he should try to get his hands on. He’d seen that some weapons ad grenade launchers mounted on them, but the thing was way too small.

Pulse? Like a laser?

“Yeah, I guess you’re right,” one of the guards shrugged. The guard then pulled a small box from a pocket in their bullet proof vest. “Anyone up for a game of Poker?”

As the small group of men and women began to play their card game, Jason watched them closely, looking for any opportunity to steal one of their weapons. All of them had their weapons either slung over their shoulders, or resting on their laps, so it was unlikely he could just reach out and grab one or use the wind to blow one his way.

But what about…

He focused on the barrel of gun of the guard closest to him and ordered a slight wind to circle it. When no one seemed to notice the small whirlwind, he had the winds scoop up a small amount of dirt to add to the vortex. He continued the process for several tense minutes until he was satisfied.

Now all he needed to do was wait.

It wasn’t until the third hand of poker did his plan come to fruition.

The guard went to adjust how the weapon was hanging from his shoulder, and instantly there was blinding flash of light, followed by a scream as the guard was thrown to the ground by twenty-thousand volts of static electricity.

It was a prank he liked to pull on Leo when the son of Hephaestus started to tune him out while working in his bunker. Leo would start to agree with everything Jason would say, at which point Jason would generate an electrical charge on whatever surface the mechanic was working at. When Leo would move ever so slightly the surface would discharge shocking him back to reality.
And Calypso would laugh until she couldn’t breathe.

The difference between now and then was Jason had never allowed the charge to be this large. While Leo would jump and start swearing in a variety of languages, the guard had been rendered unconscious and his boots had been blown off his feet.

“Jesus Christ!” one of the other shouted as the rest jumped to their feet.

“What just happened?” another shouted, holding their weapon at the ready, scanning for any potential enemies.

“I think he was hit by lighting!”

“There's not a cloud in sight!”

“Look it doesn’t matter,” one of the guards shouted as they lifted their injured colleague up. “We need to get him to medical now!”

There was a murmur of agreement and the rest helped carry the unconscious man away, leaving the weapon where it had fallen. When the group is out of sight, Jason carefully floated out of his hiding space and snatched the discarded weapon up, before shooting straight up into the air like a rocket.

“This thing is heavier than I thought it would be,” he whispered to himself as he landed on the roof of the senate.

The gun looked like it something a Hydra agent would be seen using against Captain America with all the strange modifications to it. He hefts it to his shoulder and looks through the strange scope mounted on it. Through it he can see the thermal signatures of nearby mortals and in the distance can see that part of the city is on fire. He feels that underneath the trigger are two buttons, each of which is wired to a different module on the barrel. He carefully traces the wires and determines that the top button is for the strange cylinder that was allegedly a weapon and the other goes to what looks like a laser pointer.

Carefully he presses the button to the laser pointer and a beam of bright green light illuminates the ground in front of him, startling him.

“Oh that is awesome!” he chuckles as he spins around pointing the laser at a window on the other side of the square. He quickly releases the button though when he realizes other people could potentially see the light and trace it back to him. He is actually amazed the little light still works, he would have thought that the electrical discharge would have fried everything electronic on rifle, but the damage appears to only have warped the barrel slightly.

He’s tempted to push the button for the mysterious cylinder, but an explosion in the distance reminds him that he should be searching the senate for any of his friends. He slings the rifle over is back and began his search for an unguarded entrance.

“Twilight is a load of bull,” the son of Jupiter huffed as he carefully floated into a senate office through a window. “No way in Tartarus that Edward got into her room that easily…”
Every entrance to the governing body of New Rome had been heavily guarded. No less than six guards stood at every entrance, with concrete barricades, electric fence, mounted machine guns, cameras, and what Jason could only describe as a giant bug zapper. Knowing a losing battle when he saw one, he decided to look for an open window.

So in an agonizingly slow process, he flew around the building, careful to avoid any patrols by hiding in the shadows, and tried to open every window. Once he found one that was unlocked, he learned that windows are really only easy to open from the inside. There were no grips or handholds on the outside, instead he had to carefully lift the glass with the palms of his hands.

Then once he had the window open, there was the problem of the screen, not that it was hard to cut the wire mesh with his sword, but what to do with it once it was free. He couldn’t just drop it to the ground below as there was a good chance someone would hear the impact or stumble across it, and he couldn’t just let it fall into the office for similar reasons.

So with no other choice, he held onto the wire mesh as he tried to float into the small opening feet first. He was doing fine until he got to his waist, when the stock of the gun clattered against the window. So awkwardly he swung the gun around so it laid on his chest while clutching the screen with one hand and carefully floated inside.

“Those movies were so fake,” the blond grumbled as he carefully deposited the screen onto a dust covered desk. He readjusted the confiscated weapon and took a deep breath. He knew he wasn’t going to find Hazel there, but with Percy searching the apartment and Nico using his shadow travel to check everywhere else, he couldn’t just refuse the son of Hades’ orders. He hoped that he was wrong, that he would find Hazel, Frank, Reyna, and everyone else hiding in some broom closet, but even his optimism had its limits.

“Gods damn it,” he breathed as he started to notice whose office he was in. On the wall opposite of the desk hung the American and Camp Jupiter Flags, with various photos and medals hanging between them showcasing military and political achievements both mortal and demigod. There was even a picture of Jason shaking the owner of the office’s hand.

“Julius Simmons,” he sighed as he “accidently” knocked over a picture of the senator and his blond scarecrow of a nephew into a garbage can. “Of all the senate offices I had to fly into yours,” he sighed.

Julius Simmons was not only the fraternal uncle of now deceased Octavian Simmons and senator of New Rome, but also one of the senators representing California in the US government. He was one of the reasons why the former pontiff had gotten his position and why Reyna and he had to justify every single action before a committee after an endless train of paperwork. If it wasn’t for him and his cronies, Jason would have led an expedition to Alaska shortly after becoming praetor instead of having to make due with ineffective weapons.

“It’s not cost effective,” he mocked, imitating the senator’s high pitched voice. “Maybe you should check your ego before you risk the lives of our people!” Feeling a bit spiteful, he knocked over a few more family keepsakes into the trash.

Thankfully he and Reyna only had had to deal with the man rarely, as he was stuck in Washington most of the time. The blessing ended there though as they were still stuck with Octavian.

“I wonder how you’re trying to spin your nephew’s death,” Jason huffed as he exited the office.
Jason hugged the ceiling as he made his way to his and Reyna’s former office.

He didn’t know how long the mysterious mortals had been in control of Camp Jupiter and New Rome, but they had been extraordinarily productive.

The interior of the senate had been altered dramatically. Some rooms had been removed completely, while new ones had been created in areas that had once been wide open spaces; the only way he knew his way to the praetor’s office was by remembering where things had been. Video cameras had been placed in every room, forcing him to float above them.

That was fine though, as below him mortals hustled to-and-fro. The strange thing though very few of them were guards or even appeared to be armed. Some were wearing suits carrying briefcases, some wearing casual clothing talking amongst themselves while drinking coffee, some were laying cables along the edges of the rooms or doing some kind of construction work, but there was a group that caught Jason’s eye and they seemed to be heading in the same direction as him.

He thought it was a man and a woman, but the hairnets and mint green scrubs they were wearing made it hard to tell. They were talking animatedly to each other as they hurried across the building. Jason couldn’t make out what they were talking about only catching a few words: “titan”, “transplant”, “boss”, and “witch”. The latter was of big interest to him, as he only knew of one witch at Camp Jupiter.

“And her name is Hazel,” he smiled.

“Hey did you guys hear that?”

He flattened himself against the ceiling and berated himself for being so stupid while the mortal looked around confused.

His former office was virtually unrecognizable.

Gone were the giant purple and gold banners, the antique desks, the pottery, Aurum’s and Argentum’s dog beds, the elephant-foot umbrella stand, everything. The only way he could tell he was in the correct place was the eagle mosaic on the floor. The room used to feel so large and open to the son of Jupiter due to its tall domed ceiling, but the mortals had installed a series of catwalks that left him feeling that he would be spotted at any moment. Below was a jungle of plastic sheets and tubes that the mortals he had been following disappeared in to. However, in the center of the jungle, surrounded by the steel walkways, was a pyramid of glass that sat above the whitest room Jason had ever seen, filled with people in the mint green scrubs.

*Something important is going on in there.*

He scanned the walkways from his hiding spot near the apex of the dome for any guards or security cameras and was surprised to find none. The son of Jupiter silently landed near windowed pyramid
and peered inside.

What he saw made him want to retch.

The scrub clad mortals were spread around two tables surrounded by medical equipment. On one table was the hideous remains of a mortal that appeared to either have had their skin ripped or burned off, along with their limbs. The face though would haunt Jason’s dreams though for years to come, form where he stood it seemed to be staring straight at him, the eerie white orbs bulging from the sockets and its mouth seeming pulled into a horrifying grin.

Whomever or whatever was on the second table was obscured by the mortals, but Jason could see a small metal pan filled with what appeared to be large sheets of blood soaked human skin.

He watched in horror as more and more skin was piled into the pan, before two mortals wheeled the table with the pan over to the R-rated Red Skull impersonator. The two mortals then began to place the pieces of flesh over the flayed body, carefully smoothing out the pieces like how Jason used to make his bunk.

“Horrifying isn’t it?”

Jason nearly shot straight into the sky at the unexpected question, instead he merely jumped to the side and spun around to face his possible assailant.

It was a small elderly man, wearing a black pinstripe suit, a Chicago Cubs baseball hat, and was leaning heavily on a polished black cane. “I’m sorry,” he chuckled. “I didn’t mean to startle you.”

“It’s… alright?” Jason asked hesitantly. Now he was prepared to fight mortals if push came to shove, but in his head he always pictured big muscular guys armed with machine guns and machetes, not the old guy from Atlantis: The Lost Empire. The guy looked so frail and helpless that Jason thought if he blew on the guy he’d fall over.

The man waved him off. “Nonsense, I should have announced my presence sooner!”

“Um, it’s fine Sir. Seriously.” The more Jason looked at the guy the more he was sure he had seen him somewhere before.

“Sir?” the man laughed. “It’s refreshing to see a young man your age with manners. Now- oh! Wait! Look!” the man cried out, pointing down below into the operating room.

Jason turned his attention back to the scene below. The mortals had finished covering the flayed person with the skin and were stepping back. At first it seemed like nothing was happening, but then Jason saw it.

The skin was adhering itself to the body.

Each piece wrapped around the body and fused to muscle as if it had a mind of its own. Soon angry red tissue was covered with flawless porcelain white skin. Plump red lips covered the ghastly grin, and a pointed nose formed. Long midnight black hair erupted from its scalp and tumbled over its shoulders. Just when Jason was about to look away when he noticed that the body was definitely female, when dark lines began to appear on the woman’s porcelain skin, weaving into intricate patterns.

“Modest too, huh?” the old man laughed.

Then it clicked. Jason knew where he had seen the man before. “You were that guy doing magic
tricks on the news!”

The old man arched an eyebrow and leaned on his cane. “You saw that? I thought you were one of the boys we rescued from the Amazons?”

“Um, well you see… They had TV’s for us to watch while we were locked up?” It was the worst lie he had ever told in his life, but he figured he could get out of the building before the old guy hobbled his way to an alarm.

The old man looked him over. “Ah, that makes sense… uh what was your name again?”

“You never asked,” Jason sighed in relief. Apparently the old guy took everything at face value. “Jason Grace,” he said offering his hand for the mortal to shake.

“Oh my, I always forget to introduce myself,” the man chuckled as he shook Jason’s hand, his grip surprisingly strong. “In our little organization I go by- Oh look they’re wheeling out T:C!”

Jason once again turned his attention to the surgery below and all color drained from his face.

The mortals were no longer obstructing his view of the other table, instead focusing on the tattooed woman on the other, but he wished they hadn’t. There on the table, with their limbs removed and skin peeled off with the exception of the head, was Calypso.

Jason clutched the walkway’s guardrails to stop himself from collapsing.

“Behold the modern Prometheus,” the man said, patting Jason’s back. “Forever bound and day after day the scavengers pick her flesh clean, only for it to regrow during the night, the process repeating until the end of time.”

“Why would you-” Jason couldn’t finish the question.

The old man began to rub small circles into his back. “You have to remember that despite their appearance, they are not human. That girl down there is the key to saving thousands, if not millions, of lives. As I said of so poetically, she regenerates her flesh and organs overnight. Imagine, some poor mother needing a new kidney and she wouldn’t have wait in agony for a replacement that may never come.”

Jason released his hold on the rail and watched as some mortals wheeled the love of Leo’s life away and he swore to all that was holy that he would free her, but right now he was in enemy territory and severely outnumbered. “That’s amazing,” he said through clenched teeth.

“Now,” the man clapped his hands together, “I know that was hard to watch, at least for me anyway, so why don’t we go to my office and get to know each other. After all, the night is young and I am long overdue for a good conversation.” The old man turned and began to walk away, gesturing for Jason to follow.

Jason wanted to shoot the man in the back or call the winds to send him falling to his death, but he felt like this man was just caught up in something horrible. Besides, he was willing to talk and information was something he desperately needed. “You never did tell me your name,” he said as he jogged up behind the strange man.

The man stopped and turned to face the son of Jupiter. “Merlin. Call me Merlin.”
“Would care for a cup of tea?” Merlin asked as they entered the strange man’s office.

“Yes please?”

Jason was seriously starting to believe that Merlin was not the boss like he claimed to be. His office was in what Jason was sure had been a broom closet during his tenure as praetor. The room was pretty cramped to begin with, but with the file cabinets, four chairs, flat screen TV, and Jason’s old desk (so that’s where it went!), you had to be a goat to maneuver around.

“Hope you’re not claustrophobic,” Merlin chuckled as he hopped over his desk. “Generally I stay in the New York office, so this is more-or-less a temporary space.” He then opened a drawer in his desk and pulled out two mugs and two small plastic cups with foil on top. “My mother would be amazed and horrified at the idea of making tea without a kettle,” the man laughed as he placed the small plastic cup in a strange looking coffee machine. “Granted, she would have been horrified by almost everything past 1940.” He pulled out several sugar packets from the drawer and tossed a couple to him. “What about your mother Mr. Grace? What is she having a hard time coming to terms with?”

“I never knew my mother Sir,” he answered while fiddling with the sugar packets. “Never really knew my relations, my family is one of choice.”

The machine beeped and the old man handed Jason the steaming mug of tea with a shaky hand. “I can understand that,” he smiled sadly. “I know the pain of losing a family and you know the pain of the unknown. Each pain different, but so very much alike.” He removed the spent plastic cup and replaced it with a fresh one. “Are you adjusting well to your freedom?”

Doing his best to play the part, Jason shrugged his shoulders. “Yeah, I think so. Just trying to get used to the changes.” It wasn’t a lie, but it wasn’t the truth either. He thought of the recent transition from Camp Jupiter, to Camp Half Blood, and then to LaMoille. “The people are nice, which is good,” he said before taking a sip of tea.

“I would hope so. Everyone here has a different story, but all have a common denominator: the gods have hurt them or someone they loved.”

“How so Sir?”

Merlin stroked his small white beard and sat back in his chair. “In more ways then you can count. We have mothers and fathers looking for their daughters that have been stolen away by Artemis. Brothers and sisters looking to avenge their siblings who have been raped by lecherous gods and goddesses. Men and women whose families were devoured by monsters or just so happened to cross paths with an angry god. Even children whose half-siblings existence brought calamity to their home.” The machine beeped again and the man added five packets of sugar to the hot beverage. “In a way, they are all looking to bring some order to this mad world.”

Jason wasn’t sure how to respond to that. He had never really considered that mortals would be caught in the cross fire. How many girls had joined the hunters because of a broken heart, leaving their parents to wonder what happened to their daughter? He knew from history that the gods didn’t always take “no” for an answer, so why wouldn’t the victims and their families want justice? What of Paul, Sally, and Percy’s sister? If she was born would Paul be as welcoming to demigods in his home? After all he had known first hand the kind of trouble demigods attracted.
The sat in silence sipping on their beverages until Jason spoke up. “Why the demigods Sir? Why not just focus on the gods and monsters?”

“Of course you would ask that,” Merlin chuckled. “The demigods, or DGs as you should have learned in your orientation, are the tools they use to control our world. By removing them from the equation we are taking control back for humanity. Does that answer your question, son of Jupiter?”

Jason jumped out of his seat and flew back as far away from the man as possible in the small room. “How did you know?” he barked as he drew his sword from his jeans pocket and commanded it to grow to full size.

“Oh, put that thing away. You know it won’t work on us mortals,” the man laughed. “Please, sit back down. I wish to continue our conversation.”

He’s right.

He shrunk his sword back down and tucked it back into his pocket, but he removed the rifle from his shoulder and pointed it at the old man. “How. Did. You. Know,” he repeated.

Merlin rolled his eyes and took another drink from his mug. “Do you even know how to use one of those?”

Truth was Jason had no idea what he was doing; the only experience he had with guns was from the few war video games he played with Piper and her dad, but he was pretty sure the point and click interface was similar in real life. He aimed the rifle at the coffee machine and squeezed the trigger.

Two things happened nearly simultaneously: the coffee machine exploded into a million pieces and the gun kicked back, the stock slamming painfully slamming into Jason’s shoulder before the rifle clattered to the floor.

“That was a gift from Percival,” Merlin sighed, looking sadly at the remains of the machine. “One of a kind too.”

“How did you know!” Jason hissed as he rubbed his shoulder.

With one arm the old man swept the remains off the desk into a waste basket. “The brand was a dead giveaway my young friend. It was interesting though that you gave me your real name.”

“I don’t like to lie,” he hissed.

“And admirable quality in-” The phone that was sitting on the edge of the desk rang. “One second,” the old man said, holding up one finger as he grabbed the phone. “Yes? No. Everything is fine. I was just fiddling with something I shouldn’t have. No need to worry. Hmm? Oh!”

Jason couldn’t believe what he was witnessing. The old guy was just ignoring him as if he wasn’t even there!

“Turkey on rye. Uh, apple sauce please. What are you getting? Uh huh. Yeah I always get the wrong thing. Huh? No I’m a man of conviction I stick with my choices.” He removed the phone from his ear and covered the receiver with one hand. “They’re going to a sandwich shop, would you like anything?”

If it would have been physically possible, Jason’s jaw would have been on the floor. I just shot up this guy’s office and he orders dinner!
The old man snapped to get his attention. “Do you want a sandwich?”

“Nooo!” Is this guy for real?! First I have to deal with a god who is an addict with a yeti and now I have to deal with a senile old man? I’m done.

Merlin returned the phone to his ear. “Hmm? Just a friend. He doesn’t want anything, but grab a…” he looked at Jason for a moment, eyes narrowing, “Turkey with a side of potato salad just in case. Yeah. Okay, thanks and tell the kids the magic man says hi,” he laughed before hanging up the phone. “I think you’ll like these sandwiches. They’re nothing compared to the ones in New York, but they’ll suffice.”

“What makes you think I’m sticking around to eat? How do you know I’m not going to shoot you?” the son of Jupiter asked as he picked the rifle back up.

“I’ve made it this far in life by reading people and you my young friend are not a killer.” Jason was going to protest, that he had killed dozens of monsters, but the old man held up one wrinkled hand. “There’s not a doubt in my mind that you’ve killed your fair share of monsters, ghosts, and ghouls, but there’s a difference between beasts and man. And you don’t possess that killer edge.” Merlin sighed. “Not like your older brothers. As for the gun, shoot me as much as you like. Celestial bronze bullets. I’ll have a holey suit, but I’ll be unscathed. Now you can sit back down in that chair you flipped over, wait for our sandwiches, and continue our little conversation; or you can try to kill me, and possibly succeed, but I can promise you and your friends won’t make it out of here alive.”

“How did you-”

“Your friends?” Merlin smiled. “We’ve known you were here since you arrived in the tunnel with G:HP and G:DC. My right hand man George currently has young Jackson captive in his apartment, Percival is currently using his pets to take down your godly partners, and the rest of security is on the hunt for Mr. di Angelo.”

Jason picked up his chair and sat down.

“What do you think?” the old man asked as he took a small bite of the turkey sandwich.

Jason swallowed and beat his chest. “It’s not bad.”

“Not bad he says!” the man laughed. “When I was your age a turkey sandwich a luxury item!”

“Are we going to do the “when I was your age” crap?”

The old man shook his head as he swallowed a spoonful of applesauce. “No, but I don’t get to use it very often.”

The situation should have been a lot more stressful an awkward than it was, but after Jason had sat back down Merlin had continued on as if nothing had happened; telling him more about how the gods, not just the Greek and Roman, had hurt everyone in their organization one way or another.

“What is the name of your little group anyway?” Jason asked as he swallowed another bite of his sandwich.
“Hmm?” The old man looked up from a small tablet he had removed from his jacket. “Oh! Avalon!”

“Avalon?”

“Yes, Avalon, after the mythical island that king Arthur was taken to to heal from his injuries.”

“Why?”

The old man tucked the tablet back into his coat pocket and reclined in his chair, threading his fingers. “Two reasons really. The first is when I first came to America, the first book I read was *The Once and Future King* by T.H. White at the recommendation of a very dear friend,” he smiled but his eyes were melancholy. “The second is to honor the men and women who pushed the Roman out of England with only steel, fire, and their wits.”

“Oh.”

“Oh indeed,” Merlin sighed, scratching his wrist.

Jason swallowed the last bite of his sandwich and tossed the wrapper into the waste bin. “Why?”

“How what?” the man asked.

“How haven’t you called the guards? Why did you want to talk to me? Why- why did you get me a freaking sandwich?” Jason asked, gesturing wildly at the waste bin.

Merlin laughed deeply. “The sandwich is because I’m an old man who finds the youth of today far too skinny. I can tell you from experience that you want a little extra meat on your bones. As for the rest, it’s because you are going to be my messenger. You are going to tell whatever gods are still out there what you have learned. You will tell them that humanity will no longer be shackled by prejudice and hatred that the gods create. That we may be a flawed species, but we will no longer be divided by race, religion, or creed. That from now on, any problems we face will be of our own making.”

Before Jason could speak, the room’s temperature dropped several degrees and Nico stepped out of the shadows.

“Ah, I believe your ride is here!” Merlin chuckled as he waved at the son of Hades. “Would you like something to eat young man?”

Nico walked over to Jason and rested a hand on his shoulder, all the while glaring daggers at the old man. “Fuck off,” the son of Hades hissed.

Merlin frowned. “Well at least you have manners Mr. Grace.”

Nico dug his fingers into his shoulders painfully. “If we didn’t need to go now I’d rip your throat out,” Nico hissed.

Merlin’s eyes widened in fear, but he soon started to laugh again. “Well before you go Mr. Grace, let me show you my motivation,” he said as he began to roll up his sleeves.

Just before the shadows devoured him an Nico, the old man held out his wrist for them to see.

On it, a series of numbers and letters were tattooed.
Oh boy.

For some of you, you know what's up now. I've been hinting at it for a very long time now. I'm not going to spell it out exactly yet because that is coming in a future chapter.

Poor Jason.
He just watched his first home be leveled by Hades and Demeter without them giving a second thought. He's got Calypso on his conscience now and he feels like crap that he couldn't act. Plus he got that major revelation that is definitely going to change him for better or worse. you'll get to see how this effects him as we continue with the tale.

Did you have any feelings for what you just read? Leave a kudos!
Thoughts, protests, recipes, etc? Leave a comment!

I love hearing from all of you!

next chapter is Nico! *evil smirk*

Until next time, stay golden ponyboy!
Nico

Chapter Summary

Warnings: blood, violence, profanity

Tonight:

Nico has emotional whiplash.

Nico learns to hate musicians.

Nico goes full BAMF to save his family

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Will would kill me,” the son of Hades wheezed as he rested against the barracks’ wall. “I really should have taken gym.”

Up until then he never realized how much his lifestyle had changed since being forced to stay at Demeter’s farm. Back at camp his days consisted of helping Will out in the infirmary, sparing with Jason, training the new kids, and long walks in the woods with Will. At the farm though he was cooking, cleaning, doing the laundry, homework, tutoring Jason and Percy, and trying to keep everyone’s spirits up.

Definitely should incorporate some kind of cardio into my routine.

It also didn’t help that his back was still hurting from time-to-time, severely limiting his mobility, but right now as he was struggling to catch his breath from an activity that wouldn’t have phased him two months ago, he knew he should have pushed through the pain.

“Hey did you guys hear something?”

“Oh come on!” he groaned as he rushed into the dark space between the barracks, clutching his aching side.

“I thought it came from over here!”

When Jason had returned with news that mortals had taken Camp Jupiter and New Rome, he had been skeptical.

Now though, after seeing the packs of armed men and women roaming around the Principia, occupying the fifth cohort, and the mess hall, the idea didn’t seem so farfetched.

“Check between the buildings!”

“Crap…” he stepped into the shadows only to reappear an instant later inside bath house. He collapsed to the floor and took in a few ragged breaths. Apparently he had overdone it with shadow travel the day before taking Percy out for a day of fun, as the small leaps from building to building
were seriously draining his stamina. It probably also didn’t help that he hadn’t slept previous night. How could he after what happened?

Another reason why Will would kill me, he thought, but with a smile on his face. He pulled himself to the edge of the communal bath and absent mindedly skimmed the surface of the calm waters with his hand, as he tried to control his breathing.

I kissed Percy.

That thought had been replaying in his head for nearly twenty four hours, only interrupted by Jason’s return and his father’s violent coping methods.

I kissed Percy and he kissed me back!

It was giving him severe emotional whiplash. On one hand, one of his deepest desires had come true, and not only that, it was more incredible than he could have ever imagined. The kiss had started slow, and he had managed to enjoy the taste of Percy’s lips; salty but sweet with a hint of blue food coloring.

He furrowed his brow. “Does blue food coloring even have a taste?”

It didn’t matter, because that’s what Percy tasted like! From there the kiss only intensified and Percy was the one who did it! They had clung to each other desperately and had only parted when they had to take breath. They had floated there in each other’s arms panting heavily, their foreheads pressed together, until they made eye contact, at which point the son of Poseidon started to laugh.

And so did he.

Percy swam him back to the shallow end of the pool, where they finally separated, only for the two of them to have a massive splash fight.

Percy using his powers was totally cheating, but he did let himself get wet so I guess that was nice.

They had splashed about for what had seemed like a fun filled eternity until they both grew too tired and exhausted to continue. When he had started to climb out of the pool, gravity’s sudden return and the unexpected weight of his waterlogged clothing almost made him fall on his face, but somehow Percy had been there to catch him.

“Careful Neeks, your legs will probably feel like Jelly for a while,” the son of Poseidon had laughed.

They had walked hand-in-hand to the locker room, where Percy had dried the two of them off with a single touch. They each changed on their respective side of the room, but before Nico could get his shirt on the older teen had spun him around and pinned him against the lockers before starting another intense kiss.

Somehow, and he wasn’t sure how or when, they made it back to the farm, their lips swollen and bruised. They watched a few shows on the television (Percy’s choice of course), fed the animals one more time, ate the last of the leftovers (he even ate his fair share), and finally they crawled into their beds with quiet wishes of good night to each other.

Then the guilt hit.

Hard.

Will.
Will hadn’t even been dead three months and here he was making out with Percy. He felt even guiltier because it was Percy. What did that say about his and Will’s relationship? That it only happened because he couldn’t have Percy? That Will was some kind of consolation prize or that he just got with him because Will was the only guy showing him any kind of attention?

He felt sick to his stomach.

He knew that none of that was true, that he loved Will with an intensity that scared himself. He knew that if he could have one wish come true it would be to have Will standing beside him again.

So for the rest of the night, he alternated between how amazing Percy was and how much of a scumbag he felt he was.

“This is pointless,” he huffed as sat up. “I have to focus on finding Hazel, not this soap opera garbage.”

He took out a rubber band from his jeans and worked his hair into a ponytail. “I should probably at least get this trimmed,” he grumbled as he snapped the band into place. “Will liked it long, not messy,” he chided himself. He pushed himself up and did a few stretches before stepping into the shadows.

He stepped out of the shadows into a nightmare.

His goal was to reappear at the base of Temple Hill, just behind Pluto’s temple. It was a location Hazel frequented, when Nico wasn’t around to take her to the top of their father’s temple to watch the sunset. It was something the two of them shared and he was hoping he would find clues to her whereabouts there.

Instead as the shadows dissipated his sense of smell was assaulted by the overwhelming odor of rotting meat, followed by the ground beneath his feet rolling, making him fall on his back.

“What the-“ he grumbled as he sat up and rubbed his head. At first he thought he had landed in someone’s laundry, noticing the numerous Camp Jupiter T-shirts and jeans that filled his field of vision, but then he noticed that there were still bodies in said clothing.

“Oh my gods!” he cried as he scampered off the bodies onto the grass nearby. “I’m so sorry!”

He had landed in a ditch filled with the bodies of Roman demigods, all of them in various states of decay.

“How is this possible?” he asked himself as he knelt over the corpse of a young girl, her lifeless blue eyes staring at the night sky above them. “You deserve so much better. You all do,” he sighed as he gently closed her eyelids.

“How did father not notice this?” he asked aloud as he examined a green-haired boy around Jason’s age. The back of the boy’s neck had an incision that started at the base of the skull down to his shoulders, exposing vertebrae and nerve.
He said he had the tribunal monitoring for any deaths…

He went around and examined more bodies, his stomach twisting in disgust and sorrow. The body’s told tales of starvation, torture, and resistance. Many of the fresher corpses’ were emaciated, their faces sunken and their ribs threatening to pierce through their chests. Some of them had what he assumed where bullet wounds. However, the most common feature he found amongst them was the strange incision on their necks.

How…

He wanted to desperately have the earth swallow up and conceal the mass grave, but he knew that shifting and rumbling of the earth would bring him unwanted attention. The dead deserved to be at rest, not wasting away in some open hole for the carrion beasts to feast on.

Just as he was about to shadow travel away, a body crashed down onto the first girl he examined with a sickening crunch. He looked up and saw several men standing at the edge of his father’s temple with a cart piled high with bodies between them. He could hear the men talking, but they were too far away to make out anything clearly. It also didn’t help that they had a radio on, blaring some awful song about people swaying.


He summoned the shadows around him and disappeared into them with a new revelation.

The Tribunal have betrayed my father.

Temple Hill would forever be a place of unspeakable horrors and pain to Nico for the rest of his days. The temples were demigods and legacies once went to seek advice or give offerings to the gods had become twisted mockeries of what they once were.

Many of the temples had been converted into some kind of prison where the citizens of New Rome were kept like cattle. He carefully snuck into his father’s temple and was sad to see the place had been stripped of all of its precious metals and stones, leaving the place feeling hollow and lifeless.

And not in the fun zombie kind of lifeless…

The demigods held inside the temple didn’t even acknowledge his arrival, which he supposed might be have been a good thing as he didn’t want the mortals to know he was there.

“Don’t worry, I’m here to help,” he grunted as he used his stygian sword to pry the gate open. The gate was stubborn and refused to budge, but he was stubborn too. He put his entire one-hundred pounds of weight against the blade and dug his feet into the marble floor.

“Come on!” he said through clenched teeth, before the gate popped opened, sending him falling on his face. “Ow… No one tell Reyna…”

He leapt back to his feet and tried to look cool and collected to the group of demigods he had just freed. He expected them to cheer, to rush to rush out of the cramped pen, to whoop, to scream, to do
anything really, but to his confusion they just stood there with a thousand-yard stare. “Guys?”

Nothing.

He walked into the pen up to the nearest captive, a college aged guy with sandy blond hair. “Hey!” he said while waving his hand in front of the guy’s face. “You’re free?”

Notta.

He flicked the guy’s forehead with his index finger, but the Roman didn’t so much as even blink. “This is going to be super embarrassing for me if you’re a zombie…” The son of Hades held his hand in front of the blond’s mouth and determined that, yes he was breathing.

This is creepy.

Nico continued to poke and prod the Roman, but no matter what he did, he was unresponsive. The guy didn’t even whimper when the son of Hades kicked him the cannoli’s!

“How are you standing!?”

It wasn’t until he went behind the demigod with the intent to just push the guy out of the temple did he notice the strange scar on his neck. The scar started at the base of his skull and went just below his shoulders, exactly like the ones on the corpses.

“That can’t be a coincidence,” he whispered as he ran two fingers down the length of the red tissue. He thought he felt a bump near the base of the skull, but he wasn’t sure if he was imagining it or not. “Will I could really use you right now,” he sighed.

He went around the pen examining the others and found that they were all just as unresponsive and had the same scar.

“Crap! We’ve had a breech in Pen Twelve!” a voice called out, startling the son of Hades.

“The motion sensors record only an unknown entry! They should still be in here!” another voice cried.

Taking that as his queue to leave, he spared one last glace at the enslaved Romans and stepped into the shadows.

“I’m over doing it with the shadow travel…”

“Son of a bitch! Get me more drones out there now!” screamed a short guy in lab coat, as he threw a cup of coffee at a short Indian man.

Nico had emerged in what had been the temple of Vulcan, Roman god of the forge. Like the other temples it too had changed considerably; gone were the anvils, hammers, and furnaces. In their place were dozens of computers, flat screened televisions, and hundreds of empty coffee cups. He stood behind what Chelsea called a server, the noise from its fans concealing his labored breathing.

“I’m over doing it with the shadow travel…”

“Percival we’re going as fast as we can!” the shorter man said as he shrunk away from the screaming redhead.
“It’s Brian!” the redhead screamed. “This double-o-seven knights-of-round-table crap is so stupid Rashid!” the man hissed. “Now go get me some drones!”

“Yes sir!” the smaller man cried as he scurried away.

From his vantage point Nico could see around half of the screens. The large monitors that were mounted to the temple walls flashed between various scenes of Camp Jupiter and New Rome. One second the exterior of the bath house that he had caught his breath in, changed to the street that Hazel and Frank lived on, and then to the little park that overlooked the senate. Many of the computer screens displayed random views inside the various temples, while others had overhead views of New Rome.

However, on one monitor near Nico, someone was playing *Galaga*. The player taking nervous glances around him as he blasted away at the pixelated alien invaders.

“Get me an update on G:DB!” The red head shrieked from the front of the room.

*I have a feeling no one likes this guy…*

A small mousey woman with short blue hair stood up from her chair. “We’re at a standstill. G:DC is faster, but G:DB-“

“Who?”

The woman sighed and Nico imagined she was probably rolling her eyes. “Really sir?”

“Seriously I have no idea who you’re talking about,” Brian smiled.

“Fat-ass, sir.” She sighed as if she was done with everything. “Fat-ass can take whatever she deals out, and as long as we get the drones there before she disappears.”

“Great,” the redhead nodded she stroked his chin. “And the old man?”

“Merlin is currently en route to intercept DG:JJ,” a man called out as one of the giant screens switched to an old man walking with a cane down some hallway. “Don’t you think we should have security ready just in case?”

“Nah, the boss knows what he’s doing,” Brian shrugged. “I mean he did higher me after all.”

*So that’s the boss?* He thought as he studied the limping old man on the television. *He’s not what I expected at all…*

The redhead jumped onto an office chair and rolled halfway across the room, stopping next to a guy that looked to be around Percy’s age with a phone pressed to his ear. “And how about George? What’s that bag of PTSD doing?"

“Ah, he says he captured DG:PP?” The boy said hesitantly. “Says he’s going to need a body bag.”

*G:DC? DG:JJ? DG:PP? What does that mean?* He carefully peeked around from behind the humming server just as the small guy Brian called Rashid ran back into the room.

“The drones have made contact!” the man huffed, as he bent down and grabbed his knees to catch his breath.

“About fucking time Rashid! I had to interact with these peasants because you couldn’t do your job!”
“But-”

“Whatever,” the redhead huffed as he rolled away from the smaller man. “Put the feed up on the big screen,” he laughed as he pulled a tablet from his lab coat.

Nico had to cover his mouth with his hands to prevent himself from gasping. On the screen was his father and Demeter fighting what appeared to be Dionysus and a living statue. His father was covered in golden ichor and his armor was tattered. He was standing on Dionysus chest with tendrils of darkness shooting out from his hands to the former camp director. Demeter was pinned to the ground, the statue straddling her as it mercilessly pounded her face into the earth with flaming fists.

“Wow! You two are really something!” Brian laughed as he spun in his chair. “I had poor Terminate-us scouring the city looking for you and you show up to help your lady-friend!”

First off, that is wrong on so many levels... Second, Terminate-us? He squinted his eyes to look at the living statue. Wait! That’s Terminus! When did he grow arms?!

He watched as his father was seemingly struggling to channel his powers between the two fallen gods. Something’s wrong. An Olympian and one of the big three should be able to easily hold their own against another Olympian and a minor god.

“Ah, sir?” the mousey woman from earlier said from behind her desk. “Boston is on the phone, and they say they are having difficulties with some kind of blue wolves.”

The redhead waved her off. “Just tell them to check their batteries and increase the signal strength throughout the city.”

On the screen his father collapsed onto one knee as he shot off tendrils of darkness at Terminus and Dionysus. As the darkness surrounded the stone man, his assault slowed.

“Ah how sweet! You have pet names for her!” Brian laughed maniacally. “Generally I call my girlfriends “honey” or “babe” but I guess “old hag” works too.”

If it disgusted him, it must have infuriated his father, as the darkness surrounding Terminus seemed to swallow all light and the god stood as still as a statue.

“What did he do?” The redhead asked, eyes wide.

“We don’t know sir!” someone cried out. “G:T is unresponsive!”

“Ah fuck! What the fuck did you do to Terminate-us!” Brian shrieked as he rapidly tapped on his tablet.

Get him Father!

He watched in amusement as Brian slammed his tablet onto the marble floor, the screen shattering into thousands of little pieces. You better be afraid of the house of Hades!

Instead of continuing to throw a tantrum like a child, the redhead sat straight up in his chair, did a quick spin, and sighed. “Oh well, we’ll just hit her once and she’ll be as helpless as you.” He scratched his chin and smiled wickedly. “You’ll both make lovely additions to my collection,” Brian laughed.

The sense of pride he had felt only a fraction of second ago disappeared and was replaced by dread as he watched Demeter thrash around in agony, her back arching and her mouth twisting in what had
to be ear-piercing screams. Panic was written on his father’s face as the darkness surrounding the two fallen gods began to flicker in and out of existence. He watched as grape vines began to spring up from the ground around his father and the god of wine, slowly making wrapping themselves around his father.

*I have to help them!*

He stepped into the shadows and focused on finding Demeter and his father.

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The plan was simple: get everyone out.

He would admit it wasn’t a very good plan and that it lacked a lot of details, but that never seemed to stop Percy in the past.

As the exited the shadows he was met with a wave of intense hate that radiated from Terminus. The rule obsessed god was still immobilized thanks to his father, but by the way the temperature was increasing with each passing moment it wouldn’t be for long.

Demeter was still writhing and twisting on the ground, her eyes rolled back into her skull. Numerous small flying machines surrounding her.

His father was being strangled by grape vines, his body limp and unresponsive as the vines lifted him further off the ground.

Dionysus was just getting to his feet, his movements rigid and unnatural, as if he were a marionette with several of its strings cut.

He knew this wasn’t a fight he couldn’t win, he just needed to get his father and aunt to safety.

“Hey Mr. D!” he yelled as he rushed the god of wine.

Sadly the Olympian didn’t seem to notice or hear him, as it just raised one hand at his father.

“I’ve always hated you!” he roared, jamming his stygian blade into the god’s bloated gut. Without stopping he pulled the blade through Dionysus’s gut, and as he ran to his father he could hear the sickening sound of the god’s digestive system falling to the ground.

“Who the fuck is this asshole?!” he heard Brian scream through the aircraft speakers. “Terminate-us! Stop doing your Rodan impression and do something you fucking over-sized lawn ornament!”

“Terminate-us? Really?” he scoffed as he sliced through the vines that were strangling his father. He collapsed his sword and tucked it into pants pocket before he helped his father to his feet. “Come on dad,” he half whispered as he slung the taller man’s arm over his shoulder.

“Terminate-us! Fuck!”

The lord of the underworld tried to take a shaky step forward, but almost collapsed and would have brought Nico to the ground as well if he hadn’t braced at the last second. He tried to drag him over to where the goddess of the harvest was writhing on the ground, but it was too much for him to manage. Nico reluctantly set his father on the ground and jogged over to Demeter.
The machines above her had some kind of strange satellite dish on them, all of which were pointed at her.

*What could a machine possibly do to a god?* As far he knew, there was no way a mortal, or mortal technology for that matter, could do any real damage to a god. Sure he had heard the story of Apollo getting shot by a farmer who caught the god in bed with his daughter, but Apollo had merely stood back up and walked away as if nothing had happened.

*But she’s in agony.*

He took a hesitant step forward and squeezed his eyes shut, expecting to fall to the ground dead or at least in terrible pain.

There was pain, but nothing like he was expecting. Every muscle in his body started to ache instantly and it felt like his eyes were about to explode out of their sockets at any moment.

In other words, it felt like a really bad summer cold.

He crouched down and looped his arms under the plump woman’s arms. “Why are you all so heavy?” he groaned as he pulled his aunt’s body over to his barely conscious father. Just as the flying machines began to readjust their position he grabbed the lord of the underworld’s shoulder and tumbled into the darkness.

What little breath he had was forcefully expelled from his lungs when the two unconscious gods landed on him.

He whimpered in pain as he wiggled his way out from the divine dog pile. “You can never complain about Percy and Jason being freeloaders,” he wheezed. “Never!”

He collapsed back onto the top of the pile and took in a few labored breaths. He was utterly exhausted and knew he was pushing himself far too hard, but what choice did he have? He couldn’t just let his father get captured or killed by his former camp director!

His eyes widened. “Shit.”

Without Hades and Demeter to keep the fallen gods’ attention, Dionysus and Terminus would be free to look for Jason and Percy. Surely after seeing him they would look for others!

He pushed himself up on shaky legs and ignoring the pain in his chest. “I’ll be right back,” he gasped to the tangled pile of gods as he stepped into the shadows.

“From now on, any problems we face will be of our own making,” the old man from the television announced, pointing one crooked finger at Jason-

*Who is eating a sandwich… Glad to see you’re having a goodtime Jace!*
He appeared to be in either the world’s most cramped office or a broom closet. The old man, Merlin if remembered correctly, was sitting behind an impressive oak desk with crumb covered sandwich wrappings in front of him. Jason was sitting in a black leather seat across from the elderly man with half a sandwich in one hand and one of the guns Nico had seen the mortals carrying across his lap.

Did Jason take this guy captive?

“Ah, I believe your ride is here!” the old man chuckled, offering him a little wave with one wrinkled hand. “Would you like something to eat young man?”

Truthfully Nico was starving, but unlike a certain son of Jupiter he knew better than to accept food from strangers, let alone enemies.

Come on Jason! Even I know about Snow White!

“Fuck off,” he hissed as he walked over to Jason, careful to avoid knocking his shins into any of the crowded furniture.

“Well at least you have manners Mr. Grace,” Merlin pouted.

For some reason, possibly a combination of over-exhaustion and low blood sugar, the comment enraged him. He wanted to jump over the desk and beat the little man until his was black and blue, only thinking of Percy and his father made him hold back. “If we didn’t have to go now I’d rip your throat out,” he growled.

He couldn’t help but grin when both Merlin’s and Jason’s eyes widened in shock and disbelief.

To Nico disappointment though, the man started to laugh. Just as he was pulling Jason into the shadows, the old man started to roll up his sleeves. “Well before you go Mr. Grace, let me show you my motivation.”

The man held out his wrists and on them a sequence of numbers of letters were tattooed.

His motivation is a tattoo?

As it turns out, blue baked potatoes and roast does not taste nearly as well coming up as it does going down, the son of Hades learned.

“I really need to take it easy with the food coloring,” he groaned as he wiped his mouth with his shirt.

The shadows had dropped them off next to the still unconscious forms of Demeter and hades and the first thing the son of Hades did was drop to his knees and empty the contents of his stomach into a sandbox.

“Probably,” Jason answered, but his eyes were glazed over and all color was drained from his face.

As he started to push himself up, his left hand became translucent for a brief moment, before return to its normal solid state.
Crap I’m overdoing it with the shadow travel. I just need to grab Percy then we can wait until father wakes to take us back to the farm.

He hid his hand behind his back as he walked up to the son of Jupiter, who was staring at Demeter and his father with a funny look on his face. He didn’t know what that tattoo was, but it seemed to have upset his best friend. “Jason, what was that guy talking about? His motivation?”

Jason blinked and started to rub the brand on his forearm. “The holocaust,” Jason swallowed. “He’s a survivor.”

Nico was confused by what Jason was saying. He had never heard of the holocaust, but the man was a survivor of whatever it was. “I’m sorry, but I’ve never heard of that. Is that like the *Titanic* or some kind of plane crash?”

“Yeah Neeks. It’s like that…”

Nico bit his lip. Jason was clearly not telling him the full story, but he respected his friend enough not to try and force an answer out of him. Maybe this was triggering some kind of memory tied to his time with Disciplina? *Gods we still need to talk about that.* “Okay… I’m going to go grab Percy. Can you watch my father and Demeter while I’m away?”

Jason nodded as he stepped back into the shadows.

---

Tartarus had nothing on the hell he stepped into.

He had appeared in Hazel’s apartment just outside the dining room, where one of his worst nightmares was taking place. Percy was seated at the table his father had bought for Hazel and Frank, covered from head to toe in blood. The son of Poseidon’s hands were pinned to the table by two combat knives, surrounded by ever growing pools of his own blood. Something was wrong with Percy’s right leg, as his calf looked as if the muscles had rolled up into a ball and was spasming uncontrollably. There was a large gash on the left side son of Poseidon’s face that went from his earlobe to his cheek.

A large man with graying hair, who he assumed was the demon responsible for the horrific scene in front of him, slid a knife down Percy’s right forearm, removing a large sheet of skin that had been branded by the Romans. Percy slammed his head to the bloody table and let out a blood curdling scream that shook Nico to his core.

If he hadn’t emptied his stomach before, he would have then.

“Don’t worry partner,” the man sighed as he pressed the bloody knife to Percy’s exposed throat. “It’s all over now.”

Whatever exhaustion Nico had been experiencing before was gone as adrenaline filled his system. “I don’t think so!” he screamed as he launched himself across the room at the large man.

“Nico?” Percy wheezed.

He caught the beast off guard and knocked him off of his chair, his head slamming into the wall behind them. While the guy was disorientated, he managed to rip the knife from his hand. Overcome
with rage, he took the knife and repeatedly stabbed the beast in the chest, only stopping to avoid the man’s frantic wild swings or to knock away the remains of the phone he had hit in the beast’s pocket.

When the man stopped fighting back the only thing that stopped him was the sound of Percy’s labored breathing that somehow cut through the roaring in his ears.

Percy!

He rushed over to Percy’s side and carefully knelt down next to him. “It’s okay Percy!” he cried, but he wasn’t sure if he was saying that to comfort the son of Poseidon or himself. “It’s okay!” He knew he needed to get Percy to help *fast*, but the only way to do that was to remove the two blades that were pinning Percy’s hands to the table.

*Gods I’m sorry.* He grabbed the knife that was pinning Percy’s left hand to the table. “This is going to hurt.” Then with a quick jerk, he removed the blade and tossed it to the floor.

Percy didn’t respond, other than continue to cry, his body shaking.

“I’m so sorry Percy,” he told the son of Poseidon, tears beginning to leak from his eyes. “Just… Just hang on,” he whispered into Percy’s ear as he ripped blade out from Percy’s right hand.

Percy slightly opened his eyes and gave him half a smile. “Neeks…” he said, his voice a whisper.

“Shh, don’t talk Percy!” he whispered into the raven haired teen’s ear as he ducked under his arm and wrapped his right arm around Percy. He cringed as he lifted Percy out of the chair, careful to keep Percy from standing on his trashed leg. He felt sick when he noticed that the older boy’s foot seemed to just hang lifelessly from his ankle. “We’ll get you home Percy.”

He was mentally cursing his father for making them leave the farm without any nectar or ambrosia squares. *If he wasn’t in such a fucking hurry… No! This goes back farther! If he would’ve watched the over Camp Jupiter instead of Poseidon-*

He was interrupted from his thoughts when Percy tucked his head into the crook of his neck and began to shake, before he started to sob.

He tightened his hold on Percy and gently stroked his side. “Let it all out Percy,” he whispered in his ear. Nico looked over at the body of Percy’s tormenter and sneered.

*I swear I will set this right. No matter what. Just… Hang on Hazel.*

As he opened the shadows up for the two of them, Percy kissed his cheek before passing out.

“Damn it Percy,” he sighed as his cheeks heated up.

When they reappeared in front of Jason, he was terrified to see that his father and Demeter were still unconscious.

“Oh my gods! What happened to him?!” Jason cried as he rushed over and took Percy from him.
“It don’t matter, we got to get him home,” Nico wheezed as he leaned against an ancient oak tree and clutched at his chest. His whole body felt like it was tearing itself apart, and the tips of his fingers were beginning to turn to shadow.

“Are you okay?” asked the son of Jupiter as he adjusted his hold on Percy. “You don’t look so good Neeks…”

“I’m fine,” he lied through clenched teeth. “Just take Percy over to my father and Demeter,” he wheezed. “I’m going to get us home.”

The former praetor looked at him in disbelief. “You’re going to get us home? You can barely stand! There’s no way you can take us halfway across the-“

“I said I’m fine!” he screamed, startling a flock of birds that had taken residence in the oak tree for the night. “And we don’t have much of a choice right now Jason!” He pointed at Percy, who hung from the blond like a sack of potatoes. “If we don’t get him some help now he isn’t going to make it!”

Jason chewed on his lip, the small stapler scar momentarily disappearing before Jason nodded and carried the son of Poseidon over to the gods.

Nico took a few painful steps forward and almost collapsed to the ground, but managed to correct his balance at the last possible moment. He stalked over to his family and grabbed Jason and his father by their shoulders.

*Whoever or whomever is listening, let me get them home.*

The first thing he saw as the shadows opened, was the Garfield clock hanging on the kitchen wall.

It was also the last thing he saw before he collapsed to the ground, with a giant grin on his face.

*I did it.*

Then the darkness swallowed him.

Chapter End Notes

*twiddles thumbs* Well that was certainly something.

Is Nico alive? Well you'll have to wait and see!

So we saw that Nico is a bit more sure of wanted something with Percy, which we've known for a while now. However, he thinks that he was the one who kissed Percy in the pool, or at least that's the only possible explanation in his mind for him and Percy to kiss.
And while he is trying to understand what that even means, he feels incredibly terrible about doing so with the loss of Will still so fresh. He worries that he was using Will as a sort of replacement for Percy as he was seemingly unobtainable to him, and Will was willing. This will be further explored as the story progresses.

Nico is also the only one who has seen what Avalon is capable of, he just doesn't know it yet. He noticed that something was off with Dionysus, his motions jerky and unnatural. He saw both the successful and failed results of the neural interface implant as well as the command center and our favorite engineer. He and Jason have heard the vernacular that Avalon uses (Gs, DGs, Ts, etc).

Now I know some of you are probably asking: Hey! How did Nico not explode or drop dead from being exposed to the signal? Come on Bob if it was strong enough to stop Hades and Demeter surely it would have killed a demigod?

Now yes, the signal strength to take down a god would definitely kill a demigod instantly, but the reason why Nico was mostly unaffected by it is there if you go back and look around :)

Seriously the planning involved for this tale is nuts!

Hey! Did you like what you just read? Then leave a Kudos!
Thoughts, theories, recipes, honest-to-goodness feedback? Leave a comment!
Seriously I love hearing from all of you! (comments and kudos might be the only way our sweet little Neeks lives)

Next chapter is a surprise and should be up soon!

Thanks, you're all beautiful!
The snow covered valley shook as the giant’s lifeless body hit the earth. The beast had put up an admirable fight that would make it ancestors swell with pride, surely he would be welcome to the next life with open arms.

After all, it did deal the blow that was going to end his life.

“You died on your feet, Steve the Jotnar, a true warrior’s death,” the god of thunder gasped as he held one gloved hand to his side. “Well done.”

The icy winds of Jotunheim howled like wolves and nipped at his face, before seemingly running away only to attack him again.

“So this is Ragnarok?” He asked his dead foe, the mountainous body already coated in a fine layer of snow.

This was not the way it was supposed to end, freezing to death in some nameless valley after being stabbed in the side by a giant’s snow shovel.

No, he had been promised a death worthy of legend by Odin and the Nornir! He was to fight the world serpent Jormungand to the death, while an army of giants laid siege to Asgard, and the gods fought their greatest foes! Freyr and Surt! Odin, Tyr, and Fenrir!

“And there was something about Loki and a boat!” He roared to the lifeless form of Steve. “Wait. Have I been talking out loud this whole time?”

His end was supposed to be glorious and satisfying! He was to finally end his long dispute with the vile offspring of Loki, smashing its skull in with his mighty hammer, only to be poisoned by the serpent’s venom. He was then to take nine steps before falling dead.

“Well, maybe one thing will come to pass,” he laughed as he looked longingly at an ancient oak tree not a stone’s throw away.

He took a single step forward and nearly collapsed to the earth, his decrepit body no longer able to handle the pain he used to brush off. Most gods would have given up then and there and accepted their fate, but he was Thor! God of thunder! The protector of the gods! Master of the DVR!
He pressed Jarngreipr tighter against the fatal wound and found comfort in the warmth of his own blood, before taking another step.

“I really should have listened to Sif,” he chuckled, thinking of his golden haired goddess. “But I just had to go fight giants!” The truth was he did fight and slay giants while he was away from Asgard, but really he just found Sif overbearing sometimes and he really just wanted some space. He greatly enjoyed camping in the untamed wilderness of Jotunheim with nothing but his goats, his weapons, and an active subscription to Netflix and HBO Go.

He nearly stumbled as he took his third step.

He had been away from Asgard for nearly six months before he decided that the realm was safe and it was time to return.

In other words, he ran out of shows to binge.

“I can’t believe they killed Anthony Hopkins,” he wheezed as spots started to appear in the corners of his vision.

He had been a bit surprised to see that the branch of the world tree that connected the realm of snow and ice to Asgard was missing, but he hadn’t been too overly concerned about it. It just seemed like another devious plot by the giants or Loki to keep him from interrupting some master plan that he would undoubtedly end with a little hammer time.

So, sensing his next great adventure, he began his journey to the next branch of Yggdrasil that would take him to another realm that would connect him to Asgard.

He took his fourth step and grinned like a madman.

*Halfway there!*

The reason he needed to return home was to replenish his supply of Idun’s organic non-GMO
golden apples (a product of Monsanto). The life replenishing fruit was what kept the gods young and immortal, and without a regular supply the Aesir and Vanir would wither away and die.

So by the time he reached the location of the branch that would take him to Vanaheimr, his vibrant fire red hair had begun to thin and had a few streaks of gray. When he saw that that branch was gone as well he knew that Loki was behind this, this was just a new twist on an old trick.

In the past Loki had kidnapped Idun and stole her away to some secret location, and given that the goddess was the only being in creation that could pick the golden fruit, the gods were left to rot. Now though since the god of lies knew he couldn’t keep Idun away from the gods, he would keep the gods away from Idun. It was simple and clever, the hallmark of his greatest frenemy.

Knowing that things were far more urgent than he had previously thought, he urged his goats to the next branch.

At his fifth step he fell to one knee, but pushed himself up.

By the time he had reached the passage to Midgard, or “Earth-you-idiot” as the young son of Frey called it, he knew that Loki had really upped his game.

That path was gone as well, but there was a group of very confused looking giants standing near the edge of the world. So at least Loki had left him with some entertainment.

As the giants looked out into the abyss he seized his opportunity and with one thunderous blow from Mjolnir, caved in the back of one of the massive brute’s skulls.

The fight that followed would forever be the strangest one in his life.

Instead of brandishing weapons or trying to smash him underfoot, they tried to distance themselves from him, all the while shouting strange taunts like: “Woah hold on!”, “Wait!”, “We need to work together!”, “Is this guy for real?!”, “We are all doomed you idiot!”, “The world tree is dead!”, “Why won’t you listen?!”, and others while trying to cast spells by making a “T” with their clawed hands.

It was extraordinarily one sided, but fun!

That night he rewarded himself by making mock buffalo wings from Otis and Marvin (fun fact: while happy cows make happy milk, depressed goat makes amazing mock wings), and watching the season finale of Game of Thrones. That episode secured the Hound and Tormund their spots as his favorite characters.
He took his sixth step just as the ichor rushing from his wounds seemed to turn cold.

The next morning he was shocked to find that Otis and Marvin were still dead.

He checked, and yes their bones had been placed on their skins and none of their bones had been broken. He wrote it off as another of Loki’s tricks and that it had probably been the strange spells the Jotnar had been casting that did it.

It was a shame too. Marvin had been the one he could discuss his *Game of Thrones* theories with. The goat had been in agreement with him that Tyrion would have to marry a dragon, and that Ned Stark was alive and was going to reveal himself to be the Night King the entire time. Marvin also had a strange theory that Bran was going to develop a personality, but that seemed as likely as the Allfather not spoiling Jon Snow’s parentage to everyone…

Oh yeah, he would miss Otis. He loved how the goat would discuss his feelings with him.

He guessed.

Undeterred by this newest obstacle, he collected their bones, placed them in a pouch, and wrapped their skins around him as he set off once again into the frozen wilds.

As he took his seventh step the wind and cold no longer bothered him, instead he felt quite warm.

After a week of traveling in the frozen wastes he was unable to carry Mjolnir, even with the magical aid of Jarngreipr.

He had dragged his mightiest weapon to an oak tree and buried the hammer beneath its roots, before resting under the ancient oak. He scratched a few runes into the bark that Odin had taught him that would allow him to locate the tree later.

He opened up the small pouch that contained the bones of Otis and Marvin and feasted on the marrow within to ease the growling of his stomach. It came nowhere near close to satisfying him, but it did give him a slight boost of energy.

He stood up and brushed the snow off his skins and pulled out a small mirror that he had intended to give to Sif upon his return. He looked at his reflection, but didn’t recognize himself. All of his hair had turned gray, wrinkles lined his face, and the skin around his eyes was sunken and bruised. His once thick muscular neck looked like someone had glued a turkey’s wattle to a plastic bag.
He smashed the mirror into powder with one clenched fist and continued on his way.

When he saw that the next branch was gone as well, he knew he wasn’t going to make it out of Jotunheim alive. So he decided to take out as many of the cold blooded monsters as he could before the inevitable.

_I wonder who will sit on the Iron Throne?

And with his eighth step, his story ended.

Chapter End Notes

Thor I salute thee!

I'm sorry but I based my characterization of Thor more on the actually Mythology than the series. In myth he is depicted as quick to fight, hot headed, and a bit slow. Which is why he and Loki were the original odd couple.... Someone needs to make that a sitcom!

This chapter was an intermission of sorts and allows me to hint at things to come, while making some Game of Thrones jokes along the way. (Or are they they hints! O_O )

Did you like what you just read? Then leave a kudos!
Thoughts, theories, delicious tears? Leave a comment!
I love hearing from all of you, and don't hesitate to point out any errors! I greatly appreciate that kind of thing!

Next chapter is Percy! And it's going to have fluff and angst, but it will generally be very light-hearted. I think everyone (including our boys) needs a breaks.

So until next time, thanks for reading and remember you are a one-of-a-kind awesome person :)}
Percy

Chapter Summary

Tonight:

Percy has a bittersweet reunion.

Percy hears some unsettling truths (That he will deny til the day he dies!)

And some father son bonding

Chapter Notes

Wow guys! We've reached 4k views!

Thanks to you amazing people!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

He found himself sitting at the edge of a dock, his bare feet submerged in the warm waters below. Before him stretched a calm lake that reflected the picturesque blue sky above, and the shores were lined with trees with leaves of gold, orange, and red. There was a pleasant breeze that carried the smell of his favorite chocolate chip cookies from somewhere off in the distance.

He had no idea where he was or how he got there, but he figured he would kick back and enjoy the amazing view. He raised his arms to the sky and cracked his back before laying down on the ancient wooden surface.

His heart skipped a beat.

“Hey seaweed brain,” Annabeth smiled down at him. Her golden hair was tied back into a simple ponytail, and she was wearing a simple white dress that exposed her shoulders to the gentle caress of the sun.

“Annabeth!” He tried to scrabble up off the ground, but she grabbed his shoulder and sat down next to him, dipping her feet in the waters below.

The daughter of Athena smile at him before pulling him into her embrace. “I’ve missed you so much Percy,” she said before kissing his forehead. “So much.”

He returned the embrace and kissed her deeply. “I’ve missed you too wise girl. I’ve missed you so much it hurts.”

He held her close for a time, the only sound coming from the lake water gently lapping at their feet. Eventually though the daughter of Athena untangled herself from him, and rested her head on his shoulder.
"Am I-"

"No, you’re not dead," she said, running a hand through his wild hair.

"Then how are you here?” he asked, burying his face into her hair, enjoying its floral scent. “Where is here for that matter?”

She laughed and his heart soared. “This is a dream seaweed brain! And I’m here because you need me to be.”

“I needed you before,” he sighed.

“I know Percy. I know,” she sighed, looking up to kiss his cheek. “You know I would never leave you of my own volition right?”

“I know,” the son of Poseidon sighed as he looked into her stormy gray eyes.

She smiled softly at him, and in a move he should’ve saw coming from a mile away, she gripped his forearm and flipped him into the lake. He tried to breathe, but apparently his abilities did not extend to dreams. Thankfully the water was only a couple feet deep. He stood up and coughed out the fictitious liquid. “Then why did you pull that crap with the bathtub Percy?”

“Wha- What?” he sputtered, as he tried to pull himself back onto the dock.

Annabeth kicked his hands away. “Why did you do it Percy? Don’t you know people need you? What about Sally, Pau-“

“They’re gone Annabeth!” he shouted. He swatted her legs away and pulled himself back onto the wooden structure. “They’re gone too…”

The daughter of Athena’s eyes widened and she wrapped her arms around his wet body. “Oh my gods Percy I’m so sorry! I thought… I thought it was all about me. I-I didn’t know.” He felt her body start to tremble against him. “How? How did it happen?” she asked, on the verge of tears.

“It was Gabe. Somehow he came back.” He proceeded to tell her everything that had happened that day: how he had felt so guilty for not saying goodnight to her, the fact that he was going to have to repeat his senior year, the allegations of drug abuse at the swim meet (she smacked him upside the head for that one), and finally going home to discover his parents’ fate.

Annabeth didn’t say anything at first, only looking off into the horizon, her whole body shaking. “Sally was like a mother to me.” She bit her lip and furrowed her brow. “No that’s not right. She was my mother.”

“And if I had it my way she would’ve really been your mother,” he smiled softly at the blonde. “Well at least in law.”

She grabbed his hand and squeezed it. “I know seaweed brain. I know.” She leaned in and kissed him again. “Still though. I don’t want to see you in Elysium until you’re a wrinkled old man.”

“I didn’t know you had a thing for older men wise girl,” he half-heartedly chuckled.

She kicked the water, splashing him. “Percy,” she warned, eyes narrowing.

He sighed and rubbed the back of his head. “I don’t know if I can go that long without you Annabeth. Besides, the way things are going I don’t think we’re going to win.”
“Don’t talk like that Percy, I know you’ll set everything right.” She kissed him again. “You always do.” Then she smirked at him with a predatory gleam in her stormy eyes. “Besides, I don’t think you’ll be going that long without anybody. I hear you and a certain son of Hades had quite the evening.”

He wasn’t sure if the color drained from his face, if it flushed, or if it alternated like some kind of tacky neon sign. “I-It didn’t! I mean! I love you!”

The funny thing was she didn’t look or act angry, instead she merely laughed and shoved his shoulder. “And I love you too seaweed brain, but I want you to be happy. I don’t want to have to worry about you being alone for the rest of your life. I want you to find someone. Find someone who you can share your dream with, since I can’t.” She chuckled softly, her golden curls glinting in the sunlight. “Even if that someone is a moody son of Hades.”

He wiggled his toes in the water before hooking Annabeth’s ankle with his own. “But Nico is-“ he bit his lip, unsure what to say.


“I was going to say a guy, but it sounds like you’re really into the idea.”

“Well I’m not thrilled with the prospect of you dating anybody, but at least I know Nico and I know that you two would take care of each other. Plus, I think he would be more open to the idea of sharing you with me than anyone else.” She smirked at him and trailed her foot down his leg. “Because you and I are far from over.”

He shuddered at what she was implying, and a whole new world of fantasies opened to his teenage mind. **Annabeth and Nico! Mustn’t forget this dream!** Then it dawned on him what he had just thought: that he was okay with the idea of being with Nico. “But he’s a guy! And I’m well, you know, straight.”

“But you kissed him,” she smirked.

“It was the heat of the moment!” he protested. “It just felt right!”

“Isn’t that how everything starts though? It just feels right? You enjoy being around someone, then you want to spend more time around them, you want to learn more about them, and eventually you realize what all that adds up to.”

“But I don’t love him Annabeth,” he sighed. “I love you.”

She cupped his cheek, and he couldn’t help but lean into the warm embrace. “I know seaweed brain, and I never said you did love him. I just think there’s the possibility of something there. Something that the two of you need.”

“But-“


“What does that have to do with anything?” **One second we’re talking about my love life, the next we’re talking about a guy who literally tried to kill me. Have some consistency Annabeth!**

“I knew Luke most of my life and as you are well aware I had a bit of a crush on-“
“It was a lot more than a bit wise girl,” he laughed.

“Shut up!” she laughed as she kicked up more water. “Okay I had a major crush on the guy! Anyway, then one day you came to camp and he kind of took you under his wing. He helped you get into shape, showed you how camp worked, and even taught you his signature move.” The daughter of Athena imitated the twisting motion Luke had taught him to disarm opponents.

“I did think he was pretty cool back then,” he sighed, remembering his brief stay in the Hermes cabin. Eating candy bars and drinking cokes Luke had “borrowed” from the camp store, Luke telling the cabin how he got his scars, and helping plan elaborate pranks on the Ares cabin. “But then he tried to kill me. To kill us.”

“Yes, he did,” agreed the daughter of Athena. “But for some reason, you took it harder than everyone else.”

“He lured me away with promises of coke and a chance to hang out, only to throw a freaking scorpion at me…” He kicked the water, sending a fine spray into the distance. He hated thinking about Luke. Even if the son of Hermes redeemed himself in the end, it still made him angry.

She started to rub small circles in his back, just above where his weak spot used to be. “I know Percy. But like I was saying, you took it harder than anyone, myself included. Here’s this guy who betrays you after knowing him for a month tops and suddenly you have this Captain Ahab like obsession with taking him down.” She ran a hand through her hair. “At first it made a bit of sense, but as the years passed it started to make less sense. Ethan betrayed you, but you really only ever acknowledged him when he was actually there. Daedalus betrayed you to a lesser extent, but that didn’t seem to bother you that much.”

“The man gave me a dog Annabeth, you can never be angry with anyone who gets you a dog. It’s like one of the laws of physics.”

“Yeah, it’s actually the first law,” she laughed. “Okay ignoring Daedalus, there was Nico.”

“Not his fault!” he spat out, startling the blonde. “I mean, he was just trying to get his dad’s attention and it wasn’t like he knew Hades would try to lock me up.”

She gave him a look that seemed to examine every cell and atom of his being. “You were always quick to defend everyone seaweed brain. Everyone that is, but Luke.”

As she continued to look at him, he felt nervous, sick even. “Just what are you trying to say Annabeth?”

“Oh my gods you’re thick!” she laughed as she facepalmed. “I’m saying I think you had a massive crush on Luke too!”

He thought that Annabeth had lost her mind. There was no way he had ever had a crush on Luke! He had hated Luke because he betrayed his family, that Annabeth had only eyes for him, and that he was just a jerk in general! “I think I would’ve known if I had a crush on Luke wise girl,” he chuckled forcefully.

“I don’t know Percy. When you’re young, it’s hard to understand what you’re feeling–“

“Oh my gods Annabeth! I’ve already had this talk with my mom and I never want to talk about that again!” One of the most awkward things in my life! Right behind mom not knocking before entering my room and walking into Chiron taking a shower.
“Just hear me out seaweed brain,” she laughed. “So here you are, coming from a bad home life, you don’t have many friends, and suddenly there’s this guy who takes you under his wing. He hangs out with you, tells you how special you are—”

“This sounds like the start of a bad crime drama wise girl…”

“Shush!” the blonde laughed, shoving him playfully. “And he’s this guy who represents everything you wanted to be and he’s interested in you. You think you’re friends, that you can trust him with anything.” She sighed. “But then he lets you down. Hard. All those emotions become confusing and you’re not sure what to do. So you do the only thing you can do: lash out and push them away.” She turned and looked at him with a soft smile. “Does that sound familiar to you?”

Gods damn it. He hung his head down, not wanting to look at her.

“Isn’t it?” she asked, and he could feel her stormy eyes on him. “Do you think ten year old Nico really knew what he was feeling? Not to be insulting but boys lack emotional maturity at that age, and well I think the both of you had no idea what you felt. Just in Nico’s case your relationship did improve enough for him to fully realize what he felt.”

“So you’re saying that if Luke would have came back to us, I would have realized I liked him? Like, like him? It seemed impossible to him, but at the same time it was awakening some feelings he had long since forgotten.

She laughed. “Yes Percy, as the kids in grade school say: like him like him.”

He held his hands up and let out a long sigh. “Just suppose what you are saying is true, that I’m Bi or something. Why are you so hell-bent on trying to set me and Neeks up, or whatever the hell you’re trying to do?”

“Because I love you seaweed brain,” she said as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. “Like I said before, I want you happy. I want you to have a long life filled with happiness, and if it can’t be with me I want it to be with someone I know will treat you right. Despite his massive list of character flaws, I know deep down Nico is a good guy.”

“I—“

“I’m not saying you have to seaweed brain, but I want you to consider it. I don’t want you to grow up to be that weird old guy who lives alone.”

“If I promise to think about it, can we talk about something else?”

“Anything you want Percy.”

He hadn’t realized how much he missed just talking to Annabeth, even about just trivial things like the weather.
He told her about his new school, how it was different from Goode, the people he met, how Nico was some kind of genius, how the son of Hades was tutoring him every day after school, and how Chelsea was obviously crushing on the son of Hades.

“He’s not leading her on is he?” she asked, her stormy eyes narrowing.

He laughed. “No, he’s just completely oblivious.”

“Good, I can’t stand people who lead others on.”

He forced a chuckle at that. “Funny you should mention that…”

She slugged him in the jaw when he explained how he had said he was gay and that he had the school’s only LGBT member trailing after him. He promised her that he would fix it.

Annabeth in turn told him about Elysium, about all the famous historic figures that she got to meet, that all of their friends were there and doing well, and some of the strange problems of the afterlife.

“There’s a shortage of chairs…”

“Why?”

She shrugged. “No one knows, but Leo is seriously disappointed in not being able to build his dream blanket fort.”

They continued to just chat, eventually they both laid down on the deck and the sky turned to night.

“Hey Percy, I know I’m asking a lot out of you, but could you do one more thing for me?”

“You know I would do anything for you wise girl. All you have to do is ask.” He grabbed her hand and squeezed it in his own.

“I want you to go to college. I want you to get a degree for the both of us. It doesn’t have to be in architecture, but I don’t know, it was just something I envisioned for the both of us.”

“I’ll get a doctorate if you want.”

She laughed, but it wasn’t mocking or cold. “And what would you be a doctor of?”

“Oh, starfish?”

She laughed so hard she rolled off the dock.

They had been laying in silence for a while, fingers intertwined, watching the stars dance across the night sky, when Annabeth broke the silence.

“Hey seaweed brain?”

“Yeah?”

“I’ve noticed that whenever you dream about me, I’m always not wearing any shoes. Is there a reason for that? Or am I just overanalyzing things?”
He shrugged. “You like old men, I like feet.”

She rolled him off the dock.

As the sun began to creep over the horizon, the daughter of Athena crawled into his lap, and he wrapped his arms around her.

“I think our time together is about up seaweed brain,” she sighed. The daughter of Athena tilted her head back and kissed him.

“I don’t want you to go.” He held her tighter against his chest.

“And I don’t want to go either Percy, but I don’t have a choice. You’re starting to wake up.”

“Will- Will I see you again?” It felt like something was squeezing his heart, he felt sick to his stomach, and his head started to spin. He didn’t want this to end, he couldn’t go back to a world without Annabeth. Not again.

She looked up at him and the look in her eyes broke his heart. “We will be together again Percy, just not for a long time.”

He spun her around in his lap and before she could react he smashed their lips together. In that one kiss he tried to convey an entire lifetime’s worth of love, that he would never forget her, and that he would always be hers. I’m yours wise girl; I’ll always be yours.

When they separated, tears were running down Annabeth’s cheeks. “I know seaweed brain. I know.” He tried to stop her from getting up, but she swatted his hands away. He watched in silence as she arched her back and stretched as the sun’s rays finally illuminated the dock. She held out her hand for him which he eagerly accepted, he scrambled to his feet and she wrapped her arms around him one last time. “I want you to be happy Percy. I want you to think about what we talked about.”

“I will,” he said, kissing one of her golden curls. “Anything for you.”

“I’m serious Percy. I don’t want to spend the next eighty years worrying that you’re all alone and have done nothing with your life because of me.”

“I promise Annabeth. I’ll go to school! I’ll graduate with honors! I’ll be sumo comes with latte!”

She laughed against his chest. “I think you mean summa cum laude seaweed brain.”

“Yeah! That!”

“And?”

“I’ll think about Nico,” he sighed. “I’ll try wise girl, but who says he even wants me?”

“And you tell me he’s oblivious.” She kissed him again. “I’m sure if you try it will work; and when the two of you get to Elysium we’ll make it work. The three of us. Just remember though: I will always- FOR THE HORDE!!”

He jerked awake.
It seemed like every cell in his body was screaming in pain when he opened his eyes. His body also felt extremely stiff, telling him that he had been out for quite a while. Unlike last time though, he remembered everything that had happened: New Rome, getting shot, the sadistic George, and Nico rescuing him.

*If I feel this bad just by jolting awake, I can’t wait until I have to go to the bathroom.*

When his eyes managed to focus, he saw that he was in in his bed back at Demeter’s farm. His panda was staring at him with its beady little eyes, its snout in its ever present grin as if to say “welcome back, I missed you!” Past that he could make out the top of Jason’s head and he appeared to be wearing some kind of headset. But beyond that though, he could see Nico on his bed. The son of Hades was laying on top of his blankets, wearing only a black T-shirt and matching boxers. His shaggy dark hair was plastered to his forehead with sweat and his breathing was labored.

“Neeks,” he rasped as he tried to sit up, only to fall back against the bed, the ancient mattress’s springs groaning in protest from the sudden movement.

The son of Jupiter looked at him and his blue eyes widened. “Woah guys, I gotta go after this! Percy woke up! Yeah, pop whatever cool downs you have to bring Odyn down!”

*What the heck?* He carefully shifted his position so he was closer to the edge of the bed, ignoring the intense fiery pain in his right arm and leg. His stomach lurched as he remembered the horrific sensation of his tendon rolling into itself. *Nope! Nope! Nope! Focus on trying to see what Jason is doing.*

The son of Jupiter was sitting on his sleep bag between their beds, his back against the dresser, with a large black laptop with yellow lighting sitting on his lap. To the right of the blond was a pile of their textbooks with a computer mouse on top that the son of Jupiter was clicking like a man possessed.

“Come on guys! Four percent!” Jason cried. “Three! Two!” The blond shot up into the air, his head almost hitting the room’s low ceiling. “Yeah! Great heals Chris!” he laughed as he floated gently back down the floor. “Yeah, I’ll probably be on later. I’ll check Discord. Super sparky out!” The blond closed the laptop and delicately set it on the nightstand as he stood up. “Hey Aquaman, how are you feeling?”

Jason seemed… off to him. Granted, Percy had thought the son of Jupiter had been acting strange since they had starting living at the farm. “Like someone tortured the shit out of me,” he rasped. “Is Nico okay?” he asked before coughing.

“Hold on let me get you some water.” Jason sprinted out of the room and returned a few second later with a small floral patterned paper cup only halfway filled with water. “Here,” he offered tipping the cup to Percy’s face.

Percy couldn’t help but roll his eyes as he pressed his lips against the cup. He swallowed the three teaspooons worth of water, which did somewhat ease the scratchiness of his throat. “What’s wrong with Nico,” he asked as the blond took the cup away.

The smile on Jason’s face turned into a grimace, the glint in his blue eyes disappeared. “It’s not good Perce. He- he pulled all of us out one-by-one, but when he found you he jumped us all the way here.
Gods Percy, when we landed in the kitchen I could see right through him, like a ghost. His body was like dissolving into shadow.” The son of Jupiter bit his lip. “I don’t think I’ve ever been more afraid.”

“Is he okay?” He has to be! I promised Annabeth! He’s my friend!

“It’s been touch and go all week—"

“I’ve been out for a week?!” He looked down at himself in disbelief. His right arm and leg were wrapped up in bandages, as were both of his hands and on the left side of his face he could feel a bandage held on by two pieces of medical tape. Now he knew nectar and ambrosia didn’t work instantly for all wounds, but usually everything healed up good as new within a few days! Blackjack had once broke three of his ribs and he was out of the infirmary within a day! Why the hell am I still this beat up?!

Jason awkwardly rubbed the back of his neck. “Yeah, I was getting to that. Hades and Demeter have been doing everything they can for the both of you, but there’s only so much they can do now…”

He couldn’t help but scoff at that. “They’re gods Jason. If they really wanted to Nico would be up on his feet already.” It was weird though that Hades would let Nico be in such a state though, in the months since he came to the farm he observed that the two seemed to have a solid relationship. But he’s a god. He’s fickle. He’s probably doing this because Nico scuffed his shoe or something trivial like that….

Then something funny happened; the son of Poseidon felt guilty for thinking of Demeter and Hades like that. Ever since they had arrived, Demeter had been nothing short of kind to the three of them. The goddess was even trying to improve her relationship with the stubborn son of Hades, a Herculean task that he was all too familiar with.

Hades had been a major surprise to him. He and the god had never been on the best of terms to begin with and he thought that after he had pummeled Hades into the hospital’s foundation the god would hate him.

But the god didn’t.

In fact, their relationship seemed to improve after that. Every time the god would visit he made sure to check in with him. Asking him how he was doing, telling him about his progress tracking down answers, and recently asking how school was going. He didn’t respond of course, but it nice. In a strange way Hades reminded him a bit of Paul. The god tried to act cool and suave, but deep down the guy was a massive dork.

“Under most circumstances you would probably be right man, but that segues into another important thing,” the son of Jupiter chuckled. “Apparently Avalon,” Jason paused for a second and adjusted his headset. “That’s what the mortals call themselves by the way, have some kind of weapon that can render gods helpless.” The blond sat down on the edge of his bed and he groaned as Jason’s weight made him shift position. “Sorry. Also apparently Mr. D. and Terminus are working with them.

“I must have hit my head, because that is the second dumbest thing I’ve ever heard,” Percy groaned. He slid further into the bed to stop himself from rolling to the son of Jupiter, and every single pain receptors took that as a sign to activate.

“Easy Percy.” Jason slid his arms under him and helped him change positions. “No seriously, Hades and Demeter are pretty much mortal now, any bit of power they can get has been used on you and Neeks over there,” the blond said gesturing to the son of Hades with one thumb. The blond furrowed his brow. “For curiosity’s sake, what was the dumbest thing you ever heard?”
That I had a crush on Luke. But since he couldn’t say that and he was still grappling with that revelation, he opted for: “I got a Walmart credit card!” he said in his best imitation of Jason’s voice he could muster, but he ended up coughing halfway through.

Jason’s face fell. “I hope you cough up a lung.”

Thankfully his lungs stayed in their proper place, and when he finished coughing he glared at the blond. “Thanks man, really feeling the love,” he deadpanned. “So where does that leave us right now? Why am I not healed? Is Nico going to be okay?”

“You know maybe if you didn’t interrupt me, those questions would’ve been answered by now,” the Roman frowned. “I’ll answers these as fast as possible so your ADHD doesn’t sidetrack us again. Nico should be fine, Demeter has been supplying him with life energy or something. Nectar and Ambrosia is now not working on you as well for some reason, so Hades has literally performed surgery on you to keep you going.” The blond stopped and sighed. “Your leg and hands were pretty bad Perce, Hades says nerve damage is very likely. You’re probably going to have a limp too.”

“Just fucking marvelous.” If he would have had the strength he would have punched the mattress, so he had to settle with rolling his head to the side. Great! Just great! My handwriting was barely legible before! And you know what you call a demigod with a limp? Dead.

“As for right now?” The blond asked as he stood up from the bed. “We hide here and lick our wounds. Hades wants us to return to school; I actually went back Wednesday. It’s Saturday by the way,” Jason added as an afterthought. “Beyond that? Hades has no idea.”

Eventually Jason left him alone to go do his evening chores and to inform the not-quite-gods of his condition. When no one came into the room after a few minutes he realized Jason was actually doing what he said in the order he said it. He wasn’t sure if the blond was doing it like that to give him some time to process things or if he was just an idiot.

Probably the first one, Jason is cool like that.

And everything the blond had told him was a lot to process, Hades and Demeter getting their collective asses kicked, Avalon being far more dangerous than they had feared, and that he had a test in PE next week. Fat chance I’ll be well enough for that.

But what was first and foremost on his mind was less than five feet away from him, laying on top of black sheets, a sharp contrast to his pale skin.

Looks like I owe you again Neeks.

How many times had the son of Hades saved him over the years? And how did that compare to how many times he saved Nico? He was pretty sure the son of Hades had saved him at least three times for every time he had saved him, and that wasn’t counting Nico saving him from himself either. And now Nico almost sacrificed himself just so he could live?

“You got to be okay bud, I can’t continue to owe you like this. I want to make this right for you and Annabeth,” he whispered in Nico’s direction.

He couldn’t help but be disappointed when the son of Hades didn’t respond. Wasn’t that how it
worked in the movies? One person would say something from the heart and the other person would wake up from their coma and they lived happily ever after?

Maybe that was the problem though; he wasn’t sure where his heart was at the moment. Maybe that wasn’t the right way to put it, he knew his heart was with Annabeth, but what she had said was a little more accurate than he cared to admit. He knew his feelings for Nico were changing and had been for some time. He had found some small comfort when Nico had taken him by the hand and led him to the ice cream stand after the incident at the hospital. The son of Hades’ constant efforts to try to cheer him up had not gone unnoticed or unappreciated, he just hadn’t been able to physically convey it. When Nico had helped him dye his hair was a major turning point, he had been so grateful that he had understood what it meant to him, he had hugged the son of Hades.

But he knew it wasn’t love.

At least not yet.

He knew his love life was unusual compared to just about anyone else’s. He had met Annabeth when he was young and besides the brief confusion caused by Rachel and Calypso, it had always been Annabeth even before he knew what he was even feeling. Compare that to his mom and Paul who had had relationships before they eventually found each other. No one just found the love of their lives on the first attempt.

So he was confused by what he was feeling. Was it a crush? Or was it something else entirely? He had liked the first kiss he had shared with Nico a lot, and if he was honest he wanted to do it again. He wanted to have another day out with the son of Hades. He wanted to sit on the couch and read comics with him. He wanted to continue to show Nico the important things in life, like Slurpees and bad TV shows.

Maybe that’s it. That’s what I should focus on: I like Nico, I want to spend time with him, and I want to have fun with him. I like his laugh, I like his weird sense of humor, and I like it when I bring those out in him. I’ve been so used thinking about long term, that maybe I should think of the now.

He smiled at that. He thought that maybe Annabeth would be proud of him for that realization.

Maybe Nico doesn’t even want a relationship with me, and that’s okay. I just want to be there with him.

He beamed at the still form of younger boy.

“When, not if, you wake up we’re going talk.”

He did his best to settle comfortably into his bed and dozed off.

“Jackson,” a voice whispered as he was shaken awake. “Jackson!”

He opened his eyes and saw the lord of the underworld standing over him with Demeter and
Persephone standing next to him. “I have severely injured you and you decide to shake me awake,” he deadpanned. Why am I not surprised…

What was surprising though was the state Demeter and Hades were in. While Persephone screamed goddess (wait why is she here?), here dark skin flawless and glowing, Hades and Demeter looked like normal…ish people. Hades was still wearing a black dress shirt and matching dress pants, but they no longer looked crisp and fresh, but rather wrinkled and worn. There were dark bags under his eyes and a week’s worth of stubble on his face. If he had to sum up the god’s appearance in one word he would say: tired.

Compared to Demeter though Hades looked amazing. The harvest goddess’s face was black and blue, her eyes nearly swollen shut. She was leaning heavily on a cane that he was afraid the thin piece of black wood would snap in two. Strangely though her clothing looked just as frumpy as it did before.

“I’m sorry, but we didn’t want you to wake up and panic,” the god said as he watched his wife approach Nico’s bed.

“Panic? Why would I panic? What is she going to do Nico?” He tried to sit up, but Hades stopped him by placing a hand on his chest.

Demeter slapped the back of Hades’ head. “Great going! You’re making him panic!”

Hades shot the goddess a dirty look. “It’s not my fault the boy is so excitable!” The god turned his attention back to him and rolled his eyes. Percy couldn’t help but to smile at that. “Now that it is Spring, not you could tell in this god forsaken state,” Hades grumbled. “Persephone is free to join us above ground. She’s going to siphon out the excess shadow in his body.”

“It’s the least I can do for him for saving my mother and husband,” the goddess said as she ran one of her hands down the son of Hades’ chest. Wherever her hand touched briefly glowed gold and tiny nebulae of shadow floated out and dispersed into the air.

This continued on for what felt like hours, the goddess running her hands all over Nico, only for shadows to leave his body. When she got his face, it looked like Persephone hesitated for the briefest of moments before she placed her hands on both sides of the sleeping boy’s face. He wanted to jump out of his bed and knock the goddess away when Nico’s back arched and his face twisted with agony, but Hades held him down with ease.

“I’ve done all I can,” the goddess said as she stroked the hair from Nico’s face. “But there’s something wrong with him that is preventing me from healing his physical injuries.”

Hades frowned and looked at his son with concern, which made Percy worry.

“But he should make a full recovery,” the goddess smirked.

“Goodness Phe Phe!” Demeter cried, placing a hand over her heart. “Don’t make any dramatic pauses when the poor boy’s life is on the line!”

Percy opened his mouth to ask about “Phe Phe”, but a quick look from Hades told him that was probably not a good idea.

“Thank you my love,” Hades said as he gently lifted his wife’s hand to his lips. “I know we’ve been asking a great deal of you as of late.” The lord of the underworld wrapped one arm around the goddess’s hips and pulled her close for a passionate kiss.
“Children are present,” he reminded the older couple. “And like your mother-in-law…”

“Shut up Jackson,” Hades sighed as he broke the kiss. “As if you never made my son uncomfortable when you were around that daughter of Athena.”

It felt like someone had punched him in the gut not once, but twice. “Low blow man,” he sighed. “Low blow…”

Hades shook his head and smiled at his wife. “If neither of you object, my dear would you tend to Jackson’s wounds.”

The goddess smiled wryly at her husband and ran one hand through her long dark hair. “Of course my lord.”

Apparently it didn’t matter if he objected or not, as the goddess strode over to him and placed one manicured finger between his eyes. A strange but comfortable warmth started to spread throughout his body. It felt like the sensation he got when he was canoeing with Annabeth on a warm day, sitting on the steps of the Hades cabin reading comics with Nico, walking through the farmers market with his mom, and every other pleasant memory he associated with spring. But as soon as it reached the tips of his finger it just… stopped.

“That’s strange,” Persephone said. “Let me try that again.”

She jammed her index finger against his forehead and the feeling returned. Sitting under the lake with wise girl in a bubble holding hands, teaming up with Jason and Nico to dominate capture-the-flag, Annabeth and Nico taking turns throwing miniature marshmallows into his mouth at the campfire.

Once again it faded.

“Hold on,” the goddess said, as she pulled her hand back and made a fist.

“Hey hold on! Wait just one sec-“ The goddess’s fist hit him squarely in the nose, but the pain was overshadowed by feelings of sunshine, lollipops, and rainbows, but like the last two attempts nothing happened beyond the pleasant feelings.

Just as the goddess was winding her arm up for another blow, Hades grabbed his wife by her wrist. “I think Jackson may have the same condition as Nico.”

“Please don’t call me/him that,” the godly couple cringed.

“I think your uncle is right Phe Phe,” Demeter said as she took Persephone’s hand from Hades.

In a way he was lucky as he got to witness firsthand the answer to the question all demigods have asked themselves at one point: do the gods acknowledge how weird their relationships are.

“Please don’t call me/him that,” the godly couple cringed.

“Not my fault it’s true,” Demeter laughed as she led her daughter out of the room.

“Don’t leave before I come down!” Hades called out as the two disappeared from sight. He watched as the lord of the dead stood over Nico and shook his head, a pained expression on his face. Hades then with a tenderness that surprised Percy stroked his sleeping son’s cheek. “I owe you an apology Percy,” the god said without taking his eyes off of Nico.
Woah, a god apologizing? This is like, what? The second time this has happened.

“In my anger, I put all of our lives in danger by rushing off to New Rome,” he stopped stroking
Nico’s cheek and turned to face him. “And we all paid the price,” he stopped and furrowed his brow.
“Although Jason seems fine, he did buy himself a laptop on Tuesday.” He shook his head. “Ugh, I
believe I have ADHD in my semi-mortal state. Where was I? Oh! But you and my only son paid the
most. I swear on the river Styx and my son’s life I will make this right by you.”

Now he was used to the gods making halfhearted promises to him and swearing on the river Styx to
make it sound good, but the fact that Hades was swearing on Nico’s life made it seem far more real
and binding. “You don’t need to do that,” he wheezed. “It’s all part of the job,” he forcefully
chuckled. “But if you don’t mind, could you scratch my right ankle? It’s been itching like a
motherfucker for like the last five minutes.”

He had only been half-serious, but to his surprise the god actually walked over, flipped the blanket
up that was covering his leg, and gently scratched his ankle. “Don’t swear Jackson. Your mother
would expect better of you. And as your legal guardian, so do I.”

“Ah yeah right there,” he moaned. “That’s the—” His eyes went wide. “Legal guardian? You mean
the documents you forged to enroll us into school right?”

“I only faked what I had too,” the god explained as he covered his foot back up. “Most of what I
faked was related to the warrants for your arrest. You’re welcome by the way. Since you and Jason
are still under eighteen and I am technically a blood relative it wasn’t hard for my legion of lawyers
to obtain guardianship of the two of you.”

“So you’re like my dad now,” he blurted out. And that would mean Jason and Nico are like my
brothers. Oh gods! It was weird enough when we were cousins!

Hades also must have been weirded out by the revelation as he stood there with his mouth opening
and closing like a fish. “I suppose from a legal standpoint, that is true,” the god of the underworld
coughed into his fist.

They both sat there avoiding each other’s gaze in an awkward silence. Hades was looking at Nico,
and he was looking at a particularly interesting frayed thread on his quilt.

“Soooo, did Jason tell you Demeter and myself are more or less mortal?” The god asked him,
obviously trying to change the subject.

I don’t blame him one bit. “Yeah, he, uh, mentioned something about that?” He tried to sit up, but
with two injured hands, and one arm missing the top several layers of flesh it was a little hard.
“How’s that treating you?”

“How’s that treating you?” The older man slid one arm under his shoulders and pulled him up, then
adjusted his pillows before leaning him against them. “Well thankfully from living with Maria all
those years ago I’m pretty used to it. Although, I did stub my toe and contemplated killing myself just
to escape the pain.”

He laughed, long and hard, picturing the god before him jumping around clutching his foot and
screaming in agony. “Yeah that’s actually the normal reaction,” he smiled at the god. “Nico did
mention that you used to live with….” He was going to say Bianca and Maira, but stopped himself,
unsure how the man felt about them. “Them. How did that work? How did Phe Phe not find out?”

Hades raised one threatening eyebrow at him and pursed his lips. “First of all, never, and I mean
never, call her that again. Second she knew all about it, in fact she supported it.”

*Wait? What?* He blinked. “I’m sorry I must have a concussion. I thought you said Persephone supported you living with a Nico’s mom.”

“Well I wouldn’t rule that out, but you heard me correctly: my wife supported me living with another woman.” He must have had a strange look on his face because the god rolled his eyes and sighed. “Look you know how gods and goddesses on occasion take up mortal lovers? I mean you have to because that’s the only reason you exist.”

He nodded.

“Well Persephone and I are a bit different. See while most gods live with their partners fulltime, we are only together roughly half the time. This means we appreciate each other more, absence makes the heart grow fonder after all,” the man chuckled. “But even with that after millennia the spark starts to fade and eyes begin to wander.” He wrapped his knuckles next to Percy’s knee. “But we came up with a way to prevent our marriage from devolving into the hatred that is common on Olympus. Every couple hundred years we decide to take up mortal lovers with the condition that the other has to approve of the other’s choice. If they are approved we stay with them for the duration of their life.”

*Way waaaaay too much information!* “So you’re like, what? Swingers?” Then something occurred to him. “Wait what about Hazel? We’re you like seeing her mom at the same time?”

Apparently Hades thought he wasn’t too injured to not get a light slap upside the head. “Hazel was not a product of love, rather the product of one goddess’ meddling and one woman’s desperation for power.” He sighed. “Hazel deserved so much better than Marie.” The man, because no god Percy had ever seen looked so regretful, sighed and stared over at his son. “If it would have been within my power I would’ve taken her to Maria.”

“So if Persephone approved of Nico’s mom, why does she not like him?” he asked, trying to change the topic to something slightly less depressing. “And could you scratch my nose?”

Hades threw his head back, but reached over and scratched his nose. “Don’t push it Jackson. As for Nico’s and Persephone’s relationship that’s something for another time.” He stood up and gently gripped Percy’s shoulder. “I better go say farewell to the women. Even you should know by now to never leave women waiting. Is there anything else I can do for you?”

He was about to tell him that he was fine, but he remembered his promise to Annabeth. “Jason said he went back to school already.”

“Yes?”

“Has the school sent home like any of the homework I’ve missed? I’d like to get started on it, the reading at least.” He couldn’t believe the words coming out of his mouth. *Maybe I do have a concussion!*

Hades must have thought the same thing, as the god ran out of the room screaming. “Persephone! Demeter! It’s worse than we thought! Jackson has brain damage!” This was followed by a series of crashes and groans caused by what Percy assumed was the god of the underworld falling down the stairs.

*I don’t know if I should laugh or be offended.* He looked over to Nico and smiled. “Things are going to be different when you wake up Neeks. And I promise it will be good type of different.”
“Grace would you get off that damn game and help me up?!”

Chapter End Notes

So in a weird way this is percicobeth if you think long term. But how will Nico react to that? We shall see.... (Kidding this is still a percico fic)

I hope I do Annabeth justice. I know many percico/nicercy writers tend to make her into something as a villain, but I can't do that to her. I believe that she would want Percy to be happy if she wasn't there and would want only the best for him. She knows Nico is a good guy and likes Percy for who he is rather than what he is.

I do believe Percy had a crush on Luke. It's not a popular opinion and I don't ship it, but it makes a lot of sense and can be seen as an interesting parallel with him as Nico (that I abused).

As for him liking feet... That might be canon... It just seemed like he always had to mention when someone was barefoot. Okay sure, it's adding more detail to the scenes, but it became almost Whedon-esque by the end of both series. I guess everyone has their thing, so no judgement here.

Yes, Jason is acting weird for someone who's friends almost died. We will examine that as we go. We will also get to know his World of Warcraft character! yay!

The dynamic between Percy and Hades has definitely changed for the better. It really started to change when Hades found Percy at the hospital, and well he felt bad for the boy. Hades knows what it's like to lose loved ones and with the revelation of how his and Persephone's marriage works we kind of get that he does know what it is like to watch the one's he loves grow old and die. So now, legally Percy and Jason are sons of Hades!

Hey did you like or tolerate what you just read? Then leave a kudos! Thoughts, theories, questions, rage, etc? Then leave a comment!

Good or bad I love to hear from ya!

So until next time, thanks for reading! You all are beautiful one of a kind people!
He threw his shield with all of his might at the giant before him and smirked when it ricocheted off
the brute and bounced off its allies before returning to his hand. While the giants were momentarily
dazed, he rushed forward and slammed his shield against the first giant’s shins, before doing a quick
spin and with his sword slicing the three of them just above the knees.

The pain must have snapped them back to their senses as they roared at him in a language he didn’t
understand. Two of them pulled giant warhammers adorned with what he assumed were the skulls of
long dead enemies, while the third began to chant as blue lightning crackled from its clawed
fingertips.

He raised his shield just in time to take a wild blow from one of the blunt instruments of war. Before
its comrade could swing at him, he stomped golden floor beneath him sending a shock wave through
the earth, knocking the two brawlers to the ground and interrupting the third’s spell.

“I’ve got this,” he smirked as he tossed his shield again, mesmerized by the golden light that trailed
behind it. This the giants didn’t get the chance to rise back up as as his shield was bouncing he
channeled his powers through the ground and called down one mighty blow from the heavens above
to finish them off. “Told ya,” he smirked. “I am one amazing.”

He was cut off by an ear splitting roar.

“Oh crap…”

The earth shook as some kind of brown dragon landed on the golden bridge. It was at least twice as
tall as him, and its massive maw was big enough to swallow him in two bites. Three tops. Its bulky
body shimmered with electricity that arced with every movement the beast made. On its back was
another giant, clutching the reigns and screaming what he was sure was a taunt in its strange
language.
“Oh this ain’t good…”

The beast tilted its head back and took a deep breath. He had just managed to raise his shield in time when bolts of blue lightning shot out of the dragon’s mouth. The funny thing about shields though is that while they were great for physical attacks, they did next to nothing against magical attacks. He slammed his shield against the monster’s jaw, but all it did was leave him exposed to the electrical onslaught.

“Yup. Definitely not good,” he sighed as he collapsed down onto one knee, barely able to hold his shield aloft.

“Really? You think so?” a voice sighed as a protective bubble of pure light encased him.

“This is what happens when you let a man tank,” Another voice laughed as dozens of skeletons and ghouls rose from the golden path and launched themselves at the storm dragon, clawing and biting at anything they could.

“Yes, yes Chelsea. All men are idiots,” another voice sighed as a barrage of gunfire erupted from behind him, forcing the dragon and its rider to turn away from the attack.

Two ghostly white wolves appeared on either side of him before rushing forward to aid the army of the undead with their attack. “Lay off him, we all made mistakes when we were new. Remember when Charlie tried to deck his priest out in strength gear?”

“Oh would you look at that! For some reason I can’t heal Aaron! Oh no!” Charlie laughed as he healed Jason back to full health. “But seriously man, you should never run off without your group. Because that’s a great way to cause a wipe.”

“Like seriously, Mrs. Carol only checks the class once before returning to her game of solitaire. You couldn’t wait the ten seconds for her to limp away?” Chelsea asked as she sliced the storm drake with her obsidian great sword, leaving festering boils wherever the blade touched.

Jason looked up from his screen and carefully glanced at the aging teacher from the corner of his eye. She was just sitting back down at her desk.

Mrs. Carol’s class ran like clockwork. During the first three minutes of class she would tell them what page their assignment was on and how to submit it, while she did this the class would pass around a flash drive containing a copy of the completed assignment that they would copy to their desktop. At the five minute mark, the graying woman would sit down at her desk and attempt to log into her computer, only to enter the wrong password multiple times. That was when most people were already logging on to World of Warcraft and getting into groups for dungeons or checking what daily world quests were available. It wasn’t until twenty minutes into the class did Mrs. Carol take a quick walk around the computer lab, at which point everyone would minimize their game and pretend to work on the assignment.

It was a thing of beauty really.

“Not my fault she starts by me first,” he hastily typed back. “I figured you would be right behind me.” His character, SuperSparky, tossed his shield at the nearly dead dragon to take its attention away from the rest of the group. That was his job as tank after all, make sure you take all the hits so your team could freely attack without having to worry about the enemy hitting them back.

With the five of them it didn’t take long at all to dispose of the storm dragon and its massive Viking rider. It amazed him how great of a team they were, for him only having been playing for a little
more than three weeks, and only having his own account for one.

He sighed, which prompted Charlie to look at him funny. “Nothing,” he mouthed to his healer friend.

After returning from the ill-fated trip to New Rome, seeing Percy and Nico so close to death had shaken him to the core. He had seen more than his fair share of dead demigods during his tenure as praetor, but never had he seen someone so mutilated like Percy or just fading out of existence like Nico. Now he didn’t freeze up like he did when they found Percy after his attempted suicide. Instead he had leapt to action, bandaging Percy’s hands and arm, fighting back the urge to retch at the sight.

For Nico though he had been completely useless. When he had tried to roll the younger boy onto his back his hands had passed right through him as if he were a ghost.

He had lost any sense of composure then. He had went over to the ragdoll forms of Hades and Demeter and screamed, pleaded, begged for either of them to get up and save his friends; his family. It wasn’t until he kicked Hades in the gut did either of them begin to stir. The first to regain consciousness was Demeter and he was immediately on her, begging her to save them. She must have understood because there was a flash of green light before she passed back out, but when he turned around Nico was at least solid again.

“You okay man?” Charlie asked, waving a hand in front of his face.

“Huh? Oh yeah, just a flashback to the crash,” he sighed. When he had returned to school the following Wednesday he had told the office that Percy and Nico would be out of school for a while because of a devastating car accident that had occurred over the previous weekend. He still wasn’t comfortable telling lies like that to mortals, but what choice did he have?

There I go again. They are not “mortals” they are people. Maybe if we didn’t think we were better because we’re demigods none of this would be happening!

Charlie just shrugged and went back to his healing.

There was only ten minutes left of class when they made it to the final boss, Odyn, lord of the Halls of Valor. He was obviously based off of Odin, but was thirty feet tall and made of silver and gold.

He couldn’t help but wonder if the real god approved of the use of his likeness.

“You guys ready?” he typed. When they each gave their acknowledgment, he moved SuperSparky closer to the metallic giant and tossed his shield Captain America style. He smiled at that. When he had first read that the paladin class used shields for both offense and defense, he knew immediately what he wanted to play; and he was not disappointed.

As for choosing what race SuperSparky was, that took a bit of research. As a member of the Horde, there were only two races that could be paladins: Blood Elves and Tauren. Blood Elves were the typical ancient race that thought they were better than everyone else and had only managed to gain the powers of the holy light by stealing them from others.
That didn’t sit well with Jason.

The Tauren though looked like gentle minotaur and lived that way as well. They were a simple people who lived off the land and typically only ever fought to protect their families. Every other race, even on the Alliance, respected them and their gentle ways. They had become paladins through worshipping the land and sun.

He liked that, and so SuperSparky was born.

He looked down at the chat box and saw that Aaron and Chelsea were arguing.

“Watch where your damn ghoul is standing Chels!” Aaron complained as his orc shaman, Gingerwolf, summoned his ghost wolves to attack the god. Moments later the green brute joined the fray with twin axes made of some strange glowing purple crystal.

“Not my fault its AI is clunky,” the girl typed back. The blonde played a Blood Elf Death knight by the name of Benihime, which he was told meant “blood princess”. Death knights were warriors that had been raised from the dead and had power of death, blood, and ice magic. Currently she was raising more ghouls to attack Odyn.

_It really makes a strange kind of sense why she’s attached herself to Nico…_

Tate though was the mostly silent member of the group. He played an orc hunter named LevyTate, and general hung in the back of the group firing shot-after-shot at whatever creature they were up against. Currently he had just jumped backwards to avoid one of the many spear tips Odyn summoned up through the floors.

While Aaron and Chelsea argued and Tate was hopping around, Charlie’s undead priest was busy casting shields of light around everyone and occasionally topping off Jason’s health if need be. “So how’s Percy and Nico doing?” the priest asked him out of the blue.

He waited until he had repositioned the boss before responding. “Nico’s still not awake, but Percy’s at least awake now.” He stopped to hit Odyn with a hammer of pure light. “He can’t get out of bed without assistance, but his spirits are high.” He slammed his shield into the metallic god. “He’s even started to do his homework.”

“That’s awesome!” Aaron typed as his shaman fled from Odyn, his head somehow on fire. “When do you think he’ll be back?”

“What do you mean Nico hasn’t woken up yet? It’s been a week!” Chelsea asked. He could actually hear her typing all the way across the room. “Is he receiving proper medical attention?”

“He’ll be fine,” he said, mostly to himself. He threw his shield one last time, scoring the finishing blow on the god. “As for Percy... Maybe next week?”

__________________________________________

What is it with this man’s obsession with movies?

When he had walked into his world History class and saw the ancient television and VHS player at the front of the classroom he knew he was in for another hour of old war movies courtesy of Mr. Ziggler.
“Really Mr. Z? Another movie?” he laughed as he took a seat in the back corner of the classroom. “Please tell me it at least doesn’t have John Wayne in it!”

“Hey! John Wayne is a national treasure Grace!” the history teacher/vice-principal/athletics director chuckled from behind his desk. As usual the young teacher was wearing shorts and a T-shirt with his feet propped up on the desk. “I should assign you a thirty page essay on why John Wayne is great!”

“He’ll do it,” Chelsea sighed as she walked into the classroom, textbook and notebook tucked under her arm. He momentarily panicked when she looked over at him, but thankfully she chose to sit on the other side of the room.

He really liked school, well not the homework or tests, but the social aspect of it. He liked how most of the classes only had around ten other students tops and how everyone was familiar with each other. He liked how the teachers got to actually know him personally and vice versa. What he really liked though was he could push Mr. Z’s buttons with a little friendly ripping. “John Wayne was a vegan!”

Instantly the fit teacher was on his feet. “You take that back! The closest thing the man ate to a vegetable was chicken! I should expel you!” He slammed his fists on his desks.

The two glared at each with such intensity that he worried that if someone crossed their gazes their head would explode. It didn’t last long though and the two of them started to laugh.

“Alright, let’s start class,” the teacher chuckled. Mr. Z hopped over his desk and walked up to the ancient television. “Alright we’re at the end of the World War II unit and there’s one topic that we have danced around until now. It’s hard to fathom that after nearly seven years of bloodshed on a scale that had never been seen or has been since, that something more horrifying was occurring in the shadows and had been for years. That over the course of ten years seventeen-million people were taken from their homes and sent to what could only be considered hell on earth.”

The room was silent; no one daring to make even the slightest noise, all eyes on Mr. Ziggler.

“These were people whose only crimes were being born different; whether it was the religion they were born into, their choice of partner, or having some kind of defect at birth. They and their families were loading onto trains like cattle, where they were taken to hell.”

He could hear his heart beating a million miles a minute in his ears as he remembered the old man holding out his wrist for him to see as the shadows took him away.

“Now when I was young I asked myself what kind of monsters could commit such atrocities? But eventually I realized that by saying monsters did it, I wasn’t fully comprehending the horror. Monsters did not commit these crimes, men did. Men and women like you and me.” Mr. Z hung his head. “And that makes it all the worse. Now we could spend all week talking about it, but sometimes it’s better to watch it.” He removed an old VHS from its cardboard case and slid it into the machine. “If at any time you feel uncomfortable, feel free to leave the room.” With that the teacher hit the play button, turned the room’s lights out, and instead of returning to his desk, sat in one of the many empty desks and propped his feet up.

Jason let out a breath he didn’t know he was holding when he saw that the movie was in black and white. *Okay, an old movie. That means it’s not going to be filled with gore and violence, so it shouldn’t be that bad.*
He was wrong.

So very, very wrong.

While *Judgment at Nuremburg* had no violence or over the top bloodshed and was for the most part a courtroom drama, the evidence the prosecution presented was beyond horrifying.

On the screen one of the attorneys had called a general to the stand to explain to the jury what they were about to see on a projector that had been set up in the court room. When the projector started Jason gasped, for there on the screen was a small boy lying on a cot, his stomach bloated and his limbs so withered that it looks like the bone was ready to pierce through the skin at any moment.

“This isn’t special effects,” Mr. Ziggler grunted. “This movie used real footage that allied troops had taken when they liberated the camps.”

He did his best to ignore the tightening feeling in his chest, but the general’s calm voice combined with scenes of ash and bone being removed from furnaces made it impossible. The scene changed to a soldier pouring out a box containing small pieces of metal.

“Shoes, adults and children. Spectacles. Gold from teeth melted down,” the general narrated, his voice starting to waiver from its monotone. “Sent once a month to the medical department of the… Waffen-SS.”

The scene cut to a table covered in various objects that he thought looked ordinary enough. “A lampshade made from human skin. Skin being used for paintings… many having an obscene nature.”

“Oh gods no,” he choked as the film showed dozens of children lined up, their sleeves rolled up showing the camera the tattoos on their forearms.

“Children who’d been tattooed to mark them for eventual extermination,” the general paused trying to collect himself. “Sometimes mercy was shown to the children. They were injected with morphia… so they’d be unconscious when hanged.”

The film changed to scenes of hundreds of corpses that had been stripped of their clothes lying in ditches, then to corpses piled into rooms, and finally to a bulldozer pushes bodies into open trenches.

“And this is what was filmed when… British troops liberated Belsen concentration camp. For sanitary reasons… a British bulldozer had to bury the bodies as quickly as possible.”

Jason stood up so fast that his desk flipped over. He ran from the room, ignoring the cries of Mr. Z and his classmates, and to the nearest trash can, where he proceeding throw up his lunch.

He felt a large hand grip his shoulder. “You alright kid?” Mr. Ziggler asked. “I know that’s pretty hard to watch.”

“How?” he wheezed. “How could the gods let that happen?”

That question had been on his mind for over a week. It was no secret that demigods took part in every major war in history, in fact every demigod was told that World War II was caused by children of the big three. But he had never really thought about what that really meant. He had always
picted demigods throwing lightning bolts, splitting the earth, or commanding torrents of water fighting amongst each other while mortals fought in the background.

But now though, he knew it was far more than that.

“Well as an educator I’m not supposed to discuss religion in school, but I’m pretty sure you won’t report me,” the older man said with a soft smile. “But I’ve asked myself that a lot, just you know with a singular god instead of plural,” he laughed, but quickly stopped when he saw that Jason still looked upset. “I don’t know Grace. It’s just one of those dark moments in history where men decided to put away their consciences. All we can hope for is that we learn to never let it happen again. But they say history repeats itself, and with so much hate in the world I’m inclined to believe it.” He patted Jason on the shoulder. “Now why don’t you go sit in the library for the rest of the period and,” he furrowed his brow and bit his lip. “You have PE next period right?”

“Yes sir.”

“Why don’t you sit that out too. I’ll take care of it.”

“Thanks Mr. Z,” he nodded before returning to the room to grab his books.

He had almost forgotten about the file Harpocrates had given him when it slid out of his algebra textbook.

Does this thing even matter anymore? Who cares what deal my idiot father made with the Fates? Merlin blames the gods for the Holocaust so he and whatever other mortal with a grudge he can find are out for revenge. Mystery solved!

He rested his spinning head on the table and started to breathe slowly, trying to calm his upset stomach. He had grabbed his homework from his locker before going to the library, with the intention of using it to distract him. Now though, it seemed like he was far too upset to focus.

Just how exactly were demigods involved? Olympus? How exactly did children of the big three start it? How was that even possible anyway? Both camps had already been in America for over a hundred years! How could there be demigods in Europe at that time?

A million questions continued to assault him and he was no closer to understanding his place in all of it.

If what Merlin said was true, then he is trying to avenge the deaths of millions of people.

“Welcome to my world kid,” a familiar voice grunted. “Too many questions and not enough answers.”

“Oh hell no,” Jason groaned as he knocked his head against the table, for staring back at him on a piece of paper was the god of secrets, Harpocrates, albeit in sketch form. “Would you please go away? I can’t deal with you right now.”

“Everyone tells me that, but I never listen,” the sketch laughed. The god was wearing his usual ridiculously thick sunglasses, his long face was unshaven, his three strands of hair were combed over, and a broken cigarette hung from the corner of his mouth. “I see you’ve realized not all fucking
demigods were George Washingtons, Amelia Earharts, or Hunter S. Thompsoons.”

“Who’s that?” he groaned. Why won’t the gods just leave me alone?

“Great American journalist, handsome bastard to boot! But that is neither here nor there! What you need to do now is- Hey! Wait! What are you?” The god cried as Jason crumpled up the piece of paper.

He tossed the wadded up paper into a nearby garbage basket and smiled when it went in. “I’m doing what I should have done a long time ago: I’m walking away.”

“No you’re not! There’s fifteen minutes left,” Mrs. Deal, the study hall monitor, said from behind her desk. “And are you okay dear? You’ve been talking to yourself and we’ve been kind of worried…”

The depression and anger he had felt only moments ago was instantly replaced by embarrassment as he remembered that he was not alone in the school’s small library. There were six other people besides Mrs. Deal in the room with him and they were all staring at him.

Now would be a great time to die…

“Sorry, Mrs. Deal! Just got a little dizzy!” He chuckled awkwardly before pretending to stare at his book.

Percy and Annabeth had the right idea: a normal life. Look what bending over backwards for the gods has gotten me! More near death experiences than I can count and a crippling fear of women!

He felt a twinge of guilt at the last one, but as far as he knew Piper was dead.

It’s over. That was another life. Now I just want to live a normal life. Hanging out with my new friends, finishing high school, maybe even going to college, but there will be World of Warcraft for sure!

When the final bell rang, he grabbed his things and practically flew out of the library. It was actually a struggle not to. He went to his locker and popped it open as he had learned how on the first day and filled his book bag with the day’s assignments.

“Hey Grace!” Earl, a big guy from his art class, called out. “We’re going to play a quick pick-up game in the gym, you down?”

“Sorry man, I got to help out with Percy and Nico,” he laughed as he tossed his bag over his shoulder. “Besides, you just want to see me dunk it again.” During his lunch break/free period he somehow got drafted into a game of basketball to balance out the teams. At first he couldn’t do much as everyone else seemed to tower over him, so to level the playing field he would sometimes fly up and dunk the ball. The first time he did that the whole gym went silent as everyone stared in awe at him.

“That’s only partially true,” Earl laughed, his belly jigging like a bowl of jelly. “Well, take it easy. Tell Percy and Nick I hope to see them soon!” the large teen laughed as he disappeared into the gym.

As he walked down the hallway he couldn’t help but be amused by the fact that nearly everyone in
the school called Nico “Nick”. The names didn’t even sound alike, but at this point he was pretty sure they were doing it just to mess with the son of Hades.

“I got Percy’s stuff right here Jason,” the secretary smiled as he walked into the school’s main office. The secretary, an old woman with snow white hair and a fake pearl necklace, pointed to a pile of papers on the edge of her desk.

“Thanks ma’am,” the blond said as he scooped the papers up. *Looks like Percy has more Pre-Calc homework tonight. He’ll Love that!*

He was just about through the office door when he heard Mr. Ziggler call out. “Grace! Could you come into my office for a minute?”

His heart skipped a beat. “Sure. Be right there.” He was still learning how high school worked, but he was pretty sure it was a universal constant that getting called into the vice-principal’s office was never a good thing.

“Close the door Jason,” the older man said as he typed something into the computer on his desk. “Be with you in just a moment, just got to finish this order for new track equipment.”

He sat down in one of the chairs across from the educator, and noticed that the office didn’t seem as cramped without Hades, Nico, and Percy sitting next to him. *What did I do? Am I in trouble for flipping my desk? How will Hades react?*

“Relax Grace, you’re not in trouble,” Ziggler grunted as he powered off the monitor. “I just wanted to check to see if you’re okay.”

*Wait, what?* “Yeah I’m fine, I guess,” he said, the words tumbling from his mouth. “Just got under my skin is all.” He avoided making eye contact with the older man, instead focusing on a *Chicago Bulls* poster that hung behind him.

“I should’ve known it was a bad idea to show that video to you new guys,” the vice-principal sighed, drumming his fingers on the desk. “That movie has more triggers than *Smith and Wesson.*”

“What are you talking about?”

Ziggler reclined back in his chair and folded his arms behind his head. “Look, I’m not the smartest guy in the world, but I know when things don’t add up. I get three new students enrolled by a man in black, living at a farm which no one knows who owns, and all three of you have conflicting back stories.”

“But-“

“One of you is a selective mute and looks like he is ready to break down at any minute. Another has antisocial tendencies, is small for his age, and looks borderline malnourished.”

“Wait a moment-“

“And you look like a deer caught in headlights when a member of the opposite sex even looks at you.” The man shook his head slowly. “All three of you struggle to operate a computer. Plus, you and Jackson have those brands on your arms.” He paused and shook his head again. “Look, I imagine Witness Protection doesn’t want you talking about whatever cult they pulled you out of, but I want you to know that if you, Jackson, or di Angelo, ever need someone to talk to my door is always open. And not just because it’s my job either, the three of you are fine young men and I want your time at LaMoille Community High School to be a good one. Great even.”
Wait, he thinks we’re in Witness Protection? That we escaped some kind of cult? He looked down at his Roman brand and realized that from an outside point of view, them escaping from a cult made a lot of sense. He frowned. Okay even from my point of view it sounds very cult-like. We lived secluded from society, we were marked, we took orders from our superiors without questions, worshipped them, and- crap! We were even militarized! “Umm, thanks? But you know the man you met is actually Nico’s dad?”

Mr. Ziggler pursed his lips and his brow furrowed in confusion, before he shrugged his shoulders. “Look I don’t need to know all the details; I just wanted you guys to know I’m here.”

“Ohay. Thanks,” he nodded before standing up. “Was there anything else sir?”

“Nah, get out of here,” the teacher chuckled, shooing him away.

Even though Nico (and to a lesser extent Percy) hated the old beat up truck, he loved it.

So what if it was covered in dents? That patched of its white paint had been chipped away? That the air conditioning was stuck on with the blower on max? It got them from point A to point B and back without any trouble.

He liked the feeling of control he had while driving, that no matter what he did the truck would respond accordingly without question. There was no ambiguity to it, no hidden agenda, just an old Ford waiting for him to tell it what to do.

“I think if you average everything out, it was an okay day,” he told the vehicle as he pulled out of the school’s parking lot. “My art project is nearly done, I completed my first mythic dungeon, and I got a B on my algebra quiz.”

He gave a small wave as a truck passed him going in the opposite the direction, its driver returning the gesture. It seemed that everyone in the small town waved at everyone while driving, even if they didn’t know that person. It was a stark contrast of New York and California, where if someone acknowledged you it was with one finger.

“But then I went and freaked out during World History and had to sit in the library to calm down,” he sighed as he turned down the gravel road that took him to the farm. “And like clockwork a god shows up and starts telling me what to do,” he growled, gripping the steering wheel so hard his knuckles were white. “I’m done. I mean it,” he sighed as he saw the farm house off in the distance. “Avalon can do whatever they want to Olympus. It sounds like they deserve it.”

Chapter End Notes

While Percy undergoes the physical abuse, Jason gets the mental. it's sad really.

We're beginning to see the fallout from he raid on New Rome and Jason just isn't handling it well. To be fair though he had a lot of pain to deal with even before that. He was given up by his mother, forced to work and lead since he could walk, has a broken family on a good day, was brutally assaulted by a goddess, the list goes on.
But the one thing he was certain of for years was that they were heroes. That demigods, both Roman and Greek, went on quests to save the world. Now though after Merlin's big reveal he's not sure what to make of it. He wasn't naive enough to believe that all demigods were good, but he never thought they were capable of something so heinous (granted he's making some assumptions here). He does know though that everything couldn't have been carried out by just one man or woman, that there had to be many working in tandem. He wants to know how he gods could let their children commit such crimes. After all, how many times have the gods threatened to destroy them for some trivial reason. Things just aren't adding up!

I think it's important for Jason to have mortal friends. It shows that he isn't stupid enough to think that just because a small group of them are bad that they are all bad. It's sort of funny really. He's found a way to vent his frustrations and still feel like a hero by immersing himself into World of Warcraft, and the fact that he has a team in there is really filling a vacancy in his soul at the moment.

Mr. Ziggler is just a good guy. He's just one of those teachers that care for every student and is always keeping an eye open for trouble. And god bless Hades, but his way of enrolling our boys into school set off all kinds of flags to Mr. Z. Three kids, all with different issues, some physical some mental? He'd have to be pretty thick not to think something was off.

Hey did you like what you just read? Leave a kudos! Thoughts, theories, criticism, etc? Leave a comment!
Seriously, any feedback, no matter how small, is greatly appreciated!

Next chapter is Morgan! We've haven't had one from her yet! So yay!!!

Well, thanks for reading! Remember you are a one-of-a-kind individual who deserves only the best!
**Morgan**

Chapter Summary

Warnings: none

Tonight:

A trip to the underworld.

A bouquet of Roses.

A deal with the devil.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Most people would be overwhelmed by the prospect of being surrounded by some of the greatest musicians in history, but given the state many of them were in, Morgan was not impressed.

It seemed that the god of the underworld had a thing for collecting the souls of the most popular musical artists throughout the ages and putting them to work at various jobs throughout the underworld. John Lennon and George Harrison worked in the palace as chefs. Ronnie James Dio, Lemmy, Eric Carr were in charge of maintaining the many automobiles of the underworld’s royal family. Simon and Garfunkel were Hades’ personal therapists, which was strange for her to imagine. Apparently the lord of the underworld was seeing them to work through issues with his father so that he in turn could be a better father to his children.

It was kind of touching really.

“The deal still stands right?” David Bowie asked, before throwing back a shot of tequila. “We’re risking an eternity of torture here if we are caught aiding you.”

And then there were the judges. Apparently several years back, one of the judges had gone rogue and was manipulating the only son of Hades to do his bidding. When that event had come to light, Hades had the old judges replaced with whatever washed-up rock stars were available.

She rolled her eyes, well what passed for eyes when one doesn’t have a physical body. “Trust me David, we’re almost ready to liberate you. You just need to continue the charade for a little while longer.” She wrapped one spectral arm around the blond and stared into his different colored eyes. “At this point even if you were discovered it’s far too late. Worst case scenario is you spend a month or two tops in the fields of punishment.”

He pushed her off and walked over to the only window in the obsidian break room. “The fields are hardly the worst thing down here,” he said looking out the window at a vast dark pit. “They don’t even rank in comparison to that… thing,” he spat. “I don’t know what’s going on, but since you took Hades out of the picture that thing has damn near doubled in size.” He took a step back and loosened his teal tie. “The other gods down here have fled, that damn dog won’t stop howling, and we’ve got souls disappearing without a trace. Something’s coming love. Something terrible.”
She felt what could only be described as a tug on her soul, telling her that her body had fully recovered from its wounds. “I’m sure that’s just the natural reaction to a tyrant be removed from his throne. After all, change is rarely painless. Now, I have to go take care of a few things topside. Are you and the others going to be able to play your part?”

“Yes ma’am,” the alternative rock star grunted without looking away from the pit.

“Good boy,” she smiled as she let herself be dragged back to the mortal world.

Waking up sucks.

Waking up after having your skin burnt off then having the skin of a Titan magically grafted to you, well that is a whole new level of suck.

“Why is everything so tight?” she yawned as she sat up in the hospital bed. “I do yoga for crying out loud,” she groaned before smacking her lips. *Well those feel right at least.*

“That’s what she said,” Brian’s voice laughed.

*Oh for the love of Pete! Not him!* She opened her eyes and saw the annoying ginger sitting in a chair in the corner of the room, wearing his usual lab coat and jeans, with an obnoxiously large bouquet of roses in hand. *My god he looks like the nerdy kid trying to get a date for prom!* “What are you? Eight?”

“Only mentally,” he laughed as he hopped out of the chair. “Here these are for you,” he said as he handed her the bouquet.

“Oh. Wow. Thanks.” With the minimalist of effort she turned the roses into ash.

The engineer’s eyes widened as the ashes fell to the floor. “Wow that was like two-hundred bucks worth of roses. I knew I should have gone with the chocolates…”

“What do you want Brian? Or is this just some new way to bother me?” she asked as she examined her arms. Everything seems to be in order. The runes are in their proper places, the flow of energy feels right, and even my birthmark is right where it should be.

“Oh come on, can’t a friend just stop by and wish another friend well?” His voice sounded sincere, but his eyes betrayed him.

“First off, we have never been friends. Second, you only talk to me if you have to and usually that requires Merlin or George to be around. So tell me what you want,” she hissed as she grabbed a small vanity mirror off of the bedside table.

Wow, I look exactly the same as I did before! Even that freckle on the tip of my nose it still there!

“I wanted to apologize.”

She dropped the mirror, shattering it into a dozens of tiny pieces. “Wait? What?”

“I said I wanted to apologize,” he chuckled as he began to pace slowly around the bed. “I’m going to assume you know what happened while you were out?”
“More or less,” she shrugged. “Time is different on the astral plane. I saw bits and pieces.”

The ginger barked with laughter. “Now see! The old me would have written you off! But I know better now! I know that we are dealing with things that aren’t easy to explain.”

“What changed?”

“That’s not important. What is important is that I’m offering to help you locate the creatures that did-“ he absently gestured at her, “that to you. That way you can get even.”

Ugh… “Look, DG:PA is very important to our plans, but don’t make it sound like I’m out for revenge. It’s just business. Nothing more, nothing less.” Seriously, I was trying to kidnap her. What she and her friends did was a completely natural response. I mean, if the tables were turned I’d do the same thing.

Apparently Brian had been expecting her to jump at the chance for revenge, as his creepy smile fell from his face. “Really? DG:PA burns you like the witch you are and you’re just going to let it go? Like fucking Elsa? I mean come-“

She made a slight gesture with her hand, touching her index finger to her thumb and bending back her pinkie. Instantly she felt the familiar surge of power course through her tattoos before it radiated out to the surrounding environment.

That’s better, she thought with a smile. She watched with amusement as the engineer continued to rant and rave, oblivious to the fact that she had cancelled out all noise in a ten foot radius. I have no idea how anyone can put up with him. Brian was still clearly on some sort of rant, going as far as to stomp his foot down and throw his arms out dramatically.

While he continued to rant and rave, she started to perform some small stretches to help relieve the tension in her new skin. Ok let’s not think of it like that… let’s call it donor skin. She flexed her toes, bent her ankles, and brought her knees to her chest. I am so glad I didn’t have to pull a Kill Bill!

She swung her legs off of the hospital bed and shivered as her toes made contact with the cold marble floor. She glanced over to the arrogant ginger and rolled her eyes when she saw that he was still talking. As she pushed herself out of the bed she summoned her power and channeled it so it would prevent her from falling to the floor if her legs gave out. Please don’t Little Mermaid this! Because he is definitely not my Prince Eric…

Thankfully her legs held her up with ease, albeit with some mild stiffness, but a quick spell took care of that. Although it would be pretty awesome if I had a Flounder and Sebastian to watch. Oh crap! She hadn’t noticed before but she had only been wearing a hospital gown that had its back untied.

She grabbed the back of the gown and held it together, glancing back once again to the engineer. He’s probably enjoying the view that creepy little- and he’s still ranting… Not to stereotype here, but I wonder if he’s Aro Ace? I mean besides Merlin, he’s the only other guy here that isn’t drooling all over me, even with the charms. That might make it easier to work with him at least. Oh well. She shrugged and morphed the white gown into a pair of faded blue jeans, a white tank top, black combat boots, black fingerless gloves, and a red leather motorcycle jacket to complete the look.

With a snap of her fingers she ended the sound suppressing spell.

“And don’t get me started on how she led me on! Pushing me to go further than anyone else has ever gone!” The engineer cried as he paced around the room. “And what happens when I do everything she asks? Hmm? She dumps me! The only person I ever felt a connection with and she just throws
“Yeah, I’m sure that’s terrible, but I could really go for stretching my legs right about now,” Morgan said, tilting her head towards the plastic curtain that served as a door. “You can continue to… fill me in as we walk.” She didn’t wait for Brian to respond, instead swatting the curtain away and stepping through the passage.

Her long black hair swayed in the breeze as she tried to keep her balance on the golden handrails that surrounded the Senate building.

“What are you, twelve?” Brian hissed as he walked alongside her, keeping one eye on her to make sure she didn’t fall on him.

She jumped down and gave a bow to an imaginary audience. “Only mentally, which means I’ve still got four years on you,” she laughed and stuck her tongue out at him. “Now why is everyone scurrying around like their asses are on fire?”

“What are you, twelve?” Brian hissed as he walked alongside her, keeping one eye on her to make sure she didn’t fall on him.

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“Weren’t you listening to me before?” The red-head rolled his eyes and groaned. “I swear women are the dumbest creatures! It’s like you tell them one thing and it just goes right through their empty-“ He didn’t get a chance to finish as he was suddenly lifted a foot off the ground by an invisible force, crushing his windpipe.

“Now what were you saying? It better not be anything sexist or I may go full Darth Vader on your sorry ass,” she hissed, tightening the spell’s grip before dropping the ginger on his sorry ass.

“I said the old man gave the order to clear out,” Brian rasped as he massaged his throat. “After the incursion he wants us to move the DGs out and then blow the place to hell.”

“Is that right?” she asked, slowly turning in place to look at the Roman city. The thought of the Roman stronghold being reduced to rubble sent a wave of relief through her body. *Olympus in chains and both camps destroyed. It’s almost over. I’ll be free.* “Just like that huh? One little attack and he decided to pull the plug?”

“Whatever,” the engineer said as he pushed himself up off marble stairs. “It’s his money and as long as the checks clear I don’t care what he does.” He removed his phone from a pocket in his lab coat and tapped it a few times.

She sensed their immense power before they materialized with a flash of blinding light next to Brian; the enslaved gods Terminus and Dionysus. Terminus towered over them all, his marble body was free of all imperfections save for the word “MET” carved into the god’s forehead. She noticed that the stone giant stood a step behind the engineer, as if offering an opening for any would-be attacker. Dionysus looked rough though. When she had first encountered the god after George had captured him at the ruins of the other camp, the god had been a short, pudgy, grumpy guy that looked suspiciously like Metatron from *Supernatural*. Now though he looked like the unsuccessful union of Victor Frankenstein and Poison Ivy; pale flesh held together by vines and patchwork stiches.

“I know I said that I want to work with you,” Brian hissed, “But if you try to use your freaky voodoo on me again Terminate-us and Fat Ass here will destroy you.”
Morgan may have made mistakes to end up there, but she knew she was no match for a god, let alone two. After all; her powers came from a goddess, it would be foolish to think she had been granted strength greater than its source. “Only if you stop being a misogynistic asshole,” she growled back.

They stood there glaring at each other, the gods ready to act faster than the human mind can process, while bystanders stopped what they were doing and ran for cover just in case. She readied a defensive shield spell and teleportation combo that would at least allow her to flee if the engineer decided that she wasn’t worth his time.

Brian shrugged and walked past her. “Fair enough. Now as I explained earlier with George out of commission the old man wants you in charge of field ops until that bag of PTSD is on his feet.”

That caught her off guard. She liked George, he was a good guy, he always was respectful of her, and on occasion would just sit and talk with her about anything. Sure the guy had his hang-ups with his daughter, but what member of Avalon didn’t? *I want my freedom, George wants his daughter back, Lancelot wants to avenge his mother, and Brian wants- wait, what does he want? “What happened to George?”*

Brian’s face turned red with anger, and looked as if he was ready to explode into another rant; but surprisingly he kept his cool and sighed. “DG:NH is what happened. George had just captured DG:PP and was trying to extract information from him, when the little monster teleported in and went to town on Georgie-boy.”

It took her a few moments to translate the codenames into something useful. The DG was simple enough to decode, but the first letter of the demigod’s first name and the first letter of their godly parent sometimes left her confused. *Okay DG:PP is the big shot, and DG:NH is the one who works in shadows. “Is he going to be okay?”*

“Nothing an emergency heart transplant couldn’t fix,” the engineer shrugged as he removed a stylus from his phone and began to take notes on whatever was currently on his mind. “T:C has really been earning her keep lately. You got her skin and George got her heart. It’s really amazing how her tissue and organs can change size to adapt to their new host. George’s heart was nearly twice as large as hers, but the second we set its in place, it swelled right up.”

Her, well Calypso’s, skin crawled at the thought of George laying there, chest open, with a divine organ growing inside of him. *Hey wait a second. “Does that mean George is now susceptible to the signal? Like won’t his heart give out if he pulls the trigger?”*

“I see you haven’t been reading my reports,” the red-head scoffed.

“I’m sorry, but weren’t you the one that said, and I quote: witch bitch can ignore these,” she said, doing her best impression of the engineer’s nasally voice.

“Touché,” he grunted, while the two gods smirked behind him. They may have been forced to do his bidding, but they definitely enjoyed seeing their master humiliated. “Any who, while my little signal is fatal to DGs and can incapacitate a G with ease, but Ts and higher require a lot more effort. While I was able to tear apart T:A with my little discovery, I couldn’t enslave him like I could these two brainless mooks,” he said pointing at the two gods. “Long story short: unless he holds a dozen of the pulse grenades to his chest and shoves the rifle mod at full power up his ass, he’ll be just fine.”

She frowned and raised one thin eyebrow at the engineer. “That’s a lovely image you planted in my head. It sounds to me like there are a lot of unknowns with your little toy. Surely if it can kill a DG it can take out a G with just a little more effort?”
“And that’s why we need to work together!” Brian shouted, throwing his hands in the air. “There’s
got to be something I’m missing! Something that isn’t quantifiable by normal means! I mean I hate
that I have to resort to hocus pocus, but it’s probably just a form of science I can’t understand yet!”
His tone of voice changed from frustrated, to angry, and finally to excited in the course of only a few
seconds. “Now what do you say? We go take care of things in Seattle and then we go sit down in the
New York office and figure out a way to end this once and for all!”

He offered her his hand which she eyed suspiciously. Shaking hands had got her into her current
mess. The first time she took Hecate’s hand she had bargained years off her life for a chance at
freedom. The second time she traded more years and received her first runes. The third time had
given her the twin serpent tattoos that were slowly coiling around her, ready to crush her once her
time was up, her soul would then belong to the goddess for all eternity. But why does he scare me
more than her?

“Eh? Eh? I’ll make you one of my instant Keurig machines if you say yes,” he offered, practically
shoving his hand in her face.

Just think of your freedom.

She slapped his hand from her face and then clasped it with her own in one fluid motion. “Fine.
When do we leave?” she asked, ignoring the discomfort that surged through her tattoos, the serpent
on her hand trying to slither away from the engineer’s grasp.

Brian’s smile could have scared the devil himself.

Chapter End Notes

It was about time we saw everything from Morgan's point of view.
We’ve seen her described as this drop dead gorgeous tattooed beauty with strange
powers, but we’ve barely scratched the surface of her character. Unlike the other villains
she feels a bit guilty for killing the demigods, but she's all about self preservation. She
doesn't hold a grudge for Veronica/Atlas burning her, knowing that given enough time
she would have regenerated on her own, and as she said she would have done the same
thing in their place.
She is very much a witch akin to how Hazel's mom was one as well. The key difference
is though that she kept making deals with Hecate, the price growing with each bargain. I
will say that she had no intention of becoming a witch and that she is a victim of
circumstance. This will be explored more in later chapters and unlike Brian I think you
will grow to like her.

We continue to see that Brian is a horrible human being, but now after the failed raid he
realizes that there is far more going on than he can currently understand. In the past
Morgan had tried to explain to him how everything works from a magical perspective,
but he brushed her off. Now though, he wants to increase his understanding, which is
bad news for Olympus.

Morgan is a little bit vain by assuming Brian is aro/ace for not paying attention to her.
She is used to having every man and woman, with the exceptions of George and Merlin,
drooling all over her. This is due to some charm spells she keeps active at all times.
Think of it as a passive charm speak, it influences people to suit her desires.
There was also a lot of plot development in this chapter if you happened to catch it :)

Hey! You! Yes you! did you like what you just read? Then leave a kudos!
Thoughts, theories, questions, criticism? Then leave a comment!

I love hearing from all of you and your feedback helps me grow!

Next chapter is Nico, and I promise this is a chapter many of you have been waiting for.
It's the start of the path towards recovery for him and Percy :)

Well until next time, I want you all to know you are wonderful people and I want you to have only the best.

Thanks, and happy Thanksgiving for those of you in the USA!
Chapter Summary

Tonight:

Embarrassing childhood stories.

A fight in the mud.

It finally happens.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“There was a sigh. “How did you make it this far in life?”

“Honestly, it was a team effort.”

That was the strange conversation Nico woke up to. He couldn’t quite tell who was talking, as everything sounded as if he was underwater. He knew one of them must have been Percy, but who was he talking too? Jason? Poseidon? Demeter? His father? Then he realized that Percy was alive!

And so was he!

With that epiphany his eyes flew open. After the initial blurriness faded and his eyes focused, he realized that he was in his bed at Demeter’s farm. Nico slowly turned his head to the source of the argument and couldn’t process what he was seeing.

Okay, I must have died. Or this is some kind of fever dream.

There sitting across from him on Percy’s bed, was the raven haired son of Poseidon and the lord of the underworld. His father was sitting at the edge of the bed, holding Percy’s Precalc notebook in one hand while writing down something with the other. Percy was sitting upright in the bed, trying to read whatever his father was writing down. The older teen’s hands were wrapped in bandages, as well as his right forearm. His right leg was propped up on top of two frilly pink pillows and was wrapped in bandages from his knee down to his ankle.
But he’s alive. That’s what matters.

“I could understand if Grace didn’t know the Greek alphabet, but you? Delta was Daedalus’ calling card! Nico told me all about it!” his father cried, staring at Percy in disbelief.

The son of Poseidon rubbed the back of his neck with one bandaged hand. “Oh yeah. Kind of forgot about that!”

He thought about making some kind of noise to announce his presence, but decided this was too rare of an opportunity to pass up; Percy and his father interacting without them being knowingly watched?

Nico knew that his father wasn’t Percy’s biggest fan; the accusation of him stealing Zeus’ master bolt and years of watching him deal with his unrequited feelings for the son of Poseidon had made sure of that. But lately though he wasn’t so sure of his father’s feelings for the older teen. His father seemed to care for Percy’s wellbeing, not just physically but mentally as well. He had caught the god telling Percy that he would be there for him if he ever wanted to talk. Whenever the lord of the underworld would depart from the farm house he would ruffle Percy’s hair as well as his. He even seemed to be slipping him some extra allowance money to spend on the son of Poseidon.

“Okay now that you have found the rate at which the balloon is deflating,” his father said, trailing off to let Percy finish.

He watched as Percy pursed his lips, deep in thought, before he answered, “we multiply that by seven seconds.”

Hades nodded with a slight smile. “And?”

“We… subtract the volume we just found from the original volume of the balloon.”

Now his father was beaming with pride at the son of Poseidon. “Excellent,” he cried as he wrote down what Nico assumed was the remainder of Percy’s homework. When he finished he closed the notebook and set it on the nightstand between their beds. “I believe you are now officially caught up with your school work.”

“Until Jason gets back tonight with today’s,” Percy groaned as he flopped back in his bed, his face twisting in pain at the sudden movement. “Yup, shouldn’t have done that.”

His father threw his head back and rolled his eyes at the ceiling. “It’s like you forget you’re injured. If you keep moving like that you’re going to tear your stitches,” his father chided, as he helped Percy settle back into the bed. “And I don’t wish to put you back together again Jackson.”

The raven haired teen was about to say something in return, when he must have saw him watching from the corner of his eye. Percy turned his head to look at him and his green eyes nearly doubled in size. “Neeks!” he cried, bolting up, before hissing in pain. “Son of a-“

“What are you on ab-“ his father asked before turning to see him as well.

“Um… hi?” he said, giving the two a small wave. Smooth Nico. Real smooth...

Before he could process what was happening he felt himself be wrapped up in his father’s arms. His face was crushed against the lord of the underworld’s shoulder as the hug only grew in bone crushing intensity. His father was telling him things in a mixture of English, Italian, and Greek, but he was too busy trying to escape the death trap to understand what he was saying.
“Air!” he gasped as he managed to free his face from his father’s shoulder.

“Oh, um… Sorry,” his father chuckled as he released him. “I was… overwhelmed by my emotions.”

“It’s fine,” he panted. “Just glad to know I was missed.”

“Of course you were missed Nico,” Percy said from his bed, a soft smile on his face. “How are you feeling?”

*That is a good question.* His head hurt, his whole body felt strangely tingly, everyone joint was aching, his stomach was painfully empty, and he really needed to use the bathroom. “I’m fine.”

Percy’s eyes narrowed. “He’s lying.”

“Oh I know Perseus,” his father said as he pushed him back down into his bed. “He’s always been stubborn like that.” He cracked his knuckles and looked at Nico with an evil smirk. “Now, let’s see what is ailing our patient…”

He gulped and couldn’t suppress the whimper that escaped him.

*Help!*

He had never been more embarrassed in his life.

Despite him protesting that he was fine, and he was! Hades insisted on checking him over. So his father felt up and down his arms, legs, opened his eyelids, made him open his mouth almost inhumanly wide, test his reflexes, recite the alphabet, count to ten, blink, wink, shrug, and a whole other battery of tests, while the son of Poseidon snickered at him from his bed.

“Everything seems fine so far,” the lord of the underworld tsked, “I just want to check one more thing. Take off your shirt please.”

“What?” his voice cracked. He looked over to Percy who was smiling like the cat who ate the canary.

“Your shirt. Remove it.”

He felt his cheeks heat up. Despite sharing a room with Percy and Jason for some time now, he still wasn’t any more comfortable with the idea of undressing in front of others. Especially his shirt. Before getting into the shower in the evenings he would look at his back in the mirror and was disgusted by the ugly scars left by the burns. “I, uh… that is…”

Apparently his father wasn’t having any of it, as he reached down and yanked the black T-shirt off in one fluid motion. “When you were little we couldn’t keep clothes on you and now we can’t get them off of you,” the god fussed, as he flipped him onto his stomach.

“Wait, what?!” Percy roared with laughter.

“Oh yes,” his father laughed as he probed and prodded his lower back, “our dear little Nico here
used to hate wearing clothes so much he would strip down to nothing faster than a man can blink.”

Kill me. Kill me now.

“One time his mother got so fed up with his behavior she just let him walk down the street without any pants,” Hades chuckled, as he continued to examine his back.

That had apparently been the breaking point for the son of Poseidon, as he began to laugh like a hyena. “Oh my gods! Little Nico was a streaker!”

Yup… Should’ve died…. The River Lethe is sounding pretty good right now…

He tried to slip into the shadows, but his father grabbed him by his bare shoulder and yanked him out. “Don’t even try it young man!” The god then leaned in close and breathed into his ear, “I know you told Jackson about the chicken.” His heart stopped. “Consider us even now.”

“I hate you both so much right now,” he grumbled over the son of Poseidon’s laughter.

“Oh come on Nico! I said I was sorry!” Percy whined from his bed.

He had his back turned to the son of Poseidon, holding a pillow over his head trying to drown out Percy’s insistent cries for attention. In his opinion the son of Poseidon had laughed a bit too long and too loud at his father’s embarrassing story. “I said I don’t want to hear it Perseus,” he hissed.

There was a lovely moment of silence before he heard Percy sigh. “Come on man, I really want to talk with you before your dad gets back.” There was a pause, followed by the rustling of sheets. “It’s about last Saturday,” the son of Poseidon whispered, more like shouted considering the pillow that was muffling sound. “I, uh, we need to talk about what happened in the pool.”

Nico’s heart stopped.

He knew that he and Percy would have to talk about what happened eventually, but he was hoping he could have a little more time before the inevitable rejection.

Because that’s all that can happen. I forced myself on Percy, taking advantage of his vulnerable state. He only kissed me back because he was confused.

He removed the pillow from his head and took a deep breath, preparing himself to face the music. He rolled over to face the son of Poseidon and was not prepared for what he saw.

Percy’s was sitting up in bed facing him, his bandaged leg hanging precariously off the edge of the bed. He was slightly hunched over, his hand in his lap, with one of the goofiest grins Nico had ever seen on the older teen’s face, which only intensified when he sat up as well.

“What?” he asked, his voice shakier than he would have liked.

Percy started to slightly rock back-and-forth, reminding him of a puppy that was waiting for someone to throw a ball. “Well after what happened, I was a bit confused to say the-“
Suddenly the bedroom door flew open, slamming into their wardrobe with a resounding ‘thud’.

“Alright lunch is served, gentlemen,” the lord of the dead said as he walked into the room, carrying an assortment of food on the same tray he used to serve Percy breakfast. “One blueberry shake for Jackson,” his father said as he carefully handed a glass to the son of Poseidon, who carefully grasped the glass between his bandaged hands. “And a fresh cut apple, a bowl of chicken noodle soup, saltines, a glass of ice water, and a blueberry shake for my son. Dig in!” his father laughed as he set the tray on Nico’s lap.

He looked at the food in front of him, finding it strange that his father had made it all for him. He then looked at Percy, who mouthed “We’ll talk later” and winked at him before beginning to suck down the semi-frozen purple dairy beverage.

“You made this?” he asked as he examined the bowl of soup. It didn’t appear to have come from a can, as it had big hunks of chicken, celery, and carrots as well as thick egg noodles. He took the saltine crackers and crushed them before sprinkling the crumbs into the bowl.

“You know Perseus, most gods take offense when one claims a mortal is better than them,” his father said as he sat next to Percy, glaring at the injured teen. Percy shrank back and looked at Nico for help, but he knew Percy wasn’t in trouble by the small thin smile on his father’s lips. “Luckily for you, I am not so insecure as the rest of our extended family.”

The son of Poseidon gave a forced chuckle. “I’m just going to sit here and drink my shake in silence,” he said before distancing himself from the lord of the underworld.

Something is off here, he thought as he stirred his soup. *Percy’s not the type to shrink away from a god without some kind of smartass response… So why the change? Before Jason left for Harpocrates he flipped off Poseidon, so why is he… Oh…* He decided that Percy must have been trying to score brownie points with his father before they had their conversation. That way maybe the lord of the dead wouldn’t throw him into Tartarus for once again hurting his son.

“Why do you look sad now?!” Hades cried. “It’s just soup! Maybe Demeter is right! Maybe you do need a better diet!”

Percy nearly choked on his shake laughing.

He jabbed his spoon into the bowl and took one large bite, glaring at his father for the entire process.

Woah.

When the broth touched his tongue he was transported back to a winter day over seventy years ago. He and Bianca had awoken one morning to find the world had been covered in a blanket of white as they slept.

It was the first time they had seen snow outside of a picture book.

His mother must have known that she wouldn’t have been able to sit two small excited children down for breakfast, so she dressed them in heavy coats and boots that their father had purchased for them the night before, and sent them outside to play.

After several amazing hours, he and Bianca, thoroughly exhausted, cold, and hungry, went back inside to find steaming bowls of chicken noodle soup waiting for them.
“This is mother’s soup,” he choked, dropping the spoon onto the tray.

“Yes, yes it is,” his father smiled as he crossed his arms over his chest, clearly pleased with his son’s reaction.

For the first time in years, Nico felt like he couldn’t eat enough.

“Dude, I think you ate like, a literal gallon’s worth of soup,” Percy laughed, before sipping his shake. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen you eat so much.”

“What can I say? It tasted good,” he said, shrugging as his father gathered up their dishes. It was more than that though, it brought forth something he had thought was lost forever; a feeling of home.

“I’m glad to see my efforts were appreciated,” Hades said as he exited the room, dishes in hand. “After I wash these we’ll talk.”

When Nico was sure his father was out of earshot, he turned his attention to the son of Poseidon and asked, “I take it you didn’t want him to hear what you were going to say?”

“Uh, yeah.” Percy turned his head away from him and ran a bandaged hand over the new scar on his cheek.

“Well, if he’s half as fussy as me when it comes to cleaning we’ll have about an hour to ourselves. So shoot.” Now it was his turn to look away; not wanting to hear what Percy had to say. But it’s better to get this over with now.

“Actually he’s like you on steroids,” the green-eyed teen laughed awkwardly. “He’ll be scrubbing those until they become inhabitable to all-“

“Percy,” he said, holding up one hand. “Just spit it out. I- I can handle it.” At least that’s what I’m telling myself... How stupid was he? He had let himself get too attached to Percy once again, who he constantly reminded himself was straight. What had happened a week-and-a-half ago had been a mistake brought on by two lonely souls who just wanted to feel something again.

Percy’s head snapped back to face him, the older boy’s green eyes narrowed in confusion. “Wait? What? Oh gods no Neeks!” he cried, flailing his arms. “It’s-“

“Nico!” A blond blur cried as Nico was engulfed by a spine shattering bear hug. “You’re up! You’re up!” Jason cheered as the son of Jupiter lifted him off the bed.

“Oh for fucks sake!” Percy groaned as he fell back into his bed. “What are you doing home? It’s only two!”

“First Wednesday of the month we get out early!” Jason laughed as he continued his bone crushing hug. “Gods I missed you Nico!”

“I missed you too,” the son of Hades gasped, as he pried himself from his friend’s hold.

Jason set them down on the bedroom floor, the blond’s glasses were crooked, and his hair was
disheveled from the sudden gust of air in the small room. “How you feeling? Everything okay?”

“I’m feeling a little woozy right now,” he huffed as sat back down on his bed, closing his eyes to stop the room from spinning.

Jason was instantly at his side, placing one hand on his shoulder and the other on his forehead. “Hmm you don’t feel warm… Do you need me to get you some water? Aspirin? Uh-“

“He’s woozy because you turned our bedroom into a vortex Grace,” Percy all-but-growled. “Thanks for scattering my homework!”

“That’s why you should put it in a folder kelp-head,” Jason said, pulling Nico in closer.

“I don’t think folders were intended for gale-force winds, air-head,” the son of Poseidon hissed.

“Well then-“

I live with children… “When I open my eyes the room better have stopped spinning and two certain demigods should act their age,” he growled. “Now on the count of three. One-“

“It’s Jason’s fault!”

“No it’s not!”

“Two-“

The bed shifted as Jason’s weight disappeared from next to him.

“Hey! What are you-“

“I liked you better when you were silent.”

“Three.” He opened his eyes and was greeted with the sight of Jason and Percy sitting next to each other with the biggest, fakest smiles he had ever seen. The son of Jupiter had his legs crossed at the knee, resting his chin in one hand. Percy hadn’t moved, but he was giving him double thumbs up, his eyes wide with fear. “I’m proud of you.”

“Thanks Neeks,” the two beamed at the same time.

“I was talking to the room.”

“And watch this,” The son of Jupiter grinned as he clicked his mouse. On the laptop’s screen a bulky minotaur in plate armor threw its shield at a skeleton, and bounced off of two more before returning to its hand.

“Yeah, that’s pretty cool Jace,” he said absently, as he focused more on the open math textbook on his lap. Nico had long forgotten that students were expected to make up whatever schoolwork they missed during an absence, and apparently missing a week-and-a-half added up to a ton of makeup work. It’s no wonder why Percy was upset about being abducted during a school year! How did he
“Get this, that move is called *Avenger’s Shield!*” The son of Jupiter beamed, oblivious to the lewd hand gestures Percy was making behind him. “It’s pretty much the *Captain America* of classes!”

“Do they have a *Hawkeye* type class?” he asked, as he scribbled down his answer. *Why would anyone need to know when two trains would collide? Shouldn’t the real question be who was responsible for letting them on the same track?*

“There’s the hunter class, which uses bows and guns, but they kind of have a negative connotation associated with them,” the blond chuckled as he slid off the bed onto his sleeping bag without losing momentum in his game. “They call new guys who play hunters, huntards.”

Percy bolted straight up in his bed, eyes wide. “They call them what?”

“Huntards,” Jason repeated, without looking up from his screen. “It’s like the class specific term for noob.”

“And you don’t see anything wrong with that?” Percy asked, eyes narrowing.

_Niko had just finished his history homework when there was a knock on their bedroom door._

“I believe it is time we talked,” his father said, as he entered the room, dragging an office chair behind him. The lord of the underworld rolled the chair next to Percy’s bed and sat down. “Unless any of you have any objections?”

He and Percy said that was fine, while Jason just nodded without stopping his game.

“Grace would you mind turning that off?”

“Nah, I can multitask.”

His father looked like he wanted to rip the computer from Jason’s hands, but he just shook his head, his rage seemingly turning to something Nico couldn’t quite figure out. “I’ve already told Jackson and Grace this, but I would like to apologize for my rash decision. I almost lost you and Jackson because of it and I promise I will make amends.”

It seemed Nico had awoken in a parallel universe, as Percy smiled softly while Jason scoffed. *What is that about?*

Either his father didn’t notice Jason or decided to just ignore it as he continued. “All of us have
encountered a different face of the enemy and while we have gained much knowledge, we have gained just as many questions. I would like all of us to tell our stories again and maybe now with Nico here we can fill in some of the gaps.”

“I’ll start,” Percy sighed, looking at bandaged limbs. “Look, I didn’t want to be a half-blood—”

“Skip ahead Jackson,” his father sighed.

Percy beamed like he had just told some kind of inside joke that only he knew. “Okay, okay, just trying to take the edge off before I have to recall the third worst day of my life.” The older teen turned his gaze to his quilt and began to pick at it. “I decided to go look for Hazel and Frank at their apartment. It wasn’t the most original idea, but, uh, well I’m not an original kind of guy.” He looked up and smiled softly at the son of Hades. “I may have gotten lost and unfortunately I encountered some of our mortal friends. I managed to hide in a cardboard box—”

“There is no way you hid in a cardboard box Percy,” the son of Jupiter grunted.

A rogue pillow collided with the side of the blond’s head. “If you would let me finish,” Percy said, glaring at the former praetor. “Anyway they weren’t really fooled by it, so they fired a shot which gave me this beauty,” he said, gesturing to the long thin scar that covered half of his face. “The only reason they didn’t fire again was because Demeter and your dad started leveling the city.”

Jason looked up from his laptop and glared at the lord of the underworld. “Thanks for that by the way. Not like that was my home or anything.”

Okay, seriously what is with Jason? He’s been acting weird for a long time now, but this aggressiveness is new.

“Thankfully they ran away,” the son of Poseidon continued, ignoring Jason. “Then I somehow found my way to the apartment and well, that’s where I met George, who did this to me,” he said, gesturing to his wounds. “He seemed normal enough at first, if you ignored the dollhouse. Turns out he really did not take it well when his daughter joined the Hunters.”

“I don’t think any parent would,” he said, thinking of Bianca. No rational person would approve of their loved ones joining them.

His father didn’t say anything, but he could tell he was thinking along the same lines.

“So yeah, he managed to pin one hand to Hazel’s dining room table, and I was powerless to stop him. Like, literally powerless,” the older teen growled. He turned to face Hades. “I’m glad you stabbed my dad. He fucking deserved it; especially after failing to protect my loved ones yet again.” The son of Poseidon’s eyes had an intensity behind them that Nico had only ever seen while Percy was in the middle of a fight. “If he thought he could get rid of me by cutting my powers, he’s got another thing coming.”

His father sighed before reaching over and setting a hand on Percy’s shoulder. “Perseus we have been through this. Despite my brother’s many failings, I do not believe he would cut you off as it were.”

“Then how do you explain this?” he cried, holding out his bandaged arm. “Granted he got me first, I still should have been able to burst the pipes and throw him through a window or something! Instead I got filleted!”

“Percy, I think my father is right.” All eyes turned to him. “I mean, if they were able to make him and Demeter more-or-less mortal, then why couldn’t they do the same to a demigod?”
“My thoughts exactly,” Hades smiled, clearly proud of his observation.

“But you’re dad and Demeter said it was like having their body being torn apart, and I think I would have remembered that.”

“That is true,” he mused. “But you didn’t you tell me earlier he knocked you out first?”

Percy frowned. “Yeah?”

“When you came to, was anything out of the ordinary?”

“Neeks, the whole situation was out of the ordinary.”

“I believe my son means if this George was doing anything unique, did he have any weapons or devices in hand?” His father asked. “Demeter and I were assaulted by some kind of unmanned air vehicle with some kind of satellite dish on them.”

“Well I didn’t see any drones or satellite dishes, I mean the old guy was playing on his phone when I woke up,” the son of Poseidon said, readjusting his sitting position.

_That’s it!_ “It had to be the phone then! I will be the first to admit I don’t know anything about modern technology-“

“The fact you refuse to use a calculator is testimony of that,” Jason sighed as he continued to type away on his laptop.

He ignored the gaming son of Jupiter and continued, but only after tossing a pillow at the blond. “As I was saying, I don’t know much about gadgets, but don’t phones have antennas in them?”

“I think so Neeks,” Percy said, scratching the back of his neck. “My mom’s old phone had an antenna on it, so I don’t see why the newer ones wouldn’t have one. Oh! And it also had Snake! I loved that game!”

His father leaned forward in his chair and rested chin on his hands. “That would explain a lot… If it was some kind of signal it that would explain why all of the East coast is inaccessible, why no one saw these attacks coming.”

“Um, I think you guys better hear my story too,” he sighed. “It only gets worse.”

After telling them about the desecrated temple of Vulcan that had been converted to some kind of command center, the holding pens filled the half-starved and unresponsive demigods, the trenches filled with dead Romans, and how he suspected that there were traitors working for his father, everyone sat in silence, unsure what to do with the information.

Jason had closed his computer and had his head hung low, trying to avoid eye contact with everyone.

Hades was silently fuming, rapidly tapping his fingers on the chair’s armrest. Nico knew that if his father had even a fraction of his powers back he would have gone down to the underworld and
would have tossed every suspected traitor into Tartarus.

Percy though seemed to take it the hardest. He was still looking at Nico with a small smile, but his eyes were filled with pain.

*He thinks this is his fault. Percy probably thinks he could have saved everyone if he hadn’t been grieving.* Nico was just about to get out of his bed and go comfort the older teen when Jason broke the silence.

“This has been a long time coming,” the blond said, slowly getting to his feet. “What we’re facing aren’t monsters, gods, titans, or even primordials, they’re ordinary people who are fighting to protect their families.”

Nico gulped. “What are you trying to say Jason?”

“Did you forget that these assholes killed our friends Grace?” Percy growled, his hands clenching the sheets.

“No. No I have not,” Jason shot back. “But I also haven’t forgotten all the shit the gods have pulled through the years! Percy your dad raped a girl only for Athena to turn her and her sisters into the gorgons! My dad is single handedly responsible for at least fifty percent of our problems!” The blond turned to his father who was watching with one eyebrow quirked. “And… I don’t know what you’ve done, but I’m sure you’ve done fucked up shit too!”

His eyes widened as he watched his father, waiting for him to smite down the son of Jupiter.

*Father’s more patient than most gods, but even he has his limits.*

To Nico’s surprise and relief, the lord of the underworld shrugged. “I’ve done a few things I’m not proud of, but nothing too noteworthy.”

“Yeah, I’m sure,” Jason growled. “That’s the problem! Right there! What you and the rest of the gods don’t even consider as noteworthy is life shattering to mortals! Like Percy said, how many parents go to bed wondering whatever happened to their daughters? How many families have been lost because they had a demigod among them? What about the untold number of people who are devoured by creatures they can’t even see? What about the wars?” The blond was panting and had a crazed look in his eye, which Nico had never seen before in the son of Jupiter.

“What wars?” Percy spat.

“The fucking Civil War! World War Two! World War one! We’ve been told for years that they were caused by demigods fighting! Demigods like us!” The son of Jupiter shouted as he flew to Percy, grabbing the raven haired teen by the shoulders. “We have the blood of millions on our hands!”

The room began to smell of ozone as the hairs on the back of his neck began to stand on end.

“Jason,” He said as calmly as possible. “Where is this coming from?”

When the blond released Percy and spun around, he saw that tears were streaming down Jason’s face. “Merlin’s tattoo Nico.”

“Yeah, what about it?” He didn’t understand why Jason would be so upset by a simple tattoo.

“He’s a survivor of the holocaust,” Jason choked.

“Wait! No! Time out!” Percy cried, waving his arms around. “I don’t care what our siblings did! We are not them! We didn’t do anything wrong!”

Nico was stunned at Jason’s accusations. The blond knew that Percy regretted every single life that he had been unable to save during the Titan War and to bring that up was a low blow. “Jason that’s not fair. You know-“

“You son of a bitch!” Percy roared as he jumped off the bed onto the son of Jupiter. Percy was straddling Jason, pummeling the blond’s face without mercy. “Fuck you Jason!” Percy screamed into the former praetor’s face before spitting on him.

Nico could hear and feel the pipes in the walls starting to rattle, while the smell of ozone only intensified as the two older teens rolled around on the floor, trading blow after blow. As he jumped out of bed to try and break the fight up, his father grabbed him by the shoulder.

“Nico, I think you should take this outside,” Hades sighed, his voice heavy with pity.

He nodded before diving onto the two demigods, pulling them into the shadows.

They appeared a moment later in the field behind the farm house. The field was reduced to small lakes and mud from the April rain showers, which made Nico groan in disgust as his clothes were caked with wet earth, but Jason and Percy seemed unfazed by the change in environment.

“Fuck you Percy,” Jason panted as he scurried out of the son of Poseidon’s grip. He summoned a gust of wind that blew Percy back several feet.

Percy may have been injured, but he didn’t let it show. All around them tendrils of mud erupted from the earth and launched themselves at the son of Jupiter, who jumped into the air and avoided the onslaught. As Jason ducked, rolled, and dodged, Percy pulled a tidal waves worth of water from the saturated earth and used it to slingshot himself at the blond, knocking the two of them back down to the ground.

“You don’t think I know about them Jason?” Percy roared as he slammed one blood drenched fist into Jason’s nose. “I wake up every morning and first thing that enters my mind are all the people that I have let down!” He slammed the blond’s head into the earth. “I don’t even get a reprieve when I sleep! They’re all there when I close my eyes!”

Jason managed to punch Percy in the jaw, but if anything it only pissed Percy off more.

“Michael Yew! Silena! Luke! Castor! Pollux! Bianca! Will! Annabeth! My family! All of them and so many more Jason!” Percy cried as slammed his head against Jason’s, a sickening crack echoed through the field that made Nico’s stomach turn.

Okay, that’s enough of that. Nico pushed himself up out of the mud, his body protesting with every little movement. “Never a dull moment on the farm,” he sighed as he hobbled over to the children, slipping and sliding as he went. “That’s enough you idiots!” he screamed.

Either they didn’t hear him, or had elected to ignore him, as the two continued to punch and kick at
each other, and even biting each other (that was Percy). Jason managed to knock Percy off of him, but the son of Poseidon was flailing too much for Jason to pin him down.

“I said that’s enough!” He roared as two slabs of stone erupted from the earth and pushed the two away from each other before wrapping around each teen. The two stone prisons then rocketed forwarded and spat out Jason and Percy before returning deep within the earth. He turned to Jason first who was trying, and failing, to stand up in the mud. “What the actual fuck Jason!” he shrieked. “Look I don’t know what the fuck has you so upset, but don’t take it out on us! We’re your friends and the three of us are possibly the last free demigods in the world! We have to stick together now more than ever!” He paused to catch his breath. “I don’t know why that guy’s tattoo has you so upset, but even if our parents and siblings were responsible for… whatever, that’s not us!”

Jason had managed to sit up in the mud, his glasses hanging on by an ear, blood trickling from his nostrils. “You don’t understand Nico,” the blond whispered, not looking him in the eye.

“Then make me understand Jay,” he sighed, running a muddy hand through his own hair. “I- I don’t know what’s wrong you with Jason and you keep pushing us away. You promised when you got back from Harpocrates we would talk about… whatever happened with Disciplina. I think that is the root of this,” he said gesturing to the three of them. He sighed and helped Jason to his feet. “I want you to go back to the house and clean up. Then you are going to pull your sleeping bag out of our room and sleep in the living room for the night. You and Percy need some time apart. First thing in the morning we are going to talk, even if I have to hold you down and beat it out of you. You got that?”

The son of Jupiter held his head low and nodded, before flying back to the farm.

One down, one to go… He turned his attention to the son of Poseidon, who was curled up in the muddy fields sobbing, his body shaking. “Come on Percy,” he whispered as he crouched down next to the older boy. “He didn’t mean anything by it… Jason’s just… off.”

“It sure sounded like he did,” Percy scowled as he sat up, his face twisting in pain. “I should have drowned his sorry ass.”

“You don’t mean that Percy,” he sighed. It’s always something with these two… He wrapped on of Percy’s arms around his shoulder and slowly stood him up; Percy wincing as he tried to keep his weight off his injured leg. “We’re going to have to change those bandages and get you cleaned up.”

“Yeah,” the older boy sighed. “I think I reopened everything too.”

“Gods damn it Percy,” he groaned as they slowly walked back to the farm.

“So how many times did you dream about this Neeks?” Percy chuckled.

“Fuck you Jackson,” he sighed as he stepped into the claw-foot bathtub with Percy.

It had taken them close to twenty minutes to walk back to the house, not that they had shadow traveled so far away, but because of his exhaustion and Percy’s inability to use his right leg. When they hobbled into the house, Hades had taken Percy off of him and the trio had retreated to the
basement where Percy used an old water faucet and his powers to get most of the mud off of them.

His father then removed Percy’s bandages and swore when he saw that the son of Poseidon had indeed reopened his wounds. “Congratulations Jackson,” his father grunted. “Looks like you get to stay in bed for another week. At least…” With an efficiency that surprised Nico, the lord of the underworld cleaned, stitched, and bandaged the wounds with minimal discomfort to Percy. “Nico, I want you to go help Jackson shower.”

“Wait, what?” he stuttered, almost falling out of his chair.

Hades rolled his eyes as he finished wrapping Percy’s leg. “He needs to get the rest of the dirt and grime off of him, and cannot take a bath with these bandages.”

“But-“

“Thanks for breaking my son Jackson,” the god of the dead grumbled as she stood up. “Just wear your swimsuits or something! Now I have to go get more first aid equipment since we seem to be going through it at an exuberant rate.”

Which is why he found himself standing behind the son of Poseidon in a bathtub shower combo that barely had enough room for one, let alone two. *At least we’re halfway dressed…* He thought as he stared at the son of Poseidon’s very enticing back.

“I’m only joking Neeks,” Percy chuckled as he adjusted the garbage bag that was wrapped around his leg. “Although-“

“Shut up and pass the soap,” he grunted, but if Percy could see his flushed face he would know he wasn’t really upset with him.

“Sure thing Neeks,” The green eyed teen cheerfully said as he picked up the ancient bar of ivory soap and a wash cloth that was probably older than Nico. The older boy looked over his shoulder with a grin that made Nico weak in the knees. “You know we still haven’t had our talk,” he mused.

“Is that right?” he gulped as he built up a thick lather in the steaming spray of water. He really didn’t want to be rejected in a cramped three-by-three bathtub, practically pressed up against the boy. How awkward would it be if he had to run out of the bathroom, dripping water everywhere, probably crying too. “You sure now’s a good time Perce?” he choked out as he started to work the lather on Percy’s back.

“Oh! A little higher and to the- Ah right there!” the boy moaned in ecstasy. “That is the stuff of legends right there man,” Percy sighed as he slouched over. “And I think now is as good a time as any. I mean, we are *alone* after all.”

“Alright,” he sighed. “I can take it…” *Would be pretty great if I had the strength to shadow travel right now…*

“IvebeenthinkingandIthinkIwouldliketogiveusashot,” Percy practically screeched, before cringing away as if he expected Nico to hit him.

For a moment the only sound to be heard was Percy’s heavy breathing and the water splattering against the porcelain tub.

“Umm, could you say that again? But in a way that’s understandable and won’t make every dog in thirty mile radius howl?” *There’s no way he said what I think he said. No way in Tartarus!*
“Ugh!” Percy threw his head back with a groan. “Here help me turn around, I should say this to your face anyway. Mom and Annabeth would beat me to death if they found out what I just did,” he nervously chuckled as he hopped around and placed his hands on Nico’s shoulders. “So as I was trying to say, and failing in the most spectacular way, I’ve been doing some thinking.” Percy stopped and with one hand tilted his head back so he was forced to look into the sea green eyes that haunted his dreams. “I know we are both still hurting, and well, I think that’s always going to be the case like you said. But we don’t have to be miserable, and wow, this is a lot harder than I thought this was going to be,” the son of Poseidon chuckled. “And wow! I guess I haven’t like actually done this before! So-”

“Would you just spit it out already Percy,” he said, his face literally hurting from how much he was smiling.

“Would you be willing to give us a shot?”

Percy and Nico had differing stories on what happened next. Percy would say that Nico let out the cutest squeal before jumping up and wrapping his legs around Percy’s waist and smashing their lips together before they fell out of the small tub. Nico would say he tenderly wrapped his arms around the son of Poseidon’s neck and pulled him close for a sweet, tender kiss, when Percy’s leg gave out, sending them tumbling to the floor.

Either way, the end result was the same: His first official kiss with Percy involved them being soaking wet on the bathroom floor followed by Percy howling in pain.

After finishing cleaning themselves up (which simultaneously got more and less awkward for him) and the bathroom, Nico helped Percy limp to their room and deposited the two of them on Percy’s bed; both smiling like madmen.

“So that’s a yes?” Percy laughed.

“No, I just always turn down people with a kiss,” he replied, voice dripping in sarcasm. “Gods Percy, of course that’s a yes!”

They both laughed, and it felt so amazing, like a weight had been lifted off of his chest. There was still a sense of guilt over Will, but knowing that Percy felt the same way about Annabeth made it bearable, made him see that he wasn’t the only one feeling it.

“Damn, I guess I’ll have to try again,” Percy smiled as he threaded their fingers together. “So what comes next?”

“What do you mean?” he asked, rolling over to face his boyfriend(?).

Percy propped himself up on his elbows and shrugged. “Well, I mean do we tell Jason and your dad? Demeter? The school? How do we do this? Do I treat you differently? Or is it insulting? Oh gods am I supposed to buy you-”

He smothered the almost panicking son of Poseidon’s lips with his hand, and chuckled. “Let’s take our time with this,” he said gesturing between them. “We’ll take it slow, so let’s just keep this
between us for now.”

“I guess everyone at school does think you’re straight anyway,” Percy chuckled as he dropped back down.

“And that you’re gay,” he laughed, flicking Percy’s forehead. “They’d think you turned me.”

“Maybe I did,” Percy purred, which sent a shiver down his spine.

“Uh, well, yeah,” he said so eloquently. “As for how to treat me, just treat me however you feel is appropriate. If I don’t like something I’ll tell you.”

Percy lifted his head up and arched an eyebrow. “Really Neeks? You’ll tell me? Correct me if I’m wrong here, but didn’t Will call you his “little ghost king” for two months before you snapped at him?”

Ah crap… “You are wrong,” he said matter-of-factly. “It was a month-and-a-half,” he coughed.

“Nico…”

“I’ll try Percy, just, I was afraid if I said anything to Will he would leave me. I’ve gotten better communicating my feelings after that incident with support from Will and some couples counseling from the Aphrodite cabin,” he said, face as red as a tomato.

“Wow. That sounds terrible.”

“You have no idea,” he laughed, moving closer to the older teen. “Sock puppets were involved,” he whispered.

Percy wrapped his left arm around him and pulled him into a loose embrace. “I can’t promise you much Neeks, but I can guarantee there will be no sock puppets.”

“My hero,” he laughed, enjoying the warmth radiating from Percy.

Percy shifted so that he could look him in the eye. “I know we’re taking it slow, but would it be okay if I kissed you right now,” he beamed, his green eyes alive for the first time in months.

_I am never going to be able to say no to this man if he keeps looking at me like that._ “I suppose.”

Percy rolled onto his side and bent down, and pressed their lips together. It wasn’t as hungry or intense as the one in the pool or shower, but gods above if it didn’t make Nico’s heart soar.

Chapter End Notes

Holy crap, 200k words in and we have Percico!

Truly this is a turning point where nothing bad can ever again happen.

*devious smile*

So we started off the chapter with Nico waking up to see Hades helping Percy with his homework. This is showing that Hades is trying to keep his promise to repay Percy,
while Percy is seriously trying to work hard to make Annabeth and his family proud. Hades crushing Nico with a hug was simultaneously out of character and so very much in character that I couldn't help but add it. Since Hades is practically powerless at this point, he's not able to keep his emotions in check as he used to. (just wait until he starts watching father-son dramas on TV. Many tears will be shed)

Some of you are probably wondering how Hades knew that Nico told Percy undead chicken story. Valid question. He had the house "bugged" in every room but the bathroom and bedrooms. Did you honestly think he would just leave Nico alone? So what better revenge than by telling a very embarrassing story about Nico when he was a smol bean :)

Poor Nico, of course he would think Percy was going to reject him! Nico has only been open about his sexuality for a little over 8 months and when you combine that with Percy's history and his own, well... ya... So of course I had to add a memory being triggered to lighten the mood!

And then there's Jason. Poor, poor, poor Jason. He just wants to walk away from it all, but with Hades stuck with them he has a constant reminder of what he wants to run from. It's easy for him to pretend Nico and Percy are normal, or at least think they're just metahumans, right now Jason is trying to lose himself in World of Warcraft, so when Hades decides it's time to talk he is forced to take part in a reality that he doesn't want to be part of. If Percy hadn't interrupted Jason, the blond would have probably taken it out on Hades.

Ah the shower scene, I've been waiting for that for a long time. Both our boys covered in dirt mixed with water as they clean each other? Almost like it means something! Now I know some of you are probably thinking they came together way too easy, but isn't that really the easy part of a relationship when you look back? Starting a relationship and keeping one are two completely separate battles. Percy even said he isn't sure how to treat Nico now, while Nico has known communication issues. I will say though that there will be a lot of fluff though that goes with whatever friction they encounter along the way :)

Hey did you like hat you just read? (You should it finally happened!) Then leave a kudos!

Thoughts, theories, criticism, ideas, etc? Leave a comment I love to hear from all of you!

As always thanks for reading! I want you all to know that I appreciate every view and I hope you only receive the best in life!

Next chapter is Piper!
Piper

Chapter Summary

Warnings: violence, character death, language, blood

Tonight:
An impromptu dance party.
The end of a kingdom.
The importance of driver's education.
Something you didn't know you wanted.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

I am never going to get used to this…

Piper was currently standing next to Veronica and Atlas deep within the Amazon headquarters, overlooking the corpse of a young girl that couldn’t have been more than two years older than the daughter of Aphrodite.

“You don’t have to be here Piper,” the daughter of Mercury said as she approached the lifeless body.

“I know I don’t have to, I want to,” Piper said, forcing a smile. I would rather be anywhere else right now! The underworld. Tartarus. A sleepover at Drew’s. Anything really.

“Well I appreciate it,” Veronica said as she rested one hand on the corpse’s chest. Instantly golden flames erupted from the hybrid’s hand and spread over the body, devouring everything it touched.

“Are you okay?” she asked as the flesh and bone turned to glimmering golden ash.

Neither Atlas nor Veronica responded, only the golden flaming orbs that served as their eyes flared as the ashen remains surrounded the girl. The ashes then embedded themselves into Veronica and Piper once again watched in a mix of awe and horror as the girl’s disintegrating flesh was restored to a human-like state. The titan demigod hybrid collapsed to its knees and took in a deep breath.

Instantly she was next to them, wrapping a newly rejuvenated arm around her shoulders and lifting them up to their feet. “Are you okay?” Piper repeated.

“I’m not sure how to answer that,” Veronica huffed, her head hanging limp. “Do you mean if I’m okay with the fact that I have to steal flesh to replace my own? Or do you mean if I’m okay with sharing my body with a Titan that is literally killing me? Or that if I’m okay with the fact I’m stuck like this for the rest of my life, however long that may be? Or are you asking if I’m just okay in general?”

Okay. Wow. This girl is really going through some shit. “Uh, let’s go with the last one?” she laughed
as she carried the girl out of the dank room. “Also can you seriously believe Amazon sells cadavers? They really do sell everything from A to Z!”

“Piper?” Veronica asked as unwrapped her arms from Piper’s neck.

“Yeah?”

“Shut up.”

After parting with Veronica and Atlas, Piper went back to the office that served as her room, retrieved a light jacket, and went for a walk around the Amazon headquarters’ well maintained grounds. The Seattle air was damp and cold, but it was refreshing compared to the overly filtered air that was pumped into the building.

“Gods I hate it here,” she sighed as she passed a large steel statue that was supposed to represent hope, but looked like a chicken leg to her. Seattle seemed to be the polar opposite of Los Angeles, instead of sunshine and sand there was clouds and dampness.

Even the people were different. If you ignored the people who wanted to be actors and actresses, the people of LA had a realness and ruggedness to them that couldn’t be found anywhere else in the world. Sure that guy on the corner may be intimidating, but he would quake in his boots if you said you were going to tell his mama. Seattle though was a sea of hipsters who were constantly trying to one up one another with their smugness and how great their novels were going to be.

Needless to say, Piper stopped leaving the campus soon after their arrival.

“And they’re still protesting,” she sighed, parking her butt on a wooden bench. “Don’t these people have jobs? Families? A freaking cat or something to take care of?” Even deep within the campus, secluded by the artificial forest, the chants of protesters could be heard day and night. Their numbers only seemed to be growing with each shipping facility that was raided by mortals. It wasn’t that their protests weren’t valid, it was just that she hadn’t had a proper night’s sleep in weeks.

She reclined back in the bench and went through her mental list of tasks that she still needed to accomplish before she could return to her office and binge watch Voltron for the thirty-second time.

I have to go down to the garage and check on the status of Betty White, check on Reyna, try to IM anyone at camp, and finally check in with Hylla for any news.

The daughter of Aphrodite took a deep breath and watched the clouds slowly drift across the grey skies. “Gods Jason, I’m beyond worried now,” she shuddered. “I’ve tried everything to get in contact with you and it’s like you fell off the face of the earth. I even managed to get ahold of Mr. Chase and he says he hasn’t heard from Annabeth in three months. Any rational person would give up hope of ever seeing your golden retriever ass again, but I’m anything but rational.”

She hopped up from the bench, adjusted her jacket, and set out for the next item on her list.
“The only thing that needs to be implementer are the retractable aux cords,” The daughter of Vulcan screamed over the grinding and howling of heavy machinery.

“What about the external speakers?!” She shouted, as she pushed the industrial ear muffs tighter against her head. “We don’t want a repeat of last time!”

“Those are good to go!” The brunette shouted as she slapped Betty’s rear. “She’s got enough bass in her to shut Meghan Trainor up!”

“Great!” She screamed, giving the Amazon a thumbs up.

It had been decided (by Reyna) that once the praetor was healed up, Reyna, Veronica/Atlas, and herself would drive across country to the Greek camp and recruit them to retake Camp Jupiter. To do this though they were going to need a new set a wheels, as the SUV they had taken had been more-or-less reduced to a pile of scrap, and since two demigods and titan were bound to attract a whole lot of unnecessary attention a standard mortal vehicle would be destroyed well before it reached New York; Hylla gave them full access to the Amazon garage.

And so Betty White was born.

“Gods above she’s beautiful,” the daughter of Vulcan said as the exited the loud machine shop into the girl’s quiet office. They both removed their protective eye and ear gear and tossed it on the woman’s desk before taking a seat. “A frame made of Celestial Bronze, Imperial Gold, and titanium, coated with carbon fiber. I’d hate to see the monster that could rip through that!” the woman laughed.

Gods I need to start remembering names… “Oh trust me, I’m sure we’ll fine it.” Piper laughed as she removed her hairnet. “But with all the gadgets and gizmos you’ve put into her, Betty won’t take it lying down.”

“I can’t take all the credit for that though,” the older woman smiled as she reclined back in her chair and propped her worn boots on the desk. “We pitched a lot of scenarios to the Grand Tour guys and we took the best ideas those three idiots had and put into Ms. White.”

“You know, I’ve watched that and Top Gear, that does not make me feel better,” she laughed.

“Hey! I never did ask why you’re calling this thing Betty White?”

“Mostly to piss Reyna off,” she laughed. “See when we knew that we would need some new specially made wheels, Reyna wanted to name it something classic, something bold, like Atalanta, Titania, or Angelina Jolie. But none of those are names for a car, so I suggested Betty White. I mean that woman is ninety plus years old and still working in a business that is known to break women; if that’s not bad ass I don’t know what is. Veronica agreed, Atlas abstained, and so the vote passed.”

“Wow.”

“Right?” she laughed. “So when will Betty be ready to go? Reyna is chomping at the bit and it is taking all of my energy to keep her from marching down here and building this thing herself.”

The amazon paused in thought and tapped her finger to her chin. “Well, all the hardware is done, but we’ve only tested the transmission. We need to do some regression testing on the software, debug any issues, and then hand our specs off to the literature department to write you gals up a user
“Hey! Nope! Nope! Nope! You get back in bed!” she yelled the second she entered the praetor’s room.

They had almost lost Reyna when she collapsed after the brutal (and hot) fight with her sister. After Atlas had amputated the Latina’s arm a brutal infection had set in that Reyna had been fighting off by using her abilities. While that had allowed Reyna to function normally it was draining her life and still allowing the infection to work its way deeper into her body, to the point that even the nectar and ambrosia the amazons had given her was barely effective. It had taken two very invasive surgeries to remove the infection and round the clock antibiotics to save the praetor, but yet there she was on the floor doing pushups as if nothing had happened.

“I’m fine and you know it Mclean,” the older girl huffed as she pushed herself up and then quickly clapped her only hand to her chest before catching and lowering herself.

“No! No! Bad girl!” she cried as she pulled the praetor off the tiled office floor. “Bed rest! Now!” Piper pushed Reyna onto the bed and yanked off her boots before pushing her down and draping a sheet over her.

“I’m not a dog,” the praetor huffed, glaring daggers at Piper.

Piper grabbed a nearby remote and turned on the small television that sat in the corner of the office. “I know you’re not a dog. Dogs tend to listen after the first few times,” she smiled before sticking her tongue out at the one-armed woman. “Now shut up and watch TV like the rest of us.”

“We’re just wasting time at this point! We have to get help to take back- wait is that Chopped?”

“Yup,” Piper laughed, popping the ‘p’.

The two sat in silence, only to be broken up by them laughing over how absurd some of the ingredients the cooking show contestants were supposed to use in each dish (Really, who the hell has moose tongue just lying around in their kitchen?). This had become part of Piper’s daily routine since Reyna had regained consciousness; stopping the praetor from overdoing it by distracting her with cooking shows the girl was secretly fond of. It wasn’t the worst way to spend three to four hours of her day, but personally she preferred Guy Fieri’s show over Chopped.

“So did Cindy give you an ETA on when… Betty White will be ready to go?” Reyna asked during a commercial break, reaching for a bag of carrot sticks.

So that’s her name! She picked up the bag of orange vegetables and tossed them to Reyna. “Yeah, Betty’s more or less done. They just got to add the aux cables and do some testing, said that would take around a week.”

“Why do we need aux cables?” Reyna practically growled as she dipped a carrot into a small paper
“Because if I’m going to be trapped in a box with you and Atlas for two-thousand miles I demand bitch’n tunes,” she hummed. “By the way, did you like the surprise I left in your boots?”

She was answered by two small silver packages hitting her on the head. “Seriously Piper? Where do you keep getting them? It’s disgusting!” the praetor huffed.

“Oh come on! It’s not like they’re used,” she snickered. “Besides I got to slow you down anyway I can!”

“So you shove condoms in everything,” Reyna sighed. “I don’t even know when you do it! It’s like I turn around and there’s condoms everywhere! You’re like a safe-sex Santa!”

“There are a lot of ho ho ho’s around here,” she snickered, wiggling her eyebrows suggestively at the Latina.

Reyna screamed in frustration and buried her head under her pillow.

“It appears the queen of the Amazons is entertaining guests,” Atlas chuckled from the bench outside of Hylla’s office.

Oh great just who I wanted to see after once again failing to get ahold of anyone…

“Mortals too by the looks of it. We didn’t get a good look, but I think there was a man and a woman.”

“Probably just some investors or something,” she said, sitting down next to the titan.

It was no secret that the Amazons were in danger of losing everything. After the news broke of slave labor the company’s stock plummeted. When angry protesters began raiding more facilities and discovering even more questionable activity, companies started to demand that the Amazon’s debts be paid. Now.

So now Hylla was doing all that she could do protect her people, offering greater discounts, free one-day shipping, large donations to charity, anything to get the public back on their side. Sadly, a ten dollar Alexa wasn’t enough, so the queen had to look to outside investors for help.

“You didn’t happen to hear who they represented did you? It would be pretty sweet if it was Nintendo,” she sighed, tapping her foot rapidly against the marble floor. “Get some Mario swag or something.”

“I do not know what this “swag” you speak of is,” The titan grunted, “but I believe I heard Hylla saying something about apples and islands.”

That caught her attention, well enough to stop fidgeting so much. “Was it Big Apple Island?”

The demigod-titan tilted their head and then nodded. “Yes, that sounds right.”
“Oh sweet!” she cried jumping up from the bench and doing a little dance. “They are known to just give out tablets and laptops to anyone who asks! I heard they are even donating new computers, tablets, and even phones to students and schools on the east coast!”

“So they are, as you say, good Samaritans?”

“Eh, close,” she chuckled, still grooving to the beat in her head. “They do charge an outrageous amount for their stuff, but they use that to excess to fund their charity work. So when you buy a laptop from them you’re really paying for two more to be donated to charity.”

“Why are you dancing though?”

“Because free stuff rules, and you should use every opportunity life gives you to dance!” She laughed, shaking her hips, before sliding to the left. “Don’t tell me you never danced?”

The titan in a girl’s body crossed its arms. “Not in a few millennia. Too busy either trying to overthrow Olympus or trapped beneath my father.”

“Maybe instead of fighting you should’ve been groove’n. I bet if they would’ve saw you tearing up the dance floor they would have let you go free,” she said, dropping to her knees and sliding across the polished floor while playing air guitar.

“That or I they would’ve thought I’ve lost my senses,” the titan chuckled.

“What about you Veronica? You a dancer?” After many conversations with Veronica and Atlas she had learned that just because only one could control their body at a time, didn’t mean the one not in control couldn’t see or hear. So Piper liked to engage both parties when conversing with one or the other, although she did favor talking to Veronica more.

“She wants to deny it, but there are strong memories of something called a *Sadie Hawkins Dance,*” the titan smiled. “And I think there was a boy too,” he chuckled. The hybrid tilted its head, a confused look on its face. “What is *Soulja Boy*?”

After Veronica took control of their body and showed the titan general modern dance moves alongside Piper, the dance party soon ended as both parties had exhausted themselves. The two bodies were once again seated next to each other on the bench across from Hylla’s office, getting strange looks by Amazons passing by.

“I’m going in there,” Piper announced out of the blue.

Veronica’s golden orbs flickered as if she were blinking. “Don’t you think Hylla would get upset if you just barged into her meeting?”

“Mmmm probably,” she shrugged, “but I’m bored and I can pass for an intern.” She stood up, ruffled her hair, her shirt, and jacket. “This is a tech firm, have to look make it look like I’m overworked and only survive on energy drinks,” she chuckled. “Just watch and learn!”

“Piper, no.”

“Piper, yes!”
She rapped on the frosted glass door and opened it before anyone had a chance to respond. “Ms. Arellano, I’ve got those.”

Time seemed to grind to a halt as Piper stared in horror at the scene in front of her. Hylla was sitting behind her desk, looking as poised, elegant, and dangerous as always, wearing a white suit while sipping from a steaming cup of tea, giving her the evil eye. Across from her sat a guy wearing a wrinkled coffee-stained lab coat who couldn’t have been more than a couple years out of college with a weasel-like face and thick red hair that was slicked back, who looked incredibly bored to be there.

Next to him though, sitting prim and proper, eating a biscotti, was the tattooed beauty who attacked her home.

“Oh hey! Piper! I was wondering when I was going to see you!” The woman laughed before swallowing the rest of baked good.

“This is her?” the man asked, pulling a phone out from his lab coat.

“You know her Miss Fae?” Hylla asked, staring the woman in confusion.

“She’s the one who attacked me!” Piper screamed when she managed find her voice. “She’s the witch!”

The witch stood up from her chair, and Piper thought she saw the tattoos on her bare shoulders briefly glow an eerie emerald green. “Rude, I prefer the term supernatural American.”

“And I want you gone,” Hylla cried as she pressed a button on her desk. “I would highly suggest you two surrender before my finest warriors get here,” the Amazon queen grinned.

“Oh yeah! We got this! She pulled out the switchblade she had picked up from storage depot and crouched into a defensive position. “I’d listen to the boss lady if I-“

“I got this,” the red head said with a bored sigh. He gave a sharp whistle and tapped on his phone. “Terminate-us!”

Terminus-what-now?

There was a blinding flash of light before a wave of heat slammed into her that knocked the air out of her lungs. When the world was no longer white and there were no longer spots dancing in her eyes, she gasped when she saw a giant made of marble standing behind Reyna’s sister; one huge fist pulled back ready to strike. Terminus? “Hylla! Move!”

Before the older girl even had a chance to blink there was a blur of motion and Terminus’s fist burst out of Hylla’s chest.

“JESUS CHRIST!” Piper and the witch screamed at the same time.

With a quick jerk, Terminus removed his gore stained hand from Hylla’s chest. That horrid sight would be the best opportunity the Amazon queen would ever give her, as the witch bent over and vomited, while the marble god tossed aside the blood stained body like a ragdoll.

Seizing the opportunity, Piper turned around and ran out of the office, slamming the door shut behind her in what she realized was a stupid attempt to slow them down. “Atlas! Veronica! Whoever is listening right now! We got to go!” she cried as a dozen armed Amazon warriors ran down the hall towards them. Piper didn’t even stop to wait for their response, instead pumping her legs to go as fast
as they could to get her to Reyna.

“Woah, what’s going on?” the blonde cried as the titan caught up with her with ease.

“That witch is back!” She shouted as they zigzagged through more armed Amazons.

“Pfft! So? Me and Atlas reduced her to ash before we can do it again!” Veronica laughed, which really made Piper wonder if Atlas was a bad influence on her.

“It’s not just her though she brought—“ There was an explosion behind them and screaming followed immediately after. Piper looked over her shoulder as she continued to sprint and saw smoke pillowing out of what had been Hylla’s office as the stone giant crushed an Amazon underfoot.

“Friends…”

“Is that Terminus?” Veronica cried in disbelief. “When did he get matching limbs?”

“Probably and who cares!” she panted as they rounded a corner. “You think you can take the two of them?”

“Not on my own! If we can get to Reyna, you two can keep the biker chick busy while Atlas and I turn Terminus into gravel!”

They didn’t make it much farther before they hit their first obstacle in the form of the Amazon’s lockdown procedure. The large windows that seemed to cover every external inch of the building were shuttered with electrified plates of celestial bronze. The once open office spaces were divided with spiked steel barriers, ironically giving the floor the appearance of the world’s most oppressive cubicle farm. The worst part was that every exit was sealed by giant meter thick bulkheads.

“We have to get through!” Piper cried as she pounded her fists on bulkhead with a resounding Thud.

An older Amazon decked out in a mix of business casual and warrior formal jogged up to them with a spear and shield in hand. “Sorry ladies, protocol dictates that no one is to leave or enter any section until the crisis has been resolved.”

“I don’t think you understand what is happening! Hylla is dead! There is a witch and a freaking god coming after us!” Piper cried, as Atlas began to superheat the blockade. “So unless you have a god on hand, I don’t think this is something bows and arrows is going to solve!” Why does no one use guns? A freaking grenade launcher? Something that doesn’t use wood or leather!

The older Amazon grinned and clapped a hand on Piper’s shoulder. “Take heart girl, we do have a god on our side! Lady Artemis-“

“Artemis is here!?” she cried, hope surging through her. Maybe we can do this! A goddess, a Titan, and a legions of demigods versus a witch, a D-list god, and some scrappy doctor? I’d take those odds any day of the week!

“Is here in spirit!” the warrior finished, grinning like a madwoman.

“Uh, what?” Are these ladies crazy?!

“I believe the saying “we’re fucked” applies here,” the titan laughed as the bulkhead began to groan
from changing temperature.

“Pretty-“

**Thud**

“The enemy is at the gates!” An Amazon roared. “Formations! Now!”

**Thud**

The female warriors armed with spears and shields moved into a phalanx formation in front of the shaking bulkhead at the opposite end of the hall, while those armed with bows took position behind the spiked cubicle walls, arrows nocked and ready to fly.

**Thud**

*We’re going to die here. We’re going to die with these crazy bitches.* She was actually laughing at the absurdity of the situation. “Hey Atlas?” she chuckled. “You got an ETA on when you’re going to crack that thing?”

“I’m not going to answer because you are not going to like the answer daughter of Aphrodite. Just know that if I unleashed any more power Veronica would be incinerated!”

**Thud!**

“Hold!” someone called from within the phalanx. “Prepare to tell your children of the day we, the Amazons-“

There was the same blinding flash of light from Hylla’s office, causing her to squeeze her eyes shut while trying to shield them with her arms. *How the hell could I forget about that?!* “They’re here!” she shouted.

“That we are,” the witch chuckled from atop the stone colossus. The raven haired sorceress was sitting with her legs crossed on Terminus’ shoulder, while the god was standing in the middle of the Amazon warriors with a woman held by their head in each stone hand. “Now I’m going to make this offer once and only once,” the witch said as she jumped off the giant, and landed on her feet without a sound. “We are here for Piper Mclean and Piper Mclean only,” the woman said, shooting a smile straight at her. “Now my partner would like to just kill you all and be done with it, I’m willing to let you all live if you hand her over. It’s a pretty fair deal really.”

“You killed our queen,” someone hissed. “If you think we’re going to let you out of here alive, YOU are sadly mistaken.”

For the first time in her life Piper was glad the Amazons were not chatty, as the archers released their arrows, while the members of the phalanx crouched down and took cover beneath their bronze shields.

To her disappointment though, the witch blinked out of existence just as the arrows were about to hit her, only to reappear in the exact same spot a moment later. Terminus though stood his ground and used the two struggling Amazons to take most of the arrows, but many found there mark and embedded themselves into the marble flesh.

*Holy crap! Maybe they do have this!* “You can do this! For Hylla!” she shouted, her words packed with as much charm speak as she could muster. “Kick his twelve foot stone ass!”
There was a resounding cheer and the archers nocked their arrows faster and each thrust of their spears seemed to be stronger and faster.

_So why do they look so indifferent?_ “How’s that door coming Atlas?”

“Any moment now!”

“Do you got this or do you want me to do it?” the witch asked, looking up at the god.

_Oh that ain’t good…_

Terminus shrugged before tossing the two arrow ridden corpses at the nearest archers. He then grabbed one of the spears that was assaulting his thighs and tossed it and the Amazon holding it against the shuttered windows.

“Eh, I got this,” the tattooed woman shrugged, the serpent tattoos on her arms glowing an unearthly green. “Man I wish Brian would let you talk… I feel like you and I have a connection.”

As the archers released their second volley of arrows, the witch made a few quick gestures, and the arrows halted in mid-flight.

“Atlas…”

“Almost there!”

The arrows were engulfed in an emerald green fire before they spun around and flew back to their respective archers, piercing many of the women who had not reacted quickly enough. Those who did though were now forced to dodge their own projectiles and scores more as the arrows removed themselves from their owner’s bodies to continue the attack.

The remaining members of the phalanx though did not sit idly by as their sisters-in-arms fell. Half of the warriors shielded their comrades from the airborne attack while the others attempted to bring the god and witch down. The raven haired magic user didn’t fight, rather she popped in and out of existence to avoid the thrusts and stabs of the Amazons. Terminus though was a brutal savage, swatting warriors away or igniting his body in white flame forcing the Amazons back.

“Keep fighting!” she screamed, hoping that her charm speak would somehow turn the tide. “You can-“ she was stopped short as a flaming green arrow stopped less than an inch from her eye. _I think I need a new pair of pants…_

“Ah, ah, ah,” the witch tsked, waving one finger as she appeared in front of Piper. “That’s enough out of the peanut gallery.” She then slithered closer, her tattoos glowing brighter with each step.

“Now just come with me and this will all be-“

“Piper, duck!” Atlas roared.

Her body acted purely on instinct as she dropped to the ground as the massive bulkhead flew over her, colliding into the witch with the force of a speeding train. The massive metal door didn’t lose any momentum from the impact and continued to sail across the room before it collided with Terminus and unfortunately a few Amazons. The stone god was knocked off his feet and the remaining Amazons took the opportunity to drive their spears into his limbs, pinning him to the ground.

“Atlas! If we help I think we can-“
A ring of white fire erupted from the bound god that engulfed the Amazon warriors reducing them to piles of ash and bone.

“Back to plan A! Run!”

“What the hell is going on?” Reyna cried as they entered her room.

“One… Second…” she huffed as she crouched down and grabbed her knees, breathing heavily.

Piper knew that the Fates had been kind to allow them to make to the praetor. Unlike the first group of resistance they had encountered, the other Amazons were quick to adapt and change tactics to the dive threat. Those that had assumed command ordered that all bulkheads be opened to allow greater mobility to meet the threat head-on. Crates of Greek fire had been dispersed to the masses with orders to burn anything that wasn’t a friendly face. As they passed through each section, Piper did her best to warn them of what they were facing and suggested that they flee and regroup later, but the warrior women insisted that they stay and protect their home. Knowing it was a lost cause, she used her charm speak to boost their confidence and resolve; it was the least she could do.

“Terminus is here and the witch Veronica and Atlas killed,” she huffed. She held back telling Reyna about her sister as she didn’t want the older teen to do something reckless. As much as she was loathed to admit it, she knew without Reyna they weren’t going to make it to New York. “We have to get out of here. Now!”

“What about the Amazons? How’s their defense? Can we fight back?” Reyna asked as she reached for a steel short sword she had recently acquired.

“Uh, well. I’m sure they are in a better place now and their defense can be described as tissue paper,” she said as she stuffed as much of Reyna’s things into a bag. “I thought maybe we could fight them at first, but not in a closed area. We would need to get out them out in the open and separate the witch from Terminus so those two could have a chance,” she said, gesturing to the titan-demigod.

“That’s actually… a good idea,” Reyna said as she slipped a bullet proof vest over her head. “You said the garage is pretty big right?”

“In the words of our orange president; it’s yuuuge,” she forcefully chuckled as she threw the bag over her shoulder. “But I don’t think fighting them is an option anymore. Why didn’t you tell me Terminus can vaporize people?!”

“Because when she fought him he didn’t,” Veronica said as she grabbed more things to take. “He did some fire stuff, but his flames weren’t that hot!”

“Oh so he’s only gotten stronger! That makes me feel loads better! Reyna get your boots on, we’re getting out of here!”

“I’m trying to Mclean!” the one-armed praetor hissed. “But SOMEONE put freaking condoms in them! Again!”

* I’m probably going to die, but it’s still funny! *
She skidded to a halt when she saw the massive imperial gold Gatling gun pointed at her as she entered the garage. “Don’t shoot!”

“Piper? Reyna?” Cindy, the grease covered daughter of Vulcan asked from behind the massive weapon. “Thank the gods you three are okay!”

“Only if you use the loosest definition of the word okay,” Reyna grunted as she sauntered past what were likely the last remaining Amazons.

Things had only gotten worse once they had retrieved Reyna. Navigating the many halls became dangerous as thick black smoke pillowed in from all directions. The further they went in the facility the less Amazons they saw; the few they did were trying to escape from the trap of their own making. Shuttering the windows not only kept intruders out, they prevented those from within from leaving.

“We need to get out of here!” she screamed. “We ALL need to get out of here while we can!”

“I’m afraid we can’t do that,” one of the oil covered mechanics said.

“Well, not that we can’t, but that we won’t,” another chuckled.

Okay, I’m pro sisterhood as the next woman, but this is taking it way too far! “Don’t you people get it? Everyone is dead! It wasn’t noble! It wasn’t glamorous! Just a swift painful death!”

“Hey she said it was quick! That’s a load off my mind,” Cindy laughed.

“What is wrong with-“ she paused when she noticed that these Amazons weren’t armed with spears, bows, or swords, but rather what appeared to be bazookas, grenade launchers, flamethrowers, and an assortment of weaponry that actually looked capable. “Is that a freaking bazooka?”

“Oh that old thing?” Cindy laughed. “That was just something we built awhile back when we got bored.”

“Told care of the gopher problem in moments,” another laughed.

“Why do you guys have weapons like that while the others have the equivalent of sticks and stones?”

“Because we’re daughter of Vulcan, Hephaestus, and Athena! We aren’t going to be satisfied with something that out dated! We’re mechanics, engineers and-“

“Garbage,” a man’s voice called out from behind them.

Piper spun around and pulled out her switchblade, while the Amazon mechanics readied their weapons. Walking down the burning hall was the red haired man she saw in Hylla’s office, with his hands in his lab coat pockets and a sadistic grin on his face.

“You’re all just garbage posing as human,” the man sneered, ignoring the flames around him. “And you can call me the garbage man, because I’m here to take you out.”

There was a collective murmur of confusion amongst everyone, some of the Amazons even lowered their weapons to stare at each hoping one of them could make sense of what the guy just said.
“Are you threatening us? Or hitting on us?” Reyna asked, slightly lowering her sword.

*Whew, glad I’m not the only one confused!* “Yeah! It’s kind of confusing when you phrase it like that! Granted, both options are terrible!”

She was glad to see the man’s face turn redder than the flames around him, his face twisting in rage. “It’s a threat you idiots!”

“Alright, that’s good enough for me!” Cindy cried as her golden Gatling gun began to spin. “You ladies may want to cover your ears!”

A moment later the garage was filled with the sound of a thousand thunderbolts as casing after casing was spat out of the golden monstrosity, one of which bounced off of Piper’s arm, burning her. The other’s soon joined in as well. Rocket propelled Greek fire grenades left white trails behind them, dozens of miniature rockets zoomed past her before exploding, and there was even an Amazon using what appeared to be a heavily modified nail gun.

She looked down at the small blade in her hand and frowned. *This thing is practically worthless!*

After a few seconds of deafening fire, Cindy held up a fist and everyone stopped firing. “Alright right ladies, I think we got- what the fuck?”

It took her a moment to see what had the mechanic confused. As the smoke cleared from the hall, she was not greeted by the grizzly scene of a man shredded into pieces, but rather by thick grape vines that blocked the entirety of the entrance.

“Hey Piper! You could have told us they had a son of Ceres with them!” Reyna growled as she readied her blade once more.

“How was I supposed to know Reyna!” she spat back. “It’s not like they advertise who they are! I don’t even know that witch’s name and she was in my house!”

“That would be Morgan,” the man sneered as the vines parted. “And I’m no son of a whore. The vines are from my pet.” He stuck his fingers in his mouth and let out an ear piercing whistle. “Here Fat Ass!”

Before anyone had a chance to react, dozens of vines erupted from the garage’s cement floor. They acted as if they had a mind of their own, wrapping around everyone and ripping the weapons from their hands. Piper could only watch in horror as the sentient plant life wrapped around the necks of the Amazons and snapped their necks.

She didn’t know whether to be thankful or terrified that the vines only wrapped around her arms and legs, along with Reyna and Veronica.

There was a flash of light behind the man and Piper had to blink twice to make sure her eyes weren’t deceiving her. There stood Mr. D, he was a bit shorter and his face was different, but she would recognize those horrible Hawaiian shirts anywhere.

She stopped struggling against the vines and frowned. “I’d like to say I’m surprised Mr. D., but I always knew you were a creep.”

“I’m with you on this one Piper,” Reyna growled as she began to gnaw on the vine that restrained her only arm.

*Huh, I guess losing an arm does have some advantages.* She returned her attention to the god and
“So how did you get gods on your side? You promise Terminus arms and legs? Offer Dionysus a lovely vino?”

“Ha!” The man spat. “Let’s just say they didn’t have a choice but to follow me.”

“ENOUGH TALK!” the titan roared, startling everyone. “I refuse to fall to some alcoholic!” Golden flames erupted from their body, reducing the vines restraining the Titan to ash. In an instant her and Reyna’s were burnt away as well, miraculously leaving them unharmed.

The way the red head’s eyes bugged out while his face lost all color would be a pleasant memory for Piper to look back on later. “Fat Ass, stop them! Stop them!” he cried, before cowering behind the pudgy god.

Atlas cracked their knuckles and looked back at her and Reyna with a sadistic grin. “Girls, go get this… Betty White ready to go,” they turned their blonde head back to Dionysus and the lab coat clad man, “this so called god is mine.”

Before she had a chance to respond, the titan hybrid took off running towards the wine god. Then in a blur of golden light, they bounded up before slamming into Dionysus like a falling star, sending them both flying back.

Piper’s jaw dropped in amazement. “I am soooo glad they are on our side. Right Reyna? Reyna?” She looked over her shoulder to see the praetor hefting one of the fallen Amazon’s rocket launchers over her shoulder. “Uh, what are you doing?”

“I’m going to shove this up that ginger’s ass, while you go get our ride.” The Latina flipped a safety switch on the weapon with her teeth. “You got a problem with that?”

“That is hot as hell! “No problem at all!” she laughed before taking off in a sprint across the massive garage.

“Hey asshole!” she heard Reyna call out from behind her. “I got a little something for you and you qualify for Prime shipping!”

So I am rubbing off on her! She thought with a smile. She still needs a lot of work though…

Betty White was a massive bronze SUV that could eat Priuses for breakfast. She had an experimental frame composed of Celestial Bronze, Imperial Gold, and titanium covered in carbon fiber rendering her virtually invulnerable. All of her windows acted as built in heads up display with integrated GPS, radar, and Amazon Video and they were completely bullet proof. Her tires were made of an experimental rubber the Amazon mechanics had developed using the grease of chimera fur, making them durable enough to drive through lava. She had an electric winch on the front and rear, each had cables made from a mix of silk from Arachne (don’t tell Annabeth) and Graphene. Her roof was covered in utility lights that provided a complete three-sixty coverage. Betty didn’t require gasoline, as her engine was an upgraded version of the one that provided power for the Argo II; it had twenty percent more output and didn’t require volatile Greek fire to run.

She also had a built in kitchenette in the back as suggested by one James May.

“If you were human, I’d dump Jason for you,” she purred as she punched in the code to unlock the doors (Jason’s birthday). The second she opened the door the engine roared to life, a feature she had
insisted upon if they had to get away quickly; a feature that has already proved useful. She scurried up into the vehicle, regretting that she hadn’t thought to ask for running boards, and gripped the steering wheel with a wide smile on her face. “Let’s go save our friends!”

She went to put Betty into drive, but when she reached for gear selector her hand came up empty. She looked down to her right and her stomach dropped. “Oh fuck…”

She climbed out of the driver’s seat and peaked over the roof and shouted, “Reyna! We have a problem!”

There was several explosion and the screech of metal-on-metal before the praetor shouted back, “What now?!”

“Betty’s got a stick!”

There was an uncomfortable silence punctuated intermittently by the clash of the god and titan. “How in Olympus did that happen?!”

“I don’t-“ there was an explosion followed by the scream of a twenty-something year old man, “know!”

“Well did you tell them you it had to be an automatic?”

She slapped her forehead. Ah quiznaks… “I kind of assumed they would know!”

“Well it looks like- hey! Get back here! You made an ass out of you and me Mclean!”

“Leave the jokes to me Reyna! Ask Veronica if-“ She ducked down just as the flaming bodies of Mr. D. and Veronica and Atlas sailed over her, only for the divine duo to impact several yards away from Betty White. “Never mind! I’ll ask her!” She climbed out of the vehicle and ran to the colossal clash.

“Veronica can you drive a stick?”

They had the wine god pinned to the ground, any vine that erupted from the floor was instantly disintegrated by the golden flames that surrounded the titan infused demigod. Veronica and Atlas had one arm on the god’s throat while the other flaming fist pounded repeatedly into the god’s fat face. “Yeah I can Piper, but we’re a little busy if you haven’t noticed!”

“Can’t you like knock him out or something?”

Veronica bent down ripped off the god’s right ear with her teeth before spitting it out. “I don’t think gods can get knocked out!”

“Then what do we do?” she cried, shielding her face as the golden flames flared.

Veronica’s eyes flared and Atlas cried out, “I have an idea, but I don’t think you should see this! Go get that stubborn girl and don’t look back!” They sliced Mr D.’s face with their talons.

“I’m going to take your word for it general!” she cried as she sprinted across the garage, to where she last left the Latina praetor.

Piper didn’t have to go far before she saw Reyna running toward her. The praetor was out of breath and covered in a mix of ash and sweat. “Did you get that scrawny ginger?” she chuckled, but quickly realized something was wrong when Reyna ran right past her.

“Get to the car! Terminus is here!” The Latina cried. “Hustle!”
Not one to question orders, Piper spun around and followed suit. It really amazed her how agile Reyna was even after losing an arm, as she nimbly vaulted over a toolbox and then an oil drum without losing momentum, while she herself had to go around said obstacles. *Calling it now, she does parkour!*

For some reason Reyna stopped short of their getaway car with her jaw hanging open. Piper skidded to a halt and leaned on Betty’s rear as she attempted to catch her breath. “Veronica, Atlas, are you about… holy shit.”

It was her turn to stand there slack jawed. Veronica and Atlas stood with their back arched and their jaw stretched inhumanly wide as Dionysus’ hand disappeared into the gaping maw. They collapsed to their knees and wiped their mouth with their crumbling forearm. “Let’s see my brother try that,” Atlas choked.

“Can you do that again?” Reyna stuttered, her eyes as wide as saucers, all color gone from her face.

“I’m not sure I can do it once,” the Titan groaned as they crawled into the driver’s seat. “Get in,” Veronica wheezed, before they slammed the door.

*I have officially seen everything.* Piper grabbed the stunned older girl and pushed her into the backseat, before she climbed into the passenger’s seat. “Seatbelts ladies. We may be under attack, but safety still comes first!”

“Uh Piper?” Veronica groaned as she adjusted the rearview mirror. “The door is closed, how are we-”

“Just floor it!”

Veronica wasted no time in slamming the accelerator to the floor, as Piper braced for impact. Just as they slammed through the steel door, Terminus appeared behind them with the red headed stranger in tow.

“Wait you didn’t kill that guy?” she asked Reyna through the rearview mirror.

“He is very hard to kill,” Reyna shot back as she looked behind them.

“You had a freaking rocket launcher!” she cried in disbelief. “You don’t even have to aim with one of those!”

“Well I suck! Are you happy?”

“No!” Then a devilish idea sprang to mind as she saw the man again in the mirror. “But I’m about to be!” She reached for the microphone that was connected to the external speakers and then cranked the volume to maximum. “Cover your ears because you do not want to hear this!” she laughed.

Veronica and Atlas let go of the wheel and did as she was told, covering her ears with her burnt hands. Reyna struggled for a moment as she only hand one arm, but quickly compensated by wrapping her arm over her head.

Satisfied that her friends would be fine she summoned every ounce of energy she had and poured it into her charm speak. “Hey buddy!” she shouted over the microphone. “GO FUCK YOURSELF!”
They drove without stopping until they reached the Washington-Idaho border, where they parked at a secluded rest area. Reyna smashed open the only vending machine and emptied its contents into Betty White, while Veronica and Atlas took a nap in the back.

Piper though hadn’t stopped grinning since she saw the scrawny red head pick up what she thought was a wrench and shoved it up his ass.

Chapter End Notes

The triumphant return of our bad ass ladies!

Piper is always so much fun to write! I love to have her and Reyna bicker like an old married couple even while the world around them is ending. I know, I know Piper really didn't do any fighting this chapter and instead ran away, but as we saw without Reyna and Veronica/Atlas there was no way she could have prevailed on her own. She's smarter than most people give her credit for.

Reyna is still a bad ass and isn't afraid to get her hands dirty. In fact, one of the earliest ideas I had for this fic was Reyna holding a rocket launcher, covered in dirt and blood; it just felt soooo right. For some reason I always imagined that Reyna enjoyed cooking shows, specifically the competitive ones like chopped. Chef!Reyna is just something I can picture all too well.

We got to see that Veronica isn't just a Mary Sue (or at least I hope) or a container for Atlas. She's her own woman and is really struggling with her fate as mention in the beginning of the chapter. She doesn't like that she has to take the flesh of others to keep herself alive, that she is literally never alone, and that chances are she's stuck in her monstrous form for the rest of her life. She is a pacifist by nature, but ironically is Piper and Reyna's greatest weapon and best chance for survival.

We did get to see the first major loss for Avalon, with the mastication of Mr. D. Sure, they took out the Amazons and our trio was forced to flee, but they lost one of their biggest weapons. Morgan is once again out of commission (having three tons of metal does that to a person)

And so, the girls cross country road trip begins...

Hey! did you like what you just read?
Then leave a kudos!

Thoughts, questions, theories, cheers?
Leave a comment!

I love hearing from you guys! even if it's a one word :"nice"!

Well until next time, I want you to remember you are a one of a kind person and you deserve only the best!
TO: MIKE TANGO ECHO

PRIORITY: URGENT

CLASSIFICATION: SECRET

FROM: BRIAN

MISSION REPORT: OZYMANDIAS

PERSONNEL: MORGAN: ALIVE. SPINE WAS SEVERED AND RIB CAGE COLLAPSED. EXPECTED TO MAKE A FULL RECOVERY. BRIAN: ALIVE. SURGICAL TEAM WAS CALLED IN TO REMOVE AUTOMOTIVE TOOL FROM ANAL CAVITY. EXPECTED TO MAKE A FULL RECOVERY.

Gs: G:T WAS FOUND TENDING TO AGENT MORGAN’S WOUNDS SEEMINGLY OF ITS OWN VOLITION. NO DISCERNABLE DAMAGE. G:DB IS MIA.

OBJECTIVE: FAILED. DGs PA AND RB MANAGED TO AVOID APPREHENSION ALONG WITH T:A. THEY WERE LAST SEEN HEADING EAST.

Okay, let me start out by saying that this is entirely Morgan’s fault. If she hadn’t been so obsessed with revenge against DG:PA we would have it and its friends in our hands and G:AB wouldn’t be in the belly of T:A!

I say once I’ve gotten every piece of data out of that witch we dispose of her. I mean, isn’t that the end game anyway? A world without all these freaks running around?

After what went down, I’m more willing than ever to make that dream a reality. And I hate to sound cliché, but mark my words: if I meet DG:PA again I will destroy it. I don’t care that Morgan says it is key to killing the Gs, that pathetic little monster is dead.

At least this wasn’t a total waste of time and energy. I’m glad to see you, Dare, and the rest of your rich friends took my advice to take control of Amazon’s subsidies and intellectual properties. I imagine it was a “fire” sale!

Get it?

Because their headquarters burnt down?

I’m going to assume you are laughing.

Anyway, I know that our plans have been hit with massive setbacks thanks to the DGs in
Washington challenging the legality of purchasing or leasing more cellular networks, and top that off with the lower than expected sales of the our laptops and tablets with embedded signal generators, but I believe we’re about to get a windfall in the form of Alexa.

Digital assistants are all the rage these days because everyone thinks they are so swamped, but really their just idiots after the next big shiny thing. I know we won’t be able to sell any of these with the name Alexa, but we repaint it, rename it, and slap a few zeroes at the end of the price tag and the people will eat it up.

Of course, we’ll add in a signal generator at no extra charge.

Yes, yes, I’m aware I’m avoiding talking about G:DB or as I affectionately called him: Fat Ass.

That thing that first attacked Morgan, which I now believe was DG:VM, seemingly swallowed him whole.

It was the most fucked up thing I’ve ever seen in my life. Its jaw unhinged like some kind of snake and sucked him down like an obese piece of linguini. The damn thing didn’t even show any signs of swallowing Fat Ass. My theory is it reduced it back to its energy form and absorbed it into its own.

I guess the stories say Kronos swallowed his children whole at birth, but just wow. Fat Ass was on the wrong side of three-hundred pounds and that thing masquerading as a girl couldn’t have weighed more than ninety pounds.

Tops.

I’ve done everything I can to call him back, but I can’t even track him via satellite. He’s gone.

Once again I need to remind you that this is one-hundred percent Morgan’s fault.

I’m the victim here!

Not her!

Me!

So, In light of this staff shortage I’m moving DG:HP and DG:FM to active duty. I’m sending you DG:FM since you have a weird thing for platypuses, while I’m keeping DG:HP for myself. Now before you fire back saying you’re not going to have a team of handlers following you 24/7, I wanted to let you know I’ve made massive improvements to the neural interface.

The new system works almost as well the one we use on captured Gs (ignoring that rainbow one. Too many signals going through it to work properly.). They should respond to any verbal commands from designated handlers. The system uses a mixture of audio and visual processing to achieve this.

And you said removing an eye and replacing it with a camera was disgusting! Ha!

Granted the DGs are nowhere near as strong as G:DB, but until we can locate more minor Gs they will have to do.

The Fourth of July spectacular is still going to happen, and George’s people have been busy securing more DGs and monsters for the occasion. Normally I’m not one for theatre, but I can’t wait for this!

Speaking of George, am I the only one concerned with the fact he is up and moving after only a week-and-a-half? He had a heart transplant and he’s running laps around Manhattan like nothing
happened!

He’s even faster than he was before!

That heart we gave him from T:C has to be responsible, but since he threatened to shove more automotive tools where the sun don’t shine if I tried to experiment on him, I’m in the dark here.

And I don’t like being in the dark…

Could you pull some strings and get me some willing volunteers for some organ transplants? Even if it’s just some kid who needs a spleen I could learn so much!

Chapter End Notes

Feed back in any form is greatly appreciated!

Next chapter is Nico! He’s finally going to get the truth out of Jason!

Thanks for reading! Remember the Grandmaster loves you!
“Shut that thing off!” Percy cried over the shrill ring of the alarm clock.

Nico groaned as he rolled over and slammed his fist down on the small plastic device, silencing the infernal ringing. He blinked a few times to get his eyes to focus on the harsh green light, and wanted to cry when he saw the time.

“Why did you set an alarm?” Percy groaned as he clutched his Pillow Pet to his head. “We don’t have to go to school!”

He swung his legs off the bed and flinched back when his feet unexpectedly touched the cold hardwood floor. Before Jason’s sleeping bag had occupied the small space between his and Percy’s bed, which had acted as warm barrier between his bare feet and the cold floor. “I wanted to talk to Jason before he leaves for the day,” he grumbled, his toes curling.

“And this had to be done at five in the morning?” Percy yawned.

The son of Hades slowly pushed himself out of his bed, the ancient springs groaning seemingly a little louder in the early hours of the morning. “I figured if I bribed him with breakfast he’d be more agreeable.”


He chuckled softly as he sat down on Percy’s bed. “When have I ever made steak for breakfast?”

“A man can dream Neeks,” the son of Poseidon laughed as he covered Nico’s hand with his own. “A man can dream.”

“Is that your way of asking me to make you breakfast?” he asked, turning to look at the sea green orbs in the darkness. Even if he ignored the bandages and the new scars the son of Poseidon had received, Percy still looked broken. The son of Poseidon was smiling at him, but there was still a great deal of sadness and pain in his eyes. But he’s getting better.
“I wouldn’t be against it?” Percy hesitantly asked; cringing back, but keeping one eye open and on him. “If that’s okay?”

“I’ve been making us breakfast since we got here Percy, why would I stop now?” he laughed. “Any requests?”

“Uh? How about something that doesn’t require the use of utensils?” he asked looking down at his wrapped hands. Then his eyes lit up and a devilish grin twisted his face. “Unless, you’d be willing to feed me?” he purred, gently massaging Nico’s hand.

He yanked his hand out from under Percy’s and tried (and failed) to glare at the older boy. “I don’t think so…”

Percy threw his head back and laughed deeply. “Like I said: a man can dream.”

“And he can keep dreaming,” he huffed, but the small smile on his face gave away his true feelings. “How about an egg sandwich?”

“With bacon?” Percy asked, raising one eyebrow.

“With bacon,” he smiled as he stood up from the bed.

He was almost to the bedroom door when the son of Poseidon uttered, “Thanks babe.”

His heart stopped, then began to hammer almost painfully in his chest as his pale skin flushed. “What did you say?” he asked, his voice a ghost of a whisper as he spun around, eyes wide.

“What? Did he-That can’t be-

“Thanks babe?” the son of Poseidon asked hesitantly, slowly pulling his quilt up to his face. “Look, if you don’t want me to call-“

Percy didn’t get a chance to finish as a small Italian son of Hades rushed over and slammed their lips together.

He wasn’t sure if he walked or somehow floated down the stairs like Jason. His lips were puffy and bruised, his hair was more disheveled than usual, and he was smiling from ear-to-ear; if anyone were to have seen him they would’ve known something was off about him.

At that moment though he couldn’t have cared less what people thought about him.

He was with Percy and Percy was with him, and if anyone had a problem with that or how it made him feel then he had no qualm tossing them in Tartarus. Because despite how bad everything seemed, everything seemed to fade into the shadows when he was with Percy.

Okay, wow. I better reign it in there, we’ve only been together for less than twelve hours. Let’s not rush this.

He sauntered into the kitchen and made a beeline for the fridge, where he pulled out the butter, four eggs, a pound of bacon, and to his surprise a bag of grapes for himself to snack on while he cooked. His arms full, he kicked the fridge shut, and spun around to see his father sitting at the kitchen table, massaging his temples with both hands.
“How and why are you so happy this early in the morning?” Hades asked, looking up at him. His father, who as far back as he could remember always looked neat and well-dressed, looked like a train wreck. His dark long thick hair was in complete disarray, there were dark bags under his eyes as if he hadn’t slept, and he was pretty sure he buttoned black dress shirt wrong. “And why is Jackson screaming already?”

Nico scurried over to the oven and prayed to every god and goddess that he wasn’t seeing on a regular basis that his father hadn’t seen him flush. “I’m just well rested is all,” he said in what had to be the most unconvincing lie he had ever told. He pulled out two frying pans from the cabinet next to the oven and placed them on the burners. “And Percy just twisted his leg in his sleep,” he shrugged as he grabbed a spatula and used it to scoop a chunk of butter into one of the pans.

It wasn’t a lie, but it wasn’t the truth either. Percy did twist his leg, but it wasn’t while he was sleeping. He may have accidentally caught Percy’s leg with his own when he climbed off of the son of Poseidon’s bed.

There was a moment where the only sound in the kitchen was the sound of butter sizzling before the lord of the underworld sighed. “You’d think he would learn to stop that by now.”

He released the breath he wasn’t aware he was holding and began to place the strips of fatty bacon in the butter-less pan. “That’s Percy for you,” he smiled. That’s my Percy. “What are you doing up? Or do you not sleep? I’m a bit lost on this situation.”

“If you’re lost how do you think I feel?” there was a thud which Nico assumed was his father’s head slamming down on the table. “And yes, I do require sleep. Getting it though is another thing entirely.”

Nico began to crack open the eggs one-by-one and dumping their contents into the sizzling pan, careful to not get any raw egg on his hands. He turned back to look at his father, who was slumped over the table and frowned. “I’m making breakfast for Jason and Percy, would you like some as well? Or I believe Demeter has a coffee pot around here, I could make you a pot?”

Hades rolled his head over so that he was facing him. “I thank you for offering, but with the news I’ve just received I’m afraid this stomach of mine wouldn’t be able to keep it down. Plus coffee gives me the shakes.”

He set down the spatula and put the lid on the frying bacon. “What news?”

The lord of the underworld sat back up in the chair and threw his head back with a sigh. “Well let’s start with the fact that your uncle has decided to retreat back to his realm. He claims once he gets the minor sea gods in line no one would dare to attack him. As if he could ever get them to behave,” Hades scoffed. “The truth is he’s terrified of ending up like Demeter and I, and his kingdom is well out of reach from this Avalon.”

“For now,” Nico scoffed as he popped two pieces of bread into the ancient toaster on the kitchen counter. “We thought the camps were safe, Olympus too, and look where we are now.”

“That was my argument as well, but Poseidon is far too stubborn to listen to things like: reason, facts, or logic.” His father rapped his knuckles on the table top. “On top of that, Demeter and Persephone are no closer to locating Artemis than we were a month ago. We still think she and her hunters are hiding somewhere in the southwest, but due to a rather unfortunate encounter those two must operate with discretion.”

He wanted to press for more details as to what could possibly require two goddesses, well a
goddesses and something akin to a mortal, to hide, but the look on his father’s face told him he
should focus on buttering the first couple pieces of toast.

“And finally the kicker; my lovely wife has informed me that all the gods of the underworld, save
Thanatos, have gone into hiding as well, leaving everything in complete chaos. It would seem that
death truly is the only constant in this world,” the god chuckled darkly.

“Things are only going to get worse aren’t they?” he asked, already knowing the answer. “If the
gods are unable or unwilling to perform their duties the world is going to suffer isn’t it?”

Hades rapped his knuckled again and looked out the window at the dark world beyond. “Normally if
a god fails to perform their duties for whatever reason, lack of belief, incapacitated, or they just fade
from the collective unconscious of man; another god will pick up the slack.” His father shook his
head as if remembering a painful memory. “Now though that may not be the case,” he sighed.
“While you and your cousins recovered here, I began checking in on the other pantheons, a major
discretion against the Fates mind you, and things are not any better for them.”

“Which pantheons?” Nico swallowed. To his knowledge this was the first time any of the god’s had
acknowledged another group of gods in more than just passing, so it seemed like the perfect
opportunity to fish for details.

Hades looked like he wasn’t going to answer at first, but then he shook his head and smirked like he
had just heard some weird joke. “It’s also forbidden to discuss them with demigods as well, but since
the Fates are trapped on Olympus I no longer see this as an issue.” His father sat up a bit straighter in
his chair and ran one hand through his dark hair. “I started with the Asgardians, specifically Loki-“

“You know loki?!?” he cried in excitement. He thought back to the day he broke into Annabeth’s
dorm and saw the various books on Norse mythology and the picture of Tom Hiddleston.

“Does he look like-“

A sharp glare from his father shut him up. “I wouldn’t say I know him, more of an unwelcomed
acquaintance. And he looks nothing like how he is portrayed in the media. Anyway before I was
interrupted,” he glared at Nico again, “I found Loki in a junk yard in a state just like mine. He told
me he had been completely stripped of his divinity, my hypothesis is that is due to him being but a
fragment of his self, and that their so called world tree was dying, cutting off the gods from the other
realms.”

“So I’m probably not going to meet Thor,” he sighed, removing the lid from the bacon and carefully
slipping each piece. “Pity.”

“If he was anything like Loki, then that is probably for the best. I then tried to locate any of the
Egyptian gods, but that pantheon has been in its death throes for centuries now. If Mithras is still
around he’s impossible to find. Ahura Mazda migrated back to the ancient lands shortly before this
all began I found out after watching a particularly bad Queen cover band. The only group that seems
to be holding their own is that hodgepodge that is The Nation!”

“Who or what is The Nation?” he asked as he piled the over-easy eggs onto two pieces of toast.

“The Nation is what the surviving gods native to this land call themselves. The gods of the Aztecs,
Incas, Cherokee, Navajo, Iroquois, and many others came together to save themselves and their
people.”

“Save themselves from what?” Images of giant monsters like Typhon, the avatar of Gaea, and the
horrific Nyx filled his head, battling gods dressed in furs and shifting into various animals. I should
His father bit his lip, a strange sight considering how confident his father was in seemingly every situation. “That’s a conversation for a later date,” he mumbled. “But even they are having their difficulties. Apparently our monsters have been fleeing the coasts and into their lands, which they’ve taken as a declaration of war.”

“So that’s why Demeter and Persephone have to be careful in the southwest. That’s where this “Nation” is located isn’t it?”

His father gave him a tired smile and nodded. “You definitely have your mother’s brains,” he chuckled. “That is mostly correct. The Nation’s lands are spread out throughout the continent, but we believe their stronghold is somewhere in southwest.”

Nico removed the lid from the bacon and set it carefully on a towel near the sink. He then grabbed a pair of tongs from the cooking utensil drawer and returned to the sizzling pork strips. “Wait, you don’t know where it is?”

“That’s because of the Fates no interaction rule,” Hades yawned. “The only godly abode I know of for sure is Coyote’s.” He paused and furrowed his brow. “That reminds me, if you hear any howling: arm yourself. Our meeting didn’t exactly end on the best of terms.”

He grabbed two strips of bacon with his tongs. “What does that- AHHHHHH!” he howled in pain, as the bacon dripped hot grease onto his barefoot. He dropped the tongs and by extension the bacon onto the floor, as he hopped on one foot and desperately tried to grab the pained appendage.

He almost fell over when he was scooped up by his father’s surprisingly strong arms. “Smart enough to skip four years of school, but not smart enough to not let hot grease drip on him,” his father grumbled as he set him down on the counter. Before he could argue that he was fine, Hades grabbed his leg and rolled up his pant leg and stuck his burning foot under a cool stream of water from the faucet. “A father’s work is never done.”

Nico limped out to the barn clutching Jason’s foil wrapped sandwich to his chest to prevent the bitter cold wind from getting to it. It may have been April, but the predawn hours coupled with the wind made it feel like winter.

He tucked the sandwich under his chin and reveled in the warmth it provided as he grabbed the ancient wooden door and slid it open with a massive heave. As he stepped inside, his nose was assaulted by a variety of smells; old hay, pig manure, and some unidentifiable chemical smell, none of which were pleasant. He wanted to keep the door open to vent allow the smell to vent out, but he figured if Jason closed it there had to be a reason.

“Jason?” he called out, as he slid the massive wooden door shut. “I brought you breakfast!”

“Back by the pigs Nico!” he heard the blond cry out from the back of the barn.

He made his way to the back, carefully winding through bales of hay, rusted tools, bags of feed, and large machinery, to the fenced off section of the barn that the pigs took shelter in. There he found
Jason, shovel in hand, mud (he hoped) on his face, talking to the barnyard animals.

“Leo, seriously, you need to stop sticking your head where it doesn’t belong,” the son of Jupiter sighed to a small brown pig who was sitting at his feet like a dog, curly tail wagging. “You are the only one who does that! I mean, what are you an ostrich? Who sticks their head in a hole in the ground?”

Leo the pig grunted and walked away, head held high.

“Yeah you better walk away,” Jason called out as he scooped some dirt into a hole.

Nico couldn’t tell if he should be amused or alarmed at what just transpired. Obviously it was amusing that Jason was arguing with a small pig, but the fact that he named it after one of their dead friends was troubling to say the least. “You named a pig Leo?” he asked, announcing his presence.

Jason turned to face him and a small smile lit up the blond’s face. The pigs however, ran out of their pen to the cold outdoors, squealing in fear the entire way. “Don’t mind them,” Jason chuckled as he stabbed his shovel into the earth. “They just don’t know you well enough yet.” The blond’s blue eyes trailed down to the foil wrapped sandwich in Nico’s hand. “What did you bring me?”

And father said I was too happy… “Bacon and eggs on toast,” he shrugged, tossing the breakfast food to the son of Jupiter.

“Sounds good,” The blond said, removing his dirty work gloves. “You don’t have to stick around here and watch me eat it, you can go back to bed if you want.”

He raised one eyebrow at the blond. “Jason…” he warned.

Jason seemed to shrink as he leaned against the fence. “You didn’t forget, huh?”

Nico walked over and leaned against the fence next to Jason, the older boy shifting away ever so slightly. “I don’t think I could forget my best friend screaming at my father and my other best friend, then having to shadow travel them to a field so they could knock each other senseless.”

“Yeah, that would be pretty hard to forget,” the blond said, looking at his feet.

They stood there in an uncomfortable silence as Jason slowly ate his breakfast, the only break in the silence being Leo the pig snorting in the distance.

“So you going to tell me what’s bothering you Jason?” The blond was about to speak, but he silenced him with a glare. “And don’t try that tattoo. You’ve been acting different long before that.”

“So you’ve noticed.”

He pulled Will’s comfy hat down over his ears, careful not to stretch it out. “It’s kind of hard not to Jason. Every opportunity you get you come out here to be alone, you practically tremble in fear when a girl so much as looks at you, you’re a little hostile to Percy, and on more than one occasion I’ve woken up to you crying in your sleep.”

“That’s-“

“Not the Jason I know,” he sighed. “Jay, I know you like to have a few moments to yourself, everyone does, but you also used to love being surrounded by people. Back at camp I was amazed that you could stand to be around people that long! And the only girl you were ever nervous around was Piper! Not because you were afraid of her, but because you were afraid to disappoint her! The
Aphrodite cabin practically threw themselves at you and you treated them all respectfully! And you and Percy had what Percy called a “bromance” which was almost sickening! Sure, sometimes I thought you were a little overprotective of me when Percy was around us, but not like this!” he stopped and took a deep breath then tried to get Jason to look him in the eye. “I want to help you Jason, but I can’t do that until you tell me what happened with Disciplina.”

Jason took one last bite from his toasted sandwich, removed the foil, and tossed the rest to the ground where Leo the pig ran in and scooped it up.

That pig’s a cannibal!

“I-I,” Jason started, then bit his lip and started to shake. “It was Hell Nico,” he choked.

Nico could only listen in horrified silence as Jason told him of his time spent at Pompeii Prep. Jason told him of his strange roommates; the mortal Lisa and the empousai Allison, how Lisa would come back to their room every night bloodied and often missing parts of her body only for her to be healed by morning. How he ran from sun up until sun down, while practically starving himself. How he could barely stand let alone walk or run, but feared he would end up like Lisa if he didn’t follow his orders. How they played his insecurities to make him do whatever they wanted.

The blond forced a laugh and wiped his eyes on his coat sleeve. “Looking back, that wasn’t so bad.” He then told him of how he collapsed on his final day and was taken to the goddess’s office to be “rewarded”. “She looked just like Piper,” Jason sobbed. “The only difference were her eyes Neeks. I see them every time I close my eyes. Every night in my sleep. In every girl that so much as glances at me. There they are staring right back at me.”

What Jason told him next filled him with a rage he never knew was possible, while it felt like his guts were trying to wring themselves out like a dishtowel. The rational part of his mind was reminding him that Disciplina was a goddess, but the rest of his mind was screaming for him to dismember her and spread her disgusting remains to the farthest corners of the underworld. There was no acceptable reason for that monster to force herself on Jason and one way or another, he would make sure she answered for her crimes.

“I hate myself,” the son of Jupiter sniffled. “My body wanted it to happen. How fucked up am I?” he choked.

That was enough for Nico. He jumped over the fence so he was on the same side as the son of Jupiter and wrapped his arms around the taller teen. He was worried Jason would tense up or reject him, but instead he returned the embrace and rested his head on top of his own. “You’re not Jason. That wasn’t your fault,” he whispered. “That wasn’t your fault.”

“I can’t do this anymore,” Jason shuddered.

He started to slowly sub Jason’s back as panic gripped him. “What can’t you do?” he whispered, hoping for the best.

“Fighting,” the blond whimpered. “I can’t fight for something I don’t believe in. Not when the gods I’m supposed to fight for are the same ones who allowed it to happen. Not when the people we’re supposed to fight are trying to stop this from ever happening again.”

Nico was relieved that Jason hadn’t given up on living, which meant Jason still saw some glimmer of hope. He did however want to remind Jason that the people he didn’t want to fight were the same people who killed their friends, but he knew Jason didn’t need an argument at the moment. “You don’t have fight anymore Jason,” he whispered. “Your war is over.”
Jason’s knees collapsed, dragging the two of them to ground. The former praetor letting out a lifetime’s worth of pain in the form of salty tears, while Nico offered the comfort he so desperately craved.

Despite Nico’s insistences that Jason should stay home for the day, the older teen decided that he would go to school. He told Nico that this was the life he wanted now; a normal one.

So after two quick separate showers to get what he was now sure was not mud off of their bodies and a quick change of clothes, Nico walked Jason out to the truck and waved him off.

When the truck was out of sight Nico returned to the porch and collapsed onto an ancient rocking chair to try and process everything. He knew whatever had rattled Jason had to have been something terrible, but not that. He was expecting some kind of ancient curse, a prophecy with a death, something that he could help Jason get through, not sexual assault.

He was lost on what to do, how to help. Was he supposed to give him space or hovering over him like he did with Percy? How much was he supposed to talk about it with Jason? Should he try to get more details from him or let the older teen tell him in due course? Where did that leave Jason and Piper? Should he tell his father and Percy about Jason?

He frowned at the last one. This isn’t my story to tell. I already feel crappy enough for making Jason tell me. If Jason wants them to know he’ll tell them on his own.

“I wish Will was here,” he sighed, tilting his head back to watch the clouds. “He’d know what to do.” The all too familiar weight of guilt settled in his stomach as his thoughts turned to the son of Apollo. Will would be able to help Jason better than I ever could. He’d have a hymn for him and know exactly what to say.

“But Will isn’t here, is he?” he asked the early morning sky. “I have to do this. I’m the only one who can.”

A plan began to take shape, one that required subtlety and tact, but he could do it.

He had to.

“Do you want to do something?” Percy asked.

“Like what?”

Nico was currently sitting next the son of Poseidon in his bed. The son of Hades was flying through the last of his precalculus homework, while the older raven haired teen sat there watching him.

Percy pointed to the cardboard boxes filled with the comics and Mythomagic merchandise they had bought on their day out. “Wanna teach me how to play?”

He closed his textbook with the notebook still tucked inside. “Can you even hold cards?” he asked
gesturing at Percy’s wrapped hands.

“I think so. I mean, I can move my thumbs with little pain so I should be able to lobster claw it.”

“You’re going to what?” he laughed.

“You know, lobster claw it,” Percy chuckled. The older teen then raised his hands and repeatedly tapped his thumbs to his fingers. “Like that.”

“I have no idea where you get these ideas from Perce,” he chuckled as he carefully crawled out of the small bed; he didn’t want a repeat of the morning.

“It was something my mom would do when I was little,” Percy chuckled softly. “She’d chase me around the apartment doing that saying she was a lobster monster. When she would catch me she’d lift my shirt up and blow on my stomach and I laugh to the point I was in tears.” The older boy wiped a lone teardrop from his eye. “I miss her.”

Nico crouched down next to Percy and gently grasped the older boy’s shoulder. “I know you do. I miss her too.”

Percy’s looks up at him with glassy eyes, but with a small smirk. “Thanks. Now how about that game?”

Percy picked up the game pretty quick to Nico’s delight.

He started Percy off simple with the two of them each using one of the starter decks they had gotten so he could show Percy combos that he could do as well. It seemed that Percy had actually learned a lot from watching him play at school, so he had a pretty good grasp on the basics with the exception of how and when to use traps, spells, and artifacts.

“So I can send my bunyip to the dreamtime now?” Percy asked, cards held inches away from his face. “And then attack you directly?”

“That’s…” He looked at the card on the field, aka Percy’s sheets, and frowned. Shit. “Right…”

“And that brings your health down to…”

He dropped his cards on to the bed and sighed, “zero.”

While he was embarrassed that he had lost to a novice, the look on Percy’s face squashed it. “I won?” he asked, smiling ear-to-ear.

Nico nodded with a smile of his own.

“I won!” the son of Poseidon cheered, tossing his cards in the air. He held one hand up in the air, “High-five!”

He gave the son of Poseidon a dubious look. “You really think that’s a good idea Percy?” he chuckled.

The raven haired teen looked at his own bandaged hand and smiled sheepishly. “Yeah, better not.”
He reached over and gently tapped the older boy’s hand with his own. “Will that work?”

“That’ll work,” Percy smirked. “You want to play again?”

“Do you want to play again?” he asked, suddenly anxious. “I mean we don’t have to if you don’t want to. You don’t have to do this to make me happy. We can-“

Percy’s hand covered his mouth. “Nico calm down. I’m asking because I want to play. This is actually a lot more fun than I thought it would be,” Percy smiled. “Plus, I get to spend more time with you.”

Nico hoped he wasn’t blushing like a schoolgirl, but the heat that rushed to his face coupled with the butterflies in his stomach told him that was highly unlikely. For some reason he remembered back to the day he confessed his feelings to Percy and Annabeth, how he had looked at Percy and thought he was just a normal guy, not someone to crush over. Now he realized he had been both right and wrong. He had been crushing on him for the wrong reasons, but now after all the two of them had been through, he was pretty sure Percy Jackson was worthy of whatever adoration he could give him.

“I- uh- the-,” he stuttered like a complete idiot. He gulped and picked up his cards, not caring that they were upside down. “Yeah, I can do one more.”

Percy laughed.

One game turned to two. Then two games turned to five. Five turned to ten, and by noon Percy was a competent enough opponent that Nico had to actually think several moves ahead before he played a single card or figurine.

Currently, Nico was down to only four-thousand health, which was only slightly better than Percy’s three-thousand. Percy was on the offensive with his two Yowie figures, while Nico was on the defensive with his three Mimis combined with Uluru field card.

“I never took you as a guy who liked fairies,” the son of Poseidon chuckled, gesturing to the three stick-like figures on Nico’s side of the field.

He shot a dirty look at the son of Poseidon, who only laughed harder. “They’re not fairies! They’re Australian nature spirits!”

“They look a bit anorexic too.”

“Just shut up and make your move,” he grumbled. He’s trying to get in my head, but I’m prepared for that. I’ve been fighting with Percy for years! I know how he thinks! I know that he’ll go for a direct attack-

Percy set two cards down in his empty spell zones. “I play the artifact The Aegis which prevents me from taking damage this turn and the spell Blood ritual which lets me sacrifice three-thousand health to target and destroy up to three figurines on the field. So I will choose my two Yowies!”

Wait? What?
“And whenever a Yowie is destroyed, each player takes damage equal to their attack,” Percy paused and bent down to examine one of the ape-like figures, “which is two-thousand points each.”

Nico’s jaw dropped. “You sacrificed your own figures to win?” He reached over and picked up the two cards Percy had played and was awed by the son of Poseidon’s ruthlessness. “That’s just cold! Brilliant, but cold!”

Percy reclined back against his headboard looking like the cat who ate the canary. “Hey, when there’s no real world consequences I can use any strategy to win Neeks.”

He was still staring at the bedsheet/field in amazement at what had to been the most creative victory he had ever seen, when Percy’s word sank in. “No consequences?” he asked as he carefully moved to sit next to the older boy. “Are you sure about that?” This will be fun...

“It’s a game Neeks,” the son of Poseidon shrugged as he wrapped on arm around Nico. “Why would there be?”

He snuggled against Percy, enjoying the warmth that radiated from his Percy. “Is this okay?” he asked, remembering that they were supposed to be taking things slow (and seemingly failing).

“I was about to ask you the same thing,” Percy smiled shyly. “It’s just kind of a force of habit to put my arm around people I like.”

“I’m okay if you’re okay with this.” He couldn’t bring himself to say cuddling or hugging.

Percy pulled him closer yet and rested his head on Nico’s. “Then we’re both good.”

He could hear Percy’s heart beating in his ear and the older boy’s breath blow through his hair, it was similar to Will’s but different in a way that could only be Percy’s. “There are consequences to winning like that though Percy,” he said, feeling the steady rise and fall of Percy’s chest.

“Oh? How so?”

“Well, maybe some people are sore losers,” Nico explained as he absently trailed his long fingers down Percy’s bandaged right arm.

“We’ve been dealing with sore losers most of our lives Neeks,” the son of Poseidon huffed. “Kronos, the Titans, Gaea, the list goes on and on.”

“But what if that sore loser has something you want?” he asked as he pulled his head out from under Percy’s and moved so his lips were practically touching the older boy’s ear. “Something you really want,” he breathed into Percy’s ear, his voice a whisper.

Percy turned to face him, his green eyes wide with surprise.

He placed two fingers under Percy’s chin and tilted his head back. “Because you might find—,” he said seductively (he hoped) as he tilted his head, mouth slightly open, and brought his lips only a fingers width away from Percy’s.

As Percy pushed himself forward to meet Nico, the son of Hades pulled back and jumped off the bed. “You can still end up the loser,” he laughed as he walked to the bedroom door. “Seriously Percy, everything has a consequence.”

Percy sat there, lips quivering, with a bewildered look on his face. “Wait? What just happened?”
“I’m just messing with you Percy,” he smiled as he leaned on the door knob. “I’m going to go start
dinner and bring us back some lunch. Be back soon.”

As he exited the room he heard Percy call out, “Wait! No! You can’t just leave me hanging like that!
I demand a rematch! I’ll let you win! Nico! Come back! NICOOOOOO!”

“Why is Jackson always screaming?” his father asked as the god walked into the kitchen looking a
lot better than he did in the morning.

*Because I just left him wanting* Nico thought, but instead he shrugged and said, “he just gets weird
when he’s hungry.”

“Strange, he seemed okay while I was caring for him,” Hades frowned as he pulled out a chair at the
kitchen table. “What are you making?”

“Brownies,” he announced as he slid the glass pan into the oven. “From scratch. They’re Jason’s
favorite.” *The only way they could be more made from scratch was if I became a god and created a
universe to make the ingredients for them!*

“Did you figure out what was bothering Grace? Last night was… unexpected to say the least,” the
lord of the underworld sighed from the kitchen table.

Nico chewed on his lip as he removed the corncob patterned oven mitts from his hands. He was
hoping he would have more time before they had this inevitable conversation. How would his father
take it that Jason was refusing to fight anymore? How would Demeter and Persephone take it as
well? Would they destroy him? Or would they kick him out of the farm? “Yes, but I can’t tell you,”
he cringed, waiting for his father to fly into a fit of rage.

Instead, the lord of the dead drummed his fingers on the tabletop and asked, “Is that so?” his voice
eerily calm.

“Andheisnotgoingtofightanymore,” he blurted out as he turned to busy himself with a suddenly
extraordinary spoon in the kitchen sink.

The drumming stopped and he heard Hades take a deep breath. “Is that so?” he repeated, as the god
stood up and walked over to Nico. “May I inquire one thing then?”

Nico gulped as he felt his father’s breath on the back of his neck. “Yes.”

“Is he going to be okay?” the man sighed.

Nico was caught off guard by the question. He wasn’t exactly sure what he was expecting, but it
certainly wasn’t concern. “Someday, but for now he needs time to heal and rest.”

Hades leaned against the kitchen counter and crossed his arms. “I’ll take your word for it. Jason’s a
good kid and for him to fly off the handle like that last night was definitely out of character. Just- Just
tell him if he needs to talk my door is always open.” Hades looked at him and ruffled his hair, much
to his chagrin. “The same goes for you and Perseus.” He sighed. “This does put a hamper on my
plans though.”
“Thank you father,” he said, hugging the man. “He really needs this.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Hades chuckled, returning the embrace. “Just make sure you tell them you had to fight me for three hours about this. I wouldn’t want them to think I’m going soft.”

Nico removed himself from the embrace and smiled up at the god. “Yeah, the house of Hades mustn’t show any weakness.”

“Damn right.”

Nico returned to the oven and grabbed the egg timer. “So what is your new plan?” he asked, while setting the timer.

“I’ve been examining that weapon Grace managed to ascertain and our theory of some kind of signal based weapon has been confirmed,” The mortal god said, pushing himself up on the counter. “Through some rather… painful experimentation on my part I’ve even confirmed it was the same weapon that rendered Demeter and myself into these less-than-ideal states. Which once again begs the question: how were you unaffected?”

“Perhaps it doesn’t work on demigods?” he shrugged as he pulled out some potatoes and pork chops from the fridge. *Jason should like these.*

His father shook his head. “It should actually be worse for demigods. Unless…”

“Unless what?”

“Nothing to concern yourself with at the moment. Pure conjecture,” the god shook his head, his dark hair swaying. “The important thing though is the three, er, two of you are the key to this war. At least until Artemis can be found.”

“So it comes down to demigods to save Olympus again,” he sighed, as he started to peel a potato over the kitchen sink. “Sounds about right.”

“To be fair, I am going to be with you every step of the way, as will Demeter and Persephone. Which will come in handy as what we are going to do has never been done before.”

Nico gulped. “And what would that be?”

Hades grinned in a way that sent a chill down Nico’s spine. “I’m going to train you to use the full extent of your powers.”

“I already-“

His father held up a hand to silence him. “Yes, you are without a doubt the strongest child I have ever had, but you’ve only mastered one sphere of my influence. Hazel can pluck gemstones and precious metals from the earth without a thought, Diocletian could shadow travel objects at a distance and make them reappear miles away without breaking a sweat, and Roland could turn a summer’s day into the dead of winter changing the course of battle.”

“And yet you say I’m the strongest,” Nico huffed, as he reached for another potato.

“Nico,” his father warned. “I know you are intelligent enough to know skill and strength are independent of one another. If you can master what your siblings have in the past, you will be a living god.”
“What about Percy though?” he sighed. “With Lord Poseidon hiding beneath the waves, who is going to train him?”

“Perseus has a pretty solid grasp on his water based abilities, but he is missing his father’s earth shaking abilities and he lacks finesse overall. I believe you and I can help him with that. He does seem to do whatever you tell him. If I didn’t know any better I’d believe he was quite enamored with you.”

Somehow Nico managed to choke on air.

It seemed to Nico that Jason returned home with a slight spring in his step and his smile was more genuine than it had been for quite some time.

“Hey Neeks,” Jason cried as he flew into the kitchen. “What smells so good?” The son of Jupiter asked as he kicked off his shoes and dropped his book bag on to the floor.

“Slow cooked pork chops and gravy with mashed potatoes and brownies for de-“

He was suddenly being lifted off the ground by two strong arms and wrapped in a painful bear-hug. “I freaking love your brownies!”

“Grace would you kindly put my only son down?” Hades smiled as he walked into the kitchen. “He is looking rather paler than usual. A bit blue too…”

He could feel Jason’s back tense up at his father’s unexpected entrance, but a moment later the blond released him and chuckled, “Oops, sorry Nico.”

“It’s okay,” he wheezed as he grabbed the kitchen counter with one hand and tried to catch his breath. “It’s good to know someone likes my cooking.”

“They would be fools not to,” Hades said, refilling an onyx mug with tea.

His father walking into kitchen had not been part of Nico’s plan to greet the son of Jupiter upon his arrival. Originally he wanted to get Jason by himself, stuff him full of brownies, and explain that his father was okay with him not wanting to fight anymore. Then when Jason was in a good mood, he would inform him that the four of them were going to sit down for a family dinner every night from now on.

Honestly Nico wasn’t sure what he could do for Jason in regards to what Disciplina had done to him (and he was still planning to destroy her when this was all over), but he knew he needed to rebuild the blond’s trust in his father, Demeter, and Persephone. However, with Demeter off with Persephone searching for Artemis, the only god available was his father.

“Well then I guess I’m not a fool,” the blond hissed.

And unfortunately Jason was acting pretty passive aggressive towards the lord of the underworld.

*Just great. Just freaking great! Why did I expect this to go smoothly!*
He stalked over to the brownie pan and scooped a warm and gooey chunk onto a napkin. “Jason, I got a couple things I want to talk to you about,” he smiled, offering the blond his favorite dessert.

Jason eyed the brownie for a moment as if he expected it to come to life and bite him, but he quickly took it and took a huge bite. “Arout rut?” Jason asked, his mouth full. Jason swallowed and glared at Hades, “And does he have to be here?”

It took all of his willpower to not smack Jason upside the head for being so childish, but he reminded himself why Jason was acting this way and instead forced a smile. “Well, yes, it concerns the both of you.”

Both the blond and his father arched an eyebrow at him with such synchronization it was scary.

“Jason, I talked to my father and after much arguing, he said he is fine with you not fighting anymore,” he turned to his father. “Isn’t that right?”

Thankfully, the god took the hint and nodded. “I’m not one to force others to do something against their will. I-I just want you to be happy Jason,” Hades said, smiling sincerely. “Nico here was quite insistent on this and he eventually convinced me.”

He wanted to face palm at the last part. *Why is it so important to him that he has to come across as a stubborn jackass?*

Jason eyed the god skeptically. “Really?”

His father rolled his eyes a she took a sip from his tea. “Yes, yes. Jason Grace; Son of Jupiter, Praetor of New Rome, Pontiff Maximus of Olympus, slayer of my grandmother, leader of the seven, and my son’s best friend, you are hereby honorably discharged from service. You’ll get your gold watch in the mail.” He set his mug down and crossed his arms. “Does that work for you?”

Jason smiled so brightly that it made Nico sick to his stomach. “Thank you,” he nodded enthusiastically.

“There are conditions though,” Nico added. Jason’s smile turned into snarl, but before he had a chance to jump down his father’s throat he added, “that are my own.”

Both Jason and Hades looked at him with their faces twisted in confusion.

“First, from now on we are going to eat dinner together as a family. At the kitchen table no one is a god, goddess, demigod, or I-don’t-know-what, we are all equal.” *That should help with some of the awkwardness.* “Second,” he pointed to the son of Jupiter, “You are not going to spend your time hiding out in the barn. I know you have work to do, but when you are finished you will come in and spend time with us. I don’t care if it’s just doing homework with me and Percy, watching TV together, or you playing *World of Arts-and-crafts* with us in the room.”

“I think you mean *World of Warcraft* Neeks,” the blond smiled.

“Whatever! Third, I want you to apologize to Percy for what happened last night.” He held up a hand to silence the son of Jupiter. “Yes, I know you’re both at fault. I’ve already talked to Percy about it, you can expect an apology as well. I really need you two to clear the air.” *Because I can’t have my best friend fighting with my boyfriend.* “Do you think you can do that?”

“Yeah. Yeah, I can do that.”
“I feel like a freaking toddler,” Percy groaned from his seat at the table.

“Percy you are a toddler,” Jason joked as he set the table. “You even look like one with that bib.”

“I said I was sorry Percy,” Nico apologized for the umpteenth time. Somehow while coming up with the evening’s meal he had forgotten that the son of Poseidon was extremely limited when it came to using his hands, and pork chops were definitely a fork and knife meal. So, Nico found himself standing at the kitchen counter cutting up Percy’s piece of pork for him. “Do you want me to mix it with your potatoes and gravy?”

“I’d rather you just feed me Neeks,” the son of Poseidon wiggled his eyebrows suggestively, only to get cuffed in the back of his head by Hades. “Ow! What was that for?!” he cried, rubbing the back of his head.

Hades set a glass of soda down in front of Percy and gave him a pointed look. “Don’t mess with my son’s emotions Perseus.” His father moved around the table, setting down glasses filled with various beverages for them. “And besides, you find it embarrassing to eat with only a spoon, but being fed like an infant is fine?”

“I guess,” Percy sighed, but he shot Nico a look. “And yes Nico, please mix my food.”

“Sure thing Percy,” he smiled over his shoulder. He couldn’t believe how well everything was going! Jason and Percy had apologized to each other for the events of the previous night and then proceeded to “bro-hug” it out to the point Nico was starting to get jealous of Jason holding his Percy. The three of them had then proceeded to do the day’s homework. He and Percy mostly worked together, with him writing for Percy, while Jason sat at the foot of the bed doing his own and filling them in on the day’s events (which wasn’t much given the small size of the school and community). They did have an assignment in World History that they did together, a crossword puzzle on the important people and events of the Cold War, which surprisingly Jason knew a great deal about.

Around that time, Hades had walked in and took over his scribe duties for Percy. Whatever Jason didn’t know and couldn’t find in their textbooks, his father would step in tell them and would even provide his insight on the events and persons. Nico didn’t know who this Fidel Castro was, but he was impressed that the Cuban had managed to hide from Thanatos for over fifty years.

Shortly after that, Jason and his father carefully carried Percy down the stairs into the kitchen so the four of them could get ready for the evening meal. Percy couldn’t really do much more than provide a steady stream of conversation, Jason was setting the table, His father, the all-powerful ruler of the underworld, was filling drink orders, and Nico was going around filling everyone’s plate.

And honestly, Nico was enjoying every moment of it.

*This is how it should be every night.*

Satisfied that Percy’s pork chop was in small enough pieces, he carried the plate over and set it down in front of the son of Poseidon. “Alright, I think we can start now,” He announced with pride.

“Awesome!” Jason whooped. “I’m starving!”

The kitchen table wasn’t as big as the dining room’s, the round table only seating five. He took a seat between Percy and his father, while Jason sat on the other side of Percy, the empty spot serving as a buffer between Jason and Hades.
“This looks really good son,” Hades said as he set a napkin on his lap. “Smells excellent as well.”

“Nico hasn’t made a bad thing yet,” Percy smiled at him as he tried to get a decent hold on his spoon. “Although I have to ask if I could get this in drink form?”

“Percy that would look absolutely disgusting,” Jason laughed, pointing his fork at the older teen. “Would you really drink it?”

To Nico’s amusement Percy pretended to think really hard, biting his lip and squinting his eyes. “Under most circumstances no, but since Nico made it, no problem.”

“Just quit your complaining Jackson and eat your baby food,” Hades said, shooting Percy a half-serious dirty look.

And they all laughed, rich and deeply, Percy included.

After that the conversation turned to various things, such as how Jason was liking school, how Percy was feeling, Hades’ plans to train him and Percy (which Percy readily agreed to), how grateful Hades was that Jason managed to capture one of the enemy’s weapons, to historic figures with underserved bad reputations (apparently Vlad Tepes impaled all those people because one of the Turks killed his cat), How his programming class was going (he quickly changed the subject), really anything and everything that popped into their ADHD ridden minds.

“So you’re telling me, that you have Ronnie James Dio, the Ronnie James Dio, building you a hot rod?” Percy asked, staring at his father in a mixture of shock and amazement. “Like as we speak?”

Hades wiped his mouth with his napkin and smiled smugly at the son of Poseidon. “Before I was rendered mortal the chrome had just arrived.”

Percy dropped his spoon and his jaw. “I take back anything bad I ever said about you. You are hands down officially the coolest god.” Percy turned to face him, his green eyes comically wide. “Your dad is awesome Neeks. Did you know that? Like if you opened up a dictionary and looked up cool, there would be a picture of your dad. Probably riding in his hot rod with dragons in the background!”

“Well I don’t know about all that Perce,” he chuckled as he collected the dirty dishes from the table. “But he is a pretty cool father,” he smiled at the two of them. “But who is this Ronald James you keep talking about?”

Jason stood up and grabbed the remaining dishes. “Yeah, is he like some kind of mechanic or something?”

Apparently he was not a “mechanic or something” as both his boyfriend’s and father’s faces look at him and Jason in disbelief and horror.

“He’s a god of metal!” the two shouted in harmony.

“Holy Diver!”

“Rainbow in the Dark!”

“The Last in Line!”

The son of Poseidon and god of the underworld continued to shout what he assumed were song titles at him until they hung their heads down and started to rub their temples.
“How could I have let this happen?” his father moaned.

“Jason I can understand, but you Nico? I thought for sure you knew!” Percy cried.

“We have to correct this!” his father cried, slamming a fist down on the table. “I run D.O.A records for crying out loud! No son of mine will be ignorant to the arts!”

“Go get him an IPod or something!” Percy begged.

“To hell with that!” his father roared, startling everyone but Percy. “When Persephone returns I’ll have her get my vinyl collection from the palace! Nico’s first time experiencing the greats must be perfect!”

“I have no idea what is happening,” the blond said standing next to him, his arms still full of dishes. “And is it me, but are Percy and your dad carrying on almost exactly the same way.”

“It’s you,” he lied, doing his best to not make comparisons between his boyfriend and father. This is one of those things even the Lethe can’t erase, isn’t it? The fact that Percy and him are very much alike.

“You have records?” Percy cried in amazement.

“No,” Hades smirked. “I have every record. One of the many perks of being an immortal god.”

“Oh, hey guys,” Jason called from the sink. “I hate to interrupt your… whatever it is you’re doing, but someone just pulled up the drive.”

“What?” he scurried over to the sink and jumped onto the counter so he could see out the window. Sure enough, a silver pickup truck was slowly making its way to the house. “Who knows we’re here?”

“No one,” his father said gravely next to him. “I made sure this place was completely off the grid.”

“So they found us then?” Percy chuckled from the table.

“No, it’s worse,” Nico gulped as he watched a pair of cowboy boots appear beneath the open cab door. No! No! No! Oh gods no!

“I’m going to go hide in the bathroom,” Jason whimpered as he ran out of the room.

“Worse?” Percy questioned as Nico walked to the door and his father laughed.

“Yup,” he answered just as there was a knock at the door. If the Fates were merciful they would let a bolt of lightning hit me now.

He opened the door and cringed as the blonde on the other side shrieked. “Nico! You are awake!”

“Hi Chelsea,” he sighed as the blonde pulled him into a bear hug.

I fucking hate the Fates…

Chapter End Notes
This chapter ran away on me. I was not supposed to be this long, but hey.

So now Nico knows about Jason and Disciplina and he's going to do his best to help Jason. He isn't entirely sure how yet, but first and foremost he wants to make sure Jason is comfortable in his own home and around the gods the frequent it. Like with Percy he wants Jason to feel loved and to know he is wanted and needed, and right now if Jason doesn't want to fight anymore he isn't going to argue.

Now Hades doesn't know why Jason is quitting, but he respects Nico's judgement enough to believe him. Which really shows the strength of their father-son relationship.

Nico and Percy had quite a good time playing Mythomagic even if Percy had to "lobster claw" the cards. I like to imagine Percy had cute childhood things like that with Sally, even with smelly Gabe in the picture, because Sally is a good mom.

I also had to add the scene of Nico purring into Percy's ear after losing a game, only to leave Percy hanging. It's a dick move, but something i can see him doing. Right now their relationship is new and despite them trying to be slow and secretive the need to be physical is a strong one, which is why Nico damned near killed Percy in the morning. Percy calling him a pet name other than Neeks? That had to be a dream come true for him!

Hades training Percy and Nico will begin shortly. Nico's will be more intensive at first as Percy is currently healing. They will both learn to tap into and use their abilities in ways they never thought of before, as well as get some new ones. They know their weapons don't work and that the enemy has weapons that can take them out in an instant so speed and power is the name of the game folks!

I hope you enjoyed the family time Nico set aside. Them sitting down together as equals is something they all needed. Hades can be himself (minus a few thing) around his boys without having to be proper and he can converse with his son as any father would. Percy is learning more and more that Hades is a lot cooler, dorkier, and nicer guy than he had previously thought. Jason is slowly letting down his defenses. And Nico is just happy to have a family.

So of course some one has to interrupt it!

Next chapter will be Percy and will pick up where this one left off :)

Hey! You! Yes you! did you like what you just read? then leave a kudos! Thoughts, theories, feedback, corny jokes, requests, etc? Leave a comment!

I love hearing from all of you! It really keeps me going! (that and the $25 an hour I get paid to write this at work. Kills boredom)

Well until next time, I want you to remember you are a one-of-a-kind person who can never be replaced! <3
Chapter Summary

Tonight:

An unexpected guest!

Deck building!

Jason's shampoo of choice is revealed!

Emotional whiplash!

Chapter Notes

I can't believe this has crossed 5K views! Thank you all so much! Those of you who have stayed with me this long are definitely going to love what comes next!

Well this is certainly unexpected, he thought with a grin.

Just mere moments ago they were ready to fight for their lives, and now Nico was as rigid as a statue as the blonde Mythomagic player wrapped her arms around him, while he and Hades were trying not to laugh at Nico’s discomfort.

The girl then forcefully grabbed Nico’s head and tilted his head back as she examined him for any scratch or bruise. “I thought for sure you’d be beat up pretty badly if a car wreck had you knocked out for all this time!”

Before Nico had a chance to respond, Chelsea’s eyes drifted over to him.

Oh shit…

In a blur of movement that had him wondering if she was a daughter of Hermes, the girl was crouched down next to him, examining the bandages on his arms and leg as well as the newly healed scar on his cheek. “Now he looks like someone who has been through a wreck,” the girl announced, before turning her attention back to him. “Hi Percy! How are you feeling?” she cooed as if he were a small child.


The girl reared back in surprise, falling onto her backside, sending Nico into a fit of laughter. “Holy crap he can talk!”

“Getting him to shut up, now that’s the trick,” Hades chuckled as he eyed the strange blonde girl on the floor. “Nico, who is this girl?”
Nico walked over and begrudgingly helped their classmate to her feet. “Father, this is Chelsea. She’s one of our classmates. She’s a junior just like Jason.”

He couldn’t help but snicker as the girl’s eyes bugged out as he finally noticed the god of the underworld and fellow connoisseur of the musical arts. If he was right that Chelsea had a crush on Nico, then she had just embarrassed herself in front of the wrong person. Thank the gods I’ve done that more times than I can count. Crap…

“Um, nice to-to m-meet you Mr. di Angelo,” the blonde stuttered, offering her hand to the god. “I’m Ch-Chelsea.”

Almost comically, Hades eyed the girl’s hand with apprehension before taking it in his own. “I’m Azrael di Angelo, but please, call me Mr. di Angelo.”

The blonde then furrowed her brow and looked to Nico and then back to Hades, and Percy realized immediately what she was doing: trying to figure out how Nico could be so small. Hades wasn’t a huge muscular guy by any stretch of the imagination, but in his mortal form he was a head taller than Percy and was built like some kind of Olympic gymnast. Nico on the other hand was at least a head shorter than Percy and his porcelain complexion and wiry frame made him look so small and delicate. Not that it wasn’t obvious Nico was his son, but it did make one wonder how this could possibly happen.

The difference was though Percy knew the answer. It’s my fault. I shouldn’t have let him leave camp the first time. I should’ve went after him! If I could’ve brought him back to camp he would have been properly fed, he would’ve had a social life, and he wouldn’t have lived with all that pain I caused him.

He felt a touch on his shoulder, shaking him from his thoughts. He looked up to see the son of Hades looking down at him, concern etched on his face. “You okay Percy?”

But I can make it up to him now. “Yeah,” he smiled. “As long as you’re by my side.”

While Nico did his best to hide his blush, Hades and Chelsea looked at the two of them with confused looks.

Wow, kind of forgot they were there. That’s what? Three seconds? That’s got to be a record!

Apparantly Hades had forgotten that he had used the farm’s address when he registered them for school. So when Nico’s Java teacher got concerned about him falling behind on his coursework, she had contacted Mr. Z. Mr. Z. had been busy at the end of the day so he missed talking to Jason before the blond left the school, but he did manage to find Chelsea. The girl had agreed to take Nico his coursework after she finished track practice, and long story short Hades had insisted she stay and “cheer up” Nico after being so kind to go out of her way like that.

So now Percy found himself back up in their shared bedroom, sitting on his bed with Nico and Chelsea. The three of them sorting through the crate of Mythomagic cards and figurines trying to build him his own deck. His rules were simple: he didn’t want anything Greek or Roman, absolutely nothing related to Poseidon or Neptune (He may have put a little too much anger in that one as
Chelsea looked at him funny), and, this wasn’t really a rule more of a suggestion, he wanted to attack directly instead of having to break through Nico’s defense (*I can’t beat him unless I go around him!*).

He thought he would have had to do some renegotiating on his no Greek or Roman rule (he would have been fine with using Hades or Pluto), but the son of Hades and the blonde had looked at each other, announced “Eldritch Horrors”, and took to sorting through the collection and handing him figures and cards to examine.

The cards and figures they gave him depicted creatures that could have only existed in nightmares… or Japanese cartoons. He really wasn’t sure which. Their names were clearly written by someone with crippling dyslexia who had rolled their face across a keyboard. *Seriously, how do you even pronounce Cthulhu? Is the ‘C’ silent? Something has to be silent in there…*

“Hey Percy would these work?” Nico asked, holding out three figures for him to examine.

They were some kind of half-snake half-man creatures, they were primarily reptile, but they had the arms of a man and were carrying spears and had bows and quivers on their back. They reminded him way too much of the Athenians he had encountered before the final battle. “Uh, no thanks… remind me too much of our European vacation,” he chuckled, pushing Nico’s hand back.

Nico gave him a knowing grin, and deposited the figures back in the box.

“Wait, you guys have been to Europe?” the blonde asked looking up from the box, eyes wide with curiosity and envy. “Where did you visit?”

*Oh crap…*

While Hades had given them a backstory on where they were from, how they were related, and other general knowledge that he had forgotten; they had never discussed their so called “European vacation” other than what to call it.

He took a deep breath and started, “Well you see it wasn’t really so much a vacation, but a-“


*Nice work Nico!* He internally cheered, while he grinned at his boyfriend. *Wow, that is still a strange thought!* “We went to Rome-“

“Where I was *trapped* in the hotel,” the son of Hades grinned.

“Yeah! Neeks here got pretty wicked food poisoning! Never get the pizza in Rome!”

“I did get to see the Coliseum with Percy and Jason though! We had to *fight* the crowds though!” Nico smiled and playfully punched his arm.

“We did get separated shortly after that though-“

“Percy found one *hell* of a way to get to Greece.”

“Nico got to see Venice though!”

By now both he and Nico were laughing uncontrollable over how mundane they could make their quests sound.

“Yeah! The city had a stray dog problem,” Nico laughed. “Keyword being: had!”
“That’s fucking terrible Nico!” he roared. He was laughing so hard that he was worried his stitches would open again. “After that Nico got to see Croatia!”

He realized his mistake as the words left his mouth and he regretted them instantly. Nico stopped laughing and turned away from him and Chelsea to face the wall. Percy could swear at the moment the room dropped ten degrees in temperature.

He watched as Nico shuddered and clenched his fists. “Fuck Croatia…,” the son of Hades whispered.

Fuck! Fuck! Fuck! You went too far! I can’t fuck this up in under twenty-four hours! He took a deep breath and gritted his teeth for the pain that was to come. He rolled over onto his side and then used his arms to push himself up on the bed, as what felt like a thousand needles impaling his palms. He crawled over to the son of Hades as fast as possible, doing his best to ignore the searing pain in his right leg and arm. *Yup! This is the last thing I should be doing!*

Percy flopped down with a pained groan and tenderly wrapped one arm around Nico. “Hey, hey, hey” he cooed into the younger boy’s ear. “I’m sorry Neeks. I know what happened isn’t something to joke about. You were so brave! I couldn’t have done what you did!”

He felt Nico shudder, but the tension in his shoulders relaxed at the same time. “No. It’s fine. I made light of your,” Nico trailed off nodding ever so slightly towards the blonde sitting next to them. He shook his head. “No Nico, you went through the same… detour I did, but you did it alone. What happened in Croatia was personal, I’m so so sorry.”

When Nico looked up at him with a small smile and watery eyes, it felt like his heart going to fly out his chest and do a lap around the room. And if it wasn’t for Chelsea sitting right there, Percy would have bridged the small distance between them and try to kiss away the hurt.

“Uh, this probably isn’t my place to ask, but what the hell happened in Croatia?” the blonde asked, immediately killing the moment.

“You’re right,” Nico huffed as he wiped his eyes with his shirt. “It’s not.”

After he was sure that Nico was okay (and that he wasn’t bleeding from moving around), he joined the two in their search for *Mythomagic* figures and cards for his deck, and did his best to make Nico smile by pointing out the absurdity of some of the creatures depicted.

*Okay, this thing can’t be real!* He held up a small figure that appeared to be some kind of bat-winged cucumber with a starfish for legs. “Okay, what the hell is this thing?” he laughed. *And please tell me I’m not somehow related to it… “The sea-cucumber god?”*

Nico took the figure from his hand and laughed. “No, it’s an Elder Thing!”

“Oh wow, those would go perfect in his deck!” Chelsea cried. “Percy see if you can find two more.”

He took the figure back from Nico and turned it around him in his hand. “Okay, so it’s an Elder
Chelsea’s eyes lit up as she pulled another cucumber-monster from the box. “They were a race of aliens that colonized Earth about one-billion years ago to escape the Elder gods. They all seemingly disappeared and the only evidence of their existence is the massive necropolis in Antarctica.” She tossed the plastic game piece to him and smiled. “At least that’s the basics. Read At the Mountains of Madness if you want to know more.”

“Wait, time out! These things are aliens? I thought this game only did mythology?”

“Well, they are part of mythology,” Nico shrugged. “Just not classical. They’re part of Lovecraftian mythology. Which has only been around for like one-hundred years tops.”

*Thank the gods!*

Eventually (and thankfully) Chelsea had to return home. While there was no legal curfew in rural Illinois, her parents had a very strict one and the fact that she was alone in a house full of teenage boys had not gone over to well with the blonde’s parents.

So when she was ready to leave he made sure Nico walked her out to her truck. His mom had drilled into him that he should always escort a guest out, so he wanted to instill that practice into Nico. It was one way of keeping his mother’s memory alive.

“And hello darkness my old friend,” he sighed, as the almost overwhelming sorrow and guilt returned.

Why was it that no matter what he thought about his mom, Paul, Estelle, and Annabeth, he wanted to curl up and cry and some days die? Why couldn’t he recall the good times without sulking? How was it fair that the memory of his first kiss with Annabeth brought out the same feelings as coming home to find Gabe had ended his world? Because that’s what happened right? In the course of one short week his past, present, and future had been destroyed.

“Gabe,” he snarled, as he clenched his hands into fists, the pain in his heart far outweighing that of any physical injury.

How could he have come back? That thought haunted his every waking moment. It wasn’t always front-and-center, but it was always there lurking in the dark recesses of his mind. He had theories of course, but there was no proof to back any of them up. Was it a last act of vengeance from Gaia? What about one of the numerous gods and monsters he had managed to piss off over the years? What about the mortals? Had they somehow de-stoned that bald asshole?

*Does it even matter who did it or how?* He frowned.

He supposed it mattered to someone, but not to him. The only thing that mattered was that fat piece of shit was out there walking around while he was bedridden in the middle of nowhere! Gabe didn’t deserve to be out there! Gabe had taken everything from him! He would never know what it would be like to be a big brother, to make his mom and step-dad proud by graduating, or see how amazing
his mother would be as a grandmother to the children he and Annabeth were going to have.

Gabe had taken all that away, leaving him only a future full of uncertainty.

He choked back a sob and punched the mattress in frustration. Tartarus? Tartarus is a fucking joke compared to this! I would gladly swim laps in the Phlegethon and fight Tartarus with Bob’s spear up my ass if it meant I could bring them back!

He rolled onto his side and curled up into the fetal position, trembling. He was so tired of crying, it seemed to be all he was capable of lately, and no matter how much he cried there was always more that wanted out with no end in sight.

The bedroom door’s hinges creaked as the son of Hades returned, a plate of assorted sliced fruits in hand.

“Hey Percy! Sorry it took so long, but I thought I’d bring you-,” Nico paused when he saw him, “Are you okay Percy?”

No? Yes? It varies second to second?

Unable to find the appropriate words he shrugged his shoulders.

From the corner of his eye he watched Nico set the plate down next to their shared alarm clock before he sat down on the bed. A moment later he felt the younger boy gently rubbing circles on his back, removing some of the pent up tension. “It’s about your family isn’t it?”

He can see right through me, can’t he? He nodded.

“Sally, Paul, and Annabeth would be proud of you, you know that right?”

Percy furrowed his brow and turned his head to look at his new boyfriend. “For what?”

Nico smiled down at him. “For how much you love them, you idiot!” Nico chuckled softly. “Father and Jason told me that since you’ve woken up you’ve been studying harder. They also said that of the work you’ve gotten back so far you’re grades have gone up. You’re doing it for them aren’t you?”

He thought back to his time with Annabeth and the promise he had made. “Yeah,” he answered. “I promised Annabeth I’d go to college for us, that I’d try my best.”

Nico nodded. “And you didn’t even hesitate to go to New Rome to try and save our friends.”

“Yeah, but that’s standard protocol for demigods. Besides, I don’t think they’d be proud of me for sitting here crying like a big baby.”

“You’re wrong Perseus,” the son of Hades whispered into his ear. “It’s okay to grieve every now and then, but the important thing is you keep moving forward.”

He rolled himself onto his back again so he could look at Nico better. “It sure doesn’t feel like I’m moving forward.”

“That’s where you’re wrong Percy,” Nico said softly. “You’re only thinking about how you’re feeling now. What about just fifteen minutes ago when we were making you your deck? You were pretty happy then.”

“But then I hurt you. Again.”
Nico crawled over him and laid down next to him, propping his head up with his arm. “You didn’t hurt me, it-it just caught me off guard is all,” the shaggy haired teen shrugged. “But right now isn’t about me. I was trying to say that these bouts of depression are getting less and less frequent Percy! Think about it, yesterday was a good day and so was today!”

“I guess.”

“You guess,” Nico rolled his eyes. “It’s like I told you before Percy: it gets a little better every day.” Nico dropped his head onto the pillow next to him and rested one hand on his stomach while the other stroked Percy’s arm. “Now how about I tell you some embarrassing stories that my father thinks I don’t remember. You two were getting a little too chummy at dinner for my taste.”

“You could have told me she left!” Jason grumbled as he walked into their bedroom and flopped down onto his sleeping bag, not paying attention to the fact that Nico was lying next to Percy; their pinkie fingers intertwined. “Three hours! I was in there for three hours!”

Percy still wasn’t feeling that well, but Nico telling him stories from his childhood had improved his mood slightly. Nico had also more-or-less confirmed his theory that Hades and Paul were very, very similar. “What the hell were you doing in there for that long?” he asked the blond.

The son of Jupiter pulled his laptop and headset out of from under Nico’s bed. “I read the label on the Head and Shoulders bottle until I could recite the ingredients by memory,” Jason grunted as he slung his headset on.

“What?” Nico laughed, sitting up to look at the frustrated gamer.

“Nico, I’m pretty sure he’s just-“

“The active ingredient is Pyrithione zinc at a one percent concentration. Inactive ingredients are; water, sodium lauryl sulfate, sodium laureth sulfate, glycol distearate, zinc carbonate, sodium chloride, sodium xylensulfonate, cocamidopropyl betaine, fragrance, dimethicone, sodium benzoate, guar hydroxypropyltrimonium chloride, magnesium carbonate hydroxide, methylchloroisothiazolinone, methylisothiazolinone, blue number one, and red number thirty-three,” the blond rattled off with seemingly no effort.

Holy shit.

Percy’s jaw dropped and a quick look to his left confirmed that Nico’s had done the same. Maybe he should have been concerned that Jason had hid in their bathroom because of a girl, but after the initial shock, all he could do was laugh at the absurdity of it all.

“Gods Jason!” Percy laughed, deep and hard. He tapped Nico repeatedly and cried, “Nico! Nico! Go get the bottle we have to check this!”

The son of Hades must have thought the same thing he climbed out of the bed without question and ran out of the room.

“Dude. Bro,” he laughed. “Did it even cross your mind to jack off? You had the only great
opportunity in months and you wasted it memorizing a shampoo bottle?!”

Nico came back with the shampoo bottle just in time to see Jason smack Percy with a pillow.

After confirming that yes, Jason did in fact memorize the ingredients on the Head and Shoulders bottle, things quieted down for the evening.

Jason was playing his game and occasionally speaking to someone over his headset.

Nico was currently seated next to him, looking through the stack of printouts Chelsea had brought him. The smaller teen would occasionally mumble something then write down a few notes on a page that appeared to be complete nonsense to Percy.

Currently, Nico was jotting down notes on what had to be the weirdest problem Percy had ever seen. The paper said that Nico was to write a program that would ask the user how many cookies they wished to purchase (Okay I like that idea), then it was to tell the user how many crates, boxes, and individual cookies that would come out to. There were apparently twenty-four cookies per box and twenty boxes per crate.

“Why don’t you just use one box?” he asked the son of Hades. “Or if they ordered a lot just dump them into the crate? This problem sounds way harder than it should be.”

Nico set his pen down and smiled at him in a way only Nico could. “I don’t think that would be an acceptable or even practical answer.”

“So if a big box isn’t the answer, what is?” he teased.

“Well the first thing to do after getting the order would be to do integer division on the number of cookies with how many fit in a box,” The son of Hades explained as he picked up his pen once more and began to draw diagrams. Then you would do the modulo operation-

“What the heck is the modulo operation?” Percy laughed as he scooted a bit closer to Nico. “Is that like, a surgeon removing that little hanging thing in the back of your throat?”

The younger boy glared at him in disbelief, but the small smile he had told Percy he thought it was funny. “It’s not that kind of operation Jackson. It’s a mathematical one that tells you what he remainder is after you divide two numbers.”

“Oh, that’s… neat,” he said, nodding his head.

“Anyway, as I was saying-“

It was probably not a good thing that he stopped listening to the Italian explain how to solve his problem, but he just couldn’t help but stare at the boy before him. How was it that this boy who was drawing diagram after diagram while laughing could be the same Nico who he thought hated him less than a year ago? That Nico could go from this cold, almost emotionless person to taking every opportunity to curl up with him and offer all the support he needed? How come he hadn’t noticed before how smart Nico was? How kind he was? How did he miss Nico’s almost ethereal beauty?

Okay, that was because he was always depressed and that oversized jacket did not compliment him.
But now though... I like what I see.

Percy turned his head just enough to check on Jason. The blond was currently facing away from them clicking on his mouse and hitting his keyboard hard enough Percy worried that it would break. He turned back to Nico, who was still explaining his cookie problem, saying something about ifs and elses.

Fuck it. Yolo.

He bridged the small gap between them and caught Nico in a kiss. At first the younger boy stiffened up like a board, but when Percy started to suck on his lower lip, the boy melted. He loved how Nico was so responsive to the slightest touch, how he was so eager to take anything he offered, and how he returned it right back.

Percy wrapped one arm around Nico and palmed the back of the boy’s head. His fingers became lost in the son of Hades’ long thick hair as he pulled Nico closer, deepening the kiss.

Why do I ever doubt Annabeth’s ideas?

Percy wished that the moment would last forever, but he knew he was pushing his luck to begin with, with Jason sitting only five feet away. They said they were going to take it slow and keep their newly formed relationship to themselves for a while, and he was going to do his damndest to give Nico what he wanted. He started to pull away from the Italian, but much to his amusement, Nico pushed himself forward.

Holy crap! Once you get him going he doesn’t want to stop!

Percy gripped Nico’s hair and held him in place as he pulled away. He couldn’t help but to chuckle when he saw the expression on Nico’s face; his eyes wide with confusion and lips quivering. It looked like someone had stolen his favorite toy and he couldn’t figure out where it went.

That’s right Neeks! That’s exactly what it felt like when you left me hanging this afternoon!

The adorable look on Nico’s face morphed into fear as he remembered they weren’t alone. The son of Hades leaned over Percy to check on Jason and let out a sigh of relief when he saw that Jason was still hammering on his laptop.

“You can’t do that Percy!” he whispered in his ear. “What if Jason saw?”

He couldn’t help but roll his eyes. The day he worried about Jason seeing them, would be the day he stopped liking the color blue. “Neeks, he’s so into that game right now, we could be attacked by Euryale and Stheno and he wouldn’t hear a thing,” Percy smiled. “Now, I believe you were explaining your homework to me? Something about elses?”

The son of Hades looked like he was going to press the issue further, but he sighed and shook his head. “You’re impossible Percy.”

He laughed as he adjusted his positioned, cringing slightly when he moved his right leg. “So I’ve been told, but seriously you make this sound so easy! Why is this the only class that makes you frown?”

Nico slid back down into the bed and laced his fingers together over his stomach. “Because I still can’t use a computer,” he grumbled. “Every time I think I understand something, I touch the wrong thing and then I don’t know how to fix it! It’s just so stupid!”
“Well, what if I helped you?” he offered. He knew he wasn’t the best at computers himself, but he knew how to use the internet and enough about Microsoft Office that he could put it on his resume. *Still haven’t figured out Minesweeper though... The real question is has anyone?*

“I appreciate the offer, but how?” Nico asked, one eyebrow cocked. “That’s the only class we don’t have together and it’s not like we have a computer here at our disposal.”

“Uh, yeah we do,” Percy laughed, gesturing to the blond.

“But-“

“Jason!” he yelled, ignoring what was bound to be one of Nico’s excuses to leave Jason alone. “Jason! I need to ask you something!”

When Jason didn’t respond after five seconds, Percy palmed his panda and tossed it against the blond’s head.

“What the hell Percy!” the son of Jupiter cried, peeling off his headset. “You just killed me!”

“That’s weird, you still look alive and well to me,” he smirked. “Look, Nico has a question for you. Nico?” he asked while poking the Italian’s side.

All hostility melted from the blond’s face at the mention of the son of Hades. “What’s up Neeks?”

Nico sat up and Percy couldn’t help but notice the light blush he was sporting. “Feel free to say no, because it’s not a big deal. I mean-“

Okay, why is he so hesitant to ask? Jason and him are solid, so what’s the deal here? He usually has no problem asking people for what he needs. Sure Nico is be a bit standoffish and brunt about it, but- wait a minute! This is comfortable Nico, isn’t it? Well not comfortable, but him worried about ruining the mood. It’s kind of cute. A little sad, but still cute.

“He wants to know if he can use your computer to do his homework when you’re not using it,” he interrupted the stammering Nico. “He needs help learning the basics and I thought I could help him while you’re at school, seeing as I don’t exactly have a lot going on.”

Jason eyed him warily before turning his gaze to Nico. “Is that true Nico?”

“Um, yes? If that’s okay?”

Jason closed his eyes and bobbed his head a bit, as if in deep thought. “The password is SuperSparky. One word, each ‘s’ is capitalized.”

Nico’s face lit up with a ten-thousand watt smile. “Thank you Jason!”

Jason shrugged, “anything for you Nico.” The blond then turned and shot Percy a deadly glare. “Just to warn you; if this thing gets infected I’ll know it was you. I’ll be checking the browser history.”

*Oh, I'm going to have fun with this...*
Percy thought that everyone was getting ready to settle in for the night, when Hades walked into their room carrying a tray with three glasses of water and three colorful vials of liquid.

“Your training begins now Perseus,” Nico’s dad said as he placed the tray down next to Percy.

“Uh, did you forget that I’m kind of… Nico what’s a good word?” he asked, holding up his bandaged arms.


“Ooo, I like the last one! Thank you for being my thesaurus,” he turned his attention back to Hades and smiled. “I am currently incapacitated.”

The tired looking man shook his head and let out a deep breath. “You’re incapacitated alright, but I’m not sure if it’s limited to the physical.” He then turned to Nico with a smile. “I’m glad to see you have a diverse vocabulary.”

The god then grabbed a vial full of blue liquid and opened it with his teeth before putting a single drop into one of the glasses of water. The mysterious liquid dispersed throughout the crystal clear water, leaving trails of dark blue suspended in the liquid. Hades then placed the cap back on the vial and gently swirled the glass until the entirety of its contents were a dark blue.

Hades repeated the process two more times, but one was colored red and the other yellow.

“Are these like some kind of magic potions that are going to fix me up?” he asked, eyeballing the mysterious glasses in front of him. “Because honestly, I’ve had way to many run-ins with mystery liquids in the last year alone.”

“Uh, Percy-“ Nico began.

“It’s food coloring,” Hades finished.

“Okay, so that still doesn’t change the fact that I’m stuck in bed. What do you want me to do, make Easter eggs?” he asked, examining the three glasses once more.

“As good much as a hardboiled egg sounds at the moment, no, you will not be making Easter eggs,” the god said, grimacing at the last two words. “And I know as well as you what your condition is, considering I’m the one who patched you up. So until your wounds are healed you will be working on controlling your powers.”

“I think I can control them just fine,” he huffed. *Seriously, I can make a hurricane if need be!*

He knew he was in trouble when the god of the underworld smirked.

“Okay then do this one thing for me and we’ll call it good,” Hades said as he removed a stopwatch from his pocket. “I want you to take a single drop from the blue glass and place it at the bottom of the yellow glass without the colors mixing. Then take that same drop and transfer it to the red. Think you can manage that?”

“No problem,” he boasted.

“And you only have three seconds to do it,” Hades said, adjusting the stopwatch. “Just say when you’re ready.”

“You can do it Percy,” Nico smiled from his bed.
Okay, let’s do it for Nico! Got to look cool in front of my boyfriend and his… dad.

He stared at the glass of blue water and felt the familiar tug in his stomach. “Okay.”

“Go!”

He focused on a small point in the center of the glass and commanding it to rise… only for the entirety of the glass’s contents to spill all over the tray.

“Just as I suspected,” the god-turned-mortal sighed. “Much like Nico, you have great power, but little precision. You slamming me into the foundation of the hospital and the following fight more-or-less confirmed that.” Hades grabbed the now flooded tray and turned his attention to his son. “Nico, I would like you to assist Perseus with his training every night. I will leave the tray of supplies by your beds as soon as I clean them. All you have to do I refill the glasses and most likely help wipe up any resulting messes.”

“Yes father,” Nico nodded.

“Okay, I have a couple questions,” He said, raising a hand in the air. “First, why the time-“

“Bang,” the god interrupted, his voice even and emotionless. “You just died.”

“I just what?” he sputtered, eyes wide.

“We are not fighting monsters with crude weapons anymore Jackson, we are fighting an enemy who just has to pull a trigger to end your life. On top of that, the weapons they are using will only harm us, so they do not need to worry about harming their comrades. We need speed if we wish to survive.”

“Okay, that makes sense,” he hummed. “But why a single drop of water? Wouldn’t Nico splitting open the earth or me flooding the field be better?”

Hades shook his head. “And what if you or Nico are in the way of the other? Could you risk harming one another?”

“I-I never thought of it like that.” Annabeth would’ve have thought. And I can’t risk harming the only family I have left.

“As for the drop of water, it’s just the starting point.”

Percy wanted to smack the stubborn glass of blue liquid onto the floor.

Come on! This shouldn’t be this hard!

No matter what he tried he couldn’t get a lone drop of water to break away without the rest of the liquid following immediately behind. The only thing he had managed to do in the last hour was learn when to sever his connection to prevent a mess.

He really didn’t want Nico or Hades to clean up more than absolutely necessary.

Percy had just managed to get a teaspoon’s worth of blue water to separate from the rest, when
Hades broke the silence.

“So Nico,” the god smirked. “You didn’t tell me you’ve made mortal friends.”

Nico, who was currently sitting next to his father on his bed, frowned. “I wouldn’t say Chelsea is a friend, more of an annoyance.”

“Would you say she is a significant annoyance?”

The water he had worked so hard to control fell back into the water as the son of Hades’ eyes widened.

There was no misinterpreting what Hades was saying. When Nico and Will had just started dating, the young son of Hades had a hard time saying they were boyfriends. So Will would suggest he was his significant other if he was uncomfortable, and well Nico being Nico called him a significant annoyance.

It had spread around the camp like Greek fire and it was no surprise that Hades knew about it.

Still though... I thought Nico had filled Hades in on his sexuality?

“No,” Nico spat. “You know that I-“

“Calm down,” Hades smiled, clasping on hand on Nico’s shoulder. “A father can have a little fun at his son’s expense from time-to-time. It’s in the handbook. You know I wouldn’t change anything about you.” Hades then grabbed one strand of Nico’s wild hair. “Although, a haircut would be nice.”

“I’ll give the haircut some thought,” Nico huffed. “Still though, don’t do that ever again. You know I’m still not comfortable about... myself.”

“And you know I’m always here for you,” Hades smiled, ruffling his son’s hair.

Suddenly Percy felt like he was an unwelcome observer to this father-son moment and it made his heart ache once more.

He never really had any moments like that with Poseidon, did he? There had been plenty of emotions when he had first met him, but it had turned sour pretty quick. There had been the time he showed up at his birthday, but it was more awkward than anything. Every other time was always about this quest or that, but nothing like he was witnessing now.

Paul was a bit better, but there was a little bit of a disconnect with him being a demigod and Paul being, well a mortal. He couldn’t really complain though, Paul had come into his life pretty late, but his stepdad had done the best he could. Paul had given him plenty advice on how to treat Annabeth, how to tie a tie (he failed, but it was the thought that counted), how to shave, and a bunch of other little things that a father was expected to teach his son. And he knew if things hadn’t gone to shit, he would have been moving out to New Rome with Annabeth and would have probably only seen the bookish man on holidays.

He knew it wasn’t the same type of relationship he was currently watching, and he knew it was one he was never going to have.

“Still though,” Hades continued. “This mortal form is for some reason really making me think about grandchildren. And a teenage girl coming to visit my son really has me excited.”

“I’m fifteen,” Nico scoffed.
Hades held his hand up in surrender. “I know,” he chuckled. “It’s just one of those parenting things I suppose.”

“My mom was like that,” Percy blurted, no longer content to sit at the sidelines. “She was trying to set me up with Annabeth since I was twelve.”

Hades turned to Nico with a grin. “See there’s a precedent!”

“Thanks for that Percy,” Nico growled, but the slight smile he had gave away his true feelings.

“No problem!” he winked at the son of Hades, and was rewarded with a blush.

Hades stood up from Nico’s bed and place his hands on his hips as he stretched his back. “Well I think I’m going to call it a night,” the god yawned. “And don’t worry Nico, I’m certain you’ll find someone. Probably sooner than you think too,” he smiled. “I would say someone better than Jackson, but that’s literally anyone.”

Percy sent the contents of all three glasses at the sharp-dressed man, soaking him from head-to-toe. “Oops, must have slipped.”

He jolted awake in a cold sweat and out of breath.

He pushed himself up, ignoring the pain in arms, into a sitting position and buried his face in his hands.

“I can’t keep going like this,” he whispered to the dark room. “I’m going to go nuts.”

It was the same reoccurring dream he had been having since he had woke up with Nico in the woods; him discovering his parent’s lifeless bodies followed by Gabe nearly killing him. Sometimes the dream changed slightly; sometimes Annabeth would be among the dead, her golden hair soaked red with blood. Sometimes he would watch as his mom and Paul were bludgeoned to death. Sometimes though he didn’t escape.

But the ones that bothered him most were straight out of the Manson family’s most twisted crimes, and he couldn’t bear to think about them when he was awake.

When he got his breathing under control, he looked over to the sleeping form of Nico. He wanted to wake him up to distract him from his dark thoughts, but seeing how peaceful he looked in the moonlight, how his chest slowly raised and fell with each small breath, he knew he couldn’t bother him.

I can’t keep burdening him with everything. He has his own problems to, he doesn’t need mine as well.

He then thought about waking Jason, but the blond said he was done with everything.

I don’t think we really have a choice when we’re done, but if Nico and Hades are playing along with it I suppose I should as well.
Hades was also out of the question. The god had taken up residence in the study downstairs and there was no way he could call out to him without waking the other two up.

So that leaves me.

There had been two ideas haunting him for some time now, which he wished would leave him alone.

The first had occurred to him sometime prior to slitting his wrists. He had remembered how Nico had wanted to find a soul to exchange for Bianca returning to life. It had seemed like such a sweet deal, he could trade his life in exchange for Estelle’s. She could have had a full life and he could’ve been with Annabeth in Elysium.

But he couldn’t bring himself to ask Nico or Hades to perform the required ritual. They had been so kind and understanding that it would’ve been a massive slap in the face to request that of them.

On top of that, Hades had taken him aside one night and told him that his family wasn’t in his domain. He knew the god was trying to help him in his own strange way, but that had been the deciding moment that pushed him over the edge.

And the guilt for that one moment never left him. He promised himself that he would never hurt Nico or Jason like that again.

It was definitely the easier of the two ideas to ignore.

The other was so sweet and alluring and would be so easy to do given the chance.

He wanted to kill Gabe with every fiber of his being.

There was no way his family would be okay with that, but a little voice told him that they didn’t know what it was like to experience the loss he was going through. How could they possibly judge him for taking out the man responsible for their deaths?

And the ideas he had for how to do it!

He entertained the idea of breaking the fat man’s limbs and tossing him into the sea to drown, or slitting his throat and then making him drown in his own blood, or keeping him alive underwater in a bubble and everyday slowly reducing its size.

They were all so tempting, but he knew none of them were terrible enough for that fat son of bitch.

And Percy hated himself for even allowing himself to think like that.

Because if I did, would I be any better than him?

He let out a strangled sob as he clutched his head tighter. He wasn’t a killer, so why did he think like that? Why was it his own mind was his greatest enemy?

Percy jumped when he felt a cool hand rest on his shoulder. He lifted his head up to see the son of Hades face framed in the pale moonlight.

“Bad dreams?” Nico asked, a sad smile gracing his face.

Unable to find his voice, he nodded.

Without a word, Nico climbed into bed with him and pushed him down. The smaller boy then rolled onto his stomach and draped one arm over the son of Poseidon.
“Dreams right?” Nico chuckled. “If it isn’t the standard crappy demigod dream or Tartarus, it’s our own personal hells.”

And somehow despite how terrible he felt (and how terrible Nico’s attempt at humor was), Percy found himself laughing.

How is it that when he’s around me, the pain fades away? Mom. Paul. Estelle. Annabeth. It doesn’t seem as bad when he’s here. I wonder if it’s the same for him? Do I help him with Will? Maybe if you put us together we make one whole person?

He wasn’t sure about all of that, as that was a conversation for another time.

What Percy did know as he was sharing a bed with his amazing boyfriend and he was going to take full advantage of the situation. He removed Nico’s arm from his chest and rolled onto his side. Then before Nico could question what he was doing, he rolled the boy over onto his side and pulled him close, effectively spooning him.

“Thank you,” he whispered in to Nico’s ear.

“For what?”

“For being you.”

Chapter End Notes

Poor Percy, still going through the violent highs and lows of depression, but he's got Nico to help him through it all :)  

This chapter definitely alternated between fluff and angst, but doesn't life? One second you're on top of the world only to fall into a pit of darkness the next.

Chelsea was just kind of an excuse for Nico and Percy to explore some of the more obscure Mythologies and have some fun. She was also a way to retell HoO in the most mundane way possible (too bad Percy had to take it too far).

Jason locking himself in the bathroom is as funny as it is sad. Even in his own home he can't escape his troubles, which is really sad if you thin about it. Him sitting in the bathtub repeating the ingredients for Head and Shoulders is funny though, and of course Percy is going to test if he did memorize it.

And yes, Percy is going to make a crude suggestion. They're teenage boys, not monks. The thought does come to mind pretty often for Percy and Nico. (After Nico teased him this morning, Percy was really really missing the use of his hands ;))

I know Hades training seems simple and weird at the moment, but isn't that how all great training montages begin? There is a method to his madness that I think you guys will really like.

And if it wasn't clear before: Nico is Percy's rock. He helps our son of Poseidon keep his dark thoughts at bay; and Percy really needs that. The internal conflict that rages within him is threatening to tear him apart and he just can't face it on his own. They aren't going to do anything in bed besides spoon a little. Both our boys need some
physical comfort and they can only get it from each other.

Okay time for some news!
Next chapter will be Piper!
She, Reyna, and Veronica have just entered Northwestern Montana, and things are about to get really interesting for our ladies.
I think you know what is about to start :) 
If you don’t check a map.

Hey!
Did you like what you just read? Then leave a kudos!
Thoughts, theories, opinions, feedback? Then leave a comment!
I love hearing from you! Even if it is two words, it makes my day!

Well, that is all for tonight. I want you to remember you are special and you are special to me :)
Good night and good luck!
Piper

Chapter Summary

Tonight:
The world's greatest one-stop shop,
An old married couple,
and a new beginning

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Northern Montana was a land filled with picturesque snowcapped mountains, ancient vibrant forests, crystal clear lakes that reflected the serene sky, and vast plains with the occasional small towns that could only be found in the \textit{Hallmark Channel} movie-of-the-week.

It was truly unlike anyplace Piper had ever seen.

But after driving through the winding, often mountainous roads, it got old really fast.

“Reyna, please pull over at the next gas station. I could really go for a quick stretch and a new soda,” Piper said, as she twisted in the passenger’s seat.

The praetor seemed to consider her words as she downshifted (which was pretty impressive to Piper considering the girl only had her left arm) before finally nodding in the affirmative. “Yeah, I think a break would do us all good. Veronica, Atlas, that work with you guys?”

A pained groan followed by the clinking of glass came from the backseat. “That sounds-“ Veronica belched, “wonderful.”

Swallowing Dionysus had some pretty interesting side effects on the titan-demigod. First, the god wasn’t apparently too keen on being digested and was actively trying to fight his way out, giving the poor girl stomach cramps from hell. Second, Mr. D. was apparently trying to fill her stomach up with as much random junk as possible; vines, non-alcoholic wine bottles, tacky Hawaiian shirt, all of which the daughter of Mercury threw up on a regular basis. Third, and most troubling of all, was that they were disintegrating faster than they were before due to the tremendous amount of effort it took to keep the god contained.

Piper knew that they were going to have to find a morgue soon to keep the two alive.

\textit{And I am not looking forward to that. Hey mind if we have a tour? We’re just three morgue enthusiasts and we would kill to look at your best corpses! No! Of course there isn’t a body missing! You just thought you had one on the table!}

But the idea of grave robbing was more appealing than wondering how Mr. D. was outside of camp.

\textit{ Nope! Not thinking about that! Camp is fine! Jason, Percy, Annabeth, and even Nico are fine!}
“Okay,” Reyna nodded. “It’s probably going to be a while though, we are in a national park after all.”

“Yeah, would have been really cool to see the glaciers,” she sighed wistfully, looking out the window at nature’s splendor.

They pulled over at a small mom-and-pop gas station shortly before noon, with legs of jelly and empty stomachs.

“You don’t see places like these outside of the movies,” Piper whistled, taking in the scene before her.

The store sat back in a clearing surrounded by ancient growth and was clearly ancient, with dozens of old metal signs covering the exterior. Some were advertisements for long defunct businesses and products, while others were street signs that had seen better days. The front of the store had a large wooden porch with six rocking chairs of different shapes and sizes spread throughout; one of which was currently occupied by an old woman talking to seven small children sitting at her feet. Beyond the porch was the sole entrance flanked on either side by giant windows with various deals and prices painted in neon green and pink paint.

“Yeah, the last time I saw a place like this was in Cabin Fever,” Reyna chuckled.

Piper’s jaw dropped as she slowly turned to the praetor. Did she just make a reference?

“Don’t look at me like that Mclean!” Reyna laughed. “I may not have seen the sickening amount of movies you have, but I have seen a few!” She ran her hand through her long dark hair. “Don’t make Jason watch that movie though, he wouldn’t let me shave my legs for like a month.”

The thought of making Jason squirm was so tempting to Piper, and she made a mental note of it. “You don’t have to worry in that case,” she smiled, patting her jeans. “Perks of my heritage.”

Reyna eyed her legs with a mixture of jealousy and disbelief. “You don’t have to shave?”

She shook her head. “Nope,” she said, popping the ‘p’. “No offense, but I’m actually surprised you do.”

“Roman armor has a nasty habit of ripping off any hair it touches,” the Latina cringed. “It’s not uncommon for the guys to shave their bodies either. I don’t know if he remembers it or not, but Jason used to shave his too.”

The image of her boyfriend sitting in an ivory bathtub filled with bubbles, holding a hot pink razor, with one lather covered leg in the air delighted the daughter of Aphrodite to no end.

“I owe you soooooo much for that bit of info,” she chuckled, plotting how to use this information.

“Speaking of your heritage though,” Reyna began, “is it weird to be here?”

She cocked her head in confusion. “What do you mean?”
Now it was Reyna’s turn to be confused. “Didn’t you see the sign a few miles back?”

“What sign?”

“Piper, we’re on the Blackfoot reservation! Didn’t you notice that everyone here is a native?” Reyna cried, pointing to the group of children sitting on the porch.

Piper rolled her eyes. This was something she was used to, people assuming that since she was Native American she knew every other member of the First Nation. Heck, Annabeth had wanted her to meet with a newly claimed son of Athena because his father was of the Illini. Yes, her Grandpa Tom had told her many tales from the nearly every tribe, but the Cherokee and Illini were as different as the French and Germans. “First of all Reyna, I’m Cherokee. I know more about Drew’s grooming habits than I do about the Blackfeet. Second, I don’t see color, so to me these are just people. Third, if you expect me to be overwhelmed by some kind of ancestral feeling, I’m going to slap you.”

“Sorry Piper, I didn’t mean to come across like that. I was just thinking about what it was like in Puerto Rico,” she scratched her temple and looked down at her boot clad feet. “It brought up a lot of old memories,” the praetor trailed off for a moment before gulping. “I didn’t know if this place was doing the same for you.”

Piper considered the praetor’s words and looked back at the old woman and children. She supposed it did stir up some memories of Grandpa Tom telling her the tales of the majestic thunderbird, the horned serpents Uktena, and her personal favorites the tricksters Coyote and Rabbit. But the truth was the memories with her grandfather were stirred up anytime she saw a child with their grandparents. “Not really,” she answered with a shrug. “This is just one more stop on our way to New York.”

Reyna smiled (which was weird) and nodded. “Okay then. I saw the a sign for a nature trail when we pulled in, so I’m going to go take a quick jog down it, care to join?”

“Maybe later,” she shrugged. “I want to check that place out, restock our supplies, and see if they got some food that doesn’t come in a wrapper, that kind of thing. Plus I want to make sure Atlas and Veronica make it out of the bathroom alive.”

The inside of the store was just as strange looking as the outside.

On one side of the front was the counter with what had to be the most ancient cash register Piper had ever seen. Mounted on the wall behind it were the heads of a buffalo, coyote, deer, and some kind of bear, and they all seemed to be staring right at her. Opposite to the strange checkout lane, was a beat up Donkey Kong machine that was surrounded by kids whose ages ranged from as young as five to as old as her. Every available inch of wall space was covered in various pictures and crafts that had to have been made by children.

But beyond the open front were row-upon-row of shelves that extended into the dark rear of the building. Each aisle was thankfully marked with bright hand-written signs that listed what could be found down them.

*Betty White is amazing, but we left before we could pack her with supplies. We need sleeping bags,*
first aid kits, food, water, clothing, and pretty much everything else that should be taken on a quest but for some reason isn’t...

She briefly entertained the notion of asking one of kids if they knew where things were to save time, but she figured if she hated getting interrupted during a game, they would too.

This place isn’t that big anyway, she thought as she started down the aisle with a sign that read Camping Supplies! In bright neon green letters.

“All I can say is whoever stocked these shelves was obviously a Time Lord,” Piper grunted as she tucked another package of freeze-dried rations under her chin. “Or they went to Hogwarts.”

No matter what Piper wanted, the little gas station had it.

Sleeping bags? No problem! You want two of them in camouflage and one in hot pink? Absolutely we have hundreds!

First aid kits? We’re practically tripping over them!

Solar powered thermos to keep your coffee warm until the sun burns out? What color!

Nuclear fusion reactor? Son-of-a-bitch we thought you’d never ask!

After Piper grabbed a bag of tropical fruit trail mix with her teeth she knew she would have to take her load back up to the register and come back for the rest. So she shifted everything around in her overloaded arms and turned to head back, when she noticed something strange from the corner of her eye.

“Rut ruh reck?” she murmured as she turned to face the strange item.

In the back of a shelf was some kind of leathery mask, which was either a witch or an old man. Its skin was dark, wrinkled, and weathered, its eyebrows were thick, bushy, and grey, and long grey hair lay sprawled out around it.

And when it opened its hazel eyes Piper almost died.

“Hiiiiiiiiii!” the mask cried, with a large smile on its weathered lips.

She dropped everything onto the floor and jumped back into the shelves behind her, sending its contents tumbling to the ground. “Holy crap!” she shrieked, her heart beating painfully against her ribcage.

“I ain’t got nobody, and nobody cares for me,” the mask sang. “I’m sorry about that dear, but I couldn’t help myself.”

Piper thanked every god and goddess she could think of when she saw it wasn’t a mask, but an old man who had stuck his head through the shelves. “I think you just knocked ten years off my life!” she cried, hand clenched over her chest. “What is wrong with you?!”
There was a wheeze of laughter from behind the shelves before she heard the old man say, “My old lady asks me that all the time! Now stay right where you’re at, I’ll be over in two shakes of a lamb’s tail to help ya!”

*Didn’t plan on it! I have to relearn how to breathe first!*

She heard the old man scurry down the other aisle only to jog around the corner a moment later. The man was quite tall, around seven feet if Piper had to guess. He was thin and lanky, but from the way he carried himself she could tell he was stronger than he appeared to be. He was wearing a white dress shirt and a pair of blue jeans that left her wondering how they clinging to his thin body.

“You’re new around here, aren’t ya?” he asked as he bent down to pick up the spilt supplies. “The Missus and I know every kid in the area, and you my dear are new.”

Weird way to start a conversation, she thought as she picked up her items. “Uh, I’m just passing through.”

The old man nodded at her with a smile. “Heading East I take it? That’s where everyone’s heading.”

“Ummm, yeah?”

“Good,” he beamed, as he picked up the last can of *Spam* and returned it to its proper place. Then with surprising quickness, he grabbed all the stuff from her arms and headed for the front of the store.

“Hey!” Piper protested as she followed him. “I can carry my own crap just fine!”

The old man hobbled behind the counter and dropped everything down with a smile. “Prideful, eh? Or is it stubbornness?” He shrugged. “Anyway I never caught where you were from. Or your name for that matter.”

“Piper. Piper Mclean. From California.”

*Keep it vague.*

The old man eye’s flickered at the mention of her last name. “Mclean, eh? That name rings a bell, but for the life of me I can’t remember why,” he said, stroking his chin. “Eh, when you get to be my age every name sounds familiar,” he laughed. “The name is Napi,” he announced, holding out his ancient hand. “But everyone tends to call me Old-Man.”

“Well that’s not very nice,” she frowned, shaking Napi’s hand. She was surprised to find that despite its gnarled appearance it was quite soft to the touch.

“Trust me, I prefer it to Sleepy.” He clapped his hands together. “Now what else can I help ya with?”

With Napi’s help Piper had been able to get everything she could think of (and more) in no time at all. The old man had even managed to get some of the guys hovering around the *Donkey Kong* machine to help carry the larger items to the register, like folding chairs, a small grill, and folding table. She wasn’t sure where they were going to be able to everything in Betty White, but she was pretty sure the seemingly magical store would have straps if they needed to use the roof.
“Why are there so many kids here?” she asked as she dropped three beach towels onto her mountain of stuff. “This place is like in the middle of nowhere, how do they even get here?”

Napi chuckled as he entered the price of a pound of grapes into the ancient register. “Oh, the Missus and I like the company. She tells ’em stories and what-not, while I show ’em some life skills. Tracking, hunting, small engine repair; that kind of thing. Plus, it’s better they’re here than out getting into trouble.” He then leaned across the counter and whispered, “Truth is, I let ’em have all soda and snacks they want and I made that machine free-to-play.” He winked and held a finger to his lips. “Don’t tell ’er that though.”

“That’s nice I guess. Is that your wife out there?” she asked, pointing to the old woman in the rocking chair.

“Eh, you haven’t met her yet?” Napi cried, dropping a box of condoms. “Well I better go get ’er then! Would hate for you to leave without meeting ’er!”

“No! That isn’t nec-“

But her protests went unheard as Old-man raced around the counter and opened the door. “Kipitaaki! Get in here! Ya got to meet this nice young woman who’s heading East!”

Okay, wow. I thought Greek and Roman names were hard to pronounce. Kih-pih-tah-kee. Gods I hope she goes by something else, or I am going to butcher that eight different ways!

Piper watched at the old woman rose from her chair and made a shooing motion to the small children around her. They quickly stood up and bounded into the store, nearly running over Piper and Napi in the process. As Kipitaaki entered the store, Napi bent down and pressed his lips to the top of her head, to which the old woman responded by smacking him in the arm.

“Not in front of company you old coot!” she chastised. She then turned her attention to Piper and looked her up and down. “And who might you be?” the old woman smiled, placing her hands on her hips.

Piper held out her hand to the old woman and said, “Piper. My name is Piper Mclean.”

The old woman batted her hand away and pulled her into a spine-shattering hug. “Family doesn’t shake hands dearie,” Kipitaaki whispered into her ear. “We hug.”

“Honey, we can’t adopt everyone we see,” she heard Napi laugh.

“Oh, you shush now!” the old lady snapped. She then held Piper at arm’s length and looked her over once again. “Just as I thought! You’re nothing but skin and bones! Old Coyote wouldn’t even sniff at you!”

Although Piper was stunned from the sudden Grandma-hug, she managed to get her first good look at the old lady. She was a head shorter than Piper, but that was only because she was stooped over. Her hair was as white as fresh picked cotton and was tied up in a messy bun. Her eyes were as blue as the sky and had an infectious joy to them, that made everyone who looked into them smile. Like her husband, her skin was dark, weathered, and wrinkled, but the smile on her face made her look many years younger. Thrown over her shoulders was the skin of a coyote that acted as a shawl; its blue glass eyes staring into her own. Around her neck hung a small strip of leather with glass beads that reminded Piper of her own, but with coyote claws placed between each bead.

“I think ya broke her honey,” Napi chuckled.
“Don’t you have items to ring up?” the old lady snapped at her husband. She turned back to Piper and smiled softly. “Now I am Kipitaaki, but you may call me Tacky.”

“Just like your fashion sense,” Napi quipped as he started to once again ring everything up.

The old lady kicked off one of her house slippers and got it in midair, before tossing it against the old man’s head, who crumpled to the floor.

*Holy shit! Is he dead?*

“Now why don’t you tell old Tacky where you are heading?”

“Me and some friends are just heading to New York,” she shrugged. *Keep it vague.*

“New York?” Napi asked, as he hoisted himself up from the floor.

The old lady and old man looked at each other with confusion etched on their faces.

“Did you get a tweet about that?” Tacky asked the old man. “I thought no one had heard from New York in months?”

The old man shook his head as he clutched the spot that the slipper hit. “Nothing came in this morning.”

The two then turned their attention to her, and suddenly she didn’t feel so comfortable around the elderly couple.

“Who-who are ya traveling with?” Napi asked.

“Uh…” She glanced over Tacky’s shoulder and saw that Veronica was laying on Betty White’s roof sunning herself, while Reyna was leaning against the passenger door wiping her forehead with her camp shirt. “I’m with those two,” she answered pointing to her fellow demigods.

Napi and Tacky’s faces blanched as they looked out the window at her two friends and then back to her.

*Okay, this is weird.*

Napi rubbed his hands together nervously. “Ya sure about that?”

“Why wouldn’t I know who I was traveling with?”

The ancient couple turned to each other and began to talk excitedly in a language she had never heard before, but seemed oddly familiar. Napi would occasionally point at Reyna and Veronica, his voice full of a hostility that Piper hadn’t thought the old man capable of. Tacky on the other hand, was pointing at her and her voice was calm and pleading.

“I hate to interrupt, but is something wrong?” *This is the part where they shed their skins and turn into giant lizard people or something equally horrible. The kids are probably half ant or something.*

Instead Kipitaaki shook her head with a sad smile. “No child, we were just concerned about three young girls driving across the country on their own.”

“Especially because that scary one appears to have only one arm and the blonde is blind,” Napi half-chuckled.
Okay, that is like an actual good reason. I guess the Mist is not making us look that good to these two.

“We’ll be fine,” she said, offering the ancient couple her best smile. “But thanks for the concern.”

“I hope so child,” the old woman said softly, with a sad smile. “I hope so.”

“Now why don’t we get you loaded up before that storm hits,” Napi announced.

Piper frowned and looked out the window, to see bright blue skies without a cloud in sight. “What storm?”

Napi and Kipitaaki smiled sadly at one another, before Kipitaaki said, “Trust these old bones. There is most certainly a storm coming.”

Piper was shocked when the shop owners gave her everything free of charge.

Reyna was shocked as well when an around fifteen native kids formed a long line from the entrance of the store to the back of Betty White and passed along all the supplies she had picked out for them without so much as a word.

Veronica and Atlas on the other hand were less than thrilled when they realized that they now had to share the backseat with a cooler. Their mood did improve considerably though when they saw all the snacks and drinks Piper had picked up for them. Atlas was apparently a sucker for M&Ms.

When everything was loaded, Kipitaaki crushed her in a hug again and whispered, “If you should encounter a deer, remember they must dance to any beat they hear.”

It was certainly a strange thing to say, but Piper had heard a lot stranger. Her mother alone counted for at least half of the strange things she’s heard.

The couple bid her farewell, well seemingly ignoring Reyna and Veronica, and wished her safe journeys.

And they hit the road once more.

When they were a good distance away from the gas station when she unbuckled her seat belt and turned to the titan in the backseat. “Hey Atlas, did you happen to notice anything weird about that place or Kipitaaki and Napi?”

The titan tossed a red M&M in the air and caught it with their mouth. “The Mist is so thick here I wouldn’t have been able to see Gaea herself two feet in front of me,” boomed Atlas.

“Oh, okay,” she sighed.

“You think they were gods or something?” Reyna asked, before barking, “Put your seatbelt back on!”

“Okay, fuck, fine,” she said rolling her eyes as she grabbed her seatbelt. “I’m not sure. They just seemed a bit… off. And their store had everything I could think of like some kind of room of requirement.”
“Oh that’s easy enough to explain,” the praetor said, as she adjusted her rearview mirror for the umpteenth time. Betty White had a rearview camera, but Reyna refused to use it for some reason she wouldn’t divulge.

“Really?”

“Yeah. Your dumbass can’t think of much, so it only seemed like they had everything.”

“Fuck you Reyna.”

*I’ve got a fresh supply of condoms that are going to find their way into your sleeping bag.*

True to Napi’s words they wound themselves in the middle of the worst thunderstorm Piper had ever seen. The rain was coming down so fast and heavy that Betty’s wipers did next to nothing nor her numerous lights. The sound of thunder echoed around them with such intensity that the sheer vibration would shake Betty like a ragdoll. To make matters worse they were on a series of winding gravel roads going down some mountain.

“Maybe we should pull over!” She yelled over the storm.

Reyna was gripping the steering wheel hard enough that Piper could see the whites of her knuckles. “I want to,” the praetor shouted back, “but I’m worried we’d be washed over the edge if this storms continues. We just have to take it slow and hope we get to Bynum soon!”

“We don’t even know how far away that is though!” Atlas shouted from the back, their arms clutching their stomach. “All that sign had was a name and an arrow!”

“It’s better than nothing!” Reyna responded, slowly edging them back to the center of the road. “We need to head East and Bynum is East!”

There was a flash of lightning that for a brief moment turned the world monochrome and from her window Piper got her first good look at the mountain side and just how high up they were. Normally heights didn’t bother her (having a boyfriend who took her flying and living for several months on a flying boat really get one acclimated to heights), but she couldn’t help gulping.

“Reyna how fast are we going?” she asked, gripping onto her seatbelt.

The Latina hit a button on the steering wheel with her thumb and instantly the windshield displayed a series of gauges, numbers, and maps. “Fifteen, and that’s mostly gravity. I haven’t touched the gas in a while now.”

“Any chance we could go slower?” she gulped.

Reyna shook her head. “If I apply the brakes anymore I’m afraid they’re going to lock up and we’ll just skid.”

*That’s a comforting thought.*

There was another flash of lightning and before she blinked from the sudden change in lighting, she thought she saw something flying above them. Something big.
“Piper,” Reyna whispered. “Did-did you see that?”

“Oh fuck you Reyna!” She cried, slamming her fists on the dash. “Now it’s real! Fuck!”

The sky flashed again and Piper got her first good look at the unidentified flying object.

To say it was a bird would be a massive understatement and an insult to the majesty and power of the beast. It had a wing span that was easily the length of three school buses, with talons so large Piper was positive it could pick up Betty White without any effort. Its midnight black plumage was covered with electric blue lines that made intricate patterns that seemed to pulse with electricity.

It was equal parts breath-taking and horrifying.

And it was diving towards them.

“Floor it! Floor it!” Piper cried.

“What the hell is that thing?” Reyna cried

Atlas poked their head up between the seats. “It’s much too large to be a Roc, and it certainly isn’t a phoenix.”

As she fumbled through the console display looking for any of Betty’s defenses that could be useful, a part of her whispered to her exactly what the winged being was.

She pushed that insane thought aside and told herself that Grandpa Tom’s stories were just that: stories.

They rounded a corner just as the avian pulled up out of its dive and extended its wings out. Her earlier assessment about the creature’s size was wrong; it was far bigger. Up close she saw that the electric blue patterns weren’t stationary, but were slowly changing shape and size with seemingly every beat of her heart.

You know it’s the truth.

“Zeus’s balls! That thing is huge!” Reyna cried, as she slammed her foot on the gas the second Betty White cleared the corner. “Do we even have anything for something like that?”

“I am not going out there,” Atlas said, shaking their head. “Veronica and I have filled our bird quota for the year.”

Piper ignored her friends and continued to navigate through the defensive options until she found an unexpected, but very much welcome, surprise of anti-air missiles. She double-tapped on the icon and instantly the dash in front of her opened up to reveal a joystick with a red button on top, and a small video feed with a targeting reticule popped up on the windshield.

Oh hell the fuck yes…

She grabbed the joystick and began to scan the skies above them for the whale sized avian. Every time she saw it, it would move off-screen and force her to start her search anew.

It’s smart, and you know that Piper. Grandpa told us all about it.

“Shut up!” she growled, as she hovered her thumb over the red button. She told herself again-and-
again that this was just some Greek or Roman monster that was either a distant relative or had been killed in the past by a distant relative.

Just when she thought she had it in her sights, it stretched its wings out and stalled in the air for a brief moment before it dropped like a stone. It then tucked its monstrous wings in and corkscrewed through the rain and wind before it flung them open and with one mighty beat positioned itself next to Betty White.

Piper knew she was still new to the whole demigod thing, but the bird looked at her with one glowing, blue, basketball sized eye, she knew this wasn’t just another monster.

It had intelligence.

Sure, the Cyclopes she had encountered on her first quest could speak and build an automatic transmission, the Giants were cunning and crafty, and the gods were, well gods. But she always felt that there was something off about them. Something that gave them away that they were not human. Some flaw, or obsession that they always looped back to.

She didn’t feel any of that when she stared into its eye.

“Piper!” Reyna screamed over the booming thunder. “You’re not going to get a better shot than that!”

As the massive eye dilated, Piper found herself unable to push the button, despite the screen assuring that the target was locked. She ran a hand through her dark hair and nodded at the creature.

Gods, I hope I’m right about you.

The glowing giant nodded back, then banked away and flapped back into the sky above them.

“What the hell Mclean!” Reyna growled as she removed her hand from the wheel and reached across for the joystick.

The bronze SUV hit a bump in the gravel road and time seemed to grind to a halt. The vehicle began to spin as Reyna tried to grab hold of the wheel again. She watched as the praetor slammed onto the brake out of reflex, but the wheels found no traction on the waterlogged gravel.

The rusted guardrail might as well have been made of paper as Betty White’s considerable bulk slammed through it, sending them into a freefall.

As she braced herself against the dash, she saw just how narrow the winding roads below them were and knew that even if they hit the road immediately below them, they were only going to bounce and roll to the next one and every one below that until they had rolled down the entire mountain.

Piper knew there was no surviving something like that. Even with seatbelts, airbags, and every safety feature the Amazons had installed, they were either going to snap their necks or beat their brains against their skulls.

She turned and looked at Reyna, and was amused to see that even in a no-win situation she was defiant.

Well this is-

Her head slammed against the dashboard as Betty White was pulled up.
Piper woke up with a massive headache and Reyna kissing her. 

She pushed the older girl away and groaned, “Buy a girl a meal first.”

“Oh thank the gods!” Reyna smiled as she pulled her into a hug. “We thought we were going to lose you!”

She pushed Reyna away again and clutched her throbbing skull. “Lose me? What are you-“ Her eyes widened as the memories came rushing back. The storm, the bird, and then falling to what should have been their deaths. “How the fuck are we alive?” she cried out.

She looked around her and noticed that they were in a small clearing at the base of the mountain. The storm and the sun had returned for its last few hours of sunlight. Veronica was sitting on a stump watching them with concern, but looked okay. Reyna at first glance looked unscathed, but at the edge of her neckline Piper could see a bruise. Betty White was even fine, the only evidence of anything happening were some long scratches in the paint that extended from the roof down to the running boards.

Reyna rubbed the small stub that remained of her right arm. “That thing caught us just before we crashed. It, uh, carried us down the mountain and set us here before it left. Weird thing is, the storm ended almost the second it was out of sight.”

_Huh. How about that? Almost as if it were a-

She slowly stood up from the wet earth and sighed. “I guess it was the right call not to shoot it.”

“YOU SHOULD HAVE SHOT IT WHEN YOU HAD THE CHANCE!” Reyna screamed as she swerved to avoid another impact.

“I THOUGHT IT WAS A NICE GIANT BIRD!” she cried out, fumbling through the defensive system.

They had left the clearing not long after Piper had awoken. Piper had wanted to camp in the clearing for the night, but Reyna wanted to get them to some form of civilization in the event Piper needed medical attention.

It was kind of sweet really.

The trip had been uneventful, until they reached a fork in the road at sundown. There, in between the diverging path the giant eagle-like creature stood with storm clouds in background. One path would take them east, the other west, and to Reyna the choice was clear.
But as she went to turn Betty White down the road that would take them east, the bird held out one giant glowing patterned wing as if to block them. It then tilted its head slightly towards the southern road. The Latina praetor took the bird’s advice, and kindly ignored it by driving around its wing.

That had been the wrong thing to do, as it took flight and had been trying to knock them off the road for the last forty-five minutes.

“Um, guys,” Veronica gasped, “I think you better see this.”

Piper turned around against her seatbelt. “See wha- Oh shit!”

The creature had fallen behind the bronze SUV, but its body was glowing as electricity arced from it to the earth. Then with one flap of its wings it overtook them as the road behind it exploded into millions of tiny pieces.

As it had passed her, she saw its eye again. While before it had been calm and analyzing, now it was filled with panic.

**But what could it possibly be afraid of?**

“Mclean if that thing hits us with something like that we’re dead!” Reyna cried, snapping her out of her trance. “You have to take it out now!”

She nodded and selected something more humane than a missile: a net-gun. Like before, the dash opened up to reveal a joystick and a video feed with a targeting reticule appeared on windshield.

*This is thanks for saving us earlier.*

Just as the glowing avian circled back, she held the red button on top of the joystick down. There was a loud THUNK from on top of Betty’s roof, as a giant net of Arachne’s silk rocketed forward and wrapped itself around their attacker.

The net caught the beast just as it had pulled its wings back, effectively binding it. It opened its beak, but instead of a squeak or squawk like Piper expected, the roar of thunder filled the air. Less than a second later it crashed headfirst into a tree, shattering the ancient growth and several others as the creature’s momentum and size carried it forward.

*How can you deny it now?*

“Good work Mclean!” Reyna cheered.

“Did you practice shooting womp rats?” Veronica chuckled, as they slugged her playfully in the shoulder.

Piper gave a forced chuckle as she watched the bird of legend struggle to free itself in the mirror.

“Just step out of the vehicle and I promise we won’t hurt you,” Morgan called out from between two unmarked black sedans. “I swear it on the river Styx.”
“You know, that is having less-and-less meaning the more I hear it,” Reyna growled as she gripped the steering wheel.

Piper nodded in agreement. “Yeah, I think at this point a pinkie swear is more binding.”

“I think we should switch to Pinkie Promises,” Veronica said from the backseat. “That pink party pony is definitely scarier than some river.”

_Huh, never would have pegged her as a Pegasister._

They hadn’t been driving for more than thirty minutes after escaping the bird, when massive floodlights sprang to life in the middle of the deserted road. Two sedans were blocking their path, but as Reyna went to spin Betty White around, five black pickup trucks with turrets mounted in their beds surrounded them, preventing their escape.

To make matters worse, the witch Morgan had stepped out of one of the sedans along with a squad of armed men, all with their weapons trained on them.

It wasn’t the ideal situation.

“So how are we going to play this?” Reyna asked, as she flipped off one of the turret operators.

“We could take out a few of them easy enough, but the rest will mow us down,” the titan said, their golden eye flaring in annoyance. “It’s not an ideal end, but it’s an honorable one.”

“Don’t be so dramatic big guy,” she chuckled as she cracked her knuckles. She tapped the center console a few time and the dash once again turned into a gunner’s station. “I fire the missile, blow up that witch, and bing, bang, boom, Reyna drives us straight on through.”

The praetor bobbed her head with a wicked grin. “I like it!”

Piper aimed the missile at Morgan’s feet. “When she blows, floor it.”

“Gotcha.”

The witch held a megaphone to her mouth and called out, “you have until the count of ten! Then we’re firing a warning pulse!”

“Ten this!” she cackled as she slammed her palm onto the firing button.

_Wow, ‘Ten this!’? I could have said something better._

Instead of a rod of explosive fiery death turning the wicked witch of the Midwest into ash, a disco ball descended from the ceiling and the sound of _Stayin’ Alive_ by the _Bee Gees_ filled the vehicle.

Reyna slugged her in the arm. “What the fuck Mclean! Now is not the time for stupid shit like this!”

“It’s not me!” she protested as she repeated pressed the trigger. Then she remembered that the daughter of Vulcan had said Betty’s software hadn’t been fully tested. That there were probably bugs that needed to be worked out.

_And this is apparently one of them…_

“Uh, guys I think I found one of Betty’s bug,” she awkwardly chuckled, shrinking into her seat from Reyna’s pointed glare.
“So what do we do now?” Veronica asked.

“Well, Betty is bullet proof, and the locks are supposed to be impervious from the outside. So I guess we can sit here and wait for an opening?” she suggested, as she surveyed their foes.

“Alright!” Morgan cried. “Fire a warning pulse!”

Two of the armed figures rushed forward from between sedans, rifles in hand. One ran to the driver’s side while the other stood next to Piper; Betty’s door the only thing separating them. The helmeted figure raised its rifle and stared directly at her with its strange green glowing goggles.

It took all of her willpower not to flinch away from the aimed weapon, but she didn’t want to give them the satisfaction of letting them know she was afraid.

“Well,” she chuckled, looking to Reyna and then Veronica and Atlas. “This is going to be lou—"

Piper didn’t get to finish as pain ripped through her body. Her heart felt like it was trying to force its way out her chest, as what felt like a million volts of electricity surged through every nerve. She couldn’t breathe, couldn’t move, and couldn’t even form a thought; as if her life’s purpose was to only feel pain.

And it only lasted a second.

Piper regained the ability to think when the armed mortals lowered their weapons and retreated behind the pickups.

“What the hell was that?” she gasped, as she took in deep ragged breaths of sweet, beautiful air.

Reyna sat back into the driver’s seat, having fallen forward and spasmed against the wheel. Her face was pale and covered in sweat. “I’ve felt that once before,” she swallowed. “When I was fighting Terminus. I—I thought it was something he did!”

“Apparently not,” Veronica gasped, her normally flaming eyes reduced to small flickers of light. “Titans, I think they used something like this on us back when we were still two people.”

“That was just a warning!” The raven haired witch cried out. “You can either come out of your own volition! Or we turn that back on and we’ll rip apart that hunk of junk piece-by-bloody-piece.” Morgan held up one hand and it was engulfed in green flame. “Even if I have to do it myself.”

Oh wow! Aren’t you scary?! Or do I mean cliché?

Reyna pulled a steel dagger out from beneath her seat and gave it a quick twirl. “Well, I think we’re stuck with Atlas’s plan.”

“Seriously?! I can see you with that dagger! Your windows aren’t even tinted!” Morgan cried out, as her men raised their weapons, while those on the turrets readjusted their aim. “Put your weapons on the dash and step out!” the witch slapped on hand against her thigh. “Come on! I really don’t want to be the bad guy here!”

Veronica grabbed Piper and Reyna’s shoulders. “If this is our last stand,” she gulped, digging her talons into their shoulders. “Then Atlas and I can go, for lack of a better term, nuclear. It would take everything out for a few miles, but it would be quick…”

Reyna huffed. “So our options are: we surrender, we try to fight and get taken out the second we open the doors, we sit here and wait for them to come and get us, or we blow ourselves up.”
“Thanks for spelling out how fucked we are Reyna,” Piper said, rolling her eyes. “But if those are our only options I say we-“

There was a blinding flash of blue light followed by the crash of thunder. When her vision cleared, Piper whooped with joy. For perched on an overturned truck, with a corpse of one of the mortals in its beak, was the creature that had saved them from being pancaked and had been one of the most prominent figures in her Grandpa Tom’s stories.

“The thunderbird,” she whispered, as the great avian swallowed down the mortal’s remains.

There, doesn’t that feel better to admit it? You knew what it was from the moment you saw it! Okay, sure, we have to deal with the implications of its very existence, but right now let’s focus on our survival.

The bird hopped down from its makeshift perch and rushed the next truck, flipping it over with its head and sending the gunner flying. The rest of the mortals having recovered from their shock, turned their attention to the glowing bird of legend and lit up the night sky with gunfire.

When the thunderbird raised one massive wing up to shield itself, that’s when Piper noticed that the other wing was bent at an odd angle with its black feathers broke and bent out of place. The electric blue patterns that covered the bird weren’t as vibrant or active as they had been before and its eyes seemed to have dimmed considerably since their last encounter.

“Great it looks like our bird and mortal problems will solve each other,” Reyna smirked. “And now we just sneak out.”

When Reyna reached for the shifter, Piper slapped her hand. “We have to help it,” the daughter of Aphrodite announced.

Reyna looked at her as if she were crazy. “That thing just tried to kill us!”

She shook her head solemnly. “No, it was trying to warn us. It didn’t act aggressive until we drove around it. And you saw that lightning! It could have fried us instantly if it wanted to!” She fumbled to remove her seatbelt and pulled out the switchblade from her back pocket. “You can run away if you want to, but I’m going to help!”

Honestly, I can’t wait to stab that witch in her beautiful neck!

But, the second she cracked the door open, the thunderbird spun around to face them and clapped its wings together, causing a gale force wind to slam the door shut. It then crouched down slow so its head was the only thing they could see from the windshield, and shook its head slowly as if it were addressing a small child.

“I don’t think it wants our help Piper,” Veronica said. “I don’t even think it needs help!”

Apparently the Fates had been listening to the daughter of Mercury and decided that what she said was pretty hilarious, as tendrils of green flame erupted from the earth and wrapped around the thunderbird’s talons. It tried to take to the skies, but with its mangled wing it was only able to hop off the ground before it was pulled back down.

Morgan stepped out from between two flaming overturned vehicles, with her body surrounded by an eerie dark green glow. The witch clenched her hands into fist as more green flame erupted from the earth, wrapping around the thunderbird’s wings, and allowing for the remaining mortals to focus their fire.
Every fiber of her being was screaming at her to get out and help their savior, but even as the mighty creature struggled to free itself, it was still urging them to flee. “Reyna,” she sighed, pressing her hands to her face. “Get us out of here.”

Reyna didn’t have to be told twice. The praetor hit the clutch and shifted into reverse. “Hang on!”

Betty White’s engine roared and tires squealed as they lurched backwards. They slammed into the nose of one of the flaming overturned wrecks, but it hardly slowed them down. The one armed praetor cranked the wheel hard to the left, sending them spinning around, before she slammed down on the clutch and shifted into forward in one fluid motion. Some of the mortals had noticed their escape and had started firing at them, but their bullets bounced harmlessly off of Betty’s metal hide.

As they raced away, Piper looked back to watch their savior fight what should have been their foe.

Morgan was summoning up more and more fiery lashes, but with the four of them safely out of range the thunderbird was releases bursts of lightning at its attackers. A bolt of lightning incinerated one of the gunners, while a flap of its wings sent another truck soaring through the night sky. It bent down and picked up a fleeing man with its beak only to toss it in the air and swallow it whole.

That is equal parts horrifying and awesome! Okay, way more awesome than horrifying!

Just when she thought the mighty thunderbird would emerge victorious its good wing was ripped off by the witch’s magic and the roar of thunder unlike any she had ever heard filled the air.

Unable to watch anymore, Piper face forward and buried her face in her hands and cried.

They drove back towards the mountains and off the road where the managed to find a cave big enough to park the bronze SUV in. They pulled out the newly acquired sleeping bags and a book of matches to light a fire with. No one spoke to her, although Piper could tell they wanted to ask her why she had broken down like that. The others had crawled into their sleeping bags at a safe distance from their fire and were out in moments. Piper though had silently volunteered to take the first shift as look out.

I killed it. I killed the protector of gods knows how many tribes.

She threw another stick into the fire and watched as the embers flickered and the white smoke billowed to the cave’s mouth. The only sounds to be heard were the crackle of the fire and the slow breathing of her sleeping friends.

She dragged a hand down her face before standing up and walked over to the cave. The outside world was silent, no crickets chirping, no frogs croaking, or even the wind; all was unnaturally still.

Another one of Grandpa’s stories helped me today, this time in a more literal sense. And what do I do after it saved our lives? I shot it out of the sky and crippled it. But even after that it still fought for us.

But what about the other stories? Are they true as well? How would that work? I was told the Greek and Roman run the world. Was that a lie?

Piper leaned her forehead against the cool stone entrance and then proceeded to slowly bang her
head against it.

*This is just too much.*

“Grandpa,” she whispered. “If you can hear me, I could really use your help right about now. There is way too much going on to begin with and a culture shock is the last thing I need right now.”

She felt a warm hand grab her shoulder and when she turned back she was half-expecting to see his smiling face, but there was no one there. Instead, at her feet was a long black feather with an intricate electric blue pattern that hummed with power. She bent down to pick it up and it shrunk down in her hand until it was no bigger than the one she used to braid into her hair.

She smiled as she felt the feather’s strange, but comforting warmth in her hand. “Thanks Grandpa.”

Chapter End Notes

Arc two of Shattered is well underway now!
Piper, Reyna, Veronica, and Atlas are going to have an amazing time getting to the East. While, Percy, Nico, Jason, and Hades, are going to get ready for their next confrontation. We will be checking in with Avalon soon enough as well.

**SO MUCH HAPPENED THIS CHAPTER!!!**

Some of you will have picked up on a few things, while the rest of you will have that same information revealed over time. We had some characters introduced from Native American folklore this chapter, the thunderbird being the most obvious, and spoilers: there are more to come!

(honestly I should have broken Shattered into three separate stories, but I didn't want to worry people)

Piper! My main gal Piper!
She is amazing. totally underrated character that deserved better than what she got!
(Same is true for Reyna). She's going to be struggling here for a bit with the knowledge that some of the stories she was told as a child are a bit more than that. She's kind of going through what her dad did at the end of TLH before he took the magic fix-it potion, but since she's has some experience with being a demigod, the blow is lessened considerably. We will get into why this is bothering her so much, as usually she can shrug just about anything off with a certain nonchalance.

Oh there is so much to talk about, but it would be spoilers!!!!

Did you like what you just read? Then leave a kudos!
Thoughts, theories (please please please tell me those), suggestions, etc? Leave a comment!

Any feedback you give is amazing motivation for me! I love anything you guys do!

Well, until next time, happy holidays and remember that you are an amazing person with someone who cares about your well being!

Next chapter is Hades! And it's going to get a little frisky ;)
Hades

Chapter Summary

Warning: mentions of blood.

Tonight:

Hades reflects on his current situation,

He sees something he wasn't supposed to,

and he immediately forgets about it because reasons...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Meditation was supposed to allow him to clear his mind and focus on reconnecting with his godly self.

Instead all it did was enhance all of his anxieties to the point he felt weaker than when he started.

_We are now further away from saving Olympus than when we started! Poseidon has left us to cower in the sea, Artemis is still evading us, Grace is refusing to fight, my domain is in shambles, and I can’t even resurrect a housefly!_

He released the breath he wasn’t aware he was holding and laid back on his sleeping bag/meditation zone.

“Oh, how the mighty have fallen,” he groaned, observing his less than ideal surroundings.

Since his return from the failed assault on New Rome, he had been forced to take up residence in the small study that farmhouse possessed. The walls were lined with oak bookshelves covered with intricate hand-carved patterns of various flora, a matching desk occupied the center of the room with black leather chair behind it, and off to the side underneath the room’s only window was his sleeping bag.

The large farmhouse had three bedrooms, but his _precious_ mother-in-law had taken the master bedroom, the boys got one, and Persephone the other (She’s _never_ here! I am!). So, he took the only remaining room that offered some privacy.

_Yay me…_

His hand tailored suits, custom Italian leather shoes, vast record collection, and his legions-upon-legions of servants were no longer at his disposal or beck-and-call. The only reason he had a change of clothes was his dear Persephone had been kind enough to bring him a bag up with her.

_Note to self: buy T-shirts and jeans. Sleeping in a dress shirt is highly impractical and living in a part of the world where there is more mud than roads ruins everything…_
True, he could ask her to go back down for the other things, but after hearing of the state of his kingdom from her last trip, he wasn’t going to send her back down.

She did get some of my better records for me though!

And if he wasn’t going to send a goddess down there, he sure wasn’t going to send Nico down there.

Without its king’s presence, his kingdom’s spiral into chaos had only accelerated. Cerberus, his prized companion, had been bound in chains before being tossed into Tartarus. The souls of recently departed demigods were being dipped into the river Lethe before being enslaved by the traitorous judges, while mortal souls were allowed to roam without judgment. Many of the souls sentenced to an eternity in the fields of punishment were being freed to aid in the coup. The gates of Elysium were under siege by those who believed they deserved the privilege of an eternity in paradise.

Thankfully I had Daedalus reinforce the gates and add an anti-solicitor system. Because is it really paradise if the Jehovah’s witnesses still bother you?

But all of that could be rectified by even the weakest of gods. No, what made the underworld off limits was that the primary rift that led to Tartarus was growing. He had theories for why this was happening, but what really mattered was that the larger the pit got, the stronger its pull became.

How long before it swallows up everything? And what has managed to escape from that infernal pit? Nico and Percy were incredibly lucky down there, there are far-

His thoughts were interrupted by the sound of Percy’s bed bouncing off the wall upstairs.

Must’ve had another nightmare.

Hades’ new living quarters were located directly underneath the boys’ room, which meant he heard every movement they made. During the daylight hours Nico and Percy were reasonably quiet, but it was another story entirely once night settled over the land. All three demigods tossed and turned in their sleep so much at night that he wondered if they got any sleep at all, but every morning they seemed just fine.

Well the bags under Perseus’s eyes tell different story…

Jason he could hear the most, what with his blond nephew sleeping on the floor. The blond frequently kicked and punched the floor as if he were trying to escape something, often whimpering in his sleep. His son though was a bit better, mostly tossing and turning on the ancient box spring mattress and occasionally crying out for the son of Apollo or the son of Poseidon. Jackson was by far the worst though. He tossed and turned, fought invisible adversaries, screamed out in both pain and loss, and cried in his sleep.

It was rather heart wrenching to hear the three of them night-after-night go through their personal battles, so he never said anything to them about trying to keep it quiet. Instead he adjusted his sleep schedule so that he worked through the early hours of the night and slept during the first half of the day. If the parenting books he read were to be believed, it was actually a good thing too. It allowed his boys to have their independence during the day, but in the late afternoon they had parental supervision.

Okay, when did I start thinking of them as ‘my’ boys?

The floor boards above him squeaked, as Nico got out of his bed and padded over to Jackson’s bed.
Hades couldn’t help but to smile at his son’s dedication to his friends. Nico (much like himself) came across as cold and hostile to everyone initially, but once won over he was loyal to the end. And right now Nico was exactly what they needed to keep everything from falling apart. Nico was the only one who could pull Jackson back from the depths of grief and depression and he was the only one who Grace trusted with his problems.

His smile fell though when after fifteen minutes he didn’t hear his son return to his bed.

*It’s nothing! I just didn’t hear him is all! Or Jackson just needs more time to calm down!*

To show just how okay everything was, he kicked off his shoes and as silently as he could climbed up the stairs. He rounded the corner and slowly pushed the boys’ door open, and cringed at the how the ancient door creaked. When he poked his head into the dark room he had expected to find either both boys asleep in their own beds or to see Nico sitting up with a distraught son of Poseidon.

Not Percy Jackson spooning his son.

He clamped his hand over his mouth to stop himself from yelling out. He slowly backed out of the room and pulled the door shut behind him.

*Okay. This is nothing. It’s not like I caught them doing anything… sexual. They are both hurting and maybe they both needed some form of physical contact. Yes, that has to be it! It’s not like Jackson is Nico’s type or of the same orientation for that matter! Besides, Nico would tell me if he and Aquaman Junior were dating! He and William had been together for only a few hours when he appeared before me with the news!*

When Hades had finished rationalizing the situation and was sure he wasn’t going to cause a scene, he opened the door again and snuck into the room as silently as death.

All three boys were still in their same positions; Jason cocooned in his sleeping bag with his face resting against his laptop, Nico with his back pressed against the son of Poseidon and his head tucked under the older boy’s chin, and Jackson with a smile on his lips and his arms wrapped around Nico as if he was the most important thing in the world.

*So Nico is his new anchor. It’s not surprising, but I don’t want to see either of them hurt…*

He was about to leave the room when he noticed Nico shiver ever so slightly in his sleep. Knowing how much Nico hated being cold, Hades grabbed the quilt from the foot of Jackson’s bed and draped it over their sleeping forms.

*If there is anything going on between them I’m sure Nico would tell me… or Jackson would blab about it.*

He stroked Nico’s cheek with the back of his hand before leaving the room.

Hades felt her presence before she physically appeared.

He wasn’t sure if it due to the tiny amount of power he had left or the three-thousand plus years of marriage, but he was glad she was there in any case.
“Hello my love,” he said, closing his laptop and breathing in deeply the floral bouquet of scents that always accompanied Persephone wherever she went.

There she was, in all of her glory standing at the edge of his desk, looking down at him with a smile that was reserved for him and him alone. She was wearing a black sundress that was cut low enough that left little to the imagination, her flawless earth toned skin shined in the moonlight, and her long dark hair was draped over her bare shoulders in such a way that drove him absolutely mad. Not for the first time he found himself thinking she should have been the goddess of love over that drama queen Aphrodite.

“And hello to you too,” she smiled, setting down a pile of records onto his desk.

He quirked one eyebrow at the pile of records. “I thought we agreed you weren’t going to go back to the underworld?”

Persephone leaned against the desk and picked up one of the vinyl albums and feigned interest in it. “Oh did we?”

“Yes. Yes we did,” he said, snatching Killing the Dragon from her hand, which earned him a playful pout. “Only a few hours ago in fact.”

The goddess grabbed another album as she found great delight in annoying her husband. “And I thought we agreed I was my own goddess who could do whatever she damn well pleases?” There was no anger in her voice, and the smirk on her perfect face told him this was the start of a game they had played a million times over.

*But I’m not going to let you win it just yet.*

Hades stood up from his chair and walked over to the goddess. “A goddess who is far too stubborn for her own good,” he smirked as he brushed a loose strand of hair behind her ear.

Persephone playfully smacked his hand away. “They’re mortals my love, no more threatening than ants. As for Tartarus, I think I’m a smart enough girl to avoid peering into the abyss.”

“Really? If mortals weren’t dangerous, then I wouldn’t be living in your mother’s office.” Hades lifted his left arm and pretended to sniff his armpit. “Or smell like death warmed-over.”

As expected she rolled her eyes at his terrible attempt at humor. “You always smell like death. It’s part of your charm.”

He pulled her up and wrapped her in his strong arms. “You’re a strange goddess.”

Persephone returned his embrace and chuckled. “And you should be thankful for that.”

“Oh, but I am.”

She pulled slightly away from his embrace to look him in the eye. “Seriously though, they’re dead mortals. Souls. I am a goddess. Their queen. What could they possibly do to me?”

Hades frowned at his love’s naivety. “It’s as you say; they are ants. Harmless alone, but in great numbers they can take down even the greatest foe. Yes, you could defeat wave after wave, but all it would take is for one of them to sprinkle some water from the Lethe on you and the battle is over.” She opened her mouth to protest, but he cut her off. “If it worked on a titan it would certainly work on a god or goddess.”
Persephone frowned. “Iapetus was the best janitor we ever had.”

He pulled her close again and pressed his lips to her forehead. “I don’t know, I think you could make those overhauls work for you. The king and the janitor, that could be a fun little scenario.”

“Only if I’m the king,” she laughed. “But I get it. I promise I won’t go home anymore until you have recovered.”

“That’s all I ask.” He then bridged the distance between them and caught her luscious lips with his own. Kissing he found was far more enjoyable in his mortal form, what with him being fully present for the experience and his body reacting on its own accord. There was a downside though that drove him absolutely crazy: he had to break for air.

“Someone missed me,” Persephone smirked when he finally had to stop for air.

“You have no idea,” he gasped, trying to catch his breath as fast as possible. He had gone without his queen for far too long and all he wanted to do at the moment was let her know that, but when he went back in for another heated exchange, she pushed him away.

“As much as I would love for this to continue,” She purred, “I didn’t just swing by to bring you records and smell the roses.” She smiled slyly. “I have news.”

“Oh?”

She allowed Hades to pull her into his embrace again and whispered in his ear. “Mother and I found the remains of a Hunter campsite.”

“Now that is something,” he breathed in her ear. “Did you find anything pointing to their next location?”

“Only indirectly,” she paused when he let one hand wander lower. “Stop that!” Persephone laughed.

“Sorry. You were saying?”

She nipped his earlobe just hard enough to send a tingle of pain. “Dirty man. As I was saying, they left enough to make it look like they were going to head to South America.”

“Really? All demigod activity ceased down there with the death of that son of Apollo, Mengele.”

“Like I could forget?” she groaned against his chest. “The only time in millennia that father and his twin brats paid us a visit. All to make sure he was given rebirth instead of an eternity of punishment.”

“Which monsters like him deserved,” he growled at the memory.

“They seriously left a travel brochure for Brazil and a bunch of bananas for us to find,” the goddess huffed. “Like we’re stupid enough to fall for that!”

“So where do you think they went?” he asked, as he picked her up and set his queen on his desk. She wrapped her long legs around his waist, driving him absolutely mad with want. “North. If they went west they would have hit California which is now inaccessible to us, if they went east they risk running into Coyote and the Nation. So now all we have to do is sit back and wait for one of them to stop and smell the flowers,” she purred. “It’s spring now darling,” she said, grabbing his collar. “My time.”

“It’s always your time,” he breathed against her swanlike neck. “Everyone else is just too blind to see
it."

*How can mortals stand it? To be around the ones they love without reverting to their basic instincts. I can barely form a sentence when I'm around her!*

She leaned in to kiss him, but pulled away at the last moment and placed one beautiful finger against his lips. “So what have you been up to?” she asked, a devious smile on her perfect face.

*What had I been up to? There was something about Nico and Percy, but I'm pretty sure that wasn't important. I was on my laptop when she showed up looking for…*

“Money,” he growled. “Avalon has to be spending an exorbitant amount of money. People, weapons, transport; all of it costs money and that means there is a paper trail somewhere.”

Persephone nodded in approval. “Very clever my love. To beat a mortal, one must think like a mortal. And who would make a better adversary than the god of wealth? What have you found?”

“That if you google ‘Avalon paper trail’ you get nothing,” he stammered, before trying to kiss her again.

She pulled away and gave him an annoyed grin. “Hades…”

“We know their name and their goals,” he sighed, desperately wishing they would move onto something more fun. “We know none of their names or even how many gods have joined their cause.” He bristled at the thought of the traitorous Dionysus and Terminus.

“Maybe you should talk to Jason and Nico again? Maybe they saw something that could help?” She dug her fingernails into his shoulders, but did nothing to acknowledge it.

You little hellhound...

“Sounds good! I’ll do that first thing in the morning!” He leaned in again and wanted to scream in frustration when she once again pushed him away.

“I don’t think my husband would approve of me kissing some mortal,” she smiled slyly. “He’s a very powerful god you know.”

*And the game is almost over.*

“Oh, I’m sure he has nothing on me,” he growled into her ear.

She tapped one finger to her lips and pretended to be deep in thought. “Maybe I can make an exception for a mortal like you.” She smiled and unwrapped her legs from his waist before pushing him down to his knees. “But first you must worship me,” she purred, lifting his chin up with one finger.

“Your beauty is your strength and I submit to it! Take me, and let me know what it is like to be with the goddess of goddesses! The goddess who all others envy! There is nothing, *nothing* in this world that comes close to your glory! And I am the only man who can see it! Let me worship at your altar, let me know the pleasure of being with a real woman!”

When he saw her shudder with excitement he stood up and caught her in a harsh kiss. Persephone bit his lip hard enough to draw blood, but the metallic taste only spurred him on. “You may worship me,” she growled.
And the game is over. Everyone wins.

Hades grabbed the black dress that covered his beloved and tore it off in one quick motion, exposing her body to the moonlight. His breath caught as he overwhelmed by how gorgeous she looked in the pale moonlight, how every one of her luscious curves was highlighted, how her eyes twinkled like starlight.

She should have been the goddess of love! She doesn’t need to change her appearance for others!

Apparently he was taking too long for her, as she jumped up and wrapped her legs around his waist and dug her nails into his back. The unexpected ambush caused him to lose balance and stumble back into the bookcase, sending years of farmer’s almanacs crashing to the floor.

“Were those of any value to your mother?” Hades gasped, as she raked her nails down his back.

“Gods I hope so!” she cried before ripping his shirt open.

“Me too,” he chuckled. It always amused him to no end that while his darling Persephone loved her mother, she had a rebellious streak in her that was a mile long. It was thanks to that streak that they met all those millennia ago. It was that rebellious streak that created the lie that she was bound to the underworld for half of the year.

And people think I’m the crafty one.

He carried her over to his sleeping bag and dropped her down on it, before tearing off his shirt. He dropped down to his knees where she wrapped one arm around his shoulders and pulled him down for another breathtaking kiss. Persephone’s other hand worked its way around his back and he felt the familiar painful, but pleasurable, sensation of her nails raking down his back, leaving streaks of blood in their wake.

“You know that drives me wild!” he growled, biting down on her shoulder, marking her as his queen.

She let out a moan of pleasure, then in a blur of motion he was on his back while she was sitting on his regretfully still clothed hips. “Why are these still on?” she growled, fumbling with his belt.

“One of the many downsides of my condition.”

“Well we’ll just have to take care of that.” Having grown frustrated with the complicated mechanics of the leather belt, his goddess snapped her fingers and instantly he was as bare as her. “Now let’s see what this new body of yours can do!”

His body may have been battered, bruised, and almost certainly low on blood, but Hades walked into the kitchen the next morning with a spring in his step and a smile on his face, wearing only a black fluffy bathrobe and a pair of black boxers.

“Good morning gentlemen,” he smiled, walking up behind the son of Jupiter and ruffling his blond hair.

The blond shrunk away and turned to look at him with a horrified expression, before turning back to
his bowl of oatmeal.

He didn’t think anything of his nephew’s strange reaction and turned his attention to his precious son who was currently frying bacon. “Wow that smells good Nico!” he laughed, wrapping an arm around his son’s small frame and giving him a noogie with his other hand. “Make sure I get a plate! Gods you are an amazing son, you know that right?!”

When he finished the noogie, Nico grabbed his head in pain and stared at him with the same horrified expression as Grace.

“No too crispy on that bacon Neeks,” Hades chuckled before he walked back to the kitchen table and took a seat next to his favorite nephew. “Perseus! Per-say-us! Percy! How’s it going? Feeling any better? Need anything? Cash? I know you kids are always short on dough!” He pulled out three wads of cash from his robe’s pockets and tossed one to each teen. Percy was the only one that caught one, while Jason’s bounced off his forehead and into his oatmeal and Nico’s bounced off his chest onto the floor.

“Thanks man!” the son of Poseidon grinned. “And I’m doing just fine! How about you? You get enough sleep?” he laughed, earning him a pointed glare from the other two demigods.

“No a damn wink, but I feel amazing! Better than I have in months!” He stretched out in the wooden chair and cracked his back, his robe sliding open to reveal all the scratches Persephone had inflicted upon him in their passionate exchange.

Nico’s eyes bugged out as he set a plate of bacon and eggs before him and quickly looked away.

“Holy crap!” Percy laughed, holding his hand in the air for a high-five. “That is awesome!”

Hades didn’t leave the son of Poseidon hanging and slapped the boy’s injured hand, while Nico swatted the back of raven haired teen’s head.

“Fuck, Nico,” Percy groaned, rubbing the back of his head. “What was that for?!”

“You guys are hilarious,” Hades laughed, before scarifying down his plate in what had to be some kind of record. “Well, I don’t want to keep Persephone waiting,” he announced as he stood up from the table. “Jason have a good day at school. Nico, why don’t you take Percy outside for a while? The fresh air will do the both of you good.”

Nico nodded, his mouth hanging wide open.

“Good boy,” he laughed, ruffling his son’s hair as he walked past. He was almost out of the kitchen when Demeter walked in, wearing the same expression as Jason and Nico.

*It was a good night. And it’s going to be a good morning too.*

Chapter End Notes

Percy you know damn well why you got hit!

I always believed that Hades and Persephone’s relationship was a lot more passionate
than other gods. She is gasoline to his fire, they burn brighter and hotter together. Sure as I said before they take breaks from each other every now and then and then and take up mortal lovers, but they always come back to each other.

I also liked the idea that the two of them have built up this grand lie around their relationship, thanks in part to Demeter spreading the lie that Hades abducted Persephone. The world sees Hades as a dirty creepy god and Persephone as this innocent little flower, when they are both sooo much more. They live for each other and are willing to do anything for the other (even i that means family meals with her mother).

I also always imagined that Persephone likes it rough, because every rose had it's thorns (yes, that is terrible. I know). And Hades absolutely loves every moment of it. He's a king, one of the big three, eldest son of Kronos: he lives for challenges.

And poor Nico, Percy, and Jason! They heard EVERYTHING. Jason was close to having a Vietnam-esque flashback, Nico is beyond embarrassed that his parents would do such a thing, and Percy finds the whole situation amusing. There is a reason for Percy's reaction and we will get into it, but part of it is he is a teenage boy.

Demeter didn't get any sleep either and was seriously considering sleeping in the barn.

There were some clues in this chapter too believe it or not! (and Jason did not reveal Merlin's real name to Hades... yet. That's coming)

Hey! You! Yes, you! Did you like what you just read?
Then leave a kudos!
Thoughts, theories, emojis, omgs, etc?
Leave a comment!

I love hearing from you guys! Every word and kudos is amazing motivation!

Next chapter is Piper! More adventures in Montana!

So until next time, you are all amazing people! I appreciate all of you reading this and I hope you all have a happy new years!
Reyna took a long sip of the coffee Piper had prepared for her with her eyes closed, while Piper, Atlas, and Veronica watched in silence. When the praetor finished, she set the small thermos between her legs and looked at Piper with an annoyed expression.

“So let me get this straight,” Reyna sighed, “while we were sleeping, one of that giant bird’s feathers-”

“The thunderbird,” Piper chimed in, giving Reyna her best smile.

“One of the thunderbird’s feathers magically appeared at your feet?”

Veronica nodded, her golden flaming eyes flickering with amusement. “That’s what the lady said.”

“And your first instinct was to braid it into your hair?”

“Yup,” She answered sheepishly, absently twisting the black feather.

“And now it won’t come out?”

“Right again,” Piper answered, slowly leaning back from the praetor to get out of strangling distance.

“Mclean?” Reyna asked, her voice eerily calm.

“Yes Reyna?”

Reyna uncrossed her legs and stood up, grabbing the thermos at the same time. “Are you okay?”

That question caught Piper completely off guard. She had expected Reyna to yell at her for being so foolish at least lecture her about the dangerous of sticking strange magical objects in her hair. Instead,
there was genuine concern on her face, as she eyed the thunderbird’s pulsing feather with distrust. “I’m fine Reyna,” she smiled. “It just occasionally points south and every so often the static makes my hair stand on end.”

Super glad I keep my hair short!

“South huh?” Veronica asked, crossing her arms. “You think it’s a sign?”

“I was just wondering that myself,” Reyna smirked. “What do you think Piper? You’re the expert on thunderbirds apparently.” Reyna paused and took another swig from her thermos. “By the way, where did you even here about thunderbirds? No offense, but if anyone should know about obscure monsters it should be Atlas or myself.”

“Umm, Annabeth told me about them,” she lied. She wasn’t quite ready to divulge the truth to her traveling companions yet, as she wanted to gather more information first before dropping that bombshell. “And I think we should follow it. I mean, it did save us multiple times.”

Reyna guzzled down the rest of the coffee and looked between the three of them. “It was supposed to take forty-three hours of nonstop driving to reach the New York border. We are on day three and we’ve encountered treacherous mountain paths, dinosaur sized birds, and our lovely mortal friends.” She pressed her hand to her forehead and brushed back her long dark hair. “Frankly, we could use any help the gods can throw our way. So, I can’t believe I’m saying this, let’s follow Piper’s magic feather.”

They ate a quick breakfast of trail mix and M&Ms, brewed another thermos of coffee, and packed up their campsite. After they drove Betty White from the cave, Atlas and Veronica incinerated the campsite with their golden flames to destroy all evidence that they had ever been there. They were doing all they could to not leave a trail for the mortals to follow, but Piper knew that meeting them again was a cruel inevitability.

But despite that knowledge and the previous night’s events, Piper found herself in a good mood. The thunderbird’s feather (that she was sure was a gift from her grandfather) had a comforting warmth to it that seemed to radiate to everyone in the vehicle; Reyna was humming a familiar tune and tapping her fingers on the wheel, Atlas and Veronica were sprawled out in the backseat filing their talons as one foot bounced along to Reyna’s tune, and well Piper found herself enjoying the scenic view that was before them.

They were actually on a main road for a change, following the Madison River in what had to be one of the most picturesque views in the entire country. Despite their high elevation they were in a valley with Tobacco Root Mountains behind them, the Gravelly Range to the west, and the Madison Range to the east. Every few miles she would spot someone in the river fly fishing, their lines seemingly dancing in the air with each cast.

“Looks like we got a small town up ahead,” Reyna announced. “Anyone need to stop?”

Veronica poked their head up between the seats. “Actually I could really go for a refill. Dionysus is utterly wrecking me. Also I want to vacuum the backseat. Sitting in your own ashes is kind of horrifying…”

Piper and Reyna cringed at the unnecessary imagery.
“Then it looks like we’re stopping.”

Ennis was what Piper imagined when people used the term one-horse-town. The sign that welcomed them to the small town proudly announced it had a population of a little over eight-hundred, but she was pretty sure that number included people in the surrounding area, as she could survey the entire town from the short main street.

“I’m not sure if we’re going to find a morgue here,” Reyna said, as she put Betty White into park. “This place is… small.”

“You got that right,” Piper chuckled, as she unfastened her seatbelt. “I’m pretty sure my house is bigger than this entire town.”

Veronica flicked the back of Piper’s head, earning a surprised yelp. “Your house is a freaking mansion Piper! Of course everything seems small to you!”

She held up a finger to argue, but decided the daughter of Mercury had a valid point.

The four of them wandered down Main Street for a time looking at the small mom-and-pop stores, the little restaurants, and strangely enough: a microbrewery. They did their best to mingle with the locals to try and find a body for Veronica and Atlas, but people were surprisingly uncomfortable talking to a fierce looking one-armed Latina, a seemingly blind blonde who sound like she was possessed, and a girl with Kaleidoscope eyes who was way too eager on finding a dead body.

Eventually she resorted to using her charm speak on a kindly old cop. He said that the town didn’t have a morgue or the like, but there was a body of an old woman that had died of natural causes waiting to be transported at the small police station.

“Is that going to work guys?” Piper asked, as she dismissed the old man. “Or do they need to be,” she gulped, “younger?”

Veronica pulled off her shoes and held them in one hand. It seemed that the blonde had a thing for walking around barefoot, but Piper wasn’t sure if that was a habit from before her fusion with Atlas or not. “Honestly, I prefer them older,” the blonde shrugged. “It doesn’t make me feel as bad. It’s like they lived their life, and they are now returning to the land.”

“That’s… actually a nice way to think about,” Reyna said.

More like rationalize it.

They walked in silence back down Main Street looking for the right street that would take them to their friend’s next rejuvenating meal, when a small wooden sign caught Piper’s eye.

“Hey guys, do you think you two handle this on your own?”
Reyna, Veronica, and Atlas looked her with puzzled expressions.

“I guess?” Reyna said, eyeing her critically. “But where are you going?”

“I, er, saw a payphone back there and I want to try calling my dad again,” she lied, but in this situation the truth would have sounded unbelievable. They were on the run for their lives and she wanted to stop at a library? Sure, that was something Annabeth would have probably would have done, but she felt like Reyna would have a hard time believing she would. “I haven’t spoken to him since you two saved me.”

Reyna tapped her foot against the pavement. “Fine. Alright, just- just meet back at,” she grabbed the bridge of her nose and growled, “Betty White in an hour.”

“Thanks Reyna!” she beamed, before running off in the opposite direction.

“Remember!” the praetor called out. “One hour! I will not hesitate to leave your Greek ass!”

“Don’t worry daughter of Aphrodite! I’ll make sure she won’t leave you!” Atlas laughed.

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“Excuse me ma’am? Do you happen to have any books on First Nation mythology?” she asked the librarian.

The Madison Valley Public Library was a quaint little building with a sloping overhang over the front entrance held up by four wooden posts. The inside didn’t have much of interest, central desk where the sole librarian sat, a large table near the front with several public use computers, several rows of towering bookshelves, and a small room off to the side that housed the children’s section and doubled as a community room.

“Ma’am? Really?” The librarian asked, looking up from her game of solitaire. “I’m nineteen.”

“I was just trying to be polite.”

“Whatever,” The librarian said, rolling her eyes. “If we have anything it would be in the children’s section.”

“Thanks,” she said, waiving to the librarian (who totally could pass for a ma’am) as she jogged to the children’s section.

The children’s area was pretty… bare. The shelves only came up to her waist (which she supposed made sense considering they were for children after all) and they only covered the walls, leaving the rest of the room wide open. There was a small table in the middle of the room surrounded by beanbag chairs and large plush toys, and damn it, she was totally going to snuggle up with the Clifford the Big Red Dog she spied!

*But first I need to do a little research.*

When she turned to start searching the ‘A’ section (as she had no idea what she was exactly looking for) the thunderbird’s feather roughly yanked her in the opposite direction.
“Owe!” she cried out in pain. “Just tap my shoulder or something, ass!”

The pulsing blue and black feather paid her no mind and continued to pull her hair until she was standing in front of the ‘M’s. Then in one quick and unexpectedly powerful movement, the feather pulled her down to her knees.

“Gods! You are the worst gift ever!” Piper moaned, rubbing her sore scalp with her eyes closed. “I’m seriously considering shaving my- oh!” there in front of her was an entire shelf on the various mythologies of the world. Most of them were unsurprisingly Greek and Roman (Their publicist is amazing), but there were several on the First Nation, including a relatively thick reference book. “These’ll work!”

The magic feather pulsed as if to say, “I told you so.”

Piper grabbed every book and tucked them beneath her arm, before scurrying over to the beanbag chairs and plush toys.

*Time for a little refresher!*

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Most of the books she found were intended for children and most likely weren’t myths, but new stories using old characters. However, the giant reference book (that she was positive could be used to kill a man) was proving to be incredibly helpful.

The first thing she had looked up was of course, the thunderbird. She thought her grandpa would have been proud of her when she realized she knew almost everything the book had to offer, but a refresher never hurt anyone.

*It’s a giant bird-like creature of legend that is shared between multiple tribes, most commonly in the northwest regions, but can be found in others. According to the Algonquin; it rules the upper world while the underworld is controlled by the Great Horned Serpent. It can create thunder by flapping its wing and can hurl thunderbolts at its enemies.*

*Okay, we definitely saw that.*

*The Menominee believe that the thunderbirds dwell on a hidden mountain in the western sky. Thunderbirds are the ones who control the rain and hail.*

*Okay, so that storm was its fault… Lovely.*

*A common theme among each cultures retelling is that the thunderbird is the great protector of people. They admire heroic deeds and in certain legends have been known to intercede when necessary to save the hero.*

*Yup. Been there. Done that. Got the T-shirt.*

The feather yanked at her hair again.

“Fuck! Sorry! It was a joke!” She rubbed her still sore scalp and continued reading.
In a unique case of myth imitating reality, the thunderbird is said to be a migratory bird. It flies south in the fall and returns in late winter to prepare for battle with its nemesis; the Great Horned Serpent and its many children.

Deciding that she knew enough about the great avian, she turned back to the book’s index, and started looking for other creatures that might be good to know about. The problem was, she was discovering, was that there were just as many gods, creatures, and demigods in her people’s history as there was in Greco-Roman. Possibly even more.

“Well that’s just great,” Piper huffed, resting the book on her knees. “You wouldn’t happen to have a built in guidebook would you?” she asked the sentient feather. “Cause for everything I remember there are fifty things I’ve never heard of!”

The feather as expected didn’t respond, only continuing its steady pulsing.

“Nice,” she grouched. She continued to thumb through the index, stopping here and there when she recognized a name.

When she got to the ‘K’s though her heart skipped a beat. “No way…”

There on the page was the name Kipitaaki. She flipped to the corresponding page and all hopes of it being a coincidence were dashed.

Napi and Kipitaaki, more commonly known as Old Man and Old Lady, are cultural heroes of the Blackfoot tribe. Napi is frequently portrayed as a trickster, a troublemaker, and a foolish being, while Kipitaaki is his opposite, punishing her husband for his foolishness.

Yup, that’s them…

They are generally considered to be benevolent and are responsible for shaping the world the Blackfoot live in. They were the first man and woman made by the Creator, and were charged with making the rest of mankind. Some tales say they made mankind of clay, buffalo fat, buffalo blood, and buffalo sinew, while others say all mankind are their direct descendants.

Both are gross, but really pulling for the buffalo option. I do not want to think about their wrinkled bodies… Ugh! Too late!

The two were also to decide if mankind would live forever or eventually die. Kipitaaki decided that they should perish after a time, to which Napi agreed. However, after a time they had a daughter who was taken away from them due to illness. Old Lady begged Old Man to reverse their decision, but he refused to change what they agreed upon, no matter how painful it was. That is why the couple have an affection for children and were known to appear and provide guidance to struggling youths.

That’s them alright…

Piper closed the book and set it aside, before reclining back into the beanbag. In the course of one day she had met not one, but three prominent figures in Native American mythology, and she seriously doubted that they were the only three that existed.

“And therein lies the problem,” she huffed, clutching the Clifford plush close. It seemed to her that once a demigod had their first encounter with the beyond, the floodgates opened, and it was bye-bye normalcy. Before Gaea had kidnapped her dad, she had no clue any of the demigod world existed outside of Disney movies. And now she might have to deal with another one entirely?
I swear to all that is holy (whatever that even means anymore) that I am not getting on another flying boat with people I barely know!

She looked at the clock on the wall and saw that her hour was almost up. “Reyna won’t leave me, but she’ll move Betty White to mess with me,” she mumbled as she pushed herself up from the comfortable bag. She looked at the thick reference book and realized she hadn’t really gained much in her limited amount of time, so she grabbed the book and tucked it under her jacket, and prayed to the library gods (Because those are probably a thing too!) for forgiveness.

Piper almost made it to the door when the young librarian grabbed her by her shoulder, but before the librarian could say anything, Piper snapped, “You don’t care! Go back to your desk!”

The charm speak did its trick, as the librarian shrugged and returned to her seat.

She was almost back to Main Street, when the thunderbird’s feather shocked her and tugged at her hard enough to knock her off her feet.

“What the actual fuck?” she moaned, clutching her head with one hand and picking up the book with her other. “Because seriously I will shave my head you-“

“HELP!” a terrified voice screamed.

The feather yanked hard enough to spin her around to the source of scream to see two of the armed black clad mortals pulling a young boy into the back of a van. The kid was putting up a valiant struggle, biting one of the mortal’s gloved hands hard enough for her to hear the man yelp in pain. The other mortal apparently wasn’t a fool and pulled out a cattle prod and zapped the poor kid, his little body flailing before going limp. The other mortal pried his hand from the kid’s jaw and finished hauling the unconscious boy in as the van began to pull away.

“Oh shit!” Piper cried, clutching the book to her chest as she took off into a sprint chasing after the van.

In what was either a move of sheer stupidity or brilliance, the van didn’t speed away, but rather kept a steady pace that Piper was sure followed the speed limit. This allowed her to keep the vehicle in sight, but she knew once it left the town limits, it would speed away.

“Don’t worry kid!” She screamed as she ran down the now vacant Main Street. “I’m coming for you!” She jumped onto a picnic table, rather than going around it to save time. As she sprinted past a tavern, Piper glanced inside to see the patrons inside all fixated on a giant television with a football game playing.

Of course!

As she hurdled over a mailbox (that one she probably could’ve ran around), she spotted Reyna and Veronica/Atlas leaning against Betty White.

“Start the car!” She screamed as he ran past the trio. “Kidnapped!”
Piper didn’t even bother to look over her shoulder to see if the praetor listened, all that mattered to her at the moment was keeping the kidnapper’s vehicle in sight. Her legs and lungs were on fire, but the fear induced adrenaline racing through her system allowed her to move faster than she ever had before. There was a brief glimmer of hope where she thought she might actually be able to catch up to the van when it stopped at an intersection, but as she ran across the intersection a pickup truck she had not noticed nearly ran her over.

“Watch where you’re going kid!” the driver yelled as he flipped her off.

If she would’ve had the time (or the breath for that matter) she would have told him exactly where he could shove that finger, but all she could manage was to return the favor as she resumed her pursuit.

Her stomach sank when she saw a speed limit sign less than a hundred yards away, and she damn well knew she couldn’t run sixty-five miles an hour.

“Get in!” Atlas boomed as he felt their taloned hand lift her up by the back of her shirt. In the blink of an eye, Piper found herself in the backseat of Betty White next to the beaming titan hybrid.

“Need a lift?” Veronica smiled.

“Follow that van!” Piper wheezed, clutching one hand to her heaving chest. “Demigod kidnapped!”

That was enough for Reyna as the praetor shifted Betty into high gear and tore down the road at ludicrous speeds until they were practically touching the van’s bumper.

The mortals were now fully aware that they were being followed by more than just some screaming teenage girl, as the van tried to accelerate away from the, but Reyna easily managed to match their speed.

“What the Hades is happening!” Reyna cried, as one van doors slid open to reveal two armed men, automatic rifles in hand.

“Those assholes took a kid!” Piper cried as a hail of automatic fire peppered the windshield.

The older girl cursed as she slammed Betty White against the rear of the van, temporarily halting the gunfire. As the van lost its momentum from the impact, Reyna managed to maneuver the SUV alongside it.

Atlas cracked their neck. “Don’t fret daughter of love,” the titan smiled, their golden eyes burning brighter. “We’ve got this.”

They opened the driver’s side door and in a blur of golden light dashed across to the van. When Piper could see again (I seriously need to wear sunglasses around these guys), Atlas and Veronica had one mortal pinned against floor with one foot pressed against its neck, the other was held up by his throat against the van’s door, and the driver looked like he was ready to piss his pants.

When the man Atlas had by the neck began to disintegrate and be absorbed into their body, the driver began to swerve erratically.

“Oh crap,” Piper mumbled, when she realized that Veronica and Atlas needed assistance if they wanted the kid to make it out in one piece. “Reyna try to get me closer!”

“Are you nuts?” Reyna cried, as the van slammed into them once again.

She crawled over to the open door and shot Reyna her most shit-eating grin. “My dad’s a big star!
I’m expected to be nuts!” she laughed before jumping across. She landed in the van on her chest with enough force that she was sure there was going to be a bruise.

*This would have been a perfect time to have Jason!*

She pushed herself up and looked to the back of the van, where the boy was still unconscious and locked in a cage that was barely big enough for him.

“I said I have this!” Atlas roared as they finished absorbing the first mortal. They swept their leg forward, dragging the other mortal with it. “Plus, at the rate we’re going we won’t need to mend ourselves for some time now,” he chuckled, lifting the other mortal into the air.

The driver swerved and Piper would have tumbled out the open door if she hadn’t grabbed the passenger head rest at the last possible moment.

“You clearly don’t!” she yelled at the titan.

The driver swerved again, but this time she was ready for it. Seeing that the same trick wasn’t going to work again, the driver reached into a pocket on his tactical vest and pulled out a black handgun.

*Nope!*

Then in a move she wished Jason and Reyna could have seen, she punched the driver so hard and fast that it knocked him out cold, his body slouched against the driver’s door. As cool as it was though, when the driver jerked to the side, the wheel turned with him.

“Oh crap!” Piper cried as the van bounced off a guard rail.

“Funny! When it was just me this vehicle wasn’t out of control!” Atlas yelled as the last of the mortal restored their body to almost pristine human-like condition.

“Oh shut your face you third-rate titan,” she growled as she crawled onto the driver’s lap. *Gross! Gross! Gross!* She took the wheel and slowed the vehicle to a smooth stop. She looked at Veronica and Atlas through the rearview mirror and smiled. “We just stopped a kidnapping.”

*We are bad bitches! ... And a titan.*

“Hey. Hey,” she cooed, gently tapping the young boy’s cheek. “Wake up.”

The boy, who couldn’t have been more than eleven or twelve, began to stir, groaning as his face twisted. He had black hair that had been recently given a buzz cut, a face that was losing its childhood roundness and was being replaced by long angular features, and from the few times his eyes fluttered open she could tell he had brown kaleidoscope eyes similar to her own.

*Oh please don’t let him be my half-sibling!*

The kid went to sit up, but Piper placed one hand on his chest and gently held him down. “Not so fast kid. Take it slow.”

The kid pushed her hand away and sat up, rubbing the back of his neck. “What happened? Who the hell are you?”
“Okay, first of all, language.” Like we’re any better… “Second, I’m Piper. Third, we just saved you from a group of mortals who really have it out for demigods. Also, what’s your name?”

The kid eyed her like she was crazy before saying, “Levi. My name is Levi Shaw. And what are you on about? I thought they were Child Services?”

“You were forcefully taken by armed men, who zapped you, and you think they were Child Services?” she asked in disbelief.

Levi nodded. “Hey you know the struggle. The government is always looking to take us native kids away from our parents.” He rolled his head around until she could hear it pop. “My mom told me to expect this. She mailed the car payment a week late, so yeah.”

“Wait? What? Your mom was late on a bill so that is grounds for someone to come and haul you off?” What the actual fuck?!

He scratched the back of his neck almost like a dog would scratch at a flea. “You’re not a Res kid are you?” The way he looked at her made her feel uncomfortable, like he was a predator and she was his prey. “The bill was just an excuse. After my parent’s got divorced, that would have been the start. But you said they weren’t Child Services?”

“Before I delve into that, I have to ask; was it your mom and stepdad that got divorced?”

Levi looked at her as if she grew a second head. “No. My mom and my dad. Why would you assume that?”

“You know you’re a demigod right?” This just keeps getting weirder and weirder!

“I mean, I guess. My mom is a normal woman and my dad is Coyote, but isn’t it a little weird to call ourselves demigods?”

What Levi was saying was blowing her mind. Not only was she conversing with a son of the trickster spirit Coyote, the kid was saying that his dad had stuck around long enough to marry and divorce his mother!

Son of a bitch! Mom took off after a one night stand with dad and then dumped me on his ass nine months later! This kid’s dad probably watched him take his first steps, taught him how to throw a ball, and all that other father son crap you see in the movies! I knew we were getting the shaft!

“Uh, are you okay?” Levi asked, concern written on his face. “You’re kind of spacing out.”

“Just thinking about my crappy mother….”

“So who were those guys?” Levi asked, ignoring her previous comment.

She picked up a small pebble and rolled it around her palm. “We’re honestly not sure. They’re just a group of mortals that seem to have a hate-on for the gods. They also have a witch with a crap ton of tattoos.” She paused and tossed the pebble aside. “I think we’ve killed her twice now and she still keeps coming back, like some kind of sexy Jason Voorhees.”

“You’re very weird Piper,” Levi said, raising one eyebrow critically. “Also you keeping saying gods, demigods, and mortals.” A strange look crossed his face and disappeared in an instant. “Who is your parent?” he asked, eyes narrowing.

Piper reclined back onto her arms and heaved a sigh. “Aphrodite, goddess of love and meddling.”
All color drained from the kid’s face as he scurried away from her. “Hey? What’s wrong? I promise I don’t have cooties!”

“Invader,” the boy hissed as he scurried to his feet.

Piper shot up to her feet to try and stop the boy. “Wait? What?”

“I’m not afraid of you!” he snarled, as he slowly backed away. “You may be bigger, but I know how to fight!”

“Woah! Calm down! Who said anything about fighting?” she said as calmly as possible, showing Levi both of her hands. “We saved you, remember?”

Levi backed further away, his gaze unblinking. “Yeah, like we haven’t heard that one before!” he then rushed forward, but Piper sidestepped to avoid the small kid.

Levi didn’t stop running and turn to try again as she expected, instead the son of Coyote continued to run and before Piper’s very eyes shrunk down onto all four as his body shifted into that of a black and grey furred coyote.

Oh that is so fucking cool!

She didn’t dare make a move until the kid-turned-coyote pup was out of sight.

“Did that kid just turn into a fucking dog?” Veronica asked, startling the daughter of Aphrodite.

“And now it’s time for some much deserved answers,” Reyna said as she grabbed the dangling mortal by his chin.

While Piper had been making sure the captured kid was alright, Reyna, Veronica, and Atlas had been disposing of the mortal van and tying up the knockout driver (her knuckles still hurt from the blow). They were in a small clearing, where Reyna had the mortal dangling from the branch of an ancient tree, his hands tied behind his back and his feet barely scraping the ground.

“I ain’t telling you freaks shit!” The driver growled, before spitting in Reyna’s face.

“We’ll see about that,” Reyna chuckled darkly before licking off some of the spit.

Holy shit Reyna! That’s fucking disgusting!

“Hmm, dick flavored spit,” the praetor shrugged as she wiped the rest of the bodily fluid from her face. “Don’t worry though, we have ways of making you talk.”

Piper couldn’t help but to snort at the ridiculously clichéd line. “Why don’t you say that with a German accent Fraulein Ramirez-Arellano?”

“Ignore her,” Reyna sighed, as she flipped Piper the bird. “She’s just here to observe. My friend’s Veronica and Atlas though are going to be my assistants.”
The titan hybrid walked forward with a sadistic grin and placed one now-human finger on the man’s cheek. They slowly slid their finger now his face, leaving angry red flesh in its wake as they absorbed the flesh into their own.

Piper rushed forward and smacked their hand from the guy’s face. “Nope! Nuh-uh! We are not torturing anybody!”

“Then how do you propose we get answers?” Veronica hissed as she rubbed her arm. “And may I remind you the only reason I’m like this is because these assholes did this to me!”

“Yeah Mclean!” Reyna agreed, glaring at her with the intensity only a battle hardened veteran possessed.

She didn’t waste time defending herself to the three would-be-torturers, and instead turned to the driver and mustered up a small amount of charm speak. “Hey asshole, who do you work for?”

“We are Avalon!” he hissed. “We are going to save the world from monsters like you and allow mankind to live without interference!”

“Oh huh. That sounds nice I guess.” she said, scratching he left ear. “But who are you? How does a group of mortals even know about us?”

“Our stories differ! Some of us have lost loved ones to monsters like you! Others have seen their relatives taken in by your kind and forced to breed more of you monsters! Recently the slaves we have freed have joined our cause!”

“Goddamnit Hylla…” she heard Reyna hiss.

“Okay, but what is your story?”

The man let out a joyless laugh. “My story? My life was freaking great before your kind got involved! Then it all went to shit when Ares took advantage of my mother! My father and mother fought constantly when they found out she was pregnant with the god of war’s child! Yet somehow it got worse when my monster half-brother was born! He always got into trouble, picking fights, bullying younger kids, and even torturing small animals! My dad eventually left my mother, but my mother wouldn’t let me go with him! Then around my seventeenth birthday I got to watch my mother get eaten alive by hellhounds! How’s that for a story?!”

Piper turned to look at the others and wasn’t surprised to see that they looked just as shocked as she felt.

*Ok, that might be justifiable rage… I mean… just… wow…*

They questioned him until the sun began to set, extracting whatever information they could, but the guy had a pretty low rank in Avalon and knew only the basics. When they were done with him, the loaded him into the back of Betty White and took him to the edge of Ennis, where they tied him to a road sign.

After that they drove in an awkward silence until midnight, when they pulled off the road and made camp in the thick woods, out of sight from the road.
She was awoke by Reyna shaking her.

“Piper! Piper! Wake up!” The praetor said, a huge grin on her face.

“What is it?” Piper moaned, sitting up in her sleeping bag.

“Look!” Reyna smiled, grabbing her by the chin and turning her head towards a small gap in the trees.

“What are you- oh!”

There standing in the tree line, was a large doe that glowed like the moon, and it was staring right at them.

“That’s a sign of Lady Artemis!” Reyna cried, yanking Piper out of her sleeping bag. The praetor then took off in a sprint towards the divine doe only for it to leap away into the woods. “I think it wants us to follow it!”

“I don’t think that’s a good idea Reyna!” Piper yelled, as she began to chase the Latina.

“It’s going to take us to the hunters, I can feel it! We can get Thalia and the rest to help us save New Rome!”

When she crossed the clearing boundary into the woods, she knew something was off. Reyna was no longer in sight and a thick mist obscured all but a few feet in front of her. She glanced over her shoulder and cursed when she saw that the clearing was no longer there.

“It’s the middle of the night, I’m in a spooky mist filled woods, I’m separated from my friends, and there was a supernatural creature prowling around us.” She sighed and looked up at the moon. “I really shouldn’t have mentioned Jason Voorhees earlier…”

There was a rustling to her left and she spun around to see the same glowing white Doe standing not
twenty feet away from her.

“Oh you are definitely on my shit list!” she mumbled, as she took off running towards the four-legged beast.

It gracefully bounded into the mist when she got close, but she continued her pursuit until she nearly crashed headfirst into a fallen tree.

“What the-“

There was another rustling behind her and when she spun around the doe was even closer.

“Okay Ms. Deer, why don’t you help me find Reyna and I’ll get you a nice apple. Hmm? Does that sound good?”

The deer made no indication that it heard her and instead bounded off into the mist.

She clenched her fists in frustration. “If I wasn’t a vegetarian, I would eat your ass!”

The game continued on like that for quite some time. Piper would chase the doe into the mist only for it to disappear and reappear in a completely different direction, but always a little closer than before.

“I got you now,” she smirked, the deer now just out of arm’s reach.

This time when she took a step forward the glowing creature only took one step back instead of running away.

“Come on girl, it’s fine. I won’t-“ She took a step forward and realized too late that she had walked into a trap.

Literally.

There was creak of ancient metal as the pressure pad beneath her foot was pushed down, and an instant later a set of metal teeth snapped up from the brush and tore into her flesh as the sheer force of the trap snapped her leg in two, while the doe watched impassively.

Instantly she was on the ground howling in pain as she desperately tried to free her leg from the ancient bear trap. As she tried to pry the trap off, multiple glowing does stepped out of the mist and surrounded her.

The last thing Piper saw before she passed out was he doe in front of her that had lured her into the trap stood up on its hind legs as its upper body shifted to that of a beautiful woman. A cruel smile gracing her lips.

Chapter End Notes

Oh crap! Piper is not walking away from that! (Ha!)

So a lot happened this chapter: The girl's have a magic feather helping them, Piper has begun to brush up on Native American legends, Reyna is starting to chill out a little bit, Veronica and Atlas are becoming friendlier, we got to see our first (named) demigod of the Nation, the girl's FINALLY got some answers, and then they get bamboozled by a
bunch of deer...

Piper is definitely going through some changes now because she knows deep down she needs to step up if they are going to make it to Camp. She's aware that meeting Napi and Kiptaaki is just the start to something greater and knows they must be prepared to face beings that she hasn't heard about since she was a small child.

Reyna is starting to realize that they can't just speed across the country like she did in the past. This trip is turning into their version of Odyssey no matter how much she wishes that wasn't the case. She's still motivated to save her people, but after all the encounters with Avalon she knows they got to play it safe now.

Atlas is slowly talking to Piper and Reyna more and more at the behest of Veronica. If they want to keep on living he needs to work with Piper and Reyna or Veronica will die. And he really doesn't want that. We'll check in with Atlas and Veronica again soon enough :)

Also that whole Child Services thing? That is 100% true. I've put it a lot of research into every aspect of Shattered and the shit that Native Americans have to deal with is terrible! Seriously the government will swoop down and take native kids from their homes for the smallest of reasons! I read a case of a young boy being taken from a middle class home a WEEK after his dad lost his job! Like WTF? There was no prior incidents of abuse or anything! Just Bam! taken! The court case that followed was a cluster, but thankfully they got their kid back. If you're against this sort of thing I suggest donating money to the Native American Rights Fund, or NARF. They fight this kind of thing.

I'm really excited for the next part of the girls' adventure! I want to tell you about it soooo much!

Hey! Did you like what you just read? Then leave a kudos! Thoughts, theories, criticism, etc? Leave a comment! Bookmarks and subscriptions also make my heart soar! Seriously, I love hearing from you guys! Your words mean the word to me!

Next chapter is Nico! It should be a pretty fun chapter! I don't want to spoil it though ;)

So until next time: stay safe, stay healthy, and keep a smile in your heart. You are an amazing person and you deserve the best in life :)}
Nico

Chapter Summary

Tonight:

Nico returns to school!

Jason eats some brownies!

Percy is a DJ!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Nico rested his head against the vibrating window of the old beat up truck with his knees tucked against his chest and his hoodie pulled over his hat covered head.

“Are you really that cold?” Jason laughed over the classic rock pouring out of the radio.

“Yeah,” he shrugged without looking at the blond.

While it was true that he was cold, he had more important things on his mind. The first and foremost was he was worried about Percy being left on his own while he and Jason went to school. Nico knew his father would be there and he knew he would do his best to take care of Percy, but he just couldn’t stop himself from worrying. With Percy practically bed ridden there wasn’t much for the son of Poseidon to do outside of his training other than to think.

*And being alone with your thoughts is often a terrible, horrifying thing.*

He knew deep down that Percy wouldn’t harm himself again, but he really didn’t want to go home to a depressed son of Poseidon. Not that he was sick or anything of Percy’s moods, after all he understood better than anyone what he was going through, it was just that seeing Percy happy made him happy.

*And it has always been that way, hasn’t it?*

The thought actually scared him a little. He was head over heels for the older teen, but he knew Percy didn’t feel for him as deeply as he did. Nico’s feelings for Percy had been resurrected and were stronger than ever now that they reciprocated, but Percy’s feelings for him were at best only a few short months old and most likely laced with uncertainty. He had heard Percy call out for Annabeth in his sleep and in truth it hurt, but he couldn’t fault him for that. He still dreamt about Will every night and it still hurt to think about him and he knew it always would.

He just wanted this to last with Percy for as long as possible.

Forever if he was being honest with himself.

*But if his eagerness is anything to go by maybe I don’t have to worry.*
Nico reached up and gently touched the crook of his neck that he was desperately trying to hide from the world.

_That bastard!_

That morning while Jason was out doing his morning chores, he and Percy took advantage of what was likely to be their only time alone together that day, and well, things got more intense than they (or at least he) had planned. What had started as a series of slow chaste kisses, turned into something primal. Percy had caught Nico’s bottom lip with his teeth and gently chewed on it before sucking on it, which drove him absolutely mad with want. He eagerly returned the favor and practically shoved his tongue down Percy’s throat, where for the briefest of moments they fought for dominance, but he readily let the older boy take the lead, and enjoyed the salty sweet taste of Percy Jackson.

Then in a burst of speed and power that he hadn’t thought Percy capable of in his condition, the older teen flipped the two of them over so that he was on the bed with Percy practically straddling his hips with a predatory gleam in his green eyes. Before he could ask what the son of Poseidon was doing, Percy bent down and began to trail a series of slow, passionate kisses from his jaw to his neck, which completely obliterated his ability to think, let alone speak. When he felt Percy bite down on his neck and start to suck on the sensitive skin, he thought he had died and went straight to the Isle of the Blessed.

He wasn’t sure how long it lasted, but when he finally came to his senses, Percy was holding a hand over his mouth while grinning like the Cheshire Cat. In his euphoria he didn’t notice how his neck was suddenly sore, instead he sat up and melted into Percy’s arms while silently thanking the gods that he was wearing loose fitting pants. Thankfully, Percy had the decency to point out his little possessive marking (_because that’s what it is_) and helped him choose clothing that would help him hide it (this was after Percy insisted he wear his hickey with pride).

“So are you happy to go back to school?” Jason asked, as they entered LaMoille, passing the only gas station for miles.

He shot Jason a dirty look and growled, “No.”

“Jason, why does the school look like the Iris cabin vomited all over the place?”

When Nico had walked into the tiny school he had been expecting the same drab wood paneling, the bright red lockers that occupied much of the main hall, the ancient white tile floor that looked to have not been cleaned since he was nine, and the few trophy cases with wins from as recent at 1970.

While all that was still present, it was all covered with streamers, tissue paper, and huge hand-made posters, the nearest of which proclaiming _One Night in Paris! April 30th!_

“Oh? Did I not mention prom is coming up?” Jason mused, readjusting his bookbag.

He noticed a rather large smudge on the blond’s glasses and yanked off the bronze frames and began to clean them with his hoodie. “What’s prom?”

Jason squinted at him (probably because he couldn’t see) and cocked his head to the side. “You
know, prom?"

“No. I don’t. Thus the question Grace,” he rolled his eyes and returned Jason’s glasses to their proper place.

Jason smiled as Nico adjusted his glasses. “Prom is like the biggest dance in high school.” The blond paused to wave at one of his mortal friends. “In the movies we watched it’s the dance where the guys rent tuxes and the girls wear the Cinderella puffy dresses.”

“Oh,” was all he said as he turned to look at the glitter covered Eifel tower shaped poster. The idea of a dance while the world as he knew it was crumbling was laughable, but at the same time a part of him that he couldn’t ignore was greatly intrigued by the idea. After all, his last (and first) dance he went to was where he first met Percy.

He scowled.

*Okay, things didn’t exactly end well then, but things have changed since then. For the better. Kind of…*

Plus, the thought of Percy in a tux was incredibly appealing.

“Are you going Jay?” he asked, looking over his shoulder to the son of Jupiter.

Jason frowned.

“Right, dumb question,” he said, giving Jason an apologetic smile.

*It’s a stupid idea anyway. Percy just got the bandages off his arms and is using a crutch to get around, dancing would be pretty hard for him. That and we’re still keeping this a secret.*

He adjusted his backpack and started towards his locker, but not without one more glance at the poster.

*Twenty dollars per ticket…*

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Nico was really grateful that with the exceptions of a few welcome-backs and good-to see-yous that for the most part people left him alone. Not that he wanted to be entirely antisocial, but he really didn’t feel like repeatedly lying about a car accident. Especially when he wasn’t sure what Jason had exactly told everyone.

*Seriously, how did Percy do it all those years? Leading a double life is exhausting! No wonder most of the Marvel heroes gave up on secret identities!*

---

He found that for some reason it was a lot harder to pay attention in class with Percy not there, which seemed rather paradoxical to him. When they were in class together he was always glancing over to the son of Poseidon to make sure he was paying attention and not just doodling in the margins or
worse, getting lost in his thoughts.

*Maybe it's because I had to pay attention for the both of us?*

Whatever the reason, pre-calculus was incredibly hard to focus on no matter what he tried and he felt a little guilty about it too considering that Mr. Obendorf was a really good instructor. The young bearded math teacher liked to use multiple types of examples to explain whatever concept they were discussing that day, that ranged from animated slideshows to setting up a toy car ramp and calculating where the car would land and deriving its speed and acceleration. When those kinds of examples were used even Percy managed to pay attention. Sadly though, for every activity there was a rather boring lecture that went with it.

And today was one of those lectures.

Everyone around him were in various zombie like states, those near the front of the room could pass for being alive and present while those near the back were toeing the line of consciousness. Even Obendorf was swaying slightly on his feet as he droned on about Eigen values and norms.

Eventually Nico gave up on trying to pay attention and let his ADHD take over. He wondered how his father was doing watching Percy, what they were doing, and if they were getting along. He knew he didn’t have to worry so much about them getting along though, as once the two discovered they shared a common taste in music the most intense argument they had gotten into was what album or song was better and what he should listen to first.

In a way it was actually scary how much they got along, but he supposed (and hoped) it was a good thing that his father and secret boyfriend liked each other.

*Boyfriend.*

Just thinking that word was enough to make him grin and blush like a lunatic (*Okay, let's slow it down now. We have an image to keep up.*). He and Percy had been together now for a little over a week, yet every morning he woke up thinking it had all been yet another dream. But every morning Percy would pull him down into his bed and kiss him. After Jason would leave for the day they would do their homework together, play *Mythomagic*, or just sit there and enjoy each other’s company. The evenings were a bit harder with his father up and Jason home, but Percy would take every opportunity that presented itself to kiss him or at least squeeze his hand reassuringly.

Night though, was something else entirely.

When he was sure Jason was asleep, Nico would carefully step over the sleeping blond and join Percy in his bed. It had originally started when Percy would wake up from one of his nightmares and Nico would climb into his bed to settle the son of Poseidon down, but after several nights Nico noticed that Percy (or himself for that matter) didn’t have nightmares after he joined him. Sure, he had to make sure he was out of Percy’s bed before Jason awoke, but those few scant hours together where hardly a word was said were absolutely amazing. Even if they didn’t get much uninterrupted sleep.

He tried to stifle a yawn, which somehow made him squeak.

*Well, I can die now…*

Instantly all eyes were on him, including those who had been asleep moments ago. The blonde annoyance that was Chelsea was trying to not laugh and one of Jason’s friends had spun around in his desk to look at him.
“Well,” chuckled Mr. Obendorf, “I think that’s my queue to stop lecturing and put some examples problems up on the board.”

The class groaned, some of his peers now glaring daggers at him.

Obendorf walked to the ancient chalkboard and began to scrawl out a matrix. “Nico, why don’t you find the Eigen value for us?”

“Yes sir.”

---

Nico was surprised to find that even Home Economics wasn’t as fun as normal. Which was strange because they were making brownies, which should have been a good time.

Well I think it’s just me, he thought as he looked around the room and saw that the five other students appeared to be having a good time as they worked through the simple recipe. Meanwhile he stood alone at the miniature kitchen that he and Percy usually shared, looking into the mixing bowl as if it was full of minotaur dung.

It wasn’t that he didn’t lie brownies, just without someone to talk or having to smack a hand away from the batter, the entire thing was tedious. It wasn’t even that his classmates were avoiding him either, as they would ask his opinion on something or telling him about things that had happened during his absence, but the best he could manage was one word responses.

Why am I like this?

Okay, he knew why. Fifty plus years locked away in a fantasy land, then several years on his own with hardly any lasting human contact, plus self-loathing did not add up to healthy social skills. Then there was the little issue of mortals trying to wipe him off the face of the earth, so he was more than a little leery of spending eight hours a day surrounded by them!

You’re being stupid and you know it. These people have nothing to do with Avalon and you know it. They’ve been nothing but kind to you and you keep pushing them away. Now we can either let this place be a repeat of Camp Half-Blood or you can man up di Angelo and start a conversation!

After he poured the batter into a small pan and slid it in the oven, he took a deep breath and steeled himself.

Think of it this way: if this goes well we can tell Percy and Jason!

He walked over to the small card table that sat in the corner of the room where the class waited while their food baked. “Soooo,” he began so eloquently, “what do you guys think of…prom?”

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He slammed the truck’s door shut with more force than he intended, startling Jason.
“Are you okay?” Jason asked, as he slowly pulled out of the parking space to get in convoy of departing vehicles. “Because you know I’m here to talk if you need to.”

“I’m fine,” he grumbled, fastening his seatbelt. “Just said something stupid.”

Nico had opened up a Pandora’s Box by asking about prom. While at first the conversation in Home Economics had been pleasant enough, as they filled him in on the little details such as the venue, prom premiere, and where one could acquire a tux, but apparently after class someone had mentioned he was interested in prom. So for the rest of the day he was bombarded with questions on if he was going, was he going to take anyone, and if so: who?

It had just been too much for him.

By the time he had joined Jason at lunch, he had wanted to do nothing more than to shadow travel back to the farm and burying himself in Percy’s arms. But Jason being the amazing friend he was, had taken him to Chelsea and Tate with his Mythomagic deck and stayed with him all lunch period. He was relieved (and surprised) that Chelsea didn’t pester him about prom and instead they only chatted about the game, how Percy was, and what he thought the next expansion set would be.

Maybe the girl wasn’t as bad as he made her out to be.

Maybe.

But that little reprieve had been enough for him to make it through the rest of the day.

“Were the brownies any good?” he asked Jason, as they finally made it out of the parking lot.

“Yup! I ate them all!” Jason laughed cheerfully. “I even licked the plate!”

He turned to face Jason, careful to leave his neck concealed. “You’re going to get fat if you keep eating like that Jason.”

“Nah, I’m going to join the track team, baseball team too,” the blond shrugged. “Football team too, the guys say I’d make a pretty decent quarterback. Oh! And the basketball team! So if anything I need to eat more!” Jason laughed.

“That sounds quite tiring. Are you even going to be able to stand at the end of the day?”

“They’re not at the same time Nico!” The blond laughed as he turned the ancient pickup into the gas station.

His first thought was that they needed to get gas, but the blond drove past the pumps. When Jason drove past the station itself and parked the truck in the secluded area behind it, he knew something was off. “Jason, why are we here?”

“Hand me my bag Nico,” the blond ordered, all good humor gone from his voice. “There’s something important I need to do and I’ve been putting it off for too long now.”

Nico nodded and did as he was told.

Jason took the bad and began to dig around in it before pulling out his Algebra textbook. “You see Harpocrates gave me more information than just that mortals were behind everything.” The son of Jupiter opened the book to a thick folder that had somehow been concealed within. “He told me that somehow all of this is my dad’s fault.” The blond stopped and mumbled something under his breath. “He said that Avalon, the cycle, the Fates, and even past demigods are all connected.”
the folder and pulled out an ancient photograph. “That old guy I was talking to when you found me, Merlin, his real name is apparently Jeremiah Aarons, and this was the only picture of him Harpocrates could find.”

The blond handed him the picture and he carefully examined it, noticing that the years had not been kind to the boy who would become their enemy. “Why didn’t you tell us this sooner?”

Jason sighed and rested his head on the steering wheel, all of his energy seemingly spent. “I wanted to Nico, I really did. But Harpocrates told me to not tell anyone about this, especially the gods, and well, given everything that happened-“

“I understand Jason,” he said cutting his friend off. He didn’t want Jason to have to think about what happened to him. “So did you find anything that could be helpful in there?” he asked, pointing to the folder on the blond’s lap.

Jason sat back up, his forehead bright red from resting against the wheel. “Nothing that I can see,” he said shaking his head. “Just names and lineages of demigods, some surprising and some left me wondering why nobody talks about them.”

“Like who?” Nico asked, as he grabbed the folder from Jason’s lap.

Jason reclined back into his seat and started the truck back up. “Well on the lighter side, President Andrew Jackson was a son of Athena.” Jason paused as he backed out of the parking spot. “As for the dark side, let’s just say Percy and I had a lot more siblings on the wrong side of World War Two than I expected,” Jason said, his voice trailing off at the end.

It caught his attention that Jason didn’t mention him. “What about me? Don’t try to shield me from something like that.”

“If I was trying to protect you I wouldn’t be risking my neck by giving you that folder,” the blond said, rolling his eyes. “But no, I didn’t see a single mention of children of Hades, or Pluto for that matter, in that entire thing. It hardly mentions any gods or goddesses outside of my dad, Hera, Apollo, Artemis, Poseidon, Ares, and Athena. So like-“

“A majority of the Olympians.” To say that the list of gods was suspicious to him was an understatement. With the exceptions of Poseidon and Hera, they are all Zeus’s children.

“I know I just kind of made a big show about this,” Jason said interrupting his thoughts. “But, I wouldn’t exactly put my faith in Harpocrates,” the blond chuckled. “Let me tell you about the yeti.”

The what?!

“What the hell is all this?” Nico asked, eyes wide at the training course his father had set up for him in the barn.

“I think Hell is actually going to be a pretty accurate description,” his father said, setting one hand on his shoulder and giving it a squeeze. “Wouldn’t you agree Perseus?”

Percy looked at him with a slightly sadistic gleam in his eye. “Oh yes! I think Neeks is going to love this!”
The barn had been emptied out of all the farm machinery, revealing just how vast the wooden structure really was. In place of the machinery there was now numerous bales of straw and hay that had been arranged and stacked into a type of obstacle course that vaguely reminded him of the one back at camp.

“This is the first step of your training my son!” Hades beamed, as he grabbed Percy’s wheelchair and set off towards a corner of the barn.

“What, do I have to fight off my allergies?” he asked as he jogged behind the surprisingly fast duo. “Because there is a pill for that now.”

“Funny,” his father droned. “And yes I am well aware of Claritin, I have to eat a handful a day just to breathe in this mortal body.” Hades parked Percy next to a record player and applied the wheelchair’s brakes. “No, the first step of your training is to increase your speed and stamina for shadow travel.” The god pointed to several cardboard targets that were hanging in the corner, to several on the floor, to one hanging from the ceiling, and then one at the other end of the barn, all of which had handholds in their centers and numbers painted in the corners.

“I seriously think you’re going to like this Neeks!” Percy beamed, that made his heart skip a beat.

“Yes,” Hades coughed. “Although this will be exhausting, I did try to design your training in such a way that you might find some enjoyment.”

Nico eyed the two of them suspiciously. Fun and training were mutually exclusive in his experience. “You still haven’t said what it is I’ll be doing.”

Hades laughed as he sat down in a lawn chair between Percy and a strange machine loaded with what appeared to be tennis balls. “You are going to shadow travel to each and every target.”

“Pfft, that’s-“

“Let me finish,” his father smiled, which unnerved greatly. The god grabbed a small remote that had been resting on the machine and pressed a single red button. Instantly a tennis ball was launched straight up in the air with enough force that it hit the barn’s tin roof before gravity took over. “You have to touch every target and return before the ball hits the ground.”

“That’s impossible!”

Percy and his father looked at each other and then at him with a dry look. “You can literally teleport anywhere using only shadows,” Percy said. “Hard? Most likely. Impossible? No.”

His father nodded in agreement. “Now how about you remove your… hoodie, and we get started?”

Percy stiffened up in his seat as he was sure all color drained from his face. “No, I’ll leave it on. It’s kind of cold.” To illustrate his point he crossed his arms and gave a false shiver.

His father’s eyes darted back and forth between the two of them in what had to be one of the most stressful moments of his life, before shrugging. “Alright, just memorize your path and tell me when you’re ready.”

“You forgot he most important thing though man,” Percy said, elbowing the god of the underworld. The raven haired teen then reached down to a milk crate that sat next to him and removed a record.
Hades smiled and nodded in approval. “Holy Diver, excellent choice Jackson.” His father then turned his attention back to him. “While you are training I have decided-” Percy elbowed him, which earned the son of Poseidon a pointed glare. “We have decided to expose you to the greatest music of the last sixty years, if not all time, so that your education is well rounded. Now after Perseus starts the album just say when you are ready.”

Why are the only people I love so weird?

He moved closer to the target that was marked with a giant number one and rolled his shoulders a bit and flexed his fingers to try and ready them for the amount of hanging he was going to have to do.

This is going to suck...

The speakers that his father had set up throughout the barn exploded to life from the first beat of the drums for what he would later learn was called Stand Up and Shout. He listened to the powerful beat for a few more seconds and felt more and more confident with each note.

If I can carry a giant statue of my cousin, a satyr, and Reyna from Greece to Long Island I can definitely zip across a barn!

“I’m ready,” he said, earning him a thumbs up and a goofy grin from Percy.

“And… go!” his father cried, hitting the button on the remote.

He didn’t even wait to hear if a ball launched, as he instantly stepped into the shadows to reappear six feet off the ground next to the first target. With one hand he grabbed the target’s handle and swung his feet against the cardboard while simultaneously opening the shadows once again. The second target was only a few feet away on the adjacent wall, but was even higher up than the first.

Suddenly, the straw makes a lot more sense.

By the time he got to the fifth target he felt a bit like Tarzan as he swung himself against each target. He also felt like he was going to have his arm tore off from all the sudden jerks it was experiencing.

“Fail!” his father called out over the music.

“What?!” Nico cried in disbelief as he turned to face his spectators. “That can’t be-“ but there was his father holding the bright green ball in one hand. He opened the shadows again and reappeared in front of the two. “I think five-out-of-ten isn’t bad for my first time!” he smiled, before dropping to the ground panting.

Percy cringed.

“Actually you only got four,” his father said, tossing the ball back into basket.

“What?”

“Well, to be fair you just disappeared into the shadows when it hit the ground,” Percy said, rubbing the back of his neck. “So I’d say that is like… four-and-a-half?”

“Don’t be a brownnoser Jackson,” he glared at Percy, but it felt good knowing that the son of Poseidon was in his corner. He pushed himself up off the dirty ground and turned back to the first target. “Well let’s try that again.”
After a much deserved hot shower, Nico returned to their room and promptly collapsed onto Percy’s bed. He didn’t care if Jason was in the room, or his father for that matter. He didn’t care that he still had a worksheet to finish for World History. He didn’t even care that he had slipped back into the same sweat drenched clothes he wore before taking the shower. All that he cared about was sleep.

“He’s going to be hurting tomorrow,” he heard Jason say as he buried his face into Percy’s pillow pet.

“I think he’s hurting now Jason,” Percy said as he felt the older boy drape a blanket over him.

He wanted to tell them to be quiet so Hypnos could take him, but the only thing that escaped his lips was a pathetic mewl.

*How can my arms hurt if I can’t feel them?*

“Here, I can put him in his bed,” he heard his father say, his voice almost a whisper.

He felt Percy’s hand rest on the small of his back. “No! It’s fine!”

*Smooth Perseus…*

He was sure that if he had the ability to rollover and open his eyes, he would see Jason and his father looking at Percy suspiciously.

“I mean, I’ll just take his bed when you leave. There’s no need to disturb him.” Nico was sure that Percy was giving his father a plastered on grin that would only make them more suspicious. “He needs all the rest he can get if he’s going to be doing that every night.”

He whimpered into the panda.

“Alright,” his father sighed. “Grace, please help Percy into Nico’s bed later.”

With that, the room quieted down. The only sounds being his father helping Jason and Percy with their homework in a hushed voice. The last thing he remembered before sleep took him, was wondering if the six prom tickets he had bought when he picked up Percy’s homework would be okay in his pocket.

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Chapter End Notes

What you doing with those tickets Neeks? And why do you have six? Are you an impulse shopper? And why are you trying to hide your neck… :)

You can’t have a high school without prom, it is in the fanfiction charter for Pete’s sake! I promise it will be fun :)

Nico is growing, as evident by him trying to chat with the other students of his home ec class. Yes, he got a little overwhelmed, but it’s a start and thankfully he had Jason there to help calm him down. While his situation at Camp Half-Blood did improve greatly
after BoO, it still wasn't as good as he wanted it to be. Outside of Will, Jason, Percy, and his sister he really didn't have to many friends and certainly they weren't close. Now Nico is recognizing that if he wants that he has been given a second chance and it is going to require him to step outside his comfort zone. Nico does have his anxieties and they still haunt him, but he's learning to ignore them. He knows that Jason, Percy (especially Percy), and his father will have his back and he wants to make them proud.

Jason giving him the folder is definitely going to be a game changer for our guys, and Nico noticed something important instantly that Jason more-or-less overlooked. There is definitely some fucked up shit in there and it is definitely world changing... We'll find more out as we go.

In case you were wondering, Hades parked all the farm equipment behind the barn much to Demeter's annoyance. The first step of Nico's training is building up his stamina and speed. By the time Hades is done with him Nico will never have to worry about fading into the shadows again (and he'll have a better appreciation of the arts). Once Nico beats that ball to the ground he'll start the next phase in his training, which will be amusing.

Next chapter will be Percy again, and it will take place the same day as this chapter and will have some father-son bonding, a trip, and even a little bit of smut (yeah this is going to have smut! yay smut!)

Hey did you like what you just read? Then leave a kudos! Thoughts, theories, "wait did you say smut?", etc? leave a comment! I love hearing from you guys! And judging by the amount of bookmarks, subs, comments, and kudos I think you all like this as well!

Thanks for reading! You are all wonderful people and I wish you well in all your endeavors!
He somehow fought back a chuckle as the son of Hades fled from their room in his oversized hoodie with his face as red as a tomato.

"Bye Nico! Have a good day at school!" He called out, which was responded with the sound of Nico stumbling down the stairs. He cringed at the thought of Nico hurting himself. “And be careful! I would really like you to come back in one piece!"

Once again there was no response, other than the sound of the kitchen door slamming shut. Not that he was expecting one, because he was pretty sure he just blew Nico’s mind. Sure, Nico had been a little upset about the mark he had left, but Nico’s eyes couldn’t hide just how turned on he was.

Yup, I did that, Percy thought with a smug smile as he reclined back into his bed, folding his newly unbandaged arms behind his head. Turning Nico into a drooling hot mess had to be his new favorite activity, and the way Nico would look at him only spurred him on to do it as many times a day as he could get away with!

Seriously! I never would have guessed that Nico liked to cuddle and is just so damn affectionate!

Percy felt bad, but he couldn’t help but compare Nico to Annabeth. The only real similarities the two shared were the both cared deeply for him (he didn’t want to say Nico loved him yet), they were both way more intelligent than him (even with him working his ass off now), and both had saved him more than he could count. Their differences were numerous, but there were a few that popped into his mind more than others. First of all, he found that Nico was definitely more patient with him than Annabeth when it came to helping him with his homework. Annabeth would try her best to explain it to him, but if he didn’t get it immediately she would call him a seaweed brain and move on. Nico though would spend as long as it took for him to not only solve the problem, but to make sure he gained an understanding of the problem itself and how that problem could be used to solve other problems. Nico had one worked with him on the same math problem for three hours and not once did the younger teen get upset with him.

And that really meant a lot to him. More than he thought it would.

Second, he determined that while Annabeth was more outgoing and approachable when it came to
people, Nico seemed to care more about people than he let on. Annabeth was definitely popular anywhere she went (because she was absolutely gorgeous) and would talk to anyone, but she would often forget they existed as soon as they left her field of vision. He knew it wasn’t that Annabeth didn’t care, it was just that she was often lost in her thoughts and kind of went on autopilot when talking to people, something that Piper had pointed out too. Nico though could remember the names and faces of everyone he ever talked to as well as what they talked about. One day while they were in bed Nico had wondered aloud if Steve’s mom had given birth yet, to which he responded: who the Hades is Steve? Apparently they went to school with a Steve, who was in three of their classes, and he was due to be a big brother any day now. Nico had probably only spoken to the guy once, but yet he was concerned about the guy’s family.

Third (and most importantly of all), was how Annabeth and Nico differed when it came to intimacy. With Annabeth she always had to take the lead, telling him how and where to kiss or touch her. The communication and direction was nice, and he did everything she told him because he loved her, but sometimes he just wanted to let loose and just show her how much he really cared. Not that he would ever do anything without her consent, but he always thought that certain things should be spontaneous and natural, rather than planned out in advance.

(It may have also irked him a bit that the farthest he ever got with Annabeth was a little over the shirt groping. Especially when he learned that Leo and Calypso had only been together for like a month and the little elf had lost his virginity…)

Nico though was all about spontaneity, and to Percy’s delight, loved it when Percy took the lead. There was just something so liberating and exciting about making the son of Hades moan in want for him to touch him, the rush he got whenever Nico would claw at his shirt trying to pull him back whenever he broke away to catch his breath, and that sexy satisfied smile Nico had when they were finished.

Gods, Nico drove him mad with want. And a little over a week of intense make out sessions combined with the inability to use his hands had left him very, very frustrated.

“But that’s going to end now,” he smirked as he rolled onto his side and snaked one hand down between the small gap between the wall and his bed. “Where is it,” he mumbled as he felt around for his hidden treasure. “Ah there it is!” he cried as his fingers brushed against the pristine tube sock.

It took him far longer to grab it than it should have, but now with his bandages removed he now knew the full extent of nerve damage. He struggled to make a fist with either hand, but his right hand was worse, with its little finger practically unresponsive. Sometimes they would start to shake involuntarily, which scared him a little, but Nico and Hades had assured him that they would improve over time.

When he finally pulled the sock up, he grinned with satisfaction. He had been eagerly waiting for an opportunity like this to present itself for quite some time, and once he and Nico began to fool around he had several new fantasies he wanted to try out.

After all, he wouldn’t date Nico if he wasn’t attracted to him. So after waking up from his reunion with Annabeth, he started to really notice Nico. The son of Hades had a really interesting face that was somehow both cute and handsome at the same time, Nico’s small frame gave off a certain feminine aura that most people wouldn’t notice (he would know), and from the peek he stole the night they went swimming; Nico had a nice hairless body.

A nice ass too!

Unable to restrain himself any more, he rolled onto his back and tugged his shorts and boxers down.
The little bit of friction sent a jolt of pleasure through his already hard member that made him shudder. It had been so long since his last release that he knew his body was just as eager as he was, but yet he wanted to make it last.

Percy closed his eyes and grabbed himself with one hand, trailing his thumb down the tender, flushed head. As he started to slowly stroke himself, he imagined that Annabeth and Nico were there with him; Annabeth in a white bikini that he knew she would never wear, and Nico in just a pair of black swim trunks. They were on their knees and looking at him with half lidded eyes and each had one hand wrapped around him, teasing him with a few slow strokes.

An animalistic growl escaped his throat at the vivid imagery.

Yes, yes, oh fuck!

Annabeth and Nico leaned forward in unison and he could have sworn he felt their hot breath against his shaft. His breath quickened and he gulped for air as he increased his speed. He could already feel the familiar, but always amazing, sensation build up deep in the depths of his stomach.

His fantasy unexpectedly went off-script when Annabeth disappeared leaving him alone with Nico, the small teen looking up at him with a predatory gleam in his eye that almost made Percy lose it then and there. The Italian then bobbed his head down and wrapped his lips around Percy’s throbbing head.

Oh gods please!

Fantasy Nico then swallowed the entirety of his length while Percy frantically pumped harder. Nico was on his knees with his bare feet kicking in the air behind him as he began to bob his head back and forth. The image excited Percy painfully so, and the realization that his fantasy could happen propelled him to levels of excitement he never thought possible.

A moan escaped him that seemed to echo in the empty bedroom, and he had to bite his lip to stop himself from doing it again.

He slowed his hand to best match Nico’s pace and he imagined that the slick precum that had left the tip and made its way down was the warm inside of the Italian’s amazing mouth. The extra moisture made the friction from his hand build, and another moan escaped.

The Nico in his mind’s eye stopped for a moment and looked up at him with his deep, dark eyes; with a glimmer of mischief to them. At that look, Percy fell all the way onto his back and he lost all control as he pumped at a furious pace.

So close! Just let me-

Then Nico’s tongue darted out from his mouth and flicked his head.

“Niiic-“ he gasped, as his toes curled and body clenched as months’ worth of pent up desire erupted from him. His hips bucked forward and ropes of thick, white liquid were released, some of which landed on his chest.

He lied there for a time and panted heavily as he tried to catch his breath, his body limp. He had been expecting an amazing release given how long it had been since his last, but he hadn’t been expecting that. He hadn’t been overwhelmed and lost control like that since he was thirteen when he first discovered the solitary activity (he had to wash his sheets before his mom came home, but unfortunately she walked in just as he was putting the freshly dried sheets back on, which ended with him receiving the first of many talks).
When Percy’s head stopped spinning and he wasn’t gasping for breath like a fish out of water, he slowly sat up and carefully peeled off the cum covered shirt. Since he couldn’t wash his own clothes, and Nico was their defacto housekeeper, he balled the shirt up and tossed it under his bed. When he regained the ability to walk without assistance he would have to sneak off some time and wash it.

But it’s okay for now.

He returned the unused tube sock to its secret hiding place and yawned, suddenly feeling quite spent.

I think a nap is called for.

It certainly wasn’t the most awkward car ride Percy had ever taken, but it ranked pretty high on his list.

Sitting next to the god of the underworld, who for some reason was covered in bits and pieces of hay and straw, while he just sat there in silence holding his crutches so they didn’t bounce around.

Okay, so, maybe the awkwardness was entirely on him. He could admit that. All Hades had did was wake him up and told him to get dressed to go into Princeton, but waking up to see his boyfriend’s dad after jacking off to the thought of said boyfriend deep throating him was not ideal.

At all.

“Soooo,” he drawled to break the silence. “You never did say why we’re going shopping in the middle of the day. Wouldn’t it be better to wait for Nico and Jason to get home?”

Hades turned to him, and he couldn’t help but notice the red markings trailing down the man’s neck, one of the more subtle indications that Persephone had been with him last night. “I found a grocery list Nico wrote and I need to acquire a few things so Nico can begin his training.”

He perked up at the mention of Nico’s training. “What will he be doing? Making dead bugs dance? Shadow traveling only one arm to open the fridge? Digging foundations with his powers?”

“Actually you’ll be the one digging ditches when you get back on your feet,” Hades chuckled, as he sped the car up to pass a large tractor. “Like you, Nico needs to work on the basics and build up his strength. I cleared out the main barn last night and started to build an obstacle course for the two of you, but until you are ready, Nico will be practicing his shadow travel.”

“Isn’t he pretty good at that already?” he asked, confused. “I mean, Neeks can pretty much go anywhere he wants to.”

Hades shook his head. “He is exceptional, a prodigy even, but you’ve seen what happens to him when he over does it.” Percy thought he saw the briefest flash of fear in the god’s eyes, but it was came and went so fast he wasn’t sure. “He needs to build up his tolerance and endurance, as well as speed. So starting tonight, he’s going to do a series of short jumps against the clock.”

He remembered Nico laying across from him after their ill-fated trip to New Rome and gulped. “He’s
going to be okay though, right? No more fading from existence right?"

“That’s what we’re trying to prevent,” Hades smiled fondly. “But he’s going to need our help.”

“Anything for Nico,” he said, the words leaving his mouth on reflex.

Hades looked at him critically as if he was examining every atom in Percy’s body. The god then shrunk into his seat with a sigh. “Your fatal flaw is showing, but it is appreciated. This training Nico is going to do is going to leave him exhausted. He’s going to require more sleep and is going to have to eat better for this to work. For reasons that are apparent to the both of us, Nico pretty much does whatever you ask of him. So, and I can’t believe I’m asking this, I need you to be Nico’s, let’s say, conscience. You need to get him to eat more, exercise, and stay in bed longer. Do you think you can do that?”

The juvenile portion of his mind wanted to crack a joke about Nico staying in bed, but the way the man was looking at him so sincerely, he decided against it. “I can do that sir,” he nodded.

Hades huffed. “Wow, I got called “sir” by the great Perseus Jackson, what an honor.” The god then turned with a small smile and said, “Thanks. I can’t begin to tell you how much your willingness to help my son means to me.”

Seeing Hades, the lord of the underworld, god of the dead, eldest of the big three, driving a mobility scooter of Walmart was easily, easily one of the most hilarious and surreal things he had ever seen in his life.

Nico’s dad parked the electric scooter close to the open passenger door and stood up with a groan. “Fair warning; there is no padding left in the cushion and one of the wheels is damaged so it bounces.”

“Thanks,” he sighed, pushing himself up out of the car. While he could move his right leg, putting any amount of weight on it hurt worse than getting slapped by a giant, so he clung to the door frame as he balanced on his one good leg.

Before he could even attempt to turn himself around to hop to the sweat drenched machine, Hades wrapped one arm around him. “Come on, I got you.” The god then helped him onto the machine and helped him prop his leg up on a pillow. “You good?”

“Yup!” he cried as he gave the horn an experimental honk. “I’ve always wanted to ride on one of these!”

Hades chuckled darkly as the two of them began the long walk to the store’s entrance. “If you saw the woman who rode that before you, you’d never want to touch it.”

Percy imagined some monstrous hybrid composed of Echidna, Medusa, and the muumuu clad librarian, Mrs. Deal, and shuddered. “Couldn’t just let me have one moment of happiness, could you?”

“Sorry Jackson, I may be a god, but even I follow the rules of parenting.”
And that’s where Nico gets his weird sense of humor…

Come on! Just one drop!

Percy was staring at a leaking bottle of water with such intensity that if anyone would have saw him, they would have immediately went the opposite direction. He was trying to do a little impromptu training while Hades was off getting himself some more “casual attire” as he had put it, but so far the only progress Percy had made was giving himself a migraine and an upset stomach.

“This is hopeless,” he groaned as he sank back into the scooter’s seat and closed his eyes.

It amazed and frustrated him to no end that he could create tidal waves, cause hurricanes, make pseudo-ice skates, and fire off torrents of water strong enough to level a street, but yet he couldn’t control the smallest amount of water.

It just made no sense to him! He thought that surely if he could do the big stuff the little stuff that Hades proposed should have been ridiculously simple.

But yet here he was, day after day, night after night, struggling to get a single drop of water to rise out of a glass. The best he had managed so far was getting one drop from one glass to the other, but he had lost control of it immediately and he had wanted to scream in frustration when the colored water mixed together.

He opened his eyes and sat forward, ready to try again. No matter how frustrating this was he knew that it was important for him and Nico to be ready for their next encounter with the mortals. He held out one hand over the leaking bottle; he knew his abilities were purely mental, but sometimes it seemed to help if he moved his body to what he was attempting to do. He felt the familiar pull in his gut as a small tendril of water slowly grew from the puddle like a blade of grass. When it got about three inches long, he focused on the tip and severed his hold over the rest of the water, and to his delight the small drop of water continued to float in the air.

“What the Hades are you doing!” a shrill voice cried from behind him.

The sudden cry was enough for him to lose focus, the drop raining down to rejoin the puddle. He looked over his shoulder to see that the person responsible for his latest failure was none other than his dear old gorgon friend, Euryale. “Oh, hey.”

The gorgon stopped in her tracks. “You’re talking again?”

“Yeah. Nico wanted me too,” He shrugged as he spun the mobility scooter around to face her.

It was still a little strange to see the two gorgon sisters on a regular basis and not have them try to kill him or vice versa. But Euryale and Stheno were seemingly good on their word, they were just trying to survive and look for their sister. He wouldn’t consider them his friends really, but he also wouldn’t consider them enemies either.

Funny how life works out?
“Nico?” Euryale asked, her face twisted in an even more unpleasant expression than usual. “He’s the short son of Hades that mothers you and the son of Jupiter? Kind of grumpy? Held a blade to my throat?”

“He doesn’t mother me!” Percy protested. He drove the scooter so that he was next to her and pointed at her with one finger. “If anything I mother him!”

“Really?” the gorgon deadpanned, each snake in her hair matching her expression. “Wasn’t he the one who let you carry around a stuffed animal and get anything you wanted?”

“Yeah, but-“

“Didn’t he also stop you so he could zip your coat up for you?”

“It was cold-“

“He literally made you blow your nose!” The gorgon laughed, her hair hissing with her. “Into his sleeve no less!”

“Okay fine! He mothers me a bit! But he does that for Jason too!” he huffed, backing away from her, the scooters backup alarm beeping.

The gorgon clearly wasn’t buying it and one of the larger snakes rolled its eyes. “Sure he does.” The gorgon then picked up the leaking water bottle and hid it behind another package. “So how long have you liked him?”

“WHAT?” he cried, accidentally crashing his scooter into one of the shelves. “I don’t- he’s- I’m,” he sputtered. He gave up and slouched down, glaring at the gorgon from the corner of his eyes. “How did you know?”

Euryale gave the gorgon equivalent of a smile, her tusks distorting her lips. “When you’ve been around as long as I have, you notice these things.” She shrugged. “That and you three demigods are the only source of entertainment in this rural Tartarus…”

“Am I really that obvious?” It wasn’t that he didn’t want Hades to find out, as that was inevitable, but he wanted him to only know when they were ready to tell him. That and he didn’t want to ruin his relationship with the god. Hades was kind of cool in a dorky way.

“I wouldn’t worry about it. Now walk with me, we can continue to talk as long as I pretend to help you. My manager is a real pain.”

“So you two are together now,” the gorgon laughed as she tossed a handful of Cheetos into her mouth, then one to him.

He caught the orange corn puff with his mouth and swallowed it whole. “Yup! Uh, just don’t tell anyone yet. Kind of a secret at the moment.”
They were in the electronics section next to the numerous flat screen televisions that were mounted to the back wall. As they had left the grocery section of the massive store, Euryale had snagged two bags of chips for them, claiming they were defective. Now they were watching several shows at once while eating salty and cheesy snacks.

“So you tell me? Who tried to kill you last year?”

“Eh, do you honestly care?” he deflected, as he took another handful of chips from the bag in the scooter’s basket.

“Good point.” She held up a Cheeto and he watched in a mix of awe and horror as her serpentine hair fought amongst each other for the corn puff. When the fighting stopped, the largest snake the victor, she held up her taloned hand and allowed for the snakes to lick her fingers clean of cheese dust. “So have you two gone on a date yet?”

“Oh…” he wanted to say yes, as he considered the day he had first kissed Nico to be a date, but technically that had happened before they officially got together. After that though he had been pretty beat up and confined to his bed. “No,” he sighed. “I’m a crappy boyfriend! But where the Hades does someone even go for a date around here? Plus it’s not like I can drive us anywhere in this condition!”

“Shh! Not so loud!” the gorgon hissed. She crumpled up the empty Cheetos bag and tossed it behind one of the televisions. “A date doesn’t mean you have to go anywhere you idiot! Just show him that you care! Buy or make him something! Tell him how you feel! That kind of mushy stuff!”

“That’s actually-“

He was cut off by every single screen cutting to black and immediately flashing to red with “BREAKING NEWS” in big white letters. The screen then cut to a pretty blonde reporter with a picture of Olympus next to her.

“Terrible news out of New York City, as reports are coming in of numerous lightning strikes damaging the skyline,” the reporter said, her voice devoid of all emotion.

“Oh that isn’t good…”

The screen switched to shots of the Chrysler Building, Rockefeller Center, the Woolworth Building, and other buildings he had grown up around, all of them with severe damage to their top floors and black smoke billowing into the sky.

“While this is currently being ruled a natural disaster, many people on the street are claiming the lightning originated from the mysterious structure that is floating above the Empire State Building. As you may recall it first appeared.”

“So I take it you haven’t made much progress on saving Olympus?” Euryale asked, her snakes glaring at him.

“Well, we know who’s behind everything now,” he said, not taking his eyes off of the chaos before him. “But, yeah, not much progress.”

And Zeus is pissed.
“We got trouble!” Percy cried when he finally found Hades.

“Tell me about it,” the god rolled his eyes as he leaned against a cart full to the brim with dark clothing, poster board, arts supplies, and what appeared to be a record player. Next to him stood Stheno, the shorter pudgier gorgon sister, who was way into her job. “Why didn’t you warn me about her?”

“Oh don’t be that way!” Stheno laughed in a way that only people in retail can when dealing with a hostile customer. “Just think of all the savings you’ll get when you sign up for a Walmart credit card! Plus it is a fine way to build up your credit score!”

Nico’s dad gave her a cold look that could have frozen Niagara Falls. “I am the god of wealth! All of my Aliases have perfect credit! If anything that little blue piece of plastic would damage it!”

“That’s great Hades, truly it is,” he cut in, “and I really appreciate you supporting us these last few months, but your asshole brother is hurling thunderbolts at New York now!”

That got the gorgon and god’s attention. Stheno’s arms dropped to her sides while Hades facepalmed.

“That idiot!” Hades growled. “He never learns!”

Now Percy was confused. “What do you mean he never learns?”

*Granted, Zeus repeats the mistake of repeatedly having affairs.*

Hades’s grip tightened on his cart’s handle. “Whenever things don’t go his way or he gets afraid, my bouncing baby brother decides to shoot lightning at his problems with that accursed master bolt of his! Gaea is unhappy about her children being locked up? Zap! Humanity is growing and might someday be a threat? Zap plus a flood! His hooker overdosed and Hera is walking into the palace? Zap!”

“Wait, what was that last one?”

“Never mind that!” snapped the god. “This just means he’s wasting whatever energy is left on Olympus!”

“Wait, shouldn’t they all be, you know, mortal-ish like you and Demeter?”

Hades shook his head and bit his lip (something he had seen Nico do a lot, Percy realized). “This is purely speculation on my part, but since Olympus is the wellspring of our strength it is highly possible it is acting as a protective bubble of sorts. While the weapon that rendered Demeter and I next to helpless is peeling away the Mist and cutting off access to and from Olympus, Olympus itself could be somewhat canceling out the worst of the effects.”

Percy supposed that made sense. He really didn’t get how any of this magic and now technology stuff worked, but he could grasp the idea of a bubble under the water; the pressure from the gas within equal to the pressure of the water. *But if the pressure changes one way or another… Pop!* And he was pretty sure that if the Olympus bubble popped it wouldn’t end well for anyone. “And with Zeus using up that power, that can’t be good…. …”
“The gods will get weaker, innocent people will get hurt, and our enemies will only grow in number and conviction.” The god sank against the cart, and looked as if he had aged ten years. Before then Percy hadn’t realized just how much pressure the god was under and he was positive he still didn’t know the half of it. Hades was trying to find a way to save their dysfunctional family, cope with the loss of his godhood, trying to train him and Nico, and all the while taking care of the three of them and still trying to make sure they had a normal life.

“So what can we do? Is there any way to get a message to Olympus? Something we overlooked?” While he didn’t have many friends outside of the camps, he did have a few at Goode and despite whatever they thought of him now, he wanted them to be safe. If he had to ride the mobility scooter all the way to Olympus he would if it meant saving innocent lives.

Hades shook his head, before glaring at Stheno who was trying to shove a credit card application in his hand. “The closest Persephone can get to Olympus is the middle of Pennsylvania, any magical or divine object disintegrates the second the mortal weapon touches it, and the last time I checked no one on Olympus had an email.” He swatted the gorgon’s hand away. “Or at least they wouldn’t give me their information,” Hades grumbled.

“So what can we do?”

“We get dinner.”

“What?”

“Should I get a package of breasts or just get a whole chicken?” Hades mused, holding up two plastic wrapped packages of chicken for Percy to examine.

“Maybe you didn’t hear me!” Percy cried once more. “Zeus, your brother, is zapping buildings in my home town like- like something that zaps!”

He had followed Hades around the grocery department and reiterated over and over about the godly attack on New York, but the only time the god would acknowledge him was when he wanted to know his preference on certain foods.

What is with this guy?!

“The breasts are a bit pricier, but you get more meat and everyone likes the light meat…."

“Zeus! Lightning! City on fire!” he cried, driving his scooter in wide circles around the stationary god.

Hades dropped both packages of meat back into the cooler and rubbed his temples. “Perseus I’ve explained this to you already,” the god said through clenched teeth. “The only thing we can do is continue to recover and enhance our collective strength.” The god then slapped Percy’s hand off the throttle, halting the scooter. “Unless of course you plan on driving across country on a Walmart mobility scooter…”

“Fine!” he groaned. We’ll just add this on the pile of soul crushing guilt!
“Good,” Hades nodded. “Now seriously; what kind of chicken should we get?”

Percy was about to answer, when he remembered a certain story Nico had told him involving the god before him and an uncooked chicken. “You sure you want to make chicken?” he grinned. “I heard the last time you attempted to involved a butcher’s knife and a whole lot of profanity.”

Unexpectedly Hades let out a short laugh. “Yes I am quite aware Nico told you about that moment from his childhood. But do you honestly think I lacked the ability to destroy a reanimated chicken with just a thought?”

Percy furrowed his brow. “Well, Nico said-“

“Nico was like five at the time,” the god said wistfully. “Look, what I’m about to tell you stays between us, got it?”

“I guess?” The prospect of learning more about Nico and Hades was exciting.

“I imagine Nico said his mother was a bit sick that day correct?”

He nodded, not sure where the god was going.

“Maria was far more ill than he knows, which I plan to keep that way,” the god glared at him.

“While it wasn’t exactly life threatening it could have turned that way. So, I did my best to keep Bianca and Nico entertained that day to distract them from the state of their mother. While most of the day was easy, a tea party here, a toy soldier war there, by the evening they wanted to see their mother.” The god paused and tossed both packages of chicken into the cart, clearly having reached a decision. “I believe no child should have to see their parent’s at their lowest Perseus, so I set up a little bit of theatre for them.” The god chuckled and shook his head with a small grin. “It was all they could talk about for days.”

“Nico said Maria made you sleep on the couch though after that…”

Hades laughed and spun the filled to the brim shopping cart around. “Well, I had to make it convincing. Now, let’s leave this horrible place. We have to start dinner and finish the training course before Nico and Jason return home.”

As the god walked away Percy once again realized just how wrong he had been about the god in the past. He wondered if all gods cared for their children as much as Hades did, or if Hades was the exception. Was Hades like that because he had been isolated from most of the gods for so long? Did it have something to do with him being surrounded by mortals all the time? Or was he just a generally nice guy?

His thoughts then turned to Poseidon, who was currently hiding under the sea. If the gods really were like Hades, then why wasn’t Poseidon with them now? Why hadn’t Poseidon even offered them a place to stay after everything that had happened? Surely in a crisis he could have convinced, if not just ordered the other sea gods to let them stay?

This is all so frustrating!

“Jackson get a move on!”

“Coming!”
“Why is there twenty-two checkouts if only two of them are open?” Hades said between clenched teeth.

Percy laughed. “Jason asked the same thing.”

They were currently fifth in line, standing in front of an elderly woman with curlers in her hair and right behind a stick-thin man with what had to be the greasiest ponytail in recorded history. To make matters even worse, the register was manned by Stheno. Worse yet, she had to talk to every single customer.

And she talked a lot.

“And do you have your weapon with you?” the god growled, glaring at the gorgon with an unparalleled intensity. “Because I might need to borrow it, BECAUSE SOMEONE HAS TO TALK!”

There’s that godly impatience I know and love!

“Hades, you know she gives us a discount right?”

“I’m the god of wealth, I don’t need a discount! What I need is for someone to SPEED IT UP!”

By then everyone around was glaring at them and he gave them his best I’m-not-with-this-guy smile. How do I get out of this? Percy wracked his brain for some topic but came up blank. Then he saw his salvation, the little aisle they frequented that had the comic bundles and trading cards. “I’m going to go check out the Mythomagic stuff,” he said, driving off before Hades could say anything.

“I see Hades has the patience of a middle-aged woman,” Euryale laughed as she leaned against the end cap.

“Do you ever do any real work?” he laughed as he examined two Mythomagic figuring booster boxes. He was pretty sure they were the new ones Nico and Chelsea had been talking about during the blondes surprise visit (he still felt guilty about bringing up Croatia) and judging by the box’s artwork the new figures looked pretty cool.

The gorgon shrugged. “I do just enough to not get fired. Granted, that’s just me walking around pretending to clean up or assist customers.”

Nico would really like these, he thought, but he had exactly zero money and asking Hades to let him buy something for Nico was both embarrassing and a major red flag for their relationship. Gods this sucks! With Annabeth he would save up his allowance and do odd jobs for his neighbors to fund their dates, but now with zero allowance (don’t think why! Don’t think why!) and no neighbors or job opportunities for miles, he couldn’t get anything or take Nico anywhere.

“What’s wrong kid?” Euryale asked, when she realized he wasn’t really paying attention to her.

“Being poor sucks,” he huffed.
“He says to the three-thousand year old gorgon making minimum wage…”

He set the two boxes in the scooter’s basket and spun it around to face the middle gorgon sister. “Well before Zeus so rudely interrupted us, you were saying I could show you-know-who about how much I appreciate them by getting them gifts and stuff. The problem is I have no money either!”

The gorgon raised one scaly eyebrow and looked at the Mythomagic boxes in his basket. “Is that what you want to get him?”

“Well… yeah?”

“Well they look defective to me. I better void them out and dispose of them.” The gorgon then walked over to a nearby bin containing boxes of assorted candies and pulled out several boxes. “These too!” she cried out, her serpents snickering. She then walked back and deposited the candy in his basket.

“Why are you doing this?” he asked, still not believing the gorgon’s generosity. “I killed you!”

Euryale walked over to the vacant register and hit a few buttons with her claws. “Don’t think for a second I’m doing this for you,” she hissed.

“Then why?” he asked, as he set Nico’s gifts onto the conveyer. “This isn’t going to be one of those things where I owe you my life or first born child, is it?”

“No, I just want to screw this place over as much as I can,” she said, glaring at everything around her. “Gods, one of these days I’m going to burn this place to the ground…”

He started to laugh, but stopped immediately when he saw just how serious she was, all of her snakes standing on end glaring daggers at him. “Err, just make sure no one is in here when you do.”

“I can’t guarantee that,” she said, while bagging his items. When she handed him his bag though, she briefly paused and all of her snakes flicked their tongues.

“Is something wrong?”

A look of disgust passed over her face and then a sly smile took its place. “You may want to shower more often. You smell of sex.”

He took the bag and drove off as fast as the little scooter could go, his face redder than a tomato.

As he had predicted, Jason had passed out without remembering he was supposed to help him to Nico’s bed. Which was just fine by him, as if Hades found Nico and him curled up together, he could just blame the son of Jupiter. He knew it was a dick move, but he was still a little upset about their fight in the field.

Sucks to be you bro!

Percy reached down and pulled the covers up over himself and his thoroughly exhausted boyfriend and kissed his temple before settling in beside the sleeping Italian.

He’s pretty damn cute when he’s like this.
He hadn’t had a chance to give Nico the small gifts Euryale had helped him attain, but he figured 
Nico would appreciate them when he woke up in the morning.

Neither he, nor Hades had told Nico about Zeus’s wrath as they had agreed it would be better to have 
Nico focus on his first day of training. And he was glad that they didn’t, because seeing Nico zoom 
around through the shadows, dangling from the targets they had installed for him with a determined 
look on his face. He had been so proud of Nico, as by the time they had finished training (he still had 
to do the stupid water thing while he watched) Nico had been able to reach target eight before the 
tennis ball hit the ground.

_You’re stronger than you know Nico_, he thought as he kissed the top of sleeping boy’s head.

He had also been thrilled to hear Nico humming Holy Diver as the three of them had headed back 
to the house for a late dinner. He had done what Hades asked of him and made sure Nico ate more 
than his usual two crumbs and a grape (he may have told Nico that he made dinner and strongly 
hinted that he would be upset with Nico if he didn’t eat a lot).

_{It was a low thing to do, but it’s for his own good.}_

Nico groaned in his sleep and rolled into his arms, nuzzling his head against Percy’s chest.

“Good night Neeks,” he smiled before closing his eyes.

Chapter End Notes

Ok, so this isn't going to turn into a super Smitty fic, but considering we are dealing with 
teenagers it will be a thing. Like maybe 2 to 3 more times.

Percy isn’t Lancelot, he’s more-or-less a normal teenage boy with urges like most 
everyone else. He’s also going through a lot of rapid changes recently, and he could 
really use the release. His little solo act was also a way to show that he is indeed 
physically attracted to Nico as well as emotionally. If you had any problems with this let 
me know :)

Okay on to the rest of the chapter.

Hades and Percy continuing to bond is always a sweet thing to write. They both care so 
deeply about Nico, which is bringing them together. We also saw that they can still butt 
heads, what with Percy wanting to go save New York and Hades telling him to settle 
down.

Hades's side of the undead chicken story was also developed alongside Nico's side of 
the story. Did you really think that Hades couldn't snap his fingers and have a five star 
meal ready for his precious children? It was all an act (with the exception of him 
swearing in front of the kids, he really did get in trouble for that). Now as for him not 
just healing Maria, it's kind of due to him not really being able to heal other anything 
other than magical ailments. (And the other gods kind of shun him so he couldn't just 
call for help.)

Percy is of course is caught off guard by this and gains more respect for the god, and he 
once again finds himself thinking about the father figures in his life.
It's kind of cute really :)

Yes the Gorgons are comic relief with stheno being that one employee who loves her job waaaay to much and euryale just daring management to fire her (she would eat them). It was also a way to have Percy get a gift for Nico that wasn't him asking Hades.

Oh and major plot point! Zeus is tired of being trapped and has decided to lay waste to everything in sight. No, he doesn't know that mortals are responsible, that's just how he would react. And if that isn't an accurate characterization....

It's funny how that just seemingly came out of the blue right? But that's how life is. There are no warnings for tragedy, it just happens... and I'm trying to show that in this fic. Yes, we know there is something brewing, but everything else has just happened.

Annabeth was kidnapped on what should have been a normal day of school. Percy came home and found his parents dead by the hands of a man he thought dead. Jason was sexually assaulted on a normal mission. Nico was tending to Percy when camp was wiped out. All of that happened with no warning to them. 
So remember even though things have been kind of soft and fluffy, things can change instantly....

Speaking of horrible things, next chapter is Merlin! We get to check in on Avalon's leader and his main team and see how things are progressing for them. (Hint: nothing good for either of our trios, plus other familiar faces)

Hey did you like what you just read? Then leave a kudos, subscribe, and bookmark!

Thoughts, theories, feedback, etc? Then leave a comment!

I love hearing from you guys about anything! For some reason I lost two subscribers when I posted this chapter and I really want to get some feedback now!

Well until next time, thanks for reading and you are all wonderful people! May your life be filled with happiness and wonder!
The head of the senate subcommittee, California Junior Senator Julius Simmons, banged his gavel with a smug smirk to signify that Big Apple Island had just lost their case.

*Which was to be expected.*

Merlin sat at a long oak table between his company’s legal department and several of his private lawyers he kept on retainer, all of them scratching their heads as to why they had lost the case, as well as to why there was a case to begin with, and why he did not seem perturbed in the slightest at what was potentially millions of dollars down the drain and what would be millions more to appeal the ruling.

The blond Senator laced his fingers together and looked at them with a mix of disgust and smugness. “This whole ordeal should have never happened,” he smirked, his high pitched voice like nails on a chalkboard. “There are far more urgent matters our great country is facing that deserve our attention; thousands of missing children, the mysterious explosion on Long Island, and the recent devastating natural disasters that have irreparably altered the New York skyline.”

*And we are responsible for only two of them. Well, we can’t take credit for all the missing children.*

“But the fact remains that Big Apple Island was illegally donating its products to schools across the nation and providing said schools with free internet service,” the senator continued. “And while the public might see your intentions as noble, Big Apple Island was merely trying to influence young, impressionable minds in a matter similar to big tobacco. Furthermore, it is this committee’s belief that children should have only limited exposure to technology until they’ve reached maturity.”

He could hear Brian and Morgan scoff behind him, and if he knew his engineer (which he regretfully did) he was surely doing some crude hand gestures.

*Henceforth Big Apple Island and all of its holdings will cease all of its so called charity work. Hearing adjourned.*

He watched as the skinny younger senator scurried out from his leather chair and exited through a door reserved for the officials, with his older cronies following suit. His lawyers were still in shock
and were discussing possible courses to take and precedents they could use in their appeals, but Merlin knew no matter how much they appealed, the end would always be the same.

A strong hand clasped onto his shoulder and George whispered in his ear, “What do we do now?”

He turned around to face his right-hand man and smiled. “This is why we have friends and why I scheduled an appointment with Mr. Simmons in an hour.” He slowly stood up, his joints popping in protest form having sat for so long in an uncomfortable wooden chair. “Now grab Frank and follow me. I need to move or I’m going to turn into a statue.”

George, who now looked considerably younger thanks to the Titan’s heart beating in his chest, eyed the three-legged platypus in a service animal vest that say next to him. “I hate that thing,” the head of security and procurement sighed. “I’d feel better if you had a security detail on you.”

He waived the veteran off. “Pish posh. Do you know how much attention I get when I take my very own security platypus out for a walk?”

Finding a private place in the Capitol Building was a long and tedious journey that had only ended when the four of them (plus Frank) found a small alcove and George had ordered his men to surround the entrance.

“You know we could have just killed them all,” Brian said far too loudly, as he wiggled his phone for emphasis. “One tap and everyone in that room would have been toast.”

George slugged the millennial in the shoulder and growled. “And that wouldn’t have set off a bunch of alarms!”

“Well I could have charmed the video to show Simmons killing everyone and you once again being the big hero,” Morgan hummed, running one gloved hand over George’s chest, in what he imagined was her attempt to soothe the savage beast.

Merlin knocked his cane against the marble floor to get their attention. He wasn’t one to raise his voice, as in his many years of experience he found that screaming and ranting accomplished nothing. “My friends, what just happened in there is not a roadblock, nor is it even a hiccup.” He started to pace in front of his most valued subordinates, simply because he liked to be a bit dramatic when the opportunity presented itself. “This actually works in our favor! When word gets out that Big Apple Island has been banned from giving away our fine products and services to schools in low income neighborhoods, the public will be outraged.”

“And we will be there to fan the flames,” Morgan smiled, crossing her tattooed arms.

“Exactly!” he cried, pointing his cane at the lovely young witch. “We have the PR department and Avalon’s allies just flood the news and social media about this!” He cleared his throat and smiled at his outburst. “With the public’s current satisfaction of the government it won’t be hard to completely win them over.”

While George and Morgan looked convinced, Brian did not. “Yes the sheep are quite riled up, but that still doesn’t address the biggest issue,” The red-head said, leaning against a faux marble pillar.
“What are we going to do about my system no longer being installed across the country?”

And that’s why I hired you Brian, always focusing on the problems.

Merlin couldn’t help but smile. “Well if you recall, the senator said we couldn’t donate any of our products or services, so we won’t. So we are going to sell our products to every school, hospital, and police station for… let’s say, a penny per unit and a penny per month for cell and internet service.”

Now Brian was smiling, which was always unnerving. “That’s like the ultimate slap to the face!”

“Indeed,” he said as he pulled out his pocket watch and popped it open. While to anyone passing by they would think he was looking at a simple golden pocket watch, but if they happened to look just a little closer they would see that it was something closer to a smart watch. It allowed him to receive and send messages on their quantum encrypted network, alert him to any nearby threats (he had to disable that feature in D.C. to stop it from beeping), send out an adjustable pulse to destroy said threats, and of course tell him the time. “Now hand me Frank’s leash, I have a one-on-one to get to. Oh, and Brian, Morgan, I want you two to get in touch with Mr. Dare. He’s been very patient with us, and I feel it would be in bad taste to ask a favor of him without looking into his little problem.”

Why does it not surprise me that all of his staff are young women? The man’s a scandal in the making!

Merlin was lead through the senator’s office by a young brunette who seemed to be walking as slowly as possible to put of her encounter with Senator Simmons. He couldn’t fault her for that though; the intel Avalon had found on the man from his private office in the western nest painted a picture of misogyny, corruption, and paranoia.

In other words; Julius Simmons was perfect for Avalon’s needs.

His escort knocked on the ancient mahogany door and poked her head in. “Sir, your three o’clock is here.” He couldn’t make out what was said to the girl, but by the way she tensed it he knew it was nothing good. She opened the door all the way and turned to him with a strained smile. “He’ll see you now.”

“Thank you,” he smiled as he walked past her, Frank’s leash firmly in hand.

To say the office was gaudy would be an insult to the word. Everything was trimmed in gold, be it real or painted. What wasn’t golden was roman purple, the curtains, the carpet, even the walls. Giant golden reliefs of eagles were hung on the walls, that at first glance looked like the country’s seal, but a keen eye would notice that the arrows in the right claw had been swapped out for lightning bolts and that its head was facing towards them instead of the olive branches. Around those were various pictures; some displaying the senator with diplomats and other of his family. Merlin couldn’t help but also notice that despite being a United States Senator the only American flag present in the room was on his own lapel.

“Come in Mr. Arthurson! Come in!” The scrawny senator cried from behind his desk. It seemed that Mr. Simmons did not have the common courtesy to stand for one of his constituents and seemed to take delight in watching an old man struggle with what had to be the heaviest door on the continent. “I do hope there are no hard feelings over the outcome of the hearing. We must always follow the law of the land and God’s plan.”
A democratic senator from California that sounds like he should come from the bible-belt. Now I’ve seen it all.

“Oh not at all,” he said, taking a seat in a hard wooden chair across from Simmons. “I’ve actually come to disc-”

“The room is completely soundproof Mr. Arthurson,” the senator smirked. “So feel free to start offering me what you got, and I might have the subcommittee reverse its decision.”

Merlin had to blink several times to comprehend how fast Simmons revealed he was corrupt. I have a feeling if it wasn’t for your inhuman backers you would have been ousted from office the second after you were sworn in! He cleared his throat and adjusted his tie. “I actually did come for other business.”

The smirk disappeared from the senator’s face faster than lightning. “Oh. Well then, let’s make this quick. I have a tee-time with a Keystone representative at three and I’d like to move that up. By the way, if you say anything about bribes I will hit you with slander charges so fast your liver-spotted head would spin.”

Merlin looked down at Frank in hopes that the praetor would have shown some ounce of disbelief on its bird-like face, but sadly the creature was as emotionless as always. “Well I suppose I have come to make a deal of sorts,” he said, rubbing his wrist. I have to stop that, he chided himself, relinquishing his wrist. “But before, we begin I have to show you something to set the tone of the talk as it were.” He reached into his jacket’s inner pocket and slowly removed a small rectangular package wrapped in brown paper with a red ribbon tied to it.

When he went to hand it to the younger man, it senator ripped from him and started to shake it. “Seems a little heavy to be cash. Hard too.”

Normally Merlin felt guilty when it came to the demigods and legacies; they may have been pawns in the intricate game he was playing against the gods, but he knew they were basically human with their own fears, hopes, and dreams. But seeing the creature before him behave in such a deplorable manner and finding out just how any demigods had infiltrated the government reaffirmed his convictions. A king without pawns is useless. “Well why don’t you open it and find out,” he said, his voice as calm as always.

And now the fun begins! He reached down and removed the leash from Frank before speaking. “You know where I got it from,” he smiled. “Your office in New Rome.”

“You’re… a demigod?” the blond asked, slowly turning the picture of his family around in his hands.

He nodded. Let’s see how much this fool will give me…

“I’m sorry I wasn’t aware you were one of us. I thought you were just some mortal trying to muscle in on the Amazon’s business.” The man paused and set the picture on his desk. “Are you here to help?”
He nodded again.

“Thank the gods!” The man sighed, sinking back into his chair, his hands clasped together. “We haven’t had any direction down here since Olympus made itself visible for the whole world to see, we haven’t heard from either camp in months, and apparently if demigods or legacies head or up down the coast they drop dead!” Simmons snapped his fingers. “Like that!”

“Well it’s all okay now,” Merlin said quietly, as he reached down and stroked Frank’s furry back. “I just need to know what the last thing you heard from the Jupiter was. Then I can help you and everyone else take the correct course of action.” He was playing it fast and loose, letting the idiot in front of him do all the talking. Even if the man caught on, he could disable him with his watch or have Frank fulfill his purpose as his guardian.

“Of course! Of course!” Simmons then opened up a desk drawer and began to rifle through it. “We actually should have guessed you were one of us, what with you assuming Amazon’s operations and allegedly studying Olympus. Good move by the way, really got the mortals to keep calm.”

“That’s what I do.”

“That orange looking son of Ares has been a real pain to keep in line without any guidance. He actually believes he is in charge!” The blond laughed, before pulling out a small circular silver pendant. “You know the rules; can’t discuss any of the important stuff with people outside of the order.”

Well damn, I guess this is where my free ride ends.

“I’m sorry, but I don’t know what you’re talking about. And I have to say that you revealed a great amount to me with your careless chatter.” He snapped his fingers and instantly the platypus morphed back to its natural human form of a tall muscular one armed Asian.

“Zhang?” the Senator asked in disbelief. “What is he- just who are you?!”

“For someone who is supposed to be a leader of his people you know remarkably little of the world around you. If you would have followed the news you would have heard of the mysterious explosions that woke the Burkley area a few weeks back and would have pieced together that New Rome has been burnt to the ground.”

Merlin would give the man some credit as he pulled out a gun from his desk drawer rather than one of the magical toys the younger DGs favored, but before the poor man even had a chance to aim his weapon, a five-hundred pound, one armed, Eastern Gorilla had his head pinned against the wall.

“It’s a shame that your office is soundproof,” Merlin smirked as he stood up. “Someone surely would have heard that otherwise.”

“Zhang you traitorous bastard!” Simmons groaned, his eyes bulging out and his face bright red from Frank’s powerful grip.

“Now, now,” Merlin tsked, wagging a finger in front of the scarecrow like man’s face. “I’ll have you know Frank was nothing but loyal to New Rome before we got to him. He probably still is…”

“What do you want?” the blond gasped, the plaster wall he was pressed against beginning to crack.

“I already told you what I want: information.”
Merlin (the wizard, not him, though he has been called a wizard a time or two) once said, that the one thing that never fails to cure sadness is to learn something.

He knew better than most that those words were not necessarily true. He had been sad when his sister had been taken from his arms, and was on the verge of killing himself when he found out months later that she had starved to death.

Knowledge is often the source of one’s sorrows.

“Boss are you okay?” George asked, looking at him through the town car’s rearview mirror.

“Yeah, you’ve hardly spoken since you got in the car,” Morgan chimed in, turning around in the passenger’s seat to face him. “Do you need us to pull over?”

“No my dear, I’m quite alright,” he smiled softly. “Just there was a part of me that hoped I was wrong is all.”

George adjusted the mirror so that he could see him better. “So it really is as bad as you feared?”

He nodded, his throat suddenly feeling very dry. “Yes. War is coming.”

“So?” Morgan laughed. “That just means we have to fight harder to stop it!”

George nodded. “Partner, I’d move heaven and earth to keep my little girl safe.”

“I think all of us would,” the raven haired woman grinned, the tattoos on her neck pulsing with power. “We’ve all been screwed over by the so-called gods, and we don’t want others to know that pain.”

“Even if we can’t prevent it,” George growled. “We’re going to make sure this is the last time those bastards get to do this.”

He looked between the two of them, his most faithful and dedicated subordinates (no, friends), and at that moment everything didn’t seem so bad. Yes, the gods have been fanning the flames of war, but we’ve guessed that for quite some time. But we’ve already destroyed the Nordic and Egyptian gods, with the exception of a few holdouts. Our international efforts have also been incredibly successful with the EU implementing Brian’s tech and India getting ready to follow suit. I knew when this all started that the Greeks would be the hardest to topple. We can do this.

“Eat up Frank,” Merlin said as he slid a plate full of veggies and a chicken breast across the counter to New Rome’s newest praetor. “I need you to be nice and strong to be my guardian.”

The young man (creature, it’s not human) mechanically took the fork with its only remaining arm and stabbed a piece of steamed broccoli. The athletic built creature then sat there a moment before its arm flew up with far too much for and put the broccoli in its mouth, while cutting its lip in the
“Oh blast it all!” merlin bellowed, grabbing a napkin. By the time he made it around the kitchen island, the poor creature had repeated the process three more times, its upper lip a bloodied mess. “Halt! Cease! Stop!”

Frank dropped the bloody fork and its arm fell limp to its side. If the creature was in any pain it certainly didn’t show it, its face just as devoid of expression since waking up after having the neural interface implanted in its neck.

“They can make you turn into any animal, but they can’t figure out a way to feed yourself without cutting yourself up,” Merlin grumped, wiping the poor creature’s mouth. He then examined the wound and determined that while it was bleeding profusely, it didn’t require any immediate medical attention. “A little dab of superglue will fix you right up!” he chuckled as he left Frank on his own to retrieve a tube from his odds-and-ends drawer. “It’s funny, no matter the house, be it a shanty or a mansion, there is always an odds-and-ends drawer in the kitchen.” He pulled out a brand-new tube of superglue and returned to the wounded creature. “Superglue is a marvelous thing Frank,” he said, putting a small drop of the clear adhesive on its mouth. “I always keep some handy in case I hurt myself. A practice I learned on Artie’s farm. Now keep your mouth open.”

Frank opened its mouth as instructed, but otherwise just sat there. Seemingly completely unaware of the world around it, eyes glazed over.

“I suppose I shall have to feed you then, won’t I?” he mused, sliding the plate over in front of him and grabbing the utensils. Merlin began to cut the vegetables and chicken into small pieces while they waited for the glue to dry. “You should thank me really. Brian wanted me to continue to use the IVs to provide you with nourishment, but I wouldn’t have it. Now open.”

Frank did as instructed and opened its mouth even further, and was rewarded with a mouthful of food.

“Good, now chew,” he ordered. It was rather amusing to watch the creature mechanically, and awkwardly, chew the food, with an almost exaggerated swallow coming after each bite. “This is going to take a while isn’t it?” he asked, as he looked at the plate full of food. “How about we listen to some music while we dine?” He didn’t wait for the son of Mars to respond, as it couldn’t, instead Merlin bellowed, “Guinevere, please turn on the radio.”

There was a brief moment of silence before a chime rang echoed through the manor as the digital assistant formerly known as Alexa, signal that his request had been heard. A moment after that the soothing sounds of Dukas’s The Sorcerer’s Apprentice played throughout the first floor.

“One of my favorites,” Merlin said as he put another bite in the mouth of the creature in front of him.

He continued to feed Frank with the powerful sounds of an orchestra playing around them until the final note had faded. The announcer came on with a soothing voice that one could only hear on NPR, and reminded the listeners to continue to donate to keep them on the air. From there, the announcer began to read the day’s news, which to Merlin was always dreadfully depressing. A hate crime there, a murder here, tensions escalating between two countries; all of it a reminder of what he was fighting.

“More bad news out of Washington today,” the DJ whispered. “California state senator, Julius Simmons, was found dead in his office. Investigators say that he appears to have died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head. As many of you recall, the senator was an outspoken critic of Big Apple Island’s-"
“Guinevere, please turn off the radio,” Merlin ordered with a small grin on his face, gently wiping the DG’s face clean. “You did excellent work today, and I’d say you passed your field test with flying colors.”

After he had left the senator’s office and had made sure that the staff had seen him leave with Frank in his platypus form, he had ordered the young praetor to tie up the loose ends as it were. The only criteria being that it looked like either an accident or suicide. The platypus had then shifted into an ordinary housefly and flew off to Simmons’s office. Merlin wasn’t sure if he wanted to know the exact details on what had transpired in the soundproof office, but he knew if there had been any struggle it was short lived, as his personal DG had returned in under fifteen minutes.

“Now why don’t you revert back to my preferred form and shutdown for the night? Hmm?” Merlin asked, collecting the dishes and depositing them in the sink for his housekeeper to find in the morning. “I just need to make sure Brian and Morgan have contacted Mr. Dare, and then I’m off to bed.”

Frank stood up from the stool and walked over to his little pet bed, tears leaking from his eyes.

Chapter End Notes

"I have no mouth, and I must scream." The most accurate sentence to describe Frank’s life (if you can call it that) now. Oh yes boys and girls, Frank is still in there, and he wishes that he wasn’t aware of every horrible thing that has happened to him and everything that he has done. I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again: there are far worse things than death.

I know you guys are probably like "what the hell did Octavian's uncle tell Merlin?!" Well, you'll find out in time :)

Merlin is always fun to write because if you were to encounter someone like him on the streets you'd think he was a great guy. He donates extensively to charities and public projects to try and make the world a better place, loves to talk to people, and genuinely care about everyone around him.

He also shows just how well the human mind can rationalize any abhorrent act, which considering what we know of his background is rather ironic. He survived one of the darkest moments in human history, and yet he doing exactly that and is okay with it by saying they are not human! Which is also something he witnessed! The horrible thing is I actually know people like him! Its absolutely amazing (and terrifying) how this is possible!

Once again Mr. Dare was mentioned and he has a little problem that he would like Avalon to take care of. A problem that Merlin has assigned his best engineer and sorceress to... I bet only good things can happen with that!

Hey did you like what you just read? Then leave a kudos, subscribe, and/or bookmark! Thought, theories, praise, feedback, etc? Leave a comment!

I love hearing from all of you! It always makes my day to see a new comment, kudos, etc! (yes I'm an attention starved diva)

Next chapter is... *drum roll* a surprise! I can tell you though it is not a fluffy chapter!
Well, good night and good luck in all of your endeavors. You are a one-of-a-kind amazing person and don't let anyone tell you otherwise!
Pain.

That single word described their new existence. They were trapped in a body that was burning away with each passing moment and required them to take the flesh of others to maintain it. Every step they took felt like a thousand fiery blades were slashing at the soles of their clawed feet. Each breath felt as if their lungs would pop, like a balloon over a fire. The golden flames that had replaced Veronica’s eyes never stopped absorbing information, and they saw so much more than her pretty blue eyes, more than a mortal mind could ever fully comprehend. And now with the addition of Dionysus trying to fight his way out of their stomach and eating every ounce of nourishment they ate, they felt as if they were starving.

But, their current state was nothing compared to the horrors they had undergone while held captive by the mortals. Veronica had had her eyelids removed, the muscles and nerves in her arms and legs severed, and was subjected to dehumanizing experiments that she knew would haunt her until the day she died. Atlas meanwhile, had chunks of flesh cut away and was probed and prodded as if he were some kind of animal.

Yes their life was pain, but one can learn to ignore pain.

_The little mermaid learned to ignore the pain to be with her prince_, Veronica’s voice echoed in their shared mind. _But I totally would have killed the prince at the end if this is what she felt like._

“What are you talking about?” Atlas grunted, as they circled the clearing for the umpteenth time that day.

_Just comparing my situation to my favorite fairytale, general. Have you made any progress?_

He didn’t respond, which answered for him.

It had been close to a week since the daughter of Aphrodite and daughter of Bellona had disappeared into the Mist thick woods. He should’ve known the clearing they stopped to camp in was a trap as it had been absolutely clean of any and all traces of Mist, something that was almost impossible. But while they had been in a deep meditation that passed as sleep, the Mist had rolled around the small
clearing so thick, that even they couldn’t see through it. They had only woke up when they heard Piper scream out in pain somewhere deep within the woods. They had tried to leave the clearing, but no matter what direction they went, they always wound up back in the clearing with Betty White.

*Well, we could try burning the Mist away again.*

*Burning it was a waste of energy and time, Veronica.*

*We’ve been here a week. Time is the one thing we have plenty of.*

*Not that kind of time and you know it…*

Atlas regretted the words the second he thought them. There was absolutely no need to remind the daughter of Mercury that she was always on the brink of death. If their shared body burnt away, Atlas would be forced to return to his own body, which was still currently holding up the sky, while she would be sent to the underworld for judgment.

And that absolutely frightened her.

Veronica longed to return to her home once more, to help her mother sort the local mail, to spend a lazy afternoon playing with her dog, to go to school, to detassel the fields with her friends in the hot muggy Iowa summer, and to have her grandfather hug her with his strong arms. She wanted to experience that just once more.

And the strange thing was: Atlas wanted that for her too.

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*They’re back again general…*

*I’m well aware of that…*

They had known since the beginning of their interment that they were being watched, but it wasn’t until the second day did they get their first fleeting glimpse of their captors. They always stood just at the edge of the Mist, obscuring them just enough that neither of them could identify them. The only things they knew for sure were that their captors weren’t mortal, could change shape into some four-legged beast, and had command over the Mist that rivaled Hecate herself.

When their obscured foe had shown up a second time, they had used Veronica’s speed to try and rush them, but the second they passed through the tree line, they found themselves once again back in the clearing.

*Should we try and bum-rush them again?*

*I’d rather we save our strength until they make their move. Let us just sit here for now and observe.*

*Alright, just pop another M&M in our mouth.*

Atlas eagerly obliged, tossed one of the small chocolates (one of the only foods that didn’t turn to ash in their mouth), and let Veronica catch it with their mouth. They repeated the process several more times, but tossing the candy a little farther and harder each time.

*Toss it as hard as you can across the clearing! I want to see if we can outrun it!*
Atlas stood on top of Betty White and wound their right arm back, before pitching a red M&M as fast as they could manage. As the candy projectile cleared their claws, Veronica took over their body, summoned the previously dormant speed of Mercury, and ran as fast as they could; her sole focus on the flying piece of candy.

Veronica!

_I almost have it!_ She grinned as they were less than a yard from the sweet treat and were closing fast.

Veronica stop!

_But I-_ 

Atlas exerted his presence over their shared body and locked up their legs, forcing them to skid to a halt. Veronica was going to give the Titan a piece of her mind for forcing them to stop when she had been only inches away from her goal, when she noticed that they stood just at the edge of the clearing.

_You really need to pay attention Veronica…_

Veronica crossed their arms and scowled. “It’s not like I was going to run into a tree or any-“ She was cut off when something small and fast slammed into the back of their head, momentarily knocking them off balance. “What the?” She asked, rubbing the back their head, their claws getting tangled in their blonde ponytail. “So much for three-sixty vision… Shouldn’t you have seen that coming general?”

_I was too busy trying to teach you an important lesson._

_Wasn’t that lesson about paying attention?_

_Do as I say, not as I do._

Veronica momentarily increased the intensity of their golden flame eyes, the closest thing she could do to rolling their eyes. “That is such a parent thing to say,” she groaned as they dropped to pick up what had nailed them in the head. “No way…”

_Well that is interesting…_

Veronica turned the red piece of candy around in their hands and bit their lip. “I guess it’s not surprising, but still…”

“So the Golden Fleece should be able to restore my body? She asked, as they sunned themselves on Betty White’s roof. They couldn’t feel the sun’s rays on them, their body was far too hot and volatile to feel something so subtle, but Veronica found comfort in the activity.

_Over the many cycles I have seen the results of fleece’s remarkable healing abilities. If we can obtain it, then you shall return to your natural self. With a plus one of course._

“Of course, general,” she softly laughed. “But do you really think the Greeks would just let us borrow it? Piper said that they use it to keep a tree alive.”
We don’t need it forever. We just need it until we are done bathing in the River Styx. After that they can drape it over a bush for all I care.

She laughed at that. “But we’ve chased after an artifact like that before and ended up traveling with my former boss.”

After they had escaped and dealt with their mortal captors, the so-called Avalon, they travelled to New Rome in hopes of stealing the mighty Aegis. Atlas had reasoned that if the cloak could protect whomever wore it from outside harm, it could potentially protect them from internal harm as well. Veronica had thought it was a bit of a stretch, but she couldn’t think of any better options. They had planned to steal it without having to harm anyone (though Veronica would have had no problem beating the crap out of the often abusive praetor if necessary), but once they arrived that plan was quickly forgotten.

Instead they watched from the shadows as Terminus and a red-headed mortal decimated New Rome and its occupants. She had wanted to help by fighting the protector of Camp Jupiter and Dionysus, but Atlas had forced her to reconsider, arguing that there was no way they could defeat them in their current condition. So they had waited until the perfect opportunity presented itself: Dionysus had made his presence known the last of the resistance and had entangled all of New Rome in grape vines while, Reyna had been knocked unconscious by Terminus, so they grabbed Reyna and retreated to the vast maze of sewers beneath the city.

There, they removed the Aegis from Reyna’s unconscious form, only for it to crumble into dust. With no options left but to travel across country to Camp Half-Blood, they decided to save Reyna’s life, as Veronica knew that the praetor would be obsessed with saving Camp Jupiter and would eventually travel east to the newly discovered sister camp.

And it was hard to deal with the Latina, so hard that there were dozens of times within the first day alone that she thought of just using her as parts and heading to New York on her own.

Thankfully the gods, or Fates, or God himself had sent them their salvation in the form of Piper Mclean, who was the yin to Reyna’s yang. Piper was able to get the praetor to settle down enough so that she was tolerable and Piper was friendly to them right from the start (she could forgive the daughter of Aphrodite from staring at them so much, as she damn well knew what they looked like).

“So as soon as we get Reyna and Piper back we can continue on our journey,” she whispered, staring into the thick Mist.

And I think I’ve come up with a plan on how to speed up their return, the titan chuckled from within.

Their screams of agony seemed to echo forever as they fell to their knees, their body engulfed in golden flame. The top three layers of skin flaked off and turned to ash, the little clothing they wore melting away, and all plant life within three yards of them either withered or burned away.

General, this is stupid…

It’s only stupid if it doesn’t work!

The plan was simple: they would appear to lose control of their immense power and then play dead.
Atlas concluded that their foes were always watching them and were waiting for them to become weak enough to be captured. Veronica thinking about their attempt to retrieve the Aegis had given him the idea. After all, they had waited for a similar opportunity.

*I think this would look to controlled to anyone watching. Maybe we should do one big burst then fall forward?*

*It would seem you are learning from me after all, young daughter of Mercury.*

*Shut up!*

They released a burst of golden flames high into the afternoon sky with such intensity that the bronze SUV rose up on two wheels for a moment and the Mist at the very edge of the clearing receded. The flames extinguished themselves and they raised their head to the sky before falling forward.

*Wow general, that kind of over-the-top-acting could only be found in high school theater.*

*I’m not exactly sure what that is, but from what I can gather from your memories it is terrible….*

*So now we wait, right?*

*That is the general idea. We wait here until our enemies take us to their stronghold, like the Trojans of old.*

*Weren’t you stuck holding up the sky when that happened?*

*Yes, but I was still aware of it. Plus I read a lot when I have my brief moments of freedom.*

*I would have never have guessed that you liked to read general! Do you have any favorite authors?*

*Plato had some good ideas, Sun Tzu was absolutely brilliant, and Jane Austen moves me in ways your mortal mind can’t even begin to fathom.*

*Jane Austen? Really? You’re joking right?*

*And what’s wrong with her? Her tales of love and woe are intricately crafted and are an excellent critique on society that-*

A twig snapped in the distance and the Mist around the clearing slowly dispersed as no less than eight white-tailed deer from all different directions began to approach them. Their steps were silent, and Veronica wondered if the twig snapping was just a coincidence as they moved with an unparalleled grace and purpose.

*Grandpa used to take me deer hunting ever year. We’d get up earlier than usual and dress from head-to-toe in camouflage and go sit in the deer stand for hours on end. Then at noon we would head to whoever was hosting the deer camp that year and help butcher up whatever kills we had, while eating fried deer loin sandwiches. I can-*

*Veronica, as much as I appreciate a glimpse into your past, I really think now is not the time to reminisce…*

The deer, all of them does they noted, began to circle around them when they within ten feet. They sniffed the air and the ground, their ears twitching every few seconds. By all accounts they looked like normal deer on the mortal spectrum of vision, but the strange blur of colors that their new corporeal eyes let them see (that Veronica called their aura) closely matched the colors of the few
fawns they saw fleeing from Camp Jupiter.

*Just say the word general and I’ll wrestle one to the ground.*

*Let them get a little close.*

The does halted their sniffing and looked amongst each other, having some kind of conversation that relied on queues that even Atlas couldn’t pick up. The conversation ended with the smallest doe stomping its front right hoof into the burnt earth.

*Well, at this will be easier than I thought.*

*But it’s behind us…*

*Don’t estimate a girl’s speed general!*

The small deer took a single step forward and then reared up on its hind legs, while its upper half changed into that of a young girl with long dark hair tied back in a braid. The girl-deer thing was wearing a black tank top, and unlike the fawns that occupied Camp Jupiter, a matching black skirt that covered her lower half, ending just above her knees.

*That definitely explains the fawn vibe… General, do you know what this thing is?*

*This is a first for me as well, so be on guard.*

The deer-girl kicked their foot with its hoof, but they didn’t so much as wince. Apparently satisfied with their lack of response, it continued forward until it crouched down next to them and placed two fingers on their neck. “She is still alive,” The deer-girl said, her voice soft and melodious.

*Now Veronica!*  

She didn’t have to be told twice, as she used their inhuman speed to spring up and around the young creature, putting it in a headlock and pressing her other clawed hand against its throat. “Hi there,” they smirked, pulling the creature closer. “I believe you have our friends and we would really appreciate it if you gave them back.”

As the small girl stomped in vein at their feet (*It doesn’t even register we hurt so much*), the remaining seven shifted into their more human forms, but didn’t say anything, only removing various weapons from sheathes on their sides made of some kind of black stone. Unlike the girl, they were all older and apparently knew battle, as not a single one of them was without some kind of scar.

“No one has to get hurt here, we just want our friends back.”

The seven then began to slowly circle them, twirling a menagerie of daggers, axes, and throwing knives. There was a rhythm in their steps, each timed and in sync with the others. They were obviously waiting for them to become focused on one of them, while another would strike from behind, but with their panoramic vision they would be sorely disappointed.

Veronica briefly considered erupting into flames again, but knew they needed one of them alive if they wanted to see Piper again (*oh, and Reyna*). They could try to run while carrying their captive, but it was very possible they could just use the Mist again to keep them trapped in the clearing.

*I believe now would be a perfect time for the “bum-rush”, as you call it. We run to the vehicle and keep our back to it. That would reduce their striking area by half. More if they aren’t willing to harm one of their own.*
Veronica couldn’t argue with that logic, so when there was a slight opening directly in front of them, they took off in a brilliant golden light, only to slide into Betty White.

Like a boss.

The deer-girl apparently didn’t think so, and vomited, covering the three of them in the disgusting substance. “Warn a girl next time!” The deer-girl groaned.

“Sorry,” they chuckled. “We didn’t respond well our first time either. Say! Do you think your friends would help us out?”

The others surrounded them in a single leap from where they originally stood, some even doing the overly dramatic superhero landing.

“When dealing with scum like you? No! Sisters! Do not worry about me! I knew the risks! Do what you must to protect—“

Veronica smothered the girl’s mouth, silencing her. “A simple “No” would have sufficed.”

The deer-women spurned on by their comrade’s words, readied their weapons. It appeared that those with hand-to-hand weapons would strike first and those with throwing would wait for them to try and flee.

Ah, General, suggestions?

I think our only option to come out of this in one piece is to-

There was a brief whistle and the deer-women furthest to their left, collapsed to the ground. An arrow sticking out of her neck. The other’s eyes widened in shock, the first display of emotion Veronica had seen on the creatures.

Veronica we need to get out of here now!

Wait? What? Why?

Their foes had apparently forgot about them, as they leapt together, landing in the center of the clearing standing back-to-back. The deer-women slowly glanced around, looking for whomever killed their sister.

General, I don’t see anything.

Because by the time you do it is already too late! Now go!

The whistling returned, but unlike before it was deafening. An instant later, what had to be hundreds of arrows rained down on the women in the clearing, killing them before they even knew what hit them.

Veronica! Go!

What about our prisoner? We need her to take us to Piper!

If we don’t go now, the odds of us seeing them again are nonexistent!

They released the girl from their hold and watched as the girl leapt to her fallen sisters-in-arms, tears streaming down her face. She collapsed to the ground, not out of grief, but because an arrow had pierced her lungs in mid-air.
Veronica!

I'm going!

They channeled their energy into their legs for an extra boost of speed, but before they could take a single step, arrows pinned their feet to the earth. They went to remove the wooden shafts, but more arrows were fired from parts unknown and pinned their hands to Betty White. And because apparently they weren’t pinned enough, another volley was fired, arrows piercing their forearms and thighs.

“What the fuck!” Veronica snarled, calling upon their golden flames to burn the wooden shafts.

Save our energy. Our enemy is about to make their presence known. Look.

It was hard not to, considering that she could never not look, and was awed as dozens of girls seemingly stepped out of the shadows at the edge of clearing, bows in hand and arrows nocked. They were all wearing dark camouflage, some kind of weird silver tiaras that Veronica thought only small children would find appealing, and all had their hair in braids.

Are those the-

Hunters of Artemis? Yes.

In the blink of an eye (if they could still use that measurement), the clearing was filled and no less than a dozen girls had their bows trained on them, all of which looked ready to wound them further if they so much as sneezed.

“Lady Artemis, I believe this titan scum isn’t going anywhere,” A girl with short black hair, electric blue eyes, and a punk rock vibe called out. The girl also looked pale and gaunt, as if she had lost a bunch of weight in a short amount of time.

The hunters parted enough to let a girl through with auburn hair and glowing silver eyes. Her skin was as pale as moonlight on a cold winter night, but had an odd glow to it. With their greater vision Veronica could tell without a question that she was a goddess. “Excellent work Thalia,” Artemis smiled at the punk girl. “Now go take care of our trophies.”

The girl, Thalia, paled even more. “Lady Artemis, is that really necessary? It’s just that-”

The goddess held up a hand and instantly Thalia was silent. “It is absolutely necessary. These animals dared to attack Olympus so it is our duty to remove them.” She then caressed Thalia’s cheek and the girl seemed to regain some of her color. “I know I ask much of you, but you are my sister and lieutenant, and I trust you with these important matters.”

“Yes lady Artemis,” Thalia bowed, before silently slipping away.

General, I definitely believe you about Artemis being... creepy....

Artemis then turned their attention to them, and it felt like she was analyzing every fiber of their being with her unearthly silver eyes. “I see you took a page out of Kronos’s book and found yourself a mortal shell, Atlas.”

“My brother may have had a few good ideas in his life,” Atlas smirked.

Ah... Maybe we shouldn’t antagonize her...
The goddess momentarily scowled at the comment. “She is a pretty thing, I’ll give you that.”

Stranger danger!

“Lay one hand on her and you’ll lose it,” Atlas growled, as he fought against the arrows pining them.

“Wouldn’t dream of it,” Artemis smiled. “I take it you came here to join up with the enemies of Olympus?”

“Er, Lady Artemis,” Veronica interjected. “We don’t even know who, or what for that matter, they were. All we know is that they captured our friends Piper Mclean, one of the seven, and Reyna. We were trying to find out where they were taken.”

“Is that so? And they know about the deer women as well?”

“I guess?”

Artemis seemed to think for a moment, before she ordered her hunters to release them. “You are now in my custody titan,” the goddess spat. “You will remain with us until we find your friends and the last of the deer women. If we have any difficulty with you we will tear you limb from limb. When we are finished the both of you will be returned to your punishment until the end of time. Do you understand?”

They nodded as they cauterized the many wounds that covered their body.

“Good. Now follow.”

The hunters surrounded them and marched them out of the clearing. But as they left, they noticed a few of the hunters hanging back and nailing the arrow-riddled corpses of the deer women to the trees around the clearing.

General-

I know...

If Veronica wouldn’t have been so shocked by the gruesome scene, they might have avoided stepping on the delicate early spring growth, particularly a small red flower.

Chapter End Notes

My how things have changed since chapter 1!!!

Veronica and Atlas are not the happiest of people and not exactly the most trustworthy of people. It's not that they are evil or anything, far from it, just that their goal is to restore Veronica's body and strengthen it so Atlas can share it without the negative side effects. And honestly I think of anyone was in the poor girl's situation they would do the same.

Atlas is definitely not as Savage or intense as he was in TTC. Zoe's death and the torture he experienced under Avalon has really put things in perspective for him. Yes, he no longer has his Independence, but he does have his freedom. He has seen what Veronica desires and he wants it too. It reminds him of a simpler time in ages past.
Veronica is the fire of the two. She hates what she has become and wishes she had never joined the Legion. There is a lot of pent up hostility when it comes to Reyna and to get an idea why read the part of SoN where Percy first joins the legion and Reyna asks for someone to vouch for him. She was a little harsh on Frank, so it's not a stretch to imagine she's a little hard on the new recruits. Not that Reyna's a bad person, but to a young girl from the middle of nowhere Iowa, she might seem harsh. The two don't get along and the only reason they listen to Reyna is because they need to get to Camp Half-Blood.

Thankfully, Veronica (and Atlas) like Piper and her ability to take Reyna's attention off of them. Piper is also fun to be around and doesn't look at them like some kind of monster... Well she doesn't see them as a tool at least.

We got to see our first real glimpse of the creatures that kidnapped Piper and Reyna, as well as (some of) the magical material(s) that members of The Nation use. It's actually pretty easy to guess what it is if you take into account that they are all the tribes United plus a few other pantheons that were almost decimated.

Oh and Artemis finally appeared! Yay!! Thalia too!!! Triple yay!!!
But something's not quite right... They are definitely not treating their enemies with any honor, or Veronica and Atlas for that matter....

Thankfully, help may be coming thanks to a little flower. :)

Hey did you like what you just read? Then leave a kudos!!!! Thoughts, theories (some are getting closer with each chapter), questions, etc? Then leave a comment!
I love hearing from you guys! Every kudos, comment, bookmark, and subscription puts a huge smile on my face!

Next chapter is Piper!!!!

So until next time: stay groovy and keep on truck'n!
Piper

Chapter Summary

Warnings: some blood
Tonight:
Piper discovers she is not into bondage,
Piper goes Home,
and Piper and Reyna reveal some ugly truths

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Blindfolded, gagged, and restrained to a bed, Piper determined, was one of the most horrifying things she had ever experienced. Yes, the monsters and gods she had fought were terrifying in their own right, but there was something about not being able to see the world around her and being unable to move that really freaked her out.

What was worse though was when her captors would come in, their hooves tapping against the floor seemed excruciatingly loud, and tend to her broken left leg. No matter how much she tried to prepare herself to be touched, it always made her jump and her heart race. The first time it happened she had screamed and yelled at her mysterious captors to let her go, and they had almost complied thanks to her charm speak. Sadly though, it apparently didn’t work on one of them who knocked her out, and when she woke up she had the gag in her mouth.

And people actually like this? What is wrong with them!

She supposed that things could have been a lot worse (which had become her mantra after what felt like the first few days), she wasn’t being tortured, she was fed some kind of vegetable broth three times a day, and even though it scared her, they tended to her leg.

But that can change in a moment. They’re keeping me alive because they need me for something. Probably information…

It seemed like the most likely explanation the more she thought about it. When they first encountered the thunderbird it had appeared to do nothing more than observe them at first and the son of Coyote (still wrapping my head around that whole deal) seemed absolutely terrified when she explained she was a daughter of Aphrodite.

Couple that with Napi and Kipitaaki acting weird when they saw Reyna, Veronica, and Atlas, it’s like they think… oh crap! She would have face palmed if her hands wouldn’t have been restrained. They think we’re the enemy! If Avalon is attacking them as well and keeping it just as low-key, and all of a sudden three demigods roll up in their territory, ugh… I’m surprised we’re still alive…
“I’m ready to talk!” Piper gasped the second they removed the gag from her mouth to feed her.

“What did you say?” A surprisingly gentle voice asked.

*Well they didn’t put the gag back on so that’s a good sign!* “I’m ready to talk,” she repeated. “And I would really like to see again…”

There was a moment of silence, followed by the sound of a hoof tapping against the floor, before what Piper believed to be a deer woman spoke. “I-I have to go talk to my boss. I’ll be back,” the woman said, before shoving the gag back in Piper’s mouth.

*Gods damn it,* Piper thought as she heard the deer woman walk away. *But at least they know I want to talk. Which I’m hoping is a good thing...*

If she was right that her captors were deer women, then she would have to play everything by ear. The stories her grandpa Tom told her about the deer women painted a conflicting portrait. They were nature spirits (which she hoped meant they were like satyrs) that were supposed to represent fertility and love (*Let’s hope we can make a connection over that*). Grandpa Tom had told her that they would take the guise of a deer and help lost children find their way home, but could also take the form of a beautiful woman and would join in dances late in the evening. There the deer woman would wear long skirts to cover her animal half and try to lure married men away from the rest of the tribe. If it succeeded, the deer woman would then trample the man to death for being unfaithful, which Piper thought was a bit on the harsh side. Supposedly though, if the man saw the deer woman’s hooves the deer woman would have to let him go, which she supposed balanced it out.

*But I’m forgetting something... There’s something important about them, but it's been so long.*

The door to the room creaked open and she heard at least three sets of hooves enter before the door shut again. She could hear them slowly move about the room; one approaching her left, and the other two stopping near the foot of what she assumed was a bed.

*Jeanne says you want to speak, is this true?”* a cool melodious voice asked as the gag was removed from her mouth.

“Yes, but I would prefer to see who I’m talking to,” she said as calmly as possible.

There was a moment of silence, which most likely meant there was some kind of silent conversation going on, before the voice sighed. “Okay. Jeanne, just be careful. These hunters are more dangerous than they appear.”

*Hunters?*

Piper was glad she had her eyes closed when the blindfold was ripped off, as the sudden change of light was blinding even through her eyelids. It took her what felt like a solid minute to get her eyes adjusted to the light, but eventually she found herself under the watchful gaze of three deer women.

As she predicted there were two at the foot of her bed and if she was honest with herself, they looked absolutely terrifying. Beautiful, but terrifying. The one to the right looked like she lived at the gym, her arms absolutely huge with muscle, the black crop top she wore showed off abs that would make her dad envious, she had long black hair that was tied back into a messy ponytail, and her face reminded Piper of a Native American Legolas. The one to her left was a bit taller, she figured maybe six-four, but was had more of a runner’s build compared to the terminator on the right. Her face was a bit rounder, more feminine, framed with a mess of curly red hair that dangled to her shoulders, she
would have been very lovely if it wasn’t for the fact she had a scar on the right side of her face that ran from her temple to her chin, her right eye missing as well. They both had bows on their back, but there was strangely no quiver.

“How are you feeling?” the third asked with a soft smile, her voice soft and soothing. While the other two looked like they could kill a man with their thumbs, the one hovering inches from her face looked like she crawled out of Disney movie. She was wearing hot pink scrubs and matching latex gloves, her face was round and cheerful with sky blue eyes that were highlighted thanks to her dark skin, and her black hair was tied back in a short ponytail that had sky blue highlights. “We don’t want you to be in pain.”

“Speak for yourself,” the one-eyed woman grunted. “We should’ve left them in the traps.”

The nurse glared sharply at one-eye. “Then we would be no better than them Cassandra. Besides, this one and the others don’t look like the ones we’ve been fighting.”

*Okay. So they do think we are an enemy, but they at least seem reasonable enough to hear us out. I can work with this.*

“Now,” said the nurse, her attention back on Piper, “Our matriarch is willing to meet with you, but she wants you restrained. Are you willing to cooperate?”

“Yes,” she nodded, “but on one condition.”

“What would that be?” Cassandra growled, her eye focused squarely on her. “And bear in mind that you are in no condition to be making demands.” She then removed a vicious looking black stone dagger from a sheathe on her skirt. “So keep that in mind,” she growled, pointing the dagger at her.

“I just want to know if my friends are okay,” she said as calmly as she could.

“The Latina with one-arm is locked up, but is fine aside from a few scrapes and bruises,” the scrub-clad deer woman answered cheerfully. “And your other friend is being kept at your campsite.”

Cassandra rolled her eye. “Nice Jeanne! Just blurt it out!”

“It’s not like I told her where they both are,” Jeanne snapped, as she started to unfasten the leather restraints that held Piper in the bed. When Jeanne got to her shattered leg, the doe stopped and frowned. “There’s no way she’ll be able to walk on this even with a crutch. Sarah, go get a wheelchair.”

The third deer woman nodded and left the room without a sound.

“And bring zip ties!” Cassandra yelled.

“Really?” Jeanne asked, leveling a look of disbelief at the muscular woman.

“She is dangerous!” the other fired back, pointing at Piper.

While the two continued to argue, Piper slowly sat up and looked at her leg for the first time. It wasn’t in a cast, but it was wrapped up tightly in bandages. *I guess I should be thankful for that.* It was definitely more severe than a break though, as the bandages just above her ankle were lightly tinged with her blood, and the area looked bigger compared to that on her other leg. It hurt, but now that she was sitting up she could smell a faint odor from her leg that she assumed was some kind of ointment. *Well I guess that disproves my theory of them covering my leg in wasabi...*
“Look Cassie,” Jeanne barked, startling Piper back to her current surroundings, “I very much think these three are not any more dangerous than one of our kids! So when Sarah gets back, shut up, help me get her in the blasted chair, and we’ll take- what’s your name?”

“Piper.”

“Piper, to the matriarch! Got it?”

Piper could only watch as the one-eyed Cassandra ground her teeth in fury, looking as if she was going to strike the scrub clad Jeanne, but Cassandra rolled her eye after a few more seconds. “Fine!”

“Good,” Jeanne smiled, turning her attention back to Piper. “Now Piper, would you care if I gave you a brief examination to make sure you’re okay? Nothing invasive, just the usual stuff.”

“Umm, sure?” If I’m compliant that’ll make everyone look better. If they were all like Cassandra though I’d definitely be fighting…

Piper spent the next few minutes having her heart and breathing listened to, checking her blood pressure (she really hated the cuff), and even had her temperature taken with an electronic thermometer that only had to touch her forehead for a brief moment, before Sarah returned with a wheelchair for her. She was proud of herself when she managed to hop into the wheelchair mostly unaided, but the moment died when Sarah and Cassandra pulled out a bag of zip ties and bound her wrists and ankles to the chair’s polished metal frame.

“Is this really necessary?” she asked, pulling against the plastic out of reflex. “It’s not like I can run away.”

“Relax,” Jeanne smiled as she got behind the wheelchair. “I’m sure you’ll be freed in no time! This is probably just one big misunderstanding!”

“Seventy-two missing kids, sixty-seven dead kids, and over a hundred of our kind killed within the last month alone is not a misunderstanding,” Cassandra grunted as they pushed her out of the room.

She was caught off guard when instead of wheeling her into a creepy cabin or some other horror movie cliché, they pushed her into what appeared to be an infirmary much like the one at Camp Half-Blood. There were hospital beds with nightstands on each side of the long hall, with retractable white curtains that could give the patients some semblance of privacy. The floor was white tile and the walls were painted sky blue from the floor until halfway up where they transitioned to white. Large picture windows were above each bed, that let enough natural light in to make the place seem warm and inviting, a sharp contrast to what she was used to.

Try as they might, the Apollo cabin could never make the infirmary comfortable. Adding Nico to the equation really didn’t help improve it either…

She noticed that all of the beds were empty and made, with the exception of one at the opposite end where a small boy, maybe five or six years old, was having a Power Rangers bandage put on a scraped elbow by another deer woman in scrubs.

“That’s Thomas,” Jeanne whispered in her ear, startling her. “He’s at the age where he still believes bandages fix everything instantly.”

Piper smiled at that, remembering a time that seemed so long ago when she would have her dad put bandages on her. Whether or not she actually needed them. Then a question popped into her mind that she had to ask. “Don’t you have something that speeds up recovery?”
Cassandra’s eyebrow quirked. “You mean Neosporin?”

“I think she means the moon dew,” Jeanne chuckled, as they made it to what appeared to be a small reception area inside the infirmary. “Yes we have something like that, but we only use it for emergencies.”

“Oh, is it rare or something?” Piper couldn’t imagine going on a quest, or even leaving her home, without a thermos of nectar and a few squares of ambrosia on hand.

Jeanne spun them around so that they could back out of the infirmary, as the other two deer women refused to get the door for them. “No, it’s-“ The nurse huffed as she kicked the door open with one hoof, “just that anything that accelerates tissue regeneration has a price to it, magical or otherwise. We’ve found that besides the risk of combustion from ingesting too much, prolonged use can severely shorten the user’s lifespan.”

“It does what now?” Oh gods! I eat and drink ambrosia and nectar when I’m bored! I practically lived on it when we were on the Argo II! We all did! Oh gods, Leo tried to impress Calypso with a nectar and cheese tasting! “By how much?”

The deer woman paused as they backed down a ramp made of logs. “Judging by your panicked tone I’d say your people have something like moon dew.” Jeanne hummed. “Let’s see, it has been awhile since my senior thesis, but if I recall correctly intermediate use reduces the lifespan by ten percent and daily use was projected to be twenty-five percent.”

“Lovely,” she sulked. First thing I’m going to do when I get to Camp is kick every single Apollo kid’s ass! Chiron’s too! I asked if there were any side effects! It was magic they said! Well they’re going to need magic to remove my foot from their- “Woah,” she gasped at the sight before her. “It’s like a Ewok village…”

Sprawled out before her a near perfect example of mankind cohabitating with nature. There were log cabins nestled into trees which grew around the structures and then wove together above into walkways. There were trees with trunks as wide, if not wider, than any of the cabins at Camp Half-blood, that had massive entrances that looked as if the trees had grown that way and had not been cut. As the trees climbed up, their branches wove with those of other trees, creating platforms and walkways that she could see a few people using. There were paths between each building, but instead of gravel or dirt they were made from tens-of-thousands of tiny, light-blue mushrooms that grew practically on top of each other.

“What is this place?” she asked, turning her head to look at the deer women.

“It is Home,” Sarah answered.

Home, as Sarah called it, was even more amazing up close. So amazing that she felt as if she were in some kind of Disney movie.

*Probably Fantasia.*

The branches that were walkways? They moved. Not just side-to-side like the stairs in Hogwart's, but
up and down as well, twisting and turning to suit the needs of the traveler. She even saw one become a spiral staircase for a guy about her age with an armful of books.

The streets between the buildings and trees, were lined with various vendors selling goods that Piper had never even dreamed of. A man with a wolfish grin and fangs was demonstrating a beaded necklace that allowed the wearer to shape-shift into various animals; turning into a bear, a rabbit, an eagle, and finally back to his normal state as demigods applauded. A deer woman was showing a bow much like the ones on Cassandra and Sarah’s backs, that would create an arrow made entirely from moonlight when drawn. A man with muscles so large they made Butch look tiny and a man-bun sat on the ground surrounded by buffalo-skin drums, that when beat summoned tiny little rainclouds. There was a little stand with a counter where people sat eating burgers and the like, where a snow-white rabbit manned the grill behind the counter, a raccoon took orders, and a bear operated the register.

“Please tell me these places take cash,” she murmured as she continued to look around, her ADHD working overtime. “Or credit. Heck, I’d trade Reyna for one of those awesome bows.”

“What makes you think we’re going to allow you to roam the streets? You forget you are our prisoner,” Cassandra said as she sidestepped a small man, no more than two-feet tall.

“But yes, most vendors accept credit and debit cards,” Sarah nodded, her eyes locked on one of the drums.

“Paypal too!” Jeanne chirped, as they turned a corner to the largest of the treehouses, which the community seemed to radiate around.

“I don’t suppose you can tell me about this place?” Piper asked, trying to put a name to half of the figures she saw.

“What do you think Cassandra?” Jeanne asked. “Can I give her the spiel from the welcoming speech?”

“Fine,” The one-eyed deer woman huffed. “It’s not like this place’s history is that important.”

“Yay!” deer woman behind her cheered, bouncing up and down. “Well Piper, Home, as we like to call it, is actually grown over the remains of a Civilian Conservation Corps camp that was built, and then later abandoned, in the late thirties. Due to it being so close to several reservations and several sacred locations, the council decided to renovate the cabins and surrounding area into one of the settlements and training grounds that are can be found throughout the Nation. Though it doesn’t have an official name, most call it Home.”

“Wait did you say “one of”? As in there are more places like this?” she asked, trying to turn and face the trio. “Like how many more?”

Cassandra slugged Jeanne in the shoulder hard enough that she felt it even in the wheelchair. “Way to go big-mouth,” the warrior growled. She then bent down and snarled in Piper’s face. “And wouldn’t you like to know, you little cu-“

“Jeanne!” Boomed a voice as loud as thunder from behind. “Jeanne, is that you?!”

Piper thought she had whiplash after the nurse spun her around, but any complaints she had halted in her throat when she saw the largest man she had ever seen in her life, and for the first time since she was captured, the thunderbird feather pulsed.

He was easily, easily, ten feet tall and had muscles that would make any body builder weep with
envy. His skin reminded her of the red dirt roads she had seen growing up in Oklahoma, so vibrant and full of life. He was only wearing a pair of cargo shorts, a bold move in her opinion, but it worked for him as it allowed him to not only show off his amazing body, but the numerous fluorescent blue lines that were etched into his body in an every changing pattern. His eyes lacked pupils, instead glowing blue.

“Sparky!” Jeanne cried as she ran into the stranger’s arms, where she was promptly lifted off the ground and spun around. “I missed you so much!” she laughed, as he pulled her against his chest, her small five foot frame, looking incredibly tiny against his.

“I missed you too, my sweet doe!” Sparky laughed, before kissing the top of Jeanne’s head.

Cassandra groaned next to her, clearly unhappy at the unexpected arrival. “Great. They’ll be smooching and baby-talking each other all day.”

“Wait, is that her boyfriend?” Piper asked in disbelief. “How does that even work?”

“Yes,” Sarah answered. “And there are things you are better off not knowing. There are things we’re better off not knowing.”

Sparky (the name invoking feelings of loneliness and longing for her Jason), set the cheerful nurse down and hugged against him once more, while Jeanne reached up and slowly stroked at his bare chest with one hand. They were so cute and sweet, that Piper felt like she was intruding on what should have been a private moment for the couple, but at the same time she hoped that when she was finally reunited with Jason, they would behave in a similar manner.

“How long are you back for?” Jeanne asked, looking up at the huge man, her eyes pleading him to say forever.

The man’s eyes and tattoos seemed to dim for a brief moment as his smile turned into a frown. “Just passing through to collect some supplies,” he turned ever so slightly and nodded to a group of at least thirty demigods of various ages that had been hidden behind his colossal form, “and more help.”

“We are going back east?” Jeanne gulped.

This wasn’t the first time Piper had heard about “the east”. Napi and Kipitaaki had mentioned something about it and now the deer woman was mentioning it as well. And considering no one is happy about it, I should try to find out what’s going on. Don’t want to drive straight into danger without any information.

“These days east, west, north, or south, make no difference,” Sparky sighed. “The invaders are only becoming more aggressive, while our numbers dwindle.” He ran a hand through his long, Samson-like hair. “The council ordered all thunderers, including yours truly,” he winked, “to go to Yellowstone.”

The nurse paled, and her small fluffy tail that stuck out from her a small hole in her scrubs stopped wagging. “So the thunderbird still hasn’t returned?”

The thunderer scooped Jeanne back up once more and kissed her forehead. “Don’t worry little doe,” he smiled. “My brothers, the kids, and I can handle a simple pest problem.” He set the deer woman back down and then proceeded to dramatically flex his arms, the fluorescent blue tattoos discharging little burst of electricity. “I mean just look at me!” he laughed while making his pecs dance.

“You’re an idiot,” Jeanne huffed, trying to hide the smile on her face behind her hand.
“Could you two wrap this up?” Cassandra growled, stepping between the two lovers with her hands on her hips, daring the two to say something. “We need to get the prisoner to the matriarch for questioning!”

“You really need to chill Cassandra,” Sarah said, shaking her head disapprovingly at the one-eyed warrior.

Piper thought about adding her two-cents, but decided it probably wasn’t a good idea to further aggravate the high-strung woman. Especially when she was bound to a wheelchair with no means to defend herself. That crazy bitch would definitely trample me…

Cassandra growled in frustration and glared at everyone in their party, before stalking back over to Piper. “Whatever…”

With that little side-distraction over, everyone’s attention turned back to the main distraction of the thunderer and the nurse. They are a cute couple, if you ignore the size issue, she mused. The couple was refusing to look the other in the eye, instead both blushing like small children and staring at the ground. They probably would have continued like that forever, if it wasn’t for two demigods who took the initiative and pushed the giant, tattooed man forward, knocking him to his knees.

“Hey,” he smiled, now eye-to-eye with his girlfriend. “I’ll be back you know.”

“You better be,” Jeanne smiled, cupping his face. “Or I’ll kick your ass.” She then kissed his forehead, proceeded to leave a trail of kissed down his face until she reached his lips, where Jeanne seemed to put all of her passion into one breathtaking kiss (the little exchange was definitely making Piper’s inner Aphrodite come out).

“I don’t doubt it for a second,” Sparky chuckled as he stood up. He put his fingers to his lips and let out the loudest and sharpest whistle she had ever heard in her life, making her cringe and several nearby deer women fall to ground clutching their ears. “Oops, er, sorry ladies,” the thunderer blushed. He then turned his head slightly towards the demigods (I wonder what they call demigods. I bet it isn’t half-bloods…) and jerked it back. “Let’s move out people! We’ve got some serpents to kill!” The demigods whooped and held their weapons in the air, before they departed, but not before Sparky gave Jeanne a two fingered salute.

“I hope you can help us Piper,” Jeanne whispered into her ear, as they deer woman took her position behind her. “A lot of lives depend on it.”

The inside of the central treehouse was just as awe-inspiring as the outside.

It reminded Piper of some of the cathedrals she had briefly seen during the giant war. It had a large central chamber with a platform that in the far end, which could be reached by a ramp composed of vines and beautiful flowers. On either side of the great hall were alcoves and hallways that were blocked from view by hanging ivy, which separated when someone got close to it. All the furniture grew out of the tree itself; she watched as a young boy went to sit down on seemingly nothing, only for a rocking chair to spring up in a flash. She saw a deer woman dressed for business stand up and gather a satchel from a small table, and the chair and table sunk back into the floor as she walked away.

This place is freaking amazing!
Another thing she was noticing was the sheer number of Hummingbirds that flew in and out, occasionally stopping and hovering in front of someone. She saw a few people talking to the birds to which the bird would nod and fly away, while those that simply got waved away just disappeared in thin air. At least that’s what it looked like to her. Her ADHD was going crazy with all the new sights and sounds bombarding her.

*Jason and Leo have to see this place! Er, maybe not Leo. Things look a bit… flammable….*

“Careful, a bird might poop on your tongue if you keep your mouth open like that,” Jeanne smiled.

“I’ve just never seen anything like this place. What are the hummingbirds for?” she asked, as they reached the flora ramp.

Jeanne was about to answer, but Cassandra and Sarah snapped, “That’s none of your business!”

“Okay,” she flinched. “Can you at least tell me about this matriarch I’m supposed to talk to? I don’t want to go in blind.”

“Well,” Jeanne hummed, “it’s not the matriarch you’re really going to be talking to—“

“She’ll be there,” Sarah said, nodding to another deer woman as they passed.

“But it’s her granddaughter that has been running things. It was her daughter, but she went missing about a month back,” Jeanne explained.

“She’s amazingly competent, surrounding herself with the people who can help her,” Sarah said.

“So uh, what’s her name? Or do I call her by a title? Look, I really need to make a good first impression,” she sighed. *Which is slowly becoming the story of my life. It’s always “don’t upset this god” or “show proper respect by doing this or getting that”. Why can’t there be like a god who’s like “call me Steve, and there are chips and dip on the counter”?

Jeanne patted her head. “Don’t worry about it. Bambi is pretty level headed. She’ll tell you if you’re out of line.”

*Bambi? Are you fucking kidding me?*

“Or she’ll have us gut you,” Cassandra smirked, as they passed two guards.

“Would you stop that,” Jeanne hissed. “But-oh hey! Look there’s your friend!”

Piper looked forward and threw her head back with a groan. *Of course!*

In front of a large tree stump-shaped desk, was Reyna bound in a similar fashion to herself, but was actively trying to escape her bonds, while an elderly deer woman with white hair sat in a wheelchair next to a deer woman that couldn’t have been more than thirteen (*in looks anyway, they could age like satyrs*), both looking at the struggling praetor with blank expressions. All around them there was a hurricane of activity, with deer women running around posting papers on the tree’s inner walls, talking to the hummingbirds, placing and moving small figures on a giant tabletop map in the center of the room, and all of them did not look the least bit happy.

*This must be some kind of command room. Makes sense if their leader is here.*

“Here she is boss,” Jeanne chirped as she rolled her up next to Reyna. The deer woman latched the brakes on the wheelchair and then squeezed her shoulder reassuringly. “From the little I talked to her
on the way over I think she’ll be of great help. Or at least prove not to be an enemy.”

The young girl, who she guessed was Bambi, smiled at the nurse and nodded. “That is good news Doctor.” The words made Piper feel like a presumptive ass. “This one here,” she pointed at Reyna, who was gagged with a rubber duck and scotch tape, “has only been threatening to kill us or glaring at us in silence.”

“How do you want me to loosen her lips?” Cassandra asked, cracking her knuckles. “Because I’ve been told I can be pretty persuasive.”

Bambi shook her head while the old woman next to her chuckled, throwing a few jabs at an imaginary foe. “Cassie we’ve been over this. Everyone is innocent until proven guilty. Also,” she glared and rapped her fingers on the stump, “what’s this I hear of you ordering security to use bear traps?”

As Cassandra paled and tried to stutter out an explanation, Piper couldn’t help but to grin. You’re in trouble! You’re in trouble!

The young girl held up her hand. “Enough!” she cried, silencing the ill-tempered doe. “You will have those traps removed immediately! You damn well know that they won’t work on the hunters and only pose a threat to our people!”

“But-“

“You are dismissed!” The girl cried, slamming her hand down with a resounding thud. “You too Sarah!”

“Yes ma’am,” Sarah said, giving a small bow. She then grabbed Cassandra by the hand and led her back the way they had come in.

Jeanne raised her hand timidly. “Do you want me to go as well boss?”

The girl turned to the doctor and smiled, her dark brown eyes lighting up. “Not unless you want to doctor. Grandmother enjoys your company and I would be lying if I said I didn’t.”

“Of course ma’am,” Jeanne smiled, circling the table to join the other two deer women. The doctor tapped the floor with her hoof and instantly a chair sprung up next to the leaders. “I am quite interested to hear our guests’ story.”

“You could’ve asked,” she said, smiling at the three women across from her. “I-we, have nothing to hide. I am willing to tell you anything you wish so we can put this misunderstanding behind us.” Let’s try diplomacy and pray Leo doesn’t get possessed again. “That and I would really like to itch my nose,” she added. And a little humor doesn’t hurt. The old woman in the chair chuckled, which Piper took as a good sign.

Bambi (and she still couldn’t get over the name) sat forward and rested her elbows on the table. “Do you promise you won’t try to attack us?”

“Yeah?” Bambi snapped her fingers and instantly the zip ties that restrained her disappeared. “Oh, wow, thanks!” she beamed, rubbing her sore wrists. “Any chance you could do the same for Reyna?”

Bambi glared at the bound Latina. “No. She tried to bite me. We’ll talk of releasing her after our little talk. Now, shall we begin?”
“Not like I have anything better to do. Plus, chatting with a bunch of deer women is pretty exciting.”

The three, well two, the matriarch had dozed off, frowned at her. “So you know what we are? How is that?”

“Eh, my grandpa used to tell me stories when I was little,” she shrugged.

“Very interesting.” Bambi said, threading her fingers together. “Now before we go any further, I believe introductions are in order. This is our current matriarch, my grandmother, Awinita,” she said, nodding towards the elder. “I’m sure you’ve met Galllahi, or as her friends and mortals call her: Jeanne.” The doctor gave her a small smile and wave. “And I am Adsila, acting matriarch of the deer women and leader of Home.” She heaved a heavy sigh and hung her head, “or Bambi to my family and my so-called friends.” The girl then gestured to her.

“I’m Piper Mclean, daughter of-“

“Mclean?!” Awinita cried, jerking awake and startling everyone (including Reyna). “Mclean! Mclean! Mr. Clean! Mr. Clean!-“

Bambi put a hand on her grandmother’s shoulder and shushed her. “Settle down grandma,” the young doe smiled sadly. “Why don’t you go back to sleep.” The old woman looked at Piper critically, the nodded. “Sorry about that, grandma’s… not well. You were saying?”

“It’s fine,” she said, trying to hide the pity she felt for the old woman and her granddaughter. She couldn’t fathom the strain on the young girl was under; trying to take care of her ailing grandmother, leading her people, and trying to maintain order in the city. “I was saying I’m a daughter of Aphrodite and Reyna over there,” she nodded to the struggling older girl, “is a daughter of Bellona.”

She was surprised that they didn’t ask who Bellona was (which everyone did when they first met Reyna), instead Bambi wrote on the stump’s surface with her finger, the writing momentarily visible before it faded away. “I see. Now, who or what is that creature was accompanying you?”

“You mean Veronica? She’s- they are cool. She’s a daughter of Mercury and is currently hosting the titan Atlas in her body, which is why she looks the way she does.”

“You said that like that’s not disturbing to you in the slightest,” Jeanne said, her blue eyes wide with astonishment.

“You get used to it.”

“I very much doubt that,” Bambi said, writing more notes on the stump. “Now could you tell us why you were camped so close to Home?”

“We literally had no idea this place existed. Heck, I thought you guys were just stories until we saw the thunderbird.” The room went silent. Even the hummingbirds were quiet as all attention was focused squarely on her. “Uh, are you guys okay?” Please don’t let them see that as a bad thing!

“You saw the thunderbird?” Bambi asked, eyes wide. She then cleared her throat in an effort to regain her composure. “Tell us, what did it look like?”

She scratched her head while Reyna was glaring at her with such intensity that she felt as if the praetor was punching her in the gut. “Well, it was as big as a whale, which makes me question how it could fly, with big, glowing, blue eyes that just screamed that it was intelligent, and it had black feathers with an changing electric-blue pattern all over its body.” She slowly grabbed the feather that was braided in her hair and showed the trio. “This is one of its feathers. So just imagine this, but like
Bambi leaped up onto the table and crossed it with a single leap, making Piper flinch back hard enough that the wheelchair fell back onto the ground. In an instant the deer girl was crouched over her, carefully caressing the pulsing feather. “That’s impossible,” the girl whispered.

“But that’s definitely one of its feather,” Jeanne said, crouching down next to them. “Piper,” the doctor whispered, “Do you know where the thunderbird is?”

“Yeah,” she gulped, remembering the great beast’s death. “But I think I should tell you our story first.”

“What the fuck Piper!” Reyna screamed as she slammed Piper against the wall, the second the room sealed behind them. “You knew about this?!”

“Can’t breathe,” she choked out, as she tried to lodge Reyna’s elbow from her throat.

“Right now I don’t care,” Reyna hissed, fire in her eyes.

After Piper had told the three deer women everything that had transpired since the night of her attempted kidnapping, plus a few things to help them understand Greek and Roman ideas, the five of them had sat there for a time. She would answer any questions, which were mostly about the thunderbird’s death, and the two deer women would answer any she had, while the matriarch would occasionally chime in about her name. They hadn’t taken the news of thunderbird’s death well, seemingly mourning the creature. Bambi had snapped her fingers and one of the small hummingbirds had appeared, to which the leader told it the thunderbird was dead and to inform some council. The bird then nodded and flew off. They had then questioned her about the hunters of Artemis, but she had explained that she had very little to do with them and didn’t know that much about them, besides Jason’s sister being a member.

The deer women seemed to believe her and were becoming friendlier by the second with her, until it felt like she was talking to old friends. They even understood a few references that only res kids would understand, and she hadn’t realized how much she missed that. Awinita even had a few moments of clarity and contributed a little to the conversation. The way things were going it seemed that Bambi was going to let them go, but then a little hummingbird appeared in front of the young girl and deposited a stack of photos on the stump-desk.

The subjects of the photographs was absolutely horrifying: deer women pinned to trees with arrows, some with limbs missing, some with their eyes gouged out, and some slit open from the throat all the way down to their stomachs. One even appeared to have been skinned completely. She felt like vomiting looking at the pictures and probably would have, if it wasn’t for her stomach dropping when she saw Betty White in the background of one of the pictures.

The pleasant mood that had been there only a moment ago was replaced with a grim heaviness. She tried to explain that it couldn’t have been Veronica, but all that happened was Bambi ordered them to be locked up until a proper investigation could be conducted. Thankfully, instead of having them bound and gagged again, they were sent to a guarded apartment within the great tree.
“But I do!” she choked, her face blue.

“Fine,” the praetor hissed, releasing her hold and dropping her to the floor. “But we need to talk.”

Piper took in a few ragged breaths as she rubbed at her throat, which she was sure was going to bruise. “Yeah, I guessed that.”

“You knew about this-this place?!” Reyna screamed, tossing a pillow at her head.

“No, I didn’t know this place even existed! All I knew was that the stories my Grandpa Tom told me were apparently real!” She tossed the pillow back at the fuming daughter of Bellona, who sadly caught it with her one hand. “And I only figured that bit out when we were falling to our fucking deaths Reyna!”

“How can I believe you?” Reyna roared. “For all I know you’re some kind of traitor! You could have been working with them and the mortals to destroy Camp Jupiter from the beginning! You probably wanted New Rome destroyed! You-“

While Reyna may have caught the pillow with her hand, the praetor caught Piper’s fist with his chin. “You don’t get to say that shit Reyna!” She yelled, throwing another punch at praetor while carefully balancing on her one good leg. “I’m your friend! I’ve been with you the entire time on this trip! I took care of you when we thought you were dying from that infection! I have defended your choices to Veronica and Atlas, when they disagreed. And, uh, newsflash Reyna! They don’t fucking like you at all! And you know what? I don’t fucking blame them! You’re a hard person to like! But you know what, I somehow, which can clearly, clearly be only some kind of divine intervention, like you! So you accusing me of being a traitor is a slap to the fucking face!” She fell back onto the floor and gave the praetor a two-fingered salute.

“Some friend you are,” Reyna said, spitting out some blood onto the floor. “The first time I met you, you have your hands all over my boyfriend! Who you fucking stole from me!”

“Oh don’t start that shit Reyna! You know my mom said you and him weren’t meant to be!”

“Oh and who is your mom again? Oh that’s right the goddess of fucking love! Gee, I wonder if she could have had any power over the whole ordeal?! It’s not like the gods are constantly trying to one up each other by playing with our lives, oh wait!”

“That’s-“

“Oh and then you run down Nico any chance you get! Nico, my only friend who truly understands me! I’m sorry that he doesn’t hold up to your standards, but he’s more of a friend than you’ve ever been!”

“But-“

“Face it Mclean, you’re not my friend. The only time we see each other is when Jason is in New Rome. After the war you never once came to visit me, you never contact me, you’ve never even offered to hang out with me and you live relatively nearby,” Reyna stalked to the other side of the room and grabbed another pillow. “Just-just stay on that side of the room Piper. I got to think of a way out of this,” she said, sinking to the floor, all fight drained from her body. “Don’t worry, I’ll get you out too. Because that’s what friends are for.”

She watched as Reyna laid down and turned away from her. Well shit.
“Piper! Piper! Piper, wake up!” a voice whispered as she was shook awake.

“Huh? What?” she groaned as she blinked her eyes to focus them in the dark.

“Come on we got to get the both of you out of here,” the voice continued. It was familiar, but she couldn’t quite place it. “I got to get you guys to Jason.”

Then it clicked just as the last of the blurriness left her tired eyes. In front of her face was one Thalia Grace, the technically-older sister of Jason. “Thalia? What are you doing here?”

“No time to explain kid,” Thalia said, pulling her to feet and helping her get a hold on Reyna. “We got to get you as far away from here as possible.” She removed a celestial bronze dagger from her boot and handed it to her.

“Are you taking us to the hunters?” Reyna asked, only in a slightly better mood compared to their fight earlier.

“No,” Thalia said, pulling her bow off her back and nocking an arrow. “I need to get the two of you as far away from Artemis as possible.

“Wait what?”

“Like I said before; no time! Now follow me!”

"Thalia do you have any nectar or ambrosia?” Reyna asked.

"Nope! not eating that crap ever again!” she cried, which was met with weird looks.

Chapter End Notes

HAPPY BIRTHDAY NICO! (A day late but it's the thought)

Well *claps hands and looks at audience* that was certainly something! We got to get a better glimpse of how things function in the Nation as well as some of its peoples.

The deer women were among the first beings I had ideas for when I started sketching down ideas for the nation. In some ways they function similarly to the satyrs, but are more independent. They tend to assist with training the demigods and other creatures, as they are great fighters. They are very maternal by nature which also makes them a perfect choice, but unlike the satyrs they will not hesitate for a second to protect their kids! Coach hedge (rip) would love them!

Home, is exactly what its name implies: it's home. There the various people's of the nation, mortal, demigods, and creatures can live in safety. And unlike the camps, home is an extension of nature. The nation restored the abandoned camp and had nature grow around them. They don't cut down trees to make room for growth, they plant them.
Piper was really playing it cool this chapter. She kept a level head and assessed the situation. She did not hold a grudge for being captured or for even having her leg messed up. As a daughter of Aphrodite she knows that emotions are often a great weapon. She wasn't lying to the deer women and was genuinely establishing a bond with them and things probably would have been better if that message hadn't arrived...

And Reyna is absolutely furious. She had been trying to escape for days and save Piper only to see her chatting with their captors as if they were old friends? Yeah, that's not going to fly with her... And things kind of came to a head. Let's face it Reyna and Piper are not really friends. They generally get along, and there is some back-and-forth between them, but they don't really know each other that well. The only thing that really brought them together is the second prophecy and Jason. And I don't care what anyone says Jason would have been a source of friction for those two no matter what Aphrodite/Venus told Reyna. Reyna isn't one to roll over like that. She's a fighter. She may place her people above herself, but we have to remember that she is a teenager with her own wants and needs.

So now everything is laid bare and things are going to be a bit different for everyone...

Oh hey! Thalia appears again! And she's busting the girls out to get them... As far away from Artemis as possible?

That can't be right *checks script* oooo, wow yeah... Yup. I guess you'll have to wait and see ;)

Did you like what you just read? Then leave a kudos, bookmark, and subscribe!

Thoughts, theories, questions, etc? Then leave a comment!

I love hearing from all of you! I do a little dance when I get notifications! Seriously, people have seen me dance!

So until next time, I want you all to remember you are amazing people and I want only the best for you!

Next chapter is Percy!!!
“How you feeling man?” Jason asked, as the blond sat down at the kitchen table to the bowl of Captain Crunch he had made for the blond.

“Could be better,” he yawned, blinking his eyes rapidly trying to get them to focus. “Could be worse,” he added before shoveling a spoonful of the sweet puffed cereal into his mouth. It took him a little longer than usual to chew it up and the taste didn’t seem as appealing as it used to be, but he was sure that was due to his mood. Though it being a generic cereal may have contributed slightly… Some god of wealth! He’s too cheap to buy the name brands! When Nico is in charge he lets us get the good stuff!

“You sure Perce?” The son of Jupiter asked, using his spoon to push the cereal down into the milk. “I think you could stay home one more day. I mean, it is Friday.”

“I’m fine,” he insisted. “I really need to get out of this house anyway. I’m going crazy just sitting around in my bed all day trying to move a single drop of colored water. I can’t believe I’m saying this, but I want to go to school.”

“Wow, that is bad,” Jason laughed.

“Yeah, yeah it is,” he yawned, stretching his arms over his head. The muscles in his right arm still were a bit sore from George’s sadistic attack and he would be lying if he said the large scar that replaced his brand didn’t make him sick when he looked at it. “But what are you going to do?”

“That seems to be the question anymore,” Jason hummed, tapping his spoon against his bowl. “But are you absolutely sure you’re okay?”

He bit his lip to stop himself from snapping at the son of Jupiter. He knew Jason was only asking because he cared, but he didn’t want to talk about his little episode.

“It’s okay. You know that right Percy?”

“Yeah, but it doesn’t make it any less embarrassing,” he huffed, shoving another spoonful of cereal in his mouth. “I’m seventeen for god’s sake…”
Percy had woke up in the early hours of the morning alone in his bed. Not that being alone in his bed wasn’t natural, what with Nico’s training knocking the poor kid out the second he hit his pillow, but he had just felt so lonely. And he could handle that, really he could, and he probably would have dozed off back to fitful sleep if he hadn’t had looked at a small World of Warcraft calendar on their night stand that Jason had purchased. It was such a small insignificant thing, but somewhere in the back of his mind he realized that Estelle would have been born by now.

And he absolutely lost it.

He never really understood the term of ugly crying, but he knew what it meant at that moment. He wailed in absolute pain as his sinuses decided to open up at maximum flow, snot pouring from his nose that leaked into his mouth. He couldn’t see through the tears and he could only take deep painful breaths when his body absolutely couldn’t go without air any longer. He screamed his throat raw until someone pulled him against their chest and began to rub his back while whispering reassurances in his ear.

He had continued to cry until he was thoroughly dehydrated, ruining the shirt he was pressed against in the process. He was going to apologize to Nico for waking him up and ruining his shirt, but it wasn’t Nico who was holding him.

It was Hades.

To make matters even more embarrassing Demeter and Persephone were in the room as well, Demeter in a nightgown and curlers in her hair, while Persephone was in the scant remains of a gown and her hair absolutely wild. Jason was sitting up in his sleeping bag looking at him with a mix of concern and pity, while Nico was sitting next to Percy on the bed holding a glass of water for him. Without a word he took the offered water and chugged it down in one go, then averted his eyes from everyone in the room.

They all sat there in an awkward silence, well awkward for him, until Demeter said, “Perseus, I think you would have been an amazing older brother.”

“I know you would have Percy,” Nico smiled, squeezing his hand.

And for the next hour or so the five of them would ask him questions about what he thought Estelle would have looked like, what kind of brother he would be (protective, nothing would harm a hair on her head), what kind of games he would teach her, and a whole assortment of questions that would always be hypothetical. It hurt to answer them, truly it did, but at the same time it felt like a weight had been lifted off his chest. When he had finally calmed down enough they all returned to their beds, but not before Demeter gave him a spine-shattering bear hug.

So here he was now, sitting at the kitchen table, deprived of sleep and borderline depressed.

“Age doesn’t matter Percy,” Jason said, standing up from the table, empty bowl in hand. “Sometimes you just got to-“

“Would you just drop it Jason!” he snapped, causing the blond to drop his bowl in the sink. The panicked look on the son of Jupiter’s face made him regret his words instantly. “Shit man, I’m-“ he pinched the bridge of his nose and closed his eyes, “I’m sorry. Just, I’m tired and that is not something I want to be thinking about again. Let’s-let’s just change the subject. To preferably something less depressing.”

Jason blinked then nodded his head ever so slightly. “Sure thing bro.”
“Thanks,” he said with a half-smile, then taking a bite of the mysteriously still crispy cereal.

“I think Nico has a crush on someone,” The son of Jupiter said, sitting down once again to unlace his work boots. “He might even be seeing them.”

“Wha-“Percy started to cry, but the off brand cereal began to choke him. He coughed and sputtered as he slammed his hand on the table repeatedly trying to get the yellow corn puffs of death to go down his throat. “What makes you say that?” he asked in a ragged breath, giving Jason a forced smile. Oh fuck! He knows!

“Well he just seems really happy lately,” the son of Jupiter explained, tossing one of his boots to the door mat. “When we leave at the end of the day, he always looks so happy.”

“Jason,” he sighed, shaking his head. “I know you’re new to this whole school thing, but that is how everyone -with the exception of Annabeth- acts when school is over.”

“I get that Percy. Trust me, during College Prep all I do is watch the clock. But when we leave, Nico just has this dreamy look on his face and he tries so hard not to smile,” Jason laughed. “And the only time I’ve ever seen him like that was when Will would drop him off at his cabin.”

Well I’m glad to know that Nico is excited to see me every day, but I better play along to see what else Jason thinks is going on. “Yeah, he does seem happier lately. Do you have any idea who are dear little Neeks could be after?” Me, and he got what he wanted.

Jason tapped his index finger to his lip, absently stroking the small scar. “From what I see he gets happier as the day goes on, but he peaks during World History. Maybe Mr. Z?”


“I didn’t say it was him for sure! Besides, we both know Nico has a thing for older guys,” the blond said, shooting him a dirty look.

He flipped Jason off and blew a raspberry. “First of all, fuck you. Second, three years is not that much. Paul was five years older than my mom, and let’s not even get started on our godly parents. Besides Nico and I are just fine, he’s fifteen and I’m seventeen. According to the bro-rules, the youngest you can date is half your age plus seven. So we are okay as a couple.” His eyes widened as he realized what he just said. “Er, hypothetically of course,” he quickly added.

“Where did you hear half-your-age-plus-seven? That sounds like the rambling of a mad man,” Jason asked, thankfully ignoring his omission.

Percy smiled and leaned back in his chair, crossing his arms behind his head. “Let me tell you about a man named Andy Dwyer,” he smirked. “And a little show called Parks and Rec.”

Nico is definitely a clinger in his sleep, he thought as he looked at the younger teen sleeping before him. Anytime that they slept together, even before they started dating, he would always wake up with Nico wrapped around him as if his life depended on it. He always did look cute when he slept.
The son of Hades was currently on his bed (which somehow always looked neater than his own), curled up into a ball with his arms wrapped tightly around a pillow. He was wearing an oversized black t-shirt with *Led Zeppelin’s* Icarus on the front and a pair of Percy’s pajama pants that he hardly ever wore, which were long enough that his feet were hidden in the legs. Nico’s breathing was even cute; taking in tiny breaths and exhaling with a little “puff”. *Compare that to my own, which has Jason and Hades wondering if I have sleep apnea…*

Percy could have watched the sleeping son of Hades for hours, but sadly he knew he had to wake Nico for up for school. He propped his injured leg against the bed and carefully leaned his crutches against their nightstand so that they would not fall over. He crawled onto the bed, ignoring the sudden flare of pain in his calf, and bent down and caught Nico’s lips with his own. He felt Nico tense up for the briefest of moments, before he could feel the son of Hades smiling as he returned the kiss.

“G’morning babe,” he smiled, breaking the kiss.

“Morning death-breath,” Nico yawned lazily, a small smile gracing his angelic face.

He flopped down next to the Nico and laced their fingers together. “Uh, last time I checked you were death-breath.”

“Not when you haven’t brushed your teeth.”

He blew into his free hand and caught a whiff of something bad. “Eh, guess you’re right,” he laughed. “I guess I shouldn’t kiss you good morning.”

Nico rolled on top of him, straddling his hips. “I did not say that Perseus,” the Italian purred, burying himself in the crook of Percy’s neck. “Just, maybe brush your teeth before you do.”

“Anything for you Neeks,” he smiled against Nico’s ear. He could feel the young teen relax into his arms and hear his breathing start to slow. “Hey, don’t go back to sleep,” he chuckled. “Jason wants us out the door in thirty.”

“I want to sleep,” Nico whined against his neck, stretching out on top of him. “I thought I was too smart for school.”

“Everyone thinks they’re too smart for school.”

Nico yawned. “But I actually am.”

“That is probably true,” he laughed, “But we still got to go.”

“Can’t I stay with you today?” The son of Hades asked, his breath making the hairs on Percy’s neck standup, as well as something further south.

Percy coughed and repositioned his legs, hoping that Nico wouldn’t notice his excitement. “Actually I’m going back today, remember?”

Nico unburied his head and looked up at him. “Really?”

“Yup,” he answered, popping the ‘p’. “Looks like you’re stuck with me until your computer class.” He glanced down to his bandaged legged. “Though, maybe I’ll be able to sneak in there with you since I’m you know…”

“I hope so. I don’t like being away from you.”
He kissed Nico’s forehead. “You make it sound like we’re separated from months at a time.”

“I’m very possessive of what’s mine,” Nico smirked, pushing himself up so that his face was hovering over his. “Very possessive.”

“And who said I was yours?” He smirked. “And I remember correctly, I marked you.” Nico covered the fading hickey on his neck with one hand and blushed, while Percy laughed deeply. *Everything just feels so much better when he’s around. Everything else just seems so far away.* Nico then shifted his hips ever so slightly and he felt something poking against his stomach. “Someone’s excited,” he grinned.

Somehow it was both the right and wrong thing to say to the son of Hades. Instantly Nico jumped off him, sitting as far away from him on the bed, covering his crotch with a pillow, face as red as ketchup, and uttering apology after apology. It was definitely cute, but it also showed him that Nico still wasn’t comfortable with who he was. “I’m sorry- I didn’t- it’s- I’m!”

He sat up and maneuvered himself next to the upset son of Hades, then wrapped his arm around him and pulled him close. He didn’t laugh or smile when Nico looked away and continued to hold the pillow, instead he placed a tender kiss on the boy’s temple. “That’s natural. You know that right?”

Nico grunted, but still wouldn’t look at him.

“It, uh, kind of helps me know I’m being a good boyfriend, you know?” He realized it probably wasn’t the most elegant thing to say, but it seemed true. *At least that’s what I’m using. We’re both guys right? So it should be the same for both of us.*

“Still doesn’t make it appropriate,” Nico grumped.

That he did laugh at. “Nico, we were more-or-less making out just now. If you weren’t at least a little turned on I’d be concerned. Plus, you just woke up, there was no way in Hades that something wasn’t going on down there,” he smiled at Nico, but the shaggy haired teen still looked upset. “And, I’m having the same issue right now?”

Nico turned his head so fast Percy thought his neck would snap. “What?” he asked, eyes wide and full of disbelief.

He scratched his temple and chuckled, amazed at just how awkward he felt all of a sudden. “Well, yeah. It’s a two-way street Nico, what works for you works for me. I mean, what did you think? That this was purely emotional?”

“Sometimes?” the younger boy answered, finally removing the pillow.

“Sometimes you’re an idiot,” he sighed, ruffling Nico’s hair. “I won’t lie to you and say I’m one-hundred-percent sure on how dating a guy works, or even that I know what I’m doing half the time, but Nico, what I do know is that I am *extremely* attracted to every aspect of you.” He thought back to his fantasy. “*Extremely,*” he reiterated.

Nico Beamed. “Really?”

“Really really,” he smiled, before grasping the son of Hades’s chin and pulling him in for one more kiss. “And if you allow it, we are going to have some fun. Of the adult variety,” he added in a husky voice. Nico was red all over again and stammering, but Percy released him and climbed out of bed, grabbing his crutches. “Now get dressed, I’m sure Jason is wondering where we went.”

“But-fun- adult-allow,” Nico stammered as Percy hopped his way out of the room.
He was glad Nico couldn’t see the wicked grin on face. Because somewhere along the way, reducing Nico to a stammering mess became his favorite activity.

They had just pulled into LaMoille Community High School’s parking lot (honestly he just loved saying LaMoille. It had to be a made up word.), when Nico grabbed his and Jason’s shoulders, stopping them from exiting the truck’s cab.

“I, uh, want to ask you guys something,” Nico asked, releases his surprising strong hold. “It’s kind of important to me, but, well, I will understand if you say no. It’s not a huge deal, just that-“

“You’re contradicting yourself Neeks,” he interrupted, lightly punching the Italian’s shoulder. “You know me and Jay got your back one-hundred-percent and would judge you. Well, judge you harshly anyway.”

Jason glared at him, to which he responded by flipping the blond off. “Like Percy said, before he ruined it, I won’t judge you man,” The blond said, returning the one-fingered gesture. “All you have to do is ask. It can’t be that bad.”

Nico looked between the two with a pained expression like he was about to tell them their dog ran away (gods I hope Mrs. O’Leary is okay…) or that he wasn’t going to cook for them anymore. The son of Hades then buried his face in his hands and sighed.

“I want to go to prom and I want you both to go as well.”

He looked over to Jason, who shrugged and mouthed, “No idea.”

“Oh, Neeks? We kind of need you to repeat that. Because what you just said wasn’t human, horse, or fish.” He nudged Nico’s shoulder with his own and gave him a reassuring smile. “Just take a breath and try again.”

Nico leaned forward in his seat and fished out the always fat, black wallet he kept in his back pocket (Seriously, just how much cash does he have on him?). The son of Hades carefully unfolded the wallet and Percy did his best to hide his envy when Nico started to flip through a pile of hundred-dollar bills, before extracting several small pieces of paper. Nico carefully handed him and Jason two pieces each as if they were valuable family photos.

Percy carefully examined the pieces of paper, ignoring the way his own fingers twitched of their own accord. They were small and rectangular with a small Eiffel Tower stamped on one side in heavy, black ink, while the other side had flowing cursive writing that from a combination of his dyslexia and lack of sleep he couldn’t begin to decipher. “You’ll have to help me a little bit here, my eyes aren’t cooperating with me today,” he said, turning the papers over in his hand. “Are these tickets for something?”

“Really Nico?” Jason groaned, throwing his head back against the cab’s rear window. “I thought we talked about this? I don’t want to go.”

“You don’t have to take anyone Jason,” Nico whispered. “I- I just would really like the three of us to go.”

Take anyone? “What are you guys talking about?”
Jason removed his glasses and pinched the bridge of his nose. “Nico wants us to go to prom.”

It took him a moment to register what Jason said, which was probably not a good indicator of how being a demigod was effecting his social life. Prom was one of those things he always planned to do with Annabeth. He had probably romanticized it too much, as he always imagined it would be him and her slow dancing in a ballroom, with Annabeth wearing either a white princess type gown or the classic (but sexy) little black dress. Sadly though he had missed his junior prom (thanks Gaea) and now Annabeth wasn’t with him anymore to go to his senior prom, which he had forgotten was a thing with the recent tragedies. But I have a second chance with Nico. This could be our thing! “Is that true Neeks?”

Nico nodded with an unsure smile.

“Well of course I’ll go!” he laughed, wrapping his arm around the son of Hades’s shoulders and pulling the younger boy in close. “Need a date?” he wiggled his eyebrows, making the teen turn bright red.

“Don’t mess with him like that Percy,” Jason growled, swatting his arm off of Nico. “Besides, if you noticed he gave each of us two tickets. Which is two more than needed,” the blond said, handing his tickets back to Nico.

“Oh come on Jason!” Nico protested. “I heard that there is going to be a disc jockey, a buffet, and something called a chocolate fountain!”

“Wait, you don’t know what a chocolate fountain is?”

“Then at least consider the party after!” Nico cried, completely ignoring his question. “Aaron and Chelsea told me the school is renting out some community center! They have a pool – “ that piqued his interest, “-they’re going to bring in projectors to watch movies, they’re going to have games, and some people said they’re bringing their computers!”

Jason eyed Nico suspiciously, which made Percy want to smack him. “Why is this so important to you Nico? This isn’t like you at all.”

“Well, you used to make me go to things I didn’t want to do, so now I’m repaying the favor,” The Italian glared at the driver. “What was it you used to tell me? Oh yeah! That it was good for me?”

Jason looked out the driver’s window and from his reflection Percy could see he looked like he was about to panic. “Nico, I just really don’t want to.”

Before Nico could say anything, he placed his hand on his boyfriend’s shoulder and gave it a gentle squeeze. “Hey Nico, why don’t you go inside and get our stuff ready for class? I’m going to be pretty slow with this bum leg, so maybe you should tell the office that I might require some assistance from you throughout the day? Jason here can help me get out and up the stairs.”

Nico looked at him critically, trying to figure out what he was up to. “Fine,” the son of Hades sighed, before scampering over Jason’s lap and jumping out of the truck’s cab with both of their bags in tow.

“If I didn’t know any better, I’d swear he took gymnastics when he was a kid. He’s so flexible,” he laughed, watching his boyfriend until he was up the school’s stairs and out of sight. “Like a cat or something.”

“Thanks for getting him off my case Perce,” Jason said, leaning his head against the steering wheel. “I just can’t do it, you know?”
Percy opened the passenger side door and swung his legs out to give them a good stretch. It hurt like hell to stretch his severed Achilles, but he found out that Charlie horses in his right leg made him want to die. “The thing is Jason, I really don’t know,” he said, furrowing his brow from the pain. “It’s a silly dance he’s trying to make you got to, not Tartarus. So what’s the big problem?”

“It’s… complicated.”

“Is it really?” he asked. Jason looked up and broken eyes of blue met shattered eyes of green. “Look man, I know something bad happened to you. I don’t know what, but I know it’s made you terrified of women. I have some theories and I sincerely hope none of them are true Jason, I truly do.” Jason gave him a half-hearted smile, but the pain he could see in his eyes was soul crushing. “But,” he added, “Women make up fifty percent of the population, and you can’t just lock yourself in the bathroom and read shampoo bottles every time one gets a little close.”

“I know,” Jason sighed, tears beginning to leak from his eyes. “I know.”

“I know you said you’re done being a demigod and just want to live a normal life man and I hope you get that. That was my dream and it kept me going all these years. But the thing is, even if you’re not a son of old thunder-pants you still have to be brave in everyday life. Fighting Kronos? Gaea? All the monsters in between? They were nothing compared to the fear I felt going home from school when my mom was married to that son-of-a-bitch Gabe.” He stopped for a moment to collect himself. Just mentioning that bastard was enough to make his blood boil. “But I got through it and I know you will too,” he smiled softly and lightly punched his friend’s shoulder. “I’m not telling you what to do, but if prom is anything like the other dances I’ve been to, then everyone’s going to be focused on their dates rather than anyone else. It sounds fun and the three of us haven’t really done anything fun together in a while. So why don’t you think about and I’ll keep Nico off your back. Deal?”

Jason wiped his eyes and nodded. “Deal.”

“What did you do Percy?” Nico groaned as they followed the secretary down the school’s sole hallway.

“Nothing!” he protested as he hopped behind the surprisingly fast older woman.

“I very much doubt that!” Nico hissed and he could swear the temperature dropped ten degrees.

“I’ve been with you the entire time!” I wonder if this counts as our first fight?

The secretary, an elderly woman with snow white hair, smiled over her shoulder. “Relax boys. You’re not in trouble, Mr. Z just needs to run a few things by you.”

“So he pulled us out of class?” the young Italian fumed. “Mr. Obendorf was telling us what to expect on our Precalc test!”

“I’m sure Ben or one of your classmates will tell you what you missed.”

“And Nico, you’re going to get an A anyway, so why are you worried?” he grinned at the younger boy, finally catching up to him. Percy was finding out that what Nico lacked in social skills (and honestly he wasn’t that bad, just a little standoffish at times) he more than made up with intelligence.
The morning after Nico’s first day of training, the Italian had hastily answered the homework he had neglected the night before on the ride to school. He had thought that Nico had just scribbled down a bunch of garbage, but when it was returned not only did he get it one-hundred percent correct, Nico got all the extra credit as well, while he barely got an A after hours of brain addling work. “Besides, didn’t you figure out you only need like a C and you get to keep your A?”

“I’m not worried about myself,” Nico answered, as they entered the office. Jason’s College Prep teacher was sitting in an ancient leather chair talking to their Home Ec teacher who was sipping coffee from a Styrofoam cup. They paid the two of them no mind, but Nico nodded to them anyway out of politeness. “I want to know what you need to study for.”

He was going to tell Nico that he didn’t need to worry so much, what with his grades higher than they’ve ever been, but the secretary knocked at the vice-principal’s door. “They’re here Brent,” the elderly woman announced as she opened the door.

“Cool, send them in, and thanks Janet,” The young administrator said. The secretary stepped aside, allowing Nico to enter the small office first, while he was stuck trying to position his crutches in such a way to allow him to get through the small door frame. He had almost got it (so he told himself) when Nico spun around and guiding him through and helped him sit down in the same chair he used after their placement testing, with Nico taking the seat next to him. “Relax boys, you’re not in any trouble.”

“That’s what what’s-her-name said,” he said, nudging the brooding son of Hades’s shoulder.

The teacher’s eyes widened almost comically. “Holy- you do talk!”

“Er, yeah,” he chuckled awkwardly, rubbing the back of his head, eyes not leaving Nico. “I was just dealing with some… stuff. But thanks to Nico here, I’m doing a lot better now.” That got a small smile from his boyfriend, but he still looked uncomfortable and more than a little upset.

“Well that’s great,” Mr. Z nodded, placing his feet up on his desk and reclining back in his chair. “Just remember that if you two ever need anything, just ask me. Your brother and I cleared a few things up, so I know,” the vice-principal winked.

It took Percy a few moments to realize what the athletically built teacher was talking about. Then he remembered that Jason told them the guy thought they were in Witness Protection and that Hades was their bodyguard. “Yeah, he told us,” he said, covering his mouth with is hand to hide his smile. “Thanks for keeping it a secret.”

“No problem. Now on to business so we can get you back to class.”

“Please.” Nico grunted.

“So I heard it through the grapevine that Mr. di Angelo has bought six tickets for prom,” Mr. Z. said, eyes focused on Percy as he tapped his fingers on his desk.

“Yeah, I don’t know why he got six tickets though,” he shrugged, looking at Nico who for some reason wouldn’t meet his gaze. “He only needed like, four tops.” Nico paled and sunk into his chair. “But sometimes Nico gets a little overexcited.”

The brown haired teacher’s brow furrowed. “I figured he got six because that would be one for the each of you plus your dates-“

Percy stopped listening as he felt like he was going to be sick. He had thought that Nico wanted to go to prom with him, not someone else. He had thought that prom would have been their way of
announcing to everyone that they were a couple. That it was going to be a major step in their relationship. After talking to Jason in the morning he had been becoming increasingly excited by the whole idea! Now though he wasn’t sure he even wanted to go anymore.

“-so in short,” Mr. Z. continued, “You don’t need to call the ACLU, you can bring anyone you want as a date Percy, just please follow the school’s, rather lax in my opinion, dress code.” He smiled at the both of them. “If I had known he was talking I wouldn’t have had to grab you too di Angelo, I thought I was going to be deal- are you okay Jackson? You look a bit green.”

“No really,” he choked, grabbing his crutches and pushing himself out of the chair. “I’m sorry, but I really got to go to the restroom.” He didn’t wait to see what Nico did, and instead exited the room as fast as possible, managing to get out of the small office easier than he entered it.

“Run if you need to!” he heard Mr. Z. call from behind.

“Percy are you okay?” Nico called out with some apprehension.

“We need to talk Nico,” he gasped, his breathing labored.

“Where are you?”

“Handicapped stall.” He reached up and unlatched the door and a moment later the small Italian knocked before entering. “Hey.”

Nico gave him a half-hearted smile. “Hey.”

“You were going to ask someone else to prom weren’t you?” he rasped, looking at Nico with tears trailing down his face. Percy wasn’t sure why this was effecting him so much, he knew the reasons why Nico was doing this, and he honestly this should have been something he could have laughed off. *But thing have changed. I’ve changed.*

Nico knelt down in front of him and took both of his hands in his own. “Yeah, but-“

“No buts Nico,” he snapped, immediately regretting it when Nico flinched. “Just- just tell me your idea.”

Nico sighed and squeezed his hands tighter. “I was going to ask Chelsea, I thought you could ask Aaron, and Jason was always a wildcard. We would go as a group and well, that was as far as I got…”

“So you didn’t think it through. That’s a first,” he snorted.

“I’m a coward Percy,” Nico whispered.

“You’re not a coward Nico,” he whispered back, pulling the younger boy into his embrace. “You’re just afraid of losing the new life we’ve built.”

“I think that is the definition of a coward.”
“No, it’s… I suck at words Neeks, but I get where you’re coming from. But I’m not going to prom with anyone but you,” he whispered into the boy’s ear as he heard the bathroom door swing open. “And if I can’t go with you I’m not going.”

Percy could swear he heard Nico’s heart break. The dark haired teen pulled away from him and looked pleadingly into his eyes. “But-

“Nico I can’t go with Aaron no more than you can go with Chelsea. It would be leading them on and I can’t do that Nico. I refuse to fuck with people’s feelings like that. Even if we told them we would just be going as friends, a small part of them would think that something could happen. It’s not fair to them and it’s not fair to us,” he said, gesturing between them. “So please give this some thought.” He pulled Nico back into his embrace. “I lo- I want prom to be something special for us. One of our big moments. I’m not expecting an answer from you right now, but I want to go with you.”

“I want to go with you too.”

“Then can you please think about it?” He placed a soft kiss on Nico’s slightly exposed collarbone, making the younger boy purr with pleasure. “I know it is a lot to ask of you, so think this through before you answer.”

“Okay.”

He pulled away slightly and grabbed Nico’s chin and kissed him deeply. With the kiss he tried to convey just how much his feelings for him had grown, that he would do whatever it took so that Nico wouldn’t hurt, and that he was stuck with him now. “And to help you make your decision,” he grinned, nipping at the boy’s sensitive skin, “I am an incredibly jealous boyfriend.”


“Me too,” he laughed. “We should probably be getting back to class, right?”

“ Probably.”

Nico helped him get off the rather short toilet and then hugged him, whispering apologies and telling him that he would think about telling everyone about them. He did his best to hug him back, the crutches making the simple gesture rather hard, and said he would understand with whatever he decided.

They walked out of the stall, both with goofy smiles on their faces, giddy with the knowledge that they had survived their first fight (in his mind anyway). He went to sneak a kiss on Nico’s cheek, but stopped an inch from the tantalizing pale cheek when he noticed that they were not alone.

“Were you guys in the same stall?” Jason’s friend Charlie asked, as he zipped up his fly, confusion and disgust written on his face.

Percy’s stomach dropped. He was positive that what confidence that he had just built up in Nico was gone. He watched as Nico tensed up and all emotion was drained from his face. Back to square-

“Percy needed help,” Nico stated plainly. The son of Hades then grabbed his right arm, knocking his crutch to the floor and holding it to show the guy his scarred flesh. “He’s got some nerve damage and is going to require some help for a while.”

I don’t know if this is hilarious or embarrassing, he thought as Nico released him and picked up his crutch for him.
The burly teen shrugged and walked over to the line of sinks. “That’s disgusting! Make sure you wash your fucking hands!”

The rest of the day had passed pretty smoothly in his own humble opinion.

They returned to the last half of Home EC and only received a warning for being so late from the elderly teacher. He was pretty sure it was because the old woman felt pity for how beat up he looked. He knew he would. The large scar that started on his cheek and ended at his earlobe, the large scars on both his hands, the near constant twitching of his fingers, the large patch of scar tissue on his right arm where his Roman brand use to be, and the cast on his leg made him look absolutely pathetic. But if looking pathetic allowed him to sort things out with his boyfriend and not get a detention for being late? Yeah, he could live with that.

Lunch was a bit of a hassle. Despite his insistence that he could carry his tray on his own, Nico had expressed his doubt and offered to carry his lunch to the table for him. Feeling that his manhood was on the line, he stubbornly refused and grabbed the tray with ease… until he tried to lift it off the line and dropped everything on the floor, including his crutches, sending him face forward into a ridiculously hot pile of spaghetti. Thankfully the entire school had been there to witness it so at least they had a good laugh at his expense. Nico only rolled his eyes and handed his own tray to Jason and told him to save them a seat. The son of Hades then grabbed him by the collar and literally dragged him to the small unisex bathroom in the art room where he proceeded to clean him up. If he focused on the positives (which was how he got through the day anymore), then his little accident had allowed for a few more moments of privacy and a chance to share a lunch with Nico.

World History had been pretty interesting to say the least. Mr. Z. had assigned the class a giant crossword puzzle on the sixties and allowed the class to work together on it. By then all the school had heard that he was talking and had become somewhat of an attraction, everyone in the class hovering around him so that they could “work together”. Even Mr. Ziggler had pulled up one of the spare desks and worked the crossword with Jason, Nico, and himself, asking a few questions about him every now and then.

And Nico saying he was a jealous boyfriend? Yeah, that was one-hundred-percent true. The small teen would glare at anyone that got close to him with such intensity that people would slowly back away after a few moments, some even apologizing.

Then there was Aaron, who he honestly didn’t care for. That kid was lucky to be alive. The red head had tried to move his desk next to him only for Nico to kick it over when Mr. Z. wasn’t looking. But that didn’t deter the kid, he only stood the desk back up and moved even closer to him, uncomfortably close. Nico then stood up, and he honestly thought he was going to witness him kicking Aaron’s ass, but instead the Italian only walked over to the classroom’s ancient pencil sharpener. Nico looked like an executioner sharpening his axe as he slowly cranked the sharpener. He returned a minute later with what had to be the sharpest pencil Percy had ever seen and a downright malicious grin on his face. Nico then placed the tip of the pencil on his desk and held it upright with his palm. He wasn’t sure what Nico was planning, but out of decency he tried to warn his redheaded stalker that he should probably move. Then in what had to be the dumbest move Percy had ever seen (and he was a demigod so he saw a lot of those), Aaron tried to wrap his arm around him. The keyword there was tried. From the corner of his eye he watched as Nico opened up a tiny
bit of shadow under the pencil and its tip disappeared. He didn’t have to guess where it went as Aaron yelped and leapt out of his desk straight into air, his hands covering his ass.

Percy couldn’t begin to guess what the mortal saw, but his glare at Nico told him that he knew the son of Hades was somehow behind his injured rear. Nico met his glare with his own that could only be interpreted as “Back off bitch, he’s mine!” They continued to glare at each other for an uncomfortable period of time that was long enough for Jason and their teacher to notice that something was off, but before anyone could ask any questions Aaron retreated with his desk to the back of the room.

Maybe he should have told Nico off for using his abilities inappropriately like his mom, Paul, and Annabeth would have done to him, but honestly he was trying not to laugh.

Now though, he was sitting in the small library, absently thumbing through his Anatomy notes, while anxiously watching the clock. There was only five minutes left, but the forty-five that came before were some of the longest in his life and it seemed that these five were going to continue the trend.

“You’re worried about nothing,” he told himself as he ran his fingers through his hair, stopping to play with the streak of gray. “Nico promised that he wouldn’t do anything right away.”

It was the same conversation he had been having with himself since they parted ways for their respective final classes of the day. As expected he got to sit out of gym, but due to some stupid rule he couldn’t sit in on classes he wasn’t signed up for! What kind of school doesn’t let a guy swap classes now and then?! Maybe I would like programming! So now he found himself sitting by himself worrying if Nico was going to panic and ask Chelsea to prom. Gods, I regret giving him that ultimatum! I should have been nicer! I should have explained better! I could have made us our own prom! Just me and him dancing and hanging out! We could have used Hades record player and albums! We could have cleaned out one of the haylofts! Wait, do we have haylofts? It’s a farm it has to!

He looked back at the clock on the wall and found that he now only had a minute left, apparently the Fates had been kind enough to let his anxiety speed up time for once. He started to back away his things (and patting himself on the back for thinking to grab his bag from his locker), earning him a dubious look from Mrs. Deal, but he was sure that he could outrun the massive woman even on crutches.

Thirty seconds…”

He put his arms through the bag’s straps and began the painful process of standing up. Just a few more seconds and his mind would be put to rest. There was no way Nico would ask her out, it was absurd, crazy even.

But what if she asks him out…

He couldn’t fathom why his own thoughts continued to betray him like that, because now he had a whole set of things to worry about! Nico was a nice guy who despite his gruff attitude, had a hard time saying no to anyone. I asked him to lead the guys to the Doors of Death, and he did it without protest! Okay sure, he had a crush on me, but still he could’ve said no! Combine that with the blonde girl’s boisterous and assertive personality and her obvious crush on his boyfriend.

Screw this, I got to find out now!

He moved as fast as his crutches could carry him, which was probably about equivalent to a slow jog. The librarian grunted at him as he passed her desk, but the bell rang just before he got to the
door. In one swift motion (that made him feel like a badass) he balanced on his crutched and kicked the double-doors open with his good leg and passed on through. He swerved to the right to the entrance of the computer lab and slid right in coming face-to-face with Nico and Chelsea.

“Uh, everything alright Perce?” Nico asked him, one thin, dark eyebrow quirked.

“I’m good,” he panted, trying and failing to sound casual. “Just thought I’d swing by and see how you two are doing. Walk you to your lockers, that kind of thing.”

“I think your cousin is weirder when he talks,” Chelsea teased.

Nico rolled his eyes. “You have no idea…”

“So anything going on with you two? I mean, any big news you want to share?”

Now both of them were looking at him weird. “Uh, Nico managed to log in on his own?”

“Anything else?” he asked.

Nico tapped his foot on the ground and crossed his arms. “I think Percy’s just a little exhausted Chels- “Oh shit a nickname! “.I better get him home.” The son of Hades then walked past him, but as he did so he whispered, “I didn’t ask her Percy.”

His heart soared.

“Tell me what this is,” Hades said, holding a handful of soil inches from his face.

“Uh, dirt?”

When they arrived home Hades has been waiting for them in the driveway, wearing his new casual clothes. Gone were the days of the expensive three piece suits, dress clothes, and handmade leather shoes. In their place were band T-shirts, dark jeans, and Nikes, Air Jordan’s to be precise. The recovering god grabbed him and Nico and dragged them to an area behind the main barn that had two areas of soil sectioned off with pieces of lumber. Hades deposited Nico in front of one and he was set down in a lawn chair in front of the other.

“Yes, but what is it composed of? What is in it?” Hades asked, allowing the brown clod to crumble between his fingers.

“Dirt things?” Jason laughed as he set down in Percy’s dirt box. “Worms?”

“I’m going to steal Jason’s answers of worms.”

Nico bit back a chuckle as Hades slapped his hand to his forehead. “I died and went to Tartarus. That is the only explanation for my current situation,” the god mumbled. “No. Just no,” the god sighed as he picked up another clod of dirt. “Let me put it to you this way: when my brothers and I drew lots to decide our domains, why did it make sense for us to split the earth between us?”

“Because… that’s actually a good question.” He turned and looked at Nico. “Nico you know this stuff better than me, you answer it.”
“Actually I really don’t know myself,” The teen answered, sitting down on the ground next to Percy. “I mean the land is really the smallest of the four domains, so maybe that?”

“Well then allow me to enlighten the three of you. We agreed to share it because it was composed of the other three. There is death, air, and water in the earth and from that trinity, life is born. The remains of the dead provide the nutrients, the water its lifeblood, and the air allows it to spread. Without even one of them there can be no new life, the same can be said for if there is too much of one. Balance must be maintained.” The god grabbed his arm and placed the dirt in his hand. “All of you have the capability to use the land, but so few realize it.”

Percy had never quite thought of it like that. At the ranch he had realized that there was water underneath the earth which allowed him to clean the stables of the flesh eating horses, in Tartarus he had realized that there was water to be found in all life, but he had never put two-and-two together. “So what do you want us to do?” he asked, squeezing the earth in his hand.

“Jackson, you are going to focus on moving the earth in this box to start with. You need to form a connection with the land. So just try to move the dirt around without separating the water from it. It’s already there, in minute qualities, but it is there.”

“No time limit?”

“Not for now,” the god said, clapping a hand on his shoulder before turning his attention to Nico. “And you my son, who already know how to move the earth with the dead, will be doing something a bit different.”

Nico rolled his eyes, but was smiling at his father’s erratic behavior. “Yay me.”

“In your little box I have buried a variety of gemstones and metals—“

“Where did you get those?” Percy asked, wondering if there were similar prizes in his box. The best thing I ever got was a temporary tattoo from the Cracker Jack box…

“Not important Jackson,” the god said, waving him off. “Nico you will learn to talk to the land so that it can tell you not only where things are buried, but what is buried as well.”

Jason flew next to Nico and elbowed the smaller teen in the ribs. “Looks like you can add Dirt Whisperer to your list of titles.”

“Don’t’ you have a dungeon to raid or something Jason,” he growled, jealousy flaring up.

“Not until four,” the blond shrugged. “Thought I’d see what you guys were up to until then.”

He was about to tell Jason to go away when Persephone literally appeared in a rain of flower petals accompanied by Demeter.

“We found Artemis,” the goddess of spring announced.

“Let me go too!” He cried, slamming his fist down on the kitchen table. “You can’t send Nico alone!”

Hades sighed and massaged his temples. “I don’t want to send Nico and Persephone alone either, but
we don’t have any other options. Demeter and I are practically powerless, Grace refuses to be a part of this anymore, and you can’t hold your sword let alone walk.”

“Percy I survived Tartarus on my own and got the Athena Parthenos back to camp from Greece. I think I can survive a little trip to Montana,” Nico said, his tone even and devoid of emotion. “If the princesses don’t want to talk I’ll come right back.”

“Nico is right Perseus,” Persephone added. “The first sign of trouble and we’re leaving.”

He glared at the goddess. He knew Nico and his step-mother didn’t get along, what with the latter sending him, Nico, and Thalia on that stupid quest to retrieve Hades’s sword. If she’s willing to make him do that, then what’s stopping her from leaving him there? Or offering him up to Artemis for some kind of peace offering? Nico alone with the two goddesses that didn’t care for him really grated on his nerves. “Swear to me on the River Styx that you’ll bring Nico back if things go to shit,” he growled.

The room went silent and Persephone blinked at this unexpected demand. “Fine,” she shrugged. “I swear on the River Styx that I’ll bring Nico back-

“Alive.”

“-Alive,” the goddess added.

As Percy expected there was no clap of thunder to seal the pact, but he figured it got the message across to the gods at the table. He then turned his attention to Jason who was sitting on the kitchen counter eating a bowl of cereal, kicking his legs, and humming a tune. “Jason you got to-”

“Nope,” the blond said in a tone that said he wasn’t going to change his answer. “I’m done with all of this.” Demeter frowned and looked like she was going to say something to the son of Jupiter, but instead chewed on her lip.

Hades clapped his hands. “I guess that settles things.” He stood up from the table and pulled his wife into his embrace. “You be careful out there. You know what that brat is capable of.”

“She is literally the model for the bratty spoiled sister,” Persephone laughed as Hades started to trail kisses down her neck. “We’ll be back.”

He turned his attention of Nico, who gave him a small half-smile. He returned it, but it felt hollow and fake. Nico was about to leave to gods’ know where on what was likely a dangerous mission (because there is no such thing as an easy quest) and all they could do was smile at each other.

No! Fuck this!

He hadn’t kissed Annabeth the night before his world went to hell and he regretted it almost every waking moment. He wasn’t about to repeat his mistakes, if he loved someone then he was going to tell them at every opportunity. He had too many regrets in his life already, he wasn’t going to add another!

He shot up from the table, startling everyone, Nico included. He grabbed on the table with one hand to balance himself and used his other hand to pull the skinny teen up by his collar.

“Percy what are you-“ He didn’t allow the boy to finish, instead smashing his lips against his. It wasn’t their longest kiss by a longshot, but it certainly felt like their most desperate. In those few short seconds he conveyed to the son of Hades just how much he meant to him, that he had to come back alive, and that yes, he was very much in love with him.
“Will you go to prom with me, Nico di Angelo?” he asked when he broke their kiss. “It would mean
the world to me if you said yes.”

Nico jumped on him and they tumbled to the floor as the smaller demigod shouted, “Yes!” Nico
cupped Percy’s face and kissed him again. “Yes Percy!” Then Nico’s eyes bugged out a she realized
that they were surrounded by their family. The son of Hades quickly scurried off of him and stood
up. He coughed into his hand. “I mean, yes.”

“Good,” he smiled, pushing himself up on his elbows. “We’ll sort out the details later, but I was
thinking navy blue for our color scheme, how’s that sound?”

“It sounds like we have a lot to talk about,” Hades growled as the god yanked him up into his chair.

“Nico dear, I think we better take our leave,” Persephone said, ushering her step-son into a cloud of
flower petals. “We’ll see you soon!” the goddess laughed forcefully before they disappeared.

“It looks like I have to go to prom now to chaperone,” the blond groaned, throwing Percy a dirty
look that almost rivaled Nico’s.

“Jason,” the god said between clenched teeth. “I do believe you get Percy’s old bed.”

“Uh,” he laughed awkwardly. “Where do I sleep then?”

“With me,” the god snarled. “But first I think we need to have a long conversation.”

Still worth it, he thought as Hades dragged him into his office.

Chapter End Notes

So that happened! Percy and Nico are officially out to thier family! It was a long time
coming, and we'll Jason and Hades aren't exactly taking the news well... But, I promise
they will come around (if Percy survives Big Brother!Jason and papa!Hades)
hmm...maybe Percy is fucked...

The end of this chapter is a sharp contrast to the beginning when it comes to Hades and
Percy. Percy just utterly broke down and it wasn't Nico who hugged him, but Hades. As
terrible as his breakdown was, it kind of showed him that these people; Hades, Nico,
Jason, Demeter, and Persephone are his new family now. Yes he was embarrassed and
ashamed of himself, but who do you feel more embarrassed of when you cry? Family?
Or strangers? Something to think about.

Poor Nico, Percy is right, what he experienced was perfectly natural when you're
around a loved one and things get a little hot and heavy. He never really got far with
Will in regards to the more physical aspects of a relationship so he is in uncharted
territory. But Percy is too, perhaps even more so because he's never been attracted to
another guy before. So all they can do is reassure each other and experiment.

Nico's fear of rejection got him in a bit of trouble with Percy, but thankfully they
managed to work through it. Nico may act like he doesn't care what other people think
of him, but he's still scared of being persecuted, thus his initial idea.
Ah, Aaron vs Nico, the fight of the century! Yes, Nico would never have fought or tried to scare off Annabeth when she and Percy were dating, he has far too respectful to do such a thing. However now that he had Percy and percy has him, the gloves are off. Percy kind of thought that Nico's version of jealous would be him sulking and pouting, not shadow traveling a pencil tip into a guy's ass. I guess that training is definitely paying off!

And yes, Percy was on the verge of a panic attack while waiting for Nico. He knew Nico wouldn't ask Chelsea out after their conversation, but that nagging little voice in his head got to him. I think we can all relate to that.

And what a pity we couldn't see the new training Hades had planned! Why couldn't Artemis stay hidden a little longer! Ugh now Percy has to worry about Nico being alone with his wicked stepmother! So yeah, Percy wasn't going to let Nico go without at least a kiss and a promise. He's giving the son of Hades a reason to come back alive :)

Hey did you like what you just read? Then leave a kudos, bookmark, and/or subscribe!

Thoughts, questions, theories, etc? Then leave a comment!

I love hearing from you guys! Really makes my day!

Next chapter is George! Boy oh boy, we are racing to something big!

Well until next time, thanks for reading and I want you to remember you are a shiny star in a world of darkness! You are the light in someone's life whether you know it or not!
George

Chapter Summary

Warnings: vague mentions of gore, implied death, and imprisonment

Tonight:

George has some fun with his new body.

Another glimpse at the inner workings of Avalon.

A new weapon of mass destruction.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

She’s alive, George smiled as he pulled the trigger, the Cyclopes’ eye exploding into a shower of gore. He easily sidestepped the brute’s massive body as it fell to the sterile white ceramic tile, before it began to disintegrate. Feeling a bit reckless, he shot another round into the base of the creature’s neck before it completely vanished.

“You could’ve just hit it with a pulse,” Dagonet sighed over the intercom. “There was really no need for that macho display George.”

He grabbed the lanyard from around his neck and flashed the RFID chipped ID to the clean rooms only exit, before being prompted for a retinal scan. “I’m just having a bit of fun partner,” he said as he opened his right eye as much as possible for the camera. There was a flash of white from the camera and his new heart skipped a beat as short pulse was released. It didn’t exactly hurt, but it wasn’t exactly a tickle either. A moment later the door slid open into decontamination. “Any chance you can override this for me?”

He took the woman’s silence as a no.

The decontamination procedure that Brian and his team had come up with was certainly interesting and could even pass for a decent show for any onlookers. Two massive electromagnets emerged from the floor that made the hairs on his body stand on end, as some kind of gas was pumped into the small chamber that smelled and tasted like mint mouthwash. The magnets hummed with power and if he had been carrying his wallet all of his credit cards would have been rendered useless. As the magnets pulsed the mouthwash cloud that engulfed him turned from white to blue, the result of some kind of super complex science thing the redhead had tried to explain to him, but was way over his head. After another moment the gas was pumped out, the electromagnets sank back into the floor, and a green light turned on above the door signaling he could leave.

“How are ya feeling boss?” Dagonet asked as he stepped out. Since their assault on the first Amazon distribution center, the woman had grown into a remarkably competent soldier. She had successfully led several missions on her own that included target retrieval, target elimination, and the ever critical donut and coffee runs. After all, soldier marches on their stomach. Through that he could gladly call her his number two and his confidant. “Is your heart okay?”
George appreciated her concern, but it was getting a bit tiresome. Yes, he had almost died when DG:NH stabbed him repeatedly in the chest for having a little fun with DG:PP, even managing to nick his heart. But, with the knowledge that his daughter was alive and T:C’s heart in his chest, he had never felt better. *Hell, I never looked better either,* he thought as he caught a glimpse of himself in one of the many stainless steel cabinets. The heart had somehow made him look thirty years younger and had given him an astounding boost to his strength, agility, and endurance to the point that he could run for an hour without even sweating. “I’m still stand’n, ain’t I?”

“I just don’t like you exposing yourself to the signal any more than you have to, sir.” She said, falling in behind him as they exited one of the many labs into the facility proper.

“Duly noted and appreciated,” he said as he leaned against white handrails. “This place never fails to impress me,” he noted looking around at the flurry of activity before him.

Containment Facility One, or Camelot as the old man called it, was one of many Avalon owned facilities that covered the world, with locations such as Rome, New Delhi, Cairo, Tokyo, Hong Kong, and Istanbul. Camelot though was stationed under New York’s meat packing district in what had been the remains of some giant creature’s lair. The funny thing was, according to Brian it had looked like the creature had access to some kind of high wattage laser beam if the burns on the walls had been any indication. But now though any trace of cave or sewer that remained could only be found in the memories of the contractors who expanded and deepened the place and covered it all in sterile labs, metal catwalks, hermetically sealed containment units. At last count, the facility housed over four-hundred DGs, seventy Gs, five Ts, and several dozen monsters of various shapes and sizes.

“True,” the soldier agreed, leaning next to him. “Has a very MI6 mixed with Roswell type of feel to it.”

“With just a sprinkling of *Star Wars,*” he added, earning him a dubious look from his second.

“You a fan?” she asked, waving to a team wheeling in yet another recently captured G.

“Nah, I was always more of a western guy myself,” he shrugged. “But PB was a huge fan. She thought Luke and Leia were going to have a happily ever after together.”

The woman cringed. “Ouch.”

“You got to realize there was only one movie at the time. Everyone thought that’s how it would end up.”

The team passed by them with the god contained in one of Brian’s latest iterations of the divine faraday cages. The cage itself was roughly the size of a coffin and looked the part too, the biggest difference were the electronic locks on the side and the small window that allowed one to see the G within. To match the facility, the cage was a sterile, bright white with strips stainless steel on the edges. He peered into the window and saw a pale old man with slicked back, greasy black hair, a pointed nose, and a pencil thin mustache. It was hard to tell from the small window, but it looked to him that the G was wearing a red and black pinstriped suit.

“Who do you got there?” Dagonet asked one of the escorting guards. “Anyone important?”

“No ma’am,” the guard said, saluting the two of them. George was proud to see that the team appeared to be following the safety protocols he developed down to the letter; all of them in their combat gear, goggles or helmets on and active, weapons with their safeties off, one guard holding the controller to the G’s implant, and one holding a signal cannon. “Just the minor G Caecius of the
northwest winds.”

“Ah yes, the Chicago mission.” The corruption that was within the Illinois state government was hindering Avalon’s progress in installing signal generators throughout the state, which meant for the time they were stuck with doing everything the old fashioned way. While the state itself was mostly free from activity, besides a few monsters here and there, the windy city was a breeding ground for all the air and wind based creatures. It took a little time, but eventually they determined that the city was ruled over the by the Anemoi, specifically Lips, Caecius, Skiron, and Apeliotes. “Any problems?”

“No sir. As expected the four Gs were each within their respective domains at the time. We coordinated with the three other squads and launched the attack at the same time so that none could call for aid. Within a matter of seconds all four were rendered immobile and had control cylinders inserted.”

“Good work team,” he grinned, tapping on the glass. “Now get this thing down to storage and then relax. That’s an order.”

“Thank you sir!” The guard saluted, before resuming the escort.

“Did you know who they were sir?” Dagonet asked, as they watched the team disappear into the central elevator that would take them down to storage.

“Negative. Everyone looks alike in that gear.”

The workshop was one of his favorite places to visit when he was at Camelot. It was a huge open space the size of a football stadium that was filled with heavy machinery and smelled of diesel fuel and napalm. It was one of the few places that wasn’t sterile and lifeless, and had people who were more down to earth and approachable compared to the eggheads down below.

George was staring at what looked like a slightly oversized buoy, which he guessed made sense since that’s what people were supposed to think it was. In reality though it was the R&D team’s latest weapon on how to combat the threats that lurked below the waves. When put into place, the buoy would deploy a modified version of the signal generator from its base, which was powered by a mixture of wave and solar energy. It was also determined that the signal would not affect natural marine wildlife, which he was sure PB would be glad of.

“What’s the ETA on completed the order!” He yelled to the foreman over the whir and grinding of power tools.

The foreman, an older man with a weary face and eyes, held up his clipboard and tapped his pen against it. “About a week!”

He shook his head. That wasn’t the answer he wanted to hear. “Can you do it in five? We just got a report of a boat disappearing when it left Boston Harbor! Lancelot wants to get these in place ASAP!”

The foreman shook his head in turn and wiped the sweat off of his brow. “I’m sorry George, but my
guys are already working around the clock! Besides, fishing boats disappear all the time! It’s a fact of life!”

“Partner, I don’t think you understand!” George cried out as he fished his new phone from his front pocket. He flicked through a few menus and accidentally started his GPS before finding the pictures that Lancelot and the rest of the Nordic team had sent him. He may now have had the appearance of his twenty-five year old self, but he was still absolutely terrible with phones and the like. He held up the phone to show the foreman. “It wasn’t some little dingy that went missing!” He zoomed in on the picture. “It was a naval frigate!”

The foreman bent over slightly and looked at the screen. He said something that he couldn’t make out over the roar of the shop, but his terrified expression showed that he saw the giant shadow that was underneath the ship in the last known image. “What the hell can be that big?!”

“Something that makes Godzilla look puny!” he shouted as he tucked the phone back in his pocket. Something that makes it look damn miniscule. That ship was over one-hundred meters long and the damn thing was easily double that, and that was just width of its jaws…

“I’ll see if I can get some of the guys to work some more overtime!” The foreman yelled, his face significantly paler than it had been a moment ago.

“Thanks partner!” The foreman went to leave, then he remembered that he had made the trip for another reason. “Hold on a second partner!” The man spun around and looked at him quizzically. “What’s the status on the Trans-Atlantic cables?!”

The older man (in appearance anyway) flipped a few a few pages back on his clipboard and used his finger to help him speed read down the page. “That one is actually two weeks ahead of schedule! Should be ready for deployment around the twentieth!”

“Good! We got some mermaids to fry!”

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He was just putting the finishing touches on the miniature Tiffany chandelier that was going to hang in the ballroom of PB’s new dollhouse, when Dagonet burst into his quarters out of breath and clutching a tablet to her chest. “Can I help you?” he asked, as he carefully set down intricately threaded chandelier on his workbench. Maybe I should add some gold beads at the bottom? Yes, that would look lovely with the crystal.

“This just came in,” the brunette panted, handing him the tablet. “I figured you needed to see it ASAP.”

“What do you got?” he asked as he took the tablet and removed his safety glasses. George started to skim through a report from what had been a missing acquisitions team in Montana. Apparently the team had encountered DG:PA, DG:RB, and T:A, and only one of the team had survived, the rest either dead from a traffic accident or from T:A burning them alive. “I think you meant for this to go to Morgan,” he sighed. The young lady had convinced Merlin that DG:PA was key to killing the gods; something about dreamers and her voice, but frankly he thought they just hadn’t found the right bullet for the job yet.

“Keep reading,” she panted, finally standing upright. He supposed it was quite a jog to get from central command to his room at the bottom of Camelot, but he liked his privacy and it was the most
easily defendable location.

He scrolled down a bit and continued reading. Apparently DG:PA had convinced the others to spare the guy’s life and had tied him up to the small town of Ennis’s welcome sign. Unfortunately no one found the poor bastard for two days and by then he had suffered from severe heatstroke and dehydration, rendering him unconscious. He skipped down a bit further, he really didn’t care or need to know how the guy recovered, when he stopped dead.

*It can’t be…*

But yet he would recognize his daughter’s face anywhere. She was a bit older yes, her face sharper, her blonde hair longer and done in a long braid, and despite the smile on her face, her eyes betrayed a deep sadness.

*PB…*

She was with two other girls, all of them wearing matching black tank tops, black jeans, combat boots, and silver tiaras resting on their heads. They had silver bows and quivers on their backs, as well as backpacks and sleeping bags. It was hard to be for sure, but it looked like the three were walking down some small town’s main street.

A surge of emotions overwhelmed him. Joy that his daughter was still alive and now he had more than some DG’s word about it. Anger at how miserable she looked. Sorrow that he hadn’t been there to comfort her for almost forty years. “How-how old is this picture?” he asked, his voice far shakier than he would have liked.

Dagonet smiled. “Less than thirty minutes, boss. Our guys spotted them after they picked up our missing asset.”

“Have them-“

“They are already trailing them, sir. And I have a copter ready to take you to a jet standing by,” she interrupted, seemingly reading his mind. “I’ve also taken the liberty to order additional forces to location so that they may be at your command.”

He was still looking at the image and noticed that at some point he had gripped the tablet too tight, cracking the left side of the screen. He ran his free hand through his once again brown hair before pinching the bridge of his nose. *This is happening so fast! I thought I’d have more time to prepare!* George shook his head to clear his mind. He had been preparing for this reunion for a lifetime; that was just his nerves talking. He would never be more ready than he was at that very moment; he had loyal men and women who would follow him to hell and back, near unlimited resources at his disposal, and weapons that could bring a god to its knees. *Speaking of weapons…*

He snapped the tablet in two and tossed it in the little garbage bin under his work bench, and then crouched down and pulled out a stainless steel briefcase from under his bunk. Because Brian was a showoff and had a flare for the theatric, the briefcase had a thumbprint scanner and yet another iris scanner built into a combination lock. He entered the code (*seven-two-five, PB’s birthday*) and once again opened his eyes wide for the minor annoyance. When the scan finished, there was hiss of air as the locks unlatched and the seal was broken.

“What are those?” Dagonet asked, crouching down next to him.

Within the case surrounded in nonconductive foam were two custom made, handheld railguns. They looked like the result of a forbidden love between a Beretta, a revolver, and Darth Vader.
Surrounding them were twenty-four small, gold and bronze cylinders, a more compact version of the control they implanted into any captured G. The general idea behind his request was instead of having to paralyze the G and having only a few scant moments to implant a control, he could simply blast one in in one go.

“These,” he said holding up one of the small cylinders, “are how I’m going to make that bitch pay for her crimes.”

Chapter End Notes

A somewhat short chapter this week, but one necessary to set the stage of things to come. BIG things.

So George has to be the only person in history to get a heart transplant and get stronger in every aspect. He's went from a man in his late sixties to looking like he's in the prime of his life. He is a man with decades of experience, a single goal, a body that is in peak physical form, and a sadistic streak in him (Percy will vouch for that). The enhanced body and experience alone make him one of the most dangerous men on the planet.

But (and there's always a but), we see that he is very much human. He may be a bit on the antisocial side, but he does have people he will begrudgingly call friends; Dagonet, Morgan, Brian, Merlin, and some of the guys in the machine shop. He wants his daughter back and wants to make up lost time with her. He wants to pick up before he was drafted and he believes the dollhouse is going to be an icebreaker. He is pouring all of his heart and soul into the damn thing, that you can actually feel a bit sorry for him when Percy smashed the first one.

And we have a throw back to chapter 26! We got to see just what George has Brian whip up for him for his eventual confrontation with Artemis. Now a railgun won't kill a god, and nothing Avalon has in it's arsenal can kill a god, but George has a few ideas. I highly recommend you look up "us Navy railgun" on YouTube to get an idea of just how powerful his new toys are. They certainly beat a bow and arrow...

So now the stage is set. We have Piper, Reyna, and Thalia in one corner. George and all of Avalon at his disposal in another. Nico and Persephone racing forward. And all of them are (more or less) after one goddess.

Artemis.

Things are going to get chaotic people! This is not a drill! I am shaking on excitement at what is coming!

So let me ask you:

My friends, do you want war? A war so grand that will make hell itself tremble in fear? Do you wish for a merciless bloody war? Do you wish for a war built of iron, and fire, and lightning? For this war will sweep in like a tempest, leaving only the souls of the dead to wander the barren, scorched Earth! A war-

Okay, I better stop. I'm turning into the major from Hellsing...
Hey! Did you like what you just read? Then leave a kudos, bookmark, or subscribe! Thoughts, theories, questions, etc? Then leave a comment! I love hearing from you guys in any shape or form!

Next chapter is Piper!

So until next time, i wish you all the best!
“Holy shit! Holy shit! Holy shit!” Piper chanted as the three of them slid behind an overturned wagon.

Reyna slugged her in the shoulder and screamed, “Pull yourself together Mclean!” just as an arrow embedded itself less than inch to the left of the Latina’s head.

“I’m sorry Reyna!” she snapped, as she covered her head with her arms. “I’m just not used to being in a fucking warzone!”

Because that was what they found themselves in when Thalia sprang them from their cell: a warzone. The great gathering place of the deer women and other members of the Nation, composed of a mix of manmade cabins and magical growth was on fire. Thick, billowing black smoke obscured line of sight to less than twenty feet, while the great orange and red flames cast what they did see in a hellish glow. The great trees swung their blazing branches in a futile attempt to extinguish themselves, only to make the flames grow. The mushroom walkways were rapidly being reduced to ash, even as new mushrooms would try to spring up and take their fallen brethren’s place. People and creatures of all shapes and sizes were fleeing from their homes, only to fall to arrows from an unseen hunter, or to drop from smoke inhalation, or worse being crushed under burning debris.

Their screams would haunt her for the rest of her life.

Every few seconds or so she would see a brilliant volley of the moonlight arrows pierce through the fog of battle, often accompanied by more ear piercing screams. But for every volley fired, a volley of arrows released by whom she presumed were the hunters were returned with pinpoint accuracy. With every passing moment it seemed the battle was growing more and more one-sided.

“Would you two shut up?!” Thalia grunted through clenched teeth as she fired off two arrows into the smoke covered battlefield. The raven haired (which Piper suspected was dyed) daughter of Zeus removed another arrow from her quiver and readied her bow again. “It’s kind of hard to sneak you out with you two keep snapping at each other!”

“She started it!” She and Reyna snapped back simultaneously. She glared at the annoying praetor and wanted to poke the dagger Thalia gave her into the Latina’s thigh. Nothing fatal, just enough to show her that she was still pissed as well.

“Jason so owes me for saving your asses,” the huntress sighed as she released another arrow into the
air, which was met with a scream followed by one of the hunters falling from a tree. “Piper are you ready to move again?”

She looked down at her bandaged right leg and cringed as she saw the wrapping was soaked with her own blood. “I don’t think it really matters if I am or not, we got to get out of here before the smoke gets to us.” She used the overturned wagon to pull herself up and Reyna wrapped her arm around her.

“We just got to make it to the others,” Thalia cried, jumping out from the cover of the wagon. “Now move!”

She and Reyna wasted no time following the huntress’s order, running out from behind the wagon with their heads low, and Piper keeping her blade at the ready. She had no idea what was happening as Thalia was expertly dropping both hunters and armed deer women as they ran, but from what she was gathering was that Thalia and a group of hunters were breaking away from Artemis and the others. It also apparently wasn’t an easy decision on Thalia’s part, as with each arrow released, Jason’s sister looked paler and paler.

“We just got to meet up with the others by the big tree!” Thalia cried as she leapt over a fallen branch. “I have them on guarding Atlas, which what is that all about?” the daughter of Zeus asked as she retrieved an arrow from the corpse of a fallen deer woman.

“We’ll tell you if you tell us what the fuck is going on,” Piper huffed, as she straddled herself over the obstruction, carefully swinging her bloody leg over. She turned and offered Reyna a hand up, but the praetor slapped her hand away and pulled herself up. She frowned at Reyna and was really tempted to push her off the log. “Because last time I checked, you, Artemis, and the rest of the hunters were one great big happy, borderline incestuous, family.”

Thalia smacked the back of her head as she helped her down. “Piper! That’s disgusting!”

“Eh, daughter of love, remember? I pick up on these kind of things,” she shrugged, leaning against Thalia while Reyna made her way down. “Besides, you get a bunch of young girls following a much older woman with a Peter Pan Complex, and people are going to draw very similar conclusions.”

Thalia clenched her fist and anger flashed in her eyes, before she hung her head with a sigh. “Fuck… I-I never thought of it like that.”

“Don’t listen to her Thalia,” Reyna said as she landed on the ground next to them, superhero style. “The daughter of love over here, thought that Nico had a crush on Annabeth.” Reyna stood up and wrapped her arm back around her. “Besides, Piper has a sick mind. I’m sure no one else thought of the hunters like that.”

“Well did you?” the huntress asked, one dark eyebrow quirked.

Despite the intense heat that radiated from the fires around them, Piper could feel Reyna flush. “Well, no, not exactly like that. I-I just thought the tiaras were a little over the top…”

Thalia shook her head as she fired another arrow into the burning canopy above. “I don’t know why I’m saving you two…”

“Because you’re subconsciously trying to be a better sister to Jason, and bringing him the two most important women in his life would be a good way of going about it?” She offered with a smile. “And in my defense, I never saw Nico alone with Percy. It was always Percy and Annabeth together, like they were some four armed, four legged, two backed creature. And who among us hasn’t had a
crush on either of them?”

“You told me Percy wasn’t your type!” Reyna cried, but her face was red.

“Fuck Percy,” she scoffed. “Annabeth is where it’s at.”

“You know I’m like Annabeth’s older sister, right?” Thalia hissed. “And Jason’s actual older sister?”

“And we come back full circle to the whole incest-thing,” she laughed.

“I want to put an arrow in you so bad,” Thalia sighed.

“For the love of the gods, do it!” Reyna begged.

Thankfully the fires petered down from hell-itself to Monday-in-Detroit the closer they got to the gigantic central tree. The smoke was still a problem, making it hard to see, let alone difficult to breathe. In some ways though Piper was beginning to think that she preferred the fire, as the closer they got to the center, the more bodies there were on the ground. Some had arrows jutting out of them, others blade wounds, while some seemed to have been trampled to death.

“They don’t turn to dust,” Reyna stated, as she stared wide-eyed at the corpses of a deer woman in a flower dress and a young boy she must have been trying to protect.

“Or flowers,” Thalia added, as they took a moment’s rest in the small restaurant ran by animals Piper had saw the previous day. “They bleed.”

“Does it really matter?” She groaned, sliding down to the grassy floor. “No matter what they leave behind, they are still dead.”

Reyna was still staring at the corpses, clearly distraught by the sight. “It’s just so-”

“Horrifying,” Thalia finished. The hunter then sat down across from Piper and removed her quiver and began to sort through the arrows she had pulled from the corpses they had encountered along the way.

“And this is what would have happened if the Romans would have attacked Camp,” she glared at the praetor. She spotted a case of bottled water under the bar and carefully crawled over and pulled it out, before tossing a bottle to Reyna and Thalia. “Blood and bodies everywhere. A lot more of them would be kids too,” she added before pouring a bottle of water over her head in an effort to cool herself down. When the water hit the thunderbird feather braided in her hair, it actually sparked, discharging a somewhat painful shock. “This is what you Romans were so gung-ho for.”

“This isn’t what I wanted Piper,” the Latina snarled, tossing an empty bottle of water at her head. “That was all Octavian’s-“

“WOULD YOU TWO SHUT THE FUCK UP?!” Thalia screamed, jumping to her feet, sparks arcing from her fingertips. “Because if you two want to get shot full of arrows I can save us all a bunch of time and effort!”

Piper looked Reyna in the eyes, but they both looked away almost instantly, she crossing her arms and the praetor doing the one-armed equivalent. “She started it,” they mumbled at the same time.
“And I’m going to finish it,” The huntress scowled. Thalia sat back down with a sigh and continued to sort her arrows for a time until she spoke again. “There is no way we are going to make it to the rendezvous, let alone escape, if you two keep fighting like children.” The elder Grace picked up an arrow and alternated pointing at Piper and Reyna with it. “We are surrounded by enemies, one of which is a goddess, if either of you can’t set aside your difference until we get back to your vehicle, then we are dead where we stand.”

Reyna bit her lip and looked down at her feet before sighing. “Okay.”

She looked back and forth between the two warriors and she did feel guilty for fighting with Reyna, but there was something else bothering her. “I promise not to fight with Reyna,” she said, offering the praetor a small, but sincere, smile. She then looked back at her boyfriend’s absentee sister, “On the condition that you tell us what is going on, because something just doesn’t add up here.”

“Piper, what do you mean?” Reyna asked, eyeing her critically.

Piper really wished she had the ability to walk on her own at that moment. She wanted to walk behind the counter and make herself a drink all smooth like, like her dad did in the cheesy Sherlock Holmes movie he did, while questioning the hunter. “Just something that’s been bothering me about Thalia.” She looked Thalia in the eye and the hunter squirmed under her gaze. Why are you not surprised by the existence of the First Nation Pantheons? I mean, Reyna and I have been looking at this place like wide-eyed children and you’ve just been popping arrows off left and right with an almost bored look on your face.” Thalia opened her mouth, but she tossed an empty bottle at the eternal fifteen year old. “But then I started to notice that whenever you shoot a deer woman or some other spirit, there is a split moment of hesitation. Care to elaborate on why that is?”

Thalia clenched her fists and her eyes flashed with rage to the point that Piper thought she may have pried just a bit too much. But, the anger passed as quickly as it came, the raven haired girl slouched forward, her face pale in the glow of the fire. “We-I didn’t know about any of this,” Thalia gestured to their surroundings, “until a few weeks after Olympus decided to show itself to the world.” The girl gulped and absently ran her hands over her bow. “Artemis believed that Hades, Poseidon, and Demeter had allied with some ancient enemies that had hidden in the shadows biding their time.”

“Actually, it was mortals that did that to Olympus,” Reyna hesitantly added.

“Wait? What?” Thalia cried in disbelief, he face turning green.

Piper held up her hand, signaling the two to stop their conversation. “We’ll fill you in on that nightmare after you finish telling your story.”

“Right,” the girl nodded. “The first thing Lady, er, Artemis, did was forbid us from getting in contact with either camp and demigods in general, her logic being that anyone could be a traitor. We went along with it, because she was a goddess and out leader,” the huntress shrugged. “But then things got weird. We were in the southwest, when we first encountered the peoples of the Nation. They were fighting a family of Cyclopes on the edge of a trailer park. The younger girls and I thought we were going to help them, but before we could even ask the senior members and Artemis killed them all. There was no honor in their deaths and no pity or remorse from the others.”

“And you’ve been going around ever since picking them off, haven’t you?” She figured that was the case, given the way the deer women had treated them. But the stuff about Poseidon, Hades, and Demeter is potentially the best news I’ve heard in a while! With three big-time gods out-and-about Camp has got to be safe!

Reyna walked over and crouched next to the huntress, and placed her hand on her shoulder. “And
now you and the others want out. To leave this senseless bloodshed behind.”

Piper pushed herself up and twirled her blade in one hand. “Well then we better get moving!”

Despite being so close to the rendezvous point Thalia had told them about, they had to back track several times to find an alternate route when the way was blocked. Every time they had to turn around the fires that they had once thought they were safe from, were now closing in around them.

“You know, dying from smoke inhalation seems like such an anticlimactic way to go out,” she coughed, as she and Reyna stepped over the corpse of the young boy she had seen in the infirmary the day before. The bright colors of his *Power Rangers* bandage a sharp, almost mocking, contrast to the world of ash and darkness they were thrust in.

“Yeah,” Reyna laughed forcefully, understanding her need to be distracted from the hell they were in. “Almost makes me wish Orion would have killed me.”

“Now *that* would have been a cool way to go,” she chuckled. “You would have taken him with-“

She stopped as the thunderbird feather pulsed with an intensity she had never felt before. It was then that she noticed that Thalia had just drawn her bow back as a figure emerged from the smoke in front of them.

The figure emerged from the edge of the smoke to reveal a frightened Bambi with an arrow embedded deep in her right shoulder, pushing her grandmother, Awinita, who was clutching a vicious looking tomahawk in her hands. They were both covered in ash and blood, and if the frenzied expression on the old deer woman’s face was any indication, most of the blood was not theirs.

She and Bambi locked eyes, and the acting matriarch’s face twisted into pure rage. “You!” the young girl snarled. “You brought them-“

Timed seemed to slow to a crawl. Whether it was due to some kind of magic or just the spike of adrenaline that had surged through her system as she saw Thalia’s fingers twitch to release the bow string, Piper would honestly never, or particularly care to, know. All that she knew for sure was that the leaders of the deer women were not their enemies and did not deserve to be shot down by Thalia.

So, taking a page from Annabeth’s book; Piper dropped her blade and firmly grasped the praetor’s arm, then in one quick motion Judo flipped the Latina over her shoulder. The wriggling mass of limbs that was Reyna, collided hard against their hunter escort, causing the arrow to misfire far off into the flames.

“What the fuck Piper?!” both girls screamed at her, as they leapt to their feet, ready to fight.

*This is probably the dumbest thing I’ve ever done,* Piper thought as she ran between the two groups ignoring the searing pain in her leg, *but I’m not going to let good people die!* She didn’t have her back turned to either party, as she wasn’t sure which group was least likely to literally stab her in the back; what with Bambi and Reyna foaming at the mouth. “Everyone calm down!” she cried, holding out her arms to both parties. *Thank you Chris Pratt!* “Thalia, this is Bambi and her grandmother. They’re good people. No need to shoot them.” She looked at Reyna and smirked. “Sorry for
“I hate you,” the praetor sighed, while Thalia readied another arrow. “I hate you so much.”

“Hey look, some common ground,” Bambi sneered, snapping the arrow’s shaft from her shoulder. The young leader went to grab a dagger sheathed on her hip, which Piper was just now noticing, when the elder Awinita’s hand shot up with lightning quick speed and slapped her granddaughter’s away from the black stone blade.

“Adsila,” the older woman chided, her mind seemingly clear. “There is no need for further bloodshed. We can trust these three, especially that one,” she said, pointing her blood stained tomahawk at the daughter of Aphrodite.

The younger girl stomped her hoof, the very picture of an angry teenager. “Grandmother, now is not the time for-“

“Now is the perfect time child,” Awinita chortled as she gently set her weapon on her blanket covered lap and wheeled herself to Piper. “You said your name was Mclean, correct?”

“Yeah,” she answered, brow knitted in confusion. “Piper Mclean.” Her leg was ready to give out, and she really wanted to hobble back to Reyna for support, but for some reason she felt like she needed to stand on her own in front of the matriarch. “You’ve probably heard of my dad, Tristan Mclean. He’s movie star with the abs.”

The old woman chuckled and a knowing smile appeared on her ash covered face. “I’m sure that’s it.” She then spun her wheelchair around to face Thalia. “I imagine you have your people guarding their friend, and that you told them to be at the great trees, correct?”

Thalia lowered her bow, “How did you-“

“I’m an old woman darling, I’ve had years of experience with this kind of thing,” Awinita spun around and began to roll towards a small passage they had overlooked before. “Now come along children, I know a short cut!”

Reyna thankfully came over and wrapper her arm around her shoulders again, just as she was about to collapse to the ground. “Thanks Rey,” she smiled at the Latina, leaning into the girl’s embrace, leg instantly gaining some relief.

“I still don’t trust you,” Bambi huffed, as the younger girl walked past them.

“We better get moving,” she told the other girls as the two deer woman moved ahead. “But, does anyone else have that feeling that something big is about to happen?”

“Gods, I wish you wouldn’t have said that,” Thalia groaned, throwing her head back to the sky.

Awinita’s shortcut had proven successful. The old woman had led them through a series of side passages, alleys, and even a few private residences until they emerged in the large clearing in front of the great tree. Thankfully, the fiery chaos seemed to stop at the clearing, instead she found herself facing the regular kind of chaos. Most of the entrances to the clearing had been blocked off by either new growth or makeshift barricades, forcing survivors and hunters alike to either enter via the main
entrance or the hidden side entrance they had used. At one end of the clearing was several overturned wagons in a circle, where Thalia’s rogue hunters were holed up, but between them and the tree was a no man’s land of arrow riddled corpses. It was decided that the five of them would huddle together until the halfway point, where Awinita and Bambi would head for the tree, while she, Reyna, and Thalia would go to the hunters. They would then wait for a signal from the deer women that it was safe to approach. It was putting a lot of blind trust in the two women, but something told Piper that they could be trusted.

“Thalia, this is your idea of guarding Atlas and Veronica?!” she cried, wide-eyed at Jason’s sister, as they entered the hunter camp.

“We had to make it look legit,” Thalia shrugged as she clasped hands with a younger, blond huntress. “PB, how did everything-“

Piper stopped listening to what Thalia was saying, as both her and Reyna stared in a mix of horror and repulsion at their friend and traveling companion. Veronica and Atlas were sprawled out in the center of the makeshift hunter foxhole, pinned to the earth by spears of oak and silver; three in each arm and leg, one through each shoulder, and one through their shared gut. A mixture of golden ichor and human blood seeped from every wound, drenching their tattered clothes. It absolutely broke her heart when the girl and titan noticed them, their flaming eyes flickering as they gave them a weak smile. “Hey Piper. Hey Reyna. Glad to see you’re okay.”

She and Reyna dropped to their knees and began to feverishly attempt to remove the spears from their comrade. “It’s going to be okay Veronica,” she cooed, as she tried to pull the shaft from the girl’s right shoulder.

“Would someone give us a hand?!“ Reyna cried, before biting down on her shaft and trying to yank it out with her one remaining arm.

“Piper, Reyna? Could you guys just take one big step back?” the girl asked, Atlas’s voice rumbling in the background.

Before she could even ask why, the titan-demigod erupted into golden flames, and Piper nearly lost her eyebrows from the intense heat. She could only watch in awe as the oak poles disintegrated into ash and the silver spear tips liquefied and flowed down the two’s body, leaving vicious burns everywhere it touched. “You let them do that to you, didn’t you?” she asked, her voice shaking.

The two propped themselves up on their elbows and hissed in pain. “Yeah. We needed Artemis to believe that everything was okay.” The girl then pulled down her frayed top’s neckline with one clawed finger to reveal yet another wound. “We pretended to fight, even killed one of the hunters, which forced Artemis to shoot us with one of those oh-so-painful silver arrows,” the girl smirked.

“Are you going to be okay?” she asked, eyeing their numerous wounds.

Veronica and Atlas collapsed back to the ground. “My definition of okay changes on an hourly basis,” the girl panted. “But, please drag a corpse or two over, and if you happen to have a copy of The Notebook and some ice cream I wouldn’t object to those either.”

“Would you settle for a hug,” Reyna cried, wrapping her arm around the titan and girl.

Okay. Wow. I did not see that one coming. I thought the only time Reyna would willingly hug someone was if she was going to try and squeeze them to death.

“I’m so sorry Veronica,” Reyna stated calmly, but her shoulders were shaking. “If I wouldn’t have
Veronica and Atlas looked at her for any clue on how to respond to the praetor, but all she could do was shrug. The two of them scowled at the praetor, but that quickly turned into a sad half-smile as Reyna hugged them tighter. “It’s- it’s okay Reyna,” they sighed, returning the hug.

"Ah fuck it," Piper smiled as she crawled over to the love fest. She wrapped her arms around her traveling companions- no, friends- and felt relieved when they returned the hug as well. Even Reyna. “I think we need to start over,” she whispered into their ears. “We’re in this together and we can’t keep arguing like we’ve been.” The other two nodded in silent agreement. “We need to be on equal footing if we’re going to survive this. From now on there is no more ranks, no more heroes of prophecy, or divine hierarchy; we’re just four people trying to make it. Do you think we can do that?”

“Yeah,” Reyna sniffed, which was the closest thing to tears Piper had ever seen from the praetor.

“Sounds good,” Veronica agreed.

“I would literally agree to anything if it meant you two got off of me,” Atlas grunted.

“Shut up, you know you like it,” she chuckled. 

"Uh, I hate to interrupt… whatever it is you are doing," Thalia's voice cried out, "but, Bambi is back."

While Veronica and Atlas went about repairing themselves using the dozens of corpses (to which Reyna asked if they preferred light or dark meat, to which Piper casually smacked her upside the head), she, Reyna, and Thalia exited the hunter encampment to meet with Bambi, who was escorted by the ever imposing Cassandra and silent Sarah.

“I told you we should have killed them when we had a chance,” the one-eyed deer woman snarled.

The young matriarch shook her head at Cassandra with a glare. “Grandmother says we can trust these two,” Bambi said gesturing between her and Reyna.

“With all due respect, your grandmother was just singing the Mr. Clean jingle before we left. She is not in the right state of mind to be making those kind of decisions.”

“Hey Bambi,” Piper smirked, “have you ever notice that when someone says “with all due respect”, they are about to say some incredibly disrespectful garbage?”

That got a smile from the younger girl, which was what she was hoping for. “Yup. It kind of actually makes things worse, ya know?”

“Yup,” she responded in kind. Find common ground and build from that. We don’t need to be friends, we just need for them to help us out. Awinita said there are tunnels beneath the tree that- A sharp, loud whistle pierced her train of thought, and she looked over to see Thalia removing her fingers from her lips. Bitch, she thought as she rubbed her aching ear.

“Yeah, can we not do this crap right now?” Thalia said glaring at everyone, with such intensity that
Piper figured if a moth would have flown by it would have been zapped. “We got to get out of here now.”

“Oooo, I like this one!” Sarah grinned, looking the huntress over.

Bambi cleared her throat before looking between the other two deer women. “We have reached an agreement,” the young girl said, her voice full of authority. “You may use our tunnels on two conditions-“

“Great,” Reyna rolled her eyes, but was silenced with a quick elbow from Piper to the gut.

“One,” continued the matriarch, “you assist with transporting the injured.”

Piper nodded. “We can do that,” she said smiling to Reyna and Thalia. That is probably the most reasonable-

“Two: you will leave your weapons here.”

Fuck…

Piper watched as Thalia tensed up; her knuckles white from gripping her bow so hard and her back rigid. The hunter’s eyes darted between the three deer women, sizing them up for an attack if necessary. Making a hunter get rid of her bow was sacrilege to the point that Piper doubted that even her charm speak would work. From the hunter encampment behind them she could hear the sound of roughly a dozen bows being drawn.

Yup, we gonna die…

“Fine!” Thalia cried, throwing her silver bow to the ground, followed immediately by her quiver, then a knife from her boot, a two throwing knives from her belt, and a Mickey Mouse PEZ dispenser from her pocket, which raised everyone’s eyebrows. “Disarm ladies!” The lieutenant cried as she spun around to face her troops.

Thank the gods! She cheered internally, as she let out a breath she didn’t know she was holding.

“We need some more bandages over here!” Jeanne cried.

“On it!” Reyna cried, leaping across an old woman lying on the floor.

The great tree had transformed from a place of gathering and administration to a shelter and makeshift hospital. The rear of the tree, where the ramps were to the upper level, was now a giant hole that burrowed into the earth, where the able bodied were helping the not so fortunate escape. The main level entrance was blocked by thorny pushes, but would spread apart on their own accord when a survivor drew near. On platforms made of branches and vines stood the last of the remaining deer women warriors, which including Cassandra and Sarah. They stood as still as statues with their bows drawn as they watched over the thorny barricade for anything approaching, their arrows of starlight bathing them in a calming glow. The rest of the floor space was filled with wounded, that Jeanne, the few remaining medical members, and Reyna, were trying to stabilize so that they could be evacuated. To assist in the effort, the great tree had grown a canopy of willow branches above them, the natural aspirin entering those in need with every breath to ease their pain while they waited
for treatment.

“It’ll be okay,” Piper whispered to the small girl who was curled up against her. “We’ll find her,” she said, calling forth her charm speak to try and soothe the shaking doe.

When they had limped into the living structure, Jeanne had taken one look at Piper’s blood soaked bandages and hauled her off to the side of the room. The doctor made quite the fuss as she changed her bandages and even created a living splint from several small branches and vines that had popped up at the doctor’s request. The doctor then told her to try and comfort those who were waiting for treatment.

“I want my mom,” the girl sobbed into her chest.

“I’m sure she’ll show up soon,” she said, running her hand down the girl’s back. It was probably the most painful lie she had ever told, her gut threatening to twist and tear itself into pieces as the little girl, her black hair in pigtails, hooves painted pink, wearing a bloodied Dora the Explorer shirt, clung to her as if her life depended on it. I can’t do this, Piper thought as she continued to rub the girl’s back and wear a forced smile. This- this is just too much.

She turned her attention to Reyna, who was busy assisting Jeanne wrapping a leg of one of the strange short men she had seen wandering around the city. Things were still tense between the two, even if they were slowly sliding back into their usual dynamic, but she knew if they didn’t legitimately address their fight from the night before it would just be one vicious cycle. A group hug is great and all, but without communication it means nothing.

The girl accidently kicked her leg, as Piper turned her attention to scanning the room for Atlas and Veronica. Ah! There they are, hiding in the shadows, she frowned. The two had physically recovered from the brutal torture the hunters had inflicted on them by absorbing close to half-a-dozen bodies that littered the field. Yet Piper couldn’t help but worry about how much mental trauma Veronica had experienced because of that, her body was once again a patchwork of different skins and even some fur, and when they had entered the great tree the two had found a dark area to hide and said nothing. She’s strong, but how much more can she take? She shares her body with a titan, has to watch as she burns away, and has a god trying to claw his way out of her stomach…. Yeah, her mental health has got to be fantastic at the moment. When we get out of here I got sit down with her and talk, also have her and Reyna sort out their differences.

“Mommy,” the girl sobbed, her grip on Piper’s soaked shirt tightening.

Gods I hope your mom made it out already, she thought as she watched another group of survivors enter the escape tunnels, accompanied by one of the few remaining warriors as an escort. Bambi and her grandmother weren’t telling her much, but she had gathered a few pieces of information that painted a dire picture. The deer women weren’t fragile delicate creatures by any means, but most of their warriors and demigods had been called away to other areas in desperate need of assistance, leaving Home with little defenses. The Nation’s gods were for the most part not nearly as strong as the Olympians, what with them having a smaller worship base and their stories differing, but the big take away was that very few of them could just pop up anywhere they please, instead being forced to travel like a mortal. Bambi had sent out requests for aid with the small birds, which she had learned were called “tweets” (and god did she want to slam her own head against the wall at the name), but it would take at least a few hours before anyone would show up. So we are up shit creek…

The little girl said something, but with her face buried in her shirt she couldn’t make out what was said, so she continued to pet the girl. “Everything will be fine. We’ll all be leaving soon.”

“I don’t want to see them!” the girl wailed.
“See who?” she asked.

“The monsters!” the girl cried, pointing to Thalia and her rogue hunters.

“Hey now,” Piper cooed. “They’re not monsters,” she said, looking over to where the small group sat huddled together. Damn it Thalia! You guys could help!

Since they had entered the refuge, Thalia and her hunters had retreated to one side of the massive room without so much as a word. They just sat there huddled together, looking at everyone with wary suspicion and occasionally whispering to each other. Bambi, Reyna, and the others needed help stabilizing and evacuating the injured, but yet the former hunters sat there in their own little world.

But that’s how they’ve always been… Them, the Amazons, the Romans, even the Greeks. We all stick to our own little cliques and ignore the others until we need help. Hades, we’re actually encouraged to do that! What is wrong with that picture?! Things wouldn’t be this bad if we all watched each other’s back a little more. When we get to camp I am totally going to bring this up! We need to create an al-

“Are you guys expecting anyone else?” Cassandra cried out from her perch, startling her from her thoughts.

“Younger girl, auburn hair, kind of pale,” Sarah cried out, pulling the string of her bow back.

Oh shi-

Piper wasn’t able to finish her thought as the world descended into chaos.

First a sharp whistle tore through the air, as two arrows pierced Sarah’s throat. The lithe warrior dropped her bow and clutched at her throat, as Cassandra dropped her bow and ran to aid her dying comrade. Just as the one eyed deer woman reached her friend there was a blinding flash of green light.

“Close your eyes!” Piper screamed at the small child, as she rolled on top of the girl. She had seen that green flash of light several times while onboard the Argo II, and that was only when things were exceptionally bad. Greek Fire was no laughing matter. The mysterious green liquid burst into green flames at impact and didn’t die off until everything was burnt to ash. She wasn’t sure how far the flames would spread or even where they hit, but she hoped at the very least she could shield the young doe. Less than a moment later an intense wave of pressure and heat slammed into her body, sending her and the girl rolling back, while screams were muffled out by the explosive blast.

All she could hear was a deafening ringing in her ears and despite having closed her eyes, all Piper could see was white. As she tried to blink away the blinding light, she felt he girl desperately thrash against her. Not wanting to hurt the girl (or get herself further injured thanks to a toddler with hooves) she released the girl and rolled onto her back.

Why won’t this day just end?

“Pi-!” a voice cried out over the ringing.

Here we go… She propped herself up on her elbows and then rubbed her eyes. When the last of the whiteness dissipated, leaving only some spots at the edge of her vision, she saw Reyna and Veronica were crouched over her, both looking concerned. Atlas and Veronica looked okay to her, with them just a little dirtier than before. Reyna though looked like a mess, she had a large cut on her left cheek that would probably require some stitches, and her hair long, dark hair had worked itself out of its

“Look,” Atlas said, nodding towards the great tree’s entrance.

She slowly turned her head, but apparently not slow enough as her stomach threatened to empty itself at the sudden movement. The first thing that she noticed was that the wall of thorns was gone and the entrance had grown in size, thanks to the explosion of Greek Fire, which was still burning bright. The second thing she noticed (and she hoped it was what Atlas was referring to) was that the surviving deer women were moving towards the entrance rather than away from it, their movements were strange but somehow oddly familiar. As her ears stopped ringing, she realized why their movements seemed familiar as she heard the familiar soothing sound of a lyre.

“They’re dancing?” Reyna asked.

And as strange as that sounded, Piper knew the praetor was right. In the stories her grandpa told, the deer women were drawn to celebrations by the sound of music and would stay until they had found a suitable victim or until the music stopped, but until then they were slaves to the beat. To further support that, she remembered the strange parting words Kipitaaki. “If you should encounter any a deer, remember they must dance to any beat they hear,” she whispered to herself.

She watched in awe as Thalia and her renegade hunters tried to stop the dancers, but failed time and time again. Each failure though resulted in the death of a woman, as the second they stepped just outside the entrance, and arrow would shoot them down.

“We could leave,” Atlas offered, pointing to the tunnel behind them.

Honestly, the idea did appeal to her. The four of them could escape through the tunnels, find Betty White, head to Camp and Jason, and pretend this never happened. If they stayed though, they would be fighting a group of radicalized feminists that no one had ever managed to beat in a game of capture-the-flag. Oh and let’s not forget the GODDESS that leads them.

She shook her head and looked back towards the entrance. Jeanne, doctor who had only treated her with kindness was literally waltzing around a blonde hunter and was getting ever closer to her demise. The young matriarch, Bambi, was moonwalking around Thalia. And Awinita, the elder matriarch of the deer women, who in her moments of clarity treated her with only respect, was using her wheelchair to perform breakdancing that would earn the respects of both East and West. “We got to help them,” she sighed.

Reyna smiled and hugged her only arm to her chest. “You got a plan?”

She barked out a laugh. “Plans are Annabeth’s thing,” she said, noticing that either Sarah or Cassandra’s starlight bow was still intact. “But I think I got thirteen percent of a plan.” She glanced back to the entrance just as another wave of deer women were mowed down. “But we’ve got to move fast.”

“We can do fast,” Veronica smirked, their eyes flaring.

“Then listen up.”

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“Atlas! Veronica! Can you see Artemis out there?!!” She called out as she drew back the magic bow.
If we survive this, I’m totally keeping this! While archery was never her strong suit, between her time at wilderness survival school, camp, and the intense tutelage of Coach Hedge, Piper could at least hit a decent sized target if she needed to. And I do! She found that the further she drew the bow’s string back, the brighter the starlight arrow became. And I hope that means the stronger it is too…

“Yes!” Atlas cried back, hanging from the ceiling. “Just as you expected it is her playing the lyre!”

Oh thank- not Artemis, she thought with a sigh. That means this has at least a chance of working! Thanks to Annabeth’s crash courses of Greek mythology, she had learned that one of the symbols of Artemis was a lyre. And thanks to Thalia she had learned that Artemis had been using the stringed instrument to lure out any stragglers at other deer women settlements while her hunters killed them without mercy. “Thalia! Are you guys ready?!”

“Just… Waiting… On… you!” her (hopefully) future sister-in-law grunted. The former lieutenant of Artemis was laying on top of Awinita’s back, with the old women’s head in a headlock. Despite having weak legs, the old woman was a surprisingly dangerous opponent, her drenches stuck in Thalia’s forearm. “Because… We can do this all day!” Thalia grunted as she slammed her other elbow against the back of the old woman’s head.

“Reyna, how about you?!”

The Latina poked her head around the smoldering entrance, only to yank it back as an arrow flew where her face had just been. “I’m having second thoughts about this! But I’m ready!”

You and me both sister… Piper took a deep breath in a vain attempt to calm her nerves. This plan hinged on luck, something she had been sorely lacking for months now. “Okay! Veronica! Atlas! Go when you are ready! Thalia! Reyna! You two got to distract Artemis with the most misogynistic crap you can think of! Any negative thought you’ve ever had about her or the hunters is on the table! I want her to lock herself in her room on Olympus and eat tubs of Ben & Jerry’s for centuries for what you’re about to do to her self-esteem! The rest of you will rush out when Atlas and Veronica are finished!” There was a murmur of acknowledgement from everyone as all eyes were trained on her. Somehow, and she wasn’t’ sure how, they had made her the leader of their little group. Which was surprising because Reyna, Thalia, and Atlas were infinitely more qualified to lead than her!

“And go!” Atlas shouted over the strum of the lyre. They swung town from the ceiling and burst exploded out of the entrance in a ball of golden flame.

Piper thought she’d at least hear a few shouts of surprise from the hunters outside, because how many people were mentally prepared to see a disintegrating girl with flaming eyes and talons rocket toward them. But apparently they were, and if Atlas was telling the truth about multiple Titan and Giant wars, then the hunters still loyal to Artemis had seen more than she could ever dare to imagine.

She poked her head carefully around the corner with her starlight bow at the ready. She saw that Artemis was sitting on the former hunter encampment, her silver eyes closed as she slowly plucked a tune on a solid silver lyre with her delicate ivory fingers. The goddess was the exact picture of tranquility, which was a sharp contrast to the world around her.

Veronica and Atlas were zipping around, drawing fire away from the remaining dancing deer women, and occasionally ripping a hunter to shreds. The two were focused on clearing a path from the great tree to Artemis, so that Reyna and Thalia could get to the goddess safely. Veronica slowed for a moment at a pair of hunters. The blonde had taken a few arrows in her back, but as their taloned hands snapped the neck of a now terrified hunter, the golden flames burnt the arrows away, the only evidence that they existed was the holes in the Titan hybrid’s shirt. At that moment, all fire was
focused solely on the two.

“Everyone! Move out!” Piper cried, seizing what was most likely their only opportunity.

“Oh it!” Thalia cried as she flipped off of Awinita’s back and grabbed Reyna by her hand.

Everyone, with the exception of Piper, ran out of the smoldering tree whooping and hollering, which she thought may not have been the most appropriate thing considering their location and company. She watched Thalia and Reyna split off from the group as the two ran towards the goddess of the hunt while the rogue hunters began to attack their former family.

A short Asian girl was the first to reach one of her former companions, who was focused on trying to shoot the golden blur of death. While the older hunter’s arrows were hitting the flaming titan, they did little to nothing as Veronica and Atlas would merely burn the projectiles off and repair the damage by devouring another hunter. While the older hunter was distracted, the rogue hunter snuck up behind her and performed a sweeper kick on the older girl, knocking her to the earth. Instantly the girl was on her and jabbed one of the loose arrows into the elder’s eye. It was gruesome to watch, but as the girl took her fallen foe’s weapons, Piper felt a surge of adrenaline enter her system.

*Holy shit, this is working!*

She checked back on Reyna and Thalia. Reyna had just clotheslined a hunter hard, and Thalia had delivered a devastating (and fatal) axe kick to the fallen girl’s face.

*Ugh, shouldn’t have watched that…*

She turned her attention to a girl with long blonde hair that was around her age. The blonde was engaged in hand-to-hand combat against what had to be the biggest huntress Piper had ever seen. The older hunter clearly, *clearly*, had to be on some kind of steroids and at least a low-grade beaver tranquilizer, but somehow the blonde was holding her own. Piper wanted to help her out by shooting a starlight arrow into the brute’s back, but their plan hinged on Artemis not knowing she was even there. The larger girl tried to swipe at the smaller’s head with her huge fist, but somehow the girl dodged the blow. Then in a feat of agility that made Piper wish she had taken gymnastics, the blonde flipped into the air and landed on the brute’s shoulder and wrapped her legs around her neck, while wailing on the back of her head with her elbows.

“Lady Artemis!” Thalia shouted, bringing Piper’s attention back to its proper place. “I quit!”

“I don’t blame you!” Reyna agreed, leaning casually against the daughter of Zeus. “Who in their right mind would want to be around this Peter Pan wannabe?”

“You don’t know the half of it!” Thalia sighed, the raven haired teen shaking her head in disgust. “She always has one-on-one time with each girl, and no one can remember what happens during!”

“Wait, are you serious?” Reyna asked, eyeing the girl with concern.

The former hunter elbowed Reyna in the ribs and whispered something in her ear. “And she has this weird obsession with her brother! We have to stalk whoever Apollo is courting for weeks to see if she is worthy of her brother’s affections.”

“Sounds a bit Lannister-y,” Reyna cringed.

*Huh, never would have guessed Reyna watches Game of Thrones,* Piper thought, nodding with approval. *Nah, she probably reads the books… Nerd…*
“And gods help us if she sees a man!” Thalia continued, throwing her head back dramatically and rolling her eyes. “Endless lectures and rants on how men are inferior to women! Look I’m all about girl power, but there is a limit!”

Reyna laughed deeply. “Pfft! Maybe she’s just upset that she couldn’t find herself a good one? I mean, if you have the body of a fourteen year old, you’re only going to attract other fourteen year olds and pedos. Plus, doesn’t she know that women need men?”

Artemis, who until that point had been strumming her lyre without acknowledging the two teenagers, snapped one of its strings. The twang of the broken string echoed across the battlefield and everyone stopped their fighting to stare at the goddess, even Atlas and Veronica who had just impaled a huntress with their talons. Hades, even the impaled girl was staring.

Holy shit Reyna! But she couldn’t dwell on the praetor’s words. This was the opening she was waiting for; while Artemis was still playing her brother’s gift, her attention was now solely focused on the two girls in front of her. This is it! Piper took what felt like the deepest breath of her life as she drew her confiscated bow back as far as she could. She stepped out of the shadows and felt the thunderbird’s feather pulse with life as she leveled the bow. Her eyesight seemed to zoom in on the silver lyre, her hands stopped shaking, and she could’ve swore she felt someone adjust her stance and aim, before she released the arrow of starlight as he exhaled.

The arrow traveled the distance in the blink of an eye, probably faster since it was made of light, but to Piper it seemed to be traveling at a snail’s pace. When the arrow was less than a yard from the goddess, Artemis noticed it, her face twisting from indifference, to recognition, and finally to fear. The auburn haired girl tried to move, but at that moment time returned to its normal speed and the arrow connected with the lyre.

There was an intense flash of white light (I’m going to need glasses by the time this is over!) that required everyone to shield their eyes, but when the light had faded, Artemis was clutching half of the shattered silver instrument.

YES! YES! YES! YES! WHO BAD? WE BAD!

Without music, the deer women snapped out of their trance. They didn’t need any instruction on what to do now, as they rushed forward and began to assist in taking down the remainder of the hunters. Bambi was assisting the blonde demigod, by repeatedly kicking the bigger girl with the gut. Jeanne, who normally looked so bubbly, looked completely indifferent as she pulled a scalpel from her blood stained scrubs and slashed a girl’s cerotic artery open. Even Awinita was a fearsome foe, the elder rolling herself across the field and embedding her tomahawk into anyone who dared crossed her path.

“Thalia,” Artemis tsked, her voice a whisper, but seemingly coming from everywhere. “I knew when you joined the hunt that you didn’t have what it took to do the dirty work,” the goddess said as she jumped off the encampment’s ramparts. “Or any of you for that matter,” she said, opening her arms wide. “You are all so soft. So… mortal.” The goddess started to walk to Reyna and Thalia, but for every step she took, the two took two steps back. “If you couldn’t handle a simple vermin extermination, then there was no way you would be able to handle the purge at the end of the cycle.” The goddess shook her head slowly with her eyes closed. “But I had hope, I told father that you would come around. That all of you would come around. But, I see now that he was right.” Instantly a hunting spear of pure silver appeared in the goddess’s hands.

There was a blur of silver light and Piper gasped in horror.

“I will miss you, Thalia,” the goddess sighed into the elder Grace’s ear as she pushed the spear
completely through her abdomen. “It was nice to have a sister.”

“THALIA!” she and Reyna cried as the former hunter crumpled lifelessly to the ground as Artemis removed her spear from Thalia’s stomach.

“YOU BITCH!” Reyna roared as she lunged at Thalia’s killer. The goddess easily sidestepped her and smacked the back of the praetor’s skull with the blunt shaft of the spear, knocking her out.

“You will die slowly,” Artemis said, voice devoid of all emotion.

“NOT IF I KILL YOU FIRST!” Atlas and Veronica roared as the charged across the battlefield.

Piper fueled on rage and sorrow, began to fire arrow after arrow at the goddess, but each shot either was dodged or deflected. “I’ll kill you!” she cried, fighting back tears. “DIE!” she roared with such force that the goddess momentarily paused.

“Doubtful,” the goddess said with complete indifference as she hefted the silver spear over shoulder. The goddess of the hunt then tossed the weapon with such force at the charging titan hybrid that their golden flames dissipated and they flew backwards before being pinned to a tree through their chest. The goddess then summoned more spears and repeatedly struck Veronica and Atlas until they looked like a cruel parody of a pin cushion. “Would you care to beg for forgiveness, Piper Mclean?” the goddess asked, leveling a hunting spear in her direction. “I have been known to be quite merciful to maidens and children.”

Piper fell onto her rear and dropped her bow, before defiantly giving the goddess two middle fingers. “Fuck off, you fucking cunt,” she laughed, the thunderbird feather seemingly pulsing in agreement.

“Interesting choice of words,” Artemis smirked, readying to toss the fatal hunting spear. “But I must thank you for showing me how weak all my hunters are. Purging the rest of the demigods and vermin will be much more time consuming without them, but I’d rather start over without any weakness.” Artemis turned her head slightly to address the remaining fighters. “All of you are welcome to try and flee if you so desire. In fact, I encourage it,” she smirked. “It will make the hunt more interesting.” She then drew her arm back and-

**THUMPH!**

*Holy fuck…*

Artemis’s right arm had been blown away along with a good percentage of the upper right side of her torso. Golden ichor gushed out of the wounds as the goddess began to repair the damage her mortal form had sustained. “What?” Artemis croaked, stumbling backwards several steps.

Then Piper saw them. *Oh shit…* Five black helicopters descended down from the smoke filled sky, slowly circling the clearing. On each side of the helicopters were miniguns operated by the armored goons of Avalon.

“Hold on PB!” A voice echoed from loudspeakers on the airborne vehicles. “Daddy is here!”

“Daddy?” Piper looked to her left to see that the blonde hunter was staring up at the sky; her eyes wide and mouth open in disbelief.

*Daddy?!* She wasn’t sure how that reunion was going to go, and frankly she didn’t care to find out. So she started limping towards the limp form of Reyna. *We got to get out of here!*
First part of an epic battle!

Piper and the gang (because they travel around and solve mysteries in their off time) have managed to make it out so far, but at a terrible cost...

I believe we've seen Piper grow the most on this journey so far, with her trying to be diplomatic with the deer women, coming up with battle plans, and trying to keep her team together. Yes, she's still a bit off, which is due in part because of her experiences as a demigod.

Reyna is also growing as we saw that she is learning when to lead and when to follow. She's also beginning to show her emotions and that she cares for her teammates and others. She still upset with Piper, but is learning to set aside those emotions.

Atlas and Veronica are definitely the muscle of the group, but are seemingly willing to put themselves through hell to protect Reyna and Piper, which is a big deal to considering Veronica's feelings toward the praetor.

Oh boy, that brings us to Artemis. I've never understood why people like her so much, she's done some horrible things in both mythology and pjo. She's definitely a pied Piper type character, luring children away with a promise of eternal youth and no more heart ache. But there is a cost, isn't there? The girls are supposed to hunt down "monsters" and if they are not skilled enough they will die in battle. That always smelled of separating the strong from the weak. But why would she do that? But when you remember that the hunters are aware of both camps, but belong to neither and are believed to be the best fighters, you realize that they are the assassins of the gods.

I've read up on child soldiers for school and the hunters fit the psychological profile insanely well! Well it's true both camps do, the hunters form no bonds outside their group and have this sense of superiority over everyone else.

And Artemis is there to shape them every step of the way.

You probably have a bunch of questions about this chapter and I'm glad you do! This chapter was meant to have you scratching your head at times. :)

As a note, the lyre and hunting Spears are symbols of Artemis, so I didn't pull those out of my butt haha. You're also going to see a few more of her things in coming chapters...

I bet some of you were thinking "thank God George showed up!" ;) We see how that sentiment holds up as he's reunited with his daughter at long last!

Hey! Did you like what you just read? Then leave a kudos, bookmark, and/or subscribe!
Thoughts, theories, questions, wtf?!s? Then leave a comment!
I love hearing from you guys! It really makes my day!

Next chapter is Nico! The poor boy just got asked to prom only to be forced on a
mission with his stepmother... Oi...

Well until next time I want you to remember to smile. No matter how bad things may seem, they will get better.
Chapter Summary

Warnings: unintentional physical abuse, blood, gore, death

Tonight:

Nico and Persephone search for Artemis in a burning forest,

Persephone give Nico a gift,

and Nico tries to mimic Percy with mixed results...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Leo had once told him that one of his latent abilities was that he could kill the mood of any room he walked into. Granted, this was when he was still wrestling with his sexuality and his then one-sided attraction to a certain son of Poseidon, but the son of Hephaestus had clearly never met his stepmother, Persephone.

“So,” the goddess hummed, a predatory gleam in her eye, “how long has that been going on?”

“A while,” Nico answered, as he removed his blade from his pocket and willed it to full size. The Stygian sword almost felt off in his hands from lack of use. While his father had been drilling him and Percy on improving control of their powers, their sword fighting skills had been kind of pushed to the side. I'll have to convince Jason to spar with me until Percy can stand on his own. I'll bribe him with food if need be...

“You don’t seem that excited about it,” she smirked, slowly circling around him. “What’s wrong? Perseus not meeting your expectations?”

“No, Percy exceeds them in every way,” he answered casually, though his grip on the hilt of his sword tightened considerably.

This was just how things were between him and goddess. She would either actively ignore his very existence or rarely poke and prod at him until she got some kind of response out of him, which she would use an excuse to punish him. Generally he could ignore her and pretend to be a compliant little demigod that the gods seemed to enjoy, but if she mentioned Percy, or worse, his mother, it was hard to restrain himself. Thankfully now that he was with Percy, her words had lost some of their sting, but anything related to his mother still hurt.

Deciding that it wasn’t worth going down that particular rabbit hole, he busied himself with surveying their surroundings. Persephone had taken them to a small clearing in some ancient woods. Strangely there was a bronze SUV parked off to one side, he had no idea how it got there as there didn’t seem to be a path large enough to drive the mechanical monstrosity through. The air was thick with acrid smoke from what had to be a forest fire to the north. “Are you sure Lady Artemis passed through here?” he asked, turning around to face the goddess.
“My little friends wouldn’t lie to me,” Persephone said, as she crouched over a small red flower that appeared to have been stepped on. “Flowers,” she touched one of the small plant’s few remaining petals with one glowing finger, “unlike gods and mortals, do not lie.” Instantly the flower stood upright and new pedals grew to replace the damaged and lost ones. “They simply have no reason to.” Persephone stood back up and brushed off her jeans.

Nico knew that was some kind of thinly veiled insult directed at him, but he wasn’t sure what exactly it was about. Knowing her it could be about the time I snuck Bob into the kitchen so he could get a decent meal… Deciding it wasn’t worth the risk of getting turned into some form of vegetation, he clenched his teeth and asked, “Do you know where they went?”

Persephone looked at him as if he had just asked her the most obvious thing in the entirety of history, recorded and otherwise. “Isn’t it obvious?” she asked, the goddess grinning ear-to-ear. She pointed to the heart of the forest where the thick billows of smoke originated from. “They went that way.”

“Of course they did…”

Nico was having a hard time focusing on the task at hand, which for a demigod could be a very fatal thing. It wasn’t because Percy had formally asked him to prom in front of everyone, nor was he worried about what his father and Jason were subjugating his boyfriend to while he was away. No, when he was on a mission Nico could push aside personally feelings and issues (with the exception being New Rome after Percy had kissed him the night before).

The son of Hades found himself unable to focus for two very different reasons. First and most troubling, was he was having a hard time breathing in the smoke-filled air. It was exceedingly difficult to watch for arrows and keep a low profile when he had to stop every five feet to cough up what felt like a piece of his lungs. He had tried to cover his mouth and nose with his shirt, but that seemed to do next to nothing to improve his breathing.

“Are you having trouble breathing?” his stepmother asked, pity etched on her face.

And there was reason number two!

In the few years since coming out of the Lotus and relearning his heritage, Persephone had maybe spoken to him twenty times. And one of which was forbidding me from mentioning my mother, Nico thought as he violently coughed once more. Now though the goddess was talking his ear off with idle chatter, which he believed was meant to get a response out of him. “What do you think?” he snapped back, as he pounded on his chest with one fist. I’m downwind of the fire and this is only going to get worse the closer we get to it.

“You always were a fragile little thing,” the goddess hummed as she crouched down to the ash covered earth. He watched as he stepmother brushed some of the ash and debris from a small area and then placed one hand on the patch and dug her fingers into the soil. Immediately, tendrils of green sprouted from the ground and wove around each other, forming a large ring around her hand. Then, the tendrils sprouted dozens of small white lilies blossomed, obscuring the green beneath.

“Here,” Persephone said, picking the ring of flowers. “Wear this,” she said, offering him the lilies.

“I am not wearing a flower necklace,” he spat.

“You mean a lei?” Persephone asked with a wicked smile. “Well then that’s great news because this
doesn’t go around your neck!”

“What?”

“It’s a crown,” the goddess smiled.

It was at moments like this when he wished his stepmother wasn’t seemingly immune to his glares. “I,” he growled through clenched teeth, “am not wearing a flower crown!” He had no sooner finished his declaration when he began to violently cough. Nico sank to his knees and covered his mouth and nose with one hand as he tried to regain his composure.

Through teary eyes he saw the goddess crouch down next to him. “Such a pity,” she sighed, as she gently patted his back. “You used to love wearing flowers in your hair.”

“I-,” he started, only to violently cough and fall forward. He stabbed his blade into the ground to keep himself from completely collapsing. “Have never worn a flower in my life,” he gasped. The goddess sighed as he placed the crown on his head. Instantly his eyes stopped stinging, the smell of smoke was replaced with light floral scent that smelled suspiciously like Febreeze, and fresh air entered his lungs. He greedily filled his lungs with the fresh air and wiped the tears from his eyes.

“What do we say?” Persephone smirked, watching him stand up.

“Thank you, Lady Persephone,” he said with a sigh of defeat. He knew that even though Percy made Persephone swear to bring him back alive, any assistance she gave him would have to be paid back later, and something told him an air-purifying flower crown would have a high price. I would rather owe Hera than her, he thought bitterly, as he gently tugged at the flowers in his hair. Then he thought of Hera abducting Percy. Okay, maybe not Hera… Demeter?

“You are most welcome,” his stepmother said, brushing her long dark hair over her shoulder, while a few red roses bloomed within. “Personally, I think it looks good on you. It enhances your ethereal beauty. Your Perseus would love it.”

Nico was glad that his skin was already flushed from the forest fire, as he surely would have been at least a tiny bit red from embarrassment. With the obvious exceptions of Will and Percy, Nico didn’t like to be called beautiful or the like by anyone. He was a guy, a prideful one at that, so being called beautiful seemed like an insult to his manhood. Sure, Jason and the others had explained to him that things were turning more-and-more gender neutral, but he just wasn’t there yet. Sadly though, he couldn’t snap at the goddess, so he (regretfully) swallowed his pride and said, “thank you Lady Persephone.” It’s okay though, no one will ever know about-

*CLICK*

He spun around on his heel with his blade held high, ready to strike down whatever monster would be foolish enough to sneak up on the Ghost King and the Queen of the Underworld, only to see Persephone standing with her arms outstretched, smart phone in hand.

The goddess’s merciless smirk only grew when she moved the phone closer to her flawless face. “Your father will love this,” she cackled, tapping the small device rapidly with one thumb. “He might even show your little boy toy.”

All self-control Nico had disappeared faster than a spirit at dawn. “Give that to me!” he screeched, lunging at the goddess’s phone. The rational part of him knew it was a futile action, as the picture had already been set and traveled through something called the cloud, not to mention that she was a goddess, but he had suffered one to many embarrassments in the last few minutes. Just as his...
fingertips brushed the goddess’s phone (which he noticed was covered in neon colored flower stickers), Persephone disappeared into a rain of flowers.

“Did I strike a nerve, little Ghost King?” his stepmother chuckled behind him, her breath heavy against the back of his neck. He tried to spin around, but she grasped his sword hand with one hand and his shoulder with the other, keeping him facing away from her. “Are you so insecure that you fear one little picture will scare off the son of Poseidon?” she whispered into his ear.

“Let me go,” he hissed. He tried to jerk himself free, but her vice-like grip didn’t allow him to move. Damnit! Why do I let her do this to me!

“Not yet,” she smirked into his ear. “I’m going to pretend that you didn’t just try to take one of my possessions and give you some advice Nico.” She released his shoulder, but tightened her grip on his wrist. “Love and embarrassment go hand-in-hand. Your father has embarrassed me as many times as I’ve embarrassed him. If you don’t learn to take it in stride, then every relationship you have will be doomed to fail.”

He started to shake his head and flail about. “Let me go!”

“Do you think Percy is not embarrassed by you wearing that ridiculous hat the son of Apollo left you?” Her grip grew painfully tight on his shoulder to the point that his face twisted in agony. “How long do you think he’ll put up with you?”

If she was trying to hit his insecurities, she would have to do a lot better. Percy was just as understanding about Will as he was with Annabeth; they were both important people in their lives that were tragically taken away from them long before their proper times. Percy continued to dye a streak of white in his hair in memory of Annabeth, and he actually enjoyed helping Percy keep the daughter of Athena’s memory alive (plus Percy had really soft hair, so he looked for any excuse to run his fingers through it). And Percy was just as supportive of him wearing Will’s comfy hat, he even encouraged him to wear it more often.

“As long as he’ll put up with me I guess,” Nico answered, his voice devoid of emotion. His answer must have caught the goddess off guard, as her grip loosened enough so that he was able to slip her hold. He walked a few feet away from her before rubbing his now aching wrist. What the Hades was that all about? Nico thought as he stabbed his sword in the ground and began to rub his shoulder. He pulled his shirt away from his shoulder and frowned at the sight of a bruise already starting to form against his pale skin. “Thanks for this,” he growled, turning around and showing her the damage she’d done. “Never took you to be physical abusive. So, congratulations on expanding your repertoire.”

To Persephone’s credit, she looked mortified as he walked past her, and if she was human he may have been inclined to believe that it had been an accident. But she was a goddess, which meant everything he saw was just some carefully maintained lie. So even though she was uttering apology after apology as he trailed behind him through the flaming forest, he ignored every single one.

“Let’s find Artemis and get out of here. Then we can go back to ignoring each other.” He stopped walking and hefted his sword over his shoulder. “And thanks for the crown.” This can’t get any worse…
“Get down!” Nico shouted before tackling Persephone off the dirt path, as the earth exploded in front of them from the sustained gunfire from one of the black helicopters above the flaming hell-scape. They landed hard against the trunk of an ancient tree, which thankfully offered them protection from the onslaught of bronze projectiles.

They had been walking for some time, Nico trailing behind a still constantly apologizing Persephone, when the first of the helicopters flew by. Neither of them paid them any particular attention, as he had learned from watching movies with Percy and Jason that it was common for helicopters to drop water onto forest fires and to be used to look for those trapped in the inferno. So when the ten unmarked, black helicopters flew by just above the forest canopy, Nico expected to get a little wet at the worst.

He paid a bit more attention when one of the alleged air rescue vehicles broke off from the others and circled back. As it got closer, Nico realized that it must have seen him and Persephone walking and was going to try and rescue them, which sounded like the kind of situation Percy would get into. But as it got closer, he noticed that huge machine guns were attached to both sides of the machine.

“Would you get off me!” Persephone growled, pushing him off her roughly.

Nico smacked his head off of a root with an OOMF before rolling over and sliding his back up against the tree’s trunk. “Fine. Next time I’ll get you get shredded into bits by machinegun fire,” he groaned rubbing his head. “And where was my head, thinking I needed to save you.”

His stepmother’s face jumped between several expressions before she let out a sigh. “I do sincerely thank you. And I am sorry for earlier, I-I don’t know what to do when it comes to you.”

“Don’t worry, you can pretend I don’t exist again as soon as we’re done,” he said as he carefully poked his head around the tree. The small path they had been walking on a moment before was completely decimated; large patches of earth had been tore up, branches fallen from the trees obstructed the path, and the fallen ash had been whipped up again obscuring his view. Thankfully (he guessed), the helicopter was above the cloud of ash and debris, slowly strafing to the left and right seemingly looking for them. “When Olympus is free we don’t even have to see each other ever again. Percy and I will stay far away.” And I eagerly await that day.

Persephone looked like someone had punched her in the gut. “Nico- I- that’s not what—”

She went to place a hand on his shoulder, but he shrugged it off. “Save it. Right now, I need to come up with a way to destroy a freaking helicopter.” He looked at the black blade in his hand and entertained the idea of using his newfound control over the shadows to teleport the blade into the machine’s rotor, similar to how he stabbed Aaron in the ass with an incredibly sharp pencil only a few hours previously. But my blade will just be sent flying and it doesn’t have a return function like Percy’s. If I tried to hold it though I’d just get my arm ripped off, and I kind of want to have two arms for Prom…

“No I did not.” I could try to get them to fly lower and make them crash into a tree… no that’s just dumb. “Did you forget they have a weapon that can strip you of your divinity? Or are you eager to wait in line for the bathroom with us every morning? Because just a heads up, Percy only leaves enough hot water for me. Lady Demeter and father will verify that.” He was met with silence, which he was grateful for. Normally having a goddess on my side would be great, but if they even think
there is a goddess present they’ll just activate that weird weapon and we will have lost our last godly asset. He poked his head out again and noticed that the helicopter appeared to be lacking doors, as it looked like the gunners could slide in and out of their weapons with ease. He then looked at his sword and scowled. His blade had saved him, Percy, and Jason more times than he could count, but against mortals it was mostly useless. The most obvious solution right now is for me to pop into the cabin and wreck it from the inside. The downside though is I’m going to defenseless, plus even if I do succeed, the others are going to figure out something is wrong pretty quick… Deciding that he had no other choice, he started to search the ground around them for a small branch or something he could use in conjunction with his sword to defend himself.

“What are you doing?” Persephone asked, scooting away from him as his right hand accidentally brushed against her jeans.

“I’m looking for a decent sized stick,” he answered, as he tossed aside a rather flimsy twig. “Something I can really beat someone with.”

“Let me see your sword,” the goddess sighed, holding out her hand.

Nico sat back up and eyed the outstretched hand suspiciously. “Why?”

Apparently, he had used up all of his questions for the day (or year. Possibly lifetime even), as she darted forward like a cobra and yanked the blade from his grasp. She set the black sword across her lap and began to run two fingers down the blade with her eyes closed. Where ever the tips of her fingers touched momentarily glowed lime green, then rose red, before fading away to the blade’s natural black.

“What are you doing?”

“Now you’re reminding me of the Nico I knew,” she murmured as she pushed herself up and jabbed the tip of the blade into the ash covered earth. Green, thorny vines sprouted from beneath the sword and grew along the blade’s edge, occasionally wrapping around the blade entirely for what he guessed was adding durability. When the vines got to the hilt the wrapped around multiple times before several red roses bloomed, a sharp contrast to the light absorbing blade. The roses and thorns then seemingly sank into the blade, the only evidence they ever existed was a rose was now etched into the metal just above the hilt. “Here,” she said, removing the sword from the ground and handing it back to him.

“What did you do to it?” he asked, giving it a practice swing. It felt exactly the same as before; the weight and balance feeling familiar in his hands.

“I’ve blessed your weapon with the strength of a rose.” The goddess reached out and barely touched the tip and her fingers began to bleed the golden blood of the gods. “The blade now has a rose’s thorns embedded within, it will cut through both the mortal and divine, and will sharpen and repair itself on its own.” Persephone paused and tapped her chin with one manicured finger. “Though you should probably stick it in some Miracle Grow every now and then for the best results. Watering wouldn’t hurt it either.”

“And what do I owe you for this blessing?” he asked as he effortlessly embedded the blade deep into the tree that was hiding them. If it has anything to do with Percy, I’ll stick this right up her-

“Consider this an apology for my incredibly inappropriate behavior earlier.” The goddess turned away from him and began to play with a few stray strands of dark hair. “You and I don’t have a great relationship.”
“Yeah, yeah. Living reminder that father cheated on you, favored son, divided attention. Yeah, I get it,” he huffed as he stepped into the shadows. But just before the world completely disappeared, he thought he heard his stepmother say, “anymore.”

Kicking a mortal out a helicopter to what was mostly likely his death had to be one of the best feelings in the world Nico determined, coming in behind quietly reading comics with Jason and Percy, and the half-dressed showers he took with Percy and all the fun that went with them.

One gunner down, and... crap that's a lot to go...

The helicopter was a bit larger than he thought it would be, but considering he had never really seen one up close, let alone been inside one, he really had nothing to base his ideas on. Six men were strapped into a seat against the rear, all heavily armored and armed, there was a man on each of the mounted guns, and a pilot and a copilot were behind him. He wasn’t sure where the guy who was currently careening to the fiery earth sat, but he wasn’t really an issue any more.

“Hi guys,” Nico said with a predatory gleam in his eye. “Heard you were in the area and I thought I’d swing by.” He internally cringed at his attempt at banter. *I should probably leave that to Percy.*

The goons of Avalon hefted there weapons up, but he was quicker. He swung his blade low and was amazed and horrified at how easily Persephone’s blessing allowed his blade to slice through not only their body armor, but their fleshly stomachs underneath. The men dropped their weapons and frantically clutched at their opened guts, blood and gore seeping out.

Hades...

The pilots panicked at the sight of a scrawny teenager appearing out of nowhere and laying waste to their brothers in arms. He went to strike at the pilot, but could only watch in horror as the pilot jerked the joystick to the left, the helicopter immediately following suit.

“Oh shit!” he cried as he lost his balance and slid from the tilting machine. He tried to jab his sword into the floor while trying to grab for anything with his free hand, only to turn up with nothing. He knew that he wasn’t going to fall to his death, he’d use his new-found control over the shadows to take him to safety, but the animal portion of his brain wasn’t buying it.

Just as he slid out of the cabin entirely, he collided painfully with the mounted gun and its operator, who was definitely not happy to get kicked in the face by a son of Hades, helmet or not. Nico continued to slide past him, but managed to loop one arm around the gunner’s neck. As the man struggled Nico swung his legs up and found some passable toeholds. The gunner tried to slam the back of his head into Nico’s but frantic measures like that only work when they aren’t expected. As he readied his sword to slit the Avalon member’s throat, a searing pain erupted in his right shoulder.

Nico looked at his right shoulder and saw that part of his sleeve had been torn away along with a decent amount of skin, leaving him with a bloody, but nonlife threatening wound. *Was I just shot?* He looked up and saw that on the other side of the chopper, the other gunner had his pistol drawn and aimed right at him. *Oh... crap...*

The gunner pulled the trigger in three quick bursts, two of the shots missing due to air turbulence
from the rotors above and the chaotic movement of the helicopter, but the third managed to graze his right forearm. His hold momentarily loosened around his gunner’s throat, but he gritted his teeth, and stabbed his blade though the man’s chest, his frantic movements ceasing instantly.

The pilots must have saw his brutal display, as suddenly the flying machine tilted sharply to the right, which actually worked to his advantage. The other gunner hadn’t expected the sudden shift and dropped his weapon to the ground below, while Nico used the momentum to send himself back into the cabin. He used his sword to stop himself from flying out the other side and managed to scurry into the cockpit. The pilot began to frantically move the joystick in every direction, causing the helicopter to buck and list from side to side, while the copilot went for his sidearm.

“When you get to Hades, tell them Nico sent you!” he smirked as he drove his blade into the control console, sending sparks showering onto the two men while alarms and sirens began to ring, as the machine began to fall from the sky. As he stepped into the shadows he shook his head in embarrassment. *Thank the gods no one was around to hear that. Ugh, Percy is rubbing off on me…*

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Five Helicopters.

Of the original ten he and Persephone had seen, only five now remained, and each one fell easier than the last. The second one he had received a cut from down his back from a combat knife, but it was shallow, but beyond that he hadn’t received any additional injuries. While he hadn’t been against his father’s strange training methods, he could now fully appreciate it. Zipping from helicopter to helicopter was no different than trying to beat his time at the obstacle course in the barn. While the tennis ball took far longer to fall to the ground than it took for a mortal to ready their weapon, it did have him in the proper mindset to be as quick as possible.

*Gods I wish Percy, Jason, and father could see me! There’s no way they would believe I’ve single handedly taken down over thirty heavily armed men!*

He stepped out of the shadows and-

*BANG*

Stumbled back as the wind was knocked out of him. He looked down and saw that his black T-shirt was strangely wet around his gut. He touched the wet spot and grimaced at the pain and paled when he saw his fingertips come back covered in blood.

“Hey partner,” a man that looked very familiar said as he holstered his sidearm. “I guess we’re even now. Oh, and nice flower crown.”

The man then punched him in the gut and Nico fell out of the cabin, careening to the rapidly approaching earth.

Chapter End Notes
And that's the flaw of shadow travel, you can't see what you're walking into...
Which allowed for George to return the favor. Nico stabbed him, so George shot him.
It's all very Godfather in nature.

So Persephone's relationship with Nico is strained at best, and dangerous at it's worst.
But we are going to explore it and explore it soon, and it definitely related to my head
 canon, and I think many of you will love it. I think Takara-Phoenix would approve of it
lo

Oh and if you are filling out your "Nico di Angelo cliche" bingo cards, then you can
place a mark on "wears a flower crown" honestly he's one of the few people who could
pull off that look. White lilies against a sea of Black curls? Heavens yes!

In the initially planning stages of this chapter I had Persephone making Nico a new
sword from a tree branch, but from the size of his stygian sword would make dual
wielding impractical. So, I decided to have Persephone bless his blade with the
sharpness of rose thorns.

And having ran through a rose bush, let me tell you: they hurt like crap man!

In a way now his sword now fully represents the underworld. It's of his father and now
his stepmother. I wonder what new tricks his blade has gained ;)

Hey! You! Yes you! Did you like what you just read?
Then leave a kudos, bookmark, and/or subscribe for updates!

Thoughts, theories, questions, etc? Then leave a comment!

I love hearing from you! It makes my day and my stomach jiggle with joy!

Next chapter is George!
George

Chapter Summary

Warnings: violence, blood, guns

Tonight:

George will not be stopped.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

George wiped the DG’s blood from his hand onto his body armor, as he watched the creature fall through the forest canopy beneath. He felt a twinge of pity for the creature, as being shot in the gut and then likely crippled from the impact was certainly not a pleasant way to die. But that pity was suppressed by the rage and he guilt he felt over losing half of his team to the little bastard.

“We’re detecting a shitload of activity up ahead boss!” the pilot’s voice said through his earpiece. “The tracker is picking up a G, a T, and dozens of DGs.”

The addition of a titan was certainly unexpected, but it changed nothing. “Bring us in close!” he barked as he grabbed a handhold at the edge of the cabin opening. He stuck his other arm outside and made a circling motion with his index finger, signaling the gunners to begin spinning up their miniguns. “And remember, low yield use of signal-based weapons only. We’re here to bring our girls home alive.” And to destroy the bitch responsible.

The troops behind him stomped their boots in approval, while a chorus of yes sirs, and affirmatives filled his ear, which filled his heart with pride. The men and women who accompanied him were personally invested in this mission; all of them had a little girl out there that they needed to bring home. They were fathers, mothers, sisters, and brothers, and all of them had knowingly volunteered for this, knowing full well the dangers they would face.

Will she be happy to see me? Will she come back willingly? Or has she been brainwashed enough to try and kill me on sight? Will she even recognize me? Those thoughts had been playing over and over again in his head since Dagonet informed him of PB’s location, and he was sure that those same thoughts were troubling everyone else.

Well, I don’t think I have to worry so much about her recognizing me, George thought as he rubbed his freshly shaven face. Thanks to the heart of T:C beating in his chest he looked decades younger, so much so that he actually looked as he did in the photo he had taken with PB that Christmas morning so many years ago.

But the rest of us aren’t so lucky, he thought as he surveyed the cabin. Most were like him who hadn’t seen their daughters in years, decades even. But time wasn’t the real enemy here, it was the stress and anxiety that came with the harsh reality of a missing child that really aged them. Before they knew of the hunter’s existence many of them lived with the fear of the unknown.

Where are they?
Are they okay?

Were they still alive?

Should I hope they are dead?

Questions like those can turn a man’s hair gray overnight. Add in the knowledge that their loved one could very well be fighting for their life and you were left with one haggard looking individual.

*And getting them home is just the beginning,* he grimaced. No one on his team was foolish enough to believe that they would simply retrieve their girls, head home, and pick up where they left off. No, their girls were going to need help. They were going to need years of therapy, have to be slowly reintroduced into society, learn to be around members of the opposite sex, and a whole slew of other treatments that the therapists had told him and the others that went way over his head. It would cost a small fortune, but thankfully Avalon was going to foot the bill on Merlin’s insistence. Hell, the old man was having a community built in rural Vermont so that the girls could remain close to each other to help with the healing. *PB will love it, she can pick out any room she wants and the first thing we’ll do together is decorate it. Whatever she wants, I don’t care how much it costs, she could have a solid gold bed if she wanted to! PB can-

The chopper bounced beneath his feet and listed to the left as the machine began do slowly circle and descend on a smoke-filled clearing. “Targets will be in sight any moment,” the pilot’s voice crackled over the radio. “The way the tracker’s going off expect it to be hot!”

If this was a movie he would be expected to make some grandiose speech about the forces good and evil clashing, how the righteous would prevail, to remind his men what they were fighting for, and all the same old tired clichés, but George knew no one needed to hear that. Everyone there knew that good didn’t always win, that good people died every day, and that there was no farm upstate for dogs. And from experience he found that people performed better in combat when their egos weren’t inflated, when they feared for their lives.

So instead, everyone gave themselves one more ready assessment, checking the straps on each other’s armor, the laces on their boots, ammo count, running quick diagnostics on their HUDs, and some were even praying.

George though, reached for one of two railguns holstered on his hips. He wasn’t a complicated man, so he made sure Brian replicated that into the weapon’s functionality. It had the way to familiar trigger mechanism like any of the weapons he had used in his life, a release for the magazine, that fed the small control cylinders into the barrel, a small dial that controlled the amount of force that would be put into a shot, and a small LED display that told him charge status or if the weapon needed to cooldown. He cranked the dial to one-hundred percent and the hairs on his wrists began to stand on end as the magnetic field sprang to life and the capacitors began to charge. *Take out the monster with one shot, then clean up.*

The copter passed through the ceiling of smoke, momentarily filling the cabin with smoke, George’s eyes stinging and tearing up as they descended. As he wiped his eyes with his free hand he heard the men and women around him collectively gasp.

“It’s like *Lord of the Flies,*” he heard someone mutter.

When his vision cleared, he had to agree with their assessment. Laid out before him was a large open field that was littered with bodies and numerous scuffles. He was still too far up to make out any of the fine details, but it appeared that there were two factions at war. One side was looked to be composed entirely of humans, while the other side seemed to have some kind of female satyrs with
them. Arrows and spears were being thrown every which way as others fought with various blades or grappled hand-to-hand. He could see others trying to comfort those who lay dying, trying patch up their friends and comrades in futility. Others though laid there dying and alone, crying out in vain for help that would never come.

And the sight of all that was like a punch to his gut. This was what he prayed that PB would never have to see, let alone experience. He shook his head to make himself focus. *This is just one more thing to talk about in therapy.*

George scanned the field for any sign of his daughter or G:A, but it was like searching for a needle in a haystack without a magnet. He was preparing for the worst-case scenario of having to find his PB in the chaos below on foot, when a ball of gold fire erupted below them. He thought it was some kind of flaming projectile launched at them and was about to yell at the pilot to evade, when a shaft of silver impacted the inferno with such force that not only was it extinguished, but also sent flying in the opposite direction. George tracked the object through the air and saw it impact hard against one of the unnaturally large oaks, embedding itself deep in its bark.

*Well, you certainly don’t see that everyday...*

What he had initially thought was a fiery ball of death, was in fact a DG or the like something similar, currently struggling to remove a spear of pure silver that was pinning it from its gut. It had almost freed itself when another shaft of silver light impacted the pathetic creature, this time pinning its left arm. Another quickly followed, pinning the right arm, but this time he was looking for the source of such a powerful throw.

*Where are you hiding... Where are you... Show yourself, you- There!*

Standing on the north side of the battlefield was what most would assume to be a young girl with auburn hair, but he knew that was just a façade. That *thing* was the Devil itself.

“Artemis,” he growled. He widened his stance and grasped his weapon with both hands as he took aim. The control cylinders his railgun used didn’t need to be inserted into a G’s mouth like the normal model, the ones he was using now just required them to be inside the body, so all he needed to do was get one halfway decent shot. He watched as the goddess of child abduction slowly stalked towards a fallen DG, silver spear in hand, ready to be thrown. “Looks like I’ve caught you monologuing you son of a bitch,” he smirked.

George had her back in his crosshairs, a perfect shot, when the helicopter tilted ever so slightly. The goddess still wasn’t aware of their presence, or at least didn’t see them as a threat, so he just had to compensate his aim. Compensating for a movement, be it from the target or his own, was something that was second nature to any soldier worth their salt, but the one thing he wasn’t prepared for was the flash of gold at the corner of his vision.

“PB?” he gasped, as he eyes darted to the right, to the form of his entire world. It was definitely her, strong and beautiful like her mother, but she alongside one of the satyr-women against a large brute of a girl. The fear of losing his little girl when he was this close caused his grip to tighten involuntarily, squeezing the trigger.

Compared to flash and bang of conventional weaponry, the railgun was relatively silent, only emitting a low whistling as the cylinder traveled, it had no kickback, and no flash came out of the muzzle. For normal humans the projectile would have been moving far too fast to track, but thanks to his new heart and the increased flow of oxygen rich blood to all of his systems he could barely make out its path. The goddess was just releasing her spear when the cylinder collided with her right shoulder. He watched as the cylinder tore right through her, completely obliterating her shoulder and
a could chunk of her torso, her right arm still clutching the spear being dragged along with the cylinder, before impacting with the giant tree structure.

“Shit!” he roared, feeling the phone in his pants pocket vibrate, another confirmation that he had indeed missed. He turned the charge dial down on the railgun as another round was cycled in. He then tapped his earpiece, connecting it with every transport’s outbound speakers. “Hold on PB!” he cried, his voice echoing from the loud speakers. “Daddy is here!” He tapped his earpiece again, changing it to local coms only. “Ya’ll know what to do!” he cried before leaping from the copter.

George hit the ground running, ignoring the voices crackling over his earpiece telling him to come back. He muted the incoming calls before removing his sidearm from its holster on his hip. He quickly checked the small signal generator module’s status on his weapon and grinned when he saw that the LED was still green. So, with a weapon in each hand he began to traverse the distance between him and his daughter.

Luck appeared to be on his side, as everyone was either too busy fighting one another or was distracted by the armored men and women jumping from the heavily armed black copters to pay him any mind. His mind went blank as he zigged and zagged across the field, keeping one eye on the injured goddess and the other on his daughter, who was still fighting for her life. A couple of hunters fell in front of him, viciously trying to kill the other, he leaped to the side and pulled the secondary trigger on his side arm, sending a short burst from the signal generator, paralyzing the two girls.

When he was less than ten yards away from his daughter, he saw her get smacked to the ground by the almost preposterously large girl. As PB lay there stunned from the intense blow, the strange satyr-girl leaped into the air with the gracefulness of a white-tailed deer and kicked the brute in the back, sending her tumbling forward. His heart stopped when the monstrous hunter reached down and picked up a spear with a malicious gleam in her eye. She batted away the satyr with the brunt end of the shaft, knocking the wind out of the creature, before stalking over to PB, who was just pushing herself off the ground onto shaky legs.

“PB! STAY DOWN!” he roared, skidding to a stop and aiming raising his sidearm.

The blonde, George’s whole world, pushed one hand against her temple before her eyes widened in recognition. “Daddy!” she gasped, still rising on weak legs.

He pulled the trigger three times in quick succession, the shots thankfully going over his daughter’s head and impacting her attacker in the chest, knocking her back for the final time. The grouping of the shots had been damn near perfect, each less than an inch apart from the other, utterly destroying the girl’s heart. He tucked the railgun into his pants, but keeping a firm grip on his sidearm before running to his daughter.

“Baby girl!” he cried, pulling her into the tightest embrace he could manage without crushing her. And to his absolute delight, she hugged him back. Despite the decades apart, the intense pain and loneliness, she felt exactly as he remembered, like she was the source of all joy and happiness in the world. “Baby girl,” he whispered as he buried his face into her golden hair and inhaling her scent, triggering so many beautiful memories together; making pancakes for her sixth birthday, taking her to the beach only for a wave to knock her down, his failed attempt to braid her hair for her first day of
school, and so many more came rushing forward. “I’ve found you,” he choked, his eyes leaking tears of joy.

“How,” she asked, shaking in his arms. “How are you here?” She pushed away from him enough so that she could look him in the eye with her own baby blues. When he had been drafted she had just been tall enough to reach his chest, now she was shoulder height. She wasn’t the same little girl at all, she had grown into a fine young woman as the picture had shown. “They-t hey told us you were dead,” she sobbed, throwing herself back against his chest with enough force to knock the breath from his lungs. “They gave grandma a flag and-” she pulled back again (and he immediately missed her warmth) and untucked a cord from her shirt and held aloft a Purple Heart for him to see. The royal purple fabric was faded and frayed, and the gold was tarnished and worn. “your medal.”

“PB, I was captured for ten years,” he said, offering her a sad smile as he gently ran his fingers over the medal. “But I promised you I would come back, and well here I-“ He stopped midsentence, noticing that the strange deer creature was standing just off to the side. “Would you scram! We’re having a moment here!” The creature shrugged its shoulders and bounded off to another nearby scuffle. “And well here I am,” he smiled, earning him a smile from his light.

“How do you look exactly the same though?” she asked, tucking away the medal once more. “It’s been almost forty years! You should be an old man!”

“And you should be giving me grandchildren,” he smirked, grabbing her chin with his free hand. He was about to explain his youthful appearance when sustained gunfire erupted from behind him. He spun around, drawing his railgun and aiming his sidearm simultaneously, and he couldn’t help but feel a mix of pride and shame as PB dropped into a combat stance. Pride that his daughter was strong, shame that he had missed her gaining that strength.

In the short time it took him to get to PB and their all to brief reunion, all of his men had departed from their rides and had set up a small defensive perimeter in the center of the clearing, while the five remaining choppers were airborne once more, their miniguns firing upon the disabled goddess. He could see that already some of the hunters were taking shelter behind their families, while some of his men were forced to paralyze some oncoming attackers.

“Dad, who the fuck are those people?” PB asked, tilting her head toward him with a puzzled expression on her face.

“Language, and you’re grounded for a month,” he said in a serious voice, but he couldn’t stop himself from smiling at the look of pure disbelief on his daughter’s face.

“Are you kidding me!”

“Just making up for lost time,” he smiled. “But let’s just say daddy has made friends with other mommies and daddies who wanted their daughters back more than anything. And all of us have worked together to move Heaven and Earth to make that a reality. Now hold on one second, I need to make a call.” He carefully touched his earpiece with his right hand holding his pistol, signaling the gunners to stop firing and establishing a connection to the loud speakers on the airborne machines.

“Attention! We are Avalon and I am George, chief of security and operations-“


George wiggled his eyebrows at her good humoredly before continuing. “If you are a hunter of Artemis we have come to take you home! Many of your parents and sibling are here before you! Throw down your weapons and Join them! As for the rest of you, be it creature or demigod; we will allow you this one opportunity to leave in peace! Do not be stupid! Take this chance!” He touched
his earpiece again, ending the broadcast.

“You-you know about demigods?” his daughter asked in disbelief as she picked up a silver bow. She gave the bowstring a firm tug to test its integrity, and apparently satisfied with what she felt picked up a quiver of arrows. “How much do you know?”

“Probably more than you,” he shrugged. “Now-“

A shrill ear-piercing whistle echoed through the clearing, somehow drowning out the gunfire. He looked to the goddess who was just removing two fingers from her mouth, and a satisfied grin spreading across her face despite her numerous injuries.

“Oh shit,” PB cursed, her face paling and her eyes widening in fear. “She’s called the hounds.”

He was about to ask what she was talking about when suddenly dozens of shafts of moonlight appeared around the edges of the clearing, and from them emerged the largest wolves he had ever seen, each as big as a truck, with claws as big as swords, ragged fur of silver and white, and pupil-less golden eyes.

“Language,” he choked, just as the first of the creatures lunged forward.

Chapter End Notes

And they lived happily ever after.... Ha!!

I will admit it felt good to give another person some tiny amount of happiness in this rather bleak tale, but George still has a lot to fight for yet.

He definitely deviated from protocol by running to his daughter first instead of taking care of Artemis, but who wouldn't? He hasn't seen his daughter in decades! His only family, his flesh and blood, his entire world!

He has done some pretty horrible things to get here, but look at how much he has on the line. Yes he has killed a lot of demigods, tortured Percy, and shot Nico, but it was all to get here, and he wouldn't hesitate to do it again.

Show me the parent of a lost child who wouldn't do the same.

And I particularly like the duality George displayed here. To his men he's this focused badass who won't hesitate to kill, but to PB he becomes a sobbing sentimental mess, who is quick with a terrible joke.

We also see that at this moment he is capable of mercy, telling the deer women and demigods to get out. He could have given the order to have them all killed once the human hunters were taken away, but he didn't. That was in part thanks to Bambi for fighting alongside PB and the fact that he doesn't want to appear to be a monster to his daughter.

And look! More mythology! (Go figure)

Artemis indeed has hunting dogs, in fact many paintings and statues have a dog accompanying her. The stories behind the dogs differ greatly, some say the hounds were
lithe like Greyhounds, while other say they were gigantic and wolf-like. They were
given to her by either Zeus or Pan, with the latter being the more popular origin. They
are kind of her secret weapon, as she will use them to run down whatever she is hunting
if the target manages to evade her for sometime.

So they are not fun...

We will have to see how George, Piper, and Persephone deal with them :)

Hey! Did you like what you just read?!  
Then leave a kudos, bookmark, and/or subscribe!

Thoughts, theories, questions, etc?  
Then leave a comment!

I love receiving feedback from all of you!

Next chapter is Percy! He probably wishes he was fighting giant hunting dogs right
about now...
Percy

Chapter Summary

Warnings: mentions of alcohol, threats of torture, and anxiety
Tonight:
Hades stares down Percy,
Jason has a excited new career opportunity for the eagle of Prometheus,
and real men don't read the instructions!

Chapter Notes

Over 8k views boys and girls! Never thought I'd get this many or that this fic would be received so well! I found out the other day that Shattered is mention on the Percy Jackson Fanlore page! I honestly didn't know that existed! So thank you all so much for your continued support, and I promise you all that this will be finished and you will not be disappointed! We have so many more adventures to go!

Also if anyone has made fanart or anything, let me know. I don't have a Tumblr so if you did I'm sorry I missed it!

Thank you all so so so sooooo much!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Don’t gulp! Don’t gulp! Don’t gulp! Don’t gulp!

Percy gulped and Hades’s lips twitched ever so slightly into a smirk; making his boyfriend’s father the victor in this contest of wills.

And that is not a good thing…

When Hades had drug him into his office with Jason following behind, he had been expecting a lot of screaming, death threats, skeletons, and maybe a lightning strike or two. Instead, Hades had set him in the highly uncomfortable wooden chair across from his desk and stared at him for what seemed like an eternity with such intensity he was positive that the god was looking at him at a subatomic level. Percy didn’t dare break eye contact, even if he could hear the son of Jupiter practically foaming at the mouth behind him. He could also hear Demeter’s light breathing from the doorway, and he was pretty sure she was the only reason Jason hadn’t struck him dead yet, if the flickering lights were anything to go by.

But then again, Hades could be doing that too… Or they could be taking turns… I’m not sure how much of his strength has returned.
The intimidating man rapped his knuckles against the ancient desk, startling everyone in the room, before leaning back into his chair; the ancient joints of the furniture creaking from the sudden shift in weight. “When I first met you, I thought you were just another victim of the so called great prophecy, like so many demigods before you. You followed the script; forced to confront one of the gods over the theft of another god’s symbol of power, only to find it had been planted on themselves by a traitor. Yes you were a little mouthier than previous heroes, but I didn’t exactly play fair to course you to the underworld now did I?” The god said with a sad smile.

“You kidnapped my mom,” he answered, confused as to why Hades was bringing up the past. Is this a villain monologue? Is he going to open a portal beneath my feet and send me to the underworld? Why am I panicking so much? Seriously, Mr. Chase and Athena were less scary than this! And Annabeth’s dad had a gun!

“And I gave her back when that act came to a close,” the god said, threading his fingers together.

“And that should have been the last time we encountered one another until just before the final battle against Kronos, but little did I know that you made an unscripted detour into the Lotus.” The God’s eyes narrowed and Percy would swear the gaze was somehow stabbing his very soul. “I don’t know what the three of you did, but somehow you destabilized the magic of the casino, forcing me to withdraw Bianca and Nico from the only place on Earth truly safe from my brothers.” He watched in silence as the god paused and reclined further back into the chair and he could practically feel Demeter cringing at the sounds the ancient chair was making. “So I kept them at a distance, in hopes that they wouldn’t be dragged into absurdity of it all. But to my surprise and horror, not only did Kronos find them, but that idiotic satyr as well!

“Don’t talk about Grover like that!” he snarled, digging his fingers into the armrests. “He was just doing his job!”

“Well him just doing his job got my daughter killed!” the god snapped back, slamming a fist down on the desk hard enough to make the laptop in the center bounce. “I may have not been allowed to directly intervene, but I would have used everything at my disposal to keep them safe!” Hades sank back once more into his chair and the anger drained from his face and suddenly he looked tired, older even. “But for the second time you wandered into my life,” the man sighed. “And I knew then you were going to be a thorn in my side until the day you died, and even then, you’d still be bothering me!” The god ran a hand down his face before taking a deep breath. “When I next saw Nico, he had changed drastically. Gone was that sweet little boy who clung to his mother’s skirts, who trailed after his sister doing anything she wanted, my child who embodied the best of the underworld.” Hades stopped again and Percy’s stomach twisted in guilt. “In his place was this scared, bitter boy, who was torn between loving and hating the same individual. Persephone didn’t know how to handle the situation and only made matters worse and I was under constant scrutiny by the others so I was unable to do much more than watch.”

Silence descended on the room again as the god of the underworld went back to staring at him, making Percy feel more uncomfortable than before. Hades hadn’t said flat out that he disapproved of his and Nico’s relationship, but he didn’t exactly approve of it either. And he knew, gods did he know, that he had been a huge source of misery in Nico’s life. But he knew that he was also a great source of happiness and love for the son of Hades, and no matter what Hades and Jason were going to say, he was going to do his damnedest to make Nico happy. He sat up straighter in the hard chair and stared right back, to which Hades quirked an eyebrow.

“Yeah, that’s right, I’m not afraid of you. There’s nothing you can say that will throw me off-"

“It’s funny really, that you are the only mortal in history that I’ve ever been jealous of,” the god said, his voice almost a whisper.
Except for that…

Hades stood up from his chair and turned away from everyone, looking at the back wall of the room that was covered in hundreds of pieces of paper and pictures, many of which were connected with red string and thumbtacks. To Percy it looked like the work of a raving lunatic, but Nico, Hades, Demeter, and even Persephone had been amazed by the contents of the documents, so he just went along with it. He was sure that if there was anything important Nico would tell him.

“I don’t consider myself to be a petty god when it comes to mortals,” Hades said after taking a deep breath. “But when I’m finally reunited with my son, my only son, and all he can talk about is a particular son of Poseidon, I believe I am allowed to be jealous.” He spun around quickly to face him again. “Nico looks at you as if you were a god, while he looks at me like I’m nothing. Even if it was hero-worship, it looks like it has now evolved into something purer, more powerful: love.”

“Yeah, it certainly has,” he said with a half-smile.

“But it’s not Nico’s feeling I’m worried about,” Hades sighed, leaning on his desk. “It’s yours that got me worried.”

“Hey! My feelings for Nico our genuine!” Percy snapped, insulted by the accusation.

“I’m sure they seem that way,” Hades sighed, retaking his seat. “But have you ever heard of Florence Nightingale?”

The name rang a bell. He was pretty sure they had talked about her in history, but he had a bad habit of forgetting things after he had been tested on them. Because really, did he really need to know the Pythagorean Theorem? So he took his best guess, “Yeah, she was the girl with the diary in World War II.”

“That’s Hellen Keller you idiot!” Jason snarled in the corner.

He heard Demeter snicker from the doorway when Hades facepalmed. “I knew the education you received at the camps was minimal, but this is crazy,” Nico’s dad sighed, shaking his head in frustration. “Florence Nightingale was the founder of modern nursing. She also has a small place in psychology as well, with the Florence Nightingale Effect, which in broad strokes is when due to continued contact, a caregiver develops feelings for their patient. There is also the Reverse Effect, where the patient falls for the caregiver.” Hades narrowed his eyes once more at him and growled, “Now tell me why your relationship isn’t a textbook case?”

Percy closed his eyes and furrowed his brow. What Hades had just said wasn’t an inaccurate description of start of his relationship with Nico. The son of Hades had been so kind and understanding to him that day at the hospital and the time that followed. He knew that Nico was the only reason he was alive; even if he hadn’t slit his wrists he was sure that without Nico he would have died from a broken heart. But, Nico had been there for him. The son of Hades had made him get out of bed every morning, even if it was just to brush his teeth and bathe, and would sit there and talk to him, telling him anything that seemingly popped into his mind, and looking back now, Percy realized he had found Nico cute when he was trying to engage him.

**But we grew from that. Possibly even before that.**

He thought back to the times he would invite Nico up for the weekends to hang out. How when Friday rolled around he couldn’t focus on anything else than the idea of Nico waiting for him after school. How he loved to show Nico things he had taken for granted, like slurpees, skateboarding, and where to get a good slice of pizza. He thought of how he and Nico would sometimes have to
share his bed because they had made such a mess that there was no way they could get sleeping bag set out, let alone an air mattress. And he had realized after Annabeth’s visit in his dreams that he had never been that excited when Jason came to visit, nor would he have been willing to sleep with Jason like he did with Nico.

He took a deep breath and opened his eyes again. First, he looked over to Jason and gave him a sheepish smile with a shrug, but that only seemed to further anger the blond. *Ouch, there is no way he’s going to just let this be.* Percy then turned back to Hades, sat up straight, squared his shoulders, and looked the depowered god right in his pitch-black eyes. “Look Hades—*the god arched an eyebrow, “-sir, I’m not going to sit here and lie that Nico taking care of me didn’t contribute to us coming together. It did. But!”* he added quickly, before the god could interrupt. “The feelings I have for Nico were there, I think. Like, I wouldn’t have left Annabeth or cheated on her with him, but if for some reason Nico and I were single at the same time I think we would’ve come together.” He paused and took another deep breath, he was honestly surprised neither Hades or Jason had attacked him yet. “And I get that all of you are mad, especially you sir, that we hid our relationship from all of you. But we did that because we wanted to make sure it was stable, that it wasn’t just some onetime thing like you’re suggesting. So, I’m sorry that we came out to all of you like that, but I wasn’t going to let Nico go off on some potentially dangerous mission without him having a reason to come back and without him knowing that I love him.” Percy’s eyes widened. That was the first time he had said he loved Nico out loud and it was to his father. “So how about we jump ahead to you giving me the rules for dating your son and what you’re going to do to me if I break them,” he chuckled awkwardly, scratching the back of his head, and praying that Hades didn’t notice he said the L-word.

Hades blinked, before tilting his head back and laughing deeply, almost mockingly so. “And just what makes you think that I’m going to let you continue to see Nico?” The god asked, slamming his palm down on the desk.

“Because who Nico sees is neither your business or mine,” Percy answered with a glare. “Don’t get me wrong, I would really like your approval, but at the end of the day Nico is the one who calls the shots. If he doesn’t want to date me because I don’t have your approval then I’ll step aside, but I don’t see that happening.”

The god of the underworld’s eyes widened in shock, but that quickly passed and the god started to laugh again, but this time it wasn’t mocking. “Well at least you have your priorities straight,” Hades barked. “Nico is my son, not some delicate little flower that needs protecting.” To Percy’s surprise the god shot a dirty look to Jason. “And you are familiar with my abilities and the various minor gods and monsters that serve me. So, I will not be threatening you, I’ll leave that to your imagination. BUT!” Hades cried, making him jump. “There are going to be some new rules.”

“I figured that,” Percy shrugged. *Mom and Paul had a list of rules prepared when Annabeth and I became a couple and we weren’t even living together.*

“One,” Hades said, holding up one finger. “You will no longer share a room with Nico and Jason. You will be bunking with me on a yet-to-be-purchased air mattress. Understand?”

“Yes sir.”

“Two, no more joint showers.” Hades ran a hand down his face and whispered, “Maria would skin me alive if she found out about that.” The god shook his head slowly before continuing. “If you do require any assistance, Jason or myself will be more than willing to offer a hand.”

“I think I’m good now,” Percy said, shuddering at the thought of Jason and Hades standing in the tub with him, lathering up his back. *A little extra cologne or deodorant should cover up anything I can’t scrub*…
“Three, when you and Nico are in a room unaccompanied, doors are to remain closed for a maximum of fifteen minutes. I am being incredibly generous with that time and if that is broken, there will be no closed doors. Period.”

Percy nodded in agreement. It really was a generous amount of time, considering his bedroom door was to be never closed when Annabeth was over. *Fifteen minutes is just enough time for us to have some fun, but not enough to get too far I guess. I guess this is because it’s not like either of us can get pregnant?*

“And fourth and final, is that if you intend to take my son to prom, you will not look like a beggar. I imagine I will be footing the bill for everything, so the three of you will at least look like proper gentlemen. You will shave, get a haircut, dress properly, and above all else do whatever it takes to keep Nico happy.”

Percy reached up and gently stroked his chin, feeling the little scraggly hairs that had grown from not shaving in a few days. Before everything went to Tartarus he had shaved every other day, as it came in patchy and it was a bit too itchy for him to handle. Plus, Annabeth and his mom didn’t like facial hair so he complied with their wishes. He hadn’t asked what Nico’s preference was, but that could wait until after Prom.

“If so much as a bead of sweat forms on his brow, you will hobble your way over to the punch bowl and get him a drink. If he wants to dance, you dance. If he wants an absurd number of pictures of you two, then you will pose for as many as he wants. And if for some reason he ends up sulking in a corner, you sulk with him. Do you understand me Jackson?”

*I was going to do all that stuff anyway,* he thought with a smile before nodding. “Yes sir, I can and will do that.”

“Good,” Hades said with a sincere smile as he stood up from behind the desk. The god stretched out his arms before walking to the door. “Now before I rush out and buy an air mattress, I think Demeter and I will take a look around the basement for one.”

“But I know we don’t-oof” Demeter was cut off by Hades grabbing her by the hand and pulling the plump goddess behind him.

“But it doesn’t hurt to look,” he heard Hades say. “Besides, Jason needs some alone time with Percy. Big brothers have to have their say as well, and their conversations are often so much worse than a father’s.”

*Oh shit…*

---

*You know, suddenly I’m not as confident that I can kick Jason’s ass. Like, at all.*

In the five minutes since Hades and Demeter had left the two of them alone, Jason had been silently circling the room, his eyes never once leaving him, and Percy was pretty sure that the blond hadn’t even blinked. There had been a few times where Jason would open his mouth, only to quickly close it and intensify his scowl, in each instance the lights in the room would flicker.

*Well I guess that answers the question of who was doing that, but I feel like I would have been better off if it had been Hades…*
“How long?” Jason snarled, stopping his pacing and standing with his back turned to him facing a bookshelf. “How long has this been going on?”

“There’s two different answers for that,” he answered, absently tracing the scar on his cheek with one finger. “We officially became a couple the night Nico woke up after saving us at New Rome, but I actually kissed him the night before we left.” He smiled at the memory of the two of them embracing each other in the pool and then the passionate exchange in the locker room. “It was pretty awesome,” he said with a goofy grin.

Apparently, Jason didn’t appreciate his fond memories, as the blond ripped a Farmer’s Almanac from the shelf and sent it flying towards his head, barely missing him.

“What the fuck Jason!” he yelled, as he dodged yet another ancient almanac.

“What do you think it is funny to mess with Nico like that?!” Jason roared, as the blond crossed the distance between them.

“What are you talking about?”

Jason grabbed him by the shoulders and pulled him up out of the chair so that they were face to face. “Really? Just going to play innocent?” The son of Jupiter hissed as he shook him. “Annabeth dies and suddenly you’re attracted to Nico? Please!” Jason let go of him and pushed him back down into the chair. “You’re just with Nico because you knew, you knew, that with the right prompting he would be all over you again! That way you could have someone to fuck around with!”

Percy dug his fingernails into his palms and fought back the urge to punch the blond in the gut at the accusation. This isn’t Jason, he told himself. Jason is protective of Nico, but he’s not violent like this. Just like earlier today with him getting all upset about Nico wanting to go to prom, the old Jason would have jumped at the opportunity. I have to work with Nico to get Jason back to normal, but right now I got to get him to accept us.

He took a deep breath. “Percy,” he said as calmly as possible. “You know that’s not true. I have a lot of faults and I’ve messed up a lot, but I would never, and you know this, never mess with anyone’s feelings. Especially Nico’s.”

Jason stood there shaking, which he was hoping was a good sign. “Things have changed though Percy,” the blond whispered. “We’ve all changed. How can I be sure you’re not just using Nico?”

Well he’s stopped throwing things at me so that’s an improvement… “Jason all I can give you is my word that I’m not,” he sighed. “Do you know how hard it was to keep us a secret? When every day I fall deeper and deeper and love with him? How hard it was to not kiss him in front of all of you? So, all I can tell you that if you don’t trust me, then watch me. Watch us. If I do something to upset Nico, zap me, hit me, summon a tornado and send me to Oz! But just know I wouldn’t do it intentionally.”

He looked up into Jason’s blue eyes and smiled. “But I think it would be to everyone’s advantage, especially Nico’s, if we got along. I’m an idiot—"

“You can say that again,” the blond huffed.

“So,” he continued, glaring at the son of Jupiter. “I’m going to need your help to avoid messing up. You’re his best friend, which is painful to admit, so you can clue me in on when I say or do something he doesn’t like or just give me ideas on what he would like me to do. Because Jay, I want to keep this up until the end.”

“What about after that?” Jason asked, sitting down on Hades’ desk, which he was pretty sure was a big no-no.
He thought of his promise to Annabeth, how they would be together again when he passed on, and how he had kinda not talked to Nico about a love triangle in Elysium, but yes, he did plan to continue loving the both until the end of time. “You know it,” he smiled.

Jason buried his face in his hands and sat there for a moment, grumbling under his breath. “Alright, I’ll help you—“

“Thanks!”

“For Nico’s sake,” Jason glared. “But let me be clear: if you break his heart I will chain you atop the highest peak in the Atacama Desert, the driest place on Earth, figure out a way to make us both immortal so I can kick your ass every day, and I’ll hire the eagle that ate Prometheus’s liver to eat your fucking balls every night until the end of time. Am I clear?”

Percy gulped and crossed his legs, his nether regions suddenly feeling very vulnerable. “Crystal,” he squeaked. “And, uh, why was that threat oddly specific? How do you know where the driest place on Earth is? Have- have you been thinking about this?”

Jason nodded firmly, sending shivers down his back. “If you would have seen Nico after Croatia you would have been upset with yourself too. And you and I didn’t exactly know each other that well, so I didn’t know if you had ever lead him on behind Annabeth’s back, so I started to piece together a suitable punishment if that was the case.”

There was nothing playful in Jason’s voice or expression that even hinted that he was joking. Maybe if he was in top form he would be able to escape Jason, but if the scenario played out like Jason described, then there was no way in Tartarus he would have been able to escape Jason, Nico, and Annabeth. “Gods man, that is like Batman levels of preparedness.”

“I was praetor alongside Reyna,” Jason smirked. “And I learned just as much from her as she did from me.” The blond then offered him his hand. “Now shake if you promise that you’ll do your best for Nico.”

He gladly took Jason’s hand with his own, but instead of shaking it, he pulled himself up and gave Jason a bro-hug. “I promise man,” he smiled. “And thanks.”

“Just don’t make me regret this,” Jason chuckled, and he could feel the tension leave the blond’s shoulders. “More than I already do.”

“Dude, I promise we’ll all have a goodtime at prom. Heck, we’re going to have a great time at whatever we do.” He paused for a brief moment. “I mean, it’s just the three of us now. We have to stick together no matter what.”

Jason pulled away, ending the bro-hug and helped him back into the chair. “It still hurts to think about it like that. We’re the last of a generation, possible the last demigods, period.” Jason kicked one of the desk’s front legs with a frustrated grunt.

“The let’s focus on the now,” Percy said, with a determined smile. “And could you go grab my crutches? I kind of left them in the kitchen when Hades literally dragged me in here.”

Jason snorted with a half-smile, before leaving the room.

Holy shit! Jason might be a psychopath! He would definitely miss sleeping with Nico, but at least by bunking with Hades he wouldn’t have to worry about waking up to an eagle eating his balls. “Ow,” he whimpered.
The rest of the night passed by incredibly slow, even with the impromptu trip to Wal-Mart to purchase him a bed. It was certainly strange watching Stheno and Euryale interact with Demeter, who quickly hit it off with the two gorgons, especially Euryale. As the six of them traversed the gigantic super-store, the goddess and the gorgon exchanged recipes and where to get the best coupons, while Hades (and to a lesser extent himself) contemplated ditching the two and finding shelter in the electronics department.

When they got to the rather limited selection of beds, Percy wasn’t exactly thrilled with the selection of air-mattresses, and Hades was even less thrilled with the prices. Jason however, was transfixed with a memory-foam pillow and in Percy’s opinion was having way too much fun with it. When Hades noticed that a day bed, with a real mattress and metal frame, was only fifty bucks more than the air mattress, he complained loudly and at length until Stheno pulled out her box opener and repeatedly stabbed the large cardboard box.

“Looks like it’s damaged now,” she had said with a shrug. “You can purchase it at a discount, but you won’t be able to return it.”

No one could argue with that, so Jason and Hades lifted the mutilated box into their shopping cart. And when Jason continued to look longingly at the pillow, Stheno’s box murdering spree continued to the delight of the son of Jupiter.

They returned home and unloaded his bed, and quickly sped back to Princeton when they realized that they had left Demeter behind.

It was… a long ride back to the farm.

He provided what help he could to Jason and Hades as they assembled his new bed, mostly handing them nuts and bolts, and giving his input if he thought the bed looked right. The instructions were never removed from their packaging as they were all men and did not need instructions, a sentiment that went unappreciated by Demeter who said she would have 911 on standby. But they showed her! Three hours later he had his own, only slightly crooked, bed with extra parts.

After that he and Jason went upstairs and they stripped his old bed clean of his sheets, blankets, and pillows and carried them downstairs. His clothes would have to stay up with Nico and Jason as the study didn’t have any space to store them, but he supposed that was a good thing, that maybe he could still wake Nico up every morning (though nine-times-out-of-ten Nico woke him up).

Jason was thrilled to have his own bed and quickly went to work making it his own, putting on clean sheets and rolling around on it to try and break it in. Percy nearly had a heart attack though when the son of Jupiter went to run his laptop charger cable under the bed and found his used tube sock. He had jumped onto the bed with almost superhuman speed and grabbed the stained article of clothing from Jason’s hand before he could realize what it was, awkwardly laughing that he had been looking for that particular sock.

He later took the sock to the bathroom and wrapped it in toilet paper before burying it at the bottom of the waste bin. No one must ever know…

Then things started to settle down again. Demeter went to her room and did… whatever it was she
did in there. Hades went back to the study and fussed over the documents from the mysterious folder, and he could occasionally hear the god yell about the idiocy of his youngest brother. Jason was playing *World of Warcraft* with his mortal friends and was bragging about how he finally got his own bed (he didn’t have the heart to tell the blond how sad that sounded).

As for him, he tried to watch TV in the living room for a few hours, but his mind kept drifting to Nico and strangely enough the homework he still hadn’t done. Nico was out there with Persephone trying to convince a goddess to help them, a goddess that Nico didn’t like and who didn’t like him.

*Yeah, not exactly a good mix.*

So, Percy turned off the TV (for once without his mom telling him to) and went and grabbed his backpack and a blanket from his bed. It was a bit hard carrying everything with his crutches, but he managed, taking everything out to the front porch. He turned on the porch light and sat down on the wooden bench, wrapped himself in a blanket to keep him warm from the slightly chilly April air, and started to do his homework, while he waited for Nico to return home.

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Percy wasn’t sure how much time had passed when Hades exited the house, but he had finished all of his homework and was currently practicing his control over the earth, raising and lowering the dirt next to the porch into intricate patterns.

“Here, catch,” Hades said, tossing him a can.

He barely caught the can, his hands still not obeying his every command and occasionally shaking uncontrollably. He thought Hades had tossed him a soda, but when he looked down he saw it was a beer. “Uh, thanks, but I don’t drink.”

“That’s what every teenager says,” Hades groaned as he sat down on the bench next to him. “Or at least that’s what my parenting books say.” The god opened his own can and cursed when it started to foam over, before quickly bringing it up to his lips.

“No, I’m serious. I don’t drink,” he repeated, thinking of smelly Gabe. People found it hard to believe that he refused to drink, especially at camp, but they didn’t understand or know the horrors he had experienced at the hands of his former stepfather. “And I’m surprised that you would drink,” he squinted to read the can’s label, “Bud Light.”

Hades threw his head back and laughed. “I’m just as surprised as you, but rural Illinois doesn’t exactly have access to imported wines.” The god took another drink and his face twisted in disgust. “Or even Californian for that matter.” The depowered god then took the unopened can from his hand and set it between his legs. “So the great Perseus Jackson doesn’t drink? That is surprising,” the god mused, looking up at the night sky.

“Never felt the need to. Seems like something demigods should avoid really.”

“You’re probably right,” Hades chuckled. “Horrible habit really, makes a beast out of the best of men, ruins families, and lives. But, you know all about that don’t you?”

He didn’t answer, instead looking up at the stars and trying to find Zoë, but had been unable to for
quite some time. It was like she just disappeared one night and he kept hoping that she would return,
just like he hoped everyone else would somehow return.

“I suppose that’s a good thing, but just a heads up; when Nico was younger Maria used to give him
small glasses of wine with the evening meal, Bianca too.”

“Why did she do that?” Percy asked, his interest piqued. He couldn’t imagine his mom giving him
anything to drink, so the idea of Nico’s mother giving him a drink when he was young was mind-
blowing.

Hades shrugged. “It’s an Italian thing. It wasn’t like it was enough to get drunk on or anything,
though they did sleep incredibly well,” the god laughed. “No, a little wine is good for the body and if
you introduce it early to a child they are less likely to abuse it later in life.”

“Does Nico remember this?”

Hades took another long drink and frowned. “Hell if I know. I hope he does, but there is so much he
doesn’t. Wiping his and Bianca’s memories damn near killed me.”

“Then why did you do it? Couldn’t you have taken them to the underworld and raised them there?”

“You and I both know the underworld is no place to raise a family. Plus, despite everything Zeus has
his spies down there and every god has their price. So in the utmost secrecy, I wiped their memories,
placed them in the Lotus, and told Persephone and everyone else that they were dead. With the way
Persephone acted everyone believed it, and well, I didn’t take it any better.” He crushed the can in
his hands, the remaining liquid gushing out. “If I would have had the allies and power I would have
topped Olympus and send my good for nothing brother to the depths of Tartarus.”

Percy was going to laugh, but the look in the god’s eyes told him he was deadly serious. “You really
would have, wouldn’t you?”

“Jackson, for family, I’d do anything.” Hades took the beer from between his legs that had been his
and cracked it open, this one not foaming over. “And I know you’d do the same.”

“Yeah,” he sighed. “If Gabe were here right now I would remove all the water from his body cell-
by-cell until he was just a shriveled husk.”

“Damn we’re a lot alike,” Hades smiled. “So, what are you doing out here this late?”

“finished my homework, doing my training, but mostly I’m just waiting for Nico.”

The god looked at him for a moment, before closing his eyes and shaking his head with a small smile
on his face. “Maria, I think you’d be happy,” Hades chuckled under his breath. “You really do care
for him, don’t you?”

“Yeah.”

“Then do you mind if I wait with you?”

“Knock yourself out,” he shrugged. “Just try not to breathe on me, I’m not a fan of beer breath.”

“I can do that. But, how do you know they just won’t pop into the kitchen?”

Percy threw his head back and facepalmed. “Fuck!”
How was that for a brief intermission?

I always imagined that Hades wouldn't scream or holler when he was upset. No, Hades would speak relatively calmly and try to destroy you with facts.

But facts don't really work on Percy do they? Percy is all loyalty and emotion, like a golden retriever. Whether Hades likes it or not, Percy is sticking with Nico until either Nico breaks up with him or they die, at which point Percy would wait for Nico.

But really Hades was just testing Percy, looking for any reaction that could indicate future problems.

And Percy passed :)

Jason though was the real challenge, big brothers (because that is what he is) are downright Savage. And considering the history the three of them share Jason is going to be hyper critical of Percy. The bouts of rage though are definitely a result of Jason's issues though....

And I think we can all agree the rules Hades set are super fair. I mean 15 minutes? I would kill for that! And we can understand why Percy and Nico would need to sleep in separate rooms. It also allows the two of them to have some time apart, something couples need whether they know it or not.

And finally one of the earliest ideas I had for this fic was Hades and Percy sitting outside in the middle of the night waiting for Nico and bonding. And I wanted to do something a little different by having Percy not drink. I know people who grew up in similar environments to Percy and they do not drink.

Not a drop.

So the idea of Percy drinking is absurd to me. Him drinking it counter to everything he wants in life. It's something he would heavily associate with Gabe...

Nico though would totally be given wine by his parents. It's one of the cultural things and it is good for you. (That and it allowed Hades and Maria to get a little more... Involved at night without worrying about the kids walking up)

Hey! Did you like what you just read? Then leave a kudos, bookmark this, and subscribe!

Thoughts, theories, questions, recipes? Then leave a comment!

I love hearing from all of you! It always puts a smilenony face :)

Next chapter is Piper and we are back in the thick of it!

So until next time, remember you are an amazing one of a kind person that cannot be replaced! Hang in there!
Chapter Summary

Warnings: Blood, death, profanity, the works
Tonight:
Piper realizes that Jason and Reyna were perfect for each other,
Logs are not very handicap accessible,
and an obligatory reference.

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

“I AM THE MOST MISERABLE WOMAN ON THE PLANET!” Piper screamed as she ran/limped through the burning forest, pushing the elderly Awinita in her wheelchair, with Reyna’s unconscious form draped over the retired matriarch’s lap.

“Great! Just keep screaming! Tell everyone where we are at!” Bambi hollered back, the young doe leaping ahead of them to make sure there were no enemies, hunters, mortals, or otherwise.

“They know where we’re at!” she screamed back, wincing as she put too much weight on her leg. The cast that Jeanne had made for her out of plant life allowed her to move around more than a normal cast, but it definitely wasn’t meant for running for one’s life. “They told us to run! And fifty plus women fleeing in one direction is pretty hard to fucking miss!”

“Just shut up and push my grandmother!” Bambi cried as she leapt over a burning log that had once been a public restroom.

“This is like eighteen kinds of bullshit,” she grumbled under her breath as she pushed the wheelchair around the obstruction, and cringing when Reyna’s head bounced off an outstretched root. “She’ll be fine…”

Piper had thought she was about to bite the dust when Artemis had raised her hunting spear to her after witnessing Thalia’s death at the hands of the same goddess. Yeah, that’s going to haunt me forever... How am I going to tell Jason? She had hoped the combined forces of the deer women, Thalia’s rogue hunters, Reyna, Veronica and Atlas, and herself would have been enough to at least stop the goddess’s slaughter, but Artemis had swatted them aside like an annoying fly. So when the asshole mortals came down in their helicopters all Apocalypse Now style and blew off Artemis’s arm, she gladly took the opportunity to grab Reyna and get the hell out of there.

She had just reached Reyna when Bambi and Awinita joined her, each wounded from their scuffles with the hunters, but they were in okay. The young matriarch had just told her that Jeanne was already escorting survivors to safety, when the loud speakers on the mortal vehicles came to life. A gruff male voice said that all demigods and monsters would be allowed to leave. Yeah, she dropped Reyna like a bag of potatoes onto the elder’s lap and took off like a bat out of hell.
And that’s when the howling started…

An ear-piercing howl cried out from behind them, followed by at least a half a dozen others seemingly answering the call, making the hairs on the back of Piper’s neck stand on end and a chill down her spine despite the intense heat around them.

“Please tell me you have some werewolf friends coming to help?” she frantically asked as she struggled to get the wheelchair over a downed wooden sign, advertising natural cures for baldness and fleas. “Because I could really go for some good news right about now.”

Bambi dashed back and grabbed one side of the heavy chair and helped her lift it over the obstruction with a groan. “The Skin-walkers are all down south with Coyote working at his resorts, so there is no way it’s them. Plus, whatever is howling sounds a lot bigger,” the girl gulped, brushing a few strands of loose dark hair from her eyes.

Piper leaned against the chair and allowed herself a moment’s reprieve, lifting her broken leg off the ground and wincing when she felt it throb. “I’m not even going to ask why Skin-walkers are working in resorts, because I know, I just know, the answer is going to be stupid,” she panted. “Because that’s how it works with the Greeks and the Romans.”

Bambi furrowed her brow in confusion and cocked her head to the side. “Uh, because that’s Navajo territory and Coyote’s resorts are often the only career opportunities in their communities?”

Piper held up one finger ready to rant about the inherent stupidity of her answer, when she realized what the doe had said. “That… Wow, that actually is a reasonable answer…”

Bambi chuckled at her, clearly amused by her frustration with her mother’s side of the family. The young leader then smiled at her before running a hand through her grandmother’s hair and whispering a few words that Piper did not know the meaning of. Awinita in turn smiled at her granddaughter, then strangely enough turned her head ever so slightly to smile at Piper, before gesturing to her with her blood-stained tomahawk to continue on.

She was going to protest that she needed just one more second, when another howl echoed through the burning forest, this time much closer. “Fuck it! I’ll get it amputated and Leo can make me a new leg!” she cried as she grabbed the wheelchair’s handles and pushed as fast as she could, for once outpacing Bambi.

“Get your hoof off my foot,” Piper hissed, as she pressed herself against the inner wall of the burnt-out tree stump.

“I’m trying!” Bambi hissed back. “But I can’t get it around Grandma’s chair! And why do you stink so bad!?”

“Oh, I’m sorry! It’s not like I haven’t had plenty of opportunities to bathe while running for my life for the last month!” She felt the hoof press down harder on her big toe and she wasn’t ready to rule out that it was done out of anger.

“Maybe if you two weren’t so loud, wouldn’t be hiding in a storage stump!” Awinita hissed, holding Reyna tightly against her chest. “Hmm?” The elder asked, giving the two of them a bad case of stink-eye.
Piper’s eyes widened and her jaw dropped, her face paling then flushing red with anger at the old woman’s insane words. “You’re the reason we’re in this mess!” she hissed, clenching her fists and using all her rapidly depleting self-control to not deck Awinita.

They had been making decent progress escaping the once majestic forest, finally catching a break from having to circle or climb around fallen rubble and debris, when the Thunderbird feather had sharply yanked her head to the left with such force, she was sure she was going to need to see a chiropractor to work the resulting kink out. But Piper decided she could live with a little neck pain when she saw what the feather was trying to show her.

They were huge. Giant wolf-like dogs with silver fur that glowed like moonlight were sniffing the ground in a pack of three. The lead dog (if you could call it that) was as big as Betty White, with paws as big around as tires, it was missing its left eye with a scar that started at its ear and extended down to its blood drenched jaws. The two behind the lead kept a respectable distance away from it, a clear indication that it was the alpha and not to be messed with. They were currently slowly stalking away from them on a barren street, their ears perked up listening for any signs of life, and Piper thanked whatever gods were still on their side that they hadn’t been seen or heard.

And that’s when Awinita let out a shrill battle-cry that echoed through the burning hell and tossed her tomahawk with incredible force and speed at the lead… only for the black stone weapon to seemingly bounce harmlessly off its fur.

And once again, time seemed to slow down for the daughter of Aphrodite, but this time she knew it was purely adrenaline based. Directly in front of them had been a burnt-out tree stump, which until only recently had been some kind of supply shed. She gave the wheelchair a mighty kick that would’ve impressed any of her dad’s action star friends (except Steven Seagal, he was a creep), sending Reyna and the old woman rolling into their only possible shelter, and then in one fluid motion, wrapped an arm around the young deer woman’s waist, threw her over her shoulder, and dove in behind the wheelchair, just as the pack leader let out a spine-tingling howl.

Which led them to their current predicament: trapped in a confined space with one exit (two if you counted the missing roof, but she wasn’t going to try to lift a wheelchair out that way), in the middle of a burning hell-scape, with giant hunting dogs circling around them trying to sniff them out.

Yup… Just another typical Friday night for a demigod… Next, I’ll be tied to a rock with a talking llama about to go over a waterfall!

Everyone’s breathing hitched when a giant foreleg appeared in front of the entrance, and Piper had to put her hand over her mouth to stop herself from gasping when she caught sight of the dog’s razor-sharp claws. She could hear the creature breathing before the leg in front of them bent down and the sounds of a giant nose sniffing the ground filled the stump. The only weapon any of them had was the magic bow that slung on her back, but there wasn’t the room to use it. She supposed her charm speak could be of some use, but saying a single word would give away their location, and she was pretty sure that they would not respond to “sit”.

Go away! Go away! Go away! Go away! she mentally pleaded as she closed her eyes, in hopes of the old adage of if you can’t see them they can’t see you would work. I like dogs! I helped dad with some ASPCA PSAs! Please let mean something!

The hound snorted and her eyes flew open. She saw its large muscles underneath the silver glowing fur tense up as it began to growl. The growl with quickly followed by snarling from the other two, but it quickly stopped.

Of course, they’re going to find us! Half of half of us are venison! She furrowed her brow and
quickly did the math. So, a quarter of us are venison. Mellie would be proud to know that I used math in the last moments of my short life.

She resisted the urge to sigh in relief when the beast’s leg straightened and walked forward enough that they could now see its massive hindlegs.

*Come on doggo! Just keep moving! Go eat a bear or something!*  

The dog’s legs then bent ever so slightly into a squatting position.

*No…*  

The creature then lifted its right leg and-

**NO!**

A torrent of hot, foul smelling liquid hit them with the intensity of a firehose, sending Awinita and Reyna falling back into Bambi, the poor doe struggling to keep her mouth shut and eyes closed. Piper though, wasn’t as lucky. The wheelchair had run over her exposed toes, her body reacting by opening her mouth to scream. Thankfully (and she would use that in the loosest sense of the word), her scream was turned into nothing more than a gurgle as the discharging liquid filled her mouth. The whole ordeal probably only lasted for a few seconds, but to her, it had been an eternity.

*A piss filled eternity…*

Thoroughly soaked to the bone, and with nothing to wipe her hands off on, she blinked repeatedly until her eyes only stung slightly enough that she could keep them open. She let out a sigh of relief when she saw that the wolf-dog was gone.

*I do no blame it for not hanging around! This place reeks of asparagus! Ugh, never eating that again…*

She felt a hand clasp onto her shoulder and turned her head ever so slightly to see that Bambi was trying to pull herself up, with her other hand firmly clasped over her mouth to prevent her from coughing. Despite the cramped conditions, Piper was able to help the Doe up to her hooves and then the two of them were able to right Awinita and get Reyna situated again with little noise.

*We’ll just wait a few more minutes before peaking outside to be-*

“**HOLY CRAP THAT WAS DISGUSTING!”** Awinita laughed, trying to shake herself dry like a dog.

Before Piper even had a chance to strangle the old woman, the pack leader reappeared in front of the log’s opening; it’s one eye looking directly at her as it growled deeply. Any hopes that they would be safe from the beast as long they pressed themselves against the back were dashed when something large impacted the side of the log, sending splinters raining down on them.

“They’re trying to break in!” Bambi screamed over the snarling, pulling the wheelchair back as far as possible.

“You think?” she screamed back, trying to remove the bow from her back. There was no way she could fire off a shot in the cramped quarters, but she didn’t intend to go down without a fight. She looked the dog square in its one eye and summoned up strength from deep within. “**Sit!**” she yelled, until her throat was raw. Sadly, the only creature that was effected was Bambi, who collapsed to the floor with superhuman speed. “**Well, I’m out of ideas,”** she choked.
“I could have sworn I just stood up,” Bambi groaned as she once again needed to be helped up. “And that was your brilliant plan? Tell it to sit?” The young leader than slugged Piper in the shoulder.

“I don’t see you trying anything!” she cried, just as a massive paw exploded through the wall, narrowly missing Reyna’s head. She whacked the paw back with her bow, earning her a satisfying yelp from one of the lesser hounds.

“She has a point Adsila,” the old woman chuckled as she kicked the alpha dog’s nose, the pain sending it reeling back. “It’s better to try anything, then to sit around and wait for death. Now I don’t know about you two, but I plan on fighting until the gruesome end!” The old deer woman then raised her left leg and grabbed both wheels of her chair, and wheeled herself with surprising speed out of the log, her leg colliding with the alpha’s foreleg like a knight’s lance.

It took her a moment to process that Reyna was still on Awinita’s lap, and another to realize that she had to do something. With a heavy sigh and now much more room to work with without the wheelchair, she drew her bow back, forming an arrow of pure moonlight. “Your grandmother is going to get us killed!” She screamed, rushing (limping) out and releasing bolt-after-bolt into the beast. The repeated blasts got its attention, but did little else, the arrows seemingly melting into its silver fur, and to make matters worse, the other two were rushing towards her.

“I am very much aware of that!” Bambi screamed, erupting from their former shelter in a flying kick, connecting with one of the two approaching beta male’s body, sending it crashing into the other. “I have been dealing with her on my own for months now!” The younger girl threw her hair over her shoulders and stared at the alpha with such ferocity that Piper feared for the beast. “She alternates between this mad warrior, an incoherent nut job-,,” Bambi snarled as she leapt into the air. Piper watched as the girl reached the pinnacle of her jump and began her decent, extending one leg and holding her arms out to stabilize her meteoric fall. The hound crouched down, its muscles rippling as it ready to jump up and devour its prey. Before it had a chance to unleash its pent-up energy, Bambi’s hoof collided with its cranium with a sickening crunch, collapsing its skull, instantly killing the beast. “And being my grandmother!” the girl roared, tears pouring down her face. “But I put up with her because I love her!” the doe jumped off the of the alpha’s still shaking corpse and turned to face the other two hounds that were just regaining their balance. “Now who else wants some of this?” she growled, gesturing to herself.

The two hounds crouched down low and barred their fangs, but then turned tail and ran away.

“That’s what I thought,” Bambi huffed, walking over to her grandmother and smiling sadly at her. Piper put the bow back on her back and limped over to the trio, her mouth wide in disbelief at what she had just witnessed. She took her position behind the wheelchair and balanced on her good leg. “Sooooo, you could’ve taken them out with ease like that at any time?”

“Possibly, but someone threw me into a tree!”

“Hey! I was trying to save us!”

“Your car should be just up ahead!” Bambi laughed as they rounded a corner, mowing down a patch of white flowers underfoot.
“Oh, thank… whomever!” Piper laughed.

After the incident with the hounds, they had met little to no resistance, other than the occasional fallen branches or corpses (I mean beanbags…) that required her and Bambi to lift the wheelchair or find an alternative route. What was best of all though was that they had left the forest fire behind, which allowed her to breathe a little deeper and regain some of her energy. She was ecstatic to get back to Betty White, to leave this madness behind, to finally continue on their merry way to camp!

*We drop Bambi and Awinita off at a train station, bid them a fond farewell, and I bury these memories deep. DEEP!* 

She would remember and honor Veronica and Atlas though, she decided. Without those two Reyna and her would have been dead at least a dozen times over; saving her from the witch, eating Mr. D., and trying to fight Artemis to name just a few. Piper would make sure Veronica had a proper burial shroud, even if she had to do it herself. She would also tell everyone that Atlas wasn’t as bad a guy as everyone thought, that he was caring in his own uniquely gruff way. She knew that he would be forced back to his punishment, but with this new information maybe those in charge of watching him could help ease his burden, that-

“STOP!” a familiar voice cried as she was tackled to the ground, falling like a barrel of bricks.

“Jeanne?” she heard Bambi gasp, as she tried to catch her breath.

The weight that she guessed was Jeanne shifted off of her chest, allowing her to sit up and see the deer woman for herself. “What-what happened?”

The doctor who Piper had come to consider a friend in their short time together looked horrible. Jeanne’s left arm was ripped off just below the elbow, the wound tied off with what had been the right sleeve from her formerly hot pink scrubs. Three small, albeit deep, scratches started at her left temple and extended down the side of her face to her collar bone. Her dark hair had worked itself free from its ponytail, and her sky-blue highlights were now covered in blood, framing her unmistakably terrified face. “You can’t go that way!” Jeanne cried, and Piper could feel her shaking.

Piper sat the rest of the way up and gentle pulled herself free from the quaking doctor. “Why?”

“What happened?” Bambi asked, kneeling down and gently placing a hand on the young woman’s shoulder. The doe’s eyes widened in realization. “Jeanne… what happened to the others?”

“It got them,” the doctor shuddered, “all of them.”

“What did?” she asked. She had a pretty good idea of what happened, giving what she had seen. Most likely Jeanne’s group of survivors had been ambushed by some of the hounds. Although the deer women had advantage of numbers, in the cramped forest they had been practically on top of each other, allowing the hounds to pick them off with ease.

“It was a monster!” Jeanne cried.

She, Awinita, and Bambi shared a look that said, “Duh.”

“It was so fast! With fangs! Claws! And, and the eyes! It had soulless eyes! They looked straight into your soul!”

She pushed herself up and unslung her bow (yeah, that’s right! It’s mine now) and started to limp forward.
“Didn’t you hear me??” Jeanne sobbed. “You can’t go that way!!

“Well I see it like this; our only ride out of here is that way and if some monster killed all those people, then we need to take it out before it can hurt others.” She drew back the bow, forming an arrow that illuminated their surroundings. “Now who’s with me?”

“Holy shit…” she whispered to herself when they reached the clearing with Betty White.

The clearing that she, Reyna, Atlas, and Veronica had camped at only a week ago was now a sight straight out of a horror film. The remains of perhaps dozens of bodies were scattered everywhere, not a single inch of the once scenic clearing was devoid of remains. Even Betty White, their majestic bronze SUV, was covered in blood. There was even a severed hand holding onto the front passenger door’s handle.

“My… my people,” Bambi gasped, collapsing to her knees.

She gently kicked the girl with her bad leg. “Get back up, we can’t be caught with our pants down when this-“ she gulped, “creature comes back.”

“Too late! It’s already here!” Jeanne shrieked, pointing to something moving among the bodies.

Piper dropped down into a crouch and pulled back on the bow as far as she could, creating a brilliant arrow of silver moonlight. Just a repeat of earlier. I pepper it with arrows and Bambi kicks the shit out of it. Easy peasy, lemon… “What?”

The “creature” hopped up onto the chest of a fallen deer woman, with a roar… if a yip counted as a roar. It had large paws… for a something under a foot tall she guessed. Its eyes were soulless… in the same way a teddy bears were. If there was one negative trait it had was that it’s white fur was a bit scraggly.

Otherwise, that is the cutest Pomeranian ever!

“There it is!” Jeanne gasped.

“What, behind the Pomeranian?”

“No! It is the Pomeranian!”

Bambi punched Jeanne in the arm. “You idiot!”

Jeanne went to rub were the girl had punched her, but realized that she lacked the necessary appendage to do so. “That’s no ordinary little dog!”

Piper released the tension on the bow, the arrow disappearing. “You got us all worked up for nothing!” She cried taking her turn to punch the woman.

“That is the most foul, cruel, and bad-tempered canine in the world!” the doctor snarled. “Besides! What do you think did all of this?!”

She looked back at the carnage, only to see the small white dog yipping at a moth, before dragging its butt across the corpse’s chest. “Riiiiight,” she droned, smiling at the little ball of fluff.
“It’s got huge, sharp- eh- it can jump about- look at the bones!” Jeanne cried, frantically gesturing at the tiny puppy.  

She stood back upright and hopped over the log they were cowering behind. “Look, I’ve wanted a dog for a long time, and I’m taking this as a sign that things are turning around.” She ignored Jeanne’s frantic cries and warnings, and limped over to the little thing. When she got a few yards away, she bent down and slowed her pace to not scare it away. She clicked her tongue twice. “Come here little guy,” she said offering it her best smile. “Why don’t you come with me? Hmm? We can get you some treats along the way?” The ball of fluff spun around, its tail wagging, and little tongue sticking out the side of its mouth. “Yeah! You’re a good-“ Its tail stopped wagging and its lips curled up, exposing teeth and fangs that were far too large for its mouth, and its eyes began to glow red. “- Oh shit…” 

It launched itself at her, but at the last second, she was knocked to the ground by Jeanne. In an instant, she was back on her feet, only to witness the small dog tear out the doctor’s throat. She pulled the bow off of her back and pulled back, only for the dog to leap from Jeanne to her, the latter falling to the ground dead. She managed to catch the little dog, keeping it inches away from her face as its impossibly big mouth frantically tried devouring her. 

“Jesus Christ!” She shrieked, struggling to hold the dog back. 

“Don’t worry! I got you!” Bambi cried, rushing to her aid. The doe leapt in the air to kick the dog, only to kick Piper’s hand. 

“What the fuck is wrong with you?!” she sobbed, the pain in her hand surpassing the constant throbbing pain from her leg. “I meant grab it!” 

“I am not touching that thing! It killed Jeanne!” 

“Well, it’s going to kill me too!” 

“Well what do you want me to do?!” 

“Get the Holy Hand Grenade of Antioch!” 

“The what?” 

“Wrong place and time!” She cried, as the creature managed to sink its hind claws into her hands, drawing blood. “Just bash it over the head or something!” 

“MOVE!” boomed a deep voice that Piper thought she would never hear again. 

She looked over her shoulder to see the silhouette of Veronica and Atlas approach from the edge of the clearing, their golden eyes burning with rage. When thy stepped into the moonlight lit clearing, she almost lost her grip on the furry demon. They were completely naked, revealing a patchwork of stolen skin and fur that they had taken to recover from being impaled by Artemis. Some of the talons on their hands had been replaced with the claws of the huge hounds they had encountered earlier. To anyone else other than herself and Reyna it would have been a horrifying sight, but to her, it was like an angel of victory had come to save her. 

There was a flash of golden light and instantly the titan-demigod hybrid was next to them. “I will not be made a fool of anymore!” the roared, snatching the dog from her hands by the nape of its neck. “I am so tired of the constant pain, the fighting, the petty squabbles!” The small dog started to shutter in fear as they held it up to their face. “I didn’t want to be a demigod, I didn’t want to join a fucking army of child soldiers, and I certainly didn’t ask to become… this!”
I should say something, but I think I'll piss myself if I move.

“So, tell this to your master, if she even still lives,” they growled in the Pomeranian’s face, “That we will not be stopped until I am back to my old self and have returned to my family. Tell her that Atlas will not be returning to his punishment, and that if anyone tries to stop us, we will reduce Olympus to rubble. Do you understand?”

Piper’s jaw dropped when the dog actually nodded.

“Good,” they smirked, revealing a set of fangs that hadn’t been there a few hours ago. They wrapped one fist around the small canine and pulled their arm back, then in an instant they threw the dog high into the air, sending it flying back towards where Artemis had been. “Now everyone, get in the car! And what smells like piss?!” Veronica snapped.

Bambi rushed off to retrieve her grandmother and Reyna, but all she could do was stare.

“Ugh, what is it Piper?” Veronica asked.

“I was not expecting you to be sporting a Brazilian,” she chuckled awkwardly.

Veronica and Atlas facepalmed.

Chapter End Notes

Well, that could’ve gone better. But, it could’ve been a lot worse.

Our girls have once again skirted disaster and have even picked up a few new friends. Bambi and her grandmother will play an important part in helping them get back to camp, among other things ;)

As you can see Reyna and Jason are clearly soulmates, sharing their love of being knocked unconscious at the most inconvenient times. That is true love, so Piper you better step up your game!

The hunting dogs of Artemis were no match for a girl's love for her grandmother, even if it is a painful relationship. And yes, a deer can cave in a dog or the likes skull with a well placed kick, so Piper trying to hide them was actually the worst thing she could do, a choice she was rewarded with sweet, sweet dog lemonade.

It really killed me to off Jeanne. She was such a sweet character and loved to help others. But maybe it was best she died with her people, a way to atone for her failure to save them from... The pomeranian

And yes, that was a Monty Python reference! I had this crazy idea of Artemis secretly owning this tiny little white fluff ball of a dog, but because she believes in survival of the fittest, she taught it to be her most vicious hunting dog. With it's superior agility and speed it can leap from person to person, killing them with ease and without mercy. It also has it’s own squeaky toy and Artemis has a little carrier installed for it in her quiver.

And Atlas and Veronica are not dead! Yay!! They are just very VERY pissed. In earlier outlines I had them showing up to save Piper from the trio of hounds, but then I couldn't make the pomeranian a legitimate threat. They are naked because after being impaled
repeatedly what little clothing they had before would have just fallen off.

And of course Piper has to make an observation....

Next chapter is a surprise, but some of you can probably guess who it is. It won't be an action based chapter, but it will be important to flesh put the relationship between two characters. It's definitely my head canon, but I think you'll like it :)

So until next time, take care and keep on grooving!


Persephone

Chapter Summary

Tonight:

There was never another woman.

Chapter Notes

my head canon in full force. I hope you like it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“It will be okay,” she cooed, holding the boy’s head in her lap as dozens of tiny vines and roots worked their way into his flesh to clean and seal the hemorrhaging wound in his gut. “I promised your Perseus that you’d come back alive and in one piece, remember?”

The boy, Nico if Hades was to be believed, was on the verge of losing consciousness, only managing to whimper as his face twisted in excruciating agony.

Truthfully, Persephone wasn’t even sure what she was attempting would work, even for a short amount of time. She wasn’t a healer by any means, even if much of her domain was used in medicine both mortal and divine, but she did know the functionality of the human body. In most cases she could simply heal any mortal’s wounds with just a touch, but for some reason Hades, her mother, Jackson, and this boy were unaffected.

It was incredibly frustrating to feel so powerless.

So, all she could do was try to stitch the boy back together.

She had retrieved his small frail form from a bush that miraculously hadn’t been devoured by flames and carried him to a hollowed-out tree that had once been some creature’s home. Judging by the décor and the scent in the air it hadn’t been inhabited by any creature she knew of, but that had been neither here-nor-there. She sat down near the door step and laid the boy so that his head rested on her lap, while growing a variety of Agaves, the dry heat from the raging inferno around them aiding in their growth. She then held onto the boy’s head and held his jaw shut as the first of the tendrils penetrating his skin. He had tried to buck away and scream in agony, but she held on to him tightly until the fight left his body and the plants could do their work, slowly and carefully stitching him up from the inside out.

“Shhh, it will be over soon,” Persephone whispered, as her plants removed a small piece of Celestial Bronze from his stomach, remnants of the bullet that perpetrated this horrible crime. She had learned (mostly through watching Law & Order: SVU and NCIS) that in most cases bullets were often left within the body to prevent any further damage, but with the divine metals it was too much of a risk for demigods to just leave it in. In a way, the boy was lucky it was Celestial Bronze, as if it had been Stygian Iron, he would have been dead instantly.

"It will be okay," she cooed, holding the boy’s head in her lap as dozens of tiny vines and roots worked their way into his flesh to clean and seal the hemorrhaging wound in his gut. “I promised your Perseus that you’d come back alive and in one piece, remember?”

The boy, Nico if Hades was to be believed, was on the verge of losing consciousness, only managing to whimper as his face twisted in excruciating agony.

Truthfully, Persephone wasn’t even sure what she was attempting would work, even for a short amount of time. She wasn’t a healer by any means, even if much of her domain was used in medicine both mortal and divine, but she did know the functionality of the human body. In most cases she could simply heal any mortal’s wounds with just a touch, but for some reason Hades, her mother, Jackson, and this boy were unaffected.

It was incredibly frustrating to feel so powerless.

So, all she could do was try to stitch the boy back together.

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The boy’s sweat drenched face twisted and he gasped as another piece was removed. “Per-” he started to cry before he clenched his jaw shut.

She went to stroke some of the dark hair plastered to his forehead away, but stopped herself. That was a display of affection she had reserved only for Nico and Bianca, not the imposter before her. Maria, Bianca, and Nico had died long ago from her father’s vain attempt to delay the great prophecy. The boy whose head was cradled in her lap had looked like her Nico, but he wasn’t. He was too different. Her Nico had been a charming child with a huge heart and an infectious smile.

This boy did not.

The boy whimpered again and she sighed. *You’re not him. He would remember me. The heart remembers.*

To say her relationship with Hades was strange would be a bit of an understatement, but not be much in comparison to other deities.

He was a few centuries older than her, but that was hardly scandalous when both parties were immortal. Hades was viewed by the other gods as this dark, depressing, creep of a god, but in reality, he was incredibly awkward and as the mortals would say, a bit of a dork. Others had warned her that he was bitter about ruling the Underworld when by right he should be king of Olympus, but really all he was concerned about was how her father had routinely created more and more enemies by acting on impulse.

But most of all, he had been the only one to see that she wasn’t some delicate flower to be locked away from the dangers of the world. Even her own mother didn’t recognize her for what she was, sending servants and minor gods to accompany her at all times.

It had been nearly impossible to come in as her own woman as it was, let alone her own goddess.

But one day she had managed to sneak away from her escort (something she did frequently) and stumbled upon (quite literally) Hades in a flower filled meadow she considered her own. At first she had been angry (and a little afraid) that someone had dared to intrude upon her sacred place, that her mother had sent someone to spy on her even there, but when she heard her usual detail calling out for her she realized that this strange god wasn’t anyone from Olympus.

The strange god had asked her if she wanted a moment’s peace, to which she eagerly affirmed. The god then surrounded them in shadows, placing them in a small bubble that was obscured from the outside world, away from prying eyes.

And they talked. Well, she did most of the talking, while he would listen and only occasionally interrupt to ask a question. Not once did she think he was feigning interest, as so many of her potential suitors on Olympus did. Sometime during that initial chat, she realized just whom the mysterious god was, but it didn’t bother her in the slightest. If anything, it only made him more interesting.
Like all good things, it ended far too soon, but they promised to meet again in the same spot at the same time the next week.

And Hades was good to his word, another trait rare among the gods. They continued to have their secret rendezvous for a few months, and she slowly fell in love with the dark king. But he never made a move on her, always keeping his hands to himself and sitting a respectful distance away from her. So, one day, tired of waiting and wanting to know if he felt the same way, she crossed that distance and caught him in a kiss, interrupting a humorous rant on why Hellhounds needed to be neutered.

Pandora may have released evil unto the world, but Persephone unleashed a lover unlike any other.

After that, their little chats became far more… stimulating.

She had tried to tell her mother about Hades, but the goddess refused to listen, saying she would find her daughter an appropriate suitor. So, a few years after they met, Hades abducted her. Well, he abducted her with her consent, it was the mythological equivalent of a young mortal couple running off and eloping in Vegas.

They had a lovely honeymoon in the underworld, but sadly that came to an end. She may have not told anyone her plans to run away with Hades, which may have put Olympus in a state of panic. So, when they finally found her everyone immediately thought the god of the underworld had abducted her by force.

She had tried to explain what really happened, but to her shock, Hades went along with the accusations and added a bit to the story. He claimed that he forced her to eat pomegranate seeds grown from a tree in the underworld, which meant she was now forever bound to it (a lie), but he was willing to let her go for half the year if she promised to stay for the other half (he had winked at her at that). Zeus had asked her if what his treacherous brother had said was true, and she assured him it was.

When at last the drama had ended and she was reunited with her love in their home, she had asked him why he was forcing her away for half the year. He had taken her hands in his own and gave her a sad smile, he said that as an outsider to Olympus he had been able to observe the failings of the gods’ relationships, that by being together all the time only brought disaster, and that he didn’t want for them to end up like Zeus and Hera; trapped in a loveless marriage and finding new ways to hurt each other.

And the strange thing was, it worked.

As a mortal poet would say some centuries later: absence makes the heart grow fonder. When Persephone was with her mother she would think about her husband down below almost nonstop, much to the chagrin of Demeter who was still telling everyone Hades had abducted her despite learning the truth. When she was finally able to return to the underworld (long term anyway, she did sneak down for a few quick visits), it was always a joyous occasion followed by them not leaving the master bedroom for a few days.

But even their love wasn’t immune to change, and a few centuries later she was beginning to fear that the spark in their relationship was beginning to die, so she proposed a crazy idea. It was no secret that more and more gods and goddesses were taking on mortal lovers on the side, so to prevent either one of them sneaking around behind the other’s back, they could take on a mortal lover at any time with the other’s approval. They would also be allowed to live with their mortal and their families they spawned until the day they died.
Hades reluctantly agreed.

At first it was hard to gain Hades’ approval for her would be paramours, and looking back she was probably just as bad, probably worse even given Hades rarely took interest in anyone. But they worked out a system of sorts and when given approval, the other wouldn’t interfere.

That was, until Maria di Angelo.

In the millennia following the arrangement Persephone and Hades made, only one mortal had ever asked to meet with her. Most mortals either didn’t care about the other or took it as some kind of victory that they had managed to steal a god’s heart, but Maria di Angelo refused to believe Hades and insisted that she meet with her to discuss the finer details of their relationship.

Persephone supposed that most gods wouldn’t put up with those kind of arrogant demands and would have smote the woman down without a single thought, but by the way Hades was awkwardly blabbering about it, she had to see for herself exactly what kind of woman she had approved of for her husband.

So, one early morning in August, in a lonely little café along the canals of Venice, she met Maria. At first, no words were spoken besides Hades stiffly introducing them and them conveying their orders to the wait staff. Her initial impression of Maria was that she was a strange young woman; she wore a black dress as if she had just come from a funeral, she had an impassive expression, but her dark brown eyes seemed to be looking into every facet of her being, and was surrounded in an aura that seemed to chill the room.

The mortal woman took a small sip from her expresso before setting it back on the saucer with hardly a sound, something she herself struggled to do. “Has he always been an idiot?” Maria asked, the corner of her lips twitching up into a grin.

Hades choked on his coffee, spilling the scalding hot liquid on his pristine suit. “What?” he coughed, pounding his chest, eyes wide in disbelief.

Now for as long as she had known Hades, he always tried to keep the persona of a cool, dark, stylish god that should never be crossed, only dropping the act for her and her alone, so to see another woman, a mortal at that, effortlessly take him down, caught her interest. “You could say that,” she replied with a smirk of her own.

Maria’s gaze narrowed before she picked up a tray of baklava and offered her a piece of the flakey nut and honey filled pastry. “Hades tells me you two have a little arrangement,” she said, daintily placing the tray back on the cart. “I suppose most women are foolish enough to take that at face value, but I am not one of them. Especially when the other woman is a goddess.”

She took a bite and savored the sweet taste before wiping her lips clean with a handkerchief stolen from her husband’s pocket. “You are correct, most women do not consider me, or if they do it is spiteful. But I do not get that feeling looking at you; why is that?”

Maria looked out to the canal and patted her dark hair with one gloved hand. “Because I will not be a mistress, I will not come into someone’s home and bring ruin. If things are not as Hades says they are
and I do not really have your blessing, then we shall part ways and that will be the end of it.” The Italian woman picked up her expresso and took another dainty sip.

She decided then and there that Maria di Angelo was one of the few truly exceptional mortals. “No, it is as he says, you have my blessing to be with him. Though I should warn you, he snores and tosses in his sleep like the Minoan Bull.”

Hades blanched and the two women shared a laugh at his expense.

When the laughter faded Maria’s serious expression returned. “That is good, but what of my family?”

“Why would I harm your parents? They know nothing and wouldn’t believe a word of this anyway,” she asked, confused at the woman’s words. As far as she knew, her father was some mid-level diplomat and her mother was a socialite. Even if there wasn’t an arrangement it would be foolish to punish mortals who couldn’t see the minotaur if it was standing in front of them.

Maria shook her head, as Hades waved a someone over to get them fresh drinks. “I do not mean them, I am talking children,” the woman blushed. “I know it is a bit early to be talking about such things, but I need to know that if we were to have a child they would not have to worry about a goddess trying to punish them for my indiscretions.” She paused as the waiter refilled their cups and only continued when he was out of earshot. “I know the tales of Herakles and Hera, and Hades has told me that that grudge is passed onto all of Zeus’s children. I need to know that you won’t be the wicked stepmother so common in children’s stories. If you can’t promise me that, then as I said before, we shall part ways and that will be the end of it.”

Persephone was mildly offended by the comparison to Hera, her own stepmother, but the woman’s concerns were valid. Who would knowingly bring a life into the world when there was some almost incomprehensible force after it from the moment it took its first breath? She supposed that could be asked of any mortal family given how bleak the future of Europe looked, what with the rise of Nationalism and countries still recovering from the Great War, but those weren’t specifically targeting one child. “Your children shall not come to harm by any fault of my own or those under my service.”

The woman closed her eyes and nodded, a serene smile on her face. “Good, but I do not settle for good, I demand the best.”

She quirked and eyebrow at the insolence of the mortal as Hades paled, but Maria either did not notice or care about the potential danger.

“And any children we have will be seen as bastards,” the Italian said with an unnatural calmness. “They will be born out of wedlock and carry my name, something that is frowned upon by society, and apparently among the gods to some extent.”

“Just what are you getting at?”

Maria smiled and took her hand within her own. “I know I have no right to ask this of you Persephone, but I ask that you become part of the lives of our children. I ask that you be part of their home, of their family, to welcome them into your life as well.”

Persephone liked to believe it took a lot to catch her off guard, but Maria’s request had her speechless. To allow Hades to see others was her blessing was unheard of amongst the gods, but include her as well into their lives and the lives of their hypothetical children? The idea alone was scandalous! “I think we can make an arrangement,” she smiled.
Maria returned the smile, and they made a toast to new friendships and a bright future, while Hades’ eyes darted back and forth between the two of them, clearly worried about what sort of beast had been brought into the world.

It was awkward at first, trying to form a friendship with her husband’s lover. It started with the three of them meeting for dinner or coffee once a week, chatting idly about mundane topics such as the weather and politics, but they never really made a connection.

This changed though one spring day.

Hades had told her to meet them outside a little cemetery some miles inland from Venice for a picnic. It was an unusual spot for a picnic to be sure, but she and Hades had had far stranger encounters. Plus, she had nothing urgent to do and she really didn’t want to help her mother in some field on such a beautiful day. So, she changed into an appropriate dress (with a single thought) and appeared in front of a cemetery that had clearly suffered from years of neglect, the wrought iron gate had fallen off and embedded itself in the dirt and one could only see the top of the graves over the unkept grass.

The sight of a decaying cemetery wasn’t surprising in the slightest to Persephone, but what was surprising was standing in front of her.

“Oh, good morning Persephone,” Maria greeted her with a smile. The young woman, who she had only seen so far in fine dresses, was wearing a man’s shirt and trousers with black riding boots and her long, dark brown hair falling loosely over her shoulders. In her hand was a wicker picnic basket while several rolls of paper were tucked under her arm.

“Where is Hades?” she asked, looking for her husband.

Maria frowned, but her smile returned almost instantly. “Forgive my deception, but he will not be joining us today. Today is about us. Now-,” the younger woman flipped open the basket’s cover with her free hand and pulled out a set clothes similar to the ones she wore, “I figured he would forget to mention what I had planned, so I took the liberty to pack you a change of clothes.” She practically shoved the clothing into Persephone’s hands. “They are my father’s clothes, the same as mine, so they may hang a bit loose. There is a pair of boots in the car and you may change in there as well.”

While she tended to try new things at every opportunity, the idea of changing in a confined space that reeked of fuel and flame was something she decided to save for a later date. With a flick of her wrist (because one has to show off in front of mortals) she was standing before Maria in the clothing and boots provided, and her hair pulled back into a tight bun. “So just what is it you plan on doing?”

“Follow me, and you shall see,” the woman smirked, taking her by the hand.

Maria led her through the thick grass to a series of graves so weathered of they had been anywhere else one would mistake them for natural rocks. The grass around the had been mysteriously flattened in a circle wide enough for two bodies to lie down comfortably. “Someone has been busy,” she asked, eyeing Maria who still had her in her (surprisingly strong) grip.

Maria shrugged. “I got here early to make set things up, I want this day to be perfect.” The Italian then released her and set the basket down, before sitting on the ground herself. “Tell me Persephone, have you ever done any etching?” she asked, pulling out two pieces of charcoal from the basket.
“I have not,” she answered, sitting down next to her husband’s lover. She was glad that Maria had gotten her a pair of trousers, as trying to sit down in a dress would have been troublesome. It may have been unladylike to wear men’s clothing, especially trousers, but at that moment she decided that more women should wear them for the comfort alone.

“I feel that you will like this,” the younger woman smiled. Maria unrolled one of the large pieces of paper and set it on top of the nearest weathered stone, running her forearm over it a few times to prevent it from rolling back up. She then took one of the pieces of charcoal and began to gently rub it back and forth across the paper. “There is beauty in death, wouldn’t you agree?”

“Yes, yes there is.”

Maria laughed. “Good, I do not think one can appreciate our idiot without that. Look around us, this is art! This is beauty! When you die—“ she stopped and smiled sheepishly at her, “Well, when someone dies, the family gets together and decided on a few short words to put on a rock that sums up the entirety of their existence.” Persephone watched as shapes began to appear on the paper, growing more and more intricate with each pass. “Some though, get large mausoleums, even statues, all of it art, all of it beautiful. But sadly, of all the beauty in the world, people let that fade first. Ironic is it not?” Maria removed the paper carefully to not let her see, and gently blew on it to remove the excess. “What do you think?” she asked, turning the paper around for her to see.

On the paper, the charcoal had revealed an intricate *Danse Macabre* that had been hidden from human eyes by the ravages of time. Two figures of a man and a woman were stuck in a waltz, while the skeletal visage of the Grimm Reaper lurked above them, his scythe replaced with a violin for this occasion. Dozens of etched roses of all sizes framed the image with thorny stems peeking out in the gaps between the flowers. “It’s beautiful,” she gasped at the unexpected results.

“My thoughts exactly,” Maria smiled. “Would you care to try one?”

“I’d love to,” she answered. And she meant it.

They spent the rest of the daylight hours etching graves, breaking only for a late lunch. Many of the graves did not have the elaborate ornamentation of the first, but that only made the ones that did that much more special. Persephone learned that this had been of hobby of Maria’s since she was a young girl, much to her parents’ chagrin, and that she always carried her etching materials wherever she went so that she may find the hidden gems among the dead. Maria explained that someday she wanted to collect what she thought were the best of her work and have them published in a book so that he world could see the beauty of death. It was an odd idea to be sure, but that was probably one of the reasons Hades was attracted to Maria in the first place.

She also learned that Maria was interested in poetry; with Byron, Shelly, and Dante being her favorites. She loved literature that society thought a woman of her class should not read, *Frankenstein, Dracula,* and an assortment of Penny Dreadfuls that she kept multiple copies of. The woman was equally comfortable in men’s clothing as she was with the latest styles for women, only adding her own dark twist in the color schemes. She was a night owl and an early bird, preferring to take short naps throughout the day instead of a continuous eight hours. Maria loved American and French movies and often tried to emulate the looks of the actresses she favored.

It wasn’t all about Maria though, as the woman was just as curious about her. She found herself telling Maria stories about Hades and herself that she had never told another soul; living or otherwise. They found themselves laughing richly and deeply more often than not at the foolishness of their man and how he tried to pretend it never happened.

And a strange thing happened when Persephone left that day, for she had gained something few
gods had but always sought; someone who they could trust, someone to keep share their secrets with, someone to lay their soul bare to.

A friend.

Time passed and Maria and Hades’ love for each other grew, as did her and Maria’s friendship. Since Hades was busy in the underworld during the day and Maria was well off, that allowed for them to spend the days together.

They attended poetry readings and were occasionally asked to leave when they couldn’t contain their laughter at what some people considered art. The cinema was a favorite, viewing screenings of the works of Chaplin, Keaton, and the up-and-coming Stooges. They took daytrips to cemeteries, roman ruins, and lavish gardens where they discussed the matters of the day of both the mortal and divine worlds. Maria even attempted to teach her how to cook, which ended with mixed results…

They were glorious days and she wished for them never to end, but one day Maria made an announcement.

“We are pregnant,” the Italian beamed, as the three of them sat in the same little café where they first met.

It is a rare thing to render a goddess speechless, but that had been how she found herself as Hades and Maria looked upon her expectantly. A plethora of emotions overwhelmed her, the most dominant being happiness and fear. She was thrilled that her friend, her sister, was going to start a family, and she knew from the few children Hades had in the past that he would be an excellent father, but she was afraid of what this meant for her. A child would take up all of Maria’s time, which meant no more afternoon luncheons, no day trips, and the like. But she remembered her promise, took a sip a tea, and looked the two straight in the eyes with a smile. “Congratulations.”

Over the next nine months she watched as Maria’s body changed to accommodate the child growing within, and she marveled at how different pregnancy was for a mortal compared to a god. She was not naïve enough to not know that the gestation period for a human child was nine months, but to actually witness it was something else entirely. For gods are birthed into the world in a variety of different ways all of which were different than the last, but they could typically be sorted into three groups.

The first were those that were born like infants and grew into their adult selves, like herself, her father, and the twins. Those births were among the most common (though the birth of a god is a rare thing), and typically allows for the young god to form a bond with their parent. She was quite close to her mother, Artemis was a daddy’s girl, and Zeus loved his mother.

The second were those that were birthed, but due to extraordinary circumstances had to grow up the instant they entered the world. Athena and her own daughter, Melinoe, were examples of this. Those gods tended to have little to no familiar affection for their parents and only gave them only the appropriate professional respect.

The third, and by far the rarest, were the ones that simply appeared from the ether. Aphrodite being the shining example of this, emerging from the seafoam.

So, she believed she had the right to worry about losing her friend to another, given that she had no
idea what to expect. But she stood by her friend through it all.

Then one calm evening, Bianca di Angelo entered the world with a cry that rivaled the most powerful blasts from Zeus’ master-bolt.

It was an agonizing eternity waiting to be allowed into the room, but when Hades came out of Maria’s room and waved her in, she practically tackled the god out of the way. When she entered, she was greeted by the sight of Maria reclined in the hospital bed with a small bundle held against her bosom. The Italian woman was drenched in sweat, her long dark hair plastered to her head, and she looked exhausted, but to her she never looked so beautiful or so content.

Maria looked up from the suckling infant and with a tired smile said, “come and meet your step-daughter.”

At first, she was not able to move, but Hades came up from behind her and led her to Maria’s bedside. Maria adjusted the blanket and Persephone gasped when she got her first good look at the child. It was so small, something she always forgot about newborns. Its flesh was still flushed, but she could tell it had its mother’s olive skin. The child had a full head of messy black hair sticking up in almost every way imaginable. “She’s so beautiful,” she whispered to not disturb its feeding. “What is her name?”

Her friend’s head sank and her small smile disappeared. “Bianca. After her grandmother.”

It was only then that Persephone realized that they were the only four people in the hospital room, and divine rage coursed through her body. While Hades and herself had been overjoyed with the news of Maria’s pregnancy (okay, Hades more than herself at first), her parents’ response had been an ultimatum: terminate the pregnancy or be disowned. So, Maria packed a few changes of clothes and a few small personal items and left, and as far as she knew they hadn’t spoken since. She had thought that with the birth of their first grandchild they would come to their senses, but apparently mortals could be just as stubborn and foolish gods. “I’ll-"

Hades put his hand on her shoulder and shook his head sadly.

She knew that he was right, this wasn’t the time or place to reopen old wounds. “I’ll get you some water.”

Hermes could only dream that he could match the speed at which a child could grow.

Every time that she saw Bianca (which was almost daily), the child had practically doubled in size. Clothing would fit one day only to be too small the next. During the first two years of Bianca’s life Hades had the furies knitting and sewing new clothing around the clock, something that Alecto loathed entirely.

The three of them struggled to keep up with the endless diaper changes. Maria had taught her well so that the Italian woman was spared some of the evils that emerged from the infant’s nether regions, but Hades, all-powerful god of the underworld, couldn’t stomach the sight or smell of a dirty cloth diaper. To her and Maria’s amusement he did pull some souls from the Fields of Punishment to clean the cloth diapers, something the souls considered cruel and unusual punishment.
And things did change as Persephone had feared, but she could argue for the better.

All three of them imprinted something of themselves into Bianca. From Maria, she got her fierce independent nature, first evident by her refusal to be fed and instead making a mess trying to do it herself. From Hades, Bianca inherited his desire for order and neatness; the child would wail like ghost if her (numerous) toys were arranged in a way not to her liking or if her bib was on crooked. And from her, Bianca gained the affection for soft, spring colors (which she thought wasn’t much, but Hades and Maria liked black a bit too much).

“It is such a shame she does not like flowers in her hair,” she sighed as Bianca once again removed the small white lilies she had so painstakingly wove into the toddler’s hair. “They look so lovely.” Maria chuckled as the toddler freed herself from Persephone’s lap and took off running. Bianca was now sixteen months and could seemingly not be contained by any force, mortal or divine, her chubby little legs always in motion. It was a fine spring day and the three of them had journeyed to the very cemetery that cemented their friendship to have a picnic and to allow Bianca to get some fresh country air. Persephone had shown up some hours prior to make the cemetery a safe environment for a toddler; removing any rusting metal and changing the grass to an appropriate height. “She is young. I am sure when Bianca gets older she will appreciate it. But–“ the woman smiled. “Perhaps you’ll have better luck with the next one,” Maria said, grabbing her hand and placing it on her stomach.

She didn’t have to ask if it was true, because she felt the tiny life growing within her friend. “You must be a masochist if you want to have another one of those,” she laughed, as she pulled Maria into her embrace.

“I must be,” Maria laughed, returning the embrace.

They sat there for some time just watching Bianca roam around the cemetery, occasional bending down to pick up a particularly captivating rock to taste. The soon-to-be-oldest child of Hades was absolutely adorable running around barefoot in her little gray dress, and the thought of two of them made her giddy.

But it also made her worried.

The world was on edge. Germany was under rule by a powerful group of demigods headed by an arrogant son of Poseidon and had been making big demands and even bigger threats. To the east, a son of Vulcan had taken power in Russia and was swiftly executing anyone whom he perceived as a threat. Even in their beloved Italy things had gotten worse. The former school teacher and son of Athena who was in charge ruled with an iron fist and was remaking the country in his image, removing anything and anyone he deemed inappropriate.

Which included single mothers.

Hades had told of an incident where some of the goons that thought themselves untouchable cornered Maria and Bianca on the street, calling them vulgar names and offering to make Maria fit for society by removing the child. A quick visit to “Little Benny” by the goddess of spring and the god of the underworld, ensured that Maria was put on a special protection list.

But she knew that the list offered no real protection. All it would take was for herself and Hades to be busy and for some black shirted goons to disregard orders and that would be it.

“So will you reconsider joining us in the underworld?” She asked her friend once more, hoping that with another child coming she would finally agree. “You could have your own palace, made of gold,
and staffed with the finest servants. The children could have the finest tutors the world has ever seen. The three of you could join us as gods,” she added, hoping to entice her friend.

Her heart broke when Maria shook her head. “No, my dear Persephone. I want my children to be born in Italy and have as much as a normal life as possible.” She took her hand in her own. “Besides, we will all be together down there one day soon. Let us keep your home a mystery for as long as possible, hmmm? And why do you two keep offering me a palace of gold? Do I come across as vane and greedy?”

“Would you agree if it was built from silver?” she smirked, earning her a playful smack. “What about America?” she hated offering, as it would end the little bit of privacy that the Ancient Lands provided and thrust Maria and the children under the watchful gaze of Olympus. “Hades has been acquiring more and more land in the West and has moved an entrance of the Underworld to Hollywood. We could get you and the children a nice house between Colbert and Crawford?”

“I will admit that offer is far more tempting,” Maria smiled, squeezing her hand.

“But the answer is no,” she sighed, squeezing her friend back.

“As I said, my children will be born of Italy,” her friend smiled. “After that if things do not improve, I will take the children and—”

A shrill cry pierced the air and instantly both women were on their feet, looking for Bianca. Being a goddess, she had an unfair advantage over Maria and was instantly at the crying toddler’s side. “What is wrong little one?” she cooed, picking the child up in her arms. Bianca fusses and struggled about, something she always did when Persephone picked her up, but she held firm. “You seem fine,” giving Bianca a once-over before lifted her higher. “Oh…” she cringed when she caught a whiff the girl’s diaper. “We’ve got a diaper to change!” she cried.

“You got to her first, that’s your job!” Maria laughed from their blanket, already digging out another diaper and some powder.

She turned her attention back to Bianca, who had stopped struggling and was now giggling. “Sometimes I think you enjoy watching me suffer.”

Fear is something a god is unaccustomed to, but fear was what she and Hades felt on a daily basis during Maria’s second pregnancy.

It all started innocently enough, Maria would wake up in the mornings feeling nauseated, morning sickness the young woman assured them, something that she had gone through with Bianca. Maria also had lacked her usual energy and stamina, forcing her and Hades to take Bianca off of her hands so she could rest; Maria assured them that this was to be expected as well.

Things proceeded this way until the fourth month of the pregnancy.

It had been a particularly wet morning, it stuck out to her because it was a stark contrast to the prairie states in America, which were in dire need intervention from her and her mother, something she had planned to do after a cup of coffee with a friendly face. She appeared in front of Maria’s apartment, a simple albeit spacious thing that Hades was providing for, and knocked thrice on the door. She could’ve appeared inside, or even used the key Maria had given her, but she wanted to give her
friend some semblance of privacy.

There was no response, so she knocked once more before entering. “Maria?” she called out, before making her way to the kitchen, where she felt her friend’s presence. She rounded the corner and gasped at the sight before her; there on the kitchen floor was Maria’s unconscious form. She wasted no time, instantly at her friend’s side, then checking to see if Bianca was still in her crib, and finally pulling Hades away from his daily work in the Underworld.

Sadly, there was a shortage of decent mortal physicians as many were sent to help in the war effort in Ethiopia, all that remained recommended bedrest for Maria. They were a great help. It would be years later that Persephone would figure out that Maria most likely had Gestational Diabetes, which in turn allowed for other illnesses to infiltrate her weakened body.

It was decided (without Maria’s consent) that the pregnant woman should not be left alone. Hades took the night shift and would occasionally take Bianca with him during the day if Maria was especially in need of rest, forever cementing Bianca as a daddy’s girl. She took the day shift, doing housework, keeping Maria’s spirits up, and doing what she could to keep the woman’s body functioning correctly (no matter how many times she and Hades healed her, she would still get ill again).

And despite all their divine intervention, Maria only continued to grow frailer with each passing day. She did not gain the weight she did with Bianca, instead growing thinner. Her deep olive skin grew sallow and dark bags formed under eyes, turning her into a cruel parody of the woman she had been.

The concern for Maria grew so great that Hades and herself even tried to approach the other gods, asking for their aid. Their pleas fell on deaf ears to Hermes and Apollo, and Asclepius while sympathetic, was unable to leave his imprisonment to examine Maria. So, in what was perhaps the greatest irony the Fates had ever weaved, she and Hades, gods of immense power and influence, prayed for a miracle.

It all came to a head when Maria went into labor.

Seven weeks before she was due.

“Thanatos has to listen to you!” she had screamed at Hades, as yet another nun entered Maria’s room. “You are his lord! His Master!” To make an already terrible situation worse, they had been informed that the baby was coming out backwards; a situation that was dangerous to both mother and child.

“Do you think I do not know that?!” he snapped back, eyes darting to the room’s entrance. “But if he does not take her then some other death god would! One that I have no influence over! One who would take her away from the three of us forever!” He wrapped his arms around her and she buried her head in his shoulder, sobbing heavily.

“This isn’t fair!” she sobbed, clutching Hades’ jacket.

“Life hardly is,” he whispered, gently kissing the top of her head. “It’s a strange feeling, is it not?”

“What is?” she asked, thinking her husband had lost his mind in grief.

“To be so powerless in the face of death, to feel so… mortal.”

“No wonder people were quick to make offerings but distanced themself-“ she stopped midsentence as a sudden realization hit her. “Offerings,” she repeated, prying herself from her husband’s grip. “We can save them!”
“While I’m sure Thanatos would appreciate an offering, but that will hardly detour him from performing his duties,” Hades smiled sadly. “We just have to sit and hope for the best,” he said, gesturing to Bianca, who was sleeping soundly on a wooden chair.

“Fuck that,” she hissed, causing several nearby nuns to gasp in shock. “We can save the child at the very least!”

“And how do you propose we do that?” Hades asked, his voice was laced with skepticism, but his eyes looked desperate. “And even if we do, what would we do with them? Maria wouldn’t want us to raise them in the Underworld, and I’m not going to ship them to either of those wretched camps.”

“I’ll raise them!” she snapped, shaking her husband by the shoulders. “Just- just keep Thanatos away for thirty minutes. We will know their fate by then.” She stood on her tiptoes and kissed him gently. “Please.”

He didn’t say a word, only pressing a kiss to her forehead and glancing at Bianca before disappearing into the shadows.

Satisfied with her husband, Persephone approached Bianca and kissed the sleeping toddler’s plump cheek, before placing a small charm on her that would keep her asleep for thirty minutes. Satisfied that her step-daughter would be safe with all the hospital staff running this way and that, she went back to the underworld.

Specifically, her garden.

Normally she would revel at how great it felt to be back in her divine form, but she knew she was on a strict deadline. She hurriedly walked past the unique glowing mushrooms and other fungi that she had cultivated to grow specifically in the dark environment, past her collection of one-of-a-kind sculptures created by Medusa, and past the little spot set aside for her mother, who foolishly used it to try and grow some kind of crop year after year; until she found herself in what had been her greatest pride.

A small orchard of Pomegranate trees that she had managed to grow in her early days with Hades. Their orange blossoms glowed eerily in the dark thanks to a variety of enchantments she had placed on them, and a sweet smell wafted from the always ripe fruit that grew from their branches.

While she was proud of all her creations, there was one tree that she was most proud of; the first one she planted, the very one she and Hades had used to convince the other gods that she was stuck in the Underworld. It was the biggest of the trees, as was to be expected given its impressive age, and the fruit it bore was coveted by every soul that called the Underworld home. She and Hades frequented the false shade of it branches and would lie in each other’s embrace surveying their kingdom while servants played soft music for them. It was a symbol of her pride; a symbol of their love, a symbol of everything she was as a goddess.

And it was the perfect offering to her half-sister, whose help they were in need of.

She conjured a flaming torch in her left hand and held it aloft. “Hear me Artemis; goddess of the hunt, the moon, and childbirth!” She had no idea how mortals could set aside their pride to do something so humiliating, but she thought of her family and pressed on. She also wished that she could instead make the offering to Ilithyia, but she had faded millennia ago. “I make this offering in your name so that Maria di Angelo and her unborn child may enter the world of men safely.” She knew that this offering would forever put Maria and the children in her half-sister’s crosshairs, but she swore to herself that she would keep them safe. She tossed the torch at the tree and instantly golden flames enveloped it and in a matter of seconds the great tree was nothing more than ash.
Persephone wasted no time waiting to see if Artemis would show up in person (other gods only came to the underworld with demands), instead returning to the hospital. She was relieved to see that Bianca was exactly as she left her, albeit her stuffed toy had fallen on the floor. She picked up the small black dog and brushed it off before placing it back in the child’s small hands, bending down to place a kiss on Bianca’s forehead.

A shrill cry pierced the cool night air, sending a chill down her spine.

She yelped in surprise when a pair of strong arms grabbed her waist from behind. “Thanatos left!” Hades beamed, kissing her throat. “Whatever you did worked!” He picked her up and spun her around the waiting room, both laughing hysterically.

“Ahem,” a timid voice coughed. Hades set her back on the ground, both of them still smiling like lunatics, only to be greeted by a young nun. “Sir, would you and your… sister, care to see your son?”

They were the perfect picture of dignity and poise; Hades picked up Bianca’s sleeping form and tossed her over his shoulder, while Persephone hiked up her skirts and knocked the sister over running into Maria’s room.

She snapped one of her heels as she skidded to a halt next to Maria’s bed. The Italian still looked like a corpse, her eyes sunken and skin almost yellow, but she had a relaxed smile as she gazed at the far to small bundle in her arms. “How- how are you feeling?” she asked, rested her hand on Maria’s bare shoulder.

Maria turned her head slightly and gave her a strange smile. “Never better, but that may be the morphine,” The Italian chuckled. “And thank you for your sacrifice.”

“How-“

Maria placed her fingers on her lips, silencing her. “I do not know, but let us not worry about that now. I want you to meet Nico,” she smiled, offering her the small bundle.

She took the child and marveled at how small he was compared Bianca at birth. “Nico,” she repeated. “He’s so… small.”

Maria chuckled as she rested her sweat drenched head on her pillow. “Two pounds one ounce. The doctor says that he will have to be in an incubator until he is big enough.”

“Then I will never leave your side until you are strong enough, my sweet little Nico.” She pressed her lips against his tiny little forehead and inhaled his scent; rich and earthy like his father.

Persephone decided that Nico was easily worth sacrificing her pride, and that he always would be.

On the day Nico and Maria were allowed to return home, Persephone may have gone a little overboard with the homecoming celebration. Every plant in Venice was at full bloom, she had her servants deep clean Maria’s apartment, the children’s nursery was filled with every toy imaginable from around the globe, and she had a lavish twelve course meal prepared for the evening meal. Everything was perfect, including the weather, thanks to a few well placed threats and bribes
Bianca absolutely loved it, but Maria was still recovering so most of the meal went to waste (a shame since there was ongoing food shortages for most), but she was just thrilled that the danger had passed, that her family was together.

They say that parents should never have a favorite child, but they never said anything about step-parents, as Nico was undoubtedly her favorite.

While Bianca was decidedly independent while her father wasn’t around, Nico demanded constant attention and was a sponge for any affection. He demanded to be held by either Maria or herself constantly and would burry himself into the crook of their necks, babbling contently. He would gladly eat anything that he was offered, giggling when he found a food he particularly liked (her heart swelled with pride when she discovered he loved crushed pomegranate seeds).

When Nico started to walk he would try to follow Bianca around, but the older toddler didn’t appreciate having her brother tailing her. So, Nico became something of a momma’s boy, as Maria or herself would take Nico to prevent sibling squabbles; and soon all it took for someone to find Nico was to check her or Maria’s skirts for the smiling little boy.

“Annnnnd done!” she laughed, placing the last of the white lilies in Nico’s hair and placing a big, wet kiss on his forehead.

Nico pulled back and squealed in delight, his cheeks flushing as he giggled.

Unfortunately, Bianca never did come to enjoy having flowers woven in her hair or even wearing flower crowns, but Nico did. “Now don’t you look like my strong handsome little man,” she cooed, before tickling the boy’s belly.

“Nico, what do you say?” Maria reminded the toddler. Despite Nico’s penchant for disrobing in public, he was quite shy and hardly spoke to others. He was a little over two years old, so they weren’t overly concerned yet, but Maria liked to use any opportunity to make the little prince talk.

“Tank you, Phe Phe,” he smiled bashfully, suddenly quite shy.

“You are welcome,” she smiled, before tickling his little belly, earning more musical laughter. Each of the children had their own names for her (as no child was expected to be able to say Persephone); Bianca called her “auntie” and somehow Nico ended up calling her “Phe Phe”. Hades and Maria liked Nico’s name for her so much that they too started calling her that as well.

“Mama can I go play with ‘anca?” Nico asked Maria, with a smile so adorable no one could refuse him.

Maria stroked his cheek and sighed. “You can try.” Nico scampered off as fast as his little legs could carry him, off towards his older sister who was exploring the small cemetery. “This will only end with tears,” Maria chuckled dryly, shaking her head. “He wants to play with her so bad, but she lacks the patience to deal with him.”

“I’m sure she’ll get better with time,” she assured her friend.
Maria smiled at her, but she still seemed unsure. “Bianca has her father’s and my stubbornness and independence, while Nico has inherited our gentler sides.” Maria side and turned her attention to the children. Nico was jumping up and down in frustration as Bianca refused to let him see something she had found. “I am afraid that this world is far to cruel for our little boy, that he will come to know only heartache; that he will be broken.”

“I won’t let that happen.”

Despite all the protection they offered, Maria decided to leave for America with the children. The continent had erupted in war, with the German invasion of Poland, then the fall of France shortly thereafter. Persephone was never quite sure what finally made the Italian decide to flee, but she narrowed it down to either the rumors of German camps to the north exterminated those that did not meet their standards (Maria always held the children close when that was discussed) or that the sudden influx of new souls from the battlefields kept Hades occupied.

The day before she and Hades were to take her children to the land of opportunity, Maria dressed Bianca and Nico in their finest clothing and made one final effort for her children to meet their estranged grandparents. It should have been a private affair she was sure, but she couldn’t help but follow her family unseen; and she was glad she did.

She watched as Maria assessed the children one more time at the entrance to the grand venetian home; straighten Bianca’s hat and licking her thumb before trying to smooth out Nico’s notoriously stubborn dark hair. Maria steeled herself and knocked at the door.

It took all of her self-control to not smite down her parents, and she was sure the mortals were lucky that Hades had not been there, for he surely would’ve drug them down to the Underworld and made wastepaper out of their souls, so vile was the confrontation.

A woman with angular beauty, that she was sure was Maria’s mother, opened the door and before Maria even had a chance to say a single word, the elder di Angelo began to shriek worse than any harpie. The noise attracted the attention of Mr. di Angelo and soon Maria was being verbally assaulted by both of her parents, the children were treated like animals, insults thrown at them and being spat upon.

When at last the monsters that masqueraded as humans closed the door, Bianca and Nico were in tears, confused and terrified about what just happened, and Maria was barely holding herself together. At this time, she made herself known to the three of them and pulled them into a hug, Maria finally breaking down into tears.

The next day the five of them left for America via shadow travel; and Maria never spoke of her parents again.

While the original plan was for Maria and the children to move to California, Maria fell in love with
New York. They rented her a luxurious apartment overlooking Central Park, providing an escape for
the children and a readily accessible entrance to the Underworld in case of emergencies. Maria still
wished to move to California eventually, but they had all the time in the world.

And it seemed like they did.

Especially when Bianca started school, leaving the three of them with hours to fill during the
day. Maria at first worried about her daughter going off on her own, but when she saw how happy
Bianca was to be around children her age she set her fears aside.

Nico though was another story.

The small boy was at a loss when suddenly his big sister was gone during the day. Even though she
never particularly attentive to him, he loved her so. After Bianca would leave for the day with Hades,
Nico would sit at the door with an assortment of stuffed animals, waiting for her to come home.

Seeing Nico mope like that did not sit well with Maria, so she offered to show Nico what his big
sister did while she was away. So every day, for four hours in the morning, Maria and sometimes
herself, would sit down and educate the curious little son of Hades. Something unexpected happened
though, instead of growing bored and wanting to do something else, Nico absorbed everything like a
sponge. Within the first month he had learned his alphabet and how to count to one hundred, by
three months he could read at Bianca’s level, and by six months he could multiple and divide.

She was so proud of her little genius; they all were.

In the afternoons, if the weather permitted, they would go to the park and let him play, or go explore
a cemetery where they showed Nico how to etch. If the weather was bad they would go to the
cinema. It was amazing how much of a selection America had compared to Italy and how fast new
movies were available. She and Maria loved comedies and Nico would laugh along with them (even
if he didn’t understand the joke), while Nico loved the serials and cartoons that played before;
Captain America being his favorite. Maria and herself would laugh at the terrible acting, but Nico
was always on the edge of his seat with wide eyes as his hero battled the Scarab and sometimes ball
up his little fists and imitate his hero onscreen.

Sometimes in the evenings she took him to repeat screenings just so she could see his face light up.

She wished life would continue like that forever.

She had been just finishing up the last of her work dealing with the Dust Bowl, when her loved
appeared in their chambers, as stiff as a corpse and face devoid of all emotion.

“They’re dead,” he announced before collapsing on their bed, burying his face in his palms.

“Who is dead?” she chuckled anxiously. “In case you forgot we have a lot of dead around here.”

“THEY’RE DEAD!” he roared, slamming his fist against the bedframe, shattering the hand-carved
onyx into a million pieces. “Maria, Bianca, and Nico… They’re gone.”
At those words every fiber, every aspect of her being was pulled into that room as she tried to process what her husband had just said. “How?” she choked.

“Zeus found us,” he whispered. “He used that blasted bolt of his before I had a chance to respond. I knew we should have forced them down here when that blasted oracle uttered yet another great prophecy…”

She swallowed past the lump that had formed in her throat. Maria and the children were dead; she could deal with that. It just meant the children would stop aging and they wouldn’t be allowed to return to the mortal realm. “Well,” she hesitated, “did you bring them to the palace?”

“They’re not here.”

“What-“

“THER’RE NOT HERE!” Hades screamed, the room shaking and cracks spreading through the floor like intricate spider webs. “They’re not in the Underworld,” he said, starting to shake in a mix of rage and grief.

Persephone didn’t ask any more questions or engage her husband further, instead going to Charon first and telling him to watch for them and to inform her immediately, then she went to the tribunal telling them the same thing, and finally ordering the Furies to scour every corner of the Underworld for Maria and the children.

It wasn’t until some months later when Thanatos confirmed that he did not collect the souls of Maria, Bianca, and Nico di Angelo, that she broke.

Their relationship turned bitter, as she blamed him for not being able to protect their family from his brother and his little toy. They fought every time one so much as breathed in the other’s presence and eventually they occupied separate wings of the palace during the months she was there.

She never snuck back during the spring or summer during those years.

Hades withdrew even more from the other gods; growing increasingly bitter and angry with each passing day.

She abandoned their original deal of needing approval from Hades for mortal partners, instead running from lover to lover and having her own demigod children, all in a pathetic attempt fill the hole in her heart. None came close and she only created more broken hearts with each affair.

Then one day, after over half a century of brooding and dirty looks, Hades snuck up behind her and pulled her into his embrace and kissed her deeply.

He explained to her that he had lied to her about Bianca and Nico perishing along with Maria to protect them from Zeus, that he had placed them in the Lotus Casino until the Great Prophecy began, and that time was now.

At first, she had been ecstatic; a second chance to be with her Bianca and Nico, to do right by Maria
and give them the home they deserved. But what she found was not the children. The girl that Hades claimed had been Bianca had perished before she had a chance to meet her, but the boy— the boy was not Nico.

The thing that claimed to be Nico was a cruel parody of the real Nico. It had pale sickly skin and sunken eyes like Maria’s had been during her pregnancy, the opposite of Nico’s sun-kissed olive skin. Nico had been a ball of energy, all smiles and laughs, the thing was depressed and seemed to suck all the joy from the room. It didn’t like flowers or to have flowers in its hair, ripping them out the instant she tried to place them and snarling at her like a rabid animal.

It also had no apparent memories of her, of Phe Phe.

So, she concluded that her husband was in folly; that the demigod that claimed to be Nico was part of some plot by Kronos, Gaea, or even Zeus himself to torment her husband. With that revelation, she made it her goal to make Hades see the truth.

For the next few years she threw obstacle after obstacle at the imposter with the belief that given enough pressure the truth would come out. During this time her relationship with Hades was mended, though he still insisted that the imposter was Nico.

The Nico imposter has passed out just before the last wound was closed, his whimpers finally silent. She supposed she did feel some pity for the child, being forced to be someone else with only minimal information, but she still begrudged him for claiming to be her departed step-son.

She ran her fingers through his hair, careful to avoid disturbing the flower crown, just as a series of howls penetrated the inferno around them.

“Looks like my dear half-sister has summoned her pets,” Persephone mused. *Those mortals must be giving her a run for her money if she had to summon them.*

Howls cried out again and she could feel the earth shake beneath her as the giant hounds bounded through the forest, undoubtedly looking for any and all enemies to tear to shreds for their mistress. The hunting dogs of Artemis were some of the deadliest creatures known to their pantheon, capable of devouring dozens of demigods without taking a single scratch, so intelligent and deadly they were.

“Looks like you’ll have some company to deal with when you awake,” she chuckled dryly. *I won’t let you die, but I’m not going to do—*

The boy twisted in her lap and whimpered two words that made her divine heart stop. “Phe Phe.”

“Wh-what?” she gasped, not believing what she was hearing.

“Phe Phe!” the boy cried out from his nightmare.

The world stops around her as her mind reconciles the boy’s face with her Nico. Suddenly she realizes that she has been a fool, and a terrible person. This boy, the one she had enjoyed watching squirm is Nico.
“Oh my gods,” she gasped, biting her knuckles and tears begin to stream down her face.

She had been unable to recognize that the child she had thought an imposter was the same child she loved, just that he was in desperate need of help. Of Love. She thinks back to all the promises she made Maria and herself; how she would be a second mother to the children, someone to love them entirely.

She screams and what plant life still remains screams with her, her anguish spreading through the root system for miles. She clutches Nico to her chest and kisses his forehead, muttering apology after apology; promise after promise that things will change between them, that he will never want again.

That he can depend on his Phe Phe once more.

When she opens her eyes and wipes away the tears, she sees three of Artemis’ hounds prowling towards the entrance, fangs bared and ready to pounce. The hounds are larger than any hellhound, with coats of silver and white fur that would be the envy of any fur trader, but there are no fur traders on Olympus that would dare to cross Artemis.

But she is not of Olympus, she is of the Underworld and of the earth.

She kisses her step-son’s forehead once more before carefully setting his head on the wooden floor and standing up. “You know Hades has gotten me everything my heart has ever desired,” she growls at the closest beast, her eyes glowing silver as she summons forth an immense amount of power.

“But up until now I’ve never desired a fur coat…”

Thousands of roots and vines erupt beneath the feet of the hounds, all of them yelping in surprise as they are lifted high in the air as her servants tighten their hold. She can feel them try to fight, to break free from their hold by biting, clawing, and any other thing their little minds can think of.

“But this time I think I’ll get this for myself,” she laughs cruelly as she closes her fists. There is a wet tearing sound and a few final yelps and soon she is presented with three pristine belts and the roots and vines pull the remains of the three hounds deep into the earth. With a snap of her fingers the hides are cleaned and cured, and she places one under Nico’s head and the other two on his body as blankets. “Don’t worry my little angel,” she coos as she exits the shelter, growing walls of thorns around it that would make Maleficent jealous to protect her treasure, “You rest now. Phe Phe is going to go have a nice little chat with Artemis.”

Chapter End Notes

Ignore me, I'm just crying from you beautiful reviews! :)

Grief is a funny thing. We can't escape it and it effects all of us differently. For some of us it is prolonged periods of depression, others rage, some of us denial, and it is tragic no matter what form it takes.

For Persephone it was a bit of everything, and sadly when a miracle occurred she couldn't recognize it, refused to believe it. Maybe deep down she feared being hurt again. I believe that as an immortal those kinds of wounds may in fact be worse than compared to mortals. Mortals have hope that we can see our loved ones again, Persephone had no such hope when she learned the souls of her family were not in her afterlife. For her they were truly gone forever.
Let us hope she works to make everything right. For her sake. For Nico's sake.

I always thought it was a tad cliche that every god and goddess was like Hera when it came to their step children. So I took the couple that was already strange and added to them. I will admit I am hardly the first to say Persephone's abduction was a fabrication and that she and Hades had a true love.

However I may be the first to say that the relationship between Maria and Persephone was significant, that it wasn't just another mortal woman.

There is little canon information on Maria other than her appearance, but I extrapolated from what was known. In a way she was a 1930s version of Sally, but a bit more crafty. She realized immediately that she needed to have Persephone in her corner for the sake of her future family. Maybe she didn't intend to truly befriend the goddess, but fate is funny like that.

Maria had a unique world view that caught Hades attention. She liked to mimic the looks of famous actresses with her own almost gothic twist. She was a woman a bit ahead of her time in a place in history that would label her deranged and dangerous. She could find comfort and beauty anywhere and In anyone.

It's a sad fact that many women would have been disowned by their families for having children out of wedlock. If it wasn't for Hades and Bianca, Maria and the children would have been out on the streets. I do wonder how many demigods were forced to camp for that very reason....

It was hard to write this knowing how everything ends with Maria and the children, and I imagine it was bittersweet to read.

I don't know why, but I always imagined Nico was born premature. During the 30s being born seven weeks premature was an incredibly serious thing, and honestly without Persephone and Hades watching over him, he probably wouldn't have made it.

We saw that Artemis and the di Angelos have been linked for a long time, and that it is highly possible that Artemis was at Westover for an entirely different reason than we know ;)

And now Artemis has dared to attack Persephone's little prince?

Let's get ready to rummmmmmmmmbble!!!!

(Also I will probably post this chapter as a separate story as well)
Looks like I’m not getting a “#1 Dad” mug this year either, George thought with a grimace as he slammed his arm against his daughter’s back, knocking her off her feet. To be fair though he did it to protect her, as if he wouldn’t have knocked her to the ground, the sports car sized wolf would have snatched her up in its massive jaws. As the mutt that G:AD summoned leapt past them, he swung his other arm around and pulled the trigger of the railgun in hand. Through the combination of his Titan heart and the sheer amount of adrenaline pumping through his system, he could see the small cylinder fire from the barrel and impact the creature’s flank; momentarily cratering its flesh before rocketing out the other side taking half the beast with it.

“Geez dad, a simple “duck” would have worked just fine,” PB grumbled, hopping to her feet and retrieving her bow. “I’m not a little girl,” she pouted.

“Daddy knows that, but I’m having a hard time processing that,” he said, before once again adjusting the charge dial on the railgun in his right hand with his teeth. It was definitely a great antimaterial weapon, blowing anything and everything to kingdom come, but it was meant to be a delivery device. If he wanted to rid the world of G:AD, then the cylinders needed to embed themselves in its flesh for his plan to succeed. “I’m also willing to wager you don’t want a dollhouse anymore, do you?” he asked with a heavy heart.

PB fired two arrows simultaneously from her bow, forcing one of the hounds to alter its course; saving the lives of two of his men and several of the girls. “You remembered?” she asked, eyes still focused on her target, but her voice hitched slightly.

“Baby girl that was all I thought about for years,” he grunted, as he pulled the trigger of the railgun in his left hand, sending yet another cylinder through G:AD, this time taking out her right leg in an explosion of golden blood and gore. He frowned as he realized he was down to his last five shots. The giant dogs had been an unwelcome surprise, forcing him to deliver killing-blow after killing-blow to the multitude of beasts since they didn’t want to risk exposing the girls to any signal based weaponry. Add to that the need to keep Artemis disabled at all time, and suddenly twenty-four control cylinders didn’t seem like enough. “I know you wanted the Dream House, and I’ll scavenge through eBay if you still want it, but I’ve made you one that makes the Dream House look like a trailer.”
His daughter laughed and it was music to his ears. “I just can’t see you building a dollhouse.” She paused and fired off another barrage of arrows into the rear of a hound. “But then again, I never thought I’d see you with short hair. Or wearing a shirt that wasn’t tie-dye. Or in pants that weren’t missing their knees. Or holding a gun. Or—”

“Okay! I get it!” he laughed, blowing the dog PB had just peppered with arrows to little pieces.

“Oh, see you again….”

If it wasn’t for the fact they were on an active battlefield, George would’ve pulled his daughter into a bearhug and assure her that he wasn’t going to leave her ever again. Instead he gestured for them to fallback with the rest of his team near the helicopters, to assist them and the former hunters with finishing the last of the creatures off before focusing on Artemis. They both started to run, and he marveled at how his daughter effortlessly retrieved arrows from fallen bodies and stuck them in her quiver without breaking her stride. If there was one positive thing he could say about the so-called goddess of the hunt, it would be that she trained PB into a capable warrior with the skills needed to survive in a world he hardly recognized. He took the opportunity to adjust the charge on both of his weapons, PB offering ample cover to do so. Seventy Percent is still way to powerful, the damn things don’t stop until they’ve gone through three trees… I’m definitely overestimating things, so why not lowball it and see what ten does?

“Um, dad?! You might want to move it!” PB cried, racing past him.

“Hmm?” George looked behind him to see that while PB had managed to cover the one-hundred-eighty degrees in front of them, their rear had been exposed allowing for one of the silver canines to sneak up behind them. He realized he was too far away to safely make it to the others like PB, and he mentally cursed himself for adjusting the charge; if he stopped and fired it would be the end of him if the cylinder didn’t rip through his pursuer. So, he did the only thing he could do.

He jumped towards the beast.

It was reckless he knew, as it required his team to know what to do without any kind of communication, but a good soldier always trusts his squad. The giant dog seemed confused by his action, which was what he had hoped, allowing him to slide between its massive legs. He discarded his weapons, tossing them to the side, and flattened his body to the ground as much as possible, all too aware of the severed hand that was under his stomach.

His faith was rewarded when the sounds of automatic gunfire thundered around him, earth exploding up like geysers that stung as the debris hit him. And that’s the problem with automatic weapons, he smiled. You lose all accuracy in exchange for rapid fire. The Celestial Bronze and Imperial Gold ammunition used to be the ultimate advantage in combat, harming only enemies, but since he had his new ticker, he suddenly had an Achilles Heel in the worst place imaginable.

The gunfire stopped and there was a weak snarl before golden dust began to rain down on him. He rolled onto his back and felt for his weapons, before jumping up. Out of habit he started to dust himself off, even though he knew the creature’s remains would complete disappear in a few moments. Brian had once tried to explain to him how that worked, something about matter into energy and some kind of strings, but like most things the engineer told him, it was way over his head. George looked up just in time to see a blonde blur impact his chest.

“What is wrong with you!” PB cried, burying her face in his chest and pounding on his shoulder with her fist. “You don’t get to do stupid crap like right after your back!” She wrapped her other arm around him and buried herself deeper into his chest.
George flicked the safeties to the on position on the weapons in his hands and wrapped his arms around her, tucking her head under his chin. He once again marveled at how despite an eternity apart, how much PB had grown, and how he had changed, hugging his daughter still felt exactly the same as it did before he was drafted. “It was the only thing I could think of PB. But, I’ll try not to do anything too stupid like that again.” His gaze shifted to his team and the hunters who had joined them, then to G:AD who was propping itself up on its good arm while the other was reforming. “But right now, we need to get you and the rest of the girls home and I’m going to have a little chat with your former den mother.”

A smile tugged at his lips as he watched PB eagerly wave at the departing choppers. As he feared, those girls had become PB’s family in his absence. Though he was happy she hadn’t been alone and that she had a large group of sisters, it didn’t seem healthy for his girl to be surrounded by other women who had abandoned their previous lives, mostly over broken hearts. But they kept each other safe and happy, so he couldn’t fault them too much. All that this meant to him now was he should probably expect to host a few sleepovers in the near future.

“We'll meet up with you soon!” PB shouted, waving her arms over her head. “We’ll be on the next ride out of here!”

George frowned at that. If it wasn’t for that damn DG that had somehow singlehandedly taken out half of his team, PB would have already been flown to safety. Instead, they were forced to make multiple trips, with the plan of dropping the former hunters and some of his people off in the nearby town of Ennis before returning. Realistically it would take around twenty minutes to get there, ten minutes to find a decent landing zone, and then another twenty or thirty to unload everyone; so, he was looking at around an hour before his daughter would truly be safe.

*And that means another hour with Artemis…*

George turned away from his daughter to G:AD. The goddess, his nemesis, was surrounded by the remainder of his men, all of them with their weapons trained on it, ready to fire if it even blinked. Granted, a G could kill them faster than they could react, but the pulse emitters within their armor were set to go off if their hearts stopped. It didn’t know that, and in his own sick why George wished it would try something. But sadly, he knew that was unlikely, as G:AD was still missing an arm and a leg, and could barely push itself up on its elbow.

*But this isn’t all about me; Merlin wants some answers from her before I destroy her.*

He walked over to the goddess, and for a moment he flashed back to the night they had captured the Titan Atlas, which seemed so very long ago. He crouched down in front of faux human and grabbed a handful of its auburn hair, yanking her up so that they were face-to-face. “I have a few questions for you partner,” he drawled, “and you can answer them the easy way—“ he removed a control cylinder from his belt and dangled it in front of its face, “or the hard way.”

Artemis scowled and spat a mixture of ichor and spit in George’s face. “I will kill all of you, and your daughter will help me.”

He wiped the fluid from his face with his free hand and smiled. “I very much doubt that,” he laughed, tucking the cylinder back in its proper place.
“Uh, yeah,” PB chimed in from behind, startling him. He hadn’t heard her approach, which was something few people or creatures could do. “Lady, er, Artemis it wasn’t an hour ago that you were saying you were going to purge all of the Hunters, so there is no way in hell I’m helping you anymore. Plus, this is my dad.” PB grabbed his shoulder and gave him a reassuring squeeze, which made him want to break down in tears. “I would never hurt him.”

“Then I will make both of you suffer!” The goddess screeched, before lunging at them. He almost felt pity for the creature when it only managed to hop maybe a foot forward; and his team began to unload into it.

George held up his fist, signaling for his men to stop shooting, and sighed. “Well, looks like we’re doing this the hard way.” He stood back up and he was still surprised by the fact his knees no longer popped. “PB,” he said wrapping an arm around her shoulder, “we need to take a quick walk while my boys… loosen her lips.”

The men nodded in unison, each flipping a switch attached the stock of their weapons.

PB looked at him with a puzzled expression, but it passed quickly and she leaned into the embrace. “Sure dad. I’d love to take a walk with you.”

With his free hand, he removed the silver tiara from her head, then pressed a quick kiss to her forehead. “We’ll be back in five minutes,” he said, looking over his shoulder to address his men. “So give G:AD the boots, medium-style.”

As he walked away with PB, he looked up and wished that the smoke and ash had not obscured the night sky. A moonlight stroll would seem fitting, if not ironic. When the screaming started he pulled PB closer. “So… did I mention we have a big house in the country waiting for us?”

“Wow Partner! That looks downright painful!” He laughed as he crouched down in front of the goddess. “Looks like the guys really earned their pay with that beating!”

“How is she still conscious?” PB asked, her eyes wide as she stared at the bloody, black-and-blue mess that had been her mistress.

It was a fair question he guessed, because there wasn’t a man or woman alive who would be conscious with the amount of damage G:AD had.

He had taken PB away so that his men were free to use their signal weaponry, without causing harm to either of them. Even a few seconds of exposure to the signal was enough to temporarily strip a G of most of its powers (and cause it extreme pain in the process), leaving them in a state somewhere between human and demigod.

Leaving them susceptible to ass-kicking.

Artemis had already been missing and arm and a leg thanks to his railguns, then riddled with bullets when she tried to lunge at them, but somehow the damage caused by combat boots and fists was far more unsettling. Its face was a mess; its left cheek had a huge gash that was leaking a mix of ichor and red blood, Artemis’ eyes were swollen completely shut, its nose was broken, and a large chunk of its hair had been ripped out. He could only imagine what kind of damage was hidden under its ichor stained clothing.
“Princess the first thing you have to remember is that this is not a “she”, or even a person for that
matter,” he smiled at his daughter as he yanked Artemis up by its remaining hair. “Now about those
questions.”

The goddess whimpered and it was music to his ears.

“It looks like your missing most of your teeth, so for all of our sakes I’m going to try and limit my
questions so that they are yes or no questions. Understood?”

Artemis tried to nod, but his grip prevented it from moving its head far. “Yes,” she cried, blood
dribbling down her chin. “Yes!”

“The Hundred Years’ War, The American Revolution, both world wars, Vietnam, and the turmoil in
the Middle east; these are just a few examples, but were all of these started by demigods and or
gods?”

“Yes!”

“Were they started intentionally?” He and everyone else in Avalon knew that they were, they had
evidence from journals and even the recovered laptop to back up them up, but the question was to
see if Artemis was willing to tell the truth.

“Yes!” it sobbed, spitting out more ichor and human-like blood. He couldn’t begin to imagine what
kind of fear the creature was feeling, to suddenly go from all-powerful to nothing in the blink of an
eye; but he would savor every moment.

“But not all wars are started for the same reason, are they?” he smiled.

“Yes!”

“Some are started to wipe out other pantheons, aren’t they?”

“Yes!”

He also knew the answer to that one as well, having been caught in the middle of one such conflict.
That had also been his exposure to the world of gods and monsters; his CO was a son of Mars and
most of his company were DGs as well, and when they had been captured the bastard had tried to
sacrifice him to appease Mars for their failure to destroy a temple. He still wasn’t sure how he
managed to kill everyone, but there were nights where he would wake up in a cold sweat and swear
he could taste his CO’s blood. “And to do that you need to wipe out all of the believers, correct?”

“Yes!”

“Dad?” PB asked hesitantly. “What are you talking about?”

He let go of the goddess’ hair, letting Artemis drop to the ground, and turned to his daughter with a
sad smile on his face. “Baby girl, these things are responsible for millennia of human misery and
death. The group I’m working for is going to stop that.” His smile turned to a frown as he noticed the
pained expression on PB’s face. “Honey, if you don’t want to watch this you can go stand off to the
side until this is over. I just have a few more questions then-“

The earth started to shake and a deep rumble echoed from deep within. He was knocked back on his
ass just as the ground began to buckle beneath his men’s feet. The idea that this was a natural
occurring tremor was thrown out the proverbial window when he noticed PB was jumping around
and the earth would stop cracking when her feet left the ground, only to start again wherever she
touched down. And if that wasn’t proof enough, Artemis started to smile.

“Son of a bitch!” he growled, leaping to his feet.

Artemis spat out a mixture of blood and teeth before laughing. “I’d love to see the look on your face, you pathetic little mortal. It would seem that Persephone has arrived and is in quite a mood.”

“PB!” He yelled just as thorns began to erupt from the ground, “I want you to run!”

PB was still dodging the subterranean attack, leaping here and there, watching her footing. “But-“

“Just do it!” George screamed, as he removed a control cylinder from his belt. “If you see one of the copters wave them down for a ride! I promise I’ll be fine!” He was proud of his little girl when she nodded and ran into the burning woods without another question, just as thousands of thorns exploded in existence throughout the clearing like some kind of demonic octopus. His men started to stumble back and fire rounds at the black thorns wrapping around their legs, some were smart enough to use brief pulses to instantly kill the plant life, but for every vine destroyed two more took their place.

“I would suggest running with your daughter, but it’s far too late for that,” Artemis taunted.

The thorns were wrapped around his legs now up to his knees, and George could feel blood trickling down his calves. “Interesting last words,” George sneered as he once more yanked the goddess up. Then with all of his might he slammed the control cylinder into her mouth and down her throat, cutting off the tip of her tongue in the process. He dropped the goddess off the hunt to the ground and removed his phone from his pocket just as the thorns wrapped around his torso and lifted him several feet off the ground.

“Artemis,” a female voice called out from seemingly every direction. “We need to talk.” George and his men screamed as the thorns that held them shifted away from Artemis with a violent jerk, for a large rosebud grew from the earth, before blossoming and a beautiful sun-kissed woman stepped out. The woman, the goddess Persephone if Artemis was to be believed, looked absolutely livid; her eyes were glowing gold and her fists were balled up so tight he could see golden ichor dripping from them. He watched her stoop down and smile at the wounded goddess, clearly taking some form of pleasure from seeing Artemis so injured.

That’s right, just ignore us. We’re nothing but insect to your kind, George thought with a slight smile as he tapped his phone to finish the control procedure. He couldn’t help but smile when he saw Artemis tense up; one of the few visual cues that indicated the procedure had worked.

“Just look at you Artemis,” Persephone chided, placing two fingers under the younger looking goddess’ chin. “Just like my husband and my mother you have fallen to these mortals and their little toys. And now your practically one of them yourself.” Persephone then grabbed Artemis by the throat and lifted her off the ground effortlessly with only one hand. “And to think my sweet, precious, perfect Nico and I had come all this way to ask for your help only for you to send your mutts to attack us!” At the final word, she slammed Artemis into the ground, before turning her attention to him.

Oh… shit…

“And you!” the flower goddess screamed, the thorns digging deeper into his flesh. “You would dare try to kill my stepson?! I will strip the flesh from your bones! I will-“

He had heard numerous threatening speeches from his drill sergeant, his CO, the numerous people he
had tortured for information, and the DGs and Gs he had captured, so it was quite easy to tune her out and focus on something more important.

Namely, Artemis who was now rapidly regenerating her missing limbs and repairing the rest of her injuries. Automatic regeneration was one of the commands the control cylinders ordered on their own after being administered and after the device had restored the G’s power. There were some minor issues though; the Gs became completely mute and the rapid healing had a tendency to alter the host’s physical body. It seemed to him that this was effecting G:AD’s formerly missing arm and leg, the new limbs growing back golden and slightly atrophied.

“So, do you have any last words before I end your life?” Persephone sneered in his face. “Or will you plead and beg like the pathetic insect you are?”

_I wonder how she would react if she knew I was the one who shot that kid_, he thought with a smirk.

“Oh? Is something funny?”

“Just your face bitch.” He let out a sharp whistle. “Artemis! Attack!”

As the former goddess of the hunt leaped from her crater and grabbed Persephone by her swan-like throat, he couldn’t help but be amused by how right he was.

_Her face was funny._

Chapter End Notes

Look! Answers!

But some are rather contradictory, are they not? :)

If only Persephone hadn't made her grand entrance George would've been able to get even more answers! What inconvenient timing!

George is always fun to write because on the one hand he just wants to be a good dad, but on the other he is willing to go to extreme lengths to get answers. Remember, this is the same man who gutted Percy like a fish in New Rome. He's even more dangerous than he was back then as

1) he has Calypso's heart
2) he has his daughter, and he will not be losing her again...

So George ordering his men to give Artemis the boots is not even the tip of the iceberg of what he's willing to do to protect PB.

If you paid attention we also caught the briefest of glimpses as to what George was like before the war. Before he lost his daughter. He was a genuinely good guy, but he and his family were victims of circumstance. If he hadn't been drafted, he would be that old guy with a ponytail driving around in a pickup truck with a flower painted on the hood selling his organic vegetables at the farmers market and taking his grandkids hiking.

If you really want to get into George's head, listen to "Old Hippie" by the Bellamy Brothers. It's a good, albeit bittersweet song.
Next chapter is Nico! And he's rediscovering a few things that are going to leave him confused and forever alter his life (Percy's as well).

So until next time (or if I edit the notes again), I wish you all the best as you deserve them! Remember, people can only make you feel inferior if you let them!

Good night :)}
Nico

Chapter Summary

Warnings: Blood, gore, character death

Tonight:

Nico has some unsettling dreams,
Persephone goes full mamma bear,
and Nico gains some respect for his stepmother.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Dreaming had been a strange experience for Nico ever since he and Bianca were enrolled at Westover. Many were the symbolic in nature, offering clues as to the current state of the world of gods, some were him watching events happening somewhere else in the world, and some were manifestations of his deepest desires that he thought would never come true in the waking world. All of them left him exhausted once he awoke, but the latter seemed to take the most out of him.

But there was another type of dream he had that became more and more frequent with each passing day; memories of his life before the Lotus. Those kinds of dreams were bittersweet. They allowed him to get a glimpse of his life before, to fill in some gaps as to why he liked certain things and avoided others, they gave him more time with his mother and sister, but in turn that made him feel like he was missing his family more with each passing day.

But right now, Nico was wishing that this one memory would have stayed hidden.

He was walking alongside the canals with his mother and Bianca, all three of them wearing clothing that they only wore for special occasions. The shoes he wore pinched his toes to the point that he was in tears, so his mother picked him up and kissed his forehead, calming him down to some degree.

“There, there little one,” his mother whispered in his ear, while stroking the back of his head. “You mustn’t cry in front of your grandparents. You have to make a good first impression.”

He nodded against the crook of her neck and remembered what his father had told him, that Nico was a man and that it was his job to be strong for mother and Bianca when father wasn’t around. Nico didn’t understand why as his mother always seemed so strong, but for some reason his mother looked the same way Bianca did when there was a bug in their room. He didn’t like seeing Bianca like that, so he certainly didn’t like seeing his mother like that.

“I’ll walk mama,” Nico sniffled in her ear. His mother kissed him once more and set him back down, this time doing his best to ignore the pain in his feet. He felt so proud of himself when he looked up to see mother smiling back at him, and he was sure that his father and…

The dream skipped ahead as he wracked his brain for a name, a face, or any clue of the identity of
the person who he felt would be proud of him. It wasn’t Bianca, because she had been right there, and it made little sense for him to include his mother, but his younger self had clearly held someone at the same level of his mother and father.

Now they were standing on the stoop a very large stone building with doors blacker than his father’s suits. Carved in the stone above the doors, were dozens of angels, all surrounding one with a flaming sword fighting a giant dragon. The dragon’s body was carved into the dark wood of the door and was surrounded by numerous figures of skeletons and demons laughing and dancing in a raging inferno. There was a laughing skeleton staring at him that was scary and unlike the nice ones his father called to sometimes play with him; this one made him take a step back and grab his mother’s skirt.

For her protection, of course.

“Come here Nico,” his mother sighed. “We need to fix your hair.” She crouched down and licked the palm of her hand before running her hand through his hair. Nico fussed and whined as the woman tried to flatten his wild hair, but the part of him that knew this was a dream wished that he could experience his mother’s grooming just once more. “There!” his mother smiled, standing back up to assess her work. “Your grandfather will think you are a perfect little soldier.”

Grandparents were a foreign concept to Nico. Before that morning he had never even known he had grandparents and he was positive he had never met them and Bianca thought along the same lines. Some of the kids he played with in the parks were brought there by their grandparents, old people with wrinkly faces and kind eyes, but he and Bianca had mother and-

The memory slipped by again, but this time he caught glimpses of another woman; a woman that he adored and loved. He didn’t think he had an aunt and he was pretty sure he never met Alecto until much later in life (plus the fury did not exactly come across as loving or even warm).

His mother knocked on the dragon’s back, just between its massive bat-like wings, and she visibly paled. “I’m sure they’ll love you,” she said, squeezing both Bianca’s and his hands reassuringly, but as he now watched he realized she was reassuring herself.

They waited there for what seemed like an eternity; his mother as still as a statue, but Bianca was playing with a thrill on her own dress and his younger self was kicking at the ground trying to make his shoes more comfortable. When the intimidating doors creaked open he, along with Bianca and his mother, stood up straight and were met with the discerning gaze of an older woman that looked like his mother.

“Mother,” his mother stepped forward, smiling at the strange, scary looking woman. “I’d like you to meet-“

“I’m sorry,” the woman interrupted, her thin lips turning into a scowl, “but I don’t have any children, only a whore. So take your filthy little bastards to someone else’s door.”

At the time, he didn’t know what those words meant, but looking at his mother’s reaction he had known it wasn’t good. Watching this play out again, Nico decided that if he had been able to he would have attacked his so-called grandmother for insulting his mother like that.

“Mother! Please! These are your-”

Like a cobra striking its prey, his grandmother slapped his mother with the back of her hand. “I told you I don’t have any children!”
After that things only got worse. He and Bianca began to cry, terrified that this strange, harpy of a woman had hurt their mother. His mother and grandmother were screaming at each other; his mother urging the older woman to be civil in front of them. Then a balding man with a thick, bushy mustache appeared at the door, and he too started to scream at the three of them. The old man insisted that they were not any relation of his and spat on Nico.

His younger self, who had never experienced the darkness that is humanity, began to wail to the point that he couldn’t breathe. He just wanted to leave to go home, to play with his toys and Bianca, to tell his father about all the bad things he saw that day so that he would make them go away, to have his mama hug and kiss him until the pain went away, and to get his usual bedtime story from-. His mind blanked again, but this time he remembered that the person his younger self was fond of was a woman with a strong floral scent.

“You’re right!” his mother shrieked, “my parents are not here! Only Monsters!” His grandparents then slammed the door in their faces and the world seemed strangely still and quiet, despite his and Bianca’s crying. Nico always remembered his mother as a powerful, loving, unflappable women, but for what felt like the first time, he saw a crack in his mother’s armor. She was trembling and it looked like she was using every ounce of willpower she had to not cry with them, but somehow with a strength he couldn’t even begin to fathom, she managed to smile at the both of them, before scooping up his younger self in her arms. “I have all the family I need right here.”

“You’re right,” said an all too familiar voice. “We’re all the family you need.”

The trio spun around, only to come face-to-face with Persephone.

He should have known that his stepmother would’ve been a thorn in his side since the beginning! This was most likely his earliest memory of her tormenting him! And now he had to deal with the knowledge that Persephone not only tortured him but his mother as-

“Oh, Persephone!” His mother cried, running into the goddess’ embrace, Bianca trailing behind. “My Parents- They- were monsters!” she cried, her body trembling and the tears she had fought so hard to keep back, rolled down her beautiful face.

“I know my love. I know,” Persephone said with a tenderness Nico thought impossible for the goddess. “Let’s get you home.”

Then the goddess took his younger, crying self from his mother’s arms, and kissed his forehead. “I love you Phe Phe,” he sobbed, as Persephone wiped the tears from his eyes.

Persephone smiled and kissed his cheek. “I love you too, my little prince.”

He jerked awake.

The last thing Nico remembered before his strange dream was getting shot in the gut by the psycho that tortured Percy and then falling from a helicopter into a burning forest.

“So how am I alive?” Nico whispered to himself, as he began to take in his surroundings. He was laying on a strange wooden floor that looked like the cross section of a fresh cut tree, a very ancient tree of the rings were to be believed. Even stranger was that the walls of the room seemed to grow
out of the floor, as there were no seams, and as they reached the ceiling they curve gently into a
dome. The more Nico looked around, the more he was convinced that he was in a tree that had
naturally grown the room. “Okay, that’s weird, but nothing to be worried about.”

He tried to sit up, only to realize he was covered by a large, silver fur blanket and that his head was
resting on a pillow made of the same fur. “Okay, someone clearly found me,” Nico fussed as he
removed the heavy bedding, “And I’d bet my Mythomagic collection that it wasn’t Persephone.” He
didn’t care what his dream had shown him, there was no way his stepmother would have been kind
to his mother, and there was absolutely no chance that he had ever loved Persephone. She must have
taken a page from Hera’s book and messed with my head. As weird as it was, he smiled at the
thought. Which means I have even more in common with Percy and Jason now. We could start a
support group…

He went to sit up, but promptly fell back down when searing pain blossomed from his stomach. Nico
laid there until the pain faded, and then only lifted his head up to examine himself. Well that’s…
interesting, he thought when he saw the strange stitches just to the left of his naval. Carefully, he
brought two fingers to the stitching; it stung a little to touch them, but it was nothing he couldn’t
tolerate. But what are they made of? The stitching felt like nothing like the kind Will used in the
infirmary; these felt somewhat plant-like.

“If you’re trying to get in my head, it’s not going to work!” He called out, hoping to make the
goddess come forward. He sat up in preparation for his stepmother’s arrival, this time knowing how
to move his body to avoid pain. “Come on Persephone, did you really think I’d fall for an altered
memory?” He called out again, trying to goad her out of hiding.

When the goddess didn’t appear after thirty seconds, Nico pushed himself up from his makeshift bed.
“Now where did she put my shirt,” he grumbled to himself as he stretched to loosen his muscles up.
It was bad enough that he was forced to wear a stupid flower crown to breathe, so there was no way
he was going to meet with Artemis without a shirt; she’d probably shoot him dead on the spot if he
showed up looking like that. He found his shirt hanging next to the room’s only exit (which was
strangely blocked by a wall of black thorns), the black ACDC shirt seemingly patched and cleaned, a
subtle floral scent radiated off it. “Okay, that’s a little weird,” Nico mumbled as he pulled the shirt
over his head. “Guess you’re trying to kill me with kindness now? Is that it?”

There was no response; let alone any indication that Persephone was even watching.

“Whatever,” he huffed, grabbing his sword… which appeared to have been polished. Nico slashed at
the walls of thorns blocking the exit; the blade passing through them like a hot knife to butter. With
three more slashes Nico was through the barrier… only to fine another.

Not wanting to waste any further physical effort, Nico slipped into the shadows and traveled a short
distance forward before reappearing. “Okay, maybe I shouldn’t be taunting you,” he gulped, as he
surveyed the horrifying scene before him.

The burning forest had already been terrifying in its own right, but now Persephone had decided to
take a page from Dante’s Inferno to decorate. The thorns that the goddess had used to seal the
entrance to the strange tree home were everywhere, sprouting violently from the earth, wrapping
themselves around everything that wasn’t on fire. They wound the massive tree trunks up to the
canopy; the raging inferno behind bathing the land in strange, dancing shadows. What made the
environment horrifying though, was the numerous corpses hung sporadically throughout the thorns.
Giant canine-like creatures with snapped necks hung limply above; their bodies skinned from the
neck down, with puddles of blood forming on the ground beneath. A few of the creatures were even
half buried in the earth, the thorns seemingly pulling them down if the wild claw marks and broken
paws were any indication.

But there were other corpses too; human corpses.

There were Hunters of Artemis hanging from the thorns; some still clutching their bows, while others had their hands pinned to their throats by the plants in what had been a last ditch effort to save their lives. The ground was littered with a mix of hunters and some kind of female satyrs, who strangely did not turn into plant life in death. The female satyrs’ lower halves looked odd to him, their hooves slightly bigger, their fur was finer with brown and a few white spots, and their human halves had complexions and features similar to Piper and her dad’s.

He had to stop and take a deep breath to settle his stomach. This is like New Rome. This was a slaughter. No, this was multiple slaughters in a short period of time, he realized as he looked over the bodies once more. We’re in Nation territory, which would explain these weird satyrs, and I can tell that they were the first to die along with a few of the Hunters. Most of these satyrs are unarmed, which points to the Hunters being the aggressors, but why? And Persephone may be a bitch, but she wouldn’t just attack the Hunters without provocation; add in the fact that we’re here to convince Artemis to help us... Yeah

Nico sighed and ruffled a hand through his hair in frustration, knocking loose a few petals from his crown in the process. He could stand there all night and cry to analyze the crime scene, but he knew that if he wanted any real answers he would have to find Artemis and Persephone. “Never a dull moment,” he sighed, resting his blade on his shoulder. “I just hope I can get out of here soon, I got programs to write.”

Once again, it was not Nico who found Persephone; rather she found him.

And in true godly fashion, it was over the top.

Nico had been following the trail of corpses and thorns for some time, when a furious scream thundered throughout the burning forest, immediately followed by several of the ancient oaks splintering into pieces as something exploded through them at extreme speeds.

And it was coming right at him.

“Shit!” Nico cried as he dove into the shadows. He reemerged instantly several yards behind a crater that was centered around where he had just been standing. He readied his weapon and carefully edged closer to the smoldering hole, ready for anything.

“Nico!” Persephone cried happily, leaping out of the crater and pulling him into a tight embrace. She buried her face in his hair and inhaled deeply. “Oh Nico, my sweet little prince,” Persephone sighed. “You do not know how much I’ve missed you.”

Okay, Nico would admit he wasn’t ready for that. “What are you doing?!” he hissed, prying himself free from the goddess’s embrace. He took a step back to distance himself from her, and ran his free hand through his hair. “You don’t get to touch me! You don’t have any-“ he stopped when he finally looked up at Persephone. “Oh...”

Her normally pristine face was covered in a mix of dirt and ichor, with a gash above her left eye that continuously leaked the golden life fluid. Her left arm was hanging limply at her side, with dozens of
little flowers of all shapes and sizes wrapping around it trying to mend it. Her white blouse was missing its lower half; exposing a midriff that was turning darker and darker shades of purple with each passing moment. But the physical damage wasn’t what gave Nico pause (he would have been more concerned if she had emerged from the crater unharmed), but the pain in her eyes.

“You’re right,” Persephone gulped, her eyes tearing up. “I don’t have any right to touch you. Not after everything I’ve put you through. After all the pain and sorrow you’ve felt when I should have been there for you.” She collapsed to her knees and started to shake, her eyes searching him for something. “I have so much to make up for, but I promise if you me give the chance I will be there for you.”

What is she playing at? Nico wondered as he looked the kneeling goddess in the eye. He knew that this was a trick; that his stepmother would only torture him in the long run, but the look in her eyes, so full of hurt and regret, seemed so genuine. He thought back to the Titan war when Percy had said he didn’t trust him, and how much those words had hurt him; how he had wished that someone would have comforted him. Nico then thought back to his strange dream and how it had shown him and Persephone getting along. It’s fake, but maybe she wants me to be angry. But, I bet she’s not expecting me to be the bigger person here, if I do that then I will have nothing to feel bad about. He sighed and offered his stepmother his hand. “Alright, just… get up. I’ll give you a chance.”

She eagerly took his hand with the biggest smile Nico had ever seen on his stepmother. “Thank you, my little prince,” she sobbed as he helped her to his feet. “You won’t regret it.” There was a sickening wet snap, and Persephone’s left arm was once again whole. “That’s better,” she sighed in relief, flexing her arm. “You can’t imagine how much that hurt.” Her eyes widened then fixated on his stomach; and before he could process what was happening, she had tugged his shirt up and was running one hand over his stitches. “Are you okay? How do you feel? Are you bleeding? Is there any swelling?”

“I’m fine!” Nico snapped as he pulled his shirt down. “And what did I say about touching?”

Persephone backed away, smiling sheepishly. “Sorry.”

“Whatever,” he sighed as he finished adjusting his shirt. “Now could you tell me what’s going on around here?!”

Persephone smiled at him (which was creeping him out), “Things… are not good. Artemis-MOVE!” She knocked him to the side, narrowly avoiding two silver arrows. The smiling happy face of Persephone was replaced with one twisted by rage as two silver arrows embedded themselves in her right shoulder. “You would dare make an attempt on my Nico’s life?” his stepmother roared.

“Wait, who is trying to kill me?”

“Artemis!,” Persephone spat.

The earth began to rumble and groan as Nico got to his feet. “What are you doing?” he asked, but Persephone only wrapped an arm around him and pulled him close just as the ground began to buckle and heave. More of the black thorns erupted violently from the earth, wrapping around everything in their path. The thorns then began to pull the giant oaks that surrounded them, falling them one-by-one and pulling them underground until they stood in a massive clearing.

Along with one other.

“Artemis!” Nico snarled. He had only met the goddess once before, but that one meeting was enough to make him hate her more than any other god, titan, or primordial. Yes, he could set aside
his feelings for the greater good, but not after she just tried to shoot him. He noticed that one of her arms and one of her legs appeared to be atrophied. *The perfect places to strike.*

Nico readied his sword and was about to step in the shadows, when Persephone grabbed him by the shoulder. “Nico, the mortals did something to her. She no longer has any sense of self preservation and just keeps getting up no matter how hard I hit her. Under normal conditions she would wipe the floor with me, but like this I have a temporary advantage. You need to find the mortals and figure out a way stop them.” She smiled at him and with a surprising tenderness, kissed his forehead. “There I go touching you again.”

“It’s- it’s okay,” he blushed, surprised at body’s reaction. “But where are they?”

Persephone started walking towards Artemis, summoning up rose vine with every step. “Just follow the path of destruction!” Then in a blur of movement, Persephone was next to Artemis. The Olympian was caught off guard by her half-sister’s sudden appearance, dropping an arrow from her weaker hand. His stepmother wasted no time utilizing the advantage, making rose vines wrap around Artemis’ legs while slamming her fist into the archer’s jaw. The force of the punch would have sent the lady of the Hunters flying back, but the vines held her firmly in place; the thorns digging deep into the flesh of her legs.

As much as Nico disliked his stepmother, a large part of him was in awe at the display. “It’s just like Mythomagic!” he smiled to himself as he began to run from the battlefield. In Mythomagic, Artemis had a special effect that allowed her to redirect up to three attacks a turn, which made up for her low defense. Combine that effect with her high attack and she was considered one of the most annoying gods in the game, as one had to swarm the field and waste four attacks to take her down. In fact, one of the most common ways to defeat Artemis was to use either Demeter or Persephone to summon plant tokens and use the tokens’ attack to chip away at Artemis’ defenses! *

**Careful Nico, your nerd is showing…**

“Hurry and get out of here!” Persephone cried. Artemis had freed herself from the vines and discarded her bow, which had been a hindrance in close quarters combat. The moon goddess took a swing for Persephone’s bruised and battered gut, she had been ready for it; jumping back while conjuring two Stygian Iron daggers in her hands. “GO!” she cried; stabbing one of the midnight black daggers into the Olympian’s right thigh, while slashing at Artemis’ face with the other.

Nico saluted his stepmother and stepped into the shadows. *Good luck.*

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Finding the mortals of Avalon was a bit harder than Nico had though it would be, as the entire forest and the strange structures within were a disaster. He had to travel by foot mostly, though he did have to shadow travel around a few of the larger obstructions blocking his path. The sheer amount of corpses he encountered along his way, made his ears ring and stomach churn; and he hoped whatever death god was responsible for judging their souls would be kind to them.

*A life that ends in tragedy should be given leniency in death.*

Eventually though he found the mortals in a large clearing that was littered with corpses. Nico stayed hidden in the shadows at the edge of the clearing and observed them; trying to gather information on
how they were controlling Artemis. They stood in a circle; seven of them faces outward looking for threats, while the rest huddled close together around one man.

The man who shot him.

The man was the only one not covered head to toe in combat armor, electing to not wear a helmet. In one hand, he held a phone and was staring at it with the same puzzled and frustrated expression he used to have when he first started using a computer, while the other hand held some kind of strange sci-fi looking weapon. The leader of the mortals scratched his forehead with the barrel of his weapon, while awkwardly tapping away on the phone.

What is with mortals and their phones? It’s like they can’t go five minutes without checking their Myface or Spacebooks? And then they wonder why their grades or dropping? I better try to limit Jason’s computer time; I don’t want him to get addicted like everyone else. He dropped to his stomach and slowly crawled closer to the mortals; telling himself that the souls of the bodies around him were in a better place and wouldn’t mind him crawling over them.

“Does anyone know do to turn on voice commands?” The man grumbled, waiving his phone in front of the other armed men.

“Just tap the microphone sir,” one of the men called out.

“I’ve been doing that for the last fifteen minutes!” the leader snapped, rapidly pressing the phone with one thumb to illustrate his frustration to his men.

One of the men stepped forward and took the phone from their leader’s hand and tapped a different part of the screen. “You were… hitting the physical speaker George. You, uh, got to hit the icon.”

Nico clenched his free fist and ground his teeth. George?! No wonder he looks familiar! That’s the bastard that tortured Percy! But, he was older… That and I killed him… Guess I’m losing my touch.

“That is stupid!” George snapped, swiping the phone back from the other. “Back in my day we had actual buttons,” the man sighed, shaking his head. George then lifted the phone to his face and said, “Artemis bring that goddess back here. We’re ready for it.”

I think it’s reasonable to assume that his phone relays orders to Artemis. It’s too early to think I can release her with it, but if I can gain control over her then that would but two goddesses in my corner. Knowing what he had to do, Nico slowly got into a crouching position and readied his sword to make one quick cut. He entered the shadows and propelled himself forward, only to emerge a few yards ahead. He slashed with his sword with the intent to sever George’s hand from his wrist, but the blade only encountered air.

What the-

Calloused hands gripped the back of his neck and yanked him out of the air. “You’re not half as sneaky as you think you are partner,” George tsked, holding Nico up in the air by the nape of his neck like a kitten. “Though you are surprisingly hard to kill,” George chuckled, leveling the strange weapon to Nico’s head. “But I’d like to see you survive this.”

Nico thrashed violently and swung his sword without any form or technique, trying to break free. But no matter what he did, George dodged it with ease and speed that exceeded that of any mortal and most demigods. “You’re surprisingly hard to kill yourself. And what, you get younger every time?” he said through clenched teeth, as he dug his nails into George’s hand. “Because that is bullshit!”

“Just an unforeseen side effect of my new ticker,” George snickered, as he pressed the weapons
barrel against Nico’s temple. “Don’t fret kid; this will be quick and painless.”

Nico closed his eyes tightly and hoped that Percy, Jason, and his father would be okay without him. He wanted Percy to continue his recovery, for Jason to start being comfortable around everyone again, and for his father to continue to reveal his true nerdy self instead of the bitter god he had met after emerging from the Lotus. Nico wanted Percy to think of him with the same fondness he felt when he thought of Annabeth and his parents. He just wanted everyone to be-

“GET YOUR FILTHY HANDS OFF MY STEPSON!”

George’s eyes widened and all the mortals raised their weapons just as Persephone and Artemis impacted in the center of the clearing. Both goddesses were in rough shape; Persephone was covered in ichor and her left hand was mangled, but Artemis was missing her left arm and had two daggers embedded in her gut. His stepmother stood on top of the Olympian, pinning her to the earth as vines wrapped around Artemis.

“I’m going to give you to the count of three to get your greasy mitts off of my Nico, or I’m going turn the lot of you to fertilizer,” she snarled with a ferocity that even made him gulp. She stepped off Artemis’ struggling form and strode toward them with the earth heaving at her feet.

George looked at him, then back at Persephone and shrugged. “Fire.”

The sound of thunder filled the air as the mortals fired their weapons at Persephone. Casing after casing were ejected from their weapons, but Persephone raised walls of black thorns and flowers to take the damage for her.

“One,” Persephone called out.

“I’d do as the lady says,” he choked, a big smile on his face despite his discomfort.

“Do I look worried to you?” George chuckled, removing the weapon pressed against Nico’s temple and holstering it on his belt. The man then removed then removed his phone from a pocket on his armor. “Artemis, I’m afraid your services are no longer required-”

What?

“Two!” Persephone called out, as thorns sprung up from the ground beneath the other mortals’ feet and lifted them high in the air, forcing them to cease their firing.

“But for your last order I need you to be simultaneously everywhere at once,” George smirked, before sapping his phone for his strange weapon. “Now this is where things get interesting,” The older man sneered. Across the clearing Artemis began to glow and thrash violently against her floral bonds. “These so-called gods would want us to believe that they can be everywhere at once, but that is a gross exaggeration. By my reckoning, everywhere is a pretty big place to cover for one being, no matter how powerful. So, time for a math question: what do you get when you divide one by infinity?” On the other end of the clearing there was a flash of light and Artemis disappeared.

Nico’s eyes widened as he realized what the mad man had just done to Artemis. George didn’t kill Artemis, he did something far worse. If she was following the man’s orders then the goddess was dividing herself into smaller and smaller pieces in the futile attempt to be omnipresent. “Next to nothing,” he choked out.

“Very good!” George laughed, tightening his grip around Nico’s neck. “Someone paid attention in Algebra!”
George rolled his eyes and aimed his weapon at the approaching goddess. “Oh, shut up!” George pulled the trigger and unlike the other weapons there was no bang, only a brief high-pitched whistle. The fired projectiles velocity must have been significantly higher than the others, as Persephone staggered backwards clutching her stomach; golden ichor covering her hands.

“Is that the best you got?” Persephone sneered, still continuing to march forward.

George tossed his weapon to the ground with a smile and pulled out his phone once more. “You wouldn’t believe how long it took to figure out how much power to use,” the mortal mumbled. Then everything clicked for Nico. The phone may be the controller, but whatever that weapons fires is what allows them to take control! He redoubled his efforts to escape the man’s grasp.

“Persephone! Run!”

Persephone shook her head with a sad smile; mortal red blood now leaking alongside the golden ichor. “I’m not leaving you ever again Nico. I promised Maria that I would look after you.”

Hearing those words felt like a punch to the gut; if the goddess was willing to risk her freedom, her life, for him then maybe that memory had some element of truth to it. With his renewed strength, he swung his legs up and wrapped them around George’s arm, knocking the man off balance. Then with a quick jerk the two of them fell to the ground.

“Get off me you little piece of shit!” George roared, trying to roll on top of him.

They struggled in the mud and gore, throwing wild punches, kicking, and even trying to bite each other (Nico learned that Old Spice tasted terrible). George managed to knee him in the groin, but Nico responded by slamming his forehead against the older man’s nose; earning a sickening, but satisfying crunch. The man managed to catch the son of Hades’ fist and tried to crush it with his own, but Nico responded with an old playground favorite; grabbing the man’s chest with his free hand and twisted as hard as he could. George tried to get him in a hold, but Nico’s small, lithe body was able to slip out.

Eventually Nico found his sword in the chaos and straddled the older man. “I would recommend yielding,” Nico smiled, as he pressed his blade against George’s throat.

“Why I just have to press a button and I’ll have a goddess at my beck and call once more,” George smirked, nodding his head behind Nico, towards Persephone.

He pressed the edge of the blade tighter against George’s neck and cautiously looked back. Persephone was no longer standing; she was on the ground in the fetal position shaking. “Damn it,” Nico cursed under his breath, returning his full attention to the man beneath him. She needs help now! But if we leave with that thing still inside her, what’s to stop them from activating it later? He removed the blade from George’s throat.

“Smart move partner,” George smirked. “I’d do the same thing-“

Before the man could finish his thought, Nico swung his Stygian Iron blade down as hard as he could on the man’s wrist; completely severing the hand clutching the phone from the wrist. “Looks like I have a goddess in my pocket now,” Nico smiled as he removed the device from the severed appendage and place it in his back pocket.

George’s face paled as he lifted the bleeding stump to his face. “You- you little fucker,” the man gasped before passing out.
Nico pushed himself up off the man’s chest and placed the tip of the blade over George’s heart. *This time I’ll make sure he’s dead. Even if have I to carve his heart from his chest.*

“You kill him and I kill her,” A cool female voice said from behind him.

Nico spun around, ready to strike down yet another mortal. Instead he found himself face-to-face with a blonde girl with blue eyes around his age, a bow in hand and an arrow pressed against Persephone’s neck. She was wearing all black and the way she held herself spoke volumes on her combat skills. “You’re a hunter, aren’t you?” he asked, raising his guard.

“I was a hunter. Can’t be a Hunter of Artemis if there’s no Artemis,” the girl said, not once breaking eye contact.

“Do you know what this man has done?”

“No, but I think I’m starting to understand.”

“Then why would you let him live? He has killed gods only know how many demigods and hunters! He tortured my boyfriend with the intent to kill him! This man is a monster!” He pushed the tip of his sword slightly into the man’s chest.

The hunter matched him by drawing back on her bow. “No, he’s family,” she said with a sad smile. “He’s my dad. The man I joined the Hunters for.” The blonde sighed and for the first time closed her eyes. “There are more of my dad’s people coming and they should be here any minute.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah,” she nodded slowly. “So, I propose a truce of sorts. You let my dad live and I let you take her,” she tilted her head towards Persephone. “Do we have a deal?”

In the distance Nico could hear the faint sound of helicopters approaching. Persephone was in dire need of help and he had enough energy to get the two of them back to the farm. He could probably take out the hunter, but not without gravely injuring his stepmother in the process. “Deal.”

Chapter End Notes

You didn't honestly think PB was going to abandon her dad? Separated for almost half a century, there was no way she wasn't going to watch him from the shadows. :)

So let's talk about what everyone is curious about: Nico and Persephone's relationship. Nico is a very sweet boy deep down, but he's not going to open up to Persephone right away; there has been far too much bad blood there now. He has every right to think this is some new elaborate plan to mess with him. And Persephone knows this, she knows that she has hurt Nico far too many times to just go back to the time when they were happy.

But Persephone is a fighter (in everyway) and she's going to work hard to regain her little boy's trust. And she's going to start by ripping those who wish to harm Nico a new asshole.
Percy is shuddering as he senses a disturbance in the force...

Persephone was able to handle Artemis because of the following reasons:
1. She was already expecting a fight so she wasn't caught completely off guard.
2. Artemis was still recovering from having her limbs blown off, and the control cylinder was still calibrating
3. Persephone is in her element
4. Persephone is actually a more popular good with mortals these days (seriously there are A LOT of Hades x Persephone media these days)
5. Persephone is a strong independent grown woman, while Artemis looks like a little girl.
6. Artemis (intentional or not) f*cked with her Nico.

That last point alone meant the b*tch had to die.

Speaking of death, Artemis is not dead. No, she is far worse off. Doomed to forever tear herself into pieces until she is everywhere in creation. If there was a portion of her mind left, she would be screaming.

Yeah, that's a downer...

Another downer is that that was our guys' last attempt at gaining aid to save olympus. They are truly on their own now...

Another downer is that next chapter is from Morgan's POV. Avalon's witch is going to pay a visit to one of Avalon's biggest supporters along with Brian and DG:HP.

But until then, I wish you all the best and I hope you continue to stick around. Things will only get more exciting ;)}
Tonight:
Morgan and Brian visit one of Avalon's biggest supporters.

“Oops! Another flat tire!” Brian laughed, as he once again stomped on the back of DG:HP’s foot, causing the poor creature to fall face first into the hard concrete stairs.

“Would you stop that!” Morgan snapped at the redhead, crouching down to help the poor daughter of Pluto to her feet. She cursed when she saw that the girl’s front teeth had been chipped and her lower lip was split open. “It wasn’t funny the first time and it’s not funny now!” She touched the young girl’s lip and summoned her magic; sealing the wound with green fire.

Brian continued to hop up the stone steps two at a time like a small child would, not even glancing back at Morgan. “Don’t use your freaky demon crap here! Someone is going to call the cops!”

“Really?” Morgan asked incredulously as she straightened Hazel’s jacket. “To people that can’t see through the Mist it looks like I sealed her wound with some superglue! But whether they can see through the Mist or not, it looks like you committed a hate crime!”

The engineer reached the top step and waived her off. “Honey, if legal could get George off for slaughtering a crap ton of women, they could get me off for tripping a dog.” He shrugged and rang the doorbell, “besides, this is the Hamptons; that thing has the wrong skin color for anyone here to care.”

Morgan seethed and reached deep within for her most destructive magics; the dark runes etched in her skin glowing an unearthly green. Out of all the men Morgan had met in her short life, Brian was by far the worst; which was really saying something. The redhead was egotistical, had no respect for the lives of others, liked to make his underlings fight for recognition, was abusive to theGs and DGs under his control, and generally seemed to revel in seeing others suffer.

Give him power and he would be no different than a god.

But we need him... she let out a deep sigh and let power she had called forth dissipate. She then looked at DG:HP, or Hazel, and gave the poor creature a sad smile. Morgan hated being around any of the subjuggated DGs, not out of any sense of pity or compassion, but because of the way their souls cried out for release. Despite Brian and the rest of engineer insisting that the DGs were not aware of their current state with the neural implants, Morgan could feel the agony and fear within every single one. So, if I give them the illusion that I care about them they stop screaming ever so slightly.

“Now would you hurry up and get up here?” Brian snapped, as he rapidly tapped his foot like a jackrabbit at the entrance to the large townhouse. “I can hear someone coming to the door and I don’t want to look foolish standing here by myself!”
Morgan rolled her eyes and flipped Brian off. The engineer had clearly skimmed over the briefing Merlin had sent them, as immediately after the address and scheduled arrival time was a note from Mr. Dare that said one of the private care workers he had hired for his daughter would answer the door for them.

She smiled when his normally pale face turned crimson with anger, and the redhead looked as if he was about to shoot off several nasty remarks, when the lavish French doors opened, revealing a woman covered head-to-toe by a hazmat suit. “You must be Mr. Dare’s eight o’clock; the specialists, correct?” the woman asked, her voice slightly muffled from her helmet.

“What’s with the hazmat suit?” Morgan asked, eyeing the strange blue suit. “Does the girl have Ebola or something?”

Brian laughed, while the woman shook her head. “We don’t know what’s wrong with Ms. Dare, so we’re erring on the side of caution.” The hazmat clad woman stepped aside and allowed them inside the townhouse into what would have been a grand foyer if it wasn’t covered in sheets of plastic. “Now if you would follow me I’ll take you to the patient and Mr. Dare.”

“Lead the way,” she shrugged, grabbing DG:HP’s hand. “You’re about to see one of your friends,” she whispered into the creature’s ear.

They were standing in the second-floor hallway waiting for the okay to enter the bedroom to see their patient and one of Avalon’s biggest supporters, when Brian leaned in close to whisper in her ear, “Are you seeing this freaky ass art? Looks like some Clive Barker shit.”

“How could I not?” she whispered back.

The hallway must have doubled as a viewing gallery for the girl’s numerous paintings, many of which were only a few months old if the dates on them were to be believed. Morgan wasn’t a parent and her childhood had been lackluster at best, but she was aware of the concept of parents proudly displaying their children’s artwork, but what sane person would show off something so dark and twisted.

_This must be that unconditional love I’ve heard about_, the witch gulped as she absorbed more details of surrounding artwork.

The earliest picture she saw depicted two black skeletons and a tree surrounding by a world on fire; the two skeletons had their jaws opened impossibly wide as if screaming in agony. The skeleton nearest to the blackened tree appeared to be grasping where its stomach would be, while the other seemed to be reaching out and trying to offer the other help.

Another water color had a golden trident sinking to the ocean floor with an arm cut off at the shoulder still clutching it. Golden blood leaked from the severed limb, mixing with the sea water, and illuminating the murky depths enough to show the giant coils of some aquatic reptile. Morgan initially thought the coils were no thicker than the severed arm, but a second glance at what she thought was a lone fish showed that it was a blue whale, meaning the serpent was impossibly large.

_Nope, that has nothing to do with Boston harbor! Nothing at all! Just a freaky coincidence!_
An oil painting depicting the gods Zeus, Hera, Athena, and Ares in classical Greek garb was next. The four sat at the end of a long table; Zeus at the head clutching his master bolt in one hand, his eyes glowing white with rage, and golden ichor dribbling down his chin. The queen of the gods stood behind her king, one hand on Zeus’ shoulder while the other held a bleeding heart. Hera was smiling at her husband, which Morgan thought was strange considering all the stories and reports of the royal couple’s unhappy marriage. Ares sat to the right of his king, his flaming sword sat on the table before him. The war god’s eyes were hidden behind a pair of sunglasses, but through the lenses small orbs of red could be seen. Ares’ ancient, blood red armor was gleaming almost as much as the god’s smile. Athena was to the left of her father; seemingly uninterested in the other gods. Before her was an abacus and a sheet of parchment; one hand seemingly writing down calculations with a quill while the other was on the ancient calculation machine. What made the portrait disturbing however was the mound of corpses before the table. None of the bodies were dressed the same, wearing clothing from every era of human history. On top of the pile the body of the god Apollo was splayed out. The god was wearing a simple toga, which was soaked in ichor; his heart seemingly ripped from his chest.

_That one does not leave much room for interpretation…_

Next was another watercolor, this time depicting the three Fates working on their ancient loom. At their feet were the shattered remains of other looms, broken needles, snapped embroidery rings, and other devices for weaving. The three were weaving a seemingly endless tapestry that repeated the same pattern over and over again. Instead of different strands of string, the loom was being fed hundreds, if not thousands, of people. The little figures were desperately clinging to each other, trying to pull themselves to safety only to be ensuring their fate and the fate of their neighbors to become a piece of the tapestry.

_So much for the Disney version…_

The last of the horrifying artwork was by far the simplest but somehow the most frightening. There was a solitary figure outlined in white in an otherwise pitch-black void. There was no detail on the figure; no hair color, no way to determine its age, not even any discerning features to tell if it was a man or woman. The strange thing was that the longer Morgan stared into the void, the more she was sure that there was something or somethings lurking in the darkness. Any time her mind would conjure up some detail of the lurking horror, they would be immediately forgotten as if her own magic trying to protect her from comprehending the eldritch nightmares.

“Mr. Dare will see you now,” another woman said softly, making Morgan nearly jump out of her skin.

“About damn time!” Brian groaned, yanking DG:HP by the hand into the bedroom.

Morgan spared one more glance at the dark void before following the three. _This girl is the oracle_, she reminded herself. _And I very much doubt she painted those for fun._

_“-it seems, that in tragedy, that innocence is not enough,”_ Mr. Dare sighed, closing a thick book on his lap.
The nurse had led Morgan, Brian, and Hazel into a cruel parody of a teenage girl’s room. The walls had been painted with a variety of murals, portraits, and seemingly random splashes of paint and were adorned with various knickknacks hanging off a variety of hangers and shelves. Sadly though, the walls were covered with more sheets of plastic, dulling the bright and vibrant colors underneath. A large picture window with a built in cushioned bench, perfect for reading or watching the street below, was covered up with sheets of metal; blocking all natural lighting. On a paint stained desk, where a laptop or school books should be, sat a defibrillator. Multiple beanbag chairs had been shoved to a corner to make room for oxygen tanks, boxes of catheters, crates of IVs, and other medical equipment. In the center of a room lay a giant bed, encased in an oxygen tent, with their clients within.

“So, you are agents Morgan and Percival?” Mr. Dare asked, standing up from a simple folding chair and exiting the tent. The real-estate mogul had aged considerably from when Morgan had first met at Merlin’s party only a few months ago. His fiery red hair had lost its vibrancy and splashes of gray were now more evident; the hair at his temples almost white. His green eyes had dark bags underneath them so dark, that Morgan wondered if someone had punched him in both eyes. “Merlin said he would send his best.”

“That’s us,” she said with a smile before Brian could protest the use of his codename. Dare looked to be in rough shape and did not need to be irritated by the engineer’s childish fits. “I do apologize for not getting here sooner, but I’ve been in the northwest tracking down an exceptionally powerful DG.”

In a surprising move, Dare grabbed her hand and gave it a squeeze. “Well you’re here now and that means Rachel is going to be okay!” the older man cried, his eyes begging her for reassurance. “You two know how to save my daughter right? Right?”

“She’s-“

“Yeah, she’ll be fine,” Brian announced, waving off the question as if it was an annoyance. “It’s just going to require a surgery. Errr, so to speak.”

_Smooth Brian. Real smooth._

The mogul’s grip on her hand tightened as a genuine smile spread across his face, probably the first one in a while Morgan imagined. “So you know what’s wrong with her? And how to fix her?”

“It’s pretty simple really,” the engineer shrugged. “At first, your daughter was simply experiencing the effects of our signal generators-“

“But you said the bracelet would counteract the effects!” Mr. Dare interrupted, holding up her arm and displaying one of signal canceling devices that allowed Morgan and DG:HP to travel Avalon controlled regions without dying.

“And it did,” Brian hissed. Morgan could tell the younger redhead was having trouble holding back his usual snide and rude remarks, but Merlin had threatened Brian to be on his best behavior while in Dare’s presence.

_And apparently his best behavior still leaves much to be desired_, she smiled to herself.

“My designs work just fine. Amazing even,” The engineer continued. “In fact, my designs are the only things keeping these two from bursting into flames right now!” Brian began to fidget around, curling his hands into fists. “What we didn’t know was the thing inside your daughter was going to eat her from the inside to try and get in contact with the Gs!”
The look on Dare’s face was one of confusion, and if he asked Brian to explain it, the engineer would likely berate him. *And we can kiss our privately-owned signal stations goodbye.* “Think of it this way sir,” Morgan said with her best smile, using a small portion of her power to make the man relax slightly. “When your phone barely has any signal, it works extra hard to try and find a stable connection, which in turn causes the battery to drain faster. That’s similar to what is happening with your daughter. The oracle inside of her is trying to get in contact with Olympus and the Fates, but is draining the life out of her doing so. Does that make sense?”

“Did- did you just compare my Rachel to a battery?!” the man seethed, his anger breaking through her spell like tissue paper.

Brian laughed and slapped her shoulder. “Leave the tech talk to the men Morgan.” The young engineer then wrapped one arm around Mr. Dare like one would an old friend. “I am so sorry about her. Morgan lacks the social skills functional adults like us have. That’s why Merlin tends to keep her out in the field away from VIPs such as yourself.”

*You know what? Fuck you both.* Morgan mentally gave them the finger, before grabbing DG:HP and leading them into the oxygen tent, pushing aside the plastic with a simple spell. What she encountered on the other side made her gasp.

Oh God…

On the bed was one Rachel Elizabeth Dare, but not the one in the pictures provided in their briefing. The girl in photos had long, thick red hair like her father, her skin covered in a galaxy of freckles, and seemed to radiate life from her being. The girl in the bed had none of those features. A blue knitted cap covered her head, her red mane had fallen out some time ago. Her skin was nearly translucent, the freckles had faded away. Rachel was so small and frail that Morgan wondered if the girl could even stand on her own anymore without collapsing under her own weight. Her eyes were closed and her breathing was labored even with the oxygen mask doing most of the work for her.

A small voice in the back of Morgan’s mind whispered that it was far too late to save Mr. Dare’s daughter, but another voice reminded her that others had said the same about her. Before she had made the foolish deal with Hecate. *She won’t survive as she is, but…* she looked at DG:HP and quirked an eyebrow with a satisfied smile, *a transplant of energy should increase the odds…*

Morgan grabbed the back of the subdued daughter of Pluto’s skull and dug her nails into its flesh, drawing blood. In the same instant, the serpent tattooed on her left arm sprang to life and slithered its way down her arm to the fresh blood. Blood magic was the most powerful of magics at her disposal, but the drawbacks typically outweighed the benefits. *But by using a somewhat willing source, it becomes pure gain.* The serpent began to drink the lifeforce from the demigod’s blood and Morgan felt a wave of power engulf her. *So, this is what the empousai feel when they feed! This is exhilarating! I didn’t know I could feel this good!* She dug her nails deeper into the creature’s skull, increasing the flow of blood. The serpents continued to gorge itself and its twin on her right arm began to writhe in jealousy.

She could have continued to feed like that until the demigod was nothing more than a husk, but she knew that Merlin had plans for the creature, and it would be hard to explain why she killed it. SO when she thought she had enough energy to give the oracle a jumpstart, she released DG:HP from her grasp, placed her right hand on Rachel’s chest, and released all the lifeforce she had stolen into the teen.

The effects were instantaneous; the girl’s eyes opened wide as her back arched.

“What are you doing to my daughter?” Dare cried, bursting through the tent with Brian by his side.

“And why is my pet bleeding?” Brian asked, looking with disgust as her blood drenched hand. “And
“Didn’t you just lecture me about not hurting it?”

“I’m just giving your daughter a fighting chance,” she smirked, as the frail teen weakly tugged the oxygen mask off her face. “And Brian, no one cares.”

Rachel tried to sit up, but her father already had her wrapped in his embrace. “Oh honey,” he kissed the girl’s forehead, “I knew you’d be okay. I’m so sorry I let you get involved with that Jackson boy, I should’ve sent you far away.”

“You’re all idiots,” the girl croaked. “You don’t know what you’ve done.”

“Yeah, I do,” Morgan said, wiping the blood off on the bedsheets. “But this was just a temporary boost to allow you to survive the real procedure.”

Rachel slowly shook her head. “No,” she croaked, “you don’t understand what is coming.”

“Honey, you’ve been brainwashed by some terrible monsters,” Mr. Dare explained, laying the weak girl back down. “Avalon knows what they are doing, and I’m sure with enough time you’ll make a full recovery.” He turned towards Morgan and Brian. “Right?”

“Yeah. Sure. Whatever,” Brian waved him off, his attention solely on the phone in his hand. “Yeah Morgan, could you hurry up and do your voodoo? Apparently, George needs us.” He held up the phone to her face, the screen displaying a picture of the now younger George laying on his back with a blonde girl crouched next to him. Both had heartwarming smiles, despite the fact that the head of security was down a hand. “Looks like he got what he wanted. Missing a hand though…”

“Forward that picture to me please.” Morgan was thrilled that George had found his daughter, as he deserved to have some measure of happiness in his life again. Besides Merlin, George had been the only man she had ever trusted and in term never used her abilities without his consent. If the proud father still had his severed hand then between her magics and Brian’s surgical skills there was a chance it could be reattached. But it’s still a race against time. “Mr. Dare I’m going to need you to step aside so I can cure Rachel.”

“Of course,” the man nodded, scrambling to get off the bed and out of her way. “Rachel when all this is over you can go to any art school you want. I’ll even move to be close by!”

The girl was about to say something, but Morgan shoved her hand into the girl’s chest. “All I have to do is remove the oracle and she’ll be back to normal.” The runes on her back flared to life as the serpent slithered its way into the former redhead’s soul. Rachel began to shake and gasp for breath; her father quickly covering her mouth with the oxygen mask once more. The serpent began to coil around the girl’s soul, and Morgan fed her familiar more power. The Oracle seemed to have become one with Rachel’s soul, but she could still identify the foreign spirit.

And so can my darlings, Morgan smirked as she pressed her other hand against the girl’s chest; the other serpent slithering in to join its counterpart. “I do apologize for any discomfort, but this is a cancer I’m dealing with and like chemotherapy this isn’t an exact procedure.”

Rachel screamed when the first serpent struck.

Chapter End Notes
We got to see Hazel and Rachel! Yay!... I think?

Ok let's be honest here, both girls are in terrible shape. Hazel is is trapped in her own body, and was just used as a battery. Rachel is withering away as the spirit inside her is trying to reach Olympus. I didn't realize it earlier, but they mirror each other; Hazel is suffering because of the mortals, while Rachel's suffering is brought upon by the gods.

Mr. Dare joined up with Avalon because of his daughter. There will actually be a chapter that details his exact reasons soon, but lets just say some things are genetic.

Morgan is a wildcard when it comes to her abilities. Hecate gave her with incredible knowledge as well as power, but at a high price. She is dedicated to Merlin and will use the darkest of her abilities to complete whatever task she is given. And now that she is done with this request she is ready to go back to tracking Piper again.

Rachel's art was really the highlight of the chapter (duh). Some of it was pretty on the nose with what it was depicting, while some is open to interpretation.

Or do I want you to think that? O.O

Oh we have so much fun!!!

Next chapter is Jason, which is long overdue. It will be a light hearted in tone, which is also overdue. It will have our three boys together and Jason is going to have his own agenda ;)

On another note, I have started writing out ideas for my next percico story. I don't want to give away much, but it involves parents.

Thanks for reading! I hope you have a great week! And be sure to leave a kudos and comment (in the unlikely event you've made it this far and haven't).
Chapter Summary

Warnings: minor spoilers for Justice League and Thor: Ragnarok

Tonight:

Jason chats with Leo,

Hades makes a few discoveries,

and Jason tries to help his brothers.

“Last night I woke up to screaming; which around here isn’t that unusual,” Jason groused as he jammed his spoon in the bowl of corn flakes in his hand. “But what is unusual is coming downstairs to find Hades, Nico, and Percy performing field surgery on Persephone on the kitchen table.” He paused to take another bite, and wished he had added another spoonful of sugar to the plain tasting cereal. “I mean, she’s fine, but I miss the days of nectar, ambrosia, and a few bandages.” The blond tried scraping the bottom of the bowl to find more sugar, but was sad to see all of it really had dissolved in the milk. “But I guess on the plus side I can rule out becoming a surgeon as a future career. Oh! Did I tell you my scratchboard won second place at the art show? “

Leo the pig cocked its head to the side and oinked.

“Yeah,” Jason smiled, setting his cereal down on the bale of hay he sat on to pull out his wallet. He carefully opened the frayed, brown wallet, one of the few things he had left of Piper (Don’t think about her) and his old life in general, and pulled out a gift card for Hobby Lobby. “It’s not much, but it felt really great to win something. Coach Sonders said that I should consider art school, but I’m not sure if that’s something I want to do.” I returned the gift card to its place in his wallet, then picked up his cereal once more. “Plus, I’m not even sure where I would get the money for that. I mean Demeter pays me better than anyone else my age, but that would barely even put a dent in the cost of tuition, and scholarships for art school are apparently next to impossible to get.” He paused for a moment, then started to chuckle. “Unless I can find get a scholarship for my basketball skills. The guys and even Mr. Z are starting to call me Air Grace.”

Leo stood up from and shook himself off like a dog; the pig was perfectly dry, but Jason had noticed that the pig sometimes mimicked some dog behavior. Where the pig had even seen a dog, Jason had no idea. Leo then walked towards Jason and rubbed his snout against the blond’s ankle, the pig’s way of begging for food.

“Yeah, yeah, I know you don’t listen to me for free,” he sighed, setting his bowl on the ground for his pet to lap up the sugary milk. “And don’t tell the others about this. They’ll just get jealous,” he warned the pig.

Leo oinked in response, not bothering to lift his head out of the bowl.

“One last thing,” Jason sighed, leaning back on the haybale. “Nico got his wish; he’s dating Percy.”

The brown pig began to choke on its milk.
“Right?” Jason laughed, as Leo took a step back and coughed. “Apparently they’ve been a thing for a while now.” He folded his arms behind his head shield himself from the itchy hay. “I mean, I’m happy for Nico, he deserves it.” He frowned and slowly shook his head. “But I have my worries,” he sighed. “We are the last demigods alive, and despite how often Percy and I bump heads lately, we are brothers. If something happens to break them up, which would probably be Percy doing something stupid, they won’t want to be around each other anymore. Which means that I would have to pick between them, and I don’t want to do that.”

Leo dug his snout in the bowl further, trying to lick up every last speck of sugar.

“So I guess if I want to avoid that, I need to help Percy not be an idiot like he said last night.” Jason stretched out and let out a loud yawn. “And that’s going to be a job in of itself. Right Leo?”

The small, brown pig looked up from the bowl and oinked in response.

“Leo, you are my Oprah,” Jason laughed, as he jumped off the haybale in one fluid motion. “If I didn’t know any better I’d think you’re actually Leo, but he’s chilling in Elysium.” He reached down and picked up the empty bowl. “Can’t forget this,” Jason chuckled. “Nico will have my head if I forget to bring in anymore dishes. He’d probably flip if he knew I was letting an animal eat from them.”

Leo grunted and turned away; apparently offended that he had been called an animal.

“Oh, come on! Don’t be like that!”

“Good morning Grace,” Hades greeted from the kitchen table. The former king of the Underworld (and Jason’s current legal guardian) sat at the large round table and looked completely exhausted. The man’s eyes were dark and sunken, and he was still wearing the same bloodstained clothes from the previous night. Before him scattered on the table was a mug of steaming hot tea, the dozens of pieces that were the remains of the strange object removed from Persephone, and the snapped in two cellphone Nico had brought back.

“G’morning Hades,” Jason greeted back, sitting down to unlace his work boots. “How’s Persephone?”

Hades sighed heavily and picked up one half of the broken phone. “She’ll live. Nico got her back before she was completely stripped of her divinity, so she was able to recover from most of the damage, but she’s still going to be out for a couple days.” The older man spun the broken electronic device in his hand before tossing it to Jason, the teen catching it with ease. “Tell me what looks off about that.”

Jason frowned and held the piece to his face. He wasn’t sure why Hades was asking him to look at it, as his experience with electronics was limited like most demigods; the closest thing he had done to electronic repair was swapping out a blown fuse on the Bronco. To him it looked like a pretty standard smart phone that most of his mortal friends had; white plastic case, a cracked touch screen, and a few physical buttons on the side. “It looks like every other phone I’ve seen,” he shrugged. “It’s even a name brand Big Apple Island.”

Hades smiled and nodded slightly, some life returning to his eyes. “Well you noticed one important detail, but take a look at the exposed circuit board.” The depowered god picked up the other half of
the phone and squeezed it in his fist. “It’s made of some… interesting materials.”

Jason looked again, this time focusing on the exposed interior. At first glance, it looked like the few other circuit boards he had seen; a green board with complex lines of metal covering it, tiny black boxes attached to it, and a few severed wires hanging limply. He traced his thumb along the cracked board, careful to avoid cutting himself on the thin strips of metal, when he felt a familiar tingling sensation. “Woah,” he gasped. “That’s Imperial Gold!”

Hades nodded and gave him a tired smile. “That is correct.” The held up his free hand and Jason tossed the phone back. “It seems that once again I have underestimated the enemy. The technology they have at their disposal is years ahead of anything I’ve ever seen.” Hades held up one half of the phone and pointed to a small black rectangle that had been snapped in two on the circuit board. “If you look closely, and I mean very closely, you’ll see that there are tiny little tube-like structures embedded in the silicon.”

Like I can see that from here, Jason thought as he nodded along. “Sooo, what does that mean?” he asked as he walked across the kitchen floor and sat in the chair opposite of the tired man.

Hades set the piece down and threaded his fingers together. “I can’t say for certain, but I believe we are looking at a quantum computer. Or at least a hybrid. Hephaestus himself struggled with designing a working model, but not only has Avalon created one, they miniaturized it as well!” Hades rested his forehead against his hands and looked as if he was praying. An awkward silence (for Jason anyway) descended on the kitchen and just as the blond was about to get up and leave the room, Hades raised his head and swiped up one of the pieces of the shattered cylinder. “And this… controller, I can’t even begin to guess how it works,” Hades sighed. “With the exception of a few channels for light to travel, it appears to be a solid object. No resistors, no capacitors, no integrated circuits, not even a spec of solder!” Hades tossed the piece onto the table, and Jason had to resist the urge to cringe at the loud noise. “I can’t even begin to imagine how this is possible!” The god then slammed his head down on the table.

Jason sat back in his chair and cringed. “Are you okay?”

“I’ve lost my powers, my wife and son were severely injured, I went from living in a palace to a farmhouse in the middle of nowhere, I live with three teenagers, two of which are trying to get in each other’s pants, I can’t share a room with my wife, I live with my mother-in-law who is also my sister, and let’s not forget there is a group of people that want all of us dead,” the lord of the Underworld rattled off without lifting his head. “Okay is optimistic,” Hades sighed.

“I am sorry; you know that right?” Jason wasn’t sure why he felt the sudden urge to apologize to Hades, but there were times where he felt guilty for retiring from being a demigod. A part of him said it was wrong to leave Nico and Percy hanging, but an equally large part was telling him he needed to step away for his own good. And Jason for the most part was glad he did; without the additional stress he could focus on overcoming his personal issues.

Hades rolled his head to the side so that Jason could see his face. “Jason, don’t think for a moment that I am upset with you. You reached your breaking point and needed to step aside.” Hades sat back up in his chair and pushed the pieces of electronics to the edge of the table with his arm. “That shows a lot of responsibility. A lot of maturity as well. I’m glad you told us then instead of in the middle of battle. Plus, it’s not like you’re not helping in your own way.”

Jason quirked an eyebrow in response. How?

“You help keep this place running, something that Demeter can’t stop talking about, which frees up quite a bit of time for the rest of us. The more farm and housework you do, the more time Perseus
and Nico have to train. You also keep them connected to the world; a job that used to belong to
Jackson. You are making friends at school, who in turn are trying to include Nico and Perseus in on
their activities. And you can’t even begin to imagine how important that social interaction really is.”

“Uh, thanks? I think?”

“Now there is one thing important I need you to do,” Hades groaned as he stood up from the chair;
Jason could hear the man’s knees popping. “And you can’t refuse this.”

Jason shrank in his chair. Great… “What do I have to do?”

The eldest son of Kronos pulled out a pitch-black wallet from his jeans and removed three equally
black credit cards and threw them on the table. “Get Nico and Jackson out of the house for the day,”
Hades sighed. “Persephone needs rest, and to be honest so do I. There’s a card there for each of you,
go see a movie or something on me.”

Jason picked up his card, his name in raised silver lettering. “Where do you keep getting money?”
the blond asked as he picked up the other two and stuffed them in his pocket. *Or are we living on
debt now?*

“With over two-thousand years of life, I’ve managed to create quite the diverse investment portfolio,”
Hades shrugged before yawning. “Now get moving.”

The son of Jupiter nodded and scrambled out of the kitchen.

Jason scurried up the stairs as fast as his legs would carry him (which must be a guy thing because
he, Percy, Nico, and even Hades rarely ever walked up them) and took a left turn into what was now
exclusively his and Nico’s room. “Hey guys Hades is kicking us out for the- woah…”

It was one thing to know that Percy and Nico were a couple, but another thing entirely to see it. The
two teens were sitting on Nico’s bed; Nico sitting on Percy’s lap with Jason’s laptop, while Percy
had his head in the crook of Nico’s neck, staring at the computer screen, with one hand was under
Nico’s shirt. They both looked incredibly comfortable like that, both wearing small smiles.

So of course, his arrival made Nico panic…

“Jason!” the son of Hades gasped, his face flushing. The younger teen tried to jump from Percy’s
lap, but the older boy wrapped his arm tighter around Nico to prevent his escape. “We- I- Just-
Homework,” Nico rambled off incoherently.

Percy laughed and pressed a kiss on Nico’s red cheek. “Babe, calm down. We weren’t doing
anything PG-13 or above.” The son of Poseidon kissed Nico’s cheek again before turning his
attention to Jason. “What’s up?”

He walked over to the bed and flopped down beside the couple, acting completely normal for Nico’s
benefit. Jason imagined that Nico sat in Will’s lap back at camp, but never so openly. “Hades wants
us out of the house today so Persephone can rest.” Jason said as he peaked at the computer screen to
see what Nico was doing. The screen was open to Nico’s homework, a mostly white screen similar
to a word processor with lines of seemingly gibberish. Nico had tried to explain programming to him
a couple times, but it went about as well as him explaining *World of Warcraft* to Nico.
“Wow, kicked out of the house before we’re eighteen,” Percy tsked, slowly shaking his head. “Whatever shall become of us?”

Nico rolled his eyes and tapped the son of Poseidon’s knee. “Don’t be so dramatic.” Then to Jason’s surprise, Nico leaned back into Percy. “So where should we go?”

Jason opened his mouth then quickly closed it. Dang, hadn’t thought about that part. I guess see a movie like Hades said?

“Anywhere but freaking Walmart,” Percy grunted. “I seriously need a break from Euryale and Stheno. I’m beginning to question my sanity since my best friend outside of you two is a jaded Gorgon who talks of burning her place of employment to the ground on a daily basis.”

“I was questioning your sanity long before that,” Nico smiled. Percy smirked devilishly at the son of Hades before the hand under Nico’s shirt began to tickle his stomach. Nico began to laugh and flail about (Jason grabbed his laptop before anything bad could happen to it), “Hey! Perc- stop it!” The frantic cries only seemed to spur Percy on, and Jason found himself smiling as well at the younger teen’s laughter, but then Nico’s eyes widened and he hissed in pain.

“Oh crap! Your stitches!” Percy cried, ceasing his tickling and pressing a kiss to Nico’s temple. “I’m so sorry babe!”

Nico placed one hand on his stomach and smiled at the both of them. “It’s fine, just no rough housing for a while.” The son of Hades then pulled Percy hand out from beneath his shirt and gave Percy a pointed look. “How about we go get our stuff ready for prom? We need to get tuxes, flowers picked out, and we could all use a haircut.”

Jason’s stomach dropped. He had been hoping that after the events of last night Nico would have abandoned his plans. Although he was getting a little more comfortable around women again (mostly Chelsea), Jason still panicked when a member of the opposite sex touched him; and as far as he knew there was a lot of touching involved with prom. Even if I go alone there are still going to be a people that will want to dance with me, and what happens when someone just grabs my hand? Will I have a panic attack right there? I don’t want a repeat of the diner! Maybe I can-

Jason was shaken from his thoughts by Percy punching his shoulder. “Relax bro,” the older teen grinned. “Let’s focus on something more important; like the fact Nico said he wants flowers.”

Jason expected Nico to blush and stutter, instead the youngest teen spun around and punched Percy in the gut. “And what’s wrong with wanting flowers? Hmmm?” Nico asked.

“Absolutely nothing,” Percy wheezed, clutching his stomach. “I love flowers! Flowers are the best! Whatever you want Neeks!”

Jason laughed rich and deeply and his friend’s discomfort. Percy’s right in his own way; I just got to focus on today.

“Oh come on Nico! I’ll get you whatever kind of flowers you want! They have black roses now! I think?”

April in Illinois was strange.
In the early morning the temperatures could be well below freezing, but by late afternoon they could reach up to the seventies. It could rain one day, then snow the next. The *Weather Channel* proved to be continuously useless and Jason’s mortal friends said that he should expect to experience all four seasons at least three times a week until mid-May.

*And that is somehow true…*

So here the three of them were, sitting in the Bronco bundled up for winter weather, but knowing full well that they would be shedding layers by the hour. With weather patterns like that, it was probably for the better that the truck’s AC was permanently stuck on high. Percy certainly wasn’t complaining, as the son of Hades was snuggled up against him for warmth; and Jason actually found himself happy to see the two of them lounging together. They chatted aimlessly about what ever popped into their ADHD minds. Homework, teachers, his pigs, the weird creaks the house made, Demeter’s scary snoring, and anything else that was happy and upbeat.

“Hey guys, can I ask you for some advice?” Nico asked timidly.

“Shoot Neeks, we would give you advice whether you asked or not,” Percy smiled.

“Whether it’s good or not is open to debate though,” he laughed as he turned off a gravel road onto a paved one, the ride getting considerably less bumpy. “But yeah, all you have to do is ask.”

Nico chewed on his lip for a moment, before adjusting Will’s sun hat on his head. “Persephone was acting weird last night.” The son of Hades paused and adjusted his position against Percy. “She was acting… nice.”

Jason and Percy shared a look. Even if it wasn’t Persephone, a god acting nice was one of the chief indicators of a trap. “And you bought it?” he asked, looking at Nico with disbelief. Nico never particular trusted any of the gods after the death of Bianca, a fact that was further cemented after the incident with Minos and then Eros.

“She’s just messing with you Nico,” Percy sighed, wrapping one arm around Nico. “And if she does it again, now that she is depowered, I will kick her face in.” The son of Poseidon snarled the last of his words with such ferocity that Jason knew it wasn’t just talk. Percy had lost everything and he wasn’t going to let anything happen to his new family without a fight, which Jason thought was nice in a weird sort of way.

Nico wiggled against Percy. “That’s what I thought too, but it was her change in demeanor was so sudden it just… I’m not sure how to describe it. Like she started off the night her typical bitchy self, she even hurt me once—”

“She DID WHAT?” both he and Percy shrieked in unison, as he slammed on the brakes. He turned to face Nico, not caring that they were stopped in the middle of the road, and looked him over. Nico had said that he had been shot by the same mortal who had tortured Percy, but now part of him was wondering if Persephone hadn’t somehow been responsible and only patched the son of Hades up to further mess with his mind. “What. Did. She. Do. To. You?”

Nico’s eyes widened. “Guys I’m fine, that’s not the issue here. What is the issue is what happened after.” Nico then told them about his strange dream of his childhood and his terrible grandparents (*Does any demigod actually have an extended family?*) and how his younger self and mother had been overjoyed at the sight of the goddess.

Once again, he and Percy shared a look. *Goddesses love to mess with memories apparently*…
Nico ignored them and continued on, explaining about waking up with his wounds tended to, how he had been covered in furs, discovering his shirt had been cleaned, how he had been guarded by a wall of thorns.

“Like Sleeping Beauty,” Percy chuckled. “Which you are,” the older teen added, before kissing the back of Nico’s head.

He rolled his eyes as he got the truck moving again. “Nice save Percy.”

Then Nico told them about the carnage Persephone had left; the bodies of the strange female satyrs, the giant wolves, and the Hunters of Artemis. Jason didn’t ask about Thalia, because he wasn’t sure he wanted to know. Then Nico told them the strange conversation he had had with his stepmother and how she had defended him against Artemis. “She seemed genuinely concerned about me and acting like she wants to make up for the past,” Nico concluded with a heavy sigh. “So what do you think I should do?”

“I think you should just ignore her,” Jason snapped, gripping the steering wheel tighter. “This is obviously some weird plan of hers designed to hurt you. Just thank her for patching you up and give her a wide berth.” He hit the turn signal a bit hard and clenched his jaw.

Every time I start to feel sorry for the gods, this shit happens to remind me that they are getting what they deserve! If Avalon wasn’t killing off demigods I’d sign up in a heartbeat!

“I think you should talk to her,” Percy said softly. Jason and Nico turned to look at the son of Poseidon, confusion etched on their faces. “In all likelihood Jason is right, but… I don’t know something just seems off about it.”

“Percy are you even listening to the words coming out of your mouth?” Jason asked. “Percy you of all people should be siding with me on this! What with Hera and Gabe.”

Nico cringed and Percy shot him a dark look that made Jason shrink in the driver’s seat. “I know,” Percy said, tapping his fingers idly on the passenger window. “But the way Nico told it, it sounds like Persephone was willing to die for him. Throw in the weird memories and her apologizing for everything she’s done and it just feels different from her typical crap.” Percy sighed and pulled his boyfriend closer. “Neeks I’m not telling you to start buying her Mother’s Day cards, let alone trust her, but I think this warrants more investigation. When she’s back on her feet I think you need to have a sit down with her, your dad too.” The son of Poseidon paused to take Nico’s hand in his own. “And this may be the stupidest thing I’ve ever said but, if you have the opportunity to expand your family, you should take it.”

The son of Hades nodded and squeezed his boyfriend’s hand back. “I think both of you made valid points. Would- Would you two mind being there when I talk to her?”

Jason reached over and grabbed Nico’s other hand. “Buddy for you, I’d be there with bells on.”

“And I would be there with a camera to take pictures of that,” Percy smirked.

They arrived in LaSalle shortly after their discussion on Persephone ended. LaSalle was a large town compared to both LaMoille (which didn’t take much) and Princeton. It was apparently where Percy
and Nico had their first date and according to the guys at school, had much more to do. There was a comic book and collectible shop, a mall with a movie theatre, several grocery stores, a few big box stores, various fast food joints, and a different Walmart.

But the first place they stopped at was a small barbershop that looked like it hadn’t been updated since it had opened, which according to the sign above the door was 1947. Outside attached to the building and next to a red neon sing was a barber’s pole; it’s red, white and blue stripes slowly spinning to invite customers in. The inside smelled of old cigars and disinfectant, which was oddly welcoming to Jason. The place was immaculately clean, with its white tiled floor reflecting everything above it, the barber’s stands free of all hair and organized with military precision, and the jars full of blue barbicide and grooming tools appeared to have been wiped down recently.

“This place looks like something from an old TV show,” Percy mused as he used his crutch to walk over to the small sitting area.

“No kidding,” Jason nodded in agreement, following the son of Poseidon with Nico trailing closely behind.

The store was pretty small inside; three old fashioned barber’s chairs occupied the center of the room, a small stand with a cash register stood by the entrance, and six chairs sat with their backs against the large windows. Sitting with their backs exposed like that was setting off alarms in Jason’s brain like crazy, but when he picked up an old copy of *Sports Illustrated* those alarms were replaced with stats for the 1984 *Chicago Bears*.

“So, which one of you boys wants to hop in the chair first?” The barber, a thin older man with a few remaining of gray hair asked as he emerged from the back room.

The three of them looked at each other. Percy shrugged, which Nico immediately imitated. “Looks like it would be me sir,” Jason said, tossing the ancient magazine back with its brethren. He hopped into the chair and in a surprisingly display of nimbleness, the old man draped a white sheet over him and spun the chair around to face the large mirror.

“What can I do for you today young man?” The barber asked, pulling a comb and a pair of scissors out of the blue disinfectant. “Flat top? Buzzcut? How about an undercut? Those are popular with kids your age.”

“I want a-“ he a paused as he was hit with a sudden realization. *I’ve never been given a choice before!* It was simultaneously exciting and deeply depressing. Depressing because he was seventeen and had been rocking the same haircut his entire life, curtesy of the legion’s barbers. But now though, now he had a choice! *But what to get*? “Umm, well I’m going to Prom in a week, what do you recommend?”

The barber, Floyd according to his nametag, stepped in front of him with one hand cupping his chin. “Hmmm,” the barber hummed. “You’re a little shaggy, but your head has a pleasant shape. How about a little off the sides and we tidy up the top?”

Jason leaned slightly to the left in the chair to look at the mirror. He squinted so he could see better and tried to imagine what Floyd was envisioning. “Yeah, that sounds nice.”

“You got the same freaking haircut you always do!” Percy laughed as they entered the mall.
“It’s different!” he snapped back, trying to slam the door in the son of Poseidon’s face. *Freaking safety doors... won’t let me slam it!* “I got a little more off the sides and the back is a little longer!”

“It looks nice Jason,” Nico smiled, gently patting him on the back. “And I can see the difference.”

*Great Nico is patronizing me... I’m not going to admit it’s the same though... “What about you though!”* He pointed to Percy accusingly. “You just got a trim!”

“And a shave,” the son of Poseidon chuckled, running a hand over his now stubble free chin.

“Like we could forget,” Nico scoffed.

Percy had been the last to receive his haircut, and the fussiest out of all of them, telling Floyd where to cut and how much to take off. The son of Poseidon even repeatedly said that his tuft of gray hair was strictly off limits, and that he didn’t care that the roots were starting to show. When at last the barber stepped away and spun Percy around, Jason and Nico were face-to-face with the normal Percy Jackson. Jason had thought they would just have to pay and then they could go, but then Percy announced to the world that he needed a shave, to which Floyd happily obliged by pulling out a straight razor.

Both he and Nico covered their faces as Percy bared his throat to the elderly man, only daring to peak between their fingers from time-to-time.

“Just trying to be smooth for my man,” Percy laughed, leaning heavily on his crutches.

“Next shave at home like a normal person,” Nico sighed.

“Maybe next time you can shave me,” Percy said, blowing Nico a kiss.

Nico turned bright red before walking away from the two of them. “Um, we better find the tux place...”

*What’s that about?*

—

“So, you’re telling me all three of you don’t know your measurements?” the girl behind the counter groaned, burying her face in her hands.

“I wear a large T-shirt if that helps,” Percy chuckled awkwardly. “And I’m pretty sure Nico wears a small.”

*How did he survive two wars?* Jason thought as he hung his head down in embarrassment. The son of Jupiter felt bad for the girl, truly he did, the small *Seno* shop was absolutely packed with guys their age and their parents, all of them trying to pick out their own tuxes and all the little odd and ends that went with them. In the back of the shop near the dressing rooms was a frazzled middle-aged man with a measuring tape and a pad of paper, frantically taking measurements and writing them down. It was a Sisyphean task as the line the man was dealing with actually exited the store.

The woman pulled out three pieces of paper and handed one to each of them. “Go pick out what color tux and vest you want, the style of cufflinks, the shoe style and size, any corsages, hats, and canes; and write down the number in the corresponding column on the forms. Then get in line and
have John take your measurements. When you are all done bring the forms to me and I will place you order. Understand?"

“Yes ma’am,” Nico gulped, taking Percy’s sheet so the raven-haired teen could walk easier.

The three of them then slowly made (fought) their way over to the sample section, with Nico in the lead and Jason in the rear to act as a buffer against other people for Percy. The store was maybe only thirty feet wide, but it took them well over five minutes to get to the samples and another ten before enough people cleared away so that they could actually look at their options.

“I am getting a purple tux and no one can tell me no,” Percy laughed as he grabbed the hideous Royal Purple jacket.

“No,” was all Nico said, as the son of Hades examined a standard black jacket.


Jason had been quite vocal in his displeasure about going to the dance, and had originally decided that he would just get the basic black tux. But now looking at the options a part of him was saying that he should at least go in style, and a sky-blue vest looked pretty awesome. “I’m thinking black, but that vest over there is speaking to me,” he said pointing to the blue garment.

Percy and Nico looked at the vest and nodded in silent agreement, before Nico walked over and pulled the piece of clothing down. The son of Hades then walked over and held the vest against Jason’s chest and looked him up and down. “It brings out your eyes Jace,” Nico smiled.

“Yeah man, it looks good on you,” Percy agreed. “Just like a purple suit would look good on me,” the son of Poseidon added.

Jason leaned in close to the pouting teen and whispered, “Remember how you asked for help with Nico? Well this is probably one of those things you should drop.”

It took over four hours for the three of them to get measured and have their orders placed, putting them firmly in the afternoon and hunger in their bellies. Percy had insisted that the mall should have a food court based on experience, but a slow lap around the large structure proved fruitless. Apparently, the mall had once boasted a Sears and a JC Penny, but they had shuttered their doors a few months prior, and in the months that followed most of the smaller shops had closed as well. There was still a Bergners and a Marshalls, but their food options were limited to a Didough’s Pretzels, the movie theatre concession stand, and a shady Japanese grill that was clearly bribing the health inspector to stay open. None of those options appealed to them, so they decided to head back to the truck and drive to a McDonalds.

However, on their way back to the truck, Jason did notice something peculiar about Nico. While the son of Hades did stay near Percy, he showed any signs of intimacy with the son of Poseidon. Granted with the crutches it wasn’t like they could hold hands and skip down the deserted corridors, but every now and then Percy would try to lean in for a kiss only for Nico to turn away at the last second. Jason knew that Nico wasn’t mad at Percy over the suit, so what’s the deal here?

With no real options and no clues, Jason did the only thing he could do: he observed. The three of
them chatted amongst themselves easy enough, but he started to notice little nervous ticks in the son of Hades. Nico’s eyes were darting back and forth as if searching for something, his body was tight and rigid in movements, and he seemed to jump slightly when the volume of their steps changed.

Jason wanted to facepalm when he realized what the problem was. *Of course! I’m an idiot!*

While Nico was openly out at camp, the son of Hades had never really interacted with Will outside the magical boundaries. Sure, Jason knew the two of them had snuck out for a burger a few times, but he was willing to be that Nico never showed any affection towards Will in the mortal world and Will was too nice enough to push the issue, well at least in that point of their tragically short relationship. So the fact was, Nico was still trying to hide himself in public.

*But not anymore!* It was kind of mean on his part, but he increased his speed to catch up with the son of Hades and draped his arm across the younger boy’s shoulders, forcing him to stay with Jason. He then slowed their pace so that Percy was next to them. Jason pretended to not notice Nico’s discomfort, and instead joined Percy in pointing out weird items in the window displays, like a set of knockoff samurai swords and a Kermit the Frog beanie. And as they walked and talked, Nico slowly began to loosen up, he even joined in and pointed out a display of neon crazy straws (Percy urged him to buy them with the new credit card Hades gave them).

The moment of truth came just as they turned down the final hallway that would take them out to the parking lot. Percy had just remarked about a pair of thigh high heels for men, which for some reason made Nico found particularly hilarious; when Percy struck like a cobra and caught the son of Hades lips with his own.

Jason felt Nico stiffen up and try to pull away, but the son of Jupiter *may* have pushed the son of Hades closer to Percy. He felt Nico began to relax just as the two broke for air. The son of Hades was practically glowing, which made Jason happy; his little brother deserved to be happy. But then reality kicked in and the younger boy began to look around frantically, as if he was expecting one of the nearby mortals to attack.

“Nico it’s okay,” he said just allowed enough so Percy could hear as well. “No one cares.”

“And if they did, we don’t need them,” Percy added, leaning in closer. “Love is love.”

Jason thought it was kind of a cheesy thing to say, but apparently that was all Nico need to hear. The son of Hades shrugged off Jason’s arm and caught Percy with a kiss of his own; tears streaming down his face.

As he watched his two adoptive brothers, cousins, and best friends express their love Jason realized he needed to protect them. He needed their love to last not just for their own sake, or even for his own reasons, but because this would be the only love he would see for the rest of his life. Piper was gone, as was Leo, and after Disciplina, Jason wasn’t sure he could ever love again. *But this, this is fine.*

*McDonalds* turned to *Applebees*, which was okay with Jason. The restaurant was a step above the fast food joint in terms of food an atmosphere. They ordered a sampler of appetizers to start with, and then another when they discovered Nico could practically swallow mozzarella sticks whole (Percy couldn’t stop staring whenever the son of Hades shoved a stick down his throat) and was quite keen
on honey barbecue chicken wings. For their entrees Percy ordered some boneless buffalo wings and
fries, Nico ordered a burger, and he ordered a quesadilla burger (which was incredible). The three of
them picked off each other’s plates, and Jason swelled with pride when Nico and Percy agreed that
they should’ve ordered the quesadilla burger as well.

After that the moseyed back to the mall, this time with the movie theater as their destination. They
couldn’t decide on what movie to see, even when they narrowed down their choices to either *Thor: Ragnarok* or *Justice League*, but Percy pointed out that the latter started again fifteen minutes after *Thor* finished.

So, they did the only sensible thing: they bought tickets for both.

They stocked up on overpriced drinks and candy from the concession stand even though they had
just ate and stormed the theatre as if they were invading conquerors. They sat down in the middle of
the theatre, with Nico in between the two of them, but when the final preview ended at no one else
entered the dark room, they moved to the handicap seats. Jason kind of felt bad for that, but he
assured himself that if someone actually needed them they would move.

For the next ninety minutes they laughed like hyenas and Jason’s sides were actually hurting when
the credits began to roll. As they cleaned their garbage up, they didn’t really have a conversation,
only repeating their favorite quotes from the movie.

“I just hit her with the biggest lightning bolt in the history of lightning and it did nothing!” he
repeated in his best impression of Thor.

“I was falling! For thirty minutes!” Nico hissed, his Loki impression absolutely flawless.


They made a quick trip to the restroom to empty their soda filled bladders before returning to the
snack bar for even more sugary fluids. As they walked to the next theatre though, Percy squealed
like a little girl when he saw that there was a slurpee machine. The son of Poseidon hopped back to
counter and bought the largest cup they had for the frozen concoction. Percy did pick up two straws
as well, but it seemed that Nico was just fine sharing the older teen’s straw.

Percy and Jason concluded that *Justice League* was okay, but it was definitely missing something for
it to be considered good. The only part Percy had got excited about was the end credits scene where
Slade Wilson casually met with Lex Luthor. Jason was disappointed with the lack of Aquaman in the
movie, as all the trailers made him look awesome. Heck, he had even met the actor the first time he
stayed at Piper’s house.

Sadly though, they would have to wait for Nico’s review, as the younger teen had fallen asleep just
before the CGI villain flooded the tunnels under Gotham city. Jason would wager though that Nico
probably wasn’t going to give it top marks.

He and Percy sat in the theater until the projector turned off and the lights turned on. They tried to
wake the younger dark-haired boy up, but Nico just stubbornly turned over in the padded chair with
a slight fuss.

Without any other clear option, Jason carefully picked up the sleeping son of Hades and carried him
out of the theatre with Percy following behind. It took a little bit of maneuvering to get the truck door
open and Nico safely buckled up, but somehow, he and Percy managed it.

“I kind of forgot that he was up all night as well,” the son of Poseidon whispered as Jason climbed
into the truck. “I’m actually surprised he managed to stay awake as long as he did.”

“What about you?” Jason asked as he buckled his seatbelt. “You were up all night waiting for him.”

Percy shrugged and ran his fingers through the sleeping boy’s thick, freshly cut hair. “I don’t know man, when I’m with him I just feel so energized. Like I shouldn’t even blink or I’m going to miss something incredible. Does that make sense?”

Jason fired up the Bronco and shifted it into gear, the vehicle jerking forward. “It doesn’t matter if it makes sense to me Perce. All that matters is that it makes sense to the both of you.”

It was hard to tell in the dark, but he thought he saw Percy smile. “Thanks Jay. You made our second date pretty awesome.”

“I didn’t-“

“Shut up Jason, you helped more than you know.”

Jason laughed and they drove home to the relaxing sound of Nico’s breathing.
“And that should do it,” the tiny black spider on Piper’s leg announced proudly. “You’ll have full mobility of your leg and this new spider-silk cast is as light as a feather.” The spider rubbed it forelegs together and spun around to examine her work. “I will admit that I could have done better if I still had my spindle and loom, but I’m sure if you have your friends sign it, it will be beautiful to you.”

“I think it’s absolutely stunning as it is,” Piper smiled down at the spider. She wanted to reach down and gently pet the ancient arachnid, but stopped short as she didn’t want to accidentally squash the Hopi goddess. Yeah… The four of us are on thin ice as it is and I have a feeling ‘it was an accident’ ain’t going to fly well around here.

“Thank you so much for your aid, Kokyangwuti,” Bambi, the young matriarch of the deer woman said with a slight bow to the spider goddess.

“Yes, thank you cocky- cokay- Spider Grandmother,” Reyna finished with an exasperated sigh. “We, and New Rome, owe you a great deal.”

The spider leapt from her leg and before their very eyes morphed into an elderly Native American woman. Her face was lined with age, but her eyes were full of life and just a glint of mischief. The goddess had long white hair that was held into a loose bun with a pair of knitting needles. Her body was thin, long, and slightly hunched over. And much to Piper’s approval, she was wearing a sweet WWE T-shirt featured The Rock, a pair of loose fitting sweatpants, and some kickass Hello Kitty crocs. “I don’t want anything you so-called New Rome has to offer,” Kokyangwuti snapped at Reyna. “After what they did to our people… and with textiles no less!”

Piper had to bite on her fist to stop herself from laughing at Reyna’s discomfort as Spider
Grandmother once again went off on how the Romans had killed thousands of people with germ warfare. In the few days since their late-night arrival to the remote bed, breakfast, and art colony, the goddess had been so kind to her, Veronica, Bambi, and Awinita. But from the second Reyna introduced herself as Praetor of the legions of New Rome, Kokyangwuti had been hounding her in the way only a disapproving grandmother could. *I bet after this Reyna is going to stop with the ‘I'm praetor of New Rome’ thing and just stick to ‘hi I'm Reyna’.*

“-and Custer was the biggest idiot I’ve ever seen!” Spider Grandmother cried, poking Reyna repeatedly in the chest, slowly backing her against the bedroom wall.

*This place freaking rules!*

“So, what’s the game plan now?” Piper asked Reyna in between bites of meat free chili. “Do we bust out of here or wait?” It was just the four of them sitting on the queen-sized bed eating a late dinner, it was also the first time they had been left alone in the three days since they arrived.

It had been a cramped ride with the addition of Bambi and her grandmother in Betty White as they had sped away from Artemis and the mortals. Atlas and Veronica had been driving, but with Reyna unconscious the daughter of Aphrodite had elected to sit in the back with the others to keep close tabs on Reyna. Bambi had crawled over the backseat, into the mountain of supplies, and distributed what first aid equipment they had so that they could tend to their wounds. Veronica drive for hours, without any destination in mind, all that mattered was increasing their distance from the hellish inferno they had narrowly escaped from. When the sun had just begun to peak over the horizon Bambi hopped into the passenger’s seat and hijacked Betty’s GPS system, promising them a safe have. A few hours of automated directions from a British talk show host later, they found themselves at the gates of Skyweaver Ranch.

Reyna looked up from her bowl and sighed. “Our objective remains the same, but I feel like it is impossible for us to just drive across country at this point.”

Veronica and Atlas nodded as they swallowed a mouthful of chili. “I think you’re right,” Atlas agreed, for once his booming voice quiet. “Fate is intervening for reasons we can’t comprehend.”

The hybrid’s flaming eyes flashed, signaling Veronica was now in control of the shared body. “This is our *Odyssey* boys and girls,” the daughter of Mercury sighed. “Let’s just hope it doesn’t take ten years to get home.”

They sat there in relative silence for a few minutes, the only sound being Atlas’ loud chewing and the occasional clink of metal on glass. They all had the same thought, but none of them dared to say it aloud: is the Greek camp even there?

All evidence seemed to point to no in Piper’s opinion. Before she even knew of Avalon’s existence she couldn’t contact anyone back at camp; through magical or mortal means. There was Mr. D, the former camp director and general creep who was currently chilling in Veronica’s stomach. Then there was Artemis who said she was going to kill off all remaining demigods for whatever insane reason. Piper wasn’t good at math, but she knew that all those negatives did not add up to a positive.

*But Thalia did say Jason wasn’t at camp.* That thought was one of the two things that allowed her to keep an upbeat attitude; the other being her dad was still alive and well. Most likely confused and
worried, but alive and well. “Well at least the *Odyssey* had a happy ending,” she said, offering the other three a snarky half-smile.

“Yeah, for Odysseus,” Reyna shot back.

“If that’s the case I’m calling it now; I’m Odysseus,” Veronica announced, raising her hand in the air. “Dibs.”

“Bull crap! If anyone’s Odysseus it’s me!” Reyna declared, glaring at the others. “I’m the military leader and I paid a pivotal role in ending a war!”

Piper pushed the praetor’s shoulder, nearly sending the Latina tumbling off the bed. “Please I’m Odysseus!” she laughed, smugly pointing at her chest with both thumbs. “I was a war hero and I’m trying to get back to the love of my life.”

And she regretted those words the second they left her mouth, as the brief moment of silliness ended with Reyna looking down into her half-eaten bowl of chili. “Yeah. Yeah, I guess you are Odysseus.” Reyna then climbed off the bed, careful not to spill the bowl in her one remaining arm. “I’m going to get some fresh air and think of a plan.” The praetor then turned away and quietly slipped out of the room.

“You two really need to talk,” Veronica said, reclining back on the bed’s thick green comforter.

Piper continued to stare at the bedroom door and frowned. “Yeah, but what the hell can I say to make it better?”

“Please don’t hurt. Please don’t hurt. Please don’t hurt,” The daughter of Aphrodite repeated as she began to put some weight onto her newly bandaged leg. It wasn’t that Piper doubted the spider goddess’ craftsmanship, on the contrary it was her own body she was worried about. Running around on a broken leg, even with a cast (magical or otherwise) was definitely a big no-no. Now she was worried that she had somehow done permanent damage to her leg. *And if that's the case, I'm suing Artemis!*

There was some discomfort as he straightened out her knee, but it wasn’t anything that she couldn’t live with. “Alright!” Piper whooped, wiggling her toes in triumph. She released her grip on the bed and took a tentative step forward. When she didn’t fall she took another, then another, and then another, until she was halfway across her room. “Yeah, I got this,” she smirked.

Piper turned around and walked to the small bag that held a few changes of clothes at the foot of her bed. The clothes were from the Roman supply depot they had looted back in California, which seemed like an eternity ago. *Ugh, this really is turning into the Odyssey...* She removed a pair of sweatpants and a purple and blue tie-dyed T-shirt and tucked them under her arm, before walking out of the room.

Skyweaver ranch was catered to tourists who wanted to see the grandeur of Yellowstone, experience a working ranch that had over three-hundred head of American Bison, and watch artisans perform their craft, while all the while not abandoning any of the conveniences of the modern world.

It was pretty much the kind of place her dad’s friends would stay when they wanted to ‘rough it’.
The ranch grounds had several barns and storage sheds to store feed, tractors, and the like, several authentic bunk houses where the guests stayed, a large outdoor kiln, stables, a giant stone pavilion where Kokyangwuti weaved one-of-a-kind tapestries before a crowd, and a giant house made of old growth lumber and glass where the workers stayed and people gathered in the evenings in front of a large stone hearth.

And we’re staying in the big house, Piper smiled. There is always a big house.

She closed the door to her room quietly and began her slow march down the hallway. There were eight other bedrooms down the same hall as her, but only Atlas and Veronica got a room besides Piper. Reyna had to sleep in the stables, and she was pretty sure the only reason Atlas and Veronica were allowed inside was because Kokyangwuti didn’t trust the Titan to be left on their own.

Can’t say that I don’t understand, she thought with a shudder.

The daughter of Aphrodite slowly made her way down the hall, her ADHD absorbing every little detail. Chandeliers made of discarded deer antlers hung from a vaulted ceiling to illuminate her path. Every door had an animal engraved into them; a grizzly bear and her cubs, a salmon leaping up a waterfall, a majestic eagle midflight, a spider and its web, a cougars lounging on a log, a bison standing on the prairie, a jackrabbit hiding in the bushes, and a coyote howling at the moon. While the engravings were finely detailed, they couldn’t hold a candle to the immaculate silk tapestries that hung on the walls between each room.

Like literally, don’t hold a candle to them. They would burn and Spider Grandmother would probably eat me.

Annabeth had once told her about the jaw dropping silk tapestries in Arachne’s lair, but Piper was positive that the ones before her now were as good, if not better, than anything the cursed weaver could produce. The tapestry next to her room had a picturesque blue sky with big fluffy white clouds, overlooking a vast field of golden prairie grass with Bison grazing throughout. What separated that scene from a typical Bob Ross portrait was that everything seemed to move.

The tails on the Bison twitched to shoo away bothersome insects and their heads would disappear into the amber waves to take a bite. The clouds slowly rolled across the sky and off in the distance the sky darkened as if a storm was approaching. The prairie bent to the unseen and unheard breeze and snap back into position when it passed.

Piper whistled and gingerly touched one of the bison, which quickly scurried away along with all its herd. “This is some Hogwarts shit right here,” she whispered as she ran her hand across the field, flattening a good portion of the grass. “Er… It was like that when I found it,” Piper awkwardly chuckled, slowly backing away.

Continuing her slow trek down the hall, she observed more tapestries. A school of salmon swimming up a stream. Snow softly falling on a mountain peak. A hidden alcove where a boy and a girl played in a natural spring. Two bear cubs rolling on the woodland floor as their parent slept on a nearby log. All of them so full of life and peace, that Piper felt like she should get a pair of Timberlands and flee into the surrounding woods.

But first, I need to find a bathroom. I’ve had to pee since noon and my BO could be considered a chemical weapon by the United Nations....

She got to the end of the hall and turned right. The blonde daughter of Athena had once told her that if she was lost in a maze, always turn right as the human subconscious preferred right over left. Piper had then asked her what if the person was left handed or if they took that fact into account when
designing the maze, and Annabeth promptly told her to shut her mouth. That and the fact that to the left was a staircase going up to what had to be the attic, and to the left was a staircase going down to the ground floor.

*It’s little tidbits like that that influence my decisions. That and gut feelings.*

She walked down the stairs, holding the intricate designed railing just in case her leg decided to give out on her then. The daughter of Aphrodite looked over the curved staircase and saw a small log table with an open register for guests to write down their thanks to the staff, and she flashed back to the night she had been forced to flee from her very home.

And how Reyna had saved her.

Piper stopped her descent and let out heavy sigh of frustration. “Gods damn it Reyna….”

Her friendship (*If we ever actually had one*) with the proud Roman was in troubled waters. If their only problem was Reyna thinking Piper withheld the existence of The Nation and the deities and creatures that composed it they could work pass that. She hadn’t told Reyna because she herself wasn’t sure they existed. *A giant bird and an elderly couple is hardly evidence of the existence of another world.* But Reyna’s feelings about Jason complicated things.

“But just what are her feelings?” Piper whispered in the darkness. Did Reyna still have feelings for Jason? Did she blame Hera? What about Aphrodite? How suspicious was it that Jason would start dating a daughter of the same goddess who told Reyna they weren’t meant to be?

Piper released her grip on the banister and buried her face in her hands. “Crap!” she groaned. “Reyna said I stole Jason from her, didn’t she?!” She began her descent down the stairs once more. “How the fuck do I fix this?” she hissed. *Do I say “hey Reyna, really sorry how my mom and Hera fucked you over, but I really like Jason. Here’s a gift card to Starbucks as a consolation”? I’m not going to break up with Jason though just to give her a chance. And it’s not like I can share Sparky with her; I mean, Jason isn’t that kind of guy…*

A chill shot up Piper’s spine as her barefoot made contact with the chilled stone floor. “Holy crap that’s cold,” she cried, pulling her foot back onto the step. “Ugh,” Piper groaned, massaging her temples. “This is the kind of thinking I need to do after I’ve freshened up.”

She stepped down onto the floor, this time prepared for the cold. The daughter of Aphrodite padded silently across the great room, only stopping to examine the wide variety of fur rugs that littered the room; as she couldn’t shake the feeling that they were watching her with glass eyes.

*First rule of being a demigod: everything is magic and it wants to kill you,* Piper thought as she walked over a giant Grizzly bear fur. She made it across the room without being mauled by a single piece of décor, and opened a door to what she thought would take her to another hallway (and hopefully a shower).

However, much to her disappointment, she found herself inside a small rec room. The walls were covered with the same ugly wood paneling that had been in Grandpa Tom’s study; and various posters of movies and bands were taped to them along with a dart board and a whiteboard with work schedules scrawled on. The floor was covered in a hideous, stained, red shag carpet, which made Piper regret not putting a sock on her one bare foot. A beat up black leather couch and matching recliner faced a giant flatscreen TV that hung on the wall; the lower left corner of the screen cracked. On the screen, professional wrestling was playing with the sound on mute. A small desk occupied the space on the other side of the room, and at it sat Bambi, who was fast asleep and covered in tiny little hummingbirds.
“Poor kid,” Piper whispered.

Since their arrival, Bambi had been working around the clock, sending messages to the council and trying to locate all the survivors of the fall of Home. The young deer woman was also the only reason why Piper and her friends weren’t officially locked up, as the matriarch had vouched for them and explained to the council how their actions had helped save lives. They were still under house arrest, but considering the fourteen-year-old had got them off that easy was rather impressive.

*I better wake her up. Sleeping in a chair like that is going to leave her sore in the morning.* Piper took a step forward with her right leg, and the floor creaked beneath her weight.

“Will you walk into my parlor said the spider to the fly?” a deep voice laughed ominously in the darkness.

Piper wanted to shriek, but found herself unable to, what with her heart in her throat and all. *I’m going to fucking die…* She slowly spun around, and saw that the recliner she had thought was empty in fact was not. For in it sat a small spider holding a cigarette in one of its many legs.

“I’m glad you didn’t scream,” Kokyangwuti sighed, the goddess’s form shifting from spider to human in the blink of an eye. Spider Grandmother took a long drag from her cigarette and flew four rings of smoke. “That poor girl needs to sleep.”

“I was just going to tell her to go to bed,” Piper croaked, her heart beginning the slow decent back to its proper place. *And you better stay there!*

The elderly goddess took another drag as she eyed Piper suspiciously. “Is that so? And just why are you out of bed at this time of night?”

Piper felt a little defiant under Kokyangwuti’s gaze and for some strange reason the thunderbird feather in her hair pulsed with power as if urging her on. “I smell like a horse’s ass, one of the girl’s I’m traveling with may hate me, I have group of mortals on my ass, a goddess just tried to kill me, and I watched my boyfriend’s sister get impaled, so I could really fucking use a shower.” She gestured to the bundle of clothes tucked under her arm. “Unless that’s a problem.”

For an instant Piper thought she was spider food, but the anger in the Hopi goddess passed in an instant and the goddess gave her a wrinkled smile, before giving a throaty chuckle. “You got spunk kid!” Kokyangwuti laughed. “I can see why old bird brain picked ya! Now pull up a seat and let’s have a nice long chat.” The older woman gestured to the beat-up couch.

“I just said I smelled like horseshit, doesn’t that bother you?” Piper grumbled as she stalked to the couch. Instead of sitting down like a guest should, she flopped down like she would her own home.

Kokyangwuti removed the knitting needles from her long white hair, causing her hair to tumble down to her shoulders. “Horseshit is underrated,” The goddess chuckled. She touched the needles tips together and a strand of glowing silver thread appeared between the them. “It is a fine fertilizer for the land, it can deposit seeds into the earth, and the smell can attract yummy flies.”

“You don’t really eat flies, do you?” Piper asked with mild disgust as she sprawled out on the couch; one leg hanging to the ground while she propped her cast covered leg onto the sagging armrest. “And what do you mean by ‘old bird brain picking me’?” She folded her arms under her head.

“Everyone keeps making a big deal about this feather, but I still don’t know what it means.”

The old woman balled up a freshly knitted pair of socks and summoned up more glowing thread. “So Awinita and Disney over there haven’t told you squat yet, eh?” The woman tied off severed the
thread with her teeth and folded a blanket she had just made in moments before setting it on top of the socks. “Tell me, what do you know about me?”

The black feather pulsed with static electricity. “Oh look, a goddess changing the subject to herself. How original…” She reclined her head back and took in a deep breath. *Time to go Annabeth-mode.*

“You are Kokyangwuti, also known as Spider Grandmother. And according to a book I jacked from the Ennis Public Library, you’re the Hopi creator goddess. You made the Hopi out of clay and led them from the land of the divine to the Fourth World, Earth. The book said that you were also a benefactor to humanity.”

The white-haired goddess finished knitting a stocking cap and set it on top of the blanket and socks. “So not much,” Kokyangwuti smiled, setting her needles aside to light another cigarette. “But sometimes less is more. You have no preconceived notions,” The weaver began to mumble to herself, her head bouncing side to side as if arguing with herself. “I couldn’t have weaved it better myself!” she laughed.

*That’s probably not good…*

“Here,” Spider Grandmother said, tossing Piper the socks, blanket, and hat. “Put those on, the night is cold,” The goddess announced, getting up from the recliner. In an instant, the goddess’ hair worked itself back into a bun and Kokyangwuti shoved her knitting needles back in it.

“What? Why?”

Kokayangwuti narrowed her eyes and took another drag. “We’ve got a wacan to meet; and I can’t let the Gayegogi catch a cold,” the goddess announced as a spider silk shawl appeared on her ancient shoulders.

Piper blinked. “There were a couple words in there that I-“

The goddess clapped her hands in Piper’s face. “Come on kid! We got a narrow window of time here!”

*My life is crazy,* the daughter of Aphrodite thought as she scrambled to get off the couch. *Absolutely crazy.*

“You’re letting two old women beat you!” Awinita cackled, Piper struggled to keep pace.

Kokayangwuti looked over her shoulder, her cigarette illuminating her wrinkled face in an eerie glow. “it’s pathetic really. Get your ass in gear there girly.”

Piper stopped walking and leaned against one of the stone walls that lined the trail to the pavilion; her chest heaving as she tried to suck in as much precious oxygen as possible. “I’m wearing a cast!” she panted. “I’d like to see you do better.”

The elderly deer woman spun around in her wheelchair. “Really?”

“Millennials…” The weaver goddess grumbled. “Always complaining about how hard they got it. Makes me wonder if he really was meant to be the last Gayegogi.”
The deer woman rolled herself next to Kokyangwuti and slugged the goddess in the forearm. “Despite her lineage, Piper is perfect for the role. It’s only because of her and her friends we even got of Home alive.”

Piper took one more deep breath and started walking again. The normal path to the pavilion wasn’t that long, but since Kokyangwuti insisted they bring the wheelchair bound Awinita with them, they had to take the handicap path which was three times longer, as it wrapped around the hill the pavilion sat on. “So just what is this gay yogi you two keep talking about?”

“I thought you said you were Cherokee?” The elderly matriarch asked without turning to face her.

“And have some patience,” Kokyangwuti sighed as they rounded the last corner. “We need one more to properly tell this story.”

They walked up the rest of the path in silence, the only sound coming from the wind blowing through the surrounding forest. The night sky was clear, allowing for the moon and stars to illuminate the open-air pavilion.

And in the center of the stone floor, on a white buckskin, sat a girl not much older than Piper. The girl’s skin was dark, earthy, and so flawless, that Piper believed that even Calypso would be envious. She had long black hair that was held in a tight ponytail by a rainbow’s worth of rubber bands. Her hands were working red clay into a long, thin cylinder; which made the fact she was wearing a pure white outfit even more impressive.

“Piper Mclean, this is Ptesanwi,” Spider Grandmother announced, strolling over to the girl. “Ptesanwi, Piper Mclean.” The elderly creation goddess slowly sank down to the ground, her bones popping and creaking with each movement. “She’s the new Gayegogi that has the council pissing themselves; and frankly I like her.”

“Me too,” Awinita agreed, apply the brakes on her chair and pushing herself out and onto the ground. “She’s got spunk and if she’s anything like the last Gayegogi, she’s exactly what the Nation needs.”

“Is that so…” The girl said, finally turning to look at the daughter of Aphrodite. Ptesanwi may have looked to be around sixteen years of age, but the second Piper saw the wacan’s dark brown eyes, she knew that the girl was far older than she appeared. “Well it’s nice to meet you Ms. Mclean, please take a seat.”

“One step ahead of you,” Piper sighed with relief as she sank to the ground between Awinita and Kokyangwuti. “And I’m sorry if this sounds rude, but who are you?”

“She’s being polite,” Awinita chirped. “She also means what are you.”

Ptesanwi let out a melodious laugh that strangely but Piper at ease. “I am a wacan, or holy spirit.”

“One step below a god-,” Spider Grandmother started.

“And one step above mortal,” the deer woman finished.

Ptesanwi rolled her eyes, and Piper smiled. “I act as a divine messenger for the Lakota people and instructed them on medicine, rituals, and how to make a proper pipe for tobacco.” To emphasize her last point, the wacan snapped her fingers and a long thin piped appeared in her clay covered hands.

Piper’s mind raced and long neurons fired rapidly as long dormant memories began to awaken. One day, when she was around four or five, a buffalo calf had been born with a coat of white. For days,
people came and went from her home, all of them talking her grandpa’s ear off about the albino calf. She remembered that some of them seemed nervous, while other seemed overjoyed.

Now, up until that point in her life, she had only seen adults act that strangely shortly before she got presents. So, Piper walked into her grandpa’s study and asked her if it was her birthday. The elder Mclean had of course been confused at her question, so she explained her reasoning. Her grandpa had laughed rich and deeply and explained that people were worried about the white buffalo, as some took it as a sign of things to come. And so, that afternoon Piper didn’t get any birthday presents, but she did get to have some precious one-on-one time with her grandpa as he told her the story of the White buffalo.

“You’re White Buffalo Calf Woman!” she cried, a grin spreading across her face. “My Grandpa Tom told me about you!”

Ptesanwi hung her head down while the two elderly women laughed.

“Your name translates terribly into English!” Kokyangwuti roared with laughter, her cigarette snapping in her hand.

“Like yours does any better! Spider Grandmother!” the wacan hissed. “Tell me, how is your grandson Peter Parker doing?”

“Ladies!” Piper cried. “Can we get down to business?” Despite the freshly knitted socks, blanket, and hat, she was beginning to feel a chill setting in her bones. “And please tell me a fire is involved.”

The three older women looked at each other and nodded. Ptesanwi snapped her fingers and the clay on her hands disappeared. Kokyangwuti removed her knitting needles and within half a second made a giant white sheet. Awinita reached into the bag on her wheelchair and removed a bottle of pills, and took fistfuls worth.

“To understand the Gayegogi, you must first learn about the origins of the Nation,” Ptesanwi said, before inhaling deeply from her pipe.

“And the true face of our enemies,” Spider Grandmother said as the sheet expanded and created a dome over the four women. “Olympus.”

“And of your lineage,” Awinita added, resealing her pills.

Before Piper could ask what Awinita meant, Ptesanwi grabbed Piper by the shoulders and blew smoke in her face, and the world turned black.

The first thing Piper noticed when she awoke was that she was standing in a vast prairie that stretched as far as the eye could see in every direction.

The second thing she noticed was that she was lacking her body.

“What the fuck is happening!” she screamed, spinning in circles and panicking as she tried to figure out how she was even doing that.

“Calm down,” Awinita voice boomed from the bright blue sky.
“Yeah,” agreed Kokywanguto’s voice. “Think of this as a way to emerge you into the narrative.”

“THIS IS BULLSHIT!” Piper screamed. “YOU BITCHES BETTER LET ME OUT!”

“Let us start at the beginning,” Ptesanwi’s voice said, completely ignoring her. “Not so long ago, the peoples of the Nation thrived.”

As the wacan spoke, a dozen native people appeared in the prairie on horseback. They were a jovial bunch, laughing and whooping at each other. A water skin was tossed between riders, some taking a drink, while others poured it on their faces to cool themselves from the relentless summer sun. They were mostly unarmed; only one or two carrying a bow and quiver or a knife.

“The people dwelt in the land, and the only hardships they knew were those of the natural world.”

The scene shifted; she was still in the prairie, but the sun had long since set. The riders were sitting around a campfire telling stories; the men of course were trying to impress the women with tales of their great deeds. Most of the women rolled their eyes or laughed at the stupidity of the men, but a few who were clearly love-struck hung onto every word.

Apparently, some things never change.

One of the men had just sat down and gestured for one of his friends to begin their tale, when a loud growling interrupted the festivities. Piper along with all the riders spun around only to come face-to-face with a gray coyote so large that it made Artemis’ hounds look small. The canine snarled again, revealing large fangs that would easily crush bone. One of the men went to reach for his knife, but one of the men held up his hand.

The first man looked confused, but heeded his friend’s warning and pulled his hand away from the small weapon.

The second man then smiled peculiarly, before tossing the water skin at the coyote.

In the blink of an eye the coyote shifted into a tall man with a gray mustache, wearing a mischievous grin. The strange Coyote-man grabbed the water skin in midair and took a long swig, before he burst out laughing. The people, who only a moment ago were terrified, began to laugh as well. The coyote-man took a bow and joined them around the fire.

“Back then there was no boundaries between man and spirit,” Ptesanwi’s voice sighed wistfully. “Times were good. Bellies were full and beliefs were strong.”

“But like all good things, it soon came to an end,” Kokyangwuti sighed.

The scene shifted again, but instead of the serene prairie, Piper was now standing in the middle of blood soaked street of an ancient city. The thatched roofs of the buildings lining the street were ablaze, as people frantically tried to escape their stone houses with their families and few precious possessions. Cannons thundered in the distance and a split second later the home to the left of Piper was reduced to rubble. People flocked in droves to wooden gates at the end of the street, but the guards couldn’t open the massive doors with so many people crowded together.

“They came from the east, from a land unknown,” Awinita said, her voice full of sorrow.

The cannons thundered once more and the walls opposite of the throng of panicked families crumbled to dust. Through the dust strange figures began to take shape and out stepped Spanish conquistadors brandishing sword and musket, all donned in iron armor. The people began to climb over each other, trampling many underfoot, as the conquistadors marched forward.
“The empires of the south had long since been our enemies,” Awinita continued. “They would kidnap our peoples and use them as sacrifices to appease their gods. So, when these strangers began their war we sat idly by.”

“The enemy of my enemy is my friend,” Kokyangwuti tsked. “We were such fools.”

Three of the guards rushed over the panicked citizens, seemingly walking on air. They stood in front of the Spaniards and slammed the ends of their obsidian tipped spears on the street, as they shouted challenges in a language Piper couldn’t begin to understand. The first row of Spaniards knelt and aimed their weapons at the young warriors without so much of a thought. The three then smiled at each other before springing into action. One of the three turned into a jaguar, while the other two began to mutter strange incantations as their weapons began to glow stygian blue.

“The empires put up an admirable defense.”

The jaguar pounced forward and with one massive paw tore open one Conquistador’s throat, while taking another’s in its jaws. The other two warriors stabbed their spear tips in the earth and jagged spikes of obsidian shot forth from beneath the Spaniards, impaling them with ease.

Twelve more armored men emerged through the gaping hole in the wall, followed by an imposing man on a horse as black as midnight.

“But it wasn’t enough,” Kokyangwuti sighed.

The man on the horse grimaced in disgust at the sight before him and shouted a series of orders to his men. The twelve looked apprehensively at the three warriors, before falling back behind their leader. The man on horseback then snapped his fingers and three bolts of lightning crashed down from the sky, killing the three warriors instantly.

The world began to fade to black just as the twelve conquistadors knelt and took aim at the frenzied families.

“We would only learn later that these strangers had brought more than new mortal weapons and armor with them,” Ptesanwi said. “They had brought their gods with them.”

The next thing Piper knew, she was walking shoulder-to-shoulder with hundreds of people in blizzard like conditions. Many were without adequate clothing, many more were gravely ill, and some were so malnourished they looked like walking corpses. A young woman around Hazel’s age was clutching the lifeless corpse of an infant to her chest, trying in vain to swat away flies as she wailed in anguish.

It was a sight Piper would never forget.

“To kill a god is to kill an idea,” Ptesanwi sighed. “And the gods of Olympus are unparalleled masters of doing just that.”

“The first thing they did when they came north was unleash the Mist across the land,” Awinita continued.

“That’s not true, first they stole my loom and Na ashje’ii ‘Aasdzaa’s!” Interjected Kokyangwitu.

“Nobody cares about your room!” Awinita bellowed.

“I said *loom* you senile old coot!” Spider Grandmother shot back. “And It clearly was part of their master plan!”
“Um, ladies?” Piper called out to the heavens. “Can we stay on task? I’m ninety-percent certain I’m on the Trail of Tears, and I really don’t want to be here!”

Ptesanwi cleared her throat. “Anyway…”

As Piper continued the torturous march forward, they walked into a wall of mist, and when they emerged on the other side, almost half of the crowd had disappeared. She wasn’t sure if their disappearance was from the Mist hiding them from mortal eyes, if they had died, or some combination of both.

“Almost overnight we lost the ability to interact with most of our friends and family,” Ptesanwi said, just as a man to Piper’s left burst into a cloud of smoke. “And they couldn’t see us either.”

“And as the horrors continued throughout the land, tribes slaughtered, food sources hunted to extinction, children taken from the arms of their mothers; our people stopped believing.” Awinita sighed mournfully. “And the gods, the spirits, and the creatures of the land began to fade away.”

“To add further insult to injury, the children they had taken away were forced to convert to their religion,” Kokyangwitu snarled. “And the children old enough to speak their native tongues were punished severely; needles placed in their tongues if they spoke a tribal language instead of English or Spanish.”

“Wait! Wait! Hold up a second!” Piper cried to the heavens. “My Grandpa told me about that! The thing is though it was the Christians who did that! Specifically, the Catholics! The Greeks and Romans have nothing to do with them!” Seriously, we can’t even say Merry Christmas at camp…

“They have everything to do with it!” Snapped Kokyangwitu. The creator goddess then sighed, “Look kid, you know how they say Christmas is based off a pagan holiday?”

“Yeah?”

“Well, the image of Christ is actually based off the image of Zeus.”

“We could spend all night talking about how Zeus and the rest of his cronies have infiltrated modern beliefs, but I think we better move on,” Ptesanwi said. “Anyway… where were we?”

“You said all of you were fading away,” Piper answered, while trying to avoid looking at her surroundings. She was no longer just with her oppressed ancestors, now there were flanked by soldiers on horseback. They were shouting obscenities and demanding that they move faster or face dire consequences.

One of the cavalry troops seemed to take particular delight in seeing them suffer; making his red horse rear up next to procession, scaring many of the poor souls and trampling the slow. The officer was abnormally large and appeared to be made of pure muscle, a sadistic grin seemed to be etched permanently on his face, and his eyes were hidden behind a pair of ruby quartz glasses.

Piper wasn’t sure, but she thought she saw the man’s eyes flare red behind the glasses.

“Oh, how could we forget about that,” Ptesanwi chuckled awkwardly. “All hope seemed lost. Our people were being culled and we were unable to help due to the Mist. They stopped believing and one-by-one we started to disappear.”

“But then a miracle happened,” Awinita said softly. “Over half of the gods and spirits were gone, but a miracle is a miracle.”
“The first of the Gayegogi appeared,” Kokyangwuti announced proudly.

A young boy, perhaps around Leo’s age, appeared in front of Piper; his arms behind his head as he whistled a happy tune that was out of place in the slow death march. He had mischief in his big brown eyes and a grin so infectious, those surrounding him had to smile a little despite the horror around them. He was without shoes and shirt, and his pants were three sizes too large and were only held up by a piece of twine wrapped tightly around his thin waist. He had long black hair that looked like a bird had nested in it the night before.

“By all accounts he was a nobody, just another Cherokee boy who had lost his parents,” Ptesanwi explained. “He wasn’t particularly strong or fast—”

“But he had a sharp mind and a silver tongue,” Awinita laughed. “And, oomf, not bad looking either.”

Piper watched as the boy ran through the crowd, trying to make anyone he encountered laugh or smile. He would juggle, he would sing, he would dance, and he would even heckle the cavalry; often earning him a swift and brutal beating. He had better luck with the women and children, as most of the men seemed to be aggravated by his presence.

One of the men apparently had enough of the hyper active teen and knocked him to the ground with one fist to the eye. “Stop filling their heads with tales of the old ones,” The man snarled. “You are just polluting their heads with lies, which makes you a liar. A Gayegogi.”

Awinita tsked. “That was the first time he was called a gayegogi.”

“But sometimes, the world needs a liar,” Ptesanwi’s melodious voice laughed.

The world shifted again much to Piper’s relief. This time the boy, the Gayegogi, was huddled around a small fire along with handful of children. He was telling the children Piper’s favorite story, the flood, the children’s attention solely focused on him and him alone. He got on to all fours when he was the skeleton of the faithful dog. He stood on his tiptoes and puffed out his chest when he was the proud man. He mimed canoeing when the flood waters came. And as the story progressed, more and more children came to watch and listen.

And even Piper found herself entranced by his storytelling. If this guy had charm speak he could get away with anything.

“And from such a simple thing he managed to do what the gods and centuries of fighting couldn’t do,” Awinita chuckled. “He inspired hope.”

“And that hope spread,” Ptesanwi said.

The scene shifted to the Gayegogi walking through a similar prairie to the one she started in. He was a little older, now on the brink of being a man, his soft boyish features hardening. He still went without a shirt and shoes, but Piper felt that this was more out of eccentricity than hardship now. He had a leather satchel slung over his shoulder filled to the brim with paper, pens, and ink.

“He was a wanderer at heart,” Awinita laughed. “Never able to stay in one place long.”

“He left his own land and set out to find the other tribes,” Ptesanwi said, just as he encountered another man.

The two greeted each other warmly, the second invited the Gayegogi back to his home. Once there the Gayegogi began to tell the tales of the Cherokee people to all those who would listen. Most of the
crowd laughed and cheered at the foolishness of the Cherokee man who tried to marry a Thunderer, but in the back a man scowled at the scene. At first Piper thought the Gayegogi was going to get his ass kicked again, but when the story ended, the man in the back burst forward and began to tell the story of the Thunderbird and the Unktehi. The man held the crowd’s attention as he flapped his arms and screeched as he kicked at a log that represented the horned serpent, but Piper noticed that the Gayegogi had removed a journal from his satchel and hastily wrote down every word of the story.

The scene shifted again, to another room with another crowd. The Gayegogi told his Cherokee stories, but when he finished he started telling the tales of the Lakota. And once again, another had to jump in and tell the stories they knew while the great liar wrote down all he heard.

This process repeated itself countless times and soon the Gayegogi couldn’t be called a boy at all, and a library’s worth of journals and papers were strapped to his back.

“He told his tales a thousand times and a thousand times more,” Kokyangwuti said, as the scene shifted once more to the moonlit prairie. “He weaved his tales so well people couldn’t help but believe him, even if it was just for a moment.”

“And that moment, was enough,” Awinita sighed.

The Gayegogi was sitting alone at a small crackling fire with a piece of jerky in one hand, and one of his journals in his other. He appeared to be silently repeating a story back to himself, his lips only stopping when he scribbled down a note in the margins. He had just finished writing something when the wind howled, whipping up a cloud of dirt.

When the dust settled, the man found that he was no longer alone, for the coyote from earlier stood at the edge of the fire’s light. The creature was no longer as large as it had been, now the size of a regular coyote, its coat was matted and missing large portions fur, and it was it was almost skeletal in appearance.

The man looked down at the last bit of jerky in his hand and smiled before tossing it to the canine. And like before, the coyote shifted into a man and caught the jerky out of the air. He was thinner than before and looked like he was about to cry as he hungrily tore into the small strip of dried meat. The man then took a seat by the fire before shifting back into his canine form.

The Gayegogi held out his hand and the coyote rubbed his head against it affectionately. “Welcome back Coyote,” he smiled. The wind howled again and suddenly the small campsite was filled with life. A pair of rabbits hopped next to Coyote, a white buffalo stood behind the storyteller, the thunderbird roosted nearby in all of its magnificence, a spider sat on a log spinning its web into a coat, and dozens of other creatures sat at attention. “Welcome back, all of you.”

Spider Grandmother sniffled. “I always get choked up at that part.”

“That night, under a moonlit field in the middle of nowhere, the Nation was born,” Ptesanwi choked.

“It wasn’t all sunshine and lollipops though,” Awinita sobbed.

Ptesanwi cleared her throat. “You see, while we were all aware of each other, we never really interacted with each other.”

“And those of us that remained were typically used to calling all the shots,” Kokyangwuti mumbled.

Piper found herself in a small kitchen that was absolutely packed with both animals and people, divine or otherwise. Coyote sat in a chair on one side of the small kitchen table, while a rabbit sat on
the tabletop and repeatedly thumped its foot down and screeched at the canine. Coyote bared his fangs and looked like he was one second away from having a midmorning snack.

“So the Gayegogi created the council,” Awinita explained. “The head council was composed of six gods, six wacans, and six mortals, with the Gayegogi acting as the speaker and tie breaker.”

“How often did you really need his vote?” Piper asked, watching a small raven angrily peck at a raccoon’s head.

“More often than you’d think,” Ptesanwi sighed. “But as time passed and the Nation was further refined and defined, his vote was needed less and he was free to continue to do what he loved.”

“But his words only increased in value with time,” Awinita said.

“But like all mortals, his time soon came to an end,” Kokyangwuti said with a heavy sigh.

The kitchen melted away and Piper was standing in front of an open casket containing a much older, much grayer Gayegogi. The great liar looked at peace and even had the same mischievous smile he had in his youth, a sharp contrast to the solemn looks of the multitudes that had gathered to say their goodbyes. Coyote sat next to his friend, guarding him one last time.

“And with his passing a great unease settled over the Nation,” Ptesanwi said, just as a past version of herself covered the Gayegogi with a white buckskin as a parting gift.

“For he never told us how to replace him,” Awinita tsked.

“Wait, so no one thought to ask that? Aren’t some of you supposedly all-knowing gods?” Piper asked.

“Anyone that says they’re all-knowing is full of shit,” Kokyangwuti laughed. “And no… We, uh, really dropped the ball there.”

“And for a time, it looked like all we had regained was going to be lost once more,” Ptesanwi sighed. “Each group proposed a replacement, but an agreement could not be reached.”

“And when things looked their most dire, something unexpected happened,” The deer woman cackled.

The casket melted away and in its place stood a mortal man, a titanic Thunderer, and a snow-white hare. Each of them took turns presenting why they should be the next Gayegogi, the voice of the Nation. Each made a great case, and Piper could tell that none of them were applying for the role with dreams of glory or power.

And that’s a first for politics…

All those in attendance already had picked their favorites long before the gathering, and the place was a powder keg ready to blow. A powder keg that found its spark when a plump man in a three-dollar suit took a swing at a talking bear.

Gods, I need to study up on this stuff… Maybe like some flashcards…

The room erupted into violence; chairs were thrown, glasses shattered, and bodies were tossed in the air. Piper even thought she saw a trident being thrown and a man getting dragged away by horse with a dog on its back.
The violence continued to escalate until the crack of thunder shook the sky and the giant form of the Thunderbird descended down from the heavens. It circled around twice for all to see, before landing behind the three candidates.

“The Thunderbird had long since acted as the great protector of the nation, keeping the great serpents in check even during the dark times,” Awinita explained.

“So, to see it appear before a crowd was… unprecedented,” Kokyangwuti said.

The massive black bird turned its head and examined the three, its blue eyes dilating and narrowing with each candidate as they shrank with fear. The avian then stood upright and hopped away from the three until it was towering over a young boy. The boy looked up at the Thunderbird in awe, but did not show any fear. The great protector then extended one black wing and with its beak removed a single feather, before with amazing gentleness stuck the feather in the boy’s hair.

“When everyone was at last able to collect themselves, it was agreed that from that point on the Thunderbird would be the one to choose the Gayegogi,” Kokyangwuti chuckled. “Because you try arguing with a giant bird that can create storms with a flap of its wings and shoot thunderbolts.”

Ptesanwi laughed. “I was going to try and be a little more elegant in my telling, but the blunt truth works too.”

“And for many years, the system worked,” Awinita continued. Before Pipers eyes, around a dozen figures received the blessing of the Thunderbird. Most were human, but she saw a deer woman appear in the procession of chosen ones. “Until ten years ago when the last Gayegogi passed.”

Piper blinked and found herself in a room she never wanted to see again. It was small and smelled of cleaning chemicals, old people, and stale smoke. The room was decorated in cheesy southwestern décor, wood paneling, and the occasional cross. Two rows of pews took up most of the room and were packed with people Piper had only seen a few times when she was very young, and they were all staring with grief at the white casket at one end of the room. “No way,” she gasped.

Next to the casket stood her father in his finest suit; shaking hands with all those who came to pay their respects to the great man in the casket. A much younger version of Piper stood on shaky legs, only her grip on her father’s jacket kept her from collapsing on the floor in tears. Out of all the messed-up things she had encountered since becoming a demigod, all the physical, mental, and emotional trauma she had endured, that day was still the saddest day of her life.

“It’s okay to cry little pup,” Coyote in his human form said, taking a knee in front of the younger Piper. The gray mustached man cupped her cheek and gave her a sad little smile. “He was a great man and you should mourn him as such. Plus, you’ll feel better if you let it out.” The trickster then stood up and gently patted her head, before shaking her dad’s hand. “Sorry for your loss Tristan. Tom was a hell of a man.”

“There’s just no way,” Piper choked, slowly moving towards the casket. She closed her eyes, and prayed that when she opened them that the body would change; that it wouldn’t be that of the man she loved as a second father. “Please,” she begged, but when she opened her eyes the body remained the same.

Just before she passed out, she got one last look at the body she had last seen on that warm Oklahoma summer day all those years ago. The body of the man she considered a second father.

Grandpa Tom.
Grandpa Tom was far more than he seemed, as well as the few friends of his Piper remembered from her childhood. Adding to the already impressive list of shit Piper has to deal with.

Reyna still has hard feelings over Jason, Veronica and Atlas are on the verge of self destructing, Avalon is after them, her mother's side of the family are even bigger assholes than previously thought, her Grandpa was apparently a big deal, and she has to figure out what a Gayegogi even does!

The poor kid just can't catch a break...

It took me sometime to choose an appropriate title for Piper. At first I thought about something like "the protector" or "guardian" but those are so cliche. But as I wrote out the origins of the Nation, how it rose from the ashes, I realized that it had to have a a seemingly negative connotation. The first Gayegogi was just a kid trying to make people forget about their troubles for a even split second, and by all rights should have been seen as a hero.

But the world doesn't work like that. When people give up hope they try to extinguish it in others sadly enough. So they called him a liar, and a bunch of other horrible things, but he wore them with pride.

And as time passed the term Gayegogi stuck.

I disnt give him a name, because I wanted you the readers to fill that I for yourself. Make the Gayegogi your own and follow his strange, but caring, ways.

Things are about to get even more interesting ;)

So until next time, I want you all to smile and laugh rich and deeply as often as possible.

And next chapter is Hades!
Hades

Chapter Summary

Tonight:

Hades tried to help Persephone heal her relationship with Nico.

Hades hides incriminating evidence,

Hades has a plan to cripple Avalon,

and father-son bonding

“Being mortal has to be the worst thing in existence,” Persephone whimpered as Hades gingerly examined the series of stitches on her abdomen. “What kind of being can’t push aside their pain?”

Hades bit his lip to hide a smile. His darling wife was in terrible condition, but he found her complaints on the mortal form somehow charming. *But if she’s strong enough to complain, then she should make a full recovery.* He reached for a damp washcloth on the tray of medical supplies he had set on Persephone’s nightstand. “This may hurt a bit,” he apologized, before gently touching the cold rag to the blood caked stitches.

The depowered goddess’ face twisted in pain as she let out a long hiss. “I haven’t stopped hurting since I woke up,” she cringed. “What about Nico? Is he okay?”

The god of the Underworld nearly dropped the washcloth at the abrupt question. Persephone hadn’t asked about Nico with genuine concern since the thirties. “He’s doing just fine, my love.” He put a little more pressure on the rag and began to work the dried blood off. “I sent the boys away for the day so you could get some rest.”

Persephone’s already gloomy expression deepened. “Oh.”

“Oh?” he repeated. Hades returned the washcloth to its place on the tray and grabbed a handful of Q-tips to clean the little pieces that were close to her wounds. “You sound disappointed that he’s not here. Did something happen on your little jaunt?” he asked, dipping the Q-tips in peroxide. Persephone wouldn’t look him in the eye, instead staring at the closet doors that occupied a quarter of the room’s west wall. “Or not,” he shrugged.

Hades continued to clean his wife’s wounds, entirely focused on the task at hand, when Persephone finally spoke. “I’m a monster,” His goddess said with a shaky voice.

Hades sat up and eyed his with curiously. “Why are you a monster?” He tossed the Q-tips into a wastebasket and slid onto the bed next to his beloved, and laid down next to her on the rose-patterned sheets. Persephone was a strong-willed goddess with a great sense of self-esteem, so to hear her speak of herself like that was troubling to the god.

“I hurt him,” she said, her fists balling up the sheets. “And I continued to hurt him over and over again. That makes me a monster.” Her body was trembling, and Hades worried that if she got too upset she would tear herself open again. “I made my angel’s life a living hell.”
Hades frowned and took one of her balled up fists into his hands. He knew she was talking about her treatment of Nico, how she had done what she could to make him feel unwelcomed in the Underworld and sending him off on life-threatening quests. But it wasn’t her fault.

It was his and his alone.

Persephone had suffered a form of mental break after Maria’s death, but he had been too consumed in his own grief and rage to help her. He had wanted to tell her that Nico and Bianca were hidden away in the Lotus, but he knew that she would have pulled them out. And if Zeus was daring enough to attack Maria and the children in his presence, the Underworld wasn’t as safe a haven as he had hoped. So instead he let Persephone hurt and break as she thought a woman she regarded as a sister and children she thought her own were dead and out of their reach forever.

Hades had thought that when he pulled Nico and Bianca out that Persephone would have been overjoyed at their return, but instead she was cold and callous. At first, he had thought she was merely keeping her distance until the cycle had completed, but when Gaea fell and she was still being cold to Nico, he knew something was off. Seeking a reason why, he approached Persephone in her garden and found out the sad truth.

Somehow Persephone had got it in her head that Nico was an imposter, that there was no way the sad, thin boy had grown up from the happy loving boy she had raised with Maria. And that the real Nico would remember her. He had tried to explain that Nico and Bianca had their memories wiped, but Persephone was quick to counter that the heart was untouched by the waters of the Lethe. So, without any other options, he tried to keep Nico away from her and hoped that something would make Persephone come to her senses.

“Phe Phe my love, you are not a monster,” Hades whispered into her ear, squeezing her fist. “We’ve both done wrong by Nico. Tartarus, Jackson and Grace as well,” he scoffed. “But we can change, we can be there for him.”

“But he hates me,” Persephone sobbed, tears streaking down her perfect face. “And rightly so! I let him down! I let Bianca down! Oh gods, I let Maria down!”

Hades leaned in and kissed the tears off his beloved’s cheeks. Even with tears, Persephone was the most beautiful goddess in all of creation. “We both did my love, which is why we have to do better. Nico is growing more and more every day, and we have almost missed the years that are going to define him for the rest of his life.” He rolled onto his back and stared at the plain spackled ceiling. “Even if our godhood isn’t restored, we would only have a few more years before he’ll truly be out on his own.”

It was a hard thought to stomach for Hades. He was growing used to seeing Nico, Jason, and even Perseus daily. He actually enjoyed waking up to find the three of them in the kitchen; Nico cooking breakfast and mothering the other two, Jason eating like a pig as he told the others about his games or Leo the pig, and Jackson trying to get Nico flustered. But since Nico placed into a senior standing, that meant his son and Jackson would go off to college. Sure, he would have Jason around, but they would all feel like their home was missing two important pieces.

This is home... That is an unexpected realization. “So, if you want to do right by Maria, by Nico, you need to work hard to show him who you really are. To show him that you can be the one thing that is absent in his life that he needs.”

Persephone pushed herself up on her elbows with a hiss. “What’s that?,” she sniffled.

Hades sat up and kissed her forehead. “A mother.”
Hades was abruptly awoken by his mother-in-law punching him in the gut and her shrieking, “WHAT DID YOU TELL HER?!” As he tried to catch his breath and process what the crazy woman was on about, she picked up one of the numerous feather pillows on the bed and beat him over the head without mercy. “WHAT DID YOU TELL HER?”

“Tell who what, you insufferable hag,” he groaned, catching the pillow with one hand. “And why do you blame everything on me?” he tossed the pillow to the far side of the room, knocking a tacky cornstalk-shaped lamp off an end table, and sat up and rubbed his eyes. Hades looked up and glared at his sister, and briefly entertained the idea of flipping her off (Jackson would, and I’m beginning to see the appeal), but one look at Demeter’s tomato red face killed that idea. “Now tell me, with words, what the problem is.” He turned to apologize to Persephone for her mother’s insane behavior when he noticed that he was the only one in the bed. “Uh, where’s Persephone?”

Demeter’s eyes narrowed. “Follow me.”

“Oh good, you’re up!” his love chirped, as she pulled a steaming dish of something from the oven. “You can help me with the rest!” With both hands occupied, Persephone kicked the oven door closed.

“What’s going on?” Hades asked nervously, as he surveyed the what had once been the kitchen.

Nico’s meticulously cleaned kitchen had apparently been raided by a family of hungry cyclops during his nap with Persephone. The fridge and freezer doors were wide open with their shelves pulled open, covered in fingerprints of what appeared to be peanut butter. Not one square inch of the once sterile countertops wasn’t occupied; pots, pans, and cooking utensils in various states of use scattered throughout. All four burners of the stove were occupied; on one a pot was boiling over, the dark liquid pouring over sizzling as it hit the surface. The floor, usually clean enough to eat off of, was covered in puddles of various liquids that Hades couldn’t identify.

At the center of it all was the kitchen table, covered in no less than twelve different dishes. A plate of toasted peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, a pot of macaroni and cheese, a canned ham covered in pineapple rings, a tray of mostly raw chicken breasts, a lopsided half frosted cake, and things that Hades was positive were not fit for human (or godly) consumption or even qualified as food.

Demeter slapped him upset the head and hissed, “fix this!”

He glared at the hardy woman as he rubbed the back of his sore head. “My love… what are you doing?”

Persephone used her elbow to slide the plate of sandwiches further into the tabletop, before setting down the hot pan down in its place. “Well,” she said while using a potholder to fan what Hades was positive was a failed attempt at fudge, “you said I needed to be a mother, so I began to think of all the things I used to do with Maria for the children.” She spun in place on her heels and went back to the
stove, and turned the burner off of boiling over pot. “And the first thing that popped into my mind was cooking for them!” His beloved looked down at the crowded table and chewed on her lip. “I may be a little out of practice though…”

“She just had a hole blown through her body and has been reduced to this wretched state, and you have her cooking?” Demeter roared, before slapping him again. “What is wrong with you?!”

Hades shrank away and tried to shield himself from the harvest goddess’ assault. “Phe Phe, I really think you should be in bed resting,” he said with a forced smile. “Maybe you can Nico could bond over cooking, or-“ The back of Demeter’s hand smacked his left eye, “I WILL END YOU, YOU OLD HAG!” he spat venomously. Demeter apparently got the hint that he wasn’t happy with her and turned her back to him with a huff. Hades stood up straight and straightened his shirt. “As I was saying, maybe you and Nico can cook together as a way of bonding, but I think the first thing you need to do is talk to him. Make him see the real you.” He walked over and wrapped his arms around her, and smiled when she leaned her head against his chest.

“Talking,” Persephone murmured. “Do you know how terrify that sounds?” She shifted her head so that her ear rested over his heart. “I slaughtered dozens and fought Artemis herself for him, but talking? That’s almost as horrify as the day he was born.” Persephone snuggled up against his chest even more. “I feel like I can’t approach him now without bringing him an offering.”

Hades kissed the top of his beloved’s head. “Nico’s not a god you know. You don’t need to supply this… delicious looking feast for him. Just talk to him.”

“But first get some rest,” Demeter snapped. “You look like death warmed over!”

Hades rolled his eyes and he felt Persephone silently giggle. “As much as I hate to agree with your charming mother, she is right.” He released his hold on his wife and kissed her forehead. “Now why don’t you go upstairs and rest. I’ll come and get you when the boys get home so we can all enjoy your hard work together.” He forced a smile as his stomach flipped and twisted into knots at the idea of eating the smorgasbord of cosmic horrors.

Persephone sighed, but gave him a soft smile, before following her mother out of the kitchen and up the stairs without a word.

When Hades was sure the two were out of ear shot, he grabbed an empty trash bag from beneath the sink and began to fill it with everything he was sure wasn’t safe for consumption. Should I bury the evidence or burn it? And would it be easier to drive my car into the kitchen and rebuild than it would be to clean it?

The sun had long since set by the time Hades managed to scrub every nook and cranny (and to entomb the trash bags deep within the bowels of pigpen. The pigs had hid in the opposite corner of
the pen while he dug, save for a small brown one that fancied himself more of a dog than a pig. I’m really going to have to have a talk with Grace about that. Or better yet, have Demeter have a talk with him about the purpose of a pigs on a farm… The pig kept trying to stick its nose into the contents of the bags, and Hades had tried to warn it repeatedly that inside was all the escaped evils of Pandora’s box, but it refused to listen. Poor creature was not ready for Persephone’s horseradish fudge. No one is.

He took another sip of the bright pink substance just as the unmistakable rumbling of the beat-up truck Demeter had given Jason filled the still night air. He screwed the lid back on the sacred potion and tucked the small bottle in his pants pocket; as much as he appreciated the boys now, he was going to guarantee Nico got the last remaining mouthful. Because I have a feeling Persephone is going to try and make him eat a bit of everything...

As the truck came to a stop, and the headlights dimmed, Hades collected his new leather jacket from the coat rack and walked out into the brisk April air. As he crossed the porch, Grace was just hopping out of the truck and running to the other side to get Jackson’s door. The son of Jupiter helped the son of Poseidon get his crutches positioned and the raven-haired teen hopped out of the truck. Nico crawled out last, looking a bit groggy and disorientated, but both of the older boys wrapped their arms around his shoulders. A small smile tugged at Hades’ lips as he watched the three teens approach the house, he was glad that even in these dark times they could still find some amount of happiness in each other.

“Boys,” he said, when the trio reached the porch steps. “Something has come up.” He knew that he could have phrased it differently to not startle them, but old habits die hard.

“Did Zeus blow up a building again?” Jackson asked, leaning heavily on Nico. “Or did Avalon take out another god?” The eldest teen shrugged. “Either way it’s not like we can do much.”

Grace nodded in agreement, but Nico frowned.

“While I do have news on both Olympus and Avalon, we face a more immediate threat,” he sighed, shaking his head. “Persephone has made dinner.”

“Did she poison it?” Grace asked, his brow furrowed in confusion.

“No.”

“Then what’s the big deal?” Jackson scoffed. “Did she hide a hydra in a pie-“

The son of Poseidon’s prattling was silenced by Nico shoving his hand against his boyfriend’s chin (Still not thrilled about that development). “She hasn’t cooked for anyone in nearly seventy years. She’s out of practice,” Nico sighed. “She’s trying to win me over.”

While he was proud of his son’s deduction, Hades was caught off guard by the implication of Nico remembering Persephone. “Correct,” was all he could say as he eyed his son. How much does he remember? Would it make things worse or better if he does? He shoved those thoughts aside for later and pinched the bridge of his nose. “Look. She worked really hard and I would owe you if you could eat a few bites and say a few nice things. You want godhood? Fine. Enough wealth to never work a day in your life? Easy. Anything and everything is on the table, just be nice.”

While Grace looked to Nico for guidance, a fiendish smirk grew on the son of Poseidon’s face. “So, you would let Nico and I share a room again?” Jackson asked, looking like the cat who are the canary. “Even make Jason move into your room with you?”
“No way in Tartarus,” He and Grace spat in unison.

Hades had livelier dinners and better conversations with headless skeletons.

It started with Persephone trying to sit next to Nico, but Jackson and Grace sensed her intentions and took the chairs on either side of his son. Honestly Persephone should have known that was going to happen, but his heart did break a little when he saw how hurt she was. To make her feel a little better (and to hopefully speed things up) he got out of his chair so his Phe Phe could sit across from Nico.

Jackson and Grace, the house’s resident walking stomachs, were quick to fill up their plates. However, after only a few bites, both boys began to alternate between shades of blue and green. Grace, who normally praised the cook in between mouthfuls, took slow, painful bites and washed each one down with nearly an entire glass of water. Jackson on the other hand, reverted back to a toddler and spread his food around his plate in a pathetic attempt to make it seem like he was eating.

Nico though barely touched anything, eyeing everything with a mix of suspicion and apprehension. His son would look at Persephone, and then quickly look to either him, Jackson, or Grace for some kind of help. Hades tried to nonverbally communicate to his son to say something, and Jackson actually seemed to express similar sentiments. Grace though, only gave mixed signals.

When the silence turned absolutely deafening, the lord of the underworld decided to take matters into his own hands. “Don’t you think the boys look nice with their haircut?!” Hades announced suddenly, startling everyone at the table. Demeter nearly falling out her seat.

“Jason looks like a fine, strapping young man,” Demeter smiled as she corrected herself in her seat. The son of Jupiter bent down over his plate to try and hide his reddening face. “Thank you, ma’am.” Persephone took the hint and beamed at Nico. “Nico looks like quite the heartbreaker.”

“What about me?” Jackson asked before a single syllable left Nico’s mouth.

Hades resisted the urge to take one of the numerous remaining sandwiches and shove it down his nephew’s throat. The idiot clearly did not understand that he was trying to get his family to engage in even the simplest of conversations! But, Hades simply took a napkin and wiped his own face before simply saying, “you look fine.”

The process repeated itself for another thirty agonizing minutes; Hades trying to start a basic dialogue, only for it to fail spectacularly.

When at last no one could pretend to stomach the food anymore, Nico started to clear the table. Persephone volunteered to help along with the other two demigods, but Demeter drug her daughter back to bed. It seemed to Hades that the Fates were conspiring against Persephone and Nico, but he’d be damned those old hags thought he wouldn’t get his way.
Hades helped the trio clean up, ignoring their silent conversations, and returned to his study/room to continue his efforts of sorting through the folder Grace had received from the god of secrets, Harpocrates. It was a monumental task, as the folder never seemed to get any emptier, despite coating three of the room’s walls with hundreds of documents and pictures. He then used a rainbow of colored string and pushpins to connect relevant pieces of information, and the room quickly looked as if a festive spider had taken up residence.

At first, he had been quite cross at the son of Jupiter from withholding something so valuable, but the further Hades delved into it, the more he understood why the god had warned Jason to not show it to anyone.

“History is written by the victorious,” Hades mumbled to himself, as he pinned a photocopy of a missive from President Andrew Jackson to a son of Ares, with orders to put as much pressure on the native peoples to stir up conflict. “And it is no different for the divine.” He took a step back and surveyed his hard work. “Brother, I can’t figure out the why; but what you are doing is the greatest atrocity I have ever seen.”

Persephone, Demeter, and the boys watched him pace with his hands behind his back behind his desk in silence. He ignored the fact that Jackson currently had his arm wrapped around Nico and was whispering something in his son’s ear to make him blush. He also ignored that Jason looked incredibly uncomfortable sitting between Demeter and Persephone, the blond trying to focus on Demeter. Right now, he needed to focus on summarizing his findings in such a way, that everyone in the room could understand.

“Zeus is a jackass!” He spat, slamming his fists down on his desk.

“Uh, was there anyone here who didn’t know that?” Jackson chuckled. The son of Poseidon was lucky that Nico was next to him, or Hades would’ve tossed his stapler at him.

“And what does he have to do with Avalon?” Nico asked, hand raised.

“Allow me to explain.” The god of the Underworld took a deep breath and pointed to a picture of an ancient mosaic showing Zeus before the three Fates. “Approximately two thousand years ago, just after the death of Pan, made a deal with the Fates. After-"

“What was the deal?” the harvest goddess asked, the chair she sat in creaking as she shifted forward.

Hades pinched the bridge of his nose in annoyance. “I don’t know, that’s one of the many things we don’t know. It could be purely a coincidence, but it- ”

The son of Poseidon held up his hand. “Then why did you mention it?”

“Why is everyone raising their hands if you’re just going to blurt out your questions?” He snapped. “No more questions until I’ve finished!” He traced a red string to a series of ancient correspondence from a high-ranking son of Jupiter in the legions to his lieutenants detailing a dream where his father demanded the expansion of the empire. “After that, Jupiter, or Zeus, began an aggressive expansion of the Roman empire. Pushing further into Africa, Asia, and Northern Europe.” With his index finger, he traced a black thread to a picture of a painstakingly reassembled mosaic showing Zeus
meeting with a cloaked one-eyed figure and hawk-headed man. “During this conquest, many different pantheons were discovered. Many were wiped out, their peoples destroyed or converting to a new faith. But some though were strong enough that ended with a live-and-let-live policy was adapted.” He pointed to another mosaic of the Fates Addressing the Olympians in the throne room. “The Fates hid this by decreeing that interacting with deities outside the pantheon was forbidden, failure to obey would result in having their divinity taken away.”

“And I bet, just like that, everyone stopped asking questions,” Jackson scoffed.

Persephone and Demeter cringed, but nodded in the affirmative.

Hades cleared his throat, and everyone’s attention was back on him. “During this time, Kronos and Gaea rose for the second time, and the Great Prophecy and the Prophecy of the Seven were first revealed.”

The son of Jupiter grunted in annoyance. “And that explains why New Rome had a copy of the prophecy on the freaking floor.”

“Correct Grace,” he managed to say with a small smile. It was hard to tell the kids that the one thing that made them stick out amongst the multitude of demigods was a scripted event that repeated itself approximately every hundred years. “It was horrifying. We barely managed to win against Kronos and Gaea the first time, and then they just started coming back along with the monsters of old? Plus, it made me look incompetent.” Hades looked around the room in hopes that someone got his joke, but only Nico was smiling. And he’s only smiling because he feels obligated to. Great…

He traced a green string to a written account of the one of the first seven heroes, and from there traced a yellow string to a set of early Byzantine documents containing orders to not lend any aid to the western Roman empire. “Since the three of you have recently lived through that, we’ll skip over that.” There was a general murmur of approval. “The rapid growth of the empire reached its logical conclusion; collapse. But by then the Greek and Roman pantheons had become so ingrained into the collective psyche of the western world that Rome was no longer needed.” Hades paused to collect his breath and thoughts. “And here is where things get confusing,” he said while staring at a series of medieval tapestries. “Following the fall of the Roman empire, demigods were made heads of state of the shattered empire. Not unexpected really, but the fact that they were ordered to wage war on each other is strange. Stranger yet, every record, save what you see, of these influential people being demigods were wiped out. Strangest of all though was that these demigods were limited to children of Zeus, Apollo, Poseidon, Ares, Athena, and their Roman counterparts. Not an exception to be had…”

Jackson fake-coughed into his arm. “Illuminati.”

Nico and Grace had the sense enough to roll their eyes at their cousin’s antics. He imagined though that Nico didn’t know what Jackson was even talking about, and Grace probably only had a loose understanding.

“And this continued on for centuries,” Hades sighed, tracing string-after-string that went from one war to the next. Millions, if not billions, of lives lost for a reason he couldn’t begin to fathom. “Which leads us to World War Two and the birth of Avalon.” He sat down behind the desk and removed what Harpocrates falsely claimed to be the only known picture of Jeremiah Aarons. “The younger boy in this picture is Jeremiah Aarons, the founder of Avalon, and a man we knew next to nothing about.”

He stood back up and pinned the photo at the center of a vast web of strings. “Nico, if you hadn’t brought back the remains of that phone last night we would still be in the dark. But that hunk of
plastic and silicon changed everything!” He was beaming at his son so much so that Nico was blushing with embarrassment, but everyone needed to know how proud he was of his son. “There is next to nothing about Jeremiah Aarons, AKA Merlin, because he changed his name to Jeremiah Arthurson.”

Grace made a ‘T’ with his hands and shouted, “Hold up! You’re telling us that the god of secrets couldn’t figure out someone changed their name? Isn’t there like paperwork for that? Like I can’t just wake up tomorrow morning and go by Rando Grace!”

“Oh, I am totally calling you Rando from now on,” snickered the son of Poseidon.

Hades picked up a stress ball from his desk and tossed it at his aquatic nephew’s head, earning a satisfying yelp. “Under most circumstances you are correct Grace, but after the war ended a GI claimed he was his brother and snuck him back to America. Aarons has since become a naturalized citizen and never bothered to change it, as as far as the US government is concerned he has always been Arthurson.”

“Well at least you guys know his motivation,” Grace sighed. “But what has he been doing for the last seventy years?”

The god of the dead bent down and retrieved his stress ball from the floor and briefly entertained the idea of tossing it at his son’s lover (he shuddered at the thought), but ended up placing it on his desk. “Well, you could read one of his many memoirs or-“

“Ugh, place don’t give us any assigned reading,” Jackson groaned. “It’s bad enough that I have to slog my way through my textbooks…”

And just like that, Hades’ stress ball once again made contact with the son of Poseidon’s forehead. “Or self-help books. You see,” he said while Jackson rubbed his head and glared at him, “Arthurson was and remains one of the biggest drivers in the field of technology. Investors to this day watch with their breaths held to see what he and his corporations invest in. Transistor radios? Him. Microwave ovens? Him. The personal computer? Him. Cellular phones? Him. The recently exploding field of machine learning and artificial intelligence? All him.” He paused and let out a bitter laugh, covering his face with his hands. “The man has no formal education, but he’s almost singlehandedly designed the modern world by recognizing the next big thing time-and-time again!”

Nico sighed and from the corner of his eye, Hades spotted his son grabbing Jackson’s hand. “You mean he’s designed the world to become one giant mousetrap.” The smallest of the teens frowned and squeezed Jackson’s hand tighter. “This guy, Aarons, Arthurson, Merlin, whatever you want to call him, put his entire life into this and recruited others to help him, and it paid off. He made the weapons to take down Olympus a part of everyday life. With the exception of us, I can’t think of a single kid at school who doesn’t have a cellphone and at least access to a computer. Merlin just waited until everything was in place and-,” Nico snapped his fingers, “just like that, he disabled Olympus and killed nearly every single demigod. And now that we know he has tools that can control gods, his arsenal is unfathomable.”

Everyone in the room stared at the son of Hades in silence.

“Uh, when I was little my mom bought me this board game called Mousetrap from a second-hand store,” Jackson chuckled, squeezing Nico’s hand. “The goal of the game was to assemble this large complex trap and trigger it before the mouse got to the cheese. I never actually played it as intended, as mom was always working and I had no friends, but I would try to assemble it anyway. It was missing most of the pieces, and I had to improvise with things we had in the apartment-“
“Percy, what are you babbling about?” Grace asked, glaring at the eldest teen.

The son of Poseidon picked a pillow off his bed and tossed it at his blond cousin. “One time though, I thought I had it. It took half the morning, but I swore I had it.” Jackson was smiling, but his eyes betrayed a deep sadness. “I flipped the switch and the chain reaction started. And it all went well until the marble fell off the plastic pipes. The thing rolled out of my room just as Gabe walked by.” The smile was quickly replaced by an intense sneer. “The fat fuck tripped on it and beat me to teach me respect.”

“I’m still not following you man,” The son of Jupiter said, but the hardness in his voice was gone, a gentleness taking its place.

Hades though chuckled at the son of Poseidon’s analogy. Not bad kid, not bad. “He’s saying that the more complicated a trap, the more likely it is to fail.” He turned his attention back to the picture of the leader of their enemy. “And for something so complicated as an organization, the weak spot is bound to be its leader. Take it him out, and Avalon should fall without a leader.”

Jackson shrugged and rested his head on Nico’s shoulder. “So, we kill the old man before old age gets him.” The teen’s green eyes widened. “Wow, I said that a bit to easily.”

Nico turned his head just enough to kiss the son of Poseidon on the cheek. The simple display of affection caught Hades, Demeter, and Persephone off-guard, but Hades was glad to see his son was comfortable enough to do such a simple thing in front of him. “But that leads us to another problem: how do we get to Merlin? Last I checked, both coasts were off limits and I’d bet that’s where he resides.”

Once again, Hades was impressed by his son’s intelligence. “You are correct, Nico. The headquarters of his company, Big Apple Island, is located just outside of New York, so he keeps a residence nearby. He also has homes in Virginia, Florida, California, Washington, and New Mexico. And that’s just the continental United States.”

“Okay, seriously, some people are just too rich,” Jackson chuckled. “My mom busted her as-, err, butt working at a candy shop for years, and this guy has a house for everyday of the year? Come one!” He wrapped his arm tighter around Nico, pulling the Italian closer. “Maybe we could commandeer one of those houses for ourselves when all this is over?” he asked, wiggling his eyebrows suggestively. “Just you and me? Jason too if he wants.”

Hades coughed. I’m not letting you take him away that easily Jackson... “But a bit of good luck has finally come our way,” he continued, retrieving his stress ball once more. He gave it a squeeze and shot the son of Poseidon a warning glare. “On April thirtieth, Arthurson will be in Chicago to give a massive donation to the Illinois school system at the Field Museum. Nico, Jackson, we keep this simple. We go in, kill him, and leave. Jackson you’re going to need to try and speed up your recovery. You too Nico.” He clasped his hands behind his back. “Any questions?” Everyone raised their hands; Jackson raising both and bouncing up and down like a small child. “Yes Jackson?” he sighed, knowing he was going to regret asking him first.

“Yeah, quick question; in that mess of conspiracy theories, did you ever find Pepe Silvia?”

“What?”

Persephone burst out laughing. “Or Carol from HR?”

The son of Poseidon jumped off the bed and high-fived the goddess, while he and his son shook their heads in disappointment.
Something woke Hades up from his uncomfortable slumber. The sleeping bag he slept on was incredibly uncomfortable on the farmhouse’s ancient hardwood floors, which made it difficult for him to fall asleep. While most of his family and the world pictured him sleeping in a coffin or tomb, the truth was he loved a soft feather mattress, with as many soft pillows as the bed could hold. He slowly sat up, cringing when his back popped, and rubbed his eyes.

Hades immediate thought was Jackson was trying to slip out of bed to go have a midnight rendezvous with his son, but when the sleep finally cleared from his mind he realized something was wrong.

The son of Poseidon was sitting up in his bed gasping and wheezing while one hand was clutching his chest.

In an instant Hades was off the floor and standing before his nephew. “Jackson! Jackson! What’s wrong?!” He immediately regretted raising his voice, as the son of Poseidon’s breathing only worsened and tears began to roll down his face. He’s having another panic attack, Hades realized dropping to his knees in front of the shaking teen. “Percy,” he said, his voice just above a whisper. “Percy, I want you to listen to my voice, can you do that?”

The Hero of Olympus choked, but managed to nod.

“Did you have a bad dream? I have those too. More than I care to admit.” He smiled at the boy and slowly stood up to sit next to the gasping teen. He slowly placed his hand on the teen’s back, and when Percy didn’t react he slowly began to rub circles in the boy’s back. “I dream about losing Maria, wiping Nico and Bianca’s memories, losing Bianca because I was a fool, watching Nico struggle with who he is, take your pick. They all hurt.”

Percy coughed and looked at him. The boy was still shaking, but his breathing was beginning to even out.

“The pain never fades, but you get used to it.” He chuckled at that. “Which is a trap.” He patted his nephew’s back and gave him a wry smile. “As strange as it sounds, you can’t allow yourself to stop feeling pain, or allow yourself to be consumed by it. You have to find a balance between the two extremes.”

Percy took in a ragged breath and shuddered, but the boy still was focused on him.

“And that’s easier said than done.”

A strange, but familiar, noise pierced the night air, and the son of Poseidon once again started trembling and gasping for air.

Shit, that was the wrong thing to say. He redoubled his efforts, taking both his hands and gently massaging his nephew’s shoulders. “Shh. Shh. It’s okay. Ignore me, I’m an old man.” I got to change my tactics. “Percy,” he said, removing one hand and pointing to the red stress ball on his desk, “what’s that?”

The son of Poseidon coughed and looked at him confused.
“Percy, what is that?” he repeated.

“Ball,” the boy choked between sobs.

“Good. And what’s that?” he asked, pointing to the hideous cornstalk lamp that occupied one corner of the cramped study.

“A lamp.”

“Where are we at?”

“The farm.”

They were simple questions that required only one or two words to answer, but they were meant to help bring the boy out of his dark place by making him focuses on simple things. It was something he had read in a couple of his parenting books, back when Nico was struggling with himself and social interactions in general. Hades had never put the idea in practice before now, and he was sure he wasn’t doing it one-hundred percent correct, but it seemed to work.

“Do you want me to go get Nico?” has asked, hand still patting the boy’s back.

Percy’s breathing was still labored, but he had stopped trembling. “Please,” he nodded.

He didn’t need to be told twice. Hades stood up from the bed and sprinted out the room, up the stairs, and into the Nico and Grace’s room. Grace was snoring with the intensity of a chainsaw, dead to the world, while Nico had his head buried under his pillow. Hades shook his son awake and told him about Percy. Without a word Nico slipped into the shadows.

Should I be proud or concerned that Nico ran to Percy without a moment’s hesitation? Probably both.

The former god yawned and walked to the bathroom. He relieved himself (he still wasn’t comfortable with the daily requirements of the human body), and grabbed two aspirin and a small paper cup of water. The son of Poseidon was bound to have a headache and be dehydrated after such an intense attack, so this was the least he could do for the poor kid.

Kid lost his entire family in the course of a single day. The girl he thought he was going to spend his life with lost to him while he recovered from his wounds. All his friends taken as well. It’s a wonder how he doesn’t just break down like that every day. And Rhea knows Poseidon wasn’t going to help him cope. My dearest brother only reaches out to his children when he needs something. Maybe it’s a good thing Poseidon never-

Percy’s wailing filled the house, and Hades sprinted down the stair and back into his study, spilling most of the water along the way. “What’s wrong?” he cried as he entered the room.

Nico was sitting on the bed with Percy’s head tucked in the crook of his neck, the older boy shaking and sobbing worse than when Hades had awoken. His son was rubbing Percy’s back and whispering in his ear. “I don’t know,” Nico said, turning to face him. “We were talking and then an owl hooted outside the window and-“

Both he and Nico’s eyes widened in realization. The strange noise he had heard earlier? It was the owl. Percy hadn’t gotten upset by his words, but the winged creature’s nocturnal calls. And with the owl being the sacred animal of Athena, and it didn’t take a genius to figure out what sprang to the young son of Poseidon’s mind when he heard the avian.
Without a word, he handed Nico the aspirin and mostly-empty glass and left the room. He stormed down the hall and to the kitchen, only stopping to pick up a pair of Grace’s work boots. He didn’t bother to slip on his shoes before marching out into the cool night air, nor did his pace falter when his bare feet made contact with the dew-lawn. Hades marched around the old farmhouse to the ancient walnut tree on the south side.

“Where are you,” Hades said through clenched teeth as he scanned the branches of the massive tree. It would have been so much easier if he had even a fraction of his power to correct this issue, as with a snap of his fingers he could send the bird to China or directly to Athena herself. He doubted that the creature he was searching for was an agent of his niece, but the fact that the creature upset his family was enough to make him act like it was.

“There you are!” he cried as he found a dark-shape sitting on the branch just above the study’s window. He tossed the first boot at the bird, but the footwear sailed too far to the left for the creature to notice. He adjusted his aim and put more power into his second shot, and it paid off. This time the boot hit the branch under the owl’s claws, startling the creature enough that it took off into the night sky and towards the barn. “You stay the fuck away from my family, you- you winged rat!” He shouted after the fleeing creature.

Hades collected the second boot he had thrown with a smile tugging at his lips; the other boot would have to wait for the morning to come as he couldn’t see it in the dark. The brief surge of adrenaline had faded and left him feeling drained. He slowly marched back into the house and dropped the boot in the pile of shoes by the kitchen door with a yawn and returned to the study. Both boys were staring at him with wide eyes, but Nico had a proud smile on his face that told Hades that he had done the right thing. Which was good, as he was winging it.

He collapsed down in his sleeping bag with another yawn and looked at his boys. *I must be tired if I consider Jackson one of mine.* They looked so comfortable in each other’s arms that he knew there was no way he was going to get a decent night’s rest while those two were separated. “Look,” he sighed as his face hit his cool pillow. “New rule: you two can share a bed as long as it’s in here with me. And keep it PG.” Nico and Percy perked up with an energy that should have been illegal at that time of night. “And keep quiet.” He rolled onto his side to face away from the young couple. *Maria, we could really use your help.*
Annabeth

Chapter Summary

Tonight:

We check in on Annabeth and Leo in Elysium

Chapter Notes

Sorry if you got multiple notifications!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Annabeth stood over at the head of the solid gold war table with her hair tied back in a tight ponytail, her hands grasping the edges as she examined the makeshift map of Elysium before her. The table, really Ping-Pong table taken from one of the numerous rec halls, painted a dire picture.

A red hockey puck represented Odysseus’s camp to the East, or at least what she believed was East. Surrounding it were four small pebbles she had gathered from the shore that represented the approximately four hundred souls the former king of Ithica had gathered under his banner. The camp was making ready for battle, constructing weapons out of anything and everything they could find. Umbrellas were exceedingly popular as they could be fashioned into lances.

*And he’s an idiot if he thinks brute force can save us! I can’t for the life of me see what my mother saw in him! How intelligent was he to start eating pigs that suddenly appeared right after his crew went missing?*

A dolphin plushie, representing Perseus’s camp, sat on top of a pile of *National Geographics* that represented the hills to the West. It only had two pebbles, but what the son of Zeus lacked in numbers he made up for in quality. The souls who followed the ancient hero were mainly composed of tradesmen, architects, and engineers; all of which were gathered together with the sole purpose constructing an impenetrable bunker that would last until the end of time. That group and that group alone was responsible for the lack of construction materials the daughter of wisdom desperately needed.

*If they focused their efforts on reinforcing the gates and walls they wouldn’t need to build a fort! I can’t believe Sally named Percy after that misogynistic jackass!*

Her heart, or the portion of her soul that mimicked it, felt like it was tightening in her chest at the thought of the son of Poseidon and his mother. The pain the daughter of Athena felt triggered the natural magics of Elysium that tried to numb her senses and make her forget the source of her discomfort. *Just focus on the problem at hand. Don’t be become like the others.*

She focused on the makeshift map and the tempting haze began to lift. An empty *Yoohoo* bottle she had found washed up represented the camp of her older brother, General George S. Patton. While the camp only had one-hundred men and women on a good day, the flamboyant and arrogant son of
Athena had somehow not only captured dozens of hellhounds, but had also broke them like wild horses. Some of the hounds could easily carry three to four full grown adults, which allowed the cavalry general to set up impressive supply lines and travel the elysian fields with ease.

Annabeth let out a sigh as her eyes settled on the series of sticks that represented the border of Elysium and the rest of Hades. It’s just too much.

She had long ago given up on keeping an accurate count of the unjudged souls that were desperately trying to bring down the gates that surrounded Elysium, but at last count she had 1,219 pebbles, so many pebbles that Leo had to reinforce the war table’s legs to stop it from tipping over. But with people dying every day, she could safely guess that the number of souls had since doubled.

When she had first arrived at the so-called paradise of Elysium (*not much of a paradise without Percy*), there had only been a few souls trying to get in. No one took notice of them, besides herself and Leo, as everyone else was in the strange trance-like state that only allowed them to enjoy the afterlife and give thanks to the gods for the eternal blessing they had been granted. She had of course tried to enjoy herself as a means to make the time until the son of Poseidon’s arrival, but she always found herself drawn to the boundary.

And every time she went, the number of angry souls increased.

*Possibly at a geometric rate.*

No one besides the son of Hephaestus listened to her, only telling her to schedule a tennis match, set up a t-time, or to simply just relax and let management handle it. So, with nothing better to do, sat at the edge of Elysium and watched as the horde grew steadily in size.

But things changed when the gates closed one day and never reopened. People began to take note that the influx of new faces became nonexistent, and as more time passed more and more souls began to awaken like Leo and herself. The number was almost insignificant compared to the overall population, but when they agreed to work together to figure out what was happening the daughter of Athena had hope.

*And that was the first of many mistakes…*

The first thing the group did was send a party outside of Elysium (something that had never been done before) to try and contact Hades, the tribunal, or even Charon; anyone that could have answers. She remembered how shocked she had been when a certain blond son of Hermes had volunteered himself along with the two resident troublemakers of camp to undergo the quest. She had wanted to go see the three off, but she had been terrified that seeing her former crush would reignite some long dormant feelings.

*Mistake number two,* Annabeth thought with a heavy heart.

She waited for what felt an eternity for the trio to return, but eventually everyone gave up on them returning. Deep down though, Annabeth still held onto hope that they would return even if her mind was screaming it was impossible. After all, she and Percy had done the impossible with regular frequency.

It was then decided amongst the awakened souls to set up regular patrols to monitor the border and keep track of the ever-increasing number of angry souls. It should have been a simple enough thing to do, after all, people have been monitoring boundaries for years; even with the Golden Fleece they had kept patrols at camp. But he first problem they encountered was guards getting bored and wandering off to rejoin the wide variety of festivities in Elysium.
We spent more time looking for guards than we did patrolling the border…

When at last they had a stable number of watchmen, things were already too late.

One day, a group of Elizabethan demigods failed to return from their shift. Annabeth and Leo had been part of the search party and when they found the group it took her only moments to access the situation. The demigods had just been wandering around in circles, ripping up the pristine grass, and babbling incomprehensible gibberish. The ground at their feet was wet, which was strange considering they were not near any body of water, nor did Elysium experience any precipitation. A glance at the gate though made her figurative-heart stop: the golden bars were bent and warped and some of the unjudged souls had giant water hoses. Not only had the masses damaged the wall, but they had somehow created a system to siphon water from the Lethe.

She and Leo had ran back to the others as fast as their incorporeal legs would carry them and told them what they had seen.

*Mistake number three,* Annabeth thought with a heavy sigh. *That’s three strikes. I’m out.*

That’s when the infighting started. Odysseus proposed preparing for a fight, Perseus said they should build a fortress and wait until the danger passed, Patton suggested mobilizing the population of Elysium and moving them further in, and she had proposed that they work together to repair and strengthen the border. Sadly, though an agreement couldn’t be reach and the awakened souls of Elysium splintered into four factions, which then splintered into even more.

Her steely gaze fell onto her own camp situated at the water’s edge, represented by a single miniature marshmallow. She didn’t have enough followers to receive a pebble, she didn’t even have enough for half-of-a-half of a pebble. She didn’t have the numbers to gain some kind of edge like the others; she didn’t even have a plan to save the residence of Elysium.

All Annabeth had was herself, Leo, Daedalus, and boathouse with a few decrepit swan boats that could barely float.

“But that’s enough,” wisdom’s daughter said firmly to the empty room. She knew she couldn’t win, but she also knew that there were more outcomes to war than strictly win and lose. Annabeth wouldn’t allow herself to have everything that made her herself be taken away by something as silly as getting a little wet.

She was going to see Percy again, and nothing was going to stop her.

“You know, when I died I thought I’d be treated like some kind of hero,” the son of Hephaestus complained as he tied another pontoon to their raft. “Get a set of eagle wings, a mansion, red convertible like the guy in *National Treasure,* maybe even my own fragrance. But do you know what I got?” Leo asked as he sat up, pointing his screwdriver at her.

Annabeth sighed and rolled her eyes. “What did you get Leo?” She knew exactly what her Argo II crewmate was going to say, as she had heard it only a million times before.

“Jack!” the younger teen shouted (and Annabeth mouthed) as he sent his screwdriver flying through
the air. “Nada! Zip! Cero! Null! Rien! Nichts! Not even so much as a ‘good day sir’!!” The elfish mechanic reached down to fish another screwdriver from his toolbelt that wasn’t there, and let loose a string of profanity when he came back with nothing. “All I got was laughed at by Hades and the knowledge that I will never see my mom again,” Leo huffed as he pushed himself off the deck of the Argo III.

The daughter of Athena didn’t say anything, instead pretending to focus on checking the integrity of the spot welds on the raft’s pontoons. Despite all she had been through in the two wars, she was unable to come up with anything to say to comfort her friend. What does one say to someone who found out the afterlife wasn’t nearly as great as it was hyped up to be? That they were never going to see the only two people they loved and who loved them back again? Annabeth believed that despite the ever-expanding lexicon of humanity, there would never be any combination of words that would provide Leo with the comfort he needed. So, she did the only thing she could think of, which was keep Leo preoccupied with the Argo III.

_Piper or Jason would at least help him cope_, the blonde thought solemnly.

“Annabeth?” Daedalus’ voice called out from the rear of the raft. “Do you have a moment?”

Annabeth put all her weight against the weld, and when it didn’t break she nodded to herself in approval at Leo’s work. “Yeah, be right there.”

She stood up and carefully crossed the mostly finished deck to the raft’s stern, where the greatest genius of the ancient world worked diligently on the ship’s propulsion and power unit. She was not an engineer by any means, but knew that him making an engine and power system capable of generating thirty-kilowatts of power out of crazy straws, wire, a soup can, a toga, and some nectar was a technological marvel. Leo was good, but Daedalus was on a whole other level.

“What’s wrong?” she asked, preparing herself for more bad news.

The inventor turned away from his wiring, his dark wrinkled face twisted in a joyful grin. He may have no longer had access to his synthetic bodies, but truth be told, Annabeth found that she preferred his elderly form to that of Quintus. At first, she had thought it strange that the inventor appeared so much older than everyone else in Elysium and that he still had her mother’s brand on his neck, but when she recalled that Daedalus had been sentenced to redesigning the Underworld, it made sense he wouldn’t be granted his youthful form. “For once, nothing,” he laughed. “In fact, we should be able to depart within the hour for the Isles of the Blessed if you and Valdez have finished with pontoons.”

Annabeth beamed at the news.

Ever since the architect of the labyrinth had joined her and Leo, the construction of the Argo III and her plan to take refuge on the Blessed Isles had accelerated at breakneck speed. Annabeth thanked her mother for such a blessing, because how unlikely was it that Daedalus would chaff under the leadership of the other larger, more supplied, and able-bodied camps and choose to work with her? She supposed it also didn’t hurt that Percy, Nico, Rachel, and herself had helped the inventor in the past and had built up something close to a brief friendship.

“That’s great!” she cheered, high-fiving her lead-engineer. “Leo and I were just finishing up ourselves! Right, Leo?”

Leo’s hand appeared over the edge of the raft and gave a half-hearted thumbs up.

She spared a glance at the border of Elysium; the golden gates had lost most of their shine, bars were
bent and twisted, and sections were beginning to collapse inwards from the relentless bombardment from the mob of souls. And for the first time in a long time, she felt a bit of Percy swell up in her. *Let’s see you dumbasses catch us now! We’ll get the greatest heroes the world has ever seen to help us!*

Annabeth laughed deeply and flipped off the angry souls, earning worried looks from both Leo and Daedalus.

“Blondie’s gone loco,” Leo sighed with a shake of his head.

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The spray of mist the *Argo III* kicked up as it sliced through the pristine waters that separated the isles from the rest of Elysium felt amazing against Annabeth’s face. It reminded her of the good times she had on the *Argo II*, the friends she had left behind, and of course, a certain son of Poseidon. She momentarily entertained the idea of letting the magics of Elysium lull her into the blissful existences the other souls had, but she knew that the real work was just beginning.

She looked at the crew. Daedalus at the controls with one hand on the wheel and the other rapidly typing away at a make-shift keyboard made of bottlecaps and springs. Leo crouched next to the motor, examining the complex mechanisms that Daedalus had built, ready to intervene at the first sign of mechanical failure; though she was positive the impish mechanic’s skills would not be needed.

The *Argo III* was but an echo of the *Argo II*. Three pontoons made of the remains of half sunken swan boats kept them afloat, the platform they stood on was made of the back wall of the boathouse/their command-center with the only shelter being a small overhang that housed the controls, and at the rear sat the motor Daedalus had made, which had expanded and transformed when they took to the water. There were no chairs though, which Annabeth found ironic, considering Elysium had a surplus. Not that it bothered her, back in her dorm room she would sit on the floor with her homework and research for Magnus spread out before her, something that drove her roommate absolutely nuts.

*That and the clutter,* Annabeth thought with half-smile. While her thoughts were organized, she did tend to let her workspace get a little messy. Her eyes widened as he remembered that she hadn’t thrown out the apple core in her desk drawer. *That’s got to be a pile of mush by now…*

Without warning, the motor stopped. Her head snapped to Leo, but the Texan shrugged and pointed to Daedalus. The inventor spun the wheel the *Argo III* and the last of the raft’s momentum spun the boat so it was perpendicular to the Isles and the shores of Elysium. When the raft stopped moving and the only motion they felt was from the gentle waves of the waters below, did the inventor turn to face her.

“Are we at the magical boundary?” she asked hopefully, although every instinct she had was telling her something was off. From the corner of her vision she saw that Leo felt the same way, as he stood up and walked toward her with a wrench clenched in both fists.

“Annabeth, I need to ask you an important question,” Daedalus sighed as he pushed a small red bottlecap. Unseen gears *whirred* and grinded and another control panel emerged from the platform in front of the old man. While the rest of the *Argo III* looked hodgepodge, the new panel was on a gleaming pedestal of Celestial Bronze, with several LED display rapidly relaying information to
Daedalus. “What happened to my laptop?”

She and Leo blinked and looked at each other in confusion. Why would he be asking about this now? “I’m sorry sir, but I lost it in-“

“Rome,” the inventor finished for her. “In Arachne’s lair as you fell into Tartarus.”

She took a small step forward. “How did-“

“I know that?” Daedalus sighed, rubbing Athena’s marking with his right hand as one would rub an old wound on a rainy day. The weary man flicked a switch and instantly bronze grating erupted from the deck, surrounding him in a protective cage. “So, it is true,” he half-whispered. His gaze focused her on once more and gazing into his weary brown eyes, Annabeth knew that Daedalus was betraying them. Daedalus shook his head and flipped up a safety cover with his thumb and pressed a red button underneath, “I am sorry for this.”

A series of flashes followed by a blast that rivaled even the mightiest of Zeus’ bolts, destroyed the tranquility of Elysium. As she frantically blinked to clear white light from her eyes the pressure was the blast impacted the Argo III, making it list dangerously to one side and knocking her and Leo off their feet.

“Really?! Again, with the explosions?!” Leo screamed, and the first thing Annabeth heard when the ringing in her ears stopped.

Years of training kicked in, and in an instant, she had pulled herself and the still screaming son of Hephaestus to their feet. Annabeth glanced to the shoreline and even the magics of Elysium couldn’t suppress the horror that gripped her at what she saw.

The normally picturesque blue skies were replaced by clouds of black smoke and ash with splashes of blood red in between. The fields of wheat and grasses that came up to her hips were replaced by fields of fire and smoldering debris. The various camps that had dotted the landscape were reduced to craters, even Perseus’ hilltop fortress built to withstand any outside attack was reduced to rubble; the architects and engineers having never accounted for an internal attack. There were no corpses, as everyone was already dead, but droves of souls began running for the white sandy beaches in terror. And it was easy to see why.

The golden gates of Elysium were no more and the hordes of unjudged souls raced forward.

“Why would you do such a thing?!” Annabeth screamed at the inventor, her stormy eyes blinking at the carnage before her. “Those are good people! People we were trying to protect!”

Leo shot forward with blinding speed. “Who cares!” he spat, as he slammed his wrenches against the bronze cage that surrounded the withered architect. Leo slammed against the grating with all the rage and sorrow he had been carrying with him since his arrival to the afterlife, and Annabeth was sure that if he still had the ability to conjure flames the Argo III would be ablaze.

“Valdez you let your emotions get the better of you,” Daedalus sighed as he twisted a knob on his control panel. A small portion of the deck slid back and what looked like the cross between a tennis ball launcher and a pair of binoculars sprang up.

When did he add this stuff?!

Before she could shout for Leo to watch out, the strange weapon fired four times with a burst of compressed air each time. In an instant, bronze shackles bound her wrists and ankles together. Leo managed to avoid one pair, but another launcher sprang up behind him and finished the job.
“I do see a lot of myself in you,” Daedalus continued, “so much that it hurts to do this.”

Leo struggled against his bonds, slamming his wrists against the edge of the raft. “Well why don’t you come and let your Mini-me go? We could even get matching silver jumpsuits if that’s what you’re into!” The son of Hephaestus then began to buck around like roped calf.

Daedalus cracked a smile and stroked his gray beard. “I’m sorry my boy, but I need to get my son back.”

“You already have Icarus!” Annabeth shouted. “That was part of your punishment! You would build a new road system in the Underworld and Icarus would help you!” Unlike Leo, she wasn’t wasting her strength by frantically flailing around, instead she began to slowly twist her wrists in opposite directions. Her dad had once shown her a survival video on what to do in the event of being captured, and once again his help was going to be her salvation.

“That was just an echo of the real Icarus,” the inventor scoffed. “You’ve seen what this place does to people, makes them incapable of experiencing any negativity, any pain; and without pain one cannot learn.”

Annabeth fought back a smile as the inventor focused on Leo’s frantic attempts of escaping. Kept him talking and keep his attention off me.

“You must be father of the year!” Leo snapped.

The old man shook his head wearily. “No, just the eradication of the gods. And now that I know that apostle of Hecate wasn’t lying about possessing my laptop and the plans within, I know it’s only a matter of time before I am truly reunited with my son.” Daedalus flipped another switch and the raft jerked in place before the raft began to slowly turn clockwise.

Leo stopped fidgeting and rolled on his side to look at her, his face marred with confusion. “Uh, Annabeth, did you know about any god-killing plans on that fancy laptop of yours? Because I can’t count the number of times that would have come in handy!”

Damn it, Leo! Don’t bring attention to me!

She stopped twisting her wrists and shrugged. “I didn’t know anything about that. Hades, I just found Minesweeper when we got to Spain!” It was the truth. The laptop was years, perhaps millennia, more advanced than anything she had ever seen before. While most hard drives she had seen measured their space in gigabytes, Daedalus’ was measured in zettabytes. And it had been almost full. It would have taken multiple lifetimes to go through everything the genius had on it; and that was if she had every password.

Ms. Chase wouldn’t have found it even if she knew where to look, the traitor tsked. “Nor you Valdez.”

Annabeth mentally whooped when Leo once again began to flail around. “Oh, don’t tell me it’s one of those Room of Requirement type of deals! Those are so played out!”

“I agree with the sentiment Leo,” Daedalus chuckled, once more turning his attention to Leo, and allowing Annabeth to work on her shackles. “But the truth is far simpler than that; the files could only be accessed by those with no godly blood. So, no demigod or the so-called legacy could access it. And although I’m a legacy of Athena, my synthetic bodies allowed me a cheat code if you will,” he smiled.

“Alright, I have several questions before you throw us to the sharks or whatever cliched James Bond
villain trap you have planned for us,” Leo sneered, inching his way to the gilded cage like a worm. “First, how the fuck is recreating *Dawn of The Dead* going to kill the gods? It’s not like you can destroy the Parthenon from down here! Second, who are you working with? And third, go fuck yourself. Oh, wait! That wasn’t a question! That’s just what I want you to do!”

*Yes, Leo! Keep it up!*

“Did you honestly believe for a moment that destroying some stone ruins would destroy Olympus?” Daedalus tsked. “It would have hurt them I suppose, but the real source of power for Olympus lies around you,” he said with a grand sweep of his arm. “Every soul that enters the domain of Hades is placed into a dreamlike state where their belief in the gods is cemented. Think of it, millennia of souls all focusing on one idea. One Belief. So—”

“If you wipe every soul blank they won’t believe anymore,” Annabeth finished, just as one of the links on her shackles began to bend. It was an interesting idea, but the flaws with the plan evident. “But you couldn’t figure out a way to wipe every soul fast enough before the gods intervened! Even if you were to somehow flood the Lethe, you wouldn’t even cover a fraction of the souls in the fields!”

“Observant as always Annabeth, your mother would be quite proud,” the inventor smiled. “and you are correct, I couldn’t find a way to disable Olympus.” His smile grew. “But the apostle of Hecate, Morgan I believe she called herself, introduced me to an incredibly intelligent young man who solved that problem for me. The young lady also solved the issue of making every soul bathe in the Lethe with a surprisingly simple solution. All that remains is for the Tapestry of Fate to be rewritten and for me to install the greatest sound system this world has ever seen.” He flipped another switch. “Now I must be going and Mr. Holly said I was to come alone. I hope your next life be better.” The inventor nodded to each of them before he flipped another switch.

The *Argo III*’s deck catapulted her and Leo far into the air and toward the shore.

Panic gripped Annabeth like never before. The daughter of Athena had landed on the white sandy beach, but Leo had landed somewhere offshore. She knew that Leo couldn’t die, but Elysium tended to mimic the sensations one felt whilst alive. She could only pray to the gods that her friend wasn’t experiencing the agony of drowning.

But part of her thought Leo might be the lucky one.

She was hiding under the remains of a hotdog cart, as hundreds of unjudged souls hunted down the residents of Elysium that were on the beach. The hunters carried water guns, cups, and buckets full of the memory wiping waters of the Lethe, and any soul that crossed their path were doused.

“Don’t panic. Don’t panic. Don’t panic,” the blond whispered to herself as if it were her mantra.

She was still shackled, but the one link on her wrist bindings were ready to break. After her hands were free, removing the shackles on her ankles would be easy. It would just take time.

*New plan, wait no, no plan! We’re just going to wing it after this! Save Leo, then the two of us make a mad dash for Hades’ palace. Her mind raced as she put all of her strength in twisting the metal chain links. Even if Hades is not there, he’s got to have something I can use to contact Olympus!*
Just as Annabeth started to reach for the chains at her feet, the cuffs on her wrists began to hum with power. *No!* *No!* *No!* Her wrists slammed together as hidden electromagnets within the cuffs activated, and an obnoxiously loud siren began to blare from within.

“What’s over there, David!” a voice called out in the distance.

Annabeth pushed herself deeper into the hotdog cart with her hands pressed against her mouth to muffle her sobbing as she heard the approaching footsteps.

She had failed.

The daughter of Athena who helped defeat Kronos, who retrieved the Athena Parthenos when so many others had fails, one of the seven who defeated the primordial Gaea, had finally failed.

And it was going to cost her everything.

Her shelter was pulled away and she no longer restrained her sobbing. There was no point.

*There’s was never a point to anything. Everything I’ve done and everything I am is going to be washed away.*

A man in a white dress shirt with a navy blue pinstriped vest and matching dress pants crouched before her shaking body. He had shaggy blond hair, and his eyes were different colors. The left eye was dark brown and dilated, while the other was big and a hypnotizing blue. If she would have been in a better state of mind she would have recognized him as one of the judges who Hades ordered to allow her into Elysium. In his right hand was a small red water pistol.

“ ‘Ello there love,” he said, his voice smooth and full of pity. “It’s been a while, hasn’t it?” Annabeth tried to crawl away, but the judge simply grabbed her chained ankles with his free hand. The blond raised the pistol. “Don’t worry, you won’t remember a thing.” He squeezed the plastic trigger.

And in the instant before the water left the toy and impacted against her temple, Annabeth cursed the gods, her father for falling in love with her mother, the years she had spent locked away from the world at camp, and the man before her. But what she cursed the most was herself, for foolishly attacking Mikey the cyclops the last night she had been with Percy. She just wanted to say she loved Percy and would always love him.

And Annabeth Chase knew no more.

Chapter End Notes

Did you notice it?

I mean, there was a lot of things to notice, but did you notice something strange?

***Update: see chapter 46 for a clue***
Well boys and girls, we have approximately 24 chapters left (give or take a few) so things are going to heat up. We still have prom and graduation yet for the boys as well as the assassination of Merlin. Piper, Reyna, Veronica, and Atlas still have a lot to do. And Avalon has quite a few tricks up their sleeve. Not to mention Gabe is still out there.

One of things I hate about PJO/HoO is that they still treat death as this horrible thing, when we've know since book one that paradise awaits our heroes. I mean, yeah death is going to suck for the living with being separated from their loved ones, but it has to make things easier knowing they are in a better place. I mean, the only death that was truly tragic was Bianca's, and that was because she chose rebirth, leaving Nico alone.

This latest shakeup though puts the fear back into death. We've know for sometime now that Avalon has been in control of the tribunal and and any demigods that have recently departed have had their memories wiped. But now we know every demigod you love that has passed is going to cease to exist! It's only a matter of time! Silena, Charles, Travis, Dakota, Lou Ellen, you name 'em and they are dead! not just dead, but double tap dead!

Heck, I'm insuring that demigods have a short and tragic life as mentioned in the canon!

So let us salute Annabeth. A girl who deserved better! A hero that deserved better! In another universe she got everything she deserved and more (but that is sooooo boring)

*evil laugh*

Next chapter is Piper!
She's going to figure out what she has to do as the gayegogi and how she can patch things up with Reyna. There may even be a pool scene! (not romantic)

So until next time, remember you are a one of a kind amazing person who deserves the sun, the moon, and the stars. Have an amazing week!
Chapter Summary

Tonight:

Piper unwillingly participates in the Ice Bucket Challenge.

Piper tells the others about the previous night.

And Reyna could cut glass.

The cold water was a shock to her system, making Piper bolt upright with a strangled scream.

“Rise and shine, Sleeping Beauty,” Reyna said, standing over her with a wicked smile and a dirty white bucket in her one remaining arm. “You missed breakfast,” the praetor stated matter-of-factly.

“Lunch too,” Veronica and Atlas chuckled from somewhere behind her.

“I- I h-hate y-you all!” Piper cried as her teeth refused to stop chattering. “W-was th-that f-filled w-with i-ice?”

Atlas and Veronica moved into view, and handed her a thick, fluffy, white towel that Piper grabbed eagerly. “They melted by the time we found you,” Atlas boomed. “I did manage to talk Reyna down to only one tray of ice cubes though,” Veronica added with a sheepish smile.

Piper smiled at the blonde daughter of Mercury. While she, Reyna, and occasionally Atlas butted heads, Veronica was always kind to her. Once again, Piper found herself pitying the younger girl.

Veronica looked like monster, what with her body turning to ash, the intense golden flames that replaced her eyes, and the talons that grew from her hands and feet, but she was a sweetheart on the inside. “T-thank y-you.” She peeled the soaked spider silk sheet from her body and began to dry herself with the spa-quality towel.

With a grunt, Reyna sat down across from her on the stone pavilion. “So, what were you doing out here all night? Alone.” the praetor asked with a hint of distrust in her voice, as her brown eyes bore into Piper’s soul.

As she towed off her hair, Piper shot the Latina a dirty look. She was tired of the older girl treating her like she was a wolf in sheep’s clothing; as if she was going to stab Reyna in the back at the first opportunity. Though, I do want to knock her head off when she gets like this. “I was out here last night because-.” She stopped suddenly, her jaw dropping as the memories of the night before came rushing back. “Oh, fuck,” Piper squeaked. “I’m the Gayegogi.”

Atlas and Veronica gave her a puzzled look while Reyna facepalmed. “I don’t even know what that is, but why do I know, why do I just know, that I’m going to want to strangle you,” The one-armed praetor groaned.

Piper smiled sheepishly. Yeah. You probably will Rey…
The three girls and the titan left the great pavilion, and for the next hour Piper filled the others in on what had occurred the night before, as they slowly walked around the main grounds of Skyweaver Ranch. There were only a few guests, as Spring was still the off-season, so they didn’t need to worry about watching what was said.

Atlas and Veronica listened intently to her story, with Atlas only interrupting to have something clarified and the daughter of Mercury expressing concern for her experiencing some of the darkest moments in U.S. history. And as she told her story, for the first time since Piper had met the demigod-titan hybrid, there seemed to be some issue on who was controlling their body. Their normally fair skin alternated between a raging red and a sickening green, their hands either shaking or clenching into fists, and their face transforming to a bitter sneer and then to as if they were about to lose their lunch. Piper knew that Veronica came from a pacifist family, so she was pretty the daughter of Mercury was the one who looked sick.

Reyna was… Reyna.

The praetor had listened without asking any questions, only smacking her upside the head when she told them about leaving the big house in the middle of the night accompanied by potential enemies. After that though, Reyna only continued to nod along, occasionally mumbling to herself.

“And yeah, the last thing I remember is finding out my Grandpa was the last Gayegogi,” she finished with an exasperated sigh. She collapsed down on the large stone steps at the entrance of the big house and buried her face in her hands. “Still trying to process what that means, but I think I’m handling it pretty well.”

Veronica and Atlas sat next to her and placed one taloned hand on her back; the warm hand sending waves of comfort down her back. “Piper, you are literally shaking…."

She was going to respond that she was only shaking due to the water Reyna had thrown on her, but she had dried off some time ago. “I’m good. I’m good,” she repeated, more to herself than the others.

The next thing she knew Reyna pulled her into a one-armed hug. “You don’t have to be.”

And the tears she didn’t know she was holding back began to fall. “Grandpa Tom,” she coughed.

After a nice long cry, Piper felt a bit better about the situation.

Grandpa Tom was a good man, she knew that, and he was allowed to keep secrets from her. She had been young when he passed away, so she could understand why he never told her about his other life. A part of her thought that him telling her stories growing up was his way of preparing her for an introduction that never came. And by the way her father had reacted to being kidnapped by Gaea, she was pretty positive that Grandpa Tom had never told him either. Her only hypothesis was that her dad was one of the many mortals who couldn’t see through the Mist, while the senior McLean
could.

As for being the Gayegogi?

She could handle that. She wasn’t sure what exactly it all entailed, but if it meant telling stories, voicing her opinion on matters, and helping keep the peace between the immortal and mortal world, she could do that. That actually sounded significantly easier than being the daughter of a celebrity and way easier than being a demigod.

So, at the moment all she wanted to do was take clean up. She was tired of smelling her pits every time she moved her arms ever so slightly.

“Nope!” Kokyangwuti cried from her worn armchair, rapidly knitting tapestry after tapestry. “The Gayegogi is welcome to use the bathroom, but the animals will have to bathe in the creek!”

Of course... nothing is ever so simple...

“What did you call us?” Reyna hissed, the muscles in her neck tensing up.

Veronica reached out and grabbed the praetor’s shoulder, shaking her head in disapproval. The blonde looked like spider goddess had punched her in the gut and Piper understood why. She couldn’t imagine the kind of self-esteem issues the blonde was having, but to be called an animal with her body disintegrating had to have hurt.

“Fine then!” Piper spat at the goddess. “My entourage and I will be at the creek!” She grabbed the others by the hands and drug them out of the room, completely unaware that the spider was giving her an approving smile.

“If this is for animals, I can’t imagine what the bathroom is like,” Veronica whistled as they surveyed the creek.

Reyna nodded in agreement. “This is on par with the bathhouses.”

Piper remembered going down to a nearby creek in the summer to catch frogs or tadpoles when she and her dad still live with Grandpa Tom. The little stream of water had only been about two feet wide and maybe six inches deep. The water could be clear one day only for it to become cloudy with dirt the next day or change to a beautiful emerald green. Weeds had lined the water’s edge, that had made her bare legs itch until she crouched down into the red mud.

This creek was nothing like that.

She was pretty sure it didn’t even legally qualify as a creek.

A pool of crystal clear water sat in a secluded section of the ranch, where a small waterfall flowed over a limestone rock face into the pool below. The pool appeared to be deep enough to cover their shoulders if they sat down and little minnows darted to-and-fro within. Instead of mud and weeds, the water was surrounded by dark granite that had been worn smooth by eons of flooding and receding waters. Someone had placed several beach chairs around the pool, as well as a cabinet full of fluffy white towels, and several strands of Christmas lights had been strung from the overhead tree branches.
What really got Piper’s attention though was a minibar stocked with a variety of both healthy and sugary snacks. She raced over to the small wicker cabinet and threw open the door. “Score! They’ve got Combos!” she whooped as she tore open the bag and poured the salty crack and artificial cheese snacks into her mouth. “Roh my rod, rese are so rood!” she mewled, sending bits of cracker spraying from her mouth.

Reyna frowned. “Yeah, you somehow got a little bit in my mouth. Also, some spit.”

“Toss us one!” Veronica laughed, opening their mouth wide.

Piper was more than happy to oblige, throwing the hybrid combo after combo, and laughing maniacally as Atlas and Veronica performed flips, dove to the ground, and leapt into the air to devour the salty snacks. She even tried to toss one to Reyna, but the praetor merely caught with her on hand and flicked it into her mouth; it was cool, but not as cool as Veronica launching herself ten feet into the air and doing a superhero landing.

“Ow!” Veronica hissed, grasping her left knee. “That is sooo impractical.”

Piper swallowed the last of the salty treats and chuckled, “I bet.”

Just when she went to remove her sweat stained T-shirt, when Reyna startled her and everyone in a thirty mile radius by shouting, “WHAT ARE YOU DOING?”

She blinked and quirked a brow at the praetor. “Uh, stripping? I mean, I don’t know about you, but I tend to bathe in the nude?”

Reyna face-palmed and growled in frustration. “Did you forget we’re in mixed company?!”

It was Atlas and Veronica’s turn to blink. “Oh,” the two gasped. “Oh!” They realized. Their face fell and their golden eyes dimmed. “I’m- uh- I guess we’ll just come back later,” Veronica stuttered. “I don’t want you guys to be uncomfortable…”

Piper frowned at Reyna. Nuh uh! We can’t have any more walls between us! Just as the blonde spun on her heels, Piper reached deep inside herself and summoned her charm speak. “Atlas, Veronica, stay.” The daughter of Mercury and titan general halted immediately.

Reyna narrowed her eyes. “Piper what are you doing?”

She ignored the Latina and walked over to the youngest and oldest members of the trio. Three bodies, four souls, I’m honestly not sure how to count us. “Hey, Atlas,” she smiled. “I never really got a pervy vibe from you. Can we trust you to not be a creep?” She knew that Atlas and Veronica could have killed her and Reyna at any time on their journey, but they were always pleasant enough, only getting into petty squabbles with Reyna.

And getting into arguments with Reyna is one of the only ways to pass the time in Betty White!

Their eyes flickered and Atlas’ voice boomed, “I have no interest in little girls. And the three of you remind me of my daughters.” The titan smiled sadly. “But with the things I’ve done I would understand if you want us to leave. I–“

Piper flicked their forehead, effectively silencing them. “Cool, now strip!” She said the last word like a lead vocalist of a death metal band, making the other’s eyes bulge. She pulled off her shirt and tossed it on one of the beach chairs, followed by her denim shorts. She looked around and saw that Reyna and Veronica were still just standing there with the jaws gaping. “I said strip!” she cried with her charm speak.
Reyna was the first to peel her shirt off; which was interesting to see with her lacking her right arm. With her left hand, Reyna grabbed the right side of the hem of her shirt, and in one quick motion jerked it up over the small stub that remained of her right arm. From there the praetor pulled the shirt over her head, and the purple T-shirt quickly joined Piper’s. “I did not want to do this!” Reyna protested as she pulled her jeans down.

Veronica didn’t hesitate, in fact she was smiling. “Thanks Piper!” The daughter of Mercury disrobed the fastest, and not because of her inhuman speed. The hybrid typically only wore a red sports bra and a matching pair of shorts. “Back at home, my grandpa would fill a cattle tank with water in the summer!” the blonde beamed. “It was an awesome pool! The only down side was-“

“Scraped knees!” Piper finished. “I remember one of the ranchers did the same thing for the local kids! The adults would have a barbecue, and just drop us off! Then everyone would-“

“Swim around in a circle and get a whirlpool going!” Veronica laughed. “Then you’d all try to change direction, only to fall down and scrape your knees!”

I guess there are some similarities between rez kids and country kids, she thought with a smile. She looped her arm around the blonde’s neck and pulled her close. “I think we just became best friends!”

Before Veronica could respond, Reyna plowed through the two of them. “That’s great, but I want to get his over with! I feel… exposed out here.” The Latina unbraided her hair as she walked, the long dark hair fanning out over her shoulders. “Also, we forgot soap. Which-“ Reyna stuck one foot into the crystal clear water, “JUPITER’S JOWELS! THAT IS COLD!” she shrieked, instantly pulling her foot back out.

Piper and Veronica shared a knowing look.

“Well, yeah Reyna,” Veronica smirked. “It’s a creek and it’s April. There is no way it’s not going to be cold.”

Piper re-looped her arm around the Veronica’s warm neck. “Yeah Rey-Rey-“ she smiled when Reyna glared at her, “It’s probably cold enough to turn a man into a woman. Definitely cold enough to make you cut a diamond if you’re any indication.”

Reyna quickly covered her bust and flipped Piper off, her cheeks crimson.

“But don’t worry princess,” Veronica said with a smirk. “I’ll warm it up for you.” The blonde walked over to the water’s edge and dipped her left foot in the brisk waters. The girl didn’t even flinch as she stepped completely into the water. “If there is one good thing about burning alive,” the blonde announced when she reached the center of the natural pool, “it’s that every body of water becomes a hot tub.” The hybrid’s flaming eyes flashed and instantly steam began to rise from the water.

“Veronica, would you marry me?!” Piper laughed before jumping into the water. This is awesome!

At first, they did their best to clean themselves, the steaming hot water easily removing the caked-up grime with relative ease. When Reyna struggled to reach a few areas of her back, Piper took it upon herself to help. The praetor nodded her thanks, but Piper could tell that her pride was wounded. Veronica though looked to be actually enjoying herself; dipping her head under the water only to
reemerge with a dramatic hair flip like she was Ariel from *The Little Mermaid*. No one complained about her splashing, as every time she went under, the water reheated.

After that, the four just sat around enjoying a good soak, the hot water removing weeks of stress and ache from their overworked muscles. Veronica sat in the deepest part of the creek cross-legged, the water level stopping just below her nose. Reyna sat directly across from Piper, her arm resting on the rocks with one eye closed while the other was slightly cracked open as if to keep an eye on her. And as Reyna watched her, Piper had a startling realization.

*Reyna is beautiful.*

It wasn’t that she was attracted to the praetor, or even that she thought that Reyna was ugly. Reyna had always had a fierce warrior-queen beauty to her, but seeing her relaxed with her hair down revealed another side of her. Suddenly Reyna went from badass unapproachable warrior, to a girl that could be captain of a high school track team.

Looking at her actually made Piper feel a little doubtful of her own appearance. She never really cared too much about her appearance, but knowing that this was a side of Reyna Jason had probably seen didn’t sit well with her. It kind of made her feel like Reyna was right about Jason being taken from her.

Piper also saw for the first time the numerous scars that decorated the Reyna’s body. There was hardly a square inch on her arms and legs that didn’t have some kind of small scar, evidence of years of training and combat. Evidence of a life that they should have been too young to have. The right side of Reyna’s body though was horrific. Apparently, the Latina had downplayed just how bad Terminus had hurt her during the Fall of New Rome.

*Typical Reyna…*

“I’ve been doing some thinking,” Reyna said, breaking the comfortable silence. “About you being the Gayegogi.”

Piper averted her gaze. “Oh?”

Reyna placed her arm back in the water and slid down so that only her shoulders were above the water. “Avalon is an enemy to everyone. An enemy that has figured out how to wage war on the gods themselves. They don’t care what group they’re fighting against, all that matters is their end goal of a world without gods, demigods, and monsters.”

Veronica poked her head out of the water. “I’m actually okay with losing two of those.”

Reyna splashed the girl and continued. “We need to broker some kind of peace with them, similar to the Greeks and Romans. It would increase everyone’s defenses and drastically cut down the time it takes to get reinforcements. Plus, demigods would have more safe havens throughout the country and we could establish trade.” Reyna sheepishly scratched her cheek. “Those, uh, starlight bows are pretty awesome.”

Piper smiled at Reyna. “I was thinking the same thing,” she chuckled. “About the bows and establishing peace,” Piper clarified. The daughter of Aphrodite moved into the deeper waters. “But I’m thinking this is going to take more than a kidnapping and destroying a common enemy. This is centuries of known aggression. Artemis was hunting down members of the Nation, our monsters have been attacking them for years, and the very gods themselves tried to orchestrate a genocide.”

Despite the warm water, Piper shuddered. “I think our short-term goal would be us three earning their trust so they can prepare for Avalon and have them watch our backs as we make out way East.”
Reyna closed her eyes and considered her words. “While I’m not sure I completely believe the gods did what you say they did, I think you’re right. As we make our way East, we stop and help out where we can.” The Latina sighed and sank deeper into the water. “Because I don’t think we can make it to New York without some help.”

“I’m not sure about New York,” Kokyangwuti’s voice rang out. “But, the Gayegogi is one-hundred-percent correct about peace being hard to obtain.”

Piper sighed. “I know I’m going to regret this, but where are you Spider Grandmother?” Veronica and Reyna had covered their chests to save their modesty, but she had stood up from the water to try and spot the weaver goddess.

“Over here child.”

She spun around in place until she saw a small spider sitting on one of the free beach chairs with a lit cigarette in one of its eight legs. “Yup, saw that coming….”

“I came down here to tell you some news,” the spider said before taking a drag. “A tweet went out from the council that has declared you, Piper McLean, public enemy number one. The council believes you and your friends here somehow coerced the Thunderbird to give you one of its feathers before you killed it.” Spider Grandmother paused to take another puff. “Load of bull really, but I saw it coming a mile away. Would’ve saw it centuries ago if I still had my loom and spindle.”

In a surprisingly move, Reyna put herself between Piper and the goddess, beating Veronica by a split second. “And what? You’re going to turn us over? Kill us? Or did you already call for backup? Either way, you must be crazy if you think I’m going to let you hurt Piper!”

Reyna’s words touched her. “Wow Rey, that means a lot to me. Thanks.”

“Shut up Piper.”

A strand of web shot from the spider and sealed the praetor’s mouth shut. “You two are such mouthy things,” Kokyangwuti tsked. “No, I’m not here to capture you, turn you over, or whatever cliché your mind can come up with.” The goddess shifted to her human form. Her hair was still held in a bun by knitting needles and crocks still adorned her feet, but she was wearing a white, terry cloth robe. “No, I’m here to give you guidance. As is Awinita, Bambi, and Ptesanwi.” The goddess stood up, her ancient bones creaking, and took another drag of her cigarette. “So, when the four of you are done bathing, the four of us will be up at the ranch house, where we will discuss where the Gayegogi’s help is really needed.” The old woman then extinguished the cigarette on her tongue and swallowed the butt. “The current consensus is Yellowstone. If you can clear up the issue with the Uktena, you’d free up a majority of our warriors.” Kokyangwuti began to walk down the secluded path that led to the ranch proper. “I would definitely study up on the Uktena, the Thunderbird, the Thunders, and the Stoneclad!” the goddess chuckled before disappearing.

Veronica tilted her head and cocked an eyebrow. “Did we just get a quest?”

“Did we just get told what to expect on said quest?” Reyna asked.

She was about to respond when she caught a glimpse of the Latina’s chest. Ah, what the hell.

“Reyna are you cold?” Piper asked with a smirk. In the blink of an eye, she was underwater, with Reyna’s freakishly strong hand holding her under.

“What is wrong with you?!” she heard Reyna scream above the water.

_Worth it! So worth!_
“Reyna she’s got to breathe!” Veronica cried. “Reyna!”
Nico

Chapter Summary

Warning: There be smut!

Tonight:

Nico takes a bath,
Percy is a distraction,
And a bridge begins to be rebuilt

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the late update, so here is a nice long fluffy chapter to make up for it!

Nico carefully untangled himself from Percy and climbed out of their bed as silently as possible as to not awaken either his father or the son of Poseidon. Percy’s bed was definitely made for one, but since the incident with the owl, they somehow made the small mattress work.

He would be lying if he said he said he couldn’t wait to go to bed every night.

Nico glanced over to his father. The lord of Underworld still appeared to be asleep, his body sprawled out on his black sleeping bag with one hand clutching a pillow against his head; most likely a futile attempt to drown out Percy’s chainsaw like snoring. He wasn’t exactly sure how he slept through it every night when his father struggled so, but maybe it was because how relaxed he felt when Percy wrapped his arms around him.

Percy…

The son of Hades turned his attention back to his sleeping boyfriend. In the few seconds that had passed since Nico had crawled out of the raven-haired teen embrace, Percy had grabbed a pillow in his sleep and pulled it into a tight embrace. He wouldn’t fault Percy for being clingy in his sleep, as he was just as bad, if not worse. The physical contact Percy gave him was making him feel more comfortable with displaying some intimacy in public, and he was almost ready to reveal their relationship to their mortal friends.

He frowned.

It was Wednesday morning, which meant prom was three days away. By the end of the school day he had to turn in their announcements for the premiere, so one way or another everyone was going to know. A rather significant part of him wanted to call the whole thing off and just stay home that night, but they had already ordered their tuxes and he had raised quite a fuss about the three of them going. But he was excited about it as well, and as long as he focused on that, all would be well.
Now smiling, Nico bent down and gave Percy a quick peck on his cheek, before slipping into the shadows.

Instantly he reappeared in what had more-or-less became Jason’s room; his and Percy’s clothes were still stored there, but Jason was the only one who slept in it. The blond was currently fast asleep, safely tucked beneath the covers with his arms protectively wrapped around his laptop. Only a few short hours ago, Jason and Percy had gotten into a rather heated argument. He wasn’t sure on the details, but apparently Percy had gotten the laptop sick by looking something up on the internet. Neither would tell him what his boyfriend looked up, but Jason kept saying Percy had a dirty mind. After that Jason had worked late into the night to get the laptop fixed, and judging by the blond’s content expression, he had succeeded.

He silently padded over to the sleeping son of Jupiter and tried to remove the laptop from the older boy’s embrace, but Jason had it in a vice-like grip. Well, if it falls and breaks I can honestly say I tried to stop it. Next, Nico picked up Jason’s glasses and cleaned them off with his shirt. He was positive that if Jason didn’t start to clean them on his own, the teen would need a stronger prescription in the near future. Seriously Jason, how can you even see out of them when they’re that dirty? He returned the glasses to their place on the nightstand. Finally, he retrieved a pair of boxers and a T-shirt from the closet, before once more slipping into the shadows.

This time he reemerged in the bathroom. The cool tile floor made his toes curl ever so slightly, but for the most part he was able to ignore it. The son of Hades set his change of clothes onto the sink and then turned his attention to the claw-footed bathtub. He spun the fixture, and with a rumble from the ancient pipes, cold water began to fill the tub.

“Crap,” Nico cringed at the sudden sound. It was a little after three in the morning and he was the only one awake in the house; and he wanted to keep it that way. He didn’t want Jason, Percy, his father, Demeter, or gods forbid Persephone to bother him. He just wanted an hour to take a nice hot bath all by himself without worrying about anyone needing to use the bathroom.

After one of the longest minutes of his life, the pipes stopped their incessant rattling and the only sound was the cold water filling the tub. Relieved that the thin bathroom walls would muffle the sound of running water, he quickly removed his clothes; a pair of black boxers with dancing skeletons and one of Percy’s Led Zeppelin T-shirts (the son of Poseidon’s shirts were large and comfortable to sleep in). He carefully set the clothing into the hamper that he shared with his father, Jason, and Percy; Persephone and Demeter had their own for obvious reasons.

A smile found its way to his lips. That and Demeter freaked out when she found Percy holding her bra while we were doing laundry. Poor Percy almost went mute again…

He turned off the water and took a deep breath. “Alright, you’ve done this before,” Nico whispered to himself. Closing his eyes, he concentrated on that area just outside the bathroom’s small window. He thought about how cool the night air was, as well as how cold his bath water was. He pictured the ambient heat from the air moving to the water, and felt the hairs on the back of his neck stand up.

The son of Hades opened his eyes and his smile grew; the windowpanes were covered in frost, while the bath water was now steaming. He pumped his fist a few times and spun around on his heels once in celebration; something he most certainly did not pick up from Percy.

Since his father and Percy forbade him from doing anything strenuous after he was shot, his training had shifted its focus to the more mental aspects of his powers. So besides mineral detection and control, his father had Nico working on the so called ‘chill of the grave’. On several occasions in the past, when he had gotten quite upset, the temperature in the area surrounding him would drop to the point he could see his breath. In the last few days Hades had shown him how to properly control this
ability and he had taken it a step farther. His father had explained that he was merely moving the heat from one area to another, and remember a lesson from physics class, he figured out how to easily transfer the heat to a much colder object.

In this case, his bathwater.

The son of Hades stepped into the hot water, letting out a small hiss at the initial change in temperature, before sitting down in the ancient tub. “I needed this,” he said with a relaxed sigh. Baths were a rare commodity for Greek demigods, what with the only bathtub in the camp being in the big house. Camp Jupiter had its bathhouses, but he never felt comfortable enough to use them. There was his room in the Underworld, but with Persephone lurking about he never used it. So right now, he was taking full advantage of their current situation.

He leaned over the edge of the tub and grabbed a washcloth and large cup that rested on a stand that housed all of their soaps and shampoos. Nico draped the corn-patterned washcloth across his knee and filled the cup up, before dumping the hot water down his back. His back muscles began to relax as did the rest of his body, and he sank into the tub so that only his knees and head were above the water.

Nico’s mind began to wander.

He first thought about the plan to take out Merlin and hopefully bring an end to Avalon once and for all. There were definitely some major pieces of information missing from his father’s plan, but he knew that taking out the leader of any organization typically led to its collapse. Nico wasn’t worried about killing the old man, as he had single handedly killed quite a few members of Avalon just a few days ago without so much as bat ting an eye.

They killed Will, Annabeth, and the rest of their friends; he had no mercy for them. And he knew for a fact that Percy felt the same way.

The son of Hades tapped his toes against the floor of the tub as his stepmother began to take center stage in his mind. Since their return from the ill-fated encounter with Artemis, more memories of a very different Persephone began to awaken. Chelsea, the annoying blonde, had worn some kind of floral scented perfume that had sent him back to a cemetery picnic with his mother, Bianca, and Persephone that had occurred a lifetime ago. While chopping peppers for dinner with the former goddess hovering over his shoulder, he caught a whiff of her and remembered her reading to him and English before bed, and tucking him in bed with a hug and a kiss on the forehead. Reading comics with Jason and Percy made him remember his mother and Persephone taking him to see the Captain America serials and how the two would play with him afterward. The Persephone of the past was so different from the one he had known after the Lotus, that he couldn’t come to terms with it.

In some ways, he hated Persephone more than ever. His younger self considered the goddess to be a second mother, so why was it when he needed her the most that she became the monster he knew now? He had been ten years old when he lost his sister, he had no place to go, and he was struggling with feelings for a boy he didn’t understand. If these newfound memories of Persephone were true, then he should have had a home, he should have had someone help him process his grief over Bianca, and someone to help him understand that his feeling for Percy weren’t a bad thing.

But a part of him wanted to let the goddess back into his life. A large part of that was because they were stuck in the farmhouse together now, with the Persephone constantly trying to get back on his good side, so if he let her in, it would hopefully stop her from intruding so much on his time with Percy. There was part though, be it ever so small, that wanted her back. Wanted the love and attention he had known. Nico knew he was far too old now for bedtime stories and the like, but perhaps there was something they could do.
Percy and Sally were close. I doubt I could ever get that close, but it’s something to aspire to. Nico knocked the back of his head against the tub and sighed. “I guess I’ll have to follow Percy’s advice and talk to her.”

“You should always listen to my advice Neeks,” the son of Poseidon yawned as the bathroom door creaked open.

Nico sat upright and crossed his legs, the sudden movement sending water splashing out of the tub onto the tiled floor. He was like a deer caught in headlights, but if Percy noticed he didn’t say anything. As his brain tried to process what was happening, his boyfriend simply limped into the bathroom and closed the door behind him. If he would have had the mental capacity he would have chided Percy for not using his crutches. The raven-haired teen then patted him on the head before continuing on his drowsy way to the toilet. The son of Hades managed to regain some control, averting his gaze just as Percy began to tug at his boxers.

The son of Hades’ face turned red as the sound of Percy relieving himself filled the room. “Oh, that feels good,” Percy moaned.

It was at that moment Nico’s brain decided to catch up. Sadly though, to save time his brain mashed his concerns of being naked and Percy not using his crutches, causing him to blurt out, “Percy, you’re naked!” Immediately followed by, “I’m crutches!”

The drowsy son of Poseidon flushed the toilet and quirked his head to the side. “Neither of those things are true.” Percy paused. “I think?” The older boy looked down at himself. “Nope, I’m clothed.” He then carefully limped over to the tub and with a slight grunt, plotted himself down on the tile. “You’re up early, babe.”

Nico blinked a few times as his boyfriend smiled at him. Despite his drowsy appearance, Percy was looking him over like a hungry wolf does a lone sheep. And it excited him. It excited Nico so much that he was seriously regretting crossing his legs. He should have told Percy to get out, to leave him to bathe in peace, but instead he said, “Percy, I’m naked.”


Suddenly, the water that he had splashed all over the floor began to climb up the tub’s legs and outer wall, before returning to its proper place. While that was a trick Nico knew Percy had been capable of doing for years, what he really noticed was that there was no visible indication that the son of Poseidon was doing it. No closing his eyes, no furrowing of his brow, no gestures with his hands, not even a twitch of his lip. The training Percy and he were undergoing was pushing them to levels they never thought possible.

As Nico’s attention returned to the present, he was greeted by the sight of Percy’s peeling his shirt off. “Percy! What are you doing?!” he hissed, but his heart was not in it. Percy wasn’t built like a body builder by any means (and honestly Nico didn’t really find muscles that attractive), and the son of Poseidon’s gut was getting a little softer from months of inactivity, but the sight of a shirtless Percy made Nico’s heart flutter every time. And other things grow. Ow…

“I’m going to join you,” Percy said as if that was the most normal thing in the world. The older teen pushed himself back up with a hiss and fingered the waistband of his boxers. “I mean, if that’s okay?”

His brain was screaming at him to tell Percy no. That if they were caught right now they would be in huge trouble. That the tub was a tight fit even when they showered. That Persephone and Demeter
were next door. They were all valid reasons, but Nico was no longer thinking with his brain, rather, he was thinking with his lower extremities. “Y-yeah,” he stammered.

“Cool,” Percy smirked. And he pulled his boxers down.

Nico’s jaw dropped. He was now eyelevel with Percy’s crotch, and for the first time, he realized that their relationship really was going to be more physical than just making out. Percy had told him that on multiple occasions, but he was always doubtful. But now he could see (literally) that Percy had been telling the truth.

And it excited him even more.

Percy was bigger than Nico in every way it seemed, but in this particular instance, he did not care. The son of Hades didn’t really have much experience to judge Percy, but he got the feeling that Percy wasn’t the largest either. The son of Poseidon was also much hairier than himself, but that really didn’t matter to him. What was noteworthy though, was that Percy had been circumcised like himself; apparently Sally and his mother had scene value in it.


He nodded wordlessly and scrambled forward, sending more water spilling to the floor. He wanted Percy in there with him, now.

“Awesome.” Percy then swung his left leg over the tub, putting all his weight on his still recovering right leg, but Nico had enough mental capacity left to reach out and help the older teen keep his balance. In another second Percy was standing behind him. The son of Poseidon then carefully lowered himself into the steaming water, snaking his legs around Nico’s. “This is great,” Percy sighed, wrapping his arms around Nico’s midriff and pulling him back against his chest. “But why are you up so early?”

It took a few seconds for Percy’s question to register, as every fiber of his being was focused on Percy’s member prodding his back. “I,” Nico gulped, “just wanted to have a few moments to myself. A chance to relax.” Settle down, Nico. It’s just like being in a pool together. An incredibly small pool... And we’re naked... And Percy is hard... As casually as possible, or at least he tried to be, Nico placed on hand over his own growing problem. “But, I’m glad you’re here,” he quickly added.

Percy pulled him even closer and placed a kiss on the back of his neck. “But everything is okay though, right? No dreams or bad thought?”

In a way, it was funny that Percy would ask him that, considering Percy was the one that tended to have more bad dreams and was struggling with borderline depression. But it also was incredibly sweet that Percy would worry about him. And that was just one more reason why he was in love with Percy Jackson. He tilted his head back so Percy could see his face. “No, I’m fine,” he smiled. “Thanks though.” He quickly kissed the edge of Percy’s lips.

“Good.” Percy’s hands then drifted down; his right slithering down to Nico’s thighs and his left hand began to draw little circles on his chest, occasionally touching one of his nipples. “Is this alright?”

‘Alright’ was the understatement of the century in Nico’s opinion. A warm grilled cheese with tomato soup is ‘alright’. Watching television with Percy, Jason, and his father after a long day was ‘alright’. This, this was absolutely mind-blowing. “Yes,” he squeaked, slightly grinding against Percy’s hard member. The son of Hades was going to turn and say more, but Percy’s lips found his neck.
And it was glorious.

Percy began to suck at the tender flesh, sometimes biting down slightly. Nico knew that it he would get yet another hickey, but it just felt so amazing. All the while Percy’s left hand began to twerk his let nipple; it was slightly painful, but the pleasure far outweighed the pain. And when Percy’s right hand began to work its way up his milky thigh, Nico was reduced to a panting mess.

Percy pulled away, “Do you like that?”

He might have said something, but his mouth and brain were disconnected. He did however, wrap his arms Percy’s neck and pulled him back down to his sensitive pulse. Percy chuckled, sending waves of pleasure down his neck. When Percy started to suck again, he thought he had died and gone to the Isles of the Blessed, because surely there was nothing so amazing on Earth.

And then Percy’s hand wrapped around his throbbing member and gave him a quick pump.

Bolts of pure bliss flowed through every cell in his body. Out of instinct he tried to buck forward into Percy’s hand, but the son of Poseidon held him in place with his other arm. Nico opened his mouth to moan, but Percy once again latched onto his neck, and all that came out was heavy panting.

“You like that don’t ya Neeks?” the raven haired teen asked in a husky voice, a predatory gleam in his eye. “What about this?” Percy’s hand slowed, almost painfully so. Nico tried to buck again, but Percy held him in place. “We don’t want to rush this, right?” Percy smirked, rubbing Nico’s dark, red head with his thumb.

Nico moaned in frustration. He did not want to take it slow, he wanted Percy to go absolutely wild. He wanted to know how Percy could be so collected, when he could clearly feel Percy’s hard flesh poking him. “Please!” he cried, his toes curling more and more with each sinfully slow pump. “Please!”

Percy’s hand covered Nico’s mouth to silence the younger teen. “Shhh. You don’t want to wake everyone up,” Percy whispered, before nibbling on the son of Hades’ earlobe.

At that moment, Nico could not have cared less about everyone else in the house. Avalon could been right outside the bathroom door, and all we would have cared about was the building sensation near the pit of his stomach and how he could get Percy to alleviate it.

He threw his head back and panted, baring his neck even more for the cruel son of Poseidon. “P- Please Percy!” he begged, trying to spread his legs as far as possible in the small tub. Nico managed to thrust with enough force that his lower body left the water and broke from Percy’s iron grip; the cold air further stimulating his sensitive member. “Please!”

Percy’s hand found its way back, and he tightened his grip. “Alright babe, let’s make you lose it.”

Nico squeezed his eyes shut and bit his lips as Percy began to pump him at a fevered pace. He let out a ragged moan and threw his legs over the tub’s walls as Percy continued to stroke him. It was an exquisite pain that he never wanted to end, but yet he knew the best was yet to come. “Percy!” he whined as the fire within him was roaring towards explosion.

Oh, Gods! Please, Just let me!

His cock exploded with radiant pleasure, as he released into Percy’s hand. The first spurt of the hot, milky white substance hit him just below his naval, another just above his stitches, and the last of warm fluid covered Percy’s hand; it was explosion after explosion of pure pleasure. If Percy hadn’t been holding him he would’ve sank into the water and drowned, so spent was the son of Hades.
There are definitely worse ways to go, he thought as his mental state began to return to normal.

“So... was that good?” Percy asked, the confidence in his voice gone. “I’ve never done that to anyone, well besides myself, so-”

Nico silenced the babbling son of Poseidon by rolling over and catching the older teen’s lips with his own; he smacked his legs hard against the tub, but the pain didn’t even register. As their tongues danced, he adjusted his position so that he was straddling Percy. He wrapped one arm around Percy’s next and reached down to take Percy’s erect-

“Nico! Jackson! Where are you?!” his father called out from somewhere in the house.

Nico’s head swung to the door so fast, it was amazing that his neck didn’t snap. His heart rate was up again, but unlike before it wasn’t because of arousal. It was panic.

“Shit!” Percy cursed. “Looks like we’re busted.”

An idea popped into his head. An idea that would mitigate the fallout. “Percy,,” he gulped, unsure how Percy would react to his idea, “What If I shadow traveled you out of here? Into your bed or Jason’s room?”

Percy blinked before a a cocky grin spread across his face. “Yeah, that would work. Just let me get out of the-”

He probably should have let Percy finish, but he was too worried about getting caught. He opened the shadows behind the nude son of Poseidon and pushed him through; along with about half the bath water. A split second later a loud ‘THUD’ echoed through the house.

“Jackson! Why are you on the kitchen table?!” Nico heard his father cry. “Why is everything wet?! Why are you naked?!”

Nico was a ball of tense energy for the rest of the morning.

He never went back to sleep as he was now hyper aware of Percy now. When Percy had returned to bed after an intense questioning from Hades and an intense scolding from Demeter on the perils of water damage, Nico couldn’t help but to stare at his boyfriend. He had thought that making out with Percy had opened a Pandora’s Box, but the bath had opened up a box of want and desire that threatened to destroy his sanity.

Before Will, and before he accepted himself, he was always disgusted by his body’s urges. The few times he had pleasured himself to the thought of Percy had left him feeling shame, guilt, and disgusted with himself. So, he tried to avoid those urges, but no matter what, they would win out in the end, making him feel worse with every release. It was a vicious cycle that he wouldn’t wish on his worst enemy.

Now though? He couldn’t stop thinking about the next time it would happen. That maybe next time he would get to return the favor to Percy.

Eventually he gave up on trying to sleep and made his way to the kitchen, where he may have gone a bit overboard making breakfast. He made crepes, pancakes, french toast, scrambled eggs, ham
steaks, bacon, sausage links, fresh squeezed orange juice, and hash-browns. It was the first time since his father had made soup, that he was absolutely famished.

He ate a large portion of everything, and by the time he went back for seconds, the rest of the family was up. When Percy limped into the kitchen and sat down at the table, Nico deposited a large platter of food before him, and kissed him on the lips in front of everyone. As he served everyone their own plate, he noticed that Persephone was wiggling her eyebrows at his father and jerking her head towards him and Percy with a large smile on her face. His father alternated between being pale and flushing crimson; with a vein in his forehead looking ready to burst. For some reason, his father handed Jason a hundred dollar bill and told him to hit Percy as hard as he could.

He couldn’t help but laugh when Jason slugged Percy in the shoulder.

*My family is weird.*

“Looks like I win again, Nico,” Chelsea laughed, flicking his Hades figurine over with her index finger.

It was their free-period-slash-lunch and like any other day, he and Percy were playing *Mythomagic* with Chelsea and Tate in the bleachers. Normally he could beat the blonde girl two-thirds of the time, but his head was elsewhere.

Specifically, staring at Percy’s, ever so slightly, exposed thigh.

The son of Poseidon was sitting just below, using his *Lovecraft* deck to slowly drain the life out of Tate’s Norsemen. Percy sat with his right leg stretched out on the bleacher, with his left tucked underneath. The weird position made the teen’s red shorts ride up just enough to drive Nico absolutely wild.

*If they go up anymore, I’m shadow traveling the both us back home! I don’t care what anyone says, he’s mine!*

It should be noted though that, Nico’s mind had been in the gutter all day. Every little move, every noise, every gesture Percy made did not go unnoticed by him. He couldn’t focus in any of his classes, as Percy sat next to him in every one. He hoped that Percy had taken notes and knew what homework they had, because he wasn’t even sure how he got from class to class.

*I’m not even sure when I went back to my locker for my deck…*

Chelsea snapped her fingers in front of his face, momentarily shifting his focus on the blonde. “You alright di Angelo? You’re really out of it today; you need to lay down or something?”

He smiled at her as his eyes drifted back to Percy. “I’m good. What’s the score?”

“My ten to your zero.”

*Maybe I should pay a little more attention…*
“Alright ladies and peons, let’s get started,” Mr. Z announced, scribbling notes down on the classroom’s whiteboard. “I know Prom is this weekend and the last thing you care about is World History, so for the rest of the week we will be discussing current events. Everyday I will write up several things I heard on my commute and you will break into groups and discuss them. You will be graded purely on participation,” the Athletic teacher explained, tossing a now dry dry-erase marker into a trash can across the room. “I’ll just be eavesdropping on you all, because I don’t want to grade any papers this week. So spread out.”

Nico and Jason spun their desks around so that they were facing Percy, and half a second later, they were joined by Chelsea and Aaron. It was their normal group by now, though Nico wished that the redhead would take the hint to keep away from Percy. He thought that stabbing Aaron in the ass with the sharpest pencil in existence would get the point across (ha!), but the guy just wasn’t taking the hint.

I wonder if I’m strong enough now to send him to Antarctica? I could definitely get him to Texas, but he would just find his way back. The son of Hades grinned at the redhead, which made Aaron shrink in his seat.

Mr. Z clapped his hands and pointed to the board, where he had written a list of topics. “Alright here’s a quick summary of the state of the world! Negotiations with North Korea have once again broken down; they are now threatening to launch an attack on U.S. soil, our president has responded with threats of his own. Russia is threatening military action if any NATO country sends military support to Syria; the president says they are bluffing. Two groups of protesters clashed at the former Amazon headquarters in Seattle over human rights; I’m not sure why anyone is still there after that place burnt to the ground. There is still no sign of the frigate that disappeared near Boston harbor last week; experts currently believe an unusual current is to blame.” The man stopped to catch his breath, earning a series of chuckled from the class. “More freak lightning strikes from the floating city in New York happened last night; fire fighters struggled until the early hours of the morning to put out the resulting fires in Central Park. A string of fatal snake bites has forced the National Park Service to close Yellowstone until snake populations can be culled to normal numbers. And dozens of women in the Chicagoland area suffered miscarriages this past week; medical experts believe this is similar to the ones that occurred first on the East coast and then the West coast.” Mr. Z hung his head and slowly shook it. “That was the brightest news I heard,” he sighed before walking over to his desk.

Nico, Jason, and Percy shared a look. It was becoming easier and easier to tell what was Avalon’s doing and what was Zeus’. Anytime the latter made the news with his unleashed rage, Jason would sink into depression that lasted for days. And whatever efforts Nico had made to convince the son of Jupiter to rejoin their efforts to save Olympus were erased.

“I think the country needs to step back and work on its own problems,” Chelsea announced, tapping her mechanical pencil on the side of her desk. “We need to take like a collective mental health day before we start worrying about North Korea and Russia.”

Nico raised a brow at her, interested to see where this was going.

“What are you talking about Chels?” Aaron scoffed. “If the county takes a step back, the world will only get worse! At this point war is inevitable, so we should go in guns a blazing now to get the initial advantage!”
Jason frowned and absently scribbled on his notebook, clearly frustrated. “I think we need to clean out the government first before any real changes can be made. We’ve got some bad people in there on both sides of the aisle. It just seems like they’re hellbent on starting a war and keeping us divided.”

Nico frowned, but said nothing to the blond. Jason had not responded well to the finding out that Olympus had been placing demigods in positions of power for years with the sole intent to start wars. Frankly, he was worried that Jason had lost all faith in demigods.

And what does that mean for Percy and me?

Percy apparently understood what the son of Jupiter was implying and took offense to the blond’s accusation that all the demigods in office were corrupt. But that was just like Percy though, trying to see the best in everyone and offering almost unlimited chances at redemption. “Hey! They’re doing their best! I’m sure there is more going on than we know!”

You’re probably right Perce, he smiled. But probably for the wrong reasons…

“What do you think Nico?” Chelsea asked, her blue eyes burrowing into his skull.

“Yeah, Nico, what’s your opinion?” his boyfriend asked, clearly looking for support.

Everyone in their little group turned to face him, all of them looking for him to agree with their opinion to gain some false sense superiority over the others. Naturally, he wanted to agree with Percy, even if he thought the green-eyed Adonis was a bit naive, but he didn’t want to upset the others. They all made some valid points, except Aaron, but perhaps his disapproval of the redhead was personal.

“Ummm, I think those snakes are going to be a big problem?”

Everyone threw their heads back and rolled their eyes, groaning in frustration.

It was the last period of the school day, Java Coding; the only class he had without Percy. He had thought that without Percy being there next to him the siren’s song of lust would have diminished in strength.

But he as wrong, so very wrong.

Knowing that Percy was either sitting next door in the library or currently changing into gym shorts in the locker room was driving him absolutely nuts. The linked list project he was supposed to be working in was suffering from it, he would click ‘build’ repeatedly, knowing that the IDE would only spit out a list of errors. Typically he had no problems with coding and algorithm design, and he usually enjoyed it, but gods he was tempted to go check on Percy.

“What are you humming di Angelo?” Chelsea asked, slugging him lightly in the shoulder to get his attention.

“Huh? Oh! Alice Cooper’s Poison,” he blushed.

While he was slowly learning to appreciate the various rock music his father and Percy were playing
for him during their training sessions, *Poison* was the one song that truly spoke to him. The lyrics told of a man that wanted to be with the one he loved, but knew that acting on it would only bring pain, that the lips he yearned to kiss were poison. At first the song had been a reminder of the pain he experienced wanting Percy from afar, but after the events of this morning, the song had taken on a whole new meaning for him.

“You’re one weird guy Nico,” she chuckled. The blonde then craned her neck and squinted at his screen, her ponytail bouncing ever so slightly. “Looks like you got a few errors there, want some help?”

He held up his hand and shook his head. “No thanks, I’m good. Just a bit distracted today is all.”

The farm girl nodded and returned her attention back to her screen, her fingers dancing across her keyboard with lightning speed. Once during lunch, Chelsea had told him that she wanted to pursue a degree in computer science when she graduated. She told him that she wanted to leave the farm and work as a researcher in the field of artificial intelligence.

And watching her code, Nico knew that she would achieve her goals.

They sat there in relative silence for a time before Nico decided that it was time to tell her that he was going to Prom with Percy. He had already put it off long enough, and now he was worried that with the dance only a few days away she would hate him. He would never admit it aloud to anyone, but Chelsea was his friend, and he didn’t want it to end.

“Soostoo,” he started to eloquently, “about Prom...”

Chelsea’s fingers stopped and she turned to face him. She brushed a loose strand of hair from her face and sighed. “Look Nico, I’m really sorry, but I’m going with Aaron. We went to Junior Prom together, and since Percy didn’t ask and Aaron was too much of a wuss to ask Percy, we decided to go together again. Plus, you really should have asked weeks ago.”

*Wait? What?* He had not been expecting her to say anything like that at all. The son of Hades had been expecting her to bounce up and down like a demigod with a sugar rush and tell him yes before he even said anything; not turn him down.

Well there goes my whole ‘it’s not you, it’s me’ speech...

Nico gulped and smiled sheepishly at the blonde. “Uh, no, Chelsea. I’m, uh, not asking you to Prom.” He ran a hand through his dark, thick hair, as his feet began to tap the tiled floor with nervous energy. This should have made it easier to tell her about him and Percy, but as she stared at him he found it hard to speak. “I’m,” he gulped, “going with Percy...”

Chelsea narrowed her eyes, not in anger, but rather in confusion. “Okay... A lot of guys go together. A lot of girls too. We’re a small school so-”


The blonde tilted her head to the side, her ponytail swaying like a pendulum, as she mouthed what he just said. “Oh.” Her eyes widened. “Oh! So you’re-”

“Gay,” he smiled sadly. A couple heads around them turned to look as he said the word. He knew that by the end of the day (which was less than an hour away) the whole school would know his secret. While everyone seemed accepting of Aaron, he was still afraid that they would not be so accepting of him. It was kind of funny, he could stare down monsters, gods, and the barrel of a gun without flinching, but being discriminated against by his peers was still frightening. “I’m sorry,” he added sincerely.
Chelsea smiled softly at him, her eyes betraying some level of pain. “You have nothing to be sorry for Nico,” she said taking one of his hands in her own. “I’ll admit that I have, er, had, a bit of a crush on you, but so did most girls here,” she shrugged with a forced chuckle.

“Wait, what?”

“Did you not know?” she smiled, a bit more genuine this time, and her cheeks flushed. “Nearly every single girl here has or had a thing for you and Jason. Percy too, but him being mute kind of turned everyone off of him.”

“You’re- you’re joking right?” While it was true that initially everyone had been incredibly friendly toward him and his cousins, the idea of multiple women having a crush on him was laughable. He was short, pale, and awkward around other people, which contrasted to the rest of his tall, muscular, and outgoing classmates.

Chelsea squeezed his hand. “I’m dead serious. We don’t get many new people around here and everyone has known everyone since kindergarten if not earlier. So one day, out of the blue, three new guys show up. They’re from the city, where most of us dream of going. They’re not built like cattle like the other guys. The blond has this nerdy jock vibe and is so awkward around women it’s enduring. The oldest looks like a skater with a dark past. And one is this little ball of darkness that tries so hard to hide the fact he’s a nerd and genuinely cares for other people. So of course we’re going to notice.”

“I’m not... little...,” the son of Hades stammered, his face growing red.

“I’m sorry, you’re right! You’re downright microscopic!” Chelsea laughed, releasing his hand.

He scowled at her, but only playfully. “So... Are we good?”

Chelsea smiled, though her eyes were slightly misty. “You’re the only guy I know who can keep up with me in Mythomagic and coding, so of course we’re good. I am going to go home tonight and eat a tub of Chunky Monkey and absolutely slaughter everyone in PVP, but we’re good.” She held her arms wide for hug. “Friends?”

“Friends,” he smiled, closing the distance and embracing her. The conversation didn’t play out how he had expected, but he was satisfied with the results. She’s annoying and smells of strawberries, but this isn’t so bad.

“Hey! No public displays of affectionate!” Mrs. Carol cried from the front of the computer lab.

That night, the Fates had clearly been on his side.

His father had to leave the farm to get fitted for his own tux for the assassination. Demeter had taken Jason into town to help pick out plants to grow in a garden, and Jason was strangely excited about going. With everyone gone, that meant he and Percy would have a few hours to themselves. A few hours where Nico hoped to repeat that morning’s mind blowing events.

At the very least, he hoped to return the favor to Percy.
The two of them were currently sitting on their shared bed in the study, the son of Hades sitting in Percy’s lap with Jason’s laptop in hand. He was simultaneously racing to debug his code and ever so subtly grinding his rear against Percy.

And it was having the desired reaction.

“Nico,” The son of Poseidon panted. “Are you almost done?” The older snaked his arms around Nico and began to place little kisses down the boy’s neck. “Because if you don’t stop moving, I’m going to absolutely lose it,” Percy moaned, his voice husky.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he smirked while rapidly scrolling through lines of code that made up his node class. “I just got to figure out why I’m getting a type mismatch warning and I’ll be done.” A part of him knew that if he wasn’t teasing Percy (and had proper blood flow to his brain) he would’ve found his mistake in seconds. He also knew that his code would run just fine as it was, as a warning and an error are two very different things, but he regrettably took pride in his work.

“Neeks,” Percy moaned in his ear, “you have ten seconds to fix your problem before I take Jason’s laptop and chuck it out the window! After that I am going to-”

There was a knock at the entrance to the study. “Are you two boys okay?” Persephone asked from the doorway.

“Oh, you’ve got to be kidding me,” he heard Percy hiss under his breath.

The de-powered goddess stood at the entrance with both hand clutching the door frame as if it was the only thing keeping her upright. She was wearing one of Hades’ Dio T-shirts; the large, black shirt’s hem ending just above her knees. Peaking out from the shirt was a pair of his father’s boxers, and Nico wondered how they were staying up around her small frame. Her long, dark hair was in a loose braid that hung down her back.

The harsh goddess that he had come to know was gone; replaced by a young woman that reminded him of the woman he had grown up with.

“We’re fine,” he answered. The mood of the room had changed, gone was the want and desire for Percy (well not completely), replaced with an overwhelming awkwardness. He didn’t know what to say to her, and the same could be said for her. Yet, given enough time they always gravitated towards each other.

Persephone smiled slightly, drawing a circle on the floor with her big toe. “That’s good.”

A tense silence filled the room. Persephone stood in the doorway, biting her lip stealing quick glances at him and Percy. Percy still had a vice like grip around him, and Nico could feel that he was still quite excited.

Nico tapped a few more keys on his keyboard, changing an integer to a float, before he sighed. “Would you like to come and sit with us Persephone?” *Please don’t make me regret this…*

His stepmother perked up ever so slightly, and approached the two of them like one would a dangerous animal. She slowly sat down next to him, wincing ever so slightly as she bent. “What are you two doing?”

Before he could respond, Percy blurted out, “apparently just his homework now.” The raven haired teen leaned back against the wall, pouting like a small child deprived of his favorite toy.
“Oh,” Persephone exclaimed. “Umm, would you mind explaining what you are doing?”

The conversation had to be one of the most painful in recent memory, but Nico was willing to try, be it hesitantly, to create a better relationship with Persephone. “Sure.” He quickly clicked ‘build and run’ on the screen and turned the laptop to face Persephone. In the next instant, a black window opened up on the screen. “I’m working on a project that allows you to write a list of near-unlimited numbers, and then you can either get a tally of occurrences of each number, search for a number, or add more.” He gestured to the keyboard. “Would you like to try?”

The former goddess of spring nodded, scooted closer so she could reach the keys. “How do I, um, do this?”

“Just, uh, type a number, decimal work too, and hit ‘enter’ between each,” Nico explained. He hit the number ‘1’ and pressed ‘enter’ as an example. “Then when you’re done, press ‘x’.”

Persephone reached out and did as instructed, first hesitantly adding only a few numbers. After a couple moments though, she began to feverishly type on the keyboard. She added whole numbers with upwards of twelve digits, decimals that went to down to the millionth, and she even tried to throw in some letters, but his code rejected them and flashed a warning on the screen. Persephone started to chew on her lip, apparently struggling to remember what she had already entered, but continued to type away. After a few minutes, she hit ‘x’ and asked, “Okay, how do I do the tally?”

By then even Percy was staring at the screen from over his shoulder, clearly having gained some interest in the goddess’ demo.

“Just press ‘t’” he smiled.

Persephone did as instructed, and instantly the command prompt was filled with every a column containing every number she had entered with the number of occurrences in the next column. His stepmother took her index finger and went across every row. “Yup, I did enter fifty-three four times.” She reached up to pat this shoulder, but stopped and drew her hand back. “This- this is really amazing Nico,” she smiled. “Do- do you have anything else like this?”

Percy poked his side, tickling him just enough to make him squeal. “Show her that Tic-Tac-Toe game you made for us,” the older boy smiled. “Or that thing you made that insults whoever uses it! Or-”

*Shut up Percy!* Nico elbowed Percy in the ribs, not enough to hurt him, but enough to silence his lover. “I don’t think she’d want to really see any of that.”

“Yes I would,” Persephone blinked. “I want to see everything you’ve made. I- I’ve missed too much. So please show me.”

Nico merely nodded and opened up the folder that contained his numerous projects and hand-coded libraries.

He and Percy never did get any alone time that night, but that was fine. The three of them had a Tic-Tac-Toe tournament (and another when Percy pouted about coming in last), trading light hearted taunts to try and psyche each other out. In between games, Persephone would tell them stories of his mother. Some stories were of embarrassing things Nico said or did when he was small, much to the delight of Percy. Others were scandalous adventures Persephone and his mother had before he or Bianca were born; he could’ve gone his whole life without knowing that the two women swam naked in the canals, or that they made his father model for them in the nude.
Percy kind of heaved at that last one (and so did he).

When Hades, Demeter, and Jason returned home, the three found them laughing to the point of tears. Persephone had loved Nico’s insult generator and had supplied him with more material. Apparently, being alive for two-thousand years gave you quite the arsenal of witty and vicious repertoire, so by the time the late arrivals joined in on the fun, they each had their own personalized insults. His father gave a forced chuckle and patted him on the head, all the while glaring daggers at Persephone who was laughing behind her hand. Jason had a good deal of fun with the new insults, nearly falling off the bed with laughter when the computer insulted him for being ‘able to eat an entire pan of brownies fast than lightning’. Demeter though had the best reaction, confiscating the laptop and sitting in the corner of the room making it insult her until its battery died.

He and Persephone were far from what they had been, but he realized they were heading in the right direction.

*Even if Percy thinks she’s a massive cock block...*
George

Chapter Summary

Tonight:

George tries to be a good dad,
A brief glimpse into Morgan's past,
and a Star Wars marathon.

Chapter Notes

Thank Heaven this was a short chapter, otherwise this would be delayed. I was ill most of the week.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“George,” Morgan sighed, pinching the bridge of her nose, “put the pancake batter down. You just had your hand reattached.”

“I’m fine,” he grunted, adjusting his grip on the plastic bowl. “Wouldn’t be much of a host if I didn’t provide a decent meal.”

The two high ranking agents of Avalon were in his kitchen; Morgan sitting at the island in the middle sipping on a bottle of red wine she had brought as a housewarming gift, while he fumbled around the kitchen trying to get dinner ready. Decades on the road and living on MREs had greatly diminished his ability in the kitchen.

_I can kill six men with a pencil, but I will always burn the pot roast…_

“Whatever,” the raven-haired woman sighed, rolling her eyes. “Don’t listen to the woman who magically reconnected you’re severed hand. It’s not like she knows what she’s talking about or anything.” She snapped her fingers and the half-empty bottle slid across the granite countertop.

George set the bowl on the counter next to the oven and fished out a cast iron pan from one of the well-stocked cabinets. “Wasn’t planning on it,” he grunted, turning on one of the burners.

They sat there in a relatively comfortable silence as he ladled out the batter into the hot pan, while Morgan continued to drink his gift. He didn’t mind her drinking it though, as he wasn’t much of a wine drinker; the classiest he ever got was a bottle of _Boone’s Farm Fuzzy Naval_, but that had been years ago.

He also knew that the bottle had never been intended for him, and that Morgan’s surprise visit was her way of looking for comfort.

Oh, he knew about her and Brian’s little trip to the Hamptons. He knew that Richard Edward Dare
and that idiot engineer had managed to poke Morgan’s buttons enough to make her lose her cool.

It was just such a shame though that the girl she was supposed to save had died.

“So… how’s PB adjusting?” the tattooed woman asked, breaking the silence.

George craned his neck so he could look out the kitchen window to check on his daughter, something he did with great frequency. PB was just where she said she’d be, in the backyard practicing archery with several other former hunters. As one of their first projects together, they had built an archery range in the backyard. Various targets of all shapes and sizes were hung at the forest’s edge, some of which even moved about. Some of the other parents didn’t approve of their girls continuing to practice their old habits, but George knew better than most how hard it could be to just stop doing something after so long.

Also, it makes a lot of the girls come over. So PB doesn’t have to leave often and I’ve made her popular. That’s gotta be good parenting.

“It’s been less than a week, but she’s doing good,” he shrugged, turning his attention back to the-

Now burning pancakes! Shit! He pulled the heavy pan off the burner and threw the blackened breakfast food into the trash. “I’d say the old man was definitely right about keeping them secluded though.”

“Why’s that?”

George poured more batter into the pan and smiled to himself, remembering his departure from Camelot following the emergency surgery to reattach his hand.

They had just reached topside and had a few hours to kill before their flight to Vermont, so he decided to take his daughter for some ice cream. It was incredibly cliché, but he was trying to reconnect with PB. He should have noticed that something was off; PB’s stance was rigid and her eyes darted around. He thought it was because it was all the new sights and sounds, that she was trying to absorb everything, but he should have known that she was expecting an attack; he had been the same way when he finally made it back stateside.

They had only gone a couple blocks, unsure of exactly where they were going, but hoping the hustle and bustle of the city would lead them to ice cream. The two of them had been waiting at an intersection, chatting amiably as they waited for the light to change, when some Wall Street type bumped into PB. The poor sap hadn’t meant anything by it, but in the blink of an eye, PB pinned the guy to the ground and proceeded to beat him senseless.

If George hadn’t reacted as quickly as he did, grabbing his daughter’s wrists and pulling her off, he was sure PB would have killed the guy. Emergency Services were called, as were the police, and instead of enjoying a chocolate cone, he spent the next four hours in some rundown police station explaining what happened. Thankfully, no charges were pressed after Avalon’s lawyers agreed to pay for all medical expenses. Plus, to many people he was still a hero for freeing all those people from the Amazon warehouse.

Brownie points get you far in life.

“She’s just a bit uncomfortable in the city,” he summarized.
He ended up burning over half of the pancake batter.

But the resulting carbon discs would make excellent clay pigeons for the girls to practice with.

*And just how many dads can cook and make sporting goods at the same time?*

Dinner was just fine; Morgan chatted with PB and her friends, occasionally trying to make him join in on the conversation. He would talk, but honestly, he just loved to watch and listen. Seeing PB shovel food into her mouth while trying to hold a conversation with her friends and Morgan warmed his heart; even if PB and the other girl’s table manners needed a little work.

It was also interesting to see Morgan interact with people outside of Avalon, specifically women. The witch of Avalon always put up this feme fatale persona around others, that she was a woman that got whatever she desired; one way or another. But maybe it was just him, but he woman seemed to act differently around Merlin, himself, and now the girls. Morgan acted more… childlike, and not in the sense of an immature spoiled brat, but a child that was still trying to find her way in the world. A child that seeked to prove itself, and the earn the approval of a parent.

*No real surprise there though,* George thought; pouring more syrup onto his charred hotcake.

He had heard rumors and tidbits of the tattooed woman’s past, and like everyone else’s in Avalon, it was tragic.

*Go figure…*

The common denominator for everything he heard was, that Morgan had been born in some Eastern European country, one of the countries that never quite recovered after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Her father had fallen into debt with the wrong people and to spare his own worthless life, he gave up a very young Morgan to the scum of the earth. The girl’s exact age and length of enslavement depended on who was telling the story, but to him, those detail made little difference.

For the right price, Morgan’s handlers would make her perform the buyer’s sickest and most twisted desires. For years, Morgan was forced to do the most depraved acts imaginable for people that deserved to burn for all eternity. But eventually, she had grown too *old* for her clientele, and she was going to give her final performance.

A human sacrifice, where the wealthiest psychos could have their sickest desires performed on the young woman.

After that details became jumbled. Apparently, the sacrifice was held in abandoned Roman ruins, ruins that the goddess Hecate considered hers. The goddess appeared before the girl and offered her a deal.

In exchange for her soul, the goddess would grant her unimaginable powers to kill those responsible for her years of suffering.

At least, that was the story. How much was true only Morgan knew for sure.

“Dad, would it be okay if we took Morgan outside and show her how to use a bow?” PB asked, bringing him back to reality. “She says she can make the range truly random!”

George glanced toward his colleague, whose cheeks took on a rosy shade. He tapped his knuckles on the countertop and sighing in surrender. “I suppose-“ Before he could finish the girls jumped up
from their seats, grabbed their bows and quivers, and were out the backdoor. “-So…” He shook his head and laughed to himself. *George, you’re turning into a big softie.*

He finished his godawful pancake before bussing the remaining dishes on the counter. He wrapped up what PB and her friends didn’t eat, just in case they actually liked their dinner, and placed it in the fridge. Finally, he made himself a cup of coffee before watching the girls through the kitchen window.

George knew he had done unforgivable things to get where he was now, but watching his daughter laugh at Morgan’s inexperience made him realize he would do everything again in a heartbeat.

*And as for Morgan, if she needs a place to be a kid, well then, she’s always welcome here.*

“I got the pillows, dad,” his daughter smiled as she walked out onto the screened porch, wearing an old *Return of the Jedi* T-shirt and flannel pajama bottoms, with two feather pillows tucked under her arms. She looked very much like a stereotypical teenager ready for a sleepover, and it was simultaneously beautiful and painful to the old vet.

“And I’ve got the blankets spread out,” George smiled, gesturing to the variety of quilts, sheets, and comforters spread out on the porch’s floor.

Despite the large cabin having plenty of bedrooms, PB chose to sleep out on the porch, closer to the night sky. PB had tried to explain why, but he only nodded with understanding. Both of them had spent years without a proper bed and a roof over their heads, so to suddenly have those left one feeling claustrophobic. So, they simply moved the few possessions PB had, including the dollhouse, and moved them to the porch. Though, he did start to sleep on the living room couch; just in case some force tried to whisk her away again.

*I’m overprotective. Sue me.*

“You know, your friends could have stayed if you wanted them to,” he added for what was likely the hundredth time. The friends in question were the girls who had no family left alive, be it from DG:NH, G:A, G:P, or just having passed on. They were good kids, and long before the rescue mission, the parents of the lost hunters had sworn to take in whatever girls didn’t have a home. It was an adjustment for everyone, but both sides were doing their best to make it work.

PB tossed the pillows down in front of the TV, before flopping down on them. “Nah, I just wanted to have a night with you.” In typical teenage fashion, her face turned bright red. “I mean, I hope that’s not weird or anything…”

George dropped to the floor and crawled over to his daughter. “Not to me!” he smiled, pulling PB into a mighty bearhug. He laughed deeply when she returned his embrace.

“Thanks dad.”

After that, they turned on the TV, and tried to find something familiar. It took over three hundred channels to find a station that played *The Twilight Zone, The Outer Limits, Gunsmoke, Perry Mason,* and all the other shows they watched before he was ripped away from his family. They were both terrible at actually watching though, as they would just talk to each other about whatever popped into their heads.
“So, is it true?” PB asked during the middle of an episode of *The Twilight Zone*, the one where the devil was locked away in a monastery.

“Is what true?” he asked, scratching his beard.

“That they made more *Star Wars*? I heard they made like two more!”

He laughed and pulled PB close, resting his head against hers. “Yeah, they made a few more,” he chuckled.

“Can we watch them some time?”

George pulled out his new phone and glanced at the time. It was late and honestly, they should’ve started to go to sleep, but seeing the excitement in those blue eyes told him they were going to be up until sunrise. “Hold on,” he sighed, unlocking his phone.

The blonde looked at him quizzically. “What are you doing?”

He opened his *AppleTunes* application that Brian had installed for him. “Ordering both trilogies and episode seven,” he responded as he pressed the ‘checkout’ button. “And with a little bit of luck, we should be able to watch them on our TV.” *And if I can’t figure this out, I’ll call Brian. Besides, I definitely got to record her reaction to finding out Vader is Luke’s father.*

“I’ve got to go to Illinois next weekend,” he abruptly announced as the credits for *Episode VI* began to roll. As predicted, the sun was just beginning to rise above the tree line, having spent the entire night watching the original trilogy. PB had been shaken to her core at the revelation of Luke’s parentage and had practically heaved when she realized Luke and Leia were siblings.

PB nuzzled against his shoulder, her eyes closed and ready to fall asleep at any moment. “You have to go back to work already?”

The disappointment in her voice nearly broke his heart, well Calypso’s heart. He had taken two weeks off to bond with her, even though Merlin had insisted he could take as much time as he wanted. The old man even suggested he take an early retirement, but he just couldn’t. Just because he found his happiness didn’t mean he could stop now. There were a lot of families out there that still needed answers, and even more that he and the rest of Avalon were fighting to protect.

And he also couldn’t stop now that they were so close to the endgame. “Just a quick trip, nothing too dangerous.”

The blonde buried her head deeper into his side and said something that sounded like, “like what?”

The old veteran ran his hands through her soft golden hair and hummed. “I just have to chauffer Merlin and drop off a VIP at the Field Museum. Simple stuff like that partner.” With one hand, he carefully pulled a quilt up and draped it around the both of them. “Nothing to worry about.”

“Can I go with?”

He should have expected that question, he really should have, but it still got him off-guard. *It should be a simple thing, go in, make a speech, and go. Threats are minimal and security will be standing*
by. Brian was going to loan us Terminate-us, so... He looked down at his daughter’s content face and knew his answer. “Let me run it by Merlin, but I’m sure he’ll say yes.” He kissed her forehead.

“Awesome,” she yawned. “But who’s the VIP?”

George carefully freed himself from his daughter’s grip and laid her down on the blanket covered floor. “Just some scumbag named Gabe Ugliano.”

Chapter End Notes

I'll write these up tomorrow; we're overdue for a discussion ;)

Chapter Summary

Tonight:

The girls (and Atlas) have a few moments to enjoy themselves,

Reyna is skilled in Country Grammar,

Piper's first mission as the Gayegogi begins.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

They were back on the road again, and to the daughter of Aphrodite it was absolutely amazing. For a few hours, she didn’t have to worry about offended the spirits of her childhood, getting into arguments with Reyna, that her grandpa had led a double-life, or even the ever-looming threat of Avalon since they were taking the highway (because seriously, who would attack when they were surrounded by innocent people?). They had just dropped off Awinita and Bambi at an Amtrak station in Billings and were on their way south to Yellowstone, but until they got there, Piper was going to enjoy every moment.

“I'm going down down baby your street in a Range Rover!” Piper sang at the top of her lungs along with Reyna, Atlas, and Veronica. “Street sweeper baby, cocked ready to let it go!

They were not good singers by any stretch of the imagination, which made it all the more entertaining. Betty White’s windows were rolled down to let in some fresh country air, but whenever they stopped the mortals in the cars next to them would look at them strangely before rolling up their own windows. Not that it helped, as Atlas’ deep voice could not be drowned out.

“Shimmy shimmy cocoa what?!” Reyna sang from the backseat, her head bobbing side-to-side, her one hand throwing up her interpretation of gang signs (not even close Reyna). “Listen to it pound! Light it up and take a puff! Pass it to me now!”

This is what the Argo II should have been! Piper mused to herself, as the car erupted with laughter at the sheer absurdity of Reyna’s performance. She had known before the Argo II had even left camp that it would be a serious journey, but she had thought that with a crew consisting of mostly teenagers there would have been more time to be, well, a kid. There were moments, but everything was kept strictly PG, otherwise Hazel and Frank would combust. Honestly, by the time Gaia had been laid to rest, she had been ready to backhand the daughter of Pluto if she started to fan herself one more time. Seriously, grow a figurative pair...

The music faded and was quickly replaced by the voice of the station’s DJ; reminding everyone listening that Yellowstone was closed to the public until further notice. This actually made Piper a bit more relaxed about her first mission as the Gayegogi. With only the demigods and creatures of the Nation within the park boundaries, people who were trained to handle these kind situations, it meant that she didn’t have to worry about some poor family getting ate by the dreaded Uktena.
But for a few more hours, I’m not going to worry about. The daughter of Aphrodite reclined her seat slightly, tucked her arms behind her head, and placed her feet up on the dash. She glanced to her side and saw Reyna had a similar idea; laying across the passenger seat with her feet resting against the window, the Native American Mythology book in hand, and a relaxed smile on her face. That’s new… and a little alarming…

Ever since their group bath, Reyna had mellowed out considerably. She and the praetor could have conversations that didn’t descend into flat out bitch-fests after five minutes, so much so that she was actually starting to enjoy Reyna’s company again. Reyna was even getting along with Atlas and Veronica, discussing military strategy with the titan and treating the daughter of Mercury as an equal rather than a soldier. It seemed to Piper that now that Reyna was resigned to just deal with whatever came their way on their journey to Camp Half-Blood the Latina had adopted a healthier state of mind.

“Piper!” Reyna spat, jerking upright and tossing a Gushers box at her head. “Did you eat all the tropical Gushers and fill the box with freaking condoms?!”

Before she had a chance to defend herself; and she certainly did not do that (though it was a good idea), the one-armed Latina began to kick her in the head. It wasn’t a strong kick, meant to be more playful than anything, but it still caught her off-guard. She dodged the next kick and unbuckled her seatbelt.

“What are you doing?!” Atlas bellowed, as Piper began to climb in the backseat, accidently making the Titan-demi god swerve into the next lane. “We have to respect the rules of the road!”

“Whatever,” Piper laughed, as she performed a flying elbow on the praetor, knocking the wind right out of the older girl. What up! Before Reyna had a chance to retaliate, she pinned the Latina’s only arm to the seat and put her face inches above Reyna’s. “You better say you’re sorry,” she smirked, before letting a long strand of drool dangle from her mouth.

“Oh gods,” Veronica cringed, adjusting the rearview mirror to get a better look. “Piper, that’s absolutely disgusting!”

“You wouldn’t dare McLean!” Reyna cried, brown eyes wide with panic as she frantically free herself from Piper’s grip.

In truth, Piper had no intention of letting her saliva fall on Reyna, that she only wanted to give her almost-friend a good scare for the wild accusations. She was only going to let it get a little closer and slurp it back up, just close enough to make Reyna’s eyes light up with genuine fear, but as fate decreed it, Betty White hit a pothole while traveling at seventy miles per hour.

Oh shit! Piper could only watch in horror as the two of them bounced off the seat and the string of drool snapped in two. Reyna’s eyes almost bugged out of their sockets as Piper’s DNA flew past her open lips and down her throat.

Everyone in the SUV started to scream in disgust, Atlas screaming the loudest and gripping the steering wheel tight enough to leave imprints. “What is wrong with you mortals?! You almost make me wish I was back holding up the sky!”
Piper hissed as she applied the cold bottle of water against her bruised forearm. She would not complain about Reyna striking her with the force of an atomic bomb though, as she knew she deserved that one.

Plus, she was thankful that Reyna hadn’t straight up murdered her, so there was that.

**And I’m all about not getting murdered!**

Reyna was now driving, occasionally throwing her a glare; while Atlas and Veronica chilled in the back, the daughter of Mercury trying to consult the titan about the disgusting act he had witnessed. It struck Piper odd that the so-called great titan general, who had seen the deaths of thousands, would be utterly in shock over something as silly as swapping spit.

*Who am I kidding, that will haunt me until the day I die…*

Across Piper’s lap lay the book she had borrowed from the Ennis Public Library, that she intended to return when all was said and done. That was definitely something she would not forget to do. Several pages were dogeared, as they contained potentially useful information on the creatures and spirits Spider Grandmother told them to expect once they reached their destination.

First there was the Thunderers, or Aniyvtiqualosgi, a name that her dyslexia decided no further work was needed. They were a clan of storm spirits that were supposed to live in the sky, and commanded the forces of thunder and lightning. There were apparently two groups of the spirits; the Thunder Boys, who were the elders and lived apart from the physical world, and the Ani-Hyuntikwalaski, who belonged to the material world.

*I think Jeanne’s boyfriend was in the latter group…*

The book didn’t give much information on the heritage of the Thunderers, but the common story was they were children of the corn mother, Selu.

*And if there isn’t a story about the origin of popcorn, my ancestors missed a great opportunity…*

She flipped through the pages to the next marked section, the Stoneclad.

The Stoneclad, or Nvyununwi, were a group of cannibal magic users that encased themselves in living stone. They could range in size of a normal man to the size of a mountain if the stories were to be believed, and in Piper’s experience they should always be believed. Their stony skin made them impervious to the cold, heat, and any weapons both mortal and divine. They did have two weakness though. The first was they wore talismans that were the source of their power, and if they were destroyed left the man within powerless. Their other weakness, which she absolutely loved, was that the Stoneclad lost all their powers and armor when exposed to a menstruating woman.

*They’re like a minimum wage manager! Just mention you have lady problems to them and they let you get away with anything! Damn shame none of us are currently on our cycle though…*

And last, but certainly not least, were the horned serpents, Uktena.

The serpents were described as being as big around as the tallest of trees, with curved horns adorning its head to impale its prey. On their heads sat a crest that appeared to be a diamond, hypnotizing all that dared to look at it. Its scales were the color of fire, and according to Kokyangwuti shimmered like an actual blaze. Colored rings covered the length of their bodies; the more rings the serpent had the older it was. And if its size, horns, and hypnotic gaze wasn’t enough, its breath was fatal to breathe.
But wait! There’s more!

The Uktena had only one weak point, behind the seventh ring from its head laid the creature’s heart.

*So we have to literally count the rings of a gigantic creature that probably doesn’t hold still… yay…*

“It’s pretty weird, right?” Veronica asked, her head popping up between her and Reyna.

Piper tore her attention from her book (and easy thing to do for a demigod). “What’s weird?”

The daughter of Mercury blinked, sending little clouds of smoke in the air. “Well, as Roman and Greek demigods it’s our alleged duty to go out and kill monsters. But for the Nation’s demigods, it’s their duty to go out and protect monsters, even relocate them if necessary. Conservation over eradication,” the blonde smiled.

Reyna turned on Betty White’s wipers as a light rain began to come down. “That’s because their monsters don’t come back through a pair of doors after they kill them,” the praetor responded.

“It makes sense though,” she nodded, though a part of her wondered why only Greek and Roman monsters came back. “A lot of the creatures and spirits aren’t really evil by nature, they’re just like regular animals. From my Grandpa’s stories and this book, it seems like the only really bad ones are the ones that were human; like the Stoneclad and Wendigos.”

“There is definitely some Freudian psychology in there somewhere,” Veronica chuckled. “Pity about the Thunderbird though, it was a beautiful creature.”

Instead of responding, Piper buried her nose in her book, not caring that it was upside down.

“I swear to the gods, if this is another encounter with another pantheon, I’m just going to drive us into a tree,” Reyna snarled over the sheets of heavy rain crashing against the windshield.

“Well, at least we can rule out the Thunderbird,” she chuckled nervously, clutching her seatbelt tighter.

The light rain had only increased in intensity and ferocity as they drove south, and by the time they reached Mammoth, just within the boundary of the park, the sky had turned pitch black and the rain and wind hammered against the SUV. No one dared to say it, but they were all thinking of the encounter with the Thunderbird, and how they had nearly fallen to their deaths.

The roads were washed out, and the Amazon made vehicle wanted to hydroplane with ever slight adjustment Reyna made to the steering wheel. Betty White’s traction control would kick on and off repeatedly; the central display flashing a red icon and emitting a harsh alarm that made them all jump in their seats. Combine all that with the skeletal bolts of blue lightning that illuminated the sky to the south with incredible frequency followed by the deafening crack of thunder, and you had four nervous passengers.

“I can’t make out any signs, let alone see them,” Atlas mumbled, their face pressed against the door’s window. “I hope that computer knows the way.”

“It’s called a GPS,” Piper corrected. She glanced to the central console and frowned when she saw it
read ‘signal lost’ before the screen flickered with another lightning strike. *Oh come on!* She slammed her left fist into the screen, but being a touch screen, she accidentally opened Instagram. *Great, now I can post a selfie before we die!* The daughter of Aphrodite slammed her fist against it a few more times, opening several more apps, but the ‘signal lost’ message continued to be displayed. “And it’s not working…”

“I guess we’re just going to have to take it slow, concentrate, and hope for the best,” Reyna said through clenched teeth, her eyes darting from side-to-side, ever on the lookout for obstacles on the road. They had already almost hit a downed tree once, and only thanks to Reyna’s quick reflexes that they managed to not crash or drive off the road.

Piper reached down and tapped on a speaker shaped icon on the SUV’s center console, muting all alarms and notifications. “I turned off the sound so we could see better.”

There was a moment of silence before Reyna just shook her head. “I hate that that makes sense.”

“Right?” she laughed, some of the tension leaving her body. “My dad has to have the radio off when we’re looking for a street- REYNA LOOK OUT!”

Reyna slammed on the brakes, making Betty White skid across the water as its tires locked up. The SUV began to spin to the left and everyone in the car braced for impact. Reyna tried to drive into the skid, while Piper said a few quick, profanity-ridden prayers to her mother, and Veronica said the *Lord’s Prayer* with the speed and rhythm of a professional auctioneer. If Piper hadn’t been panicking she would have thought the Roman’s choice in god was interesting.

By some miracle, Reyna managed to mostly straighten the SUV, coming to a halt halfway over the painted yellow line in the middle of the road. “What the Hades, McLean!” The one-armed praetor snapped, her breathing heavy.

Piper pointed out the window and simply said, “look.”

Standing in the middle of road, a mere ten feet from Betty White’s hood, was a small child dressed in a yellow raincoat, holding a flashlight. Even with the headlights, it was too dark for Piper to tell if it was a boy or a girl, but by the way it just stood there, unmoving in the torrential downpour, she knew that this was no coincidence.

“Uh, guys,” Veronica gulped from the backseat, “I don’t do clowns…”

“What?” Reyna asked, turning around in her seat to look at the daughter of Mercury.

“Nice reference,” she chuckled nervously, her gaze not leaving the illuminated figure. *I swear to every freaking god in existence that if that kid pulls out a balloon, I will have Reyna run it down while I fire up Betty White’s weaponry!*

With all their hearts already in their throats and eyes on the verge of popping from their sockets, it was at that moment a tiny, glowing hummingbird decided to pop into existence in front of Piper’s face. In an instant, Veronica and Atlas had bolted to the back of the SUV, Reyna leapt out of the driver’s door into the pouring rain, and Piper only sat there and shrieked like a banshee.

“DM for @RealGayegogi from @RealOGSpiderWoman,” the little bird chirped, “would you care to play it now?”

“Huh?” was all she could muster, still waiting for an attack to come.

“DM for @RealGayegogi from @RealOGSpiderWoman. Would you care to play it now?” the
hummingbird repeated as darted in front of Piper’s face.

She swallowed down the lump in her throat as Reyna and the others returned to their places; the older girl looking like a wet dog. “Uh, sure?”

The little, green bird nodded (which actually freaked her out more than it talking) before opening its beak. Kokyangwuti’s voice began to play from the bird, first coughing before saying, “McClean, I had one of my grandkids sign you up for a Tweeter account, he apparently got you verified too, whatever that means….” The goddess coughed again and Piper swore she could hear the sounds of professional wrestling playing in the background. “Anyway, I saw that the Three Stooges whipped up one heck of a storm down your way, real storm-of-the-century type stuff, so I got ahold of one of the kids to escort you and your motley crew to Heart Lake. They aren’t happy about it and want you to keep your distance; Coyote has got most of the council and the rest of the Nation out for your blood-“ there was more coughing followed by a groan. “But well-placed bribe made her turn a blind eye. There is some good news though, Bambi and Awinita aren’t your only supporters. Apparently, Napi and Kipitaaki think you were a polite, respectful girl. That puts you at six people on your side McLean, two of which are council members.” The spider goddess chuckled and Piper could hear a lighter being struck. “Keep it up and you might have a chance.”

And with that the little bird closed its peak, nodded to her, and blinked out of existence in a flash of green light.

“Really? Tweeter?” Reyna groaned, as she tried to squeeze the excess water out of her braid. “@RealOGSpiderWoman?”

“Is it really any more groan worthy than Iris Messaging?” Piper asked, her gaze not leaving the raincoat clad figure in front of them.

“I guess I better crack out the ponchos, huh?” Atlas chuckled from the backseat.

There was no road, at least that they could find, that would take them directly to Heart Lake. So, the Kokyangwuti’s contact led them to a vacant parking lot, where the Greek and Roman party donned the ancient, latex ponchos they had taken from the Roman supply depot back in California. They also took some weapons they had scavenged during their escape from the burning deer woman city or Spider Grandmother had provided.

Piper took the magic bow she had used to destroy Artemis’ lyre; the bow itself was simple in appearance, but arrows made of moon and starlight would appear when drawn. She also took a simple, mortal-made switchblade knife; the threat of Avalon’s goons always playing in the back of her mind. She slung the bow over her shoulders and tucked the knife within her spider silk cast.

Atlas and Veronica, who were living weapons by their own right, only took swiss army knife. Their reason was they could simple incinerate or absorb their foes, but they were absolutely screwed if they needed a toothpick, a can opener, or a tiny pair of scissors. Piper wasn’t going to argue with that solid logic and decided that the titan and daughter of Mercury really needed to meet Annabeth.
Reyna’s weapon of choice was a bit odd, even by demigod standards. It was a hatchet; close to a
tomahawk in size, but the back of the head was large and flat, similar to a hammer. The shaft was
simple enough, a length of some dark wood that was wrapped in leather for a better grip. The head
though was strange; it composed of some magical material like Celestial Bronze or Imperial Gold,
but simple obsidian. The blade wasn’t blessed by some god or spirit, it wasn’t consecrated in some
super special building, nor was it mined from a magical mountain. It was regular, old obsidian, the
kind you could buy in any crappy giftshop that dotted the west. But as White Buffalo Calf Woman
had explained when she gave Reyna the weapon, obsidian was the sharpest material in the known
world; even capable of harming the divine.

Reyna absolutely loved it.

With their weapons packed, plus a backpack full of protein bars and bottles of water, they set out on
the path that would take them to Heart Lake.

It was an absolute nightmare.

The unrelenting storm had practically flooded the trail, some spots were so bad the water came up to
Piper’s hips. In those cases, she, Reyna, and the hybrid, would hold hands to ensure they weren’t
washed away. Their guide made no attempts to help them, let alone communicate with them, always
staying just close enough so they could see the dim glow of the flashlight through the sheets of heavy
rain.

The ponchos, which she was sure were going to be useful, proved otherwise. Having sat in a bunker
for close to sixty years, the heavy latex had become quite brittle, shredding into little pieces as the
rain came down. They also provided no warmth, and with Piper and Reyna wearing shorts, the two
girls quickly began to shiver and shake uncontrollably. Thankfully, Atlas and Veronica noticed their
plight and erupted their body into golden flames.

Piper tried to thank them, but the roaring wind and crashing thunder carried her words away. She did
make a mental note to properly thank them later; she knew that the act only accelerated their body’s
decay and was quite painful if the look on their faces was any indication. It was times like these that
made her wonder how Veronica simply didn’t start to drink the bottles of wine they periodically
belched up to ease their pain, but she had a lot of respect for the younger girl for being so strong.
Though, it did make her hate Mr. D all the more…

They trekked on for hours. She had no clue what time it was, and the pitch-black sky offered no
clues. Whether it was still the afternoon, evening, or if they had been walking for so long it was
morning again was anyone’s guess. All she knew was she was cold, tired, and miserable.

No longer able to ignore the pain and exhaustion in her legs, Piper collapsed to her knees and yelled
in frustration at the heavens. “I hate this!”

“Join the club Piper,” Veronica cried over the rain. The girl extinguished her flames, leaving Piper to
stare at the two fiery orbs she had for eyes as she knelt down in front of her. “Do you want us to
carry you?”

Before she could tell Veronica that she only needed a moment to gather herself, the largest bolt of
lightning Piper had ever seen illuminated the world. For but a brief moment, everything was black
and white, the numerous trees around them casting eerie shadows over them. Before she had to blink
though, she saw that they had reached their destination, for before them was Heart Lake in all its
majesty.

“I think we’re here,” Reyna called out, as she too crouched next to her.
They looked up to their guide for some form of confirmation, but the walking Stephen King reference had disappeared. While creepy (and a bit rude), it was not a huge problem, as off into the distance, numerous campfires burned despite the horrible weather.

“I think you’re right, Reyna,” she replied as he got to her feet. Let’s hope they will listen…

As with everything with her life, things did not go smoothly.

In fact, this was had gone right passed her worst-case-scenario.

“I will squeeze the life from you!” The Thunderer, Sparky if memory served right, roared as his powerful grip around her neck tightened. “You will pay for what you did to my doe!”

They had approached the largest of the fires, which was located in center of what could be described as a small village of tents, with the intent to find someone in charge. What they found was perhaps two dozen weary and drenched demigods of the Nation, sitting around the fire, while watching two huge hulks of men trying to comfort a third hulk. It took her a moment to realize that she had briefly met the sobbing giant at Home, that he was the Thunderer that had been Jeanne’s boyfriend.

She cleared her throat to announce their presence… okay, she whistled sharply to be heard over the raging storm. As heads began to turn, a sense of weightless came over her as the air was knocked from her lungs. It took her a moment to process that there was a giant red face with glowing blue eyes inches from her own. Just as she realized that she was flying through the air with a huge fist wrapped around her throat, she slammed into a tree.

“I knew that nothing could come from you!” The giant roared in her face, as she frantically tried to pry his hand loose. “But Jeanne-,” his voice hitched as the sky flashed, “Jeanne thought you were a good and noble person!” He clenched his fist tighter and her vision began to dim. “And you killed her!”

“Bro! You need to chill, bro!” an unfamiliar voice shouted.

“Yeah, bruh! I know you’re feeling unmellow, but you need to calm down!” another shouted over the storm.

“Bro! Just let her go, bro! You don’t want to murderize her in front of the kids, bro!”

Frat boys are trying to save me… I’m so screwed…

There was a blinding golden light and Piper thought she was about to see her Grandpa Tom again, but instead the grip around her neck lessened and she fell to the forest floor. With her windpipe no longer in a vice, she took in a deep ragged breath before coughing like crazy as her vision began to clear.

Oh, that explains a lot…

Sparky hadn’t released her, rather Atlas and Veronica had severed Sparky’s arm from his body. The titan-hybrid, which was really gunning her the honor of being her best friend, stood between her and the Thunderer, arms bathed in golden flame. “Anyone takes another step closer and I’ll rip your fucking heads off!” the duo snarled.
“Here Piper, let’s get that… arm… off you,” Reyna said.

As Reyna pried the, apparently earthen, fingers from her neck, her vision cleared and her senses began to return. Sparky was flanked by two other Thunderers, each as gigantic as the first. Like Sparky, they had dirt red skin etched with glowing electric blue lines that pulsed in a manner similar to the Thunderbird feather in her hair. Despite the heavy, cold rain, the trio weren’t wearing any shirts, showcasing their chiseled torsos that put Terminus’ to shame. While Sparky let his long dark hair cascade down his back, the other two opted for manbuns; combine that with the crocs and khaki shorts they wore and they looked like extra-large college frat boys.

The two thunder-frats were holding back Jeanne’s boyfriend, a murderous glare in his eyes. “Kids, go back to camp! I don’t want you to see this!” he roared as thunder sounded in the distance.

_Kids?

It took her a moment to notice that the seven of them were surrounded by the demigods she had seen at the fire. They formed a wide circle around them and most were brandishing weapons; axes, bows, spears, knives, even a couple rifles. There were even several bears, coyotes, and wolves among them that she was sure were demigods. None of them looked as angry as the Thunderer, rather they looked exhausted and a bit nervous; it seemed that they didn’t want to fight as much as her.

_And I can work with that._

As Sparky’s arm fell from her neck, she pushed herself off the muddy earth. “I am Piper McLean,” she rasped to the crowd of onlookers. “My grandfather was Thomas McLean, the previous Gayegogi.” Some of the older demigods began to murmur, as the thunder trio’s eyes widened. “I was chosen by the Thunderbird to be the next Gayegogi.” As if to emphasize her point, the Thunderbird’s feather began to glow. Now the entire crowd was whispering; some looked curious, others angry. “These are my friends, Reyna, Veronica, and the titan Atlas. Despite what you have been told, we have come here to help.”

Sparky tried to break free of his friend’s hold, but the two held strong. “You are the reason Home was burnt to the earth! You are the reason so many are dead!”

The gathered crowd had abandoned whispering and were now borderline screaming. “That is not true,” she replied keeping her voice even. “That was Artemis. While it is true we were there, that was merely a coincidence. We helped buy time so many people could get to safety.” She wasn’t going to bring up Avalon just yet, she needed to win the crowd over, not get them further wound up. She reached deep within herself for her charm speak; just enough to help put the crowd at ease. “Look, we don’t want to fight. We came here to help with the Uktena. How about we all go talk this over someplace dry, and if you still want to rip my head off.” She gulped. “So be it.”

One of the Thunderers nodded. “That seems fair, bruh.”

“Bro, we probably should get everyone out of the rain. Their parents will kill us if they get sick, bro.”

Sparky looked at his two comrades and then back to her, the rage in his eyes still unabated. “Fine,” he said through clenched teeth. The giant then bent down, ignoring Atlas and Veronica, and picked up his severed limb. The arm then crumbled to dust in his grip, only for a small whirlwind to pick up the pieces. “We talk, _then_ we kill them,” he spat as the small whirlwind began to reassemble his arm.
“Brah, you’re giving us a lot to process here,” Digasgi, or Chad, nodded.

“Like, trying to cram four finals worth of information the night before,” Ulogili, or Andy, said, massaging his manbun with one massive hand.

The seven of them were seated in an almost circus sized tent near the middle of the camp site, but with six bodies inside, it was still a little cramped. Not that Piper was complaining, it felt good to strip off the tattered remains of her poncho, rest her leg, and dry off.

And it looks like Reyna feels the same.

“I admit that is a lot of information, but I swear on the River Styx it is true,” The praetor said, her gaze unblinking and her voice firm. Despite being soaked to the bone, Reyna radiated authority; which was the reason why Piper suggested she explain everything that had happened, starting with the attack on New Rome.

At first, the Thunderers only half-listened, with Sparky more focused with glaring daggers at her than actually listening, but as Reyna continued their story, they began to pay attention. By the time Reyna recanted the death of the Thunderbird they were all aptly focused, even Sparky.

Jeanne’s boyfriend crossed his arms over his massive chest and closed his eyes. “The death of Thunderbird has thrown nature out of whack. Your monsters are invading our territories and decimating ecosystems. Without the Thunderbird to eat the newly spawned Uktena, we risk having an apex predator spread across the land. And if these people, this Avalon, can really kill gods, then the world is in great peril.”

“It’s like my enviro professor’s worst nightmare, bruh,” Chad frowned, reaching into a cooler and pulling out a can of Monster. “Total systemic collapse.” He tossed the can to Andy, before grabbing another. “Any of you fine xirs want one?” Everyone nodded, though Piper was pretty sure Atlas had no idea what he had agreed to.

“It’s like they’re removing variables from an equation,” Andy said before chugging the Monster in a single gulp and crushing the can in his huge fist. “Yeah, it makes it look easier, but you’ve really just unbalanced the whole thing.”

“Plus, the professor gets really upset with you,” Chad smirked.

Andy high-fived Chad. “You know it bro!” he laughed.

Sparky hung his head and sighed. “They go to college while I work at Home, and they come back behaving like children,” he mumbled to himself.

Since the Thunderer was no longer seething, Piper saw this as her chance to speak. “So, you’re not going to kill us?” I ask, like a naïve Disney Princess...

The two bros stopped laughing and turned to Sparky, the Thunderer’s brow furrowed in thought. He looked down to his regrown arm and then at each of them. There was still a great deal of rage in his glowing eyes, but grief seemed to be his dominant emotion. The poor storm spirit had only left hours before the Nation community was attacked and his love was killed; and that kind of rage and grief would be with him for many years to come. “I won’t kill you,” he finally said, earning a sigh of relief from her and Reyna, Veronica remaining silent. “Jeanne wouldn’t have wanted that and I met your
grandfather when I was young, he was a good man. Plus, we really need the help,” he quickly added.

Before she could ask about her grandfather, Reyna cut her off by asking, “good, could you tell us what we’re dealing with? What is our strategy? What kind of numbers do we have? What kind of resources do we have available? That kind of stuff.”

Give Reyna a battle and all her problems melt away.

“You’re throwing around a lot plural possessives there, brah,” Chad grunted, knocking back yet another energy drink. Since the Thunderer’s body was really just an earthy casing, Piper wondered if the energy drinks actually did anything, or if that was just a habit the two had picked up at university.

Just like the khakis, the manbuns, their speech, and- are those freaking Uggs?!

Reyna bowed her head and closed her eyes, as if she was addressing a god. “Forgive me, it’s just that as the Gayegogi’s senior advisor—”

“My what now?”

Reyna simply flipped her off and continued, “I would like to know what the status of everything is so that we may figure out how we can best aid you.” The praetor then opened her eyes and looked Sparky straight in the eyes. Reyna had singled him out as the leader, which Piper thought was a safe bet judging by the juvenile actions of Andy and Chad, and was doing her best to assert her dominance over the storm spirit. Even with the sopping wet clothing that made her look small and her missing arm, Reyna’s stare was intimidating. Veronica, who had been on the receiving end of the Latina’s stare before, began to fidget on the sleeping back.

But I am completely unaffected, she mentally told herself, despite averted her gaze from the older girl.

Sparky was the first to blink and shrink back, his large muscular form now much less intimidating compared to Reyna. “Well, uh, things aren’t going that great,” he sighed, rubbing the back of his neck with one hand.

Andy shook his head and scratched his temple. “It’s a regular clusterfuck.”

“Elaborate,” Reyna demanded, still in full praetor-mode.

“Before, when the uktena began to hatch, the Thunderbird would strike the lake repeatedly with lightning to kill off the young before they developed their imperviousness,” Sparky said, rolling his neck. “But since we didn’t arrive until much later, we missed a lot of hatchlings.”

“We’ve been striking the lake for weeks now and dozens just keep slithering their way to the surface and onto the shore,” Chad explained, crushing a can against his forehead. She also noticed it was the first time he hadn’t said ‘bro’, ‘bruh’, or other stupid frat terms.

“The kids have been great with scouring the shores and land for any strays, but we don’t know how many we’ve missed,” Andy chimed in. “We’ve already lost thirteen little bros to the uktena, which is thirteen too many.” His chiseled face, which had always looked annoyingly upbeat until then, lost all happiness. “I feel like total trash for having to ask them for help in the first place. They should be enjoying summer vacation, not risking their lives over a stupid snake…”

Chad leaned over and wrapped his arms his brother. “Bruh.”
“Bruh,” Andy repeated, returning the embrace.

Sparky flushed as he cleared his throat, apparently uncomfortable with the other two’s bromance. “Since the Thunderbird passed, our control over the wind and rain has only increased, but we can’t control this storm—”

“It’s like someone overfilled a can of Monster and shook it,” Chad explained, still hugging his bro. “We can keep it contained, but if you crack it open it will just explode out and ruin that fine sorority babe’s blouse.”

Is this guy for real? Piper thought, her jaw hanging slack. From the corner of her eye she could see Reyna and Veronica had the same expression. Seriously, is he a storm spirit or a fraternity ghosts?!

“Err… anyway,” Sparky continued, looking at his brother in a mixture of disbelief and embarrassment. “We can end the storm to let the kids have an easier time destroying the stray Uktena, but if we do, that just means more will escape.” The Thunderer clenched his fists and tiny blue sparks began to rain down. “There is no easy way to win this.”

Piper laughed. “We’re used to hard.” Then something dawned on her. “Kokyangwuti mentioned the Stoneclad, how do they work factor in to all of this?”

Andy leaned back and propped one leg up on his knee, leaving Atlas and Veronica with an eyeful of Ugg. “There’s a small settlement of the stony bros here in the park, and we were hoping that since they are practically invincible they could assist with keeping the other practically invincible creatures at bay, brah.”

“I feel like there’s a ‘but’ coming…” she sighed.

“But,” Chad added, to no one’s surprise at all. “Apparently they weren’t in the mood to help and ate the delegation we sent.”

“All they sent back was their spleens,” Andy shuddered. “Poor bros…”

Sparky slammed a fist into Andy’s gut, while simultaneously punching Chad in the shoulder. The blows were hard enough to leave a spider web of cracks on their hard earth bodies. “I can’t believe you two let them go alone!” The thunderer bellowed, as the other two clutched at their injuries. “And don’t give me that ‘children should be allowed independence’ BS! You sent a bunch of teenagers to deal with cannibals! Cannibals!” he emphasized. The large spirit turned his attention back to Reyna and Piper again, looking even more weary than before. “So, we also have to worry about the kids running into Stoneclad on top of everything else.” The man ran his hands down his face. “Maybe your outside perspective is what we need.”

Piper chewed on her lip as she tried to process everything she had been told. It seemed to her that the Thunderers were actually doing everything they could, but there was something missing. Something important that she couldn’t just put her finger- The momma snake! She suddenly realized. “Question!” she yelled, startling everyone. “Is there just one Uktena that is laying all the eggs, or a lot of them?”

Andy, who was still clutching his stomach, blinked. “Well, uh, at the moment there is only one, the original Uktena, brah, but if the others are allowed to live, there will be a lot more. It’s basic mythological zoology.”

“But stay with me now,” she grinned. “What if we took out the mother? I mean it sounds like we’re stuck with dealing the hatchlings no matter what, but what if we don’t have to worry about this
happening ever again?” She felt the Thunderbird feather pulse rapidly in her hair, she couldn’t tell if it was in protest or support, but considering the bird was the snake’s mortal enemy she figured it was the latter. “I know you the Nation is trying to breed many of its creatures back into stable numbers, but I’ve yet to hear someone say they want the Uktena around.”

The three Thunderers exchanged looks. Andy and Chad seemed thrilled with the idea, likely so they could go back to their frats. It was spring after all, prime partying season. Sparky though seemed unsure of her idea. Jeanne’s boyfriend seemed to be a traditionalist in her opinion, but without the Thunderbird around to keep the Uktena in check he and his brethren would be forced to repeat the process every spring. And that meant they would have to endanger more demigods year after year.

After a tense minute, Sparky finally sighed in submission. “Okay, fine!” he shouted, throwing his hands up while the bros cheered. “But the Uktena never leaves the lake’s bottom, how are you going to bring her up? And what do you got to kill it with?”

She pointed to Atlas and Veronica with a smug little smile. “If Reyna is my senior advisor, then those two are my sword.” Atlas chuckled at her words, but nodded in agreement. “And as for getting her to the surface, well, let’s just say I can be very convincing…”

“I really wish Jason or Percy were here!” Reyna shouted, holding onto the speedboat’s wheel for dear life.

“And ruin our girls-only-trip? No way!” Piper forcefully laughed, clutching onto her lifejacket as a wave sent their boat hopping over the water.

Veronica, whose head was over the side of the boat vomiting up a mix of wine bottle, vines, and their dinner, groaned. “Piper, this is the stupidest thing we’ve done yet!” their talons dug into the aluminum hull, crushing it like a Styrofoam cup as another wine bottle forced itself out of their throat. “I am from Iowa for Pete’s sake! I don’t do boats!”

“And if she doesn’t like boating, that make me miserable as well!” Atlas groaned. “Why won’t he just digest already!” Their head went over the side again as a whole grapevine unraveled from their mouth. “No wonder Kronos was a miserable bastard!”

Her plan was simple, which meant that it was most likely to have the least amount of problems; at least in her mind. They would take a boat out to the center of the lake, where she would use her charm speak to call the Uktena to the surface. The Thunderers had provided her with a megaphone that would hopefully allow her to be heard over the raging tempest. Once the horned serpent was above the waterline, it was Atlas and Veronica’s turn at bat. The hybrid would leap from the boat and impale the beast through its only weak spot, the seventh ring. From there, Reyna would take them back to land, where they would assist in the cleanup effort, winning much respect from everyone.

So of course, things went bad almost immediately. She thought, as another dead Uktena hatchling smacked her in the face.

The storm had made the lake’s waters as rough as any sea’s, with waves tall enough to capsize the boat if they weren’t careful. To compound their troubles, the near constant lightning strikes had fried
enough hatchlings that the lake’s surface was covered with them. The little serpents’ bodies would get caught up in the speedboat’s propeller, forcing them to stop and frantically clear out the bits of Uktena. When that happened, the waves would begin to fill the boat, forcing Reyna to bail out the water with the holiest bucket Piper had ever seen. Even with all of Reyna’s efforts, the icy water still came up to their ankles.

“Gods I hate these things!” She screamed as she tossed the serpent overboard.

Piper could understand how mortals could confuse the Uktena for normal snakes. They typically were only a foot in length, but they had found a couple bodies that were three times that. Their skin wasn’t the flaming reds and oranges of their mother had, rather they were a mix of reddish browns and greys. They hadn’t developed their horns yet either, but a keen eye would observe two little bumps just above their black, soulless eyes. As for the gleaming jewel, there was a tiny fleck of something between the bumps that reflected light; maybe it could be mistaken for a piece of costume jewelry from an arcade machine, but that was a stretch.

_A sequin at best, but who would go out and think someone glued a sequin to a snake’s head._

A bolt of lightning struck the far shore, illuminated their surroundings for a brief moment. Beneath the floating bodies she saw thousands of dark shadows slithering through the water, all of them swimming towards the shore. If one of these creatures could lay that many eggs in a single year, then Piper shuddered to think what would happen if they were allowed to escape.

Piper tightened her grip on the megaphone in her hands. _And if they eat everything like Chad says they do, that would mean the end of countless ecosystems.... This is what would happen if the monsters didn’t have to go through the Doors of Death, they’d breed and overrun the world in a few years..._

Reyna killed the engine and cranked the wheel hard to the left, sending them in a circle. “I think this is as close to the middle of the lake as we’re going to get!” The Latina shouted in her ear. Reyna then removed the obsidian axe from her back and rested it on her shoulder. “Try to make this quick! I’ll try to watch for any potential attacks, but this is all you and Veronica!”

Piper nodded and stood up from her seat on shaky legs. There was a drastic difference between the _Argo II_ and the little aluminum boat which made her realize that she really didn’t have sea legs. “Atlas! Veronica! Are you two ready?!”

The titan-demigod hybrid raised one hand and gave a shaky thumbs up as they once again emptied their stomach. _Oh, that’s not good..._ She imagined she looked terrified to the others, but to be fair, they looked scared too. Trying to gain some composure, Piper squared her shoulders before she stumbled over to the edge of the boat. She stuck her torso over the edge and put the megaphone to the water, only mildly creeped out by being inches away from dozens of deadly reptiles. _Well here goes nothing...._

She started to sing.

It wasn’t a song with words, nor was it one that had any history to it, as she sung from the heart. Like a siren’s song, her song demanded all those that listened to come to her, but with one key difference, it her intentions were for non-humans only. And as she sung, the hatchling Uktena began to swim around the boat in a wide circle, their numerous small bodies creating a huge dark ring. But those weren’t what she was after, so she altered her desires. Now she sang that the boat and its occupants were prey, but were far too dangerous for something so small. The smaller serpents increased their distance, to which Reyna sighed in relief, but still continued to circle.
I’m going to need some tea for my throat after this…

Just when she was about to stop and tell Reyna to take them elsewhere to try again, a small red light appeared in the murky depths.

_Come to momma, you scaly bitch!_

She redoubled her efforts, pouring her very soul into the song, as the light became brighter and bigger.

And bigger.

And bigger.

And bigger…

_Oh shit!

The red light was now illuminating a good six yards in every direction around the boat, and it was still growing.

_We’re going to need a bigger boat…_

“Reyna we need to go!” She shouted, whipping her body back into the boat, dropping the megaphone into the hellish waters below. “Reyna we need to-”

She didn’t get a chance to finish as something erupted from the water next to their puny vessel, making the boat almost capsize. She managed to grab hold of the edge, to stop herself from flying out, with Reyna grabbing onto the driver’s seat, and Atlas and Veronica dug their talons into the floor.

As the boat righted itself, Piper could only stare in abject horror at the sight before her. Segment after segment of scaly flesh rocketed out of the water into the sky with no end in sight. Unlike its children, the terror of the deep’s scales burned like infernos of Hell, with a single glowing, yellow ring on each segment. Somehow, she managed to will herself to look up, following the body what was as big around as a small house until the very top.

And she regretted that.

Immensely.

Jagged, black horns with dozens of razor sharp points glowed an unnatural stygian blue against the stormy sky; numerous long dead bodies were impaled on the points. Large, brown fangs dripping with bacteria filled saliva filled its cavernous mouth that could easily devour their boat in a single bite. A gleaming white gemstone, larger than Piper’s body sat in nestled between its horns. And while the jewel was beautiful, Piper realized that the legends had lied about its hypnotic powers, because while beautiful, that wasn’t what paralyzed her.

It was the eyes.

Like the Thunderbird, the creature before her had eyes that betrayed its intelligence. But while the Thunderbird’s eyes had been full of pride and a certain warmth, the serpent’s eyes were full of a burning rage and pure maliciousness. This wasn’t just some animal performing its natural instincts, no, it desired its progeny to devour the world.
This was the Uktena, the great horned serpent.

Somehow Piper managed to break the serpent’s evil gaze, despite every fiber of her being screaming not to turn away. “Atlas! Veronica! Do your thing!”

Thankfully the two-in-one almost seemed mildly disturbed by the giant beast, only mildly quivering as they got on their feet. “There’s a problem!”

“WHAT?!” She shouted back in disbelief.

The hybrid pointed at the horned serpent and shook their head. “There’s only five circles above the water!”

Piper’s head snapped back to the Uktena’s terrifying head and gulped. One, two, three, four, five-

She reached the waterline, where the beginning of the sixth yellow circle just poked above. Shit! Shit! Shit! Shit! She hadn’t counted on the mother of all Uktena being so large, but for a brief moment she had thought that actually would have made things easier for their heavy hitters. The hybrid was supposed have used their speed to impale the beast’s heart, but now that plan was thrown in the trash.

She flashed back to a lesson with Coach Hedge. The crazy Satyr had borrowed Mr. Nugent’s rifles and borrowed one of her dad’s Gopros. Hedge had then shot the rifle into their pool (which didn’t go over well with his wife) and used the camera to record the bullet’s trajectory. The highspeed videos showed that the bullet’s angle changed dramatically the second it hit the water, as well as slowly down.

“Reyna, we got to go!” She screamed, as the Uktena began to pull back. She wasn’t sure if a snake could smile, but that’s what it seemed to be doing to her.

There was no sound of the engine roaring to life, no sound of Reyna shouted in affirmative, no nothing.

“Reyna, we need to--” Piper started to shout as she spun to the praetor, but stopped.

The fierce praetor, who Piper honestly thought was fearless, had dropped to her knees, her obsidian axe lying next to her. Reyna’s jaw hung open with her eyes wide, her entire body trembling as she stared at embodiment of evil.

“Reyna!” She screamed at the top of her lungs. “Rey--”

Lightning flashed.

And before all went black, the sound of aluminum being crushed by massive jaws drowned out the storm.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, I totally failed with notes last week, but I will get to them this week!

So until then, how ’bout that chapter?

**6/14/18**
Okay ladies and gents, it's been a while since I've written some in depth notes.

I really wanted Piper, Reyna, Veronica, and Atlas to have a bit of fun before things got real again. So I drew in from real experiences, real interactions, to help write them interacting in Betty White. Sing-alongs are a must on any road trip as are snacks.

Reyna has mellowed out a bit thanks to the idea of getting help from additional forces for New Rome. There are other reasons, but we'll get into them as we go ;)

Atlas and Veronica are continuing to keep their plan for salvation a secret, but do genuinely care for Piper. And Reyna to a lesser extent...

And Piper is trying to figure out how to be the Gayegogi and what that even means. She's trying to figure out what her Grandpa Tom did, and why he kept it a secret from her and her dad.

Right now, Piper had the Greek/Roman demigod mindset where you do a quest and BAM! Instant profit. But as you may have noticed, the Nation doesn't seem to operate on that idea. Their creatures and spirits are endangered so they only slay them as a last resort. And although the Uktena is a major threat to the world, it still has its place in the natural order, it's just nature needs to adjust without the presence of its natural predator.

Sparky, Andy, and Chad are the muscle of this operation. They are trying to do as much of the dangerous stuff as possible so the kids (demigods) don't have to be exposed to as much peril.

Remember, the Nation learned the hard way that they are nothing without believers, so their number one priority is to protect and expand the belief base.

The thunderers are a bit of my own creation in some regard. They are storm spirits, composed of wind and rain, but I had the idea to have them make bodies of Earth and clay so they can interact with the physical world easier. The glowing lines etches on their bodies and their eyes are the only indication of their true selves.

So starting next chapter we have the Prom story arc, starting with Percy's POV. These chapters will be generally light hearted with a bit of smut ;)

After that though... Well you'll see...

Thanks for reading!

I hope you all have a pleasant week!
Percy

Chapter Summary

Tonight:

Prom finally arrives,

Percy and Hades have another chat,

and Percy panics over chicken.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“And there, all done,” Hades smiled, before pulling on Percy’s tie once more. The weakened god then took a step back to admire his work, rubbing absently at his chin, while giving Percy a look over. He felt just as embarrassed and self-conscious with Hades checking him as he did when his mother did before any of his bigger dates with Annabeth. It was a necessary evil though, as just like with Annabeth, he wanted to look his best for Nico. “You’re passable,” the older man said with a nod of his head.

“Um, thanks, Hades,” Percy said awkwardly. He wanted to scratch the back of his head, but stopped himself at the last possible second. For once he had managed to comb his hair to resemble something akin to neat, but he had a feeling that even the slightest touch would make it go back to its natural chaotic state.

It was finally Saturday, the day he, Jason, and Nico were going to behave like normal teenagers for once by attending Prom.

But first we have to get there...

The house was in chaos. They had picked up their tuxes the night before and hadn’t thought anything of it, they had had their measurements taken the day they ordered them so all should have been fine. Wrong. The navy-blue vests he and Nico had picked out had been replaced with an almost neon purple. Nico’s pants were a little long, while his own were too tight and a little short. Jason’s jacket was just big enough to fit, but not big enough to button comfortably. Persephone and Demeter, in a surprising move, had cracked out an old sewing kit and were frantically making alterations; safety deposit be damned.

But the worst thing, well at least to him, was that they had given him an actual tie as opposed to the clip-on he ordered. Paul had tried to teach him on several occasions how to tie a tie, showing him several simple knots, but all that ended up doing was confusing him and making him almost strangle himself. But today he tried, and took his time, remembering with a sad smile Paul showing him how to make a Double Windsor, but still he failed. Not because he got the steps wrong, but because of his hands. His hands shook so bad whenever he tried to perform some detailed movement; his handwriting was practically scribbles now, typing was a slow struggle, and he gave up on tying his shoes, preferring to just slide them on and off now.
So he swallowed his pride and asked the only person in the house that wasn’t busy: Hades.

“IT’s no problem Jackson,” Hades said, taking a seat behind his desk. “I wanted to talk with you anyway.” The head of the house gestured to the wooden chair in front of the desk. “Take a seat.”

*And here comes the ‘they’ll never find your body if you bring Nico home late’ speech, or ‘if you touch my son, I’ll castrate you’ spiel, both classics!* 

Percy didn’t say anything though, only nodding and gritting his teeth as he stepped forward. He knew that he should still be using his crutches, as the still healing muscles in his right leg constantly reminded him, but he wanted tonight to be special. He wanted to give Nico the full Prom experience; walking down the school’s stairs for premier are a couple, dancing together, getting him punched when he was tired, the whole shebang. But crutches kind of ruined everything.

So that one early morning where he and Nico had a little fun-in-the-tub, he decided to man up and leave the hunks of metal. Sure, he was eating fistfuls of Tylenol to mitigate the pain, but it was worth it. He didn’t get as many pitiful looks as he limped down the hall at school, he didn’t disrupt class when he knocked his crutches over (which happened a million times a day), and best of all he got to train with Nico a little more actively now.

“So what kind of death threats do you got for me today?” he grinned at Nico’s father as he took his seat. It was a dumb thing to say, as Hades could simply say they weren’t allowed to go, but he and the god had built up this little back-and-forth that for the most part was good natured. Percy actually liked Hades (especially on days after he got some alone time with his wife), he always kept an open door and genuinely cared for the wellbeing of everyone in the house, but the weakened god tried to hide it behind a mask of frustration and indifference.

“Just the typical,” Hades shot back with a slight smirk, “skin you alive, feed you to Cerberus, that kind of thing,” the god finished with a flourish of his hand. The little bit of humor disappeared from Hades’ dark eyes as he folded his hands. “We do need to talk though.”

“Oh,” Percy gulped.

“Despite what Persephone, Maria, Demeter, and pretty much every other woman I’ve ever known say, I’m not an idiot.” The room suddenly felt colder, and Percy wasn’t sure if it was his imagination or if Hades was doing it with what little power he had. “I know that you weren’t sleepwalking the other night,” Hades said with a wicked grin, leaning forward in his chair. “I know you were… fooling around with my son.” Hades didn’t seem angry, which actually made Percy more nervous. The calm before the storm and all that. “And judging by your disappointed looks and Nico’s bliss, you didn’t get as far as you hoped.”

“I, um,” he stuttered, trying and failing to come back with some retort.

“I also know that you almost destroyed Jason’s computer looking up, shall we say, examples?”

At that moment, he wished that he could turn into a puddle of water and drip through the floorboards. It was bad enough when his mom had caught him changes his sheets, or when Paul had checked his browser history, but to have a god know what he had looked up? That kind of embarrassment would last until the end of time. I’ll be known as Percy Jackson, the guy who Hades caught looking up p-

“And that’s fine.”

What?
Hades reached down and Percy could hear one of the desk drawers being pulled open. “I’m not thrilled with the idea, but I get it. You are teenagers with raging hormones, topped with being sons of well, you know. It is only a matter of time.” The man in black, then closed the drawer and deposited a small plastic bottle and a box on top of the desk. “Be safe,” Hades said sternly, tossing the items to him.

Thankfully, he managed to catch them, the small, purple box almost sailing past his fingertips. Percy was both mortified and amused when he saw the word Trojan written in big letters on the box. Clearly, Hades was being a smartass with his choice in condoms. The little bottle read Shibari Premium Personal Lubricant, as apparently Hades couldn’t find a brand with a Greek or Roman reference. “So you’re… okay, with me and Nico having…” he trailed off, too embarrassed to finish the sentence.

“Sex,” The god said bluntly, rolling his eyes. “And my feelings on the matter aren’t relevant. What does matter to me, and let me reiterate is: be safe.” Percy could feel Hades’ eyes piercing through his soul, analyzing his every little reaction. “If you have questions let me know. I am here for you. For all of you. I would rather have some discomfort on my end explaining things to you, than to see you or Nico get hurt.”

Percy sat there for a moment, startled by the look in Hades’ eyes. Genuine concern from an adult was a rare thing for him, only his mother and to some extant Paul had ever really cared. Mr. Chase acted like he cared, but that was really only for Annabeth’s sake. But here was Hades, willing to help him with whatever questions he had on a subject that he couldn’t imagine talking about with anyone but his mother. “Thank you, sir.” There was no mocking tone or any attempt at humor there, he genuinely respected Hades. “But I read and watched what I needed.”

Hades nodded to him, some of the tension from his shoulders eased. “Then let me tell you one more thing.” The god reclined into his chair and gave him a sad smile. “What no one tells you about sex is that it deepens your feelings to depths even a son of Poseidon can’t fathom.” Hades stopped to laugh at his own corny joke. “But for my children and myself, those feelings become absolute. I want you to know now, that if you and Nico were to ever engage in the act, Nico would love until the end of time. Which is as much as a blessing as it is a curse. As no matter what happens, he would always be yours. Do you understand?”

To be fair, he had figured out that Nico was passionate about anything he loved. It had explained so much about why the son of Hades had been in so much pain while he was with Annabeth. But the fact that Nico’s, and his own, feelings for each other could only grow actually scared him a bit. He already couldn’t deal with being apart from Nico for a few hours as it was, so what would it be like then? Percy wasn’t too worried though at their being a potential breakup, as the only way their relationship would end was if Nico ended it. He couldn’t be alone, he just couldn’t.

“I think so, sir,” Percy gulped.

Hades smiled slightly, “Good. One last thing.” The man then stood up from his chair and fished out his car keys from his back pocket. “You’re not going to Prom in Jason’s piece of crap. Take the SUV, just be careful. I know you said you don’t drink, but if the situation arises, call me. Persephone, Demeter, and myself will figure out a way to get you home.”

“Will do.”

“Good. Now go find Nico, Persephone wants to get there early for pictures.”

“You know that sounds weird, right?” Percy laughed, tucking the keys, lube, and Trojans in his back pockets.
Hades shook his head with a little grin. “Kid, in case you haven’t figured it out yet, our family is weird.”

Percy found Nico sitting on what had been his old bed, wearing only a slightly too big, white dress shirt, a pair of black boxers, and black dress socks. In his hands was Will’s Comfy Hat, the only thing Nico had left of the son of Apollo. Nico didn’t look up or acknowledge his presence as he limped into the room, only continuing to slowly rub the dulling yellow fabric with his thumbs. It didn’t bother him in the slightest that Nico still missed Will, as still missed Annabeth every day. That didn’t mean that they loved each other any less, in fact it was one of the things they shared: ghosts of the past.

He flopped down next to the son of Hades, but didn’t get so much as a guffaw from him. “What’s wrong Neeks?” he asked softly, placing a hand on the small of his boyfriend’s back. “Did Persephone say something?”

Although the relationship between Persephone and Nico had improved considerably, with the goddess eager to win Nico’s trust, he still slightly worried that Persephone was out to hurt Nico. Yes, he was the one to push Nico to reconciling with the woman on the chance everything was on the up and up, but Percy made sure to keep an eye open for trouble.

“No… she’s fine,” Nico mumbled, still not looking up from the hideous, sun-shaped hat. “It’s just-“ the younger teen started, before biting his lip.

“Take your time,” he reassured the son of Hades. Despite everything that had happened in the last few months, Nico was generally the upbeat demigod in the house, a sharp contrast to a year ago. Nico kept him and Jason going, so he had all the time in the world for Nico whenever he was down.

_Hades, even if we weren’t dating I’d make time for him._

Nico took a few shaky breaths, but didn’t say anything, only resting his head on Percy’s shoulder when the older teen began to gently rub his back. Whenever Percy had a panic attack or a bad dream he liked it when Nico did that for him, so he figured Nico would appreciate it as well.

Finally, Nico looked up at him, and it nearly broke his heart to see that Nico’s eyes were red and puffy as if he was holding back tears. “There’s going to be parents there.”

“And why’s that a problem?” he asked.

“What if- what if they don’t approve of us?”

“Oh,” was all he could say at first. In all honesty, Percy knew that they had been really lucky to have so many understanding people in their school. The small community had ensured that everyone knew each other and that they had each other’s backs no matter what. It hadn’t been like that at Goode, the sheer number of people made it impossible to know everyone and forced people into tight knit friend groups. At LaMoille it seemed that everyone had one or two best friends, but everyone else was still a friend. It wasn’t perfect, as he had witness a few heated arguments, but everything seemed to blow over in a couple days.

So to him, that kind of acceptance and closeness was probably present in their classmates’ parents. He liked to think he got most, if not all, of his good traits from his mom, so maybe that was the same for everyone.
But he also wasn’t foolish enough to not know that every group has a few assholes in it. He wasn’t going to tell Nico that though, as it would make him worry more, but also because people like that rarely ever made scenes in public.

“Nico,” he smiled, cupping the boy’s chin. “No one is going to say or do anything. Besides, your dad, Persephone, and Demeter will be there too, and if someone says anything I’m positive that they will smite their asses. Hades would probably beat them until they were a bloody mess, Persephone would probably start tossing chairs or pull a knife, and Demeter is a big woman; I bet she could take a few hits.” He wasn’t entirely joking either, Persephone had switched into this momzilla mode that made him worry about whatever poor sap that may upset Nico.

Nico pursed his lips and clenched the sun-hat tightly. “I guess.”

“What else is bothering you?” Percy asked, his hand traveling further up Nico’s back. “I want you to talk to me about anything and everything.”

A lone tear trailed down Nico’s face, which the boy quickly wiped into his sleeve. “You- you know how I’ve been remembering more and more of my past?” Nico asked with shaky voice.

Since Persephone and Nico began to talk, namely the former telling stories of Nico’s youth, often embarrassing the son of Hades, Nico’s memories of his time before the Lotus came back faster than before. It was nice to hear Nico talking about a childhood so vastly different from his own; one without fear or resentment, one of family outings and togetherness.

It had been joked about at Camp that he was the prince of the sea. But that was far from the truth, he wasn’t really welcome in Poseidon’s kingdom for political issues and his godly family would sooner see him dead than admit they were related. But after listening to Nico and seeing him interact with Hades and Persephone, Percy realized that Nico really was a prince. It would honestly not surprise him one bit if someday Hades gave Nico his throne so he and Persephone could retire.

*He’s already the Ghost King, why not climb the Underworld’s corporate ladder?*

“Yeah?” Percy nodded, piecing together what was really bugging Nico.

“What if-“ Nico choked, “what if my mother wouldn’t approve of me?” And with that, the tears that the son of Hades had fought so hard to contain burst forth. The younger teen dropped Will’s hat to the floor, wrapped his arms around Percy’s waist, and buried his head into the son of Poseidon’s chest as his body trembled.

He wrapped his arms around the frightened son of Hades and dug his fingers into Nico’s thick, dark hair. He could understand worrying about parental approval. His mom had put up with Gabe (*Don’t get upset*) and worked thankless, dead-end jobs to put him in boarding schools to keep him safe, sacrificing so much to give him everything she was able to. So he would never do anything that his mom wouldn’t approve of. If she hadn’t of approved of Annabeth, he would have reluctantly parted ways with the daughter of Athena. Thankfully that wasn’t the case, and Percy was also positive that his mom and Paul would have approved of his relationship with Nico.

But it’s hard to tell with his mom though. Attitudes were way different back then. But from everything Nico has said, she sounded a lot like my mom…

“Nico,” he whispered, gently massaging Nico’s scalp. “Your mom would have loved you no matter what. It’s me she would have hated,” he added with a chuckle, trying to lighten the mood. “She would have probably had Persephone turn me into plant food.”
“How do you know?” came a muffled sob from his chest.

Percy untangled his hand from Nico’s hair and moved it to the teen’s back, patting him gently. “I don’t know, but everything you’ve told me about her makes her sound like an amazing person, Neeks. There’s not a doubt—”

He was cut off by a sudden knock at the bedroom’s door. A moment later, Persephone walked in with Nico’s pants in hand, wearing one of Hades’ black band shirts and a pair of black jeans. “Nico, I think I hemmed them enough, would—“ her hazel eyes widened in shock as she registered what was before her. “Nico, what’s wrong? Do I have to kill Jackson?” Even though the small goddess wasn’t related to Nico, the glare she shot the son of Poseidon would make one think otherwise.

Percy ignored her glare though, as it dawned on him that the answer to Nico’s fears stood in front of them. According to both Nico and Persephone, the goddess of spring had been an inseparable companion to Maria, to the point that a young Nico and Bianca considered her a second mother. “Hey, uh, Persephone, Nico’s mom,” he paused for a moment to see if Nico would stop him from asking, but the son of Hades only continued to shake in his arms. “She’d be cool with Neeks, right? About him going to Prom with me?”

At first, he thought that the goddess didn’t understand what he was really asking, as she furrowed her brow and cocked her head at the question. But then it must have clicked. “Oh. Oh!” The young woman dropped the pants to the floor and knelt down before them. “Nico, angel, I want you to look at me.”

When Nico didn’t move, Percy carefully pried the son of Hades from his chest and spun him around. He hated to do it, but this was hopefully for Nico’s own good.

*If not, he can kill me later.*

“Nico,” the weakened goddess said, carefully taking the sobbing teen’s hands in her own. “I know our relationship isn’t the best and it’s all my fault. You have no reason to trust anything I say, but I swear on the river Styx, my life, and my divinity, that your mother would have loved you no matter what. Maria didn’t have a mean bone in her body, and if she were still alive, she would be there tonight screaming louder than anyone, that you were her son and Percy was your date.” She stopped and gave Percy a small smirk. “She, we, love you, little prince, and we always will.”

Nico collapsed to his knees and wrapped the goddess in his arms; burying his face against her neck as he started to sob uncontrollably. Persephone appeared to be shocked at first, but quickly returned the embrace. “There, there, little one,” the woman cooed. “Let it all out.”

Percy watched the scene in silence with a bittersweet smile on his face. Seeing the son of Hades and his goddess stepmother embrace each other made him miss his own mom; that he would never be wrapped up in her arms again. But seeing Nico slowly regain a family that was thought lost to time was something special. Something, that he felt honored to witness.

*I love you mom.*

“Just leave it running and get in there,” Coach Sonders, the school’s art teacher and football coach,
cried as they pulled up to the school’s rear entrance. “They’re looking for you two.”

Percy stepped out of the driver’s seat and was nearly knocked to the ground as the large, linebacker of a man jumped into black SUV and floored it. “Alright…” he blinked as the SUV whipped around the corner at unsafe speeds, tires squealing in protest.

In order to accommodate the large number of both parents and student who would be attending the premiere, the school’s faculty were acting as valets for students who were attending prom. The students had been told to pull up to the high school’s rear entrance, where a teacher would take their vehicles and park them on the football field. It was a strange concept to Percy, as back at Goode there was no way teachers would have been entrusted with a student’s car, but in the middle of nowhere no one so much as batted an eye.

“Are you okay, Percy?” the son of Hades asked with a bit of concern in his voice.

“I’m fine, just caught off-guard,” he replied as he limped across the small road to his boyfriend’s side. He offered his arm to Nico, which he eagerly took, linking it with his own. Percy was so glad that their classmates and friends were accepting and understanding about their relationship; well honestly no one cared, which was just as good. It allowed Nico to show a little bit more affection in public. “And may I add that you look absolutely amazing.”

Nico rolled his eyes, but the way his face flushed gave away his true feelings. “Percy, you’ve said that at least thirty times since we left the farm.”

He opened the door for the two of them, having to do a little maneuver so they could both go through without unlinking arms. “Doesn’t make it any less true, babe.”

Every man looks good in a tux, it was a fact of life that Percy had learned from movies and experience. Mostly movies. Okay, entirely from movies. But Nico looked took wearing a tux to the next level. The way the black formal wear hung off his body was sure to catch anyone’s eye, regardless of orientation. Nico had attempted to tame his hair, but it still looked shaggy. The strange thing was though it worked, giving the son of Hades a I-look-good-in-anything vibe. The black and navy-blue fabrics contrasted sharply against his pale skin, but it gave Nico the illusion of an ethereal glow.

And it drove Percy absolutely wild with want, making the gifts from Hades seemingly grow heavier in his pocket.

*Whatever gods are still out there listening, please let this night go as smoothly as possible!*

“There you two are!” Mrs. Carol called out the second they entered the small library. The elderly computer teacher had a clipboard in one hand and a Mick Mouse pen in the other, checking off their names with a shaky hand. “You two are the first to be announced, so get down the hall!”

In a span of less than thirty seconds, he was almost knocked off his feet for a second time. This time though, it was because Nico’s grip on his arm tightened to the point it was painful.

“We-we’re first?” Nico stuttered at the elderly teacher. “How are we first? Why are we first? Can we not be first?”

“I’m going to lose my arm to a small Italian!” he gasped as the son of Hades’ vice like grip only increased. *I’m going to lose my arm to a small Italian!*

No one noticed his pain though, as Mrs. Carol only shook her head. “Nick, it’s in alphabetical order. And Angelo is the first.”
He started to rapidly tap on Nico’s shoulder with his free hand. “N-Neeks, my arm is started to tingle!”

“My name is Nico di Angelo!” The Italian hissed. “Emphasis on the di! Di Angelo is one name!”

If the computer teacher hadn’t been wearing glasses as thick as coke bottle, she might have cowered in fear at Nico’s glare. Instead, Mrs. Carol only smiled as she mistook Nico’s anxiety for excitement, “Well consider that a clerical error in your favor!” She then waved them off and turned her attention to the next pair of students.

While Percy was concerned with whether or not Hades could reattach a severed limb with his freaky knowledge of field surgery, he was more concerned with how Nico was taking the news. He too had expected some kind of buffer before they were announced, as no one wants to be first at a public event. “Neeks, it’s going to be-“

“Okay,” the son of Hades finished with a deep exhale. “It’s going to be okay,” Nico repeated, sounding a little surer of himself. He ran a hand through his dark, shaggy hair and closed his eyes, repeating the words once more. Nico opened his eyes and smiled at him, which quickly turned into a frown. “Percy, why are you so pale?”

“A-arm!”

Nico’s eyes widened as he realized what he was doing. “Oh! Sorry Percy!” he cried as he loosened his grip.

“It’s okay, Nico,” he cringed as the blood began to flow normally in his arm, the resulting pins and needles sensation something he would rather do without. “Shall we get moving then?”

Nico nodded with a small smile.

They exited the library, arms still linked, into the main hall, where they were greeted by a scene straight out of a fairytale. There were roughly three dozen couples lined up down the hall; every one of them dressed to the nines. Every guy was in a tux, most were the traditional black, but there were a few white ones that, in Percy’s humble opinion, made his classmates look like young Colonel Sanders. There was also one guy wearing a camouflage patterned tux, and while he looked happy, his date was hiding behind her hand in embarrassment. The girls though were a sight to see, with dresses of all shapes, sizes and colors. There were girls in the big, poofy cinderella-style dresses, girls in sleek little, black dresses that left little to the imagination, and there were even a few backless dresses that Percy honestly couldn’t believe were allowed.

And while Percy did notice that many of his female classmates were beautiful, Nico was the one who his gaze kept returning to. Maybe it was a bad thing, but he felt like he was showing off Nico to everyone else as they walked, that Nico was the greatest prize there was and somehow he was lucky enough to win the Italian’s affections.

And I will do anything to keep it that way.

“There you two are!” Someone shouted for what seemed like the hundredth time today. It was Jason’s College Prep teacher, whose name escaped him. The woman had her hands on her hips and a frown on her face, that just reeked of that liberal arts confidence that had gotten him into trouble for years. “You need to get in there now!”

Before he could process what was happening, the woman shoved him and Nico into the gym onto and old beat up red carpet. “What just happened?”
“And here is our first couple of the evening!” Mr. Z’s voice blared over the ancient gymnasium speakers. “Nico di Angelo and Perseus Jackson!”

The gym looked… mostly the same if he was going to be honest. There was a bunch of folding chairs set up at the far side of the room for attendees to sit in once they were announced. Near that was a rolling, wooden podium with the vice principal stood behind; Mr. Z had even dressed up for the occasion, wearing Under Armour pants instead of his usual Under Armour shorts. The collapsible bleachers that he, Nico, and their friends hung out on during lunch were pulled out entirely, seating a horde of parents, siblings, and friends. The only things that really indicated it was prom was the red carpet they stood on, that went from the entrance to the folding chairs, briefly passing under an arch covered in plastic flowers.

“Boys!” Jason’s teacher hissed. “Move it!”

He leaned down and whispered into Nico’s ear. “Are you ready for this?”

The son of Hades nodded with a nervous smile, and they started walking.

“Nico, is the son of Azrael and Maria di Angelo; and is one of our new students for those of you with confused looks,” the vice principal chuckled as they were halfway to the first turn in the carpet. “His hobbies include reading comics, programming, and cooking. Nico is currently unsure what he wants to do, but says he sees college in his future.”

Percy took a quick glance at their audience. No one seemed to be upset or remotely bothered by them walking down the aisle as a couple. In fact, most people just looked bored. They most likely only cared for their kids and maybe a few others, but given the opportunity many would rather be at home. There were a few parents holding phones and cameras, snapping pictures in rapid succession, so in his book all was well.

“Perseus, or Percy as he likes to be called, is the son of Sally Jackson; also, another one of our new students,” Mr. Z clarified, flipping over a notecard in his hands.

It was only then did Percy realize that all of the information their history teacher was reading had been written entirely by Nico. “Nico,” he whispered from the corner of his mouth, “What did you write?”

The son of Hades only smirked as they rounded the corner and approached the flowery arch. Revenge shall be swift, di Angelo…. Revenge shall be swift…

“Percy’s hobbies include reading comics, making sarcastic remarks, and thinking he’s funnier than he really… is?” Mr. Z turned and looked at him, but all he could do was shrug. But if this was Nico’s idea of a joke, then he was safe.

Revenge will be like a bad knock-knock joke, I guess…

“When Percy graduates, he plans on doing whatever Nico tells him to do.” Mr. Z paused once again, then nodded his head. “Yeah, that sounds ‘bout right,” the man mumbled into the microphone, earning a couple laughs from the assembled families.

It was slightly embarrassing yes, but nothing that people would remember for more than a few days. He was actually proud of Nico for trying something like this. I guess I’m rubbing off on-

Revenge did indeed come swift and unexpectedly, as the eager voice of a familiar goddess shouted, “That’s my stepson! That’s my Nico!”
Everyone in the room turned to the source of the outburst: a very excited Persephone bouncing up and down on the top row of bleachers, flanked by a very embarrassed Hades and Demeter. Demeter pretended to be busy examining her nails, while Hades just sat there with his head buried in his hands. In Persephone’s hands was an ancient Kodak camera, that was snapping pictures faster than what should have been possible.

“Honey you’re not taking pictures!” Persephone cried, smacking Hades shoulder.

Before Percy had a chance to laugh, Nico dragged them down the rest of the carpet, before taking their seats in the back row of chairs. Nico immediately copied his father’s actions, and buried his bright red face in his hands, trying to hide from his embarrassing stepmother.

_I wonder if that bonding moment they had earlier is gone now? I should probably explain to Neeks that parents are supposed to be embarrassing…_ Just to be on the safe side, he relinked their arms to stop the son of Hades from considering shadow travel as a way to escape.

Mr. Z coughed into the microphone. “Er… yeah. Just a reminder to refrain from clapping or cheering until all students have been announced.”

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“Hades, would it kill you to smile?” The spring goddess sighed once more.

“It might,” the god groused.

“Well, I will kill you if you don’t,” Persephone shot back.

The rest of premier had gone off without a hitch, with the exception of everyone cheering for their kids just like Persephone had done. Mr. Z had announced the prom king and queen, which ended up being Jason’s buddy Charlie and his girlfriend Tricia. Percy had kind of hoped that he and Nico would’ve won, but he guessed that was hard to do when they weren’t even nominated.

*But that’s fine. It’s just a plastic crown… a crown I don’t have*…

So now everyone was outside of the high school waiting for their respective vehicles to be pulled around. So, while everyone waited, parents were forcing their kids to take an obnoxious number of pictures to fill their scrapbooks that would most likely be never looked at again.

So, of course, Persephone had to take _more_ pictures and be _more_ critical than any other mother. She may have lost her powers, but she still retained her divine personality.

“Let’s do one with all the men!” Demeter cried, pushing Jason into the trio.

“That’s a great idea!” Persephone beamed, firing off six more rapid-fire pictures and quickly swapping out the film. “Jason, dear, why don’t you stand behind Nico and Percy? Yes! Like that! Now rest your hands on their shoulders like your about to pull them into a hug! Good! Now Hades- don’t you frown at me like that- stand just behind your sons!”

Persephone and Demeter took another rapid burst of pictures, and Percy wondered if he was going to need glasses by the time the two women were done taking pictures.
Yup, that squiggle in my left eye is still there… I wonder if Hades has health insurance for us?

“Pictures were not part of the deal, Nico,” he heard Jason whisper to the son of Hades.

While the goddesses were changing film once again, he slugged the blond on the shoulder; something he could only get away with if Demeter wasn’t looking. The harvest goddess was a little overprotective of the son of Jupiter, which Jason would take full advantage of. “Suck it up, Grace! Don’t pretend like you’re not enjoying this.”

As Jason rubbed his arm, a crooked smile revealed his true feelings. While it was still true that the son of Jupiter wasn’t thrilled with the idea of going to a dance, Jason was excited for the afterparty. Chelsea, Aaron, Tate, Charlie, and Jason had made plans that once everyone arrived at the metro center, they would play World of Warcraft together and potentially some Mythomagic as well. Which was why Jason had his laptop, their decks, and a change of clothes in his truck for them. “Yeah, you’re right.”

“How about a silly one now!” Persephone shouted.

The breathalyzer beeped and a little green LED flashed green.

“Well kid, you’re good to go,” the officer nodded. As Percy was about to step away, the officer grabbed him by the shoulder, stopping him in his tracks. “one second though, do I know you?”

“No, sir,” he lied. “I just have one of those faces.”

The officer, one of the very same that had tried to arrest him at the hospital in Spring Valley so many months ago, shrugged his broad shoulders and waved him off.

He felt slightly bad for lying to the man who had been just doing his job that day, but he wasn’t exactly sure how Hades had been managed to get the police to drop the charges. Then there was that little issue of him and his father practically leveling the hospital in a titanic clash, so he imagined the cop may have some choice words for him depending on what the Mist showed him.

A familiar weight wrapped around his arm, which was beginning to feel like a part of him. “So those machines can tell if someone has been drinking just by blowing on them?” Nico asked incredulously, eyeing the small device as Jason blew into it. “That is weird.”

“Yup, but it’s for everyone’s safety,” he explained, pulling Nico closer.

The school district had requested several officers from the county to administer sobriety tests to everyone entering and leaving the venue. Percy thought they should have done the test before the left the school, but that might have ruffled a few parents’ feathers. So, here they were, at some golf course’s clubhouse outside of Mendota, getting tested.

“Shall we go in?” the son of Hades asked, eager to see just what was instore for them.

Percy had a feeling that Nico’s expectations were a little high, as he heard the budget for prom mostly went to paying for the catering and the DJ, but he simply smiled and kissed his boyfriend’s forehead. “Of course.”
Arm in arm, they walked through a pair of heavy oak doors and Percy realized that his expectations had been set too low.

The small, ranch clubhouse was far bigger on the inside than he would have imagined, as a great hall stretched out before them. A freshly polished hardwood floor stretched across three-quarters of the room until a marble dance floor replaced it, with some students already dancing to Katy Perry’s *Firework*. The DJ was set up next to the dance floor, with an assortment of computers, turntables, and speakers around humming around him; Aaron was talking to the DJ, a college aged guy with blonde hair, no doubt trying to request a song. To the right side of the room, several tables sat covered with large, silver serving trays filled with fried chicken, spaghetti, tortellini (which was called ravioli in the Illinois valley for some reason), fries, bread, and garden salad. The left side of the room was filled with white cloth covered tables, with large floral centerpieces, silverware wrapped in cloth napkins, and nametags in front of each placing.

What was really interesting to Percy though, and it was all interesting, was the small tables displaying the art class’s work for the year just to the left of them. “Hey Neeks, before we go find our seats, could we take a quick look at the art?”

Nico shrugged against his arm. “Sure, I think Jason has a few pieces on display.”

They started to slowly browse the art. To Percy, it was similar to what he was used to seeing in the hallways at Goode. There were watercolors of people’s pets and family members, sketches of rural scenes and anime characters, photoshopped images of the same person doing multiple zany things, and even some ceramic pots that he was sure could double as something a little less legal.

Nico’s breath hitched as Percy was busy looking at someone had done of the LaMoille grade school. “Percy, are you seeing this?”

“Yeah, someone really did an amazing job with the detail on the school’s brickwork.”

“Not that, Percy.” Nico grabbed the back of his head and turned it gently to the left. “*That.*”

“Holy shit…”

It was Piper.

Well, a lot of artwork depicting Piper and Jason.

And they were all absolutely breathtaking.

Every medium that the son of Jupiter had used rivaled the next in sheer detail. It took Percy a moment to realize that the picture Jason had used was the same one in his wallet, but somehow Jason had actually improved on the original. The oil painting depicting the couple included a small scar on Piper’s left earlobe that would be impossible to notice in a photo, the water color captured her cocky grin perfectly, the pencil sketch captured the daughter of Aphrodite’s subtle body language.

But what was really arresting, was the scratchboard.

Somehow, using only the golden foil and unscratched back portions, Jason had captured Piper’s kaleidoscope eyes, which in Percy’s opinion was her most striking trait. He could tilt his head this way and that, and Piper’s eyes would change color. The sheer amount of work Jason but into this and every other piece spoke volumes of the son of Jupiter’s feelings for the daughter of Aphrodite.

“What do we do?” Nico asked, eyes still focused on the golden Piper.
Percy craned his neck and spotted the blond sitting next to Chelsea and Aaron, the trio talking about the-gods-know-what with big smiles on their faces. The fact that Jason wasn’t freaking out about being next to Chelsea and wasn’t glancing nervously around the room, made Percy smile.

_It’s an improvement I missed._

He wrapped Nico in his embrace again and breathed in deeply the son of Hades’ sweet, earthy smell. “We enjoy ourselves.” And with that, he steered Nico towards their friends.

Okay, he messed up. He overestimated his abilities and now he was going to suffer for it.

“Jackson, would you hurry up already!” Someone barked from the back of the buffet’s line.

As part of his promise to be the world’s best prom date, Percy had told Nico to sit at the table while he went and got their food.

_And that was a mistake..._

Not thinking, he had grabbed a plate for himself as well as Nico, instead of coming back for his own like a normal person. The son of Poseidon realized his problem almost immediately, when he had to set down one plate to grab the salad tongs. He briefly entertained the idea of just leaving one plate sitting there, but the buffet’s attendant’s glare told him not to do that. So what followed was a slow juggling act that was _really_ pissing the people behind him off.

“I’m hurrying!” Percy shot back.

He was at the last stop, the fried chicken, and he was trying to figure out what piece Nico would prefer. _Who the hell has fried chicken at a formal affair anyway?_ He had grabbed a breast for himself, but there seemed to be an invisible force field mere inches above the poultry that was preventing him from picking up a piece.

It was silly, but for some reason he feared picking the wrong piece for the son of Hades. Of course, they had eaten chicken before, but he couldn’t remember what Nico had eaten, and in his mind, that made him a bad boyfriend. It was bad enough that he hadn’t known Nico’s basic info when he had carried the unconscious son of Hades to the hospital, but now he felt that he should know Nico’s food preferences.

“Light or dark? Light or dark? Breast or thigh? Breast or sigh?” he repeated rapidly under his breath, moving his hand back and forth between trays.

“Jackson, if I miss _Free Bird_ I am going to kill you!” Jason’s friend Earl snapped from the back of the line.

“I’d like to see you try!” he shot back as his hands continued to dance between piles of chicken.

_of course!_ Percy suddenly realized the answer to his problems. He quickly picked up a thigh and set it on (hopefully) Nico’s plate. _I won’t say whose plate is whose! I’ll just say ‘Neeks, take your plate’ and we are good to go!_ He replaced the tongs into the pile of fried poultry, earning a mild sarcastic
cheer from the people behind him, and picked up both plates.

The son of Poseidon wandered back to their table, which they shared with Jason, Chelsea, Aaron, and Tate. A stray chair made him tilt one of the plates slightly, making the scorching hot marinara sauce from the ravioli and spaghetti flow against his thumbs. Percy clenched his teeth and ignored the burning sensation, increasing his speed.

_Hot! Hot! Hot! Hot!_

His right leg was beginning to throb again, but Percy was sure that some time off of his feet and a fistful of _Tylenol_ would have him back up to one-hundred-percent again.

A blonde girl suddenly scooted back in her chair as he walked behind her, but thankfully the son of Poseidon was able to dodge it. However, there was a cost, as some of salad fell to the floor, and the red French dressing hit his shoes.

_Soooo glad that we need these tuxes for next Saturday!_ He cringed. _Don’t think about killing the old guy. Tonight is not about that._

At last he reached their table, where Nico sat with one hand resting under his chin and the other tapping absently on the white tablecloth. The son of Hades perked up though when he spotted him. “Hey Neeks!” he smiled cheerfully as he stood in front of the Italian. “I got our plates.”

“Which one’s mine?” Nico asked, destroying Percy’s plan with one question.

“Ummmmmm, are these both not breasts?” he asked, squinting at both plates. It was his last-ditch effort, that only a total idiot would b-

“I guess they do look the same,” The son of Hades said, squinting his eyes as well at the heavy plates. “Good thing I like light and dark,” Nico shrugged taking the plate with the thigh. “I really don’t understand what could have happened to make people think chicken tastes different depending on the piece. I mean-“

Percy stopped listening to the rambling son of Hades and thanked his lucky stars that he was dating an old man in a young person’s body.

_Okay let’s not refer to Nico like that ever again, that was super creepy. And ‘lucky stars’? He’s rubbing off on me as much as I am on him._

“And that is not dancing!” Nico continued as Percy stabbed his dressing drenched salad. “That is just lewd!”

After endearing the likes of _Barbie World, Hooked On a feeling, She Thinks my Tractor’s sexy, Red Solo Cup, I’ve Got Friends In Low Places, Copperhead Road, _and the gods awful _Cotton Eye Joe_ (Percy didn’t care where he came from, or where he went, only that he was gone), the DJ announced it was time for the king and queen’s dance, signaling the start of the slow dances.
He stood up from his table and once again offered Nico his arm. The son of Hades smiled at him so sincerely as he took the offered arm, that Percy felt a tear leave his eye. Percy then led him to the dance floor where they stood on the side as they watched Charlie, Tricia, and the rest of the court dance. Percy couldn’t name the tune they danced to, but that wasn’t important, it just felt amazing to be in a room full of so much love.

At that moment, no one in the room worried about getting accepted into the college of their choice, if they passed an exam, if their farm was going to make it another year, or if they would never see another pegasi again. Nor did they worry about whether their relationships would end in the months following graduation. Right now, all that mattered was the person they were with.

He squeezed Nico’s hand, and Nico squeezed back.

The song ended and everyone with a date took to the dancefloor as the next one, a slowed down version of *Total Eclipse of the Heart* began to play.

“Shall we?” Percy asked with a small smile.

“I’d love to,” Nico smiled back.

They snaked their way through the crowd, until they found a spot near the middle of the dancefloor. He bowed slightly to his date and Nico blushed, which was the desired reaction. Percy wrapped one arm around Nico’s waist, and pulled him close. Nico quickly followed suit and wrapped his arms around Percy as well.

He wasn’t a dancer by any stretch of the imagination, but after his dance with Annabeth at Westover all those years ago, he had his mom show him a few basic steps. Percy smiled at the thought of Westover, Annabeth, and the first time he met Nico. He would’ve never in a million years guessed that he’d be in the middle of nowhere, dancing, and head over heels in love with Nico di Angelo. Were there things he wished he could change? Yes. But not if it meant losing Nico. They were part of each other now, both unable to function without the other. Even if by some miracle Annabeth and Will would return to them, he wouldn’t leave Nico. They’d make it work somehow.

“What are you thinking about?” Nico laughed. “You look like you’re in pain.”

“Oh nothing,” he chuckled, “just about how lucky I am to have you in my life.” He pulled Nico against his chest, the younger teen squealing in surprise. “And that’s for laughing at my pain,” he grinned.

The son of Hades rested his head on his chest and let out a content sigh. “I’m not laughing at your pain, Perce. I’d never laugh at that,” Nico whispered as they gently swayed. “I was just laughing about how lucky I am to have you.”

He didn’t say anything, only kissing the top of Nico’s head.

And they stayed that way for some time. Couples came and went from the dancefloor, a disco ball was turned on at the DJ’s booth, and the music switched back to faster, more upbeat tunes, but still they slowly danced across the floor in each other’s arms. The pain in his leg seemingly disappeared as they danced.

They were the last couple on the floor when Mr. Z announced it was time for everyone to head to the Metro Center for the afterparty. He, and he was pretty sure Nico, would’ve have stayed there all night if given the chance, but when Mrs. Carol began to approach them, they reluctantly let go of each other.
But just before Nico left the dancefloor, he grabbed the younger teen’s hand and spun him around. The son of Hades looked at him with a puzzled, but patient, expression. Percy didn’t think of a lot of things through in advance, one of his flaws he supposed, but his mom had told him that feelings weren’t governed by thought and should be spontaneous.

“Nico, I love you.”

Chapter End Notes

Just a fun little chapter, will update notes later :)


Chapter Summary

Warning: this chapter contains nonconsensual acts and panic attacks. It's not as bad as Disciplinary, but be warned.

Tonight:

Jason mopes,

A brief glimpse into his past,

and the importance of friends.

Chapter Notes

6/28/18

I would like to apologize to my readers for forgetting to place a warning on this chapter. It slipped my mind when I posted it, but that is not an excuse. From now on I will try to post chapters earlier so that I won’t be as tired, this should prevent further mishaps.

Also, I do want to warn you that there are going to be a couple chapters coming up that are going to be rough, I will mark them as such and have written them so that they can be optional reading. Chapters after these will contain mentions of the events, but not in excessive detail.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Jason didn’t want to be there, let alone dance.

The dancefloor was packed, the music was loud, and everyone seemed to be having a great time, but the son of Jupiter just sat at his assigned seat and tapped his feet to the beat. The dance had really only just started, meaning he had at least another three hours before the afterparty would start.

Whoop-de-freaking-do…

He glanced to the back of the room, where Percy and Nico were looking at the art class’s display. When Nico glanced Jason’s way, he felt a twinge of worry. He hadn’t realized until that night that he had been using the exact same picture of himself and Piper for every single project, and it scared him. He still had nightmares about Disciplina, still feared that she would come for him when he was alone, still waited for some woman’s eyes to flash gold before taking him away.

And yet, some part of him missed Piper, despite the goddess having taken her form.

Every time Coach Sonders had announced their next project, Jason had somehow pulled out the only picture he had left of him and the daughter of Aphrodite, completely forgetting that he had already
used it before.

_And nobody said anything._ He sighed and took a sip from his punch. It was red, sweet, and cheap, something that Dakota probably would’ve enjoyed, but it cooled him down. _Everyone just let me keep in doing it as to not upset me._

It was true that everyone was nice to him, Percy, and Nico, but that didn’t mean there wasn’t talk. Once in the bathroom he had overheard two guys talking about how fragile he and Percy looked; how he looked like he was always ready to bolt out of a room when a girl got within five feet of him. Another time, as he was entering the locker room after PE, he caught the end of a conversation discussing how long it would be before he snapped.

People were nice to him, but they didn’t think highly of him.

And it hurt.

“Jason, are you okay?”

The son of Jupiter looked up and was greeted by a frowning Chelsea, clutching a pair of white flats in one hand.

He would be lying if he said his dungeon crawling and PVP companion didn’t look beautiful tonight. The blonde had curled her hair, but kept it up in her usual ponytail, creating an interesting look. She had a small diamond stud in each ear, that glinted in the light of the chandeliers. She wore a simple, white slip that clung to her body in all the right way and exposed her tan, freckled shoulders, and dipped down enough to highlight her swanlike neck. Her opened toe heels showcased a fresh pedicure, each toenail trimmed and painted white to perfection. It was a complete one-eighty from her usual boots, jeans, and hand-me-down T-shirts from her older brothers.

“I’m fine,” the son of Jupiter said, returning his gaze to his cousins. “What’s with the shoes?”

“You’re as bad a liar as your paladin is a healer,” the girl said, taking her seat. “But I’m not going to pry.” She bent down and loosened the straps on her shoes before kicking them off. “The shoes are because I’m not an idiot.” Chelsea dropped the pair of flats to the floor and slid them on with a sigh of relief. “We all want to look good, but man do heels hurt after a bit. Most women just take them off and go barefoot, but by the end of the night their toes are all bruised and battered from their dates stomping on them. These—“ she pointed to the white flats—“offer a little bit of protection.”

“I take it Aaron has two left feet?” he asked, still watching Percy and Nico chat next to the table with his art.

“Ha!” Chelsea scoffed, slapping the table. “I won’t see Aaron until it’s time to leave, he saw that little rainbow sticker on the DJ’s laptop and won’t stop hitting on him until a restraining order is filed.”

Jason turned his attention back to the blonde tomboy as Nico and Percy began to walk over. “So, who are you going to dance with?” It didn’t seem fair to him that Chelsea’s date would abandon her like that, they had agreed to go with each other so they should at least dance together one time.

The blonde shrugged, causing her ponytail to bounce ever so slightly. “Eh, for now it’s a free-for-all, but I should be able to wrangle up someone when the slow dances start.”

“Maybe me,” the son of Jupiter blurted out, surprising both Chelsea and himself.

The blonde put a hand to her chest and feigned shock. “Why a paladin and a death knight dancing
together? The Azerothian press would have a field day!” She stood up from the table and set the discarded heels on her chair just as Percy and Nico walked up. “I wouldn’t be opposed to it,” Chelsea smiled. “But only if you really want to Sparky. Now, Cotton Eye Joe is starting and that is my jam!” And with that strange outburst, she took off towards the dancefloor as the sound of electric fiddles filled the air.

“What was that all about?” the son of Poseidon asked.

The chicken was amazing, if not a little greasy. Charlie had told him some days before that prom was going to be catered by someplace called Rip’s Tavern, which Charlie claimed had been featured on The Food Network and had won the award for greatest chicken in the universe. Jason doubted his friend’s claims, but everyone had seemed pretty excited about it as well.

The fries were good as well, and he was pretty sure they had been fried in the same grease as the chicken. The salad was a salad, nothing special, but still good. The spaghetti was okay, nothing more than ground hamburger mixed with tomato sauce on some noodles. The tortellini were great, as apparently the meat-filled pasta was made by a small factory nearby, making it fresh. Though, he did have to wonder why everyone called them ravioli or ravs…

“I’m really regretting wearing white now,” Chelsea frowned as she wiped her hands clean on the small cloth napkin. “Does anyone have a wetwipe?”

“You should’ve used silverware like a respectable human being,” Nico said, rolling his eyes.

“No, it makes me the clean one.”

The blonde shot back. “Can it, shorty,” the blonde shot back. “You’re the only one that used a fork and a knife to eat chicken, that makes you the weird one.”


“Same,” Tate replied.

“Ditto,” he said with a small, crooked smile.

“Fine,” the blonde huffed, standing up from the table with her arms outstretched like a surgeon who had just been sanitized. “I’ll be right back, I have to go to the lady’s room.”

“Like anyone here considers you a lady,” Nico mumbled just loud enough for Chelsea to hear. The blonde backhanded the back of Nico’s head, but both were smiling. Since the son of Hades had confessed to their classmate about his feelings for Percy and orientation, the two’s friendship had progressed leaps and bounds in the last few days. Though, Jason remembered the girl dragging his paladin into a string of PVP matches that the girl won singlehandedly after the reveal.

There had been no mercy. No quarter was given. Armor repair bills had been high.

He thought back to one match, where their opponent, a gnome mage, had ported in without their
teammate. Chelsea’s Death Knight blew every spell and ability it had in an instant, sending waves of the undead and festering diseases at the poor little guy.

*Rest in Peace, CuddleMuffin. Rest in Peace…*

“Let’s see you talk trash after I kick your pale ass tonight in *Mythomagic,*” Chelsea fake snarled, before leaving the table.

Jason hid his smile behind his napkin.

It took a lot of goading, but somehow Charlie, Earl, and a couple of his other buddies convinced him to go out on the dancefloor.

At first, he was worried about not knowing any dances beyond the Robot, which Leo had once said looked like a critical systems failure. So, for the first couple songs the son of Jupiter, former praetor, slayer of the Trojan Sea Monster, and one of the seven, stood off to the side slowly bending his arms and torso.

It wasn’t pretty.

But as he stood there, watching the others, he began to realize that no one really had an idea what they were doing either. There were people grinding against each other, which was bringing up some memories he would rather forget, Tate looked like he was trying to ride a horse, Earl just kept swinging an imaginary lasso, and Charlie was trying to do the Worm.

*I guess I could try something else…*

He stopped his twisting, something his body thanked him for and thought back to his early days at Camp Jupiter. They weren’t exactly bad times, but they weren’t exactly good times either, it had just been lonely. As a son of Jupiter great things had been expected of him even at such a young age, so making close friends had been hard. There had been kids to play with in New Rome, but eventually they had to go home to their families; something he lacked.

Sundown became something of an omen for the young son of Jupiter. Sundown meant the streetlights would turn on soon, which in turn meant the few friends he had would have to return home, and he would have to return to his lonely barracks. Sometimes some of the officers would come and check on him through the night, which was nice, but that couldn’t fill the emptiness of not having anyone to tuck him in, read him a story, or even just say they loved him, like the other kids had.

He had been raised by Lupa, he wasn’t supposed to want those kinds of things.

One depressing evening though, he stumbled upon something interesting. He had been walking back to the barracks, not looking forward to another night of loneliness, when he heard a strange sound fill the air. Wanting to avoid his nightly rituals for as long as possible he followed the noise, until he found the source; a small group of legionnaires huddled around an old transistor radio.

They had removed their armor and weapons, were definitely AWHOL from their posts, and the radio was contraband; all serious offenses in their own right, but together could result in flogging or dishonorable discharge from the legion. The young Jason knew that he should’ve reported them, but
for some reason he just stood in the shadows and watched the group of teenagers goof off.

A heavyset son of Vulcan tried to spin on a piece of cardboard, a small daughter of Venus tried to disco, a lanky legacy of Apollo hopped up and down while pretending to play a violin; none of their moves matched the beat or mood of the music, but that wasn’t the point. They were just having fun.

There was one teen that stood out from the others, a son of Mercury that knew how to move. Jason had seen the older boy around camp before, but never really paid him any mind; he was just another face in uncomfortable armor. But there, in their little slice of Elysium, the son of Mercury was praetor, emperor, and god. The silver-haired boy appeared to float on air, capable of leaning side-to-side at angles that Jason thought impossible, popping and locking in ways almost unnatural, but what really amazed the young son of Jupiter was how he could moonwalk. With the slightest of movements, the son of Mercury could glide across the cobblestone street and then somehow with the same movements, move the opposite direction.

Enraptured by the display and music, he had stayed until the small group of friends returned to their posts. Every now and then he would hear the music playing and return to the secret sanctuary, but he never once stepped out of the shadows, preferring to watch from a distance. The older teens never directly acknowledged his presence, but they would give him a knowing smile if he passed them on the street, and sometimes the silver-haired dancer would ruffle his hair as he walked by.

*Let’s see if I can do that…*

Taking a deep breath, because the moonwalk required intense concentration, Jason put his feet flat on the floor. He then lifted his left heel until only the toe of his shoe remained on the floor, dragging his foot back simultaneously. As he brought his heel down, he repeated the process with his right foot, sliding himself back slightly across the floor. He couldn’t see himself, but by how jerky the movement felt, he knew that he wasn’t anywhere near as smooth the son of Mercury had been.

*Let’s try it again,* he thought, returning to first position.

He tried again, and did slightly better. A couple people noticed what he was doing and laughed, but it was good natured. There was a lot of things to laugh about on the dancefloor.

*Maybe if I…*

He kicked up a little wind beneath his feet, not enough to lift him, but enough to reduce the friction between the soles of his shoes and the floor. He repeated his movement from before and flew almost three times the distance. He shifted the breeze and went forward, his motions getting smoother.

*Okay, this is more like it!*

More confident now, he slid across the floor and did a spin, nearly knocking over some junior in the process. He was so into his dance though that he didn’t notice, continually trying to refine his movements.

“Holy crap! Look at Grace!” someone shouted over the music.

In a matter of moments, a crowd formed around him, providing the son of Jupiter with more room to experiment with. He did more spins, moonwalked back and forth across the floor, dropped back onto his hands and kicked his legs before jumping back up with the wind’s assistance, before dropping forward and with a strong burst of air did a backflip.

“Go Grace! Go Grace! It’s your birthday! It’s your birthday!” the crowd chanted, clapping along to the beat. It was incredibly cheesy, and a little embarrassing, but overall, he enjoyed it. He saw Nico
in the crowd, smiling at him with a I-told-you-so kind of look.

*I guess this isn’t so bad,* he thought as he did a front flip.

“Alright, can we get everyone off the floor, it’s time for the royal court’s dance,” the DJ announced as *Cotton Eye Joe* switched to something slower.

And just like that, Jason’s fun was over. He wasn’t going to complain though, as he was sweating like Leo the pig, his undershirt would definitely have sweat stains in the armpits. Despite using the wind to cushion his feet and slow his falls, his body still ached from the strenuous physical activities.

Like so many others, he walked off the dancefloor and grabbed himself another cup of punch. This time, the punch tasted incredible, but he was positive that anything cold and wet would’ve tasted good then. He refilled the glass once more and returned to his table.

“And just where did you learn to do *that*?” Chelsea laughed as Jason sat down. The blonde had her shoes off, with one foot resting on Aaron’s chair while she carefully massaged the other. Strands of hair had worked their way free from her ponytail and she looked as hot and red as he felt.

Jason shrugged. “Back in California. I take it the shoes didn’t work?” he added with an exhausted smile.

“Wow that explains everything,” the blonde groaned, rolling her eyes. “I think the only time you guys haven’t said New York or California was the time Percy mentioned a camp.” She flinched when she touched a particularly red spot near her big toe. “And the shoes only work for defense, they don’t do anything for self-inflicted damage. Could you hand me a piece of ice from your drink? Please?”

He fished out a piece of ice and shook it off before tossing it to the girl. “Kind of like how a pali’s bubble doesn’t negate a warlocks lifetap,” he laughed.

“Something like that,” his fellow junior smiled. Chelsea then tenderly pressed the ice cube against her foot and closed her eyes, sighing in relief.

The two of them sat there in silence, watching the other couples begin to fill the dancefloor once more. He watched Charlie’s crown sway across the crowd, no doubt he was still dancing with his queen. Earl was with his girlfriend next to the DJ’s booth, his hands on her hips as she wrapped her own around his neck. Percy led Nico by the hand into the crowd until Jason couldn’t see them anymore. There were a few people sitting at the tables, but that number fluctuated with the beginning of each song; some getting up to dance, while others stopped to catch their breath.

Jason glanced over to the blonde and frowned when he saw her disappointed expression. “Couldn’t find anyone to dance with?”

Chelsea shrugged slightly. “Nope.”

His frown deepened. Despite his initial reservations about her being, well, a her, Chelsea had become a good friend of his. Really, the only female friend he had outside of Demeter. And outside of Charlie, Chelsea was the one he played WoW with the most, the blonde dragging him to various dungeons, raids, battlegrounds, or even just interesting places he would have overlooked. In person,
she respected his personal space and could seemingly tell when he was having a particularly bad day with flashing back to Disciplina. He didn’t have any romantic ideas about the girl, but he could say he cared about her wellbeing. In short, she was a good friend.

*And I should be a good friend in turn.*

“Would- would you like to dance with me?” he asked.

Instead of bouncing up and down in excitement or anything of the like, she simply raised one eyebrow. “You know dancing involves me touching you, right?” she asked. The question wasn’t sarcastic or mocking, but rather one of concern. “You don’t have to force yourself for my sake.”

“No, I want to,” he said with a small smile.

The blonde responded with a small smile of her own. “Well then, let me get my shoes back on.”

They stood up and Jason followed the shorter of the two to the far side of the dancefloor, where the mass of bodies muffled the amplifiers enough so that they could hear each other without screaming. They faced each other and he started to reach out only to freeze, not out of fear but of uncertainty of where to place his hands.

She must have sensed his hesitation as Chelsea laughed. “Just put your hands around my waist Sparky, and I’ll put mine on your shoulders. That is, if that’s okay?”

It was strange, but reassuring to him that the blonde was asking permission to give the slightest of physical contact. “Yeah,” he nodded slowly. Jason wiped his hands on his jacket, worried that his hands might ruin Chelsea’s white dress, and then carefully wrapped his arms around her waist. Chelsea’s smile grew and she gently placed her hands on his shoulders.

And just like that, Jason had his first slow dance.

“You’re pretty light on your feet there, Sparky,” Chelsea said, her voice just above a whisper. “Have you done this before?”

He smirked at the compliment. “Nope, first time. You’re not bad yourself, Benihime.” Chelsea smirked back and lightly tapped his shoulder at the use of her death knight’s name. He was the paladin Sparky, she the death knight Benihimi, and together with Charlie, Tate, and Aaron, they were the greatest heroes in Azeroth.

*Or so the quest text would have us believe.*

They danced in silence to *Total Eclipse of The Heart, Stand By Me,* and *Creep*; gently swaying side-to-side, while only occasionally bumping into other couples. He was aware that he was surrounded by women, but for the moment it didn’t bother him that much, like how it was back at camp before his life got flipped upside-down for a second time.

“I have a question,” Chelsea said as they slowly spun around, “and if it’s a touchy subject, feel free not to answer.”

“What is it?” He wasn’t panicking, but he hoped it had nothing to do with his strange behavior. *No matter what Nico and Hades say, I know I’m not normal…*

“Piper McLean-” his heart stopped “-what was she to you?”

At first, he wanted to flee, positive that his fears had come to pass, but a quick look at Chelsea told
him that this was genuine curiosity about Piper. “How do you know Piper?”

Chelsea laughed. “I don’t know her, but I know of her.” They continued to slowly shuffle around the dancefloor. “I practically inhaled every interview and sneak peek for the second Warcraft movie. At the premiere Tristan McLean’s daughter about beat the crap out of a pretty racist reporter.” She smirked. “People like that tend to stick with you. So, imagine my surprise when one of my new friends, because we are friends, has a picture with her.”

“What if I said that isn’t her?”

“What if I said you’re full of shit,” the blonde in white countered.

Jason stopped moving and sighed. “She was my girlfriend….”

Chelsea closed her eyes and nodded, “Okay, I can see that. Would explain the almost-stalkerish amount of art you did of you two.”

Jason should have been insulted he supposed, but the idea of him being a stalker was kind of funny. *I can see it now, me floating outside someone’s window like a demented Peter Pan. Actually, Peter Pan was already pretty messed up, so just Peter Pan.*

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“Can I ask another question?” Chelsea asked as the music transitioned to *What the World Needs Now.*

“Sure.”

“Piper’s disappearance, you and the other guys moving here, and all the other missing people in the news, they’re connected, aren’t they?”

*And I was not expecting that leap in logic…*

His body language must have changed as the blonde gasped. “They are! Can you tell me how? I promise I won’t tell! Wait, let me guess! It’s an international organ harvesting cartel! Or- or an underground revolution is in the works to remove the corruption is Washington! Or-“

Jason let her ramble on with possible theories, ranging from drug cartels, to alien invaders, and even getting close with guessing that Olympus was involved. It was amusing to listen to, even if part of his mind had wandered to thinking about Piper and her dad.

*I can’t imagine what Tristan is going through right now. His daughter, life coach, and Mellie just disappeared from his life. What about the Chases and all the other parents out there?*

Chelsea ended up riding with Jason to the afterparty.

Aaron had wanted to stay and flirt with the DJ as long as possible, leaving the blonde stuck waiting for the redhead to realize it wasn’t going to happen. Everyone, with the exception of Nico and Percy who were still dancing, had already left or were on their way out. Jason’s gaming crew had made plans to have a pseudo-LAN party at the afterparty, so without Chelsea their plans would have been delayed.

So, he told her to grab her stuff from Aaron’s car and ride with him.
They rode in a comfortable silence behind a small convey of other students leaving Prom until they got to Princeton; Chelsea made him stop at McDonalds where she purchased the both of them some burgers and an ice cream sundae as thanks for giving her a lift. It was a bit of a challenge to drive and eat the strawberry sundae at the same time, but after sweating for hours in a slightly too small tux, it tasted incredible.

Soon after they pulled up in his beat-up Bronco to the Princeton Metro Center, a large, red brick building that was the location of the afterparty. Nico had confessed to him that this is where he and Percy went on what they would consider their first date. Chelsea on the other hand, had rattled off all the things it had; a basketball court, a track, pool, sauna, hot tub, theater, gym, tennis court, and a decent cafeteria.

Jason found a spot in the back of the small parking lot and before the truck had stopped moving, Chelsea jumped out with her bag of clothes and laptop and sprinted to the door. He couldn’t do that though, but when he did turn the truck off, he quickly grabbed his laptop and his, Nico, and Percy’s shared bag and gave pursuit, using the winds to give him a slight speed boost.

Chelsea still beat him inside, but he felt victorious as he wasn’t gasping for breath like the blonde.

_It’s not competitive, so therefore it’s not cheating_, he smirked to himself.

“I swear if you don’t go out for track, I’m kicking your ass,” the girl panted as he entered the lobby, a rather plain looking room with a reception desk, potted plants, and a spiral staircase in the center that took people down to the lower levels. “Because you just did one-hundred meters like it was nothing.”

He shrugged and readjusted the strap of his backpack. “I know Mr. Z and the guys want me to join.” _Plus, every other team. Was not aware that Scholastic Bowl was a thing, much less a sport…_

“Please join,” Chelsea panted, crouching down and resting her hands on her knees. “I think with you, we could actually make state.” The farmgirl continued to pant, but Jason soon realized that it was mostly for show. “Charlie texted me on the way over and said we were going to play in the theater. I’ll meet you there shortly, I want to get out of this dress.”

“Alright, sounds cool. Guess I’ll just follow the signs.”

She nodded at him before limping down the staircase to the locker rooms, loudly complaining about how she regretted running with sore feet.

_I think she just likes to hear the sound of her own voice… Like some kind of gender flipped Percy…_ The son of Jupiter shuddered at the thought; surely the gods wouldn’t be cruel enough to bring another Percy into the world.

Pushing that horrible thought aside, Jason began to make his way to the theater, following little, plastic signs that hung on the grey, tiled walls. He passed by the basketball court, where he saw several of his friends had shed their tuxes in favors of gym shorts and T-shirts, playing a quick pickup game with Mr. Z. Several of the guys stopped playing for a moment when they saw him, waving for him to come and join.

“Maybe later!” Jason shouted. He smiled when his answer was met by a chorus of groans and a threat to drop his World History grade.

He passed the snack bar, where a bunch of girls were huddled around the punch bowl. One girl, Kelsey from his College Prep class, stood awkwardly looking out toward the hall, as if looking for
something or someone. She saw him and gave him predatory grin, and gave a come-hither gesture with her finger. Jason’s chest tightened and his face grew hot, and he took off running as Kelsey laughed cruelly at his discomfort.

Out of breath, the son of Jupiter finally arrived at the theater’s entrance. He kicked open the oak door and was greeted by a comforting sight.

“Hey, look who decided to show up!” Charlie laughed. His potbellied friend was lounging in one of the dozen chairs near the back of the room, his sock covered feet propped up on the seat in front of him. Charlie’s crown still sat on his head, albeit at an angle that made it dangerously close to falling off his head. In Charlie’s lap, sat his laptop, power cable plugged into one side and an HDMI cable on the other; if the larger teen had to get up suddenly one of the cables was bound to be ripped out. “Bro, stop smiling at me and check out the screen,” his friend said, pointing to the front of the room.

Jason did as instructed, forgetting the troubling moment at the snack bar, and gasped in awe. “Holy Illidan…”

There, before him on a twelve-foot screen, was Ogrimmar in all its pixelated glory. Charlie’s orc shaman occupied the center of the screen, its blue robes pillowing as the giant, feathered raptor it rode sped by the auction house. Dozens of other characters of all shapes and sizes zipped and flew across the screen; A goblin riding a phoenix, a blood elf hopping in place next to its imp, a large tauren doing circles in its motorcycle, and even Tate’s hunter could be seen talking to a forsaken merchant.

“Please tell me I can use the screen next,” he said, his jaw still hanging wide open as he collapsed into the nearest chair.

“Hell no! I’m next!” Tate cried from one of the chairs down front. The brunette had his sticker covered laptop out as well, but he seemed to be trying to find a large enough space to set his wireless mouse.

“Gentlemen! Gentlemen!” Charlie chuckled, “As your king, and most handsome guy here-“ Jason and Tate scoffed “-I hereby declare that control of the projector will switch after each completion of a dungeon.” The king banged his fist against the plastic armrest as if it were a gavel to make his proclamation binding.

Jason rolled his eyes. “Yes, my king.”

“Annnnd, Avenger’s Shield!” Jason whooped as his tauren paladin, SuperSparky, threw a golden shield of pure light at the Dragons of Nightmare. The spinning shield bounced off of the dragon Emeriss and flew across the shadowed clearing and impacted Lethon, drawing that dragon’s attention away from Tate and onto himself.

“Thank you, Mr. Grace,” Tate sighed, drinking a health potion, before opening fire at the dragons with a barrage of arrows.

“No problem,” Jason grunted back, tongue poked out the corner of his mouth as she concentrated on the giant screen before him.
Aaron had never shown up to their *WoW* session, but that was no problem, as they simply picked up a pug to fill his place. They cleared four mythic difficulty dungeons in less than two hours, giving the four of them each a chance to use the massive screen. After that though they decided to run a raid, and much to Jason’s delight, it was unanimously agreed upon that he should get the giant screen since he was their tank.

The raid had started well enough, clearing trash and downing the first couple bosses with minimal effort. But then for some reason the other tank, a pandaren monk, died when the dragons had twenty-five percent of their health remaining. While, the raid was old and his team’s gear was way higher than needed, there was still a distinct possibility of them losing due to the fight’s mechanics.

“Jason, you got the keep both dragons on you bud,” Chelsea cried, as her death knight used its *death grip* to draw Emeriss’ attention away from a troll druid and onto her. The blood elf death knight then ran to SuperSparky, where he used another *Avenger’s shield* to take the beat off of her.

“I’m doing what I can!” Jason protested, as Lethon tried to sneak off to a group of warlocks and mages. He pressed ‘5’ and instantly SuperSparky consecrated the ground at his feet, causing the possessed dragons to roar in rage and pain. “It’s just hard to keep the attention of two dragons and a ton of adds when I’ve got thirteen people attacking them at random!”

“Keep calm my young Padawan,” Charlie chuckled, as his shaman cast heal-after-heal on the assembled raid. Jason didn’t like the fact that his main healer’s mana bar was less than twenty percent full, but the prom king seemed to pay no mind. “We only got five percent to go.”

Although five percent was pretty much meant guaranteed victory on old content, he didn’t want to take any chances. *How about a little Avenging Wrath!* Jason clicked on the icon at the top left of his action bar and instantly SuperSparky was enveloped in a golden light from the heavens. Large, golden wings grew from his paladin’s back, signifying a thirty-five percent boost to his haste, defense, and attack stats.

“Alright guys, I’ve got this!” the son of Jupiter cheered as he fired off ability after ability in rapid succession. His shield slammed against the first dragon’s chest, before flying off to impact the other dragon’s flank, and finally bouncing around a pack of walking flowers before returning to his huge arm. He filled his sword with holy light, and slashed at Lethon, the emerald dragon collapsing to the ground in its death throws. He cast judgement on Emeriss and a hammer of pure light crashed down on the beast’s skull, dropping its head for Jason to deliver the final-

A ghoul flew out of nowhere and bit the dragon’s neck, stealing the killing blow from him and ruining his fantasy. Jason bolted upright and glared at the blonde down in front. “Chelsea! What the hell, man?!?” he shouted as the loot was distributed.

The girl didn’t turn around, instead she lifted both arms in the air and gave him a two-fingered salute, making Tate, Charlie, and Tricia burst out in laughter.

“Yeah, well, don’t come crawling to me when you need a ride home tonight,” Jason scoffed as he returned his attention back to the game. He clicked open his backpack and saw that he won a helmet for SuperSparky. *Hmmm*… He moved his cursor over the helmet and held ‘shift’ to compare the new helmet’s stats to the one he already had. *It has a nice haste boost, but a decrease in ilvl, strength, stamina, mastery, and critical.* He chewed on his lip in thought. *I could have Aaron disenchant it tomorrow, but I could just sell it for the gold-

The wind was knocked out of him when a large form flopped across his lap, sending his laptop falling to the floor with a worrying crack. A hand wrapped around his neck and pulled him down, face-to-face with a very red-faced Kelsey.
“Hey, J-Jason,” the brunette slurred. Her breath reeked of alcohol, her hair was a mess, one of the straps on her violet dress was ripped, exposing quite a bit of skin, and she only wore one shoe, the heel snapped off. “When are you gonna man up and stop playing this little game,” she swatted the mouse form his hand and giggled.

Jason was paralyzed with fear. He felt trapped in his own body as Kelsey’s brown eyes stared lustfully into his own. She continued to pull him down closer, parting her lips slightly. Jason’s mind raced as his lungs screamed for air and every muscle painfully locked up to fight the girl’s pull. As her lips connected with him, dozens of images flashed before his eyes; all of them with Discpilina, and none of them pleasant. He could hear his friends, but they sounded like they were a million miles away.

“Oh, come on baby, loosen up a little,” Kelsey grinned as their lips parted. She released his neck and he sprang back upright. “Maybe if we got into a more comfortable position,” The brunette giggled. She repositioned herself so that she was straddling his lap, with both arms on his shoulders to keep him in place. “Just relax and let me reward you for- AAAAAAAAH!”

“Get the FUCK off him, you skank!” A familiar feminine voice spat, as Kelsey was brutally yanked off of him by her long, brown hair.

With the girl off him, his instincts finally kicked in. He bolted up over the chair, jumping over the remaining rows with the assistance of his abilities before sprinting out the door, tears streaming down his face, as his friends called out for him.

Jason finally stopped running when he reached a dead end in the Metro Center’s basement, collapsing to the cold, concrete floor. The son of Jupiter wrapped his arms around his legs and buried his face in his knees, his body shaking as he sobbed.

He hated himself. He hated what he had become. He hated how weak he had become, how he distanced himself from Nico, Percy, and the rest. He had stared down monsters, gods, and the very Earth without a second thought, but a series of bad experiences had reduced him to rubble. To top it off, all the trials he had gone through turned out to be nothing more than a complex scripted event created by his father and the Fates.

My entire life has been a lie. Just the Olympus version of Keeping Up with the Kardashians….

He hated that his initial reaction to Prom had been correct, that it was going to be terrible. It only made it worse by the fact that night had started off so good.

Why is life like this? How come no matter how happy you are, all it takes is for one person to ruin it?

A door open and closed in the distance and the sounds of people running echoed down the pipe-lined hallways.

“Jason! Where are you, bud?!” Charlie’s voice echoed down the halls.

“Come on Grace! We’re worried about ya!” Tate called out.

“We told Mr. Z what happened!” Chelsea shouted. “He wants to talk with you!”
Jason heard them stop running, most likely at the first four-way intersection he encountered. He said a quick prayer that no one would find him like this. They were his closest friends, he didn’t want their pity.

*I just need a couple minutes to pull myself together. Then I can grab my stuff and sneak out of here, and I am going to let Nico have a piece of my mind tomorrow! I told him I didn’t want to come! He knew what happened to me and yet he still insisted! Hades at least could plead ignorance…*

“Jason?” Chelsea called out. “Jason, I can hear you, just stay where you are.”

His legs felt like jelly, and he couldn’t see through his tears. Despite his wished, he wasn’t going anywhere.

The footsteps grew louder and Jason could tell Chelsea was running barefoot, and he felt more guilt being stacked on the already impressive mountain that was crushing his soul.

*Her feet are probably bleeding because of me…*

“Ja- oh, Jason,” the blonde whispered as she skidded to a stop. He glanced up and wiped his eyes, Chelsea stood there, barefoot, in jeans, with a black top, looking at him with concerned etched on her face. “Jason,” she said softly, “I’m going to sit down over here. I’m not going to touch you.”

Jason watched as the girl sat down at the far end of the hallway and placed her hands in her lap. “I’m sorry,” he rasped. “I’m sorry.”

Chelsea cocked her head slightly and frowned. “What the heck are you sorry for?

He wiped his eyes again, briefly wondering where his glasses went. “For freaking out, running away, making you guys worry, take your pick.”

The blonde sighed and shook her head. “Jason, you’re the victim here, stop apologizing.” Chelsea paused and picked up one of her swollen feet. “What Kelsey did was unforgivable, which is why I’m not apologizing for breaking her nose.”

Jason blinked the tears from his eyes and took in a ragged breath. “You did what?”

Chelsea held up her left hand and he saw that her knuckles were covered in blood. “Jason, you’re not the only one in this hallway who has issues with the opposite sex,” she sighed, returning her attention back to her feet. “I, uh, wasn’t exactly sure when we first met, but I’m pretty sure now you’re a survivor too.”

“What happen-“

She held up her hand and he stopped talking. “Let’s not go there right now, unless you’re willing to tell me your story.”

Jason shook his head, he was already feeling bad as he was, he didn’t need to completely relive the trauma. “What happened after I freaked out?”

“Jason, you didn’t *freak* out,” the girl said, emphasizing the word freak in air quotes. “Your reaction was perfectly normal and don’t let anyone else tell you otherwise. And trust me, I know it’s easier said than done,” Chelsea sighed. “After you *flew* out of there, I went to town rearranging Kelsey’s face while Tate tried to pull me off. Charlie went and told Mr. Z what happened and they found out someone spiked the punch.” She let out a long drawn out sigh. “The place is on lockdown now and the cops are on their way. Plus, they called everyone’s parents. Heads are going to roll.”
He unwrapped his arms around his legs and leaned back against the wall. “What about you? Are you going to get in trouble? You just said you broke Kelsey’s nose.”

“No, no, no! I said Kelsey broke her nose when she tripped over her own feet,” The blonde smiled maliciously. “And before you ask, she was so lit, she won’t remember anything come tomorrow morning.”

“Oh. Am I in trouble?”

“Jason, Mr. Z want to know if you want to press charges.”

“Charges? For what?” he asked, wiping the last of his tears on his arm.

Chelsea looked at the floor away from him, all remnants of a smile gone from her face. “Sexual assault-“ his eyes widened “-and if you did agree to, Charlie, Tate, and myself would stand with you. You’re our tank and more importantly, our friend, we got your back.”

Jason’s stomach dropped, which was a feat as he thought it was already in Tartarus. Right now, he was presented with an option that hadn’t been available with Disciplina: retribution. He could get some sense of closure and security, with the girl most likely being expelled in the process. But, it could ruin her life in the process. Kelsey’s only seventeen, and I guess she was technically under the influence. “Do you think I could have some time to think about it? It’s a lot to think about…”

Chelsea smiled sadly and nodded. “It will be a bit before the cops get here. Why don’t you settle down and talk to Mr. Z about it? He- he helped me with a lot…” With a wince, the blonde slowly stood up. “I may be overstepping some bounds here, but there’s a group that meets in Ottawa twice a month, I think it would do you some good to come with me next time.”

“I’ll think about it.”

The blonde leaned against the wall, propping one foot against it. “Sooo, I saw you got a helmet; was it an upgrade?”

The beginnings of a smile graced his lips. “Just an upgrade for my wallet. What about you? Did you get anything?”

And they just sat there awhile and talked, about anything and everything. Charlie and Tate soon joined them and neither of the guys said anything or raised a fuss, only seamlessly joining the conversation. Soon they four of them were laughing and joking like normal teenagers. When they heard Mr. Z calling out for them, Charlie offered Jason his hand and pulled him up. Jason then wrapped his arms around the two boys’ shoulders while Chelsea stood just off to the side with a smile on her face.

He had a lot to think about, and he knew that he still had a lot to overcome, but strangely he felt a bit better. He appreciated Nico and Percy’s efforts to help him, truly he did, but knowing that there was someone else that could relate to him was reassuring in a new way.

*It was a good night. I can’t let one thing ruin everything. I have to focus on the positives and roll with the punches like I used to.*

He looked over his three friends, the latest additions to his strange family. They were an odd bunch to be sure, but they were normal by demigod standards. “Did any of you guys happen to grab my stuff? How’s my laptop?”

The three cringed and looked at each other awkwardly.
Why do I know I'm going to be glad I bought the two-year warranty?

Chapter End Notes

Before any of you panic, this is not a Jason/OC fic. He and Chelsea are just going to be good friends is all.

I also want to take this time to point out that Chelsea is not my self insert OC. Like, at all. I divided my personality into several characters, but one got most of them.

Jason and art always seemed to jive with me. He seemed like the kind of soul who could express himself with any medium, whether he was aware of it or not. It has been hinted at several times now that Jason was using the only picture he had of him and Piper repeatedly, but I intentionally made it vague. He has a lot of issues with Disciplina assaulting him in Piper's body, but his subconscious is reminding him that that wasn't Piper. That Piper and Disciplina are two vastly different people.

I always imagined that Jason's childhood was very lonely. (though I do want to write a fic about Jason being raised by an older couple in New Rome, only for the memory wipe to make them forget. It would be a very bittersweet story). He was always an outsider due to his parentage and his unique circumstances. Taken as a toddler and given to a she-wolf does not make a healthy childhood. I also wanted to take the opportunity to show that some of the legion really did see how much of a joke their lives were and blew off their duties. You know, like kids!

Jason's family view is evolving. He now considers Nico and Percy to be his brothers, with Hades and Demeter being surrogate parents. This means that he's going to be looking for comfort and fun elsewhere. He worries about Nico and Percy's opinions, worries that they are going to be disappointed in him; this is partly brought on by Nico's concern for him, and Jason worrying about intruding upon Nico and Percy's relationship.

And I'm sorry, but Prom seemed like the perfect place for Jason to have a panic attack. But! It was also the perfect place to start his recovery as well.

We shall see that the future holds for Mr. Grace.

Thank you all for reading! Please leave a kudos/comment and don't forget to bookmark/subscribe!
You are all wonderful people, and I love to hear from you!

Next chapter is Nico, and it's going to be a good one!

Also, planning is well underway for my next fic in the series. I will always try to write about things that haven't been done, or at very least put a huge twist on them! It won't be as dark as a Shattered, but slightly darker than the canon. Not to spoil to much, but the themes are family and prophecy.
They rode in comfortable silence, with their fingers firmly laced together. At every stop sign, Percy would lean over and kiss him or he would do the same to the son of Poseidon. When they went around corners, Nico would glance at the one he loved and feel the oh-so-foreign giddiness well up inside him once more.

_Percy loves me._ That thought had been playing on an endless loop since Percy uttered those three simple words only many minutes ago. All the ordeals he had gone through, all the pain he had felt, all the losses he experienced, they all felt worth it now. _This_ was what he wanted with every fiber of his being. _This_ is what he felt like he deserved.

“I love you, Percy,” he repeated for what had to be the hundredth time, but the words still felt like the smoothest velvet and tasted like the sweetest honey on his tongue.

Percy looked over to him and with grin said, “I love you too.”

He squealed in delight, squeezing Percy’s hand even tighter, and if it wasn’t for the seatbelt across his chest, he would have jumped into his green-eyed lover’s lap. A part of him was saying he needed to settle down, control his emotions, and be dignified; but the rest of him beat that annoying part into the dirt and allowed him to fully feel and express his emotions.

_I think, no, I know this has been the best day of my life! I’ve forgiven Persephone and regained a second mother, Father gave me a hug before we left for the dance, and, well, Percy Loves me!_

It had been an amazing night, even if his expectations had been a bit too high. Nico could vaguely remember the grand dances that had been held in the public squares throughout Venice and seeing his mother, father, and Persephone dress up in their finest clothes for a night out. He had pictured violinists playing soothing melodies in the corner, a grand, marble dancefloor where couples slowly danced, servers walking around offering finger foods and beverages. Not a third-rate country club with a DJ and people behaving like animals and calling it dancing.

_I really should have asked for some details… But, that’s what I get for assuming. Plus, I should have known better after Westover._
Still though, it was an amazing night. The prom committee had decorated the place exceedingly well despite their minuscule budget; the wrought-iron Eifel Tower someone donated was done with amazing craftsmanship. The food, while unorthodox for a formal event, had been really good; he even stole a few tortellini from Percy’s plate after he ate his own. He didn’t care for the loud, often repetitive music, but one Percy took him by the hand and led him onto the dancefloor, the music disappeared into the background.

And then there was Percy, and if he was honest with himself, any venue would have been amazing as long as Percy was there with him. The son of Poseidon had really tried to make sure everything went as smoothly as possible, and where he failed, it made things more entertaining.

He chuckled as Percy stopped at a traffic light.

Percy had tried to be the perfect date, emphasis on the word tried. Nico never finished a cup of the sickeningly sweet, red punch, as every time it got low Percy would grab it and limp off to get a refill, something he was more than capable of doing himself. When it was time to eat, Percy insisted on getting him his plate, only to run off without asking him what he wanted to eat. It had been funny, and a little sad, to see Percy struggle to fill and carry two plates and then panic and hold up the line over a piece of chicken. He had only wanted a salad, but seeing Percy come back with two heaping plates and his thumbs in hot marinara sauce, he ate every bite and then some. Shortly after their stomachs settled, Percy led him out to the dancefloor. With Percy’s leg still injured they couldn’t do anything too fancy other than the occasional twirl, and sometimes the son of Poseidon would step on his feet, but just being their wrapped in each other’s arms was perhaps the second greatest moment in his life.

The greatest moment following shortly after.

*But that’s the thing, what makes Percy so great is that he tries. He tries so hard to make everything work and if it doesn’t, he tries to not let you know. But he’s a freaking terrible liar to people he cares about, so you can’t help but find him enduring.*

“Hey, we’re here,” Percy announced as they turned into the Metro Center’s parking lot. Percy turned the borrowed SUV once more to park next to Jason’s truck, killing the engine a moment later. “You ready for this?” the son of Poseidon smirked, with a look that said he wasn’t just talking about the afterparty.

“I’m ready for anything, as long as you’re by my side.”

Percy threw open what had to be the tenth door in a row, only to growl in frustration to see the room was, yet again, occupied.

“Hey Percy! Hey Nick!” One of the juniors in the room cried cheerfully. “Up for a game of soda-pong?” they asked, gesturing to a Ping-Pong table covered with red plastic cups. A pair of girls stood at each end of the table holding little, white balls in their hands, taking turns trying to toss one of the balls into the other team’s cups. It looked to Nico that if the ball went into a cup, the cup’s owner had to drink its contents. “It’s pretty fun!”

Percy, who was still rather excited after a brief moment of heated intimacy in the parking lot, looked like he was ready to pass on the offer, but he glanced at him first and asked, “Neeks, do you wanna
play?"

He loved Percy, truly he did, but he also liked to watch his boyfriend suffer a bit. He knew Percy desperately wanted some alone time with him, and so did he, but he also wanted to try some new things that night. "I’d like to try," he shrugged, hiding his true interest.

There was a chorus of cheers and before he knew it, he and Percy were ushered to one side of the table, while a pair of Juniors, Jim and Dave if he remembered right, were ushered to the other. The cups from the previous game were cleared away and were quickly replaced by ten new ones on each side of the table filled with coke. Three balls were given to every player, and the game began.

“So, I just toss the ball into their cups?” he asked the older teen as he lined up his shot.

Percy nodded and shifted slightly to the left so Nico could get better centered with the table. “More-or-less, the rules kind of depends on a game-by-game basis.”

“Well I’ll keep it simple for the first game,” Jim said, removing his jacket.

“First team to make their opponent drink all their cups, wins,” Dave nodded.

*Oh, this will be easy then! Two mortals can’t hope to prevail against two sons of the big three!* Nico aimed for the center of the triangular formation and released the ball with a flick of his wrist. *Easy as the ball sailed past all the cups and over the table - crap.*

“Come on Nico! You can do this!” Percy whispered in his ear, as the older teen massaged his shoulders. “Just make this shot and we win!” The raven-haired teen had shed his jacket and rolled his sleeves up to his elbows; his tie undone and hanging loosely around his neck.

They lost the first game without Jim and Dave taking a single drink. They lost the second game. They managed to get seven cups the third game, but were once again defeated. They weren’t going to talk about the fourth game; the fourth game never happened. The fifth game was a little closer, but they still lost. Apparently, he had overestimated his own skill at a game he never played, while Percy struggled to keep his hands from shaking and releasing the ball at the right moment.

“You’re not helping!” Nico snapped, and the son of Poseidon stopped rubbing his shoulders. Like Percy, he too had removed his jacket, tossing it on one of the folding chairs near the table. He hadn’t rolled his sleeves up, but he had unbuttoned the wrists. The small room was packed with onlookers so the both of them were drenched with sweat, his hair was back to its normal messiness. “Sorry, didn’t mean to snap like that,” he apologized, his eyes not leaving the lone cup.

“Neeks, if you make this shot, you can yell at me all you want.”

He chuckled dryly. After their first loss, it was agreed that they wouldn’t stop playing until they won one game; their natural competitiveness kicking in. Jim and Dave had agreed, but now seemed to be tired of playing, despite their string of victories. They were kind enough to not attempt and throw a game, but the allure of something called *Mario’s Cart* was starting to get to them.

*Well, here goes nothing! Or is it everything?* Nico flicked his wrist, using far less strength than his
initial attempt. He held his breath as the little, white, plastic ball flew over the table and began its
descent. His heart stopped beating when the ball hit the cup’s rim and bounced up. Thankfully, the
ball arced down, but this time it hit the opposite end of the cup, making the cup tilt. He swore that the
cup was going to spill, when suddenly, the cup abruptly snapped upright, making the ball land firmly
in the carbonated liquid.

The assembled onlookers cheered, mostly for the fact that the game was over, but a few for the actual
victory.

Before he even had a chance to look at Percy, the older boy cupped his face and slammed their lips
together. The salty-sweet taste of Percy’s lips washed away any thoughts of the older boy using his
powers to ensure their victory, and Nico was just fine with that. In fact, he was a little impressed that
Percy had been quick enough to shift the liquid before the cup fell over; the training Percy was doing
was really helping.

The son of Poseidon was the one to break the kiss, though Nico put in a valiant effort to stop the
older teen’s retreat. “Hey,” Percy panted, “Why don’t we try and go find someplace a little more
private and pick up where we left off?”

All Nico could do was nod mutely with dreamy, half-closed eyes. Percy grabbed their jackets and
then his hand, and the two raced out of the room to the sound cat-calls, wolf-whistles, and laughter.

They were a tangled, panting mess when Percy kicked open the sauna door. Their tuxes were in
shambles; their jackets balled up under Percy’s arm, Nico’s shirt was missing a few buttons from
Percy trying to pull him even closer, Percy’s navy-blue vest had torn at the shoulder, and the
hemming Persephone had worked so hard on had torn itself free on his pants. Nico had his arms
wrapped under Percy’s, while Percy gripped his hair to try and pull him even closer. As they
stumbled into the hot, humid room, they ground their hips against each other; each feeling the other’s
clothed erections.

Percy nipped at his lower lip as they tumbled onto the lone, oak bench in the sauna; it hurt, but it
only excited the son of Hades even more. They fell onto their sides, before rolling so that Nico was
on his back, with Percy laying on top of him. Percy tried to pull away, but he wrapped his legs
around the son of Poseidon’s waist to keep the older boy in place; he was not going to let this stop,
especially when there was finally no one around to interrupt them.

“Neeks,” Percy panted, breaking the kiss, “let me lock the door.”

“No,” he protested, unable to fully process what his boyfriend was saying. He simultaneously lifted
his head and tried to pull his green-eyed Adonis back down, but Percy managed to push himself up,
and Nico cried out in frustration.

“I know, babe, I know,” Percy said as he unwrapped Nico’s legs from his waist. Percy bent down
and quickly pecked his lips, temporarily silencing him, before crossing the short distance to the
sauna’s only door. He watched as Percy grabbed the handle, only to swear under his breath when he
realized there wasn’t a lock. But if necessity is the mother of invention, then horny teenagers are the
father; as the son of Poseidon quickly removed his belt and wrapped one end on the door handle and
the other on one of the oak bench’s thick legs. With a satisfied grin, the older teen removed
something from his back pocket as he shimmied out of his pants.
Nico couldn’t help but to laugh at the strange sight; Percy with his hair even more of a mess than usual, standing there wearing the ruined remains of a navy-blue vest, a white dress shirt missing a few buttons, black boxers, and a pair of black socks. It was somehow dorky and hot at the same time.

“Oh, I am going to wipe that smirk from your face, di Angelo!” Percy laughed. In a surprising burst of speed, the green-eyed teen jumped back up on the bench, and pinned his arms above his head with his own, dropping what appeared to be a small bottle and box next to them. Percy’s face was inches from his own, the older boy’s breath felt cool in the compared to the humid air. “I told ya,” Percy smirked, before smashing their lips together.

Ever since Bianca had passed away, he had been forced to become self-reliant. This had created trust issues and a bit of a control complex in him, but right now, with Percy pinning his arms above his head as he straddled him, the last thing Nico wanted was control. He loved being dominated by the older boy, and his body reacted accordingly. He moaned into their kiss and arched his back, but Percy held firm.

“Gods, you’re so freaking incredible!” Percy panted before continuing their kiss. The older boy released his arms, which immediately sprang up to pull the raven-haired teen closer. He then once again wrapped his legs around Percy’s waist; he wanted to be as close to Percy as physically possible. “You’re like a horny koala,” Percy chuckled.

“Would you shut up and kiss me,” he growled, trying to pull his boyfriend back to his duties.

“Wait, Nico,” the older teen sighed, pulling back from him. “Before we continue, I need to know just how far you want to go.”

Percy’s comment snapped Nico out of his hormone induced daze. What does he mean ‘how far’? Isn’t it obvious? It was confusing to him that Percy had to ask, as he thought they both knew where this encounter was heading. But I guess this is one of those consent things Will tried to lecture me about… Which I guess is the right thing to do, and a little sweet too. Smiling, he leaned up and pecked Percy on the cheek. “Percy, I want to go as far as you want to go, and of that means all the way, then let’s do-“

He was silenced by Percy tackling him back down and hungrily assaulting his mouth. Nico melted into the kiss, but this time things were even more frantic. With one hand, Nico struggled to undo his belt, while Percy tore off his own vest. They both kicked off their shoes, the uncomfortable, black leather, toe-pinchers falling to the ground and scattered throughout the small room. They erupted into a fit of giggles as they both tried to toe their socks off, failing miserably, with Percy eventually reaching down to take them off for the both of them. With his belt finally unbuckled, Nico raised his hips and Percy pulled them off; the heat from the wooden bench felt amazing against his now bare legs. Their shirts were next to go, Percy not bothering to unbutton his and simply pulling it over his head, while Nico rapidly unbuttoned his.

When at last his arms were free from the constricting, white dress shirt, he wrapped his arms around Percy’ back. A combination of wearing the stuffy tuxes, making out, and the hot humid air of the sauna, had left them both with a thin layer of sweat, but Nico reveled in how warm Percy was. He loved being wrapped in the son of Poseidon’s arms and absorbing the older teen’s body heat. “G-gods Percy!” he moaned, as the son of Poseidon bit down on his collar bone. “J-just! Just-“ he wasn’t sure what he was trying to say, but he wanted more.

“I know, Neeks,” the raven-haired teen practically growled, turning Nico on even more. Percy then reached past his head and grabbed the small bottle that had miraculously not been knocked to the floor in their frantic disrobing. “We just-“ Percy brought the bottle to his lips, and ripped the plastic
wrapping off with his teeth “-got to go through the steps. Otherwise, your dad and Persephone would kill me.”

He cringed. “Please, don’t mention them right now. They are the last thing I want to think about…”

Percy laughed as he covered his right hand with the clear liquid; the faint scent of strawberries filling the sauna. “Yeah, sorry, that was a real mood killer,” the older boy huffed as he slicked up his index finger. “Could you, ah, pull your boxers off? I kind of did the order wrong.”

Silently, Nico nodded, transfixed on the older teen’s actions. He lifted his hips off the bench and pushed his boxers down. He wanted to curl into a ball and hide when the dark fabric cleared his groin, his own erection practically springing out like a jack-in-the-box. All that’s missing is Pop Goes the Weasel… But the look on Percy’s face and the bulge in his shorts, told him that all was well. He brought his knees to his chest to finish removing his boxers, then because he was feeling a bit cheeky, he threw them at the son of Poseidon.

“Dick,” Percy chuckled, catching the boxers with his free hand. Percy tossed the black undergarments aside and crouched down near Nico’s hips. “I’m- I’m going to start loosening you up now,” the son of Poseidon blushed, his face already red from the sauna’s heat. “Just tell me to stop if it hurts too much. So, uh-”

Nico rolled his eyes and shifted slightly so Percy had better access to his entrance. Maybe it would come as a surprise to Percy, but he had never experimented with his own rear before. As an independent demigod, it had been hard to get a moment’s privacy, let alone one safe enough to try that sort of thing; the last way he wanted to die was a monster devouring him while he had a finger up his ass. But he knew the basics, knew that there would be some initial discomfort, but how he had fantasized about this very- “Ha-ah!” he gasped as Percy slid the tip of his index finger inside.

“No, just… weird. Give me one second to adjust.” Nico shifted slightly, still feeling the strange pressure and warmth of Percy inside of him. It didn’t hurt, but his body needed to adjust. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. “Okay, I’m ready.”

The son of Poseidon obliged, and slowly pushed his finger in further, his body involuntarily clenching. Percy then began to push in and out, the strange feeling soon started to feel analogies to an itch that he could not quite scratch. As Percy continued his teasingly slow preparations, his body began to relax. He let out a moan of pure pleasure when Percy pushed just a little deeper, and some prehistoric part of his brain told him that the son of Poseidon was close to hitting some hidden treasure.

“You like that, don’t ya babe?” Percy chuckled.

“Don’t- “ Nico moaned as the finger slid back in “-get cocky Jackson.”

“Oh, I think you’re the one that’s going to get cocky,” the teen grinned, wiggling his eyebrows suggestively. Nico groaned at the terrible pun. “Okay, I think I can slide the next finger in now, just tell me if it’s too much.”

This time, Nico thought he was ready for it.
But he was wrong.

He let out a hiss as the second fingertip entered him, not out of surprise, but out of pain. Once again, his body clenched around Percy’s fingers, this time with the intent to remove the foreign objects. “Stop! It hurts!” he cried involuntarily. Before Percy could remove his fingers though, he followed with, “not all the way, just- just distract me!”

“How?” Percy asked.

“Kiss me or something!” he groaned. He barely finished the sentence and Percy’s lips were once more on his own. As Percy’s tongue snaked into his mouth, his fingers began to move in as well. He was still aware of the pain, but as Percy began to suck on his tongue, it faded to a minor discomfort. As he savored the exquisite taste of his boyfriend, his body relaxed once more, allowing Percy to probe deeper. As Percy left a trail of kisses down his neck and to his shoulder, the son of Poseidon began to scissor his fingers, making Nico breath hitch, as he dug his fingernails into the older teen’s back. He felt the son of Poseidon tense up, but Percy continued on without saying anything, which was a testament to Percy’s love for him in his eyes, as he was sure he drew blood.

“Oh, okay,” Percy said, unfortunately stopping the amazing biting on his collar bone, “I think you’re ready; do you think so?”

Truth be told, at that moment Nico would have agreed with anything at that moment. Despite how strange it felt having Percy’s fingers inside him, he wanted Percy inside of him. He wanted Percy to continue to nibble on his neck. He wanted Percy to wrap him in his arms. In short, he wanted Percy. “Gods, yes!”

Percy’s eyes lit up and in a flash, the older teen stood up and dropped his own boxers to the floor, and for the second time now, Nico was face-to-crotch with Percy’s manhood. Unlike the night the night they had bathed together, Percy was fully erect and red. As Percy reached to grab the box of condoms, Nico shot his head out and quickly licked Percy’s head. The son of Poseidon jumped back in surprise, spilling most of the contents of the box on the floor. “Holy shit, Neeks! Just- just give me a second.”

I can’t let him do all the work, without a little reward, he grinned at the green-eyed teen, the latter staring back at him with the foil-wrapped condom in his teeth. Nico knew that this whole ordeal was a little awkward, as neither of them had ever done something like this before, but he knew they would get better with time and practice. And although they hadn’t even got the actual act, he was already looking forward to the next time.

Percy fumbled with the small piece of latex, trying to put it on with two very shaky hands. With his eagerness getting the better of him, Nico grabbed the condom and rolled it onto Percy’s himself, saying a quick thanks to Will for the very awkward demonstration using a banana. When he finished unrolling it, he let it snap into place, making the older teen wince. “Oh, you are going to get it, di Angelo!” Percy growled.

The son of Poseidon grabbed him by the ankles, spun him around, and rested his legs on his shoulders. Then with a cocky smirk, Percy lowered himself slightly so he was lined up with Nico’s entrance. Then, ever so slowly, Percy pushed the tip of his condom covered member into him. His body didn’t try to reject Percy this time, only momentarily clenching at the relatively cool latex. Percy looked as if he was about to stop, but through clenched teeth Nico urged his lover to continue.

“Holy crap, Neeks! You’re so tight and hot!” Percy moaned once he was fully in. The older teen then grabbed Nico’s own throbbing cock and began to pump him while slowly rocking his hips back and worth. “Gods!”
With Percy assaulting him on two fronts, the son of Hades thought he had reached the heights of pleasure; that was, until the son of Poseidon thrusted just a bit deeper. He screamed as every cell of his body was electrified with a blinding pleasure. “There Percy! There!” he screamed, desperate for more. Percy obliged, increasing his speed and hitting his prostate repeatedly, making him scream in ecstasy.

“Scream for me, babe,” The son of Poseidon grunted, his body covered in sweat.

Nico knew that he was only creating a monster by obliging Percy, but that was a problem for future-Nico, not him. He dropped his legs from Percy’s shoulders and wrapped them around the raven-haired teen’s waist, trying to pull him in even deeper. He screamed when Percy began to piston at lightning speeds, the unrelenting impacts on his pleasure spot making his vision flash white. He opened his mouth to scream, but it was caught in his throat. The familiar, yet somehow always strange, fullness feeling in his stomach began to build, and Nico knew he wasn’t going to last much longer. “P-Percy!” he wailed, throwing himself up and wrapping his arms around Percy’s neck.

“Ni-!” The older teen called out in surprise as he stumbled backwards, slamming his back into the door. Percy grunted at the impact, but otherwise showed no signs of discomfort, only adjusting the way he thrusted as his lips found Nico’s once more. And as Nico raked his nails down his back once more, the exquisite pain pushed him over the edge. “Ni-Nico! I’m gonna cu-”

The sudden burst of heat and the new fullness from Percy coming pushed the son of Hades over the edge. His body clenched around Percy’s member as he threw his head back and cried out. His own cock erupted with a force he never thought possible, his seed covering Percy’s chest. The shift in weight and the sudden weariness that followed their orgasms made them collapse onto the hot floor.

“H-holy crap, Neeks,” Percy panted. “That was-“

“Incredible,” he finished with a tired smile. “Absolutely incredible.”

Percy felt around and found one of their discarded socks and used it to clean off his chest. “I couldn’t have said it better.” Percy rolled over and kissed his temple. “We’re going to do that again, right?”

“Every chance we get, but-“ he yawned “-but right now, I could use a nap.”

Percy chuckled, but it turned into a yawn halfway through. “Same.”

He helped Percy remove the filled condom and tied it off, before chucking it into a small trash bin in the corner of the sauna. Or at least he hoped it was a trash bin… They then gathered their clothes and spread them out on the floor to use as pillows. When they laid back down, Percy wrapped his arms around his waist and pulled him in close, and the son of Poseidon quickly dozed off.

What had just transpired would take some time for Nico to fully process, but as he lay there in the afterglow, a single tear rolled down his cheek. *This was it. This was the ultimate act of love, everything that I wanted.* He looked over his shoulder at the dozing son of Poseidon and wished he could kiss the older teen without disturbing his peaceful slumber. *I’ll do it later.* He yawned once more, closed his eyes, and snuggled up against the love of his life; content with the knowledge that he would love Percy forever, that there would never be anyone he loved as much as he did Percy. Percy had his heart, and he would never get it back.

He dozed off shortly thereafter.
Nico woke up sometime later, still wrapped in Percy’s arms. It took him a moment to remember where he was, but the hot, humid air jogged his memory. *But why is my mouth so dry?* Nico laid there for a couple minutes, listening to Percy’s soft breathing, until his thirst grew too great.

He carefully unwrapped Percy’s arms and sat up, only for a sharp pain to shoot up his spine. “Yup, there’s the pain,” Nico hissed, carefully rubbing his sore backside. It felt like he had been pierced by a red, hot poker (*Percy would have a joke there*), it wasn’t an unbearable pain, but it would slow him down for some time. *And this is what it feels like after we took our time, what the hades would have happened if we hadn’t?*

Slowly, he pushed himself off the pile of clothes they slept on, wincing with every little movement. Besides his entrance, he found his neck hurt from Percy’s love bites, his back ached from being bent at such a strange angle, and his legs felt stiff. *I feel like I just went ten rounds with a giant…* He picked up his pants and shirt, quickly dressed himself, and with a promise to return shortly, left the sleeping son of Poseidon.

At a snail’s pace, he began to walk down the Metro Center’s halls in search of something cold to drink for himself and Percy, whenever he woke. The cool, tiled floors felt good under his bare feet, but the knowing looks of the people he passed in the halls he could have done without. He knew what he must look like to the others, and to be fair their guesses would be right. *Bruised, limping, and covered in sweat, I was easier jumped or I just had mind-blowing sex.*

He crossed paths with a guy from his Home Economics class carrying two cups of punch. He asked him where he got the amazing looking beverage, to which the boy told him refreshments were in the snack bar before walking off towards the pool. Nico wanted to sob when he saw the snack bar was on the main floor, but he pressed onward.

“Oh, thank the gods!” Nico cried with joy as he entered the snack bar, earning a round of laughter from a group of girls standing near the refreshment table. He paid them no mind though, quickly grabbing a plastic cup and filling it with the artificially sweetened drink. He brought the cup to his lips and drank the entire thing in a single gulp, noticing that it had a strange aftertaste, but not really paying it any mind. He quickly refilled his glass and drained it again.

And again.

And again.

“I love you baaaaby!” Nico belted out at the top of his lungs, holding the microphone against his lips. “And if it’s—” he had to stop and squint at the screen, as his vision was doubled for some unknown reason. “I need you baby!” Although he was disappointed to lose his place in the song, his audience didn’t seem to mind, laughing and cheering him on as he sung.

*I love singing! Singing is the best! Why don’t I sing more? Why doesn’t Percy sing more? Percy has a great voice! I love his voice! I love him!*
Nico wasn’t quite sure where he was, but when… someone came into the snack bar announcing the karaoke machine was set up, he followed the crowd. He loved karaoke! He didn’t know what it was, but he loved it! When he saw that it was singing and dancing in front of his peers, he loved it even more! He loved how the lyrics were displayed on bright, technicolor backgrounds and changed colors!

He had waited patiently for his turn, bouncing up and down with a newfound energy that hadn’t been present before the punch. When at last the mic was handed to him, his face lit up and he chose songs that had love in the title. *Love Game, Love Yourself, Love the Way You Lie,* and *I Love Rock and Roll* were among the first songs he sang, and the list would’ve been even longer if people would have stopped wresting the microphone away from him after every two songs. Didn’t they realize he had an amazing voice? They should be praising him for gifting them with song!

“*You’re just too good to be true*—two strong, familiar hands gripped his shoulders and spun him around. “Percy!” he beamed as his vision unblurred from the sudden movement. “Percy! There you are!” he giggled, dropping the mic onto the floor. “I missed you sooo much! Why did you leave me?” The joy he felt a fraction of a second ago was replaced with sorrow at the idea of his Percy leaving him. “Why did you leave me?” he asked, lips trembling.

The son of Poseidon cocked his head to the side like a confused puppy (*I want a puppy! We’ll name it mini-O’Leary*!). “Nico, you left me. I woke up and you were gone—” He remembered that now! Percy didn’t leave him! Percy would never do that! That was why Percy was the best! “Are- are you feeling okay?”

“I feel great! Do you know about karaoke?” he asked, inches away from the son of Poseidon’s face. *I could kiss Percy! Nico realized. I can kiss him as much as I want! Why don’t I do that? Kissing is great! And sex is too! “Percy,” he tried to whisper, “we should go have sex again!”* A couple heads snapped their direction, and Percy’s perfect face flushed. The older boy then gently grabbed Nico’s chin and lifted it up. Percy was going to kiss him! He just knew- the son of Poseidon sniffed the air just in front of his mouth. *Percy’s being silly! He knows that’s not how you kiss! He went to lean in and close the small gap between their lips, but Percy pushed him back slightly, earning a frustrated groan.*

“Nico, have you been drinking?”

He blinked at the question. “Yeah!” he answered cheerfully, holding up the cup of punch he had gotten for Percy; he frowned though when he saw it was empty. He didn’t remember drinking it… “I’ve had some punch! It’s really good! It tastes a little funny, but if you drink enough of it you get used to it!” his eyes widened. “You need to try some!”

He started to turn away, but his boyfriend grabbed his wrist. “Nico, I think you’re drunk,” the older boy chuckled nervously.

“Drunk?” he was scandalized by the accusation! “I’m not drunk! I’d know if I were drunk! You can’t get drunk off of punch!” He poked Percy in the chest at each word. “Maybe- maybe you’re drunk!”

Percy let out an exasperated sigh and pinched the bridge of his nose. “Okay, you’re not drunk—“ Nico smiled at the admission “so why don’t we go get some food? I’m hungry and… I’ll feed you?”

He perked up at the idea of Percy feeding him. *Percy could feed me grapes! Or strawberries! Well, I didn’t see any of that, but there was a cheese tray! I like cheese! I was the one that at Jason’s Cheetos after all! Poor Percy got blamed for that! “I’ll feed you too!”* he beamed, dropping the empty cup on the floor and grabbing Percy’s arm. “We’ll go eat and then we can go back to the
sauna!” Nico tried to wiggle his eyebrows suggestively like Percy, but he just looked like he was having some kind of fit; possibly a stroke.

As they got to the door, Nico turned to check if he was still holding Percy, and not dragging someone else. Unfortunately this caused him to collide face first into Mr. Z’s broad chest, making him and Percy tumble to the ground. The son of Hades erupted into a fit of giggles and wrapped himself around Percy’s warm body as he stared up at his favorite teacher.

The brown-haired teacher didn’t look as carefree as he remembered him being, in fact he looked angry. “Listen up!” Mr. Z barked, making everyone in the room jump. “The party is over! All of you have five minutes to get to the lobby! One of you idiots spiked the punch, which has led to an incident! The authorities and your parents have been notified! You will not be allowed to leave until you have passed a breathalyzer or until your parents pick you up!” The instructor then shook his head and looked at the two of them on the floor. “You guys okay?”

“Yeah!” he chirped, nuzzling against Percy’s chest. “It’s a good thing we didn’t drink anything! Oh! Did you know Percy and I had sex? It was amazing!”

Percy groaned and covered his face with his hands, while Mr. Z just coughed and looked away. “I’m- I’m going to pretend I didn’t hear that.”

Nico blew a 0.09 while Percy blew a flat zero, which to Nico meant he had the higher score, beating Percy. He couldn’t beat Percy at Mario Karts or whatever else video games they played, but he could beat him at the breathalyzer! For some reason though, they weren’t going to let him and Percy drive home, so they had to wait for his father to come and pick them up.

That was just fine by Nico though, as he currently sat next to Percy on a bench in the lobby, holding hands. He was kicking his feet up and down as they waited, enjoying the weird sound that was made every time his bare soles hit the floor. Their shoes, vests, and jackets were piled on the floor in front of Percy, who kept looking at him with a concerned expression.

Maybe he’s worried that I didn’t enjoy myself? He’s so sweet like that! He stopped his kicking and pecked Percy on the cheek. “Stop worrying! I had a great time tonight!” Then in a somewhat hushed voice he added, “and you were amazing! I can’t wait to do it again!”

“No, you were the amazing one, Neeks,” Percy chuckled. He unlaced their fingers, but before Nico could protest, Percy wrapped his arm around his shoulders, pulled him against him, and kissed the son of Hades’ head, making the younger teen giggle. “and I’m not worried about that, I’m just a little concerned about-“

“Nico!” his father and Persephone’s voices cried out.

“-them,” Percy groaned.

Nico perked up upon hearing his father and stepmother’s voices, turning his gaze to the main entrance. His parents wore different outfits than the ones they had at the premier; both wearing black band T-shirts and black jeans, with Persephone wearing little, silver skull earrings. Demeter was with them too, wearing a simple ivy-patterned blouse and blue jeans, but she quickly jogged over to Jason who was talking to the cops and Mr. Z for some reason. His parents jogged over to them, with Persephone dropping to her knees and sliding the last couple feet.
“Nico, baby, are you okay?” Persephone cooed, cupping his face. “Do you need anything? Can you walk? Do you need me to carry you?” She turned to Percy and narrowed her eyes menacingly. “What did you do to him?!”

He giggled as Percy cowered under his stepmother’s gaze.

His father placed a hand on Persephone’s shoulder and gently squeezed it. “My love, leave the boy be. Jackson is sober. The authorities just wanted to alert us about Nico’s condition and Jason’s incident. Although…” his father paused, mostly because he was a diva, “we did have to take an Uber to get here. That will be coming out of both of your allowances.”

Nico chuckled. “Uber! That’s a funny word! Percy say Uber!”

“Uber…” Percy gulped.

His father quirked an eyebrow, which was a weird thing to do in Nico’s humble opinion. “Just- “ his father stopped when he snorted with laughter “-just how much did he have?”

“I honestly don’t know,” Percy sighed, the older boy rubbing the back of his neck. Nico hated seeing his Percy look so down, so he kissed the older, earning an ‘ah’ from Persephone. “I, uh, was kind of asleep when he started drinking, but judging by the way the cop swore when he blew, I’m going to say a lot.”

He huffed and crossed his arms. “And I keep telling everyone I didn’t have anything to drink! I just had punch! And I think a coke? Maybe a handful of chips too… And a cookie…”

As he continued to list things he vaguely remembered eating and drinking, Persephone glanced between Percy and Hades. “Honey, do you know what ‘spiked’ means?”

He stopped listing what he ate and looked his beautiful Phe Phe in the eye. She has pretty eyes! She’s also very nice! I need to tell her that!

“Yup! It when you’re playing volleyball and you jump up and hit the ball to the ground!” he mimed the action, rising up from the bench slightly and swatting an invisible ball. “Like that!”

While Persephone smiled, Percy and his father face-palmed. “No, little prince… well yeah that is true, but in this case spiked means adding alcohol.”

“Jackson, I thought you were keeping him up to date with the lingo,” his father snapped.

“I’m sorry! I didn’t realize it was my job!” his boyfriend snapped back.

He laughed at the way Percy and his father bickered. They fight a lot, but that’s because they care about each other! When Percy and I get married I won’t have to worry about them getting along! His eyes widened as he finally processed what Persephone said. “Wait, I was drinking? Am I in trouble?! I didn’t mean to drink! I was just thirsty after I woke up!”

“No, you’re not in trouble, Nico,” Persephone giggled.

“The hangover will be punishment enough…,” his father deadpanned. “We better stop for some Gatorade and Tylenol on the way home.”

“Yeah,” Persephone nodded, her dark ponytail bobbing up and down, distracting Nico. “But one question: why were you two sleeping? Was the party that boring?”

He giggled and shook his head with a big grin. “No! The party was fun! Do you know about
karaoke? We’ll have to try it sometime! We were just tired because Percy fucked me! Sex is amazing! I would recommend! I can’t wait to do it again!”

It seemed to Nico, that Persephone’s face found all the color that drained from Percy’s face. “HE DID WHATB?”

“Mom, please don’t kill my boyfriend. I love him and he loves me,” he giggled.

His stepmother snapped her attention back to him, allowing Percy to take shelter behind Hades. “What- what did you call me? She asked, her voice just above a whisper.

Nico had to think for a moment. “Mom?”

Persephone squealed and wrapped her arms around him in a spine-shattering hug, which he gladly returned. He wasn’t sure why she was so excited, but he liked hugging her. He also liked her kissing him, but not as much. Kissing was reserved for Percy.

“Can we go home now?” He asked, while Persephone continued to squeeze him.

“I imagine so, Demeter is with Jason,” Hades shrugged.

Hades and Persephone picked up his and Percy’s belongings, while he climbed onto Percy’s back and wrapped his arms around the son of Poseidon’s neck. “I’m really hungry,” he announced. “Can we stop for McDonalds?”

“A burger does sound good,” Percy agreed as they walked out the front door.

“Maybe,” Hades grumbled, but Persephone slapped his shoulder. “Fine,” he relented, rubbing his shoulder. “We’ll stop at McDonalds.”

He, Percy and Persephone cheered, as they passed another group of parents in the parking lot. McDonalds to end the day! That’s just the cherry on top! This has been the best day of my life! He reached forward and nibbled on Percy’s ear. “I love you, Percy. Soooo much.”

“I love you too, Nico,” the older boy grinned.

“My butt really hurts,” he announced.

Chapter End Notes

I'll do a write up soon, but I think for the most part this was a fun little chapter :)
Poseidon

Chapter Summary

Warnings: mentions of blood and gore, violence, and dark revelations.

Tonight:

We check in with Poseidon under the sea.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

With one last burst from his trident, the former god of the seas and king of the ruined city of Atlantis, propelled his broken body into the last remaining sanctuary his domain had to offer; an undersea cave so deep and remote that no mortal, beast, or god could ever find it without knowing about it before hand.

Or so he hoped…

The creature was still out there, he could feel its massive form on the currents and feel the hatred and fear that composed its titanic form like a sudden change in the water’s temperature. With luck though, it would grow bored and move on to other prey, giving him the few minutes of rest every iota of his being screamed for.

“Damnit,” Poseidon moaned, collapsing onto a throne of bioluminescent coral, the only source of light besides the bronze glow of his symbol of power. “Damnit all, Zeus!” he screamed, slamming the butt of his trident against the cave floor, causing the surrounding seafloor to quake. He knew that he should reign in his anger if he wished for the creature, the destroyer of the seas and all he held dear, to leave, but everything that had happened was all his brother’s fault!

The cave walls shook and the small creatures cowered in fear as the beast let out a spine-chilling cry that had signaled the end of Atlantis, his wife, and all the other gods, nymphs, and creatures of the deep that called the ocean home. If only he had acted when the creature had first been spotted, devouring a ship in Boston harbor whole, they might have stood a chance. Even though it had already devoured the World Serpent, he could have rallied the forces of Atlantis and the sister cities of the other pantheons to strike down the beast.

But with access to-and-from Olympus cut off, he had to step up his involvement to ensure that the cycle of Olympus continued. Without Ares and Athena to stir up resentment among the mortals, he had to work with the demigods they had installed as leaders of the mortal nations to initiate the chain of events that would start the next war. Without the dimwitted Apollo to inspire rebellion in youth via media and the arts, he had to… well, with the political and economic state of the world as it is, he didn’t have to do much. To tell Arges to continue with their plan to eradicate the Nation once and for all and begin preparations for the next move. Thankfully, Artemis had still been around to purge the demigods to prevent them from starting a fuss, she even had unknowing assistance this time in the form of some strange mortals.

Then there was his eldest brother, the ray of sunshine that was Hades. Somehow that idiot along with
Demeter and Persephone had avoided being locked away in their respective realms, forcing him to play the fool and ‘help’ them uncover the culprits behind the sudden deviation from the carefully choreographed cycle. Oh, how he had been tempted to confide in the trio the truth of the cycle to gain their assistance, but sadly those three had been flagged as potential troublemakers since Zeus made his deal with the Fates so many epochs ago. Gods like them actually cared about the mortals, as if they were to be respected almost as equals and not as the source of power they were. To make matters worse, Hades would have been offended by how Olympus had been secretly using his domain and subjects to keep the Tapestry of Fate ever growing.

The sea god groaned in pain as he shifted in his hidden throne, placing one hand on his side and ignoring the golden ichor that danced forth from his wound. “Hades,” he snarled through clenched teeth, making all the sea creatures around him flee the area.

Perhaps if he and Zeus hadn’t rigged the drawing of lots against their eldest brother they wouldn’t have needed to keep their actions hidden away from most of Olympus, but they had been young and the idea of being stuck in the Underworld was nauseating at best. How were they supposed to know that one day they would be on the verge of fading away? No, they had lived in the moment and it almost cost them everything.

The waters stilled in the depths just outside the cave entrance, but the creature’s noxious aura still permeated through the water. The creature, a being far older than any pantheon, was no doubt trying to lure him out, but it would take more than calm waters to fool him. Despite what the monstrosity thought, if it even could think, he was the fisherman here, not it. Just a few more minutes and I’ll be ready to send it to the depths of the abyss!

Poseidon ground his teeth at the thought of the abyss, the reason all of this had transpired. Watching Helios be absorbed by Apollo had been praised as a victory against the old order, a sign that the Olympians were there to stay for eternity. But seeing Pan fade away had rattled all of them to their very cores. Death was one thing, a minor inconvenience for a god, but to cease to exist entirely? That was another. Suddenly everyone had been terrified that another pantheon could overtake them as the beliefs of the mortals changed. There of course had been a few, such as his brother, that simply shrugged it off an inevitable fact of existence, but Hades had always been the strange one.

So, fearing for their lives and all they had built, Zeus approached the Fates for a solution. They had told the king of Olympus that it was as they feared, the end was nigh. The three explained that the they were running out of the eldritch materials they spun into thread to weave with, that without it they would be unable to weave new fates, new stories. Even they, the Moirai, had felt the effects, with Clotho and Lachesis becoming as withered and haggard looking as Atropos.

Zeus though, had always been a little cleverer and a lot more crooked than their siblings; the latter trait he would vehemently deny. The king of the gods simply suggested they follow Hephaestus’ example and reuse what materials they were no longer using and re-forge them. And even if truly new fates couldn’t be woven, surely a continued repetitive existence was better than fading away, his brother had argued.

The Fates weren’t opposed to the idea, but Atropos had explained the lack of materials was only part of the problem. That, without belief they would all fade anyway, that new believers would be required to not only continue the tapestry, but to maintain what had already been woven.

By then though Zeus had already formulated a plan and promised the Fates all the materials they could ever wish for, and more, if they continued to weave.

They agreed.
What followed was the restoration of Olympus, a miracle to even the gods. Few questioned it, taking the miracle at face value, but Zeus confiding in a select few on what was happening behind the scenes. First, Zeus had declared that a portion of Elysium be set aside for only the greatest of heroes, and to get there they had to prove their worth by living not only one noble life, but three. The truth though would be considered heinous to many. Any soul foolish enough to accept such a vague offer would not be reborn, instead they would be broken down to their base materials and used by the Fates to continue their tapestry. There was no record of how many lives one lived, so it was easy to keep the truth hidden from all, even Hades.

Second, Zeus had Hecate create a spell that was undetectable to all, that placed any soul that passed into the Underworld and didn’t choose rebirth into a trance like state, where each soul believed in the power and might of Olympus. This newfound rise in belief insured that there would always be strength for every god and goddess. Combined with the fact that the dead only grew in number as time passed only made their power grow.

Third, to further expand their belief base, the king of the gods had ordered that all gods should continue procreating with the mortals. For most, Poseidon included, this was a simple request, as mortal lovers were one of the best way to pass the eons. The real reason was simple; disposable troops to take down the now reoccurring forces of Kronos, Gaea, and every other half-wit with a bone to pick with against Olympus, who were now a part of the cycle. Plus, those demigods lucky enough to survive into breeding age would produce more believers.

The sea god let out a bitter laugh at the thought of the numerous children he had sired over the years through his different aspects. They had all been so eager to earn his praise, to prove themselves in fighting a never-ending war. Many had proven to be unnoteworthy, the only thing of value they did was choose rebirth, keeping their father alive and well without their knowing.

Their lives were pitiful no matter how you looked at it. Even Percy-

The sea cave shook as the creature howled from somewhere in the trench, apparently growing frustrated waiting for yet another divine meal.

“Just give me another few minutes and you will learn your proper place…” the sea god grumbled, clutching his trident even tighter. He removed his hand from his side and sighed in relief when he saw the wound had closed; the only indications that he had been injured was the ichor stained hole in his shirt. “I will avenge all you devoured!” His trident flared to match the rage he felt, before quickly dimming once more, his energy drained.

Something was happening within the depths of the Underworld, that much he was sure of. He and his subjects had been feeling weaker and weaker with each passing day, some even fading entirely. He hadn’t been this weak since before Zeus made his deal with the Fates. Of course, he had tried to go investigate the problem, but that was when he and every other sea-dweller found they were trapped beneath the waves. The same field that cut off Olympus had spread across the lands and seas, effectively binding him to his own domain.

And trapping us with that beast…

Poseidon closed his weary eyes and continued to think of the path that brought him there.

Things had gone mostly well the first cycle, Kronos and Gaea rose, only to be toppled by the prophecies the Fates wove in. Those that didn’t know about the cycle had been worried about the idea of monsters and titans returning after already being vanquished, but with time these fears were forgotten. After all, if you feed and entertain the masses, all their worries disappear. The demigods that perished in the wars and had chosen rebirth had provided ample materials for the Fates to
continue their tapestry, while those who simply went to Elysium gave the gods a boost of energy. There was the unexpected hiccup of Pan being on a constant state of fading away, but hiding him in the labyrinth taken care of that.

The conclusion of the second cycle was when they hit their first major problem. One of the Seven, a child of Aphrodite if he recalled correctly, had found a journal of one of the previous Seven, detailing all the trials and hardships they had encountered. When the Aphrodite spawn realized that they had gone through the exact same scenario, the demigods tried to revolt. Their reasoning was understandable to some extent, not even gods like to be used, but Zeus dispatched Artemis to purge them. After that, all demigods were wiped from the face of the earth following the completion of a cycle, either by a staged disaster or Artemis, and her select few, hunting them down.

It wasn’t until the end of the third cycle that they realized that while adding to the tapestry would always require a fixed number of souls, the number of souls required to maintain the previous sections would grow exponentially with each passing cycle. The initial plan was to simply depose of Hades and install some other god to take his place, allowing them unlimited access to the much-needed souls. Leave it to Athena to see the pitfalls of that plan. The aptly named goddess of wisdom argued that removing Hades would only make the other gods paranoid, inviting a potential rebellion the likes of which they had never seen, and that without an increase of souls the proposed solution would only be temporary.

But leave it to that frigid goddess to come up with a better, albeit crueler, plan…

Athena proposed the follow, which was quickly put into action: Hades would remain as the sovereign lord of the Underworld, but they would take a portion of all souls that crossed the vail of death; a small portion that would be hard to notice unless one looked for them. This small percentage would ease the burden of maintenance for quite some time until the end of a cycle. Prior to the end though, they would install demigods into positions of power throughout the world; kings, emperors, presidents, chancellors, and the like. This would allow for a better integration of Olympian ideals and symbolism into the collective unconscious of man, and allow them to stage massive military campaigns at the end of each cycle. The massive influx of souls would be too much for Hades and his minions to keep track of, and allow them to take more souls with none the wiser.

And as much as I loathe to admit it, her plan worked...

It had been remarkably easy to get mortals to kill each other; bring up a difference in ideology, resources, or even something as mundane as skin color and with the right prodding they were tearing each other’s throats out on a blood-soaked battlefield. Better yet, they continually developed new and better ways to kill each other, some weapons capable of wiping entire cities off the face of the Earth with a single push of a button.

He was quite eager to see how the war they were preparing for would be like; they unfortunately had to end the last one just as their latest weapons were dropped on that small island nation. Now with remote weaponry mortals could kill each other even easier too, it’s very easy for them to disassociate the acts they were committing when sitting in front of a screen.

The system wasn’t perfect, even if it was crafted by the gods. As the corners of the map began to fill, they encountered other pantheons that threatened to steal their believers. Zeus had the Fates decree that no gods would be allowed to interact with their foreign relations, allowing their little shadow council to deal with them without worrying about being found. They used their demigods and Artemis to wipe out rival pantheon’s believers, bind their death gods so those souls could be taken, and even stole their tools of fate; incorporating their materials into the Tapestry of Fate.

We are the dominant rulers of all creation, Poseidon assured himself. All that oppose us will be
crushed under heel. Even Harpocrates, he smiled at the thought, closing his eyes. Poseidon had been relieved when they found Harpocrates, as he was the only god who had come close to figuring out the truth. But that’s because it was in his nature, the man lives and breathes secrets. He had also been slightly relieved that he didn’t have to kill his nephew, as the god of secrets only revealed that mortals had destroyed the camps. We’re short on demigods now, but Jason, Nico, and my son will make excellent statesmen. With the right prodding, they can be at each other’s throats. Grace especially; I can see now why Zeus ordered Disciplina to break him. The fear in his eyes after that little rendezvous with that waitress could easily turn into hate given enough time.

Before he drifted off into a dreamless sleep, he thought of the look on Harpocrates’ face as the mortals killed his hairy companion as they drug the god off. What fools these mortals be…

Poseidon woke up a few hours later, healed, but still weak. The shift in currents and the movements of the creatures of the deep told him the creature had finally departed. There was not a doubt in his mind that once he returned to the open ocean it would come back, but now he was ready for it. He would avenge every soul that had perished and then continue his work on the cycle so that they would return to him.

He stood up from his coral throne and arched his back, his spine popping and providing some sweet relief. The sea god slapped himself a couple times to shake the remaining weariness from his godly system, before pointing his trident at the cave floor.

A flash of light and heat exploded from his symbol of power and he was propelled out of the cave at speeds impossible for any mortal. The twirling water shook off millennia’s worth of sea growth from the sea trench’s walls; it pained him to know how long it would take to return to that state, but he was also aware that if he failed in his task the entire ocean would perish.

The damn thing eats everything in its path! From the smallest of plankton to… Triton…

With a heart full of grief and rage, the mighty king continued his ascent, angling slightly to the east so that he would approach the surface just off the coast of Florida. Within moments he had passed the icy depths and their strange lifeforms that hugged thermal vents to stay warm, to slightly warmer waters where more complex creatures eerily glowed to lure prey in. And as he approached his destination, the details of his plan began to take shape.

I’m not trapped under the waves with it, it’s trapped here with me!

Poseidon swung his trident up, bringing him to a dead stop, and undoubtedly sending a series of large, damaging waves to the mainland. If he had torpedoed up just a bit further he would have hit the strange, painful field that tried to drain away a god’s strength and destroyed anything lesser.

It had disturbed the sea god greatly to find a young goddess’ lifeless body on the currents, the poor girl had drowned in the what had been her home for eons.

But they can all be restored! Once I take care of this annoyance, I can summon up the greatest tsunami the world has ever seen and wipe out the coasts! Then I can get the cycle back on track!

He cut the power to his symbol and floated with his eyes closed in the strangely calm waters. Usually
at this depth and so close to the shore, the sea would be bustling with life; marlins, porpoises, the occasional stray manatee calf, and hundreds of others, would display the intricate circle of life. But there was none of that now, nothing could be seen and no scents other than his own were carried on the currents.

Poseidon smirked. *Which means it’s only me and it out here! Come and get me!*

Almost immediately his mental taunt was answered, as an ear-splitting roar echoed from the inky depths.

*I feel bad for any mortal listening to sonar right now,* the sea god smiled, his eyes snapping open. *Poor bastard’s ears are probably bleeding.*

The shift in current and the sudden wave of terror told him that the creature was trying to sneak up from beneath, which was ideal. He flipped forward and fired a bolt of pure energy from his trident; illuminating the depths for miles and allowing him to see the creature in all its horror.

Unlike the scores of creatures he had encountered from the various pantheons they had conquered, this creature was an oddity in a sea of strangeness. It lacked a definite form, the black mass that made up its body seemingly sprouted tentacles, fins, pincers, mouths, and eyes at random, before fading away as quickly as they appeared into an inky mist. Its size was also undefined, as it was capable of growing large enough to devour the Norse World Serpent, transforming its body into one massive maw, and shrinking to the size of a single germ, to devour its prey form the inside out. The strangest thing about the creature though in Poseidon’s eyes, was the fact that the fabric of reality seemed to shy away from the creature; a strange void appearing and immediately disappearing in its wake.

At this moment though, the creature had opted for a more serpentine appearance. Eerie purple eyes covered its long, sleek form along with razor sharp beaks much like that of an octopus’. What passed for its head was the partially decomposed skull of a blue whale, with discarded shark teeth filling the massive maw. Instead of a tailfin, dozens, if not hundreds, of black tentacles trailed behind it, their violent whipping propelling it towards the sea god, and allowing it to dodge the glowing blast with ease.

*Excellent!* He smirked, as the leviathan twisted around the blast. He quickly followed up with more blasts, and while the golden beams flash boiled the surrounding salt water, he intentionally missed the brute’s body so it wouldn’t lose any speed. *Just a little more…*

The creature’s stolen maw opened with another primordial roar, a sound so terrifying that even he shuddered. The sight was somehow even more horrifying than before, its open mouth revealed the large, glowing, purple eye surrounded by a mass of writhing tentacles and moving teeth.

“Woah, boy!” Poseidon shouted, firing off another blast, this time hitting one of the creature’s innumerable dorsal fins. Thankfully, the missing appendage didn’t slow it down, as two more sprang into place instantaneously. If anything, the blast only seemed to provoke it even more.

Poseidon fired off one more blast, disintegrating many of the leviathan’s rear tentacles, temporarily reducing its maneuverability. Then just before the tentacles from its nightmarish maw could reach him, he spun his trident to the side and used it to propel himself off to the side and beneath the beast.

*I’ve got you now!*

He spun his trident around to cancel out his momentum, before aiming it at the arcane leviathan once more. The creature tried to adjust its heading, changing shape and swallowing its skull in a haunting display, but the pure force the sea god put into the blast from his trident continued to propel it ever
closer to the surface.

Numerous fanged maws sprang forth along its body, all screaming in protest as it fought against the currents. Eyes gave way to tentacles, the shadowy masses trying to deflect some of the awesome power bombarding it. Its body tried to collapse in on itself, but the king of Atlantis adjusted for the change in shape, and called forth the currents to push the creature upward.

*You don’t belong in this world, do you?* Poseidon tightened his grip on the shaft of his weapon and poured everything he had into the assault. *Us gods have a mortal form to fall back on, but you don’t! You’ll simply cease to exist!* “You’ll be nothing more than fish food!” he roared, and the sea roared with him.

The creature’s uncountable mouths shrieked in pain as its form forcefully breached the surface. It writhed in agony from his unrelenting blast, and tried to return beneath the turbulent waves, only for the strong currents to keep it treading water. The various appendages it sprouted turned to black mist almost instantaneously. The whale skull and shark teeth began to split from its body, the smaller teeth were snatched up by the raging sea and would undoubtedly make landfall.

Poseidon let out a mad laugh and raised his trident for the killing blow as a passage almost as immortal as him sprang to mind. “Towards thee I roll, thou all-consuming whale: to the last I grapple with thee; from Hell’s heart, I stab at thee; for hate’s sake, I spit my last-“

The sound of flesh being torn and an indescribable pain interrupted his monologue, as a black shadow darted before him.

Poseidon looked slightly to the right and a fear gripped him the like of which he had never known. For sinking into the fathomless depths, was his right arm, still clutching his trident; leaving a trail of ichor behind it. “Im-impossible!” he gasped as the second creature slowly circled him.

The second creature was no bigger than a bottlenose, opting for speed rather than power. Dozens of eyes surrounded the fanged orifice that served as its mouth, two tentacles acting as pincers to hold its prey in place. Instead of fins, eight almost bat-like wings propelled it through the water with an unnatural ease. It had multiple tails trailing behind it, each ending with razor-sharp claws covered in ichor. Just like its much larger kin, existence itself seemed to warp around it.

Poseidon dove into the depths, kicking harder and faster than he had ever done in the entirety of his existence. He called upon the waters and made a whirlpool around him, the swirling waters propelling faster and offering some defense against the smaller abomination if it decided to attack.

As he descended he could see the faint glow of his trident, growing brighter with each passing moment. *I need to get out of here! I need to get back to Hades and the others and warn them! Tell them about these creatures from the-*

A strange infinite darkness opened before the sea god, and a third leviathan emerged.

Swallowing him whole, the only remains of the god being his arm, his weapon, and a son who disowned him.

Chapter End Notes

So now we see the true nature of Olympus. Their time was coming to an end, but Zeus
and so many others couldn't accept that. So to save their selves they betrayed their brethren, the beings that worshiped them, and even creation itself. I can't say I wouldn't do that myself, as I was the one who pieced this theory together; after all, what self aware being doesn't fear their end? There were some gods who were ready to accept their end, like Hades, content with the fact that they had shaped the world in ways few can claim, and some were possibly curious as to what happens to a god when they fade.

Are Zeus and those involved with the creation of the cycle villains? That is for you to decide. Every "villain" (except Brian) presented has their motivations that are understandable to some extent. The gods feared death, Merlin wants to stop the slaughter of millions, George wanted his daughter back, Morgan wanted out a Faustian bargain, and so many others just wanted closure and to ensure no one else ever felt their pain. Would you go to their extremes if you were in their shoes? It's easy to answer, but hard to be certain for most. We still have a few chapters to go (approx 16) so perspectives might shift by the end.

As for the cycle, this chapter connected the pieces finally, but there are details that I've left out. Trust me, it's way more intricate than what's presented here. There is a reason for the prophecies, and even a reason why the last one had Percy as the one to defeat Kronos. They aren't super important, but let's just say the gods take turns on who and who can' have kids for a while.

Onto the man of the hour: Poseidon. Some of you were correct on saying Poseidon was out of character in early chapters and as you can see there was a very good (subjective) reason for it: he was intentionally playing the fool. By being an idiot it allowed him to move around easier without arousing suspicion from the others. Yes he watched New Rome, he watched it fall and checked off an item on his to-do list. He found Harpocrates, the only god outside of the few that might have had an inkling about the nature of the cycle, and tipped off Avalon his location when the god had nothing (hehe, or so he thought). He may or may not have placed a spell on the waitress to make Jason seem extra-attractive, so that the blond would become further damaged. After all, you can't have a good natured demigod as the leader of the next genocide. Percy, well, he never got to Percy yet. So maybe now you see Poseidon in a new light.

Guess what? Those "creatures" aren't something I made up, they are from a very old mythology. I'm not telling you what they are or where they are from just yet. Some of you may guess, but I will neither confirm or deny it until the final chapter :) 

So, what did you think? It felt good finally getting here! :) remember to leave a kudos, bookmark, and subscribe if you already haven't! I live for feedback! Because I'm a diva!!!

Oh! and a few more details for my next fic: it will be Percico (duh), Mrs. O'Leary will be an important character, as will Sally! It's going to be something you've never seen before!

7/12/18
There may be a slight delay in this week's chapter. Slight family issue. But don't worry, I have 3k words already written!
The daughter of Aphrodite found herself in a rather strange situation when she came to her senses. She was back in her living room in LA, sitting on the old, beat up, brown couch that had belonged to her Grandpa Tom, with the large flatscreen playing *Die Hard*, one of her Grandpa’s favorite movies. Everything about the room seemed perfectly normal; her dad’s framed posters decorated the walls, their DVD and Blu-ray collection was waiting to be organized, the coffee table’s surface was scratched ever so slightly, the ceiling fan was spinning slowly, and off in the distance she could hear Mr. Nugent’s lawn being mowed. It was all so mundane, so ordinary, that it seemed off considering the last thing she remembered was a skyscraper of a serpent crushing her boat.

Thankfully, there was something out of the ordinary sitting next to her, in the form of her Grandpa Tom. He looked pretty good for a dead guy, having seemingly regained the weight he lost before his untimely death; no longer the frail old man Piper remembered from the wake, but the hearty man from her childhood. He wasn’t as tall as she remembered, as she used to be able to sit on his lap without her head reaching his chin; but maybe that was because she had grown several feet taller in the years without him. He wore his usual blues jeans, white button-up, and black vest, with a cheap tourist stand bolo hanging around his neck. His hair was long and black with a few streaks of silver, tied back in a neat braid that would make Reyna envious. His face was just as wrinkled with laugh lines as she remembered, with his lips curled up ever so slightly into his permanent smirk. And since he was on his favorite couch, watching his favorite movie, one hand clenched onto the remote while the other hand was slightly tucked in his waistband.

“Hello, Piper,” the old man smiled. “It’s been a long time.”

“Yeah. Yeah, it has,” Piper gulped. She pulled her feet up onto the couch and turned to look at the man, trying to absorb every detail that had faded from memory over the years. The subtle curve of his nose. The way his left pinky twitched whenever he moved his right thumb. The way he crossed his toes when he relaxed. All such important details that made Grandpa Tom, Grandpa Tom, that she had somehow forgotten. “Am I- Am I dead?”

“Only mostly.” The former Gayegogi let out a deep, throaty chuckle and ruffled her hair, without dropping the remote. “And there’s a big difference between mostly dead and all dead.”
“The Princess Bride,” Piper smiled, rubbing her now sore head. *I guess I’m not dead if I can still feel pain.* Strangely though, the thought of being dead didn’t seem that bad. If she was dead she wouldn’t have to worry about Avalon, being the Gayegogi, the Nation, Reyna, or Atlas and Veronica; she could chill with her long-missed grandfather in eternal peace.

“Don’t think like that!” Grandpa Tom said, the familiar and painful look of disappointment in his piercing black eyes. “You’ll be with me again for sooner than either of us would like.” He flicked off the TV just as Hans Gruber was making his big monologue, and tossed the remote onto the coffee table. “Now, our time together is limited, so let’s get down to business now so we can enjoy our time together.”

Piper nodded, unwilling to blink and miss a moment of the old man’s company.

“First off, I owe you more apologies than there are winds. I’m sorry I wasn’t around to properly introduce you to your heritage; I really should’ve cut back on the red meat and fried foods,” he added with a chuckle. “I’m sorry that I forced you to take up my mantle, that was always the plan, but not like this. I’m sorry that Coyote is on your heels; he is a good dog though, just remember he’s lost so many friends over the course of his life. And above all else, I’m sorry you were ever born.”

“Wh-what?” At that moment, it felt like her entire world had just been upheaved. Even after learning that she as the daughter of Aphrodite, she had been sure of two things: her dad would always try his best, and Grandpa Tom loved her more than any other person. To hear him say that made her wish that she really was dead.

“Oh! No! Not like that, young one,” the large man cried, pulling her against his barrel chest just as the tears began to fall. “No, no, no! You and your father were the only things that made my life worth living! You two were the only reasons I worked so hard restoring the Nation! What I meant was, I’m sorry you had to experience so much hardship in your young life. I’m so sorry you’ve been made a pawn by not one, but two different groups from the moment you were born.”

The tears stopped and she pried herself from his warm chest. “What do you mean?” Piper asked, narrowing her eyes. The old man averted his eyes and coughed. “Grandpa…”

The former Gayegogi scratched his jaw with one finger, an awkward smile on his face. “It’s important to remember that the Nation and your mother’s people have been at war with each other for centuries. A war that almost wiped out our people,” he sighed. “There were those on the council that foolishly believed that the Nation would emerge victorious in the long run, but a few others and myself knew better.”

“Grandpa, what did you do?” she asked, already guessing the answer.

“I knew that we would never win in true conflict, but I also knew that negotiations would never work.” His smile turned into a mischievous grin. “But you come from a long line of tricksters. I thought that if we had someone who could walk between both worlds, someone that could command respect of all, then maybe both sides would come know peace.”

*Oh, you’ve got to be kidding me…*

“So, I gathered together the few weavers we had and used the last of their thread to alter fate. They arranged it so that one of their gods would fall in love with one of our people, and a child would result from it. The child would then become one of the greatest heroes of Olympus and be of importance to the Nation.” The grin fell from his wrinkled face, a deep sorrow taking over. “I just didn’t realize Tristan would be the one chosen…”
“I would say it serves you right, but that would be insulting myself too.”

“No, you’re right. I got what I deserved; the rest of my life filled with dread over the sweetest little
girl I’ve ever known. A deep guilt from watching my only son trying to figure out where the woman
he loved disappeared to, asking himself why he wasn’t good enough. No one, not man or god,
should ever mess with fate; it never ends well.”

Piper knew that she should be mad, furious even, at the old man before her, but all she could see was
her grandpa. She remembered him telling her stories every night, taking her for rides in his big
Cadillac to get ice cream, sneaking her cookies even when her father said no, taking her to meetings
to show her off to his (hopefully) mortal friends, and a million-other little special things they had
done in their short time together. Those were not the actions of someone trying to raise some savior,
but that of an old man who loved his granddaughter. “Well, I guess I know where I get my stupidity
from,” she sighed. “Because that has got to be the dumbest idea I’ve ever heard.”

“Well,” Grandpa Tom chuckled, “it sounds like your mother’s side isn’t much better.”

“Yeah, I’m pretty fucked on both sides,” she said with a slight smirk.

“I see you also got my mouth.” He paused. “Or your grandmother’s, she had a viper’s tongue.”
Grandpa Tom pretended his hand was a snake and hissed, then grabbed Piper by her shoulder,
making the teen laugh. Most people her age would roll their eyes if their grandparents were to play
such a childish game with the, but unlike them, Piper knew to cherish every moment.

When she stopped laughing and caught her breath (okay, is this a dream or what?), Grandpa Tom
nodded. “I see you are having trouble dealing with the Uktena.”

“It’s a giant, impervious, snake demon,” Piper huffed, crossing her arms like a pouting child. “I think
I’d need Leo to whip up a tactical nuke to take that thing down. I mean, unless we can get it to come
out of the water I—”

The old man poked her nose with his index finger, silencing her. “The Thunderbird told me you
were quite gung-ho, but killing monsters is not the way of our people anymore.”

“It’s a giant snake that wants to devour everything, what else can we do? I mean, it sounds like the
Thunderbird has been doing battle with it for years! Why not take it out now since the big bird is
gone?”

Grandpa Tom shook his head with a grin. “Unlike your mother’s world, everything has its purpose
in our world. To remove even the smallest creature will forever alter the world.”

“So, what does the Uktena contribute to the world, besides hatred?”

“Oh, be nice to her, Piper! She’s just doing what comes natural to her!” He chuckled. “Besides
producing offspring for the Thunderbird to devour, the Uktena plays a crucial role in the natural
world. During the winter months, she burrows deep within the earth, so that the earth’s heat may
sustain her. These tunnels, help relieve the massive pressure beneath the earth, preventing that
volcano from erupting. Plus, those tunnels sometimes make geysers, which bring in that tourist
money,” he added with a shrug.

“So, if we kill it, the Midwest goes boom?”

“Not immediately, but yes. Don’t get me wrong though, it is an issue that needs to be taken care of
immediately.”
“Then what do I do? I can’t even sing it to sleep if it needs to be digging!”

The old man wrapped an arm around Piper and pulled her close, resting her head on his broad shoulders. “You are the Gayegogi, the Liar, a trickster whose very words can alter the reality of all those who listen. You can make people believe it is night at noon, make a dog think it’s a cat, and make anyone think they need the replacement warranty for a DVD. I’ve been watching you, Piper, I know you’re capable of great yarns, you made a machine believe it was alive! So, it is time you stop thinking with your Greek side and use your heritage!”

“I—“ she sputtered.

“You come from a family of great liars and storytellers, child. Tristan is a great actor that can transition into a new role like a snake shedding its skin. I made you and your father believe I was a bumbling old man, while I led a double life. And your grandmother, well,” he coughed, “she made me believe a lot of things.”

“So, what should I do?” she mumbled into her grandfather’s shoulder.

The old man smirked. “I’ll help you just this once, so listen closely…”

By the time they finished talking about the Uktena, the Thunderbird, the Nation, and the finer points of being the Gayegogi, the sun had begun to set in the strange limbo Piper found herself in. She pulled out some old blankets from a wooden chest next to the couch and the two covered up, as she told her Grandpa Tom about everything that happened since he had passed. Although he had watched a great deal of it, he was always interested to hear about it from her point of view. She tried to ask him about what it was like to be dead, and what the afterlife was like, but he refused to divulge such spoilers, other than to say it was worth it.

“There is one more thing that concerns me,” The old man sighed before taking a sip from a steaming mug of peppermint tea.

“What’s that?” Piper asked, her head still resting on his shoulder.

“Your personality shifted quite dramatically once you returned from Greece, after you slain the corrupted Earth Mother. I know a part of it is from growth, but you’ve also developed this impish-nature.” He set his mug down on the arm of the couch. “Why is that?”

“I—“ Piper closed her mouth and chewed on her lip. She knew what he was talking about, it wasn’t a subtle change, or an unconscious one for that matter. It was part of her way of coping. “It’s complicated,” she sighed, her chest starting to tighten.

“Things always seem complicated until you talk about them.”

“I, er, remember how I said my friend Leo died?” Grandpa Tom nodded. “I didn’t take it very well. Jason either. We held out hope for a while that he wasn’t dead, that he had survived, but eventually reality set in.” Even though she now knew Leo was alive, it still hurt to talk about, as her eyes began to water. “It was the three of us since the beginning, you know? He made us feel… whole. Balanced. One. So—“

“With him gone, you felt the need to take his place,” her Grandpa sadly smiled. “But what about
“He came back,” The daughter of Aphrodite sniffled, “but not really.” She shifted positions and rested her head on her grandfather’s lap, the old man gently running a hand through her hair like he did so many years ago whenever she got upset. His fingers lingered at the thunderbird’s feather momentarily, but otherwise didn’t stop the soothing motion. “I can’t say how thrilled we were when Leo came back to us. We were a little upset about him going on a vacation with Calypso before returning, but that quickly passed.” She smiled fondly at the memory of Festus descending from the sky with her best friend and his new girlfriend on his back. “But it was like there was this wall between us. Like he had to keep his distance.”

“Did you think that maybe once he got used to this girl things would have gone back to normal?”

“Yeah. Yeah, I thought that at first. Hoped it, really.” She pulled the blanket up. “But as the months passed, he rarely left the bunker, and when he did hang out, his mind was elsewhere. The jokes were few and far between, often forced. And it always seemed that he would have some excuse to leave.”

The old man paused his petting and smiled sadly. “People grow apart, it’s a regrettable fact of life. The friends you make in childhood rarely last into adulthood. It just sounds like-“

“But he was Leo!” Piper snapped, for once not wanting to hear her grandfather’s words. “He was special! It was the three of us against a strange new world! It was always us! He was my brother! My best friend! He was the one I-“ Her eyes widened at what she was about to say.

Grandpa Tom patted her head with a smile. “Go on,” he urged, gently patting her back.

“Loved,” Piper whispered, the world falling out from under her. That- that’s not right… She loved Jason, and she knew that was true despite their false beginnings. She thought of the son of Jupiter every day, and imagined what it would be like when they finally met again. She also knew that she loved the hyperactive mechanic, but she had always thought she loved him like a sibling. But now she realized it was a different kind of love, something between family and partner. It made sense in a weird sort of way, as memories of her diving off the Argo II and kissing the Texan when he emerged from the ocean filled her head. I wasn’t as worried about anyone else. “I’m confused now. What do I do?”

“Piper, we’re all confused. It’s part of being human,” Grandpa Tom said, still patting her back. “As for what to do? You of all people should know there are many different forms of love, and it sounds like you’re figuring out one of those right now. I think you do truly love your boyfriend, but I think you need to make this Leo aware of just how important he is to the both of you. If he is as good a man as you think he is, then he shall rejoin your family.”

“You make it sound so easy, Grandpa. But-” Piper paused at the thought of the fears she had been repressing since Veronica and Atlas had swallowed Mr. D.

“But what?”

“I don’t think he’s alive anymore,” she sighed. “It’s just that, all signs point to Camp Half-Blood-“

“What a terrible name,” the old man scowled.

“is around anymore. I haven’t been able to contact anyone there for months by any means, New Rome was captured without anyone knowing, and Mr. D is always at camp, so to see him being used by the red-haired freak is a bit alarming. I- I don’t think any of my friends are alive…”

“I wish I could give you the answers that you want, but those are not mine to give,” the old man
sighed. “But do not be discouraged by someone being dead, as in the end we will all be together.”

“Wow, Grandpa, did you get that from a fortune cookie?” she laughed. She reached over to the coffee table and grabbed her own cup of tea and took a sip, only to immediately spit it out. “What the-?! Why does it taste like beef broth?”

“Well it looks like our time is coming to an end,” Grandpa Tom sighed. As the world started to fade to black, he pulled her into a bearhug, which she eagerly returned. “Piper, I want you to know no matter what happens, I will always be proud of you and love you. I want you to be true to yourself, I want you try your best, and I want you to be happy.”

“I will. I promise.”

“One last thing, don’t be afraid to lose. Sometimes, losing has its own rewards.”

Piper bolted upright to the sound of thunder, headbutting Reyna, and causing the older girl to drop the bowl of broth she had been feeding the unconscious daughter of Aphrodite.

“Gods of Olympus,” the praetor groaned, holding her hand to her forehead. “Even waking up, you’re a pain in my ass!”

After colliding with Reyna, Piper fell back onto the sleeping bag, clutching her now throbbing head as well. Her head wasn’t all that was hurting though, her entire body had a dull achiness to it and her broken leg once more felt terrible. “Sorry, Reyna,” she apologized. “The thunder startled me as I was waking up. Also, was that freaking beef broth?”

“It was,” The Latina sighed, grabbing an empty sleeping and pressing it against her now soaked lap. “I’m glad it wasn’t hot…” she murmured.

“You gave me beef broth, knowing I’m a vegetarian?”

“Suck it up, princess! The storm has only gotten worse and everyone’s running low on supplies.” Reyna sighed and tossed the wet sleeping bag aside. “I took what I could get, which wasn’t a lot. If it makes you feel any better, it was from a dry mix, so I’m pretty sure the cow it saw was whatever cow that walked through the water.”

“Lame, but appreciated,” she snorted, sitting upright once more. “So, let’s get the obvious out of the way; how long was I out, where are our titan tag-team, and more importantly, how the hades are we still alive?”

Reyna closed her eyes as if in deep thought. “Well, that first one is a little hard, as I haven’t seen the sun since we got here. So… let’s say, three days? As for Atlas and Veronica, they are resting in the tent next door; they are in pretty bad shape, they need a corpse soon.” With cobra like speed, Reyna reached over and grabbed the pulsing black feather in Piper’s hair. “This thing saved us. Just as the Uktena’s jaws closed around the boat, this- this electrical field erupted from your feather and zapped it back to the lake bottom. The boat was pierced though and taking on water; Veronica then grabbed the both of us and practically flew us to shore.” Reyna released the feather and hung her head. “They almost died saving us, because I froze up.”
“Ehh! Wrong!” Piper shouted, startling the downtrodden praetor. She pulled her legs from the sleeping bag and crawled next to Reyna, throwing an arm around the older girl and pulling her into a friendly hug. “First off, my plan was crap. I assumed that thing was about, oh, three hundred times smaller! Plus, it relied too much on Atlas and Veronica without any kind of backup plan. Second, show me one person who wouldn’t freeze up at the sight of it! That thing made Shrimpzilla look like, well, a shrimp! Third, it’s actually a good thing we didn’t kill it.” Reyna raised an eyebrow at that. “Look, I got a new plan, a non-violent one that should, no will, work.” She paused and took a deep breath. “But I’m going to need a badass, no nonsense praetor to make it work. Are you my praetor?”

Reyna smirked.

Piper would be lying if she said she wasn’t afraid. For even with her arm linked with Reyna’s, a rope tied around her waist to drag the titan hybrid, and her bow on her shoulders, fear gripped her heart.

The storm the Thunderers had conjured had only intensified during her brief visit with Grandpa Tom. The rain was coming down so hard, that it stung what little skin was uncovered; her hands and face were red despite the cold. The black storm clouds filled the sky, blocking out the sun, the moon, and the stars leaving those without a watch to guess if it was day or night; and even with a flashlight she and Reyna could only see a few feet in front of them. Not that they needed to see far, as they mostly kept looking at their feet, carefully monitoring each step in the roaring, knee-deep waters that threatened to wash them away with every step. Compound that with the possibility of a lightning strike electrocuting them or a young Uktena biting them, and you got three worried girls and one slightly nervous titan.

Reyna gently pulled on her hand to signal she wanted to talk. “Piper!” The praetor shouted over the storm. “How much farther ‘til the cave?!?”

Farther than I’d like… She shrugged her shoulders. “Not too much farther! Sparky said the cave mouth is by the pit geyser!”

Reyna shook her head, her hair plastered to her face despite the poncho’s best efforts. “We need to find someplace dry! We got to check on them,” the Latina cried, jerking her head to their precious cargo.

Okay, but where? She nodded to Reyna and gave her a thumbs-up, before taking another shaky step forward through the rushing water. They were in the middle of a remote hiking trail, in the far-off corner of a national park that was closed to the public, there was no way they were going to find any place dry outside of-

The sky flashed, and in the brief moment that the world was illuminated she saw the outline of several large tents, just a short distance away.

Well isn’t that just convenient? Talk about a deus ex machina… Piper swatted Reyna’s shoulder and pointed in the direction of the camp. Reyna must have saw it as well, as the older teen nodded.

It was hard work dragging the daughter of Mercury and her Titan roommate through the rushing water, only made harder by the fact that their target destination was apparently slightly up hill. In the span of ten yards, she and Reyna had almost lost their footing five times, but thankfully they always
managed to help the other out. There was undoubtedly still tension between them over Jason, but at least now she didn’t have to worry about Reyna letting her die, or being smothered to death in her sleep for being an allegedly traitor.

*Thank the gods and Grandpa Tom for that…*

With one final heave, they pulled the sleeping bag up to the campsite, Reyna collapsing to her knees. While Reyna collected herself, Piper shined her flashlight around the apparently deserted camp. Directly in front of them were three large, black tents, that would have been impossible to see without the lightning’s aid. They were large enough to stand in without ducking and judging by the cables that ran inside them from a generator, Piper was pretty sure whoever owned them weren’t there to experience the great outdoors. In the center of the campsite, were the remains of a campfire; most of the ash and rocks though had been washed away some time ago. Scattered between the tents were a few large plastic crates with plastic tarps wrapped around them and anchored to the ground. She flashed her light near the inactive generator and caught a strange metallic glint from behind it. When her eyes finally adjusted to the darkness and made sense of what she was seeing, she smacked Reyna’s shoulder.

“What?!” Reyna shouted, rubbing her now sore shoulder. “Why did you— Oh!”

There, right behind the campsite was an unmarked black helicopter; the same kind that Avalon used to assault Artemis and Home.

“I think I know whose camp this is!” She cried, spinning around to the nearest tent. The way she saw it was they could either, leave now and hope that they managed to avoid the dangerous mortals, or they could rush into the tents, taking them by surprise, and hopefully gather some more intelligence on their enemy. Both options put all of them at great risk, but— Reyna ran through the nearest tent’s flaps, her obsidian tomahawk raised and ready to strike.

“Oh, gods damn it,” Piper mumbled to herself as she untied the rope around her waist. She pulled her knife from her jeans and flipped the blade up; her bow was cool and all, but it wasn’t practical for close quarters combat. Taking a deep breath to steel herself, she pushed the flaps aside and stepped in, ready to lash out with her knife.

Instead of finding the Latina with her stone blade embedded in some Avalon stooge’s chest, while she ripped out another’s throat with her teeth, Reyna was just standing there, staring down at the corpse of a middle-aged man on a cot. His flesh was gray and slightly bloated, a sign that he had been dead for some time; but by the position of his blankets and content expression, he had at least died in his sleep.

“Snake bites,” the praetor said, gesturing to the man’s neck. “The uktena got them in their sleep. Poor bastards.”

It was only then that Piper noticed that there were three more cots around them, each occupied with the deceased. It was funny, she had been prepared to shank all these men only moments ago, but seeing them dead saddened her. *But this is the actually a good turn of events for a change.* “Reyna,” she said timidly. “We should drag the others inside. They could, uh, use these.”

“Yeah,” Reyna nodded.

They left the relatively dry tent and grabbed their weakened companions, more cautious than ever about the possibility of a juvenile uktena attacking them. In the dark of the night anything that rushed by them in the runoff had to be taken as a potential threat. They quickly grabbed the ropes attached to the sleeping bag, though Piper briefly hesitated at grabbing the long skinny rope in the dark, and
pulled the hybrid into the tent, setting them near one of the cots.

“Hey guys,” Piper cooed, as she unzipped the bag. “We got you some much needed help,” she gulped, gazing at her friend. Reyna hadn’t been kidding when she said the two had nearly perished to save her and Reyna, and looking at the shriveled husk before her somewhat made her wish that they had. The daughter of Mercury had pushed herself to untold limits running them across the turbulent waters of Heart’s Lake, burning herself to little more than charred skeleton. The girl’s golden hair had been incinerated entirely, leaving nothing to soften the blow of seeing the sunken, black skeletal face. Every inch of flesh was black and tightly wrapped around bone; looking as if to flake off from the slightest of movements. The only way to know if they were alive was by the slow, painful rise and fall of their chest, and the slight glow in their hollowed eye sockets. This is going to haunt my dreams... I’m never going to sleep without a teddy bear ever again. A gun and dagger under my pillow as well.

Reyna went to grab Veronica’s left hand and place it on the dead man, when Atlas rasped, “No.”

Piper flinched at the pained movement of the dark figure, but did her best to hide her discomfort. “Huh? Why?”

“Pain,” the titan choked. “Veronica can’t keep going on like this. No mor- no human can, or should be subjugated to this kind of agony.” They paused as their flaming eyes began to rapidly brighten and dim, to which Piper thought indicated some kind of internal struggle. “No Veronica, they must know. If they won’t help us, then they don’t deserve your help.”

“Know what?” she and Reyna asked simultaneously, both crouching in front of their comrade. “We want to help you.”

There was another struggle, but the hybrid’s eyes flashed brighter than Piper had ever seen and Atlas’ voice boomed, “The only way to stabilize this body is to use the Golden Fleece in tandem with the curse of the River Styx. If you are unwilling to help Veronica, then let her die. I- I will not allow her to continue to suffer like this if you will not aid her.”

The titan general’s words stunned her in more than one way. The idea of stealing the golden fleece, her camp’s primary source of protection, was a bit unnerving, but it made sense. The fleece would restore Veronica’s body to its pre-Avalon condition, and the River Styx would allow Atlas to continue to dwell within her without destroying her body. It was also interesting to hear the Titan talk about Veronica’s pain. Not once did he mention his pain, only voicing concern for his host. To some it might sound cruel that he would in essence put Veronica out of her misery, but without her, to Piper’s knowledge the Titan would either return to his body or die; neither were advantageous to him. Piper bit her lip, before turning to Reyna. “Hey Rey-“ The praetor scowled “-how do you feel about assisting in the greatest heist in Greco-Roman history?”

Reyna smirked. “I think I wouldn’t mind showing the Greeks the superiority of the Roman mindset. Plus, I think I could get Nico to help with getting us to the underworld,” she shrugged.

Atlas smiled and mouthed, “Thank you.” The Titan then lifted its shared left arm and grasped onto the nearby corpse. Instantly, the Avalon soldier’s body began to glow and flake into pieces, flowing into the hybrid. The blackened flesh began to regain color, muscle and flesh re-growing and knitting itself together in a haunting ballet before their very eyes. When the last of the body was absorbed, leaving only a pile of black clothes, the two pushed themselves onto shaky feet and walked to each body, repeating the process.

When the last body was gone, standing before her and Reyna was a nearly pristine Veronica. No longer did her hands and feet end in talons, her blonde hair restored and hanging just below her
shoulders, and even the flesh around her eye sockets was no longer blackened. She was as naked as a jay bird and still burning, pieces of burnt flesh slowly falling away, but thanks to the four bodies, it would hopefully be sometime before she truly needed a refuel. “I’m sorry… I- I should have told you both sooner,” the youngest teen said, hanging her head in shame. “It’s just that, you two are heroes, and well I’m-

Piper and Reyna interrupted the blonde by tackling her to the ground in a group hug. The burning duo felt amazing in Piper’s embrace; it was the first time she had been warm since leaving the Thunderers’ campsite. “If anyone here is a hero it’s you,” Piper said, wrapping her arms around Reyna as well. “You two have saved us countless times on this trip and have endured unimaginable pain to do it. So, us helping steal a fucking blanket? Yeah, we can do that.”

“And if anyone had a problem with it, they can go through me,” Reyna added, snuggling against the blonde. “Man, you feel good.”

“Besides, it’s not like we aren’t going to return it when we’re done with it. And if Reyna can convince Nico to help, then we’ll only need it for like two or three hours. There’s only two people I can think who would have an issue with that, and one of them is in your stomach.”

Reyna chuckled. “And if Chiron so much as opens his mouth, I’ll brand him like your grandfather’s cattle, Veronica.”

The blonde beamed and returned the embrace. “You do know that you don’t brand horses, right?”

“Well it’s a good thing Chiron is not a horse,” Reyna smirked.

“You know Reyna, you can be pretty dark,” Veronica laughed. “And Atlas approves.” The blonde shifted slightly. “Um, I hate to kill the moment, but I’m naked and I’m lying on my back in inch deep water. I’m not sure if I can catch a cold, but I’d rather not risk it.”

“Understandable,” Piper said, untangling herself from the mess of limbs and standing up. “Must be cold to, because I thought your nipple was a shank at first.”

Veronica flushed, while Reyna groaned and rolled her eyes.

They helped Veronica and Atlas get dressed, sorting through the clothing Avalon had left and finding the smallest articles of clothing available. They had to rip apart a bedsheets to use as a belt for the blonde, but the duo didn’t mind, marveling at the fact that they could wear shoes for the first time in months. The baggy clothes made the hybrid look years younger than their body’s fourteen years.

Piper smiled as Reyna continued to have her arm around the daughter of Mercury, telling the blonde how worried she was for her number-one-soldier, Titan ally, and friends. They had come a long way since saving her ass back in California, and part of her knew they still had a long way to go. There were still issues between herself and Reyna, and there was certainly some distrust about Atlas. But if we can remember these moments, tell ourselves to believe in each other, then we can make it. We have to, it’s us against the world. So, let’s keep this energy going as we prepare to meet our stone covered cannibal!

No longer needing to drag a living corpse behind them, their speed drastically increased. They still tied a rope around their waists as a precaution, which really paid off when Piper stepped into a
burrow and lost her balance; it was only thanks to Reyna and the hybrid that she wasn’t washed away. Atlas and Veronica also saved all their asses, pulling them up into a tree when dozens of young uktena swam dangerously close to them. The two would also hold onto her and Reyna and jump them over particularly dangerous portions of the forest.

*I don’t think we would’ve made it without them. Reyna and I are athletic, but not jumping-over-flooded-ravines athletic.*

In the space of half an hour, they covered twice the distance in what it took her and Reyna to cover in four, placing them directly in front of the eldest Stoneclad’s cave.

It was an interesting location; at the far end of a field of geysers surrounded by a multitude of beautiful rock. The cave entrance stood sunken just behind one such geyser that screamed ‘photo opportunity’, but was just remote enough that it wouldn’t arouse too much suspicion if a hiker disappeared every so often.

*So, the guy figured out how to never have to leave his home, lucky bastard, Piper thought, missing her home in California and all the little luxuries like delivery. I would kill for a Korean taco right about now…*

Reyna pulled them into a huddle, keeping one eye on the cave’s entrance. “So, we go in there, steal the thing’s talisman, and run like hell, right? That’s our plan?”

Piper nodded. “We all know anything more complicated than that is going to fail, so let’s keep it simple and adapt to the situation.”

“Are you sure we can’t just over power this stone-man and make him give us his trinket?” Atlas asked, eyeing the cave entrance with a cocky grin, eyes flaring. “Because I haven’t felt this strong in quite some time. Yeah, we could take him.”

Piper rapped her knuckles on the Titan’s shared forehead. “Easy there, roid-rage. My Grandpa Tom told me if Larry the Stoneclad gets nervous, he’ll place the talisman under his rock, and if he does that we’re sunk. Our best bet is to sneak in and steal it.” The others nodded in understanding. “Okay, let’s do this.”

They broke apart and tightened the rope around their waists, as if something went wrong Atlas and Veronica could hopefully get them out of there. Single file, they approached the cave mouth, with Piper leading them as it was her idea in the first place, and the hybrid in the rear. With some apprehension, they stepped down into the flooded geyser basin, the water coming up to their knees and feeling considerable warmer than the rain water; none of them wanted to be there if the geyser erupted. In what had to be the most obvious use of magic in any pantheon, an invisible barrier kept the water out of the cave, seemingly floating there on its own accord. Thankfully, the barrier offered no resistance to them as they walked through, but it seemed all the more likely that they had set off some kind of alarm notifying the Stoneclad of their presence.

*Let’s hope he’s an ever sleeper, or his stone makes him super slow. Really anything. Why did I think this was a good idea again?*

Upon entering the cave, the floor began to immediately slope downward, spiraling around in an unnatural manner. With each turn, the cave walls grew smoother and taller. Their flashlights were strangely unneeded, as the ceiling was covered in a strange glowing moss that bathed the cave in an equally strange comforting light. The temperature also warmed up as they went, but she was pretty sure they hadn’t gone deep enough for it to be natural.
The guy must have a heater. And judging by the lack of humidity, a dehumidifier as well…

When at last the tunnel stopped spiraling and leveled out, the signs of human modification were undeniable. The walls had been smoothed so that they had a vaulted ceiling, the glowing moss was placed into scones spread out evenly along the walls, the floors worn completely smooth, and several doorways had been carved into the walls.

“So, do we even know what this talisman looks like?” Reyna whispered, as they carefully trod down the hall. Their every step slow and deliberate. “This is going to sound bad, but I’m imagining like a carved, circular rock with feathers on it.”

Piper bobbed her head. “Not entirely sure, but despite your stereotypical ideas, you’re probably right.”

“I may be of some assistance in that regard,” Veronica whispered, her steps feather light. “I can see magical signatures, and while this entire place is dripping with ancient magic, I should be able to know what it is when I see it.”

“Okay, I seriously love you, you overpowered Mary Sue,” Piper chuckled. “If this works out, you can freaking keep the Golden Fleece and use it as a bathmat for all I care.”

They peeked into the first room and were stunned at what they saw; a man cave. One wall was occupied by a giant white screen, a projector hanging from the vaulted ceiling. The walls were lined with shelves upon shelves of VHSs, DVDs, Blu-rays, and even a few film canisters. In the center of the room sat the largest black, leather recliner Piper had ever seen, wide enough to seat four people comfortably. A large end table sat next to the chair, the top covered with a box of Kleenex, a roll of paper towels, several remotes, and a large bowl filled with what appeared to be buffalo sauce. On the others side of the chair sat a waste basket, filled with various human bones covered in buffalo sauce.

“Atlas, do you see anything?” she gulped, her mind trying to figure out just how many people were in that pile. Answer, too many! Way too many! The titan shook their head. “Okay, let’s move to the next room.”

The next room was equally stunning. The cave walls were covered in split logs, making it seem like they had stepped into a log cabin. A large bed made of oak occupied the center of the room, a large oil painting of a bird’s eye view of Yellowstone hanging over the intricately carved headboard. A bookshelf occupied one corner of the room, filled with books on poetry and the natural sciences. Near the entrance, was a large stone mantle, covered with various animals carved from stone.

“Anything?” she asked again, hoping that the cannibal was the kind of guy who left his valuables on his nightstand.

“Negative,” Veronica sighed. “Though, it appears his underwear has an enchantment on them.”

They crept to the next look, a large study. Bookshelves lined two walls, while maps of the park and the surrounding area covered the other two. The maps were covered with dozens of pushpins with labels, some stating a date, while others appeared to be names and addresses. Two old fashioned, red, high backed armchairs sat in the middle of the room, overlooking a chessboard with pieces made of marble and onyx. But what really caught their attention, was a small, golden amulet sitting on the center of the chessboard.

“Atlas is that-“

“Yeah,” the Titan nodded. “That’s it. If you could see it like we do, you wouldn’t even need to ask.”
“This is probably a trap,” Reyna sighed.

“Oh, indubitably,” Piper laughed nervously. “But we really don’t have a choice here, do we?” She stepped into the room, with closed eyes, ready for a boulder to fall from the ceiling, darts to shoot from the bookcases, a trapdoor to open, every cliché she had encountered since learning she was a demigod. *Because somewhere in my life I became Indiana Jones…*

But when no one screamed, or no ancient machines rumbled to life, she opened one eye and let out a breath she hadn’t been aware she was holding. *Okay, I can dig it.* Confidence restored, she strode across the room scooped the frisbee-sized talisman and held it triumphantly for her comrades to see. “Okay, let’s get out of-“

Predictably, she was silenced as a massive stone arm reached out from the floor and grabbed wrapped its stony fingers around her torso, making her drop the talisman and nearly crushing her. As this happened, two more arms grabbed Reyna and the duo, then glided across the floor and put the four of them in a neat line.

“Can’t an old man take a bath without some young punks breaking into his house?” a deep voice cackled from beneath them. Before their very eyes the room began to grow, the ceiling growing higher, the chess table doubling in size, and the chairs becoming as tall as a bus. As this occurred, a large, stone covered, man rose from the floor as if it were liquid. The Stoneclad was easily thirty feet tall, with arms and legs as big as tree trunks, and fists as large as boulders; which was an apt description as they were made of stone. His body was composed of hundreds of stones of various size and color, all of them jagged, but polished. A curtain sized, pink towel was thankfully wrapped around his waist, with fluffy, pink bunny slippers on his huge feet. His was made of hundreds of pebbles, shifting against each other to allow the Stoneclad a full range of expressions. Instead of eyes, two pieces of polished obsidian took their place, like a rich kid’s snowman. His huge maw was filled with stalagmites and stalactites, most of them yellow and chipped from age. Instead of hair, a large, grey, flat stone occupied the top of his head, giving the stone covered man, an elderly look.

The elderly spellcaster picked up his talisman and placed it around his neck, before placing his face inches away from Veronica and Atlas. “What do we got here?” the Stoneclad sniffed the blonde, the large piece of granite that served as his nose twitching slightly. “Roman, with a hint of Greek, and dare I say Swede?” He then moved onto Reyna and sniffed again. “Interesting fusion, Roman and Puerto Rican! My, I’ll have to call Clara over here for a rarity like you! She’s into that food-truck style cooking you know.” The monstrous giant moved to Piper next, and the Gayegogi caught a whiff of his rotten breath and nearly vomited. “Oh, a member of the Nation and Greek! You must be something-“ his stone eyes widened as he caught sight of the pulsing black feather in her hair. “Impossible…” He went to poke the feather with one log sized finger, only to get shocked by a bolt of blue electricity. “Nope, you’re are definitely the Gayegogi,” he chuckled, sucking on his finger.

“Yup!” she cried, no longer stunned. “So, you better let me and my friends go unless you want to trouble!” She poured her charm speak into the threat.

It must have worked a little bit, as the Stoneclad shrank back slightly, but quickly regained his composure. “Oh child, that magic may work on lesser creatures, but I’m far too old to succumb to something that pathetic.” He snapped his fingers, the rocky fingers cracking from the stress. Instantly his towel and slippers were gone, replaced by the largest red flannel shirt, blue jeans, and boots Piper had ever seen. “I’ve been a practitioner of the arts for over three millennia,” he collapsed down onto one of the armchairs, “plus a gourmet chef, poet, painter, sculptor, woodworker, mason-“

As the Stoneclad continued to list off his seemingly endless list of hobbies and professions, she, Reyna, and the duo looked at each other. It seemed to them that despite having an immortal body, his
mind was slowly going like any other normal human. Atlas shook their head, silently asking if they should break their bonds, but Piper shook her head no.

“Sir, uh, Mr. Stoneclad?” Piper asked, interrupting him listing every Pokémon card he owned. “Are you sure you can’t let us go?”

“Huh?” The spellcaster tilted his head and leaned forward. “Why would I do that? It’s not every day a gourmet meal walks into my home carrying the last feather I need for my collection.”

“Just a heads ups there chef; I’m mostly dead tissue,” Veronica snickered.

“I would also like to point out that I am recovering from a terrible infection, you could very well get sick eating me,” Reyna added with a nod of her head towards her shoulder.

The Stoneclad rolled his eyes; literally the polished black stones rolled over completely. “I’m not a savage, I plan to cook you first. Possibly throw a dinner party as well. Oh, that will-”

“I’m on my period,” Piper said bluntly. That will shut him up…

All heads snapped to the daughter of Aphrodite; Reyna and the Stoneclad’s mouths hanging agape, while Atlas and Veronica tried to hide their grin. The stone giant sat back in his chair, eyes wide. “I beg your pardon?”

“I’m. On. My. Period,” she repeated, growling each word. “It’s my time of the month. My ovaries are refreshing themselves. My Aunt Flow has come for a visit. The Red Sea is at high tide.” With every stupid expression, the Stoneclad shrank a little bit. Rocks began to fall from his body, causing a minor avalanche to cover the floor. The strange thing was, she was lying. The creature’s weakness appeared to be completely psychological in nature, which made her want to roll her eyes. Seriously, why are men so freaked out about a woman having her period? And if he could smell my freaking heritage and ethnicity, shouldn’t he be able to smell that?

Reyna having recovered from the daughter of Aphrodite’s announcement, remembered that this was the creature’s only weakness besides its talisman. “Oh, ouch! Mine just started! Oh, I feel so bloated and the cramps! Oh, the cramps!” she cried, twisting her face in mock agony.

“I might be bleeding to death,” Veronica deadpanned. “You may want to put a towel beneath me.”

“ENOUGH!” The elderly giant roared, bolting up from his chair. All the rocks he had shed came rolling back and snapped back into place, restoring him to his previous size. He eyes the three of them in sexist disgust, grinding his stone teeth in his cavernous mouth. “I-“ he stopped and bit the tip of his thumb. “I guess I’ll just have to wait until you are finished with your… womanly functions,” he cringed. He snapped his fingers and a book and a large pair of gold framed glasses appeared in his hands. “However, this does give me time to plan the dinner party accordingly.” He sat back down in his chair, placed his glasses on, and opened To Serve Man to a dogeared page. “I’ll have to compose a special tweet, it’s not everyday someone offers the Gayegogi for dinner.”

Eventually after hours of whining about imaginary cramps and bleeding, they gave up, and silently agreed to observe the elderly giant, waiting for the right opportunity to have Atlas and Veronica to
free them and grab the amulet.

The Stoneclad was actually kind of funny to watch in Piper’s opinion. He would read for about ten minutes at a time and then conjure up a small piece of rock candy and suck on it until gone. He would occasionally snap his head to the room’s entrance as if he had heard someone talking to him. Every so often, his eyes would begin to droop, then he would doze off, only to snap back up in his chair and continue to read from his cookbook. He even summoned a bird once and tried to compose a tweet, to get frustrated by the simple commands and immediately dismiss this.

*Good gods, he really is just an old man. We just need to for him to fall asleep, and we'll be golden! He just need to do something incredibly- Her eyes lit up when she saw the chessboard- Bingo! “Um, excuse me sir?”*

The Stoneclad looked up from his grocery list with a grunt. “What is it now?”

“Do you play chess?”

The giant perked up at the mention of the game. “Do I play chess?” he scoffed. He picked up the polished, black knight and smiled at it fondly. “I realize you are new to your position, but I’ll have you know I am the Nation’s greatest chess player. In the span of three thousand years, I’ve only been beat once, by one Thomas McLean. And only because he cheated,” he added.

*How do you cheat at chess? Sounds like a sore loser to me… And props to you Grandpa! The Thunderbird’s feather pulsed in her hair, sensing her plan, and giving its approval. “Well my friend here with the painful cramps,” she jerked her head to Reyna, “is the grandmaster of Olympus. She’s never known defeat—“*

Reyna looked at her and mouthed, “What the fuck are you talking about?!”

“-In fact,” she continued on ignoring the Latina, “There’s been talk of making her the goddess of chess.”

The Stoneclad stood from his armchair and got into Reyna’s face. He narrowed his eyes, which was the black stones snapping in half and folding back on themselves. “Is that true?”

Reyna didn’t so much as flinch, looking the giant straight in its beady eyes. “It’s true. I beat Athena herself in five moves; Zeus in four,” she shrugged. Piper was sure that if Reyna’s arm would have been free, she would have been examining her nails.

The spellcaster stroked his chin, which sounded like nails on a chalkboard. “Hmmm, I haven’t had decent opponent in a while. How’s this: we play best two-out-of-three and if you win, I’ll let you go. If I win, I still eat you and I get bragging rights. Deal?”

Piper nodded slightly to the praetor. “Two-out-of-three?” Reyna repeated. “Deal.” With a snap of his fingers, the stone arm that held Reyna in place melted into the ground, freeing the Latina. Before walking over to the chessboard, Reyna nodded at Piper, understanding the plan.

*Slow game, Reyna. Make it a slow game.*

“Best five-out-of-eight?” The Stoneclad growled in frustration, as Reyna knocked over his king for
the fourth time in ten minutes.

*Reyna you overcompetitive bitch! It didn’t matter if you won or lost! You were supposed to take an absurdly long time thinking about your move so he would fall asleep! If we get out of this, I am making out with Jason in front of you! On your bed!*

Needless to say, Reyna did not understand the plan, or if she did, her competitive nature got in the way. While the Stoneclad could take up to two minutes a move, each turn taking slightly longer than the last, Reyna thought it was a race and just moved her pieces as fast as possible. And apparently the Stoneclad was all talk, as he kept falling for the exact same play every game. The four same moves and Reyna won every time. In fact, the only one asleep was Veronica.

Before Reyna could accept yet another challenge, Piper rolled her eyes and said, “Golly gee guys, you are both such amazing players! But it’s kind of hard to keep up with your lightning fast plays. Do you think you could slow it down? Specifically, you Reyna. Reyna, you need to slow down. Reyna, slow down.” *Gods that has to be obvious... At this rate, I should just have Atlas bust us out and just freaking wing it...*

“Oh!” Reyna exclaimed, eyes wide with understanding. She turned back to the elderly giant and nodded. “Sure, sounds good.”

Five games later and Piper was on the verge of falling asleep. Her eyes had just begun to close, when the Thunderbird’s feather zapped her awake, making her yelp in surprise. “Huh, what?” she cried, looking around the room.

Reyna was still seated across the Stoneclad, hand held against her chin in deep thought. Meanwhile, the Stoneclad was passed out in his chair, mouth open wide with a trail of drool dripping onto his flannel shirt, his talisman dangling from his neck like low hanging fruit.

“Reyna,” she hissed. “Reyna!”

The praetor turned around and looked at her with a puzzled expression.

She rolled her eyes and jerked her head at the talisman. “Grab the talisman,” she mouthed, jerking her head repeatedly.

Reyna furrowed her brow and picked up her black rook. “This?” she mouthed back.

If she would have had use of her arms, she would have face-palmed. *Jesus Christ... “The necklace,” she mouthed, hoping that ‘necklace’ was easier to lip read than ‘talisman’.*

“Oh!” Reyna mouthed. The Latina abruptly stood up from her chair and yanked the magical item from its owner’s neck.

Piper wasn’t sure what the signs were for a heart attack or a stroke, but she was pretty sure she was experiencing them all simultaneously. *Freaking, blunt-ass Romans! She watched in horror as the Stoneclad’s upper body began to tilt forward from the sudden pull as Reyna strolled confidently toward them, holding the talisman triumphantly. It was like watching the world’s slowest avalanche as the rock shifted in the chair, the sheer weight and gravity propelling the giant forward. Just before the ancient crashed onto the chess table, she shouted, “Atlas! Veronica! Now!”*
As the Stoneclad jolted awake, the Titan duo awoke and exploded from their bonds in a flash of golden flame, not needing any explanation like a certain praetor who will remain nameless. Just as the giant fell into the chessboard, crushing it like a marshmallow, the hybrid sliced the stone arm that held Piper, and grabbed her and Reyna. “Hang on!” Veronica cried.

“No! Give me back my talis-“

Before he had a chance to finish, Veronica propelled them out of the room at speeds only possible for a god. They raced out of the study, down the hall, and up the spiral entrance, and back out into the roaring thunderstorm. At such high speeds, the cold rain stung at their skin, but that was a preferable alternative to the extreme heat radiating from the duo’s shared body.

The two carried her and Reyna until they left the geyser field. “Just give me a second,” Veronica panted, steam pillowing from off her body. “Are you sure your plan will-“

A deafening roar, louder than the thunder, shook the forest, as the geyser field erupted into a cloud of dirt and rock. “GIVE ME BACK MY TALISMAN!” The dirt and debris then amalgamated into a gigantic version of the eldest Stoneclad. “GIVE ME BACK MY TALISMAN OR I WILL EAT YOU!” the five story tall giant roared, heading straight towards them, absorbing more earth and rock with each step. “I DON’T CARE WHAT TIME OF THE MONTH IT IS!” He picked up a boulder the size of a car and rocketed towards them.

Veronica’s eyes flared. “On second thought, I’m good!” the daughter of Mercury and Atlas grabbed her and Reyna again, and carried them once more, muttering, ‘must go faster’ repeatedly under her breath.

My sentiments exactly! She thought, as the boulder barely missed them.

“EVERYONE MOVE OUT OF THE WAY!” Piper screamed as they entered the Thunderers’ camp.

The dozen or so demigods and the three storm spirits stood in the center of the camp, staring at the four of them with a mixture of awe and confusion. Which to fair was a natural response, what with a demonic looking girl carrying two more with golden flames trailing behind them, while a giant stone monster that towered over the tree-line chased after them, throwing pine trees like they were lawn darts.

“GIVE ME MY TALISMAN!” the Stoneclad roared.

They passed Sparky, Chad, and Andy, the latter dropping his Monster as his jaw hung open. Atlas and Veronica’s flames accidently ignited Chad’s pants, but if he was in pain he didn’t show it. The Nation demigods reacted fast enough, jumping out of their way and running out of the way of the spellcaster’s destructive path.

With a mighty spin, the hybrid tossed her and Reyna into a tiny rowboat on the rocky shore, then pushed it into the water. “Hold on tight!” Atlas roared, grabbing onto the rear. She and Reyna didn’t need to be told twice, grabbing onto the side of the small dingy just as the hybrid began to kick at inhuman speeds, kicking up a trail of mist, steam, and dead Uktena. They reached the center of Heart’s Lake in seconds, the Titan hybrid rocketing out of the water and landed behind her and Reyna. “Piper, get going!”
Piper nodded and spared a glance at the shore. The Stoneclad had just ran into the lake, creating a
large wave that almost washed away the camp. As the wave receded, she saw Andy toss a full can of
Monster at the Stoneclad, the impact sounding louder than the thunder, but not phasing the stone
giant at all. Okay, that's not good… Let’s hope momma snake still hates me, she gulped. The
Gayegogi took a deep breath, leaned over the boat, and began to sing once more.

Unlike before, the prime Uktena answered her call almost instantly, the same red glow from that
terrible night rising from the depths. The Uktena must have had some negative feelings regarding her
survival, as the red glow grew in intensity far faster.

“I’LL EAT YOUR LIVERS WITH A NICE CHIANTI!” the Stoneclad roared as it waded through
the turbulent waters, oblivious to the second monster rising from the depths. “I WILL COOK YOU
ON A SPIT! YOUR DEATHS WILL BE SLOW AND PAINFUL! I-“

The Uktena exploded from the lake depths, climbing ever higher in to dark sky, sending waves that
threatened to flip over the small wooden boat. Its fiery colored scales bathed the lake in an eerie light,
the yellow rings on its body pulsing in sync with its heart. Despite having seen it before, it was still
terrifying to behold its horned head, massive brown fangs, and soul piercing eyes. It paid no mind to
the Stoneclad, focused solely on Piper and her friends with a burning rage.

“HEY! BACK OFF! THEY’RE MINE!” the giant screamed, pointing one car-sized finger at the
snake.

“ATLAS! NOW!” Piper screamed, pointing at the serpent’s open mouth.

“Yes ma’am!” The titan smirked. They clutched onto the golden talisman in their now-returned
talons and wound their arm back. “I hope you choke on this!” Veronica screamed as they tossed the
necklace high into the air and right into the Uktena’s open maw.

The malicious glare was replaced by confusion and panic as the golden frisbee impacted the back of
its throat. It blinked once, before on reflex, it swallowed the Stoneclad’s source of power, before
returning its glare at the small boat and its occupants. It readied itself to strike-

“GIVE ME BACK TALISMAN!” the Stoneclad shrieked in pure terror and it jumped onto the great
Uktena, trying to pry its mouth open with its massive hands. The two fell into the water, creating a
giant wave that propelled the boat near the shore, thrashing wildly against the other. “SPIT IT OUT!
SPIT IT OUT!” he shrieked as the Uktena wrapped around his body, before the two sunk beneath
the water’s surface.

Despite being drenched to the bone, and a bit motion sick, Piper high-fived Reyna, Atlas, and
Veronica (twice for one body), and laughed at their triumph, pulling the real amulet out from under
her poncho. Thank you, Grandpa Tom!

Piper stood next to the grill with Sparky, enjoying the smell of grilling burgers, brats, and tofu dogs.
It was still raining, but the Thunderers had managed to make it less ‘storm of the century’ and more
‘Saturday evening rain’.

“So000,” the thunderer drawled, “You stole a frisbee and used it in place of the real one.” He began
to flip the cooking meat and bean curd, sending a fresh plume of deliciousness into the air. “What’s
going to happen when he finds out he’s been duped.”
She inhaled the delightful smell and smiled contentedly. “I wouldn’t count on that happening anytime soon, if ever. Poor guy seemed to be losing it anyway.” She glanced toward Reyna and the duo, the two were surrounded by the other Thunderers and the demigods, being bombarded with questions and praise. Atlas and Veronica seemed to enjoy it more than Reyna, and was definitely enjoying being waited on hand and foot by some of the boys of the Nation. She deserves it. “If all goes well, those two will be down there fighting until the end of the world.”

Sparky smirked and swatted her hand when she tried to grab one of the tofu dogs. “That would be nice, but what are you going to do with the real talisman?”

She rubbed her sore hand and glared at the storm spirit. “I was thinking of sending it to the council as a show of goodwill. Show them that I’m on their side and we are here to help.”

“That would be yet another notch in your belt, so to speak,” the red Thunderer smiled. “You’ve not only found a replacement for the thunderbird, but placed it in the council’s control.” He patted her on the back with his huge hand, almost knocking her to the ground. “You’ve made Yellowstone a safer place for everyone.”

She shrugged again. “Just part of the job. But it wasn’t just me,” she nodded to her friends. “We’ll have to get them a Tweeter account as well. They’ve earned it.” Sparky then pulled out a bag of hotdog buns from the cooler and pulled out a single bun, before placing one of the tofu dogs on it. “Here,” he said, handing her the warm, delightful bean curd. “Consider this my way of apologizing for my past behavior. And, I’ll get Chad a new frisbee, what’s a little theft between friends?”

Piper took a huge bite of the grilled treat, savoring how warm it was before swallowing it down. “Man, that’s good! And don’t worry about before, I get it. Jeanne was an amazing woman.”

“Thanks,” Sparky said, nodding solemnly. “It’s just-“

“Emergency DM to all from @MoonHowler,” a tiny hummingbird cried, popping into existence in front of her face. “Would you care to play it now?”

Piper glanced around and saw that everyone, with the exception of Reyna, Atlas, and Veronica had a bird in front of their faces, all in various stages of accepting the message. “Uh, sure?” she said, turning her attention back to the bird.

The little, blue bird nodded and opened its beak. “This is an emergency message from the council,” a smooth male voice drawled through the bird. “We need all able-bodied members of the Nation to report to Keystone immediately. The government has declared eminent domain and are going to attempt to seize the sacred grounds by force if necessary. We cannot allow this to happen.” There was a pause and some muffled voices could be heard arguing. “As of now, the Nation is officially at war. This is Coyote, signing off.” The hummingbird closed its beak and disappeared in a burst of blue sparks.

“Uh, Sparky? Care to explain what that was about? Like who we are at war with?”

The Thunderer gulped. “The United States.”

She dropped her tofu dog onto the ground. “Shit.”

Chapter End Notes
This was a fun chapter to write, and I'll go in more in depth later.

For now though, I've been doing some examining of what is left, and I feel like I need to add two or three more chapters, bringing this to a total of 102 or 103 chapters in total. I wouldn't mention this unless they were necessary. I do think you'll like them, they are more fluffy in nature.
Chapter Summary

Warnings: none

Tonight:
Piper learns even more about the Nation and the world of the divine,
More memory hi-jinx,
And the reunion you've all been waiting for.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

After the emergency tweet, the Thunderers and demigods packed up at lightning quick speeds, while giving Piper a brief explanation of what was happening.

According to the Thunderers, the US and Canadian governments had agreed to install an oil pipeline that would stretch from Alberta down to Illinois and Texas, where the crude oil would be refined. The corporation that was behind it, Jove International, had a terrible track record with pipelines bursting and destroying far more land than needed during construction, irreparably altering the landscape. Thankfully, despite promises of lucrative job opportunities, the public was mostly against the construction for one reason of another. The low public opinion combined with the Nation’s lawyers suing the corporation for whatever reason they could think of, forced the previous administration to intervene and halt the project indefinitely.

However, in an unsurprising turn of events, the administration had ordered the pipeline to be completed, and used eminent domain to seize the remaining land. To ensure that construction proceeded without a hitch, the National Guard was sent out to protect the workers.

“And I get that is bad and all, but why is the Nation making everyone run there as fast as possible?” Reyna asked, as the Latina pulled back on the highway and back into the nearly endless convoy of rusted out pickup trucks, RVs, and jalopies. “I’m as environmentally conscious as the next person, but I think going to war over a pipeline is a bit excessive.”

Piper yawned and put her feet up on Betty White’s dash. No one had slept since leaving Yellowstone and even with fresh coffee the urge to fall asleep was strong. “Reyna, I literally watched you throw a McDonalds cup out the window three hours ago.” Reyna turned and stuck out her tongue. “But, from what Sparky told me, it’s more important than some cornfields getting torn up.”

“How so?” Veronica asked, their blonde head poking up between the seats, a huge grin on their face. Ever since she and Reyna had agreed to help the duo steal the Golden Fleece to save the daughter of Mercury, Piper had never seen them happier. Veronica had sat in the front seat for once and talked with Reyna through the night to keep the praetor awake, something Piper felt was impossible before. And even Atlas could be heard whistling an ancient tune in the back every few hours or so. It seemed to her that Veronica and Atlas had officially become loyal friends for life.

“When the spirits of the Nation made their presence known to the first Gayegogi, a new bond was
formed between the two worlds. And from what I understand, that bond was tethered to a specific location, the Gayegogi’s campsite, turning it into what Chad called a-

“-An axis mundi,” Atlas finished. “Every pantheon has at least one. The Norse have Yggdrasil, the Hindus have Mount Meru and Mount Kailash, and I’ve lost count of how many the Olympians have created over the years. They… anchor the mortal and divine together. To lose even one can greatly diminish, if not destroy a pantheon.”

“Which is why the Nation’s on the warpath,” Reyna nodded. The Latina then peered over to Piper with a frown. “This is their only axis, isn’t it?”

“Technically no,” Piper cringed. “Many of their old one still exist, but the campsite became like their main one.”

“And if they lose it, we lose any chance of the Nation helping us retake New Rome,” Reyna said through clenched teeth. The praetor put her foot down on the gas and merged into the other lane, quickly passing two trucks filled with demigods and one BMW bug filled with deer women. “And I’m not going to let that happen. I’m-” Reyna was cut off by the hybrid punching her in the shoulder, hard enough to make her yelp. “What was that for?!”

The duo’s golden orbs dimmed then brightened, their equivalent to blinking. “Veronica says slug- bug?”

She couldn’t help but feel sick to her stomach as she looked out Betty White’s window and surveyed the land.

“Christ almighty,” Veronica whistled from the backseat.

What should have been a nondescript cornfield in the middle of nowhere South Dakota, was a warzone with sides that were easily distinguishable.

To the south lied the Nation and its protesters, hundreds, if not thousands of bodies standing united in opposition of the pipeline. The mortals had signs, megaphones, piñatas of the president, and countless other tools they were using to express their outrage. In the throngs of people Piper could spy the occasional deer woman, Thunderer, and other members of the Nation, usually accompanied by dozens of glowing hummingbirds that rapidly blinked in and out of existence to relay messages. It almost looked like to her that the Nation was keeping an eye on the mortals, looking for any potential troublemakers that may escalate the situation.

And that’s not a bad idea…

To the north lie the pipeline, an unnatural fusion of steel and earth. Instead of running in a straight line with gradual curves, the massive pipes zig and zagged across the land, seemingly trying to take up as much room as possible without crashing into itself like some twisted version of the game Snake. The massive pipes seemed to be old and rusty, a contradiction for what was touted as a new endeavor. Some of the pipes rested on platforms that appeared to be ready to fall over at the slightest gust of wind, while others seemed to be shoved into the ground, only to remerge a few yards later. And while the great, iron snake twisted and turned across the land, the very earth itself seemed to
grow ill around it, for all vegetation and top soil had been stripped away by giant, diesel belching, orange earthmovers for half a mile in all directions. The strange thing was, the savage architecture reminded Piper of something, but she couldn’t exactly put her finger on it.

Separating the rusting eyesore from the mass of protestors was a veritable wall of armed men. Police officers dressed in black riot gear held their shields and batons defensively, ready to strike at the first protestor that so much as sneezed on them. Military Humvees were parked sporadically along the line, each with a massive grenade launcher mounted on the roof ready to fire canisters of tear gas into the crowd. A mix of military, police, and news helicopters filled the sky, all waiting for the first drop of blood to swoop in, be it for a story or to put down the unrest.

“There’s something happening here,” Reyna whispered, brow furrowing, as she slowly drove Betty White off the road into the field.

“What it is ain’t exactly clear,” Atlas confirmed, their flaming orbs growing brighter as they continued to survey the pipeline to the north. “There’s a man with a gun over there,” Veronica added, pointing to a native emerging from a port-a-potty with a rifle slung over his shoulder.

*Huh, an unintentional music reference. Fitting...* She turned away from the powder keg and faced her friends. “We best be on guard; this place looks ready to explode at any moment.” The others nodded in agreement. “While we have been making steady progress earning the Nation’s trust-“

“Two-hundred followers of Tweeter,” Veronica smiled, in reference to the nonstop notifications they had received after word had gotten out about them removing the eldest Stoneclad and Uktena in one shot.

“-We still are viewed by many as the enemy. Which is why-“

“-We need to do our best here,” Reyna finished. “Most of the Nation will be gathered here, if we help here, then we’ll be seen as a legitimate ally.” The praetor smiled, no doubt thinking about having the Nation aid her in destroying Avalon and taking back New Rome.

Piper reclined in the chair and placed her feet up on the dash once more. *Sometimes I forget that behind that gruff disposition, Reyna is a pretty selfless individual. Not once has she mentioned wanting revenge for what happened to her or Hylla, which would be my entire motivation if I was in her shoes. I-I think I need to corrupt her a little more though, make her a gain just a little bit of selfishness. Something besides watching Chopped....*
their eyes, and a bunch of other childish questions that had the two smiling in delight.

“So, the first thing we should do is head to the council tent and inform them we made it,” Sparky said, as the Thunderer helped his brothers lift a massive cooler from the bed of an old Chevy pickup. “That way we can get an update on what’s happening.”

“Nothing good, bro,” Andy huffed as he jumped down from the truck bed.

Chad folded his arms and surveyed the land, frowning at the fallen stalks of corn. “Mom would be heartbroken if she could see this, bruh.”

Before Veronica and Reyna had a chance to ask what the thunder-frat was talking about, piper whispered, “Their mother is Selu, goddess of corn. Remember?”

“I don’t think anyone could look at this and not be heartbroken,” Veronica sighed, eyes dimming. “This land, even with the destruction, it’s so vibrant and abundant with life. ‘Even with mortal eyes, it would be easy to see why your gods made this place your axis,” Atlas added.

“Wasn’t really a choice,” Sparky said, as he swung a huge backpack over his broad, earthen shoulders, “more like a happy accident.”

“I don’t think so,” Piper smiled, remembering the visions Kokyangwuti and White Buffalo Calf woman showed her of the first Gayegogi. The first liar always camped in remote locations, despite journeying from reservation to reservation to collect and tell tales. It appeared to her that he had been welcome wherever he went and was a genuine people person, yet he always isolated himself from others in the evening. She couldn’t prove it, but she had a feeling that he had been awaiting the gods’ return and wanted their reappearance to be in a land untouched by man. “I think the guy knew more than he let on.”

The Thunderers bobbed their head and shrugged their shoulders, not dismissing the idea.

She couldn’t help but smile for some reason. She picked up her bag nodded to Reyna and the duo for them to follow the giant, bare-chested storm spirits. “So, where is the council’s-“

“DM for @RealGayegogi from @MoonHowler,” a gray hummingbird squawked, popping into existence an inch away from her face. Unlike the other small birds she had received messages from, this bird almost looked scary, with grey eyes, pale feathers, and somehow a scowl on its beak.

“You care to play it now?”

“You know what, your IT department really needs to come up with a messaging system that doesn’t require me to change my pants,” the daughter of Aphrodite growled at the Thunderers and gathered demigods, many of them snickering at her panic-stricken face. “Yes, play your damn message.”

The creepy bird opened its beak and a man’s voice barked out, “Word on the Tweeter-verse is you’ve come to help us in our hour of need, Gayegogi.” Saliva actually flew out of the bird’s mouth at the mention of her title, and she wondered if Coyote had done the same when he recorded the message. “I’ve also heard tell that you solved out little snake problem and took care of our most proficient killer in the same day,” the bird nodded approvingly. “Kokyangwuti, Awinita, and Bambi have also been, as the kids say, ‘blowing up’ my inbox telling me you and your friends are to be seen as allies.”

“No,” Reyna rolled her eyes. “We’re helping out because we hate you…”

The little bird turned and glared at Reyna (which sent off dozens of red flags to Piper), before continuing. “My son, Levi, also recently told me you helped him escape a few rough characters.”
Coyote sighed. “So, I want to meet, all face-to-face like. Talk about making nice. Scratching each other behind the ears, as it were. Coyote, out.”

The bird flew closer to her face, and she could feel the small breeze its rapid wingbeats made. “I’m going to guess he’s waiting at the council’s tent.”

“Nah,” the little bird spat. “I’m right HERE!”

Before she could process what the bird even said, the hummingbird morphed into a huge gray coyote and pinned her to the ground. The canine was just as big, if not bigger than Artemis’ hounds. Its paws were as big around as dinner plates; engulfing her shoulders and a good amount of her arms. The long, thin beak was replaced by a massive, snarling, fanged filled maw that was dangerously close to her exposed throat. If Piper had one thing going for her, it was that its red eyes weren’t filled with hatred, rather a twisted sense of humor.

“Piper!” Reyna and Atlas shouted. She couldn’t see them through the sea of fur and fang, but she didn’t doubt for a moment that they were about to attack Coyote.

“Down boy! Down!” she yelped, closing her eyes, and resisting the urge to vomit from the trickster’s horrendously foul breath. *Damn it Grandpa! You said his bark was worse than his bite! Curse your Dad jokes! And as suddenly as it started, the snarling stopped and the massive weight that held her down disappeared.

“Come on girl, let’s get moving,” she heard Coyote snicker. She cautiously opened one eye, and instead of being greeted by a mess of fur and fang, A tall, thin, older man was crouched next to her, offering his hand. He was dressed in a gray suit, with a matching ten-gallon hat like he was some kind of Texas oil-barren. Polished, black cowboy boots, complete with silver spurs that glinted in the afternoon sun, adorned his legs. He would have easily passed as a normal, if eccentric, man if not for his red, lupine eyes. “Well?”

She quickly glanced around and saw that Atlas, Veronica, and Reyna had indeed readied themselves for a fight; Reyna brandishing her obsidian tomahawk and the hybrid’s arms engulfed in golden flame.

*And they’re not the only one ready…. *

The Thunderers and demigods were all ready for a fight, but looked weary. Sparky’s huge hands were balled into fists, electricity arcing between each knuckle. Andy had pulled out a spear from seemingly nowhere, its black tip pointing at Reyna’s gut. Chad had two cans of *Monster* in hand, ready to toss them at Atlas and Veronica, but the look in his glowing blue eyes said that he didn’t want to; whether it was out of respect for them or the love of the energy drink was impossible to tell. The demigods had all either pulled out their weapons of obsidian or starlight, or had shapeshifted into an animal form that reflected their parentage.

*Coyotes, bears, wolves, and… is that a freaking jackelope?! I thought those were a scam for tourists?! What the hades is that thing even gonna do? Ugh… I need to brush up on my stories… But first… *

Not wanting to be the spark that would set off the powder keg, she took the trickster’s hand.

“Good,” Coyote whistled, pulling her up to her feet. “Let’s head to my tent and talk.”
As Coyote held open the tent flap for them, Piper was greeted by an assortment of familiar faces. The deer woman matriarch, Bambi, and her grandmother, Awinita, sat at a long, white card table in the center of the tent, hastily recording information be relayed to them via Tweeter birds. At the tent’s rear entrance, the first humans, Napi and Kipitakki were busy talking to rabbits; while Tacky busied herself translated the critter’s gestures, Napi would sneak them sugar cubes before they scurried out the back flap. The great weaver, Kokyanwuti and the creator of the pipe, Ptesanwi, sat next to a radio playing hits from when her grandpa was a boy. The old woman was knitting bulletproof vests seemingly out of thin air, while the wacan formed rectangular plates for the vests from the earth.

Okay, I didn’t see the Olympians giving out flap jackets during the war with Gaea, just vague clues and side-quests… Fuck! I would have killed for a sugar cube after Athens!

“Hey Coyote is back!” Napi cried. The ancient man looked as if he was about to say something else, but his eyes widened when he noticed Piper and her friends. “Tacky,” the old man half-whispered, repeatedly elbowing his wife. “Look!”

With lightning quick speed, the woman slapped the back of the old man’s head. “Touch me again with that greasy elbow of yours and-“ and her ancient eyes widened “-It is her! Thank the maker!”

Before she had a chance to say anything, let alone blink, the first man and wife dropped what they were doing and rushed over and wrapped her in their embrace. “We are so sorry!” they cried, as Piper’s face was smothered against Tacky’s chest, while Napi stroked her hair like a loving grandfather. “We didn’t know you were Tom’s granddaughter!” they wailed, as Piper’s vision began to dim.

“Oi!” Spider grandmother shouted from her chair, not even bothering to look up from her work. “You’re going to smother our Gayegogi if you two don’t stop!” She tilted her head slightly and used her mouth to pull herself out another cigarette out from her shirt pocket.

“Councilwoman,” she heard Coyote growl, “May I remind you that this is a non-smoking tent?”

“I’ll stop smoking in here when the councilman gets a flea bath,” Kokyangwuti scoffed. “Seriously you two, the girl needs air.”

“Eh? Oh! Sorry!” Tacky laughed, finally releasing her from her embrace.

Piper stumbled backwards, spots dancing in front of her eyes, but was caught by Reyna and Atlas before she collapsed. So that’s what those poor rabbits felt like when Lenny got a hold of them. She blinked a few times while Veronica patted her back. And hey feather! I thought you were supposed to protect me?! I almost died from old lady cleavage! The feather pulsed indifferently. Dick…

“I would like to thank council members Napi and Kipitakki for bringing up the first topic of discussion,” Coyote smiled slyly, sitting down on a folding chair and cocking his large hat forward to hide his eyes, “That this girl here, is Thomas’s granddaughter.”

“No shit fleabag,” Awinita huffed, the younger deer woman beside her looking up in shock at her grandmother’s use of profanity. “You, Napi, and Tacky were the only ones who either didn’t know or refused to believe.”

“And in our defense,” Napi interjected, “me and the old lady are not gods or spirits, so the memory gets a little fuzzy.”
“Noted,” Coyote growled. “But that still doesn’t change the fact that Piper McLean and her little friends are children of Olympus, and therefore should be treated enemies.”

“Woah! Woah! Woah!” she cried. “Time out here! Enemies?! Still?!”

“Did we not just save the world from the Uktena and take out the monster responsible for eating hundreds of people in Yellowstone?” Reyna growled, her hand clenched in a fist.

“Or how about us helping the deer women escape from Artemis?” Atlas rumbled, flames dancing on the tips of their talons.

“They bring up very valid points,” White Buffalo Calf woman chuckled, tucking a stone plate into one of Kokyangwuti’s jackets. “From what I’ve seen, the Gayegogi and her friends have been nothing but helpful.”

“I say we put it to a vote,” Tacky suggested, earning a murmur of agreement from most of the tent. “All those in favor of trusting the Thunderbird’s judgement and therefore Ms. McLean, raise your hand.” Tacky, Napi, Ptesanwi, Kokyangwuti, and Awinita raised their hands. “Piper, you can vote too, you know.” Piper quickly shot her hand up. “Opposed?”

Everyone’s eyes turned to the man in gray, waiting to see him cast the single nay, but instead the lupine stroked his mustache and smiled. “I’ll abstain from this vote.”

Okay, did not see that one coming…

“But!” he continued, staring directly into the daughter of Aphrodite’s kaleidoscope eyes. “I would like to remind everyone present that the council is composed of eighteen members, so this vote means nothing.” He quickly scratched behind his left ear, only to smile bashfully as he realized what he was doing. “And contrary to popular opinion, I am not the bad guy here!”

Andy cleared his throat from behind her and whispered into her ear, “I don’t know about you, but wanting a teenager dead is not typically not something a good guy would want.”

“What was that, boy?” Coyote growled.

“N-nothing, S-sir!”

Coyote raised one hand and gestured at her to approach him. “Come here kid, let me get another look at you.”

Piper looked around the room and everyone, with the exception of Reyna and the duo, nodded that it was okay. This feels like such a set up. She swallowed the lump in her throat and walked towards the trickster a little faster than she expected herself to. When she got within arm’s length of the councilman, he placed one hand on either side of her face and pulled down so her face was only inches from his own.

His nose switched and his red eyes narrowed. “Do you remember me?”

Piper blinked at the question. Not the question I was expecting… She gulped and nodded, “A little bit. I saw you at Grandpa’s funeral, you tried to comfort me.”

Coyote released her and stroked his mustache. “Yeah, but do you remember anything else?”

She shook her head, she supposed it was possible they had met before. Coyote could have been one of Grandpa Tom’s many acquaintances he introduced her to, but she had been young, the names and
faces became obscured with age. “No.”

It may have been the lightning, but it she thought she saw pain flicker across his face. “That’s another point in your favor, little girl. Let’s see if you really are who you say you are.”

He tapped the center of her forehead with one long, tanned finger and a rush of images filled her head. At first, she thought she was falling victim to having her memories altered and tried to fight it, only to realize that her memory was being restored.

She remembered being in her room, no more than five years old, laying on the floor coloring, with what she had thought was a gray dog stretched out beside her. Her younger self reached for the black crayon, only to come back empty handed. She looked up to see that Coyote had the crayon in his mouth, and dropped it in front of her. She patted the canine on the head in the rough way only a five-year-old is capable of, but Coyote paid no mind, laying back down.

Next, she was running on the bank of the creek that ran a bit behind her house, with Coyote closely following her. Her father and grandpa had warned her to stay away from the runoff, as the water was a bit deeper there. But that day there had been a particularly large bullfrog sitting on a rock that she wanted to catch and show her dad. She carefully crept up on it, as the larger frogs were quicker to flee from humans, and slowly padded on the pile of bricks and cement that people had dumped there for years. Just as she went to lunge at the large amphibian, one of the bricks slid from beneath her feet. She let out a panicked yelp, but instead of falling into the water, she was pulled back up and plopped on her butt. She turned around and of course, there was Coyote; he jerked his head, urging her to go home. “Don’t tell Grampa or Dad, ‘kay?”

Then she was sitting on her Grandpa’s lap, on the large front porch’s swing, the large gray hound at their feet. Grandpa Tom was just finishing up her favorite story, the flood. Her small hands were wrapped around a glass of iced tea, which had started out as Grandpa Tom’s but the young Piper was quick to confiscate. The prior Gayegogi had just closed his journal of stories and rubbed her head, before picking her up and setting her on the ground and walking into the house to answer the phone. When the screen door slammed shut, and the old man was out of sight, she bent down and offered the cup to the trickster. “Don’t tell Grampa, ‘kay?” she whispered, as Coyote lapped up the tea.

Finally, it was the week after the senior McLean’s funeral. She was sitting in the man’s couch, clutching a pillow against her chest while tears streamed down her face. Her dad was in the next room, packing up the few items they would take with them on a move that she was against. At the time, it had felt like they were abandoning Grandpa, moving far away and leaving everything that she held dear. She sobbed into the pillow, only to feel something warm move up her cheek. She looked up to see the red-eyed canine sitting next to her, a pained looked in his eyes. He licked the last of her tears, earning a small laugh. “I can’t go with you,” the trickster said, “and I must return to my greater self.” Her constant childhood companion nuzzled her and then the world went black.

“W-what?” She gasped when the memories ended and she was back in the present. Sitting in front of her was Coyote in his animal form, not the giant snarling beast, but the dog-sized version she had known as a child.

“I’ll be damned,” the animal smirked, “It really is you…."

It would be impossible to describe all the emotions that were coursing through Piper at that moment. The closest approximate would be learning that your childhood pet was not dead, and had journeyed across the globe to find you once more. She cried out with pure glee and hugged her long-forgotten friend, earning a chorus of ‘ah’s.
“Easier there, girl,” Coyote chuckled, “we both have reputations to keep.”

“Would someone please tell me what’s happening?” Reyna cried.

“I have questions too,” the trickster said, while nuzzling his head against her neck. “Namely, how come I didn’t know she was a child of the enemy when she was a girl? Her scent has changed completely since then!”

Kokyangwuti cleared her throat. “I believe Ptesanwi, Awinita, and myself can explain…”

Spider Grandmother explained all the meddling she and Grandpa Tom had done to bring the daughter of Aphrodite into existence, plus the various blessings and wards that Ptesanwi and Awinita had placed in her hometown to disguise her as a normal mortal girl. Everyone took it rather well, though Coyote did threaten to tear out Kokyangwuti’s throat at a later date for messing with his humans.

Now they were all sitting around the central table, with Piper at the head with Reyna and the hybrid flanking her, while she ran her fingers through Coyote’s fur; the god refusing to take his human form. “So, would someone explain why we are at war with the United States? That seems to be a bit of an exaggeration,” Piper said, noticing the way Coyote’s leg bounced off the floor when she scratched the spot behind his left ear.

Napi, who was cradling a rabbit in his arms, cleared his throat. “Well, all legal options have been thrown out the window thanks to the president, and even if we were to appeal it would be far too late. Our only option at this point is sabotage—”

“Which would immediately put us in conflict with the National Guard,” Tacky finished for her husband.

“The bastards got us over a barrel because we refuse to harm civilians,” Kokyangwuti coughed. The weaver pulled her knitting needles from her long hair and began to knit a black stalking cap. “If it was just the monsters, we’d send a strike team and remove them.”

“Or start a stampede,” White Buffalo Calf Woman suggested. She took a drag from her pipe, and then exhaled, the white smoke forming a dozen tiny, buffalo that ran across the table, knocking over Reyna’s coffee.

“That has never worked,” Bambi sighed, rubbing her forehead. “And you’d think after suggesting it at every meeting, you’d learn by now.”

Awinita placed a hand on her granddaughter’s shoulder. “Honey, she’s been making that same suggestion for as long as I can remember. She ain’t gonna learn.”

“Hold up a second,” Piper said, holding up one hand. “What do you mean ‘monsters’?” The council went silent as numerous glances were thrown around. “Guys?”

Coyote looked up growled at the assembly. “Let’s adjourn for now.” He stood up on all fours and stretched out. “It would be easier if you three saw this for yourselves.”
Under the cover of a moonless night they followed Coyote to the outskirts of the worker’s campsite. Unlike the Nation and protestor’s city of tents, Jove International had pulled in a small village of double wide trailers for its workers, surrounded by tall barbwire fence. All the trailers, save one, were beat up and appeared to be bulging outwards as if they were ready to pop at any moment. The trailers were arranged in a circular fancy that obstructed the view of any potential snoopers. That is, unless one knew where the gaps were…

“Keep low and quiet,” Coyote growled, as they crawled the slowly forward. “One of our scouts found this gap last week.”

“What are we looking for?” Reyna whispered, un-phased by the arduous crawl. “All I see is a campfire.”

Piper was about to ask the same thing, when she heard a door slam shut followed by voices.

“Ma, how come we got to clean up the place?” a male voice whined.

“Slump’s right, Ma!” Another cried, followed by the sound of something heavy impacting the ground. “Not like some bigshot is go’n ta care ‘bout how the place looks.”

There was a loud WHACK followed by the two voices groaning. “You boys shut your mouths!” an all-too-familiar female voice shouted. “You boys should be thankful that your uncle Arges agreed to take us in after we got back up here!”

“Sorry Ma,” the two male voices apologized.

“So, if your uncle wants the place to look spotless for some bozo from Olympus, ya’l’ll ask how high!”

“That don’t make no sense, Ma,” Slump’s voice said in confusion.

Another Whack rang out and Piper cringed at the volume. “You know what I mean!”

“Yes, Ma….”

“Good. Now toss another log on the fire and throw another mortal on the spit.”

“Yes, Ma,” the other voice said. A large shadow blocked out the campfire. “Hey Ma?”

“What is it now?”

“Did Uncle Arges say who was supposed to come?”

The shadow moved and a large log was tossed onto the fire, illuminated the ghastly visage of the cyclops matriarch, Ma Gasket. “Dunno,” she shrugged. “Some Titan I think.”

Chapter End Notes

At long last, Piper has been reunited with Ma Gasket! hahaha *dodges rotten fruit*
okay, first off, do to unexpected circumstances I had to split this chapter in two. I think that was a pretty nice stopping point right there anyway, so that worked out.

And before you ask, yes, Coyote wiped Tristan's mind as well. It would be really weird for a parent to remember a loyal dog and not you. Coyote is fiercely loyal to the Gayegogi as we've seen in flashbacks, so of course he would follow any of Grandpa Tom's orders, including watching over his granddaughter. He couldn't follow Piper out to California though as that was outside of the Nation's small domain and the concentration of Mist would have made it hard to properly protect them.

Please don't get offended over the pipeline. Yes, it is a reference to current(ish) events, but I have greatly exaggerated how destructive and hideous the thing is for narrative purposes. We'll learn more about it next chapter, as well a little more about our cyclops friends.

Yup, that's right: three Piper chapters in a row. I hope these aren't painful for you, and I hope you find them at least a little interesting because of the large cast of characters. Also hoping no one is too offended by their characterization, I've been trying to avoid ethnic stereotypes. I'm okay with using generic stereotypes like old people being forgetful, I mean, I think everyone does that. Just let me know for future reference :)

We are fast approaching the end of this fic and I guarantee the final chapter will make many of you so very excited. On a slightly related note, here is some more details about my next fic: It involves a prophecy, but one that has already been told.
Chapter Summary

Warnings: blood, gore, death (some of you may want to skip the last section)

Tonight:

Piper and gang infiltrate the Cyclops Camp and all hell breaks loose

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“How are those suits coming, Kokyangwuti?” she cried out as she inspected the assortment of sunglasses Andy, Chad, and Sparky had gathered from the protestors and demigods. She was quick to discard a pair of Dora The Explorer shades, but hesitantly set aside a pair of Ray-Ban’s that, frankly, she just thought looked cool. Aviators! We need Aviators!

Spider Grandmother looked up from measuring Reyna’s crotch and removed the dozen or so needles from her mouth. “They’ll make Armani look like rags,” the weaver said, eyeing her own work with an approving eye. “Your friend here’s a bit lanky, but she’ll look even more fierce in this bad boy.” The elderly woman then morphed into a spider, her measuring tape that had hung around her neck falling to the floor, and scurried about on Reyna’s leg, weaving a fine black silk as she went.

“I’m- I’m not lanky,” Reyna stuttered, watching the spider weave a pant leg in a matter of seconds.

Piper beamed when Chad walked in carrying two pairs of Aviators and a smirk of his own. She took the pairs of sunglasses from the Thunderer and gave him a high-five before walking over to Reyna. “Of course not, Reyna,” she said as she placed the reflective lenses on the one-armed praetor. “You’re beautiful babe.” She then leaned in and pecked Reyna on the cheek, making the older girl stutter in confusion.

Piper placed the other glasses on her own head and jogged out of the tent into the early morning sun. She took a deep breath, only to immediately choke on the unpleasant scent of diesel fumes, sun baked port-a-potties, and weed. “Freaking hippies,” she hacked. “Ugh,” she coughed one more time. Straightening herself up, the daughter of Aphrodite jogged over to center of the Nation’s camp, where a group of demigods, Sparky, and Ptesanwi were busy painting Betty White. “How’s the old girl doing?”

Ptesanwi set down her pallet, placed her brush in a mason jar filled with dirty water, and stood up from her white buffalo hide. “Well your vehicle is no longer bronze,” the wacan said, gesturing to Betty White’s shiny, new black coat of paint. “But I still have to paint the seal on the passenger’s side yet.” The young (in appearance) woman bowed her head. “I apologize, Gayegogi.”

Piper suppressed the urge to roll her eyes, instead patting the wacan on the shoulder. “No need to apologize, I’d rather have this done right with a slight delay, than risk using a rush job. Hades, it’s amazing enough that this is even possible in the given timeframe.” White Buffalo Calf Woman beamed and flopped back down on her furs, picking up her brush one more to continue work on the impressive eagle.
“Nice shades, McLean!” Sparky snickered from the other side of Betty White. The Thunderer had kicked up two small dust-devils next to the previously bronze SUV, using the wind they generated to dry the fresh paint. It required a good percentage of the earth covered storm spirit’s concentration to control the winds so that they would not make the paint run, or embed dirt into the still tacky paint. “You look like a state troop with those things on!”

“That’s the idea, Sparky!” she called out. _Seriously, everyone looks cooler and more intimidating in a pair of Aviators!_ She let her mind entertain the idea of Jason wearing a pair of the awesome shades while on the beach in nothing but a pair of board-shorts. _Ooowoow, that’s nice._ She expanded her fantasy a little further and had the son of Jupiter playing beach volleyball with Leo and Annabeth; the blond leaping into the air to spike the ball to the ground in delicious slow motion, his tone body- _Okay, better stop that now,_ she thought, fanning herself as her body was suddenly very hot. _Let’s get back to work._

Collecting herself, Piper crossed the open area and popped inside another tent to check on yet another critical component of her plan. “How’s our fierce titan coming along?”

Veronica, who was laying on the top of a towel covered table, with nothing but a towel over her derriere, looked up with a dreamy look on her face. “I haven’t felt this good since I was back on the farm,” she practically moaned with pleasure. “This old man, this Napi,” the titan general purred, “does things with his hands that are indescribable.”

Napi, who had his backed turned to them as he reapplied oil to his wrinkled hands cackled at the compliments. “You two sure know how to make an old man blush!” The first man then grabbed the hybrid’s left foot and placed his thumbs on their arch. “This one may hurt for a second,” he apologized. Before Piper or the duo could ask what he meant, the old man pushed his thumbs down hard, making Veronica shriek. The pain must have subsided almost instantly, as her shocked expression was one again replaced by a dreamy, content look, before her face fell forward into her arms; a throaty moan following shortly after. And as the man continued to massage her foot, the pieces of ash that fell from the hybrid like a constant rain began to slow, then stop completely. Soon, the damaged flesh began to mend itself in Napi’s hands; the patches of burnt skin turning to the girl’s naturally sun kissed coloring, her sharp talons returning to soft, round does, and the muscle underneath reknitting itself back together.

“Creating flesh is a challenge,” the old man said as he worked on Veronica’s big toe, “but repairing flesh? That’s easy.”

There was a rustle behind Piper and a moment later Tacky walked in, carrying a burger and fries on a small platter. “What’s this I hear about you blushing?” the old woman asked, eying her husband critically. The plump, grandmotherly woman then sat the platter in front of the duo and patted their blonde head “Enjoy.”

“I was just saying these two know what to say to an old- Ah! Ah! Ah!” Napi cried out as Tacky twisted his ear. “I-I-I mean you heard nothing of the sort!” The old woman released him and he returned to his work, while rubbing his ear against his vest. “Shoulda stuck with men,” he muttered. “But I just had to change things up! Nothing good came out of that…”

“I am the greatest good you have ever known!” Tacky snapped at the old mumbling man. The first woman then turned to her with a genuine smile. “Your friends will be up and about shortly. We may not be able to restore limbs, but we can fix the damage your titan is doing to the Veronica. And the food I’ve prepared for her should help slow down the degradation for some time; just as long as they don’t overdo it.”
Veronica over to her and Tacky, burger in hand. “This-this isn’t made of people is it? Because, I’m drawing the line at direct canabalism.”

Tacky and Napi laughed. “No child, that is one-hundred-percent, grade-A beef.”

The duo bobbed their head side-to-side, considering the ancient proto-demigod’s word, before shrugging and taking an almost comically large bite. “Roh! Ris is roo rood!” Atlas moaned, a mix of grease, ketchup, and tomato juice dribbling down their chin. They swallowed and wiped their face on the towel covered table. “Could you please bring us more?!” They took another bite, the burger’s size now half of what it was. “Why did I waste my time helping Kronos? I should have traveled the world, eating delicious mortal food!”

“Remind me to introduce you to Korean barbeque tofu tacos then, big guy,” she laughed, remembering the awesome food she ate the night before her life went from crazy to insane. “And great work guys,” she beamed at the elderly couple. “I can’t thank you enough for helping with this plan and helping my friends there.”

Tacky smiled warmly at her and then pulled Piper in for another spine-cracking bear hug. “Your thanks are not required, young one,” the old woman whispered in her ear. “We should be apologizing to you and your friends for sending you out into that storm. We judged you on what we thought you were, not what you are.”

“It’s all good. If you had warned us, then I would have never gotten this feather, never became the Gayegogi, and never learned just how awesome my Grandpa Tom really was.” Piper hugged the old woman even harder. “So, thank you. Thank you both for helping me find a piece of myself I never knew existed.”

“I hate to interrupt this tender moment, Piper;” Napi said, now working on Atlas and Veronica’s lower back. “But, what color did you want their eyes to be?”


“Just got to finish up the paperwork side of things for the plates,” Bambi said over the sound of metal being hammered and shaped, while the deer woman continued to type rapidly on a laptop with a giant Hello Kitty sticker on the lid.

It took Piper a half a second to process what the younger girl said, as she couldn’t tear her eyes away from the strange, and often horrifying, creatures that shared the tent with them. “Cool. That’s, uh, cool.” She then leaned forward and whispered into the deer woman’s ear, “Aren’t you uncomfortable right now?!” Because I sure the fuck am!

Standing behind the two girls were six of Coyote’s personal entourage, the yee naaldlooshi, or skin-walkers. Although the Navajo witches started off life as humans, demigod or not, that was not their preferred form, twisting their bodies into more animalistic forms. And while the Nation was home to plenty of shapeshifters, these six were the cream of the crop, for they had collected the pelts of the most fearsome creatures. They all stood upright like a man, but were covered from head to toe in ashy, gray fur. Their limbs were long and thin; their elbows and knees threatening to tear through their own flesh with every movement. Their head was a strange mix of coyote, bear, and deer; large
antlers decorating their skulls, with dull eyes that were pushed back deep within the sockets, and a muzzle filled with sharp teeth surrounding by torn, bleeding lips.

These skin-walkers had not only faced the much-dreaded wendigo, but took their hides to become them, creating the most deadly and adaptive fighters the Nation had in its disposal.

“What do you mean?” Bambi looked up quizzically. She stopped typing and chewed on her lip. “I mean, it is a little warm in here, I guess?”

“No. I mean-“ Piper subletly motioned her head to the six, who were busy re-forging Betty White’s license plate with their bare bear claws. Frank would miss his pants if he saw those guys. Leo would probably be envious though…

The deer woman matriarch looked at the skin-walkers and gave them a dismissive wave. “Nah, the skin-walkers are cool. Ever since the last Gayegogi and Coyote got them healthcare and 401Ks they’ve dropped all the cannibalism and work with the Nation now. Plus, they took care of the wendigo problem a few years back, so they cool.” To emphasize the point, the doe jumped out of her seat and fist bumped one of the nearby Navajo witches.

Yet another thing I didn’t know about Grandpa Tom. “Wait, hold up! Healthcare and 401Ks? For what?”

One of the skin-walkers turned to her, blood dripping from its tattered lips. It raised its paws to its head and pushed back, and before her very eyes the ghastly visage shifted into a rather handsome young native wearing what appeared to be a fur coat. “For being part of the Nation?” he answered, his voice rich and deep. “Do you not have benefits in your world?”

“My mom made me take out my-,” she stopped to think just how Gaea was related to her, “-great grandmother with six others and some vague hints. The only benefits we got are two places where the monsters can’t get you,” Piper sighed. “That is, as long as you don’t leave your cabin past curfew.”

The skin-walkers and Bambi all shook their heads in pity. That’s a new low, getting pitied by former cannibals… Then the uncloaked skin-walker began to laugh. “No wonder you Greeks and Romans are so angry! You get shit jobs and don’t even get a retirement package!” The other skin-walkers threw their strange heads back and began to howl with what Piper guessed was laughter; a strange gasping noise that sounded what she imagined was a goose choking.

It wasn’t that funny…

Piper tugged on her black tie once more, tightening it to the point that it was just starting to get uncomfortabile. But that was the point, she and Reyna needed to look pristine if her plan was going to work.

“Okay, I think this will work,” she mumbled to herself, appraising herself in the camp’s only mirror. Midnight black suit, blinding white undershirt, perfectly straight black tie, black leather gloves, and black shoes shined so bright, the reflection could blind anyone unlucky enough to get caught in the glare. “And the piece de resistance,” she chuckled, placing the Aviators on. “Yeah, that will work,” she whistled, nodding at her reflection in approval.
It felt like she was looking at another version of herself from an alternate universe. This new other Piper was a no-nonsense badass who only smiled when the light faded from her foe’s eyes, didn’t know the meaning of the word fear, and ate bullets and the tears of her enemies instead of cereal for breakfast. Her smile, that she usually received compliments on from Jason, looked eerie on this put-together version of herself, like she was about to strangle someone with her bare hands. But that was the impression she and Reyna needed to have if they were going to get past the mortal guards and into the cyclops camp without any trouble.

Once we get in there, we should be able to trick them into abandoning the project. They’re pretty stupid. After all, those three idiots tried to open an automotive company in the middle of a recession! And if we can’t… well good old fashion monster killing is the next step.

She checked herself one more time, making sure the Thunderbird’s feather was hidden beneath her hair, before walking out of the tent into the late afternoon sun.

Outside, everyone was waiting for her: Reyna, Atlas and Veronica, Napi, Tacky, Bambi, Awinita, Kokyangwuti, Ptesanwi, Sparky, Andy, Chad, Coyote, and a host of animals, spirits, and demigods, all stood there looking at her. Seeing so many gathered there for her, made her realize that the Nation really was just that: a nation. They were a diverse group that had come from drastically different backgrounds to make something greater than they had been apart. Despite years of being on the edge of oblivion, they had all continued to press on to forge a better future where their, no, her people could prosper. And at that moment, that future rested squarely on her shoulders.

“Um, wow, okay,” Piper said, for once at a loss for words.

Reyna walked up to her, wearing the exact same intimidating clothing, and playfully punched the daughter of Aphrodite’s shoulder. “Come on princess, we got to go over the plan one more time.”

Piper smiled at the sharply dressed praetor, who looked even more intimidating than usual. “Right,” she nodded. “First off, let me thank all of you for your assistance on this plan. This would not be possible without all your hard work.”

“Damn right,” Kokyangwuti grunted, but the smile on the ancient weaver’s face gave away her true feelings.

“So, before the four of us leave, I want to go over the plan once more…”

“I’m sorry ma’am, but if your name is not on the list I can’t allow you inside,” the guardsman frowned, handing back the forged identification papers.

Piper drummed her fingers on Betty White’s steering wheel and stared at the young man with a passive, but agitated expression, the light from the SUV’s dash bathing her in an eerie glow. “I don’t think you understand, son,” she said with an even, emotionless tone as she took back the paperwork. “This VIP goes wherever she wants.”

“Miss Trump was sent here under direct orders from her father to inspect the progress of the pipeline,” Reyna said from the passenger’s seat, her voice completely calm. The praetor leaned forward slightly and lowered her dark glasses, “Do we need to call the president for something this trivial?”
Piper mechanically shook her head and tsked. “Calling the president on a Friday night? During primetime? Do you know how upset he gets when someone interrupts *Once Upon A Time*?”

Reyna followed suit and shook her head as well. “The man loves his RumBelle. The last man who interrupted that was reassigned to Fullajah. *Permanently.*”

Her plan was playing out almost exactly as expected. The four of them had left the Nation’s campsite in the late afternoon and drove about an hour out before they stopped and swapped Betty’s license plates, placed two small American flags on her hood, and removed the small tarps that covered the presidential seals that Ptesanwi had painted on the doors. They then drove back to the construction site when it started to get dark, but still light enough out for them to be spotted with ease. As expected, the protesters did not appreciate the sight of a presidential motorcade approaching the construction site, and began to hurl food, paint, and even some human waste at them, covering Betty White in a fine layer of filth that hid the finer details that would give them away as phonies.

When they pulled up to the camp’s only official entrance, three National Guardsman and a dog scrambled out of the small guard-shack; the first approaching the driver’s window, while the other two and the dog began to do a sweep round the SUV. The smell of human feces kept the dog and its handler a bit further away from Betty White than normal, stopping the German Sheppard from detecting Veronica and Atlas. The other guardsman punched their license plate number into a tablet, and thanks to the combined efforts of Bambi, Coyote, and the skin-walkers, the plates checked out, showing Betty White as an official vehicle registered to the Secret Service.

The third guard, the one who approached Piper, appeared to be young and inexperienced, twitching every so often in a mix of anxiety and fear. He had been caught completely off-guard when the window rolled down to reveal two women clad entirely in black, their eyes hidden behind dark, reflective lenses. Before the grunt could even ask, Piper had shoved the forged paperwork into his hands with a slight growl, stopping him from examining them too much. As even though their attire and the dim light made it difficult to determine their age, it wouldn’t be too hard to figure out they were teenagers upon closer inspection.

“M-Miss Trump?” the guard stuttered, his brown eyes widening in panic. He pulled a flashlight from his belt and shined it against the rear windows, piercing through the dark tinting just enough for him to see an attractive blonde girl sitting in the back, wearing an expensive looking dress. The guy flinched when the duo gave him a small wave. “I-, um-“

“Just get on the damn radio, rookie,” Reyna snarled, channeling her inner drill sergeant. Reyna was really the MVP of the plan, as having served as the leader of the Roman Legions gave her a genuine ex-military aura that Piper could only imitate so well. Plus, the rolled-up sleeve for her missing arm would give anyone the impression she had seen some action.

With the idea firmly planted in his head and the genuine unease the poor guy felt, Piper called forth her charm speak to finish the job. “Radio it in.”

The young man nodded, sprinted into the guard-shack, and grabbed the radio sitting on the room’s sole bench. She couldn’t make out what the nervous recruit was saying, but she could hear the distinct growl of Coyote’s voice coming from the receiver. Coyote must have really enjoyed pretending to be someone of importance, as the trickster spirit ranted and raved far longer than necessary; the guardsman paling with each word.

After several minutes of constant beratment, the poor guy turned off the radio and snapped a salute (probably out of habit), before rushing back to them. “Apologies ma’am!” he practically screamed in her face, a drop of spit hitting her glasses. “The CO says that the first daughter is to have unlimited access to the site!” He waved to the other two, who quickly moved the barrier that was blocking
Betty White’s path to the side. “Is there anything else Miss Trump requires?”

Piper wiped away the spittle with one gloved finger and made a show of trying to slick the saliva back at its owner. “Please radio ahead and tell them of our arrival. She doesn’t like to be kept waiting.”

The soldier snapped off another salute and backed away from the black SUV.

Piper shifted Betty White into gear and slowly pulled forward on the gravel path. When the guard-shack was out of sight, she turned to Reyna with a huge grin. “Told you that would work.”

The Latina removed her sunglasses and smirked. “I admit I had my doubts, but that went off without a hitch.” Reyna then punched her lightly in the shoulder. “So, good job. I don’t think Annabeth could’ve thought of, let alone executed that so perfectly.”

“This is definitely a story we’ll all have to tell her if we want to be believed,” she chuckled.

“Yeah, good job,” Veronica called from the backseat, voice dripping with sarcasm. “Just wish I didn’t have to be called ‘Miss Trump’. I feel, so dirty now…”

“Oh, you’ve got to be kidding me,” Piper sighed as they lurched to a stop inside the cyclops camp.

Up close, the camp was even more of a disaster than she had first suspected. All except one of the pull-in trailers were on the brink of collapse; their windows busted out, the doors replaced by large cyclops sized holes, and bits and pieces of flesh and bone were scattered around them. Pieces of piping, heavy construction tools, and broken pieces of machinery were strewn across the ground, a mix of dirt, oil, blood, and mess that they could smell even within Betty White. The filthy, derelict environment she could handle, and with enough time the land would heal, but what she wasn’t ready for was the sheer number of the one-eyed brutes and their easily distinguishable leader.

There were dozens of the stupid brutes gathered for their arrival, each one seemingly larger than the last. Even Ma Gasket and her two sons looked puny to the others, and somehow, they looked less intelligent as well. While the family was clothed in rags, these new cyclops wore overalls, flannel shirts, giant steel toed boots, and white hard hats; there was even a few that wore jeans, dress shirts, and ties, which made her think they were the foreman.

The leader of the cyclops, Arges, if Ma Gasket was to be believed, stood out amongst the crowd of monsters. He was a bit of an oddity, even in the sea of strangeness before them. For a cyclops he was rather small, maybe being slightly taller than six feet with a chest that was as wide as three men. He wore a black suit, similar to her and Reyna’s, shiny, Italian, black leather shoes, and all of his sausage-sized fingers on his ham-sized fist were covered in golden rings. His skin was an unnatural orange, reminding her of Cheeto dust or the girls back in California that went to the spray tan a bit too often, which made his single red eye stick out even more. Weird, thinning, gold and orange hair adorned his head, and she was ninety-nine-point-nine-nine-nine percent certain it was a bad wig.

Reyna leaned forward in her chair, eyes wide as she stared at Arges. “Is he supposed to look like-“

“Yup,” Piper said, popping the ‘p’. “That’s our VIP’s dad.”

The hybrid kicked the back of the driver’s seat, sending Piper crashing into the wheel. “Not fucking
funny, Piper!” Veronica hissed.

“Yeah, you’re right,” she smiled, rubbing her now sore chest, “Political humor is too easy anymore. On the plus side though, I think our job just got a lot easier.” Then Piper took a deep breath and turned to Reyna. “Let’s do this.”

In perfect synchronisation, she and Reyna opened Betty White’s doors and stepped out into the foul, dirty camp. While Reyna moved to the back-passenger door, Piper circled around the SUV; using all of her mental strength to not show any sign of fear at being surrounded by the bane of so many demigods.

Not happy with the idea of my bow being in the back of the car, but Reyna has her tomahawk in her pants. Plus, if things go south, fighting our way out isn’t likely…

She reached the other side of Betty white and stood on the other side of the door; both of them standing perfectly straight as they gazed out at the assembled horde. As Reyna reached with her one arm to open the door, murmuring could be heard coming from the monsters, and Arges’ brow furrowed as his eye darted side-to-side. When the Latina opened the door, Piper reached inside and helped the titan duo out.

“Arges,” Atlas smirked, “how long has it been? One? Two millennia?”

It took all of Piper’s willpower to not burst out laughing when every cyclops’ eye nearly bulged out of their socket upon hearing the Titan’s deep, unearthly voice come from the body of a fourteen-year-old blonde girl. The guys aren’t going to believe this shit!

“Atas?” the lead cyclops asked, his jaw agape. “But, you’re-“

“Free,” the titan laughed. Atlas placed his hands on his hips and laughed again. “Freed to help Olympus in its darkest hour.”

Arges brought one meaty hand to his jowls, as his red eye appraised the sight before him. No matter what way you looked at it, it was strange that he great Titan general was sharing the body of a fourteen-year-old girl. It would have been even strange if said titan’s body was on the brink of self-destruction. So, with the combined efforts of Napi, Tacky, and Kokyangwuti, they turned the duo into what they imagined would pass for acceptable. Kokyangwuti created a suit for the duo made of the finest black and gold silks, which helped mitigate their body’s femininity. Napy and Tacky had worked hard to restore Veronica’s body to a pristine condition, minus a few subtle changes. The first humans had increased her muscle mass slightly, giving her something between a gymnast and swimmer’s build. And per Piper’s orders, gave her golden eyes instead of her baby blues. “Why don’t we go into my office,” the head cyclops grunted, apparently satisfied with the Titan. “As for the rest of you… BACK TO WORK!”

The inside of the trailer was cramped to say the least, even without the wide cyclops. One half of the single room was occupied by two king-sized beds pulled together, covered in red silk sheets and a mountain of throw pillows; it struck her as a little odd, but she wasn’t one to judge a man by the number of pillows he used. The other half of the trailer was set up as office space. A large, black desk taking up the center of the space, with a single XXXL black, leather chair on each side.
Scattered on the desk were an assortment of papers, blueprints, half-empty coffee cups, and drafting tools that Piper was sure Annabeth could identify with ease. On the wall behind the cyclops’ seat, hung dozens of framed pictures of the monster standing with gods and mortals alike, that raised many questions.

*FDR, Nixon, Jason’s dad, Percy’s dad, Bush, Clinton, Bush Jr., Obama, and his Cheeto colored successor? What the fuck? This has got to be the most well-connected monster I’ve ever met!*

“So, fish-boy sprung ya from prison to assist us,” Arges stated as he eased his massive form into the executive style chair. The orange cyclops reclined back and laced his fingers, his eye narrowing one again. “I knew things were bad, but I didn’t think things were *that* bad yet.”

Atlas chuckled, sitting down in the only other chair, with her and Reyna flanking him. “It’s even worse than you think,” the Titan said, gesturing to his shared body. “I’m stuck in a third-rate body with fourth-rate mongrels serving as my only assistance.”

Arges’ eye moved to her and then to Reyna. “Both Camps were taken out far too soon,” the boss cyclopes grunted. “No time to make selections and no time to groom them.” He huffed. “Which leaves us with these two and the other three. Damn mortals.” He bobbed back in the chair and closed his eye. “I will give them credit for using a nuclear device,” Arges chuckled. “Definitely more entertaining than the gas leaks and fire I’ve set. I’ll have to remember that for the next cycle.”

It took all of Piper’s willpower to not react to the cyclops’ words. *What the fuck is he talking about? Both camps? Selections? Nuclear device?* She swallowed the lump in her throat, and quickly glanced over to Reyna. The praetor, who was normally hard to read on the best of occasions, stood like as still as a statue, the only indication of emotion was her clenched fist.

“Both camps?” Atlas coughed, knuckles white as they gripped the chair’s armrests. “I heard it was just New Rome.”

The cyclops leaned forward and shook his head. “Afraid not,” he sighed. “Those mortals attacked the eastern camp first in a blazing ball of nuclear purity. Word on the street is they used that know-it-all daughter of Athena to carry a bomb in, Trojan horse style. Only survivors were the kids of the big three.” Arges unlaced his meaty fingers and placed one fist on the desk. “Didn’t Poseidon tell you all of this?”

Piper’s heart soared and stomach plummeted at the same time. As Thalia had said Jason was alive, but not just him, Nico and Percy as well. Yet within the same breath, her worst fears had been confirmed: Camp Half-Blood was gone. Not only that, but her best friend had been blown to kingdom come. She felt like her knees were going to buckle, but the Thunderbird’s feather pulsed with energy and she held firm.

Reyna though, didn’t keep it together as well. The praetor baring her teeth and growling.

Thankfully, Veronica and Atlas kept it together, probably only because they knew the fleece wasn’t needed anymore. “Unfortunately, the lord of the seas only gave me this body and instructions to come here with these two. I do have some news for you as well, but why don’t you educate me first?”

*Atlas, you magnificent bastard! If I wasn’t on the verge of puking and passing out I’d kiss you!*

Arges, one of the original cyclops that forged the Olympian’s weapons, shrugged. “You know how we keep repeating history over and over again?”
“You mean the cycle,” Atlas nodded. “What of it?”

What followed was perhaps the most disturbing and horrifying thing Piper had ever heard in her life. The Olympians, or at least a small subset of them, had instigated every war, every atrocity, every incident where human lives were lost on a large scale, all for the sake of their continued existence. Now, she had never had the delusions like some of her peers that their parents were purely benevolent beings, there were far too many stories that said otherwise, but the gods using the souls of their own children and countless others was beyond anything she dreamed of. And with the cherry on top of the gods killing off all but a chosen few demigods at the end of every cycle, suddenly she had forgotten where she was at and what she was supposed to be doing.

“So, it sounds like one of you two will get to be president,” Arges grinned. “I knew Artemis and Athena had been pushing for a woman in that office, but I’m not sure America’s ready to embrace an ethnic woman. Then again, Poseidon said the son of Jupiter still has promise.”

You could’ve heard a pin drop as the four of them stared at the suit wearing cyclops. Her and Reyna’s jaws were practically on the floor, while Atlas and Veronica’s face couldn’t decide on what expression to settle on.

Just as Arges was about to say something, Reyna let out a guttural yell and launched herself at the cyclops. “Hey!” he grunted as Reyna’s fist connected with his jaw. “Atlas- oof!”

“FUCK YOU!” Reyna roared, tears running down her face. “FUCK ALL OF YOU!” she cried as she evaded the cyclops’ grasp. The praetor then bit into his thick neck and ripped out a chuck of flesh with her teeth. Arges shrieked in shock and pain, jumping up from his seat and slamming the berserk praetor through the trailer wall. But apparently, being shoved through a wall did little to stop Reyna, as the girl reached down with her one arm and pulled out the obsidian tomahawk she had hid in her pants. “FUCK YOU MONSTERS!” she cried, burying the weapon’s head deep into Arges’ chest. “FUCK THE GODS!” she screamed, removing the stone weapon and plunging it into his gut. “FUCK ALL OF IT!” Reyna roared, as the two tumbled out of the trailer.

“Help me you idiots!” Arges roared. “Double rations for whoever kills this bitch!”

“Fuck,” Piper hissed, finally coming out of her stupor. “Hey!” she cried, shaking the duo by their shoulders, “Have an existential crisis later! We’ve got to help Reyna!”

The blonde nodded, and dashed out of the massive hole in the wall, their body igniting into golden flames as they moved.

“And I’m going to use the door like a normal person,” Piper yelled to help settle her nerves. Of course, the plan went to shit! I hadn’t included Reyna losing her shit when a cyclops makes a dark revelation! Silly me! She kicked the trailer’s door open, and darted outside. Good thing for plan B!

As she ran, she spared a glance over her shoulder and saw that Reyna was still fighting Arges, while the hybrid was busy fighting a rapidly increasing number of one-eyed monsters that were answering their boss’s call. Yup! Went to hell before we could ask where Jason is! She threw open Betty White’s rear hatch and pulled out her bow. Let’s hope they’re in position! She aimed the bow at the sky and drew back the string with all her might, causing an arrow of pure starlight to form. Annabeth, I know you hated these one-eyed fuckers, so this one is for you! Piper let the arrow fly, its silver trail flying high into the night sky, only to burst like a fireworks; illuminating the campsite in a silver glow.

“Ma! Over there!” Torque’s voice called out from behind. “I told ya that was the girl we was gonna eat!”
“Quit your yap’n and get her!” Ma Gasket cried out. “Slump! You help ya uncle now!”

Piper scurried up Betty White and stood on her roof just as the ground began to shake from what she assumed was Torque’s heavy plodding. As she spun, she felt a massive hand wrap around her leg and yank her up in the air. *Oh, not this shit again…*

She was spun around, the friction from the fabric of her pants burning her leg, to come face to face with Torque. “Remember me?” the cyclops chuckled. Somehow, the creature had gotten even more disgusting since Detroit. His yellow teeth (all two of them!) were not an almost brown and covered in a thick layer of plaque. His skin was covered with blackheads; some as big around as a quarter. And his sole eye was bloodshot and starting to form cataracts. “Where’s your little mechanic friend?”

Perhaps under different circumstances she would have felt pity for Torque, but at that moment she was processing a lot of negative emotions. “Yup!” Piper screamed. Then in a burst of fury powered speed, she jabbed the end of her bow into Torque’s eye, blinding him until the next time he rose from Tartarus. He released her from his grasp as he yelled out in pain and horror. “And Leo is dead!”

And then it hit her.

**Hard.**

Leo was dead. Her oldest and truest friend had perished months ago and she was only learning about it now. How cruel was it that after realizing she had deeper feelings for the boy that she would be denied the opportunity to tell him? And if Leo had chosen rebirth, she would never be able to tell him. And the thought of Leo being used as thread to patch a fucking carpet was enough to send Piper over the edge.

“MAAAAAAA!” Torque screamed, thrashing around with his hands cupped over the leaking socket. “MAAAAAAA!”

Piper pushed herself up off the ground, and climbed onto Betty White once more, ignoring the pain from the fall. She got into a firing position and began to fire arrow-after-arrow at Torque and the other approaching cyclopes. She wasn’t nearly as skilled as the Apollo cabin or Frank when it came to using a bow, but the sheer sizes of the approaching horde made it hard to miss. She gave covering fire for Reyna, who was still locked in one-sided combat with Arges. Atlas and Veronica were mostly okay, their repaired body already burning away more and more with each slain monster. “COME AND GET ME!” she shouted over the barrage of starlight.

“I PLAN ON IT!” Ma Gasket roared, plowing through her extended family, completely un-phased by the glowing bolts extruding from her body. The angry mother was brandishing a red monkey wrench that was as long as Piper was tall, swinging it wildly like a club.

“Oh, crap…” she muttered just as the enraged cyclops slammed the tool into Betty White’s side. Time slowed to a crawl as she was tossed into the air from the impact, and watched as the great vehicle, the last work of the Amazons, crumpled in half; it’s bullet proof windows cracking before shattering into a million pieces. The SUV she, Reyna, Atlas, and Veronica had designed together, traveled halfway across the country in, and lived in together had been reduced to scrap by one angry mother. *And the warranty isn’t even valid anymore…*

Piper landed hard on her side, her bow snapping beneath her, and she was pretty sure one or more of her ribs cracked or broke as well. The rage she felt only moments ago was gone, replaced by sharp pain and exhaustion. She tried to push herself up, only to be yanked violently off the ground; her
shoulder dislocated from the sudden jerk.

“You blinded ma boy,” Ma Gasket growled. The cyclops matriarch swung her to the side only to quickly yank her back; the intense pain made Piper empty her stomach. “And I’m gonna make ya suffer for it.” The oil covered cyclops pulled a screwdriver from her tattered coverings and held it in front of Piper’s face. “First things first, an eye for an-“ the ground began to shake “-what the?”

Dozens of starlight arrows illuminated the night sky, changing night to day. Whoops and screams could be heard over the sound hooves and truck engines approaching from all directions. A half a moment later, the collected forces of the Nation came into view.

Coyote and his skin-walkers led the pack; the former in his giant canine form, his red eyes glowing in the thrill of battle. The skin-walkers alternated between running on two legs or on all fours, snapping and slashing as they ran in their strange bodies. Napi and Tacky followed close behind in an old Ford pickup truck, carrying several bow carrying demigods; one particularly brace demigod stood on the cab’s roof firing shot after shot at the cyclops horde. Sparky, Chad, and Andy sat on top of small storm clouds, pounding on drums that shot off bolts of blue lightning with every beat. Kokyangwuti sat in a recliner in the bed of a pickup truck, knitting who-knows-what. Following all of them were dozens of bears, wolves, coyotes, eagles, and even some normal demigods on horseback.

And all of them were racing to her.

“Oh, Ma!” she laughed, ignoring the pain racked body for one brief moment. “You might want to kill me now, or you’re not going to get the chance. Bitch!”

Ma Gasket looked at her, the screwdriver, and then the approaching horde and growled in frustration. The female monster then threw Piper to the ground and spun the screwdriver around in her hand. “I coulda just bit your head off, but I want ta see ya suffer!” She raised the screwdriver up, ready to bring it down and impale the daughter of Aphrodite with the large tool. “Hope ya choose rebir- AAAAAAAH!”

Pain ripped through Piper’s body, her back arching in protest as her lungs and heart locked up. Through the pain though, she saw that she wasn’t the only one in agony, everyone in the camp had fallen to the ground in a writhing mass. But as quickly as it started, the pain ended. She tried to get back on her feet, but her body was too broken and battered to comply with her needs.

“I don’t know what that was,” Ma Gasket gasped, getting back to her feet. “But-“

“Piper! Stay down!” Coyote howled. The majestic trickster god bounded across the distance and lunged for the cyclops, catching her by the neck in his massive jaws. Maybe it was the pain, but seeing Ma Gasket’s throat being ripped out by Coyote, and then having her body tossed around like a rag doll before turning dust, was the funniest thing she had seen in a while. “Shit,” the trickster growled as he turned into his human form. He knelt down next to her and picked her up. “Hang on girl, I’ll get you to help.”

She reached up and weakly grabbed her former pet’s bolo. “No, I need to stay until this is finished.”

Coyote closed his eyes and shook his head. “You got a lot of your grandpa in you,” he sighed.
The number of cyclopes was far greater than initially estimated, as dozens more poured into the camp from the north, and even more crawled out of the derelict trailers as if they were the monster equivalent of clown cars. Thankfully though, the Nation’s surprise attack was enough to keep the monsters off balance in their response.

“How you are holding up up there?” Coyote asked, as he raced across the battlefield, nimbly jumping from monster to monster, leaving a trail of death in his wake. “Just tell me if you need to—“ he ripped the throat out of another Cyclops “-get off.”

Piper nuzzled against his fur, enjoying the warmth and the way it muffled out some of the sounds of the battlefield. “I’m good, how we holding up?”

“The skin-walkers are approaching the physical structure as we speak, and we seem to be-“ An explosion rocked the night sky “-holding our own… Damn it, Napi! Watch it with those things, would ya?!” Coyote yelled.

Napi looked up from their work, shaping pieces of earth into little human figures. Whenever the old man finished one, Tacky would bring it to life, at which point the earth-boy would run across the battlefield and explode when it made contact with a cyclops. “Sorry Coyote! Little guys got a mind of their own!”

“That you gave them!” Coyote snapped back. “We got kids out here!”

“I don’t know if I should be disturbed or in awe,” Piper murmured as Coyote once again took off.

“Hey Piper!” Sparky shouted as his cloud swooped down next to them. “We’ve got a bit of a problem forming!”

“What is it?” she asked, pushing herself up into a sitting position. The sudden motion made her head spin, which wasn’t helped by Coyote running at Ludacris speeds. “Is Reyna okay?”

“Reyna’s Fine!” the Thunderer shouted, as he sent a gust of wind at a trio of cyclops, knocking them on their asses and giving several demigods a chance to attack. “She’s a killing machine! Andy says she’s killed twelve of these things singlehandedly! No, the problem is that!” he shouted, pointing to the sky.

It took her a second to realize he was pointing at the helicopters, which were strafing and circling the battlefield. “I wouldn’t worry about them!” she shouted. “The Mist should cover us! They probably see this as the protestors-“ her eyes widened “-oh shit!”

For plan B, she may have overlooked a few crucial details, like the helicopters, the large group of mortals camped nearby, and the National Guard. She had been so confident that Plan A would succeed, that the cyclops would pack up camp and go to Canada, that Plan B was merely a formality. Plan B was ‘get-us-the-fuck-out-here-alive’ and nothing else. So regardless of what the mortals were seeing, it was going to be met with the same response: force.

“Sparky! Pass the word around to fall back to the border! Near the protestors!”
As expected the cyclops weren’t going to give up the attack, despite being so close to the mortal population. Maybe if Arges was still alive he would have told them to stay back, but even then, it was doubtful they would have listened. The one-eyed behemoths were enraged at the attack, and they weren’t going to stop until they or all their assailants were dead.

“Everyone! Change to your human forms!” she shouted, dismounted from Coyote. The trickster quickly shifted into his human form and wrapped an arm around her to keep her upright.

“Oh—“

Her statement was finished for her, as dozens of Humvees and armed men raced over the hill, and a half-dozen more helicopters flew overheard; all racing toward the pipeline. Gunfire pierced the chaos, as the military helicopters opened fire, and her heart skipped a beat when she thought they would be targeted as well, but strangely it appeared they were only firing at the approaching cyclops. Her belief that the National Guard was only firing at the monsters was quickly confirmed when the Humvees and soldiers made a wall between them and the monsters, only to open fire on the hulks.

Canisters of tear gas shot of out the mounted guns in quick succession; the gas making the mass of cyclops fall to the ground clutching their eye, allowing the helicopters and ground soldiers to pick them off at their leisure.

They can see them! How can they see them!

“Keep firing!” Someone shouted over the chaos.

“Protect the protesters!” Another shouted.

“What the fuck are these things?!”

Someone tapped her good shoulder, and when she looked up she saw it was Chad. “We’ve got another problem,” he said gesturing to a crowd of mortals that had assembled to watch the chaos. The Thunderer then pulled out a phone from his jeans and unlocked it before passing it to her. “Look.”

“Oh, fuck,” Piper swore as she scrolled through the Youtube home page. Monsters in South Dakota! Proof of Cryptids at the Pipeline! Cyclops fighting werewolf! Were just some of the titles that were trending, the thumbnails showing scenes from the battle. But what was worse was Shailene Woodley had a video up on her channel, somehow making the other videos seems all the more creditable. “We’ve got to get everyone out of here. NOW!”

“You heard the lady,” Coyote snapped at the Thunderer.

“But where should we go?” Andy asked, jogging up to them.

“The capital of course! Crazy Horse!”
Despite her arm hanging useless at her side and how much it hurt to breathe, she ran and tackled Atlas, Veronica and Reyna to the ground when she finally found them.

“Easy Piper,” Veronica laughed, returning the hug. The duo’s eyes were one again balls of golden flame and their body was flaking apart, but they were alive and well, which meant the world to Piper. “We heard we’re bugging out, is that true?”

“No,” she laughed, rolling her eyes. “Everyone around us is just packing up and leaving because Disney World tickets are half-off!” Veronica and Atlas laughed and helped her and Reyna to their feet. Piper then noticed that Reyna hadn’t laughed or said a single word, not even a ‘McLean!’ for knocking her to the ground. “Reyna, are you okay?”

That got a laugh out of Reyna. A bitter, painfilled laugh, but a laugh none the less. “Okay? Okay?! Are you fucking kidding me?!” the praetor shouted, making a few passerby’s stop for a moment. “Our lives are a lie!” she hissed. “One great big fucking joke played on us by our parents! I gave everything for New Rome! For Olympus! My youth, my love, my time, even my fucking arm!”

Veronica moved to comfort the praetor, but Piper shot her a look that told her to stop. Reyna needed to let it all out before the comforted her or she would never talk about it again.

“My sister, Piper! My sister!” the Latina cried, tears flowing once more. “She was going to choose rebirth! She’s gone forever Piper! Gone so that our parents can continue to live on! And they were only going to kill us off anyway!” she laughed maniacally. “Everything we’ve done for them had been done before! We don’t matter at all! We don’t-"

Piper slapped Reyna with her good arm as hard as she could; a red handprint quickly forming on her cheek. The praetor blinked and brought her hand up to the red flesh, clearly shocked by her action. “Then we do something that matters,” Piper stated plainly. “Yeah, we learned are parents are fucking cunts, more than we though possible. Our friends are dead and I’m going to be struggling to process that for quite some time. But this-“ she gestured around them “-this is something that matters. If you want to get back at Olympus, and I sure as fuck do, then let’s start by helping the Nation. You heard Arges, Olympus has been trying to eradicate them for centuries, so I think the ultimate slap to the face would be we make the Nation a force to rival them.” She paused to catch her breath; it was hard to make passionate speeches with a damaged ribcage. “Which I don’t think will hard to do if we can get the mortals on our side.”

“The what on our side?” Atlas asked, their flaming orbs growing brighter.

“The mortals saw everything. We are trending worldwide on every social media platform,” she explained. “And we are going to use this to our advantage,” she smirked. She wrapped her arm around Reyna and leaned her head against her friend’s neck. “Now, we gotta go pack up our camp. Coyote said he’d give us a ride to the Nation’s capital, and get this: it’s under the Crazy Horse Statue!”

As they approached their tent, Piper realized something. “Did Arges ever say who he was actually expecting?”
Veronica frowned and scratched her chin. “I don’t think so, if he did I was too busy being in shock.”

Reyna shrugged and scratched the back of her head. “I went full berserker mode, so, I missed it if it was mentioned.” The praetor then sprinted forward and unzipped their tent. “I don’t think it matters any- Um guys? There’s a titan in our tent.” Reyna pulled back the tent flap and there, bound and gagged in a strange dark green energy, was a silver skinned titan.

The Thunderbird’s feather pulsed with power just as several more important details clicked into place. The sudden pain. The momentary pause of battle. The Mist retreating… “Reyna! We have to-“

A lash of the dark green energy shot out of the tent and wrapped around Reyna’s neck. “Hello ladies,” a familiar voice purred. “Sorry it had been so long, but I’ve been busy,” Morgan stated as she crawled out of the tent. “But my boss really wants you for tomorrow night’s show.”

Atlas and Veronica rushed forward, golden flames covering their arms. “I’ll kill you this time you fu-“

The duo never got to finish their threat as the terrifying form of Terminus appeared in front of them in a flash of light. The stone giant punched the titan hybrid in the gut with a vicious uppercut, launching them in the air. The fallen god then grabbed the two out of the air by the throat and by the ankles, and pulled; popping their head from their body like a grape.

“You have no idea how satisfying that was for me,” Morgan smirked, moving ever closer. “Terminus, please save that head, I’ll save it as a souvenir.”

The god of boundaries tossed the body of Piper’s friends aside and nodded at the witch before disappearing in another flash of light.

Piper had no weapons, her body was broken and battered, and even at her best she couldn’t fight off the witch of Avalon. So, she did the only thing she could think of. “Hel-“

The motorcycle jacket clad witch snapped her fingers, and Piper’s mouth snapped violently shut; her teeth ripping her lower lip. “Now, now,” Morgan tsked. “We need you to save that voice of yours for the endgame.” With her free hand, she formed another lash of green energy; her tattoos briefly glowing. “Now, why don’t you be a good girl and come with me? Hmm?”

Piper would have traded everything she possessed at that moment to tell Morgan to ‘fuck off’, but her mouth refused to open. Her only hope was she could get someone to notice them, so she started to limp towards the main campsite.

“You’ve made the right choice,” Morgan sighed. The witch then lashed out with the other band of green energy, which wrapped around the daughter of Aphrodite multiple times, binding her arms to her sides.
For a brief moment, Piper had hoped that the Thunderbird feather would have generated an electric forcefield and shielded her from the witch’s magic. Instead, it just continued to pulse like normal, completely oblivious to the danger she was in. But then again, the witch had been the one to kill its owner, so maybe it just knew better. Maybe, and she was praying on this one, that the feather was just conserving its energy for the appropriate moment.

“Don’t worry,” The witch smiled, as she was lifted off the ground. “You’re going to be reunited with Jason very soon.” Piper’s threatened to bulge out of their sockets. “The boss wants you to be a show of good will.” The women then turned to Reyna and frowned. “You though… Brian wants you for his research.” A pained look flashed across Morgan’s face, and she bit her lip in thought. “I-I can’t let that happen. This- this is better….”

The witch snapped her fingers and Piper watch in horror as the lash around Reyna’s neck tightened until a sickening crack echoed across the land. The green energy disappeared, and Reyna’s corpse fell to the ground.

Piper wanted to scream, but all she could so was close her eyes as the tears rolled down her face and her heart broke for the fourth time that day.

The last thing she heard was Coyote’s voice screaming her name.

Chapter End Notes

That was painful to write, I actually had to walk away a few times.

I am going to promise you all this: scores will be settled. And you will be happy.

Though their is a large part of me that wants me to spare one character... Your reactions may produce an edit...
Chapter Summary

Warnings: brief descriptions of anxiety, rage, profanity.

Tonight:

Percy and family have a night at the museum!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

“More sensational reports are flooding out of the now cancelled Keystone Pipeline, with-“ Hades grunted at the DJ’s voice and began his search for classic rock again.

“I don’t mind Johnny Cash or Waylon Jennings, but I draw the line at Taylor Swift and Florida Georgia Line,” the depowered god grunted, rapidly hitting the seek button and only stopping to listen to a single note before moving on to the next station. “Speaking of which, remind me to add the latter two to the Fields of Punishment playlist. Love Story on an endless loop would break even the hardest of men…”

Persephone looked up from her magazine, Bikers, Babes, and Roses, and punched Hades’ shoulder, causing him to swerve slightly into the left lane. “We’re not monsters, my love. What’s New Pussy Cat has worked so far, and it will suffice for another thousand years.”

“Do I even want to know what else is on that playlist?” Nico asked without looking up from his laptop; rapidly typing in bursts only to stop a moment and read what he had just done. Then the son of Hades looked up and mouthed, “What’s a playlist?”

Percy smiled and suppressed a laugh. “A list of music,” he mouthed back, the younger teen nodding in understanding.

Anyone who would have happened to glance into the SUV would have never guessed that they were on their way to assassinate a titan of industry and leader of a shadowy organization bent on the destruction of the divine. No, instead they would have just thought the four of them were part of a normal family on their way to some classy gala or the like. There was the father who was constantly fidgeting with the radio, criticizing other drivers, and looking in the rearview mirror to make sure his son and boyfriend weren’t getting too frisky. The mother was thumbing through a magazine she had brought for the long trip, allowing her to ignore her husband’s demands to take her feet off the dash and turn a blind eye to whatever was happening in the backseat. There was the dutiful son, who had kicked his shoes off and placed his feet in his boyfriend’s lap while he worked on his homework. And then there was the boyfriend, who must have done something wrong by the way the parents kept glancing back at him.

Well, I didn’t really do anything bad, I just let Nico get completely shitfaced and kind of crippled him for a couple days. Oh! And wasn’t there for Jason…

The morning after Prom had been… awkward to say the least.
Nico had been the first to awaken, only to immediately vomit all over the both of them. The son of Hades had started to apologize, only to drench him once again in a mix of partially digested McDonalds and spiked punch. His face must have been twisted in disgust (could you blame me?) as Nico paled and began to cry; choking out apology after apology. This of course, further upset the crying teen’s stomach and the sheets on their bed by that point were ruined. Hades had woken up by then and was helping him get Nico to his feet, and the two of them carried the poor boy up the stairs and deposited him in front of the toilet.

He quickly stripped off his drenched nightshirt and help Nico do the same when the younger wasn’t gagging. And while he whispered assurances in Nico’s ear that it was okay, Hades began to search the medicine cabinet for the Tylenol they purchased the night before. When at last Nico was empty, Hades made the boy take the pills, then he and the former lord of the Underworld went to work cleaning Nico up, and finally caring him back to bed with a bucket in hand.

Nico quickly passed back out after his head touched pillow, but Percy was wide awake. So, he and Hades retreated to the kitchen, adrenaline still coursing through both their systems, only to find Persephone waiting for them at the kitchen table; her arms crossed and disappointment and anger etched on her perfect face. Both he and Hades got an earful that lasted for hours. Apparently, Persephone and Nico’s mom had been incredibly close, as the goddess informed them exactly what Maria would have thought of the current situation.

Frankly, he thought he and Hades had been lucky to leave the room with their manhood still attached.

For a while after that, he just kind of lounged around the house, reading comics, watching some TV, and just staring at the weird picture of John Deere Demeter had in the living room, because the farm was pretty boring without Nico to keep him company. He even got dressed and visited the pigs and chickens, though he found out the pigs preferred Jason over him.

When his boyfriend finally awoke, Percy was there in a flash; despite the constant throbbing in his leg. It was then that he realized just how messed up the male psyche was. As it turned out, the previous night’s activities (I had sex! S-E-X! What’s that spell? Sex!) had left Nico a little more worn out than he had thought; without alcohol coursing through his system to numb the pain, Nico could barely walk. So, on the one hand, Percy felt absolutely terrible that he had done that to the son of Hades. On the other though, he couldn’t help but be a little proud of himself, as every movie he ever watched said not being able to walk was a sign of mind-blowing sex. He didn’t say anything like that to Nico though; he wasn’t that stupid.

What followed was several hours of working (bickering) with Persephone to take care of the Nico. The son of Hades ended up having two choices of breakfast and lunch, choice of Tylenol, and choice of entertainment, as some goddess couldn’t concede that his ideas were the better. Nico took everything in stride, though Percy could tell that his options were the better; or so he told himself. Hades rolled his eyes at the two of them and devoted his time to talking to Demeter and Jason about the blond’s own misadventure the night before.

Later in the day, after he and Hades had helped Nico into the living room, the son of Hades started to ask how much he remembered of the night before actually happened.

Short answer: all of it.

After several rounds of did-that-really-happen, Nico had buried his face into the crook of Percy’s neck and swore that he would never drink again. Nico also suggested they flee the country and take up no identities so that he could avoid facing their mortal friends on Monday, but Hades quickly put the kibosh to that idea, threatening to cut them off financially if they didn’t finish high school. He
would have stopped his boyfriend anyway from doing something so outlandish, as Nico was hardly the only person who had been drunk the night before. He then went on to tease Nico about how forward he was when inebriated and that he kind of liked it, to which Nico responded by biting his neck.

*I don’t care what he says, children of Hades are freaking vampires!*

And once Nico unburied his face, the night proceeded a bit like normal. Jason joined them to watch some TV, and the both of them apologized for more-or-less forcing him to go to Prom. Jason, the good guy that he is, shrugged off the whole thing and admitted that he had fun and wasn’t going to let one thing ruin the memory. The blond also mentioned that Chelsea would be coming over Saturday to hang out with him while they were away, and it took all of Percy’s self-control to not tease him. Hades joined them shortly after Jason, parenting book in hand. The god wasn’t much for small talk, but would add his own razor quips to the conversation when he felt like it. Then Demeter and Persephone joined them, the elder goddess taking a seat in one of the unoccupied recliners and the younger flopping down next to her stepson. Persephone was still ecstatic that the drunken son of Hades had called her ‘mom’ and was trying everything she could think of to make him say it again. Eventually, whether from frustration or genuine feelings, Nico relented and called her by that magic word.

The rest of the week had also been normal, well normal for them since they were forced to move to the LaMoille farmhouse. They went to school during the day (the only comment Nico got was that he was a mic hog), in the afternoon he and Nico trained together, and in the evening, they worked on their homework and chilled before heading to bed. The only real difference was he and Nico would take a walk after their training, sometimes with Jason sometimes without. He preferred to walk without the son of Jupiter tagging along, as it gave him and Nico some precious alone time. They talked about anything and everything that popped into their heads on those gravel roads, holding hands, and stealing kisses from one another every couple minutes. And there something so alluring about Nico framed in the light of the setting sun, something beautiful and precious beyond words that he didn’t want to share with anyone.

Gods how he wanted to push Nico into a cornfield and have his way-

“Hey, Percy?” Nico asked, snapping the son of Poseidon back to the present.

“Yeah, babe?” he smiled, looking up from his lap to meet Nico’s dark eyes. Once again, he was blown away by just how amazing looked in a tux (and he was so glad the goddesses had been able to fix their tuxes) and just how natural Nico looked with a laptop in front of him.

“As much as I’m enjoying you rub my feet, could you maybe switch? My right foot is starting to get a little sore now,” his boyfriend said, pale cheeks flushing.

He looked down at his lap and realized he had been rubbing the same foot while he zoned out. “Uh, sorry, Neeks,” he awkwardly chuckled. Then a devious thought popped into his head. “Do you want me to kiss it and make it better?” he smirked.

“What? N-“

Before Nico had finished, Percy lifted the younger teen’s foot from his lap and placed several quick kisses on its sole. *Gods, I’m weird....* He thought as his pants suddenly felt tighter.

And while the act had excited him greatly, the same could not be said for Nico, who pulled his feet back. “PERCY THAT IS DISGUSTING!” the boy cried, rubbing where Percy had just kissed him.
“Oh, come on, babe,” he laughed deeply. “I love every part of you!” He leaned to the right, his seatbelt tugging against him, and pretended to try and grab Nico’s other foot. “Let me try the other one!”

“Settle down back there,” Hades growled, adjusting the rearview mirror to shoot the two teens a glare without turning around. “Or there will be two deaths before we even reach Naperville…”

“Listen to your father, boys,” Persephone sighed without looking up from her magazine. “’cause if you don’t I hear about it later.”

Under most circumstances a New Yorker would take one look at Chicago and scoff. The so-called second city had nothing on New York, despite what its residents claimed. Its skyline was barren and short compared to New York’s unending towering structures. The city overlooked a lake, a freaking lake! Who cares if it’s a Great Lake, it has nothing on the view of an ocean! Chicago didn’t have a subway either, instead using trains that traveled overhead, which stuck out like a sore thumb; at least New York could hide some of its ugliness below ground. There were street performers and vendors on nearly every corner in New York, while Chicago only had some kids beating on overturned buckets. Really, the only thing good about Chicago was that the original cast of *Saturday Night Live!* were from there, but even then, they moved to New York!

And yet, as he stared out the window at the city, a halfhearted smile began to form. *I haven’t been in a city in about four months,* he realized. The last night time he had been home was the day Gabe had killed his family, and they had been in hiding ever since. The urban jungle sparked memories of a time before he knew he was a demigod, back when it was just him and his mother against the world with nothing but each other and a case of blue food coloring. Those memories sparked questions he had been avoiding for quite some time. *Did Mom and Paul have a funeral? Did anyone show up? Where are they buried? Did Estelle get a grave? If so, did they put a name on it? Will I ever get the chance to visit them?*

With each unanswered question, his mood darkened. He still wasn’t sure how Gabe had been de-statued, but he was becoming more and more confident that it was somehow related to Avalon. The timing was just too perfect for them not to be related. Whether the group of angry mortals intentionally or unintentionally released his scumbag former stepfather meant nothing to him. No matter which way you looked at it, Avalon had killed his family.

Which was why he had no problem with what they were about to do. Killing Merlin, Jeremiah Aarons, Jeremiah Arthurson, or whatever the old bastard wanted to be called, wasn’t just about revenge, it was a way to make sure future demigods would be safe.

That he would be safe.

That Nico would be safe.

During their time training together, he and Nico had looked up ways to kill the old man using their own abilities in the subtlest ways possible, and preferably, as painlessly as possible.

They weren’t monsters after all…

The easiest method they figured was to make a false aneurysm; something both of them could do. Either he would make a few arteries burst in the old guy’s brain, or Nico would use his shadow
traveling abilities to send a tiny blade into the man’s skull. It would be a quick, painless death that wouldn’t raise any suspicions. The man was in his nineties, dropping over dead was pretty much expected of him.

Then we slip out and figure out where to strike next. This isn’t going to be a quick process, this is going to take years to set everything right. He frowned. Not right, but better. Then there’s that whole matter of Zeus starting wars for whatever reason to look into…

Nico leaned his head against his shoulder, shaking him from his thoughts once again. “Percy, are you okay?” the younger teen asked, curling against him.

Percy kissed Nico’s hair and reveled in the earthy scent that was uniquely Nico. “Yeah. Just- just being back in a city is bringing up a lot of memories. Good ones, bad ones, all have the same effect.”

Nico looked up and kissed his cheek. “We’ll go back to the farm in a few hours.”

It was a weird thing to say, but at the same time it was exactly what Percy needed to hear. The farm. The boring, nothing-to-do, god’s forsaken, barren, isolated farm actually sounded like the place to be, which was strange considering he always fancied himself as something of a city boy. But somewhere along the way, he had transitioned from city living to the slow changing ways of country living. Yet, as he thought about it, he realized it wasn’t the location, but the people there that made it home. Namely, the son of Hades pressed up against him.

“Yeah, that sounds good,” he said, nuzzling up against the son of Hades, his home.

Okay, I’ll admit it, Chicago has a few things that New York doesn’t have, Percy thought as he gazed up in a mix of awe and wonder at the world’s largest and well-preserved T-rex skeleton, Sue. What was even more mind-blowing was the fact that a sign posted next to the prehistoric display said Sue would be moved to make way for an even bigger dinosaur. “Aren’t these guys supposed to be dragons?” he blurted out.

“Why would you ever think that?” Hades asked, the god’s arms wrapped firmly around Persephone’s waist as they gazed up at the ancient behemoth.

“When I was at the Smithsonian, I overheard Atlas saying mortals confused dragon bones for dinosaurs,” he shrugged. “Never really thought about it much until now.”

“No, there were dinosaurs,” Persephone stated, leaning back against her lover. “There was life long before the gods, you have to remember that we have been here for only a blink of an eye in terms of the Earth.”

“Ugh,” Nico groaned, “my head hurts every time I start to construct a timeline with the gods. Just when I think I start to get a grasp of it, some new little detail messes it up.”

The goddess laughed, the sweet melodious notes making several nearby mortals look at her in awe. “Little prince, when it comes to us, it is better to live in ignorance.”

“That’s her way of saying we’re not entirely sure ourselves,” Hades chuckled, before placing a kiss on Persephone’s swan-like neck.
Percy rolled with it, happy that *Jurassic Park* was still a possibility. A remote possibility, but still a possibility.

They were in the grand entrance hall to the Field Museum along with a couple hundred lavishly dressed mortals waiting for the fundraiser to begin. Servers zigged in an out of pockets of people, offering champagne and hors d’oeuvres to the upper crust of America; he of course took a handful of shrimp, much to Nico and Hades’ displeasure. There were dozens of artifacts scattered about the hall, representing the best of what he museum had to offer to hopefully encourage the guests to make hefty donations. There were also the subtle reminders of why everyone was there, such as giant banners hanging from the balconies covered with the faces of smiling school children, several televisions showing Jeremiah Arthurson reading to a group of little kids, and hundreds of handmade cards thanking the man and his company for donating to the Illinois Public School System. You know, subtle things like that.

He spared a glance at the nearest TV and realized he had never actually seen the leader of Avalon until now. Hades, he never really met any of Avalon outside of George, and after that he honestly didn’t care to meet any of them. Which struck him as odd, as before he always had Luke, the giants, or Gaea’s faces or voices to visualize, but for Avalon it was just some guys with guns, nothing definitive.

*And that guy does not match up with my expectations at all! He looks like a generic grandfather! He’s got wild white hair, a beard, and- are you for real? He shuffles his feet to move? Gods! If Nico just stole his coat he would be dead in thirty days!* He stopped and chuckled to himself, reminded of a childhood song. *William Harrison, how do you phrase? That guy was dead in thirty days!*

“He doesn’t really look like the supervillain-type, does he?” he whispered in Nico’s ear. “Looks more like the rich old guy from *Atlantis.*”

Nico didn’t laugh, didn’t even crack a smile, but he did clench his fists. “It doesn’t matter what he looks like, Percy,” the younger boy hissed. “And I’ve never been to Atlantis, so I don’t know who you’re talking about.”

He wrapped his arm around his boyfriend’s shoulders and pulled him in close. “I know, just that I’m used to fighting bad guys with dragon legs, bull heads, glowing eyes, the works,” he whispered back. “And we really need to have a Disney night.” He pressed a quick kiss to Nico’s temple, which settled him back down.

“That’s right, just keep whispering to each other and attracting attention,” Hades sighed, clasping his and Nico’s shoulders and steering them away from the center of the room. They skirted around several groups of well-dressed people, who looked at the three of them with weird expressions; probably thinking the older man was taking his two sons aside to chew their asses over something they had done. “Look,” the lord of the Underworld said, stopping at the entrance to *Inside Ancient Egypt,* “I may not be directly in touch with the ways of mortals, but I know that normal teenagers do not hang around their parents at formal events.” Hades then shoved the both of them forward. “Go and explore the museum like normal kids until the Arthurson’s big speech.”

He and Nico looked at each other, confused by the god’s words.

Hades face-palmed. “Go! Get!”

Percy shrugged and rewrapped his arm around Nico. *Like I’m going to say no to some alone time with Nico.*
“-I heard he used to sell appliances.”

Percy’s grip slipped, allowing for the weighted down irrigation model’s lever to fly up, taking a certain son of Hades with it.

“Percy!” Nico shrieked, from the unexpected upward motion.

They were currently deep within the heart of the ancient Egypt section of the museum, learning firsthand what it took to water crops in the days of old. The museum had set up a replica of an irrigation system, which was little more than a bucket tied to one end of lever and fulcrum system, that allowed visitors to try and lift the bucket out of the water where it would empty onto a small field full of plastic plants. They soon found out that the deceptively simple contraption, was a lot harder to use than it appeared, as neither of them had the strength to pull the lever down far enough to fully raise the bucket.

Upon closer examination, Nico figured out that the bucket was far larger than it appeared and the lever was not optimally placed, which Percy thought was pretty dumb of the Egyptians. Surely if they could build the pyramids they could figure out how to make a decent level, right?

So, what followed was him and Nico trying to one up each other on who could lift the bucket the furthest, and if one actually managed to lift it to water the field the other had to do whatever they wanted. Percy went first, and the son of Poseidon thought that he would have the advantage with his extra height and weight, but even just hanging on the lever barely lifted the bucket halfway up. Nico did roughly the same, focusing more on optimal placement rather than blinding pulling. This went back and forth for quite some time, each telling the other they could do better, which earned them many weird looks from other passerby’s.

Eventually, growing frustrated with the stupid bucket, they set aside their competition and decided they weren’t going to move on to the mummies until they succeeded.

And they had been so close! The bucket was just beginning to tip over when a beautiful, dark haired woman, with a crazy number of serpent tattoos wandered by, talking with a group of similarly beautiful women. He and Nico had been hanging from the lever and he honestly wasn’t paying any attention to the women, but for some reason the tattooed women’s words cut through his mind.

He caught Nico before he could fall to the ground, and helped him to his feet. “Are you okay?”

Nico straightened his tux jacket and redid his tie. “Yeah, but I think I should be asking you that question. You look a bit pale.”

“I’m good,” he lied, looking at the tattooed woman before she disappeared around a corner. “Just, uh, lost my grip.”
They had worked their way through the reptile and amphibians exhibit, the bird habitats, and the Mammals of Africa exhibit before the strange anxiety began to fade away. What really helped was the strange discovery they made in the Rice Gallery.

The exhibit, The Lions of Tsavo, was a deceitfully simple thing, composed of two mangy stuffed lions and a plaque. Neither lion had a mane, which struck him as funny as the plaque stated they were both males. Which means the one fact I know about lions is B.S. Their fur was more gray than gold, and for normal lions they were a bit on the large side, measuring a little over nine feet from nose to the beginning of their tails. They had striking eyes, even if they were glass, that betrayed a fierceness and intelligence that he had seen once before.

“Percy, did you read this?” Nico asked, gesturing to the small unassuming plaque.

“That’s like asking me if I stuck my hand in boiling water.”

Nico rolled his eyes, but smiled nonetheless. “It says these two lions killed over one-hundred-and-thirty-five people working on a railroad in Africa! That these two were unaffected by gunfire and didn’t fall for the hunter’s traps, often turning the traps against them.” The son of Hades stopped and looked back at the stuffed lions. “You don’t think they’re-“

“Nemean Lions,” he finished for his boyfriend. The facts fit the story for the most part: practically indestructible, intelligent, and large. But even then, their coloring was off, they didn’t have manes, and- Oh shit… “Cubs,” he gulped. “They’re cubs.”

Nico’s eyes widened, but he didn’t challenge the idea. “But… didn’t you say the Neman Lion was male?”

“I guess that means there’s a momma out there.”

“Not a happy thought.”

They stood there for a bit longer, swapping theories on how no one had discovered this before, if Percy actually faced the original lion, and spit-balling what other creatures could have reproduced without the demigods knowing. And despite the fact that the conversation started off serious, it quickly turned silly in nature: No Nico, I very much doubt your dad has a genderbent Cerberus hidden away.

“-his ex-wife made a lovely statue of him,” the same voice cut through the air.

He spun around just in time to see the tattooed woman from before disappearing once more into another section, but this time he swore she winked at him.

It’s a coincidence, he told himself as Nico continued to rattle on about the unknown world of monsters. Just a coincidence.

There comes a point in every relationship where you do things you don’t want to do because you love that person. His mother had told him that, Paul had told him that, Mr. Chase told him that, and Hades had told him that. Persephone and Jason had also told him that, but they were less civil and threatened bodily harm if Nico was ever unhappy with him. But what none of them had every said was how to deal with the situation where both parties thought the other was enjoying something they
They had accidentally wandered into *Plants of The World* instead of *Dinosaur Hall*, which should have simply been a matter of turning around and heading to the far superior exhibit (Living on the farm for months had made him an expert of watching plants grow). Instead, he accidentally looked a bit too intensely at a weird red flower, which in turn made Nico look at a far cooler looking black flower. This set off a chain reaction of each thinking the other had a secret interest in flora.

Percy would look at what he thought Nico was looking at and then Nico would look at what he thought Percy was looking at, both of them putting on interesting expressions for what they thought was the benefit of the other. The seemingly endless loop seemed like it was never going to end, as they stayed longer in the stupid plant zone than their combined time in all the other exhibits.

“Percy,” Nico sighed, as they looked at what had to been the hundredth variation of Venus Flytrap, “Do you really like plants?” The son of Hades had dropped all pretenses of caring and looked borderline exhausted.

He shook his head. “I think I’m starting to hate them,” he answered honestly. “Like, genuine hatred,” he added, glaring at a particularly taunting cactus. “You?”

“Gods, no!” Nico laughed. “I thought you liked them!”

“And I thought you liked them!” he laughed, wrapping his arm around the son of Hades. “Why don’t we say fuck this and go look at some awesome dinosaurs! The posters show they have a tricer-”

The museum’s intercom system clicked on. “Attention guests,” a cool female voice echoed through the stone halls, “Mr. Arthurson’s speech will start in five minutes, if you would kindly make your way to the main hall.”

When the intercom clicked off the other guests in *Plants of The World* looked at a pair of teenage boys, who were whining as if they were small children over not getting to see the dinosaurs.

Charity speeches, school assemblies, Chiron’s lectures, all boring and all so easy to tune out of and focus on other, more important things. Such as a loose string on his cuff, the small brown spot just under Nico’s right earlobe, the way Hades’ nose twitched when he was angry, or that Persephone had taken off her heels revealing a particularly painful looking set of blisters, all of which were more interesting and easy to focus on.

Why can’t he just be like ‘here’s some money! Spend it wisely and enjoy the buffet!’ , he thought as the old guy continued to talk. *But I guess this helps us in the end.*

The plan was that they would let the old guy talk for a while before they took him out, making it seem less suspicious. Because what are the odds of a guy walking out on stage and just keeling over? Pretty low Percy figured, but if the guy fell over dead after a couple minutes, that would mitigate some suspicion. Though, he was still keen on the idea of opening a window and let nature take its course. Mostly because he was having second thought about the whole thing.

*If it was George, no problem! Or if this guy was a bit younger or buffer. But come on! He’s a walking skeleton! He looks harmless!*
Nico grabbed his hand and smiled up at him, easing his anxiety. “Do you want me to do it?” the son of Hades mouthed.

Honestly, he did. He really did, but he didn’t want to burden Nico with yet another death. He squeezed Nico’s hand and mouthed back, “no. I got this.”

He closed his eyes, partially for concentration and partially to not see the act unfold. He reached out and felt the water that was within everyone in the museum hall, and in a weird way he could almost ‘see’ the entire room like some kind of water based echolocation. *I’ll have to play with that later. Me and Nico could defend Hell’s Kitchen if I get good enough!* He began to sort through the bodies; a fat balding man with nearly completely clogged arteries, an older woman with high blood pressure, the tattooed woman from before who seemed to be considerably dehydrated for someone her size. It wasn’t hard, but it was slightly time consuming to work his way to the front of the room, but it was worth it if it meant no innocents would get hurt.

*I can’t guarantee they won’t be mentally scarred, but seeing an old man fall over shouldn’t be too terrible. Right?*

Finally, he got to the stage only to find nothing, except for the bottle of water sitting on the oak podium. Thinking that he missed the Arthurson, he started over, but once again he found nothing. *Okay... Weird*... He cracked open one eye and saw that, yes, the old man was still up there talking about the importance of providing a safe environment for children. This led him to one of two possibilities: either the old man was severely dehydrated, or he powers weren’t quite as accurate as he thought they were.

“Nico,” Percy whispered just loud enough for Hades and Persephone could hear as well. “I can’t find him,” he admitted.

Instead of looking disappointed or angry, Hades patted his back. “You tried son, that’s all we ask.” The god then looked at his son and jerked his head towards the stage.

Nico only nodded before releasing his hand. The son of Hades than shoved his hands in his pocket, his way of making sure that no mortals would see him opening up the shadows; plus Nico had placed a sewing needle in his pockets, his weapon of choice.

Percy couldn’t help but marvel at how indifferent and natural Nico looked, like he really was just a bored teen that had been dragged to some event and not a guy stabbing a-

Nico’s eyes widened. “What the…,” the son of Hades whispered to himself. The younger teen’s impassive look morphed to one of frustration, furrowing his brow and biting his lip as he began to shove his hand in and out of his pocket, making it look like he was doing something rather obscene.

Hades left Persephone’s side and move in between him and Nico. “What’s the problem?” the man asked, eyes not leaving the stage.

“He’s not there!” Nico growled. “He’s not here!”

Hades bit his lip. “Are you-“

The god was cut off as the room burst into applause, making the four of them turn their attention back to the stage.

“No ladies and gentlemen,” the not-Merlin said, leaning heavily on his cane. “It is my pleasure, nay, privilege, to introduce the man who has rekindled my hope in the human race! A man who taught me what it means to be truly generous! A man that knows nothing but love for his fellow man
and wouldn’t even harm a fly! A saint by any definition! Mr. Gabriel Ugliano!”

Percy’s heart stopped.

The crowd erupted into applause once more as a small door marked ‘staff’ opened up and out stepped the man who had tormented his every moment for what felt like an eternity, the man who took his world, his future, his family.

His breath hitched.

Smelly Gabe had apparently changed somewhat since he had last saw his former stepfather. The balding man had gotten a toupee and a clip-on ponytail that were two different shades of black and so bad that even Polyphemus could see it was fake. His cheap glasses were replaced by some much thinner golden frames that weren’t held together by scotch tape. Like Percy, Nico, and Hades, he was wearing a tux as well, but the buttons on his shirt threatened to pop off every time his beer belly jigged. And yet despite those changes, those pathetic attempts to improve his style, he was still the ugliest thing in existence.

Nico, Hades, and Persephone were talking to him, but the only sound he could hear was the rapid beating of his heart in his ears.

He took a step forward, and Hades grabbed his shoulder, which he quickly shrugged off.

Then he heard Nico call out his name, but he seemed so very far away.

Another step, this time knocking two socialites out of the way. The couple said something to him, but they mattered little.

One more step and suddenly it was only him, Smelly Gabe, and a room full of obstacles.

Percy started to run towards the stage, ignoring the pain in his leg, while pulling water from every direction with only a small part of his mind stopping him from ripping the water out of every living thing within range.

When he got within twenty feet of the stage the ground exploded beneath his feet, a torrent of water propelling him high into the air as the museum rumbled and groaned from the stress of every pipe and valve exploding, all the liquid coursing out to aid their master.

“I’LL KILL YOU!” he roared, as thousands of gallons water rushed into the room, be it as geysers or waterfalls from the balconies above.

Maybe if he hadn’t been focused solely on his former stepfather’s terrified face, he would have noticed the smile on Merlin’s wrinkled face as he mouthed, “checkmate.”

Chapter End Notes

Let's be honest, you saw that coming.

Gabe showing up was blatantly mentioned before, so the only people shocked by this were our heroes. It is also petty obvious what's going on with Merlin this chapter, but
that does raise some questions, doesn't it? ;)

The lions of Tsavo are a very interesting chapter of history that fit amazingly well into PJO/HoO. Seriously, those lions were almost supernatural according to first hand accounts. They turned several traps to their advantage and devoured their would be killers. They were shot multiple times and still came back for quite some time. There is some controversy over the exact number of kills, but many experts believe those two did not kill 137 people on their own, but they do agree their aggressiveness was unheard of. I hope you enjoyed that little head canon of mine and you can see the Lion's at the Field Museum, or watch the movie "Ghosts in the darkness" which is based off of the events.

I also hoped you like the evolving family dynamic, as family is important to this fic. Persephone is movie her way into the group and is winning over Nico and Percy slowly. She will also have another POV chapter soon as will Hades. Maybe they'll live ;)

Also, just so you know I do feel terrible about last chapter, I truly do. However, it was necessary for this tale and I don't want you all to lose hope (yet) as there is still more to the story.

You may have also noticed I but an end chapter of 105, this is a rough estimate. I may expand it slightly depending on how things go. Due to life I sometimes I have to split chapters in half to make my self-imposed deadline.

And I see that you are asking questions in the comments and making suggestions. we're almost done with this fic so I'm not pulling in any AU characters like Disney or the like, they do not fit into this story at all. This is a story of mortals, demigods, and gods. I have a list of AUs I do plan to do someday so maybe then :) As for questions, well I want to answer, but I'm afraid at this point I'll give away the plot. I'm not discouraging questions mind you, some I can answer :

and trust me boys and girls, you ain't seen nothing yet.
As the water rushed in museum from seemingly every nook and cranny, Nico’s thoughts were for once not focused on Percy, but rather his family. So just before the flood waters reached them, he wrapped his arms around his mother and father and pulled them into the shadows.

As they zoomed through the realm of shadows he could hear the terrified screams and anguished cries of the unlucky mortals who had been caught within the son of Poseidon’s fury. He just hoped that Percy had enough sense left to him that he wouldn’t intentionally harm the mortal guests. He could forgive Percy for a few broken limbs and ruined clothes, but the blood of the innocent would be pushing it.

The three of them tumbled out of the shadows into the now partially flooded Lions of Tsavo exhibit, said lions had been knocked over along with everything else and were floating away in the ankle-deep rapids.

“What the hades is wrong with Jackson?!” Persephone cried as his father pulled her to her feet. His stepmother, who had looked lovely only moments before, looked like a drowned rat. The black slip she wore was now in danger of slipping off, her hair had worked its way out of its bun and was plastered to her head, and the water had made her mascara run. In Nico’s opinion, he thought that she had never looked more like the Queen of the Underworld. “Does he not understand the meaning of subtle?!” she cried, wiping away the smeared makeup.

Nico gulped and stared his stepmother in the eye. “He wasn’t going for Arthursen. Percy was going for-”

“His stepfather,” Hades finished. “Gabe Ugliano, the only thing I believe Percy truly hates.” The older man then removed his drenched jacket and tossed it aside; the article of clothing quickly disappearing from sight along with a stuffed capybara. “There is no way this is a coincidence, this was a trap.” The god bit his thumb and stared off into the distance in thought. “And from what you and Percy experienced, I’m going to wager that Arthursen had some form of protection.”

“Wait, wait, wait!” Persephone cried, shaking her head rapidly in disbelief. “How would they even know we were coming? How would they know to set their trap in Chicago? Or know about Jackson’s stepfather for that matter?”

He thought that Persephone raised some valid points. How could they know? We’ve been keeping to ourselves and hiding at the farm. It’s not like Percy was running a blog about-
“They’ve always known where we were,” his father announced, his voice suddenly quite small. Hades threaded his fingers through his long dark hair and pulled at it. “They’ve known since the beginning! How could I have been so stupid!”

“What are you talking about, my love?” Persephone asked nervously.

“I’ve been a complete and utter idiot!” Hades cried, terror in his eyes. “Avalon has been after demigods since the beginning! It would only make sense for them to keep tabs on any unusual events!”

“Unusual events? Father, what are you talking ab-“

His father turned to him and grabbed him by the shoulders. “The day this all began, Nico! The hospital! A god and a demigod riding on torrents of water, hurling cars at each other, is going to attract a lot of attention, Mist or not! We couldn’t have been more obvious if we shot off a flare!” the Lord of the Underworld cried, shaking his son as if the action would help Nico understand. “Then, I was foolish enough to register you for school using your real names! And chances are they search New Rome for registers, records, anything and everything that would list out the names of demigods!”

Thankfully, before he developed a severe case of whiplash, Persephone grabbed his father’s arms and gently pried them off Nico. “My Love, settle down,” she whispered. The goddess then placed her hands both sides of Hades’ head and pulled him down so they were looking eye-to-eye, which seemed to calm the man down considerably. “As funny as it sounds, we are only human. We made some mistakes, but everyone is okay,” she cooed. “Let’s get Percy, go home, get mother and Jason, and leave. We can start over as many times as necessary.”

For some strange reason, Persephone’s words upset the son of Hades. “No,” he stated. His parents turned to him, their faces looking as puzzled as he felt. “No,” he repeated. “We are not running, I’ve- we’ve already lost one home to Avalon, we are not losing another.”

Persephone dropped her hands from his father’s face and place them on her hips, a signature move his mother used when he or Bianca were in trouble. “Nico-“

“No,” he said, pulling his miniaturized sword from his pocket and willing it to its normal, intimidating size. “Merlin is here,” he growled, challenging his stepmother and father to argue with him. “We can end this tonight.”

“Honey, he’s probably dead already,” Persephone said calmly, her body relaxing. “Your boyfriend summoned pretty much the entirety of Lake Michigan to kill his stepfather, who happened to be standing next to the old guy.” She smirked. “I very much doubt he still draws breath.”

His father stepped forward and placed his hands on Nico’s shoulders. “Your mother is right, the odds of either of them surviving are miniscule. They’re-“

“They’re both alive. I can feel it,” he growled. Somehow Percy’s attack hadn’t made a single soul depart from the earth, which was troubling to say the least. But if his father was right, and it really was a trap, then it made sense that Avalon would have protection in place for their leader, but where did Gabe factor into that? Even if the goal was to have Percy lose it, wouldn’t it be better to have him kill Gabe? Because what else could make him so valuable to Avalon? It’s not like he would have any valuable information. He came back to life from being a- Two sets of arms wrapped around him and pulled him into a tight embrace. “Wha-“

“Just shut up and let your father show you he cares for once,” Hades whispered in his ear.
“You have your mother’s stubbornness,” Persephone sighed, resting her chin on top his Nico’s head. “So, we know there’s no point in arguing with you about this.”

His father chuckled, which somewhat tickled him in his embrace. “Combine that with my own stubbornness and you are a lost cause.” Hades and Persephone held him tighter, and Nico wasn’t sure how to react. “Just—just be careful son. I know I don’t say it enough, but I am proud of you and I love you.”

“We both love you,” Persephone sniffled. “Even though I was an idiot before, I never stopped loving you.”

He dropped his sword to the water covered floor, splashing the three of them, but neither of his parents said anything as he returned their hug and buried his head against his father’s chest. It had been a lifetime since he had last experienced a moment like this, and although Bianca and his mother were no longer with them, it still felt just as precious as it did before. “I—I love you too. Both of you,” he choked out.

They stayed that way for another minute or so, far too short in Nico’s opinion, before Persephone pulled away, eyes glistening with tears. “Alright, you go kill that Camelot wannabe, while your father and I go save your boyfriend.” She smiled and wiped the tears away. “Just so you know though, Percy is going to have to kiss our asses until the end of time to make up for this fiasco.”

Nico scooped up his sword and rested the flat of the blade on his shoulder. “I plan on giving him a hard time too,” he smirked.

Just before he stepped into the shadows, he heard his stepmother say, “That’s my boy.”

It felt more like he was traversing through a sinking ship than a museum, what with all the water rushing in from every direction. Every window had been blown in and now had waterfalls coursing down them. White water rapids formed in the museum’s hallways, as priceless one-of-a-kind artifacts created obstacles for rushing waters, making some hallways completely inaccessible for anyone not equipped with hydrokinesis, flight, or shadow travel. The museum pieces that didn’t get jammed in the rapids became hazards themselves, threatening to knock anyone off balance if he wasn’t quick enough to swipe them away with his sword.

The strange thing is though, besides worrying about getting knocked on his ass by a rogue shogun helmet, the waters allowed him to pass through them as if they weren’t there. His heart knew why of course, but his mind was trying to wrap his head around just how powerful Percy had become. He isn’t even nearby! He’s not even in sight! How in Tartarus does moving drops of water lead to this? What about me for that matter? I know I can shadow travel now with ease, but what else has father’s training done? Do I need to take a trip to a graveyard and see how many souls I can summon?

He climbed over the shattered remains of canoe and into the Plants of The World exhibit, the same exhibit he and Percy had spent way too much time in a little more than an hour ago. It seemed strange to him that Merlin would retreat to the second floor, but that was where he could feel the old man’s soul along with two others that were oddly familiar. Merlin’s soul also felt a little different from their brief encounter in New Rome, almost younger and more feminine in nature, but he wasn’t going to rule out the possibility of the grievous sins the man had committed had irreparably altered
his soul.

Speaking of which...

At the other end of the flooded exhibit, he caught a glimpse of the old man at the exit, heading in the direction of the dinosaur exhibit he and Percy had been denied. It looked to him that the old man had been purposely waiting there for him, as one is to do when they are trying to lure someone into a trap. But if they thought having two guys hiding near the entrance ready to jump him was going to work, they were sadly mistaken.

*I bet they have a net. Merlin is going to monologue and when they think I'm distracted, they'll jump out and throw a net on me. He gripped his sword tighter. Yeah, no. This son of Hades isn’t getting captured ever again.*

Nico took off sprinting down the hall, jumping over obstacles, and steeled his mind for whatever was about to happen. He made a hard left, almost falling over on the water covered floor, but he quickly corrected himself, and ran into *Dinosaur Hall*, shadow traveling to the center of the massive room the second he crossed the threshold.

Now, despite being in a room filled with the remains of ancient colossuses that he vaguely remembered drawing crayon pictures of with his mother and Persephone on the kitchen floor, ADHD was not going crazy. No, the complete triceratops, the partial stegosaurus, the brontosaurus (which Percy said no longer was a thing, which confused him), stuffed one-armed gorilla, T-rex, and other prehistoric creatures did not distract from his target, which was standing only a few short yards away.

The old man stood before the fossilized remains of the tyrant king, back turned to Nico, leaning heavily on his black cane. Despite the rushing ankle-deep water, the thin man showed no signs of it affecting him. “I’m afraid—”

Good, Nico thought with a sneer as he rushed forward, blade ready. While Percy was one to engage enemies in witty or snarky banter, he preferred action. True, there were times when he needed to distract his foes to guarantee victory, but most of the time it was unnecessary to draw out that fight.

As he closed the distance between them, the old man’s eyes widened in fear. Merlin raised his hands, dropping his cane, to shield his face as he stumbled backwards. The leader of Avalon fell back onto the raised platform, cowering in fear like a small child.

Nico stepped into the shadows and immediately reappeared above Merlin, his Stygian sword aimed at the old man’s chest. He reveled as he fell to the earth, gravity increasing his speed, and was elated when the tip of his blade pierced his enemy’s chest—

Only for the man to completely disappear, and his sword to stab through the plastic between the T-rex’s feet.

“I’m afraid that you have wasted your time, Mr. di Angelo,” the old man’s voice wheezed from behind.

Nico yanked his sword free and spun around, to see the Merlin standing in exactly the same place and way as only moments ago. He lunged at the man again, growling in rage, but this time Merlin didn’t disappear, rather he fell through the man, crashing head first into rushing waters. He quickly pulled his head out of the water and coughed violently.

*Is he actually magic?!
"-for you see, I was never here," Merlin continued, still looking up at the fossilized giant. "What you see is just an illusion, and as Mr. Grace knows, I’m all about tricks." The old man raised his left hand and snapped. "But it would be unfair for a magician to take all the credit, when the lovely assistant is critical in baffling the audience."

A cloud of emerald green smoke popped into existence to the right of the CEO of Big Apple Island and out stepped a dark-haired woman with serpent tattoos on her arms wearing a little black cocktail dress. It took Nico a moment, but he realized that he and Percy had seen her throughout the night as they wandered around the museum. "Ah, even as a recording that is so nice to hear!" the woman cheered, her voice smooth and seductive.

"So, we’ll leave you with some friends of yours," Merlin continued after a second, the unnatural pause further proof that he really wasn’t there. "But I believe we will see each other before this night is through." The man started to cough, and leaned heavily on his cane. "It would be quite disappointing to Mr. Grace if he learned you fell fighting, especially to them."

"Shut up!" Nico screamed, tossing his sword with all his might at the specter.

"Toodles!" the woman smiled, and with a snap of her fingers, the two members of Avalon disappeared; Merlin blinking out of existence while she disappeared in another cloud of emerald smoke.

Nico collapsed to his knees and stared at the spot the two had just been standing. "When the hades did they get magic?!" he cried, slamming his fist into the water. "Guns, technology, remote control gods, and now magic! This is bullshit!" He punched the floor again, and hissed when he split his knuckle open on the hard marble. "Ow!, Mother-," the son of Hades hissed, before placing the bloody wound in his mouth. "Probably going to need some ointment for that because of the water," he sighed.

He took a deep breath to calm himself. *Okay, we failed at our main objective. No big deal, that’s pretty normal. I’m still not sure what the point of all this was, but Percy, father, and Persephone are still alive, and that’s what’s important. We’ll just get out of here and-*

Something large splashed down in the water behind him.

*Oh, right*… He dove forward, snatched up his sword, and spun around in one fluid motion, only to come face-to-face with the last person he would have ever expected. "Frank?" he asked, lowering his sword slightly. If he had been Percy, he would have ran and embraced his sister’s boyfriend, but he wasn’t.

And something was off.

For starters, the son of Mars was missing his left arm; which, Nico was positive hadn’t been missing the last time he saw him. His once magically toned body had lost most of its muscles, leaving Frank looking like an emaciated parody of his former self in tattered rags that he could swim in. Honestly, Nico had no idea how the praetor was alive, let alone standing.

The most striking change though was Frank’s eyes. The dark orbs that had once betrayed Frank’s insecurities and his feelings for Hazel, now were filled with agony, were glazed over, and unfocused. It was like Frank didn’t even see him, despite standing ten feet in front of him.

“Frank,” Nico repeated as the Canadian took a shaky step forward. He took a step back and raised his blade. “Come on Frank, talk to me!” He fell into the shadows only to reappear on the T-rex platform, putting more distance between himself and one of his first friends. “Just tell me you’re
alright and we can get out of here! I can take you to Percy and Jason!”

Frank stopped his slow march and mechanically lifted his head like one of Leo’s failed automatons, and stared at him. It was unnerving, but Nico hoped that it was a good sign.

“That’s right,” he said in the same soft voice he typically reserved only for Jason and Percy. He lowered his sword and took a small step forward, his wet shoes squeaking. “Percy and Jason are fine,” the son of Hades cooed. “Percy’s here actually, and Jason… Well, Jason’s back at the farm; long story.” A single tear leaked from Frank’s left eye and Nico thought that Frank was really there, that the reason the son of Mars hadn’t spoken was due to some unknown trauma. “It’s okay,Frank.” He gulped, and asked the predominant question on his mind since he saw the praetor, “Frank, where’s Hazel?”

That must have been the wrong question, as Frank’s eyes widened and rushed at him; transforming into a massive, black, one-armed ape in a fraction of a second.

Just as what was supposed to be his future brother-in-law reached the platform, Nico slipped into the shadows, and reappeared directly behind the great ape. With the flat of his sword, he smacked Frank in his bulbous ape ass, sending the mammal tumbling forward into the giant skeleton. He sighed and hefted his sword on his shoulder, “Not the reaction I wanted, but it does-“ he gazed up to the back of Frank’s neck and his breath hitched, for there was a small patch of skin that wasn’t covered in black fur, revealing a long scar.

The same scar he had seen on the corpses and unresponsive captured demigods of Camp Jupiter.

“That must have been the wrong question, as Frank’s eyes widened and rushed at him; transforming into a massive, black, one-armed ape in a fraction of a second.

The son of Mars’ answers was to rip one of the massive fossilized femurs from the T-rex and swing at the son of Hades, growing in frustration when the Italian narrowly dodged the blow.

“Come on Frank, fight it!” Nico shouted as Stygian iron met dinosaur bone. While Frank’s movements were unrefined and the material of his weapon weak, the sheer size and strength of the massive mammal was more than enough to make up for those deficiencies. He gritted his teeth as he put all of his weight into his blade, watching as Frank’s primitive weapon began to crack from the pressure. “Fight it!” he groaned, just as the bone snapped in two.

Instead of falling back when his weapon broke, Frank pushed forward, dropping his bone and reaching for him as Stygian iron tore through the ape’s bicep. But just before the massive hand wrapped around Nico’s throat, the heir to the Underworld opened the shadows beneath his feet, and literally slipped from Frank’s grasp.

Nico reappeared on the far side of the room, emerging from the shadows behind the triceratops, hopefully out of sight. As he hid behind the triceratops’ ribcage to catch his breath, he watched as Frank began to survey the room, and began to piece together yet another atrocity committed by Avalon. If they have the means to control gods, then controlling demigods should be a piece of cake in comparison! But they had to implant a device in the gods, so it’s most likely the same for demigods. Frank roared and bounded off the T-rex’s display, splashing into the cold water below. It’s got to be in the neck! That would explain why no one in New Rome was responsive; they were under Avalon’s control! So maybe…

If there was one aspect of training he and Percy enjoyed the most, it was learning how to control the earth beneath their feet. While he had had some control prior to father’s instruction, the prowess he had now was on a whole other level. The same went for Percy, who could shake the earth when he was upset, but now could perform far more localized movements. The two would spend some time
behind the barn every evening, making castles of dirt pop from the ground like mushrooms, or playing gigantic games of tic-tac-toe in the earth. And while sometimes he questioned some of his father’s methods (Percy called his father the ‘Greek Mr. Miagi’), the results spoke for themselves.

With the minimalist of effort on his part, the skeletal remains of the greatest predator to ever walk the Earth roared to life (which raised a lot of questions); what little glass that hadn’t been shattered from the flood rained down from the devastating decibels. Nico watched in awe as the one-legged skeleton shook off sixty-five-million years of stiffness, joints somehow popping and cracking, before it fixed its empty eye sockets on the gorilla before it. Before the device or whatever contraption that controlled Frank could make him react, the apex predator lunged forward, snapping cables and steel rods that held it up, and wrapped its jaws around the enslaved praetor.

“I am so telling Percy about this!” the son of Hades cheered. He severed his connection to the beast as he ran out from his cover. He bounded up and slid over the triceratops platform, just as the freed skeleton began to crumble; vertebra, hips, and leg bones raining down into the water below. But that was fine, as all that mattered was the ancient skull binding Frank. It wouldn’t hold long, and if Frank shifted into a fly or something, his plan would be foiled, but there seemed to be some delay in his favor. “I’m sorry about this Zhang!” Nico cried as he slid behind the struggling ape. He gripped his sword tight with both hands and imitated the stance of the New York Yankees’ batter from the game his father had taken him too so many years ago, and swung at the base of Frank’s neck with all of his might.

Only for his sword to be shot out of his hands, sending it flying to the back of the room…

The force from the impact knocked him down as well, submerging him entirely in the cold water. He instantly bolted upright and coughed uncontrollably as he rubbed the water from his eyes with his now sore hands. Just as his vision began to return, a hairy hand lifted him from the water by back of his jacket, and shook him violently.

“Get your paws off of me! You damn, dirty ape!” he shouted as he thrashed at his mind-controlled friend. Feeling like an idiot, as he remembered he was wearing a jacket, he raised his arms up and slid out with ease, splashing down and running forward, only to run into- “No… Please no…”

He thought his eyes were playing tricks on him. He prayed they were deceiving him, as this was the last thing he wanted. He did not want to see his sister covered in bruises, her teeth chipped and broken. He certainly didn’t want to see her in tattered clothing with gemstones and precious metals sewn into her very skin. And he most did not want to see Hazel with the same pained, distant look in her eyes as Frank.

“Hazel,” Nico’s voice hitched, as he fell back onto all fours. This is a nightmare! Please not this! Let me wake up! I don’t care if all of this is a dream and I’m still trapped inside the jar, anything is better than this! “Hazel-“

She raised her left arm mechanically, her head rolling to the side with a emotionless face, as she took a single step forward. In the blink of an eye, a ruby the size of a Mythomagic figure shot off of her forearm and embedded itself in Nico’s thigh.

Nico screamed in agony as the gemstone tore through skin and muscle, thankfully missing bone, but unthankfully lodging itself inside of him. He didn’t have time to continue to express his pain as he heard Frank splashing towards him from behind while Hazel slowly moved her arm closer to his chest. So with no other option, he fell into the shadows, landing hard on the floor next to his sword. As the terrible two spun around looking for him, he scooped up his sword and clamped his other hand on his thigh, before slipping once again into the shadows to lick his wounds.
If profanities were bullets, then Nico would have been a Gatling gun as curse words from four different languages poured from his mouth as he tore off his blood-soaked pant leg. The rationale part of his brain that wasn’t busy instructing him how to make a proper tourniquet was telling him that he should find his family and get out of there now, but the rest of him was saying not without Hazel. Sadly, having been around Percy and Jason for so long, his illogical side won out.

“Fuck!” he hissed as he tightened the makeshift bandage, dozens of dark spots filling his vision. He collapsed back on the sarcophagus of a pharaoh whose name he couldn’t begin to pronounce, and panted heavily. With his eyes squeezed shut, he focused on locating his family. Percy was easy enough to find, outside on the museum’s front steps, his soul radiated pure rage. Persephone was near him, her mortal soul was similar to an infant’s, new and innocent. His father was running through the museum for some reason, his mortal soul now like his mother’s, but far darker and tired.

He smiled tiredly knowing that they were alive, but the incessant ringing in his ears had him terrified. Since he reappeared within the Ancient Egypt exhibit, dozens of souls had left their mortal coil, and that number seemed to only be growing. Nico understood and was used to the fact that there were always going to be a higher number of deaths in a city, but not like this, not so close together in frequency and location. He could only pray that Percy wasn’t the reason why.

There was a loud splash and the rumble of something large and scaly coming from the entrance of the exhibit and Nico groaned in frustration. God damn it Frank. He rolled over and gingerly put some weight on his leg, but he still nearly collapsed. “Yup!” he hissed. “Walking is not an option.” He dropped to the floor and peeked out from around the casket, only to sigh once again. Great, as if the gorilla wasn’t bad enough!

Hazel was walking down the main hall, her motions become less jerky and mechanical with each step. Frank, or at least he hoped that was Frank, followed behind her in the form of a large, black dragon; its serpentine head scanning from side to side. To make matters worse, the back of the dragon’s neck was covered in thick scaly armor, preventing him from destroying the device within.

I’m sorry Frank, but if it come down to you or Hazel, well… He didn’t finish the thought, not wanting to think of his friend that way.

His sister stopped abruptly, before stepping to the side to let the draconian Canadian pass. Okay, what’s that- The dragon opened its massive maw and jets of blue flame shot out, enveloping the hall in fire. The water pump he and Percy had been monkeying around on was reduced to cinders, the field of plastic crops turned into a pile of hot green and black goo.

Nico pulled back and covered his mouth to stop him from gasping. His initial thought was that they were there to capture him, so that Avalon could transform him into a mindless drone like them. But there was no way they aimed to take him alive if they were using a burnt earth strategy.

They’re either trying to drive me out, or as the world’s most cruel form of tracking! He stuck his now bloodied hands in the water, and frowned at the bloody bite marks. Okay Nico, think. I could shadow travel out of here now, or make one last effort to save Hazel. He glanced around the
sarcophagus one more, just as Hazel shattered the glass of a display on ancient agriculture tools with a diamond, before Frank lit the tools aflame. He frowned. *Option one is starting to sound a little better…* He pushed that thought aside. *I’m in an Egyptian section, in knee deep water, surrounded by ancient treasures, and the remains of- I’m an idiot…*

Nico reached out and found the wrapped remains of pharaohs, high priests, and peasants, all in perfect condition for what he needed. With the minimalist of effort, he commanded the ancient corpses to rise up, with the goal to subdue his sister and scaly future brother-in-law. He bit back an amused chuckle at the situation, *The Mummy* had been one of his mother’s and Persephone’s favorite movies, but Boris Karloff in all those wrappings and makeup had terrified him when he was younger, much to the chagrin of his father. Now he was using a childhood fear to save-

**THUMP! THUMP! THUMP!**

“What the-?! OH, FOR FUCK’s SAKE!” the son of Hades facepalmed.

He had successfully raised a small army from the dead, and they were all eager and willing to do his bidding, but he had forgotten to take one important detail into account: the bullet proof glass that shielded the mummies from handsy visitors. His Egyptian comrades were stuck in their displays, beating on the glass with all their might, one was even using an ancient chair, but dehydrated skin and bone didn’t pose much of a threat. If anything, all they did was confirm that he was nearby, Frank performing longer blasts of flame.

Rolling his eyes, the son of Hades severed his connection; the worthless minions crumbling into dust and bone. *Well that was a waste of time and effort, time for plan B…* His wounds were beginning to drain him of his strength, and with the exception of shadow travel, his mobility was shot. *This is going to hurt Hazel, but I’d rather have her alive and injured than, in Avalon’s sick hands. Why are her teeth messed up? What’s with the bruises!*

He opened the shadows first around a golden throne, swallowing it whole. He then had the shadows devour an ornate golden staff, an iron sickle, a golden bejeweled set of scales, and a host of other ancient items made from softer metals. When he thought he had gathered up enough objects, he opened the shadows on the ceiling, away from Hazel and Frank, and opened another, larger portal directly beneath, creating an infinite loop of falling objects. It was tiring to do, unlike sending a pencil through the shadows to stab an annoying redhead in the ass, but the principle idea was the same.

Next, he pushed himself up, using the golden casket to balance himself, putting him directly in the sights of his pursuers. “Hey guys,” he said weakly, “miss me?” He dropped his sword in the water below, its weight becoming too heavy, as his family and friend began to rush towards him. Nico focused on the water in the hall, and began to siphon out the heat.

Hazel and Frank found that it became increasingly difficult to walk, the water freezing until at last their feet and claws were frozen in ice that was a foot thick. This did not detour them, only making them change their priorities; Hazel shooting gemstone to chip the ice away, while Frank began to thrash about and pull. Nico didn’t know why Frank didn’t simply incinerate his way to freedom, but he hoped that there was still enough of the Canadian in there that wanted to protect Hazel.

Nico didn’t dwell long on whether or not Frank was still in there, as it would only make things worse, and he needed to concentrate. He continued to pull the heat away, the waters instantly refreezing beneath their feet and starting to creep its way to him. *Just a bit more…*

He wasn’t moving the heat to some random location, no that heat was being used to forge his dragon slayer. All that heat was being channeled into a column that stretched from portal to portal. And as
the collection of ancient metal knickknacks tumbles down in their endless fall, the combination of their acceleration, air friction, and the heat reduced them to a blinding white pillar of molten metal.

“I’m sorry Frank,” was all he could manage to say as he closed the portals and immediately reopened the exit above Frank’s large, scaly body.

It is said that the cyclopes Arges, Brontes, Steropes, fashioned the greatest weapons in history for Zeus and his siblings to use in their war against their father, with the master bolt being the greatest of all. For the master bolt, Arges added the brightness, Brontes, the thunder, and Steropes the lightning (Nico had always thought it sounded like Steropes did all the work), to form the mighty weapon. However, as the pillar of molten metal crashed down on and tore armored hide into two in a blinding light that threatened to singe his corneas, Nico thought it was about time for a reevaluation.

Nico could only watch in a mix of awe and horror as the superheated metal rained down its fiery destruction. A dragon, a beast built to withstand raging infernos from both within and without, was instantly split in two, with a good portion of the body turning into ash. Despite how horrifying it looked, it was a quick death, and it still hurt Nico to his core that he had been forced to commit such a dark deed.

Hazel though, arguably suffered worse.

Having stood in front of Frank, the heat of the blast hit her like a brick wall, a painful experience that he was all too familiar with…. The ice that had bound them in place had instantly melted and flash boiled away, irreparably destroying his sister’s legs. She collapsed forward, her mouth opened as if to scream, but no sound came. Her body jerked and spasmed, the sheer amount of pain almost overwhelming the device in her neck.

Although his stomach was on the verge of emptying itself and the amount of guilt he felt threatened to break him, Nico knew this was his only chance to free his sister. He heaved himself forward and pressed on through the pain and the burning steam, only stopping when he reached his sister, dropping to his knees.

“It’s okay, Hazel,” Nico cried, more for himself than Hazel. “You’ll be okay. Father is here, he’ll help!” He rolled her over onto her stomach, cringing as her soft, round cheeks touched the heated floor. He began to peel away the ragged clothing so that he could see where to strike, while rapidly telling his sister about the farm, their father’s caring side, all the animals she could play with at the farm, his mortal friend Chelsea, and promising to color with her anytime she wanted from now on; anything and everything he could think of to calm his sister if she could hear him.

He tore away the last of the rags, ignoring the amount of charred skin that clung to them, only to be greeted with a message written in gems embedded in Hazel’s back: ‘Claymore, noob -Brian’

Hazel’s head snapped back, a ragged breath escaping her throat, as her body began to convulse, and Nico could only watch as the bedazzled message exploded outward from her back, seemingly in slow motion. Even with all the training, all the combat experience from years of fighting, his reflexes were still too slow to do anything at that close of range. The first gemstone, a sapphire that made up part of the comma, tore through his left shoulder, embedding itself deep in the bone. The second stone, a ruby the size of a pea, zoomed towards his eye-

Only for him to fall through the shadows and land hard on the top of the sarcophagus.

“Nico!” he heard his father cry.

Nico lifted his head, still dizzy from the impact, and if he was being honest, the blood loss, to see his
father standing at the far end of the hall, right arm outstretched and panting heavily. “D-dad?” he wheezed.

In an instant, his father was at his side, scooping him up like an infant. In his delirium, Nico thought that he really needed to put on some weight, he was quite tired of being carried by everyone that wasn’t Percy. “My son, are you alright?”

He thought about making a smartass remark, but instead he simply wheezed, “Hazel. Help Hazel.”

Hades spun around and carried him to his sister, gasping at the sight of his bloodied and battered daughter. If he thought Hazel was in bad shape before, he was wrong. The exploding gemstones had torn away the flesh from the base of her neck to just below her shoulders, revealing several vertebrae.

And he knew that there was nothing his father could do.

Hades sat him down facing away from his beloved sister, and he had never seen his father so pale. “Nico, give me your sword,” Hades said, voice devoid of all emotion.

He knew what his father was asking, and he knew that it was the right thing to do, but he didn’t want to do the right thing. “No,” he choked.

“Nico-

“NO!” he cried, tears blinding him. He clutched his sword to his chest, sobbing uncontrollably. This couldn’t be happening, not again, not to him. He couldn’t lose another sister, especially not Hazel. Hazel had been his sunshine, his lifeline, and closest friend for some time. Hazel, who embodied the joys of their father’s kingdom. Hazel, who loved to groom horses and color. Hazel who couldn’t watch a movie rated above G or she would get flustered. No, this couldn’t be happening to Hazel! His sister was supposed to live to a ripe old age, have tons of kids that he would spoil, and be the flower girl at his wedding, not die a slave by their father’s hand! “No! No! No! No! No!” he screamed, rocking back and forth.

“Damn it, Nico!” his Father roared, grabbing him roughly by the shoulders. “DO YOU THINK I WANT TO DO THIS? SHE’S IN PAIN!” Hades stopped, and for the first time in his life, Nico saw his father cry. A part of him had always thought that his father was incapable of shedding a tear, of feeling weakness; after all, he was a god. But on his father’s proud, powerful face, the tears flowed freely and a pain that matched his own was mirrored in his father’s dark eyes. “Please, Nico. Don’t let her suffer.”

With the heaviest of hearts, Nico handed his father his sword.

The sound of his sword piercing his sister’s heart would never leave him.

Hades ended up carrying him out of the exhibit, before the two of them collapsed on the stage in the main hall, under the ancient gaze of Sue the T-rex. As he cried like he never cried before, Hades went to work bandaging his wounds, with pieces from his own tux. His father tried to diagnose the damage and explain what would have to be done, but it was a pathetic attempt to distract both of them from what happened, and they both knew it.

Eventually though he ran out of tears, though his body continued to shake. “W-where’s Percy? Phe
Hades smiled sadly and ran a hand through his hair, ruffling it slightly. “They’re fine, but we need to get out of here. *Now.*” The older man stood up, and frowned at his submerged Italian leather shoes. “Avalon,” he paused and kicked at the water. “Avalon is a monster that even I thought wasn’t possible.”

“What—“

Hades silenced him with a look, telling him that this wasn’t the time or place. “If there is one good thing about this, it’s that we no longer have to worry about being subtle in our escape.”

Nico looked up at Sue and smiled. “I have an idea….”

Chicago is a city with stories and legends all its own. The Saint Valentine’s Day Massacre of ’29, Mrs. O’Leary’s cow starting a fire that would engulf most of the city, the Devil Baby of Hull House, or H.H. Holmes murder castle, all legends, even on the national level. However, all those tales would be dwarfed by the story of how Sue the T-rex smashed its way out of the field museum, knocking over two stone pillars, with a whooping father and son riding on her back.

Chapter End Notes

:)  

Fun fact: I might be the devil. Or Actually Satan (the 'Actually' is important)

More notes later.  

8/16/18

Okay, that was a pretty rough chapter, emotionally speaking. But hey, we had a lovely little family reunion *smirks*

As if it wasn't evident before, Brian's depravity knows no limits. If he is given a task he will do anything to achieve it. Weaponize Frank? Easy. Weaponize Hazel, well she has control over gemstones and rare metals, but those aren't that common... Hm... Aha!! Embed them in her body! It's not like DGs can feel pain! So let's bedazzle her like a pair of Levi's!!!! Let's place a self destruct protocol if she takes too much damage! Best million he ever spent for Avalon.... I promise you this: he will receive what is his.

Okay, in case it wasn't clear, Merlin was never at the museum, it was just Morgan
creating an illusion with some pre-recorded messages. Despite being called Merlin, he's not magical. He's just an old man who wants to make sure no one suffers like him ever again.

Nico. Nico, Nico, Nico. You are always so fun to write. I've been waiting for a year now to use his 'rail gun' attack. It was one of my earliest ideas, but it needed proper set up and development. And despite his new strength, it is still very tiring to perform, especially while injured. And yes, I thought about him freeing Frank just as he drew his final breaths, but that's so cliche. Perhaps it's better that Frank went out quickly, perhaps not. Either way, Elysium awa- oh wait... It doesn't... ;)

Once again Hades came in to save the day. And let's be honest here, if Nico had been forced to kill his sister (crippling her was bad enough) he would have been broken as bad as Percy. There would be anger on par with Percy's, but i think that would consume him. So I gave the poor kid a break.

Ain't I merciful?

Okay, next chapter is Jason and it's going to be a long one, so it is possible that there will be a delay. So subscribe if you want a notification :)

And one more thing, a surprise for sticking around. Here is the initial summary and title for my next fic: Bonds

Plot summary: Kronos was called the crooked one for good reason. Assaulting Olympus when a prophecy, despite what the Fates say, was against him? Merely a ruse to something greater.

No, with Gaea rising and the emperors of old waiting in the wings, it was not an opportune time to take Olympus. So let them think they won. Let them enjoy their false victory, let his children and their brood defeat his opposition for him.

So he will March to his doom willingly, as with the (unwilling) aid of the child of Hermes, two of the three cyclopes that forged the Olympians' weapons, his most trusted Titans, and an unfulfilled prophecy, Olympus will be his.

I hope that piques tour interest :) let me know your thoughts!

Thanks and have a great night
Jason

Chapter Summary

Warnings: mentions of sexual abuse, violence, death.
Tonight:
Jason has a friend over,
Leo the pig is strange to everyone,
Truths are revealed

Chapter Notes

12K words tonight boys and girls!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jason could only watch in horror at the fallen titan’s final act before he was sealed in his eternal prison. The fiery being, reeking of demonic energy, and larger than a planet, drove his massive sword deep into the planet the son of Jupiter and his comrades had been fighting to save. Sargeras, titanic leader of the Burning Legion, an army of demons that reached across all realities, laughed maniacally as he was pulled back by his brethren. They had defeated him, but how could they heal Azeroth from such a grievous wound?

“Pretty depressing, right?” Chelsea whispered in his ear.

He nodded, unwilling to look away from the screen.

It was Saturday, and for once he had the house (mostly) to himself. He had made plans with Chelsea to come over and raid together, talk about what happened at prom, and just kind of hang out. The plan had almost hit a snag when Hades and Persephone were leery of letting him have a girl over without parental supervision (which he couldn’t believe with everything he had been through), and he had almost been reduced to begging on his hands and knees before Demeter stepped in. The elder goddess stated that if Percy and Nico got to go on a trip to a museum (which was way oversimplified), then he should be allowed to have a friend over, and that she would keep an eye on them. Hades had looked like he was going to press the issue, but Demeter’s glare won out. So much so, that his adoptive father left them money for pizza.

“You mean to tell me, that after all the demons we’ve slain, the friends we’ve lost, and the sheer number of hours we’ve put into our artifacts, that we lost?!” he practically cried out in disbelief, gripping his mouse so tight that the plastic threatened to crack. “Wait, that’s the bad ending right? If we do it again, but faster, we save the day, right?”

Chelsea absently reached over and grabbed a slice of the meat lovers pizza that sat between them on
the bed; frowning when several pieces of sausage fell off as she pulled it free. “Nope,” she said, popping the ‘p’, before taking a rather unladylike bite of the greasy mess that passed as pizza. “That’s the end, minus giving up your artifact’s power to help seal the wound.”

“I have to what?” the son of Jupiter cried, looking at his mighty Tauren paladin’s sword and shield, Truthguard. He had braved the depths of an ancient tomb to retrieve the powerful set of weapons, infused them with power and the blood of thousands of demons, and he was expected to give them up?! Just like that?! Suddenly, the world getting stabbed didn’t seem like such a bummer. Hades, he had let his grades drop (slightly) so he could invest more time into gearing up Super Sparky.

The blonde swallowed the last of her pizza (Seriously Chelsea? That was like two bites?!) and rubbed her mouth clean on her arm. “Yeah, it’s a bummer,” the girl shrugged. “But next expansion we get a necklace and do pretty much the same thing all over again. Plus, you can just transmog your artifact’s appearance onto whatever new weapon you get.”

He bobbed his head side-to-side as the cutscene ended. “I guess that’s true… Still though.”

“Level. Grind. Repeat,” Chelsea chuckled as she responded to something in guild chat. “That is the Warcraft way.” She then pushed the pizza box closer to him. “Aren’t you going to have anymore? You’ve barely touched it.”

Jason eyed the pizza skeptically. “I don’t know Chels, getting pizza from a gas station sounds sketchy to me.” The pizza did taste good, even if it was a bit greasy from all the meats piled on top, but he had heard enough horror stories about food purchased at gas stations to make him hesitant to eat more than two slices. “So, you go on right ahead.”

Chelsea looked at him as if he had just uttered the darkest of blasphemies. The blonde girl closed her eyes, took a deep breath, and closed her laptop. “First of all, city boy, Fast Stop, is not a gas station,” she said, using air quotes. “It’s a general store that happens to sell gas.” The blonde leaned forward, but still get a comfortable distance from him, a clear sign that she was feigning her rage. “Second, you should be thankful for its existence! Do you know what it was like around here before it was built? Hmm? A twenty minute drive, minimum, to any place that had a store, let alone pizza! Third—”

“You had to walk up hill both ways in eight feet of snow,” he said rolling his eyes. “I get it. All you country kids say is how lucky I was to have grown up in a city, and all the hardships you lot have.”

Chelsea pulled back and rested her back against the all, a small smile gracing her lips. “It’s true though. You got to experience delivery, highspeed internet, cable, heck, having everything in walking distance! Given the chance, I’d leave this place like that,” she said, snapping her fingers. Chelsea sighed. “Only a one more year until college, and I can get out of here.”

He smiled and leaned back as well, closing his laptop. He liked these mundane conversations, they were something he never had a lot of growing up in New Rome. With his mortal friends, he could almost forget that he was a son of Jupiter, that a secret society was wiping out everyone like him, and that he was letting his adoptive family down by refusing to fight. He then picked up his wireless mouse and began to flick the power switch slowly on and off. “Have you thought about where you want to go?”

Chelsea tucked one arm behind her head, scowling when she accidentally pulled her hair. “I was thinking somewhere on the east coast initially, but with that floating city shooting lightning at New York sporadically, it kind of put a damper on that. Then there California, but that explosion near Berkley ixnayed that too. Then there’s all those missing people, which has my dad spooked, and he says he won’t pay for anything outside the Midwest unless the world, and I quote, starts making sense again.” The blonde sighed and for the second time he saw his friend look genuinely sad. “So
optimistically, I’m looking at NIU, Bradley, SIU, or Iowa State. Realistically though, I’m going to be stuck here for another year going to IVCC.”

As he tried to make sense of the rapid assault of acronyms, he felt more than a twinge of guilt over his friend’s circumstances. Every obstacle she was facing was indirectly because of Avalon and his father, and he felt like he should apologize. And how would that go? Hey Chels, all your problems are because of my dad is a power-hungry psycho and a holocaust survivor’s grudge, sorry! “What’s IVCC?”

She looked at him again with disbelief. “You really need to pay attention more in school, man,” she giggled, a sound that was starting to grow on him. “Don’t you remember that guy who came into Carol’s class and gave us that spiel about the benefits of starting at a community college?” He shook his head, if it was during Info Processing, the only thing he was focused on was glory for the Horde. “IVCC. Illinois Valley Community College, it’s the closest thing to a local college we got, besides Sauk, where a lot of kids go after high school.” Her eyes turned downcast as he began to play with the frayed denim of her jeans. “It- it is a good idea to go, especially since most big universities tend to look down at rural schools, as getting an Associates looks good. But…,” she trailed off.

Jason scooted a bit closer to the girl, the pizza box now pinned between their outer thighs. “But what?”

“Even with the summer classes I’ll be taking, it will still take a full year.” She bit her lip. “I- I worry that if I stay I’ll never leave. It happens to so many people.” A lone tear slid down her cheek.

Jason also bit his lip. He could understand completely about wanting to get out of a bad situation, of feeling like he was trapped, and worrying about being stuck in the same role forever. He never wanted to be the pontiff, he only took the job to save others, and it was certainly something he didn’t want to do until the he drew his final breath. Then there was Disciplina, a name that still made him shudder. He had thought that nightmare was never going to end, and for a long time it seemed like it wouldn’t. But here is now, sitting a little more than a foot away from a girl, a good friend, he had an excellent relationship with Demeter, who had become something of a grandmother to him, and with each passing day the world got a little brighter. So, with his life turning around, he should help his friend better their life too. “Is it too late to enroll in summer classes? And do my grades have to be stellar?”

“What the hell are you talking about, Grace?”

“I’m talking about taking a few classes with you, or at least at the same time as you,” he rolled his eyes. “We could motivate each other. We could also try to talk Nico and Percy into joining us too since they are graduating in a few months. That is if I can enroll.”

“That… That wouldn’t be a bad idea,” the girl hummed in thought. “I’m sure with the four of us we’d have a few classes together. And the enrollment requirements are ‘can you open a door’ and ‘can you pay’, so I think you’re covered.”

“I don’t know, I’ve tried to pull open a lot of push doors.” He tried to sound seriously, but by the end his was grinning. Chelsea rolled her eyes before grabbing another slice of pizza. He then looked at the pizza and realized that he was still a bit hungry and decided to risk another slice, grabbing a particularly pepperoni covered piece. “I suppose this ain’t that bad.”

After that the conversation slid back into more random topics: homework, gossip (Can you believe Aaron actually hooked up with that DJ?), Mr. Z trying to avoid eye contact with Nico and Percy the whole week (I think Nico’s eyes never left the floor this week either), summer plans (I don’t know, my dad says I should get a job. What about you, Grace?), to tips on how to groom pigs (If
Charlotte’s Web was right about one thing, it’s that buttermilk works wonders.) They played WoW some more, even going so far as to make new characters to level together. He made a dwarf shaman healer, while Chelsea made a night elf druid tank, and together they ran through dungeons and power leveled to forty in under two hours.

They had just stopped to stretch their legs out, when Demeter’s voice called out from downstairs. “Jason dear, could you come down here for a moment? I could use a hand.”

“I’ll be right there, Demi!” Jason shouted back, as he scrambled to get off the bed. But as he started to stand, Chelsea’s leg shot out, her leg hitting just behind his knee, and knocking him off balance. Thankfully, he was able to stop himself from falling by grabbing onto what had been Nico’s bed.

“Oh, crap! I’m so sorry Jay!” the blonde cried as she hopped off the bed. She ran to his side, but didn’t touch him, only offering her hand which he gladly took. “I- er- was coming to lend a hand too.”

“It’s fine,” Jason said, once he was back on his feet. He bent down and began to massage his leg, the accidental kick combined with the fall had left him feeling a little sore. “I guess country hospitality is a real thing,” he chuckled.

“Yeah…”

It turned out that Demeter needed help moving some of the heavier objects in the barn for her own project; a pseudo greenhouse for her and Persephone to grow flowers year-round without worry of Roundup from the surrounding fields killing the more delicate plants. It was hard work, but with the three of them it went fast; they even found an old tractor tire and convinced themselves that they needed to turn it into a tire swing in the near future, so in his mind it was worth it.

Chelsea and Demeter got along exceedingly well, partly because Demeter held farmers in high regard, and partly because Chelsea thought her name was the coolest, practically gushing when she found out the name of Demeter’s daughter. If only she knew, he smiled as the blonde asked if there was anyone else in their family named after Greek gods.

For their hard work and as an apology for interrupting them, Demeter slipped them both a twenty and told them to go get ice cream; and bring her back a cone as well. So, for the second time that night, the son of Jupiter and the farmer’s daughter, jumped into his truck and went to Fast Stop, the general-store-that-happened-to-sell-gas. The store only had a soft serve machine with choices of vanilla, chocolate, or twist, with your choice of cone or bowl. Three large vanilla cones, I guess? As they left, Chelsea once again almost tripped him, but he caught himself on the propane tank exchange.

The drive back to the farm was fun, as driving a pickup truck with one hand while trying to eat a rapidly melting ice cream cone was a new, frustrating, experience for him. Thankfully, Chelsea was quick to eat hers and took his cone from him, scooting closer to him so that he could eat it from her hand while he drove. It was awkward at first, but soon turned into a kind of game as he tried to eat it before a drip touched the girl’s hand. He may have drove into the ditch at one point, but the Bronco was quick to drive right out. Let’s see Percy’s Prius do that!
Once home, they gave Demeter her mostly melted cone and retreated back into the barn. Nico and Percy’s training course and equipment took a bit of explaining (*Nico’s dad wants to be on American Ninja Warrior*), but Chelsea bought it easy enough, only asking how the man would reach some of the targets (Uh… grappling hooks!). He then showed her Leo and his siblings, and the blonde agreed that Leo’s behavior was strange for a pig (*I grew up with pigs all my life and I can guarantee I’ve never seen on play fetch or want a belly rub*).

“I still can’t believe you didn’t press charges,” Chelsea said as Leo the pig dropped his chewed-up tennis ball into her waiting hand. The blonde stood up and then hurled the ball to the other end of the pen, Leo running after it squealing in delight.

Jason frowned as he flopped onto a bale of hay. This wasn’t a topic he wanted to discuss, but he had known it was going to be brought up eventually. “It was a drunken mistake, I didn’t think it was worth wrecking Kelsey’s life over.”

The truth of the matter was that a part of him had wanted to press charges, as what his classmate did had threatened to reopen wounds that had just started to heal. But as he told Mr. Z what happened, he saw Kelsey out of the corner of her eye, and it looked like she had no idea what planet she was on, let alone what she had done. Her dress was tattered and covered in vomit, she was missing her left shoe, and the only thing keeping her upright were two very concerned friends. He realized then and there that she would wake up in a world of trouble, unable to remember what she had even done. So, he told Mr. Z that he didn’t want to get the law involved, but would like the chance to talk to Kelsey once she sobered up. His history teacher respected his decision, but still gave the girl a two week out of school suspension, which prevented them from having their one-on-one. Although, on Wednesday, the girl’s teary-eyed mother showed up to the farm after school and gave him a homemade apple pie as thanks for not ruining the eighteen year old’s life.

Chelsea huffed and threw the slobber covered tennis ball again, making her a lifelong friend to Leo the pig. “I still think she deserves more than a two-week vacation.”

“And what do you think she deserves?” he asked, eyeing his friend. Her body language was easy enough to read, her neck muscles tight, stance rigid, and hands slightly clenched. Chelsea had told him at prom that he wasn’t the only one with problems of the opposite sex and had even invited him to go to some kind of support group with her. She never told him what happened to her, and he knew it wasn’t his place to ask.

“To have her teeth knocked out of her fucking skull,” Chelsea growled, as Leo came scampering back. She bent down, took the ball, and scratched the brown piglet behind his ears, making him oink in delight. The blonde hurled the ball with all her might, Leo chasing after it, before wiping her hands off on her jacket and marching over to the son of Jupiter. “But that’s just me,” she sighed, sitting down next to him. “That’s just me,” she repeated, her voice barely above a whisper.

“I- I can relate actually,” he said slowly, plucking a loose piece of hay out of the bale. He gulped and began to coil the hay around his finger. “I wasn’t always like this, wasn’t always so messed up.” He stopped and le tout a pained laughed. “This is all pretty recent actually. I had a girlfriend, who I loved, a large group of friends that were my family, and I was pretty self-confident. But all it took was for one person to wreck it all. So, I do have a someone I want to see suffer, but channeling those feelings to Kelsey wouldn’t do anyone any good.” He tied the coil’s ends together, making a small, albeit itchy, ring.

“You’re a better person than me, Grace,” Chelsea sighed. She started to lean over to rest her head on his shoulder, but stopped.

The action made him feel a bit guilty, but glad that his friend, even while upset, respected his
personal space. So, he slowly brought his arm up and tentatively wrapped it around her shoulders, which she accepted. Chelsea smiled at him and gently leaned her head against his shoulder, and Jason leaned his head against hers. It was comforting to sit there feeling the warmth radiating from another body on a cool April night, bringing up memories of him and Piper star gazing from Cabin One. It wasn’t romantic, but it was nice, so for a time they sat their together, taking turns throwing a worn-out tennis ball for the world’s strangest piglet.

Eventually, even with their jackets and each other, it grew too cold to stay out in the barn (that and Demeter would probably begin to think they were up to something, trauma or not). So, after tucking Leo into his personal doghouse (Jesus, Grace! And you wonder why he acts like a dog?!), they returned to the farmhouse for the last few hours of the night. He grabbed the rest of the pizza from the fridge, with Chelsea trailing behind him with sodas, and they retreated to his room; with Chelsea accidentally stepping on his heel as they climbed up the steps.

“Okay, what the heck is this thing?” he asked, holding up one of Percy’s Mythomagic figures. It was unlike any monster he had ever seen, which was really saying, a black bulbous mass covered in numerous fanged maws, haunting violet eyes, tentacles, and other appendages seemingly at random. What was stranger, and a little neat, was that no two figures looked exactly alike.

Jason placed the figure on the field (still not sure exactly what he was doing) and picked up the creature’s card. The artwork on the card has clearly been made by a disturbed individual, as it depicted a much more detailed version of the creatures chasing a group of Antarctic explorers trying to flee from the black mass of nightmares, as tentacles darted forward in attempts to snag their ankles. One of the explorers wasn’t lucky though, screaming in a mix of agony and terror as their lower half was being devoured by one of the creature’s many fanged mouths.

The blonde looked up from her own figures, which happened to include most of his family, and squinted at the creature in his hand. “Uh, that is a-” The house went silent and all the lights went out, bathing the room in darkness. “-crap. Power’s out.”

“Thank you for stating the obvious,” he laughed, setting aside Percy’s cards and standing up from the floor. Thank you! I don’t think I could play that game much longer! In the dark, he shuffled carefully to his nightstand, still managing to stub his toe along the way, and retrieved a flashlight from the top drawer. He gave it a quick shake (for reasons unknown to him) and flicked it on, the beam of light illuminating the floor between him and Chelsea.

“Were you a boy scout, Grace?” the blonde asked, a hint of amusement in her voice.

“Sort of,” he shrugged. Using the light, he walked over to the door, Chelsea in tow, and cried out, “Demi, are you okay?!”

“I’m fine!” Demeter shouted back after a moment. “Just worried about the roses in the basement! They’ll wither and die without light! Just like Persephone is because of her husband!”

“Your grandmother is weird,” the blonde chuckled behind him. “And was she talking about her daughter or the goddess?”

“Both,” Jason answered truthfully, with a sigh. “We’ll be down in a moment! Stay where you are!”
He then turned to his *Warcraft* partner. “Are power outages common around here?”

Chelsea shook her head. “Only during bad storms, but I don’t think this is an outage. Look,” she pointed out the window. It took him a moment to realize what she was pointing it, but then it hit him, the ancient light that hung on top the barn’s entrance was still on. “I think the breaker tripped is all. You know where that is?”

“Yeah, in the basement, next to the washer and dryer.” He then gestured for her to follow, as he was pretty sure it was rude to leave someone alone in the dark. *I mean, I wouldn’t want to be left alone.*

Jason had walked through the farmhouse numerous times at night, often to use the bathroom or grab a late-night snack form the kitchen, but the house had nightlights throughout so this was the first time he had truly been in the dark. And it was decidedly far creeper in the dark. The tree branches that scratched against the north side sounded more menacing, the portraits of John Deere looked creepy in the light of his flashlight, and the squeak of the floorboards made him think there was more than Chelsea following him. *ADHD used Heroism! It’s super effective!*

The staircase, which was narrow and steep, required him to hold the handrail in the dark. Any other time he would have simply floated down them, but with a mortal in the midst, he wasn’t sure the Mist would be able to cover up something so apparent that close.

“Hey Chels, watch it, this step is-” his warning was interrupted by the very thing he was trying to warn about, the loose board springing up, sending him falling face forward. Out of reflex, Jason stopped his fall, his face floating mere inches away from the floor.

“I knew it!” Chelsea cheered. “You can fly!”

*Oh shit…*

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*So, this is a thing,* he thought as he bent down and grabbed another flashlight from beneath the kitchen sink; the previous one broken during his fall. He flipped it on, almost blinding himself as the ultrabright LED flared to life.

“You can fly, Nico can teleport, and Percy can… well I’m not sure what Percy can do, but he can do something!” the blonde rattled behind him.

“Jason,” Demeter chuckled nervously, “What is she talking about?” The elder goddess was sitting at the kitchen table, a candle in front of her, as she watched his classmate continue to accuse him of superhuman feats.

*Just my luck…* The son of Jupiter placed the flashlight in the center of the table, illuminating the darkened kitchen by some degree. He would have preferred to go check the circuit breaker first, but there was no way that was going to happen until the blonde settled down. “She, uh, saw me float.”

Demeter’s eyes widened as she looked back and forth between him and Chelsea. Jason figured that this was probably the worst-case scenario in her mind, and she was trying to think up of an excuse. “Float? Whatever are you talking about?”
“I saw him fly at the after party!” the girl cried. Her claim caught Jason completely off-guard, his mouth opening and closing like a fish on land. “I also saw Nico teleport a pencil up Aaron’s ass! And I’m pretty sure you’re connected to those gorgons at Walmart!”

“You can see them?” he gasped, which pushed them well past the point of denial; Demeter beginning to rub her temples. Jason chewed on his lower lip as Chelsea’s eyes lit up. Okay, Chelsea can see through the Mist. Which I guess explains why she guessed Olympus was Olympus. But what do I say? What did Percy say to Rachel? Do I tell her everything? Do I wait for the others to get back? Do I-

“Jason, were you expecting any more company tonight?” Demeter asked, looking out the kitchen window. “Because someone is pulling up the drive.”

He looked up from his thoughts. “No…” He moved away the sink and toward the front door, ignoring Chelsea’s excessive questioning. Sure enough, a black SUV was driving up their gravel drive. His initial thought was that it was the others returning home, but upon closer inspection, it was a completely different make and model vehicle. It quickly stopped behind his truck and Chelsea’s, which was quite rude as it would prevent them from easily backing out. “Chels, do your parents drive an SUV?”

“-And I know, just know, that-” she blinked and tilted her head, realizing her had asked her a question. “Uh… No, we all have pickups.”

In the dim glow of the barn’s light he saw the rear passenger door quickly open and close, and then a second later, the silhouette of a teenage girl with a ponytail bounded out from behind the SUV, and sprinted to the passenger door. “I think it’s someone from school,” he said slowly, squinting, trying to make out the girl. “Maybe it’s Kel-” His heart stopped when he saw the end of a cane touched the ground beneath the open car door. “WE NEED TO GET OUT OF HERE, NOW!”

Instantly, Demeter was on her feet, knocking the kitchen chair to the floor. Chelsea, was equal parts terrified and confused, asking him to explain what was happening. He quickly grabbed her by the hand and pulled her out of the kitchen and down the hall with Demeter on their tail.

“We’ll leave through the window in Hades’ office, I can fly us to the next-“

The basement door flew open in front of the them, and out stepped a large, grizzled man in black combat gear, with a gun in each hand. “Not a bad idea, partner,” the man said, pointing one gun at Jason and the other at Demeter, Chelsea cowering behind the son of Jupiter. “But, that would be pretty rude to your guest. Now, why don’t ya’ll turn around slowly now and return to the kitchen,” he said, gesturing with one gun for them to move.

There was a part of Jason that was saying he could take the intruder, but his rationale side pointed out that the odds were exceedingly high that Chelsea or Demeter would get hurt in the scuffle. The hall was small, he had no room to maneuver. Lightning would just hurt everyone. A gust of wind might knock the man off of his feet, but he looked ready to pull the trigger at the slightest provocation. Like most things in my life, I don’t have a choice… Jason sighed in defeat. “Alright, we’ll do as you say.”

“Good,” the man said with a crooked smile. “The boss has been looking forward to this. Though, I have to say, I was really hoping you would have come in the basement, I had this whole fight-in-the-dark thing planned.”
“I do apologize for showing up at such a late hour unannounced,” the leader of Avalon said remorsefully. “But, like good guest, I brought a plate to pass.” The old man then slowly reached down and opened the black bag the blonde girl had brought into the house, and pulled out a cake box. “A cherry cheesecake!” he said, a smile tugging at his lips.

This is too surreal, Jason thought at the old man instructed the combat ready teen to search for plates and utensils. The man who the others went to kill is in the house, offering us cheesecake, with guns pointed at our heads! He hugged Chelsea tighter, the girl was in tears and clinging to him desperately. “It will be okay,” he whispered in her ear, trying to reassure both her and himself. “You’ll be fine. You’ll be fine.”

“You should listen to Mr. Grace, young lady,” Jeremiah Arthurson said, using his cane to slide a plate across the table to Demeter. In the months since Jason had last seen the man, his appearance had changed greatly. He was already thin before, but now he looked little more than skin and bone. Dark bags hung under his eyes that made Nico’s at his worst, look healthy. The spring in his step was gone, as he now leaned heavily on his cane. It seemed to Jason, that the man was nearing the end of his days. “George, please lower your weapon from the children. This is a celebration after all.”

“A cele-“ Demeter mumbled, looking at the cherry covered dessert in front of her. “You are a monster! I don’t need my divinity to kick your-“ the armed man bashed the back of Demeter’s skull with the butt of his pistol, sending her face first onto the table.

“George,” Merlin tsked, “That was uncalled for.”

“Sorry boss,” George said, lowering the gun from the back of Jason’s head, and placing it in his hip holster. “Just making sure these things know who is in charge here.”

“Jason, what’s going on?” Chelsea sobbed into his shoulder, still shaking in terror. “Who are these people?”

Merlin slid two more pieces of cheesecake across the table, before offering a piece to the other blonde girl, who politely refused. “To answer that question, I must ask my own. That boy you are clinging to, do you know who and what he is?”

“Jason Grace,” Chelsea answered, looking up from his shoulder. “My friend.”

“Thanks,” he whispered, squeezing her shoulder.

“I suppose that’s true,” Merlin smiled. The man then reached into his suit jacket and pulled out a small, white tablet, and with a shaky hand woke it up, to reveal a picture of Jason, Nico, and Percy on the front steps of the school. Then with one wrinkled finger, the man swiped the picture away, and a long-distance picture of him, Leo, and Piper riding Festus against the Chicago skyline took its place. “But he is so much more.” Merlin swiped again, this time a picture of him and Nico from their time in Croatia appeared. Another swipe, and a picture of the Argo II floating above Arachne’s lair took its place. “Much, much more,” he smiled, sliding the tablet to the blonde.

Chelsea picked up the device and began to flip through the images. There were pictures of him getting knocked out by the cyclops in Detroit, satellite images of the Argo II fighting shrimp-zilla, and even a picture of him and the others fighting the giants in Greece. With each picture, Chelsea’s eyes grew wider and she flipped through them faster and faster. “Jason, what are these?”
That is an excellent question. How long have we been followed? Deciding that there was no delicate way to answer her questions, especially given the situation, he blurted out, “My father is the Roman god, Jupiter. I’m a demigod.” To emphasize his point, he rolled up his sleeve and presented his brand. “And Demeter is, well, Demeter.”

Jason wasn’t sure what kind of response he would get, but her response made him laugh. “Shut the fuck up,” she said, eyes on the verge of popping out of their sockets in amazement.

“I’ll vouch for the boy,” Merlin smiled, a bit too fondly in Jason’s opinion. The old man then took a bite of his own slice of cheesecake, eyes never leaving Jason or Chelsea. “All the so-called mythologies of the world are true, or were. Mr. Grace and his adoptive brothers just so happen to be children of Jupiter, Hades, and Poseidon. Though, he did have a sister who was a daughter of Zeus…”

Jason felt his stomach drop at the mention of Thalia, and the past tense sucker punched him. But he held out hope, that the old man didn’t mean it that way.

“Okay, say I believe you,” Chelsea said, still scrolling through the tablet, stopping every so often to examine a picture in closer detail. “That still doesn’t answer who you are or why you are here.”

“I am terrible with introductions,” Merlin laughed. “I always forget them. I am Jeremiah Arthurson-”

“The founder of Big Apple Island?!” Chelsea cried out. When she realized that no one shared her enthusiasm, she slid back into Jason’s arms and blushed.

Merlin coughed into his fist, clearly embarrassed for the girl. “Erm, yes. But to Mr. Grace and my compatriots here,” he gestured to George and the girl, “I am known as Merlin. These are George and his daughter PB, and surrounding the area with their rifles aimed at all of our heads are the other members of Avalon.” He raised one wrinkled hand to silence Chelsea. “And Avalon is a little society I started to free the world from divine oppression.”

“Divine oppression!” Demeter snapped, still eying George warily. “I will admit that my brother has done some terrible things, but you’re committing genocide! Against children!”

The old man sighed and set his fork down before sliding his plate away. “It would seem I’ve lost my appetite,” Merlin sighed. “I was hoping that wouldn’t happen until the appointed hour, but alas, the truth cuts to the core. Pity too, I brought this all the way from New York.”

“Could someone fill me in here?” Chelsea asked. “I just found out about demigods two seconds ago, and now we’re talking about genocide?”

“It’s pretty simple, Chels,” Jason said, looking at Merlin straight in the eye with a glare that would make both Nico and Hades proud. “He and his flunkies have been systematically killing every demigod and monster they come across. Which is the most hypocritically thing a Holocaust survivor could do,” the son of Jupiter growled. From behind he could hear George remove his gun from his holster, pulling the hammer back as he did so.

“I am well aware that I am a hypocrite, Mr. Grace,” Merlin sighed. “And I know one way or another, I will answer for it. But even though I came here to tell you the war is effectively over, I wanted you to know that a hundred other peaceful plans were attempted first, that war was the last resort. As it should be.”

“What?” he was confused, firm what interaction he had with Avalon and Merlin, it seemed that war was the only option.
“I suppose I should start at the beginning,” Merlin said with a sad smile. “But first, does anyone need to use the bathroom? This could be quite long.” Everyone shook their head, though Jason had a sneaking suspicion that they would be forced to stay anyway. “I was born Jeremiah Aarons in Berlin to a competent, Jewish horologist and his wife. I was the oldest child by seven years, with my sister, Abigale, being quite a shock to my parents. We had a good, comfortable life; I helped my father repair pocket watches in his shop and my sister helped mother with the household.”

“Really?” Chelsea scoffed. “Were the women folk not allowed to leave the house?”

Merlin scowled. “Abigale was too young to work in the shop, I myself didn’t help my father until I was ten, as was tradition! Anyway-” he shot a glare at Chelsea “-Things were bad back then, and all too similar to what’s happening now. Xenophobia, nationalism, divided communities, all things our parents tried to shield us from. They- they failed of course.” Merlin rested his arm on the table and began to rub tattooed letters and numbers.

“Then one morning, the gestapo broke into our home and drug us away. I can still hear my mother screaming and my sister crying. I never saw them again.” The old man paused. “I do apologize once again for coming like this, I swear on my mother’s grave that none of you will come to harm or be taken on this night.” Merlin sighed and started his story again. “The next thing I know is my father and I are being packed into a freight car like cattle, with hundreds of other men. I thought the heat combined with the smell of sweat and excrement was going to kill me.” Merlin ran a hand threw his thin gray hair and laughed. “Kind of wish it would have.”

“Sir?” PB asked, gently placing her hands on the old man’s shoulders. “You don’t have to tell them.”

“No, no. It is only fair they know,” he said, reaching up and squeezing the girl’s hand.

Despite knowing everything the man before him had done, Jason couldn’t help but pity Merlin. The man was still clearly mourning the loss of his family, even after over fifty years. And he realized then that he, Nico, and Percy would probably be the same way as well.

“The government, in all of its generosity, gifted me with this wonderful tattoo, and gave me and my father employment at a munitions factory, where we worked twelve hours a day, seven days a week,” Merlin said with a forced chuckle. “And free room and board. Where I stayed for four long, agonizing years. My father was lucky, he died early on from infection. Believe me when I say there will never be a greater hell than what we experienced.”

“Um, Mr. Merlin, sir?” Chelsea asked, raising her hand. “What does this have to do with demigods?”

“During my stay, I started noticing things about the guards and staff: In hushed voices, they praised the gods of old, they carried weapons of bronze and gold that only I could see, they referred to the prisoners as mortals. It wasn’t enough for me to make any conclusions, but enough to arouse my suspicion. And as the years passed, my eyes opened more and more the horrors that surrounded me: horrifying women with twin serpent tails instead of legs, hulking behemoths with one eye, high ranking officials with glowing eyes of silver and gold, but the worst was yet to come.”

Merlin gripped his cane tighter and his face paled. “One of the most common points holocaust deniers make is how it would have been impossible to dispose of so many bodies; as even with the furnaces, the ash and bone would still remain.” He tapped his cane on the floor. “But your family had centuries to perfect their craft, and their solution was as simple as it was horrifying. For you see, drakons have an insatiable appetite and highly combustible feces. Picture it: dozens of scared, malnourished people being told to strip and march into what they are told to be showers, only to locked in with monster they can’t even see.” The old man stopped and his eyes began to glisten with tears. “Do you know what it is like to shovel up what had been your friend, so that they could be
used as fuel? The soul-crushing guilt from knowing that you’ll continue to do it to save your own hide? The fear of knowing that if you are unable to continue, you’ll share the same fate?”

Jason sat there, staring at the leader of Avalon in shock. “How- how did you survive?”

“By a miracle,” the old man answered, wiping his eyes dry with the sleeve of his jacket. “In the closing days of the war, your father, or at least an aspect of him, paid the camp commander a visit. I’ll never forget him, all storm and fury clad in black leather, your godly brother and sister trailing behind him as he roared at the commandant. ‘More souls’, your father said, ‘more souls’. Those words haunt me to this day, for when he left, the staff began exterminating all of us with extreme prejudice. The drakons couldn’t keep up with the amount of bodies, so many were left to rot out in the sun.” For the first time since the tale began, Jason saw Merlin smile. “I tried to escape, but the guards caught me. I thought it was over, a terrible ending for a terrible life, when two gunshots rang out, and the guards dropped dead.” Merlin’s smile grew, warm and fond. “And that was when I met Arthur Arthurson.”

Chelsea snorted with laughter, and Jason thought for sure that she had just got them killed. “Really? Arthur Arthurson? Did he attend Hogwarts? Let me guess, wizards are real too?” the blonde huffed.

“Well, they were,” George answered. “Until Mordred and his team took them out.”

“Dad, what’s Hogwarts?” PB asked, staring at Chelsea suspiciously.

“I’ll, uh, add it to our to-watch list,” George said, a hint of a smile appearing. “Um, sorry sir, please continue.”

“No needs for apologies,” Merlin chuckled, waving everyone off. “It is quite a silly name, and Artie was a silly man. He was a scrawny sixteen-year-old American, who lied about his age to enlist. He deplored violence, but was a crack shot with a rifle. If someone couldn’t understand him, as was my case, he would simply talk louder. He was a good soldier, following orders without question, but for some reason that he was never able to explain, he broke away from his unit that day, and because of that saved many lives. He cut through that barbed wire and tossed me, a fourteen-year-old Jew, one of the guards’ guns and the two of us liberated the that hell hole.” The old man paused again and spun his cane in his hands. “Two teenagers fighting hordes of monsters and nazis, wouldn’t that make an interesting story?”

Chelsea nodded. “I’d read it.”

“I’d wait for the movie adaptation,” Jason answered honestly. But then a thought occurred to him. “Wait, could Arthur see through the Mist?”

Merlin nodded. “Indeed. He was one of the few people that could, and you have no idea how much of a relief it was to know we weren’t crazy.”

“Oh, I think I do,” Chelsea said rolling her eyes.

“I do to actually,” he answered, remembering his ill-fated trip to the Grand Canyon. “Of course, everything is a bit crazy after you’ve had your memory wiped.”

“Your memory was what?” Chelsea asked, mouth gaping and eyes wide.

“Okay, fine! Everyone in the room, know what it’s like,” Merlin laughed.

“I don’t,” Demeter answered, rubbing the back of her head.
“In any case,” Merlin continued, ignoring the harvest goddess. “Arthur led us back to his unit. I didn’t speak English yet, but I’m positive that he someone got his ass chewed and praised at the same time by his CO. He was given a medal for his actions and sent on the next ship home. I believe he accidentally revealed his age in that heated exchange; which I learned was just like him, he was always putting his foot in his mouth.” Merlin paused. “That is an expression you kids understand, right? Putting your foot in your mouth?”

Chelsea nodded.

“Well, at that point I had no one left, and all I wanted was to avenge my family. Artie… Artie wasn’t going to let that happen. So, for three Hershey bars and a comic book, Artie bribed an acquaintance of his to forge some papers, and Jeremiah Aarons died and Jeremiah Arthurson, Arthur’s younger brother, was born. During the voyage to America, Arthur taught me some basic English, using his favorite book, *The Sword in the Stone.*”

*Well that explains the knights of the round table stuff,* Jason thought as he glanced around the room. Despite being interested in the old man’s story, he wasn’t buying it that they weren’t there to kill him, Demeter, and probably Chelsea to not leave witnesses. No, he needed to find a way to get everyone safely out. But with George’s gun still aimed at Demeter, PB staring at him like a cobra ready to strike, and the threat of armed men outside, he wasn’t sure if there even was a way out. *And my sword is upstairs, retired or not, I should’ve never stopped carrying it! Demeter made it keychain size for gods sake!*

“No imagine our shock when we saw Olympus floating above New York when our ship arrived. Centaurs, cyclops, chimera, and all manners of gods and beasts walking amongst unsuspected peoples. I of course, wanted to bludgeon the first creature I saw to death, but Artie… Artie talked me out of it, rationalizing that there was far more going on than two teenagers could handle.”

Jason rolled his eyes in understanding. “Story of my life…”

“Anger quelled, we travelled to his home in Iowa, to a farm just like this one,” Merlin said, holding his arms wide. “His parents took a shining to me, his mother trying to fatten me up, while his father was just happy to have another hand on the farm. I must say, the piglets were always my favorite.”

The man chuckled. “We even had one for a while that thought it was a dog.”

Jason looked at Chelsea, and she at him. *No freaking way…*

“But all good things come to an end,” the old man said, his smile disappearing. “One day, around four years after I arrived, Artie’s father caught us in the barn. Artie lost his family and we fled to New York, where there was a small area where people like us were accepted. I got a job repairing watches and Artie jumped from job to job; it was a hard life, but we got by. But being back around the unknown awoke memories and feelings I tried to bury. For a time, I even went out at night with nothing but a *Louisville Slugger* killing every monster I could find.”

“That sounds like a healthy coping mechanism,” Demeter huffed. She then glared at George, daring the man to hit her again. “It is not surprising though that you went unnoticed. Olympus can be… a little too self-centered.”

“Artie of course was furious with me when he found out of my nighttime escapades. It… It was probably the biggest fight we ever had, but in the end, we agreed that something had to be done. So, in a little eastside apartment, Avalon was born.”
“Wait,” Chelsea said, squinting in confusion. “Isn’t that, partly, the story of how Big Apple Island was founded?” Jason looked at her, tilted his head and raising on eyebrow. “What?” the blonde shrugged. “I wanted to get a job with them someday! I know these things!”

Merlin and George chuckled, making the three teens even more confused. “Time for a little lesson on Arthurian mythology,” George said, taking his eyes off of Demeter for the first time and lowering his gun ever so slightly. “Avalon roughly translates from Welsh or Breton to ‘the island of apples’. You could say Big Apple Island could also be called Big Avalon.” When the armored man realized all eyes were on him, he flushed every so slightly. “I, uh, tend to learn about my employers before taking a job.”

“A lesson you should remember, Jason and… Chelsea, was it?” Merlin asked, and the blonde nodded. “But what the young lady said is true, our public face was founded the same night. Artie had managed to get his hands on a bunch of vacuum tubes and other electrical components, and we opened a little shop building and repairing radios. Business was good, we expanded quickly, having a staff of over one hundred in under five years. We took our profits and invested heavily into technologies that the two of us thought would benefit the world: semiconductors, personal computers, and cell phones just to name a few.” Merlin bounced his cane off the floor, his smile returning. “That was what we did during the daylight, but at night we were slowly building an intelligence network composed of people like us; people who could see what we saw.”

“And you’ve been killing demigods ever since,” Jason growled, fists clenched.


The metaphorical rug was once again pulled out from beneath his feet by the old man. “You’re joking, right?” he asked. The idea that Avalon, the group that had hunted down his friends and family to the point of extinction was laughable at best. Next he’s going to tell me Santa is real….

“No, I swear on my mother’s grave that it’s the truth,” Merlin said, looking him straight in the eye. “Our organization quickly found out about the various groups of demigods from half-siblings, parents, and the like. See Avalon has two main divisions: the sword and scabbard-“

“The legend of Excalibur!” Chelsea blurted.

“Correct!” Merlin cried, pointing the end of his cane at the girl. “Give this little lady a cookie!” PB then spun around, approached the kitchen counter, and began to open up the various jars and crocks on it. “Err, no sweetheart, that was just an expression,” the old man blushed, but not as much as PB. “Anyway, where were we? Oh! The sword and scabbard!” Merlin cried. “The scabbard was led by Artie, it’s goal was information gathering and development of strategies to protect the general public. The sword, my side, is pretty self-explanatory, we took out any monsters we could find that posed a threat. We quickly became aware of the existence of the various groups of demigods, wizards, and adapt-s, and we decided to watch from the shadows.”

Jason remembered a passage he had read once from an old book while he was studying on how to be a better praetor. That, and once in an issue of Captain America. “The enemy of my enemy is not my friend.”

“Exactly, Mr. Grace,” Merlin nodded approvingly, as did George. “Despite many of our members’ negative attitudes towards them-“ George grunted “-we decided that it was for the greater good to aid them since we thought we had the same goal. Our organization helped in a variety of ways: feeding misinformation to the authorities, so they wouldn’t apprehend any demigods on important quests, thinning the number of monsters they would have to face-“
“The Battle of New York,” George grunted. “We camped out in the subways to make sure your little friends weren’t taken from below.” The man then barked with laughter. “There is nothing like watching an empousai realize it messed up when its bronze leg touched the third rail.” George snapped his fingers with a dark chuckle. “Zap!”

“-sabotaging the Roman convoy by falsifying detours and blowing out a few tires, protecting the families of demigods from both the forces of Kronos and Gaea, to something as simple as providing a ride to the Atlanta Aquarium and providing a little food.”

Jason’s eyes widened. “How-“

“How long have we been helping you? Or how long ago did we stop?” The old man asked. “For the latter, we stopped when we recovered this-” Merlin reached for the tablet once more, opened a different album, and enlarged a picture of a silver and bronze laptop. “- from a collapsed parking garage in Rome. The personal laptop of one Daedalus.”

“The maze dude?” Chelsea asked, leaning forward to better look at the picture. “Shouldn’t he be, you know, dead?”

Jason sighed, but smiled lightly at his friend. If we survive this, I’m going to have to make a PowerPoint to explain everything… “First thing you learn as a demigod, even before who your godly parent is, is that no one who should be dead is, and even if they are, they come back.” As he uttered those words, he had an epiphany. “Just like in comics,” he groaned, resting his forehead on the blonde’s shoulder. If I wait long enough, Leo should come back with amnesia and a metal arm…

“I had already suspected for years that Olympus was behind a great deal of sorrow. The abduction of young girls for the Hunters of Artemis, the targeting of young girls to bare their children, the number of demigods in positions of power, all pointed to something dark. But to have all my fears verified, and then dwarfed proved too much. A never-ending cycle of war to harvest the souls of the living to extend their immortality? To recreate the same hatemongering that led to my family and millions of others to be slaughtered like cattle? To see that despite our best efforts the word was doomed to start the largest war it had ever seen? Suddenly, the idea of altering the human collective unconscious to create, gentler, more benevolent gods seemed laughable!”

“Ugh, I still remember all the excitement from the psych team over Disney’s Hercules,” George huffed. “They thought the children of the world would magically turn Zeus into John Goodman, Hermes into a Elton John parody, and Hades sassy.”

“Wait,” Demeter said quietly. “What do you mean Olympus was harvesting souls? This is the first I’m hearing about that. Granted, I just found out my youngest brother and his family has been starting wars for the last two-thousand years, but what would they need souls for?”

Merlin flipped through the tablet, opening a PDF reader, before handing to the depowered goddess. “Read for yourself,” the old man said, before sliding the electronic device across the table. He then nodded to George, who in turn lowered his weapon completely.

“What did Arthur think of that?” Jason asked, eyes on Demeter, who was growing paler and paler as she read. “It doesn’t sound like the guy would condone what you’ve done.”

Merlin closed his eyes and gripped his cane tighter; twisting it back and forth on the floor. “Artie died while trying to evacuate people around Mount Saint Helens, Typhon escaped faster than anticipated. When we discovered that laptop, it… it was the first time I was glad he was dead. That he didn’t have to see the horrible truth.”
“For what it’s worth,” Jason said, “I’m sorry for your loss. Arthur sounded like a good man.”

“Yeah,” Chelsea nodded. “It sounded like he was a hero.”

Merlin nodded in thanks, a tear running down his wrinkled cheeks. “I appreciate that, and he would’ve liked you two. Would’ve thought you two were a cute couple.”

Despite the circumstances, Jason felt his face heat up. “Oh, we’re-“

“Not a thing,” Chelsea finished, looking at her sock covered feet as if they were the most interesting thing in the room. “We’re just friends.”

“I know,” Merlin smirked. “Artie was terrible at reading people.”

“Uh, sir?” PB said, looking at her watch. “It’s almost time.”

Merlin nodded to the teen and returned his attention back to him and Chelsea. “Mr. Grace, I came here tonight to tell you Avalon’s story, my story; to let you know that what we have done and will do is the last thing I ever wanted to do. So, I have arranged three gifts for you.” He snapped his fingers, and PB pulled out a black box from a bag slung over her shoulder, and placed it in front of Merlin. The old man carefully removed the lid, to reveal seven white wristbands in nonconductive foam. “After observing you and your new family for some time, it was decided that none of you were a threat. Tools to be used, but not a threat. So, anyone that walks into this house tonight will be allowed to live a normal life. As these bracelets negate the signal, our ultimate weapon. They will allow you to keep your natural abilities, so I expect you to show your friend here a good time.”

Jason relaxed slightly. “Chels, if you think I’m going to dress up as Peter Pan and fly you around, you are sadly mistaken.”

“Yeah,” Chelsea laughed, rolling her eyes. “Because I so want to see you in spandex.”

George and Merlin groaned in disgust at the visual, while PB only hummed.

“The second gift will arrive with later this evening with my associate Morgan,” Merlin continued, sliding the box of bracelets across the table. “They should be finishing up their business in the Underworld shortly. I think you’ll like-“

Demeter slammed the tablet down on the kitchen table and rested her head in her hands; a horrified expression on her face. “No… It can’t be…. Hades would’ve known! Zeus-“ her words became unintelligible as she broke down sobbing, pulling at her hair, as her body began to shake.

Seeing the goddess like that was strange to the son of Jupiter. Ever since they had arrived at the farm, Demeter had been cheerful and upbeat about the situation, and had comforted him many times when he went out to the barn to be alone and cry. The goddess had taught him to drive, showed him how to run the farm, let him keep Leo, kept Hades off his back when his grades were less than stellar, stayed home so he could have Chelsea over, and so many other little things that had helped him greatly in the last few months, earning her a special place in his heart.

He slowly placed his hands in the table, earning pointed looks from George and his daughter, but a small smile from their boss. Jason then slowly, ever so slowly, stood up from his chair, only to instantly stop when George drew his second gun in the blink of an eye. Merlin then nodded to the man, who replaced his weapon with a grunt. With approval, he moved next to Demeter and wrapped his arms around the large woman. She looked up, tears in her eyes, and patted his arm with a thankful smile.
“It warms my heart to see that you appreciate your family, Mr. Grace,” Merlin said, a wistful look in his eyes. “Be sure you never take them for granted.” Once more, the old man reached across the table and picked up the tablet. “I suppose you are well aware by now of our capability to take control of gods and demigods,” the leader of Avalon said as he maneuvered through the several menus. “We do this so we can capture and store them at a secure location until we can finally, truly, kill them. On many occasions though, we use the stronger gods to help us subdue others so that we have a chance to extract information before we turn them into puppets.” Merlin slid the tablet across the table to Jason. “Now imagine my surprise when we encountered a goddess in Massachusetts that claimed to know you.”

Jason’s heart stopped.

With trembling hands, the son of Jupiter picked up the device, only to immediately drop it as if it was cursed. For there on the screen, in black and white security footage, was Disciplina.

“She had quite the story to tell,” Merlin sighed. “Quite the story. Putting you threw a week of pure hell designed to break you. Keeping you physically and mentally exhausted, exposing you to traumas beyond your control, and of course, destroying your trust in the one you loved.” Merlin smirked. “And all at your father’s orders.”

“What?” he choked out, eyes not leaving the tablet. The video ended and the screen transitioned to a transcript allegedly between the goddess of discipline and an interrogator of Avalon. For once the son of Jupiter was able to read through an entire page without his dyslexia hindering him, but that was hardly cause for celebration, as with each answer, it felt like an invisible hand was squeezing his heart tighter and tighter. There’s no sign of the guy leading her to get he answers he wants. And it’s like she’s bragging about how Zeus ordered her to… he couldn’t finish the thought. He felt… a lot of things. Betrayal, rage, confusion, sorrow, all changing so fast that he thought that he was going to pass out.

“There is audio if you care to listen for yourself.” Jason slowly shook his head, gripping the tablet so tight, that cracks were beginning to form. “I know this is a massive blow, but I promised a gift,” Merlin sighed, reaching across the table and swiping one finger across the top of the tablet. The screen transitioned to a live feed of the goddess that looked like his former girlfriend, standing stationary inside some kind of cylindrical pod; at the bottom of the screen was a red button with a skull and cross bones in the center. “Mr. Grace, at its core, Avalon still seeks to protect people from the divine. And while we haven’t been able to kill any of the Greco-Roman gods yet, we do know how to permanently remove them. If you press that button, that monster will never be able to harm anyone ever again.”

How many times have I fantasized about something like this? Making her disappear? Making her suffer? Jason let go of one side of the device, leaving a bloody thumbprint behind. This would be closure. A chance to move on without fear, he thought, his finger hovering over the button. It should have been easy, should have been a reflex, but for some reason his finger just hovered there.

“Jason,” Chelsea said, her voice just above a whisper. “I- I don’t know what exactly happen to you, or what she did. But if it’s anything like I think it is, and if you believe she would do it again to someone else, then you should push that button.”

Demeter clapped a hand on his shoulder and the former goddess looked up at him, tears still flowing. “Jason, listen to the girl. What Disciplina did is unforgivable. She, and gods like her, are not part of the Olympus I remember. We were supposed to be the shining examples for humanity to follow, not monsters to fear,” she spat.

Jason nodded and steeled his resolve. This isn’t just about me. This is making sure she never harms
anyone again.

He pressed the button.

There was no screaming, no melting away, no curses, or even a flash of light. Simply the goddess that had took the form of Piper McLean was there one second and gone the next. Did a part of him wish that his tormentor would have shown sign of suffering? Yes. But the greater portion of him was just relieved. Relieved that it was over.

“Uh, sir?” PB said, looking at her watch, which Jason just realized was a smart watch. “We just received confirmation that Jackson took the bait.”

“The mention of Percy was enough to snap him back to the present, but before he could say anything, Merlin stood up. “I don’t suppose you have a television in your lovely home?”

They filed into the living room, the only person speaking being Merlin, who was marveling over how well maintained the old farmhouse was. Jason, Chelsea, and Demeter sat on the loveseat, with the son of Jupiter in the middle. Merlin sat in Hades’ armchair, the old man laughing when he sank into deceivingly deep cushions. George and PB stood at the room’s entrance, the father daughter duo ready to strike at the first sign of trouble.

“I have a question,” he said, as he fished for the remote in the cushions. The remote was supposed to sit on the coffee table, but Percy, for reasons unknown, was incapable of remembering to put it in its proper place. “If that’s okay?”

“If you have only one, then you haven’t been paying attention,” the old man said, reclining into the chair. “You all may ask whatever questions you want.”

“How did you find us? When did you find us?” he asked, removing the remote and an empty bag of Cheetos from the cushions. Gods, Percy…

“Very good questions, Mr. Grace. Very good.” Merlin closed his eyes and hummed to himself for a moment. “The day your friend Perseus and his father nearly leveled Saint Margaret’s Hospital, we knew you were in the area. When you signed up for a Walmart credit card, we thought we had your address, but we thought perhaps it was a coincidence. It wasn’t until Nico di Angelo, Jason Grace, and Perseus Jackson were enrolled at LaMoille Community High School, that we knew without a doubt. I suppose we could have taken you all out at any time, but it isn’t every day that we get a chance to observe three powerful demigods in their natural state.” Merlin hummed and spun his cane.

“Why are you letting us live? Why now?” Demeter asked, still red-eyed and pale.

“It could be that I liked seeing the six of you come together as a family. It could be that Jackson and di Angelo reminded me a lot of Artie and myself. It could be my subconscious’ way of keeping me from fully becoming that what I hated.” Merlin stopped and huffed. “But I think the real reason is that I wanted to give you the one thing I never had: a way out.” Merlin hummed and spun his cane.

“How do you know that?” Jason asked, turning on the tv. He grimaced when he saw that Percy had left the channel on Adult Swim, as he wasn’t a fan of the adult humor or anime. But why do I have a
feeling Nico would get obsessed with anime? “Why are you so sure Percy is going to do anything?”

“Because we have the perfect bait,” George said, cocking his head to the side as he tried to make sense out of a foul-mouthed milkshake and meatball on the television. “His low life stepfather.”

“You see,” Merlin said, also tilting his head at the TV screen. “While we were performing our initial testing of the signal in New York at an all-girls boarding school, something… unexpected was happening to the centerpiece of one of the city’s premiere art collectors a few blocks over. Gabriel Ugliano, a missing man that was missed by no one, was freed from Medusa’s curse. We didn’t know it at the time, but the signal also can reverse any and all curses and hexes, besides disrupting divinity.”

“It turned out to be quite handy, partner,” George said, crossing his arms in the doorway. “We were able to free and restore a lot of innocent people.”

“Gabe was hardly an innocent person!” Jason snapped. “Do you know what he did to Percy’s parents? To his sister?”

“Unfortunately, yes,” Merlin sighed, no longer looking him in the eye. “Which is why he is the logical choice to be our sacrificial sheep as it were. We fattened him up, made him think he was somebody, indulged him in some of his disgusting desires, but tonight he will be killed by his former stepson.”

“Wait,” Chelsea blinked, furrowing her brow. “How is revealing the existence of, well-” she gestured to him and Demeter “them, going to end your war? If your super-secret group couldn’t defeat the with RC gods, advanced weaponry, and who knows what other gizmos and gadget, what good will it do to inform the public?”

“Poison,” Merlin stated plainly.

Jason blinked. “Come again?”

“Tyrants, no matter how powerful, have always been susceptible to poison. And hate and fear are the greatest poisons in history. Your father knew that, as did his cronies. Replace belief and respect, with hate and fear, and a god begins to starve. Isn’t that right, Lady Demeter?” Merlin chuckled. Demeter shrank back into the cushions, her actions answering for her. “That was one of Olympus’ many strategies to take out other, rival gods, so why not use a sure thing?” Merlin clapped his hands. “Now Mr. grace, if you would kindly turn off… whatever this is, and turn on the news.”

Jason nodded solemnly and turned the channel to CNN.

Usually, the news anchors on the network were pretty calm and collected people (as long as they weren’t talking about the president), and Jason liked to watch some of the fluffier pieces, like water skiing squirrels, strangers donating their organs, or long-distance adoptions. Tonight though, the anchors had a frantic, panicked look, they had shed their jackets, and studio hands ran in and out of shot handing them paper after paper.

“I repeat: a flying man clad in a toga has reduced downtown LA to rubble, seemingly summoning and controlling tornadoes at will. We are still receiving a list of casualties, but so far they include Sylvester Stallone, Mila Kunis, Tristan McLean, and-“ the anchor woman paused, placing a hand to her ear. In the corner of the screen, shaky camera footage showed exactly what the brunette had described, a man standing in the air between twin tornadoes.

Jason heard Merlin gasp, as he leaned forward in the chair.
“Jesus Christ,” the anchorman cried, staring at them with eyes filled with fear. “Reports are now coming in of one eyed giants devouring children at Saint Jude’s in Peoria, Illinois.” The screen cut to black and white security footage of a cyclops storming down a packed hallway, chasing after an elderly orderly. The cyclops gave a mighty roar and raised its club just as it ran off screen.

“George,” Merlin gulped. “Get Brian on the phone.”

“Jason,” Chelsea whimpered. He wrapped his arm around her and pulled her close, the girl burying her head in his shoulder.

“Groups of armed teenagers have begun to pop around the count-“ the woman stopped and listened to her earpiece. “correction, the world, seemingly murdering people at random. Sources say they are wearing either orange or purple shirts. Some, have brands on their forearms. If you are watching this, please stay inside!”

“I’m on it,” George said, a hint of panic in his voice. The man pulled out a flip-phone from his back pocket and began to scroll through his contacts.

“-Giant, blue wolves have been spotted in Boston, Lillehammer, and Paris. Civil defense is urging all peoples worldwide to stay indoors!”

“-Another flying man has been cited in New Delhi, the city has been reduced to rubble by massive quakes-“

“-A flying woman has flooded the Rhine-“

“-Multi-headed serpents-“

Jason could only watch in horror as the world was seemingly coming to an end. He watched as Roman and Greek demigods mechanically gunned down or slaughtered any soul unfortunate enough to cross their path, sea serpents pulling oil tankers down off the coast of Australia, strange gremlin like creatures emerging from the waterways of Japan and pulling in people to drown, and countless other atrocities that flashed across the television. All he could do was hold Chelsea close and squeeze Demeter’s hand.

“GET THAT RED-HAIRED SON OF A BITCH ON THE PHONE! NOW!” Merlin roared.

Chapter End Notes

How was that for some twists and turns!

That's right boys and girls! once upon a time, Avalon was exclusively good guys! Granted, a good percentage of them wanted to 'kill 'em all' they took out their aggression on monsters and other troublemakers. In fact, they aided our heroes multiple times in the past! From humble beginnings of a kid waling on monsters with a baseball bat, to a shadow organization with the sole goal to protect mankind from the things that go bump in the night. If not for finding out the truth about Zeus and his shadow council, they would have continued on to be that way. They would continue to feed the authorities false information so demigods could thin they were 'evading' the law. They would have
offered aid and clues when the time demigods needed a little hand. They would continue to kill cull monsters to keep the population down. They would have tried to protect the parents and siblings of demigods from the forces of evil.

But truth changes things. Imagine learning that everything you were doing was for nothing? that some of these kids you were helping would grow up and start wars? to learn that there was a very high possibility that your departed loved ones were turned into fuel? Yeah, your methods would change. Drastically.

But there would be guilt. Especially for Merlin, as he was forced to use methods that took his family away from him. So, him letting Jason, Demeter, and the rest simply exist is his way of rationalizing that he isn't as bad. that there is a shred of humanity still left in him. That Arthur wouldn't hate him.

I've hinted about Arthur's existence for quite sometime now, way back when Jason visited Harpocrates was the first hint. I did not do Jeremiah and Arthur justice this chapter, as their story is, well, a story in itself (see crappy joke in chapter). Though, I've actually considered writing it out, but I have other tales to write first. Arthur was Merlin's impulse control to some extant, while Merlin was the brains of the two (gee where have we seen that dynamic before?). Now Arthur does add another mystery to the story, but I promise it will be answered.

There is a lot to discuss this chapter, so I may add more notes later, but let's talk about that ending.

Do you honestly think there would be massive social change because a teenager killed a fat piece of shit in a museum? No. That is wishful thinking on Merlin's part. But do you know who has the vision to incite the fear and hatred Merlin wants? I think you do.

And you'll get to read about him next chapter :) 

Update 8/23: I went back an edited a few things. Nothing plot related, just some glaring spelling and grammar errors.

But!

I wanted to say this as well: in this chapter there are enough clues to solve a mystery, that in turn points to a larger mystery that I've been hinting at since day one!

I'll give you one hint: the clues are before Merlin's arrival. Then with a decent memory and some googling you can figure it out :) 

Happy hunting!

One more thing: I will be having some dental surgery done tomorrow (wisdom teeth removed) so there may be a slight delay in this week's chapter. Thank you for your understanding :)
Brian

Chapter Summary

Warnings: Blood, death, mentions of torture and experimentation on sentient beings

Tonight:

Brian takes a stroll and moves ever closer to his own goal.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Brian ignored his phone, in favor of examining the corpse Terminate-us had brought him from his little jaunt to South Dakota. It was a pity that the stone slave was unable to bring him back the corpse of the Latina praetor, but DG:VM was proving to be far more interesting than he initially thought.

“Subject’s eyes have been burnt away from the inside,” he muttered so the overhead mic could record his thoughts. He rotated the severed head in his gloved hands, facing it away from him. He then held out his right hand; Terminate-us handing him a scalpel.

He made a small incision at what could now be considered the base of her neck and frowned underneath his surgical mask. What the… Brian enlarged the incision and pulled the skin apart with his fingers, revealing two separate layers of skin. “DG:VM appears to have two separate epidermises. The outer matches its profile from the first encounter.” He cut a piece of the outer skin away and set it in a small silver pan. “The inner epidermis appears-“

Aloud banging on the surgical theatre’s door interrupted his chain of thought. “For the love of God! Let me in!” a voice cried over the hammering. He was just about to send Terminate-us to take care of the idiot, when there was a terrified scream followed by one final ‘bang’.

And things have a nice way of coming up Brian, he thought with a smirk, returning his attention to his work. “The inner epidermis appears to have several different colorations, and are seemingly seared together, strongly suggesting that much of this is foreign tissue.” He cut a piece away and put it in its own pan. “Sample will be shipped off for genetic analysis, but I’m pretty sure I just figured out where our missing staff went,” the redhead snickered.

He set his bloody tools aside and replaced the head in its specimen bag, before returning it to cooler. “Still exploring why signatures of T:A radiate from the remains, but at this point in time, it is my professional opinion that this was the result of an improper fusion between T:A and DG:VM. As a reminder, the only other known instance of a T fusing with a DG was between DG:LM and T:K, but collected data is piss-poor at best.”

Brian removed his surgical mask and tossed the blood covered thing at Terminate-us’ stone chest, the enslaved god catching it with ease. “You know,” he hummed as he pushed the cooler into the theatre’s freezer, “this makes me curious about what would happen if a DG and a T got it on. Would the offspring be more powerful than its DG parent but less so than the T? In terms of ability would I have access to both of its parents’ skill sets? What if one of the parents was like this thing? Does that mean it has a third mother or father? How do the genetics work in that case?” he asked the god,
growing more and more excited with each question. This is what he lived for! Exploring the unknown, learning things that no one else ever had or ever will! “Any ideas?”

As usual, the mute god was, well, mute. Shrugging his stone shoulders his only response.

“I don’t even know why I talk to you,” the engineer sighed, pulling off his latex gloves. “But then again, most people speak without thinking, which is really annoying.” He tossed the gloves into the biohazard containment unit and grabbed his phone and security badge from the sterile table. “Alright, let’s go check on how things are progressing.”

Terminate-us nodded and ripped off the comically tight scrubs he had been wearing; the pieces turning to ash before they hit the ground.

“Don’t do that!” he hissed, as he pressed his badge against the RFID reader. “You’ll set off the fire system like that!” The heavy stainless-steel door slid open with a hiss from the powerful hidden hydraulics. At first, he frowned at the sight of the mutilated corpse of a Big Apple Island employee crumpled on the floor before him, but then he realized that it was the same asshole who took his parking spot only a few hours earlier. “Karma’s a bitch, isn’t it?” he laughed as he stepped over the body and into the hall.

In general, Brian tended to avoid Big Apple Island’s campus in favor of the underground sanctuary of Camelot (What a stupid name). The skyscraper that offered a unique view of New York, especially Times Square, was what some people would call ‘sleek’ and ‘modern, but to him, a turd wrapped in a shiny package was still a turd. Yes, the state of the art labs, the catered food, onsite gym, and quick commute all appealed to him somewhat, but that would mean he would have to deal with people. He would have to answers endless questions from those beneath him, have to be civil to people that deserved to be berated, and all the other inconveniences that came with interacting with others. On top of that, Big Apple Island had a modern dress code, meaning its employees could wear whatever they wanted at work. Indie band shirts, mohawks, piercings, unnatural hair colors, everything that signaled that someone was a lesser being was accepted on the campus.

Everything he hated about college.

Tonight though, he made an exception to his self-imposed exile, and he was glad he did.

The windowed hallway the overlook Times Square was not just a cruel parody of its former self. The smart windows that were inlaid with OLED tech, solar powered, and helped heat the massive building, were mostly smashed into tiny pieces by some unknown creature; a few were flashing take-cover and evacuation warnings. The all white surfaces that people associated with cutting-edge were covered with blood and gore; no doubt from the heavier, slower employees that had really shouldn’t skipped leg day. Brian did have to smile though as several of the janitorial robots were trying to clean up the mess.

“You’re going to need more than a little soap and water for that,” he chuckled, tapping the top of the cylindrical robot with his foot. The redhead stepped closer to the broken windows, thankful that he didn’t suffer from vertigo as he surveyed the city far below. “How... cliché…”

He had only given the attack command a little over an hour ago, and the city was already looking like it had limped out of a John Carpenter movie. Billows of black smoke could be seen in every direction, the fire below bathing the city in an eerie orange glow. Many of the buildings that hadn’t been hit my Zeus’ frantic assaults were now missing floors upon floors of windows; the work of either flying beast or god he supposed. Sirens, gunshots, and frantic cries swallowed the normal sounds of the city, punctuated by here and there by the sound of squealing tires and metal-on-metal shortly after. On the street immediately below he could make out a throng of people trying to flee
from a chimera, but they seemed to be hurting each other more than the creature itself.

“We humans are a pathetic lot,” he sighed, stepping back from the ledge. “This should definitely help cull the pathetic.” He let out a short whistle, and instantly, in a flash of light Terminate-us was at his side. “Your primary order is to protect me from all harm. Your secondary order is to stay out of sight,” he ordered, walking down the ruined hall.

In a display of sheer efficiency and brutality, the stone god ripped the lower jaw off of one of the telkhines, only to impale its partner with it in a single, swift motion. The first dog-seal-man-thing frantically clutched at gaping bloody hole as the second thing collapsed to the floor. Satisfied with his work, Terminate-us blinked out of existence, no doubt scouting ahead for any more potential issues.

The one-sided fight hadn’t broken his stride in the slightest, stepping over the dissolving creatures with hardly a second thought. He was engrossed with his phone, playing *Marvel Future Fight*, and absolutely crushing it with his tier three Thor. Sure, he bought every item in the store to get so good, but it wasn’t his fault other people weren’t smart enough or hard working enough to get decent jobs.

But even with Thor smacking Proxima Midnight in the face, wearing the new *Thor: Ragnarok* costume, that was hardly enough to occupy a fraction of his immense intellect. He wasn’t capable of multitasking per say, but he processed his thoughts in a round robin method at speeds anyone would be envious of.

In one partition, he was navigating through the wreckage of the home office, trying to avoid getting his shoes dirty. In another, he was playing his game, defeating world bosses to harvest valuable black anti-matter. In another, he was performing fifth dimensional calculus related to one of his more interesting finds. And in another he was admiring his improvements on the old man’s plan.

*The old man had it right the first time, only to chicken out in the end…* He mentally tsked and shook his head. The originally plan to expose the public to the existence of the so-called ‘gods’ was a series of controlled world-wide attacks on the Fourth of July. Avalon would have placed a portion of its stockpile of monsters, DGs, and Gs throughout the capital, and used them to slaughter the corrupt government. Once the army suppressed the situation, Avalon would place several false flags that pointed to several government officials that acted as puppets for the Gs. Similar events would have played out all over the world.

Unfortunately, the old man scrapped those plans over concerns of civilian casualties and delayed military response times for some of the less developed countries. Brian had his hopes up when he was told they were accelerating their time tables, but those hopes were quickly dashed when the memo came with the new plan.

His left eye twitched at the memory.

*Oh yeah! Because having one of those creatures kill a fat man would totally freak out the world!* Brian huffed. *For like five minutes or until the next cat video is posted!*

He would admit the old man’s plan would be a decent start, but it couldn’t be the last act as well. If they truly wanted the world to turn on the Gs, then they would need to follow up with greater atrocities. *This country won’t ban guns when a shit ton of kids get murdered, do they honestly believe one fat guy’s death would change anything? No, but that’s why they have me.*
It had taken a considerably amount of time and effort to set everything up for the night’s big show. Sneaking out and sending specimens around the globe without being noticed had required him to edit and destroy various documents, but thankfully he was the system architect, so he was able to hide his tracks.

The monsters had been tricky to acquire at first, with the loss of the field base guarding T:A, and George and his team killing any monsters they came across. There were some samples stored on ice in Camelot, but not nearly enough to cause a panic, and Brian highly doubted people would be terrified of a retarded cyclops named Tyson, of all things.

*Help me! Help me! Save me big brother! What a little bitch… Glad I popped its big eye…*

No, the monsters almost had been cut from his plan, until a field team made a discovery in an abandoned studio lot in Burbank. A strange set of rusted elevator doors, that floated in place. They had been on the verge of collapsing in on themselves, when the team brought them to his lab, but he knew that there was more to them than their cruddy appearance would have them believe. The doors were placed in isolation, where he toiled with them for months in secret, revealing a few truths.

First, the elevator style doors were merely an aesthetic illusion, a reactionary camouflage so that they could blend into their environment. Thanks to the Mist piercing goggles (designed by him, the smartest man to ever live) and a blow torch, he was able to cut away through the ages, revealing that they had once looked like a gated lift, a dumbwaiter, a wrought iron gate, a marble gateway, and finally a black stone archway.

Second, at its deepest level, the architecture didn’t match any style known to man. The other styles were easy to figure what time period they originated from, some as little as a few decades ago, to several thousand years old. He took some pictures and ran them through some custom image recognition software, but the only things that remotely resembled them was some stone carvings from ancient Babylon and an illustration from the eighth century. Both depicted the strange, cyclopean stonework, but there was no context for what it was.

Finally, after peeling away the ages of disguising, the stone archway revealed it function. He had unplugged the signal generator to plug in a diamond-tipped power drill he hoped to use to take samples of the unknown stone, when a swirling mass of darkness appeared in the center of the arch. He watched in wonder as the tiny black galaxy expanded as it rotated, eventually taking up the entirety of the archway. The entire process took about fifteen minutes, at which point the darkness rippled like the still surface of a lake after a rock was tossed in, and a pack of five telkhines stepped out. Thankfully, Terminate-us took care of them effortlessly, as all Brian did was smile in delight.

The plan was back on.

For months, he had Terminate-us subdue any creature that came through the gate, or the Doors of Death, as he learned from some captured intelligence. He had the creatures sent way to locations around the globe in signal proof cages, waiting for the opportune moment to be released.

“And that time is now,” the redhead hummed as he kicked open the door to the stairwell, leaving a bloody shoeprint on the previously pristine door.
The last thing Brian expected, but wasn’t necessarily unwanted, was to enter the server room and be greeted by a small Indian man brandishing a bundle of Ethernet cord and a chair as makeshift weapons. The man was covered in a mix of red and gold blood, and if he wasn’t mistaken, had soiled his pants.

“Stay Ba-Brian?!” the man cried, dropping his weapons and rushing forward. “Brian! You are alive my friend!” the small Indian (Or is he middle eastern?) laughed, pulling him into a tight embrace (and ruining his pristine lab coat). “How did you survive?”

“By being smarter than my opponents, Rashid” Brian grunted, prying the man off. He looked down at himself and frowned when he saw how dirty he had gotten from the unwanted physical contact. Idiot! Does he know how hard it is to get blood stains out of a white coat?! I should send him the bill!

He looked back at his ‘colleague’, the poor schmuck looking at him the same way a puppy looks at its master. “So how did you survive?” he asked through clenched teeth.

Rashid collapsed onto the chair that only moments ago served as a weapon, running one hand through his short black hair and resting the other on his knee. “That app of yours! Absolutely genius— Brian hummed at the praise— I never would have made it down here if it wasn’t for you! The monster just- just crumbled to dust when they got near to me! I mean, I’ve seen the field reports, but to actually see it first hand was incredible!”

“Then, what’s with the chair and whip?” he quipped, pointing at the bundle of cables. “You got a lion to tame, or something?” Rashid’s brown eyes widened, then returned to normal, realizing that he had made a joke. But that’s Rashid for you; slow with a minimal grasp on the English language. I bet if I would have been on the initial team, I would have found the signal in a one-hundredth of the time it took this idiot to…

“Oh!” the man laughed, which was really annoying to the redheaded engineer. “It is embarrassing to admit, but I forgot to charge my phone last night and my kid was playing some games on it, so it died just as I reached the first subbasement.” Rashid wiped his forehead off with the sleeve of his bloodstained shirt. “Just as one of those seal-dog things saw me. So, I grabbed the first things I saw, and well here I am!” The man laughed again, clearly some kind of nut-job.

“But why did you come down to the basement?” he asked, already knowing the answer. As much as it pained him to admit it, Rashid was the only other person who could figure out (mostly) what was happening, and then try to correct it. “Seems like you should’ve hopped in your car, plugged your phone in, and got the hell out of here.”

Rashid arched one of his thick eyebrows. “The same could be asked of you, my friend.” The small man then jumped up from his chair and gestured for him to follow. “But I know why you’re down here, quite heroic really,” the Indian(?) engineer said as they walked down the server lined hall, thousands of lights blinking in beautiful synchronization. “You figured out that the signal network had somehow been disabled and came down here to reboot it! Clearly, we will be heroes for this!”

Close but no cigar! I came down here to make sure no one rebooted it until I’m good and ready. “You caught me,” he said with a forced chuckle. “It would appear that someone has sabotaged our systems, allowing the Gs to attack.” Me. “So I came down here to force a reboot.”

Rashid nodded as he worked his way around a server rack. “Probably some new variation of DG that we haven’t encountered. Possibly one of those Native American DGs that Morgan encountered.” The smaller man pulled out his own ID badge from his gore covered pocket and tapped it against a reader hidden behind an unassuming digital thermostat. With a quiet hiss, a large section of drywall slid up to reveal one of the quantum computers the redhead had developed for all Avalon communications. “Really boggles my mind that an entire group could stay hidden that long!
And did you see that giant bird Morgan killed? That thing shouldn’t have been able to fly!”

Brian rolled his eyes as Rashid rattled on. “Seems likely,” he agreed absently, more interested in the newsfeed on his phone (and the ever-increasing number of missed calls), than his colleague. Most of the reports were still on their Armageddon kick, but some reports were starting to trickle their way in of World Leaders revealing themselves to be DGs, and ordering the masses to obey the gods of old or perish. He would grudgingly admit that the script he provided was half-assed.

That had been a little something he had thought of to expedite the recovery process. Because of Avalon’s end goal was to rid the world of G influence, then wouldn’t it make sense to remove all the pawns entirely? So he had Terminate-us and several other Gs deliver ‘orders’ from G:ZJ to the leaders of the ‘free’ world. The United States, Germany, France, Russia, Canada, and the United Kingdom were the big ones (though he was disappointed that the royal family was completely human, he lost five bucks to George because of that). The great thing about his plan was he made them all think that the Gs, their lords and masters, would be there to protect them.

"Nope! I would love to see the looks on their faces! Probably a mix of terror, betrayal, anger, and maybe, just maybe some realization that they've been duped!"

“Hmm, that’s strange,” Rashid hummed, removing his hands from the keyboard. “The master control is password protected.” The smaller man bit his lip and furrowed his brow.

“Did you try the admin password?” He absently replied, his gaze focused on his phone, which was showing a live feed of the American Vice-president strangling the president, while secret service agents were attacking each other. He honestly hadn’t expected such a quick reaction, but watching the real world of Race Bannon strangling an oversized Oompa Loompa, while their bodyguards were reenacting the end of The Thing, was a pleasant turn of events. He’ll be the only VP in the history of the world who gets applauded for killing his president.

“Nope! I would love to see the looks on their faces! Probably a mix of terror, betrayal, anger, and maybe, just maybe some realization that they've been duped!"

“Of course, I tried that!” Rashid snapped. “And before you ask, I’ve already tried turning it on and off…”

He sighed and tucked his phone in his coat pocket, hoping that he could find a repeat broadcast later or an upload somewhere. “What about I_Love_Alexis? First letter in each word capitalized, underscored between each word.”

“Why would-“

“Just try it,” he smirked, gesturing at computer.

Rashid turned away and did as instructed, because if there was one word that summed up the entirety of the little man’s sad existence, it was obedient. There was a satisfactory beep and the monitor transitioned from red, to green, and then to a menu screen granted complete access to the network. “How did you- Alexis, that is the name of my-“

“Wife, yes,” he chuckled, greatly enjoying the smaller man’s shock as he slowly put two and two together. “Which is strange, Dr. Fierro, why would your wife’s name be in the password that locked us out of the system? What’s even stranger is why the hacker chose your office and user profile to initiate the attack? Or why an email just went out to all of Avalon condemning them for the death of your-“ he had to stop and think about what he had actually wrote “-niece?”

The middle eastern man (I guess he has to be? Never really connected his name before now… Like it matters now.) snarled, his lip actually twisting up like a dog’s, which made Brian chuckle. “You did this! You sick son of a bitch! You did this!”
He clapped his hands in amusement at the small man, a devilish grin replacing his passive expression. “Very good Rashid! You finally caught the culprit after he stared you in the face for ten minutes! Kudos!” He took a single step toward his coworker and burst out laughing when the man fell backwards.

“It is one thing to have no disregard for the lives of these creatures,” Rashid snarled, trying to stealthily reach for the bundle of ethernet cords. “But there are innocent people who are dying out there! How can you live with yourself?”

Brian shrugged and pretended to not see the man’s fingers wrap around the makeshift weapon. “I’m just doing what it takes to meet Avalon’s goals. A couple kids slaughtering a museum full of wealthy assholes isn’t going to change anything. It will get about a week’s worth of attention, some idiot college kids will cheer them as heroes of the working class, and then they’ll fade into obscurity. This… This will lead to real change, this will get that fear and hatred we need, and for once, no one will be divided on this issue.” He turned his back to Rashid, which if he was right (and he always was), the man would try to lash out at him. “Plus, let me remind you, life isn’t special. Not the yours, not your kid’s, your wife’s, the people’s in the streets, and certainly not the lives of those creatures. So, stop being dramatic—”

Two things happened simultaneously. First, Rashid leapt to his feet with a primal scream, brandishing the bundle of cords like a whip. Second, and another reason why he turned away from the small man, was that Terminate-us appeared in a flash of light directly behind Rashid. Now with his back turned, he would never know the exact expression on Rashid’s face as Terminate-us grabbed the arm with the cords while punching a hole through his chest with the other, but he liked to think it was a cross between terror and realization.

“Perfect timing,” he smiled, turning around just as his personal god dropped the corpse to the floor. “But get that thing out of here, we don’t want blood on the equipment.” The stone giant nodded and picked up his mess before disappearing in a flash of light.

The engineer blinked a few times, before rubbing his eyes to try and rid himself of the last of the colored dots that floated on the peripherals of his vision. “And can you stop with the light show?!?” he called out, but the only response was the hum of millions of dollars’ worth of servers.

“Whatever,” Brian scoffed, turning his attention to the console before him. “Better make sure everything is proceeding nicely.”

With a few simple keystrokes, he copied master control of the signal network to his phone, tablet, and backup phone (he had a tendency to snap his in two if a game got too frustrating). With that done, he picked up Rashid’s chair, and whistling a cheerful tune, proceeded to bash the quantum computer he had worked so hard on, until it was nothing more than a useless pile of silicon, carbon, and plastic.

“That was oddly cathartic,” he panted, tossing aside the remnants of the chair. It was at that time, his phone started to buzz once more, but instead of ignoring it, the redhead pulled it out of his pocket and answered. “’Ello?”

“WHAT THE F**K IS GOING ON?!” George screamed loud enough to make him flinch.

Saw that coming. But man, he needs to work on his temper. He pulled the phone away from his ear
and switched it to speaker. “I take it you haven’t got Rashid’s email?” It was incredibly hard to ask that without snickering, and he was so glad that it wasn’t a video chat, as his smirk would have given everything away.

“Email?” George mumbled, and in the background several voices could be heard. “How do- Do any of ya’ll know how to check email on this phone?” Through the speaker a chorus of ‘no’s could be heard. Brain could here Merlin and George’s daughter, PB, but there were three other voices that he couldn’t place. Two were young, a boy and girl, while the other was that of a woman’s.

I bet they’re at George’s. Hanging out with those freaky hunter girls. The engineer sighed and spared a glance at the puddle of Rashid’s blood. “I’ll save you the hassle, and give you the short version. Rashid’s heart really wasn’t into killing his niece, so for the past couple months he’s been preparing for tonight. He’s been moving monsters, DGs, and Gs around the world, and was waiting until we were all preoccupied to turn off the network and attack, or something.”

There was a collective murmur on the other end of the phone, before Merlin’s voice cut through. “Well can you turn it back on?” The old man’s voice was skeptical, but considering they were probably hours away from the nearest control station, he knew to play nice.

“It’s going to take some time,” he said with his best fake sigh. “Rashid smashed the master control at HQ, so I have to reroute control elsewhere.” Namely, my pocket.

There was more murmuring and even some cursing from the old man, a rare thing from Mr. Squeaky Clean. “Just- just be careful and get the system back up,” Merlin sighed. “Many lives rest in your hands.”

Brian closed his eyes and let that thought sink in. Oh, yeah! That’s the stuff! “Well, on the plus side, I think the world has figured out that the stories of old are real.” And with that, he ended the call.

Before he left the server room, he opened his phone once more, and looked at a picture he had taken of Olympus floating high above the Empire State Building. I’m coming for you, he smirked. And this time, you won’t be able to refuse me.

That horrible night, many heroes emerged from all different walks of life. All would be remembered by their respective communities for their actions long after they moved on from this earth, some remembered by their countries, and some remembered by the entire world.

There were of course the legions of fire crews, police officers, EMTs, who did their jobs despite the adverse conditions. A ladder crew in London battled both flame and fae; driving back the long-forgotten foes with their axes of iron just as their ancestors did centuries before. In Dubai, several officers drove back djinn from a crowded mall using salt packets from the food court and megaphones. In Dublin, a group of EMTs took a leprechaun and Chulainn’s dog to a pub and… well it made an interesting story to tell their grandchildren.

The world’s militaries weren’t prone to sit idly by as their leaders revealed themselves to be pawns to this supernatural threat and immediately scrambled to aid their people. And yet, despite this influx of military activity, no wars broke out. Israel and Iran even aiding each other, reasoning that the devil you know is far better than the devil you don’t. Similar events happened with China and Japan,
North and South Korea, and even Canada and Denmark, the bitterest of enemies.

Outside of organizations, there were also individuals that rose to the occasion. Some were former military and law enforcement personnel, but many were people simple responding to the situation.

There the nightshift nurse, Sarah Davis, in upstate Vermont, who single handedly fought off four hellhounds that tried to make the maternity ward into a late-night snack. Using nothing more than a scalpel and her wits to protect twelve mothers and their newborns. The rights to Sarah’s story would be purchased by Lifetime Movie Network within days of the event.

In Kyoto, Japan, Akimasa Tsuyuki, a young man with no job and no ambition, rose to the occasion to protect tourists from a Colchis Bull, with only a cheap Buddha statue and a bad disposition. He had managed to drop down on the bronze bull from the second floor of a café and wailed on the creature with the plump statue until it suffered a malfunction. The Oni that had been approaching were quick to retreat, fearful that Sakata Kintoki had returned once more. The event changed Akimasa’s life, inspiring him to pursue a career as a police officer.

A village in northern Norway got significant attention, when it was discovered the residents fought off trolls for hours using UV lights and sledgehammers. By the time defense forces arrived, the residents had constructed a stage in the center of town out of the trolls’ stone remains and were having a celebration. The town council plans to auction off the spare remains to fund several public works projects, including a new school.

However, the greatest hero to arise from the horrific night was a low level engineer for Big Apple Island. He had watched in horror as his friends and coworkers were slaughtered by monsters that existed previously only at the edge of imagination, and he would have been killed too if he hadn’t fled into the facility’s wireless lab. It was there, on sheer accident, he discovered a frequency that reduced the various creatures to dust. Thinking quickly, he sent a message out to every user of Big Apple Island products with instructions on how to replicate the signal and a message of hope that he was working to reconfigure every cell network to broadcast the fatal frequency.

And after eighteen hours of blood and terror, Brian Bender, the greatest hero Earth has ever known, reconfigured the world’s largest communication network into humanity’s greatest weapon.

Chapter End Notes

Yup...

Brian will go down in history as a hero. Or will he?

We have 14 chapters left and there is still a lot coming. Zeus is still chilling on Olympus with his shadow council, the mysterious creatures under the sea, the mess in the Underworld, the Nation after their outing, Piper MIA, and of course Nico and CO, so there is a lot to wrap up yet. I'm really excited to get there, as once I post the last chapter I can update the tags! *squees* This is all so exciting!!!

I can you believe Dr. Rashid Fierro, would do such a thing? Hahahahaha! Even if you don't, he's still a bad man :)

Will add more notes later! Thanks for reading!
Persephone

Chapter Summary

Warnings: Blood, brutality, and death

Tonight:

Persephone gets wet, ruins a dress, and proves she is a lady you don’t mess with.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The moment Nico was out of sight, the smile she wore for her son disappeared, as did the joy she felt when he called her mom. Those pleasant things were replaced by their less than welcome counterparts, a frown and worry.

A pair of strong, albeit wet, arms wrapped around her waist from behind, and a series of gentle kisses were left at the base of her neck. “He takes after her, you know?” her husband breathed in her ear, exciting her ever so slightly.

Persephone spun around in Hades’ arms to face him, and wrapped her own arms around his neck. “Rushing off into a danger is a great trait for a friend, but an absolutely horrific trait for your child.”

“If Maria is watching, she is surely laughing at that comment,” Hades said almost absently, his deep dark eyes staring into her very soul. “And cursing me for allowing such danger to become the norm of Nico’s life.”

“Don’t be silly,” she smiled, “she’s clearly cursing us both.”

Her love hummed in agreement.

It struck as funny, that despite her son running off to face an unknown threat, a son of Poseidon bent on killing the foulest human alive, and numerous antiquities floating by them in knee deep water, that she felt content in Hades’ arms. That the rest of the world was but a far-off dream and reality only consisted of herself and her love.

Funnier yet, was the fact that she felt similar at the farm. Despite losing her divinity and being trapped in a semi-mortal body, she enjoyed the time spent with her husband, Nico, her mother, Jason, and even Percy (though after tonight that may change…). She liked to watch her mother showing Jason how to run a farm, how to tend to the animals, test the soil, and how to understand the subtle language of plants. Watching Hades work in his office-slash-bedroom-slash-Percy’s-bedroom was also fun in its own right; her kind mumbling to himself as he tried to connect the ever-increasing complexity of her father’s conspiracy with Avalon (He’ll find Pepe Silvia at this rate…). She loved pretending she didn’t see Nico and Percy sneak off to have some alone time when they thought no one would notice; the two didn’t know how many times she had sent Hades in the wrong direction. Those rare evenings when it was just her and Hades were memories that would be treasured forever; each learning how to please each other in the new bodies.

Strawberries, Hershey’s syrup, and handcuffs, she thought, a sly smile gracing her face. It was hard
to explain to Nico where his chocolate went, but considering I caught him going down on Percy, he wasn’t too keen to press the issue.

“As much as I would love for this moment to last forever, I believe we should get moving,” Hades said with a sad smile. “We have to make sure Jackson doesn’t destroy the city.”

“I doubt he would possess such hatred- “ she stopped talking when she saw the look in Hades’ eyes. Most viewed her husband as this grim, brooding, serious god that even Felicitas couldn’t reach. The truth was that the other gods just didn’t understand his sense of humor, never learning the little tells that he was joking. It also didn’t help that he was shy in his own way, so few ever knew the real Hades. But the look he was giving her right now was just as serious as the day he informed her of the deaths of Maria and the children. “Really?” she asked in disbelief, dropping her arms to her sides and tilting her head.

Hades released her, the chill of the water returning, but he took her hand within his own and some of the warmth returned. “Honestly, the two of you should be best friends when it comes to hatred,” he said, leading her out the flooding lion exhibit. “He hates his stepfather and you hate your father, another point of commonality between you two!”

Persephone couldn’t think of a response, but she knew that she had nothing in common with Percy Jackson. Besides loving Nico. And loving bad TV shows. And having a fierce loyalty to their mothers. And-

Fuck….

Let it be known that riding out of the Field Museum on a replica totem pole from the Pacific Northwest is far easier, and far more pleasurable, than entering said museum in heels. Before, she had never understood why mortals were so quick to complain about wearing heels, but now having walked a mile in their proverbial shoes, she wondered why anyone would wear infernal things in the first place. So yes, she would rather wade through waist deep water, help her husband knock over an expensive replica, cling to said replica for dear life as they careened over the artificial rapids that had been the museum’s entrance, and crash into several overturned limos, then ever wear the dreadful footwear again.

There was a groan from behind, and she turned around to spot her husband sitting up on top of an overturned Cadillac. “That was fun,” Hades grunted, placing one hand on his lower back. “But let’s not do that again. Are you okay?”

Persephone dropped down from her spot on the makeshift flume ride, thankful that the coursing water below now barely covered her feet. “I’m fine, you?”

Hades jumped off the vehicle and landed (almost) gracefully on the water covered pavement with a painful groan. “Yes, my love,” he said with a fake smile, while massaging his crotch. “Just as long as you don’t want children. Rhea help me…”

She rolled her eyes at her love’s painful moaning, as he tended to exaggerate his pain. Really, how painful can a paper cut really be? However, his comments about children though made her curious. Can we even have children in these bodies? Would the child be born a mortal, god, or something in-between? Would I have the same experiences as Maria? Would Nico like another-
“Get down!” Hades shouted, tackling her to the ground, just as a torrent of water filled with debris shot past them. The water impacted the totem pole with a deafening explosion, sending it flying back, and piercing the museum’s eastern wall like an oversized throwing dart. She followed the water’s trail back to its origin as it diminished in strength, the water raining down on the two of them as the pressure dropped, and gasped.

Now, there have always been powerful demigods within each cycle. Those were usually the children of prophecy, so that they would have a much-needed advantage over the forces of Kronos and Gaea. They were usually children of the Olympians, namely Zeus and Poseidon, but there had been a few exceptions, such as a daughter of Tyche, who literally lucked her way to the end. They had all been powerful, for mortals that is, but they had absolutely nothing on Percy Jackson.

Said son of Poseidon was currently hovering over one of the many crosswalks in front of the stone building, held aloft by a raging waterspout several meters high and just as wide. Circling outward from the raven-haired teen was a massive wall of water, completing encapsulating an area of at least four acres. Water rushed from all directions to join the walls, bubbling up from storm drains and sewers, bursting from hydrants, and rushing up from the Chicago River and Lake Michigan. All that water had flooded the area for as far as the eye could see and the numerous people that had been caught in the unnatural flash flood were trying to get to higher ground; some even clinging to the modern art statues that littered the metropolitan area, but all were looking directly at looming son of Poseidon.

“Damn it, Hades!” Persephone growled, punching the already hurt man as hard as she could in the shoulder. “How in the fuck are we supposed to stop that?!” She turned her attention back to Nico’s boyfriend and watched as the walls of water grew higher and wider with each passing second. The boy then tilted his head almost imperceptibly, and a 2015 Buick was catapulted over the wall of water, and a terrified scream followed. “What kind of training did you give him? He’s practically a god and we’re mortals!”

“I taught him speed, precision, and control,” Hades said, pushing himself off the ground and then helping her up as well, as a good man should. He then peeled off his soaked jacket and tossed it aside, the rushing waters carrying it away to be added to the swirling debris within the vortex and walls. “But this… this is not my doing, at least partly. This is rage, pain, and sorrow. Though…” he cracked a small smile, “did you see him launch that car in the air? That was done by blasting water underneath it and pushing the earth up simultaneously! He couldn’t have done that before! I wonder-“

She placed the palm of her hand over Hades’ mouth and rolled her eyes. “Now is not the time to be a proud father.”

“I’m- I’m not his father…” Hades mumbled as he pulled away from her hand, but he said it almost as if it was a question. The former god looked up at the son of Poseidon and furrowed his brow in deep thought.

Oh, good grief… She slugged him hard in the shoulder, because it was not the time or place for Hades to be trying to understand his relationship and role in the teen’s life. “Hey! Focus! What can we do to stop this?! Surely, he’s killed his stepfather by now? Right?”

Hades shook his head, just as the totem pole they rode in on was ripped from the museum wall and tossed like a harpoon over water wall. “That man killed his family in cold blood; his stepfather, expecting mother, and almost Percy too. And from what I’ve gathered, that fat waste of flesh was quite abusive to him when he was younger. Percy wants to make him suffer. Just look at those walls and you’ll see what I mean.”
Persephone did as instructed and turned her attention to the massive water structures. They had stopped growing in height, topping off at well over fifty feet, yet water continued to flow into them, carrying more and more wreckage to be used as projectiles. *Okay, but where is that water going?* Then it hit her like a bucket of ice water. *That's dark kid,* she smiled wickedly. *But I like it.* While the wall of water had stopped growing in height, it was continuing to grow in thickness. She couldn’t see what was happening within the ever-shrinking area within, as the dark green water filled with various debris obscured all from sight, but it wasn’t hard to guess what was happening within. *That monster is probably running around terrified, dodging projectiles, as the walls slowly begin to close in around him.* He’s wondering what will get him, some random object, be torn apart by the raging waters, or will he simply drown in that polluted water? He’s probably pleading for his life, trying to remind the kid of the few times in his life he did something decent, but I doubt Percy can even hear him.

She turned her attention to the raven-haired teen. It was hard to accurately describe the kid, but the closest she could come up with was… twitchy. The son of Poseidon just floated there, staring down into the cage he had made with his expression changing so fast it almost gave her whiplash. One moment he was grinning like a mad man, the next he was grinding his teeth together in rage, and then instantly transitioning to a pained expression; the only constant was the tears streaming down from his broken, green eyes.

Persephone covered her face with her hands and took a deep breath. She knew that Percy needed to stop this before he hurt some innocent bystander, himself, or worst of all, Nico. She also knew though that she couldn’t deny the boy his vengeance, as there would never be peace for him or the ability to develop a positive relationship with her if she interfered.

*And I really want to continue to rebuild my relationship with Nico. I don’t want him to stay away in the future because his boyfriend doesn’t like me.*

She had a plan, or at least a start of a plan, but she didn’t like it. And if she didn’t like it, there was no way Hades was going to like it, let alone allow her to execute it. “You need to go get Nico,” she said, pulling her hands down her elegant face and wiping away some of the already smeared makeup. “Cause this is way out of our league.” Persephone didn’t like to lie to her other half (unless it was for nothing naughty), but what needed to be done had to stay exclusively between her and the son of Poseidon.

Hades thankfully didn’t question her. “I believe you are quite correct, my love,” he said, not taking his eyes off of the raging teenager. “As the only option I see right now is to throw junk at him to gain his attention,” he gulped. “And I don’t think he would appreciate that.”

He went to grab her hand, but she pulled it away, earning her a quizzical look. “I’m going to stay and make sure he doesn’t hurt the mortals.” He looked like he was about to protest, but she had her ways to make him forget. She stood on her tip toes and pulled his head down to meet her lips. Despite the countless years they had spent together, each time they kissed still felt like the first time. There was never a chaste kiss with her king, never a halfhearted peck on the cheek in the mornings, or even something as pathetic as a hug. No, she was life and he was death, and like fire and gasoline, each time they met was a raging inferno.

*But sadly, I need to put a pause on this,* Persephone thought as her love began to nibble on her lower lip. *But we are so picking this up later! Better remember to stop and pick up some chocolate sauce on our way home!*

With incredible reluctance, she pushed Hades off her, the king blinking in confusion. “Nico, my love. Go get Nico. Then we can finish this later,” she purred. The god’s eyes widened at the
implication and he quickly spun around and ran back into the museum; the artificial rapids that were the entrance not slowly him down in the slightest, practically jumping up the faux waterfall like a salmon.

“Men,” she snorted when at last the man finally disappeared inside the flooded structure. “It’s a pity my sisters never learned to fully appreciate them,” she sighed, turning her attention to the massive wall of water before her. “There is no way around it, this is going to suck.”

She looked down at her dress, a little black slip that left little to the imagination. It was a rather scandalous choice for what was supposed to be a charity event, but she wanted to make other men jealous of her husband; call it a quirk on her part. That, and the fact she looked at least twenty years younger than her husband was far more scandalous; some of the other attendees believing she was his daughter until they… expressed their love for one another.

_Perks of choosing the body of a twenty-five-year-old_, Persephone thought with a grin. _Though getting carded is a real annoyance…_

But sadly, the little dress, her last connection to wealth and luxury, was going to be sacrificed. She needed to have a full range of motion for her plan, and while her arms were unrestricted, her hips and thighs were a little tight. So with the greatest reluctance, the former goddess of spring ripped a considerable portion of the bottom of her slip off, tossing aside the fabric to be carried away by the current.

_Glad mother stayed home, and gladder yet that the Olympus paparazzi are trapped, or this would never leave the tabloids…_ And with that, without thinking any further on what she was about to do (because a sane person would stop themselves), she ran towards the wall of water, and dove in.

When the water engulfed her, two thoughts crossed her mind. The first, being that she had been wrong about being cold before. So very, very wrong. Yes, standing in ankle deep water in soaking wet clothing at night was cold, but jumping into the combined waters of Lake Michigan and the Chicago River was far worse. The initial shock had almost knocked the breath from her lungs, but she somehow managed.

Second, Television and movies were full of crap. In every show she had ever watched, the hero or heroine could dive into any body of water and keep their eyes open and see everything with crystal clarity. She did not experience this in the slightest. She could barely crack her eyes open; the polluted waters making them sting so bad they begged to be closed. As for the visibility? Darkness with specks of even darker, moving darkness. Persephone initially thought that the blobs were the result of her eyes burning, but when one of them zoomed into her thigh fast enough to leave a bruise, she determined that they were all debris.

And she didn’t like the number of specks at all.

_This is dumb! This is dumb! This is dumb!_ She chanted internally as she struggled against the current. _This is the worst possible way to learn to swim in this body!_ She had no way of determining how thick the wall of water had become, and fighting against the current made her move more horizontal than forward.

_Dumb! Dumb! Dumb! Dumb!_ She screamed at herself, as she narrowly avoiding being impaled by a lamppost. With each passing moment her flailing became more coordinated, her movement more graceful, and the current became less of an issue. While she was still berating herself for such a foolish idea, Persephone found some joy in learning to swim so quickly, beginning to enjoy the feeling of water flowing through her toes with each kick.
The aquatic goddess had just pushed aside a high velocity hubcap, when the first inkling of light appeared before her. She thanked, well she wasn’t sure who she thanked, but it had come at the perfect timing, as her body was beginning to crave oxygen and she wasn’t sure how much longer she could fight the need to inhale. She kicked with all her might, propelling her forward, while using her hands to push away the dangerous faux torpedoes.

With each kick the light grew brighter and her excitement grew. But just as the light became all encompassing, a something slammed her chest. The object made her spin around and carried her away, but worst of all it knocked what little air she had remaining out of her lungs and made her inhale a copious amount of the dark water. Persephone began to panic, thrashing wildly and inhaling more of the foul fluid on instinct.

Fuck! No! No! No! No! She clapped one hand over her mouth and blindly swam forward, no longer knowing what was up and what was down, only knowing that if she didn’t get air soon it would spell her doom. Kick after kick she the goddess propelled her self forward, no longer able to keep her eyes open, only hoping that she was heading in the right direction.

Just as she thought she wasn’t going to make it, the goddess breached the wall of water, and inhaled deeply… only to feel the cruel grip of gravity. She opened her eyes and saw that somehow, she had swam upward around ten feet, and now she was falling ten feet. The depowered goddess of spring covered her face and braced for impact, but the even then, her landing was quite painful, landing on her back. The only good thing from her less-than-graceful landing was that the impact made her spit out the remaining water from her oh-so-mortal lungs.

“Maria,” she whined, “I hope you appreciate all I’m doing for our son, you crazy bi-“

“HELP!” a panicked cry interrupted Persephone’s one-sided conversation with her departed friend.

The young goddess sat up, groaning along with her body’s protests against movement. “That was-“ she stopped as her mind processed what was before her, “-rude… Wow.”

Being inside the wall was drastically different from the outside, the first and foremost was the interior was dry. But that was the only positive thing she could say about it. The place looked like someone had taken a scrapyard, rotated it ninety degrees, and tried to pass it off as art. Lampposts, telephone poles, cars, the replica totem pole, and even a bus were sticking vertically from the ground, with more objects crashing down by the second. The walls of water that surrounded the area were curves like waves and steadily closing in at a surprisingly fast rate. But at the center of it all, and source of the panicked cry, was her target, Gabe Ugliano.

Wow, he somehow gets more disgusting the longer I look at him, like one of the hidden object pictures…

The man, and she was using that term in the loosest of definitions, was running towards her, arms flailing. His jacket and shirt had been torn away, revealing a blob of hair covered, milky white flesh that scarred her psyche. His pants were drooping in the rear and even at a distance a quick whiff confirmed her suspicions. The bad toupee and hair extensions though somehow, despite the will of the gods themselves, were still somehow on his head, albeit barely holding on and flopping up and down with each step.

“Lady,” Gabe panted as he skid to a stop next to her, the smell of his soiled pants making her gag. “You got to get me out of here! That- that- that thing is trying to kill me!” He placed one ham-sized hand over his heart and began to take deep breaths, sounding a bit like Cerberus when he was yacking up a bone. “I tell ya, babe,” he panted, his beady little eyes wandering lower than any gentlemen’s, “You show a little kindness to a single mother and they try to kill ya!”
Persephone’s skin crawled as the lard before her continued to look at her exposed thighs with a hungry look in his eyes, licking his lips slightly. She resisted the urge to slap him and gouge his eyes out with her nails, and instead went, “Wait? You know that thing?” If she were with, well, any other man, she would have clung to his arm and played the part of a damsel in distress, but there were limits. “What does it want?” she asked with a quivering lip.

He must have forgotten that only a moment ago he had been asking her for help, as he stood up straight; mostly so he could ogle her chest. “That thing is just an animal,” Gabe said, his voice suddenly deeper, obviously trying to impress her. “I knew I should have put it down years ago, but I was far too kind,” he sneered. “It’s just low-class scum, mooching off welfare with a huge sense of entitlement, not like people of are standing and breeding.”

It took all of her self-control to not scoff at him. Does he even listen to himself? She leaned a bit forward, allowing him to get a better look at her bosom, further enrapting him. “Oh, well if you know how to stop it, why don’t you do it now?” the goddess put one long finger in her mouth, before trailing it down to her cleavage. “You would be a hero! Especially to me,” she winked.

Now, Persephone had known plenty of dumb men in her long life, a vast majority of which were gods, but Gabe Ugliano was without a doubt in her mind the dumbest man in the history of the world.

“Lady! Do you not see him tossing cars—” he eyes darted up and down and he clamped his mouth shut. “Yeah… Yeah! I mean if I could smother him with a pillow when he was younger, and beat him with a two, er, I mean, I can take him now!” He puffed out his chest, which really only made his gut bigger, and turned his disgusting gaze to the son of Poseidon. “Yeah, this has been a long time coming….”

Honestly, she thought that while they stood there gabbing that Percy would have smashed him like a bug with a bus, reach out with watery tendrils to grab the foul man, or anything along those lines, but instead he just sat there, gazing down at them. Maybe it was because he didn’t want her to get hurt, or he was curious about what she was doing, but either way he had blown his opportunity.

Really kid? I have to deliver him to you? She rolled her eyes and started to follow the human slug, staying just far enough back in case she needed to quickly dive away to avoid a projectile. And as they walked, she was forced to listen to the man’s obviously made up life story. Gabe claimed that after several years studying in a Tibetan monastery, he made his return to the states and inspired the CEO of Big Apple Island with his humility, becoming fast friends. He then claimed that he helped invent some new transceiver that was going to change the world, all the while teaching blind children how to see by using their sense of smell.

I can’t tell if I respect Sally Jackson or pity her for putting up with this piece of garbage. We’ll call it fifty-fifty.

“Persephone,” Percy growled as they approached the waterspout, “you need to step away.” To emphasize his point, the teen tossed a manhole cover over the great wall of water, landing just a few feet between her and his former stepfather.

“And you need to cut this shit out and just finish it,” she shot back, glaring daggers at her stepson’s boyfriend.

“Wait…,” the fat man said, look back and forth between Persephone and Percy. “You know—”

Persephone didn’t give the dimwitted man a chance to finish, grabbing him by his hairy, flabby arm and flipping him on his back. She then quickly pinned his arms to his back while pulling his head
back by yanking on his toupee. She *may* have also scratched his balding head with her nails just to be spiteful. The out of shape Italian of course tried to struggle, but forty plus years of beer and a couch potato lifestyle left him with little strength. “One wrong move and I’ll slit your fucking throat,” Persephone hissed in his ear.

“Persephone!” Percy roared, the water seemingly roaring with its master. “Get your hands off of him! He’s mine!”

“Then get down here and fucking do it!” she shouted back, digging her knee into the fat man’s kidney. “Stop this bullshit and get down here and kill him!” She slammed Gabe’s face into the pavement, earning a satisfying ‘oomph!’

“You don’t have any right to tell me what to do! Do you know what this fat sack of shit has done?!” The son of Poseidon cried, lowering the waterspout ever so slightly.

“He killed your family! So, man the fuck up and come down here and kill him!” she shouted back, digging her knee into the fat man’s kidney.

“You don’t have any right to tell me what to do! Do you know what this fat sack of shit has done?!” The son of Poseidon cried, lowering the waterspout ever so slightly.

“Excuse me?!” Persephone cried, rubbing Gabe’s face in the pavement with one hand. “I don’t know what it’s like to lose a family? I guess it doesn’t count that I lost Nico, Bianca, and the greatest mortal to ever live to my fucking father?! The decades I spent mourning their loss, driving me to the point I didn’t recognize the child I considered my son, don’t count?” she growled. “Get your head out of your fucking ass, Jackson. You’re not the only one to lose everything.”

“But-“ the teen dropped down around twenty feet, now only floating slightly above them. “Mom, Paul, Estelle…” The kid was starting to lose it, and the walls of water started to shrink; Persephone just hoped that he didn’t let everything go at once or they would be in trouble. “He- he needs to pay.”

“Then fucking kill him already,” she sighed, lightly enjoying the crunching noise the human slug’s nose made as she continued to ram it into the pavement. “Stop with this *Ten Commandments* crap and just end it.” As she spoke the walls came down slowly, the water reversing in direction. The waters receded back into the river, parting around any people that had been stranded. The manhole and storm drain covers that had been blown off in his initial fury were carried back and put in their proper places. Even some of the statues, buses, and various vehicles were flipped upright. “Do it for the both of us. At least one of us can deliver justice.”

Percy descended the rest of the way, tears still streaming down, but with a sad little smile on his face. Without a word he walked up to his former stepfather, and his smile turned into a frown. Without being told, she pulled Gabe’s head back so that the man could see what was happening to him and by who. The slug looked at the teen with a pleading smile, missing several teeth, and gushing blood from a broken nose. Percy responded by kicking the man in the mouth, simultaneously shattering all his teeth and breaking his jaw.

Gabe tried to say something as he started to sob, but his unintelligible words fell on deaf ears. It was Persephone’s and Percy’s deepest desire that he felt the same fear that his parent’s in their final moments. She also hoped that he knew that what awaited him on the other side would be far worse than these final moments and last an eternity.

Percy crouched down in front of the sobbing, pleading man, and said in a voice just above a whisper, “f**k you.” And with those final words, every ounce of liquid that made up Gabriel Ugliano, exploded outward, leaving nothing more than a shriveled husk no bigger than a loaf of bread.
Unfortunately for her, the Gabe juices had splashed on her in the explosion, and she still had her hands on the tiny corpse. “Warn, a lady next time,” she groaned, wiping the juices off on her dress. “Bad enough I had to touch the guy, now I’m wearing him.”

Percy ignored her attempt at humor and continued to stare at the shriveled of carbon that had been his stepfather, before kicking it once more, making it crumble into dust. “Do you think Nico is going to be mad?” he asked, still staring at the dusty remains. “Because I killed him?”

“No,” she sighed. “Nico won’t hold that against you. But-“ she gestured to the incalculable damage he had done around them. “-the damage to the museum and city is another story.” The son of Poseidon deflated, afraid that he was going to lose the only person he had left in the world because of one foolish moment. She frowned at the sight, she hadn’t meant to imply Nico would break up with the boy, rather that he would be in the metaphorical doghouse for a while. “Buuuuut I think I did see Avalon doing a lot of damage to the city too,” she smiled, slugging the teen in the shoulder playfully. “Some new giant water gun or some nonsense like that.”

Percy smiled and rubbed his shoulder. “Thanks, Persephone. You’re not so bad, I guess.”

“You’re not so bad yourself, kid,” she smiled back. “Now, let’s go look for our men and get the f-“

She was interrupted by a sixty-five-million-year-old T-rex smashing its way through the entrance of the Field Museum, with her husband and stepson riding on its back.

Are you kidding me?!

The fossil reared back and opened its jaws to let out a roar, declaring that the tyrant king had returned to rule the Earth once more. She and Percy could only watch in awe and disbelief as Hades dug his heels into one of the beast’s many ribs and pointed to the two of them, the dinosaur nodding in understanding before rushing towards them; jumping over smaller wreckage and using its head to push away the larger obstacles without slowly down.

“You know,” Percy said, eyes squarely focused on the approaching fossil, “Nico’s powers are far cooler than mine.”

Persephone was inclined to agree with him, if it wasn’t for the fact that she noticed something was wrong. With each step, the beast lost some of its form. First the tail vertebrae, then an arm, a rib, then loosing multiple bones. Her eyes focused on Nico, and her heart stopped. Her son, was covered in blood, and what little untainted flesh was ghastly pale, and the only way he was sitting upright was because Hades had an arm wrapped around the teen’s waist.

“Coming in hot!” Hades cried as the last of the T-rex crumbled away, its second reign lasting less than a minute. Somehow, she and Percy managed to catch the two, Percy quickly taking Nico away from Hades and cradling him in his arms. “No time for questions!” Hades barked. “We need to get to the car now!”

I’m living in a bad horror movie, Persephone gulped as she shut off the radio and looked in the rearview mirror for what had to be the hundredth time in less than an hour. That’s the only explanation for this. That’s the only way any of this makes any sense.

Every station she turned to while driving was reporting the same thing: the existence of their world.
Monsters and gods were attacking the mortals worldwide, with each story worse than the last. Children’s hospitals leveled, landmarks toppled, islands wiped off the maps by rogue waves; anything and everything that could be found in the cheesy B-movies she enjoyed was playing out. She finally had to turn off the radio when the President of the United States, flat out revealed his ties to Olympus for the world to hear.

“Eyes on the road, Persephone!” her husband snapped at her from the back seat.

She silently nodded and did so, gripping the wheel tighter, and pressing the accelerator down further so she could weave through the traffic.

Maybe she was cold, callous, and selfish, for as bad a shape as the world was in, she only cared about what was happening in the backseat.

The back seats had been laid down, and Hades and Percy were kneeling over the motionless, blood covered form of Nico. Percy was holding her stepson’s hand, his lips silently moving, mouthing prayers and deals to any and every god he could think of. While Hades had a first aid kit and a sewing kit next to him, needles and thread in his mouth as he tried to stop Nico’s bleeding and occasionally cutting out what appeared to be gemstones from the unconscious teen’s various wounds.

“She needs pressure! What the hell is taking so long?”

She wanted to take Nico to a mortal hospital, for surely, they were better equipped than them, but Hades had shot down the idea as soon the radio kicked on. He argued that it was very possible, and extremely, likely that Avalon had placed warnings about them to the police. So, with no other options, the sped towards the farm.

_Just hang on little prince. I can’t lose you just when I got you back…_

She should have known something was wrong when they pulled up to the house and no one came out side to greet them. She should have noticed the black SUV parked in the drive. And she really should have noticed the shadowy figures lurking just beyond the lit areas. But she had been so preoccupied with Nico’s state that she walked right into a trap, and she had no one to blame but herself.

“Long time no see, partner!” the bearded man cried as he slammed her face down the kitchen table, while pinning her arms behind her back. “Been, what? About a month since your little skirmish with Artemis?”

Persephone growled and tried to slip his grip, but when she felt the cool, metal barrel of a gun on the back of her head, she quickly stopped.

She heard Percy cry out in surprise, right before the same painful sensation that had stripped her of her divinity flooded the room. It thankfully hurt less in this new form, but not by much. A moment later the son of Poseidon’s face was slammed down next to her, a feminine hand on the back of his head.

“George. PB. There was no need to be so rough,” an elderly male voice sighed. “The signal pulse would have rendered them powerless anyway.”
“I just didn’t want to take any chance,” the bearded man, George, grunted. “And excellent form PB! You dropped Jackson like a sack of potatoes.”

“Thanks dad!” a girlish voice chirped from next to her. “If there’s one good thing about my time with the Hunters, it’s that I learned how to hold my own.”

“Oh, hey!” Percy cried, as PB’s hand continued to squash his face against the table. Persephone would admit that the son of Poseidon was handsome, but even he wasn’t good looking when half his face was pressed flat against a tabletop. “You found your daughter! Grats! Seriously! So why don’t you let us-“ PB pulled his head up by his thick black hair and immediately slammed it back down. “Ow…”

“Please sir, let them go,” she heard her mother say. “They can’t harm you, and my daughter is peaceful by nature.”

Before she could process what was happening, she was yanked up by her hair and slammed back into one of the table’s chairs, as was Percy. When the last of the spots in her eyes disappeared, she found herself sitting across from the very man they had set out to kill that night. The old man looked far more frail and haggard than he had at the museum, but it was definitely him. She had no idea how he had gotten to the farm before them, and to add to her confusion, Jason, his friend, and her own mother were standing behind him. “You!” the goddess snarled.

“Yes, me,” Merlin smiled sadly. “The old man that is the source of your woes.”

“What do you want?” Hades said, stepping forward with Nico’s unconscious form in his arms. “How are you here? How are you even alive for that matter?” her king barked.

The old man held up one wrinkled hand and cracked a genuine smile. “For the last two, I was simply never there. I’ve been sitting right here the entire night, acquainting myself with your charming family, oh Lord of the dead.” Merlin then turned his attention to her. “And I must say your mother is an absolute gem! If it wasn’t for the given circumstance I’d dare we could even become friends,” he chuckled, while Demeter looked away in shame.

“Spare me your prattle and tell me what you want,” Hades growled, his dark eyes narrowing. “Because there is no way you came all this way to socialize, much less with your enemies.”

Merlin placed both hands on his cane and tapped his index fingers together repeatedly. “I dare say you are quite wrong about that Hades,” the old man sighed. “I traveled all this way for several reasons, the trap in Chicago being the most obvious to the four of you, but I also came down to make sure my choice is right.” He tapped his cane off the kitchen floor and rested his head on his hand for a moment before looking back up at them. “The war ended tonight, with the cat coming out of its bag, as it were. Starting now the rest of the world is going to do our job for us, by poisoning Olympus with hatred and fear, and destroying all creatures that the Mist had previously obscured. We, and by that, I mean my company, are going to make sure that the number of innocents killed after this night are kept to minimum by introducing our signal to the masses. But-“

“That would mean our deaths,” Hades said, all color draining from his face. “There would be no place for us to hide.”

“Normally yes,” the old man said, bobbing his head. “But, unlike your brother, I am a merciful man.” He snapped his fingers and PB slid a black box across the table, with five perfectly white wrist bands sticking out of black, nonconductive foam. “These bracelets nullify the effects of the signal, allowing any demigod or god a chance at a normal life. Mr. Grace? Ms. Demeter?”
Persephone’s stomach dropped when the son of Jupiter and her own mother held up their right arms to reveal the white bracelets. No….

“So, I’m going to off you this once and only once,” Merlin continued. “Admit defeat and take these. You gods will remain mortal for the rest of your days, while the demigods will retain their abilities, but you will all live in peace.” The old man used his cane to slide the box closer to Hades. “What do you say?”

Persephone closed her eyes as she knew exactly what her husband was going to say. They had known going into tonight that this had been their last chance to take down Avalon, as all other sources had run out. And every time they fought the mortal organization they only came back weaker and closer to death. The first encounter at New Rome had robbed her mother and Hades of their divinity, while almost killing Nico and Percy in the process. Her and Nico’s mission to find Artemis had ended with Artemis more-or-less dead, the loss of her own divinity, and Nico shot. Now, the botched Chicago raid had resulted in two of the Seven dead, and Nico at death’s doorstep, and not the one outside Hades’ office. This is it…

Hades looked at Nico and then her, silently apologizing for what he was about to do. She only nodded and accepted her fate; there were far worse things than being mortal. “Fine. You win. Just… Just let my family be.”

Merlin smiled, bringing the age of the gods to a close.

Persephone didn’t bother to see their guests out, choosing to stay at Nico’s side with Percy and the boy’s mutual friend. She understood why Hades, her mother, and Jason walked their former foes out of the house, but it still felt off to her, but not as off as grasping the idea that she was going to be a mortal forever. So, as she held her son’s hand, she tried to process a now uncertain future. Do I need to get a job? Between Hades, Demeter, and myself we have near unlimited funds, but how will I fill the day? The boys are gone at school most of the day, and one can only watch Netflix for so many hours. Do I need a hobby? How does one even go about getting a hobby? Should I enroll in school? At that moment, the only thing she was sure of was that she needed a bottle of wine.

“So, you’re really Persephone?” the girl asked, breaking the silence.

She cracked a smile. “I was, not sure what I am now,” she said, absently touching the white bracelet on her right wrist. I feel like cattle with this… They’ve got us chipped and tagged.

“And Nico’s dad… is really Hades?”

Before she could answer, gunshots rang out. It wasn’t one or two, but steady, sustained fire, that instantly had her on her feet. “Stay here,” she the now mortal goddess said, as she left the room. “Guard Nico!”

She ran down the hallway to the kitchen and out the front door, not bothering to slip a pair of shoes on, and out onto the lawn. “What the…”

Between the porch and the driveway was the massive, disintegrating form of a hellhound, surrounded by several of Avalon’s troops with their guns pointed at it. Hades, Jason, and her mother stood off to the side with the Avalon brass, looking just as confused as she felt. She sighed in relief though, knowing that Avalon hadn’t tricked them.
“What’s going on?” Chelsea asked, appearing at her side. “Woah! Is that a hellhound?!”

Persephone nodded mutely as the creature crumbled, its golden remains being scattered by the winds.

“We got a body down here!” one of the nameless armed men cried out, point at a lump on the lawn. “A girl!”

“What?” Merlin asked, stepping forward with Jason trailing behind him.

Two of the men rushed forward and crouched over the still form. “She’s breathing!” one of them cried out. “Let’s sit her up!” The two men wrapped their arms under the dust covered girl’s shoulders and carefully sat her up.

“No,” Jason gasped, jumping back as if he had seen a ghost. “No,” he cried, placing his back against the side of the SUV as the men helped the girl to her feet. “No.”

One of the men pulled out a penlight and flashed it in the girl’s face, making her kaleidoscope eyes blink. “She seems to be fine,” the man said. He then squeezed her face so that her mouth opened and promptly swore and dropped the light. “Scratch that, she’s missing her tongue!”

“This isn’t right,” Merlin mumbled. “Where’s Morgan?”

Persephone supposed the man’s questions were valid, but she had her own. Where in the hell did Piper McLean come from?

Chapter End Notes

The end!

JK, just too tired to write notes at the moment :(
Chapter Summary

Warnings: amputation, blood, gore, death.

Tonight:

We find out what happened to Piper....

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Piper had always tried her best to keep her emotions in check, even before she learned she was a child of Aphrodite with charm speak. It was partly because she was an only child to a very busy single parent, which meant there was no one there to put up with any childish tantrums. But mostly it was because her Grandpa Tom had tried to teach her about carrying oneself with pride and dignity at a young age. This did not mean she was as cold and calculating as Annabeth at times, nor did it mean that she couldn’t emote when needed, it just meant that she was less likely to be overwhelmed in a bad situation.

But watching Reyna and Veronica die had pushed her far past her breaking point.

So, when Piper and the witch of Avalon reappeared in a sterile, white room surrounded by armed men and women, and she found her mouth was no longer restrained, she screamed. It was a wordless scream of unparalleled anguish, loss, rage, and hatred that combined with her charm speak would have made a primordial drop to their knees and weep. For the dozen or so mortals that had their weapons trained on her, the scream was overwhelming.

Two men dropped their weapons, removed their survival knives from their belts, and slit their throats. One woman ran to the nearest pristine, white wall and repeatedly slammed her head against it until her skull collapsed, leaving the wall covered in her blood. One man snapped his own neck, while another disemboweled himself, pulling foot-after-foot of intestine onto the floor. In a matter of moments, the occupants of the room lay dead or dying on the floor in an ever-expanding pool of blood.

That is, all except for Morgan, the one-person Piper McLean could truly say she hated. Oh, she hated Olympus too for what they had done, for using humans as cattle, but it was the witch of Avalon that had sent Reyna and Veronica to a possible oblivion. The witch had tried to reseal Piper’s mouth the instant the banshee’s wail first left her lips, but the initial spell was grossly underpowered compared to the raw emotion the daughter of love emitted. When the first spell failed, the serpent tattoos on the witch’s arms flared to life in their strange emerald glow and her face twisted in visible effort as she cast spell after spell to silence her.

“Look, kid,” the witch panted when she was silenced, with her hands and legs bound for good measure. “I know you hate me, but I just saved your friends from a fate far worse than death.” The dark-haired woman took a step closer, the blood on the ground parting before her. “Avalon has its own monsters,” Morgan said crouching down before her and cupping her chin. “Monsters that would love nothing more than to cut you and your friends open to figure out how you tick. But
before they start cutting you up, they’d take away everything that makes you, you, and leave you trapped in your body, forever screaming, begging to escape.” Morgan released Piper’s chin and sighed, and a deep pain flashed in her eyes. “But my boss has other plans for you. He wants me to take you to your boyfriend when we’re finished.”

And with that the world went black.

“All the equipment is ready to go, Lady Morgan.”

“I can’t thank you enough, Daedalus. If it wasn’t for you, we’d never have been able to completely cripple Olympus.”

Morgan? Daedalus? Piper began to stir from the conversation, but was unable to move or even open her mouth. With no other options, she kept her eyes closed and continued to listen. At best she could hear something that might aid in her escape and at worst gain some new information about Avalon. I’d settle for the location of a wooden stake so I could burn this bitch!

“I just can’t believe I didn’t come across this signal of yours before now,” the voice she assumed was Daedalus said. “I spent years researching RF and I never even came close to something like what your organization has found. Tell me, what was the frequency? Was it in megahertz? Gigahertz? Terahertz?”

“Uhhhh…” It was a familiar sound to Piper, one that she made quite frequently when Coach Hedge would ask her to repeat what he said when he caught her zoning out, or when Leo would ask her for the specs of whatever new gadget or gizmo her dad had bought. “You’ll have to ask Brian or Rashid about that, I’m on the magical side of things,” Morgan laughed awkwardly.

“I hate to interrupt your pleasant ‘lil chat, but the girl is awake,” a third voice said, a man with a slight British accent.

Fuck!

She felt a strange energy wrapping around her arms, almost feeling like a fuzzy blanket fresh from the dryer charged with static electricity, that slowly lifted her off the ground. She thought about simply pretending to still be unconscious, but she could practically hear the smile on the witch’s face. So, with no other option, she opened her eyes.

Holy…

Okay, she had been expecting Morgan’s ridiculously beautiful face, that was a given. Seeing the ghostly forms of David Bowie, Prince, Buddy Holly, and Daedalus was a bit weird, but given the last two years Piper had, she just rolled with it (that, and she thought they were all overrated). It was the fact that just behind the witch and the dead rock stars, was a sheer drop that lead to a massive ravine with seemingly no bottom, and an aura around it that made her skin crawl in fear. She had only felt that kind of fear once before, in Rome.

Tartarus… Which means…

Piper gazed up, somewhat relieved that she had some control of her body, and seeing a seemingly endless ceiling of earth and stone overhead confirmed her suspicions that she was in the Underworld.
And it was a mess.

Just beyond the gaping chasm of darkness, was a scene straight out of *World War Z, Dante’s Inferno, Teen Titans Go!*, or some foul combination of the three.

The gates to Elysium, which she had been told were unbreachable, lay twisted in piles, while souls rushed around them. Elysium itself wasn’t any better, with vast sections of its legendary fields burnt or burning, its structures on the verge of collapse, the waters that separated the Isles of the Blessed polluted to the point that they were black, and the sky mirrored that foul blackness. It was hard to tell from a distance, but it appeared as if there were a great number of souls just standing around, completely oblivious to the chaos around them.

Outside of the false promised land was somehow worse. Piper had never imagined that the Underworld would be a wet environment, but it appeared that there was far more water than land, which she was positive wasn’t natural. Throngs of souls covered the dark and flooded landscape, and their actions confirmed her suspicions, as those close to the water’s edge acted like cornered animals, desperately trying to fight their way back inland, pushing the weak into the feared waters without a second thought. Those that had been unlucky enough to be caught in the water, they either stood there gazing up like a young turkey in rain, or floating on their stomachs or back to wherever the currents took them. To add to the insanity, there were souls deliberately pushing others into the waters, and worse, down into the pits of Tartarus.

It broke Piper’s heart knowing that the chaos before her was the better of two options for the souls of Reyna and Veronica.

*Non-existence or an eternity in a grunge pit? What kind of nightmare have I awoken to?* A wave of grief and rage hit her at the thought of lost friends. And the negative emotions only grew as she realized just how many others faced the same fate. *Clovis, Drew, Malcom, Jake, Annabeth, and… Leo…*

Piper tried to thrash, flail, wiggle her toes, anything that would let her escape so that she could figure out a way to set things right. *Even if I have to rip Olympus apart! I put Gaea asleep! And I wasn’t even pissed off…* but whatever spell the witch had on her only allowed her to move her head, and nothing more.

“Easy there, Piper,” Morgan said, placing her hands on either side of the daughter of Aphrodite’s face to stop her from hurting herself. “I promise I’m going to take you Jason when we’re done,” the witch whispered, the friendly tone and mention of the son of Jupiter only infuriating Piper further. “I’ll even restore your Tweeter connection if you so wish, but we’re going to need you to do one tiny, little thing for us first.”

The loss of the Nation’s primary method of communication was troubling, as she planned to contact Coyote, or someone to come and get her once she figured out how to escape. *Just got to bide my time, get out, and find a phone. I’ll call dad and he can get me a ride to the Nation. Also, get bent, lady…*

“Do you really think it wise to let the girl open her mouth, Lady Morgan?” Daedalus asked, the ancient inventor looking at Piper with the same disgusted look he would give a fried capacitor. To him, she was just another component prone to fault in a machine that he was forced to make due with. “You did say she killed some of your men with just a scream.”

“In case you’ve forgotten, daddio, we’re already dead,” David Bowie scoffed, his strange eyes shifted between her and the inventor. While she was never a particular fan of the musician, it seemed so strange for him to be a villain after all of the nice things she had heard about him. *But then again,*
he was the sovereign of the Guild of Calamitous Intent, so… “It’s not like she could harm us.”

Buddy Holly smacked the blonde rock star upside the head and sighed. “Really, Bowie? Have you forgotten that there are worse things than death already? She could make us walk right off this cliff! Or take a dip in the Lethe flooded fields! Or-”

“Make you shove a wrench up your ass, like she did to my colleague Brian,” Morgan finished with an amused smirk. “Thanks for that by the way. He had to take an inflatable donut with him to sit on everywhere,” she whispered. “But yes, Mr. Holly is right, we can’t trust her to do what is needed. It took all of my strength to stop myself from lighting myself on fire when she screamed, and I’m still not fully recovered.”

“Then we are at a standstill,” Daedalus frowned. “My sound system will reach every corner of the Underworld, but without the girl’s charm speak it is nothing more than a glorified surround sound system.” The elderly inventor looked at her with even greater disgust than before. “This is why I never use humans in my plans…”

Morgan placed one tattooed hand on the fuming inventor’s shoulder (which Piper thought would have passed through it, but apparently magic lets one touch the dead). “I never said it was a problem, this is just going to require some creativity on my part. And a lot of power.” The dark-haired woman then turned her emerald eyes to the daughter of Aphrodite. “A whole lot of power…”

Oh, I do not like the sound of that!

The twin serpent tattoos flared to life on the witch’s arms; their green glowing bathing all assembled in an ominous light. “This might be a little painful,” Morgan said as she magically forced Piper’s mouth open. The older woman’s eyes then began to glow, along with more and more of her tattooed body. It was an equally captivating and terrifying sight to behold.

Then without a word, as fast as cobra’s strike, the witch shot her hand into Piper’s mouth.

Fear like she had never known came over her as she felt Morgan’s long, white fingers grasp her tongue; her heart beating painfully fast. She wanted to scream, to gag, and bite down all at once, but the witch’s magic had her completely paralyzed. Her panic only grew when the serpent tattoo on Morgan’s arm began to move down it, and she could feel something slither down her throat.

This isn’t happen-

Morgan yanked at the same time she felt something bite down deep within her neck, and a blinding pain like nothing she had ever known overwhelmed her. The magic that had held her up failed, and she collapsed to the ground, writhing in agony. Her throat was aflame, and she could feel her mouth filling with warm blood, but the familiar metallic taste was different, muted. She rolled onto her stomach and went to scream, only for blood and a sharp gasp to leave her mouth. Through the pain, Piper wrapped her hands around her throat and tried to make a sound, but all that came out was silence.

“It’ll be okay,” the witch’s voice cooed above her. “I made sure to cauterize it so you won’t bleed out.”

Through teary eyes, Piper looked up at the witch, and instantly regretted it. For in the blood covered hands of the witch, was her tongue and vocal cords.

“Don’t worry, I’ll put these back in their proper place when I’m done with them,” The witch smirked, before swallowing the flesh whole. The sight of her tongue being swallowed was enough to
make Piper empty her stomach onto the already blood covered ground.

The witch’s tattoos flared brighter than ever before, the emerald light momentarily blinding all onlookers. When the light faded, everyone gasped, as the witch had undergone a dramatic transformation.

_Holy shit…_

Morgan, the witch of Avalon, former apostle of Hecate, and all-in-all unbelievably good-looking woman, was gone, in her place was a girl perhaps a few years younger than Piper. The girl’s hair was long and dark, but lacked the amazing sheen of Morgan’s. The tattoos were the same, if slightly smaller to fit on the smaller frame. The exposed flesh between the numerous dark lines was not the same flawless porcelain, instead covered with numerous scars caused by horrible beatings and burns. The face was also different, the nose had clearly been broken and never properly set, her left earlobe was missing, and a vicious scar ran the width of her throat. The girl then collapsed to her knees as her body shuddered.

“Jesus Christ,” Prince gasped, the man’s quiet voice seemingly echoing in the silence.

“She- she’s just a girl!” Bowie cried, eyes wide in panic.

“I bet you feel like a real creep for hitting on her now,” Buddy Holly smirked.

“I would appreciate it if you forgot all about this,” the true Morgan said, with Piper’s voice. “And stop standing around and get the equipment ready,” the young witch said as she pushed herself up onto two shaky legs.

The four dead men nodded and scurried off, leaving Piper alone with the witch.

“Pretty surprising, right?” the girl asked, as she sat down in front of Piper, who was still shaking in pain. “Here let me help.” The witch placed one hand on her and it felt like the pain was being siphoned away, until it was nothing more but a dull throbbing where her tongue used to be. “I am sorry you know, truly I am.”

“Fuck you,” Piper mouthed slowly so that the witch could understand. She wanted nothing more than to sit up and strangle the girl to death, to toss her lifeless body into the pits of Tartarus, but the pain from losing her tongue and vocal cords had sapped her of all her energy. Even her burning rage wasn’t enough to move her body.

“I deserve that,” the witch said, hanging her head down with a sad smile. It was incredibly strange to hear her own voice coming from another’s mouth, and like hearing a recording of oneself, Piper hated it. “But I want to tell you again that I will give you your tongue back, I will take you to Jason, and I really am sorry for what I did to your friends.”

“Fuck you,” she mouthed again, her anger growing. _She deserves to burn for what she did to Reyna! What she had Terminus do to Atlas and Veronica! You can’t just say ‘I’m sorry’, that’s not how that works!_

“Yeah, I hate myself too,” the girl sighed, leaning back so that her hands propped her up. “But if the engineering division, specifically a guy named Brian, got ahold of your friends, they would have continuously torn them apart and put them back together in an endless cycle of pain.” Morgan started to rub her right arm, which was by far the more scarred of the two. “Trust me, you didn’t want them to go through that.”

“Let. Them. Go,” she mouthed. _You could’ve just taken me! You could’ve let them go! You could’ve_
done a million other things that didn’t involve murdering them in cold blood! The tears started to flow anew, her body began to tremble.

Morgan began to absently draw patterns in the dirt, as she avoided eye contact with the daughter of love. “That wasn’t an option, not with Terminus there,” the witch sighed. “You, I had permission to take alive for this operation, and the boss wants a sample population left in the new world. Reyna and that… girl, on the other hand, had no such value. Plus, the boss is keeping you and Jason off the books so certain members of Avalon don’t take matters in their own hands…”

Lucky me… Still trembling from pain, Piper pushed herself up in a sitting position, directly across from Morgan. She entertained the idea of lunging at the obviously weakened witch and sending them both into the seemingly endless chasm below, but with her luck, the witch would probably just teleport away leaving her to fall to her death alone. She also thought about just reaching over and strangling Morgan with her bare hands, but once again magic powers thwarted that idea. At the moment, it really seemed that she would have to wait and hope that either the witch was telling the truth about taking her to Jason, or an opportunity to escape presented itself. Might as well make the best of it, and get something to distract me from, well, everything… She reached over and tapped the girl on the knee until she looked up. “Story,” she mouthed, pointing at the young witch. Might as well figure out what THAT is all about…

Morgan blinked. “My story?”

Piper nodded. No! The story of the three little pigs!

“I suppose I owe you that, especially with all of this,” the witch sighed, gesturing to her radically different body. “Well, this is it, the real me. Fourteen-year-old me in all my scarred glory! I don’t think it’s hard to figure out why I preferred that older, better looking form, or are cigarette burns, scars from flailing, and a slit throat a little too subtle for you?”

She shook her head.

“Yeah, I thought so. My preferred image is how I was supposed to look in ten years if the fates hadn’t been cruel,” Morgan spat, her tattoos momentarily flaring to life.

And here we go with the gods-hurt-me-or-my-family spiel…

“My mother, as if she deserved to be called that, was a junkie and sold me to the most wretched humans on Earth for a fix.”

Okay, not expecting that…

“I was five. Five,” the witch stressed with Piper’s voice, and she could feel her own charm speak washing over her; a very strange and unpleasant feeling. “Those animals kept me locked in a cage and only let me out to film me.” Morgan scoffed, and dug her fingers into the dirt. “Just like your dad, I was a big star.”

Oh…

“But I think you guess the kinds of movies they made me star in,” the dark-haired girl whispered. “Every week a new man, every week I would be tossed back in my cage bloodied and broken. I was five years old and begged for a death that wouldn’t come. And every time I thought it couldn’t get any worse, it did.” She pointed to the numerous round scars on her arms. “These are from a burn video. They tied me down and jabbed me with cigarettes and cigars for what felt like an eternity. The big finale was they dipped me feet in acid. Look at the camera sweetheart!” the witch laughed, tears
building in her eyes.

Despite the hatred she felt for the girl sitting across her, Piper felt a twinge of pity for the young member of Avalon. But only a twinge. *It still doesn’t excuse you for killing my friends! For destroying my home! My family!*

“One time they whipped me until my back looked like hamburger. Thankfully, I passed out long before they were finished. Another time, they nailed my tongue to a bored. They broke my legs and made me crawl across the ground, where a delicious bowl of dogfood awaited me.”

The witch continued her tales of horror, each story more disturbing than the last. Piper was unsure whether it was intentional or not, but her charm speak became more potent with each word. As the girl described having her fingernails popped off with a screw driver, Piper curled her hands into fists, digging her nails so hard into her palms that they started to bleed.

“-but eventually I grew too old for their clients’ taste and it was time for my final role: a snuff film. They took me to Europe, to some old ruins, you know to make it a fitting ending for their star.” Morgan lifted her head up and pointed to the jagged scar that ran the width of her throat. “And that’s where I got this, and where I met Hecate.” The witch stopped and wiped her dark eyes on her scarred and tattooed arm. “They slit my throat with some crappy dagger on an altar of stone, but even while I bled out, they had their way with me. Even in death I was violated for the amusement of the scum of the earth. And then-“

“Lady Morgan!” Daedalus cried, walking back to them with what appeared to be a bronze microphone in his hand, closely followed by the others with their own microphones. “The system is primed and awaits your input,” the inventor said as he and the others set their devices up on near the cliff’s edge.

Morgan looked back and forth between the four men and Piper, before turning to her and saying, “We can finish this later,” before pushing herself up on unsteady legs.

*No, I’m cool! No need for that horrorfest! I mean, fuck, I can’t think of a way for her to suffer that she hasn’t already experienced. I mean, just, wow… I have no faith in humanity or the gods anymore.... Just, Jesus…*

As Morgan approached the array microphones, Buddy Holly approached the young victim and cleared his throat. “Umm, miss? You said that we would be protected in exchange for our assistance. I believe now would be the time to place some kind of spell or charm on us?”

Now as the daughter of an actor and being the kind of girl to lounge around the house watching TV with her pants off, Piper knew exactly what was coming.

And she liked it.

She even smiled a bit, which felt strange without her tongue, but she really wanted to see some form of justice take place. *If I had the ability to speak I might even be inclined to warn them, but oops! Would you look at that, I’m mute!*

Daedalus, being the genius that he is, was the first to realize that they had been played as Morgan’s scarred lips slowly twisted into a grin, but he was only one second ahead of the rock stars. “You-“

The inventor’s cry turned into a shrill cry of terror as tendrils of green energy erupted from the ground and wrapped around the waists of the four spirits, before flinging them off the cliff into the abyss. Their cries echoed throughout the Underworld, even the usually quiet artist-formerly-known-
as Prince’s scream could be heard. Buddy Holly screamed something about a plane and Iowa, before his voice was lost to the darkness.

*As Don McLean once said, today’s the day the music died… well, died again,* Piper thought with a wicked grin.

“Piper,” Morgan said, startling her. “I just have to do this and we can leave. And once I regain my strength, I’ll give you your tongue and vocal cords back.” The witch stepped closer to the microphones, somehow looking even smaller and frailest than before, and cleared her throat. The serpent tattoos glowed and their tails extended up from her shoulders and coiled around Morgan’s neck; the girl’s eyes squeezing shut in apparent pain.

“To those that have taken their last breaths and discarded flesh for this painful eternity,” the girl said, her voice echoing from every direction and radiating power. “Forget your troubles. Forget your pain. Forget your fear. Leave it all behind by bathing in the waters of the Lethe. The Lethe will take you to the afterlife you were promised, the afterlife you deserve. Submerge yourself in the waters and you will never know conflict again.”

Despite the charm speak being specifically directed to the souls below, the sheer strength of it and allure of what the witch was promising almost made her want to go down and bathe in the Lethe. She wanted to forget about the loss of her tongue, the loss of both camps, the loss of Reyna and Veronica, and even the new responsibilities of leading the Nation. She even wanted to forget about being a demigod. It was all just so tempting.

But two things kept her from following the witch’s words: the thunderbird’s feather and the words of her grandpa. The Thunderbird’s feather zapped her to her senses as Grandpa Tom’s words filled her head.

*Never run from your pain. Embrace it.*

The words and zap were like a second wind, the pain she felt before was still there, but ignorable. She pushed herself to her feet, as she remembered the last words Grandpa Tom spoke to her in her dream.

*Don’t be afraid to lose. Sometimes, losing has its own rewards.*

The witch still had her back to her, speaking to the masses below, while the runic tattoos on her body glowed with power. But, Piper noticed they weren’t glowing as bright as before. The witch had already said she was weakened, so she figured that using stolen charm speak to order possibly millions of souls around was draining her of strength even more.

*I know what you meant now, Grandpa,* the daughter of Aphrodite thought with a sad smile. She wanted to hit herself for even thinking about just letting Morgan, and therefore Avalon, have their way without a fight. If she waited for Morgan to finish, she would be taken to Jason, to a safe place. But that would just be resigning herself to the same fate as her ancestors: forced to live on a reservation while everything that was rightfully theirs was taken away. *No! Fuck that! Even if I don’t get my voice back, even if I die in the Underworld, it is still better than to be complacent with fate!*

With adrenaline coursing through her body, Piper ran forward, and with all of her strength, slammed into Morgan’s scarred back, sending them and the microphones falling forward. Piper smiled in malicious delight when she caught a glimpse of the girl’s face changing from surprise, to confusion, and then finally terror before she fell off the ledge, while Piper stopped just short, her head and
shoulders hanging over the edge.

She quickly shimmied back from the ledge, and pushed herself to her feet. Down below, she could see the multitudes of souls now eagerly rushing towards the flood waters of the Lethe, but she just added that to her sacrifice. *I think Atlas and Reyna would appreciate that tackle. Hell, coach too. She began to brush the dirt off herself. I need to get in contact with the Nation, which I guess is by text at this point? I hope Skyweaver Ranch’s address is online… But first things first, I need to find a way out of the- she felt someone tap her shoulder- Huh? She turned her head, only to get a fist to her face, knocking her to the ground.

“You fucking bitch!” Morgan shrieked, holding her fist close to her chest, rubbing it with her other hand. “I told you I was going to take you to the others! That I’d give your voice back! And this is what you do?! Try to send me to hell?!” The witch’s arms ignited in emerald flame, and the serpent tattoos rose from her arms and solidified into two, very real, serpents. “I’m gonna-“

A strange, inhuman shrieking and the wingbeats of an unknown number of creatures erupted from the chasm to Tartarus. “Tekeli-li! Tekeli-li!” the voice seemed to cry over the wingbeats.

Neither she nor Morgan had to ponder long about the origin of the cries, as an uncountable number of black and purple forms of various shapes and sizes flew up from the pit. Once clear of the chasm, the black beasts scattered throughout the Underworld, screaming their strange cries on loop. Many swooped down and attacked the nonresponsive souls, the unknown creatures seemingly unaffected by the memory wiping waters. Some of the creatures impacted the Underworld’s ceiling, and if Piper’s eyes weren’t fooling her, they sprouted large, black, fang-tipped tentacles and began to chip away at the rock with the same speed and force of a jackhammer.

Now, under ideal circumstances, Piper would have used that momentary distraction to jump up, punch the witch in the face, and run away, but ideal circumstances are as probably as going a day without pissing Reyna off. Four of the unknown creatures landed on the cliff, surrounding her and the young witch, and Piper thought that it would probably be better to fight with the witch, rather than try to run way on her own.

As up close, the creatures were far more strange and terrifying. Each one was radically different from the next, the only thing in common was their black, almost gelatinous flesh and the numerous glowing, purple eyes that popped up all over their bodies without rhyme or reason. They had wings to allow them to fly, some looked like those of a bat, while some had feathered bird wings, but they were melting away and reshaping into new limbs or disappearing into their bodies.

Piper had been focused on the largest one, directly behind Morgan; the strange monster growing three thick, furry appendages from the top of its body, when from next to her, the familiar voice of Daedalus rasped out, “H-hel-el p me.”

Piper turned just in time (or perhaps at the wrong time), to see Daedalus’ spectral head sticking out of a creature’s chest; black tendrils digging their way into his left eye socket and neck, as his mouth was sewn shut. Around the head, dozens of purple eyes sprouted, first looking at the inventor as he was sucked further into it, and then fixing all its eyes on her; including Daedalus’.

*Holy shit! Holy shit! I did not sign up for Halo!* Piper scrambled to her feet and turned to join Morgan- only to be greeted by an even more terrifying sight. The largest creature had finished its transformation in the few scant seconds she had looked away.

And it was horrifying.

The three growths had turned into cruel parodies of dog heads, with impossibly large fangs in each
mouth, long tentaclesque, purple and black tongue jutted out of their maws, and cancerous growths of purple eyes spread throughout. The body had become more solid, with six, thick legs growing from it, and a bundle of razor-tipped tentacles made up the faux dogs’ tail. It didn’t take Piper long to figure out that this is what became of the Underworld’s famous guard dog.

“Um, Piper?” Morgan gulped, backing into the demigod. “Stay close…”

*Stay close? Stay close?! How about teleporting us the fuck out of here!* She said with her eyes, while pointing up. She had no weapons, no charm speak, and no friends to come and save her, so she was all about running away. *Click your heels three times and take us to Kansas for all I care! I do not want to star in the new version of The Thing!*

“Oh, gee! I never thought of that!” Morgan cried, rolling her eyes. “I could’ve gotten us out of here in an instant if someone hadn’t tried to push me off a fucking cliff!” The emerald flames disappeared, but the twin serpents stayed, ready to strike.

*Okay, I’ll admit my bad. BUT! I wasn’t expecting shit to go all George Romero!*

“Yeah, you know I should let these things kill you, but I’m going to be the bigger person here!” The witch shouted, lashing out at the faux Cerberus with one snake, while the other circled around the two girls and hissed at the other beasts, daring them to come closer. The first snake unhinged its jaw and wrapped its massive maw around the middle head, swallowing it whole, as emerald flames engulfed it, keeping the other two heads from biting it. “These things aren’t so-“

It was at that moment that Piper knew they were fucked. It was an unspoken rule as a demigod, and honestly as a human in general, that one never said something was easy, that things were going smoothly, or that an opponent wasn’t tough, as the second that happened the universe would laugh in your face.

And the universe’s chosen form of laughter was for the Cerberus creature to split its body in two, forming a massive fanged mouth that rivaled the Uktena’s in size. The two remaining heads transformed into a pair of mantis-like pincers, and bit into the flaming serpent. A massive, black tongue covered in eyes formed in the maw and shot forward, wrapping around the witch of Avalon. Piper could only close her eyes as the girl’s screaming started, only to be silenced a moment later.

*So, this is it huh? The end of Piper McLean. Eaten and absorbed by living nightmares in the Underworld with no one knowing.* There was nothing she could do. She couldn’t run, as she was surrounded on all sides, with even more of the creatures flying overhead. She had nothing to fight them with. And if even if she found a way to kill herself, the creatures would just devour her soul or she could become fuel for her mother’s immortality. *Maybe oblivion is the better option. Maybe-

“Did somebody order one super-hot rescue?!” A voice Piper thought she’d never hear again whooped.

Piper’s eyes snapped open and her heart soared higher than ever before.

As riding on Mrs. O’Leary, on a saddle made of the fabric of beach chairs, was The McShizzle, the Latino Lover, the son of Hephaestus, and her best friend, Leo Valdez. He was translucent like the other souls of the Underworld, but he was the most beautiful thing Piper had ever seen. Even if he was wearing the ugliest orange earmuffs she had ever seen…

“Hold on Beauty Queen!” Leo cried, as the giant hellhound bounded over the Daedalus creature, landing between her and the Cerberus-beast. “’Cause shit’s about to get wild!” he dug his heels into
Mrs. O’Leary’s side and clicked his tongue twice. Before Piper knew what was happening, the giant dog grabbed her by her collar and in one quick motion, tossed Piper onto her back behind Leo. “Hold on tight!” And as she grasped the makeshift saddle, they disappeared into the darkness.

They exited the darkness and skidded to a halt, sending Piper flying off, and landing hard against the stony earth. But even the painful landing wasn’t enough to dim her spirits, as she was reunited with Leo Valdez.

The Texan jumped down from Mrs. O’Leary’s back just as Piper was rolling onto her back, and ran over to her side. “I told you to hold on,” he smirked, offering her his hand.

She held up the ripped pieces of red and white fabric she had been grasping for the young man to see, before tossing them aside with a goofy grin. *I did dumbass! Your saddle just wasn’t what’s the word? Good!*

She went to take Leo’s offered hand, only for her hand to pass right through his; a grim reminder that they were now of different worlds.

“Oh, that’s right,” Leo said, retracting his hand and his own grin falling ever so slightly. “I mean, I guess that it’s a good thing…."

Piper stood up and wrapped her arms around her best friend, a strange chill running through her when her arms accidentally passed through the boy’s shoulders. This wasn’t the reunion she dreamed of, but it was still a reunion, and she wanted Leo to know that she was happy, no thrilled, to see him. Even if it did mean that she had fallen victim to the damsel in distress trope. *There are far worse things. Like whatever the Hades those things were…."

“I missed you, beauty queen,” Leo whispered in her ear, as he did his best to return the embrace, accidentally running an arm through her ribcage before he found its proper place.

They pulled away at the same time, both of their faces red with an almost giddy expression. It was only then that Piper took in their new surroundings. They were on a stone river bank, with some unknown (and probably dangerous) river raging less than ten feet away, filled with a mix of debris and souls. Less disturbing was, the large cave mouth that stood next to them, with the great hellhound already heading inside of it; ducking its head so it could clear the entrance.

“Let’s… Let’s get inside before any of the Tekels spot us,” The mechanic said, following the hellhound.

Piper walked beside him and raised an eyebrow. *Tekels?*

“Oh, those blob things,” he said, holding open a large curtain made from various pieces of clothing, beach blankets, and a few advertisements. “They started appearing shortly after Anna-, er, after Daedalus ruined Elysium and the tribunal flooded the Lethe. So, uh, don’t soak your feet in anything.”

Behind the curtain, in typically Leo fashion, was the start of a workshop. The son of Hephaestus had constructed himself a forge out of numerous mismatched bricks, with a large fire roaring within, and
Mrs. O’Leary curled around it, absorbing its warmth. Against one wall, dozens of buckets and milk crates filled with pieces of scrap metal were piled haphazardly, threatening to tip over at the slightest disturbance. A small card table was set up, one leg missing and replaced with an umbrella, but Leo had his hand-crafted tools laid out in uniform lines, ready to assist their creator in a moment’s notice. There was a distinct lack of a bedding or anyplace to sit down, but she figured the dead had no need for such things, and it broke her heart.

“Wellcome to Bunker six-hundred-and-sixty-six!” Leo announced with pride, throwing his arms up and doing a quick spin. “I named it that because-” Piper slugged his shoulder with a smile “-yeah, no need to explain, you always did get my crappy jokes.”

_Crappy can be an understatement_, she thought as she continued to examine Leo’s new pad. It shouldn’t have surprised her that Leo would be able to create something like this with next to nothing, he was a survivor by nature, but still, he never ceased to amaze her.

“Uh, Piper? Why haven’t you said anything yet?” Leo asked. “You’re not mad about something are you?”

Her stomach dropped and she averted her gaze. She chewed on her bottom lip, before closing her eyes and opening her mouth wide for the Latino to see.

“Gods,” she heard the teen gasp. “Who would do that to you?”

Piper closed her mouth, but kept her eyes closed, not wanting to see whatever pitiful look her friend was giving her. The last thing she wanted was his- something cool touched her cheek. She opened her eyes to see Leo cupping her cheek, a cocky grin on his face.

“You know, if I took up ventriloquism, you and I would utterly destroy Jeff Dunham,” he said with a small laugh.

It was a terrible joke on every level, but it was exactly the kind of thing she wanted to hear.

Leo dropped down to the ground. “This is just another obstacle to overcome with a bit of engineering and me being a slob.” He ran his hand over the dirt covered cave floor, and then drew a smile face. “See, this is why you should never vacuum! One day your friend might go mute and you won’t have a pad of paper and pencil! Now, tell me what’s happening up above.”

She dropped down to the ground across from Leo, and began to write.

Despite the grim subject matter (Really, Reyna? I thought she would be stubborn to die!), the conversation flowed like a calm spring. It took some time at first to get a rhythm going with her having to write almost everything, and eventually it turned into the two of them writing messages in the dirt; the only sounds being Leo’s laughter and Mrs. O’Leary’s snoring. By the time she had informed him of everything that had transpired above ground, and he informed her of the hell of the Underworld became, their hands were black with dirt.

“So, what happened to Annabeth?” she wrote in the dirt with one hand, while drawing an ‘o’ with her other in the tic-tac-toe game they had going.

Leo shrugged. “After I shimmied my way to shore and broke my cuffs, days had passed. I searched
for her for quite days, but all I found was the big fleabag—“The hellhound snarled without opening its eyes “-er, best doggo over there, and the dead reenacting _The Purge_. So she’s either wandering around out there with no clue who she is, or one of the Tekels got her.” While answering with one hand, he tried to wipe away her ‘o’ without her noticing, but a quick slap through his hand stopped that noise.

Piper redrew her ‘o’ and gave the mechanic a pointed glare, daring him to try that again. “What are they though?” she wrote after clearing the sand. “Are they connected to Avalon? The tribunal? The Olympians?”

The impish boy drew an ‘x’ just above her ‘o’, before responding wiping the floor, and responding. “They didn’t start appearing until Daedalus and the washed-up rockers destroyed the Underworld. Dicks,” he added with a huff. “But they are more dangerous than anything I’ve seen.”

She wiped the dirt clean with one hand, while drawing the final ‘o’ with her other, winning the twelfth game in a row. “How so?”

Leo cleared his throat as he wiped away the evidence of his defeat. “You saw that they absorbed Cerberus, which is pure nightmare fuel on its own, but they can change their bodies to adapt to any situation,” he said, breaking the silence. “I saw one sprout insect like legs and a like a dozen tentacles to move boulders out of the way with ease! One of them flattened itself and slid under the rubble that had been Hades’ palace, only to reemerge with the wreckage of a hotrod! That one then dissembled it, repaired the parts, and put it back together, before smashing it into pieces! It was a ’57, Piper! A ’57!” he shouted, jumping to his feet and pulling at his hair. “Watching that hurt worse than realizing Calypso wasn’t going to join me!”

Piper realized that maybe Leo had been on his own for just a little too long, but she just smiled at her friend’s antics.

Leo clapped his hands together, and took a deep breath. “But that’s okay! Now that you’re here I can get out of this hellhole! Go back topside and see the sun again!”

She tilted her head at him quizzically.

Leo pointed to Mrs. O’Leary with the same crazy grin he had whenever he was excited about an idea. “I’ve been trying to ride this big doggo to the land of the living for quite some time. But, wouldn’t you know it, the one thing that still works properly down here are the wards that prevent the dead from leaving.” The son of Hephaestus reached over and began to rub the giant hellhound’s belly, making the dog pant approvingly. “But you’re not dead! You can ride her out of here, find Hades, and have him let me go! Then it’s hello food, sunshine and ladies!”

Piper hopped to her feet as Leo gave a sharp whistle, making Mrs. O’Leary jump to her feet. The three of them sprinted out of the cave and back to the riverbank. In the distance, they could make out the Tekels actively attacking the masses of souls, while more and more of the black devils rose from the pit. Those that had attached themselves to the roof continued to cut and pull rock down, making incredible progress in such a short period of time.

She didn’t want to leave Leo so soon, but she also knew that she couldn’t let him stay trapped in the Underworld with those creatures.

“Mrs. O’Leary should know how to get to Hades, or at least she acts like she does,” The boy said, readjusting the saddle on the hellhound’s back. Mrs. O’Leary sniffed as if agreeing with the son of Hephaestus. “So, you go up, convince death breath senior to let me come back, send doggo back, and we’ll have the band back together!” He spun around and smiled at her, offering her his spectral
hand. “Easy as pie!”

It did sound easy, but she knew better. There was so many things that could go wrong with his plan that it was almost laughable. She wanted to believe him, that they would be reunited in minutes, a few hours tops, but she wasn’t going to take the risk of never seeing him again, as there was one important thing she hadn’t told him. One thing that couldn’t be fully conveyed in words written in dirt.

It was foolish she knew, she couldn’t touch Leo and he her, but she lunged forward and pressed her lips against his. But instead of falling through the phantasmal Latino and taking a face full of hellhound fur, her lips found purchase. It didn’t take Piper long to figure out why, as she felt the Thunderbird’s feather in her hair, pulsing with power; the static electricity it gave off make her hair stand on end.

To Piper’s relief, as she felt terrible about ambushing her best friend like this, after a few moments of initial shock and confusion, Leo returned the kiss. It felt right to the daughter of love, like kissing Jason, but different in its own way. As Leo worked his hand in her hair, gently massaging her, she tried to memorize the taste that was Leo Valdez.

Motor oil, Pringles, and cinnamon, Piper thought with a smile, as she began to nip at Leo’s lower lip. She wove her own dirt covered hands in Leo’s hair and realized that her hair was going to be a disaster from Leo’s own dirty hands. Who cares...

Sadly though, like all good things, it came to an end. Sadder yet, was when she opened her eyes, she saw that Leo had returned to his ghostly form; the Thunderbird’s feather had only granted her a temporary gift.

“What was that?”

Leo panted. “What do you think it was?”

Piper conveyed with a roll of her eyes. But just in case he didn’t understand her, she placed her hands over her heart, and then put them on over his.

His eyes widened enough to make Piper laugh silently. “But- Wow- I-“ he stuttered on, like a robot tasked to solve a paradox. “How long?” he finally asked.

Still trying to sort that one out myself. Piper shrugged.

“What about Jason? Calypso?” Leo asked, placing his fingers to his lips. “What about them?”

She held up three fingers, then four, and finally two fingers on each hand. I love Jason and I love you. You love Calypso and maybe me and Jason. Jason is probably cool with anything. We can make something work. She knew there was no way he would completely understand what she was trying to convey, but she was sure Leo was smart enough to catch the important bits.

Leo buried his face in his hands and growled in frustration. “You mean to tell me, the two hottest women I’ve ever known both have a thing for me?!” he cried, removing his hands and staring at her in disbelief.

She arched one eyebrow with a playful, wicked smirk. So I’m one of the hottest women, huh?

Leo’s ghostly face flushed, and he began to scratch the back of his neck. “Er, I mean, why did you think I called you beauty queen?” His voice squeaking at ‘beauty queen’.

It was at that moment that Mrs. O’Leary reminded them that she was there with them, with an uncomfortable saddle on her back, waiting for two awkward teenagers to say their goodbyes, by
growling and stomping on the ground with her front paws in impatience.

“I suppose this is goodbye for now,” Leo chuckled, kicking at the ground absently.

Piper smiled and approached the hellhound, who lowered herself so that she may climb in her back unaided. She took her seat on the hodgepodge saddle and blew Leo a kiss, who in turn caught it and pressed it to his heart.

“The first thing I’m going to do when I get up there, is kiss the most beautiful girl I see!” He cried before Mrs. O’Leary slipped into the shadows.

I love you.

Piper wasn’t sure what happened next. Mrs. O’Leary had exited the shadows, and she thought she caught a glimpse of Jason before the shouting started and then the gunfire, before everything went back.

So, when she woke up in her living room once again, she knew things hadn’t gone great. It meant another visit and lecture from Grandpa Tom.

But she was wrong, in the best way.

Sitting on the floor in front of the coffee table, with Xbox controllers in hand, was a giant of a man and a young girl with blonde hair tied back in a ponytail. The man wore a black suit and freshly polished shoes, he had dark hair that was slicked back with way too much product, with a matching trimmed beard, and his thumbs practically covered half of the controller. The blonde sat with her legs tucked underneath her, her bare feet poking out, while a pair of black flats sat nearby. She wore a simple black T-shirt and a pair of shorts; a sharp contrast to the titan next to her, but her fingers danced across the controller with unmatched speed and grace. On the giant television before them, Halo 3 was on in split screen mode, with the top player falling to his death after being hit by a sniper round, and judging by the giant’s clenched jaw, it had been him.

“Veronica? Atlas?” she asked, leaning forward on the couch. Wait! Piper’s hand flew to her mouth, and she found that she had her tongue back.

The two spun around, tossing their controllers aside. “Reyna! She’s up!” Veronica laughed in her real voice, a sweet melodic sound that Piper had only guessed at before.

Reyna?!

“Yeah, Yeah!” A familiar voice called out from the hall. “I’m just carrying the tea now!” A moment later, Reyna Avila Ramirez-Arellano stepped into the room, carrying a tray with four steaming mugs of peppermint tea, with both arms. “Hey princess,” the praetor smirked as she set the tray down on the coffee table. Reyna was wearing a pair of jeans, a Samurai Pizza Cats T-shirt, and was barefoot, something Piper had never seen. Her hair was out of its usual braid and trailed down her back. “You didn’t think we’d go away that easy, did ya?” Reyna smirked.

Piper jumped up from the couch and over the coffee table, tackling Reyna to the floor in a back breaking hug. “How?!” she cried, squeezing the praetor even tighter. “How are you here? How are you not with Leo or turned into god food?!”
A large hand picked her up by her shirt’s collar and set her on her feet. “Easy there,” Atlas chuckled. “Wouldn’t want the roman to die again.”

“Super death,” Veronica chimed in, before wrapping her arms around Piper. “It’s good to see you,” the blonde whispered in her ear.

“As for not being reduced to thread.” Reyna grunted as she was pulled up by Atlas, “that one surprised us too.” The Latina began to rub her neck with one hand, remembering her own demise.

“Me especially,” Atlas said. “I was expecting to be back at that accursed mountain top, not lounging it up in the afterlife.”

“You are the literal definition of lucky,” Reyna said, slugging the titan’s elbow since she could reach his shoulder. “Apparently by learning the truth about Olympus, may it fall from the sky, and carrying such hatred for it in our hearts, we no longer qualified for the Underworld.”

“But we qualified for the Nation’s instead,” Veronica whooped. “Our little road trip qualified us as heroes of the Nation! And with a little help from the previously Gayegogi, we were pulled in!”

“And apparently her soul and my core were somehow merging, so I was snuck in as well,” The titan cheered, fist pumping.

Reyna smiled at Atlas, before focusing her gaze back on her. “But we didn’t come just to tell you we were fine-“

“But yeah, mostly that,” Veronica said with a crooked smile. “We didn’t want you to beat yourself up to bad.”

“Okay, fine!” Reyna snapped. “We wanted to make sure you were okay! Geez!” The older girl picked up a steaming mug of tea and downed it in one gulp. “But we did come with important news-“

“The universe is fucked,” Veronica said with no humor what so ever.

Chapter End Notes

Hey look! A chapter ended that wasn’t a complete horror show!

And yes, I had planned out Piper's reunions long ago. I think you can figure out what is going to happen with Leo given the circumstances of the farm!fam...  

Atlas, Veronica, and Reyna though, they are in a (relatively) safe place. As stated, they no longer desired the Greek/Roman afterlife (or to be stuck under the sky) and felt more in tune with the Nation. They died as heroes to the Nation, as they accomplished a lot in a very short time. If you take a look at the cycle, the gods had to slaughter an ever growing number to get the numbers they needed to repair and expand the tapestry. The had to influence the human concept of the afterlife to become more inline with the Underworld, increasing the odds that a soul would wind up there. But with our women, rebelling against their heritage, there souls went someplace else. Someplace they deserved. Sure, Reyna and Veronica won’t see their families again, but they have each other and Grandpa Tom.
And Atlas is just rolling with it. That poor Titan is stuck with Reyna and Veronica for the foreseeable future, possibly eternity. (Still better than holding a primordial for all eternity). Yes, the road trip has ended, but for those three another adventure is just beginning.

Morgan. Morgan, Morgan, Morgan. Honestly, she has the most messed up backstory of anyone at Avalon, besides maybe Merlin. And that reveal? It has been hinted at over the course of the story. George having a paternal instinct around her. Merlin being protective of her and taking her to a kids movie. Brian commenting on her juvenile behavior (like he's one to talk). And even just the way she talks to Piper. She is a child. A child with powers. A child without a childhood. A child who made a foolish deal to get out of a bad situation and get revenge. We didn't discuss the exact details of the deal, and I'm going to leave that up to your imaginations. She was probably the most sympathetic to the demigods out of all of Avalon's main crew, but at the end of the day she had to look out for number one. But at the end of this, I hope you all at least feel some pity for the witch of Avalon. Maybe some of you will even donate a few bucks to the victims of human trafficking.

The monsters, or 'Tekels', as Leo calls them. That is obviously not their real name, as Leo just based their name on their cry. Some of you will be able to take the information in the chapter and determine now with 100% certainty their true name and origins. I have fleshed them out slightly, updated them for the 21st century, but their function remains the same. They are honestly the most dangerous creatures the heroes have faced, as as Leo said, they adapt to any situation and can learn at very fast. Just imagine what they can do with Daedalus' soul. They also lack personalities and cannot be easily tricked.

I love them so <3

I may add more notes later, but I believe that is enough for now.

Remember to comment, kudos, bookmark, and subscribe!
Coyote

Chapter Summary

Tonight:

The Nation struggles to survive after Avalon’s move.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lucky.

They had all been incredibly lucky after the Mist was lifted from human eyes. The initial thought was that if they all laid low for a few days after the pipeline fiasco that it would all blow over. They had all thought that that eventually someone would claim the footage was doctored, it was just some kids in costumes, or even mass hysteria, because that was how it always played out. After all, it was how the handled the Ts’emekwes and their attention seeking ways.

But things had not gone the usual way, not even close.

After the abduction of the Gayegogi, those gathered at the former Keystone pipeline had rushed back to the Nation’s capital, conveniently located within and under Crazy Horse Memorial. He had initially been skeptical of building something so large and, in his humble opinion, lavish, but the Gayegogi had some remarkable foresight. The great stone memorial had shielded him, the council, and hundreds of others from the devastation that followed shortly after.

Shortly after their own news broke out, reports started flooding in of creatures, gods, and even demigods attacking innocent people all over the world. Now it was only natural that the younger folk would want to get out there and fight the good fight, because they were good kids, but he could smell a trap. His innate ability to sense trouble the reason why he stayed close to all past Gayegogies, and his senses hadn’t led him astray yet. The attacks had just seemed too in synch, too widespread, and way too damn public for them to be random. So, with a heavy heart, he and the rest of the council issued orders that all members of the Nation were to not intervene and to take shelter immediately.

While it did condemn thousands of mortals to death, his decision had saved hundreds of Nation lives.

Maybe I really ain’t no better than old lighting britches…

As in less than twenty-four hours after the initial attacks, the mortals ‘discovered’ a weapon that purged the Earth of all but the strongest gods, and leaving the surface uninhabitable to anything with a drop of the other world in them. They still lost quite a few of their own, with the number steadily increasing by the hour, but the great Lakota chief’s stone shielded a great many from the signal.

“Dad?” a small voice cried out, snapping Coyote back to the harsh present.

He slowly turned around to see his youngest son, Levi, standing at the chamber’s entrance, clutching a blanket in his hand. He resisted the urge to frown, as the boy was getting a little too old to carry a blanket around, but given the circumstances they were in, he’d let it slide. “Yeah, champ?”
The dark-haired boy wandered closer, and stood next to the trickster. “What is this place?”

_Leave it to a kid to walk into someplace and have no idea what it is._ He took his gray ten-gallon hat off and placed it on his son’s head, noticing that it no longer fell below his eyes. “The Hall of the Brave,” he answered, glancing at its two newest inductees. _What a terrible name though. Should have never had that write in… “It’s where we bury our heroes, so that they may return to the Earth, while still being honored.”_

“Oh,” Levi replied, clearly not understanding. “What are you doing down here then?”

Coyote twisted the hat on the kid’s head, making the boy laugh. He loved kids, their innocence was always a breath of fresh air. _Plus, they enjoy my stories. Real big boost to the old belief base._ “Just pay’n my respects to the newest members.”

He flashed back to that terrible night, recalling everything in vivid detail; the curse of being a god. He had been searching for Piper and her friends, as he was going to have them ride with him. But he had just rounded the corner, coming into view of their tent, when he saw the feisty Roman’s body fall lifeless to the ground. Acting purely on instinct he shifted into his bestial form and bounded over and through any obstacles, only for Piper and her assailants to disappear in the blink of an eye. He had wanted to run off and search for his friend’s granddaughter, but he had no leads and two bodies that needed attending to.

“Piper’s friends?” Levi stated more than asked.

“Yup.” Coyote looked at the temporary stone plaques that bore the first names of the bodies and nothing else. Despite everything that those three young women with a SUV of bronze had done, there was far too much left unknown. _And I’ll be damned if it’s going to remain that way!_

“You’re going to find her, right?”

“Damn right I am,” he said, taking his hat back. “Now come on, we got work to do. Oh, and don’t tell your mother I swore in front of you…”

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_Thomas McLean was a shrewd, calculating man, that hid behind a visage of kindness. To most of the Nation he was viewed with a reverence that gods and spirits envied. To some, he was the Gayegogi who ended the Wendigo threat of ’95, wiping the blood thirty creatures off the face of the earth, while simultaneously giving their immense power to the strongest skinwalkers. To others, Tom was a great stateman who fought for better representation and treatment of his people in the judicial system; stopping many children from being taken from their families. And to the young of the Nation, he gave them a glimmer of hope in the form of setting up numerous scholarships._

_Those were all fine, even amazing, things, but they were all part of a bigger picture that few ever saw. Tom knew, hell, they all knew that one-day Olympus was going to come for them again, but only Tom and himself knew that the Nation was hilariously outgunned. The things that people remembered Tom for were really just ways of bolstering their defenses. The Wendigos had been a problem, but the reports had been greatly exaggerated so that their skins could be harvested to create an elite guard. The courtroom bull? A way to keep the children within the Nation so that they could grow up into strong warriors. The scholarships were a way to make sure they had the medical and_
tech know-how to support a war.

*And now I find out he made his own granddaughter into the perfect double agent and leader. Peaceful ways my hairy ass, Tom…*

But right now, watching the perpetual frat boys, Andy and Chad, working with a dozen or so other STEM majoring college students, he was willing to just remember his friend as a patron for the Nation’s young scholars.

“You boys got anything yet?!” Coyote barked, announcing his presence to everyone in the cramped room.

Everyone stopped what they were doing to look at him. A boy and girl, set aside the components they were about to place on their breadboards. Six young ladies seated at a conference table ceased their argument on Fourier series identification and closed their laptops. A young man, with a long greasy ponytail and a bad case of acne turned off his oscilloscope. Even the elderly daughter of Kokyangwuti stopped pushing her snack cart to look at him. Everyone in the makeshift lab (it was supposed to be a teleconference room) and turned to the councilman.

That is, except for the twin thunderers.

The two storm spirits incased in bodies of red earth and *Monster* energy drinks continued to verbally berate each other’s work on the whiteboard they stood in front of. Each trying to scribble out the others work, only for the other to slap the dry erase marker away.

“You are out of your mind bro!” Chad screamed, poking his brother in the chest with a black marker. “It is clearly, clearly, GSM based in nature! You can see the Gaussian Minimum-Shift Keying if you opened your eyes!” The thunderer tapped the tip of his marker on a piece of paper taped to the board, showing a kind of wave pattern. “It’s staring you right in the face, bro!”

Andy, pointed to another waveform taped on his half of the whiteboard. “GSM? What is this, four years ago? Bruh, you’re tripping! It’s EDGE in nature! Look! It has phasing! Phasing!”

*How is it that they can talk about high level concepts, yet still sound like morons?*

While the two continued their intellectual argument, Coyote stalked up behind them. For most people and being he would actually have to try, maybe even shift forms, but for those two all it took was a casual stroll. He stood there and watched them, waiting for the perfect moment. He didn’t have to wait long, his patience rewarded with the two screaming in each other’s faces. So, with just the tiniest bit of strength, he grabbed the two by the back of their necks, and shove them together hard enough that their heads crumbled. “Now, I’ll ask again. Do you boys got anything for me?”

The two headless frat boys staggered in place as two small dust devils formed in their neck, a moment later their heads reformed.

“Oh, uh… Councilman! We didn’t see you there,” Andy stammered, clutching his newly reformed head.

“Yeah, caught us by surprise!” Chad agreed, nodded enthusiastically. “Well, um we know it’s a signal?”

Coyote felt his eye twinge. “No shit Sherlock, the Gayegogi herself told us that! Do you have anything new? Do you think we can counter it?”

The two thunderers looked back and forth at each other and at him, their mouth opening and closing
like a fish out of water.

“If it’s a signal, we can jam it,” one of the girls at the conference table said. “We just have to identify it.”

“And it’s going to take time,” another said

“And parts!” the two breadboard workers chimed in.

He wasn’t too keen on the idea of it taking time, as they had a Gayegogi and hundreds of other people to save, but he knew there wasn’t a damn thing he could do about it. “I admire your optimism,” he grinned. “Whatever you need, I’ll get it for ya’ll.” One way or another.

“We don’t have enough room,” Bambi, the young matriarch of the deer women said as if he was not part of the daily struggle. “And we have another busload coming in from Nebraska.”

That, I didn’t know…

One month.

One whole month had passed and they were still trapped in the hollowed-out mountain the network of manmade caves beneath it. One month without any progress on countering the mortal weapon, other than transporting people in containers lined with thick plate metal and a crapload of blessings. One solid month of peoples of all shapes, colors, and creeds trapped in cramped, unfinished tunnels. The whole situation was turning into a powder keg.

“Look,” he sighed, kicking his feet up on his desk and reclining in the squeaky office chair. His office in the monument wasn’t nearly as big as his resort office, barely large enough to fit three chairs, a desk, and a file cabinet. Nor was it finished, four stone walls with some wooden studs bolted to the, awaiting drywall. “I got the construction guys working around the clock to expand the tunnels, but it still takes time. If this was the old days, I could just snap my fingers and we’d be golden, but it’s not. So, if you really want to help, go grab a shovel.”

The deer woman crossed her arms and tapped her hoof against the unfinished stone floor, eyeing him critically. Coyote didn’t really know that much about the young woman, but she was giving him the same look and stance as her grandmother, Awinita, when she was young, which meant this conversation was far from over.

Lucky me, he thought as he pulled his hat down over his red eyes; hoping that she would take the hint and leave him be.

It was times like this that he yearned for the old days. He missed traveling form tribe to tribe, taking on their beliefs, their stories, and becoming a new version of himself. He missed wandering the plains with Iktomi, sometimes as friend, sometimes as rivals, the two of them getting into all sorts of trouble which provided great stories for the Lakota. He missed messing with Black God in the southwest; where his status was elevated to almost that of a creator. He missed his times in the Northwest, where he could teach the young how to make fire and shape the world to better their people. Oh, sure there were times where someone got the better of him, but if people could learn from his mistakes, then he had no qualms on being laughed at every now and then.
Those had been the glory days for sure, but as with everyone under the sun, he had had to grow up and take responsibility. When the conquerors from unknown shores landed and released their Mist, he and so many others could only watch in horror as their people were gradually slaughtered, killed off by foreign ailments, and rounded and placed on reservations so that the invaders could say they were the civilized ones. He had been so close to giving up, to just fading away when he first heard the call of the Gayegogi. One boy, one orphaned boy, had reminded the people of their heritage and inspired enough hope and belief to pull back so many from the edge of oblivion. It was on that night so very long ago, that Coyote realized he had to stop being so self-centered and work hard so that such a travesty would never happen again.

But there were times, like now, when he wished that he could cast aside his duties as a councilman and run free. Even if it was just for five minutes.

“I don’t see your flea-bitten ass down there digging,” the girl said with a voice as venomous as a rattlesnake. “I thought dogs were supposed to like to dig?”

Five-hundred years ago he wouldn’t have put up with insults like that, he would have morphed into his preferred form and gobbled down the little girl in one bite. Instead, he tilted his hat back up, removed his boots form his desk, and leaned forward so that the little doe would know he was not happy. “Look,” he growled, showing his canines. “I get it, your frustrated, but you know what? Everyone is! We’re trapped like rats until the college twins can guarantee our safety, we don’t have enough room to breathe, let alone house more people, and let’s not forget we are down one god damned Gayegogi!” he shouted, banging his fist on his desk, sending an empty shot glass crashing to the floor. “But if you ever call me a dog again, they’ll be pulling your remains out of the shit-shack for weeks. Got it?”

Now usually when he channeled his big bad wolf, people would agree with him and get away from him as fast as possible, but Bambi was apparently not one of those people. All she did was roll her eyes and tap her hoof again. “Says that trickster who lived with Piper. Did you let her scratch your belly?”

Yes. Coyote reclined back into his chair and looked the deer woman over. Bambi had undoubtedly grown since he first met her as a small girl hiding behind her mother’s skirts, but she had also grown considerably since she took over her late mother’s role as matriarch. But he was sure that the greatest change came when the hunter of Olympus and her murderous posse burned Home to the ground and slaughtered dozens of innocent lives. Bambi had worked alongside Piper to save as many people as possible, so it made sense that a little growling didn’t phase her. “I was just performing my duties as the Gayegogi’s protector. And since Tom worried about her more than anything else, I stayed with her when she was on her own. That’s all.”

Bambi looked skeptical of his story, as it was pretty much the worst lie he had ever told, and he had told plenty in his time. While that had originally been his reason for part of him to stay close to the future Gayegogi, he eventually came to love the girl as if she was one of his own pups. She had been the perfect mixture of cuteness, innocence, mischief, and clumsiness to keep his interest. There hadn’t been a day gone by that he hadn’t needed to intervene to stop her from damn near killing herself. He was always a nervous wreck at the end of the day, but when he told Tom of each day’s events his stress always disappeared and he found himself howling with laughter alongside the senior McLean. And he would never admit it to anyone, but when Tom’s idiot son decided to move to California, it broke his heart to say goodbye to his adoptive pup.

“Do you think we’ll find her?” the deer women matriarch asked, her voice losing its edge. Bambi sat down on the edge of his desk and began to straighten her skirt. “Alive I mean.”
“I don’t think, I know,” he replied. Despite all signs pointing to the contrary, her Tweeter feed disconnected, anything with a connection to the otherworld dropping dead, and none of the Nation’s human agents seeing hide not hair of the last McLean, Coyote knew that she was still out there. He just hoped that she was someplace safe and that she wasn’t taking the death of her father, her only blood relative left after Tom’s passing, too hard. “She’s a McLean and the Gayegogi, she’s far too stubborn to die.”

Bambi laughed warmly. “Yeah, I mean, she fought a goddess and her hounds, didn’t die. Faced the eldest Stoneclad, didn’t die. Subdued the Uktena, walked away unscratched. And she helped take down a pipeline being built by cyclopes, and did it with style!”

Coyote’s eye shot open and he jumped to his feet. “Wait, what was that last one?”

Bambi arched her left eyebrow. “Um, the cyclops camp?”

“No, the one before that!” he cried, one doozy of a plan taking shape in his mind.

“The Uktena?”

With a wolfish grin, he snapped his fingers, and in his other hand appeared the golden, frisbee-sized disk gifted to the Nation by Piper McLean, the talisman of the eldest Stoneclad. Currently, the granite encased sorcerer was under the impression the Uktena had swallowed the thing, and was fighting the serpent beneath Yellowstone; creating new underground tunnels in the process. *Tunnels that we can use!*

Bambi looked at him as if were mad, and truth be told, he probably was. Yet, all great ideas and men were initially called mad, so he figured he was on the right track. “You can’t be serious…”

“Oh, I’m never entirely serious,” he said, setting the talisman on the center of the desk. He reached down and rapped on its etched surface with his knuckles. “Hey, soft rock,” he spoke to the talisman, its edges beginning to faintly glow. “If you want to keep on keeping on, then you better listen up…”

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Five days.

Five days was all it took for the Uktena to burrow all the way from Yellowstone to Crazy Horse Memorial, a distance of around four-hundred miles. Part of the work was apparently done for them, as the two behemoths encountered a strange, subterranean structure that went every which way, but for the most part the monstrous snake did most of the digging.

The council hadn’t been too happy with Coyote for not consulting them before enacting his plan, and were even less happy about pretty much using the Stoneclad and Uktena as slave labor. But they eventually got over it, remembering that the Uktena was hellbent on destroying the world and that the Stoneclad was a cannibal; so why not make two subjectively evil beings work for the good of the Nation? Plus, their work spoke for itself.

“Alright!” Sparky cried out, “Everyone get clear!”

Coyote and several kids walked behind the hastily constructed barrier at the edge of the Uktena-made cavern. The Thunderbird’s eternal enemy left behind tunnels wide enough to fit a four-lane highway through, and tall enough to fit a two-story structure. The only issue, besides blocking off the
entrances to the strange structure, was that the tunnels were round, making it hard to walk on, let alone build anything.

But that’s where the thunderers came in.

“Put on your safety glasses kids,” Coyote barked. He knew that he should have probably set an example and worn the safety equipment as well, but what’s the point of being a god if you can’t bend the rules every now and then? When he was satisfied with the kids’ equipment, he gave Sparky the thumbs up.

The storm spirit nodded, before his body exploded into a cloud of red dirt. But before the dirt had a chance to hit the ground, a massive whirlwind kicked up, and in a moment the only thing the kids could see was a red haze. Coyote though, could see though the storm, watching with interest and pride as the thunderer used his own body and being to erode the cave walls down, while collecting all the potentially harmful, fine dust in a pile in the center. The while thing only lasted a minute tops, but when the winds stopped and the thunderer reformed his body, the cave had been worn perfectly smooth, straight, and level.

Sparky place his hands on his knees, and grinned at the kids. “Tada!” he panted.

Coyote jerked his head at the kids, who instantly grabbed their shovels and buckets, and raced out to begin cleaning up the pile of dust on the floor. “Excellent work as usual!” he cried as he followed the kids out from behind the barrier. “Thanks to you and your brothers, we no longer have a housing problem.” One problem gone from a list of hundreds...

“You honor me too much, councilman,” the young spirit said, standing up to his full stature, towering above everyone in the cave. “I am just doing what needs to be done, as is my duty.” He cracked his neck, and looked around at his work. “So, what’s this tunnel going to be?”

“Either a gym or a greenhouse,” Coyote shrugged. Now with nearly unlimited space, the council was starting to deviate from housing, and work on other necessities. The warriors, particularly the bears, wanted space to train, and requested a gym. A sensible request, that way they could stay in shape while also blowing off some steam. The healers, namely Ptesanwi, wanted a place to grow the various herbs they used in specialty medicines, but he also had a feeling some of those herbs would wind up in the wacan’s pipe. Either way, they were both sensible requests that would have to be put to a vote.

“Jeanne would’ve loved a greenhouse,” Sparky whispered.

It was no secret that the thunderer was still tore up over the death of his love. Jeanne, the first deer woman to get a medical license, and Sparky had been inseparable in life. Anyone who saw them together would swear that they were destined to be together forever. But destiny is a cruel thing, while Sparky had been away dealing with the Uktena, the evil goddess Artemis had razed Home and slaughtered many of its inhabitants, including Jeanne. Now, without his love, the thunderer was lost, busying himself with whatever tasks he could.

“I’ll vote for the greenhouse,” Coyote said, nodding at the giant. “I think it would lift everyone’s spirits to see some plant life that hasn’t been trucked in.” He stroked his moustache, his fingers coming back covered in dirt. “And if the warriors complain, I’ll tell them to grab a shovel. That’s just as good a workout as any.”

He walked away before the thunderer could respond. Coyote wasn’t one for thank yous.
“Sarah, Sarah, now look. I know the county is hounding you about Levi, but he can’t go back yet,” he stated as calmly as possible into the phone, while massaging his throbbing temple with his one free hand. “Why? What do you mean why? He would die!” Coyote flipped the phone shut and tossed it on his desk, his patience and sense of humor gone.

Sarah, his ex-wife, and Levi’s mother, was a wonderful woman… to everyone but him. The marriage had been a mistake, just like every other marriage of his. Every one of them either ended with death or separation, both horrible things. But every time he found himself getting a little too invested, he would swear that this one would be the one to work.

_I have to be the dumbest son of a bitch in existence…_

It was during arguments with his ex that Coyote wondered if the enemy had it right; one-night stands and very short relationships before disappearing forever.

But then, like now, he would remember being there for his children’s birth, their first words, first transformations, and a list of firsts that never got boring. Every memory, like every person, was unique and irreplaceable. He couldn’t imagine _not_ being there for his pups, or how anyone could skip out on their children. So, if he had to put up with his ex to be part of Levi’s life, so be it.

_She’s still less painful then council meetings…_

He conjured up a bottle of scotch and a crystal glass, as there was paperwork to do, but creator help him if he was going to do it without a drink. The drink did nothing to him, but years of business dealings had created a certain image for himself, and that included drinking overpriced swill. He supposed it was a bit hypocritical of himself, considering all the damn sobriety campaigns the council had funded. _But what’s life without a little hypocrisy? Keeps everyone on their toes._

A tiny, red hummingbird blinked into existence inches in front of his face, and Coyote frowned. He had known it was coming, his animal and divine senses told him it was coming the second he conjured the scotch, but he hoped, just this one time, he was wrong.

“Emergency message from Kokyangwuti,” the little bird chirped. It was a red bird, meaning it was an emergency, so it didn’t bother to ask him if he wanted to hear the message, and just began playing it. “Coyote,” Spider Grandmother’s voice rasped, “you need to get down to the tunnels, we got a bloodbath down here.” And with that, the hummingbird disappeared.

“Five minutes,” Coyote grunted, standing up from his desk. “Five minutes without things going to shit is all I ask for…”

Coyote considered himself a smart man. It was part of his story, part of his very essence. Sure, there were many instances of him being outsmarted in his narrative, but there was just as many stories where he outsmarted others. And in all those stories he had traveled to strange lands and seen even stranger sights, but he had never seen anything like the thing before him.

Unlike every other mythical creature under the sun, it bore no resemblance to any living nonmagical animal. It’s black, gelatinous body lacked any sense of form or symmetry; a tangled jungle of limbs
and eyes spread out almost at random. He couldn’t even tell which end was up on the damn thing. The only things he was certain of was it smelled of death, it was dead, and it had killed Sparky and all but one of kids.

The cave he had just seen the thunderer shape only hours before had become the killing floor of a slaughter house. The walls were covered with blood stains covered practically every surface, with the blood itself flowing to a large, jagged hole in the floor that had not been there before. A child, no more than thirteen, was pinned to the north facing wall by his own obsidian spear threw his gut. Another lay crumpled up in a ball near the creature’s corpse; the girl’s back snapped in two. But perhaps they were the lucky ones, the others had been torn into pieces, their remains scattered about around the unknown entity.

But then there was Sparky.

The storm spirit’s body stood motionless by the hole, a horrified expression permanently etched on his face, as if in his final moments he was telling the others to run. His right arm had been torn off, but that was hardly fatal to a child of Sulu, their physical bodies were just shells and could be completely destroyed with no harm coming to them. What was interesting was the fist-sized hole in the middle of Sparky’s chest. The hole was perfectly round with a strange black sludge lining the entrance.

“Okay, I’ll bite,” the trickster said, standing up from examining the strange corpse. “What the fuck am I looking at and how did it kill a thunderer?”

Kokyangwuti, the Hopi’s arachnid weaver and the Nation’s last incarnation of Fate, took a drag of her cigarette before blowing three concentric rings of smoke. Despite being a permanent member of the council and holding such high esteem within the Nation, in Coyote’s opinion she dressed like a trailer park grandmother; wearing old beat up wrestling t-shirts, ripped up sweatpants, hideous neon crocs, and keeping her hair up in a loose bun held together by her knitting needles. “I think it would be obvious,” the weaver rasped, “you’re looking at trouble.”

Coyote fought back the urge to leap forward crush the spider like the insect she was. Yet he knew that this was the kind of answer she would give him. Vague and useless. “I can see that,” he snarled, his red eyes glowing with rage. “But I want some damn specifics! We have eleven kids and one thunderer dead! People aren’t going to be happy with ‘trouble’!”

Kokyangwuti stared at him with the same bored expression she had worn for the last two centuries, while flicking her cigarette off to the side. “Sometimes I forget that you aren’t the Coyote I knew when I was young.”

The comment caught him off guard. “Same Coyote? When you were young? You were never young, you crazy old kook! You’ve always been Spider Grandmother!” Just my luck, I get stuck with a bloodbath and divine Alzheimer’s!

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The old women walked past him, and stood over the seemingly endless hole, staring deep into its abyss. “Maybe in this world,” she said just loud enough for him to hear. “Did I tell you that I had placed a spy in the Gayegogi’s jacket before she went to the construction camp?” He was about to answer, but she shushed him. “No, I did not. I’ll summarize what I found out. The Olympians do indeed possess my spindle and loom.” She stopped and took another drag. “But, we pretty much knew that already, just like we knew they’ve been taken other pantheons’ Tools of Fate as well.”

She turned her attention to the hollowed-out shell that had been Sparky. “Poor bastard,” the spider sighed with a shake of her head. “What we didn’t know, or at least I didn’t tell you my suspicions, is that they’ve been using the other tools and the souls of humans to prolong their existence.”
Kokayngwuti closed her eyes and shook her again in disapproval. “It’s not sustainable, not in the slightest. What’s worse is that by tying everything together like that you risk a complete systemic collapse.” She snapped her long, wiry fingers. “Everything gone, just like that.”

Coyote moved closer to the Hopi goddess, careful to avoid touching the strange creature’s corpse. “Okay, that sounds bad, but what the hell does it have to do with this?” he asked, gesturing to the slaughter around them.

The elder goddess tossed the butt of her cigarette down the pit, and they watched in silence until the cherry glow disappeared from sight; an incredible long distance even for a god’s sight. “Have you ever wondered how their can be multiple workers of Fate?”

“Can’t say that I have,” he answered, trying to judge just how deep that hole went. “I’ve been too busy worrying about keeping our people alive to worry about something like that.”

Spider Grandmother’s ancient lips actually twitch up into a smile for the briefest of moments. “And you’ve done a good job at that.” She reached into the pockets of her sweatpants and removed a pack of cigarettes and placed another of the cancerous stick into her mouth; the end igniting on its own. “Think of Fate as a shield. You can use it in battle to block many blows, but eventually your shield will either break from the assault or be worn down with age. Now imagine if you had others with their own shields to help take those blows. When one shield becomes too old or battered, the others can move into the gap, while the old shield is repaired or a new one is being made.”

Coyote removed his hat and scratched at his temple in confusion. This is why I hate talking to her, I never get a straight answer without a thirty-minute run around. “So, the Fates of various pantheons are there to protect the world? From what?” He spun around and pointed to the pile of black foulness. “That?”

His question made Kokyangwuti throw her head back and howl with laughter. Her laugh was muted and rough, as if he was hearing it from far away; the price of age and a carton of cigarettes a day he supposed. When her laughter stopped, she flicked her spent smoke at the dead beast. “That? That is nothing. That is just a remnant of Ni’Hodilhil.”

“That ‘nothing’ just killed twelve people,” Coyote growled. “So, enlighten me, what are we dealing with?” He honestly didn’t understand what the old woman was babbling about with shields and fate, what mattered to him was if this was an isolated event or not.

“Something very old and very powerful. An enemy older than time that is using the decaying Tapestry of Fate to push its agents into our world.” She coughed into her hand, and then patted her chest. “So, to answer your question, we are dealing with a force that can’t be stopped by something as small as a god. Our only hope, and I do mean only, is the liberation of the Tools of Fate, so that we may undo the damage.”

It took him a second to process what she just said, an eternity for a god. “Okay, I’m sorry, I thought I just heard something crazy!” He stuck his pinkies in his ears and twisted them for emphasis. “I thought you just said we should march on Olympus! Which is pretty funny, considering we are trapped underground, two-fucking-thousand miles away! Just tell me, and tell me straight, is this—” he pointed at the monster’s corpse “—going to be a reoccurring problem?”

The old woman didn’t so much as bat an eyelash at his outburst, looking at him with the same expression a tired mother might look at a child throwing a tantrum. “You’re using the Uktena to dig down. Those tools spawn in the dark, deep, neglected parts of reality, so they are undoubtedly coming up. They also tend to travel in packs, overwhelming anything that crosses their path. Somehow, these kids killed this one, an impressive feat, but these things learn. They adapt. They can
communicate across vast distances, so they know exactly how their friend here was defeated and have learned to counter our tactics. So, no, this is not an isolated incident. This is just the beginning.”

Coyote changed into his four-legged form, not the giant form he used in battle, but that of a regular coyote, and covered his face with his paws in frustration. *Her definition of straight needs work… One of these… these things eleven demigods and a near impervious storm spirit before it was taken down! And she’s telling me this is just the beginning?!*

Kokyangwuti knelt down and ran a hand through his thick gray fur. Normally he would tear the hand off of anyone that dared to get that familiar with him, but she just so happened to hit the sweet spot just behind his left ear. “If we stay here, everything we have built will fall. As we look like an all-you-can-eat buffet to these remnants. But if we move, and move fast, they’ll be to focused on the largest source of divine energy.”

“Olympus,” Coyote growled.

The old goddess smiled wickedly, while continuing to scratch behind his ear; his right leg involuntarily beating off the ground. “And while everyone is busy, we sneak in, take back our tools, and set things right.”

“There’s just one problem, in case you forgot, we’re trapped down here. For what you have planned requires us to go above ground.” It took all of his strength to not roll on his back and ask for a belly rub. *Damn she’s good.*

“That won’t be a problem now that I know what we’re dealing with.” Spider Grandmother stopped her petting and he let out a whine of protest. “I must say they were pretty clever with their opening moves this time around. Even I was convinced that those mortals found a weapon to kill a god.”

His eyes shot open. “Wait, you’re telling me-”

The old woman silenced him with a look, her true power radiating from her for the first time in millennia. And it dwarfed his own. “Just what you need to know,” she said, standing back up. She pulled yet another cigarette and tucked it in the corner of her mouth before walking away, taking the sickening and overpowering scent of tobacco with her. “What you need to ask yourself is what kind of egotistical mortal would think they could topple gods with so little effort. As clearly, they do not fully understand what they have.” She stopped in her tracks and craned her head over her shoulder. “One last thing, the Gayegogi? She’ll be in New York. That should help you make your decision,” she said with a dark chuckle.

“Wait!” Coyote growled before the Hopi goddess left the tunnel. “I have one more question.”

The old woman nodded in her own, bored way.

“When Piper first entered our territories, you told me she was an imposter!” he snarled, baring his fangs. “You said that she was of the enemy and needed to be taken out! You would have had me kill my friend’s granddaughter and a girl I considered one of my own! Why?”

Kokyangwuti removed the cigarette from her mouth and flicked the ash aside. “Because,” she shrugged, “she needed to be strong. If you would’ve known the truth you would have rushed to her side like a dog reuniting with its master. And if you or your cronies did manage to kill her? Well, I guess it wouldn’t have been a big loss, now would it?”

Coyote shot off the ground, fangs bared, ready to rip the old woman’s throat out-

But she disappeared in the blink of an eye, her rasping laughter the only thing she left behind.
It took a lot of convincing to get not just the council, but every member of the Nation to agree on the underground mass migration. Some called it a forced march, which really cemented people’s beliefs who were already dead set against it. Others protesting saying it was the start of a war they could not win, that they were better off to hide and wait for some breakthrough that would allow them to go topside again. Some dared to suggest the attack was staged on his orders, just so he could satiate some kind of bloodlust. There were even a few that suggested reaching out to the mortals in hopes of peace.

The only ones that didn’t protest were the Hopi and Navajo, remaining silent as they watched the council meeting with their full attention. The elder members of those tribes, especially the spirits, had always been a strange lot in Coyote’s opinion. But he suspected that Kokyangwuti had informed them of what happened and a few things she hadn’t told him.

The thunderers, Andy and Chad, protested, but in his and Kokyangwuti’s favor. The two young spirits wanted to avenge their fallen brother, and they couldn’t do that trapped beneath the earth. It wasn’t until the Hopi goddess had the corpse of the remnant, as she called it, dragged into the half-finished council chamber that people began to listen. Even in death the thing was horrifying to all who gazed at it. Its uncountable eyes seemed to stare back, each purple eye an abyss unto itself that seemed to try and pull you in. Its black, formless body hung limp on the giant steel hooks, and anyone who looked at the hooks would have noticed that they had not pierced the beast, but rather its flesh had parted for the hooks. To all assembled, be it mortal or god, it appeared that the beast was not dead, but merely trapped in a dreamless slumber.

Then, as if that wasn’t bad enough, the council woman turned on the room’s projector and played the horrific aftermath of the creature’s attack. Most everyone was horrified into silence as photo after horrific photo played on loop; the only ones not silent were the ones crying over seeing once more how their loved ones perished.

It was an incredibly low blow. One that even a scavenger like himself found detestable.

“You should be thankful that you are even alive,” Spider Grandmother had said at her seat of the council. For once the old woman was dressed formally, and Coyote found himself wishing she hadn’t. Her long hair had been combed out; her knitting needles nowhere to be seen. Gone were the T-shirts and sweatpants, a black, ceremonial robe with white spiderwebs patterns covering it taking their place. In Coyote’s and many other’s opinion, she looked like a prophet of doom. “If that remnant hadn’t been stopped, it would have devoured everyone here, growing stronger and smarter with each kill.” Before anyone had a chance to sigh in relief, she continued. “But there are more, in numbers not comprehensible to even gods, and if we do nothing they will be here shortly. They know where we are, and they won’t stop coming until they’ve completed their foul mission. So, we can either sit here and wait for our demise, or we can go and stop this ancient threat, while also retaking what is ours.”

It was a unanimous vote; the first in decades.

Yet, it still didn’t make it any easier when they collapsed the monument, their first of many steps to make sure they weren’t followed. Crazy Horse Memorial, what was to be the seat of the Nation’s power and the world’s largest monument, was no more. Many of the elders, including himself, felt like a piece of themselves had been ripped out as they watched it come down behind them. They had
commissioned it in 1948 from a Polish-American immigrant who poured his entire life into it, and yet it would never be finished.

So, with heavy hearts, they began their long journey.

It was hard work, as they filled the Uktena’s tunnels as they went. They had to circle back a few times when they encountered underground lakes, or the more of the mysterious hodgepodge maze. Sometimes, Kokyangwuti would make them stop digging for seemingly no reason, but no one dared to question her.

Keeping the kids’ morale up grew harder with each passing day, as many realized they were getting farther away from their homes with every step. The Nation generally tried to keep their demigods close to home, no more than a day out, so for many of them this was the farthest they had ever been from home. And it wasn’t like they were heading to Disney World.…

And much like with the first Gayegogi, stories helped make the best of a bad situation. People, wacans, spirits, and gods swapped stories as they worked and traveled. Some told their favorite ancient stories, others told of their own experience, and he’d be damned if his ears didn’t perk up every time a McLean was mentioned. While Tom’s exploits were told mostly by the older members of the Nation, it seemed to him that Piper and her friends had gained quite the standing with the younger members.

And as with all stories, they soon became embellished.

Coyote heard that the young McLean, with just the power of her voice, made the Stoneclad had over its talisman (the old bastard actually heard that too and protested). How the mock titan Veronica could sprout the wings of a demon and fly faster than even the eye of a god could perceive. How the one-armed Roman, Reyna, had slaughtered thirty of the one-eyed union workers with just her bare hand (that one was probably true). The best one though in his opinion was that the young Gayegogi had fought a killer Pomeranian; which sounded crazy even to a mythological being.

It made time move slightly faster, and after twenty-five days of near darkness, they reached their destination.

Or so they hoped.

“So, this will protect me?” He asked as the elderly goddess tied a small bracelet around his paw. The bracelet looked more like a doily one might find on an old woman’s coffee table, than something that would protect him from being ripped a sunder. Even examining the spiderwebbed pattern thing with all his senses, he could find no power to it. No matter how he looked at it, it appeared to be nothing more than thread. “Because this definitely feels like the kind of trick I would pull on someone I didn’t like.”

Kokayangwuti flicked his ear, and he growled at her. “It doesn’t protect you, but rather hides you. So, don’t use too much energy to attract any unwanted attention.”

Coyote lifted his paw and sniffed the doily-bracelet. “You are not instilling a lot of confidence.”

The old woman rolled her eyes. “Stop being a puppy and get on with it.” She placed two fingers in her mouth and let out a sharp whistle that damn near killed him and any other canine within thirty miles. “Andy, Chad, blow the top for the esteemed councilman.”

The two thunderers, who looked too happy for his liking, high-fived. “You got it, bruh!” the two said in perfect synch. They walked down the Uktena’s tunnel, away from the crowd of gather
onlookers, and the blue lines that were etched all over their bodies pulsed with power. To a human, it was a pleasing light show, but to those of the divine inclination, they could see the energy flow from their bodies, the electrons building up at the top of the tunnel, and see the electrical imbalance right before nature corrected itself with a bolt of lightning; blasting a Coyote-sized hole in the roof.

“You’re all good, bro!” the two cried, as they ran back to join the crowd.

Not wanting to appear afraid in front of his people, he leapt on the tunnel’s wall-I really miss the old days- pushed off it, and propelled himself through the small hole.

Well, I’m definitely not in South Dakota anymore… But at least I’m not dead…

He had emerged in what appeared to be a junkyard. Old rusted and beat up cars were piled up around him, some crushed into cubes, some not. Old refrigerators, ovens, and other appliances were scattered about; their copper wiring long since removed by someone looking for a quick buck. Plastic and glass bottles, many of which were broken, dotted the landscape. But in the center of it all, not far from where he emerged, stood a lone figure covered in rags, with their hands held out over a small fire in an old, rusted out barrel.

Well, I would think he would know where we are. Not wanting to scare the poor thing, Coyote shifted into his human form before stepping into the dim light. “Evening, hoss-“

The figure jumped at his words, the rags falling away to reveal a frail man who had clearly seen better days. The guy’s hair was black with first and had leaves and twigs wove into it; some appeared to be there on purpose. His face was smeared with oil and grease, but on closer inspection it appeared that it was his attempt at makeup. His skin was covered in cuts, bruises, and even a few dog bites, and his ribs looked dangerously close to poking through his own chest. “Who goes there?!” the man cried, flailing his arms like a Muppet trying to do karate. “You don’t know who you are dealing with, foul junkyard warden! For I am-“

“Woah! Woah! Easy there,” he said, holding his hands up to show he meant no harm. “I just wanted to ask where I am. I went out with some buddies last night and, well, one thing led to another, and I wake up here.” He grabbed the brim of his hat and twisted it slightly to the left. “That was Vegas, but I think I’m in New York now? Not sure how that happened…” He gave an awkward chuckle with just a hint of concern, trying to sell his lost-idiot act.

“New York? New York? New York?!” the homeless man cried, anger growing with each utterance. “Do not mistake that cesspool for the entrance to the fallen world tree, Yggdrasil! Do not think that a team as great as the Red Sox could be anywhere else but Boston!”

Boston?! Damn it all! We made a wrong turn somewhere! I knew we shouldn’t have trusted Napi with the map… He entertained the idea of tapping into his powers and verifying the man’s claims, as he seemed a few beavers short of a dam, but he decided to heed Kokyangwuti’s warning. “Welllllp,” Coyote drawled, interrupting the man’s incoherent rambling, “thanks for the help, but I best be on my way.” He went to turn and head back to the tunnel-

“Wait!” the man cried, running towards him, hopping over the various refuse between them; his ragged garments opening and closing, revealing far more than Coyote wished to see. “Could you spare some coin for a lost soul?” The man panted, holding out an outstretched hand. “I did help you after all.”

If the man looked bad, then he smelled terrible; a musky, rotten scent radiating from his body that made Coyote want to rub his nose in the dirt. “Yeah, sure,” he said, fighting his gag reflex as he reached in his back pocket for his wallet. “Just one sec-“ A scrawny hand grabbed him by his collar
and slammed him back into the driver’s side door of a scrapped ’57 Nova.

“Loki, doesn’t beg,” the man, presumably Loki, laughed maniacally. While he had been digging out his wallet, the homeless man had pulled out a knife from who-knows-where, and was now twirling it in front of Coyote’s face. “Loki takes.” He pressed the knife against the Native American trickster’s cheek. “Now give me your wallet.”

The look on Loki’s face, a mixture of horror and realization, as Coyote shifted into his giant, lupine form was the stuff of legend. The fresh urine that flowed down the former god’s thighs as he had to tilt his head back to look into Coyote’s glowing, red eyes, was a spring bouquet of fear that masked the Norse trickster’s foul scent. Honestly, Coyote was about to work out three months’ worth of stress on the man he thought was but another mortal.

“Loki’s going to take an ass whoop’n,” he growled, just before the screaming began.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter really flowed out of me, so enjoy an early update!

This chapter definitely raises more questions, but it also has some answers buried in there as well. Some of you will start to understand my reasoning for including the Nation in this story was not just for Piper's story, but to establish a larger world. Some characters are definitely more important than they initially appeared (you know who), things are not what they appear to be, and things are getting even more complicated! Yay!

I will write some more notes later, but I wanted to get this up tonight.

And as always, I love to hear from you!

...and I have no idea what a tv tropes page is.... I'm old.... I guess whoever gets to it first gets to make it?
Nico

Chapter Summary

Warnings: none

Tonight:

Nico adjusts to a new world.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Despite his insistence that he was going to sleep in from the previous night, the second the sun’s rays peaked through their bedroom window, the Son of Hades was up. Not out of bed, but up. He closed his eyes tighter, arched his back, and stretched out his legs, while enjoying the feel of Percy’s warm breath on the back of his neck. It was moments like these that made him almost forget what had transpired only a little over two months prior.

Almost.

He, and the rest of the world, were still processing what the mortals called Revelation Day. In the span of twenty-four hours not only had the world learned about the existence of their world, but decided that it needed to be wiped out. But he couldn’t blame them for that, not given the circumstances of Avalon’s big reveal. Billions in damages, trust in world leaders destroyed, and hundreds of thousands dead in mere hours.

To many people, it seemed to be the end of the world.

Nico included.

Hazel and Frank died that night, the latter by his own hand. The pain in his heart surpassed the pain from the injuries of that fight, and in the days that followed it had nearly consumed him. If it hadn’t been for his father, mom, Percy, and Jason’s constant love he would have reverted back to his old, miserable self. Thanks to them he realized that it wasn’t his fault, that their suffering was now at an end, and that Avalon was to blame.

But then again, so was Olympus…

When he regained conscious the following day, he found himself in his and Percy’s room surrounded by his loved ones. They all wore somber, depressed expressions, and strange, white bracelets on their wrists. They of course smothered him with hugs when they realized he was awake, his father needing to literally drag Persephone and Percy off of him, and then they told him the news. They told him of Zeus’ and the other Olympians’ plan to prolong their life by harvesting the souls of the dead and of those that chose rebirth. The news hit him hard, as while he had already made peace with never seeing Will again, he wasn’t ready to hear that his soul had been destroyed.

And then they told him that the war with Avalon was over.

And they had lost.
Now they were forced to wear bracelets that gave them immunity to the mortal weapon, and tracked their every movement. Every few weeks they would spot an unmarked, black SUV scoping out the farm. Sometimes the leader of Avalon would even call and speak with Jason; the strange old man for some reason considered the son of Jupiter a friend. Then at his and Percy’s graduation, Merlin and several of his goons attended, casting an unwanted shadow on what was supposed to have been a great day.

Nico pushed the thoughts of the past aside, that was enough unpleasant memories for one day.

He rolled over and smiled as he gazed at the sleeping son of Poseidon’s face, and even after being together for months, his heart soared. Unable to resist, he closed the distance between their face, and kissed the raven-haired teen on the lips.

Percy, who could sleep through just about anything, was quick to awaken and respond, wrapping one arm around the son of Hades and pulling him close to the point that their bare chests touched. “Mmm,” the green-eyed teen hummed when the kiss ended, “I love waking up to that. And, I love you.”

“I love you too, Percy,” he replied, the son of Poseidon’s words still sending a wave of bliss through his body. Nico set his head down on Percy’s pillow and grinned at his lover. *This. Moments like this are what keeps us going.*

Percy stretched out with a loud yawn, and wiped the residual drool from his face. “How are you feeling? Need me to get you some Tylenol?”

Nico laughed. “I’m a little sore, but good.” Shortly after Revelation Day, his father moved into Persephone’s room to be with his wife, as if they were going to be mortal forever, the former king of the Underworld didn’t want to waste a moment apart. And with his father gone, and their room the only bedroom on the ground floor, his and Percy’s sex life really took off. At first, they did it every opportunity they got, but that left the son of Hades sore for days. Eventually they only fucked on the weekends so that he had a chance to recover. But now, now that they were both more experienced and his body was more accepting of Percy, they were back to whenever they felt like it, which was still every chance they got. “Work is going to be fun though,” he said with an awkward chuckle.

Ever the diva, Percy rolled onto his back and threw his head back with a groan. “Ugh! I forgot you had to work today! I wanted to hang out with you today!” The son of Poseidon crossed his arms and puffed his cheeks, the spitting image of a whiny child. “How long’s your shift?” he asked after a few moments.

“Noon to four—” Percy started to cheer “—but I promised mom I’d help her after work,” Nico added with an embarrassed smile. The son of Poseidon crossed his arms and puffed his cheeks, the spitting image of a whiny child. “How long’s your shift?” he asked after a few moments.

“‘Noon to four—’” Percy started to cheer “—but I promised mom I’d help her after work,” Nico added with an embarrassed smile. The son of Poseidon then rolled on top of Percy, and kissed him again. “But it’s early yet. Plus, you could help later if you wanted to.”

Percy wrapped his arms around him, and they could each feel each other’s growing erections, which in turn excited them both further. “I guess, but I feel like Persephone wants me as far away from her plants as possible. I somehow have a worse green thumb than you.” His head darted up and he kissed Nico once more.

“That’s why I work the register and the tech side of things,” he replied, before gently biting Percy’s nose. *If we don’t do something soon, I’m going to have to use the bathroom…*

“You’d just think a guy who can control water would be better with plants,” Percy chuckled, his voice slightly off from having his nostrils closed by a horny Italian’s mouth. “Sooooo… What should we do in the meantime?” The son of Poseidon asked, wiggling his eyebrows.
“Well, we could get up, shower, and go try and hang out with Piper—” Percy frowned “—or we could have a repeat of last night?” It was stupid to be sure, as he would be far more tender than he was already, but he was fifteen and horny. He was allowed to be stupid every now and then.

Percy’s lips curled into a predatory grin. “I’ll get the lube.”

After the sweaty lovemaking session (and a quick nap), Nico limped his way up the stairs, and took a quick shower before changing into his work clothes. He was thankful that the shift was going to be a short one, plus Chelsea was scheduled with him, but work always flew by faster when Percy was with him.

Probabley because we sneak out back and make out... I have no idea how we haven’t been fired or written up yet...

Once clothed, Nico pocketed his wallet and house keys, and went to the kitchen, where he found his father sitting at the kitchen table with his laptop open, while staring out the window. “Good morning father,” he greeted, as he reached across the table and took a fresh, red apple from the basket in the middle.

“It certainly sounded like a good morning,” Hades said absently, still focused on the window.

Following their defeat, Hades, Persephone, and Demeter had to ponder what they were going to do with the rest of their mortal lives. For Demeter, the answer was simple enough, the former harvest goddess took a more direct approach in running her various agricultural businesses; and she was showing Jason the ropes. Hades, on the other hand, became something called a day trader; Percy was sure that Hades was trying to lower Big Apple Island’s stock prices as a form of revenge. Persephone… well, he and Percy saw a lot more of her, and he was actually pretty happy about that. After months together, and returning memories, Nico had no problem calling his stepmother ‘mom’.

“What are you looking at?” Nico asked, leaning forward to try and see what his father was looking at. He could see the giant hole that had been dug out for the coming addition to the house, the now owl-free tree, and—

Oh.

Outside, sitting beneath the tree, was Piper McLean.

“Do you think she’ll ever come inside?” his father asked, before taking a sip of tea. “If someone sees her we are going to be in deep trouble.”

Nico sighed and rubbed his apple against his red shirt. “Percy and I have been trying to convince her you guys had nothing to do with Olympus, but she’s got a lot of issues now.”

Hades frowned deepened. “If it was within my power, I would have let you go and retrieve the boy. Just as I allowed you to take Hazel, but I used the last of my powers to save you from your sister.”

Hades set his ‘#1 Dad’ mug down on the tabletop and sighed. “I am sorry, truly I am.”

Piper’s arrival came as a shock to everyone, save Merlin, who orchestrated the whole thing as a peace offering or consolation prize. But what surprised everyone was that her tongue was missing and the fact she rode in on Mrs. O’Leary, before Avalon’s goons killed the gentle giant and knocked Piper out in the process. When she awoke, she had been handed a pen and paper, and was told to write down what happened.
It was disturbing to say the least.

Nico had thought that Avalon couldn’t have sunk any lower after unleashing hordes of monsters to create the toxicity needed to weaken the gods, but he had been wrong. While they had known that the tribunal were traitors by concealing the truth of Avalon’s existence, their treachery went far deeper than thought possible. While they had been fighting above, Avalon had flooded the Lethe and forced the souls down there to bathe in it, wiping their memories and further crippling the gods. To make matters even worse, Piper told them of monsters emerging from Tartarus that could devour and merge with souls. He and his father had never heard of such a creature, but the description she drew reminded him vaguely of a card in Percy’s deck.

But as disturbing as it was, it didn’t change the fact that there was nothing they could do about it. All they could do was hope that the son of Hephaestus was okay.

Piper though, didn’t take that well.

“I know,” he said, not taking his eyes off the daughter of Aphrodite, who just sat under the tree with her eyes closed. “She’s just going to need time. She’s like us when this whole mess began, confused and alone; I just wonder where she was for all this time.”

“Perhaps it is best we don’t know,” his father said, frown deepening. The former king and god quickly glanced at his computer screen, some notification popping up and then quickly disappearing. It must have not been important as his gaze returned to the daughter of Aphrodite. “Have- have you tried to get Jason to talk with her?”

Now it was Nico’s turn to frown.

This wasn’t the first time his father had asked that question; it was pretty much a daily occurrence. Despite Jason knowing that Disciplina had suffered the same fate as Artemis, and by his own hand no less, the son of Jupiter suffered from panic attacks when alone with Piper. Thankfully, and the word was a stretch by anyone’s imagination, Jason only had severe anxiety when he was with Piper along with other people. Nico knew, and understood, why the son of Jupiter behaved the way he did, but he wished that Jason could push aside his own insecurities for even just five minutes and comfort the Piper. The girl had clearly been shaken when she found out her father had died on Revelation Day, and who knew what horrors she had experienced in three months following Avalon’s initial attack.

“We’ve tried,” Nico answered. “And tried,” he sighed. “But Jason’s just... I don’t know what.”

Hades reached up and clasped his son on the shoulder. “I guess we just have to play it by ear,” the man said, squeezing Nico’s shoulder. “But seriously, if I end up building that addition for nothing, I am going to be livid,” he added with a wry smile. “For the price of one room I could’ve built a new home…”

Nico returned the smile, before taking another bite of his apple. “It’s all about money with you, isn’t it?” he laughed after swallowing.

“Well if I can’t have godhood, then I’m going for the next best thing,” his father shot back playfully. “And on that topic, are you waiting for Jackson before you head off to work?”

Nico shook his head. “No, I’m scheduled to work with Chelsea today. Percy’s got the day off.”

Hades smile morphed into a frown. “Great,” Hades said with a roll of his eyes. “He’s like a lost puppy without you, you know that, right? He’ll wander around the farm trying to entertain himself,
but he always ends up bugging me.”

“It’s part of the reason why I love him,” Nico smiled before tossing the apple core into the compost can Demeter had set up. “But we both have homework in our respective classes, so maybe that’ll keep him busy.”

“Doubtful, but a man can hope.” Hades stood up from his chair and wrapped one arm around his son. “Alright, have a good day, and I’ll see you in a few hours.”

Nico nodded and returned the embrace. “I will, and tell mom I haven’t forgotten about tonight,” he said, before slipping into the shadows.

“Welcome to Dairy Queen, what can I get for you?” the son of Hades asked with a plastered on fake smile.

Nico had never considered a summer job before, he had been too young and, more importantly, trying to survive the last few years than to worry about pocket money. After their defeat though, the realization came that there would be no more monsters, no more quests, and no more cycles to keep any of them busy, and that they would need to adapt a mortal lifestyle. Now, while he and Jason (mostly him) were mostly lost on what to do, Percy wasn’t even fazed. Before Percy knew he was a demigod, he spent every summer and winter break doing whatever odd jobs he could find to get away from his now thoroughly deceased stepfather. So, to Percy the first thing they needed to get was jobs.

No one disagreed.

So, after they graduated, he and Percy began to search for a part time job. They found out that in a rural community, as with most things, options were limited. The number one source of employment, was of course, farm related. Detasseling, or walking through the fields and removing the tops of corn stocks was a big thing to do, but considering Nico had to take two Claritin a day to just survive in the heavily pollenated area, it wasn’t an option. They could have gone Jason’s route and handled heavy machinery and took care of animals, as a general farm hand, but animals didn’t like him and he could only picture apocalyptic scenarios if he got behind the wheel of a twelve-ton machine. The only other options were to join the service industry, which meant becoming a stock or bagboy at one of the smaller grocery stores, or some job at a fast food establishment.

Princeton’s Dairy Queen was the first to call.

“One small, vanilla cone please!” a little girl chirped as she slid a dollar bill and a quarter across the ancient counter.

“Sure thing,” Nico smiled back, this time genuine. *There are definitely worse jobs for sure.* He punched in the order into the register and slid the money in the drawer, then handed back a dime to the little girl. Next, he grabbed a napkin and used that to grab one of the cones, before holding it under the giant soft serve machine and pulled the lever with his other hand. With a hum and a hiss of refrigerant, the sweet frozen dairy began to fill the cone. There was a bit of art to getting the swirl at the top of the cone (something Percy couldn’t master), but he mastered it soon enough, and for some reason people really seemed to enjoy it. He released the handle, spun around, and offered the girl her cone. “Here you go! Have a nice day!”
“Thank you!” the girl chirped, before practically shoving the top half of the cone in her mouth.

The smile on Nico’s face grew as he saw the girl place a hand on her forehead as she walked away. *I shouldn’t laugh, but I remember my first ice cream headache too. And my first Slurpee headache, thanks to my ass of a boyfriend.* With no other customers, he grabbed some paper towels and began to wipe the counter down.

All-in-all, it was a decent first job. The Princeton Dairy Queen didn’t have a drive-thru and it didn’t serve hot food; the hottest item on the menu being the hot fudge sundae. The only seating was three metal picnic tables that they wiped down at their leisure, and since they were on a concrete slab outside there was no need to mop, only sweep away the dirt every day. At first, he had been worried about being cold while working at an ice cream shop, but the large windows on the counter that amplified the sun’s rays combined with the heat radiating from the refrigeration units kept him one warm son of Hades. And since the store itself was so small, there was never more than three people working, meaning the owners rarely showed up other than to hand them their checks.

“Sorry I’m late!” an all-too-familiar voice called out as the door in the rear squeaked open. “I got busy watching the news.”

Nico rolled his eyes and tossed the paper towels in the waste basket under the counter before turning to face his friend and coworker. “I literally have no idea how you haven’t been fired yet,” he huffed, folding his arms across his chest. “I don’t think you’ve ever shown up on time.”

Chelsea shot him an embarrassed smile as she crouched down to tie her shoe, her blonde ponytail bouncing as she did so. “It’s really hard to get fired when your aunt and uncle own the place.” She bounced up and joined him at the counter, hopping up and sitting on it just after he cleaned it. “They demolished the Parthenon,” the blonde said before he could protest.

That… that caught him off guard. The Parthenon, what was supposed have been the primary representation of Olympus to the mortal mind, was gone. The Parthenon, the very same structure where Percy and his friends had made their final stand against the Giants, only to still have Gaea awaken. It shouldn’t have surprised him though, it really shouldn’t have, as after Avalon’s worldwide attack mortals had been destroying ancient structures on an almost daily basis. The Sphinx, the ruins of Delphi, Machu Picchu, and so many other one of a kind wonders had been destroyed by the angry masses, all lost forever. “How?” was all he could ask.

Chelsea shrugged. “Some guys hijacked some construction equipment and went to town on it. Motives are unknown at this time,” she said, using air quotes on the last sentence.

“Right,” he huffed.

The motives always ended up in one of three categories: fear, anger, and revenge. Some people believed that even with the Avalon engineer’s weapon steadily covering the land and sea, the attacks would happen again. Their fears had some merit he supposed, as while the monsters and demigods had all been killed, the gods only disappeared; back to whatever cage Avalon kept them in. Other people just wanted to lash out, to strike before another attack. Those people were undoubtedly the worst, as there were daily reports of people being killed on suspicion that they were demigods or monsters in disguise. The last group, those out for revenge, Nico had some understanding of. They were the people who had lost loved ones on Revelation Day and wanted no one else to feel their pain. Nico couldn’t be sure, but he often wondered if Avalon was quietly fanning the flames.

They were definitely behind New York though, he thought, a grim expression settling on his face.

Around a week after Revelation Day, the United States government evacuated the northeastern
metropolis and its many boroughs in what was now considered the largest forced migration and relocation in modern history. A week later, when they were sure the area was clear, the armed forces launched the first military operation on domestic soil since World War II, shelling Olympus with artillery containing a special payload. The gold and bronze glimmer that covered the remains of New York confirmed his suspicions of what that special payload was.

And yet, after days of shelling, Olympus was still floating above the wreckage that had been the Empire State Building and the surrounding area. That’s not to say it was untouched, as the floating city had split into multiple pieces, some had even flipped over as their center of gravity had changed. Most of the pristine gold and marble structures had been destroyed or at least damaged. At first it had looked like the mortals had succeeded.

Until the lightning came.

“Are you okay?” Chelsea asked him, pulling him out of his thoughts.

Nico grabbed the now sticker-covered bracelet on his right wrist and sighed. “I really wish you wouldn’t tell me these things,” he said with a shake of his head. “I may have no love for the gods, but stuff like that just reminds me how… trapped we are. How much we’ve lost.” Will. Hazel. Frank. Reyna. Bianca.

The blonde hung her head down. “Sorry Neeks, I guess that was rather insensitive of me.” She slid off the counter and moved next to him, playfully bumping his shoulder with her own. “Sooo,” she drawled on, her way of announcing a change in subject. “Did you finish the hash table?”

Nico grabbed the paper towels with one hand and pushed his annoying friend away with his other. “Yeah, wasn’t that hard,” he answered, wiping down the spot where the blonde had just sat. “It took me a minute to get the pointers correct, and I had to debug the key generator function, but like I said, it wasn’t that hard.” He tossed the paper towels away (we should really switch to reusable) and turned to face Chelsea. “You?”

“Finished it a few nights ago,” the blonde answered, adjusting her hat. “And, same with the pointers,” she shuddered. “C++ makes me really appreciate Java.”

“You really don’t know what you’ve got until it’s gone,” Nico said with a bittersweet smile. “Also, is it me, or is Data Structures our only challenging class at IVCC?” he asked, while scanning the small booth for anything else to do, but finding nothing. “Everything else seems like a joke.”

“That’s community college in a nutshell,” the blonde smiled. She tried to hop on the counter once again, but Nico shot out his arm, blocking her from doing so. “Bitch,” the blonde whispered before sticking out her tongue. “The general education classes are meant to be blow offs. Seriously, I’m taking Art Appreciation with Jason, the only requirement for an A is to have a pulse.”

“Speaking of Jas—”

The blonde stuck her hand in his face, silencing him, and giving him a close-up of the freckle on her palm. “I’ve talked to him about Piper several times, but her appearance like that was a major step backwards for him. I can’t say much, but he has opened up more in group, so I think it’s just a matter of time.”

Nico was about to say they didn’t have time, but then he remembered that they did now; part of their new life. “Well, do you think maybe you could talk to Piper? Maybe a little girl talk?” I honestly don’t know what to do about Jason and Piper. They make me miss fighting monsters, that was easier than this… Less feelings too…
“Dude!” the blonde cried. “She thinks I stole her boyfriend! Whenever I come over, I can feel her glaring at me! The only way that is happening is if you and Percy are there to protect me!”

Nico held his hands up in surrender. “Fine, fine, it was a dumb idea anyway.” He arched an eyebrow. “But I have to ask, did you steal her boyfriend? The two of you are quite-”

Chelsea slugged him hard in the shoulder. “We. Are. Friends.”

He rubbed his shoulder, hissing in pain. *Freaking farmgirls and their unnatural strength… This is going to bruise…* “Fine, touchy subject!” He glanced at the small clock on the wall above the toppings station and frowned when he saw only an hour had passed since his shift started. “What should we talk about then?” he asked, already knowing what the blonde would say.

“Story time?” Chelsea asked, hopping up on the counter while he was weakened. Honestly, Nico was pretty sure she did it just to annoy him.

“You assault me and you think you deserve a story?” The blonde smirked at his question, making him roll his eyes. “Fine,” he said with an exaggerated sigh. “I’ll tell you about how I first met Percy. It features a manticore, Jason’s sister Thalia, Apollo, and Artemis…”

Nico exited the shadows in the kitchen and immediately removed his DQ hat and kicked off his black, nonslip shoes. He wandered to the living room where he found Percy sitting cross-legged on the loveseat, glancing back and forth between his sociology text book and his laptop’s screen, occasionally pecking out a few words on the keyboard. As much as he loved doing their shared homework together, it always made him happy to see Percy working on his own without being told to; it was one of the positive changes the son of Poseidon had underwent. Without saying a word, Nico flopped down next to his boyfriend and reclined back into the overstuffed cushions.

Before he could process what was happening, Percy picked him up, set him in his lap, and began to suck on the sweet spot between his shoulder and neck. Nico’s vision flashed brighter than the sun with pleasure as Percy continued his hungry assault. In the months following their defeat, he and Percy explored each other’s bodies in ways they’ve never done before, finding each other’s sweet spots and figuring out new ways to overwhelm each other. Which was why when Nico’s vision cleared he found himself straddling the older boy’s lap while his shirt was draped over an armrest and his normally loose pants were feeling a bit tight in the crotch.

Percy looked up at him with a devilish smirk and puffy lips. “Have a good day?”

Nico felt his face flush, but he didn’t look away, instead placing a quick peck on the son of Poseidon’s lips. “It’s always a good day with you,” he said before carefully climbing off the older teen.

Even though Percy was fully healed now, there was permanent damage done to his hands and leg, which frequently left him with painful cramping. Perhaps there was a cruel irony to the fact that Percy hurt worse every time it rained; his hands becoming almost unresponsive and his right calf locking up. But Nico made sure to stay by Percy’s side and keep him distracted or attempt to massage the sore muscles. He knew he was nowhere near as good as Will, but once again the Son of Apollo had aided him in his and Percy’s relationship.

“But right now,” Nico said, grabbing his shirt, “I have to go clean up before I head to the green
Percy’s smirk grew. “Yeah, you don’t want to go to Persephone a sweaty mess.” He then reached down and retrieved the textbook that had fallen on the floor and opened it back up to the page he had been reading before their little encounter. “But I promise I’ll be out once I finish this paragraph.”

“I don’t think I’ll be out there that long,” he said with a chuckle, earning him a two-fingered salute from the older boy. Nico then bent down and kissed Percy once more. “Okay, see you in a bit,” he said before slipping into the shadows.

It really wasn’t a surprise what Persephone decided to do with her mortal life, that is, opening a greenhouse and flower shop. Hades had built the large, sprawling, venetian style greenhouse for his wife on what had been a corn field next to the farmhouse; the construction crew erecting it in under two weeks thanks to extra zeroes Hades‘ added to the check. Persephone of course had to order her initial stock, but everything grew at a supernatural rate, suggesting that maybe she was closer to a demigod than a pure mortal. The biggest surprise though was just how popular Persephone’s Garden became; especially considering its remote location (though Nico had his suspicions that his father and Demeter played a big part in that). Already they were receiving orders for weddings, upcoming festivals, and even a few formal events. And not just for local events, but as far away as Chicago. It was enough to keep Persephone occupied.

And Nico busy.

Somehow, and he honestly had no idea how, he was put in charge of running and creating the small business’ website and social media pages. The social media was pretty easy, once he understood what social media was, simply taking pictures of Persephone’s floral arrangements and uploading them, posting online flyers and coupons, and deleting the negative comments of trolls, which he was disappointed were not in fact trolls, but a term for people with poor social skills on the internet. The website creation was a bit of a task, for he had to learn yet another programming language, but after two sleepless days (and a lot of coffee) it was done. Now he just updated his stepmother’s portfolio, reported orders, issued tracking numbers, and all the little things that people took for granted on the web.

“I’m here!” Nico cried as he ran into the main wing, where he and Persephone spent most of their time. He grabbed his black apron with the letters ‘PG’ embroidered in silver and quickly pulled it on over his still wet hair, while he scrambled to get behind the counter. “Sorry!” he cried out as he bent down to retrieve the pricey camera he used for pictures. “I’m-“ the son of Hades started to apologize, but when he looked over the counter he stopped.

Persephone stood at her work station in the middle of the room, a black, cast iron table whose legs looked like vines with a glass top. On the table were stacks of red and black roses, black chains, several miniature silver skulls, and a black vase covered in spikes that already has several of the thorny flowers in it. What made Nico stop speaking, wasn’t the in-progress arrangement, but the amused expression on his stepmother’s face.

“You’re cute when you’re flustered,” his second mother quipped, sticking another black rose in the vase. “Has Percy seen you like this?”

“Shut up,” he mumbled as his felt his face flush. He took his camera and walked over to a bench
near the windows, where Persephone placed the arrangements she had made that day, where they waited to be photographed, and then placed either the pickup area or moved to be packaged for shipping. Now before he and Persephone reconciled and he remembered his past with her, Nico would have never admitted to anyone, not even himself, that his mother’s work was beautiful. But now, he could, and was caught off-guard everyday by the beauty of her creations.

“I notice you’re limping a bit today,” Persephone teased. “I wonder why that is?” she asked, looking around the arrangement with an arched eyebrow and a suggestive look.

He took a picture of an arrangement of white lilies and yellow daisies before firing back, “Probably the same reason why there’s never any whipped cream or chocolate sauce in the house.” He would never talk to his mother or father that way, but his relationship with Persephone was different. For one thing, the former goddess only appeared to be a decade or so older than himself, so it was easy to think of her as an older sister at times. Yet, his memories from before the Lotus were vivid enough now to remember her being a mother, albeit a mother who spoiled his younger self rotten. But it wasn’t always fun and jokes with her, after Chicago she had been there for him as he struggled to cope with the grim reality of Hazel’s death, offering him a shoulder to cry on.

Persephone meant a lot to him now.

So now his stepmother was no longer an enemy or someone to be avoided, but a friend, confidant, an older sister, and a second mother rolled into one.

“Don’t forget about cucumbers,” Persephone shot back. “Your father loves to shove them-“

“NO! NO! NO! NO!” he screamed on an endless repeat, covering his ears with his hands. “I do not need to hear this! You win!” He spun around to see her grinning at him, before sticking her tongue out at him. “Too much information,” he sighed, removing his hands from his head.

The dark-haired woman rolled her eyes and grabbed one of the decorative skulls and a piece of doll rod. “Relax, I wouldn’t tell you something that private,” she giggled. He watched as she took the skull and jammed the doll rod into the base of the foam skull, and then cut off some of the extra wood with a pair of cutters, before sticking it into the vase. “But I do want to know if you’re okay. I don’t want you to feel obligated to be here.”

He returned to taking photos, his stomach still threatening to empty itself on the greenhouse floor. “I’m fine,” he insisted, snapping a picture of a golden vase filled with sunflowers. “And I like coming out here, it’s calm. Peaceful even. Plus, I like talking to you,” he admitted rather sheepishly. Not anymore embarrassing than your parents telling you about their sex lives...

Persephone squealed in delight before quickly composing herself. “Um, yes. I enjoy talking to you too.”

“So, is that for a funeral?” he asked, gesturing to the arrangement his stepmother was currently working on. “Or for a heavy metal concert?”

“EHH! Wrong!” Persephone laughed, making him jump ever so slightly at her noisy outburst. “It’s for a wedding. A lovely goth girl and a metalhead stopped in the other day to commission these.” She stopped and chuckled to herself. “They kind of reminded me of your father and myself, but the woman definitely had some Maria in her.”

Nico shut off his camera, returned to the counter, and pulled out the SD card. “Oh. That’s nice.” He then pulled the laptop they used for the business out from under the counter and slid the SD card into the reader and turned the computer on.
“You know you can ask me anything about her, right?” Persephone asked, setting down her sheers to look at him. “Back during the Titan War, when I told you and your father not to mention her I… I was hurting. I thought you were an imposter and that your father didn’t love her, so I didn’t want… I’m not sure I can put it in words. But she was my best friend, my sister, the woman who gave me two perfect angels, and the happiest years of my life. You were so very young when she was taken, so I want to be the one to fill in the gaps.” By the time she had finished speaking, tears had begun to form at the corners of her eyes and a sad smile graced her face.

He wasn’t much better. The son of Hades had stopped copying files from the SD card as a lump began to form in his throat. Persephone and his father had been telling him more stories about their time with his mother, both before and after his and Bianca’s births, but the stories had been jovial in nature, only giving a partial view of his mother. He had questions, but the only one he had asked, and only indirectly, was if she would have been okay with his sexuality. He dared not to dwell on his chances of seeing her again in the afterlife.

“Would… would she have liked Percy?” he choked out. It wasn’t the deepest of questions he had, not by a longshot, but it was a start. “And was she a dog or cat person?” Wow, you’re really killing it with the questions… But let’s work up to why my grandparents hated her.

Persephone didn’t laugh (though it looked like she was fighting back the urge) and instead answered him with a smile. “Dog person. Maria believed that any creature that didn’t enjoy a dip in the canals wasn’t worth her time. And since Perseus is a dog, she’d love him too.”

“What about-“

Percy joined them about an hour later, seamlessly joining the Maria di Angelo Q&A. The son of Poseidon asked questions that he wouldn’t have thought of as he carried the finished arrangements to their proper places. Questions such as, was she a morning person? Coffee or tea? What were her guilty pleasures? What did she think Nico would do as a career? What were the odds that there would have been a third di Angelo? And did she and Persephone ever kiss?

Both he and Persephone threw glares and items at the son of Poseidon for that question.

“That wasn’t a ‘no’,“ Percy had chuckled moments before a pair of sheers zoomed dangerously close to his face; embedding themselves in an oakling.

But by the time they finished for the night, Nico felt like he had a better understanding of who is mother was as a person. He learned that some of his quirks undoubtedly came from her, such as his need to keep things tidy and the way he clung to Percy while he slept. He learned that she used to frequent graveyards and make etchings of the tombstones; Persephone claimed there was a book of them, but that had been lost. It would have been better if his mother had been there to tell him those things herself, but he still thanked his Persephone with all of his heart, going as far to hug her.

“Anything for you, little prince,” the woman whispered, returning the surprise embrace.

After that, he and Percy joined Jason in the living room, the blond sitting on the couch working on the same sociology assignment Percy had been. Nico and Percy retrieved their own laptops, a relatively recent purchase to accommodate their needs as college students, and began to do the same.
Jason and Percy sat on the loveseat, while he elected to sit between them on the floor, placing his laptop in the coffee table rather than his lap.

*I like to be warm, but not THAT warm.*

Since Percy had the assignment mostly done, the older teen was able to help them considerably, working with the two of them to reword his own sentences for their own papers. When they first started their summer classes, Nico had been hesitant to work that way with Percy and Jason, but after a couple of study sessions with his other classmates he quickly realized that was how people got things done in college.

*United we stand, divided we work a lot harder and longer for no reason. That started strong only to crash and burn like the Hindenburg.*

When they finished their papers, Nico climbed onto the loveseat between Percy and Jason to watch some television before they retired for the evening. While Jason flipped through the three-hundred-plus channels of nothing trying to find something decent, the son of Poseidon had pulled Nico close and leaned his head against the younger teen’s. They eventually settled on watching some old action movie called *Die Hard*, and while the sons of Jupiter and Poseidon were enthralled in John McClane’s efforts to take down Hans Gruber (who Nico was eighty-percent sure was Professor Snape), it didn’t hold Nico’s attention. His attention was divided between Percy and Jason, just watching the two of them, listening to their animated conversations of what stunts were possible and which weren’t, and trying to etch the moment in his memory. It was moments like this that told him they were going to be alright, that they would survive in this new strange world of mortals.

Hades, Persephone, and Demeter joined shortly before the climax of the movie, voicing their own thoughts in the two older teens’ conversations. Maybe he would never know why the British villain invaded Nakatomi Plaza, but he would remember sitting there amongst his family. They were as far away from a normal family as they could get, but Nico loved them.

*And there’s one more person that we need to bring in,* he thought, thinking go a certain daughter of Aphrodite that refused to move into the farmhouse. *But she’ll join us in her own time.*

That was the last thing Nico remembered before falling asleep against his Percy.

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Nico jolted upright in bed, his heart racing, breathing heavy, with a thin layer of sweat coating his body.

“It’s okay. It’s okay,” he repeated to himself as he surveyed the dark environment.

He was in that former office that was now his and Percy’s room, the light of the moon passing through the room’s sole window, illuminating it just enough to make out the room’s content. The desk that had occupied the center of the room had been pushed to a corner, with notebooks and opened textbooks covering the surface where he and Percy would work on their coursework. The spider’s web of string, photos, and documents that linked Olympus with Avalon that had covered the walls were gone, replaced by a few band posters taped to the walls. The contents of the built-in bookshelves had been changed as well; almanacs had been swapped out for comics and programming books. And next to him, still fast asleep, was the son of Poseidon.

“It’s okay,” Nico repeated to himself once more, before pulling his knees to his chest. He buried his
face in his hands and took a deep, shuttering breath. “No. No, it’s not.”

During the daylight hours Nico could distract himself with his job, classes, and his family. At night though, his subconscious had full control while he slept, bombarding him with everything he tried to ignore. Like the fact that the people who killed his sister and friends got away with it, that Will had suffered a fate worse than death as did all their friends in Elysium, that Leo could still be down in the Underworld waiting for a rescue that would never come, or what death meant for them now.

But tonight, inspired by thoughts of his mother, his mind drifted into a new horrifying direction.

His father had once told him that his mother’s soul was not in his domain. He had also said the same for Percy’s family. But he didn’t know about Zeus funneling souls off for their cycle. He didn’t notice the souls that were supposed to enter his domain were missing. That means-

His body shook and a sob he didn’t know he was holding back escaped his throat. A part of Nico had hoped that someday he would be reunited with his mother and he held that same hope for Percy and his family as well. He had rationalized that with death being eternal, the more time that passed, the greater the probability of something, even something seemingly impossible, could happen.

Now though, he knew better.

His mother, sister, and second love were gone forever, broken down into primordial materials to prolong the lives of unjust gods. His half-sister and his friends were now stripped bare of their identities every time they got wet, or were being devoured by some monster he couldn’t even fathom. And the only thing stopping his family from meeting one of those fates was a thin piece of white plastic on their wrists.

How pathetic was it for a son of Hades to fear death? Or was it foolish of him to have never feared it in the first place? Those questions, and thoughts of the dead swirled around Nico’s head to the point he wanted to scream. He-

A strong arm wrapped itself around Nico’s shoulders, as another was placed on his bare chest and pushed him back down onto the bed, bringing him face-to-face with a now very awake Percy.

“It’s going to be okay, Neeks,” the son of Poseidon said, his green eyes so bright and vivid in the moonlight. There was still a great deal of sorrow in his eyes, but after Chicago, after avenging his parents and sister, more of the light had returned. “This isn’t over,” Percy whispered, as if there were others in the room that he didn’t want to overhear them, “not by a longshot.”

Nico moved scooted closer to his lover, who in turn wrapped his arms around him and held him close. “Yeah,” he sniffled through teary eyes. “We have to set this right.”

“We will,” Percy nodded. “Even if that means tearing down Olympus and starting over, we will set things right.”

“What about Avalon?”

“Them too,” Percy yawned, pulling him closer. “I actually did some thinking about that. The reason why we lost was because we never worked together. Every event, New Rome, Artemis, Chicago, we were always separated.” Another yawn. “If we would have stuck together, there is no way we would have lost.”

Realization washed over Nico like a wave. Percy was right, they had always gone it alone, with no one to watch their backs. If they would have stuck together in New Rome, Percy wouldn’t have been tortured. If someone would have went with him to see Artemis, there was a good chance he
 wouldn’t have gotten shot and Persephone may not have lost her divinity. In Chicago the two of them could have saved Hazel and Frank.

*And imagine if we would have had Jason!*

Nico pulled the son of Poseidon’s face closer and kissed him passionately. “You’re right! You’re one-hundred percent right!” *With the three of us, there is no way we can lose! And when the time comes, we won’t underestimate our enemies again!*

“Yeah, I’m right about a lot of things,” Percy yawned. “And right now, I think we should get some sleep.”

He didn’t disagree with his boyfriend, cuddling up to the older teen. “I love you,” he yawned, before sleep took him once more.

**Chapter End Notes**

Come gather ’round people wherever you roam
And admit that the waters around your have grown
And accept it that soon you'll be drenched to the bone
And if your time to you is worth saving
Then you better start swimmin’ or you’ll sink like a stone
For the times that are a-changin
-The times they are a-changin, Bob Dylan

The above song was a big influence on this chapter and this fic overall. This image formed in my head of the various demigods being rendered irrelevant and forced to join society in less than glamorous positions. I know that is partially Percy's dream, but that is a dream that will turn into a nightmare of mediocrity. In the long run there is just no way for him and Annabeth to have a happy, stable relationship, and it will break down. Remember, Annabeth awaited Percy's arrival for years as he would signal an end to her mediocre time at camp. Realistically that relationship will end in divorce and both of them yearning for the past. Alas, we will never see that in the canon, as the main heroes get happy endings...

T.H White is rolling in his grave...

So, this chapter was a taste of that mediocrity, but with some happiness in there.

We got some mention of the fallout following Revelation Day (great name...) and that fallout will build more and more in the following chapters. So yes, the United States government, with worldwide approval, leveled New York in their attempt to destroy Olympus. Cultural significant sites are disappearing at a rapid pace. People are being killed for being different... okay that last one happens anyway, but still. Here's a question to ponder: are Hades, Persephone, and Demeter lucky that they've been rendered mortal(ish)?

I'm honestly surprised that no one picked up on how impossible it was for Leo to come back! I would have thought ya'll would've picked up on that sooner!
Which leads to Piper. Our favorite Gayegogi has become something of a stray on the farm, interacting with hardly anyone after Hades broke the news. She refuses to join the others in the house an is antisocial. We'll be exploring her more.

Next chapter is Percy, and we have one more roadtrip to undertake...

And I'm really digging that you cool cats are generating so many theories down in the comments *evil grin* I will say this, Brian is 100% human. His motivations are even human, albeit terrible. You'll find out soon enough :) 

News on Bonds: As previously mentioned, Sally Jackson is a main character. What hasn't been mentioned is May Castellan will play an important role as well! She won't be a POV character (ATM), but she will play a critical role. Hyperion and Krios will also be involved in the story, because I need at least one titan per fic; it's in my contract.

News on an unnamed fic:
Tentative summary:
Hazel was quite shocked to receive a letter stating that her mother's estate was waiting for her to claim it, as she swore they had sold everything they couldn't take to Alaska. But there on the paper, written clear as day in red ink, was her old address, a short list of her mother's supplies, and a bank account that had aged exceedingly well, and all she had to do was go to New Orleans and meet with one B. Saturday Esq. and sign a few papers.

But Nico is suspicious and Percy is... hungry for gumbo...

Surely, Nico is just being paranoid.

Right?
Percy

Chapter Summary

Warnings: mentions of previous deaths

Tonight:

Percy wakes up early, Piper is doing better than expected, Things are confirmed, and one last roadtrip.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Percy regrettably sat upright in his and Nico’s bed and looked at the small digital clock on their nightstand. In the dark of the night the glowing red ‘5:00’ sent a shiver down his spine not unlike those he got when he thought of his time in Tartarus, though a part of him argued this was probably worse. Five in the morning was possibly the worst time to be abruptly awoke. It was too late to go back to sleep, but early enough that he would be dragging his ass all day. This was especially bad considering he and Nico had volunteered to carry in bags of potting soil, mulch, and woodchips for Persephone, and they only weighed like fifty pounds each.

“Today is going to suck,” he groaned to himself, covering his face with his hands. He took a deep breath before removing his hands and looking down at the sleeping son of Hades, who had his slender, pale arms wrapped around his waist. That was enough to improve his mood, be it ever so slightly.

Nico had had a rough night; tossing and turning while calling out the names of the dead. It always pained him to watch his younger boyfriend hurt, but he couldn’t protect him from his dreams, only offering him support and comfort when he inevitably woke up.

And Nico would do the same for him.

For despite killing the monster who murdered his family, there was still a lot of pain to process. He didn’t regret dehydrating his former stepfather, he actually felt better knowing that the man would never be allowed to hurt another person. But immediately after his death, he had been barraged with news of the Underworld going bottom’s up, Revelation Day, and a gravely injured son of Hades.

I thought I lost him. I thought I was going to be left alone again. A tear welled up in his eyes, but he quickly wiped them away with his arm. All because I let my anger get the better of me. But that won’t happen again. I’m not leaving his side.

Percy sat there for a time, just watching the younger boy sleep, his no-longer-quite-so-pale chest rising and falling with a steady rhythm, perfectly in sync with the laughably cute snores of Nico’s. His mind raced between thoughts of college, when his next shift was, ways to sneak a nap in the afternoon, of Nico, and of course Annabeth.

The blonde was never far from his heart and thoughts, as he mourned her loss every day. But just when he was getting a grip on it, Piper had appeared out of nowhere on the back of Mrs. O’Leary
and delivered yet another blow to his psyche. She had written about her time in the Underworld, how a member of Avalon had stolen her tongue and charm speak to force the souls to bathe in the Lethe, of the soul devouring monsters that had emerged from Tartarus, and of Leo. And while the daughter of Aphrodite never specifically mentioned Annabeth, he could read between the lines. He also knew his wise girl, he knew her better than he knew himself, and if she had been still around she would have been there with Leo, trying to figure out a plan that didn’t involve Hades to escape.

Percy shook his head to clear his thoughts. *Fuck, I’m going to lose my mind if I continue down that path. I just have to remember to keep her alive in my heart and hold Nico close. I’m not going to lose him.* He bent down and kissed the sleeping boy, and smiled when he saw Nico’s lips twitch up in his sleep. *I was blessed twice, and I know this is my last blessing.*

With that, the son of Poseidon carefully freed himself of the son of Hades’ grip and climbed out of bed. He bent over and placed his right hand under his right foot and pulled up, stretching out the tight and sore muscles in his leg. Then he stood back up and as fast as he could, tapped each of his fingertips against his thumbs. These were some of the simple stretches and exercises he did every day to help with the lasting damage George had inflicted on him.

“Must be gonna rain today,” Percy whispered to himself. “The leg feels extra stiff this morning.”

After he finished stretching, he slipped back into a pair of red gym short and a plain, black T-shirt he had worn the day before that didn’t smell too bad. He neglected putting on socks though, as the Illinois summer was a completely different beast than the summer he was accustomed too. *I don’t think I’ve worn socks outside of work or helping Persephone since I graduated. Is this adulting? Probably not since Nico made me buy Odor Eaters...*

Fully(ish) dressed he quietly crept out of their room, down the hall, and into the kitchen. Unlike the rest of the house which was slowly changing to reflect its occupants, the kitchen had seen little change. A compost bin and a Keurig were the big changes, but the rest of the room was the same, right down to the *Garfield* clock ticking away on the wall. The only other change was a small dent on the kitchen table’s surface from when George’s psycho of a daughter slammed his head against the it; chipping a tooth in the process.

“Little... gods... bitch...” Percy grumbled incoherently as he removed two cereal bowls from the cabinets and set them on the counter. “Hope she gets knocked up...” he then grabbed the gallon of skim milk from the frige (*because Persephone and Demeter dictate what milk we can buy!*) and the family size box of *Fruit Loops* from the cupboard, and made two bowls of cereal. After wiping up the little bit of water-claiming-to-be-milk, Percy slipped on his shoes, grabbed the two bowls, and walked outside.

*It’s like taking care of a cat...*

“Piper,” Percy hissed at the bottom of the ancient wooden ladder that led to Piper’s loft. “Piper! I know you’re awake! I can see your light on!” he shifted the bowls around in his hands, his grip getting looser. “I brought breakfast!”

Piper McLean was an unexpected addition to the new House of Hades, seemingly a gift to Jason from the strangely kind leader of Avalon, Merlin. The girl, who Percy had written off as dead months ago after the first reports of her missing emerged, was a sight for sore eyes; another person
who he could relate with. But this wasn’t the Piper he had met on the Argo II, nor was it the Piper that used her charm speak to lull Gaea asleep. This Piper had clearly undergone some kind of trauma in the months she had disappeared, besides the obvious physical trauma of having her tongue and vocal cords removed (Never watching The Little Mermaid again…), something had turned the girl into a badass woman.

And somewhere along the way, she had learned the truth about Olympus. Possibly even before them.

There was some rustling followed by the sound of footsteps in the loft above, and a moment later Piper’s head poked over the ledge. Her face was red and covered in sweat, her hair disheveled, and a doubtful look on her face. Granted, there was a legitimate reason for her doubt, as he and Nico had tried to get her to talk before under false pretenses.

“No tricks,” he quickly said, holding up the twin bowls of fruity goodness. “Just wanted to hang.”

Piper’s head pulled back from sight.

Well, there goes that idea. Guess I’ll just give this to Leo-

Percy’s heart nearly burst from his chest as the daughter of Aphrodite jumped down and landed next to him. In that same instant he jumped back and flung one bowl of cereal onto his chest. “G-gods!” he yelped. “Don’t freaking do that!”

Piper ignored his panicked cries and took the somewhat still full bowl of cereal from his hand. She took hold of the plastic spoon and moved the bowl next to her mouth, before shoveling in a large spoonful of the multicolored rings.

Watching Piper eat was a strange spectacle to Percy, as he had never really given much thought to his tongue before. As at first there was really no difference in how Piper ate compared to, say Nico, just chewing her food like anyone else. However, without her tongue, the daughter of Aphrodite struggled to swallow. She would tilt her head back and let gravity assist in her efforts to swallow, or sometimes she would have to use her fingers to push it down. Percy knew that the others pitied the girl, but he was too grossed out and intrigued to feel anything else.

With incredible speed, Piper finished the sole bowl of cereal and handed him back the bowl. Apparently, he didn’t take it fast enough as she then shoved the bowl back into his hands and grabbed ahold of the ancient wooden ladder.

“Wait!” he cried, his outburst making her turn to look at him. “I was serious, I want to hang out.”

Piper narrowed her eyes, as if examining him for any signs that he was lying. After a moment of intense scrutiny that only rivaled Hades, the mute daughter of love shrugged and began to climb up the ladder.

Percy waited until Piper had pulled herself up and over the hay covered ledge, before setting the two bowls down on the ground (remember to not forget them, Nico will kill me otherwise) and following up after her. A mixture of unease and curiosity rolled over him as he climbed the ladder. Unease because if his hands decided to let go on their own accord it would be a pretty long way to fall. Curiosity, because no one had ever seen what Piper’s living situation was; the girl refused nearly everything that they had offered her, except for some food. Okay, if she’s living in a pile of hay, I am dragging her in the house. She can hate me all she- What the fuck!!

The second his head had peaked over the edge, his worst-case scenarios had been completely blown away. While there was some hay, it had all been piled at the ledge as a kind of camouflage to conceal the dramatic transformation the loft had undergone. The wood plank walls, which should have let a the wind and rain through were covered with blankets, creating a more closed in feel. A giant piece of red shag carpet covered the floor; starting just after the decoy hay. A king-sized air mattress
occupied the center of the hayloft, covered in a mixture of sheet, comforters, and throw pillows. Night stands stood on each side of the bed, each covered in various books and a single red lava lamp. Hanging on the wall directly in front of the bed was what had to have been the largest flatscreen TV Percy had ever seen, with the latest game consoles and games sitting on a black stand under it, along with a few multicolored beanbag chairs. Tucked away in a corner, was a small writing desk, that was also covered in books, but also pieces of crumpled paper and a small lamp perched on top.

Piper’s barn room, was better than his and Nico’s room.

“What the shit, Piper?!” Percy cried, rushing over to the piles of videogames. *Call of Duty, Metal Gear Solid V, Pokémon, Mass Effect!* “Where did you get all of this?! How did you get all this?!” He briefly wondered how she had access to the internet, but then he remembered that Jason had bought a really powerful router so that he wouldn’t lag in raids.

Piper flopped down on her air mattress and grabbed a plushie of *Clifford The Big Red Dog*, before looking at him. With one hand she pointed to a pile of boxes he hadn’t noticed before. Each of the boxes had a logo depicting a giant apple with the Empire State Building in its center, the logo of Big Apple Island. The public face of Avalon had replaced the Amazons as the world leader in the online marketplace.

“Okay, so that’s the where, but still not the how,” he murmured aloud. *Weird gifts from Merlin? No, how would he know she needed them?*

Piper rolled her eyes and reached over to the nearest nightstand and grabbed a piece of paper and a pen. She then set aside the plushie, set the piece of paper on her knees, quickly scribbled something down, before holding it up for him to see. “Bought it with inheritance,” was written on the paper in big loopy handwriting.

*And now I feel like an asshole…* Sometimes he forgot that Piper’s dad had been a bigshot actor, which meant that she actually had an inheritance. He imagined that he had one too, but given the circumstances of his family’s death, the fact that he had been a suspect, and he disappeared for months, meant it had been taken by the state, leaving him with only memories. “Oh,” he said, scratching the back of his neck, “sorry.”

An insufferable silence followed his apology, something that had never happened before. Piper had probably been the only one of the seven, besides Annabeth, that he could relate with. Both of them had been clueless on their heritage, both had single parents that loved them but were far too busy, and they both had a grasp on pop culture and the mortal world. Leo had even joked once that they were the genderbent versions of one another.

“Soaaaa,” Percy drawled, trying to end the silence. “What do you do out here all day?”

Piper returned the paper to her knee and scribbled down an answer. “Workout while watching Netflix, research, and some games before bed.”

One-and-a-half of those answers fit with the Piper Percy knew, but working out and research was something he’d expect from Reyna and Annabeth. He couldn’t doubt her claims though, as the scattered, open books were one thing, plus the daughter of Aphrodite’s arms were definitely toner than when she had first arrived. “What are you researching? School’s out,” Percy added with a forced laugh.

Once again, Piper eyes him critically, looking for any sign of dishonesty. It felt like her kaleidoscope eyes were staring directly into his soul, and he swore that the black feather in her hair flashed electric blue, before she closed her eyes and nodded. Piper climbed off her air mattress and walked over to
her desk, waving for him to follow.

The books that covered Piper’s desk were all on the various mythologies of the world, many with pages dogeared or open to various creatures. Scattered around the books, and pinned to the blanket covered walls were what at first appeared to be Rorschach tests, but upon closer inspection Percy realized that they were the monsters Piper had warned them about. They were all bulbous, black, amoebic creatures, with various limbs and features seemingly growing from them at random. Some had tentacles, other batwings, and even one had a human face pressing against the creature’s chest screaming in agony. The strange thing was, they were familiar to him, but he couldn’t place from where.

*I really wish she was a terrible artist,* Percy gulped.

A piece of paper was shoved in his face with the words ‘they’re coming’ written in big bold letters and underlined multiple times.

Percy pushed the piece of paper aside, and continued to stare at Piper’s drawings. “But what are they though?” he asked, continuing to rack his brain trying to figure out where he had seen them before. *It was recent too, which is really weird…*


When Percy read the last sentence, realization hit him like a dolphin’s tail to the face. Of course, he had seen those monsters before, they were part of his defensive strategies in his games against Nico! “They’re shoggoths,” he stated plainly, examining the pictures closer. His cards and figures lacked the some of the details of what Piper had seen, but Mythomagic tended to vary from reality. “You wouldn’t find them in a mythology book ‘cause they’ve only been around for like a hundred years.”

“How?” Piper mouthed, confusion written on her features, and once again he swore he saw her feather pulse.

“I use them in my Mythomagic deck.” Piper arched one eyebrow, a small smile on her face; the first he had seen since her arrival. “Nico released my inner nerd, ‘kay?” he huffed. “Anyway, a long time ago, this guy named Lovecraft wrote a bunch of short stories about alien gods and their followers just utterly destroying people in increasingly messed up ways. You’ve probably heard of Cthulhu?” Piper nodded. “Yeah, he’s part of that.”

Piper picked up her pencil and paper and wrote, “doesn’t sound right. Old and powerful. These sound too new.”

Percy shrugged. “I mean, it’s just a theory, but it could be worth looking into.” He returned the creepy sketch to its place on the desk and stepped away. “Either way, it’s not like they can get up here, not without one of these,” he said, holding his protective bracelet up. “And if they do, they’re Avalon’s problem.” He walked to the front of Piper’s bed and collapsed on one of the beanbags. “Now, I see you have *Black Ops II* and two controllers. I also said I came out to hang. So, let’s do that before I have to break my back carrying dirt and shit.” He patted the neon green beanbag next to him. “Please?”

Piper looked at him and the paper’s on her desk, chewing on her lip in thought.

“I can give you a ride to LaMoille’s library later to see if they’ve got any Lovecraft books?” he offered, still patting the seat next to him.
Piper sighed and joined him, grabbing two Xbox controllers from the little stand along the way. She tossed him one, which he barely caught, before taking her seat.

It felt great to hang out with someone that wasn’t Nico or Jason, a nice refreshing change of pace. Not that he was tired of the other two, but to be around someone who appreciated the fine art of blowing a terrorist up with a bazooka was something he sorely missed.

The conversations were pretty one-sided, with Piper occasionally pausing the game to scribble down a question, such as how he and Nico got together and how this weird Brady Bunch parody came to be. He of course answered all her questions, even if she refused to answer his questions with anything other than silence, a punch, or a middle finger, and he supposed it felt good to explain everything to an outsider that wasn’t a blonde.

Percy was sad to learn that he now thoroughly sucked at first-person shooters; his hands not reacting nearly as fast as they used to, or his index fingers pulling either trigger on random. Piper was far better, practically carrying his ass through every game, but she wasn’t the warrior goddess he remembered her being. She was clearly distracted by thoughts of Leo, the shoggoths, and who knows what else, glancing back at her desk every few minutes.

The war is over. We lost. Move on, he thought bitterly, as a sniper killed his avatar for the fifth time in two minutes. The world belongs to the normal people now, just as I thought before I learned I was a half-blood. There are no more monsters, no more quests, and soon there will be no more gods. His avatar respawned, only to be promptly exploded by a frag grenade. Fuck! I feel like shit lying to Nico about someday taking out Avalon, but it makes him feel better. I mean, what else can I tell him? We’ll just keep training together and someday reality will sink in. He respawned again, only for Piper’s avatar to whip a throwing knife into his forehead. “Serious?!! What the fuck?!”

Piper silently giggled.

As he predicted, Percy was thoroughly exhausted by the time he took his first break. Hanging with Piper for a few hours had been a mistake, as by the time he left, his body had relaxed to the point that he could’ve easily gone back to bed. It also didn’t help that he challenged Nico to see who could carry the most bags before noon, an idea he regretted after bag twenty. Bag three if he was being honest.

“I’m going to go grab a coke from the house, you guys want anything?” Percy panted as he opened the greenhouse door. Working in a greenhouse, in the summer, in Illinois, is torture.

Nico looked up from his laptop and smiled. “Yeah, grab me one too, please.”

“I’m fine Percy,” Persephone grunted as she dragged one of the bags of potting soil to her work station. “Unless we have something to return my divinity, because this weak body sucks…”
“I’ll, uh, I’ll take a look,” Percy said before stepping out the door.

No matter how many times he experienced it, he was never ready for the wall of humidity and heat that hit him every time he stepped outside. True, he could manipulate the water in the air around him, but after a while it became tedious and in truth it only solved half the problem. Demeter and Persephone had also promised them that the humidity would lessen once the surrounding fields were harvested, but sadly that was still months away.

“Not much of a reassurance considering summer just began,” he grumbled as he opened the kitchen door. “Oh, hey.”

Sitting at the kitchen table, clutching a glass of pink lemonade, and looking as exhausted as he felt, was Jason. Percy felt that the son of Jupiter had it worse than him, as besides the physical labor, Demeter was cramming his brain full of a millennia’s worth of farming information. How to check for crop diseases, if the plants were properly hydrated, their expected growth rates, how to repair and maintain the various farm equipment, and a thousand other little things that were required to run a farm that he had never considered.

And the weird thing was, Jason enjoyed it.

“Hey,” Jason responded. “You taking a break too?”

Percy went to the fridge and pulled out two cans of coke before sitting down at the table across from the blond. “Yeah,” he answered, cracking the can open. “Being in that greenhouse just zaps the life out of you,” he said before chugging down half of the can, and then releasing a mighty belch.

“Dude, that was nasty,” Jason chuckled. The younger, but somehow taller boy took a sip from his lemonade and let out a content sigh. “It also doesn’t help that you were with Piper in the early hours of the morning.” Percy thought that Jason was getting ready to accuse him of something, but instead the blond said, “is… is she doing okay?”

A part of Percy wanted to snap at him, that by the way Jason had ignored her that he didn’t have the right to ask that anymore. But after avenging his family and realizing that everyone at the farm was his new family, most of his excess anger left. “I don’t know, why don’t you ask her?” he asked, with the same type of interest one would have about the weather. “She is out there you know.”

Jason stared into his glass, sloshing the sweet, pink drink around. They had tried everything to get Jason to talk to Piper, either for a chance to repair the relationship or give it closure, but the blond would either clam up or find some reason to leave, often infuriating Nico. It just seemed to everyone but Jason, that he still had some feelings for the woman, given the fact of the numerous works of art he made that were currently hidden beneath his bed.

In Percy’s opinion, it would all come together in a matter of time.

“If it helps, Nico and I could accompany you,” he offered, sliding back into his chair. “He and I could play Xbox-“

“What Xbox?”

“Not important!” Percy snapped back. “What is important is that-“

“She’s taking Persephone’s car,” Jason blurted, jumping up from his seat.

“Exactly! Wait? What? Wait?” he sputtered as the son of Jupiter flew past him and out the door. Percy spun around in his chair, and sure enough Piper was closing the driver’s side door of
Persephone’s black, convertible; a Jaguar XK. “Oh, shit!” Percy cried, jumping out of his chair.

“Keep it down out there!” he heard Hades cry before he sprinted out of the kitchen door.

Persephone was generally a nice person to hang around, as long as she wasn’t competing for Nico’s attention. She didn’t care what they said, or how they acted for the most part, and in Percy’s opinion had excellent taste in television. The former goddess could be a little bit extra though, something she carried over in her transition to a mortal, and her car was definitely part of that. When she had first brought the black beauty home, he had practically drooled over it, but one quick look from both Hades and her old him that if he touched it he would be castrated. Thankfully, it was easy to overcome the temptation to take it out for a joyride by the simple fact that it was a manual transmission.

“When did she learn how to drive a stick?!” Percy bellowed as he hit the ground running. Piper was nearing the end of the drive, and he was positive that if they didn’t get to her before she reached blacktop they might not see her again. He could see that Jason was closing in on her, but if Piper put up a fight there was a good chance that they could wreck the car and both get injured.

He pulled as much water out of the surrounding air as possible to and pushed it down into the lawn between him and the road. He knew he would probably get a lecture from Hades, Persephone and Nico for what he was about to do, and the damage it would cause, but he had several reasons that made it worth it.

One, it would stop Piper from running away to who knows where.

Two, it was the only way he was going to catch a car with his bad leg.

Three, it was going to look awesome.

*If it doesn’t kill me!*

The second both of his feet touched the over-saturated lawn, some of the water shot up and wrapped around his work boots, securing him firmly to the earth, while simultaneously propelling him down the path he made at Ludacris speeds. In Percy’s mind though, it was like standing up on the world’s fastest *Slip-n-slide.*

*Oh, I am so making Nico and Jason do this later!* He thought, as at the last second the water pushed him up, launching him into the passenger’s seat. While it was a fun way to travel, the landing was a bit painful, stunning him for a moment. A second later Jason touched down in the backseat, ready to assist in stopping Piper.

“Piper, could you please pull over?” Percy gently asked, ready to grab the wheel if needed.

“Please?”

But like most things in his life, it wasn’t going to be easy. Piper ignored him and turned on to the main road, shifting into a higher gear and pushing further down on the accelerator to make the Jaguar purr like the cat it was named after.

*Well that went exactly as expected.* He turned to Jason and shouted over the roar of the wind and engine, “You grab her and fly to safety! Then I’ll jump in the driver’s seat bring it to a stop!” The son of Poseidon then carefully stood up, keeping on foot on the floor and the other on the leather seat, while grabbing the dashboard with one hand. *This is going to suck…*

Jason nodded, but looked apprehensive at the prospect of touching the daughter of Aphrodite. But
after a moment and a deep breath, the son of Jupiter reached down to wrap his arms under the potential runaway’s shoulders-

Only for the strange, black feather in Piper’s hair to shoot out bolts of blue lightning into both him and Jason, while seemingly leaving the car and Piper alone. Before he passed out, Percy felt some slight vindication that he had seen the feather glow.

Percy hadn’t realized how spoiled he had become by waking up normally, as opposed to waking up after getting knocked out by monster, explosion, or explosive monster. No, he had gotten use to waking up in bed with Nico, smelling of B.O, with his only aches being from his hands and leg or his hips and back if he and Nico got carried away the night before. So, waking up in a car, with a massive migraine, feeling like a giant had punched him in the chest, and with the scent of burnt bacon in the air was a bit foreign to him once more.

“I feel like I’m twelve again,” he groaned, sitting forwards and opening his eyes. “And look, I have no idea where I am,” he sighed.

They were parked in front of a Casey’s gas station, which all looked alike, but the surrounding area was more urbanized than anything near the farm. Piper was absent, but he figured that she was in the shop. A quick glance behind him showed that Jason was still in the back and still unconscious. Do I file that as good or bad? He continued to look around from his seat, stretching out as he did so. The city that they were in wasn’t Chicago or any of the other Chicagoland cities, as it lacked the distinct feel and lack of large structures. To the east he could feel a large river, but that hardly narrowed it down. It wasn’t until he looked at the license plates of the other parked vehicles that he realized that they were pretty far from home.

“Iowa!” Percy cried. “How long have I been out?” He reached over to the steering console and fumbled with the keys before flicking them to the ‘on’ position. The center console came alive, and ‘1:49’ was displayed in a haunting, green digital font. We’ve been unconscious for almost two hours?! The son of Poseidon spun around and proceeded to rapidly poke and prod Jason. “Jason! Jason! Jay! Get up!”

The blond began to stir, groaning from probably the same headache and pain he had. “W-What happened?” Jason asked, sitting up, pressing one hand to his forehead.

“Piper shot us with lightning and now we are in Iowa,” he answered. “And that’s really all I know. Are you okay?”

Without removing his hand, Jason nodded. “Yeah. Just thinking how much getting knocked out sucks. There for a while I thought I was getting used to it,” the blond said with a forced chuckle. “Where’s Piper?”

As if on cue, Piper emerged from the gas station carrying a fountain drink in one hand and a bulging plastic bag in the other. She gave a quick thumbs-up to someone in the store before opening the convertible’s door and tossing the bag on Percy’s lap. A quick peek inside revealed it was full of various sodas, candies, and snacks that piqued the son of Poseidon’s interest. Then without so much as a glance to either him or Jason, the daughter of Aphrodite started the car, threw it in reverse, and exited the lot.
“Woah! Wait!” he cried. “Piper, where are we going? I don’t know about you, but I was quite content on the farm!”

“You could let us out,” Jason said timidly from the backseat.

Percy glared at the blond through the rearview mirror. “We’re not letting her go, Jason. Like us, she’s got no one else.”

Piper rolled her eyes, while digging one hand into the back pocket of her frayed jeans. A few seconds later, and almost swerving off the road, the daughter of Aphrodite removed a folded-up piece of paper and slapped it against Percy’s chest.

He furrowed his brow as he attempted to unfold the warm piece of paper; accidentally tearing it a few times in the process. Once unfolded, and once he deciphered Piper’s rushed handwriting, Percy realized that it had directions to some place called Unionville. “Hey Jason!” He cried over the wind. “Does Unionville ring any bells?”

The son of Jupiter closed his eyes in deep thought before replying, “No, why?”

“Well I guess that’s where we’re heading!” he shouted back. *Persephone is going to fucking kill me… Right after Nico…*
Did they force her to listen to it on an endless loop? Or does it remind her of how she wasn’t there to see her relationship with Jason crumble?

Percy looked in the rearview mirror to see what Jason was going to do, but once again was disappointed. The son of Jupiter looked torn over how to respond; biting his lip and glancing between Piper and the surrounding cornfields. For a brief moment it looked like Jason was going to say something, when he leaned slightly forward, but in the end, he kept his mouth shut.

Jesus, Jason…

So, they rode in silence, and the one-time Percy tried to turn the radio back on Piper slapped his hand away.

Worst road trip ever…

After six packs of Gushers, a Hershey’s bar, three cokes, and another hour-and-a-half of driving, Piper pulled into the gravel drive of a little farm outside of Unionville. Unlike their farm, Werld Farmstead, as the small sign adorned with horses at the end of the drive called it, was rather picturesque.

A small, white, two-story farmhouse sat onto a small hill at the end of the drive. The house had pristine, black shutters around every window; a sharp contrast to the clean white siding. A porch wrapped around the house, with a swing and rocking chairs situated near the main entrance, where the family probably sat on warm summer evenings. A border collie with a coat of brown and white sat lazily on the porch, barely lifted its head when Piper shut the car off.

The lawn surrounding the house was immaculate, not one single strand of grass was out of place. There were a few small patches of flowers planted here-and-there that would have made Persephone proud. A small orchard consisting of six trees sat a bit away from the house, with a cattle tank and a lawn chair perched beneath the mighty branches. The setup almost looked like a pool to him, but who would swim in a cattle tank?

The rest of the property was spotted with barns and animal pens, that put their own to shame. A red stable that appeared to have never known hardship was the closest to the car, and he could see several giant draft horses walking around the fenced in area next to it. The other structures were all equally red and maintained as the rest of the property, and Percy had to wonder what kind of workforce it took to maintain everything.

Also, if I can get out and talk to those horses… Because as I learned the hard way, not all farms have horses. Damn stereotypes not living up to my expectations…

Before he could ask a single question, Piper opened her car door, and mouthed, “wait,” holding her hand out to help show her intentions. She then climbed out of the small convertible and jogged up the sidewalk, pulling out a folded piece of paper as she went.

“Hey, Jason,” Percy whispered when Piper stepped onto the porch. “Any of this ringing any bells? Like some extended family, family friend, or secret Hollywood hangout?” He watched as the dog lifted its head and looked at Piper with an almost sad look, to which the girl gently patted its head
before she rang the doorbell.

“Still nothing, Perce,” Jason answered, eyes not leaving Piper. “I think she’s never even been to Iowa before.”

Before Percy could respond, the screen door on the porch swung open, and a small blonde woman stepped out of the house. It was hard to make out any specifics about the woman, but if he had to guess, she was probably in her early thirties; a few years younger than his own mother. Her hair was tied up in a ponytail, similar to Annabeth’s, and she wore a postmaster’s uniform.

The mysterious woman asked Piper a question that went unheard by him and Jason, and Piper responded by baring her neck and tapping it with two fingers. The woman covered her mouth with her hands and was probably apologizing profusely, but Piper didn’t seem to mind, instead holding out the folded-up paper to blonde. The post office worker took the letter and began to unfold it.

“Jason?”

“Still as lost as you.”

The woman began to read Piper’s letter, and with each passing moment, her grip on the paper grew tighter and tighter, while her body began to shake. Piper stood there watching in silence, but her own body language changed as well, her fists clenching as she forced herself to stand straight. Then, without warning, the woman wrapped her arms around Piper as a painful wail escaped her throat, and the two collapsed onto the porch.

Jason was about to jump out of the car, but Percy quickly grabbed the son of Jupiter by the wrist. He now knew why they were here. “She’s fine Jason,” he said, just loud enough to hear. “She’s just informed a parent of the death of their child.” Percy could now say with certainty that Piper hadn’t been with Avalon for all this time, that there had been a time where she was on the run. On the run with another demigod. But who? Where did they go? What happened? They were all very important questions, but he knew that this wasn’t the right place, and certainly the wrong time to ask.

Jason nodded, but still stayed standing in the convertible; ready to jump or fly out at a moment’s notice.

Piper and the blonde were on their knees now, still clinging to each other as if their lives depended on it. The woman’s cries were carried on the wind to the car, and Percy had never felt like bigger intruder before. He and Jason didn’t belong there, this should’ve been a private affair. But he supposed that none of this would have happened if the daughter of Aphrodite would have asked for a car or at the very least a ride, rather than committing grand theft auto.

“I’m sorry, Piper,” he whispered to himself.

As the two women pulled one another to their feet, an idea formed in Percy’s head. “Jason, I need you to switch places with me. I need to stretch out my leg.”

“Why don’t you just get out and stretch it?” The son of Jupiter asked skeptically.

“Do you want to get out of the car?” Percy asked, turning to face the blond. “Even I think it wouldn’t be appropriate to stretch out while people are grieving. Plus, we have another three-hour ride ahead
of us, a couple minutes isn’t going to help me.”

Jason opened his mouth to protest, but only sighed in defeat. “Fine, but you owe me,” the blond grumbled as they climbed over the seats, careful as to not grind any dirt into the leather from their shoes. “Not going to lie, this thing may look cool, but it is way too small,” Jason said as he sat down.

“Agreed,” he said, as he stretched his leg out on the back seat. “And I thought the Prius was bad.”

Up on the porch, the blonde pulled Piper into a spine shatter hug and whispered something in her ear. And without another word, the daughter of Aphrodite stepped off the porch and slowly marched back to the car. Her face was red, her eyes puffy, and tears stained her face. Any casual observer could tell that she was barely keeping it together.

Neither of them said a word when she climbed back into the Jaguar, both of them taking up bird watching at that exact same moment as well. Piper started the car up and backed out of the drive, giving the dog and woman on the porch a small wave before they pulled back onto the main road.

But they only had rove about a mile or so from the farm when Piper pulled the car over and began to sob hysterically. Her whole body shook as the tears began anew. Her mouth opened to scream, but only a rush of air came out. She punched the steering wheel repeatedly, making the horn go crazy.

And it took all of Percy’s willpower to not lean forward and comfort her.

Jason, I know what happened to you is tragic, but you have to realize that Piper is not Disciplina. She is our friend, and once upon a time you loved her as much as I love Annabeth and Nico. You don’t need to go back to the way things were, that is impossible, but be a man and offer her some help.

Jason sat there at first and did nothing; probably wishing that he was anywhere else at the moment. But then, as if by Percy’s silent urging, his hand slowly moved over and took hold of Piper’s, giving it a gentle squeeze. That was apparently enough for Piper, who launched herself across the seat and buried her face in Jason’s neck. The blond looked panicked at the sudden embrace, and Percy thought that it was going to be another step backwards, but after a moment Jason returned it, gently patting the girl’s back with his free hand.

It’s a start, Percy thought with a smile, before leaning back in his seat and closing his eyes.

“We were worried sick!” Hades bellowed, pacing in front of him while Persephone and Nico watched with their own angry expressions. “Seven hours without a call?!”

I really should’ve hid in the barn with Jason and Piper…

“Where did you guys even go?” Nico snapped. Percy was pretty sure that if Hades and Persephone weren’t in the room Nico would have followed with a and-why-didn’t-you-take-me?

“Until we noticed the car was gone, we thought Avalon had taken you!” Persephone shouted, glass of red wine in hand. “I had to stop Nico from shadow traveling to your location in case it was a trap!”
Percy sighed. This was exactly the same way his mom, Paul, and Annabeth reacted whenever he got
torn away for some stupid one-shot quest by some god or goddess. “I’m sorry,” he apologized for the
umpteenth time. “We were trying to stop Piper from stealing your car, when she knocked us out with
a magic-lightning-feather. Next thing I know, we’re in Iowa.”

Hades stopped pacing and glared at him with Persephone and Nico, forming the much-dreaded
House of Hades glare that could make a Titan shudder. “A magic-lightning-feather,” the god-turned-
man repeated. For a brief moment, Percy thought that Hades would go into story of such a feather,
but instead he got, “As if that’s a thing!”

“Shhh… stop making so much noise,” he whispered, as he and Nico slowly crept through the barn.

“Says the guy who knocked a stack of paint cans down not thirty seconds ago,” Nico chuckled.

“They probably didn’t hear that…”

After a thorough lecture-slash-threat from the house of Hades, Percy pulled Nico aside and told him
the entire story, but mostly importantly that there had been a breakthrough with Jason and Piper. The
son of Hades had been thrilled when he heard the news and promised to reward him later.

In the bedroom.

With his mouth.

So yes, Percy was very happy. Oh yeah, and he was glad for Jason and Piper too. They were good
kids.

Now because there was nothing to do, and he wanted to prove that the two were on the right path
(and he wanted to show Nico Piper’s sweet loft), the two of them were sneaking through the barn to
spy on the former couple. The sneaking could’ve gone way better on his part, with him knocking
over the aforementioned paint cans, and he had never noticed how crunchy and loud the pieces of
hay and straw were that covered the floor. Nico had proposed just shadow traveling them to the loft,
but he had thought sneaking would be more fun.

And I was wrong about that… He cringed as the ground cracked beneath his feet.

When they got to the ladder, they stood in silence for a minute or so, trying to listen for any sounds
that would indicate the son of Jupiter and daughter of Aphrodite should be left alone. Hearing
nothing, Percy climbed up first, with Nico only a rung behind. After he stood himself up, he offered
his hand to Nico, and pulled his boyfriend up so he too wouldn’t get covered in the decoy-hay.

“That’s more like it,” Nico said with a soft smile, looking past Percy.

Because sitting next to each other on beanbag chairs, fast asleep was Jason and Piper. The son of
Jupiter was reclined back with his laptop clutched tightly in one hand, no doubt showing Piper his
World of Warcraft addiction, while the other was draped over the snoozing girl, her head resting on
Jason’s lap. For the first time in months, Jason looked content while he slept.
Percy knew that they would never be the old Jason and Piper ever again, but that wasn’t necessarily a bad thing. He wasn’t the same Percy and Nico wasn’t the same Nico anymore, but that didn’t make them lesser versions of themselves. They all had been broken and battered in ways they had never imagined possible in the previous months, but somehow, they had survived. And not just survived, but were finding new happiness.

He loved Nico, and he liked going to college and working together. He liked to think that his mom and Annabeth would be proud of him for changing his grades from Cs and Ds, to As and Bs with a little help from Nico.

He thought of how Hades, Persephone, and Demeter had lost their godhood, but were adapting to living as a mortal. Hades and Persephone were madly in love with one another, and Percy aspired to follow their example with his relationship with Nico. By losing their divinity they had gained a strong bond with their son, him, and Jason; something that he was positive wouldn’t have happened any other way.

So maybe Jason and Piper wouldn’t be a couple again, but then again, maybe they would be. At the moment though they were at least friends now, and in Percy’s mind that was just fine.

He wrapped an arm around his boyfriend, pulled him close, and kissed his forehead. “Let’s leave them alone,” he whispered. “We have our own sleepover to worry about,” he growled before nibbling on Nico’s ear.

Chapter End Notes

First off let me say this: if you want everyone to have a happy ending, then this was the last chapter for you. As after this, the terror picks up again.

I'm actually going to keep tonight's notes brief since I'm very tired, so expect more later, but there is one thing I want to discuss.

Lovecraft confirmed. Many of you in the comments have figured this out already, but it is now 100% official. The creatures are indeed shoggoths. The first direct reference to Lovecraft was in chapter 17, with Jason traveling to Kingsport, which was a town feature in a couple of the late author’s tales. Poseidon also makes a passing mention to a Lovecraftian entity, but that one exists outside of the typical Cthulhu realm, so the gods of Olympus would have no reference to them outside of the books.

Now, the other thing I wanted to talk about is my portrayal of the various Lovecraft beasts. I will keep to the original stories, but I'm scaling them up to match with the advances in humanity since the early 1900s. The various gods are supposed to be beyond human comprehension, such that if anyone gazed upon them they would go mad. Our understanding of the universe and fabric of reality has also changed dramatically so, expect them to be far more powerful than anything we’ve seen, if they should appear. They are walking devastation and unknowable, the only exception being Nyarlathotep, who is a dick. (and also NOT Brian)

So let's discuss the shoggoths a little bit. They were created as a slaves by the Elder Things, in a time long before humans. In the source material they are gelatinous and can
change shape to accomplish their tasks, similar to an octopus. Being an engineer, I started thinking what a slave race would need to be effective by alien standards today, and one word popped to mind.

Adaptability.
They would need to change their bodies to perform a wide variety of tasks, as well as adapt to any environment; be it the cold vacuum of space or the crushing depths of the sea. The easiest and quickest way to adapt would be to mimic the creatures that are already suited to the environment, which is why we see them in a variety of shapes. The shoggoths gain can do this my digesting what ever or tearing it apart and reassembling it, the former being the fastest method, and they gain the knowledge of anything they absorb. They can communicate what they have learned to each other is ways that are unknown to humans (the magical equivalent of pheromones).

More to be revealed as the story continues!

One last thing, do you think I should tag this with Lovecraft? or leave it a surprise?
George

Chapter Summary

Tonight: George and PB investigate a security breach.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Why didn’t we do something about Brian, dad?” PB asked him, as she gazed out at the passing Massachusetts coast.

George gripped the wheel tighter and sighed. He had known this conversation was coming, but it didn’t make it any easier. “It’s... complicated.”

“That’s what Artemis always said when she refused to answer our questions,” the blonde huffed, turning her body further away from him.

He cringed at being compared to the goddess he had personally delivered to oblivion. He wanted to be a good father, which in his book meant behaving nothing like Artemis. “Okay,” he sighed. “If it was up to me, I’d put a fucking bullet through the back of his skull and feed his skinny ass to the hogs.” He hit the blinker and turned the company issued car off the highway and onto a gravel road that looked as if it hadn’t been maintained since the colonial days. “I still might,” the single father growled through clenched teeth.

Brian, or son-of-a-bitch-number-one as George liked to think of him, had been given too much freedom and now they were all paying the price. Hundreds of thousands dead, billions in damages, and enough civil unrest in some countries that martial law was declared.

It was pretty much the worst parts of the Bible.

But what was worse was the fact that with that freedom, Brian had nearly total control of Avalon’s systems, which he designed himself, and could deactivate the signal generator network or unleash the captured Gs at any moment of his choosing. Couple that with the fact that every pair of eyes in the world looked at him as if he were a savior meant that there was little they could do directly.

Indirectly was another story.

Teams of engineers were working around the clock to get control of the quantum computer network out of Brian’s hands; a process that was agonizingly slow since most of them had only heard of a quantum computer in theory. It was even slower as everything had to be done in secret, as who the hell knew what the redhead would do if he found out what Merlin was trying to do.

“He killed my friends. My sisters,” PB growled.

That anger, that righteous fury, in her voice was enough to make his Titan heart skip a beat.

While they had escorted Merlin to the DG reservation, their new home in Vermont had been destroyed by one of the very Gs he had helped capture. The girls and their parents, both of the groups extremely well trained, had been killed with barely any effort by a former wind god. The
footage they had recovered from the security system had been hard to watch, even for a veteran like him. But as bad as it sounded, all he cared about was that his daughter had been safe at his side.

George reached over and squeezed his girl’s shoulder. “PB, you can be the one to pull the trigger when the time comes.”

Kingsport was without a doubt the creepiest place George had ever encountered. The seaside town built into a cliff wall, that was surrounded by a perpetual mist made every hair on his body stand on end just looking at it. The ancient wooden shacks covered with the bones of sea creatures and rocks adorned with strange carvings, but hardly a window, made him feel like he was being watched and that something was going to jump out at him at any moment.

The people were somehow even worse.

They citizens of Kingsport all had a distinct waddle to their walk, that bordered on being inhuman. He knew though that it was the result of working on fishing boats for most of their lives, but it still was strange. They all bundled up in heavy winter clothing no matter the time of the year, exposing very little of their gray, clammy skin. Their eyes were all black and set wide, giving them an almost fish like appearance. They spoke in a strange accent that made their words end in hisses and gurgles; that is, if you could get them to talk to an outsider at all.

George honestly thought that they were monsters.

But apparently, they were just inbred.

And he was very happy that he didn’t need to go to that forsaken place.

“So, what did this place used to be?” PB asked as they stepped out of the car. “Frankenstein’s Castle?”

“Up until March, it was a school,” he said, checking the weapon in his holster; a handgun with nine rounds and a signal generator attached to the side. He wasn’t expecting trouble, but he wasn’t a fool to not be prepared for it. “One of those stuffy private ones with a well-manicured lawn and kids wearing matching jackets.”

PB looked at him as if she was waiting to tell her he was joking.

It was an understandable reaction. The building before them, the remains of Pompeii Prep, looked as if it had been abandoned for decades, rather than months. The lawn was completely dead; the formerly green grass now brown and stiff. The track and field looked as if someone had deliberately dug hundreds of small holes, or it had been attacked by a herd of rapid gophers. The gymnasium, which would have been the pride of any division one university, had collapsed in on itself; looking more like a giant pile of gravel than a building. The neoclassical mansion where students both lived and attended classes had lost its east wing and had fallen victim to some kid with a can of yellow spray paint; a stylized letter ‘y’ being the most prominent symbol.

But most of that damage had been there, been there before him and his team captured G:D and followers, as the Mist had concealed it from all. Including those that had called the school home.

“Well, let’s go see what tripped the motion alarms,” George said, striding toward the ramshackle
George had seen some disturbing shit in his life; human sacrifices in Vietnam, enslaved children in a warehouse, and involuntary surgeries on humanish animals were among the top things that kept him up at night. But somewhere in a long list of horrors was his brief mission to *Pompeii Prep.*

It had started out simple enough, a nighttime search and capture, that had gone off without a hitch. His team had surrounded the campus and set up four large signal generators and transmitters, effectively neutralizing the G inside and destroying any DGs or monsters that had been inside. They then breached the main building and located the target G, Disciplina, Roman goddess of discipline.

And that’s when things deviated from the norm.

Unlike previous missions, Merlin ordered that they capture the G without using one of the control cylinders. It was a strange request that he vocally protested, citing the dangers it posed, but the old man said he had some questions for it. So, once they found the writhing goddess, they didn’t shove a cylinder down its throat, rather they strapped several signal generators to her body to keep her powerless (and in agony) during transport. His men then began to do a thorough sweep of the campus, searching for any other Gs that might have been there or intel that may prove valuable. It was then that they found the school was crumbling around them, and it was then that they found the girl.

The girl, Lisa, had been found in what could only be described as a dungeon straight from medieval times; stone walls, little lighting, chains on the walls, a rack, an iron maiden, and a large assortment of knives and daggers. She was strapped belly down on a stone slab, with five large strips of flesh removed that went from the base of her neck all the way down to her lower back. The missing flesh was easy enough to find, as it sat next to her, with the five pieces halfway through being braided together into so sick parody of a rope. And yet despite the pain she had to have been in, she was screaming for them to help someone named Allison.

George had quickly ordered half of his team to search for another girl, while the others helped get the girl stabilized. While they freed her from her restraints, he tried to distract her with a cheesy heroic spiel about they had come to slay the monsters and free those imprisoned like her. However, George had not been prepared for her to attack him; the redhead launching herself at him the second her hand was free. Her frantic blows felt like little more than taps with how weak she was and the heavy tactical armor he wore, but in her frantic screaming George pieced together her story.

This ‘Allison’ Lisa spoke of, was a monster. Not a bad person, but a genuine monster. The monster had apparently lured the girl into the dungeon and proceeded to torture her. And for some reason, Lisa was wanted her back. To George it spoke volumes of the kinds of depravity the Gs were capable of, if they were willing to brainwash a girl to want to be tortured.

The scuffle ended quickly, with his men pulling the poor girl off him with ease and binding her wrists together with zip ties. They did their best to bandage the redhead up, and carried her by force to their waiting extraction. It was only as he did one last sweep of the dungeon did he notice a pile of clothing at the front of the lab; the only remains of Allison.

From there, the girl’s story only got sadder. She was so distraught over the loss of the monster and goddess that they confined her to a mental ward so that she could get the help she need; all on
Avalon’s tab. Then, with a little detective work, they located Lisa’s family in Hoboken, only to be informed that they had disowned her for her sexual orientation. George hadn’t found his daughter yet, and to hear a man run down his own flesh and blood for something so idiotic… well that guy now knows what it’s like to be thrown out a first story window. With no friends and family, the poor kid was all alone in the world.

And George would bet money on who set off the motion alarms…

In the months since he was reunited with his daughter, George learned that there was many things that could be left unsaid when she accompanied him on missions. The blonde was light on her feet thanks to her decades with Artemis, so things like ‘watch your step’ and ‘be quiet’ were pointless. Hunting down monsters and the occasional human had her defenses up around the clock, so ‘stay on guard’ was a waste of breath. All-in-all, his daughter was the perfect partner for him.

And yet he still worried.

“You hear that?” she whispered behind him.

He paused for a moment to listen. Even with his new heart and all the senses it had enhanced, PB could still hear things a good five seconds before him. But this time, he heard it as well: someone walking around on a stone floor. “Yeah. I think I know from where too.”

The inside of the former prep school matched its exterior. The walls were covered with the strange yellow ‘y’ or had large holes in them as if someone had struck them with a sledgehammer. The plaster ceiling had begun to fall and coat everything in a thin layer of white dust that kicked up at the slightest disturbance. There were large chunks of the floor that had caved in, leading to a pitch-black abyss that had been the service tunnels beneath the school.

It was all unsettling, and he was starting to see movement in the shadows, but he knew better. That was just a side-effect of a lifetime of war. But he soldiered on like he always did: with one hand on the trigger.

Eventually, they reached the entrance to the dungeon he had found months ago, and sure enough the footsteps came from within. George turned and nodded at his daughter, and when she nodded back, he opened the large, wooden door. “Alright kid, let’s get you someplace- Jesus…”

George’s hunch had been correct, the intruder was the redhead he and his team had rescued months ago, but she had changed dramatically. The girl sat on the stone slab they had found her on, cross-legged, completely naked. Her hair, which had been short and vibrant, was now shoulder length and black with faded red at the ends. Her face was sunken and pale, so much so that it looked as if her cheek bones would puncture through the paper-thin flesh with the slightest movement. And carved all over her body was the same strange ‘y’ that covered the school.

“He told me you would come,” Lisa croaked, fixing her now yellow eyes on him. She hopped off the slab, and he could see that some of the symbols were freshly made, blood dripping down her thighs. “Said that all I had to do was show my devotion and I would be rewarded.”

And the kid’s off her rocker. Lovely… George pulled out his handgun and aimed it at the former redhead’s chest. “Come on kid, let’s settle down and I’ll take you to get some help.”
“We can take you home,” PB said, her eyes not leaving Lisa for a second. If there was one thing true in the world, it was that the blonde was just as protective of her father as he was of her. If the strange girl would make any sudden movement, she would use her decades of combat training to subdue or kill her.

“Home?” Lisa gurgled, blood leaking from the corners of her mouth. “This was my home! This is where my family lived! My adoptive mother and the love of my life lived here! And then you came and took them away!” she cried, dragging her fingernails down her face, leaving several nasty gashes in their wake. And then she giggled, which given the dark atmosphere was unsettling. “But that’s fine! It’s fine! He said I can get them back if I do one little thing for him.”

George didn’t know who this ‘he’ was she spoke of, but the man was obviously off his rocker. DG:JJ had scattered that goddess across the universe and whatever the hell Allison had been was trapped in whatever hell it came from for all eternity. “And just what would that be?” he asked, turning the safety off.

“A sacrifice to The King in Yellow,” the girl snarled as she lunged for the man.

She didn’t make it far though, as three shots rang out, and she was knocked back off her feet; three holes grouped together near the center of her chest. Her body began to convulse as she hit the cold, stone floor, and a gurgling sob emerging from her throat.

It was a bad way to go.

He and PB stood over the deranged girl, with PB removing her jacket and draping it over the teen to hide her nude form. In his mind, this girl’s death was just another to be added to the long list of tragedies that the Gs were responsible for. “Rest,” he whispered as he took Lisa’s hand in his own. His heart ached for her as she tried to speak, only to cough up blood. “I’m sorry it had to be this way. You, and so many others, deserved better.”

As they watched the girl’s final moments on earth, George couldn’t help but notices how the blood pooled beneath the Pompeii Prep student, spreading through the spaces between the stones in perfect unison. How the dark fluid rose in perfect-

“MOVE!” He shouted, grabbing his daughter by the shoulder and tossing her to the room’s entrance with all of his considerable might, as he jumped back.

That split-second decision saved both of their lives. As he tumbled backwards, black tentacles exploded out from beneath the near dead girl, some wrapping around her while others pulled the alien form out of the hole. In another instant, Lisa’s body was pulled into a gaping maw, that had seemingly appeared out of nowhere on the purple and black mass. And as he watched, he tried to make sense of what the damn thing was, but everything on the creature was in constant flux; the number of limbs and purple eyes, its size, its shape, and number of mouths changed with each passing moment. He didn’t know what it was, but he sure as hell knew it wasn’t Greek.

But despite its strange and grotesque appearance, George wasn’t worried. As while the signal now covered most of the earth’s surface, it could be blocked off by any number of things; metal or cement walls, being underground, or a strong enough magnetic field. There were still monsters in the world, it was just that they were trapped and that instead of exterminating them in secret, the public got to see a show.

So without so much as a twinge of his eye, George slightly pulled the trigger, activating the signal generator attached to the side of his gun. He could feel the slight magnetic field as the relays activated, the small, green LED flash on, and-
Nothing happened. The monster didn’t howl, didn’t collapse to the floor in agony, and it certainly didn’t dissolve into golden dust. Instead, around a dozen purple eyes spawned from its flesh and fixed their unblinking gaze on him.

*Oh, shit...* “RUN!” he cried, as he fired off two rounds into the cluster of eyes. Unlike the signal, the creature shrieked in agony as the projectiles popped the purple growth, momentarily stunning it. But as George ran, he noticed that the eyes had reformed, and in greater number.

“What is that thing?” PB yelled, as they knocked over a derelict cabinet as they ran.

“I was hoping you could tell me!” He shouted back, looking over his shoulder. *Fuck!*

The creature was right on their tail; only several yards behind them. It had sprouted more tentacles that it was using to heave itself forward, while its lower, bulbous body rolled over every obstacle the same way the treads do on a tank. From its many mouths it shrieked and roared with every inch of ground it covered.

And it shrieked even more when he fired another round into it.

“We need to get to the car!” the former soldier bellowed as they reached the staircase.

“No shit, dad!” PB cried, as she jumped over a section of the staircase that had collapsed with the grace and agility of a cat. As she bounded up the last of the stairs, she bent down and snatched up a chair leg. He really should have let her bring her bow or have gotten her a gun, but considering the creature’s resistance to damage it probably would have made little difference. “This is the last time I let you make a detour for work!”

“I’m going to be apologizing for this until the day I die, won’t it?” He grunted as they exited the stairwell and into a hall. They could still hear the creature’s strange screeching from the stairwell behind them, but the small space had at least slowed it down. *Thing like that is going to need hollow-points or birdshot to take it down. Need to do a lot of damage all at once.*

They ran as fast as their feet would carry them down a moonlit hall lined, with one side filled with windows and the other side displaying various pieces of art depicting the various women who had run the former prep school. Most of the busts and paintings all had the same name on the plaques beneath them, ‘Disciplina’, but with different faces and bodies. However, the goddess’ name soon gave way to other names, and as he ran, George noticed that the school’s name also changed; from *Pompeii Prep* to *Hall School*.

Before he could dwell on the name change, the floor at the other end of the hall exploded into a cloud of splinters and asbestos, and the strange creature pushed itself out of the hole.

“Double-back!” PB cried, spinning on her heel. “Or not!”

He didn’t need to ask why, as he saw it as he spun around: there was a creature still behind them.

*It’s a nest,* George thought grimly. But that was as far south as he would let his mind wander; he was a soldier and a father, he had to get them out of there. He fired a shot into the closest creature, blowing away a set of eyes and crippling a tentacle, while he scooped up the bust of a former headmistress and tossed it through the nearest window. Then, without another thought, the veteran jumped out the window.

He didn’t jump out of the window first because he wanted to save his own hide, but rather to insure his daughter could get away. As unlike in the movies, where the windows turned into raindrop-sized pieces the second something touched them, real windows tended to leave behind jagged chunks of
glass, creating yet another hazard to jump through. And as the Avalon security agent tumbled forward, he felt a shard tear at his forehead, one rip through his right forearm, another embed itself in his right calf, and dozens of other nicks and cuts form across his body. The pain didn’t register until he hit the ground, but when he saw PB had emerged with only a scratch on her cheek, it was worth it.

“Come on Dad!” the blonde cried as she helped him to his feet. PB wrapped his right arm around her shoulders and pulled his body close to take the weight off his leg. “You shoot, I’ll get us to the car!”

“Deal!”

Through some kind of miracle, the creatures had given up their pursuit after they had exited the building. But as his daughter all but dragged him across the unkept campus, they could still hear the strange, otherworldly cries of the abominations and the sounds of the interior of the building collapsing. He didn’t say it aloud, but he was sure that more of those creatures were working their way up from the basement and it was only a matter of time before they left to search for prey.

*And Kingsport is too close for comfort.*

“We’re almost there, dad,” PB grunted, his large frame beginning to take its toll on her stamina. The girl was in excellent shape, but anyone would get tired after carrying two-hundred-and-thirty pounds several hundred yards. “Do you need me to drive?”

George looked at her with his one eye that he could see out of, the other had too much blood flowing down it to keep it open, and gave a forced chuckle. “I would say you’re too young to drive, but that’s a load of BS on every level. Yeah, you need to drive us to Kingsport.”

PB shifted his body against her own. “Kingsport? Why?”

“They’ll have a working phone,” he grunted as put just a little too much weight on his leg. “And we have to warn them; it’s our job to protect people.”

“…I guess,” the blonde mumbled.

Honestly, he wanted to get the hell out of Dodge as much as she did, but the little company-issued KIA wouldn’t be able to take single blow from something the size of those creatures. If the creatures did decide to give chase, it was at least fifteen miles to anywhere else. The seaside village though was only a mile away, and had strong, sturdy structures that had survived hundreds of years of brutal storms. And the people were tough as well, if a little strange.

*And I’d bet my last dollar that they’ve got some illegal weaponry; Rednecks are the same—*

The ground beneath them began to rumble, knocking the both of the father and daughter off their feet. George rolled on top of his daughter and held her close as the very earth itself began to buckle and roll like the raging sea; the only reason they weren’t tossed away was because he gripped the ground and dug the foot he could still feel into it as well. His daughter’s mouth was open as if to scream, but the rapid shifting and groaning from every direction drowned out her cries. Then, like clockwork, black forms began to shoot from the earth in numbers that seemed impossible, blocking
out the light of the crescent moon.

_Jesus Christ_...

They were undoubtedly the same creatures they were fleeing from, but no two looked exactly alike. They were kept aloft with batwings, bird wings, insect wings, clouds, or some combination of the four. The forms shifted and changed faster than he could blink; the only constant being their dark coloring and the multitudes of purple and violet eyes that bathed the world in their eerie glow. And when the skies grew too crowded, some many began to land and change into an even wider assortment of shapes.

And that’s when George sprang into action.

He jumped to his feet and tossed PB over his shoulder; the adrenaline in his system overriding the pain old soldier felt. Their car had been destroyed in the upheaval, but he hardly thought that diving would have been a viable option now, as the multitudes of creatures probably would have targeted anything large, loud, and bright. But he didn’t need to run, just get out of sight until the things had passed.

_And they provided me with just that_...

He took off running towards the nearest hole the amorphous monsters had emerged from, just as one of the bat-winged creatures swooped down and let out an ear-piercing screech. As it neared them, the grizzled veteran aimed his weapon with his good arm at a large cluster of eye near the center of its body. It shrieked something that sounded like, “Tekeli-li!” but George shut it up with one shot, making it collapse to the ground as it was temporarily blinded by the loss of most of its eyes.

He briefly looked into the hole, and felt the minimalist amount of relief when he saw that it was angled as opposed a vertical shaft. He then jumped into the hole and shimmied the both of them down so that they were out of sight, while keeping an eye on the tunnel behind him, gun at the ready.

“I won’t let them hurt you,” He whispered in his only daughter’s ear.

George has lost a lot of blood and he knew it.

Tinges black were forming at the edge of his vision and his body felt increasingly heavier with each step. The Titan’s heart that beat in his chest, that restored him to his prime, mattered little when there was too little blood to circulate, yet he knew that it was the only reason he was still conscious.

And part of him wished that he wasn’t.

The landscape had been dramatically altered for as far as the eye could see from the emergence of the beasts. What had been coastal pastures and rolling hill of green grass had been transformed into a lunar landscape. Craters pockmarked the earth, forces the two of them to zig and zag their way across what had been a field. The green grasses were now all buried under dirt and rubble, making the land barren of life in all directions.

Well, life that wasn’t hostile.
The skies were still full of the black creatures, and more were coming by the minute. Some were still emerging from the earth, but some were also appearing from the East, where there was only open sea. They were thankfully leaving them alone, all of them migrating West, where the human population was significantly higher.

*Got to warn them.*

“We’re almost there,” PB grunted from beneath his arm. “We’re almost there.”

That made the old soldier crack the faintest hint of a smile: his PB’s determination. For despite their apocalyptic surroundings, there was still hope in the form of the dim lights coming from Kingsport. It didn’t matter if those poor villagers had been devoured by whatever those creatures were, for as long as there was power, there was a way for him to contact Avalon. And where there was light, there was sure to be shelter and materials they could use to patch him up.

“I know we are sweetheart,” he smiled softly, as the mist covered village began to take form. He couldn’t see much of the fishing village, but from what he could see it seemed to be completely intact. *Maybe the smell of decaying fish threw the things off? Or the mist and fog concealed it just enough?* There were a lot of unknowns that were bothering the old soldier, but he had to make do with what he had.

After a few more minutes of PB dragging him, mud and dirt gave way to cobblestone streets barely lit by century old street lamps. The smell of decaying fish was overpowering to the point that even the shallowest of breaths made him want to heave and his one good eye fluttered shut.

“It looks like there are people up ahead,” PB said, her pace picking up ever so slightly. “They must be gathering in the center of town.”

He forced his eye open and through the bleariness of stench induced tears, he had to agree with her assessment. Ahead of them what had to be the entire population of Kingsport were gathered around a large statue of a legged fish near the docks, many of them carry torches and flashlights. The crowd appeared to be swaying in rhythm and their calls almost sounded like chanting, but at the moment he couldn’t trust his senses.

“Help!” he heard his daughter cry as they approached the edge of the crowd. “My dad needs help!”

The crowd stopped their movements and went silent, moving aside for them as if he and PB were plague carriers. He could hear hissing coming from the crowd around them, but he paid it no mind. They were all probably scared out of their minds, and to have strangers appear out of nowhere after a monster attack was most likely setting off some alarms. But that reasoning didn’t stop the veteran from gripping his gun tighter.

*People do stupid shit when they’re afraid.*

“Bring him forward,” A cool feminine voice said over the crowd. “We can help.”

The rest of the crowd between them and the statue parted like the Red Sea, revealing two figures standing on the macabre statue’s base. The first was a young woman with long dark hair, clad in a skintight gray leathery one-piece. She had on a pair of thick framed glasses as well as a pair of gloves made of the same leather-like material as her clothing. The other girl-

“That’s impossible,” George gasped, adrenaline flooding his system and clearing his vision.

“Long time no see,” Lisa giggled, seated comfortably on the edge of the statue, one leg dangling off the side. To say the girl changed drastically in the few hours since they had met was an
understatement. Her hair had been replaced by a tangled mass of vibrant red tentacles, with one tucked behind her ear as if it was a loose strand of hair. Two sets of yellow eyes had grown on her temples with no symmetry; one set was staring at the other girl. Neither of the girls were wearing any clothing upon closer inspection, rather most of their flesh had been replaced with that of the creatures they had escaped from. Their toes and fingers had been replaced with black and purple talons that flashed menacingly in the torchlight. “I want you to meet my girlfriend, Allison.”

“Charmed, I’m sure,” the other girl hissed through razor sharp teeth. She bent down and wrapped one arm passively around the redhead, before a tentacle-like tongue darted out of her mouth and licked the side of Lisa’s face.

“I killed you,” George choked, as his daughter started to shuffle them back, but the crowd had surrounded them. “How are you here?”

“OOO! Storytime!” Lisa cried giddily, clapping her claws together like an excited toddler. “Well you see-“

Allison struck the other girl, leaving three vicious claw marks on her cheek. No blood leaked from the wounds and instead of red or pink flesh, the marks revealed black goo that almost instantly mended itself. “Quick version, my love.”

“Yeah, yeah,” the redhead pouted, rubbing her cheek. “Let’s see, broad stroke… Hmm… After you killed my family and had me locked away- BTW not cool –the fine people of Kingsport were the only ones to come and visit me,” she laughed, gesturing to the assembled masses. “And they told me of new gods, gods that could give me back my family, my lover, and revenge in exchange for one teeny, tiny thing,” she said holding the tips of her claws close together with a maniacal grin.

“A sacrifice,” he grunted, eye darting in every direction, searching for anyone that was trying to sneak up on them. But the people of Kingsport stood idly by in their thick clothing watching them with their dark eyes. “But I stopped that nonsense.”

“No ya didn’t,” Lisa laughed. “I was the sacrifice. I was the willing catalyst needed to free this world’s fragment. You were just the means.”

“And in these final hours we will celebrate,” Allison cooed, kissing Lisa gently on the forehead. “We celebrate my return from the hell Tartarus has become, our new masters, and the end.”

“And we will celebrate with a feast!” Lisa cried jumping to her clawed feet. “And they’ve-“

A single gunshot rang out, making the crowd take a single step back, and the two mutated girls gasp in shock.

And PB fell to the ground dead; a bullet hole on her right temple, and an expression of disbelief, horror, and betrayal on her lifeless face.

“I promised myself I wouldn’t lose her to any freaks like you,” George sighed, slumping to the ground next to his world, smoking gun in hand. “And I know a loss when I see one.” He stroked his daughter’s long blonde hair with his free hand. “I was in ‘nam, you know?” he chuckled. Then without a moment’s hesitation he stuffed the barrel of his gun in his mouth and-

*Click*

George’s eyes widened, and he pulled the trigger again.

*Click*
“Oh, thank the gods,” Lisa sighed from her perch. “I thought we were going to have to cancel the feast!”

*Click*

“Dig in everybody!” Allison cried.

*Click*

All around him, the villagers began to disrobe, revealing very non-human features. Their long scarves and thick-necked sweaters hid gills and mouths full of shark-like teeth. Underneath their gloves and mittens were webbed hands and flippers with thumbs. Their bodies were completely hairless and ranged from smooth like a dolphin, to partially covered in scales.

And as the first lunged for Avalon’s head of security, George continued to pull the trigger of the empty weapon.

Chapter End Notes

I’ll leave it to your imaginations how the inhuman inhabitants of Kingsport cooked up George. Or maybe they wanted sushi or a veteran tartar?

Some of you undoubtedly noticed that “what goes around, comes around” was the case with George, as the worst injuries he sustained were in the same places where he filleted Percy. The man was dedicated to the cause, to protecting people, and above all else his daughter, but it could be argued that he failed on every level. If he hadn’t been capturing gods and monsters, then Brian’s attack wouldn’t have been so severe. If he hadn’t started to take his daughter everywhere out of fear of losing her, he might not have needed to killed her. In some ways he was a hero, and in other a villain; it really depends on you interpretation of him. The common thing though is his life was one tragedy after another.

Okay, now before you all jump down my throat about the numerous Lovecraft references this chapter, let it be known: things will make sense eventually. We had a reference to another Lovecraftian god, a Great Old One, to be precise, the first appearance of the Deep Ones (Kingsport branch), and of course the Shoggoths. Typically, some of those things don’t get along with one another, but as said, it will make sense eventually.

And who doesn’t love good love story? Two girls, separated by a cruel fate, are finally reunited with the help of a little pixie dust! They might be the most romantic pairing i’ve ever written! And now, they can be together until the end of time and have all kinds of freaky tentacle fun.

Gross....

I will probably post more notes later...

Bonds Update:

Krios and Hyperion will appear as supporting characters and I think you'll like how I'm
handling them. Leo will be giving a personal guided tour of Camp Half Blood to a lucky individual! (Really, he pissed off Calypso and is using new camper #572 as a human shield). You'll get to see Paul and Sally have some one-on-one time without a demigod or infant in the room. Nico wearing a baby sling. And Estelle in sunglasses!
For the third consecutive day, Jason woke up feeling happy. A tightness in his chest that he hadn’t noticed before had considerably lessened. His dreams weren’t entirely nightmares of his past (though he did have a nightmare about being de-pantsed by Reyna in front of the senate). His body felt lighter, odd considering he had actually gained a few pounds since living on the farm. And he felt more energetic than he had been in quite some time.

And he knew why.

With him making peace with the past and realizing that Piper was really Piper, he could truly begin to move on. The survivors group that he went to with Chelsea felt like they were finally beginning to help, his relationship with Percy and Nico was a lot less strained, he was noticeably warmer to Persephone and Hades, and he didn’t seek out isolation as much. There were still issues, and he knew there would be for possibly the rest of his life.

One such issue was his relationship with Piper.

At the moment, they were just friends. They had talked at length about what he had experienced and Piper had understood and accepted where he was coming from. Piper then had written out for him her confusing confession about loving Leo as well as him. It was a bit much for both parties to handle, so they agreed to remain friends until they could sort themselves out.

And yet, the son of Jupiter’s heart ached every time he thought of their agreement.

Jason sat up in his bed and stretched his arms out over his head with a loud yawn. His shoulder popped and he let out a content sigh at the soothing feeling. And with that, he swung his legs off the side of the bed and thought of what was on the day’s agenda.

First things first, feed the animals. If Piper’s up I’ll introduce her to the Leo and the others, she should enjoy that. After that, Demeter wanted to show me how to balance the farm’s budget and how to account for bad weather. I might want to take an aspirin before that, sounds like a headache in the making. After lunch, I got to head to Amboy for football practice. I have to remember to take a few bottles of water just in case. Feed the animals again. And if I’m not dead by then, I’ll work on my sociology paper with Percy.

“When the hell did summer get so busy?” the blond groaned, itching the back of his head before standing up. He picked up a pair of jeans that weren’t completely disgusting and slid them on; almost tripping himself when his left foot got caught in a hole. Hopping from foot to foot, he pulled on a pair of socks that were clean. And finally, he grabbed his wallet and keys from his nightstand before
exiting his room.

And that’s when he noticed that something was off.

“That’s… weird…”

The door to Demeter’s room was wide open, as was Hades and Persephone’s; all three rooms vacant of their occupants. He wouldn’t have thought nothing of it if it had only been Demeter’s, as he was an early riser like himself, but Persephone was a notoriously heavy sleeper, only getting up when she wanted to or a forty-megaton nuclear explosion. Hades was a bit better, often getting up in the middle of the night to check on him, Percy, and Nico, but his uncle wasn’t one to get up at four thirty in the morning.

*Maybe they have to make a delivery this morning?* It was a likely theory, so he just quietly walked into the bathroom where he proceeded to perform his morning rituals. The son of Jupiter brushed his teeth vigorously with the electric toothbrush he had recently purchased for himself, squeezed his eyes shut as he gargled with *Listerine*, and quickly flossed between the teeth he could reach; he still couldn’t figure out how to reach his molars without gagging himself. He grabbed his stick of *Old Spice*, lifted his shirt, and applied a thick coating under each arm, as he found out that after football or chores, one layer certainly wasn’t enough. Feeling slightly refreshed, he left the bathroom, and floated down the staircase.

Only to find Percy and Nico’s door open as well.

That gave him pause. Usually his siblings of choice kept the door shut tighter than Fort Knox, after several unfortunate incidents of them being caught in the act. Jason himself had once walked in without knocking only to find Nico riding Percy on their bed, both panting and covered in sweat. He and Nico hadn’t been able to look each other in the eyes for days, while Percy never stopped grinning. However, it wasn’t until Hades caught them in the act did the door never forgot to be closed.

“Are you guys decent?” he half whispered as he slowly peeked around the doorframe. But once again, the room was empty. Stranger yet, the bed wasn’t made, something that Nico fussed about for reasons unknown. “Ooookay then…”

Jason closed the bedroom door shut and began to walk down the hall to the kitchen, only to notice something out of the corner of his eye as he passed the living room. “What the…”

Everyone, including Piper, was gathered in the living room, standing in front of the TV. Hades had his arm wrapped protectively around Persephone, while the former goddess held her hands over her mouth as she stared on in shock at the screen. Percy and Nico practically mirrored the older couple, with Percy holding Nico as they both glared at the screen; Nico’s fists clenched. Demeter looked pale and afraid, the elder goddess mouthing something he couldn’t make out. And Piper looked strangely indifferent; just standing off to the side glancing from the TV to the others.

“What’s going on?” Jason timidly asked, as he stepped into the room.

Demeter was the first to acknowledge him, the big woman walking over and moving him so he could see the screen. “Watch,” she said in a grave voice.

On the TV was what appeared to be some big-budget sci-fi movie that he liked to watch on the weekends with Nico, Percy, and occasionally Chelsea. Dozens of people were running down a city street that looked as if it had been bombed, while a mixture of police officers and soldiers fired their weapons in the direction the people were fleeing from. Pursuing them were strange, blob-like,
masses of black tentacles and eyes of all shape and sizes. Large ones rolled over abandoned vehicles
with ease, snatching up the slow with their elastic tentacles and tossing them in fang filled mouths,
while smaller ones swarmed the skies, swooping down and latching themselves onto the backs of
people and absorbing them like cell. If the monsters felt the fighter’s weapons, they certainly didn’t
show it; not so much as flinching when hot metal met flesh.

The scene abruptly changed to an aerial view of a bright and sunny coastline, and odd choice for a
sci-fi movie in his opinion. A countless number of monsters were pulling themselves out of the sea
onto the pristine white sands. These creatures were a bit different, sporting tails, fins, and a sleeker
form along with the same tentacles and purple eyes. Some leapt from the water into the air like
dolphins, only to instantly sprout wings and lose their aquatic features. Those that beached
themselves seemingly retracted their fins and flippers and sprouted more tentacles without even
breaking their stride. Then there was a flash of white light, and all it dark.

You know things are bad when a nuclear weapon is used. I wonder what this movie is called?

“Folks if you are now just joining us, the situation is dire,” a man’s voice said, before the black
transitioned to a white-haired anchorman in a news studio. “Overnight, more creatures of unknown
origin emerged from both beneath the earth and the depths of the sea in overwhelming numbers. The
signal-based weapon, while active, appears to have no effect on them—“

Jason felt like someone had punched him in the gut. This is real? What- what are those things?!

While he continued to process what he had just witnessed, the newsman continued. “In the last few
hours all communications have been lost with most countries that are not considered a global super-
power.” The image cut to a composite view of the earth taken from space. As he watched, a few
brief pinpoints of light began to appear along the coasts of China, Russia, Japan, the UK, South
Africa, and then France before the lights picked up in frequency and spread out across the globe; no
longer just confined to the coasts. “Multiple agencies are confirming multiple detonations of nuclear
devices based on the time-lapse photos you have just seen. The United States has followed suit, and
only moments ago launched strikes on Miami, Boston, LA, and Chicago.”

This can’t be real…

“Everyone is urged to stay inside and take shelter until—“ The man paused and held a finger up to his
ear, clearly listening to something. “We now take you live to a joint conference with the CEO of Big
Apple Island, Jeremiah Arthurson, and lead engineer, Brian—“

The screen cut away to Merlin and a strange, weaselly redhaired man standing behind a wooden
podium, with the seal of the union hanging on the front. Merlin, looked terrible, his eyes sunken,
with bruise like bags underneath. The elderly man looked frailer than ever and was leaning heavily
on his cane. His normally perfect black suit was misbuttoned and rumpled, giving the impression he
had dressed in a hurry. However, the man next to him seemed thrilled to be in front of the cameras,
wearing a grin so wide it looked like it hurt. His red hair was slicked back and looked greasy to the
point that one spark would set him aflame. He wore a stereotypical white lab coat that one would
expect of a doctor or scientist, while a black Led Zeppelin shirt peaked out from underneath.

Merlin cleared his throat and leaned into the podium’s microphone. “Ladies and gentlemen—“

Only to be shoved aside by the redhead. “Alright, things look bad,” the engineer laughed. “We got a
new horde of monsters that my signal isn’t working on, countries around the world have gone dark,
and we’re on the brink of nuclear holocaust.” The man turned to Merlin and looked him up and
down. “I guess this would be your second holocaust, wouldn’t it?”
Jason had never seen Merlin angry before, he never even thought such an emotion was possible for the strange old man. But for a single moment, rage flashed in the man’s eyes that rivaled his father’s, and it looked as if he wanted to strike the redhead with his cane. And in Jason’s opinion, he should have for such a horrible comment.

“Anywaaaay,” the redhead drawled, rolling his eyes as he turned back to face the camera, “We know what’s causing this and we know how to stop it-” The unseen crowd exploded into a roar with questions, microphones and hands popping up at the bottom of the screen along with the occasional head. “Woah! Woah! Woah! Settle down!” the redhead smirked, clearly enjoying the attention. “Let me explain. There is an object in a hidden chamber on the remains of Olympus called the Loom of Fate. With it, the so-called gods can summon and control monsters at their leisure. However!” he cried holding up his finger dramatically. “That same object also controls the gods! So! The old man, myself, and some of America’s best, will be flown into the Olympus after this, destroy the loom, and end this once and for all!”

“But how will you reach Olympus?” A reporter shouted out over the crowd. “Those things have taken over the skies!”

The redhead’s smirk grew. “Excellent question! Since Revelation Day I have been-“

Jason and everyone gathered in the living room never got to hear the man’s answer, as Hades whipped the remote through the ancient glass screen; sending up a puff of smoke and filling the room with the scent of ozone. “Those idiots!” the former god roared, tugging at his hair. “Those colossal fucking idiots!” Hades shouted as he kicked the smoking remains of the TV over.

“Please settle down, my love,” Persephone said, carefully placing her hands on the fuming man’s shoulders.

“No. No, he’s right to be angry,” Demeter sighed. “Because you reached the same conclusion I did, didn’t you? Besides our impending deaths, of course.”

“Our impending what now?” Percy asked, eyes wide.

Hades let out a sardonic laugh as he ran a hand through his thick, dark hair. “Oh yes Jackson, if the loom is destroyed everything Greek and Roman will be wiped from existence.” The man turned to Demeter and crossed his arms. “And if you are talking about the stolen instruments of Fate, then yes, I reached the same conclusion.”

Nico stepped away from Percy and made a ‘T’ with his hands. “One second, I’m the mythology nerd here, and even I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“I think I do though,” Persephone said, her voice just above a whisper. “If the Fates really did intertwine everything, then every living thing on this planet would perish if the loom and tapestry were destroyed.”

Hades smiled slightly. “You have a part of it, my love. But-“

“It’s everything as well as everyone,” Demeter finished. “Some pantheons have threads of fate for objects as well as souls, so when everything was woven together-“

“Everything became one,” Hades sighed.

The room went silent other than the sounds of their breathing and the smoldering television set. There were monsters out there that seemingly had a very good chance of wiping out the human race. Then there was Avalon racing to Olympus to find the Loom of Fate and destroy, potentially wiping
out everything as well as everyone. It seemed that they were caught between a rock and a hard place, which was fitting for the family of Greeks and Romans.

“What if we got to the loom first?” he asked, surprising everyone including himself. “What if we altered it? Could that stop everything?”

“It’s… possible?” Hades answered, though he sounded unsure. “I’ve had very few interactions with the Fates, but given the nature of the Cycle, I believe we could loop it back to a time before today.”

“Okay, so we could potentially save the world. Again,” Percy said, eyes not leaving Nico, and a worried look on his face. “But suppose we do get past all those monsters, Avalon, and who knows what else, do we even know where the loom is?”

Demeter laughed. “Of course I do! You and Nico have actually been there, you just never knew it.”

“Huh?” Nico asked, cocking his head in confusion.

“The entrance to the Chamber of Fate was hidden in plain sight, while also being under the watchful eyes of the Olympians,” The harvest goddess smirked. “As it was forbidden for anyone below an Olympian to enter.” She paused and furrowed her brow. “Which, thinking about it now, was probably to hide the true nature of the Cycle.”

“Wait, are you talking about the throne room?” Percy asked, moving closer to the son of Hades.

“Yup,” Persephone said, popping the ‘p’. “The entrance is directly in front of Zeus’ throne, hidden under the enchanted floor. How cliché…”

“So, we’re doing this right?” Jason asked, looking around the room.

“Do you think we can, Jay?” Percy asked.

The truth was, he didn’t know what he thought. There was a lot of unknowns and he knew they didn’t have time to investigate them, but he supposed that was the way it had always been. But if we do nothing, we die for sure. If we do nothing Chelsea, Tate, Aaron, and everyone else we’ve met could die. While he was lost in thought, Piper walked over next to him from her place on the wall, and took his hand in her own. It interrupted his thoughts, but when he saw her smile and nod at him, her kaleidoscope eyes filled with confidence in him, he knew. “I don’t think we can. I know we can.”

Percy sighed. “Grace, that was the tackiest thing I’ve ever heard…”

Jason was never particularly bothered by shadow travel, as he appreciated the convenience of covering long distances in seconds rather than hours, but he didn’t like it either.

And now he was pretty sure he didn’t like it at all.

For as Nico propelled the seven of them through the darkness to the ruins of Olympus, he could tell that something was wrong. The realm of shadows and darkness had always been cold enough to make his teeth chatter after coming out of a long jump, the second they crossed over into the darkness the breath had been knocked from his lungs by the sub-artic temperatures. And as he struggled to breathe, he could feel hundreds of needles poke and prod every inch of his body. Things
only got worse when he felt something thick and slimy wrap around his left ankle. He started to kick with all his might-

Only to land face down on a pile of ruined sidewalk.

“What the fuck was that?!” he heard Percy shout from nearby.

Jason pushed himself up and looked at his ankle before taking in his surroundings. Sure enough, there on his pantleg, was a ring of some black, grease-like substance. Pulling up his pantleg ever so slightly, he saw that the skin underneath was an angry red. *So I didn’t imagine that…* Looking around him he saw that they had emerged not on Olympus, but directly beneath the remains of the floating city, in a debris filled crater that had likely been the Empire State Building. Thankfully, the only monsters he saw were swarming around Olympus, drawn to it like moths to a flame. “Better question, is everyone okay?” he asked, looking for his family.

“I feel like I was punched in the chest,” Demeter wheezed as she stood up on what had been the roof of a taxi. “But otherwise, I’m fine.”

Persephone, who had landed a few feet to Jason’s left, lifted her left sleeve, revealing a large, round red mark. “I’m pretty sure something bit me,” she frowned.

Hades sat up on what had once been a bathroom sink, clutching his lower back. “Why me-“

“Guys! Get over here!” Percy yelled, hunched over the still form of the son of Hades.

*No! No! No!* Instantly Jason was on his feet and running over to Nico and Percy, along with everyone else. He dropped to his knees when he got close, sliding the last few feet until he was next to Percy. The worst of his fears were quickly dispelled when he saw the younger teen’s chest steadily rise and fall, but Nico had obviously suffered more than any of them in the transit. Red cuts were spread across all over Nico’s olive skin, his black T-shirt had been shredded, and a nasty bruise was already forming on the right side of his face.

“Come on, babe,” Percy whispered, gently shaking his boyfriend by the shoulders. “Talk to me.”

*What the hades was in there with us?* He thought, as he continued to watch the son of Poseidon try to wake Nico. He looked closer at the cuts covering the son of Hades and noticed that they were almost papercut-like; very thin, but surprisingly deep. Stranger yet was that there wasn’t much blood leaking from the wounds, the cuts seemingly avoiding any major arteries or veins. *It’s almost they were deliberate, just to slow him down. But why?*

Nico bolted upright, taking a huge gasp of breath, before clinging to Percy. “Is everyone okay?” he asked.

“We should be asking you that,” Jason chuckled, patting the younger teen on the back. “Has… has that ever happened before?”

“No!” Nico spat, eyes wide as he looked around at their assembled family. “I wouldn’t shadow travel to work every day if I was- wait this isn’t Olympus…”

“Close though,” Persephone chuckled, pointing up. “Just a couple thousand feet off on the Z-axis, I’m afraid.”

“Do you think you can get us up there?” Hades asked, eyeing his son with worry.

“Yeah, but I’m going to need a min-“
Suddenly a terrible screeching filled the sky accompanied by the sound of a thousand flapping wings. Jason didn’t have to look up to know what happened; they had been spotted. The blond quickly removed his sword from his pocket, still attached to his keyring, and instantly it grew to its full size; the imperial gold blade humming in his hand. “I don’t think we should stay in this crater!” he shouted, as he launched himself out of the hole with a gust of wind.

Jason touched down on the ruined remains of what had been 5th Avenue; all the surrounding buildings had been leveled in the artillery strike on Olympus, with the nearest standing structure more than five blocks away. He looked behind him and saw that Demeter was halfway out of the crater with her shotgun in hand, Piper was a step behind, Persephone and Hades were just behind her, with the former goddess leaning against her king, and Nico was piggybacked on Percy, the son of Poseidon struggling to climb out.

Then Jason looked up, and his stomach dropped.

Not just one or two of the mysterious blob creatures had spotted them, no dozens had stopped swarming around Olympus and were currently flying directly at them.

And they looked far more horrifying than they did on the TV screen.

He could see the creatures changing shape with each passing moment in ways that shouldn’t have been possible for any creatures, divine or otherwise. Gaping maws filled with razor sharp teeth would open up at random across their black bodies only to disappear without a trace a moment later. Their numerous purple eyes had a black, lifeless stare to them, reminding him of the eyes of a doll. They grew and lost appendages constantly; one moment having a pair of batwings only to grow four feathered ones the next. Some of them had even abandoned wings altogether in favor of going into a freefall, clearly unafraid or unaware of the dangers of falling from such a great height. Sprouting claw-covered tentacles and other limbs as they traveled.

Jason would be lying if he said he wasn’t afraid. He could picture himself being snatched up by one of their many tentacles and being tossed into one of their many mouths. But he had been afraid during his time as praetor, during his fight with Krios, and during the war against Gaea, so that was nothing new. What was new was that he had a family now, a family that he loved and cared for greatly.

And he was terrified to lose it.

And those monsters? There was no morally gray area like there was with Avalon. They weren’t parents seeking their lost children. They weren’t siblings seeking to stop people from losing their families. And they certainly not holocaust survivors who wanted to prevent another from ever occurring. There would be no guilt for their deaths.

And for the first time in almost half a year, the son of Jupiter tapped into full extent of his powers.

A gale force wind with all the intensity of his fear and rage blew across the ruins of New York, black storm clouds filled the sky, and thunder cracked loud enough that he could feel it. The sudden wind made the black creatures blow off course, those that had been freefalling had been sent careening far away. The monsters screamed and hissed from his assault, growing more wings to compensate for the bad weather. But if they noticed the growing smell of ozone in the air, there was no way of knowing. And it was already too late. The darkening sky was illuminated for one brief moment as a bolt of lightning descended from the heavens, zigging and zagging its way through the approaching creatures, and popping them like oversized water balloons.

And just as the roar of thunder started, Jason Grace, son of Jupiter, Pontifex Maximus, and former
Praetor of New Rome, rocketed into the sky.

More of the creatures were already moving in to replace their fallen comrades, many more than before, but they were in his territory. As he flew towards the first winged blob, he called upon the winds to fluctuate from what direction they came from, forcing the creatures to constantly adapt to the changing conditions. So, when his golden blade bit into the strange flesh of the beast as it tried to change wings, it was already too late. Jason flew the length of the creature, dragging his sword through its flesh, severing wings and tentacles from its bulbous body as he went, and by the time he cleared it, it was already dead; falling lifelessly to the earth below.

“WOOT! WOOT!” Jason cheered, as he repeated the process on the next creature. A third creature tried to lash out at him with a tentacle ending with what appeared to be a drakon’s claw, but he released the wind holding him up, and entered a freefall, before rising back up and stabbing what passed for its underside. He planted his feet firmly on the creature’s body, only to spin them completely around as he pulled his sword free; him propelling further into the air while the creature tumbled below.

“Don’t mess with Super Sparky!” he spat, feeling every bit as awesome as he did when he played his paladin. He glanced down below and saw that Nico and the others had made it out of the crater in one piece, with the son of Hades still holding onto Percy for support. Piper had picked up a pipe and was carrying it like a bat, while Demeter stood over the lot with her shotgun at the ready. A quick glance around told him why. While his aerial acrobats and lightning strike had taken out quite a few of the beasts, many more had slipped passed him and were now crawling across the ruined city landscape towards his family.

“That’s not good,” Jason muttered to himself. There were more creatures rushing towards him along with the ones heading to the others, and he knew he couldn’t be in multiple places at once. Nico still needed a few more minutes to pull himself together, so he couldn’t fight. Hades and Persephone were extremely limited in their mortal bodies. Demeter could at least wound one or two of the creatures with her shotgun, at best killing one. Piper may have looked tough with that pipe, but without her charm speak she was little better than his adoptive parents.

So that leaves Percy…

The son of Poseidon was without a question stronger than him now, even when taking into account his permanently damaged leg and arm. While he had been playing World of Warcraft and trying to forget about his past, Percy and Nico had been training with Hades to take down Avalon, putting them years ahead of him in terms of ability. Percy could control water with such ease that Jason sometimes wondered if the older boy had somehow crossed into godhood; especially after witnessing what happened in Chicago. But the problem with Percy was that he still needed a source of water, and while he was sure the son of Poseidon could pull it up from the sewers beneath, it would still take time and energy.

So, he was going to bring the water to Percy.

Jason dropped back to the ground, landing next to Piper. “Can you cover me for a second?”

Piper nodded with a smirk, giving her pipe an experimental swing as she did so.

“Thanks.” He closed his eyes and pictured the dark storm clouds that he had summoned over the city. Come on, let’s show Percy up at least once more… Controlling wind and lightning was one thing, there wasn’t a day gone by on the farm that he hadn’t used the wind to help him lift heavy object or to float him around when he was tired or lazy. And he was getting decent with controlling electricity, sometimes giving his laptop battery a boost when he didn’t want to return to his room to
get the charger, or more recently, recharging Piper’s Xbox controllers.

But rain? Rain was a bit of a challenge. It required him to both blow up particles of dirt and sand high into the sky, while making sure that they didn’t blow out of the cloud formation completely. It was really a bit more complicated than that, but that was what it felt like to him. The big problem was gauging just how much rain it was going to create, with the few times he tried to water the crops ending in either a sprinkle that evaporated almost instantly or inches of water that flooded the fields, and he had yet to figure out how to control that aspect.

_Come on! Come on! Come on!_ Jason thought, clenching his jaw as he heard Demeter fire off a shot. The blond was putting everything he had into the updraft. _Do something! Just a little-

Thunder roared across the sky, and down came the rain.

“Hey Percy!” He grinned as the first of the water droplets pelted his skin. It was a hard, heavy rain, the kind that would leave one’s skin stinging if they stayed out too long in it. The kind of rain they needed. “Special Delivery!”

Percy grinned back, already soaked with his hair plastered to his head. “This might be the second greatest gift I’ve ever gotten!” the son of Poseidon whooped as he began to construct a wall of water around them.

“Nico, any time now would be great,” Jason huffed as he remerged into the dome of water to catch his breath.

After almost twenty minutes of fighting the monsters off with Percy, Nico still hadn’t been able to shadow travel them to Olympus. The son of Hades was physically better, able to stand on his own now, but he said that the shadows were hesitating to listen to him now, almost as if there was something they were afraid of.

What was worse, was that the monsters were rapidly adapting to whatever tactics eh and Percy could come up with.

The monsters that had dedicated themselves to their eradication had given up on an aerial approach, dropping to the ruins of New York like black meteors and either dragging or pulling themselves to the assembled group. At first the heavy wind and rain had been able to blow many off course and allowing Jason to take care of them at a distance. But every falling creature got a little closer to the protective shelter Percy had made, and were now practically bouncing off the roof.

The creatures had also grown savvy to his attacks from above, and had grew more tentacles, pincers, and even mouths on stalk-like growths, that hampered his ability to attack. He had access to lightning, but it was tiring, and Jason didn’t want to use that again except for a last resort, less they somehow could adapt to that as well.

Percy had started out strong, pounding the creatures into the asphalt with torrents of water, or somehow shredding them to pieces with the rain. But they even adapted to that, flattening themselves out like pancakes to spread out the impact of the son of Poseidon’s blows, resembling flatworms as they moved across the ground. And if Percy started to use the rain to shred them, they would simply harden their bodies into an almost rock-like substance, before continuing on their way. By now, Percy was resorting to popping them like water balloons, by forcing water down their many mouths,
but it was easy to see it was draining Percy rapidly.

“I’m trying Jason!” Nico sneered, as he repeatedly tried to open the shadows. The darkness at his feet would momentarily widen, only for it immediately return to normal, reminding Jason of a truck that refused to turn over. “They’ve never done this before!” The youngest member of the family turned to their father. “Has this ever happened before?!” he cried.

Hades, watching Percy inflate yet another monster, shrugged. “Not to me, and if any of your siblings ever experienced this, they never told me.”

“Uh, Nico, you know I love you more than anything,” Percy said just as another creature exploded into a rain of black and purple liquid, “But please try harder!”

Nico’s face grew red with anger, “I-“

The ground began to shake, and the sound of shifting steel and asphalt grated against their ears and completely overwhelmed the wind and rain. He saw Piper lose her footing, but before she could fall he zoomed over and caught her, only to see a smile on her face. Not a ‘oh you’re my hero’ smile, but a ‘watch this’ smile.

It was one of those moments where Jason wished he had a camera to record everyone’s reactions as well as his own, because he was pretty sure everyone’s jaws dropped to the ground when the giant black horns pushed their way out from beneath the ruins of Korean Town. The horns then gave way to a serpent’s head with a dazzling gem nestled between its massive horns. Its scales reminded Jason of fire, a mixture of oranges, reds, and a ring of yellow on each segment that seemed to glow even in the darkness of the storm. The sheer size of the thing was hard to comprehend, as its massive form continued to climb into the sky. And once it finally emerged from the ground in its entirety, Jason was sure it could have coiled completely around the Empire State Building and still have some leftover body to spare. Suddenly his fight with the Trojan Sea Monster seemed downright laughable.

And Piper cheered silently, jumping up and down with her hands raised in the air.

_What the hell did she do all this time?_ Jason thought as the unknown creature began to pluck the shapeshifting creatures form the sky and ground with its massive jaws. Despite its size, its moved just as fast as its smaller cousin, the King Cobra, its strikes almost faster than the human eye could see.

“You show them who’s boss, Uktnee!” an ancient voice wheezed, as two large boulders erupted from the same hole the snake emerged from, knocking dozens of creatures from the sky. A moment later, two large hands made of stone emerged from the hole, grasping the ground, before pushing up and revealing a giant man seemingly made of stone. The stone man was easily thirty feet tall, but with every step he took, pieces of rubble integrated themselves into him, and by the time it had moved next to the serpent it had doubled in size and showed no signs of stopping.

“Hey guys? Question?” Percy asked, dropping the water dome as the smaller creatures’ attention shifted to the new, much larger, threats. “What. The. Fuck?”

“Valid question, Perseus,” Hades gulped as he watched the titanic duo fight the hordes of monsters. “Nico, isn’t this usually the time when you chime in with knowledge gained from Mythomagic?”

“I’ve got nothing dad,” Nico stated, eyes wide. “Unless you count Percy’s theory that the smaller things we’ve been fighting are shoggoths.”

“At this point I’d believe anything,” Persephone said, as the giant stone man clapped his hands together, crushing several shoggoths all at once. “Because none of these things are Greek. I can
guarantee that.”

“Guys, I didn’t sign up to fight kaiju,” Jason said with a half-forced chuckle. But as Long as they are fighting the shaggies, or whatever they’re called, they can keep on doing what they’re doing! He turned to Piper who was grinning so wide that there was no way her face didn’t hurt. “You knew this would happen, didn’t you?”

His former-somewhat-still girlfriend wiggled her hand and shrugged. “Kind of,” she mouthed, which just raised even more questions about the daughter of Aphrodite’s previous whereabouts. At that moment though, he would have bet she had been in Japan.

The ground began to rumble again, but not as intense, and the sound of hundreds of running feet filled the air. Whoops, hollers, and growling followed shortly after, as beams of light shot out of the serpent’s tunnel and pierced the airborne shoggoths; making them fall from the sky in screams of agony. Giant Eagles that put the legions to shame emerged and began to tussle with black creatures, tearing chunks of flesh out with their talons. Wolves, bears, coyotes, and even a few rabbits emerged yet, making a beeline for the nearest shoggoths.

“There she is!” a voice growled. “Just as that crazy arachnid said!”

Jason had to blink to check to make sure he wasn’t hallucinating, as a giant Coyote emerged from the hole followed by an assortment of men, women, children, and creatures he had never seen before, let alone imagined. The first thing he noticed (after like twenty other things) was that all the people were like Piper in terms of appearance.

“Piper, you weren’t captured by Avalon for all that time, were you?” Jason gulped.

Hades stepped forward and placed a hand on Jason’s and Piper’s shoulders. “You were with the Nation weren’t you?” the former god asked, eyes wide and face pale. “How did—”

“Hey creep!” the coyote growled as it bounded towards them followed by dozens of members of the Nation. “Hands off the Gayegogi!”

“Oi!” Percy shouted back, “just because Nico is flexible doesn’t mean you can call him that!”

The next thing Jason knew, he was knocked off his feet, pinned to the ground by two large grey paws, with a muzzle full of razor sharp teeth being the only thing he could see. He tried to toss the canine off, but the sheer size of the thing made his efforts laughable. I’m going to die, eaten by a coyote, and the last thing I heard was a stupid joke from Percy!

A pair of slender arms wrapped around the furry beast’s neck, stopping it from mauling him. “Eh?” the coyote growled in confusion. The blink of an eye, the canine disappeared, leaving a tall, lean man, in a gray suit and a matching cowboy hat in its place; the only similarities were his gray mustache matched the coyote’s fur and they had the same red piercing eyes. “Oh, come on Piper! Don’t tell me this the Jason you spoke of?” Piper, who still had her arms around the man’s neck, nodded frantically. “Really?” the man asked, looking over Jason like he was a piece of old meat. “Oh child, you could do so much better,” the man sighed, before stepping off Jason.

While Piper was engaged with the shapeshifter, Jason slowly sat up and looked around. He and his family were surrounded by members of the Nation, who were brandishing strange, bladed weapons made of a black stone, bows with arrows composed of silver light, or their own fangs and claws depending on their form. Percy was trying to shield Nico, who was rolling his eyes at the son of Poseidon’s embarrassing attempts, and Hades was doing the same for Persephone. Demeter however, pumped her shotgun and glared at the surrounding force; practically daring them to try
“Piper, why haven’t you spoken yet?” the man asked suddenly.

“She lost her tongue,” Jason said, slowly pushing himself off the ground, careful to not startle their captors. “Vocal chords too.” He dropped his sword and held his hands up.

Piper opened her mouth and the man gasped at the sight, along with several others in the crowd. The man turned from Piper and walked over to Hades, his left eye twitching as he audibly growled. “You did this didn’t you?!” he said, ripping Hades away from Persephone and lifting him off the ground by his shirt collar. “This is just some kind of sick punishment your kind does to my people!” He choke-slammed Hades into the ground. “I remember what ya’ll did to those poor kids at those so-called schools! Piercing their tongues with needles if they spoke their mother tongue!” He went to kick Hades, but Piper stepped between the two, holding her arms wide to shield the king of the Underworld.

“It wasn’t him, sir,” Jason said. “It wasn’t any of us.” Piper nodded enthusiastically. “It was Avalon.” At the mention of the mortal organization the assembled crowd began to murmur, some even lowering their weapons slightly. Two large men, who appeared to be made from dirt and covered in lines of electric blue, looked at each other and nodded.

“We’ll see if that’s true,” the man said, before letting out a sharp whistle that made everyone cringe. “Napi! Kipitaaki!” the lupine-eyed man barked, “We need your medical expertise!”

The crowd behind Nico and Percy parted, revealing the oldest man and woman Jason had ever seen. The man was long and lanky, his face was a sea of wrinkles, with thick, bushy eyebrows, and long, gray hair. He was clad in a simple pair of jeans that looked ready to fall off his thin frame at any moment and a simple black vest, with brown sunny pack on his waist. The old woman reminded Jason a bit of Demeter, while her husband was long and lean, she was short and stout. She had snow-white hair that she wore in a simple bun, friendly joyful blue eyes that put him at easy, and a wrinkly face that screamed grandmother-material. She wore a simple blue dress, with a coyote skin draped over her shoulders; both somehow completely dry despite the heavy rain.

The two approached Piper, and when they got close, the old woman pulled Piper into a tight embrace. “We were so worried about you!” the woman cried as she picked the daughter of Aphrodite up off the ground in her embrace.

“And rightly so by the looks of it,” the old man chuckled. From his sunny pack he removed a tongue depressor and a small flashlight. “Now open wide for me, and I’ll see what we need to do. Shouldn’t be anything worse than your titan friend…”

Titan friend?

Jason slowly crept back to Percy and Nico while Piper was poked and prodded by the strange old couple, who he was positive weren’t human. “What do you guys make of this?” he whispered just loud enough for the both of them to hear. He didn’t like the way everyone was looking at them, especially not the two large earth men and the strange assortment of creatures that looked like they walked straight out of Stephen King’s worst nightmare.

“I think Piper was hiding something from us,” Percy whispered back.

“You think?” Nico scoffed, clutching his sword tighter.

“Do you think she knew about the Nation before knowing she was a demigod?” he asked, as he
watched the old man remove a lump of clay from his bag. “Or was this a recent thing?”

“Definitely the latter,” Percy said, watching in awe as the old man quickly worked the lump of earth in his hands, stretching it this way and that; its color changing from brown, to red, and then to pink. “Would definitely explain where she got that taser feather…”

“If that’s the case, I think I and my father owe you an apology, Percy,” Nico said, as the old man stuck the lump of clay into Piper’s mouth, making the three of them cringe. “So, sorry about not believing you.”

“It’s all good.”

The ancient couple stepped away from Piper, who had her hand on her throat as she moved her mouth around, her face marred with disgust. “Am I always going to taste clay?” the daughter of Aphrodite asked, flicking a tongue in and out of her mouth.

He, Percy, Nico, and the former gods stopped talking and stared at the daughter of love in shock.

“Alright everyone,” Piper shouted in a voice that was very much her own. “Because We got a lot to cover and a short time to do so! This is just a lull in the battle boys and girls! And you haven’t seen nothing yet!”

An arrow of moonlight whistled past his head, missing him by mere inches, before embedding itself in a shoggoth that otherwise would have devoured him. The creature shrieked in pain from the arrow, and rolled back, allowing Jason to fly back to the twin Thunderers.

“Get your head in the game, bro!” the Thunderer, Andy, shouted as he unleashed a whirlwind that knocked several of the black monstrosities from the sky.

The other Thunderer, Chad, grabbed the son of Jupiter by the shoulder and tossed him behind them, allowing the two to let loose a barrage of wind-carried debris. “Either help out, or go back with your friends!” Chad shouted.

“Sorry,” he mumbled floating back to his feet. He knew they were right, that he was more a liability than anything in his current state, but he just couldn’t stop looking at Piper; who was currently riding Coyote while firing arrow-after-arrow into the ever growing horde of horrors.

After having her vocal capabilities restored by the ancient Blackfoot creators, Napi and Kipitaki, Piper gave them a brief rundown of what happened to her since Avalon’s first attack. Joining up with Reyna and Atlas, who had merged bodies with a daughter of Mercury, escaping Avalon’s attack on the Amazons, helping take down Artemis, and meeting up with the Nation in general, had left everyone in awe at the Daughter of Aphrodite. And if that wasn’t enough, she had also learned of the Cycle and the horrible means by which his father and others continued their immortality. That was the reason why she didn’t communicate with them at the farm, as she was unsure if the depowered gods could be trusted. He, Percy, and Nico were quick to vouch for them, but Piper said there was more pressing matters to worry about.

Matters which were approaching rapidly in every direction, by land, by air, and by sea.
“Tekeli-li!” A shoggoth cried as it broke through the front line, tearing four Nation warriors into pieces with razor-tipped wings. Men and women quickly filled the gap, less more got by, but that still didn’t take care of the creature making a beeline for Nico. Dozens of arrows of moonlight were dispatched at the creature, but its numerous appendages battted them aside.

“I got it!” Jason cried, as he took off flying toward the grounded creature, zipping through the lines of archers and riflemen. They all eyed him with distrust, some of them even glancing behind them as he past, making sure he wasn’t planning on attacking them from behind. The members of the Nation also looked at Nico, Percy, Hades, and Persephone the same way, and were not keen on them being sent to Olympus to take control of the Loom of Fate. Strangely though, Coyote got along with Demeter, obviously flirting with the goddess, and since he was apparently the head honcho, everyone followed his lead.

The creature’s tentacles shot out in and either wrapped themselves around the necks of the nearest warriors, or impaling them through the chest, killing them instantly. It was a gruesome sight, far worse than he had ever seen on the Argo II, but it was an opportunity he would be foolish to miss. The son of Jupiter flew over the occupied tentacles and spotted a section on the shoggoth’s back that appeared to be a blind spot.

I’ve got you now!

Just as Jason went to plunge his Imperial Gold blade into other worldly flesh, The tentacles that he thought occupied snapped upright, creating a fleshy cage, as the entirety of the creatures back opened up into a fang filled maw. A startled cry escaped his mouth as he tried to halt himself from diving blade first to his death; stopping just in time.

Shit! Shit! Shit!

Jason began to slash at the tentacles around him, but gold met a strange, chitinious material that resisted his best efforts. The cage then began to recede back into the creature’s flesh, pushing the son of Jupiter ever closer to the hungering mouth below. He could hear other’s outside calling for aid, but he couldn’t count on the others getting him out on time. He quickly changed his tactics, focusing on gouging the flesh around the mouth in hopes of hitting something vital. But the creature responded by darting out a thick, purple tongue that wrapped around his sword arm, dragging him closer to the hungering mouth.

It wasn’t lost on him that the creature was more than capable of instantly retracting its tentacles or yanking him down with its tongue, which made a surge of greater panic clench his heart. The monster didn’t think there was anything around it that would endanger it, so it was taking its time to watch him suffer.

And just when his trapped hand brushed against one slime covered fang, the maw snapped shut, tearing it from his arm.

The first thing Jason felt was the sting of rain on his face.

Followed immediately by an intense agony in his right hand.

Then the voices started.
“Come on Jace! Get up!”

Something hit his cheek; the sting on his cheeks nothing compared to that of his hand.

“Grace, it’s hard to be the three amigos if it’s just me and Nico!”

“Come on son, Persephone and I were really looking forward to watching your football games!”

Another hit.

“Jason, Leo will be besides himself if we don’t bring you back with us!”

Another blow.

“Sparky-“

The familiar voice and the familiar pet name made his eyes snap open. Things were blurry for a moment, but he could make out six very familiar faces hovering over him. Percy, Hades, and Persephone burst into grins when they saw him open his eyes, while Piper, Demeter, and strangely Nico, began to cry. Before his vision had even cleared, Piper pulled him into a tight embrace.

“What happened?” he asked groggily.

“We almost lost you!” Demeter sobbed, joining in on the spine-crushing hug.

“You’re sticking by me for the rest of this! You got me Sparky?!” Piper cried, buried deep in the crook of his neck.

He went to pat Piper on the back, only to notice that he was missing half of his right forearm and his hand. Strangely, there was no sign of a wound, not even a scar; the flesh rounded and smooth. There was pain, a lot of pain, but the shock was far greater. “What happened?” he repeated. “And how long was I out?” Jason asked, marveling at his damaged limb.

“Eh, I wouldn’t say longer than, oh, twenty minutes?” Napi said, walking into view, busily working a lump of clay.

“And don’t worry, we can restore your arm, but we’re kind of pressed for time,” Kipitaki said, pushing her husband away.

Piper pushed him away, holding him by his shoulders, her kaleidoscope eyes searching every inch of his body for any other injuries. “You went to take on a shoggoth alone, like an idiot” -The son of Jupiter winced- “and you damn near got eaten! If I hadn’t have seen you get trapped, you would be dead!”

“Wait, you saved me?”

Piper huffed with a satisfied smirk on her face. “I can’t take all the credit. Coyote was the one that raced over and tore the thing to shreds, but yeah, I saved ya Sparky.”

His face felt hot and his heart fluttered ever so slightly seeing the daughter of Aphrodite smile and hearing her say his pet name once more. He smiled back at her, feeling rather goofy as he did so, while memories of their first quest with Leo sprang to mind. *It had been awkward, but was it like this? Maybe-

Suddenly there was shouting from all around them, and people were pointing to the skies behind him. Jason turned to follow their gazes and his jaw dropped.
Dozens of black helicopters filled the sky, rapidly approaching from the South. Brief flashes of light erupted from the sides of each craft, and moments later shoggoths began to fall from the sky. And as they got closer, the sound of gunfire could be heard over the storm, but Jason started to notice something flying alongside the helicopters.

*No way…*

Another swarm of the black, flying creatures began their approach to the oncoming mortal vehicles; shrieking the only words they knew. Their forms changed to become more aerodynamic, gaining greater speed and maneuverability than the helicopters were capable of, and becoming nigh impossible to hit with mortal weapons. The shoggoths method of attack appeared to Jason to be a Zerg Rush; just hoping to overwhelm the potential threat with sheer numbers rather than tactical advantage. But as they neared the aircrafts, the small objects flying around them began to intercept the creatures, blasting them with wind, ice, fire, and even lasers; blocking the would-be attackers.

“So, Avalon kept a few gods around as insurance,” Hades hummed, as the divine clashed with the unholy in the air above them. “This certainly complicates things…”

“You guys got to get up there,” Jason groaned, as he rose to his feet with Piper’s aid. He nearly fell back down at first when he tried to lean on his nonexistent right hand, but Piper was quick to grab him. “You have to get to the loom.”

Percy narrowed his eyes. “Why do you keep saying ‘you’? You’re coming with us.”

Before he lost his hand, he would have; that was the original plan. But as he was a liability, most likely liable to try to use his right arm at a wrong moment putting his family and himself in danger. Jason gave a forced laugh and looked at his family. “Nah, I’m sticking with Piper. We’ve got a lot to catch up on now that communicating doesn’t require a pen and paper. Plus, I wouldn’t want to take ALL the fun.”

“That’s bullshit, Grace,” Nico stated, looking at him with pleading eyes. It was moments like these that Jason realized just how much Nico had changed since they were forced to the farm, how he would never show what he construed as weakness to anyone, but now the son of Hades fully expressed his emotions without a second thought.

“Yeah,” Percy agreed, “we started this thing together, so we’re ending this together.”

“Let him be boys,” Demeter sighed, her eyes misty. “He’s made up his mind.” It felt good that Demeter had his back, even if doing so was hurting her. She had been so kind to him at the farm, even before losing her divinity. She paid him handsomely for all the work he did, showed him how to do things with unlimited patience, and being a shoulder to cry on if he needed it. He never had an adult like that in his life before, and it was nice. It was something he never knew he was missing in his life.

He smiled sadly back at her. “Thanks Demi.”

“Ugh! Enough of the sappiness,” Persephone groaned, but the smile on her face gave away her true feelings along with her own misty eyes. “We’ll be gone like an hour tops! We’ll secure the loom, take it back to the farm, fix this mess,” she said, gesturing to the chaos all around them, “and we’ll have dinner together like we always do.”

“Grace,” Hades said, before putting his hand on the blond’s shoulders and looking him in the eye. “There’s a good chance your father is still up there. Is there anything you want us to tell him?”
Jason nodded. “Tell that bastard I don’t need him. That he came close to breaking me, but he failed. And to really piss him off, tell him I see you more as my father than he ever was.”

Hades let out a sincere chuckle before ruffling the son of Jupiter’s hair. “With the utmost pleasure.”

Percy simply patted him on the back and nodded. Theirs was a bond of brothers, they didn’t need words.

Nico though moved to be in front of him and wouldn’t look him in the eye; looking at the ground as he chewed on his lip. Then with the quickness of a cobra, Nico stood on his tiptoes and kissed Jason once on each cheek, before spinning back around and walking away. “Stay safe.”

“I love you too, Neeks,” he chuckled, placing his hand on his left cheek were Nico had kissed him. _Wow, he really does have soft lips._

And with that, he turned away from his family, and walked away with Piper, ready to rejoin the fray.

“So,” Piper said with a smirk on her face and her hands behind her back, “Am I competing with Nico now for your affections as well now? ‘Cause I think I can take his scrawny ass. I can rip his fucking head off with my bare hands. Same with that blonde bitch,” she said trying to sound threatening, but the smile on her face said otherwise.

And he laughed.

“I hope Nico managed to get control of the shadows!” he yelled to Piper as he jabbed at a shoggoth that was trying to sneak up on Coyote’s flank with a black stone tipped spear.

“You don’t understand how much is at stake if he doesn’t!” Piper shouted back, as she peppered a different, dog-like shoggoth with arrows.

He pulled his spear free and repositioned him on Coyote as the trickster god rushed ahead to ravage his next target. “I think I understand it pretty well! Everything ends!”

Piper looped an arm around his waist to hold him in place as their divine canine pounced on its prey, making quick work of it before moving onto the next one. “It’s a bit worse than that,” she said as she unwrapped her arm and went back to using her bow.

“How can anything be worse?!” he shouted, holding his arm-and-a-half wide to the battle around them.

They were losing, and it was obvious to everyone. The titanic serpent and rockman, or Uktena and Stoneclad as Piper called them, their greatest advantages were being overwhelmed by the sheer number of shoggoths and enslaved gods. The stoneclad itself was trapped in a continuous process of removing and adding new stones as the shoggoths tried to squeeze themselves through the cracks to get to the sorcerer that resided deep within. The Uktena had become a danger to everyone, thrashing its massive body in every direction to try and shake off the black monsters, crushing anyone unlucky enough to be in its path.

Then there were the gods Avalon had dispatched. Whatever programming or orders they had received had been incredibly basic in Jason’s eyes, as they fought the Nation more than they did the
shoggoths. They had already decimated an entire squad of Skinwalkers that had been assigned to protect Napi and Kipitaki, leaving the wounded unprotected from attackers. Thankfully, their movements were rather slow and jerky so it was possible to outmaneuver them.

Which the shoggoths took advantage of.

The seemingly never-ending horde of Lovecraftian nightmares were always ready to intercept the fleeing members of the Nation, slaughtering them like cattle. They were adapter quicker and quicker to each new strategy they tried, losing a handful of their own in the process while taking out more people in exchange. To top that off, they were starting to see shoggoths merging with one another on the peripherals of the battlefield, becoming tall, tower like formations. To Jason though, it was somewhat of a relief, as those that were merging were ones they didn’t have to deal with.

Yet.

He jabbed his spear into a cluster of purple eyes, as Piper fired arrows into the gelatinous creature’s mouth, silencing it forever. “Jason, think you could bring down some lightning? We’ve got a build up again,” Piper barked as she pulled back on her bow, a shaft of silver light forming as she did so. “And it looks like the Bear Brigade could use a little assistance, Coyote!”

“Yeah. Yeah, I can do that,” Jason nodded. With the Thunderers assisting in maintaining the storm around them, and riding on Coyote’s back as opposed to running or flying, the son of Jupiter was saving a lot of energy. Energy that he surely would have run out of by now. He was incredibly tired though, his body drained from losing an arm, but he could still call down the lightning every few minutes; their most devastating weapon.

He pointed his spear at a wall of shoggoths that were being barely held at bay by a group of bears; massive grizzlies with paws as big as his torso, brown bears that could carry a man, and strangely enough a polar bear. There was the familiar whiff of ozone, a tug in his gut, and a flash of light-

But the lightning didn’t hit its intended target, instead arcing to the growing black towers of shoggoths. Dozens of the beasts were burnt to a charred crisp and fell away, but dozens more quickly took their places and the towers continued to grow.

He tried to call down another blast, but the same thing happened again; the lightning diverted its path to one of the towers.

And his stomach dropped as he realized what those towers were. “Lightning rods!” he gasped. The creatures were piling themselves up and somehow lowering their bodies electric potential, forcing any lighting he may call to them. It was simple physics, and they were using it against them.

“Pretty bad day when your weakness was invented by Ben Franklin,” Piper said with a forced laugh, clearly distraught by the loss of their most devastating weapon. “Coyote, we have to get over to them!”

“On it!” the canine barked, before racing off to the Bear Brigade.

But before they got there, the walls of shoggoths halted their advance and stood completely still; even their bodies stopped shifting and morphing. A moment later, lines of gold cross-crossed across every single inch of their bodies, before they crumbled into piles of cubes, looking to Jason like the disgusting Jell-O cubes he was sometimes served at lunch.

And standing behind the pile of dead cubes, was a little, old woman. She had long gray hair that was tied up in a bun, held into place by a pair of knitting needles. She wore an almost bored expression
on her ancient wrinkled face, her eyes half laden, while a lit cigarette hung loosely from her mouth. She wore bright, red Crocs on her feet, a black, WWE T-shirt, and a pair of gray sweatpants; all of which were absolutely drenched. Slung over her back was something long rolled in a canvas tarp, which she held in place easily with one hand. In her other hand, she clutched dozens of golden fibers that trailed to the ground and led to eviscerated pile of shoggoths.

“Well? Isn’t one of you going to help an old woman carry her bags?” she rasped, staring directly at him.

Chapter End Notes

You thought I was going to kill Jason this chapter, didn't you?

Nah, I think it would be too predictable to have a character die in their POV chapters. I'm not saying it won't happen though as we go through these final, dread-filled chapters, so be prepared :)

The Nation, Shoggoths, gods, and demigods, oh my! Things are certainly heating up and everything is going to hell! The world is going dark, countries are using whatever means they have at their disposal to attempt to halt the invasion. Some nations are implementing the M.A.D philosophy (mutually assured destruction), choosing to launch nuclear weapons in hopes of taking their enemies with them. There isn't a single land mass that isn't being overwhelmed by the Shoggoths. They are emerging from land and sea, with seemingly one thing on their mind: destruction. Now there is a goal, a goal we know all about, but they are taking out any potential threats beforehand. Which makes you question some of their actions this chapter :)

Okay, I want to say this now. Next chapter is one you have all been waiting for: Brian. We will get to see how he has changed in the months since Revelation Day (I'm sure it was for the best...) and we will finally see what his connection to Olympus is, what his motivation is, and why he is so full of hate. I guess on the latter we've seen some of the reason; his 'brilliance' isolating him from others, but it will all come together. I can also say that no one has even come close to guessing it. All I can say is he is 100% human, despite what he might think.

I might add notes later, as I'm drawing a blank.

Bonds update:
In Shattered we saw a decent amount of Hades and Poseidon, more the former than the latter. In bonds we will see Hades and Zeus. Zeus will play a bigger role, but nothing like Hades in Shattered. There will be no #1 Dad Zeus, if that's what you were hoping for, more along the lines of we get to see his asshole-ness from his POV. I have a scene planned where he and Hera attend marriage counseling. You can imagine what that is like...

Paul may also have a few chapters, sort of gag chapters serving as intermissions.

Well, that's all for now. Thank you all for reading, you're all special awesome people! :)
Brian

Chapter Summary

Warnings: graphic violence, language, abuse, and far worse. See chapter notes for more details.

Tonight: What makes Brian tick.

Chapter Notes

I am not saying this lightly: this is the most horrifying chapter I have written. I want to take this time to also state this: Brian is a horrible human being and his actions are not, and should, not be condoned by anyone for any reason.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“I’m going fight ‘em all,” Brian sung to himself, tapping his feet on the helicopter’s metal floor to the beat of the White Stripes blaring through his earbuds. “A seven-nation army couldn’t hold me back.”

For the first time in years, he was truly nervous. And a quick glance around the cabin proved that he wasn’t the only one to feel that way. The ten armed-to-the-teeth marines around him, despite being known for their stoic dispositions, all jumped in their seats every time the helicopter bounced unexpectedly; which given the battle going on around them was every few seconds. Some of the men were looking at pictures of loved ones, some were praying, and some were doing last minute checks of their equipment; all trying to stave off their nerves for whatever was coming next.

“They’re going to rip it off. Taking their time right behind my back.”

But he wasn’t nervous about any battles or death, he was nervous for an entirely different reason. His nervousness was also accompanied by a sense of anticipation. Anticipation that had been slowly building since he had been recruited into Avalon.

“And I’m talking to myself at night, because I can’t forget.”

The engineer’s gaze drifted to Merlin, who sat directly opposite of him. The old man looked comical wearing an oversized flap jacket and helmet over his standard attire, and Brian had to wonder how long he would actually be able to support all that Kevlar before keeling over dying of exhaustion. Sadly though, he knew he wouldn’t get rid of Merlin that easy if the pure unadulterated rage in his ancient eyes was anything to go by. The old man wanted to kill him for Revelation Day, but Brian knew that if they would have followed Merlin’s plans the change he desired would never truly come to pass.
He also knew that given the opportunity the old man would have him killed. But being the world’s savior kept him under twenty-four-seven surveillance, preventing Merlin, George, or any of Avalon from so much as touching him. That, and he had conveniently taken Terminate-us off the system and made him his dedicated G.

“Back and forth through my mind, behind a cigarette.”

The helicopter bucked yet again, and the rotor groaned as something splattered against it. Some of the men raised their weapons to the ceiling, their fingers on the triggers, waiting for something to burst through. It didn’t happen though, and Brian knew it wouldn’t happen. The Gs he had pulled from storage to escort them to Olympus had two primary objects: escort them safely there and kill anything in their way. Terminate-us’ orders hadn’t changed though: protect him and do everything he said.

“Don’t want to hear about it. Every single one’s got a story to tell.”

He looked down at his phone to check the status of the Gs; opening an app of his own design. It wasn’t much in terms of interface, just a list of each active G, with their designations highlighted a certain color based on their status. No color meant inactive, a sign that they were in storage, green meant active, red meant they were free but could be rebooted, and black meant that all connection had been lost. Of the forty-five he had deployed to escort them, forty-two were green, while the other three had gone black.

Brian frowned. “Everyone knows about it. From the Queen of England to the hounds of hell.”

A black status was a rarity, something that he coded but at the time thought an impossibility. The quantum state by which the control cylinders interacted with the Gs could theoretically never lose their signal; existing in a place between one and zero, between existence and nothingness. But never-the-less, when G:DB was devoured at the Amazon headquarters, its status had gone black. It was something he wanted to investigate, but it never made it to the top of his list.

“And if I catch it coming back my way, I’m going to serve it to you.”

The helicopter bounced again and an unearthly shrieking could be heard over everything, before quickly being silenced.

“And that ain’t what I want to hear, but that’s what I’ll do.”

His thoughts drifted to the chaos spanning the globe, and before that moment he was probably the only person on the globe not thinking about it. The creatures that were the first monsters that had impressed since joining Avalon, besides the budget. While the rest of the world viewed them as simple killing machines bent on their eradication, he could see them for the engineering marvel they were. Their invertebrate-like bodies reminded him of an octopus, able to squeeze through the tiniest of openings with minimal effort, but unlike an octopus, change their shape on a whim. Their ability to grow new appendages and openings on their bodies allowed for them to adapt to the task at hand with ease, and any tools that they would need to complete said task could be generated from their own bodies. They clearly communicated with one another, given the nature of their coordinated attacks, but the means were unknown. They were clearly artificial to him, no doubt her work, and it was truly astonishing to see just what a mind like his was capable of, given that level of power.

Merlin of course couldn’t see the bigger picture, too focused on why the signal wasn’t working on the constructs, but the old man only saw what he wanted to see. He didn’t understand that the
creatures were simply part of the natural progression of things. That each generation creates something better than the last, something better than themselves. Children typically gain a stronger immune system than their parents. Computer memory costs less and takes up half as much space as it did the previous year. Nuclear reactors generate more power and produce less waste with every generation. Improving strengths and cutting out weaknesses was part of the natural order; the only part Brian respected.

“And the feeling coming from my bones, says find a home.”

The redhead smirked at the lyrics.

A light flicked on overhead, bathing the compartment in green light. All the armed men jumped to their feet as the rear hatch’s hydraulics began to push the massive hatch open. He pulled the white earbuds out and deposited them in his lab coat pocket along with his phone, before reaching down and removing a stainless-steel briefcase he had stored under his legs.

*It’s showtime!*

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Olympus was a dump.

Which wasn’t saying much, because he thought it was a dump before the armed forces bombed the ever-living shit out of it. It had been gaudy, an atrocious eyesight made of marble, gold, silver, and bronze that reflected their false belief of style over substance. Its classical architecture was laughably outdated and should have stayed where it belonged: in the classics. Most of the structures had clearly not been designed with war in mind, with most of them being open and airy. Even the roads were outdated and opulent, cobblestone made of pearls and gems; anything with wheels would have bounced like crazy and even walking would hurt after a time.

It seemed to him that it was all designed by a teenage girl who was told to think of every Greek stereotype, add a little Elton John, and run with it.

*And look where that got them!*

The floating mountain top had been cracked into two primary pieces and dozens of smaller orbiting pieces. One half had rotated approximately forty-five degrees, making it occasionally rain debris down below. The open-air market they had landed in, and most of the nearby surrounding structures had been flattened; the pearls that lined the streets reduced to a glittering dust that kicked up at the slightest movement.

The only positive thing he could say about the dust was it made the corpses look interesting.

For piled in the center of the former marketplace was a multitude of deceased Gs. It was clearly a relatively recent addition, as the shelling would have scattered the bodies everywhere. It was interesting to note that the bodies seemed to be piled in what appeared to be a hierarchical manner. The ones at the bottom were smaller and frailer, had less elaborate garments and jewelry, while those on the top were bigger, heartier, and wore a king’s ransom worth of precious metals and stones.

At the top of the heap were a blonde young male, his eyes open in an eternal look of shock and betrayal, and an older female whose anger could be felt from beyond the grave. The two matched up to descriptions given by Avalon’s members and captured DGs of Apollo and Hera. And if that was
true, there would be much celebration after this whole ordeal was over.

But all of the deceased Gs, be they Olympian or minor nuisance, they all had something in common: a hole in the center of their chests.

“What do you make of this?” Merlin asked, shuffling next to him, as the men quickly emptied the helicopter of supplies so that he next could land.

Brian shrugged, his thoughts elsewhere. “Someone watched Temple of Doom and no one told them to not try that at home?”

Merlin picked up his cane and struck Brian on the knee, knocking the engineer onto the dusty ground. “Would you be serious for once!” the old man hissed. “The world is on the brink of collapse and you make jokes?”

There was a flash of light from behind him, and he felt two large stone hands loops under his arms and lift him to his feet. “If you ever hit me again, I’ll have Terminate-us rip your goddamn head off!” he hissed, as he clutched his throbbing knee.

Merlin didn’t even bat an eyelash at the threat, only gripping his cane tighter and looking up at the stone god. “I’ve dealt with far worse things than both of you, so I’d like to see you try.”

He thought of hurling another insult, or just following through with his threat, but reeled in his anger. For as much as he loathed to admit it, he still needed the old man. At least for a little while longer. “Fine,” he growled, brushing off his black dress pants. “My best guess is that they were running low on energy and were taking it from the lower castes by force. I know that before a control cylinder is inserted, the heart of a G radiates a lot of measurable power. There, happy now? Does my hypothesis meet your requirements?”

Merlin turned back to the pile of bodies. “What kind of man sacrifices his own child and wife to prolong his own?”

“A happier one,” Brian shot back. Just like every family, the House of Zeus had more than its fair share of problems. Problems that were well recorded in history. Zeus and Hera were always fighting over his extramarital affairs, with the goddess often trying to punish the resulting bastards. Apollo seemed to be trying to have a fling with every woman between the ages of fourteen and dead, which surely did not go over well with Hera, and by extension, Zeus. Add those issues to the normal family issues, multiply that by several millennia, and to Brian, Zeus’ reaction made perfect, logical sense. “Also, didn’t your god order a man to sacrifice his son?”

“A clever barb as always,” The older man said without looking away from the corpses. “And I don’t have a god. Haven’t had one for a great many years.” He tapped his cane against the street and then quickly spun it around. “Now, it appears we have one more chopper to land before we are ready to take the loom. Are you ready?”

Brian grinned. “Actually, you’ll have to take the loom yourself. I have to acquire an important piece before we can fix all this.”

“An important piece?” Merlin repeated. “An important piece?” The old man’s face grew red as she clenched his teeth. “Why didn’t you get what you needed before we left?! What could you possibly acquire in this divine necropolis?!”

Brian picked up his briefcase and turned away from his superior, walking away without an answer.
Giddy.

As Brian walked through the charred remains of Olympus giddiness was slowly replacing the nervousness and anxiety he felt before. Each step made an almost long forgotten happiness well up from the depths of his being. All because the dwelling that he sought could be seen in relatively one piece amongst the wreckage.

Not that he expected anything less.

He set down his briefcase on the remains on what had been a fountain, seemingly adorned with silver birds and spears, and pulled out his phone and earbuds. The redhead quickly placed the two pieces of white plastic into his ears and a moment later the sounds of Imagine Dragons filled his ears.

“First things first, I’ma say all the words inside my head,” he whispered along with music.

The engineer then flipped open the stainless-steel case open and he smirked at its contents: four portable signal generators, six signal grenades, two control cylinders, a spare phone, battery pack, a lint roller, and three critical components to the task at hand.

“I’m fired up and tired of the way that things have been, oh ooh.”

He snapped his fingers, and instantly Terminate-us was by his side. Without a word, Brian began to toss the signal generators to the stone colossus, who caught them all with ease; even the one he tried to launch over the fallen god’s head.

“The way things have been, oh ooh.”

With another snap of his fingers, his divine servant disappeared in a flash of light. It was all according to plan, as Brian had informed the god of what needed to be done to complete this most crucial of tasks. There was another flash of light near the entrance to the imposing structure, then another to the East, another to the West, and finally one from the south.

“Second thing second, don’t you tell me what you think that I can be.”

The lyrics made him pause for the briefest of moments, long suppressed memories threatening to escape their mental shackles. *I’m the only one that knows what I can be.*

“I’m the one at the sail, I’m the master of my sea. Oh ooh.”

His phone vibrated, signaling that the four generators were setup and ready to be activated. Without a second thought, Brian pushed the comically large, red button on the screen, sending the activation message to the waiting devices.

“The master of my sea, oh ooh!” He sang, starting to sway side-to-side to the beat.

He reached into the case and pulled out the first of the pulse grenades; the silver cannisters looking more like cans of spray paint than a weapon. They were a bit different than the standard issue grenades the security teams received, they were double the size and sixty-four times more powerful. The signal they emitted could pierce even the thickest of stone walls, but the increased size made them difficult to throw.

For a man.
Terminate-us reappeared next to the engineer with his large stone hand held out, to which Brian happily supplied the first grenade. This time the stone god didn’t disappear, instead he wound back his arm like a baseball pitcher, and then whipped his arm forward at speeds that would be impossible for a human, releasing the cannister. The grenade became a blur of silver as it traveled towards the structure, and when it impacted, an entire wall collapsed from the sheer force.

And Terminate-us held out his hand again, a small smile on his face.

To which Brian happily obliged.

And now my favorite part of the song!

“I was broken from a young age! Taking my sulking to the masses! Write down my poems for the few!” He sang at the top of his lungs as the second grenade was sent soaring by the former protector of New Rome. This time the grenade didn’t go as fast, and it didn’t need to, the inner walls were significantly thinner than the outer.

“That looked at me, took me, shook me, feeling me!” Brian belted out as he handed Terminate-us two more grenades. In a display of expert coordination, Terminate-us pitched one underhand and one overhand, the two crossing over one another in midair without colliding. One of the grenades ended on the roof of the building, while the other entered.

“Singing from the heartache and the pain!” he kicked his minion in the ankle. “Taking my message from the veins, speaking my lesson from the brain!” Brian handed Terminate-us the final two grenades with a pointed glare, to which the god responded with a slight nod. This time the two grenades both hit their target. “Seeing the beauty through the-“

Brian removed the spare battery pack and phone from his briefcase and deposited them in the back pockets of his dress pants. He didn’t intend to use them, but even with Terminate-us there was always a chance that things could go badly.

“You made me a, you made me a believer! Believer!” He pulled off his lab coat, revealing a black dress shirt that matched his pants, and tossed the dirty white thing aside. Then from the briefcase he pulled out a black jacket that he only wore for special occasions or for special people.

In this case, it was both.

“You break me down, you build me up, believer! Believer!” He noticed that he was literally shaking with excitement as he pulled the jacket on. How many years has it been now? It was a rhetorical question, he knew how long it had been since their last, painful, encounter down to the hour.

He next pulled out the lint roller and began to run it across his clothing, starting from the top and working his way to his legs, still singing as he did so. It took him far longer than he would have liked to get himself clean, but he had not predicted just who dusty and dirty Olympus would be. He was just thankful though that he packed the lint roller.

“Last things last, by the grace of the fire and the flames, you’re the face of the future, the blood in my veins! Oh ooh!”

That made his smile grow. Because everything he had done up until that point had been for one purpose: to prove himself worthy. Worthy, of that one face that occupied his thoughts at all hours of the day and night. A face that hid the mind of the only one to ever understand him and match his intellect.

Brian removed his earbuds and placed them in his jacket pocket, before removing the last three items
from the briefcase. The control cylinder he placed next to his earbuds, while he tucked the bottle of French champagne under his arm and gingerly held the bouquet of roses.

“I’m finally here for you, Athena.”

When Brian found his goddess laying on the floor next to the remains of owl stature, covered in dust and breathing shallowly, he somewhat regretted his methods.

But only somewhat.

If he would’ve waltzed into her temple before she would have simply obliterated him and worse, held the same opinion of him as she did when she left the first time. No, he needed to prove that they were equals, that they were truly made for one another. And if that meant knocking her off her divine pedestal and dragging her down to his level, then so be it.

“Hello, Athena,” he cooed as he crouched over her now, very mortal, form. Her long dark hair was exactly the way he remembered it, and despite having been knocked the floor, not a single strand was out of place. Her arms and legs were as slender and long as they had been. Her hands were still callus-free despite working on numerous projects together that had left him with his fair share of cuts and bruises. “It’s been awhile.”

Her eyes snapped open and Brian’s heart soared. The stormy, gray pools that haunted his every thought and dream were still as intelligent and calculating as he remembered, but infinitely more beautiful. For a brief moment, panic flashed in her eyes as she pushed herself into a sitting position, clutching the large piece of fabric she was wrapped in to her bust to preserve her modesty. “Brian?” She asked, eyes wide.

He chuckled, enjoying the sound of her voice. “The one and only! And these, are for you,” he said, thrusting the roses into her hand. “I know flowers aren’t really your thing, but I figured, what the heck?”

Athena looked at the flowers in her hand and frowned; tossing them away as if they were a exceptionally detestable piece of trash. “I already know the answer to this but, why are you here?”

“For you of course!” he said, offering his hand to his goddess. She hesitated at first, but then took his hand, sending a nearly forgotten tingle down his spine, as he helped her to her feet. Once up, Athena started to wobble, unused to her mortal form, but he quickly looped an arm around her to keep her from falling. “You were the only one for me.”

“And I told you I wanted nothing to do with you,” she stated plainly, voice devoid of all emotion. The former goddess of wisdom removed his arm from her waist, and stumbled backwards until she leaned herself up against the wall.

“Oh, but that was before,” Brian responded, brushing her comment aside. “Back when we were of two different worlds, but I fixed that now!” he cried, before she could respond. “I made you human! I made you like me! There is nothing to separate us now! Now we’re are just two minds that can bend the world to our will!”

“Human?!” Athena sneered. “What makes you think-“
“I saw your work with the DGs, or demigods,” he interrupted. He knew that she wouldn’t be happy with him for stripping her of her beloved divinity, but she would come around eventually. But for the moment he needed to keep her calm, and the easiest way to do that was to talk about her work. After all, she was just as prideful as him. “The extra nerve bundle on the back of their necks, that was your work, wasn’t it?” he asked earnestly.

And there it was, the flash in her eyes that signaled he had stroked her ego just right. “You found that?” she asked, the barest trace of a smile tugging at the corners of her beautiful lips.

“Oh yes,” he said with a genuine smile. “Excellent work by the way, hard to detect, compact design, great filter design, and a messaging system that would be impossible for most to reverse engineer.” He set the bottle of champagne on the floor so that he was free to applaud her.

Athena eyed him critically; like she always did when he applauded her those many times during his tenure as a graduate student. She was the only reason he lasted as long as he did in academia, her pushing him to go further than anyone else had gone before. “Impossible for anyone, but you,” she stated. “Which is impressive, considering a god should have been the only one to know how to interact with them.”

“Oh, it took a little time, but I found a work around.” He pulled out his phone and quickly opened up the schematics for his neural interface and held it so Athena could see the small screen. “This supplemental implant helped decode the commands in real time and also prevented the DGs from reestablishing control of themselves if the signal was lost.” He stopped and smiled at his Athena. “You could say this was a group project.”

She took the phone from his hand, while adjusting her covering with the other, before grey eyes began to analyze his design. “This isn’t… bad,” she said as she started to move through the diagrams. The way her eyes danced across the screen, how her brow wrinkled, and the slight twitch of her nose took him back to those precious nights they had spent together alone in the electronics lab, discussing their ideas and findings into the early hours of the morning. “The surgery would be hardly invasive… There’s no need for a power supply as you’ve incorporated a wireless power system… Solved the issue of respiratory arrest…” She continued to mumble on about all the features and problems he had fixed, her lips twitched into a genuine smile. “This is, actually brilliant. For a mortal,” she quickly added.

Brian knew he was on the right track to winning her over when she mentioned his mortality. She only ever did that when she found something he had done to be truly exceptional. It was her way of reassuring herself that she was still better than him; a falsehood, but one he could live with. “Thank you,” he said with a slight bow.

“I take it you’re at least partly responsible for all that has happened?” his goddess asked, smile disappearing in an instant.

“Mostly,” the engineer shrugged. “I was recruited by a group that had, let’s say, likeminded goals. They provided me with the resources I needed, I in turn gave them the tools they thought they needed, and here we are!” he cried throwing his arms wide and spinning around. “Proof that I was right! That gods are no better than man. That, you are no better than me.”

“You kill or enslave all of my relations, destroy the natural order, and bring the world to the edge of ruin, just to prove you were right?” Athena scoffed in disbelief. “How does that prove anything?”

“As I said, it proves that man and god are equal,” the redhead hissed. Before he continued though he took a deep breath to reel in his anger; this was a reunion and he didn’t want to be the one to ruin it. “I have thoroughly shown you that your kind was more than capable of the same stupidity of man. I
demonstrated multiple times that your kind is just as stuck in their ways as man, and might I add, very easy to destroy because of that. That you are not beyond comprehension. That you are just as mortal as me.”

“If you wanted to prove that man and god are equal, why didn’t you elevate man?” She asked, gray eyes narrowing. “I will admit that we gods delude ourselves with the idea that we are immortal, but wouldn’t it have been a greater accomplishment to raise man up to our level? To create something new rather than destroy.”

“Because I’m not an idiot,” he said through clenched teeth. “If I did that, mankind would experience the same stagnation of your kind that allowed me to destroy them so easily. Without the fear of death there is no need for progress, no desire to create a lasting impression on history. That is why every single advancement has come from humans, because we are constantly trying to escape the void, to gain some ounce of immortality. Which is down right hysterical considering existence is suffering! So why would I inflict that kind of cruelty to man? Why would I eliminate the one thing I like about humankind? Immortality is a joke,” he scoffed.

“So, you would take it from me?” Athena hissed.

“You never had it!” he shouted, throwing his arms up. “Not really. That cycle of yours” -her eyes widened- “Yeah, I know all about it. Repeating the same events over and over, placing DGs into positions of power, using them to start wars, and then using the souls to keep that tapestry from unraveling; the whole shebang! Sounds good on paper, but the problems quickly became apparent, didn’t they?” Athena stood there glaring at him. “Didn’t they?!” he shouted, face turning red. He absolutely hated when people didn’t answer him.

“Yes,” the goddess growled. “The amount of raw materials required to maintain and expand the tapestry grew exponentially with each iteration. Each iteration required significantly more time and effort to make sure everything played out perfectly. Some of the key players were starting to become aware of the Cycle, which in turn required special handling to make sure they didn’t veer from their scripted paths.”

“And?” he asked, raising his eyebrows.

“And it wasn’t sustainable,” Athena sighed. “My models projected that we would be able to have one, possibly two, more iterations before our energy consumption would outpace what we could take from humanity. And of course, Zeus won’t listen…”

“So, one-hundred to two-hundred years left,” Brian tsked. “And all that time being devoted to maintaining a failed system.” He took a step forward and cupped Athena’s cheek; the familiar tingles running up his spine when he touched her once more. “And that is why, I had to free you. Save you from centuries of futile work and instead give you fifty years of happiness. With me.” Overcome with desire, he leaned into-

She pulled away from him just before his lips brushed hers. “I won’t belong to any man!” she snapped.

Oh, not this shit again… Brian took another breath to keep his cool. “I never said anything about belonging to me or anyone else.” Though I want nothing more. “I just want us to work together again, to work together and make this world more bearable.”

“And the last time we worked together ended with you getting handsy,” Athena stated.

“And that won’t happen again,” he sighed, holding up his hands in surrender. “I’ve grown since
then. I’ve learned to control my emotions. Learned just how painful being alone is…”

“Really?” she scoffed. “Because the flowers, the champagne, and let’s not forget, your attempt to kiss me, show otherwise.”

_Damn_… Brian scratched the back of his neck while he looked around the room, trying to think of a believable excuse. He had thought that surely proving himself to her would have been enough to change her mind; to make her see that he was the only one worth her time. “Fine,” he sighed, shoulders drooping. It was time for him to lay it all out for her to see, to tell her exactly how much she meant to him. “I will admit I had romantic intentions, but can you blame me? You are the most beautiful woman on the planet, your intelligence knows no limits, and you are the only person to understand me.” He dropped down to his knees. “You are the only person that made me feel that life was worth living. I- I love you, Athena.”

At first Athena just stood there, possibly shocked by his confession. Then a glimmer of amusement flickered in her stormy eyes, the same eyes that he got lost in during their lengthy conversations. That same amusement traveled down her flawless face to her lips, which curved up into the biggest grin he had ever seen on the goddess.

Brian felt his heart start to beat erratically, as his own face copied Athena’s. _This is it!_

And then she started to laugh. Not a sweet, understanding chuckle, or even an excited, nervous guffaw, but a deep mocking, laugh. Tears started to leak from her eyes as her laugh grew deeper. The former goddess practically doubled over, nearly dropping her coverings.

“What’s so funny?”

“Y-you!” Athena cried as she laughed at him. She placed her hand on the wall to steady herself and waited for her laughter to die down, wiping the tears from her eyes into her coverings. She took a few deep breaths before answering. “You think you’re my equal and that you love me? Oh, Brian, that is the funniest thing I’ve heard in a great many years. It’s like an ant thinking it is equal to a leopard. If you were truly on my level, you would know that love is a waste of time. It has no value. It’s what the common rabble use to trick themselves into believing their lives have purpose, have meaning.” She shook her head, and stood up once more. “You love me,” she scoffed, “I guess you really are as pathetic as the rest. Possibly more so, they at least knew to leave well enough alone when I was done with them. You’re just a sad little boy-“

Athena never got the chance to finish her tirade, as the anger he had been biting back burst through its mental damn. With a primal scream, Avalon’s chief engineer scooped up the bottle of champagne and broke it against the side of the goddess’ head, knocking her to the cold, stone floor. A mixture of blood, glass, and French spirits covering the left side of her previously perfect face.

“YOU FUCKING CUNT!” Brian roared as he jumped on top of her, straddling her hips. Her arms flailed against him wildly as he proceeded to pound the side of her face with his fists. Tiny fragments of glass tore into hands, and the alcohol made the wounds sting, but he couldn’t feel it, the only pain he felt was from his heart shattering into pieces. “YOU THINK I’M AN IDIOT?” he screamed, leaning forward to press one forearm against her swanlike throat. He wanted her to suffer, wanted her to feel the same pain he felt. “WELL, I’M NOT THE ONLY IDIOT!” he yelled, pummeling her face with his other fist. He felt her nose break from the impact of the blow, blood gushing out of her nostrils. Excitement welled up inside him as he watched her struggle to breathe; the one eye that wasn’t swelled shut wide with panic. “WELL ONLY AN IDIOT WOULD USE THE SAME FUCKING FREQUENCY THAT CAN CONTROL THEM TO-“

One of Athena’s fist found purchase, punching him in the kidney and knocking the frenzied engineer
off her. She gasped for breath, rubbing one hand on her already bruising neck, before bolting upright and lunging at her former student. Without the element of surprise on his side, Athena easily parried his frantic blows, while getting in a few herself. “YOU DARE ATTACK ATHENA?!” she screamed in his face, before biting the tip of Brian’s nose off. The adrenaline courses through her veins was a new experience for her, and for the first time in her existence, she truly understood the blood lust that her mortal heroes talked about. “YOU PATHETIC, LITTLE WRETCH! YOU CAN’T CONTROL A GOD WITH A-“

There was a flash of light, blinding the room’s occupants, then the sound of bones breaking as the weight from Brian’s chest disappeared. He already knew what had happened before his vision returned; Terminate-us had followed his orders perfectly. A stone hand pulled him to his feet, where he saw Athena lying across the room on her side, her left arm bent in an unnatural angle, while her left side was rapidly turning black and blue. He brought his hand up to his nose, only to hiss in pain as she pulled his hand back, his fingertips now covered in his own blood.

“Fucking cunt,” the engineer sneered, as he wiped the blood into his jacket. This had not gone even remotely close to how he envisioned their reunion. He thought that she would appreciate him, understand his points, see him as the only one worthy of her time. They would go secure the loom for humanity and spend the rest of their lives working to understand its secrets. They would use it to purge the world of the unwanted and make intellect and logic the driving force that made world go round. They would find happiness in each other. Be the only one the other could relate to. “Bitch.”

But look what happened…

She had laughed at him. He bared his heart and soul before the only woman he had ever loved, and she laughed at him. The woman who he had pulled the heavens down to earth for, laughed at his feelings. She called him an ant, common rabble, pathetic, and worst of all, an idiot.

Athena was just another individual who didn’t understand him.

He was alone in the world once more.

And that realization hurt him to the core. As much as he despised everyone around him, a small part of him envied them and what they had. George had his monster of a daughter, the two always side-by-side and happy. Rashid had a wife and kids, who were always there for him when he got home from assignment. Merlin, the insufferable fool that he was, had had Arthur and the ability to make friends with anyone he met. Even Morgan, who despite her past, was popular and friendly with every Avalon grunt she met.

But him? He had a big house that was cold and lonely. His parents had stopped talking to him the second he went off the college. And before that, they only talked to him if it was absolutely necessary, as they blamed him for the death of his brother. Yes, he did hijack his brothers RC car and made him chase it out into the road, but it was his own fault for being stupid enough to follow. When he had met Athena, he had been so happy, so relieved, that there was someone out there that understood him. And when she left he dedicated his life to proving he was worthy of her.

He just wanted someone he could relate to.

And look where it got me…

A stone finger tapped his shoulder, interrupting his thoughts. Normally Brian would snap at anyone that disturbed him, but he was emotionally drained and the interruption for once was a welcome reprieve. He looked up to see Terminate-us gingerly holding the control cylinder he had brought
between his massive stone thumbs and index finger; the small object probably had fell out of his pocket during the tussle. Under different circumstances, he might have questioned why the usually emotionless god was smiling, but things were hardly normal.

“Not yet,” he said, pushing the stone hand away, a malicious grin slowly growing on the redhead’s face. Athena would still be his, albeit not in the way he had envisioned. He shed his jacket and popped the top button of his shirt open, before stalking over to the goddess of wisdom’s broken body. “What were you saying about not being able to control a god?” the redhead sneered.

He rolled the goddess over onto her back, making her snivel in pain as her broken arm bounced off the marble floor. It was clear to the engineer that Terminate-us’ backhand had broken a fair share of the goddess’ ribs on the left side of her body; the black and blue flesh a clear give away combined with her shallow breathing. The right side of her face was covered in blood; her left eye swollen completely shut. Her nose was broken and twisted; blood still pouring from both nostrils. Her perfect front teeth had been broken or knocked out; the missing teeth either scattered on the floor around them or swallowed by the once majestic goddess.

“Because If you haven’t noticed, I brought hard, irrefutable proof with me,” Brian laughed, kicking the goddess’ leg.

Athena opened one gray eye as her body shuddered. Her lips started to move, but only a wet wheeze could be heard, before she started to cough; her face twisting in agony at the action. She tried to move away from him by pushing her bare feet against blood covered floor, but her legs went limp after moving less than an inch.

It was absolutely pathetic.

And he was only going to make it worse for the goddess.

“Oh, Athena,” Brian chuckled, as he slowly removed his belt, “I always pictured this just a little different; less blood and you being a little more willing.” With his belt removed, he started to unbutton his pants. “But you know what? This is fine too.” With a slight wiggle of his hips, his pants dropped to his ankles.

He dropped to his knees and crawled over to the broken body of Athena; her body shuddering every time the engineer touched her. The one eye that she could see out of was opened wide and full of fear, which only excited the redhead. He slowly trailed one finger from the base of her neck to her breasts, and then to the bruised flesh, before pushing against it; the goddess whimpering in response. Brian bent down and began to kiss her neck, biting down in places far harder than any lover would. Her breathing became erratic when he bit on her clavicle hard enough to draw blood, and she tried to flail around to remove her former protégé.

“Hold her down,” Brian ordered, the stone giant nodding in response. The former protector of New Rome moved to stand over Athena’s head, and placed one hand against her non-broken arm and the other on her other shoulder; pinning her to the floor.

*She always did tell me to go farther than anyone else.*

“Naaaa! Naaa!” the goddess screamed in protest, trying to fight her way free of the fallen god’s grip.

“You know from my angle,” Brian sneered while pulling down his boxers, “you’re the pathetic one.” He briefly wondered if he should use a condom, but he figured that she would be clean. After all, it was going to be her first time. Plus, he really didn’t like the feel of latex. “I would say that this won’t hurt, but I’d be lying.” He dropped down so that his lips were next to her ear. “Because, I’m
going to hurt you as much as you hurt me.”

And as he rammed his manhood inside of her, for the first time in her existence, Athena wished for death.

Brian didn’t feel any better.

But he did feel worse.

He was just as alone and miserable as he was before his unfortunate reunion, but the difference was he didn’t have any prospects to look forward to. Sure, he was considered the savior of the world, and would be again when he took control of the loom, but all that attention only numbed him so much. The talk shows, the glitzy parties, and the women that threw themselves at him, only distracted him so much. That wasn’t the life he wanted, but neither was his life before that. All he had ever wanted was Athena.

The redhead flinched as the goddess of wisdom’s temple-slash-home collapsed into a pile of rubble, sending up a billowing cloud of dust and plaster. “Warn a guy next time!” he spat to his newest toy.

Athena appeared next to him and bowed to him. His bedroom antics had almost killed her, but upon inserting the control cylinder in her mouth, she was back to her godly and neigh invulnerable self; minus the free will and ability to talk of course. However, he did order her to keep the wounds he had inflicted upon her as a constant reminder of who was superior. Sure, that meant that one arm hung uselessly, she leaned to one side, and could only see from one eye, but it served an important purpose. A reminder that he was better than everyone else, a grim warning for those that thought about crossing him, and a monument to his eternal isolation.

“It’s not fair!” he shouted, grabbing handfuls of red hair. “You were supposed to be the one! You were supposed to make everything better!” Brian released his hair and proceeded to wale on Athena once more, but the goddess didn’t react to his frantic blows, upsetting him even further.

He hated Athena. He hated Merlin. He hated all of humanity. He hated all the gods, monsters, and demigods. He hated his past. He hated his present. He hated his future.

Someday he would leave his body, but even then, he would still exist in a state of isolation. There was no escaping it. No way of-

“But there is,” Brian smiled to himself. “And the answer is nearby.”

He turned his back to his pets and gazed up at the last stronghold on Olympus. “Come along Athena, Terminate-us, we have a loom to destroy.”

Chapter End Notes

I actually censored this chapter a bit. The scene in question was actually going to go a
bit farther, but I felt what I had was too much already.

I debated with myself about this chapter since this story was in its planning stages, but I realized that Brian would only work as a truly horrifying villain if we went this route. Immortality, lusting for power, godhood, all those reasons were too cliché. Too Riordan. But love, the desire to not be alone, to have someone to hold is a very human want that people have done horrible things for. In my studies, I encountered many people that had personality traits like Brian, and some that were scarily close. They all thought they were better than everyone else, that they were smarter, that they deserved it all, and the world should bow before them. But they had a few common traits. They said that life was painful, and yet they wanted someone to share it with. Their view of themselves combined with their loneliness led to some bad situations. One girl had to file a restraining order after she rejected one guy, and another girl received texts and calls that fluctuated from harassing to suicide threats. It wouldn't be a stretch of the imagination to see things turning worse....

So, I just imagined what would happen if Athena had come into contact with one of those people. As I started to think about that scenario I figured it would end in one of two ways. The first is the obvious mortal gets destroyed. Not a lot one can do with that. The second option requires the mortal to be truly exceptional, one thats existence would be of great benefit to humanity and more importantly Olympus. That person would get a pass, and Athena would just leave like always. But if that person was just a little... unhinged and obsessive, well, you now know.

Anyway, happier topics. If only ever so slightly.

There were a couple revelations in this chapter that should ring some alarms if you caught them. Things that many of you will start to piece into a much greater puzzle. A puzzle you are trying to put together without the box, without knowing how many pieces, in the dark.

Well, the next chapter is a little more upbeat, as we get to check in on Merlin.

Thanks for reading, and I hope you all continue to read. Leave me your thoughts and opinions.
Merlin

Chapter Summary

Warnings: Blood, torture, death.

Tonight: Merlin, much like his namesake, has a few tricks up his sleeve.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Merlin clenched the silent radio in his hand with enough force that the military-grade plastic began to give. His grip grew tighter and tighter as the gunfire rang out around him as if subjecting the inanimate object to such torture would somehow make it cease its silence.

“Fallback!” he heard one brave marine call out, before an intense wave of heat hit the old man.

His grip loosened ever-so-slightly when a familiar odor filled the air. It was a smell that he had thought he’d never smell again, and he wished with every ounce of his soul that it would have remained true. For one whiff of that sickening smell of burning flesh transported him across the sea and nearly eighty years in the past. He wasn’t Merlin then, nor was he Jeremiah Arthurson, but a small, malnourished boy named Jeremiah Aarons who had given up on life. Day in and day out he had watched people be worked to death while others were rounded up and fed to monsters only he could see.

“Shoot him!” a voice called out over the fog of memories, only to be silenced by a flaming sword lopping the soldiers head off. The body dropped to its knees before collapsing only a few feet in front of the Big Apple Island founder, triggering another wave of memories.

Merlin could still feel the splintering wooden shaft of the shovel against his blistering and bleeding palms, feel his feet stinking into the hot, fetid material that had once been human. He could feel the bile well up in his throat every time he found a bone fragment, or wore, a whole bone that had belonged to someone that should have been far too young to experience such horrors. Worst of all, was the fear he felt every time his body was ready to collapse, knowing that he would be the next victim if he proved too weak.

It had been a reality void of hope.

“Run little mortals! Run!” a booming voice cackled over the gunfire.

That voice was also jogged a few unpleasant memories. Memories of a time when the camp was under inspection from the so-called high brass. Two men, a boy, and a girl, dressed in black leather trench coats and hats adorned with skulls and lightning bolts that marked them as Schutzstaffel. The bearded man and two teens paid him no mind as they walked by him, but the other man, a huge, muscular man wearing dark lensed glasses laughed at him and made a quick motion along his neck with one finger. But the young boy didn’t shrink back, instead he glared at the officer in defiance. The man’s eyes then quickly flared from behind the dark lenses, making Merlin fall backwards in fear, to which the man only laughed.
And Merlin never forgot that day.

That was enough to snap him to his senses, leaving that dreaded camp behind and bringing him back to the ruins of Mount Olympus. The old man looked at the ruined path before him, bodies of minor gods and humans alike strewn about at random. Flying all around the peripherals of the floating mountain top were an untold number of the strange black creatures that had emerged from below only hours ago; the strange creatures seemingly held at bay by an unseen force. The ever-moving mass of wings blocked off most of the light of the early morning sun, bathing the ruined divine city in an artificial night. What little light there was came from the few magical scones that remained, tracer rounds, and of course, Ares himself.

“Run away!” The god roared with laughter as he swung his fiery sword down, cleaving the street, and a marine, in two. The god of war stood four times taller than the average man, his sword nearly half that in length. The blood-stained armor he wore somehow made him seem even larger than he already was. His eyes flared as brightly as the sun from behind his helmet, which truly made him look like his title.

“You think your puny little weapons are going to hurt me?” Ares bellowed, as gunfire from every direction bounced harmless off his glowing form. “You forget who you’re dealing with!” The god heaved his sword up over his head. “Allow me to remind you!”

Two of the gods they had brought with them rushed forward to strike at the god of war; gods of wind from Chicago if he recalled correctly. Their bodies were surrounded by small cyclones carrying dirt and debris; the occasional arc of electricity could be seen within. They began to fire off their payload at Ares, the rocks and dirt leaving a few dents in his armor.

But in the blink of an eye, the two gods were cut asunder; their physical forms scattering with the very wind they had summoned. “I’m Ares,” the god sneered, as he pulled his weapon free from the ground. “God of war!”

*The one time we truly need that little puke, and he runs off!* Merlin thought with a huff. The signal generators mounted on his armed accompaniment were having a reduced effect on the home of the gods, which he supposed, wasn’t entirely to be unexpected. The problem was that the men with him were not Avalon men, and therefore not accustomed to fighting gods and monsters, so when the signal failed to incapacitate Ares instantly, the men reverted to old fashioned lead. *Which is proving to be a costly mistake.*

“God of war,” Merlin stated, taking one step forward. “That always seemed like such a contradiction to me. Demon of war, monster of war, or even the classic warlord, are all suitable titles. But god?”

He took another step toward the hulking giant and gripped his cane tighter. “Don’t be absurd.”

Ares looked down at him with what Merlin thought was confusion. “Really?” the god bellowed, slowly spinning around in place. “The bravest amongst you is an old man with a big mouth?”

“The word *god* invokes images of benevolence, understanding, and love. While *war*, brings to mind human tragedy, chaos, and evil,” Merlin explained as he took another step closer to his ancient foe. “So, a ‘god of war’ is really an oxymoron by many accounts.”

Ares’ flaming eyes darted from side to side, looking for some indication that this was really happening. “Look, I’m all for honorable deaths, but even I’m going to feel bad for this…” the god said, hefting his flaming sword up once more. “Seriously, would someone come and grab this old fart? I-”

The god’s monologue turned into a blood curdling scream as Merlin pressed a tiny button built into
his cane’s handle, releasing a high-powered blast of the signal. Merlin’s engineers had looked at him skeptically when he first requested the cane some many months ago, citing the weight from the power cells would make it impractical for him to carry it around all the time. He showed them though, as he went absolutely everywhere with it; New Rome, DC, Mr. Grace’s farm, and even the crater that had been the eastern demigod camp. The only down side to the disguised weapon was that it was so fun to spin around and bounce off the floor, which had become a nervous habit of his. And now, he had just proved its usefulness as a weapon as well.

The giant bronze sword fell to the ground, its flame extinguished, as the god clutched at his head, screaming in agony. His size rapidly reduced in moments, leaving but a man lying on the ground where a god once stood. His body twisted and jerked painfully, as he continued to hold his head in his battle worn hands.

A small part of Merlin wanted to continue to watch the former man writhe in agony before him, a little voice telling him that this was what the god of war deserved, but he was better than that, and Ares could have some crucial information. He released the button on his cane, and shortly thereafter, the god stopped his writhing, taking deep ragged breaths as he laid on the ruined streets of Olympus. “You would think that the god of war, would know that old men are often the first to throw themselves into the face of danger.” Merlin chuckled, slowly walking towards the fallen god. “People my age know our time is nearly up, and are willing to give what little we have left to save those with so much left.”

From all around him, the surviving members of the military emerged from their make-shift shelters, slowly approaching with their weapons at the ready. Many of the men and women wore awed expressions, their eyes rapidly shifting from Merlin to Ares, trying to process what they had just witnessed. The others though, wore expressions of clear hatred for the god of war, and Merlin was sure that if he hadn’t been standing there, they would have unloaded their weapons into the Ares. And rightly so, as of the original three-dozen soldiers, less than twenty remained.

“Quickly gather up the fallen,” Merlin said, loud enough for all to hear. “I need to have a chat with our friend here on a few… important matters.”

Merlin looked intently at the silent radio once more, as he sat across from the tied-up god of war, as his stomach seemingly twisted into ever more complicated and painful knots. The constant beeping that emanated from a secret bunker for the executive branch had stopped shortly after Brian had departed for- whatever he needed to do. That simple beep represented, to him anyway, the heartbeat of the world; the one clear sign that there was still humanity out there. Not that he doubted that those around him were the last people on the entirety of the planet, but with the loss of that beeping it seemed incredibly likely that all organized resistances to the unknown menace had fallen.

A scary thought, and a likely scenario.

At first it seemed that luck had been on his side when the creatures first appeared. He had been summoned to DC the day before along with Brian, to discuss before a senate panel to discuss the implementation of additional failsafes into the ever-growing signal network. Unlike his previous trip to Washington, the gathered senators and statesmen had been willing, and eager, to listen to what he had to say. His proposal to immediately begin transitioning the network to be solely powered by renewable energy sources and implement the new glass-type recharging batteries developed by Dr. Goodenough was accepted without question. In a way he felt bad for lying to the elected officials
like that, but sometimes drastic steps are needed to ensure a better future for all; as his choices would tip the world to a green future.

After the meeting, Merlin had done what he always did in the evening, listening to the radio while filling out some paperwork, thinking of Arthur, and trying to figure out how to have his greatest mistake removed from the face of the Earth. He had narrowed the last down to either dropping the redhead into the Mariana Trench, or staging and accidental drug overdose; he knew that he later was far more practical, but it wasn’t nearly as fun. With his nightly rituals done, he removed his suit, said his goodnights to the picture of Arthur he always carried, and tried to sleep on the too hard hotel mattress.

In less than two hours after closing his eyes, his phone began to vibrate and ring. He answered the phone and a gruff voice had told him to get dressed and be ready for immediate extraction. Before he had the chance to process what was said, his hotel room door was kicked in and two stone-faced members of the Secret Service stood there with their weapons drawn. He would be lying if he said a certain memory wasn’t triggered, but he was able to push it aside. He barely had time to pull on his suit before the men escorted him out of the hotel and placed him in the backseat of a black, armored SUV typically reserved for government officials.

Merlin’s silent abductors wouldn’t answer any of his questions, but the reason for his abduction quickly became apparent. The great bastion of democracy that was Washington D.C was ablaze, many of its century old buildings collapsing into piles of rubble as unseen forces ripped through them. The narrow streets, arranged like the spokes of a wagon wheel around the capitol, were filled with people trying to flee the city, or cratered with holes that seemed to stretch on forever, forcing them to backtrack multiple times and even running over innocent bystanders much to his dismay.

And as the approached the National Mall, he saw the source of the chaos around him or the first time. Huge, black creatures with multitudes of glowing, purple eyes, whose every feature defied the natural order of the world. Their gelatinous bodies could seemingly sprout any appendage they desired in great number with less than a moment’s notice; as one grew dozens of razor-tipped tentacle-like limbs to impale those brave enough trying to fight them off. Some were capable of flight, swooping down on unsuspecting victims, only to shed their wings and be devoured whole.

But before he could make out any further characteristics of the creatures of nightmare, his driver suddenly whipped the SUV into an alley, as the far end of the mall exploded into a ball of fire and fury. The explosion continued for the entire length of the battlefield, vaporizing the black abominations and those fighting them, only stopping once the Lincoln Memorial was reduced to rubble. It took him a moment to realize that he had just witnessed a carpet bombing.

The rest of the trip became a blur of chaos, and somehow Merlin found himself standing next to Brian in front of the president and what remained of his cabinet in a secret bunker deep within the ground.

And things only got worse.

The monsters weren’t an isolated incident, not by a longshot. Shortly after he had retired for the evening, the creatures had begun to emerge in mass from the sea and from beneath the earth all around the globe. The sheer number of them and their unexpected attack had reduced most nations’ chances of a counteroffensive to zero; many smaller countries were not responding to any attempts at communication. Larger nations were fairing barely better, all contact lost with rural areas and major metropolises were going dark by the minute. Early warning systems, a remnant of the Cold War, were detecting multiple ICBM launches; a fact confirmed by satellite surveillance.

Satellite surveillance also showed that the horrors were all migrating to one place: the ruins of New...
York City.

And the assembled government officials wanted to know why.

Brian quickly rattled off that they were Olympus’ last ditch effort to reassert control over the world, a theory that Merlin doubted, and that the only way to stop them was to take control of the Loom of Fate, a statement that made Merlin’s jaw drop. Early on in Avalon, it was decided that any divine weapons or artifacts of sufficient power would be kept hidden from any government or organization to prevent their abuse. The Loom of Fate was not only one such object, but the most dangerous on their list, so to have Brian volunteer to take control of it was greatly disturbing. But it was at least partially a good idea, as something as powerful as the loom would surely be able to turn the tide of battle.

One television conference, and an hour later, they were being flown to Olympus, accompanied by what marines and soldiers that were at hand and what Gs Brian was capable of calling from storage.

“What can you tell me about those things?” Merlin asked, setting aside the silent radio and looking the god in his nonexistent eyes. “Are they under Zeus’ control?”

Ares, sitting on the remnants of a marble pillar, struggled against his bonds. Merlin didn’t doubt for a second the muscular man could break the zip ties restraining him, that is, if his biceps were anything to go by. But breaking free would be a death sentence for the blind god, as the two soldiers standing on either side of him only a few feet away would shoot him dead in an instant. “Wouldn’t you like to know?” Ares growled.

“Yes, that is why I’m asking,” Merlin responded with a smile. “And I am asking nicely.”

“And I’m telling you nicely to go fuck yourself,” the former god of war said, staring three feet to Merlin’s left. “Because why would I aid the enemy?”

“Oh, you think we’re the enemy?

The zip ties around Ares’ ankles began to cut into his flesh as he twisted and turned, drawing blood as he did so. “Well you’re either the enemy, or the boy scouts have gotten far more aggressive selling popcorn,” he growled, as he continued to struggle against his bonds. “Damn the bastard who invented these to Tartarus!”

I don’t have time for this, Merlin thought, closing his eyes to ponder a way to make the god talk.

Ares. Ares. God of War. His roman aspect is Mars. Reports state he is hyper aggressive and quick to anger. Possibly power hungry. Not a dullard though, some of the finest generals in history received tutelage from him. One of the gods that know the full extent of Zeus’ madness. Has numerous demigod children at any given time, only Apollo, Athena, and Hermes can rival. Has had a millennia long affair going on with Aphrodite, who is currently rotting on that pile… The slightest hint of a smile tugged at the old man’s lips. “You are correct, we are enemies. We have come to overthrow Zeus to end the madness around us.”

Ares stopped struggling for a moment to laugh. “Overthrow Zeus? Good luck with that! Stronger beings than you have tried! Even if you somehow repeat what you did to me, he still has the master bolt!”

Merlin heaved a heavy sigh. “Yes, I suppose that is a problem. But we do have a small army of gods on our side. I wager that would do the trick.”

“You mean like more of those runts I cleaved in two?” Ares laughed. “Zeus could zap them out of
What if… what if we had an Olympian on our side? Someone who could level the playing field? Surely, with our weapons, army of gods, and a willing Olympian would be enough to take down someone so old.” Merlin’s acting skills were terrible, he could never fool Artie on anything big or small, but he didn’t need to be a great actor or even a convincing one. “Someone who would be willing to take the throne and work with us when all is said and done?”

“Me,” Ares huffed, sitting up a little straighter, clearly weighing what he was being offered. And then the god burst out laughing. “You must think I’m some kind of idiot! Yeah, taking the throne is tempting, but not when the kingdom only has three members! And let’s not forget how your kind forced us to resort to cannibalism, by locking us up here!” Ares shook his head. “I ain’t helping you, so you can forget it.”

Merlin’s smile grew, and he was thankful that Ares was blind, or he would have given himself away. “I guess,” the old man sighed. “I guess when it’s you, Zeus, and Aphrodite, there is hardly-“

“Don’t say her name!” Ares growled, spit flying from his mouth.

“Oh? Why not? She is one of the three survivors, is she not?” he asked the angered god. “I mean, on the way up here I saw the bodies of Hera, Apollo, Hephaestus, and Hermes. Dionysus and Artemis were taken care of a few months back by my men. Poseidon is believed to be trapped beneath the sea. As for Demeter, well, she is accounted for as well. So that leaves You, Zeus, Athena, and Aphrodite unaccounted for. Surely-“

“SHUTUP!” the former god of war cried, blood trickling down his wrists as he pulled even tighter on his bonds. “SHUTUP! SHUTUP! SHUTUP!”

“Oh,” he gasped. “Zeus chose his daughter over the goddess of love, didn’t he? It’s understandable I suppose, but that must be painful. To lose the one you love.” He knew firsthand how painful it was to lose loved ones, but he did not feel any compassion for the god of war. He has been arranging wars for thousands of years, destroying families without a second thought. This is what he deserves. “Well that must have been pretty recent, We didn’t see her on any of the piles-“

With a mighty roar, Ares broke free of his bindings and rushed forward- only to miss Merlin by several feet to the left. Instantly the two soldiers were on him, pummeling him relentless with the stocks of their weapons, knocking the god to the dust covered ground. Ares definitely lived up to his title, as even while blind and flat on his back, he managed to get in a few good hits, even going as far as to bite an ankle of one of the men, but after a minute, the god was placed before him once more. Albeit, a few shades darker and a bit redder.

“I’m not going to lie to you anymore, Ares,” Merlin stated, voice completely void of emotion. “I plan on killing you and everyone else up here. I plan on taking the Loom of Fate and setting the world right. Nothing is going to change my mind on those two statements. However, what I am willing to do is let you choose your death.” He stood up, his old bones creaking seemingly a little louder than usual. “You can either die as you are now, a bullet to the head and your body tossed in a ditch for the carrion to feast on.” Ares frowned at that. “Or you can tell me what I want to know, I restore your godhood, we go avenge the woman you loved, and then if you’re still living, I kill you then. You’re choice.”

Ares furrowed his brow in thought as he considered his options. It was fairly easy to tell what was going through the depowered god’s mind. The first option definitely wouldn’t do for the god of war; it left his honor wounded and was not a warrior’s death. The second option though, had promise. He could go along with the proposal completely, an unlikely scenario. He could betray them the second
he got his divinity restored, but he was just as likely to have it stripped away again. He could lead them directly to the throne room only to betray them there, which was likely. Or, he could use the mortals to his advantage, aiding them to kill Zeus, and by extension avenge Aphrodite, and then take his chances on wiping them out. What he did would depend on what he perceived as the most honorable path.

“Fine,” Ares growled through clenched teeth. “Ask your damn questions.”

Merlin clapped his hands together. “Excellent! You made the right choice! Now, let’s go back to my first question, what are those things, and are they under Olympus’ control?”

Ares shook his head. “Not a damn clue. Old though, you can tell just be looking at them. As for controlling them? Nah, in case you haven’t noticed they seem mighty determined to get in here.”

“And why are they keeping their distance?”

The former god shrugged. “Best guess is the same power radiating from the loom that kept Olympus safe is keeping them at bay.” Ares lifted his head to the sky and gulped. “For now…”

Not a single part of him doubted Ares’ answer, though it did give the old man the slightest bit of hope. So, the Loom of Fate is the answer. If we can increase or reproduce the field it emits on a global scale, we can end this. And as much as it pains me to admit it, Brian is the only one capable of doing so… Merlin took a deep, shaky breath. “You mentioned there is only three of you up here. Do you mean only three gods? Or three total? What of the Fates?”

“Three. Total,” Ares stated, slumping forward ever so slightly. His injuries were starting to take their toll, and being unaccustomed to a mortal form meant that he had no resilience. “The Fates disappeared a couple months back. Went into their chamber one day and poof! They never came out.”

“Then who has been using the loom? Tending to the tapestry?”

Ares narrowed his nonexistent eyes. “You know an awful lot for a mortal…”

“First rule of war is to know your enemy,” Merlin shot back.

“Respectable,” the god nodded. “As for who is using the loom? That would-be Athena. Not that it’s doing any good,” Ares growled. “The materials are tickling in at best, the holes in the tapestry are growing every day, and the dumb bitch hasn’t figured out the Olympian Pattern yet!” he shook his head. “To make matters even worse, the war we had planned didn’t start! All that planning and hard work for nothing!”

A pity, truly… Merlin thought, rolling his eyes. “Last question. The entrance to the Chamber of Fate is in the throne room, but where exactly?”

“Beneath the hearth, but you don’t need to worry about that. It’s been open for months. Athena got tired of asking Zeus to open it for her, and he got tired of her asking.”

Merlin smiled as he rose up to his feet. “That’s some good news I suppose. I thank you for your cooperation, oh god of war.”

“Yeah, sure, fine, whatever,” Ares spat. “Now put me back the way I was!”

Merlin stepped closer to the blind god, gripping his cane tightly. “About that…” he bounced his cane off the ground and caught it in midair, before striking Ares upside the head with it like a baseball bat,
knocking the muscular man over. The old man didn’t stop his assault though, continuing to beat the god’s face with his cane with surprising vigor. It had been years since he had last fought a monster, and even longer since he caved ones’ skull in with a *Louisville Slugger*, but the muscle memory was surprisingly still there.

As was the ferocity.

He heard Ares’ jaw break from one harsh blow, that also made the black wooden exterior of the cane split open, slightly revealing the stainless-steel interior. A mixture of blood and teeth flew out of the god’s mouth, some of which landed on Merlin’s shoes. With a mighty backhand, the handle of his cane tore a huge gash across Ares’ cheek. He followed through with a forehand, breaking the former god’s Maxilla and left Zygomatic. By then Ares had stopped struggling, but Merlin refused to stop his relentless assault; delivering blow after blow with his cane to the man’s head.

He released decades of pent up fury and sorrow, remembering the family and friends he had lost because of the man before him. He thought of George, and how his right-hand man had been torn away his family to fight in a war he didn’t believe. A war that was orchestrated by the writhing, bloody mess before him. Ares wasn’t a god to respect, he was an idea that delighted in death and suffering. And in an ideal world, he wouldn’t exist.

“I lied!” Merlin gasped as he delivered his final blow. He stopped to catch his breath, suddenly feeling incredibly drained, before addressing the two shocked soldiers. “Toss him over the side,” he panted, “we won’t be needing him anymore.” The two looked at him and then to Ares, whose skull and much of his face had been caved in. If the god of war was someone still alive, it wouldn’t be for very long. “Well?” he asked, wiping his cane handle clean with his wrinkled jacket.

The two snapped out of their stupors and each grabbed one limp arm of Ares’, then drug him out of sight, leaving a trail of blood in their wake.


Merlin stole a glance at the fiery redhead as what remained of their force cautiously approached the throne room.

Something was definitely off with his chief engineer. Not that that wasn’t normal, the young man had been flagged early on as having a multitude of psychological problems, problems Merlin had (regrettably) ignored. But, something was more off than usual.

The millennial had returned to the group missing the tip of his nose and was covered with blood and bruises, with a far more battered Athena in tow. He claimed he went and captured the goddess of wisdom as a potential trump card against the king of the gods and as a way to easily make changes to the Loom of Fate and its ever growing tapestry. If she was to truly fight Zeus, then it would have made far more sense to keep in one piece and not look like a fresh arrival to a woman’s shelter. And the glances the engineer kept sneaking at Athena were very much out of character for him.

Brian’s emotions were also in a state of rapid flux, one second his face would grow red with anger, only to instantly pale as his eyes dimmed. The rapid mood swings just left the millennial looking exhausted, as if he just wanted to lay down and enter an eternal slumber. The fire in his eyes, that
had propelled Avalon’s technological advancements at an unheard-of pace, was gone, replaced by an empty abyss.

Even more telling was that not once since his return, had the young man insulted him. No old-man cracks, no time-was-running-out jabs, or holocaust barbs. Brian just followed the armed escort with his golem and goddess trailing slightly behind him.

“Sir,” A young woman and combat armor said, snapping Merlin from his thoughts, “the throne room is just up ahead, how should we proceed?”

Merlin look up and examined the remains of the imposing structure before them. It wasn’t hard to see that the palace had once opulent beyond compare, with its marble columns, gold and silver reliefs, gemstone and pearl mosaics, and statues of bronze. But like all these beautiful, they were fragile, and had been mostly destroyed by the artillery strike months ago. The great dome that covered the center was mostly collapsed, only around a quarter of it still standing upright in a weak defiance. The west wings had been completely leveled, leaving a pile of rubble composed of the riches of the Earth. The great works of art that surrounded it now looked more ancient, gray, and worn than those discovered by the Borgia so very long ago.

“Surround the place and move in slowly in teams of two,” he said, scratching his chin in thought. “While you do that, Brian, myself, and those two will face him directly.” He took a weary step forward. “I do not see our direct assault working, so it is imperative you use the signal generators to weaken him. Like Ares, they will not be instantaneous, and will possibly take even longer to take effect since he is near the fount of their power.”

“Understood sir!” the captain, if he was reading her regalia correctly, said with a quick salute. With that she strode away, barking out orders to the surviving men.

In its current state, it was easy to forget that Olympus was a place that existed beside the mortal world, but as they wandered the once magnificent halls were gods and titans once strode proudly, not so subtle reminders began to manifest. Half-burnt tapestries made of the finest silks depicted moving recreations of centuries old battles, only for them to suddenly stop and distort before starting their woven recording once more. Pieces of stonework and plaster hung suspended in the air by an unseen force, some of which spun in place, while others sparked with a golden electricity with the consistency of a beating heart. Pieces of the grand halls seemed to shrink and enlarge at random, as if the structure itself couldn’t decide on what size it should be. Even the floors were in a state of flux; one second appearing to be marble tile, the next a diamond encrusted mosaic, and going momentarily transparent to show the ruined city far below.

He nearly needed a new pair of pants on that last change.

But despite everything they saw, Brian remained silent. Before the young man would have been running through the halls like a sugar crazed child examining every phenomenon and making hypothesis after hypothesis. Now though, he looked as exciting and interested as a young child taken for back-to-school clothes shopping by their mother.

To Merlin, the sights reminded him of a time when he was still learning English. The boat ride from Europe to America had been quite long and by the time they were halfway across the Atlantic, they had gone through what few books and comics the American had with him. But Arthur wasn’t one to
reread a book immediately after finishing it, so he traded his last Hershey’s bar (much to his chagrin) for a book of poetry. Most were short, simple verses of love that the other GIs copied into their letters home, but there were a couple that were a bit more substantial, particularly one by Shelly, with a name nearly impossible to say by someone just learning the language.

“I met a traveler from an antique land,” Merlin recited from memory as they reached the final corridor to the throne room.

“What was that?” Brian asked, looking at him curiously.

“Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone, stand in the desert,” he continued, ignoring his companions question and feeling a feeling a burst of energy from seeing their target so close. “Near the, on the sand, half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown, and wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command, tell that its sculptor well those passions read, which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things.”

“Oh great, Alzheimer’s final hit, didn’t it?” The redhead sighed as he struggled to keep up with the energetic old man.

Merlin removed his helmet and flap jacket; the heavy, Kevlar filled thing thudding against the floor. He knew that such things would make no difference to Zeus’ bolt, so he was going to present himself to the greatest mass murderer in history with dignity and a brave face. “The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed them.” And with those words, he stepped foot into the throne room.

At one time the room would have been beautiful, a true wonder of the world. The gods of antiquity would sit in their massive thrones and discuss topics they deemed important, determine whether or not to interfere with the mortal world, and argue with one another, while the world around them change with each divine utterance. Servants would rush out and attend to whatever trivial need of their masters, possibly as lavishly dressed as possible as yet another means for their masters to display their wealth and power. The gods themselves though would make their servants look like paupers in comparison, every gesture, sentence, and bauble calculated well in advance to give the illusion that they were perfect.

“And on the pedestal these words appear,” Merlin cried, his voice echoing in the large chamber. “My name is Ozymandias, king of kings! Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!”

But that grandeur was gone, destroyed by its own creator’s desire for immortality. Most of the twelve thrones, each different from the last, were destroyed or damaged; one that looked like a deep-sea fishing seat was embedded just above the entrance, no doubt thrown there in a fit of rage. The grand dome overhead had mostly collapsed, showering the floor with pieces of a faux night sky, whilst some lingered midair. A large aquarium at on its side near the opposite wall, what little water remained was dark and thick with algae. In the center of the room, the remains of a hearth had been pushed aside, revealing a spiral staircase that was far smaller proportionally compared to the colossal architecture around it. Every surface was covered in dark ash, giving the illusion that the room had not been used in a great many years.

“Nothing beside remains. Round the decay of that colossal wrack, boundless and bare. The lone and level sands stretch far away,” he finished with a whisper.

For sitting in his once grand throne of silver and gold, clutching a rod of bronze, was Zeus.

The king of the gods had changed slightly since their last encounter. The youngest son of Kronos and Rhea still had the same long dark hair and beard, though there were a few more streaks of gray
in it; most likely having acquired them recently. His frame was still powerful and imposing; his traditional Grecian attire displaying his muscles to the world. His face was still timeless, locked somewhere between youthful and middle aged.

But the madness in his eyes was new; reminding Merlin of a stray dog that had been cornered. There was still intelligence behind those eyes though. An intellect that had orchestrated countless battles and wars for centuries. Arranged it so mankind would always find a way to hate one another, while remaining ignorant to the truth. Had his minions exterminate anyone and anything that threatened the status quo. All for the sake of his own longevity.

And the king of the gods started slowly clapping with ichor stained hands; one hand still clutching his master bolt. “That might have been the best rendition of Shelly I’ve heard in years,” Zeus stated, eyes fixed solely on him. If he noticed Brian, Athena, or Terminus, he didn’t show it, possibly considering them nothing but flies on the wall.

“And one that is appropriate, given our current surroundings,” Merlin responded, holding his arms wide amongst the ruin. “For here I stand amongst ruin; all that remains of a once great kingdom.”

Zeus chuckled with amusement. “I suppose it looks that was to the mortal eye, but Olympus is eternal as I. Everything lost will be restored thanks to those charming little abominations out there. Just you watch.”

“I guess you are referring to that charming little cycle of yours? Using the souls of the dead to reset your kingdom to a previous point?” Merlin took a step forward, stepping down the small set of stairs that led to the center of the room. “Then I must be the one to regretfully inform you that your Underworld operations have been thwarted.”

And like the lightning he controlled, Zeus’ expression changed in a flash; amusement replaced with rage. “What?” he asked through clenched teeth, sparks erupting from the ends of his master bolt. “Explain!” the king of nothing commanded.

Merlin strode closer to the throne, walking passed the stairs that would take him to the Chamber of Fate. He had hoped a moment like this would come, dreamed of it really. A time when he could knock the god down to the earth. “The River Lethe has flooded most of the Underworld, while the souls continuously knock each other into its memory wiping waters. Any spell or enchantment you would place on them—" he snapped his fingers “—gone.”

“What?!” Zeus repeated.

“People’s belief in you?” He asked sardonically. “Replaced by hatred. The concept of the Olympians is now synonymous with evil itself. What souls that bypass the underworld for that loom are more-or-less poisoned. I imagine working with those would be quite hard.”

To that Zeus laughed, a laugh deep and mockingly. “So, a little mortal thinks he has brought Olympus to its knees? Then let me be the one to inform you that your efforts have been in vain. The Underworld? The souls believing in us? That is merely a small percentage of our power base. As for the mortals’ hatred? This is far from the first time they have hated Olympus.” Zeus chuckled, his grip on his bolt relaxing ever so slightly. “But we have ways, agents, to alter public perception. Adapting us into new religions, making our symbols of power a part of everyday life, releasing another Hollywood adaptation of one our many heroes’ exploits. Even children’s’ literature plays a role. Hook them while they’re young. It’s only a matter of ti—“

“And your demigod children?” Merlin continued, a smile growing on his face. “All but four have been wiped clean from the earth. From the grunts you keep at those delightful camps to the leaders
you placed around the globe, all dead.” He took another step closer.

“How!” the god roared, muscles clenching, as static electricity building in the air. Zeus’ expression of panic, rage, and disbelief made the old man wish he had polaroid camera, but it was a face that he would remember for the rest of his life; savoring it every time he closed his eyes. It was the exact moment that the king of the gods realized his rule was at an end.

“By my hand of course,” Merlin smiled, shrugging off the danger he knew he was in. “The hand of a boy who was carried off with his family to a hell on earth of your creation. A boy that swore he would set the world right, no matter what. And let me tell you, Oh-mighty-Zeus, I lowered myself to your level to achieve it. I ordered the deaths of hundreds of children, with little guilt. I ordered the construction of a network that made unborn demigods shrivel up in their mother’s wombs, and I ate a five-course meal afterward. I enslaved numerous demigods and every god I came across and lost no sleep. I—"

“ENOUGH!” Zeus cried, jumping to his feet, thunder cracking overhead. Electricity crackled from the ends of the bronze cylinder, bathing the room in blue light. “You come into my kingdom and dare to tell me these falsehoods!” The god raised his arm back, ready to smite down the insolent mortals before him.

And Merlin pressed the button on his cane.

“What?” the god choked as he stumbled backwards, clutching his chest. As her had predicted the effects of the signal were greatly reduced so course to the source of the gods’ power, but it still packed a wallop. And as the king of the gods grasped his throne for support, the armed forces emerged from the shadows, guns raised, with fingers pulling the signal generator triggers. “Impossible!” the god choked, dropping to one knee as the soldiers closed in around him. Zeus’ body started to fluctuate in size, shrinking down several feet only to spring back to his previous size.

To Merlin, it was a beautiful sight, one that under less dire circumstances he would relish. This was the endgame, the fall of a tyrant, and the rise of freedom. This was what he had desired with nearly every fiber of his being for over seventy years. Once Zeus and the creatures lurking above were removed from the world, never again would people be used as cattle. There-

There was the sickening sound of tearing flesh and crunching bone, and suddenly he was falling. He didn’t understand what was happening, as his left side impacted the floor; his cane sent sliding across the floor.

Why did I fall?

He scanned what he could of the room before him, as time seemed to slow down and a dull roar filled his ears. The king of the gods was still struggling against the effects of the signal, though without his cane, Zeus seemed to be stabilizing. The men and women surrounding him seemed to be realizing this too, with some of them beginning to open fire at the colossal man.

When his gaze drifted to the right, Merlin saw Athena, standing there with one leg clenched in her hands; blood dripping from the severed thigh onto the floor below. The leg was covered in the tattered remains of a very familiar pair of dress pants, with an Italian leather shoe on the twitching foot. A glanced down upon himself and confirmed that he was indeed missing a leg; his left leg was tore cleanly at his hip, blood pooling around him

But where is the pain?

Athena tossed his leg aside, just as a harsh blow to his back flipped him over. Now Brian was
standing over him, his lacking any emotion. The redhead began to speak, but his words went unheard. It lacked any of its usual bravado, looking as if he was reciting a recipe to himself. Then the engineer, the boy he had hired off the streets after being kicked out of school, turned and skulked away, leaving Athena to stand over his body.

He closed his eyes, and when he reopened them Athena was gone.

Then the pain began, but it was radically dull compared to what Merlin expected. It felt little more than a Charlie horse, which was nothing compared to what he had experienced in life. His left arm crushed by a cyclops in Brooklyn, getting beat without mercy by bored prison guards, shot in the right shoulder as he and Artie liberated the prison camp, and so many others in a long painful life that made a Charlie horse laughable. The only thing that concerned him was how cold he felt, but he knew why, his end was finally in sight.

Then guttural scream cut through the dull roar, and a flash of light made his world turn white.

*It would seem betrayal will be my end.*

As his vision slowly returned, though there was a blackness at the edge of his vision that remained, he could feel the approach of giant footsteps. Then the livid form of Zeus leered over him; electricity arcing from his most treasured possession clenched tightly in his hand.

“You know what’s funny?” Merlin choked with a slight grin. “You still have no idea who I-

“I think that son of Poseidon will be our big chance to make some real change,” Arthur casually announced, as he strode into Merlin’s office. Although Arthur was the older of the two, he didn't act his age in the slightest, his mind stuck in a permanent sixteen-year-old mindset. It was somewhat admirable, as he still went on missions with men and women a quarter of his age, but it also put Merlin on edge until his return. “He has a lot of passion, goes the extra mile to protect what he loves.”

“I take it the Hoover Damn cleanup was successful?” Merlin asked, looking up from his newspaper with a slight smile.

“As successful as expected,” the former GI shrugged, grabbing a Hershey’s bar from a box on his partner in crime’s desk. “The missing statues were a bit hard to explain, but I think I covered it up pretty well.” The salt-and-pepper senior paused, eyes widening slightly. As if remembering something expensive... “Expect an invoice.”

Merlin rolled his eyes and set his paper down. “I take it we purchased them? How much this time?”

Arthur swallowed one small bar of chocolate whole and then beat on his chest. “Not much.” Then he added in a whisper, “’bout half a mill.”

“I’m just going to pretend I didn’t hear that,” Merlin sighed. Although they ran a fortune five-hundred company, it didn’t mean that Arthur should be so willing to cover expenses for every Olympus related incident. But he knew it was far too late in life for Arthur to change his ways, so he reached over and grabbed himself one of the chocolate bars that bound the two men together. “And
what’s this about DG:PP?”

Arthur rolled his eyes. “I wish you’d call them by their names. Like it or not, they are people,” the older man said, propping his feet up on Merlin’s desk. “Jackson has a lot of spunk, what with traveling across country with to save that girl of his, disregarding protocol in the process. He’s going to be the key to lasting change! Passion will change the world!”

“Not necessarily for the better,” Merlin huffed. “Peoples’ passions are the reason why we met when and where we did. Passion makes people do terrible, stupid things. Passion can make a man sacrifice the lives of others for one he deems more valuable.”

The older man shrank back in his chair, cringing slightly. “That’s a hit below the belt,” Artie chuckled. “So, if not Jackson, who do you think we should look into?”

Merlin leaned forward in his chair, a small smile on his lips. “Jason Grace, son of Jupiter, and praetor of New Rome. Passionate, but not foolhardy. Places the needs of the masses over his own. Seems to have a nice head on his shoulders.”

“Ah, yeah, him,” Arthur muttered, rubbing some chocolate from his cheek. “Not a bad choice, but my money’s still on Jackson.” The man, who Merlin sometimes still thought was a boy, bit his cheek, a sign he was thinking deeply. “How about a wager? In two years we evaluate where the two are at and see who is in a better position to use?”

“And what are we wagering?” Merlin scoffed, though his smile betrayed him.

“The usual?” Artie shrugged.

“A box of chocolate bars,” the younger of the two hummed. “Agreed.”

Chapter End Notes

Incase it wasn't obvious, that last bit was a flashback. I wanted to get Arthur to appear once before this all ended, and well there we go. Was it important? maybe? You'll just have to wait and see. But it does answer a few questions, but raises others.

I think Merlin's death was fitting. Betrayed by Brian, but zapped by Zeus, the one god he hated above all else. Yet, he died believing his goals were accomplished. Olympus is dead, all that remains are ruins and its king. did Merlin want to be the one to kill Zeus?
Yes. But, he can go to the grave knowing that Zeus has been thwarted, that he will suffer a slow, isolated death. Or he'll be ate by the Shoggoths. It's a win either way for Merlin.

And my God, I've been talking about that blasted cane for chapters, I'm honestly surprised no one called me out on that! He's an old man, and a smart one to boot! He wasn't going to walk into New Rome, the farm, or Olympus without something to guarantee his safety! So, like every great wizard, he has his staff. A staff loading with a massive signal generator, power source, and antenna, capable of ripping the divinity from Ares. So yes, I wanted Merlin to have one bad ass moment, and also show what would have happened if Percy, Nico, or Jason ever tried anything.

I did have reservations about killing him, as when all was said and done, he was just a sad little boy haunted by his past. He just wanted to make sure that no one would know his pain. He has been a controversial character, so some of you will say good riddance while some of you will mourn him.

And that's what I wanted. I wanted to create characters that made you think, made you question morality, weren't one dimensional monsters. Even if you hated him, most people put a "but" in there comments, so I think I did a decent job. I've learned a few things along the way, and I will take what I learned and put it in "Bonds". Speaking of which...

"Bonds" update: Tentative length is 50 chapters, each approximately 8k words in length, for a total of 400,000 words. The first 15 chapters will be kind of slow, building up Percy, Nico, Sally, and a few other key characters. The story will be told from 6 different POVs, you have a general idea of who, but some characters will get more love than others. The main settings are New York (a flip from Lamoille) and another familiar local, but radically different.

And... *flips through notes* that can't be right? *checks again* apparently Bianca di Angelo is important... I wonder what that's about?
Hades

Chapter Summary

Warnings: blood, harsh language, gore.

Tonight:

Hades has an encounter eons in the making.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“And here is your son,” Maria said, handing Hades the youngest di Angelo the moment he walked through the front door. “He has been a handful today,” she continued, turning her back away from the both of them and walking back to the living room. Nico, who was only in a diaper, cooed and clapped his tiny hands together as Hades struggled to make sense of what was happening. “Dinner will be ready shortly!”

“Wait, what?” Hades cried, as his son reached up to grab his dark hair, tugging it rather aggressively for an eight-month-old. “Hey, no!” the god hissed, at his son’s actions, but the babe only giggled, and tugged once more. “No!”

_How does she know?!_

Maria di Angelo was, and always would remain, a mystery to him. She knew when and where he or Persephone would appear with an accuracy that an oracle would be envious of. His mortal love reacted to every incident mortals would consider strange or terrifying with enthusiasm; once cornering and questioning a malevolent spirit in a graveyard, to which the spirit begged to be sent to the Underworld. The Italian woman was also the only one of his lovers to ever demand an audience with Persephone, and not only that, but somehow befriended her and make his wife part of their family. Such things made him positive that no matter how many eons past, Maria would remain one-of-a-kind.

But, there was one mystery he had solved, one that involved their children.

“And why is Nico _my_ son today?” he asked, following after his mortal lover. “Ouch! Nico! Stop it!” he cried, while his son continued to yank on his hair.

Whenever the children were particularly well-behaved Maria would refer to them as ‘our children’. However, if one of the children was a little fussier or rowdier than normal, suddenly they became ‘his children’, which he didn’t think was fair. It wasn’t like the children inherited their bad behaviors from him and him alone, last time he checked Bianca’s tendency to pick up every shiny thing she saw in the street was something her mother did, not him.

“I think you know the answer to that, dearest husband,” Persephone smirked, as he entered the room. The three women of his life sat relatively close to each other in the lavishly decorated room. Maria and Persephone sat on opposite ends of an overstuffed, black couch that had been custom ordered to suit their needs, each with a magazine in hand. While Bianca laid on her belly on the Persian rug
before them, little legs kicking in the air as she drew whatever popped into her head on a pad of paper with her new crayons. It was typically an ideal sight to come home to, but the devilish grins Maria and Persephone wore made him feel like the butt of a joke, rather than the god-of-the-house.

“Our precious baby boy has decided that hair is the most interesting thing in the world,” Maria sighed, opening up the pulp magazine to a page she had dogeared. “Which is an absolute delight to Bianca, Persephone, and myself.” She lifted her legs off the floor and tucked them beneath her, now completely mirroring the goddess to her right.

“So, we discussed it and decided that the little prince needs to spend time with his father,” Persephone said, turning the page of her issue of *Time*. While Maria had always been an exceptionally clever and cunning woman, her time spent with Persephone, the chaos bringer, had only amplified those traits to almost goddess-like levels. “After all, a boy should spend time with his father,” the goddess smirked.

And he hated it… Despite being the eldest son of Kronos, king of the Underworld, lord of death, and having as many titles as there were ways to die, it meant nothing to them. To Maria and Persephone, he was just Hades, the schmuck they both loved. Which, on second thought, was a far greater honor.

“Very well,” he sighed, knowing he was defeated. Then with a snap of his fingers, a pair of black mittens with a white skull-and-crossbones pattern appeared on his son’s grasping hands. “A little father-son bonding sounds nice after the day I’ve had.” He lifted Nico into the air, the baby kicking and cooing in delight.

Maria’s eyes darted to Persephone, who in turn shrunk back into the couch. “Why didn’t you think of that?!” the mortal woman hissed.

“Ummmm… Mortals must learn these things for themselves?” Persephone said, making up the answer on the spot.

“Really?” Maria asked in disbelief, her deep dark eyes boring into the goddess’ being. “I seem to recall a certain goddess growing just as frustrated as me only a few hours ago.”

Hades chuckled as he gently lowered Nico and himself to the floor, sitting close to his daughter. He enjoyed seeing his women bicker like sisters, especially when it was about their unorthodox family. It was always good natured and sometimes seemed almost vaudevillian, which he wondered if they did that on purpose to entertain Bianca and Nico.

“Hello there Bianca,” he cooed, placing one hand on his eldest daughter’s back. “How was your day?”

Bianca looked up from her drawing with a beaming smile brighter than Apollo’s sun. “I drawed a tutle!” the little girl exclaimed, holding the pad of paper out for her father to inspect. “It’s gween!”

Hades adjusted his hold on Nico, the toddler squirming in protest as he was placed even further away from the suddenly oh-so-interesting hair of his father. “Let me see it,” he smiled, taking the drawings from his little girl. Bianca was getting to the age where her drawings were starting to look like what she said they were; that is, if he squinted just right. But sure enough, Bianca had drawn a boxy turtle, with a green body, brown shell, and a simple smile on its face. In front of the turtle was bunch of black dots with tiny ‘v’s sticking out on top of them. “What are these?” he asked with a gentleness reserved only for those in the room.

“Fwies!” his daughter answered happily. “They his food!”
Yes. Definitely my daughter. “That’s lovely, sweetheart!” he laughed, handing the little girl back her drawings. Bianca beamed at the praise and then went back to her coloring; adding many more flies for her turtle friend to eat. Hades then readjusted his hold on his squirming son once more, holding the baby up to his face. “It would seem your mother and I’s morbid sense of humor starts early,” he cooed to the mitten wearing babe, tickling his belly with his forefinger as he did so. Nico squealed in delight; kicking his chubby legs and flailing his little arms. “Which explains why you’re torturing your mothers’ hair! Doesn’t it? Doesn’t it?” Hades then placed his mouth on his son’s belly and blew, making the baby lose his mind with laughter. He was so thankful that Nico was a happy, healthy baby after having such a rocky start in the world.

My helmet, my kingdom, and even my power are worthless compared to moments like these.

With Nico now content to sit on his father’s lap, grasping at the folds in his pants, Hades turned back to look at the loves of his life- “What the…”

Hades had seen a great many things during his time on Earth; the birth of new species, the rise and fall of empires, and the creation of jazz. But the lord of the Underworld had never seen Persephone in a headlock, with one hand yanking hard on Maria’s dark locks while the other was trying to hit the Italian with her magazine. Both were red in the face and breathing heavily through clenched teeth, but the second they noticed him looking in their direction, the two unraveled from each other and returned to their respective corners on the couch, acting as if nothing had happened.

And he laughed. Laughed harder than he had in a great many centuries at the absurdness of it all. Bianca looked up from her coloring, clearly confused by her father’s behavior, but started to laugh as well. Nico, was at first startled by the loud noise, his little mouth hanging open and eyes wide in shock, but he too started to giggle and laugh the way babies do. Maria and Persephone looked at each other, faces flushed with embarrassment, but when Maria stuck her tongue out at the goddess, they both dissolved into fits of laughter.

While he and Persephone could laugh until the world crumbled away if they so desired, Maria and the children were very much mortal, and as such, soon needed air.

“You once told me the two of you were sisters,” he said, wiping the tears from his eyes.

“Sisters fight,” Persephone mumbled from her corner.

“And it has been a long day,” Maria added, picking up her magazine from between the cushions. “It has just been a very long day is all.” She flipped to her page once more, and scowled when she saw it had torn slightly, but that was quickly rectified by either him or Persephone; he wasn’t sure who fixed it first. “So how was your day?”

That particular question dampened his mood slightly. The truth was his day never ended, a part of him was still in the Underworld talking with Minos on the influx of new arrivals, a part of him was in Greece watching a protest turn violent, another was in Germany watching a rally with the utmost disgust, and so many other places across the globe that it left him emotionally drained. But he needed to be everywhere, he needed to know exactly how much danger his family was in and from what.

“Better now,” was all he said, something of a coded answer indicating that he didn’t want to talk about it in front of the children, especially Bianca. His little girl was getting smarter and smarter every day, listening more and more to the conversations they had, and repeating what she heard. Which is why I came home to a two-year-old yelling at the top of her lungs ‘ass!’ Thank you for that, my darling wife.

Hades continued to play with Nico, while the women read in a comfortable silence. A part of him
was over analyzing his son’s every action, believing that every slight tug, every flail and kick, and nonsensical bit of baby talk was a sign of great things to come. He couldn’t decide if that was because he was a god or because he was a father. He also didn’t question why Nico was wearing only a cloth diaper besides his mittens, as his son had the tendency to go through four or five outfits in the course of the day through various bodily-fluid related accidents. “What are you two reading?” he asked, breaking the silence. He could instantly know, instantly read the magazines if he so desired, but he liked to keep a little mystery in his life. Plus, communication was key to a healthy relationship.

“I’m reading *Time* to pick out articles for Maria to practice her English with,” Persephone answered, looking up from the editorial. The goddess then turned to the mortal and threw her head back dramatically. “And bad news, they are as dull as Trivia’s dinner parties…” Maria arched an eyebrow in confusion. “Roman goddess. One of my mother’s friends. Which is really, really, ironic…”

Hades snorted.

“I’m just reading one of those *Astounding Stories* you picked up for me,” Maria said, eyes not leaving the page. “*At the Mountains of Madness*, to be precise-“

“Oh, so that’s the title of my brother’s memoirs,” Hades chuckled.

No one else laughed, save Nico, with the two women looking at each other and then rolling their eyes in perfect unison. That was their reaction half the time when he tried to be funny, and their reaction all the time when he brought up Zeus. However, he could make them laugh about Poseidon on rare occasions. That is, if he could think up a clever enough pun to insult his deep-sea sibling.

**Deep-sea sibling, save that one for later…**

“It’s actually really good. Unsettling and horrifying, but good,” Maria continued returning to her reading. “Though it does make me wonder…”

“Wonder what?” Persephone asked, beating him by a fraction of a microsecond. It was little things like that that made him wonder if he was actually the third wheel in their relationship dynamic.

Maria closed her magazine and set in aside on an end table, chewing on her lip in thought. “It’s hard to put into words without you understanding the background of my question?” She paused and looked to both divine beings in the room. “yes, I think that is called for,” she said with a nod of her head.

Now, the Italian woman wasn’t asking them to actually sit down and read the beat-up American magazine, that would be impractical for something she deemed trivial. Granted, in the past they had actually read a few books together and discussed them at lengths; *Paradise Lost* and *The Inferno* had led to some lively conversations. No, she was asking them to simply summon the story into their minds.

Which they gladly did.

Miskatonic University, Antarctica, William Dyer, Elder Things, Shoggoths, R’lyeh, Kadath, and giant penguins. All strange words that popped into his mind and then quickly converged into ideas, then into concepts, and then connected into a cohesive story. The writer’s style was interesting, giving just enough details to let the reader build a foundation, but being vague enough to let them fill in the gaps themselves. It was a truly unique story that captured mankind’s fear of the unknown and expanded on it. Hades thought he might actually have to truly read it sometime.
“Okay, ask away,” he said, carefully laying Nico on his back.

“The author implies that there are or were intelligent races that existed before mankind with gods of their own. Is that possible? And if those races disappeared, what of their gods?”

Hades opened his mouth to answer, but realized that he had never actually thought along those lines before. He had seen gods be born, changed into another form, and even fade away, but there had always been some trace of their existence left. “I suppose it is possible that there was something before mankind, but I’ve never seen any evidence to suggest as such. Certainly not any underwater cities or lost civilizations at the south pole. And—” Bianca shoved the pad of paper in his hands once more, and pointed out her newest doodle, but divine or not he couldn’t make out what it was supposed to be. “This is amazing sweetheart!” he cried, handing back the artwork to a beaming toddler. “Oh, where was I?”

“No Antarctic civilizations,” Persephone answered, clearly amused by his interaction with Bianca.

“Thank you,” he nodded. “And if there were any, their gods would have faded away with them.”

“Can’t have gods without believers,” the goddess hummed, as Bianca now handed Persephone her drawings. “Oh, these are really good! Did Michelangelo draw these?”

“No! I did!” Bianca cried, bouncing up and down in excitement.

“I guess that makes sense,” Maria muttered, but she didn’t sound convinced by their answers. “It’s just that, if a god is limited by its believers’ understanding of the world, wouldn’t a more advanced race therefore have a more powerful concept of what a god can be?”

“I wouldn’t lose any sleep over it, Maria,” Persephone said, grinning ear-to-ear as she watched the elder of the two children hand her drawings to her mother. “If by some chance what you said is true, any surviving god would be a shriveled-up husk that Hades or myself could obliterate with hardly a thought. The children have nothing to fear.”

And that really was the heart of the issue: the children. Maria, like any good mother worried about the possible dangers the children could encounter in life. She had to worry about not just the dangers of the mortal world, but of a world unseen as well. And after her complicated pregnancy with Nico, those worries only increased. “I know,” Maria sighed. “I know the children have nothing to fear with you two, but—” The Italian paused and furrowed her brow, looking at whatever her daughter had drawn. “What is this?”

“They know!” Bianca cried, pointing to him and Persephone.

Hades and Persephone locked eyes, silently asking each other what to do. They had both praised the girl’s skills but had no clue as to what she had actually drawn. For a split second he considered placing the child asleep to spare her feelings, but that would only anger Maria. Reading the little girl’s head would prove worthless, as the thoughts of small children changed too rapidly to make any sense. And in the end, it came down to who could escape first.

And with Nico resting between his legs, Hades knew who was going to win.

“Oh, would you look at that,” Persephone said rapidly. “There’s a flower about to be squashed by a bear in California, I have to save it! Bye princess!” And with that, his wife disappeared, leaving only a faint scent of roses in her wake.

Bianca, still too young to understand what happened, simply turned her full attention to her father; her eyes full of anticipation for him to tell her mother what she had drawn.
Hades gulped. “Uh, it’s a-”

A shrill ringing sounded from the kitchen, and he knew his salvation was at hand. “Oh, dinner is done!” he cried with glee, scooping up his son. “And you know what the means? It’s almost time for desert!” At the prospect of something sweet, Bianca forgot all about her question and scampered off to the kitchen; tossing her crayons and paper to the floor.

“You are so lucky,” Maria laughed, getting up from the couch. She walked over and took Nico from him, before kissing him properly for the first time since his arrival. “So, so, lucky,” the woman purred, before departing to the kitchen with their infant son. He of course watched her every second until she was out of sight, enjoying the view as it were.

Hades knew he was lucky. Luckier than he felt he deserved to be. He had two women that he loved and they loved him back, and somehow, they got along perfectly. He had two children that, for the first time in centuries, he got to be part of their daily lives. “Don’t I know it,” he whispered, a warm smile on his face.

“Dinner smells good,” Persephone said, reappearing next to him with a mischievous grin.

Hades wasn’t sure what hurt worse: the bullet that grazed his shoulder or Jackson tackling him to the ground. Both choices certainly had their merits, both hurting instantly, and he would certainly feel both for days following (assuming there were any more days after this one). But he had to award the honor to the latter when the teenager’s full weight landed on him, knocking the wind from his lungs.

“Are you okay?” Percy asked him their faces only inches apart. There was a fear in his eyes, a fear that shouldn’t have been there; the fear of losing a loved one. But through a series of impossible events they had become a family, and Hades knew that he was just as worried about Percy as Percy was worried for him.

Funny how life works out like that... The older man and former god, rolled his nephew off of him as the bullets flew overhead. “I’m doing as well as any man who got sacked by a seventeen-year-old,” he wheezed. “And thanks,” he added. “That could’ve ended badly.”

Hades sat up, careful as to not poke his head over the fallen marble pillar that was sheltering him and his nephew. He could see that Persephone, Nico, and Demeter were taking shelter behind a fallen, half-melted statue of Zeus, with Demeter occasionally firing a shot off. His mother-in-law’s shots weren’t meant to actually hit the people shooting at them, but to keep them from getting closer; a clever bit of strategy he would admit. The gunfire seemed to be coming from somewhere up ahead, near the entrance to the Olympian throne room, which sadly, was exactly where they needed to go.

Why would I expect anything different!

Under normal circumstances, Nico would simply shadow travel them past their attackers, but for reasons unknown to even him, the shadows were hesitant to listen to his son. What was worse, was that if they did enter the shadows, there was something in there with them that attacked them. Nico especially, the young teen emerging each time with vicious scratches and bruises. And he wasn’t going to make his son experience that again.

Another option that would have worked before was currently crouched next to him. Olympus, prior to its destruction, had been filled to the brim with lavish, ornamental water spewing sculptures and
fountains, as each god and goddess tried to one up each other in the most stupid of ways. There was enough water flowing on Olympus to keep Cloacina completely occupied. But now, with no gods or nymphs to summon forth the water, the once home of the gods was as dry Tantalus’ mouth. To make matters even worse, the storm his other nephew had summoned was below Olympus.

Leaving Jackson limited in his abilities.

He supposed that his nephew could mess with the soldiers’ own water or go to the extreme lengths of dehydrating them like he did to his former stepfather, but still required him to know where they were at. “Percy, do you know where they’re at?”

The son of Poseidon shook his head as a portion of the pillar just above his head exploded into tiny little pieces, covering the both of them in a fine dust. “Every time I think I get a beat on them, the shoggoths flying above us throw me off. It’s… weird.”

“How so?” he asked as he poked his head up again, only to immediately duck back down. Hades thought he saw the flash of a barrel from the remains of third column from the left, but that was still a bit uncertain, and only one of their attackers.

“They—“ Percy as interrupted by another bullet impacting the slab of marble just above his head. “They adjust how much water is in their bodies when I start to get a lock on them, which throws off my concentration and pulls me to the sky.”

“Have you tried clearing the sky?” he asked, carefully looking for the shooter on the right. Between the fourth and fifth. Percy arched and eyebrow and pointed up, Hades’ gaze following. “Oh. Yes. Silly me.”

The sheer number of winged monstrosities above them was mind boggling. So many in number that they darkened the sky on what should have been a sunny July morning. Percy was powerful, that was a fact that Hades knew and couldn’t argue, and had only grown stronger under his tutelage. But unless the son of Poseidon was in the ocean, with his father’s trident in hand, and had an army of copies at his back, there was no chance he could take on such numbers and hope to survive.

We’re running out of time and options. Every second wasted here is a second closer Avalon gets to the loom and another second those beasts get to rampage.

Hades took a deep breath and placed his face in his hands, a potentially suicidal plan taking shape. “If you knew exactly where they were, you could get them, right?”

“Yeah?”

*The things I do for love…* “Okay,” Hades sighed, steeling himself or what he was about to do. “Okay,” he repeated. “Jackson, I’m going to need you to take my blood.” The former god tore at his sleeve just above his wounded shoulder, revealing the bloody wound.

“Won’t that kill you?” Percy asked, looking at Hades as if he went crazy.

“Won’t that- Not all of it you idiot!” Hades shouted. “Just what’s already out. Which looking at it now, is a lot more than I initially thought…”

His nephew and adoptive son nodded, holding out one shaky hand above Hades’ wounded shoulder. It was both fascinating and a little unnerving to see and feel the blood on his body reverse its direction and flow up him, and then even stranger to see water separate from the flood and collect in the teen’s hand, forming a small sphere of pure water no bigger than a golf ball.
“And that is your backup,” Hades cried before leaping over the downed pillar in one swift movement. *This is crazy!* His mind screamed at him as he hit the ground running. *And the stupidest thing I’ve ever done!*

Almost immediately the gunfire started up, with every shot trained on him. He knew that the men shooting at him would quickly account for his speed and movement based on past experiences, and he could tell you that the Hollywood cliché of zigzagging would only get oneself killed faster. So, as he sprinted perpendicular to his attackers, he hoped that Percy would react fast enough, and he wished that he had chosen a more youthful appearance rather than middle-aged man.

*The one thing Apollo was right about!* Hades shouted internally as he leapt over a fallen ambrosia stand, bullets tearing apart the wood and bronze box into splinters as his foot cleared it. *If I ever get my godhood back It’s a twenty-five-year-old body all the-* His foot snagged on the remains of a celestial bronze sewer grating, sending him tumbling face first into a pile of rubble that had once been a café. *And that’s it for me!* He squeezed his eyes shut and waited for the pain.

But it didn’t come.

And that’s when he noticed the gunfire had stopped. He slowly pushed himself up and opened one eye.

Only to see Percy and the others approaching him; the son of Poseidon sporting a cocky grin.

“That’s my boy,” Hades huffed, before laying back down to catch his breath.

Hades did not like Merlin. It could even be said that he hated the old man. But watching him be reduced to ash by Zeus’ master bolt even made his cold heart feel for the man ever so slightly. He could understand the man’s motivation and could even sympathize with him after learning his story and the truth about Zeus and the Cycle. But the old man had messed with his family, so what he did feel lasted only for a split second.

As there were far more important things that deserved his attention.

First was, as always in his pantheon, Zeus. Golden ichor stains covered the god from his lips to his partially exposed chest, which confirmed a theory Hades had hoped wasn’t true. Zeus had survived on Olympus partly from the effects of the Loom of Fate, but also from a form of cannibalism. While to the mortal eye it would appear that Zeus had ripped out and devoured the still-beating hearts of his fellow immortals, in reality the king was removing their cores, their very essence, and combining it with his own. While gods would occasional merge over time, what Zeus had done was a perversion of the natural order. And if the mad gleam in his eye was any indication, there were some side-effects.

*Not that he wasn’t mad before…*

It also appeared that Zeus was fluctuating in size, shrinking and growing several feet in the blink of an eye. Judging by the charred remains surrounding Zeus’ throne, the king of the gods had been exposed to Avalon’s vicious weapon.

*Combine that with the stress he has to be under from absorbing all that power and I’m surprised he hasn’t blown yet.*
The other thing that caught his attention was that his know-it-all niece, Athena was standing over the entrance to the Chamber of Fate. And it was clear to see that she was under Avalon’s control. Her body was covered in a mix of dried blood and ichor; bruises and cuts prominently displayed on the few areas of skin that wasn’t covered. Her face was beaten and battered, with one eye completely swollen shut under a blood-filled eyelid. But what was most telling was her lack of expression and noise. Goddess or not, any being that had that much damage done to their body would exhibit signs of pain. A shaking body, whimpering, a pained expression, anything but standing there like an emotionless statue.

*A statue that is in our way...*

“She’s turned,” Persephone whispered next to him, the goddess clutching the rifle she had taken from one of the fallen soldiers.

“Just like Dionysus was,” Demeter whispered in agreement.

“What do we do?” Nico asked, gripping his sword tight enough his knuckled turned white.

Athena was undoubtedly an enemy now, but Zeus? Zeus was a complicated. In short, he was an enemy as well. Zeus and those closest to him had been slaughtering humanity and breaking down their souls to prolong their lives and using the demigods to make sure the process repeated without a hitch. Because of that he had lost Maria and Bianca, Nico had lost William, and it was possible that Percy had lost his entire family. There was no way he, Persephone, and Demeter would allow Zeus to remain in power, let alone serve him.

However, in their current state defeating Zeus was unlikely. Defeating Zeus and Athena in their current state was impossible. At least with Zeus they could ally themselves with him for a time to defeat Athena, who was without a doubt a hostile-

Athena lunged at Zeus, her movements fast but rigid. Zeus though, possessing free will and centuries of experience dodged his daughter with a simple side-step. The elder god raised his arm, the bronze cylinder in his hand crackling with electricity, to strike down the fallen goddess- Only for Athena to quickly spin around and wrap herself on Zeus’ arm, planting her feet firmly against his face, and knocking them both to the ruined floor.

For the first time since he awoke in the early hours of the night, Hades smiled. “Let. Them. Fight.”

“Really?” Jackson choked, holding one hand to his mouth to suppress his laughter.

“Shut up and let him have it,” Nico sighed, placing one hand against his boyfriend’s mouth.

The two gods continued to struggle at the foot of Zeus’ throne, Athena biting into the flesh of her father’s wrist, while the king wildly delivered blow after devastating blow to the goddess’ head; the master bolt arcing electricity across the two of them. And while his brother showed intense discomfort, his niece remained impassive and blank as she tore away a chunk of flesh with her teeth.

“Oooo,” Percy cringed, as did they all, when the goddess spat out the ichor covered flesh only to latch back on. “My former potential mother-in-law everybody…” Nico and Persephone shot glares at him and he shrank back. “Yup. Sorry. Shutting up now…”

Seeing as the fight was keeping the two gods distracted, he thought that it was a good time for them to make a dash to the stairs leading to the Chamber of Fate. “Let’s-“

Zeus let out a primal scream that shook Olympus to its foundation. The with his free hand, Athena off him and tossed her across the room into the remains of Hermes’ throne; reducing it to a pile of
pebbles. With one hand now hanging limp at his side, Zeus crouched down and picked up his symbol of power with his one good hand- only for Athena to race across the room on a broken leg and knock the god off his feet once more.

“-stay here,” Hades sighed. “Let’s stay here.” It's too dangerous to go out there, he thought as Zeus kicked Athena off him.

Hades had to begrudgingly admire whatever system or operator was controlling Athena, as it clearly knew that it needed to disable Zeus from using his master bolt. The goddess didn’t care what Zeus did to her body, as she was fixated solely on the king of the gods’ last remaining functional hand. Even more impressive was that her movements got faster and smoother with each passing moment, looking more and more like the goddess she once was.

*Has to be a learning algorithm. No human could adapt to a situation that fast. Which means the longer this battle lasts, the greater the odds of her winning.*

Zeus jumped to his feet, and sidestepped another rush from Athena, and as she past he grabbed the back of her head. Using her momentum Zeus pushed her forward, the king of the god going with her as he embedded her face in the floor. With Athena momentarily stunned, Zeus took advantage of the situation and jumped back up on his feet, before dropping back down on his daughter with his elbow.

*The ‘flying elbow’ he created that move during the closing days of the first titan war. And he never let us forget it…*

But as Zeus reached once more for his weapon, the enslaved goddess of wisdom lashed out, grabbing her father’s ankle and hurling him across the room. And as the god smashed through a half-ruined pillar, Athena was already racing towards him.

Giving them the perfect opportunity to make their move.

“GO! GO! GO!” Hades shouted, sprinting out from behind the colossal pillar they hid behind. He spared a quick glance back as he passed the first throne, and was glad to see that Persephone was right behind him, followed by Nico and Percy, with Demeter a few steps behind the boys. And as he ran, he realized just how annoying and ill-conceived the titanic scale of Olympus was. *We spend most of our time either human-size or have no size at all! Is showing off yearly to a bunch of kids really that important to them? I thought what I did was-

The room flashed with light, the world going white with contrasting shadows, before succumbing completely to the light. An instant later, the concussive blast from the following roar of thunder sent Hades flying off his feet, skidding to a stop across the room.

Through the pain, and there was a lot of it, the former king of the Underworld pushed himself up, as his vision slowly returned with each rapid blink of his eyes. Every sound was muffled and drowned out by a harsh ringing in his ears, but that hardly mattered to him. For Zeus was approaching the still forms of his sons; the master bolt glowing white in his hand. The smoldering upper body of Athena lay behind him, everything burnt off from the waist down.

“Two-thousand years without an unscheduled visit and now two in one day,” the youngest son of Kronos tsked as he aimed his bolt at the fallen demigods.

“BROTHER!” Hades shouted at the top of his lungs. “BROTHER STOP!”

Zeus lowered his weapon, much to Hades’ relief, and looked upon his tiny body with confusion.
“Hades?”

“Yes, brother,” Hades grunted as he slowly climbed to his feet. The hard landing and gunshot wound to his shoulder slowing him down. “It is I!” He scanned the room and was relieved to see his wife and mother-in-law were also slowly making it to their feet, Nico was rolling onto his side, and Percy was looking around in a daze. “And Demeter and Persephone are with me, along with your nephews!”

Hades let out an audible sigh of relief when Zeus’ master bolt deenergized, while the god shrank down to their level. “Is it really you?” the god asked as he strode past the Percy and Nico as if they weren’t even there. “I see you, but I don’t feel you. What happened?” Zeus asked as he offered Hades his hand.

Hades took his brother’s hand without hesitation, but his stomach twisted in knots and his skin crawled at Zeus’ touch. They were never family, not like the one he made with Maria and Persephone, or the one in a backwater town in rural Illinois, the use of ‘brother’ was almost used as a reminder that they were in fact related. But looking into his brother’s eyes, all Hades could see was the man responsible for untold human suffering and the man who almost destroyed his true family all for the sake of prolonging his own life. Whatever scrap of fondness he had for Zeus was gone, and he knew that it would never come back. But, for the moment he had to set aside his personal feelings for the greater good. “It’s a long story, one we don’t have time for. We need to get to the loom and stop this madness.”

Zeus just looked at him as if he sprouted a second head like a decapitated hydra. “Madness? What do you mean?”

Hades pointed to the partially collapsed dome above them, to the sky filled with the winged monstrosities. “In case you haven’t noticed Zeus, the world is under siege by an evil we’ve never seen before. Before we arrived, there were already millions dead and the mortal nations were launching nuclear weapons in a final act of defiance! We have to fix all of this or there will be nothing left!”

Zeus appeared to be stunned, eyes wide with his mouth slightly agape, but then he started to chuckle. Then that chuckle turned into a deep, almost insane laugh, and the king of the gods had to place his hands on his knees to keep himself from falling over. “Oh Hades. Hades. Hades Hades,” Zeus wheezed, slowly shaking his head. “You don’t know how great this ‘madness’ of yours is for us!” Zeus turned away from him and looked at Demeter and Persephone; his gaze lingering a little too long on the younger goddess for Hades’ taste. “But then again, I suppose part of that is my fault; as I kept you in the dark. For you see-“

“The Cycle,” Hades interrupted. “I learned the truth. We all learned the truth. The wars, rebirth, wiping out the other pantheons, Artemis eliminating the demigods at the end of every cycle, all of it.” It took all of his self-control to not shout and take a swing at the god before him.

“Even them?” Zeus asked, casually gesturing to Nico and Percy. “It’s not like it matters,” he shrugged. “Then you should see why this is a good thing!” Zeus boomed his attitude changing from passive to joyful as fast as one of his thunderbolts. “Those creatures are killing off mortals in numbers faster than anything I’ve seen before! We’ll have more than enough for what I have planned!”

“Your son is down there fighting for his life alongside the Nation against those creatures,” Demeter growled, her finger dangerously close to the trigger of her shotgun.

Zeus arched an eyebrow. “Heracles is here? And the Nation? It doesn’t matter,” Zeus said with a
wave of his hand. “those creatures have provided more than enough materials to repair the tapestry and restart the cycle, but with some-“

“She means Jason,” Nico snarled. “Jason Grace, your son. The best thing you ever-”

Nico was silenced as Zeus backhanded the teen to the floor. “Know your place, boy,” Zeus growled as Persephone and Percy rushed to Nico’s side. “We definitely got too lax with them this-“

Zeus, king of Olympus, ruler of the heavens, usurper of his father’s throne, and so many titles created to stoke his own ego was knocked on his ass by a vicious right hook from a livid father. “Percy. Nico,” Hades growled through clenched teeth, shaking his now sore fist, “go on ahead. Your uncle and I need to have a little chat...”

Nico looked ready to protest, but Percy quickly took his hand and pulled him to the stairs that led to the Chamber of Fate. “Kick his ass, dad!” his son, and he wasn’t sure which one, shouted before disappearing down the staircase.

Zeus sat up, eyes glowing with rage as golden ichor ran form his nostrils. “You would dare to strike your king?! he bellowed, the air around him filling with the scent of ozone as sparks danced across his body. “After everything I-“

Demeter’s finger must have twitched as she emptied both barrels into her youngest brother’s face. “Hades isn’t out daring me,” the woman huffed as she ejected the spent shells and pulled out two more from her coat pocket. “Consider that a message from your son. You lousy piece of-“

Zeus roared in a mix of agony and rage as his body grew rapidly, tower above them in the blink of an eye, master bolt in hand. While Hades punched had possibly broken the god’s nose, a minor wound that would heal in seconds, Demeter’s blast had shredded the left side of his face. His left eye was gone and his ear was reduced to its lobe barely hanging on by a few strands of flesh. Most of the skin had been blown away, golden ichor, and strangely enough, red blood spilling from the wounds.

And that gave Hades hope.

_He’s still feeling the effects of Merlin’s weapon! He won’t be able to regenerate as fast or tap into his full strength._

“Persephone!” he shouted. “Use your weapon!” _And keep him distracted._

“Was planning on it!” his wife and first love called as she hoisted the heavy assault rifle up and gave the triggers and experimental squeeze. Her squeeze was answered by a barrage of bullets whose recoil almost knocked her to the ground, and a howl of pain from the giant god as the invisible signal tore at his being. “Oh, mama likes,” she grinned, before jumping away to avoid a giant sandaled foot.

“Excellent shooting, Persephone,” Demeter cried, praising her daughter. The harvest goddess unloaded her weapon once more, this time aiming for her brother’s nether regions. “Make sure you hit him where it hurts!” she cried, strafing to avoid an arc of lightning. “Like his dick!”

While the two women taunted and attacked their former king, Hades made a mad dash for Zeus’ throne. He had seen the charred piles of ashes that had been soldiers and saw a few weapons had been seemingly spared from destruction. But, up close that wasn’t the case. Most of the weapons’ magazine had exploded from the electricity setting off the rounds within. Many had their barrels melted or warped from the intense heat. But he didn’t care about the projectile aspect of the weapons, but rather the signal generating devices attached to them. The one Jason had retrieved on their ill-fated trip to New Rome had been solidly constructed and appeared to have been able to take a
“Come on! Come on! There’s got to be one that isn’t fried somewhere!” Hades mumbled to himself as he tossed yet another worthless weapon aside. “Can’t mortals make something lightning proof?!”

“My love?” Persephone cried from behind, as something that sounded very large smashed into something that sounded very hard.

“Yes, dear?!” he shouted as she scooped up another weapon closer to the throne. “I’m a bit busy!”

The room behind him lit up in a blue light that quickly faded away, followed by a small explosion and the roar of an angry Olympian. “I’m out of bullets!” the goddess of Spring shouted.

He tossed aside another weapon as he heard Demeter shout some rather hurtful things at Zeus. Things that cut to the core of any man, immortal or not. “How?!” he shouted. “You only fired for a few seconds!”

“Stop running away!” Zeus shouted, before another flash of light. “How can someone so fat move so quick!” Another flash followed by another explosion.

“I’m not fat!” he heard Demeter cry as she fired again, Zeus groaning in pain in response. “I’m full bodied, you rapist!”

“Because real life isn’t a movie!” Persephone cried. “Guns don’t have unlimited ammo! So, whatever you’re doing, do it faster!”

“I’m trying!” he shouted, his voice cracking slightly. He was down to the final two weapons, he was covered in the ashen remains of mortals, and his brother was trying to kill them. Hades had never been more stressed in his life. *Fuck! Shit! Bugger! Bloody!* He ran through every swear and curse he knew in his head as he gave the trigger an experimental— the led illuminated to the most beautiful green he had ever seen. “HA! HA! YES!” he cried in delight as he lifted the weapon high above his head in victory. He spun around with his weapon ready-

Only to see Zeus unleash the full force of the master bolt onto the floor directly beneath the giants’ feet.

*Oh, this is going to—*

An explosion of pure electricity radiated out from the center of the throne room; the blast sending the depowered gods and pieces of floor and debris flying back. The metallic weapon in his hands absorbed a great deal of power, power the voltage imbalance between him and it grew to great, creating an arc that blasted the already hot weapon from his hands. His skin felt like every ounce of moisture it contained was being sucked away, and in the very back of his mind he wondered if this what Percy’s stepfather’s last moments were like. Hades vision went white and his ears popped from the change pressure as his body was tossed high in the air. The buttons on his shirt shot off like speeding bullets, and his right shoe was blown off his foot. The invisible force of the blast that hit his body felt like his insides were being run through a blender.

And then he landed.

And that really was the worst part in his opinion, it gave him a chance to truly process the pain he felt.

“Why would you attack me?! Your king!” Zeus’ voice bellowed over the ringing in his ears. “Over a demigod? A tool? A piece of flesh that will eventually decay? You should know better than most
how idiotic that is!” Hades felt himself being lifted from the floor by the back of his shirt, but his vision had yet to clear. “I would have restored your immortality! I would have made the three of you part of my new order!”

Shapes began to form in front of his eyes.

“Olympus was growing too bloated, the Cycle too complicated. These… these beasts are a chance to start over, to take direct control of the world and remove the weak. “

Hades was beginning to see some features of his brother’s face, but he was positive that he didn’t have four noses.

“It would have been the four of us, ruling over the Earth, taking whatever we desired! No more mist! no more adapting to the times! The times would adapt to us,” Zeus hissed.

Behind Zeus, he could make out the lifeless torso of Athena, but there was something wrong. Is her shadow growing?

“Mortals would worship us, and us alone! As it should be!”

Hades glanced around the room. He could make out Persephone, and was relieved to see her moving, but he couldn’t find Demeter. She was probably closest to the blast. She went out fighting.

He looked back to Persephone, and saw that she was moving away from Athena’s shadow; crawling as fast as she could.

“Look at your king when he speaks to you!” Zeus roared in his face.

But Hades paid him no mind, as his vision cleared more and he realized what was happening. Oh. So, that’s what’s happening, he thought as Zeus’ visage continued to scream at him; large drops of spit and ichor flying from the god’s mouth and hitting the eldest son of Kronos and Rhea. A game within a game, within a game. And we have the nerve to call ourselves gods?

“Answer me!” Zeus screamed, shaking him wildly.

Hades smiled at his younger brother almost drunkenly. “Behind you.”

Zeus scowled and furrowed the half of brow that hadn’t been blown off. “Wha-“

“Te-Tekeli-li! Tekeli!” The shoggoth screeched from behind Zeus as the first of its tentacles wrapped around the god’s limbs. The black mass of eyes and teeth had analyzed the ruler of Olympus’ combat style and concluded that it could not defeat him in a one-on-one fight while Zeus possessed the master bolt. So, it had simply remained hidden and observed their fight, waiting for the ideal opportunity to strike. The fact it did that simultaneously impressed and horrified Hades.

When that moment presented itself it struck with speed, precision, and a brutality that would make Ares squirm. It wrapped its rubbery appendages around Zeus’ shoulders, elbows, knees, thighs, and across his waist as well, which on its own was nothing to the god of the heavens. Zeus had broken out of chains forged by Hephaestus himself with nothing but his sheer strength. Maybe the creature had heard that tale, Hades wasn’t sure, but when razor sharp claws erupted from its tentacles with the speed of a guillotine, severing the gods’ limbs, Hades wouldn’t right that theory off.

He fell to the floor with his brother’s severed limbs, as the god screamed in agony and fear as the creature pulled him into its giant, fang filled maw. He could see that through his panic, Zeus was trying to revert back to his true form; a god’s ace in the hole. But the prolonged exposure to Avalon’s signal had made Zeus far more mortal than he realized, taking away his trump card. But Hades
wondered if that would even work, seeing the shoggoth wearing Athena’s torso the same way a hermit crab wears its shell.

The thing ate her from the inside out...

Hades slowly pushed himself to his feet, his body feeling far heavier than he remembered it being. His breathing was labored and the taste of copper was on his tongue. And as he slowly made it over to his brother’s severed arm, he wasn’t concerned by how black the skin on his arms had become or the angry red flesh that shone through the forming cracks. In the grand scheme of things, his burnt flesh was minor compared to what he imagined he had for internal injuries.

I look like a burnt marshmallow, but my insides are pureed. He wanted to chuckle, but all that came out was a rasp. How many poor souls did I try to save with similar injuries?

With a few shaky steps, he reached Zeus’ severed fist, still clutching his weapon as tightly as it did in life. The former king of the Underworld brought one shaking hand to end of the bronze cylinder and in an instant, it had shrunk down to a size he could manage; slipping easily from the lifeless fist. When he went to pick up the cyclops’ forged weapon, he collapsed to the floor, sending the bolt rolling across the room.

If he possessed enough liquid in his body he might have cried at that moment. But alas, he could not, so he comforted himself by rolling on his side and watching the shoggoth slowly devour his brother. It was absolutely horrific to see Zeus’ torso try to thrash at the creature with limbs he no longer possessed, see the look of pure terror grow on his half-bearded face as the creature tore away a chunk of his back, and then see his face settle on the horrifying realization that there was no escape, but Hades relished every moment of it. The only downsides to his brother’s end was that he wasn’t the one to deliver the fatal blow and that the creature would next come after him and-

Once more there was a flash of light followed immediately by deafening roar.

Well, it’s not like I’m going to be needing my eyes much longer anyway...

When his vision returned, Zeus and the shoggoth were replaced by a pile of black ash; slowly being scattered by the wind. He craned his neck up, doing his best to ignore the sound of cracking flesh, and what he saw made him smile.

“Fuck. You,” his wife wheezed, standing on two trembling legs with the master bolt clutched in one hand. Some of her hair had been burnt or torn away, blood trickling down the side of her face, with a few burns on its right side. Her clothes, which consisted of one of his T-shirts and a pair of black jeans were covered in holes, predominantly along her right side, and it was easy to see the burnt red flesh beneath. She was in ruff shape, but with the right attention she would live. “That’s for raping me, you sick fuck.”

What did I do to deserve a woman like her? Hades thought as he coughed, not surprised to feel blood come up with it. The taste is the worst part...

“Hades,” Persephone cried as she dropped the ancient weapon and moved as fast as she could to his side, dropping to her knees and sliding the last few feet. “Come on, my love, talk to me,” she said, trying to figure out how to touch him without hurting him.

“You look beautiful,” he rasped, smiling as best as he could manage. “I would take you right here and now if I could.”

“You’re an idiot,” his goddess chuckled. She then lightly slapped his shoulder, then realized what
she had done. “Sorry! Sorry!”

“No need. I hurt so much I don’t even feel it.”

Persephone then tried to wrap her arms around him, but he shrugged her off. “What are you doing? Let me help you!”

“We both know I’ll slow you down,” he said, his voice now barely above a whisper. “Take the bolt and go find the boys, they’ll need-” the woman laid down next to him “-what are you doing?”

“I’m not leaving you alone,” she said, tears leaking from her eyes as she laced her fingers with his. “The king of Olympus will not die alone.”

“The what?”

“You are the last of your brothers, and we are the last two gods, that makes you king,” she said, smiling through her tears. “Long live king Hades.”

“And queen Persephone,” he chuckled, immediately groaning from the action. “Whatever that means now.” He closed his eyes, and enjoyed the warmth of his love’s hand. “My twenty second reign is already better than the previous two-thousand years.”

“Definitely,” she chuckled, sliding closer to him; her grip the only thing he could feel now.

“I love you,” he smiled as the world slowly succumbed to darkness; the pain he felt fading as well. Hades was glad to see that his life didn’t flash before his eyes as the mortals like to believe, as there were many things he didn’t wish to relive again. However, his mind did drift to Persephone, Maria, and their time together. Of Bianca and Nico’s births, watching them grow up, and the joy and frustrations that accompanied that. He thought of their time at the farm, Jason and Percy somehow becoming his sons, of Nico and Percy finding happiness together, and of Persephone and Nico finding each other once more. It was a good life he concluded, if a strange one. “Take care of our family for me.”

“Wake her and grab that… stupid lightning bolt, and be quick about it. You’re going to need them both.”

Chapter End Notes

What do I say here?
I genuinely feel sad for this chapter, as Hades deserved a happy ending. But, life has a tendency to ignore what we think is deserved and deals whatever it wants. I liked Hades, he flowed probably easier than any other character. We also got to see the man/god beneath the souls and shadows that surround him to see that he was far more than what was presented to us in the books. He was awkward, a nerd, a lover, and a father. He was admirable in his own way, and he had his faults. He loved, but that love
ended with him going into a deep depression along with Persephone that lasted decades. He didn't moan about the loss of his divinity and just adapted to the situation. He saw that Jason and Percy needed help and tried to help him in his own way, learning as he did so. In some ways he was the true hero of Shattered, which is why he died. Heroes don't get to ride off into the sunset, something that the main series preached, but then forgot.

At least Hades got went knowing that he had done what he could, and that at least one evil was gone. Maria and Bianca were avenged, and he knows that Persephone will be there for Nico and Percy; or at least he hopes.

So join me in raising a glass to the last king of Olympus, Hades! A man among men, and a god among gods! May you reflect back on him with a smile.

(also the flashback doesn't mean they knew shoggoths existed, to them they were pure fiction)

Next thing: if it wasn't obvious, Zeus was completely off his rocker. Like all kings whose reign is coming to a violent end, he had become a bit delusional. How much of it was fact and how much was fiction I'll leave you to decide. Was he evil? That also depends on you. Do I condone his actions? No. Do I understand where they initially (and that is key) came from? yes. Those thoughts are mirrored to Merlin as well. For Zeus though, the creation of the Cycle was spurned on by the fear of his own mortality, which every sentient being has. Then as time passed the Cycle had to change, with Athena, Ares, Artemis, Poseidon, Hera, Apollo, all adding to it and making it more twisted, so the fault is not his alone. Either way, he is not a god that should be missed, be it in Shattered, the books, or mythology itself.

And another big reveal if you happened to catch it! Which adds a few more questions (which will be answered). This was something I've waited like 99 chapters to reveal, and there were times I thought you'd catch on! I'm so happy you went with what was presented to you and ignored the subtle clues that something wasn't right. This kind of makes you look back on past events in a new light :) That's all I'll say for now, or the boss will get mad.

Bonds update:
The first chapter will be Kronos' POV, but don't expect him to be a main character. He's the driving force of the story, and his presence will be felt in most chapters. The story will actually start just prior to The Last Olympian, have a few pit stops during Heroes of Olympus, but for the most part take place when Trials of Apollo should happen. Each chapter title should be in the format of "POV, funny(ish) title". Example "Sally destroys her son's love life" or "Sally tosses Annabeth out by her stupid ponytail" or "Percy gets wrecked" or "Nico moves in and instantly regrets it". Of the given examples that's two Sally chapters, a Percy, and a Nico.

The first dozen chapters or so will alternate between different places and times, before merging into one. It's still linear, so it won't be confusing. Trust me, you'll see. Bonds is Sally's fic, really. She's loved in the fandom, but one dimension. She is going to come face-to-face with what Percy has become thanks to Camp Half Blood and she's going to see that her initial fears of sending him there were somewhat valid. She's going to see that its rules and teachings do a lot of damage and are faulted at a fundamental level. She's going to call bullshit on Orange T-shirts for quests. "Percy, the only reason you should wear bright orange is if you're fighting a goddamn deer! Now take it off!"
She's going to be badass in her own way. We're going to expand on that brief bit of awesomeness we saw in TLO.

One last thing: Guys, keep it civil in the comments. And please, please, please, no pure caps messages. They hurt my eyes and I just completely ignore them then. I don't know why they hurt my eyes, but they do. Feel free to debate, but keep it civil. And I apologize for not responding to every message, but my job keeps me pretty busy, so I pick and choose. thanks :)}
Chapter Summary

Warnings: blood, gore, death, emotional trauma

Tonight:

The Nation's last stand and truths come to light.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chaos.

Madness.

Those were the only words Piper thought came close to describing what was happening all around her. This was nothing like the battle she and the rest of the seven had arrived to at camp after defeating the giants and looking back she wanted to laugh at how pathetic everyone had carried on about a spat between children. There hadn’t been the horror-stricken screams of men, women, and children being disemboweled. There had been no survivors walking around in a daze carrying their severed limbs or the remains of what had been their friends or family. No one standing in shock as the warrior next to them was carried into the sky and torn asunder, only for them to meet a similar fate for being distracted. No one had to see their youngest child have their limbs cruelly torn off one-by-one as they frantically raced across the battlefield in vain, as Coyote did for Levi. There had been nothing like the sight of a lifeless Awinita clutching her granddaughter’s severed head to her chest; that scene would echo in the daughter of Aphrodite’s mind every time she closed her eyes.

No, they had just been children playing with war with pointy sticks, goaded on by terrible parents.

She held on tightly to Coyote’s fur as the trickster tore through another shoggoth; with Jason wrapping his stumped arm around her waist, and her stomach sank to depths unknown. Her childhood protector had seemingly cast aside his reasoning after the death of his son, only living to protect her and kill as many as the black demons as possible. She and Jason did their best to fight off any attacks that Coyote was blind to, but fangs and claws still got through, along with the occasional hit from an Avalon controlled god. To make matters worse, every so often the god would flicker; going transparent for a split second before returning to normal.

“On your right!” Jason shouted in her ear, his voice still full of hope despite the hell that surrounded them. She wished that she had even an ounce of the hope Jason possessed, that this was a battle that could be won with the strength of man and god.

She wordlessly nodded, as despite having her tongue and vocal chords restored, she found it hard to speak to the blond, to one of the men she loved. Piper looked up to see a large monstrosity rapidly approaching them, stampeding over members of the Nation as if they were nothing but blades of grass. The daughter of Aphrodite drew back on her bow, a shaft of pure light appearing in place of an arrow, and quickly released it. The arrow found its mark, a giant purple eye just above the head of a bull, and the creature shrieked in pain before falling over dead.
“Great shooting, Pipes!” Jason cheered.

Once again, she nodded, but the corner of her eyes started to water, so she turned her gaze forward. She wanted him to stop being so damned enthusiastic and hopeful, but at the same time wanted it to last forever. She wanted to go back to that stupid farm, pick up their relationship, and pretend that her visit with Reyna, Veronica, and Atlas had been just a dream. Or, at the very least, tell Jason and everyone else the truth.

But that couldn’t happen, or it shouldn’t happen; she wasn’t sure which.

*Is it better to die fighting believing victory is possible, or to throw down your arms and wait to die?*

She didn’t know the answer to that question, and each option left her feeling like a monster. She went with what made her feel less terrible, taking into account the members of the Nation’s pride, and deciding that it was better to die with hope. A choice that Kokyangwuti, the spider woman, knew all about and found some sick amusement in. It was the greatest lie she had ever told.

*And I am the Gayegogi. The liar.*

She dared to glance back at Jason, the son of Jupiter clutching at his obsidian-tipped spear with the same determined look on his face that she used to find so attractive.

*I started my life as a demigod as a liar, so it’s only fitting that I lie in the end.*

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The tea Reyna had made for her suddenly lost all appeal, which was a shame because peppermint tea was one of the daughter of Aphrodite’s favorites. A part of her knew that the steaming mug in her hands wasn’t real, that she was in a dreamlike state, but the praetor has made it specifically for her. And it was possibly the last thing Reyna would do for her for a very, very long time.

“So, losing my tongue wasn’t the loss my grandpa was talking about?” she asked, gently swirling the mug around in her hands. The other three nodded solemnly, all staring into their own hot drinks.

“Ain’t that a bitch…”

“That is really fucked up,” Veronica said with a forced laugh. “And I’m sorry that had to happen,” the daughter of Mercury continued, all humor in her voice replaced with a deep melancholy.

Piper took a sip of her tea, forcing herself to savor the strong flavor. She knew that without her tongue her sense of taste was more-or-less shot, her sense of smell would do its best to compensate for the loss, but everything would still be severely muted. “Nothing to be sorry about,” she said after swallowing. “Wasn’t like there was anything you could’ve done about it.”

“At least the bitch is dead,” Reyna scowled as she tossed another sugar cube into her own mug. It was kind of funny to Piper that the badass praetor, who drank her coffee as black as the deepest depths of Tartarus wouldn’t drink tea unless it has the consistency of maple syrup. Honey and sugar cubes were liberally added to her cup, with the Latina only taking a sip so that more sweets could be added. “It’s a consolation prize I know, but it’s better than nothing.”

She didn’t respond. She hated Morgan, hated her like no other. The Witch of Avalon had taken
away her ability to communicate, killed her friends, and destroyed the Greek and Roman
Underworld where some of her friends were wiped from existence. But, there was that nagging little
part of her mind, that little voice that she couldn’t stomp out, that made her feel the slightest twinge of
pity for the teen masquerading as an adult. Piper supposed that that little voice was what made her a
good person, but she wished that, just this once, she could ignore it. “Run this by me one more time;
it’s a lot to process.”

“It’s a lot to process for even me,” Atlas sighed, the Titan taking up nearly two-thirds of the couch
with his large frame. Even in death, dream, or whatever this was, he had to remind them he was
superior to them. But he knew he wasn’t, that was just the way he was, the way he was scripted to
be. “It’s a lot for anyone.”

Reyna set her tea down on the coffee table and took a deep breath. “We’ve been played,” the older
girl said, staring off into the distance. “Olympus, the Nation, Avalon, and everyone else are just
pawns in a far greater game; a game that ends in the destruction of everything.”

“Gods, Titans, even Primordials, all pale in comparison to the forces using us,” Atlas said, his voice a
whisper. “And you can’t fight them, not directly anyway, not when even gazing at even the weakest
of them would shred your mind and soul. We are but sheep for them to slaughter.”

“Thanks for the imagery, Atlas,” the daughter of Aphrodite hummed.

“The fact that their grunts entered the world, has historically speaking, signaled that the game is
over,” Veronica said, picking at a loose thread on Atlas’ jeans. While no longer sharing a body in
death, the two were still joined at the hip; the Titan becoming something of a father figure to the
daughter of Mercury. “I mean, it happened three times before and the trend looks to continue.”

“The fourth world,” Piper said, one goddess springing instantly to mind. “Now going on five.” She
took another gulp of her tea, the reveling in the feel of the hot liquid flowing down her throat. “Tell
me why I shouldn’t just throw in the towel now. Why I shouldn’t tell everyone about this.”

“Because losing a battle is not the same as losing a war, McLean,” the Latina huffed a she squeezed
a plastic honey bear hard enough it bordered on inhumane. “If the enemy so much as sniffs that
something isn’t right, then everything is truly lost. But! If everyone fights like their life depends on it,
then we have a chance. A chance to end it once and for all.”

“How do we know they’re not listening to us right now then?”

“It is true that they frequently employ dreams to influence their pawns, they can’t peer into the
Dreamlands-” Piper huffed “-I didn’t name it McLean,” Reyna said with a roll of her eyes. “It’s the
only place they can’t see, though it is what they seek.”

“And you guys are there, right?” she asked, gripping her mug tightly.

“And your grandfather,” Atlas said, placing one large hand on her back with a surprising gentleness.
“Yes, we are there, and we will all be waiting for you.”

Reyna scooted closer to her and wrapped an arm around her shoulder, with Veronica quickly
following suit. “What we’re asking you to do is terrible, a fate I wouldn’t wish even on my worst
enemy.” Reyna paused. “Well maybe Morgan, but it’s the only option we have, and I’d do it myself
if I could to spare you.”

“Same,” Atlas and Veronica said at the same time.

She wiped away tears that she didn’t know she had and did her best to smile. “Thanks. What’s a few
eons between friends anyway?” Her three traveling companions has the decency to laugh at her shitty attempt at a joke, something that made her feel slightly better. “When does it start?

The Uktena was the first of the Nation’s giants to fall. The giant, horned serpent, with scales that shined like fire, and a gaze that paralyzed all who looked at in in fear, soon succumbed to the sheer multitude of attackers. While the creature could only be killed by piercing its heart located behind its seventh ring, it had really only been a matter of time before they got lucky. While the Nation’s best archers had tried to defend the vulnerable ring, a sharp contrast to what their ancestors had tried to do, the truth was that they had given away the Uktena’s secret, and the shoggoths swarmed the serpent in greater numbers.

There had been some glimmer of hope among remaining fighter’s when the Avalon controlled gods showed up, the thinking being the gelatinous creatures would have to split their numbers to face this new foe. But the fallen gods had more interest in the Nation once the helicopters they escorted were out of sight. And even if they hadn’t been focused on them and attacked the shoggoths, the latter’s numbers were growing by the minute; emerging from the earth, pulling themselves form the water, and flying in from every direction.

The eldritch monsters’ numbers had become so great, that the storm Jason and the Thunderers had summoned could no longer be seen or felt. Her internal clock said that they should have seen the early morning light sometime back, but there was only darkness. What little light they did have, came from the arrows that shot across the field of battle and the glowing scales of the Uktena, but as it’s gargantuan form stilled, that light began to fade.

The Stoneclad was doing little better. The shoggoths were prying away the rocks that made up the magician’s outer shell almost as fast as he could replace them. The giant was now doing as much harm as he did good, stomping across the ruins of New York and crushing anyone and anything unlucky enough to be in his path as he flailed around. He tossed remains of buildings and pieces of asphalt at his attackers; oblivious to where it landed and who it landed on. But for all the damage it did, the Stoneclad was still losing its battle. A number of shoggoths had attached themselves to his back, just out of his reach, and were attempted to burrow their way to his soft, human center.

But of course, there were those who were going to try and save the creature; an act that only twisted Piper’s guts further.

Coyote’s elite skinwalkers, those that had the ability to morph into the feared Wendigos, saw the danger the Stoneclad was in and the damage he was causing, and sprang into action. Those that remained raced across the ruins of the Empire State Building in their strange, almost malnourished, forms, alternating between running on two legs or using their long, bony arms as well, to reach the giant; killing as many of the ever-adapting monsters as they could along the way. Many were lost in the process, a valiant death she supposed in the eyes of many, but a handful managed to get to the giant.

Those that survived quickly began to climb up the Stoneclad’s legs; using their sharp claws to dig into the stone. The shoggoths and gods were quick to notice and began to attack the climbers with mixed results. The Wendigos did better when dealing with the nightmare creatures; their horns and claws tearing through the black flesh like a hot knife to butter.

The gods though, were another story.
The divine shells were far too powerful for a mortal to face directly; shapeshifting abilities or not. The gods may have been slow and a little clunky compared to their normal, non-mind-controlled selves, but they were still incredibly dangerous. And the elite warriors used that to their advantage in ways that would surely make Reyna cheer. They would navigate dangerously close to the digging shoggoths, pretend that they didn’t see the approaching gods, only to dodge an attack at the last moment by either dropping down or flinging themselves further up the Stoneclad. The shoggoths near them, did not dodge the attacks. Some of the more daring skinwalkers even went so far as to pry the Lovecraftian monsters of the stone giant like a leech and toss them at the pursuing god.

But as with every strategy the Nation employed, the Shoggoths quickly adapted. Tentacles would jet out and keep the Wendigos in place for the gods to strike. When a skinwalker went to grab the writhing atrocity, it would secret some kind of acid from its dark flesh, making the member of the Nation lose its grip and fall. Other’s would simply snag the Nation warriors and pound them into a bloody pulp against the Stoneclad’s back.

Piper closed her eyes tightly and took a shaky breath, using all her willpower to not empty the nonexistent contents of her stomach. They’re all dying. They’re all dying for me. All for a lie.

“Piper! Brace yourself!”

Her eyes flew open just in time to see ten tentacles erupt from the ground like angry, black geysers. Coyote tried to stop, to maneuver around the deathtrap, only for the three of them to be sent tumbling into a pile of rubble. She thought for a brief moment that she and Jason were going to be crushed to death under Coyote’s sheer size, but thankfully (and she was using that term loosely) they started to skid into of flipping over. The downside to that though, was that her right side of her body received a massive friction burn and tiny pieces of glass and rock cut through her clothes and worked their way into her skin.

“Are you guys okay?” the blond asked from her after several moments of just laying there.

Coyote lifted his head slightly, red eyes flickering in the darkness. Looking into those eyes made Piper want to curl up into a ball and cry. They were filled with pain and anger over the loss of his children and his inability to save them, haunted by the screams of all of the members of the Nation he had fought so hard to protect. “My right sides pretty banged up, twisted my front paw, I can see patches of what had been my fur in front of me, and that homeless guy I ate a few days ago is still bothering me.” He set his head back down. “But, I’ll be back on top in a second. This is nothing for a god.” He said those final words as if it was a curse.

Piper looked around, ignoring the warm, wet sensation growing along her body, and saw that her bow, the one she had used to destroy Artemis’ lyre, lay broken in two just above her. “I hurt. Everywhere,” she groaned as she pulled her leg out from beneath the giant canine. Once free she looked over to her somewhat-but-not-really boyfriend. Like her, Jason’s right side was beaten to Tartarus, his glasses had been torn off his face along with a chunk of his earlobe, his half-arm was bleeding from several places, and the thigh of his jeans had been torn awhile along with the top layer of skin. “How ‘bout you?”

“Been better,” Jason said as he floated to his feet. “But, after getting hit with a brick, impaled, and having most of your arm bit off, scrapes and bruises don’t even register anymore.” He offered her his left hand, which she gladly took. “Wow, that was a lot darker than it sounded in my head,” the son of Jupiter said with a slight flush to his face. “Sorry.”

And Piper burst out laughing. People were being slaughtered in mass, the dead had been devoured, nuclear bombs were being detonated, and gods were clashing overhead, but Jason Grace was concerned about sounding dark. It was crazier than anything that was going on around them. And it
was so very much Jason.

Jason quirked his head to the side and squinted ever so slightly, reminding Piper of a Golden Retriever. “What’s so funny?”

Her laughter only intensified at his confused look, and her sides genuinely began to hurt from laughing. Coyote rose to his paws, the damage he received mostly healed, and looked at her the same way the son of Jupiter did. To others, she probably looked like she had snapped, succumbed to the madness of war, but she needed this so much. “The- the w-world is fal-falling t-to shi-shit,” she panted, sucking in large gulps of air as she clutched at her sides. “An-and you’re w-worried about be-being dark?”

Coyote looked to Jason, one ear twitching up as he examined the boy. “She has a point.”

Jason only blushed a deeper shade of crimson.

Maybe I have gone mad? The Gayegogi asked herself as she doubled over laughing. The guilt finally got to me and I snapped, right? Or maybe I’m just so stressed I would have laughed at anything remotely strange. She glanced up and through her tears saw that Jason and Coyote were still staring at her; both with their head slightly tilted to the side.

And a realization hit her.

Do-do I like freaking dogs? Not in the literally sense, but as she flashed back through every crush she had and their characteristics, she realized that she liked loyalty, an endlessly upbeat attitude, and a fierce protectiveness. Shit… Leo had all the energy of a puppy and was always quick to defend me. Jason is like the living embodiment of a Golden Retriever and even does that head-tilt-thing. What the fuck is wrong with me?

“Uh, Piper? You gonna be okay?” Jason asked, gripping her shoulder and helping her stand upright.

She wiped the tears from her eyes. “Yeah, just had an epiphany in the worst possible place.” When the blurriness faded, and her vision came back, Piper was greeted by a sight she hadn’t seen in months.

Jason’s smile.

It wasn’t the unsure, sometimes confused smile that she had been seeing on the son of Jupiter after their trip to Iowa, but the confidant, almost sly smile she had seen on the rooftop of Cabin One. It was the smile of the Jason she had fallen in love with.

I have lost my mind, haven’t I? Oh well, what do I got to lose at his point?

She leaned in, eyes closed, and-

“Ahem,” a raspy, old voice called out just as Piper’s lips brushed against Jason’s.

Son of a bitch…

Both her and Jason’s heads snapped to the left, and with no surprise whatsoever stood Kokyangwuti. After her initial flashy entrance of shredding several shoggoths into fleshy ribbons, the elder weaver had dropped out of sight, with the only evidence of her still being alive was the occasional sliced-and-diced pile of eldritch horror. But Piper knew that the so-called Spider Grandmother was following them, making sure that she lived even as so many others died around them.
“What do you want?” Piper hissed, each syllable dripping with venom. *Depression, to laughter, to love, to anger in under thirty seconds! It’s a new emotional whiplash world record!*

The Hopi goddess either didn’t notice her anger or didn’t care, only fishing out a mostly flattened pack of cigarettes from her sweatpants. “I have two Marlboros left,” she said far too casually. She shook the pack and one of the white and gold cancer sticks slid into her wrinkled hands, before lighting itself on its own. The elder goddess then placed it to her lips, took a deep drag, and said, “and at the rate I go through these, that’s not much time left at all.” She flicked the ash to the wind. “I suppose I should savor them while I can.” And with a final adjustment to the large canvas-wrapped item on her back, Kokyangwuti disappeared into the battle once more.

“Ummm, okay?” Jason said perplexed.

“Don’t put too much thought into it kid,” Coyote sighed. “I’ve known her for centuries and she is still a mystery to me.” The giant canine huffed. “Women.”

Piper only nodded, watching as lines of golden thread appeared seemingly out of nowhere and eviscerated any shoggoths they touch with ease. The words of the Nation’s most senior member were meant for her, and their meaning was clear: time’s almost up, be ready.

The daughter of Aphrodite squared her shoulders before turning to face the son of Jupiter and her childhood guardian. She tried to memorize their faces, the way they carried themselves, and the unique lights in their eyes, but she knew that she would never remember them perfectly. Her Grandpa Tom had been dead for years and her memory of him had become eroded with time. Even the memories of her own dad, who had passed only a few months ago were starting to fade. “Let’s get back to it. We have a war to win,” she lied.

The thunderbird’s feather pulsed just as Coyote was flipped back by a surprise uppercut from one of Avalon’s gods. The feather had been more-or-less dormant since it knocked out Percy and Jason, with it only pulsing electric blue every few days, so to feel it once more was about as a big a shock as getting tossed into the air.

And with most cases with the feather, Piper found that time had come to a crawl.

And she really wished it hadn’t.

As she reached the pinnacle of her arc, she surveyed the battlefield. The ruins of New York were hidden under what at first glance looked like an ocean of oil, with some ruined buildings sticking up from the ominous sea. There were a handful of pockets free of the blackness though, where the last remnants of the Nation were making their final stand. Blades of obsidian, arrows of light, along with tooth and claw, struggled to hold back the slowly advancing blackness. It was impossible for her to know if they still believed that victory was still possible, that Nico and the others would get to the loom on time, or if they just wanted to take as many of the abominations with them before they were killed and devoured.

Her gaze next turned to Coyote.

The trickster, council member, and protector of the Gayegogi was just hitting the ground below her, with several shoggoths moving in. The blow the god had delivered to him had been devastating, catching him in the throat and collapsing his windpipe; a fatal blow for any creature of flesh and
bone, but one that a god could quickly recover from. But time was something they didn’t have, with the shoggoths and fallen gods directing their many lifeless eyes to the last true threat in the Nation’s arsenal. In his animal form, he was as fast and untouchable as the wind, leaving a trail of destruction in his wake. Coyote could throw his voice to confound his enemies, cloak himself from sight, and change his size on a whim; simple tricks compared to the gods of Olympus, but quite dangerous when used by someone with hundreds of years of experience. But for once, Coyote was stationary, and there were no tricks or distractions he could use when all eyes were on him.

Her body turned away from her childhood protector to Jason.

The blond had been the first to hit the ground and was in the process of pushing himself up with his one good hand; the other only propping him up so far. The spear Chad had lent him was lost in the sea of shoggoths, leaving Jason weaponless. Before him though, stood the strangest looking god she had ever seen; a thin, scrawny little man wearing a red Hawaiian shirt that had seen better days, white short-shorts that left little to the imagination, scuffed up tennis shoes with white socks that went up to his knees, a pair of sunglasses hid eyes, and a fishing hat covered in lures covered his head; failing to hide the fact he was balding.

The strangest thing though was that Jason looked as if he knew the fallen god. If that was the case, then the son of Jupiter had to have met him after the whole mess began, as Jason detailed every god he encountered in the letters he used to write to her. And there was no way in Hades that he would have skipped the details on this particular train wreck of divinity.

Jason got into a crouching position, eyes scanning the immediate area for anything he could use as a weapon. Despite his, Chad’s, and Andy’s best efforts, they were never able to take out the shoggoth constructed lightning rods, stripping him of his greatest ability. His mouth began to move, but with how slow everything was, Piper couldn’t make out what he was saying; not that she had ever excelled at lip reading in the first place.

The strange god tilted his head to the side just as she began to connect with the ground; the impact at least temporarily mitigated do to how slow she was seemingly moving. Seemingly taking the god’s reaction as some kind of sign, Jason continued his Percy imitation, continuing to talk as he slowly rose to his feet. He started to back towards her and Coyote, still talking (Piper thought she saw him say ‘yeti’), and offering the god his best smile, as she finally hit the ground.

And just when Jason was within arm’s length from her, the god’s mouth opened impossibly wide, his lower jaw being blasted off as a mass of black and purple shot out of its throat. She couldn’t react in time, and nor could the son of Jupiter as the stream of shoggoth opened wide into one giant maw and devoured the teen whole, landing next to her in a pile of blood and ooze.

Time returned to its normal pace as dozens of purple eyes stared at her as the sickening sound of bones snapping, the tearing of flesh, and several liquid filled pops emanated from within the creature; the last sounds she would forever associate with Jason Grace.

*It’s not fair*, she thought as several tentacles snaked their way from the beast. It was a juvenile thought and she knew it. Life wasn’t fair, it wasn’t even close to fair, but Jason and her certainly deserved better than what they were dealt. Jason never knew his parents, was a pawn to a petty goddess since he was a toddler, forced into becoming a child soldier, had his memories stripped away, and when they finally met, finally thought they had someone to call their own, he was forced to become a servant to the gods. Then came Avalon, and when they were reunited, Jason had become so traumatized he couldn’t be in the same room with her alone. And just when they were starting to rebuild, starting to find themselves again, it ended suddenly and violently.

“It’s not fair,” Piper rasped as the tears began to flow and the first of the tentacles wrapped around
her ankles. The shoggoth’s grip was cold and rubbery, unlike any living creature she had felt before. Everywhere it touched felt like hundreds of pins and needles were being stuck into her skin, and a part of her wondered if that was really what was happening. But that didn’t matter to her, as it felt like someone had reached into her chest and wrung her lungs, heart, and stomach together taking her to new levels of anguish. “It’s not FAIR!”

As she shouted the final word, blue energy exploded outward from the thunderbird’s feather; bathing everything in a blue light. The shoggoth that had its grip on her was instantly incinerated, while the daughter of Aphrodite remained unharmed. The wave of destruction didn’t stop there, radiating outward in every direction. The empty husk of the strange god was reduced to ash, along with several of the fallen gods hovering above them. The black monstrosities arced and briefly glowed white before being blown away in a cloud of ash. When the destructive blast reached Coyote, it passed over him as it did Piper; leaving the wounded councilman untouched from its power. It only lasted for a second, but when the light faded, there were no gods or monsters for a hundred feet in every direction.

None of that mattered to her though. None of it mattered anymore.

Piper heaved herself forward to the spot where Jason had last stood, and began to scour the ash, looking for anything that of the blond’s that might have survived. A shoe, his belt buckle, a piece of his t-shirt, even something as morbid as a tooth, just something that she could have of him. But all she could find was ash.

“Huh, if you actually learned how to use that thing you might have been able to save him,” Kokyangwuti’s voice wheezed from behind her. There was no emotion in the weaver’s voice, no pity, no sorrow, not even a hint of sadistic glee, just her commenting on the scene like one would when one reads the instructions from a label. “I just finished my last smoke, and I believe you know what that means.”

“Go fuck yourself,” Piper growled as she clenched her hands in the ash.

“What was that?”

Piper slowly stood to her feet, fists till clenched in rage. “Go. Fuck. Yourself,” She repeated, growling each word.

If she would have said that to any of the god or goddesses of Olympus, even her mother, she would have been struck down where she stood; and a part of her wished that the Hopi weaver would have done the same. Instead, the elderly goddess merely shrugged and began to search her pockets for a cigarette she knew wasn’t there. “Eh, you’ll forget about him eventually. You’ll forget about all of this eventually. They all do in the end.” She paused and frowned. “Damn, I should have brought a carton.”

“What are you rambling about,” Coyote snarled, as he limped up next to Piper. His throat was mostly healed, but many of his other wounds were still untended and the light in his eyes was dimming. He was nearing his end, as those that believed in him were now but a handful and we’re shrinking by the second. “You’ve never made any sense, but since we left Crazy Horse, you haven’t uttered a single word that makes sense! If it wasn’t for these,” he held up his front left paw, which had an intricate woven band on it, “I would’ve put you out of your misery!”

“Brave words for a scavenger,” the woman said with a slight smile on her face. She adjusted the package on her back one more and sighed. “I’m just telling our illustrious Gayegogi what comes next
for the Nation. What comes next after you’re gone.”

“Next? What comes next? There is no next!” Coyote howled. “This is it for everyone! Those Greeks obviously failed to get the loom, or any of the Tools of Fate! The only thing that’s coming next is our-” The large canine vanished completely, only to reappear a second later, like the picture on an old television with a bad signal. “Oh…”

Piper threw her arms around Coyote’s neck, wrapping him in a tight embrace to silence him from uttering those words. She thought that in another life, one where her grandfather’s life wasn’t cut short, the trickster would have been her lifelong friend and protector. He and Grandpa Tom would have taught her the ways of the Nation, introduced her to all its peoples, and showed her what it all really meant. She could’ve grown up alongside his kids and the other members of the Nation she had met only briefly. It was easy to imagine herself hanging out with Bambi and Jeanne, learning about medicine and leadership, getting tutored in math by Andy and Chad, helping out in Napi and Tacky’s store on summer break, or staying at one of Coyote’s resorts and pranking the staff. Yet, she didn’t want to give up the memories and friends she made in the last few years either. Jason, Reyna, Veronica, Atlas, and the rest were people she loved and would always be glad she met them, even if the circumstances weren’t ideal. She just wished that there was a world where both could have been. “Don’t tell grandpa, ‘kay?” she sobbed into Coyote’s fur, holding him tighter. “‘Kay?”

She felt Coyote change into his human form; her arms being pulled up as his neck changed locations. A pair of strong arms wrapped around her and returned the embrace. One hand gently stroked her hair as the trickster whispered in her ear, “Okay.”

Piper felt something being placed on her head, and when she opened her eyes, Coyote was gone, the only thing left of him was the ten-gallon hat on her head. She didn’t have time to ponder anything further, as golden thread wrapped around her waist, and she was pulled high into the air.

She held onto the hat as if her life depended on it.

“Who are you?” Piper cried, as she followed the elderly goddess through the ruins of Olympus.

For as much hype Annabeth had given the place, the part of her that cared was simply not that impressed. Yes, she was aware it had been bombed and that the piles of corpses had most likely not been part of the original décor, but with a little imagination she could picture what it was like. And frankly, it came across as gaudy and tacky, like something a drugged out his mind Elton John and a drunk Liberace would come up with. It lacked any and all subtleties, which the Olympus dictionary also lacked, as everything was overstated.

“I’m Kokyangwuti, Spider Grandmother,” the goddess said as they passed through a ruined marketplace. If Piper hadn’t been so upset and frustrated, she might have actually found some form of pleasure in seeing Hera’s lifeless corpse. “You know that.”

Piper clenched her fists, her fingernails digging little, bloody crescent moons in the palms of her hands. “That’s bullshit, and you know it! If you really were a member of the Nation you would’ve faded too!”

Kokayangwuti stopped midstride and looked up at the shoggoth filled sky. “Oh, I am very much a member of the Nation. In fact, I’m it’s oldest.” Her dark eyes scanned the heavens, but after a few
seconds she shook her head and frowned. “Perhaps I have a bunker full of believers still out there.”
The ancient weaver than started to walk again, stepping over the remains of a soldier that had been split in two as if it were nothing but a pile of rubbish.

Piper growled in frustration and picked up the largest piece of rock she could find and tossed it at the vague goddess. Before the rock even got close, it was sliced into tiny pieces by Kokyangwuti’s golden threads.

“Don’t test me,” The goddess said passively. “I know you are grieving right now but try to keep your emotions in check. Besides,” the white-haired woman shrugged, “I made sure you knew what was coming well before now.”

“Knowing the world is going to end and experiencing it are two vastly different things!” she shouted back. “No one can prepare themselves to see the people they love die in front of them! In fact, knowing about it actually makes it worse! It’s fucking maddening!”

Kokyangwuti rolled her eyes the way any adult does at a child throwing a tantrum. “Well you seem to be handling it just fine. Now pull up your big girl panties and get moving, we don’t have much time left.”

Piper wordlessly followed the goddess, glaring daggers into her back as they traversed the ruins of Olympus. She knew that Kokyangwuti was far more than she appeared to be, and a part of her had known when she first encountered the so-called goddess. When the truth came out that her grandfather had made the weaver alter her fate, she thought that had been what she had felt, but she was wrong. So, very, very wrong.

“So, this was the fourth world,” the daughter of Aphrodite hummed as they reached the foot of Olympian’s palace. The gigantic size was momentarily impressive, but that quickly disappeared and was replaced by annoyance, as she had to pull herself up a step that was far too large for normal humans. “And you were from the third world?”

Golden threads looped around Piper once more to help up the last of the stairs, with Spider Grandmother setting her down gently on the top. “Trying a different tactic, I see,” the elder hummed. “Fine, I’ll humor you. If only to stop your bitch fit. Yes, according to the stories I am from the third world.”

“But you’re not, are you?” she asked as they entered the palace. The floating debris that arced electricity, the movie-like tapestries, and moving statues might have been cool to many demigods at either camp, but she had seen every Harry Potter and played a lot of RPGs, so they were pretty ‘eh’ to the daughter of Aphrodite. “Let me guess, the story changed over time? The truth was lost to the ages and only you know the truth?”

They paused to look at a moving mural that depicted an unruined Olympus floating amongst the clouds. Tiny gods and goddesses could be seen moving through the streets using various forms of transportation; pegasi, chariots, clouds, and even a floating dolphin. From the top of the palace a bolt of lightning would flash and illuminate the sky, branching out more-and-more as it traversed the sky before fading completely.

“No,” Spider Grandmother said as she watched a tiny version of Apollo’s chariot appear from the East, only for the mural to cut off abruptly and start over again. “I just never told anyone the whole truth. Why worry people with things that are beyond their understanding?” She slowly shook her head, and the mural was reduced to dust by her threads. “What a piece of crap…”

“How long did the fourth world last, I mean, in comparison to the others?” she asked as they
continued down the long, arched hallway; Kokyangwuti’s threads destroying what little artwork remained as they past. “It had to last longer than the others, right?”

“In human terms? Fourteen billion years. Give or take a few hundred million.”

“And that’s-

“An eighth as long as the previous. A *hundredth* of the one before that. Humanity practically sprinted to the grave…”

Though she loathed to admit it, Piper was still a kid. She thought a year was a long time, a week without TV a life sentence, and a two-minute timer for nachos an eternity, so she couldn’t even begin to process the numbers the goddess was spitting out, and she doubted anyone could. *Annabeth would probably say she could or any one of the gods, but two-or-three-thousand years isn’t even one percent of the times she’s talking about. Quick maths! Holy crap, I am losing my mind…* She shook her head to clear it, not liking the direction her thoughts were heading. “What about the first world?”

That made Kokyangwuti and her threads pause. “That knowledge is not known to me. But by comparing my creator’s technologies to those of the subsequent worlds, I’d say far longer than any other world. The Yith were the closest, but were still quite primitive in comparison. And Humans hadn’t even achieved interstellar travel…”

“Wait! Wait! Wait!” Piper cried, making a ‘T’ with her hands. “Hold the fuck up! My mind, or whatever is left of it, is A-okay with magic, gods, and more recently, things lurking in the darkness. But I am not okay with a sudden shift to science fiction!”

Kokyangwuti laughed at the shaking teenager. “Your definitions of science and magic are really pathetic, but I suppose that isn’t your fault… If your family hadn’t found, and unleashed, the fragment of the Magnum Innominandum-“

“The Magnum in-a-what-now?”

“Human history would have taken a radically different path,” the elder goddess finished with a glare. “Look, magic and science are the same once you get past a certain point. My creators could create life on a whim, rearrange galaxies as easily as it is for you to make a cup of coffee, visit multiple alternate realities simultaneously like they were taking a Sunday drive, and those things that killed everyone?” The white-haired woman asked, raising one eyebrow. “Those, shoggoths as you call them, well they were nothing more than their janitors. Now tell me, which example is magic, and which is science?”

Piper could only stare at the croc-wearing being before her. She had a tenth-grade education, and her knowledge of magic and the divine was minimal at best. If she was being honest, most her of knowledge came from experience and pop culture; the Quadratic equation was nigh impossible for her, but she could recite every line of the *Princess Bride* as easily as the alphabet. So, while she couldn’t answer Kokyangwuti’s question, she could think of one of her own. “If your creators were so great, how come they aren’t still around?”

The older woman narrowed her eyes and her lips thinned. “Because after eons of fighting and more failed plans than there are stars in the universe, they were left with only two options: eradication and the end of everything, or sacrifice themselves to ensure creation continues. Guess which one they chose?”

“Oh.”
“Oh’ is right,” the older woman sighed. “In their final days, they shattered reality and turned it into what was to be an unbreakable cage, they created me and others to oversee each piece, and implemented failsafes in the event of a breech. They did all of that knowing that there was no hope for them.” She stopped and let out a raspy chuckle. “In a way, they died for you.”

“Yeah, and I bet they would be super thrilled with the job you’re doing…”

“Fuck you, McLean…”

Piper almost regretted that she got Kokyangwuti to talk to her, as there was more information given in a few short minutes than she could ever hope to fully process, but it helped her push away thoughts of Jason and what was going on outside the relative peace of Olympus. For if she lost what little resolve she had left, she knew that she wouldn’t be able to pick herself up again. Jason had been devoured in front of her, Coyote had faded in her arms, the people she was supposed to lead and protect had been sacrificed for a greater good (which are never the case), and everything with a soul was on the verge of being devoured; so she would gladly focus on ancient civilizations and trying to guess Spider Grandmother’s true form.

And as they walked through the empty halls, the one conclusion her mind kept coming back to was that all the horror surrounding her was the result of someone meddling with something they shouldn’t have.

Zeus and the Olympians messed with the natural order of things to save their own butts and found a magnum-something-or-other to help them do it. This led to them to take every Tool of Fate, including Kokyangwuti’s, put them in one place, and making the shoggoths’ jobs easier. This also led to the creation of Avalon, whom in turn took out every remaining god and goddess for their own, sometimes justified, purposes and further assisting the shoggoths… Man, there is just something not adding up here. Something criti-

Deep in thought, she collided into the might-be-a-goddess’ back; her head smacking into something metal under the canvas wrapping. “Ow!” she cried, rubbing her palm against her now throbbing forehead. “Why did you- oh…”

Despite having never seen it before, it was clear to her that they were standing in the remains of the throne room. The twelve gigantic thrones in various states of destruction were the big giveaway. While a lot of the damage appeared to have been caused by the military’s shelling, a good percentage of it looked to be the result of a fight. A very recent fight. There was a large pile of black ash on one side of the room, some of which was still smoldering and smoking. Part of the marble floor was so hot it was faintly glowing. Perhaps most alarmingly, was that at the base of the sole remaining throne, human shadows were burnt in, immortalizing their owner’s final moment of life.

“That’s certainly unexpected,” The Nation elder smirked.

Piper followed her gaze and her breath hitched.

Laying on the opposite end of the room, were the remains of Hades and Persephone. One side of the Spring goddess was covered in burns; portions of her clothing burned or melted away. What wasn’t burned was covered in cuts and bruises, the first imperfections Piper had ever seen on the woman.

But Persephone looked like a spring daisy compared to her husband.
The only way Piper knew it was Hades was by what little clothing he had left. His flesh had been burnt as black as charcoal, with about the same consistency. Where the blackened skin cracked, angry red muscle could be glimpsed peeking through.

It concerned her that the sight didn’t even make her cringe, only feeling pity for the god-turned-man. During her brief stay at the farm, Persephone and Hades had shown her nothing but kindness and patience, something that she ignored. While Hades had been drawing up plans for an addition to the house just for her, she had been distrustful of anyone from Olympus and was focused on the upcoming war, something she regretted now. *They weren’t of Olympus, were they? They were of the Underworld.*

“Well, don’t just stand there,” Kokyangwuti said, making her way to the sunken staircase in the center of the massive room. “Wake her and grab that… stupid lightning bolt, and be quick about it,” the woman rasped, voice echoing. “You’re going to need them both.”

“Wait, what?” Piper cried, jogging up behind the goddess.

“The woman is alive. Wake her,” Kokyangwuti said, talking to her as if she was a small child. “And grab that bronze cylinder over there, which just so happens to be the most powerful weapon left in existence.”

“Why?”

“Because we need four mortals this time and only two went into the chamber. As for the weapon…” The goddess swung the canvas wrapped package off her back and tossed it to the floor; unrolling itself in one motion.

Piper’s heart stopped. “That’s—“

Chapter End Notes

This chapter is bound to make a lot of you mad for many reasons. Some of you probably wanted a more glorious send off for many of the characters lost this chapter. Some of you may have wanted to be there when they passed on. Some of you may even have wanted to see it from their POV.

But death is strange and often tragic. Jason deserved more, he really did. He was just starting to reclaim his life and was on track to really make something of himself. Despite being a Junior, he was taking summer college courses with Nico and Percy, his relationship with Piper and women in general was slowly mending, and he liked to work on the farm. Jason deserved to live to a ripe old age and die peacefully in his sleep surrounded by loved ones, not devoured by a shoggoth masquerading as someone he knew. I actually had his death planned well before the crappy ToA death, which made me really consider sparing him, but it didn't work for the rest of the story. I can however, promise you that in future works he will be dealt a better hand.

Coyote and the Nation could be viewed in one of two ways. Either they went out in a blaze of glory or a waste of life for a game they didn’t know they were a part of. They were good people, a good pantheon, they were nothing like Olympus. They were people just living day-to-day and working to reclaim their heritage. Now they are nothing but a memory held by the last Gayegogi. But then again, we have seen that all it
takes is a believer. ;)
I should also take this time to mention I plan a Nation fic with Jason, Piper, and Leo
traveling around the country similar to our girls. I can't give you an ETA on that
particular fic, as I have others planned, but it will (hopefully) do them justice.

Now for Piper.
That poor girl is on the verge of a complete nervous breakdown. The only thing that
stopped her from just giving up earlier was her sense of duty to protect her friends. She
sees a glimmer of hope and she is focusing solely on that as the darkness moves in.

And now for the bombshells!
Holy Hades! A couple of you partially guessed the existence of a greater cycle of
events, but you were off slightly. While Olympus' was supposed to be a continuous loop,
the one Kokyangwuti spoke of was purely unintentional. That cycle of events were only
supposed to happen as a worst case scenario, a fail safe if you will. There wasn't
supposed to be a third world, or even a fourth, the second should have been it. We also
saw that the worlds are lasting less and less with each iteration, which is also something
that is not supposed to happen. If you start to piece together some of the details we've
learned before this chapter, you can see that it is FAR more complicated than Zeus', and
let me tell you, it's only the tip of the iceberg.
If you have ever seen that meme of Charlie from It's Always Sunny trying to explain
something complicated, that was me designing the damn thing! Scouring religious works
and scientific papers and building something that would make sense. Looking back, this
might be why I'm insane...
Also, points to whoever can figure out what the Magnum Innominandum is and how it
fits into the series with ease. Honestly, that was one of my first inspirations for this story.

Bonds update: I'm debating whether or not to wait to post it until I have a few chapters
written so you guys can get a good feel for it. I'm thinking wait until I have two chapters
(Kronos and Sally) and then post.
A little teaser for you: there will be an event that will plunge Olympus into a civil war.
And as we know, if there are problems on Olympus, they drag the camps into it. We are
going to see some of our heroes doing their best to try and maintain the peace. And want
to know something funny? That isn't even the main conflict, that's secondary. Also
funny is the fact that Sally, Percy, and Nico won't step foot in either camp :) Let that eat at ya!
This was not how Percy pictured his day going.

Not even close.

He was supposed to get up at the crack of noon, mess around with Nico for a bit (and see where that led), help Persephone out in her greenhouse for a few hours, mess around with Nico some more, work on some calculus homework he had been putting off, mess around with Nico, work with Hades on a few home improvement projects, mess around with Nico, and then in the evening, hang out with Jason and Piper on a not-double-date.

Nowhere in that schedule was their time allocated for his Mythomagic deck to come alive, for the world to go up in a nuclear fireball, meet Piper’s extended family, have a heart attack thinking Jason had been eaten, find out Zeus had resorted to cannibalism, save Hades from some marines \textit{(Mom would be thrilled with that)}, or fleeing with Nico down a creepy spiral staircase while Hades, Persephone, and Demeter attempted to hold back Zeus. Those events should have been scheduled properly, not tossed on him without any prior notice.

\textit{Like that would ever happen…}

So, here he was, dragging Nico by the wrist down a seemingly endless set of spiraling stone stairs. He could hear his boyfriend protesting behind him, but there was no time to stop when their very mortal family was trying to hold off Zeus and a horde of the level four monsters in his deck. Their only hope to save their family and prevent the end of the world rested with them reaching the Loom of Fate. He had no idea what they would do once they got it, but he’d been flying on the seat of his pants for years now and it generally worked out in the end.

\textit{I don’t know how to use a loom, but thanks to Home EC, I can patch a sock and put on a button like nobody’s-}

Both the son of Poseidon and the son of Hades shrieked in surprise when they suddenly found themselves tripping on the stairs that were suddenly going \textit{up}. It was far from the worst fall in his life, but it still hurt like hell when his jaw slammed against the cool, stone steps and his knees caught the edge of another step.

“Percy, don’t let go!” Nico cried, now wrapping his hand around his wrist. “I repeat, do not let go!”

Hearing the panic in the younger boy’s voice, Percy clenched his grip as tight as he could and rolled over as he hauled Nico up to his chest, placing him in a rather suggestive position. But before he could make a witty (in his mind) comment, he saw why the son of Hades had panicked. “Holy
shut..."

Besides the stairs suddenly going up instead of down, they were no longer in a magically lit tunnel. While his back was still resting against something cold and solid, space in front of him was gone to reveal an endless expanse of darkness devoid of any light or form.

It was something he definitely didn’t want Nico to fall into.

“I don’t think we’re on Olympus anymore,” Percy mumbled aloud as the two slowly got to their feet; still holding onto each other’s hand. As he stared into the abyss he flashed back to his first time in the Underworld, looking into Tartarus. The pit had felt like it was staring back at him and had its own gravity to it that threatened to pull him in, and he shuddered to think what would have happened if he had been the one wearing Hermes’ shoes instead of Grover. This endless void though was like Tartarus on steroids. His skin crawled as he swore he could feel the gaze of an endless number of eyes on him. Within the darkness that his eyes struggled to understand, he thought he saw movement, flashes of stygian blue that disappeared the moment his eyes tried to focus on them. And while his body was instinctively trying to distance himself away from the darkness as much as possible, there was a strange allure to it as well.

Maybe this is just some big illusion, that if I look ever the edge I’ll see the bottom. Just one step and I’ll shatter the illusion.

Before he could even lift his foot, Nico slammed his back against the wall and caught his lips in a forceful kiss.

Hello!

Any thoughts of the abyss or looking over the edge of the stairs were thrown out the window and replaced with a hunger for the small Italian, who was currently nibbling on his lower lip. The responsible part of Percy’s mind was saying that they did not have time for this, but when Nico’s tongue slid into his mouth, it too was tossed out the window. He gripped the front of the son of Hades’ shirt and pulled him closer, trying to eliminate all space between them as their tongues fought for dominance. With his other hand, he wove his fingers through Nico’s thick, dark hair, while the younger teen’s right leg started to wrap around Percy’s left. Typically, when Nico did that they were going to fuck each other’s brains out-

But Nico broke away, leaving one very frustrated son of Poseidon.

“Percy, look at me,” The son of Hades said, cupping Percy’s chin. Despite their short make out session, Nico looked absolutely terrified, his eyes darting side-to-side as his shoulders shook. Despite having regained much of his olive skin tone from their time at the farm, the younger boy was now as pale as he was during their war with Gaea. “Look at me.”

“I’m not looking anywhere else,” he smirked.

Nico nodded slightly. “Good. I thought I lost you, you weren’t responding to me.” The smaller teen released him and took a shaky breath.

“Lost me? What are you talking about?”

“Percy, you stared into the darkness for like five minutes. You almost walked off!”

That didn’t sound right to him, as he thought he had only looked at it for a few seconds. But Nico wasn’t one to lie about something like that and the fact that he looked genuinely scared, spoke volumes to the son of Poseidon.
“Don’t look at it again,” Nico shuddered. “Please don’t.”

It took all his willpower to stop his eyes from darting to the void, but he held his gaze on his boyfriend. “Okay, I can do that,” he said, the urge to look decreasing as he looked at Nico’s red puffy lips. “It’s just a whole lot of nothin’ anyway, not like it’s Tatar-“ The words hung between them as Percy’s eyes widened.

While Tartarus had been hard on him and Annabeth both mentally and physically, they had been partially shielded from the full effects of the primordial plane. The longer they had stayed there the more glimpses of the true form of land slowly wormed their way into their minds. The son of Hades though, had been exposed to the horrible truth that Percy could just grasp.

“Neeks,” he gulped, “what do you see?”

Nico bit his lip but continued to look him in the eye. “Just- just keep moving.”

Despite Annabeth’s best efforts, he never really did pick up anything about architecture. She could rattle off terms and names of important people the same way Nico could go on about coding and Mythomagic, and he would try to understand and retain some of it, but it was like trying to catch smoke with his hands. He could somewhat identify the region that inspired a building, but that was more thanks to Disney movies than the blonde’s passionate lectures. He could also determine if something was ancient or not, but he was positive that anyone could. If it was made of stone, covered in cracks, and missing most of it, he would be willing to bet it was ancient.

But he could not grasp the age of the structure they were climbing.

After they had exited the obviously old and Greek spiral staircase into the void, the stairs changed rather drastically. Each step was now large enough for both him and Nico to lay on without crowding each other, and they could’ve probably fit Jason in still without being crowded. Instead of a true step, small ramps roughly a foot wide connected each platform; which his bad leg was eternally grateful for. And unlike the stone stairs from before which had been worn in places and had bits and pieces chipped away from ages of use, these new stairs looked as if they were constructed only a short time ago; lacking no flaws whatsoever.

And that was only the beginning of the weirdness.

The stairs circled around a cylinder that could have fit their school, its football field, and the farmhouse with ease, and it was just as flawless as the stairs. Everything was made of a strange, cobalt blue material that was like nothing he ever felt before. As the two of them ran up the seemingly never-ending stairs, he dragged one finger along the strange blue material and found it had several strange characteristics. The first was that it was warm to the touch, the warmth reminding him more of a living creature than an oven or the ice cream machine at work. Second, there was no friction generating between the material and his finger. Sometimes at the farm he would walk down the halls and drag his finger behind him, feeling every bump and divot in the drywall, and strangely enjoying the growing heat on his fingertips. But there was no bumps or divots, the structure seemingly one solid piece without any imperfections. Third, and the coolest and strangest in his opinion, was that strange material would briefly glow every time they touched it, which made it look like they were wearing Sketchers, something he sadly didn’t have in his childhood. The glow would last for a few moments after the initial contact, and the son of Poseidon was finding some entertainment in
watching his fingers leave long lines of light in their wake and fading away. If they weren’t so pressed for time, he would have stopped to see if he could write his name before the light faded away.

Maybe on the way back. Okay, definitely on the way back!

“Nico, you’re the smart one,” he called out as they continued their ascent, “got any idea what this stuff is?”

The son of Hades looked over his shoulder, eyes narrowed before he locked eyes with him. “Not sure, but I wouldn’t touch it more than necessary.”

“Why?”

“Every comic we’ve read and movie we’ve seen, shows that glowing things are either radioactive or bound to explode, and I’d rather not risk dealing with either.”

Percy immediately dropped his hand from the wall and frantically wiped it against his shirt.

Percy had never been so glad to see the end of a staircase in his life. After running up the spiral staircase that bordered oblivion for what felt like hours, his right leg felt like it was on fire. While stretching out his leg in the morning tended to prevent any cramping or sudden jolts of pain, there was no amount of stretches that could have prepared him to scale the equivalent of a skyscraper.

“You okay, Percy?” Nico asked, crouching down in front of him, eyes filled with concern.

“I’m good. I just have fire in my veins is all,” he answered, pushing himself upright. Despite all the running, he noticed that neither of them were out of breath, nor were they red in the face, or even sweating. It was weird, especially considering they tended to return from their nightly jogs damp with sweat, but those concerns were quickly pushed to the side. “Okay, not what I expected, but that’s a little closer to normal.”

The top of the cylinder was drastically different from the strange path leading up to it. Socks, scarves, pants, leggings, shirts, robes, tunics, mittens, boxers, and even a few neon thongs, were heaped in piles as far as the eye could see; like it was the aftermath some kind of horrible laundry day explosion. The piles ranged in size from an overturned laundry basket to there-might-be-an-elephant-trapped-under-there, the larger sizes all wobbling in the non-existent breeze. Placed precariously at the top of each mountain of laundry were various weaving tools. Spindles, knitting needles, sewing machines, looms, and even an honest-to-goodness spinning wheel, were perched on top of the piles with thousands of threads running from the pile of clothing, through the instruments, and then out, heading to the center of the platform.

“What are the odds that we need to go to the center?” he sighed, already knowing the answer. A part of him knew that he should really appreciate how easy things were turning out, but after learning his entire time as a demigod was scripted he couldn’t help but feel like he knew what was going to happen next.

Nico smiled, clearly relieved that it wasn’t just them and the abyss anymore. “If this was Vegas, I’d take those odds in a heartbeat.”
He had to chuckle at that. There wasn’t a casino or bingo hall in Vegas, let alone the world, that had one-hundred percent odds. “We should go,” Percy blurted out as they began to trudge through the knee-deep pile of (hopefully) clean laundry.

Nico grabbed his hand to help keep him steady as he stepped into a pit of left gym socks. “Go where?”

“Vegas,” he answered, peeling off a sock whose thread got tangled on his pant leg.

“And do what?” the son of Hades asked, dealing with his own tangled troubles. “We can’t gamble, the buffets are only so interesting, and I don’t believe either of us are big on magicians. And before you suggest it, we are not visiting the Pawn Stars shop.”

“We could get married,” he said, the words flowing with ease. But when he realized what he said, he slapped his mouth shut.

“Wha-!!!” Nico cried. The younger boy lost his footing (which was easy to do on a pile of quilts) and tumbled face first into a stack of enough lederhosen to start their own Octoberfest. The sudden disturbance was enough to shift the delicate balance of the laundry pile, and Percy watched with a mix of amusement and horror as Nico was covered in a German avalanche.

Without thinking, Percy dove in after Nico and found that his natural swimming abilities did not extend to laundry. He tossed away multiple pairs of the ridiculous German festive ware in a frenzy, before finding a flustered son of Hades with a black tube sock tangled in his hair. “Are you okay?”

“We’re kids, Percy,” Nico sighed as he tossed away the sock in his hair. “We can’t get married, not yet anyway.”

He’d be lying if he said the words hadn’t stung, but when he fully processed what Nico said, that pain quickly faded. “So… That’s a yes?” he asked as offered Nico his hand.

Nico rolled his eyes as he was pulled to his feet. “We’re not getting married in Vegas, Percy. And do you honestly think mom and father would allow that? Mom would want a grand venue, probably at some tropical resort—”

“Or a beach,” he suggested.

“Or a beach,” Nico added, as they continued on their laundry filled trek. “And you know she would have to do the flowers, she would never forgive us otherwise. Father would also insist on having the finest catering money can buy; we’d probably have an asinine number of plate options for people to choose from—”

Percy could only smile to himself as Nico rattled on and on about the details of a wedding that he said they were too young for. And from the enthusiasm in his boyfriend’s voice, he could tell that Nico had been thinking about this for quite some time already. “Whatever you want babe.”

“Jason would obvious be the best man, but I’m not sure whose…”

By the time they reached the center of laundry-palooza, as he now called it, Percy was positive that he and Nico knew what the life of a fabric softener sheet was like. From all the crawling and walking
on the various fabrics, their bodies had built up a considerable static charge that zapped them every
time they touched something new. It was annoying and a little painful, but it would take more than a
little shock to slow them down.

“That’s… different,” Nico whispered as they looked up at strange structure that dominated the center
of laundry-palooza.

Percy nodded in agreement. “That’s one way of putting it…”

The structure was yet another cylinder that he estimated to be three stories tall and about as wide as
the barn Jason and Piper hung out in, and it was constructed from the same strange cobalt blue
material as the cylinder it stood on. If there weren’t so many clothes piled along its base, he would
bet that it was merely an extension. Strangely though, someone had affixed to it marble columns,
spaced out in even intervals around its circumference along with billowing tapestries depicting
important moments from the history of Olympus. The castration of Ouranos, the defeat of Kronos,
the rise and fall of the giants, and the creation of the first McDonalds; all immortalized in living
thread. The structure only had one entrance that could have easily fit Zeus in his giant form if not for
the thousands of threads strung overhead; all of them rapidly being pulled within.

Without another word, the two of them stumbled over the last pile of booty shorts and entered the
faux Greek building. They braced themselves for a surprise attack, a booby trap, or some goddess to
start shrieking at them, but nothing came; only the sound of rapidly moving thread high above
greeted them.

It made a kind of sense to Percy, as in order to get to the Chamber of Fate, someone would have to
first get onto Olympus, navigate through the city without being seen by the gods, goddesses,
nymphs, and other creatures that called Olympus home, and then get through the throne room. Each
step as unlikely as the next. Though there was one person who might have been able to do all that. A
person that might have been his first crush. Might have.

Once they were sure that they were fine, the two demigods took off sprinting down the long empty
hall, passing various moving tapestries as they went. These tapestries though caught his particular
interest, as he thought he recognized certain scenes. The loss of one of the big three’s weapons,
recovering the golden fleece, Atlas being freed, the destruction of the labyrinth, Kronos being
vanquished on Olympus, two demigods being kidnapped, the construction of a flying ship, a trip
across the sea, two falling into a dark abyss, demigods battling giants in Greece, and Gaea being torn
apart. All things that he had thought were exclusive to him, but here was solid proof that everything
had been scripted. That everyone he had lost was meaningless to the gods of Olympus.

And they can all fade away…

____________________

Once again, he was no architect, but he was pretty sure that the inside of a building couldn’t be larger
than its outside. Unless of course said building was designed by a timelord from Dr. Who, but that
seemed unlikely.

Ugh, who am I kidding? At this point nothing would surprise me anymore. Hades, I would be
relieved if that dude showed up right now.

The inside of the building was laid out in a series of concentric rings, that to him, seemed to be of
equal size. There was no direct path to the center, but they followed the threads that ran overhead. And much like the labyrinth, navigating the halls made little sense; sometimes they would run around the entirety of a ring multiple times only for an entrance to the next ring to appear where they had started. It was pointless, stupid, and it made his leg hurt all the more. If he ever found out who designed the place, he was going to throttle them.

“Percy, are you seeing this?” Nico asked, pointing above them, as they entered the seventh ring.

He nodded. “Yup. I started noticing it about two rings ago.”

High above them, the threads were beginning to change. While many of the strings still appeared to be made of earthly materials, like wool, nylon, and silk, some were starting to glow, and looked more like neon lights or fiber optic cable than true threads. And with each step they took, more and more strings transitioned into this new form.

“So do you think that they—”

“No,” Nico interrupted, shaking his head. “These are all coming from those other tools. The souls are somewhere else.”

“Get down!” he heard Nico half-whisper, before he was knocked off his feet by a blur of black.

They had reached the center of the Chamber of Fate, and what he saw was radically different from what he imagined the Loom of Fate to be. It was a loom (which he was relieved to see), but his imagination was far off on the size of the thing. Every depiction he had ever seen of it had shown the three Fates hovering around a loom that wasn’t much bigger than them, but the loom before them was super-industrial sized; easily as big as their house. The monstrosity sat on a floating platform, with only one ramp connecting it to the rest of the building; with nothing but darkness beneath it. The threads they had been following were now all glowing and humming with a strange power and were being fed into the giant wooden weaving tool along with an even greater number of threads being fed into the loom’s warp via a portal. And even with all of those strings, only two thirds of the warp were filled.

And without a sufficient input of materials, the output suffered.

As the loom’s shuttle raced back and forth along the breast beam, and the beater rapidly pushed in and out, the glowing tapestry it weaved was missing large patches at random intervals. The faulty tapestry was then wrapped around a roller, before being strung to an ever larger roller where it could easily be unwrapped by the Fates. And although he only got a B- in the sewing portion of Home EC, he could tell that the tapestry as a whole was just as filled with holes as the newly created pieces.

It was only then that he had noticed a strange, beat-up looking red-haired guy along accompanied by Terminus, examining the Loom.

And that was when Nico tackled him.

“Sorry Perce, but we don’t want to be seen by them,” Nico whispered. “At least, not yet.”

Percy nodded in understanding. Nico, Hades, and Demeter had informed him with vivid detail about
their fight with Terminus in New Rome, and how it had been a relatively one-sided fight. He would have never expected the stone god to be a good fighter, but then again, he also never imagined the god having arms or legs. “What should we do?” he asked a she untangled himself from the son of Hades.

“There’s only one way to the loom, unless you feel like trying to jump over that abyss—” Nico glared at him before he could answer. “Which you are not doing. One way or another, we have to face them head on. From there, there are two possibilities. The first is that guy has the same goal as us and we can work together. Or, he’s here to destroy the loom and we have to fight him and Terminus.”

“Let’s prepare for the latter.”

Nico rolled his eyes, but smiled nonetheless. “If that happens, we need to protect the loom while dealing with—”

“I CAN FUCKING HEAR YOU!” a nasally voice called out from the central platform. “Show yourselves! Or Terminate-us will kill you where you stand!”

The two of them rose to their feet and slowly walked down the ramp the central platform; both careful as to not look into the abyss. Up close Percy could hear the steady hum of power from the Loom of Fate as well as some faint screaming, but he tried not to focus on the two potential threats before them. Despite previously being nothing more than a rejected bust from *The Haunted Mansion*, Terminus was now rather imposing with his new limbs. The god’s new body was well defined with muscle and perfectly proportioned and would have been flawless if not for the word “met” carved into his forehead. The son of Poseidon had not even the faintest inkling of what the word meant, but he knew that anyone who had a tattoo (or equivalent of) on their forehead was not to be taken lightly.

That crappy Joker really springs to mind…

And while Roman god of boundaries was next to flawless, the sneering redhaired guy behind him was as far away from flawless as someone can get. The redhead was missing the tip of his nose; dry blood covering everything from his upper lip to the top two buttons of his dress shirt. His face reminded Percy of a weasel, and he was positive it wasn’t just because of how it was swollen. And despite being obviously older than either him or Nico, he got a distinct vibe of immaturity from him.

Probably because he’s cowering behind Terminus.

Percy put both his hands up and offered the two his best smile. “Look, we’re just hear to fix what’s going on…. Outside? Huh, I’m not even sure where we are anymore…” Nico cleared his throat. “Oh, anyway, I’m sure you’re hear for the same reason. Let’s work together and put a stop to all of this.”

With the quickness of a cobra, the guy’s right hand shot into his coat pocket and pulled out a phone; unlocking it and pointing it at them in a single motion. Then with a triumphant gleam in his eye, he pushed a large red icon on the screen with exaggerated movement. He looked between the two of them and frowned, before pushing the button again. And again. And again.

“Uh, hi?” Percy said, as the redhead continued to button mash his phone.

“I think he’s trying to kill us,” Nico said, head cocked ever so slightly in confusion.

“Why won’t you die?” the redhead screeched. His voice high enough as to make both him and Nico cringe.
Percy and Nico raised their right arms simultaneously to show the strange guy the signal-cancelling bracelets Merlin had given them. “Because Merlin gave us these?” the son of Poseidon said, shaking his wrist and jiggling the piece of white plastic. “Also, surprisingly stylish.”

The redhead’s eyes bugged out at the sight of the bracelets. “That son of a-” The man slapped a hand to his face, one angry, bloodshot eye peering out between his index and middle fingers, before he slowly dragged his hand away.

“Sir, we don’t have to fight,” Nico said, slowly stepping closer to the Avalon representatives. “We all want the same thing.” The son of Hades glanced at Terminus, but the god remained stationary. “We just want this nightmare to be over.”

“Over?” the man cackled. “Over?” he repeated, laughing like a hyena. “Oh, I think we have two very different definitions of over.”

Percy moved up next to Nico, shoving one hand in his pocket and clutching onto Riptide. “You can’t-”

“END IT NOW, TERMINATE-US!” the man screamed before Percy could finish his thought.

The stone god’s body erupted into gold flames; the extreme heat forcing the three mortals to jump back in surprise. Terminus then turned away from them and fixed his gaze on the rapidly moving loom, raising one flaming fist.

“No!” Nico screamed as he took off running, pulling his sword from his pocket as he ran. Stygian Iron met living marble as the son of Hades’ blade slammed into the fallen god’s Achilles heel. To Nico’s credit, he did manage to leave a considerable crack in Terminus’ lower left leg, but the flames around the god roared greater and Nico fell back on the floor to evade their each.

Before Nico’s rear touched the strange floor, Percy was on the move. He quickly slammed his fist into the sneering redhead’s nose, sending him crumpling to the floor with a howl of pain, as he took off running after his boyfriend. Terminus opened his raised fist and a ball of flame gathered in his hand, aimed directly for the loom. He planned to use his momentum and plunge Riptide into the wound Nico made, but when the god’s other arm swung back, a golden ball of flame forming in his palm aimed at Nico, he realized that he had to make a choice.

He could attack Terminus and knock him down but allow Nico to be incinerated or, save Nico and let the world burn.

“Hold on, Neeks!” He cried as he tackled the love of his life out of the golden ball of destruction’s path.

It was the easiest choice he ever made.

The Loom of Fate would probably disagree with him on that though.

While he and Nico avoided a fiery fate, the other mass of golden flame washed over the loom. The glowing threads were instantly bathed in flame; fire racing down every strand to and from the ancient machine. The shuttle that had been racing back and forth, supply the cross-threads of the tapestry, burnt away to ash. The massive treadles began to rise and fall faster as if trying to extinguish themselves, only for to pull in more material to burn. One by one, the great bundles of string on the warp burned away, depriving the burning tapestry of what few materials were left.

And as the great loom and tapestry burned, Percy realized something that was contrary to what he had been told.
They were still alive.

They hadn’t ceased to exist, no eternal darkness devoured the world, there was no nothing. He could still feel pain in his leg, still feel the cool floor against his skin, and most of all, he could still feel Nico in his arms. And if they were still alive, that meant there was still hope. After all, there were plenty of tools in the great laundry-palooza just outside. Surely one of those would work as well as the loom?

But while he was ecstatic that he and Nico were still alive, the red-haired guy next to them was not.

“No,” the stranger gasped, looking at his own arms as if they were some horrible growth. “No, no, no, no!” He cried like a child throwing a tantrum. “That was supposed to end everything.” He ran his fingers through his hair, only to tear out two large chunks as his eyes darted between Terminus, the loom, and the two demigods. “Wait, calm down Brian. Calm down. It’s just not all destroyed yet is all.” The guy, Brian, Percy guessed, looked directly at them. “Terminate-us! Kill these two and then we’ll try again!”

But much to the son of Poseidon’s relief, the fallen god ignored Brian’s orders and continued to strike at the massive weaving machine and its materials. Flames continued to erupt from the god’s stone body as he lashed out with his fists; snapping the loom’s frame with a single strike. As the flames traveled up the bundles of thread that emerged from the strange portal, the faint screaming he heard increased tenfold, now a deafening roar.

“Terminate-us! I said kill these two first!” Brian shrieked, frantically tapping on his phone once more. “Why aren’t you listening to me?!?”

“Percy, we got to stop him!” Nico cried.

“On it!” he cried in response, jumping to his feet and pulling the son of Hades up with him. He knew that assaulting Terminus, Terminate-us, or whatever his name was, head on with those flames covering his body would only result in the two of them being charbroiled. Ideally, he would simply call upon some water to douse the flames, but the only traces of water he could find were himself, Nico, and Brian.

Also, an easy choice.

“Normally I’d feel bad for doing this,” he smirked as he started to tug at every ounce of moisture in the redhead’s body. “But you wanted to kill Nico, and that’s a pretty big no-no for me.”

Brian must have felt that something was changing with his body, his eyes widened, and he tried to scramble back as far away as possible from the two of them on the small platform. The man’s body began to shrivel as every drop of liquid was pulled out every single one of his cells. His eyes shrank into their sockets as crystal clear water sprang forth from his nostrils and cracking lips like little fountains. In his final act of life, the redhead opened his mouth to scream, only for a cloud of his own dead flesh to blow out with his last gasp. The shriveled corpse seemingly took a step back, before falling over the ledge into the darkness below.

“Hope that was as painful as it looked!” he cried as he took a large portion of the gallons of water he had gained and launched it at Terminus. Much of the water evaporated as it met the flames on the god’s back, but the small amount that made contact stone created a vast web of cracks. “Hey Terminus! What kind of god doesn’t have a dick?!” he taunted as he pulled back what small amount of water vapor he could.

The attack did have the desired effect, as the Roman god did stop his assault on the mostly-destroyed loom, but as cracks on his back quickly healed themselves as the expressionless statue turned to face
him, Percy realized that maybe he had messed up.

*Oh shit…*

The flames on Terminus’ body flared and the god blinked out of existence. An instant later, there was a loud ‘pop’ form behind him, and as he whipped around he was yanked to the ground by Nico; a giant flaming fist narrowly missing his head. The water he had collected crashed to the floor with him, as he lost what little concentration required to maintain it. But considering it was the water or his head, Percy was just fine with getting them a little wet.

“This is not the place to fight,” Nico hissed as the son of Hades rolled the both of them over to avoid being stomped on by a perfectly formed stone foot.

He reformed the glob of water and slammed it into Terminus’ chest, throwing the god off balance long enough for him and Nico to scramble to their feet and run off the loom’s platform. “You are a master of stating the obvious, Neeks!” the son of Poseidon cried as he pulled back the water once more.

“Left!” Percy screamed as he tossed a spear of water at the teleporting god’s knee.

The water extinguished the golden flames long enough for Nico to slash at the temporarily vulnerable knee; shattering it into tine pieces. The son of Hades didn’t try for a second strike, instead racing past Terminus and into the next ring.

Percy really understood now why Brian referred to the stone god as Terminate-us, as he was just like the freaking Terminator. The god was an unstoppable juggernaut of destruction, decimating anything and everything around him with either flame of fist. Any damage he or Nico dealt was quickly mended, forcing them to only strike to try and slow the god down. And the fact that Terminus could teleport put them squarely on the defensive; Percy using the rapidly diminishing supply of water to shield the two of them from flame and heat. At this point, if the god started to talk, he wouldn’t be surprised if he had an Austrian accent.

“Shit!” he yelped, as Terminus appeared directly in front of him; left fist pulled back to strike. Percy dropped to his knees, sliding between the god’s sculpted legs while simultaneously coating himself in a thin layer of water to stop himself from being burnt to a cinder. When he cleared the legs, he used some of the water to launch himself back to his feet, while slamming the rest of it into the fallen god’s back; knocking Terminus off balance for the briefest of moments.

“Nico, you got any idea on how to beat this guy?” Percy shouted as he caught up with the younger teen.

“I’m working on it!” the son of Hades snapped as they dodged yet another pile of burning thread. Percy wasn’t sure who or what designed the strange complex they were running through, but they obviously neglected basic fire safety in their designs. Every bit of cloth they saw was burning in the strange golden flames, be it the bundles of threads overhead or the numerous tapestries that lined the walls, and there was nothing springing out of the ceilings or floor to extinguish them. “Just keep running!”

He pulled Nico to the left as Terminus appeared in front of the son of Hades, saving his boyfriend from getting roundhouse kicked through a wall. “Wasn’t planning on stopping!” he shouted. But he
wanted to do nothing more, the throbbing pain in his right leg reaching levels never felt before. The
pain was starting to take its toll on his ability to run, as he was starting to trip over his own feet, but
he persevered. What choice did he have? He was at least grateful that neither he or Nico were out of
breath, both not panting in the slightest, something he attributed to their evening strolls.

Whatever works!

They ran through the into the seventh ring and Percy almost sighed with relief when the building’s
sole entrance and exit came into sight. He had hoped that laundry-palooza’s open space would be a
more ideal location, that they could better avoid the god’s flames, but that wasn’t to be the case. The
golden flames that burned over their heads had already reached the laundry wasteland, trapping them
in the hall with Terminus.

“Percy, you can’t by any chance feel an ocean out there can you?” Nico asked, skidding to a stop.

Terminus, predictively and annoyingly, popped up behind the son of Hades, but Percy was ready for
him. As the god pulled back his fist, the son of Poseidon slammed every ounce of water he had into
his chest, the blow and sudden change in temperature causing the carved six-pack to warp and hiss
before cracking. “Hate to disappoint you Neeks, but the only thing out there is burning laundry
surrounded by a dark, cold abyss.” He pulled back what water he could from the staggered statue
and frowned when he could only reclaim a couple gallons. He knew that collecting water vapor was
a skill he owed to Hades, something he could have never done before, but he wished he could do it
better.

And while he was trying to figure out how many more hits he could deal to Terminus before his
water supply dried up (not many), the son of Hades started to smile. “Percy, you’re a genius!” the
boy laughed, as he parried a blow from Terminus.

“And you’ve lost your mind,” he grunted, redirecting a blow aimed at Nico. He hit the former god of
boundaries in the face, the lifeless stone eyes splitting open only to quickly reform, but he took
advantage of the moment to use Riptide and slice off a few of Terminus’ fingers, with Nico
following suit.

“No! Yes! Maybe,” Nico cried as he lashed out at the fallen god’s thighs. Terminus dropped down
and tried to sweep the Son of Hades’ legs, but Nico managed to jump over the high velocity leg just
in time. “Percy, remember the first bath we took together?”

He to stop and think for a moment as they had taken a lot of baths together, and most of them ended
with them being dirtier than they were before they got in the tub. It had actually gotten to the point
that Hades had bought a gallon of bleach and instituted a rule that everyone had to rinse the tub
down after each use, which was fair he guessed. He certainly would have been grossed out if he
encountered one of Jason’s loads. “Uh, yeah? But I don’t think Terminus is going to stop so I can
jerk ya!”

Nico flushed, which made Percy swell with pride. It really said something that in a life-or-death
situation he could still make his boyfriend flustered. “No… not that! How I heated the water!”

Terminus appeared to his left, and Percy rolled forward, barely avoiding being reduced to charcoal
by a wall of golden flame. “You turned on the hot water spicket?” Nico face-palmed, as the son of
Poseidon sprang to his feet, gritting his teeth as he felt the skin on his back start to blister and crack
from the heat. “I don’t know! You had already ran the water! I mean, there was a few times where
you- Oh!”

“Yes! That!” Nico cried as he pulled Percy out of the path of what would have been a spine
shattering kick. “Only in reverse! I need you to hit him with everything you got while I pull all the heat into that darkness! And keep pushing the water into him!”

It was a simple plan, but simple was all they could afford at the moment. Wherever water hit the god, the superheated stone would crack before quickly reforming; the water evaporating almost instantly. But if they could stop the water from boiling away and keep it within the cracks, they had a chance. “Just tell me when!”

“When!” Nico shouted.

Percy slammed every ounce of water he had into Terminus’ chest, knocking the god back against the wall. The son of Hades pointed one arm at the god and the other at the dark abyss outside, and the results were almost instantaneous. The hallway’s temperature dropped from blast furnace to a more tolerable frying pan; the golden flames surrounding the god starting to flicker. He found it easier to recycle the water he was pounding the god with, but he was still losing more of the precious fluid than he would have liked.

“Keep going!” the son of Hades groaned as the temperature continued to drop.

The cracks forming on the living statue’s chest continued to grow; spiderwebbing out in every direction. Pieces of stone began to fall from Terminus as he pushed the water deeper into the god with every ounce of strength he had. There was a loud creak as the first of the silent god’s abs fell to the floor, shattering into tiny pieces. The last of the flames extinguished and the cracks continued to widen as the water began to turn into ice within the growing fissures.

“Just a bit more Neeks!” he grunted as fought to keep the god pinned to the wall. “Almost there!” Ice wasn’t his thing, so it was a bit harder to keep all the moisture in one area instead of spreading out like it was. He needed to keep the water near the center of Terminus’ chest, so he could bore a hole straight through the god. A large hole there would most likely only grow with every movement the god made; the weight of his own arms would threaten to pull him apart alone. But the ice wasn’t melting fast enough to keep the damaged centralized and he was grasping for water that wasn’t there, and the pressure dropped.

And Terminus used that to his advantage. The god launched himself off the wall faster than Percy could react, and one stone fist smashed into his stomach. Percy had accumulated many injuries over the years, broken bones, cuts, burns, severed muscles, and he had even been skinned, but hearing and feeling all of his lower ribs snapping at once and piercing his organs was now at the top of his most-painful list. He couldn’t even scream, couldn’t even let out a ragged breath as his body was plowed into the wall before he crumpled to the floor, slumping on his side.

“PERCY!” the son of Hades cried as the stone god turned away from him; content that he was no longer a threat.

But that’s where he was wrong. Despite being in unbelievable agony, he was still conscious. Not on the edge of conscious with the light slowly fading away, but fully conscious; which was confusing, but certainly welcome to the alternative. He didn’t dare glance down at his body, as he was positive that mess of flesh would probably be enough to make him pass out, and instead focused on Nico and Terminus. His boyfriend was ducking and rolling around the stone god, striking him every chance he got, but the younger was too preoccupied with Percy’s condition to give the fight the full attention it needed. To make matters worse, the fallen god’s body was beginning to heal, with golden flames slowly flickering back to life. He needed to end this fight now if he wanted Nico to escape with his life, which was the only thing that mattered to him now.

But the only strategy that worked required a lot more water than what was puddled on the floor. The
only sources of water around were Nico and- Yeah... that will work.

Percy shakily lifted his right arm and gritted his teeth to the point he swore he could hear them cracking. He started pulling water from his shoulder, working from the outside in while he moved down his arm. It was painful, but the damage done by Terminus’ punch almost cancelled it out. If he had to describe it, it would feel like a billion little water balloons filled with boiling water were popping along his arm; burning and stinging as they went. It was horrifying to watch his arm shriveling and crumble away, but he persevered for Nico’s sake. And as his pinkie fell away, he launched his watery essence at Terminus’ back. “Gotcha,” Percy rasped, loud enough for only him to hear.

The torrent of water knocked the god forward, forcing him to brace himself against the wall to stop himself from falling. Nico thankfully knew what to do and once more began to siphon the heat away from Terminus; the flames extinguishing faster than before. The two demigods poured every ounce of remaining strength into their combined attack, Percy spinning the rapidly freezing water into the stone giant’s chest like a drill, while Nico began to rapidly add and remove heat.

His body unable to keep up with the ever-amounting damage, Terminus began to crumble faster than before. His entire back turned into a jigsaw of cracks and fissures, his left arm fell away just as a chunk of stone hair collapsed. The cracks spread down the back of his thighs, and his right knee exploded like a party grenade; pieces of shrapnel spraying the wall. Terminus tried to remain upright by digging his fingers into the wall, but the material gave no purchase and he dropped down as his ankles shattered. The former protector turned to face his killers just as his head split into two, crumbling lifelessly to the floor.

Instantly Nico was at his side, pulling his head into his lap. “Come on Percy, talk to me,” the son of Hades half-sobbed. “You’ve survived worse than this! You survived two wars and Tartarus for gods’ sake!” He bent down and kissed Percy’s forehead; tears now flowing freely. “Come on.”

He hurt, he was in the worst pain he had ever experienced, but he pushed through the pain and reached up with his one remaining arm and tenderly cupped the crying teen’s face. Perhaps it was strange, but Nico had never looked more beautiful than he did at that moment. The surrounding flames framed bathed his face in a golden light that made his olive skin glow. His dark eyes, though tear-filled, twinkled like stars in the Milky Way.

_He really does live up to the name di Angelo._

“I love-“ there was a flash of movement in the corner of his eye and the son of Poseidon’s heart stopped. “Move!” he screamed as he pushed Nico away, trying to save him from the danger growing behind the son of Hades.

Emerging from the hollowed out remains of Terminus was a body of black and gold, covered in a countless number of purple eyes, fang filled maws, and grasping tentacles. It was a shoggoth, one of the many creatures he used in his deck, and one of the many creatures that Jason and Piper’s friends were currently fighting, but this one was slightly different from the others. Streaks of gold were mixed into its black, rubbery flesh, with a faint golden aura surrounding its mass. Its fangs and claws were golden and appeared far malleable; changing shape as easily as mercury. But the most striking difference were its eyes. Every other shoggoth’s eyes were like those of a doll, lacking any signs of life or what he considered intelligence, but the one before them now radiated intelligence; seemingly sizing the two of them up.

Nico saw the danger and was on his feet in an instant, his sword at the ready. But instead of running to save himself, the son of Hades stood over him to protect him.
“Go!” he yelled at his idiotic boyfriend, finding the strength to yell.

The son of Hades slashed at a razor-tipped tentacle, slicing it in two. Unlike the other black creatures, the severed piece did not writhe and die, instead it sprouted its own eyes and began to swell in size. Nico saw this, and quickly kicked it away. “I’m not leaving you! We’re in this together ’til the end!”

“Well this is going to be the end if you don’t run!” Percy snapped, pushing himself into a sitting position with his one arm. He grasped Riptide and took a swipe at a tentacle that meant to snag Nico by his ankle. “I sacrificed my life for you, so please make it a worthwhile sacrifice!”

The tentacled monstrosity teleported just like Terminus, forcing Nico to scoop Percy up and toss the both of them to the side to avoid being eaten. “It doesn’t sound like you’re dying! I can’t even feel you dying!”

He collected up the left-over water form Terminus’ remans and launched it into one of the beast’s many hungry mouths, while Nico tried the heat exchange trick again. “I guess I’m just slow at that too! I’m slow at math, writing, running, and dying!”

“Stop trying to be funny and-“

Nico was interrupted by a series of clicks and whistles, as the ground began to shake, knocking Nico onto Percy’s, very, very sore chest. Multiple openings appeared in the walls and floor around them, that he thought had been seamless, as unseen speakers came to life. Their ears were assaulted by a series of clicking and whistles that were not unlike the sounds the shoggoth made, but the sounds changed rapidly, become more familiar. First turning into a series of grunts and groans like those of an ape, then to human-like sounds, then words that weren’t quite Latin but very similar, and finally into English.

“Outer God contamination detected,” a cool, monotone voice announced. “Initiating purge in universe seven-two-five-nine-zero, iteration four, containment facility entrance alpha.”

Now he, and probably Nico, didn’t understand most of what the voice said, but the word ‘purge’ combined with the glowing coming from the newly revealed holes told them that they needed to move and move fast. It also dawned on him that the Chamber of Fate had a monster eradication system, but not one damn fire sprinkler… The fire marshal would shut this place down!

Nico pulled him to his feet, and he would have cried if he had the tears, as he felt things shift in him that had previously been stationary. Thankfully, they didn’t travel far as the first of a series of golden threads shot out of the holes and wrapped themselves around the shoggoth. The creature shrieked as it tried to teleport away, disappearing for split second only to reappear in the same place; restraints still holding it in place. More and more of the golden bonds encircled the creature and its offspring, their flesh liquifying at their touch. Then the threads began to retract, tearing the beasts into pieces, followed by a flash of light. When they could see again, there was no trace of the shoggoths, the threads, or the openings in the walls; only a perfectly sterile corridor remained.

A soothing series of chimes played from the unseen speakers. “All contaminants have been eradicated. Facility sterilization has returned to optimal levels. Please drive safely on your way home.”

“What just happened?” Nico huffed, as they collapsed against the wall.

“I’m not going to question it,” Percy wheezed, as he looked at his withered appendage. What remained of his arm would have to be amputated, there was no way around it, though he wished he could simply jump in a pool and it would grow like those little foam dinosaur tablets his mom had
once got him. “Just like I’m not questioning how I’m still alive.”

Nico rested his head on his good shoulder and sighed. “Percy, I don’t think we’re alive,” the son of Hades confessed. “I know you should be dead, but neither of us have breathed since we started to climb those stairs. But I don’t think we’re dead either…”

It made no sense, and yet it made perfect sense. He remembered that neither of them were ever out of breath despite all the running and fighting they did, but he swore he could remember breathing. But then again, who consciously remembered their breathing? “Nice, sucks that pain is still a thing though.” He leaned his head back against the wall and closed his eyes, now firmly aware of the fact he wasn’t breathing. It freaked him out a bit, but compared to his arm and stomach, that ranked pretty low on his list of immediate concerns. “Any idea on why we’re like this? And more importantly, do you think dad can fix me up?”

Nico chuckled. “You called him dad.”

“Well, he is going to be my father-in-law,” he shrugged, though he instantly regretted the movement. The son of Hades flushed (another win) and continued on as if he hadn’t heard the comment. “Not a clue on the why, but I very much doubt that father can fix that on the kitchen table.”

“So, maybe he could in the garage?” He snuggled up closer to the son of Hades, the pain fading ever so slightly as he did. “Maybe you should go find the others? Get someone up here to fix the loom or something?”

“You’re right, but just give me a second. I thought I-“

“There are no others,” a cool, raspy voice echoed through the corridor.

The two’s heads instantly snapped towards the direction of the entrance and saw Piper and Persephone standing behind a strange white-haired Native American woman wearing a WWE T-shirt and a pair of crocs of all things.

“There is no anything anymore,” the woman said, glaring at the two of them.

“I beg to disagree?” he chuckled nervously under the woman’s steely glare.

Chapter End Notes

Ha! You thought he was going to die there, didn't you? Granted, anywhere else he would have been dead even before destroyed his own arm; Terminus' punch would have saw to that. Though, I can safely guarantee that he's never going to be 100% ever again (assuming he survives two more chapters).

As for the Chamber of Fate and the Loom of Fate, I think you all can kind of piece together a back story, but here are some broad strokes to help you. Ancient humans knew that there was something unique about Mt. Olympus and placed there gods there. The Olympians discovered this facility and figured out some of its special qualities, giving them an advantage against the other pantheons; the Mist being one of them. Despite eons of trying to understand the chamber, the Olympians still remained ignorant
to its true function and purpose, only scratching the surface.

And I think it's evident enough now that Avalon has had a wolf in sheep's clothing since nearly the beginning. Terminus, Terminate-us, or the first shoggoth has been playing the humans to achieve their own goals. We will be getting into the specifics real soon, and I can't wait! it's another moment I've been anxiously awaiting.

This chapter will definitely be controversial for some of you, and I can't wait to hear from you! Feedback is critical to help me grow as an author.

Bonds update: Iapetus/Bob will play an important part, but he is not one of Kronos' titans, that would be Krios and Hyperion. He's regained his memories fully and he's still conflicted with deciding who he wants to be. He's regained a bit of his old self's temper, but is still a good guy at heart. He now cleans whenever he is stressed, a nervous habit he has developed. He and Sally will get along splendidly, as she is grateful to him for taking care of her son and he is loving the cleaning tips she knows.
Nico

Chapter Summary

Tonight:

Truth are revealed and decisions are made.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Nico murmured reassurances into the son of Poseidon’s ear, even though the older teen had his hand in a vice grip. Percy’s grip hurt, and his nails were drawing blood, but he knew what he felt was only a small fraction of the pain Percy was going through. “Just a little bit more.”

Despite being held down by Piper, Persephone, and Kokyangwuti’s strange golden threads, Percy still thrashed in agony as the same threads sliced through his right shoulder as easily a hot knife to butter. Percy’s eyes almost popped out of his skull, and the belt he was biting down on was nearly severed in two, as the strange goddess’ threads slid through his flesh. It was for Percy’s own good, but it felt like the ultimate act of betrayal.

“Keep him still,” the croc clad goddess sighed. “Because this next part is going to be the real bitch.”

He pressed a kiss against Percy’s forehead, which somewhat calmed the thrashing teen. But that calm disappeared the moment Kokyangwuti’s golden strings pierced the son of Poseidon’s abdomen like so many needles. Percy started raise his head to look at what was happening, but Nico held it down to spare his boyfriend yet another horror show. “Just look at me. Just look at me,” the son of Hades repeated.

Nico wasn’t a doctor, but he did get an A+ in anatomy, so he could say with relative confidence that the human body wasn’t supposed to be as thin as a pizza box. He couldn’t even imagine the kind of pain Percy was feeling after Terminus squashed his stomach and couldn’t begin to fathom how the older boy wasn’t screaming his head off in agony. Percy’s pain only continued as more of the thread wormed their way into him, causing his purple flesh to slowly expand and change back to its natural tanned tone. Bones snapping back into place could be heard from within the son of Poseidon, and Percy tried to arch his back with every pop and crack.

“Come on kid, you’re doing great,” Persephone hissed between clenched teeth, the goddess pinning Percy’s left leg to the ground. His stepmother was burnt and bruised, but other than that okay, for which Nico was grateful for. Her eyes were red and puffy as if she had been crying and with his father absent from their little group, he was pretty sure he knew why.

His father was Hades, god of the Underworld, the eldest son of Kronos, he was supposed to be immortal, a constant in his life. His father dying was something he had written off as impossible, gods such as him don’t die. Even when he had been rendered mortal the idea that he could die never really caught traction. He just expected a few more wrinkles and gray hairs to appear over time, maybe a cane in his later years. But, here he was face-to-face with a reality he thought impossible.

“Just a little longer,” The Nation goddess said in a bored tone. “I haven’t had to repair a digestive
system since the winter of eighty-nine. B.C., that is.”

“Just shut up and fix him!” Piper snarled from Percy’s right leg, the strange black feather woven in her hair glowing a faint electric blue. Something had changed in the daughter of Aphrodite in the short time since they left her. Her kaleidoscope eyes, while always deep and powerful, now carried with them a terrible guilt and an anger that burned like a raging fire. Thankfully, that rage seemed to be directed at Kokyangwuti, as Nico was positive now that a look from her was deadlier than Medusa’s. The only positive change he could see was she now had a grey cowboy hat that really made her look even scarier (he was really reaching for a positive there).

But like Persephone, the reason why she was upset was easy to deduce.

Jason Grace, son of Jupiter, his best friend, and adoptive brother was dead. Nico knew that one day Jason would die and had thought he would have a good grip on it when the event occurred. Jason was a hero and above all else, a good man, when he died he was supposed to go to Elysium for an eternity of paradise. But now there was no peace to be found in Elysium, and possibly not even Elysium if the goddess was to be believed, leaving the fate of Jason’s soul in question. And there was no preparing for that. No telling himself that he could pop in for a visit.

And it felt like an icy grip was slowly squeezing his heart and lungs as he began to realize everything and everyone he had potentially lost in the span of a few hours. There would no longer be any coding and Mythomagic sessions with Chelsea and Tate. No more Saturday nights where Jason invited his World of Warcraft friends over to raid together in their room. He’d never see his father roll his eyes behind Mr. Z’s back whenever their former vice principal hinted that he knew they were in witness protection. There would be no more family time after dinner, where Demeter would fall asleep in her recliner while the rest of them took turns throwing pieces of popcorn into her open mouth. Jason would never sneak Leo the pig into the basement during a thunderstorm to calm the animal’s nerves; his father having conniption every time he woke to Leo sitting at the kitchen table. So long halcyon days…

There was a sickening snap and Percy’s shriveled arm was pulled away by the golden threads to Kokyangwuti’s hand. “This must have really hurt,” The whitehaired goddess said, examining the limb. Then tossed Percy’s former arm away while retracting the threads from his stomach; the only evidence of Terminus’ blow was a massive blue and purple bruise. She set down a long canvas wrapped object and began to unroll it. “If you would have tried a stunt like that anywhere else you would have died instantly; your heart would have given out.”

Percy lifted his head over so slightly as the three of them released their holds and removed the belt from his mouth. “Now that you mention it, I thought I felt my chest hurting, but it was pretty minor compared to everything else.” The son of Poseidon then turned to face him. “Neeks, don’t be alarmed if I don’t wake up for a couple days after we go to bed. I have never been more exhausted,” he grinned.

“I bet.” He bent down and placed chaste kiss on Percy’s lips, but the son of Poseidon was having none of it. A weak hand wove its way in the son of Hades hair, holding him down as the green-eyed teen intensified the kiss. It was a bit embarrassing to be practically straddling his boyfriend in front of his stepmother, Piper, and a complete stranger, but just this once he would allow it. They had both lost so much that it was okay to celebrate that they still had each other. Plus, some of the things he said while drunk to both his parents and Percy were far more embarrassing than a little make out session.

“Humans,” Kokyangwuti huffed as they broke their kiss, both smiling and red in the face. “Always quick to screw and fight. The only good things about your race were cigarettes, professional
wrestling, and recliners.” There was the distinct clink of metal-on-metal followed by a gasp from Persephone. “Yeah, that seems to be everyone’s reaction…”

“Two people is not everyone,” Piper sighed, immediately followed by a murmur of, “just half of the total population.”

Curious, Nico turned around, and while he didn’t gasp, he was certainly close.

For piled up haphazardly in the center of the unrolled canvas wrapping were Zeus’ master bolt, Poseidon’s trident, and his father’s helm. Each of the weapons were in different states of disrepair. The master bolt was in the best shape of the three items as it had only a few dents and dings. The trident was the next best, as it was covered in barnacles, slightly bent in the middle, and its center prong had its tip snapped off. The helmet though was the worst, almost completely smashed flat. Nevertheless, the items still contained an aura of power to them.

Percy’s jaw dropped. “Where did you—

“Get these?” the Nation goddess said as she picked up the trident. Golden threads shot out of her fingertips and encircled the bronze weapon; the barnacles and seaweed being ripped away. “From the ocean obviously.” The threads began to glow brighter and constrict, the cyclops forged weapon groaning in protest as it began to bend. “I took a little swim in Boston to retrieve this. I believe you kids would call swimming through the inky depths, surrounded by shoggoths ‘nightmare fuel’.” With a loud crack, the trident snapped in two; horrifying the onlookers. The threads began to glow even brighter as an intense heat began to pour from the bundle, and Kokyangwuti began to shape it as easily as clay. “The pancaked helmet I got from the ruins of New Rome. The bolt should be obvious.”

“I think the better question is why do you have them?” Piper growled, as the goddess began to form the trident into an almost peanut like shape. “And don’t just say ‘you’ll need them’ again.” The whitehaired woman narrowed her eyes at the daughter of Aphrodite, but Piper responded in kind. “We need answers.”

Kokayangwuti rolled her eyes. “I’ll give you answers, but first I think I should take care of the cripple,” she said as her threads formed five small tubes on one end of the former divine weapon.

“Like what is out in that abyss,” he asked before he could stop himself.

That made the weaver momentarily pause her work and look him directly in the eye. “Well that’s a surprise,” she hummed, the smallest of smiles tugging at her lips. “But you were touched by the darkness, were you not?” He nodded hesitantly. The goddess continued to reshape the trident; flexing the center of the reforming object. “And being a child of a death god already made you sensitive to such things… Oh, my… I’m amazed you’re still sane,” she rasped in a mocking tone.

Nico gulped. He had thought that his time in Tartarus was horrifying, that there would never be anything more disturbing than realizing he was but a spec on a being he couldn’t begin to fathom in scope, that the very land he stood on sought to kill him. But what he glimpsed in that darkness was beyond Tartarus. Was larger and more powerful than anything mankind or the gods had ever imagined, and yet any term he could think of didn’t apply to it, that it was beyond understanding. He knew that he was lucky that he only caught a glimpse of the slumbering being, as looking at it directly would have destroyed his mind. Hades, he was positive a god wouldn’t be able to look at it without being consumed by madness. And he knew its name, and Percy did too as it was the trump card in the son of Poseidon’s deck.

And he somehow knew there were other beings in that infinite void trapped a deathlike sleep.
Entities that were far smaller and younger, but still beyond human comprehension. Entities, that if awoken, could destroy reality with hardly a thought.

*If it wasn’t destroyed already….*

“And that should do it,” Kokyangwuti announced as the threads deposited the former trident in her hands. She pushed Nico away without a word and crouched down next to the son of Poseidon, holding the thread wrapped object where Percy’s right arm should have been. There was a brief flash of light and the threads began to unwind as their ends shot into Percy’s shoulder, making him scream in pain. When the threads had finally worked their way into his body and connected with his severed nerve ends, Percy pushed himself to his feet with his new celestial bronze arm. “You’re welcome,” the goddess sighed as she moved away and snatched up the helmet next. “It should feel the same as your original, while still retaining the abilities of its previous form.”

“Holy,” Percy mumbled as he began to flex his fingers, then tapping each one to his thumb. His new arm didn’t look like his old one, but rather like the arm from a suit of armor. Each finger was in three distinct pieces, with (thankfully) rounded tips. His hand was like a gauntlet, but with several points of articulation on the wrist and palm, before joining into a vambrace that was his forearm. His upper arm was a bit thicker and squarer to accommodate the pauldron-like shoulder. And Nico couldn’t help but smile when he noticed that on the shoulder a skull with two tridents crossed behind it was etched into the shining bronze surface. “I can actually feel with it!” As if to emphasize the point, the older teen reached out and cupped Nico’s chin.

**At least it’s warm. And surprisingly soft.**

“I said it would,” the goddess said with a roll of her eyes. She didn’t cover his father’s helm with the mysterious golden thread as she did Poseidon’s trident, rather working it back to its former state.

“And I believe this is yours,” she said, tossing it to him.

Nico caught the helmet with ease, but it felt incredibly heavy in his hands as he stared into the empty face. This was the inheritance he was never supposed to inherit, the symbol that was used to rule over the underworld. His father’s kingdom. And as he continued to stare into the Helm of Darkness, he felt no fear, only deep sorrow and grief. He may have called himself the ghost king, but he never desired to actually rule anything; not really. Not if it meant he’d lose his father.

The son of Hades shook his head. “This isn’t mine,” he said as he turned to his stepmother. “He’d want you to have it.” His voice shook as he pushed the helmet into Persephone’s hesitant hands. “You’re the queen after all.”

His second mother frowned as she took the helmet. “No, you’re his son. His only and rightful heir. It’s yours.” She swallowed loud enough for him to hear before giving a painfully fake laugh. “Besides, I wouldn’t be caught dead in this hideous thing. It would mess up my-“

“Please,” he croaked.

She gently set the helmet down and pulled him into a hug; kissing his cheek like she did when he was but a small child. “I’ll hold onto it, okay?” She squeezed him tighter and he did the same. He knew that later they would both completely break down and grieve together, but right now they were struggling to keep it together. “Until you’re ready.”

He nodded against her shoulder as both of their bodies shook. “Thank you,” he whispered.

“I would say that was touching, but I honestly don’t care,” Kokyangwuti rasped. “I would also say we don’t have all day, but that also isn’t true.” He turned around just in time to see her pick up the
master bolt. “Gayegogi, I think this one-“

“Nope,” the daughter of Aphrodite cried, as she pulled the brim of her hat down over her eyes. “I’m content with learning how to control this feather,” she said, brushing her hand against the black, glowing feather in her hair. “And I think there is more to Coyote’s hat than meets the eye. Besides, why would I want the weapon of the god who ordered the extermination of my people? And don’t try saying ‘Jason would want you to have it’, he would have refused it too.”

“She’s right,” Percy piped in. “Jason wanted nothing to do with any aspect of Zeus after coming to the farm; he didn’t even want to be a demigod anymore. And I don’t blame him after finding out what Zeus ordered Disciplina to do to him…”

“Whatever,” the old woman said. “But what about you?” she asked, turning her attention back to him, twirling the bolt around in her hands like a baton. “Or are you just going to pass it off to your mother too?” she chuckled mockingly.

With a scowl, the son of Hades grabbed the bronze cylinder in midair. “I’ll keep it,” he growled, tiny sparks shooting out of the weapon’s end to match its new owner’s mood. He had mixed feelings about using the mad king’s master bolt, as it had been the tool he used to kill his mother. But, it certainly didn’t feel evil in his hand, didn’t even feel any intelligence to it, nothing that would corrupt him in any shape or form. It was warm to the touched and hummed with power, but in all honesty, it felt like he was holding a larger version of the microwavable ice cream scoop Persephone had bought after a particular incident involving Sister’s Rocky Road and several bent spoons. “Not sure why we need these though.”

At that, the old woman smiled. “Well then it’s time you learned why.”

The interiors of the Chamber of Fate’s sole structure had changed dramatically the instant Kokyangwuti stepped inside. The numerous tapestries and Greek aesthetics that had lined the cobalt blue halls had been wiped away without a single trace remaining. But the walls were hardly barren now, as intricate glowing lines of blue light raced across every surface; pulsing in perfect synchronization. And while most of the patterns seemed to be nothing more than nonsense to Nico, there were a few that he recognized. “These are circuits,” he said as he ran his hand over the perfectly smooth wall.

“You are correct,” the ancient goddess said. With each step she took, more and more of the interior lit up and hummed to life. “They are the written testament to my creators’ greatness.”

“So, we’re like, inside a computer?” Percy asked as he pulled the son of Hades away from the walls. “Any chance this thing can get Netflix?”

“Technically yes,” Kokyangwuti answered, Percy pumping his new arm in celebration. “But first, let me explain the a few things.”

“Finally,” Piper and Persephone cried with a roll of their eyes.

“In the beginning, there was nothing, and then in an instant there was everything. You humans would refer to this moment as the Big Bang.” One of the circuit lined walls went dark, only for it to immediately flash with a binding white light. “But while you humans viewed this as a singular act, that moment had an infinite number of permutations that resulted.” The wall changed aging to show
multiple flashes of light overlaid on top of each other.

“A multiverse?” he asked. *That’s not super hard to understand. It’s a been a staple of Marvel comics since I was a kid,* he thought with a small smile.

Kokyangwuti nodded. “Correct. Within many of these instances life formed, grew and flourished. My creators were among that life.” As they walked, another wall went blank, only to depict some huts, then some stone buildings, a modern city, and then a city straight out of *Star Wars,* but all distinctly not human. Human architecture tended to use ninety-degree angles, while what was being shown was rounded, and more organic in appearance. “Over time, my creators expanded their territory across the stars, and eventually into other universes as well. Their knowledge and understanding of the universe was beyond reproach.”

“I’m sensing a ‘but’ here,” Percy said, watching as one of the walls depicted what appeared to be a night sky.

“But like all that fancy themselves gods, they were quickly humbled.” One-by-one the points of light began to flicker out, and in moments all but a few were lost to the darkness. “I do not know the exact circumstances of how the end came about, but I know that from within the void between realities, titanic beings of destruction emerged that could exist in every reality simultaneously, accompanied by hordes of their followers.”

Those black things, Persephone said, clutching Hades’ helmet to her chest.

Kokyangwuti shook her head. “No, those were tools of my creators that were eventually corrupted to the enemy’s side.” The group entered the second of the building’s rings and were greeted by a wall depicting what appeared to be a tree branching out in nine directions. “Through eons of conflict my creators learned how to stop the destruction.” The tree was cut into pieces by an unseen force, before the pieces were rearranged into a circle. “The enemy’s greatest strength was also its greatest weakness. My creators shattered the structure of reality, separating each universe, and in effect cutting the enemies very being into pieces. These pieces were then gathered up and locked away in facilities just like this one; existing between reality and the void.”

“I am, strangely enough, still following this,” Percy said as the various pieces started to grow into their own trees and interweave with each other.

“Do you want a dog treat for that?” The old woman said with a glare leveled at the son of Poseidon. “Because I’m telling this story in the most dumbed down way I can.”

Percy looked down at his feet, face slightly red with embarrassment. “No…”

“It’s okay, Perce,” he whispered as he took the older teen’s bronze hand in his own, giving it a gentle squeeze. It was definitely different from what he was used to feeling, but he knew he’d get used to feeling it in time. *But I better not let him touch me in some more… delicate places until we’re both sure he mastered it.*

Those pieces, stripped of their consciousness, were turned from engines of destruction into engines of creation, the goddess continued. “These containment facilities channel the infinite power of those fragments and create new universes and branches of it in what should be a never-ending cycle.”

“But…,” Percy said with a shit-eating grin.

The old woman flipped the son of Poseidon off. “But apparently there was one entity, an Outer God, that wasn’t torn asunder. It is constantly trying to force its way out of the void, but as long as things
are progressing naturally, it can’t weasel its way in.”

“And that’s where The Cycle messed things up,” the son of Hades said.

“Correct,” Kokyangwuti nodded as they entered the fourth ring. A wall lit up to show the vast network of branching and crossing universes circling around the void, before zooming in on one node. That universe was surrounding by a slow spinning ring of blocks, that would occasionally crumble, only to be immediately replaced by a new block. “That last Outer God is entropy itself, and without proper precautions its mere existence would destroy everything. My creators got around this by using the collective unconscious to take the brunt of the blow. Gods are created, they flourish, they are replaced, and then they fade away. But when that doesn’t happen, it gives the enemy an opening.” The ring of blocks stopped spinning and began to crack before shattering into pieces. Darkness rushed in from the void, destroying that node. But the darkness didn’t stop there, it started to travel to the nodes that were connected to the devoured universe. “And well, you saw what happened.”

“So everything really is gone,” Percy gulped. “Then why are we still here? How are we still alive?”

“Laplace’s Demon,” The elder shrugged.

“Wait, now there are demons?” Piper asked, shoulders slouching in disbelief.

“No, it’s an idea,” he corrected. “It states that if you know the location and momentum of every atom in the universe, then you can you can know the past and future. But the only being that would be powerful enough to do that would be a god or demon.”

“Yeah, sorry, no. I couldn’t even begin to do that on a good day,” Persephone said with a smile. “That was something definitely beyond our power.”

“Well of course it was,” he continued, setting the master bolt on the floor. “It would be impossible for anything to do it from within the universe as the computation time required would exceed that of the Universe’s life and energy. But if you could exist outside of it, you are no longer subjugated to those limitations. We currently exist outside of the universe, so things like life and death do not apply to us anymore.” It was only after the son of Hades finished his explanation that he realized everyone, including Kokyangwuti, was staring at him with wide eyes and slack jaws. “Or something like that,” Nico chuckled nervously.

“Where in the hell did you learn that?” Kokyangwuti gasped. “I would have bumped up the explanation a bit if I knew I wasn’t dealing with complete idiots.”

“Uh, partly from comics and partly from my Java class,” he mumbled.

“Either way, he is correct,” the goddess continued. “This facility contains fragments of Outer Gods that controlled time, space, and reality.”

“If we’re keeping up with the Lovecraft stuff, then that would mean Yog-Sothoth and Nyog’Sothep.” Percy chimed in. Piper and Persephone looked at him with matching expressions of confusion. “I swear I didn’t just have a stroke. Those are real names.”

“That, or they’ve got three infinity stones in here,” Nico chuckled. *Oh crap! I’m never going to see *Avengers 4*, or am I?*

“Great, I chose nerds as the builders. Just great. Marvelous even,” the whitehaired woman huffed. “But yes, those would be the names that idiot Lovecraft gave them. I knew that fool was sign of the end,” she added under her non-existent breath. “This facility uses their essences to create the physical
universe, as well as inject randomness in it to prevent a true Laplace’s Demon. This facility does distribute tools to those appropriate, so they can get glimpses into the future and make some slight alterations if need be, while still maintaining uncertainty; all a part of the plan to keep the Outer Gods contained.”

“Well that explains why every prophecy is so frustratingly vague,” Percy huffed as he picked up the master bolt for him. “There was just enough wiggle room to keep them guessing.”

“But the loom and the other tools went up in flames, the tapestry too. So what are we going to do?” he asked, taking the bolt from Percy, who had been trying to twirl it with his new arm. Call him old fashioned, but he didn’t think a teen with ADHD should be playing with a weapon of mass destruction. “Just sit here forever?”

“And leave a hole in reality?” Kokyangwuti shook her head. “No, that would mean I have failed at my task.”

Piper rolled her eyes. “Like you failed three times before.”

“it’s only failure if a new universe can’t be created to replace the old.”

The Loom of Fate and its tapestry were gone, with not even a single ash remaining on the platform where it had stood for ages unknown. The bundles of thread that fed the machine had also disappeared; the portal that fed it the stolen souls closed forever. In their place, high above the platform, was a single point of light no bigger than a tennis ball.

It hurt to think that his mother, Bianca, Will, and so many of the people he cared about had been torn apart and fed into that infernal machine to prolong the existence of Olympus. It hurt worse to think that even those souls that didn’t meet that fate were gone too. I guess in the end, they all shared the same fate…

He must have looked upset, as Percy quickly wrapped his arm around him and pulled him in close. “We’re alive, babe.” The son of Poseidon kissed his temple. “Focus on that.”

“He’s right,” Persephone said, moving in closer. “And they’ll live on in here,” she touched his chest, just over his heart.

“Guys, we need to talk,” Piper whispered, sliding in between Nico and Persephone. “We can’t let her-”

“And it’s almost ready,” the goddess’ voice echoed throughout the chamber as she turned away from a terminal made of light. Upon entering the room, multiple terminals and displays sprang into existence for the woman to use. She didn’t need to move around, as while the terminals would appear in front of her hands, golden threads shot out of her back and connected with the advanced machinery. “I’ve entered the four of you into the system, so you’ll be able to make changes as you wish. We just have to wait for system to power up and-”

“Tell us again what we’re going to do,” Piper interrupted, twisting her hat to the side. The strange feather in her hair began to pulse with electricity, making the girl’s hair begin to stand on end. “Because there are a few things I still don’t understand.”
Kokyangwuti sighed and pinched the bridge of her nose. “The four of you will enter your combined knowledge into the system, which will then detect the flaws that allowed the previous world to fail. The system will then create a new universe, which can take some time, based on your information and the information from previous iterations. Once completed, and sentient life emerges, it will be your job to instill the idea of gods into their collective unconscious. You will be their first gods, heroes, demons, and monsters; whatever it takes to get that wheel rolling.”

“Uh, yeah, okay,” the daughter Aphrodite nodded. He and Percy exchanged looks. Piper clearly knew something they didn’t, which given the last few months was remarkably easy. “You told me this was the fourth world. That, not counting your creators, this has happened twice already. Shouldn’t that mean there are two more sets of people or beings like us?”

“They chose to die in the worlds they created,” the construct shrugged. “You can’t imagine the timeframe you’re talking about, but when things are settled, previous builders decide they’ve lived long enough and go out and die.”

Nico supposed that made sense, though it did shake him a bit. He was fifteen going on sixteen, and he knew he was going to live for at least another ten billion years if Kokyangwuti was to be believed. He and Percy got bored almost instantly if they didn’t have something to occupy them, he couldn’t begin to imagine what the next year in the Chamber of Fate would be like let alone a billion! Hey Percy, best of ninety-nine-billion-six-hundred-and-forty-two in our hangman tournament?

“Ok, understandable,” Piper said, looking between the four of them. “But why save only four people? This place is pretty big, and if it can do what half of what you claim, it could easily have supported a decent population.” She removed the gray cowboy hat and spun it around on one finger, glaring at the Hopi goddess from the corner of her eyes. “A population the size of, oh let’s say, the Nation?”

Kokyangwuti paused in her work and squared her shoulders before addressing the daughter of Aphrodite. “They were my colleagues too McLean. And might I add, I knew them far longer than the few weeks you did.” Piper didn’t flinch at the comment, only clenching her teeth tighter. “A large population risks contamination and breeches. My protocols specify to increase the number of samples for each new iteration by one. The reality you called home was the result of three, so we are now incrementing to four. So, count yourselves lucky.”

“I bet that’s why the number three was so prevalent,” he whispered to himself, but the son of Poseidon overheard and smirked. But as he thought about it, something was fundamentally off with that strategy. “How do you know you have enough data to patch the faults?” he asked, and Piper smiled like a predator about to pounce on its prey. Or more accurately, like a Coyote.

“Come again?”

“The data you’ll get from the four of us to construct the next universe, how do you know it’s enough?” Nico furrowed his brow as he tried to recall what he had learned about sample sizes and machine learning. Chelsea and him had messed around with neural networks for a while for a pet project of theirs that never took off, but they had learned a few interesting things as they went. “Until this morning, Persephone, Percy, and myself never knew about any of this. And Piper only saw them in the Underworld briefly.” The three nodded beside him. “Up until then, we had been dealing with Avalon. The only thing that really connects them is we now know there were shoggoths inside of their gods, but beyond that we know nothing. None of us know how they got there or even into the world for that matter. What info we could give would be useless and potentially harmful to the system. Because if it can learn, it can be taught it incorrectly.”

“Look at all those Twitter bots for proof of that,” Persephone said. “They went from nice and smart
to hateful and dumb because of a few people messing around.” He appreciated her backing him up with an example. It was nice knowing that he still had someone he could fall back on besides Percy.

Kokyangwuti began to massage her temples with one hand. “This facility can create a universe. It can extrapolate any information you give it into something useful.” Her threads began to move once more, operating the various terminals of light. “This process will continue on and on until all flaws are found and rectified; creating a perfect universe.”

“But you told me this universe lasted less than the last,” Piper said, her smile growing. “And that one lasted less than the one before that. That doesn’t sound like they’re improving.”

The whitehaired goddess shrugged once more. “Just a bit of bad luck is all.”

That made Nico’s stomach drop. Luck shouldn’t be a factor in something as complicated and important as the life and death of a universe. If she was attributing the shortening lifespans of each iteration to luck, then he was certain there was something dreadfully wrong with the system. He looked to Percy, who nodded slightly. *Okay, there’s one more thing that is bothering me. And I think I already know the answer. “One more question.”*

“Shoot.”

He gripped the master bolt tighter, as Persephone casually lifted Hades helm as if to examine it. Percy had his new hand tucked inside his pocket, no doubt clutching Riptide. “Other universes, at least the ones like ours, they would have the same faults as ours, right? How is that addressed? Are they patched like software, or-”

“Those are reset too,” Kokyangwuti said without looking up from her work. “When this facility activates its systems, a signal is relayed to other realities, and if certain… conditions are found, they are reset one-by-one. It’s a very orderly procedure and quite merciful compared to the alternative.”

“Us,” Percy growled, the joints on his celestial bronze arm glowing. “You’re talking about us. If there is a version of us in that reality, you destroy it. No questions asked.”

The old woman laughed. “No, not like that.” She gave a dismissing wave. “Any realities that contain a reference to you are also reset as a precaution. Things must-“

Kokyangwuti was silenced by a blast from the master bolt in his hand. He could deal with the idea that everyone he had ever cared about outside of the people with him were gone forever, and he could deal with the idea that of becoming something akin to a god of a new universe. But there was no way he could deal with knowingly destroying an infinite number of lives; among them Percy, Jason, Annabeth, Will, Bianca, his father, his mother, Persephone, and everyone else he had ever cared about. And he knew that the others wouldn’t accept that either.

When the lightning faded from the master bolt, the left side of the goddess’ body had been completely destroyed. For a brief moment, Nico thought that was the end of it, but when thousands of golden threads emerged from her remaining body and began to wrap themselves into string-based limbs. Limbs, that were distinctly not human.

“YOU WOULD DARE ATTACK ME?!” the goddess roared, as her body was lifted high into the air by the threads emerging from her body. Her mortal form hung limp, eyes unseeing, as the colossal mass of gold began to fill up the small platform. “I CHOSE YOU TO LIVE!” her voice echoed, becoming deeper with each syllable. “AND THIS IS HOW YOU REPAY ME?!” A wave of the glowing thread shot out of golden mass, aimed directly at the son of Hades.
‘Not gonna happen!’ Percy shouted, darting out in front of him. Riptide grew from pen to sword in his bronze hand in the blink of an eye, severing the threads before it had even finished transitioning. But the second the son of Poseidon had finished his arc, his arm began to glow, and the sword was enveloped in a torrent of spinning water. “Okay, that’s new!” he said, stopping momentarily to examine his weapon.

The mass of thread and mock flesh roared in frustration. “YOU ARE BEING SELFISH! YOU ARE PUTTING EVERYTHING AT RISK!” More bundles of thread shot out again, this time at Piper and Persephone. But his stepmother placed the Helmet of Darkness on her head and disappeared; the threads halting in confusion. He didn’t need to worry about her, so he used the master bolt on those heading for the daughter of Aphrodite.

But his assistance was proved unnecessary, as a wall of electricity blocked and incinerated the approaching threads before he even managed to get a shot off. “You used the Nation, didn’t you? My grandfather too? Even Atlas, Veronica, Reyna, and myself!” Piper screamed as the wall of energy slammed into the mass that had been Kokyangwuti, knocking it back several feet.

“Any idea on how we’re going to win this, Neeks?” Percy called out as he slashed at an ever-increasing amount of threads. “cause the whole not-dying-thing is kind of working to our disadvantage here!” The water shot off the tip of his blade, intercepting every incoming projectile. The soaked threads then froze and crumbled to the floor. “I’m not even sure how I’m doing that…”

“I WILL MAKE YOU BEG FOR A DEATH THAT WILL NEVER COME!”

They were on a small platform with a being that expanding at a rapid pace, and it would either capture them they ran out of room to maneuver or simply push them over the edge into the darkness below. Neither option sat well with the son of Hades, but it did give him an idea. “EVERYONE FOCUS ON ONE SPOT!” he shouted as he unleashed the full force of the master bolt into the center of Kokyangwuti’s monstrous new form. He was thankful that the bronze cylinder responded to his wants, but its current output of power was far less than that of Zeus, who had centuries to master the weapon.

And I’ve had it for twenty minutes.

Despite his inexperience, the combined force of his and Piper’s respective weapons halted the golden mass’ approach. The lightning was burning away threads almost as fast as Kokyangwuti could generate them, and had stopped her from lashing out at them, redirecting what was available to defense. The false goddess could still be heard screaming over the roar of thunder, but she no longer spoke in any language Nico knew; instead emitting a stream of clicks, whistles, and hums that no human could utter.

“Percy, you got to help too,” he said through clenched teeth. The constant output of lightning was beginning to make the bronze casing heat in his hand; a meaningless side effect for a god, but a growing pain for his very mortal flesh. A quick glance to Piper revealed that the feather in her hair was now a solid, glowing electric blue, and the pained expression on her face told him she was dealing with issues similar to his own.

“Electricity and water don’t mix!” the older teen called back as he slashed at a thread that had tried to sneak up behind them from under the platform. “Even I know that!”

The remains of Kokyangwuti’s human form could no longer be seen; absorbed into the mass of golden threads. There were no distinct sections of mass, just one round nucleus covered with millions of individual strings; vaguely reminding Nico of a cell. If only we could find the mitochondria... And the thing was rapidly adapting to their attack, the strings melting and combining together to create
plate-like segments that dissipated the intense heat. “JUST TRUST ME AND DO IT!”

Without a moment’s hesitation, Percy aimed the water encased Riptide at the center of the formless beast and fired a torrent of water.

And several things happened simultaneously. When the cold water hit the super-heated plates, they instantly exploded into millions of tiny pieces that rained down on the entire chamber. That explosive blast combined with his and Piper’s lightning and Percy’s water sent Kokyangwuti flying off the platform into the abyss below. And when the torrent of water crossed streams with the electricity, a powerful current traveled down it and blew the son of Poseidon to the ground with a loud ‘pop’.

But the son of Hades didn’t get the chance to worry about his boyfriend, as in a final act of defiance, Kokyangwuti launched a thread that looped around his ankle, knocking him off his feet and dragging him across the platform. The master bolt fell from his hands as he desperately clawed at the floor, trying to stop himself from being pulled into oblivion. But the floor was devoid of cracks, of divots, or joints that he could jam his fingertips into, and he was pulled over the ledge-

“I GOT YA!” Persephone’s voice cried as an invisible force grabbed his outstretched arm. It took Nico a moment to put two-and-two together, but when he did, he had never been more grateful to have his stepmother in his life. “JUST HOLD ON!” With his other hand, he managed to grab ahold of the ledge, but the there was still a massive weight still tugging at his ankle, and he could hear Persephone’s invisible form begin to slide with him. “WE NEED SOME HELP OVER HERE!”

Nico would have laughed at the absurdity of the statement if it wasn’t for the fact the snare on his ankle was getting tighter and he was on the verge of being dragged into an eternal darkness. Persephone was invisible to the naked eye and the only part of him that was visible on the platform would be his fingers. Percy was down and out, and it was unlikely that-

“Hold on!” Piper cried as her upper body slid over the edge, his sword in hand. “I’m not letting you take any more of my friends, you bitch!” she swung the stygian iron blade and severed his restraints. Now free of the massive weight, the daughter of love and former goddess of spring hauled Nico onto the platform.

He rolled onto his back and placed one hand on his chest, thoroughly exhausted. “I owe you two sooooo much.”

Persephone removed her helmet, reappearing to his left with a small smile on her face. “You don’t owe me anything, my little prince.” She propped herself up on her elbows and blew a strand of hair out of her face. “Okay, maybe a little something for the helmet hair…”

“And I’m going to lord this over you until the end of time,” Piper chuckled beside him. She pulled the hat over her eyes before sprawling out on the floor. “Your ass is mine, di Angelo.”

“I strongly object to that statement!” the son of Poseidon’s voice called out from behind them. Still on his back, Nico tilted his head back to see his boyfriend slowly standing up. His hair was sticking up in every direction, his bronze arm was smoking, and his belt buckle had been blown off, but other than that he looked just fine. “I claimed ownership of that ass months before you arrived Piper.”

Nico rolled his eyes as the other three began to bicker about who owned him. Persephone was arguing that he didn’t belong to anyone, to which Percy quickly began to apologize saying he knew that. Piper was still arguing that he belonged to her, but the gleam in her eye told him that she was just doing that to egg the other two on. It was a decidedly weird transition from what had just transpired moments ago, but it was okay by him considering the alternative.
“I KNOW I DON’T OWN HIM! IF ANYTHING, HE OWNS ME!” Percy frantically cried. “NICO, PLEASE HELP ME!”

“So, what do we do now?” he asked after they had all settled down. They were laying in the center of the platform the Loom of Fate once rested on but were all as far away from the edges as possible. Percy had his left arm wrapped around him, hugging him to his chest, and it was strange not to feel his chest rise and fall. It was even alarming that he couldn’t hear the son of Poseidon’s heart beating, but Percy would kiss his hair every so often to reassure him that all was fine. Persephone held his father’s helm above her, staring into the empty eye holes as silent tears leaked from the corners of her eyes, but a bittersweet smile graced her beautiful face.

The daughter of Aphodite sat up, removed her hat, and smoothed her hair. “We end this.”

Percy turned his head to look at Piper, arching one eyebrow. “I’m pretty sure this is the end.”

“No, this is far from the end. The same forces that ended our world are still out there, with their sights set on other worlds. And if we don’t stop them, they’ll do it again and again and again.” Piper hopped to her feet and held out her hands, making one of the light terminals Kokyangwuti had used appear. “But we’re not alone, Reyna told me there are others out there like us. Others that made the same choice we did.”

“Reyna’s still out there?” He asked, bolting upright at the mention of his adoptive sister’s name.

Piper nodded with a smile. “Her and a few other friends I made. There in a world separate from all the others, a place called the Dreamlands.”

“And how are we supposed to get there?” Percy asked, sitting up as well. “Because I didn’t see no roads connecting us to other universes anywhere.”

“These-” Piper pointed at the terminal “-have the power of creation and we know that this place does communicate to other worlds, so we just have to figure out how to control it. How to create what we need.”

Nico stood up and walked over to the console and furrowed his brow. The layout of the terminal was very similar to that of any keyboard, albeit with more keys and what appeared to be eight touchpads spread throughout. The symbols and shapes that covered the screen and keys meant nothing to him, and some appeared to be changing their shapes or overlaying on top of others. Oh... boy... He hesitantly placed his hands on the keyboard, only to quickly pull away when it began to glow and move.

The whole terminal shrank down, the keyboard losing numerous keys and all but one touchpad. It lost its glow as the light transformed into a familiar black material. The screen which had been an indecipherable mess of circles and lines was replaced by a picture of him, Percy, Jason, and his father that Persephone had taken before Prom, with the IDE he used to code popping up in a small window. When its transformation had finished, Nico found himself staring at an exact replica of his laptop.

He cracked his knuckled before plucking the laptop out of the air. “Let me take a crack at it.”
Nico, Percy, Piper, and Persephone will return.

Chapter End Notes

I want to take this time now to thank all of you for reading and supporting this massive work. I am a first time writer and I have been overwhelmed by the sheer amount of attention and positive responses I received. I would have never dreamed that Shattered would have over 17,000 views and a loyal fanbase. Never would have thought that I would be mentioned in a wiki. Never would have believed there are posts saying this fic ruined a person's perspective on the entire series. I also would have never thought that people would find something to hold onto during hard times in this fic. I thank you all with all my heart, and I hope you continue to stick around.

Which leads us to what comes next.
Well, as we can see we have now established a multiverse, which means we have an infinite number of options to explore. However! I am not going to be doing crossovers (okay, I might have one planned, but it's an AU), each universe will differ slightly by a single moment that cascaded into something new. The outer god threat is still very much out there, as our this universes heroes. The presence of either party will be felt in every universe, but how much is felt will very greatly; sometimes you'll never even know unless you read Shattered. I am NOT going to have this universe's Percy and Nico show up and warn the other versions of themselves out of the blue; there are rules that must be followed. Plus, they are not omnipotent and the odds of them interacting with a given universe are slim-to-none compared to the Outer Gods.
I can tell you though, that there is a build up to a final confrontation where everything hits the fan. Where the Lovecraftian gods will begin to rouse from their slumbers and threaten to destroy everything.
But until then, here are some things to look forward to:

1. Bonds. Kronos was a greater schemer than we knew. Main pairing is Percico, and Sally is one of the main characters. 50 chapters tentative.

2. Untitled Voodoo fic. Hazel, Nico, and Percy travel to New Orleans after the daughter of Pluto receives a letter telling her to come and claim her mother's estate. Pairing is Frazel and some background Percico, but neither is important, more of an adventure story with good food and good music. 10 chapters.

3. Untitled celtic fic. Reyna is dragged into a trip to the UK by Annabeth and Piper. And after a night of mistakes, Reyna has to work with the annoying daughter of Aphrodite to save Annabeth from a shrieking ghost woman. No pairings are important, this is a fun adventure fic. 10 chapters. (same universe as the voodoo fic and same timeframe)

4. Teach Me To Be Superman. While everyone else is on various trips, Frank goes to Jason for advice on how to properly maintain his new body. Oneshot, humor. Frank cries while eating celery without ranch.
5. Untitled Liper fic. Piper drags Leo along on a campus visit after both split from their respective partners. They meet a shrewd doctor with interesting ideas on death. Heavy Lovecraft themes. 10 chapters.

6. Awakened Dreamers. The grand finale, where everything comes together.

Also expect some other one shots along the way. I hope you those interest you, and I hope you continue to follow.
Let me die.

Brian was falling, or at least he thought he was.

The last thing he remembered was the Jason Todd looking brat ripping every ounce of moisture from him and tumbling off the loom’s platform into the darkness below. The sensation of falling and an indescribable pain was the last sensations he felt before everything went black.

And it echoed within his mind on an endless loop.

Every pain receptor had been reduced to dust. His ears becoming nothing but holes in his skull. His mouth was open in a scream that would not come. He could not feel the rush of wind from the fall as his skin had been turned to leather. His eyes were reduced to naught but shriveled beads, leaving him in an eternal darkness. Though, part of him knew he would see the same infinite void even if he still had his eyes.

And without any new sensory input, his subconscious grasped onto that last moment of pain, clinging to it to prove that he was still alive. If he was capable of more than one thought, he might have found it ironic that the one thing he valued above all else was now condemning him to an eternal hell. But like the unending pain, he was only capable of one thought.

*Let me die.*

He did not know if he had been falling for seconds, or centuries, but for one moment was the same as the last.

And each lasted an eternity on its own.

*Let me die.*

That thought became a prayer to whatever being could hear it.

*Let me die.*

A prayer to Athena, Zeus, Thor, Odin, and any of the gods he had helped topple. For surely, they would be eager to see him die. Surely, whatever hell they could come up with would be better than an eternity of pain, darkness, and isolation.

*Let me die.*

Perhaps with the passage of time his mind would shut down, that what little awareness he had would fade away. That he would forget who and what he was and become nothing.
His mind was wracked with a new pain, one far worse than what he had been locked in, as horrible screeches, wails, and unearthly screams echoed within every corner of his being. The echoing squeals of pigs having their throats slit in mass, the terrified pleading of dolphins beaching themselves, the hushed cries of infants being strangled by their own umbilical cords, and a thousand more cries, each worse than the last, filled his mind, driving him to the brink of madness.

“Oh, you were already mad,” a sickly, smooth voice laughed as the horror retreated from his mindscape. “Now, tell me, who do I sound like?”

Let me- The thought was interrupted by a new pain, different but just as intense as the last. Horrible visions accompanied the wracking agony; carrion birds ripping his intestines from his gut, his ribcage being pried open by George’s bare hands, and his legs being torn off at the knee.

“Let’s try that again. Who do I sound like,” the voice said, each syllable sending Brian to new levels of anguish. And just like that, the pain stopped, and he was allowed to think for the first time in an eternity. Willem Dafoe? There was silence, and for a brief moment Brian thought he had imagined the voice.

Then the cackling started. It began slow and steady, like one laughing at a bad joke, and picked up until it reached the levels of a madman. “Excellent! Perfect! He really had an insidious edge to his voice.”

Who are- Pain once more tore through him. It was different, but just as sharp as before.

“You will speak, well think, when I tell you to,” the voice said, all joviality gone and replaced by a malicious edge. “But, I will admit that is a fair, and important, question. But before I answer, let me tell you a story.”

Suddenly he could see again, and he was found himself in the Olympian throne room. It was not the dilapidated dump he had seen but restored to all of its glory. Seated in his throne was the king of the gods, Zeus, while three old crones stood before him. “This was the instant I was first able to gain a foothold into your little world.” The three women, the Fates if he had to guess, were clearly talking but he could hear nothing. Zeus was clearly concerned about what the Fates were conveying, his lips drawn in a tight frown. But then, the barest hint of a smile began to form. “A king that refused to let his reign end, who made a dark bargain, and shattered the cycle that kept me out.” The voice cackled once more. “It’s men like him that always places a world firmly in my clutches.”

The vision shifted, and Brian was hurled through thousands of years of deceit, corruption, and bloodshed until he stood in a small, green tent, over the sleeping form of an American GI. A black mist appeared next to the sleeping teen’s ear and instantly he began to toss and turn in his sleep. “But thunder pants was a bit too slow for my taste, and the Deep Ones I managed to squeeze through, were, well, smelly fish people. So, I added another player to the game. A player that would not exist without my… divine intervention.” The black mist disappeared, and the GI bolted upright covered in a thin layer of sweat and out of breath. His eyes searched the darkness as he ran a hand through his thick black hair. “So, I helped old Artie here find the love of his life. A love,” the voice sounded disgusted at the word, “that otherwise would have never happened. A love that would exist outside the gaze of immortal eyes.” The GI grabbed his rifle and bolted out of the tent into the dead of night; a determined look on his face. “Love is really the greatest toy humanity ever gifted me.”

The scene shifted again, this time to a more familiar locale. It was the night after George had raided T:A’s prison, and a past version of himself, a very much alive Rashid, and a few other engineers
were busy analyzing samples of T:A and the various DGs they had collected. “You must have thought you were pretty smart to discover a signal that at lower frequencies could control the so-called demigods and destroy them and a few creatures at higher frequencies.” His past self flipped on the first signal generator and smiled with delight upon seeing the muscle tissue extracted from DG:VM begin to break down. “But there was one massive flaw you missed, you all missed, with that discovery.”

Brian now found himself in the ruins of the DG’s eastern nest, shortly after DG:AA detonated its payload. George and his men were taking turns pummeling G:DB into the ground, laughing and carrying on as the being stripped of its power begged for mercy. “It never once occurred to any of you to ask why the same signal the gods used to control their offspring and keep their foes in line worked on them as well. Never thought to ask how they could use a signal that would also hurt them?” The voice tsked before bursting out laughing once more. “As something of a scientist myself, I can say that’s just sloppy work.”

With more laughter the scene shifted to another version of himself working alone in his lab. He was hunched over his workbench wearing a pair of magnifying glasses, with a set of fine picks in hand, carefully scrutinizing the first control cylinder. The one that would eventually find its way into G:DB. Off to the side was the quantum communication device Merlin had made him develop, it beeped a few times before his past self reached over and silenced it. “And here we have the two most important pieces to the puzzle,” the voice snickered. “One of which was overlooked by all.” The communicator buzzed beeped again, and his past self picked up the device and hurled it to the other side of the lab. “Quantum computers with quantum encryption. A cipher so complex that not even a god could crack it before the universe died a natural death. But outside the universe is another story entirely, makes the whole rigmarole infinitely easier.”

Now he was watching his first encounter with Terminate-us, back when the G was but a talkative head and torso. His past self pulled the trigger on the prototype signal gun, which had stunned Terminate-us so he could insert the control cylinder. But from this perspective he watched as the moment his finger pulled the trigger a black hole opened in front of the G. He watched as the G’s very essence was pulled into the blackness, only to end when he released the trigger. “I found it quite easy to hitch a ride with your little organization and provide whatever assistance was needed,” it chuckled maliciously. “Plus, the look of horror on those pathetic creatures’ faces when they realized they weren’t half as powerful as they thought they were never got old.”

The scene remained the same, but a portion of Terminate-us was cut away, revealing the insides of the stone god as the control cylinder was inserted into its mouth. “Admit it, you never were able to precisely figure out how your own creation worked.” The younger Brian activated the cylinder with his phone, and he could only watch with horror as the cylinder within opened, and a small black mass slithered its way out. “You really have my thanks for following by instructions exactly. Otherwise, those veil piercers would have never worked, and I wouldn’t have been able to push those little guys through. Shoggoths, so much better than smelly, inbred fish people,” the voice said with a mocking sigh. “Plus, you gave me my most faithful servant.”

Now he found himself standing in a hellish landscape. The land was a mix of angry reds and browns, cracks covered the earth, and a red haze filled the air. Giant pustules dotted the land as numerous creatures of all sorts and sizes pulsed themselves free, as a river of blood-like water flowed off in the distance. “Tartarus, a realm without prying eyes.” In a flash of light, Terminate-us appeared and opened his mouth in a silent roar. Dozens of the tiny shoggoths poured forth from its mouth and began to burrow into the ground. “And the perfect breeding ground for an invading force. Within weeks the realm was dead and the shoggoths were forced to move onto greener pastures.”

Now he stood on a dock, overlooking a picturesque sunset on a picturesque lake. Sitting at the edge
of the dock with his feet dangling in the water was the same DG that had sentenced him to an eternal agony, and his blood would have boiled with rage if he had any left. Sitting next to him, was a pretty little blonde girl, which he thought might have been DG:AA, her feet dipped in the water as well, wearing a white dress that screamed purity and innocence. “I never leave loose ends, and this little puke right here would have been big trouble; the girl too. But I hand delivered the girl to you, taking care of one threat, and this one only needed a little encouragement to play along as well.” The boy leaned in and kissed the girl, and it was only then that Brian saw the horrific network of tentacles and eyes controlling the girl like a demonic marionette. “Pucker up, lover boy!” the voice laughed. “Make sure you get some tongue!” The two fell back, the boy oblivious to the horror around him.

Then time flowed by Brian in a rapid succession, showing him events he had not been present for, such as his former boss gifting the DGs with the signal canceling bracelets he had been told were for the Hunters of Artemis. “Oh! That’s got to be a sore point! But don’t worry, I wasn’t going to let you kill them anyway! They were just as important as you in this little performance!”

And he found himself back in the darkness.

“And you want to know what’s funny?” the voice whispered. “All of it was a ruse. One giant production to keep the guardian distracted while other unseen players retrieved fragments of my kin. The fragment of Lord Hastur was freed from his bindings deep beneath Kingsport by the tragic lovers. Hydra from its trappings in Yggdrasil by a dead boy desperate to make a deal with any being to save his crumbling world. Daoloth from its icy tomb by some rowdy Celts. All released, because the guardian was foolish enough to think this was just another attempt to escape from my prison."

There was a pause, that may have lasted a moment or a millennium.

“And not that it wasn’t an attempt, but that was only a secondary goal. Freeing fragments of the others was first and foremost. Followed by making sure hopeless romantics were the last survivors, ensuring there wouldn’t be a reset because ‘they love their friends’. Torturing old Howard and his mother with visions of alternate realities; that literally never gets old. Then browsing memes; you humans got deliciously dark there in the closing days. Looking for that accursed book, which I’m beginning to think doesn’t exist. A trail to the Dreamlands, once again nothing there. And finally, the old destroying the universe gag. I’ve left out about sixty-million more other goals, but that’s to save time.”

Who are you?


And the voice just stopped, leaving Brian alone in the darkness. Once again, he thought it was just a dream, the first signs of a deteriorating mind. But then what sounded like footsteps echoed through the void, and in the darkness before him a figure began to take shape; bathed in a subtle white light. He could not tell if the figure was a man or woman, an adult or child, and yet it seemed vaguely familiar to him. And even as the figure grew in size, it remained a mystery, devoid of all characteristics. Then what sounded like stage lights began to flip to life around him, and within each circle of light, he could see the same withered body with strands of redhair, over and over again; like a hall of mirrors.

Is that-
“I am Nyarlathotep,” the figure said. “And we both seek the end. And you shall aid me until that time.”

Then there was light.

And at the unspeakable horrors that stared him in the eye, his mind could only do one thing.

It shattered.

Chapter End Notes

And now the fun begins! See you in your dreams! -Nyarlathotep

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