### Third Life

**Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at** [http://archiveofourown.org/works/11163318](http://archiveofourown.org/works/11163318).

**Rating:** Teen And Up Audiences  
**Archive Warning:** Choose Not To Use Archive Warnings  
**Category:** F/M  
**Fandom:** Harry Potter - J. K. Rowling, Percy Jackson and the Olympians & Related Fandoms - All Media Types  
**Relationship:** Hades (Percy Jackson)/Harry Potter, Hades/Persephone (Percy Jackson), Maria di Angelo/Hades, Ἀδης | Hades/Λευκη | Leuke (Hellenistic Religion & Lore), Hera/Zeus, James Potter/Lily Evans Potter/Zeus (Percy Jackson), Minor or Background Relationship(s)  
**Character:** Harry Potter, Amaranth Chrysocomê Potter, Hades (Percy Jackson), Thanatos (Percy Jackson), Persephone (Percy Jackson), Ἀδης | Hades/Λευκη | Leuke (Hellenistic Religion & Lore), Maria di Angelo, Zeus (Percy Jackson), Percy Jackson, Annabeth Chase, Luke Castellan, Grover Underwood, Hestia (Percy Jackson), Alecto (Percy Jackson), Chiron (Percy Jackson), Hera (Percy Jackson), Dionysus (Percy Jackson), Thalia Grace, Nico di Angelo, Bianca di Angelo, Teddy Lupin, Sirius Black, Remus Lupin, Weasley Family (Harry Potter), Sally Jackson, Paul Blofis  
**Series:** Part 1 of [Once, Twice, Thrice-Born](http://archiveofourown.org/works/11163318)  
**Stats:** Published: 2017-06-10 Updated: 2019-07-04 Chapters: 33/? Words: 201614

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**Third Life**

by **Queen Apolline (InvisibleSilence)**

**Summary**

Upon dying in the Battle of Hogwarts, the god Thanatos informed Amaranth Chrysocomê Potter-Black that by becoming the Master of the Deathly Hallows, she had passed a test that he and Persephone had set a thousand years before in order to find Hades a companion for the summer months. Upon arriving in the Underworld, the rechristened Chrysa Potter discovers that she is on her third life. She is the reincarnation of Leuke, Goddess of Shadows and Secrets, and Maria di Angelo. Chrysa is reunited with her greatest love, but there are other forces in the world that seek to tear everything she has worked for in all of her lives.
Notes

Previously posted on FF, I'm planning on updating quickly over here until it matches what's already up over there. After that, I'll update on Sundays.
Chapter Summary

“You did WHAT?” Hades yelled.
Thanatos and Persephone, both used to his rages, did not even flinch.
“We decided that you were lonely in the summers, so we set up a test to find a
companion for you seven, eight centuries ago. I created three items associated with the
powers of the dead, to find someone that would not abuse the powers that would come
with being your concubine. When the three items united and accepted their owner, Lady
Persephone made it so that person would automatically become your secondary
consort,” Thanatos explained calmly.
“She’s a very nice young lady,” Persephone said. “I approve.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

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three items united and accepted their owner, Lady Persephone made it so that person would
automatically become your secondary consort," Thanatos explained calmly.

"She's a very nice young lady," Persephone said. "I approve."

"You've had time to meet her? But it's winter! When did this girl accomplish your 'test' anyway?"
Hades questioned irritably.

The conspirators exchanged guilty looks.

"Last May," Persephone admitted.

Hades resisted the urge to grind his teeth.

"And why did you wait until now to tell me?" Hades asked.

"I was waiting until Lady Persephone was back, since this was her idea in the first place," Thanatos
said shamelessly.

"I was trying to finish collecting information on the girl," Persephone stated. "I am not quite done,
but you need to know what I recently found out."

Hades sighed, slumped in his throne, and waved his hand for them to continue.

"Go on. Tell me about this girl."
"I wouldn't let her hear you calling her that, if I were you," Persephone warned. "She hates being called 'girl'."

"Her name is Amaranth Chrysocomê Potter," Thanatos interrupted.

Hades blinked.

"Isn't 'Chrysocomê' just Greek for 'amaranth'?" he asked.

"Well, yes," Thanatos said. "It turns out that Amaranth's father, James Potter, was only her adoptive father."

Hades groaned.

"Please don't tell me she's a demigod."

There was silence from the pair.

Hades groaned again.

"Whose is she?"

Thanatos and Persephone stared at each other, silently arguing over who should tell him.

"Spit it out!" he ordered.

Persephone sighed.

"My father's."

"WHAT?!"

"She's already seventeen, permanently seventeen," Thanatos said quickly. "She's not the prophecy child. She doesn't fit. She had her own prophecy, and it has already been accomplished."

"How did my dear youngest brother have a child that made it to seventeen without anyone noticing?" Hades asked incredulously.

"She's a witch," Thanatos offered. "One of Hecate's Blessed. She's spent almost all her life behind strong wards, and she has a blood sacrifice protecting her from the notice of the gods. Zeus originally claimed her when she was a year old – she was attacked by the warlock Tom Riddle, the one who tried to split his soul in order to avoid us and was a general pain for years – it was due to Zeus's claiming of her that the Killing Curse hit Riddle instead of her. She has a lightning-bolt shaped scar on her forehead from the claiming. The entire Wizarding World recognizes her as the "Girl-Who-Lived". She's famous. She also is the one responsible for finally sending that blasted Tom Riddle to us."

"I was glad to finally…acquire the entirety of Riddle's soul," Hades mused. "I suppose I should at the very least thank her for that. Have you told her that she unintentionally became the immortal concubine of a god?"

"Yes," the pair said as one.

"We covered the immortal part last May, a few days after she acquired the Hallows," Thanatos said.

"Hallows?" Hades asked.
Thanatos waved a hand in dismissal. "The three objects I created. The unbeatable Elder Wand, the Resurrection Stone that could summon shades of the dead, and the Invisibility Cloak that was modeled after your Helm. The wizards called them the Deathly Hallows. Anyways, Lady Persephone went in person to explain the 'immortal concubine of the god of the dead' part after I visited one of Amaranth's dreams to warn her about her godly visitor."

"How did she take it?" Hades asked, his voice slightly hopeful.

"At first? Badly. However, the only two people she ever cared enough to date are both dead now, so she's willing to give it a try. I know she'll be perfect, though. She wouldn't have been able to master the Hallows if she wasn't," Persephone claimed. "And she's going by 'Chrysa' now, not Amaranth."

Hades sighed.

"Fine. When am I supposed to meet her?"

"I was planning on arranging a date for the two of you a week from today," Persephone said helpfully. "I've already cleared your schedule."

Hades sighed again, deeper this time, well-used to his wife when she was feeling stubborn.

"Very well. It seems I have no choice in the matter."

A week later, Hades found himself sitting in a café in Manhattan, waiting for the woman his wife had set him up with.

"Excuse me?" a British-accented voice said from behind him.

Hades turned to see a woman he was instantly attracted to. She was not beautiful as Persephone was beautiful; his queen had golden hair and bright blue eyes, a bright light amidst the darkness of the Underworld. No, this was a darker beauty, though no less beautiful than Persephone. The woman had long black hair and bright green eyes. Most of Hades' lovers had similar features; usually when he took a lover it was because she reminded him of his first and dearest love. His last lover, Maria, had also had black hair and green eyes.

"Chrysa Potter?" he asked hesitantly.

The woman smiled and took the seat across from him.

"That would be me. I presume you are Hades?"

"Indeed I am," the god replied. "I admit, I was somewhat in shock that my wife set me up like this."

Chrysa let out a huff of laughter.

"I was shocked about being set up by people I'd never met. Though it did help me kill Voldemort, even if there was the unintended somewhat-marriage part of it."

Hades laughed in reply.

"I'd like to thank you for that, by the way. Thanatos and I were quite vexed with what Riddle had done. However, since it had to do with Hecate's Blessed, we were unable to interfere," Hades explained.

Chrysa tilted her head to him.
"Glad I could help, then. I had wondered, after learning that the Greek gods were real and reading some of the myths, why Thanatos had never collected the pieces of Riddle's soul on his own after his first death."

They sat in an awkward silence for a minute, before Hades said quietly, "I am not expecting you to do anything that you do not want to do. If you would rather avoid me on a personal level and merely work together professionally for the rest of time, I will not stop you. However, since we are both going to be working in close contact with one another in the foreseeable future – most likely for a very, very long time – I hope to at least get to know each other a bit better."

Chrysa smiled slightly, but it was bittersweet. She placed her clasped hands on the table and looked down at them.

"That makes me feel a bit better. My-my first boyfriend, Cedric, well…Voldemort killed him in front of me when I was fourteen, nearly fifteen. I saw him die. My second and last boyfriend so far, Fred – he died last May, during the Battle of Hogwarts. He died when a wall exploded in on us. Again, I was there, and I saw him die. So, I'm not really ready to jump straight into a romantic relationship just yet."

"That's completely understandable," Hades reassured, placing a hand over hers. "Besides Persephone, I have taken several lovers over the centuries, when the loneliness got to me. I never slept with as many people as my brothers did, and mine was always out of loneliness, not just an inability to keep it in my pants. My last lover's name was Maria. We had two children, Bianca and Nico. She died in 1945, when Zeus destroyed the hotel they were staying at in an attempt to murder my children. I've never even thought of taking another lover since Maria – barring Persephone, of course."

Chrysa was silent for a moment, before slowly saying, "According to Thanatos, Zeus is my father. Do you hold that against me?"

"If you were raised as a child of Zeus, with all the privileges and arrogance that come with that, I might," Hades said honestly. "Zeus tried to murder Nico and Bianca because of a Prophecy that stated that a child of the Big Three would reach sixteen and possibly destroy Olympus. If I knew about a child of his under the age of sixteen, I would probably try to destroy them in revenge."

Chrysa looked slightly alarmed.

"I am already eighteen – well, Thanatos said that my body is never going to grow older than seventeen now – but I am older than sixteen. That prophecy cannot apply to me, can it?"

"No," Hades said. "The Fates have assured us that you have nothing to do with the prophecy. You are already too old, for one. For another, you're one of Hecate's Blessed, which acts as a sort of loophole for the "child of the Big Three" bit."

"May I ask what the prophecy says? Having had one prophecy kept from me for most of my life, I would at least like to know what this one is, especially if it could possibly mean a sibling or child of mine in the future," Chrysa said.

Hades nodded, feeling a slight spark of excitement when she referred to her future children.

"A half-blood of the eldest gods"
Shall reach sixteen against all odds
And see the world in endless sleep.
The hero's soul cursed blade shall reap.
A single choice shall end his days,
Olympus to preserve or raze."

Chrysa looked slightly shocked.

"Well, that's not ominous."

Hades chuckled.

"You can see why my brothers were so quick to attempt to kill my children."

"You keep saying, 'attempt'. I assume Nico and Bianca survived? What happened to them?" Chrysa asked curiously.

Hades took a deep breath, trying to calm himself at the thought of what he had been forced to do to his youngest children.

"They are in Las Vegas, at a place called the Lotus Hotel and Casino. You said you had been reading up on the myths, did you ever read about the Lotus-eaters?" he asked her.

"In the Odyssey, yes. The sailors ate the lotus-flower and they forgot about ever trying to leave. The Lotus-eaters are in a casino now?" Chrysa asked incredulously.

"Yes. Eating the lotus-flower does not just make you forget about what you were doing; it makes you not want to ever leave. It also prevents you from aging. Bianca and Nico have been trapped in limbo there for nearly seventy years now."

Chrysa's face softened in pity. She reached across the table to grasp his hand.

"I can't imagine what that's been like for you. My godson, Teddy, is eight months old tomorrow, and I can't imagine being separated from him for a year, much less seventy! I don't think I could bear it."

"It's hard," Hades admitted. "Whenever I think on it overmuch, I remind myself that one day the prophecy will be fulfilled, and I'll be able to get them out of there. It will be hard; their memories are locked currently, so they won't remember that they're demigods, and they don't remember me. They won't know why it's so many decades later than they thought it was. But they'll be alive, at least."

"Why are their memories locked?" Chrysa asked curiously.

"We were in the building when Maria – their mother – died," Hades admitted. "They had already been threatened. Zeus ordered me to send them to Camp Half-Blood, but they were potential prophecy children, and my children at that. They would have been dead within a month. I planned to move all three of them to someplace safe. I was going to protect Maria from the influence of the Lotus-flower and move all three of them into the hotel, until they could be safe. At least they'd still be together, and at least I could visit. Maria and I had been discussing it in the lobby they were staying in while the children played. She had finally agreed, and she went back upstairs to their rooms to get her purse. Zeus destroyed the hotel. Since I was with Nico and Bianca, I could protect them, but Maria was too far away – I had no time..."

Chrysa squeezed his hand. Up until that moment, Hades hadn't realized she was still holding it.

"I'm sure she knows you tried," she said softly. "And I'm just as sure that she would have rather you
protected her children than have possibly had them injured while you tried to get to her."

Hades looked deep into her green eyes, green eyes that seemed to know more than they should.

"That's exactly what she would have said," he admitted softly. "As much as she loved me, she would have done anything to protect Nico and Bianca."

"How long were you with her?" Chrysa asked, voice equally soft.

"Thirteen years," Hades admitted. "It was about a year before Bianca was born, and I was with her until she died. Her death was too traumatic for the children to remember. Enough depressing talk," he said firmly, shoving Maria to the back of his mind. "You mentioned your godson? Teddy? Would you tell me about him?"

Chrysa's face lit up as she began speaking animatedly about the baby.

Several hours later, their conversation was interrupted by a café employee, who brusquely informed them that the café was now closed and could they please depart? The pair parted amicably, making hurried plans to meet again the next week.

At the end of their next meeting, Hades broached a significant topic.

"Tomorrow is the Winter Solstice," he said.

Chrysa nodded.

"The Winter Solstice is the one day a year where I am expected on Olympus. We have a council meeting every year on that day. Some years we have additional meetings at other times in the year, sometimes none, but we always hold a meeting on winter solstice, and I am always invited. I do eventually have to announce your ascension to the position of my secondary consort and the Champion of Thanatos. Technically, I should do so this year, but if you would like, I can put it off until later," he explained.

Chrysa thought for a moment.

"Can you see how this announcement might affect me in any way?" she asked, tilting her head.

"There's nothing that I can think of," Hades replied. "You might have some curious gods showing up at your door, or stalking you through the grocery store, but threatening them with me ought to be enough to get them to back off. Nothing should interrupt your daily life, and nothing should get back to your family in England."

"Then go ahead," Chrysa said firmly. "I wouldn't want you to get into trouble for no real reason."

CHRYSOCOMÊKATACTHONIA

After Hades' revelation the night before, Zeus had one thing on his mind (besides avoiding his very irate wife): meeting his eighteen-year-old, newly immortal daughter. While the laws prohibited him seeking her out as a demigod, her quasi-immortal status made her an exemption to the rules.

He had kept an eye on his eldest demigod daughter over the years, though as she was protected behind wards as one of Hecate's Blessed, he had admittedly watched her less closely than he had Thalia and Jason. Saving her from the Killing Curse as an infant had been his only true involvement in her life. He had obviously not kept quite close enough an eye on her, since she had managed to become Hades' second consort without his notice, but that was just after Jason was left at Wolf
House and Thalia ran away, so he had been a little bit occupied at the time. Now, his little girl was all grown up. She had survived the dark prophecy of her birth, she had escaped the Great Prophecy, and she had somehow become his least favorite brother's second consort. Chrysocomê Katakthonia. Chrysocomê of the Underworld. But she was immortal now, which meant he was allowed to talk to her.

Something small within him reminded that it wasn’t right that he should seek out his elder daughter on the birthday of the younger that she knew nothing about, the younger daughter who was right now on the streets, alone, but he squashed those doubts. He wanted to meet his daughter, dammit! He had gotten so lost in thought while watching Chrysocomê from the café across the street, that he did not notice someone come up behind him and tap him on the shoulder.

"Excuse me?" a slightly British-accented voice said.

Zeus turned around, ready to tell off whoever it was that was interrupting him, only to find himself face-to-face with the very woman he had been watching.

"I can't help but notice that you've been watching me all morning," she said crisply. "Is there something I can help you with, Mr. –"

Zeus was too busy drinking in the sight of his daughter to reply immediately. She was stunningly beautiful, with curly black hair and stunning emerald eyes. She bore the greatest resemblance to his mother, with only clues in her facial features hinting at which Olympian had fathered her.

Chrysocomê snapped her fingers in front of his face.

"You can understand me, right?" she asked dubiously.

"My apologies, Chrysocomê," Zeus said hastily, hoping to smooth over his transgression. "I was just very pleased to finally meet you."

Chrysocomê frowned, and she ran her eyes over him discerningly. They lingered on his electric blue eyes before she hesitantly asked, "Father?"

Zeus smiled, resisting the urge to beam that his daughter recognized him.

"Yes, Chrysocomê," he said. He gestured towards his table. "Would you care to sit with me for a bit?"

"First, its Chrysa; Chrysocomê was a bit too clunky for me," the young woman said firmly. She glanced down at the bags in her hands from her shopping. "I really would like to stop and chat, but I have frozens I need to put away."

"Would you be willing to meet me for lunch?" Zeus asked, unable to keep the strains of hope from his voice.

Chrysocomê – Chrysa – hesitated, then smiled.

"I'd like that. There's a Thai place on East Twenty-eighth street I enjoy, if you'd like to meet there in an hour or so?"

"I'll be there," Zeus promised. "The reservations will be under the name 'Bolt'."

"I'll see you in an hour then," Chrysa said, slightly more firmly than her hesitant overtures earlier.
She turned quickly from the café and began walking back in the direction Zeus knew her apartment building was in.

CHRYSOCOMÈKATACHTHONIA

Hades was understandably nervous as he waited in the lobby of DOA Recording Studios. For the first time since Persephone, he was bringing a lover down to the Underworld. Well, potential lover. Neither he nor Chrysa had felt the need to take that particular step yet. But they had time. They had nothing but time.

But still, it was only the second time he had ever brought a lover down to the Underworld. While Leuke, his first love, had lived in the Underworld as well, she had been raised by Erebos and Nyx in Tartarus, so she had been more familiar with their home than he had for the first few centuries. Now, with all the expansion and rebuilding, he could probably get her lost. But unlike with Leuke, who had seen the Underworld when it was still one of the biggest messes in Olympian history and then helped him untangle it, Chrysa was coming to the finished Underworld. He wanted to impress her.

Every one of the servants had been instructed to clean the palace from top to bottom. Charon had built an exclusive, bejeweled barge to take her across the river on. The first cleanup project of the River Styx in more than a millennium had been instituted. Even the ghosts in Asphodel Fields had been instructed to wander the fields and pick up any debris they might find.

Instead of being offended by the lengths he was going to for a potential lover, Persephone had been amused. She had asked whether this was what he had been like before he had kidnapped her, a fact that was confirmed by Thanatos. Hades had spoken privately with her about her feelings for the new "other woman".

Persephone had taken his hands and said, "Dear, I chose to set this test up. I want you to be happy, and you can never be happy when you're alone for so much of the year. I know that's why you took your lovers, and I know that you can't help falling quickly and deeply whenever you choose to give your love away. It's one of the things I love most about you. Now that you have Chrysa, you won't be lonely anymore. You'll always have one of us down here, if not both of us! Maybe not constantly, but Chrysa won't leave you for months on end. Maybe for a few days, so she can visit her godson or her godfather, but not like I do. I'm happy for you, Hades."

The Lord of the Underworld had embraced his wife.

"Thank you, Seph."

She had laughed. "You're welcome, dear. Now, I think the servants are about to drop the vase your mother gave us as a wedding present."

Hades had stormed off, just narrowly rescuing the vase from destruction. It was a beautiful piece of work, made of obsidian and pearl and silver, but Rhea had intended it to serve as a reminder. As much as she liked Persephone, her greatest favor would always be towards Leuke, her former attendant and Hades' first consort, though they had never married. The vase depicted several scenes from Leuke's life: her birth to Oceanus and Tethys, her service to Rhea, her participation in the Titanomachy, her life with Hades, and finally, the largest scene on the vase, her death.

Leuke had been murdered in what should have been the safest place of them all: Elysium. No one knew what had happened to her. The spirits who had inhabited that area of Elysium had been annihilated, never to be reborn. Hades had found her broken and bleeding body at the exact center of Elysium. She had still been alive, but barely. She had been waiting for Hades. The Titaness had only enough strength in her to whisper, "I love you," before dying in his arms. In his grief, Hades had transformed her body into a beautiful white poplar tree that still grew at the center of Elysium. Seeds from the tree had spread into the River Acheron, and grew upon its banks both in the Underworld.
and above ground, especially near the Necromanteion. The reminder of Leuke was why it had always been Hades' favorite temple.

Now, Hades was waiting for the woman who reminded him so much of his lost love. In appearance, they were quite similar, with the emerald eyes and black curls both Leuke and Chrysa had inherited as descendants of Gaea. Leuke was the first grandchild of Ouranos and Gaea, and resembled her grandmother and her aunt Rhea more than either of her parents. Chrysa was descended from Gaea on both sides of her family: Gaea was her great-grandmother through Zeus, and her twice-over great-great-great-grandmother through Lily Evans-Potter, who was a granddaughter of both Poseidon and Hecate. Somehow, everything had come together in just the right way so that Chrysa was the closest image he had to Leuke since Leuke herself, with Maria di Angelo as a close second.

In personality, they were similar, but still different. Neither had been raised by the most loving of caregivers. Chrysa had been sent to live with the abusive Dursley family when she was just fifteen months old. Leuke had been practically abandoned by Oceanus and Tethys shortly after her birth, foisted off to Gaea as a supposed "playmate" for Kronos. Leuke had not been abused as Chrysa had been, but having the bitter woman who would soon order her children to murder her husband as a caregiver did not set her up to be truly emotionally stable. Chrysa, however, had found friends at age eleven, and gained a family in Remus and Sirius at the end of her third year. By the time she reached adolescence, Leuke was coming into her own as the Titaness of shadows and secrets. Gaea had promptly sent her off to Erebos and Nyx, who raised her for the rest of her youth. While that was a much more loving environment that Gaea and Kronos, Nyx and her children were not exactly known for their strong moral compasses. As a result, Leuke had little compassion for those she deemed "weak", and tended to be utterly ruthless and remorseless. While Chrysa had a vicious and cunning streak as large as the Underworld, she knew how to care.

There was a slight shuffle among the spirits in the lobby of the studio as the door to the outside world opened and a slight figure stepped in.

Hades quickly moved to greet her, the spirits of the dead instinctively moving out of their lord's way.

"Chrysa!" he called.

"Hades!" she replied with a bright smile, stepping towards him and embracing him briefly. "It's good to see you. How's the Underworld?"

"Anxious to meet its newest lady," Hades replied, offering her his arm courteously.

She smiled as she took it, and he led her into the elevator, where Charon was already waiting, dressed as usual in one of his Italian suits.

"Chrysocomê Potter, may I introduce you to Charon, son of Nyx and Erebos, god of boundaries and territories, and ferryman of the Underworld," Hades said politely.

Charon bowed to Chrysa.

"A pleasure to meet you, Lady Chrysocomê," he said.

"The pleasure is mine, Charon," Chrysa replied politely. "You're Thanatos' brother, aren't you?"

"That would be correct, Lady. One of them."

"The others are Geras, Hypnos, Aether, Phanes, Moros, Dolos, Momus, and Epiphron?" Chrysa asked, her face scrunching slightly as she tried to remember. "Hypnos is the god of sleep, Geras is the god of old age, Aether is the god of light, Phanes is the first-born king, Moros is the god of
doom, Dolos is the god of deceit, Momus is the god of blame, and Epiphron is the god of prudence, if I'm not mistaken."

"You're not," Hades said, amused. "You've been studying, I see."

Chrysa shrugged, looking slightly sheepish. "I've been focusing on the Underworld when going through Greek mythology. I'm sure not all my information is right, but I thought it would be best to be at least somewhat familiar with everything, since I'm going to be living down here six months out of the year."

Suddenly, the elevator morphed into a barge, Charon's suit into a long black robe, and their surroundings into a river.

"This is the River Styx," Hades explained to Chrysa, but she was no longer paying attention to their surroundings.

"I'm feeling very dizzy," she said faintly.

Hades wrapped a steadying arm around her waist, and felt her nearly collapse into him.

"My lord?" Charon asked uncertainly.

"Get this boat across the river," Hades nearly growled.

Chrysa chose that moment to pass out completely. Hades caught her easily, and lifted her up into his arms.

Charon must have used some sort of magic on them, because the barge reached the Underworld side of the Styx faster than Hades had ever seen him go before.

"Call for Thanatos," Hades said, tossing a drachma to Charon. "Tell him to get to the palace now for Chrysa."

Once in the Underworld, there were no boundaries to stop Hades as he ran. He could have simply flashed to his palace, were it not for the mortal-born woman in his arms. Spirits moved away as he approached. Even Cerberus, sensing his master's worry, stepped aside. Asphodel Fields were no different. All parted from the path of their Lord.

The Furies joined as an honor guard as they approached the palace. Distantly, Hades realized that he could probably give Chrysa to one of them, as they could fly faster than he could run, but he refused to release his precious cargo.

Finally, he reached the rooms he and Persephone had prepared for Chrysa. He laid her gently on the bed. She looked gentle in sleep, with nothing to indicate that she was ill. He knelt beside the bed, holding her hand in his.

Thanatos appeared in the blink of an eye on the other side of the bed.

"What happened?" he asked.

Hades shook his head in bemusement. "I don't know. We were crossing the Styx when she said she felt dizzy. A moment later, she fainted. She hasn't woken."

Thanatos mirrored Hades, kneeling and taking Chrysa's other hand.

"She seems simply asleep," he observed.
"But there's no reason for her to be!" Hades nearly growled.

Suddenly, Chrysa twitched violently, and power exploded around her, throwing the room into chaos. Hades gritted his teeth and weathered the waves of power – dark power – until it died down enough for them to move again. The power was not gone, but it was not exploding anymore; it rested around Chrysa like a well-worn cloak.

"She feels like Leuke," Thanatos said, slightly in awe. "Her power – Master, look at her! She holds the mantle of shadows and secrets!"

Hades stared at the young woman who had somehow taken over his first consort's domain.

"How is this possible?" he whispered.

Chrysa stirred, her eyes rapidly blinking.

"Hades?" she asked hesitantly.

"I'm right here," the god replied, squeezing her hand.

In a sudden movement, the demigoddess sat up and flung herself at the Lord of the Underworld, her arms wrapping around his neck and her head nestling beside his ear.

"I remember," she said quietly in his ear. "By the Void, I remember everything – well, not everything, but I'm sure the rest will come in time. Hades, beloved... Aïdôneus, I remember that this is not my first life."

Hades froze at the name that very few people had ever called him. His mother had used it on occasion, and some of the chthonic deities used it after "Lord" in formal settings, but only one person had ever used it regularly.

"Who were you before?" he asked, his voice barely a whisper.

She brushed her lips against his cheek.

"In my first life, I was Leuke Apatouria. In my second life, I was Maria di Angelo."

After that shocking declaration, she moved back so that she could press her lips to his.

Hades remained frozen for a long minute, before suddenly and urgently kissing her back with all the passion that had been denied him since her death – both deaths. Here, before him, was his last love and mother of his children. Here, also, was his first and greatest love, the love he had never truly forgotten, despite the many millennia that had passed. He kissed her with everything he had, in order to show her exactly how much he had missed her.

They finally broke apart when someone cleared their throat.

Both turned to see Thanatos, looking amused.

"As heart-warming as this reunion is, I do have a job to do. Leuke, sister, it is good to see you alive again. I'll be informing the others that you're back. However, as I believe you'll be busy tonight, I shall endeavor to tell them that you will not be receiving visitors until tomorrow," he said.

"Thank you, Than," Chrysa said warmly. "It's good to see you again too."

The death god leaned over the bed and pressed a kiss to Chrysa's hair.
"Shame about the room though. I suspect you won't be using it now, between the destruction from your partial ascension and your rekindled relationship," he said casually.

"Partial ascension?" Hades questioned.

Thanatos nodded.

"Partial. She's still only immortal through my power. She's just a demigoddess with the powers and memories of a goddess."

"Partial memories," Chrysa corrected.

Both gods turned to look at her.

She shrugged slightly. "I remember all of my life as Maria di Angelo, and the end of my life as Leuke. My gut tells me that the rest of my memories as Leuke will return. It will just take a while."

"I'd talk to Hypnos about that," Thanatos recommended helpfully. "He's good with memories, and can probably give you a time span. I'll tell him to come by in a few days."

With a flap of his black wings, the death god disappeared.

Chrysa looked to Hades, a cunning smile playing on her lips.

"I believe we were in the middle of something?" she said.

"We were," Hades said, sweeping her into his arms again.

CHRYSOCOMÈKATACTHTHONIA

Chrysa trudged up the hill and walked through the archway labelled "Camp Half-Blood." The grey light of false dawn dimly illuminated the valley below. Twelve cabins formed a "U" around a central fire pit. An open-air pavilion filled with tables and benches served as the dining area. Basketball courts, archery ranges, an elliptic track, a truly massive rock wall, and a pastel mansion were laid out in other areas of the valley.

Chrysa headed for the mansion first. According to her sources, this was where Chiron, the activities director, and Dionysus, the nominal camp head, spent their time. By sources, she meant Persephone, who was the only one who thought to give her directions when recommending she visit Camp Half-Blood.

She knocked sharply on the front door. While she waited, she glanced down at herself, making sure she was still presentable. She had shadow-traveled directly outside of the Camp boundaries, so she probably looked a good sight better than most demigods who arrived, who were fresh from the streets or monster attacks. She, on the other hand, was dressed in white blouse and black jeans from Gucci, with a matching handbag, and boots from Christian Louboutin, with the promise ring Hades had given her resting on her left ring finger. The ring was carved from a single diamond, and probably worth more than everything in her Manhattan penthouse.

The door was eventually answered by a man with thinning brown hair, bushy eyebrows, and a scruffy beard. He was also a white centaur from the waist down.

"Are you Chiron?" Chrysa asked with a friendly smile.

The man smiled at her.
"I am indeed. May I ask your name?"

"I am Chrysa Potter. It's a pleasure to meet you," Chrysa replied, extending her hand for the centaur to shake.

He did so, then offered, "Would you like to come in?"

"Thank you," Chrysa said promptly.

Chiron opened the door wider and gestured for her to enter. She stepped into the house, looking around at the décor.

"Would you come into my office?" the centaur asked politely.

Chrysa smiled and gestured for him to lead the way.

The walls of the office were bronze. There was a large TV on one wall, perpendicular to the centaur-sized desk that had several papers on it. There were several chairs of various styles in front of the desk, some facing the desk, others facing the television. On the wall opposite the television was a shelf holding both a boom box and a record player. The shelves below it were filled with CDs, tapes, and records.

Chiron took his place behind the desk, and gestured for Chrysa to sit. She did so.

"I assume, since you did not seem shocked to see me, that you are somewhat familiar with your heritage?" he asked.

"I am," Chrysa nodded. "I've spoken with both my father and my patron, and they informed me of Camp Half-Blood.

"Patron?" Chiron questioned, a curious look on his face.

"I have a…summer job, you could say, working with one of the gods," Chrysa said. "Not my father. But – well, I should probably start from the beginning."

"I've often found that to be the best place to start," Chiron nodded, folding his hands on the desk.

"My full name is Amaranth Chrysocomê Potter. I was born on July 31, 1980 in Godric's Hollow, West County, England, to James Potter and Lily Evans-Potter, both of whom were of Hecate’s Blessed. Lily Evans-Potter was the granddaughter of both Poseidon and Hecate. James Potter was not my biological father, which they had suspected before I was born. Apparently, while they were on their honeymoon, they had a drunken threesome with a man who identified himself as Meallán Bolt. James did not care, and blood-adopted me as his daughter and heir. The only person who knew the truth was my godfather."

She gave Chiron a quizzical look.

"Are you at all familiar with the goings-on in Wizarding Britain over the past few decades?" she questioned.

"I know there was a grandson of Hecate who declared himself a Dark Lord and was terrorizing the populace," Chiron said. "I heard he died and then came back, only to die again, but that's all I know."

Chrysa nodded.
"He called himself Lord Voldemort, but his proper name was Tom Riddle, Jr. Before I was born, there was a prophecy about a child who would be born with the power to defeat him. That child was me. When I was fifteen months old, Voldemort found my family and killed my parents. When he tried to kill me, I was protected by my father's Claim, which caused the curse to ricochet and kill off Voldemort. He was not dead, however, and came back when I was fourteen using my blood. I defeated him a year and a half ago after collecting three artifacts known as the Deathly Hallows. According to the legend, the person who can collect all three becomes the "Master of Death".

Chiron raised an eyebrow.

"I cannot see Thanatos as having a Master other than Hades."

"That's correct," Chrysa replied. "The Hallows were a test set up several centuries by Thanatos and Persephone. It was meant to find a summer companion for Hades, so that he wouldn't be lonely, and so that someone could do Persephone's half of the paperwork during the summer months. I did not take up the position that first summer, but I did attend my Lord Hades in the Underworld this past summer. Also, you should probably know, as the Champion of Thanatos, I am somewhat immortal."

Chiron looked shocked, but still managed to ask, "Somewhat immortal?"

"I can die, but Thanatos will just send me back to my body if I end up at the Underworld gates. It really hurts though. He only heals me enough so that I'm not dead. I got hit by a lorry last February, and it took me weeks to stop aching, even with magic."

Chiron was looking more than a little stunned now. Chrysa waited patiently for the immortal centaur to gather his composure.

Finally, he said, "Miss Potter, I may be ten thousand years old, but this is the first time I have met an immortal demigod witch who is the legacy of two other gods. After the rest of this conversation, I'm almost afraid to ask this, but who is your father?"

Chrysa allowed the glamour charm on her forehead to melt away, revealing the lightning-bolt scar on her forehead.

Chiron sighed.

"Of course. I assume, if your father is Lord Zeus and you work with Lord Hades, you have been informed of the Great Prophecy?" he asked.

Chrysa nodded briskly.

"I have. It has also been determined that the prophecy does not apply to me. Father, Hades, Thanatos, and the Moirai all agreed that I am not the child of that particular prophecy. I've had my own prophecy already, thank-you-very-much."

Chiron seemed to gather his thoughts and nodded firmly.

"Well, I suppose since you are already aware of what our orientation video covers, all that is left to do is to introduce you to Mr. D. and to give you a tour of the camp," he said as he rose from his kneeling position.

Chrysa rose as well.

"That would be lovely, thank you."
A note on Chrysa's memories of her past lives: she is remembering in reverse order, and she has a lot of years to cover, so she remembers her entire life as Maria di Angelo while only remembering the end of her life as Leuke at the moment. She'll remember relatively quickly though.
The early life of Amaranth Chrysocomê Potter:

From the moment Lily Evans-Potter found out that she was pregnant, she and her husband both knew there was a chance that the baby wasn't James'.

During their honeymoon, they had not exactly been chaste. During their month-long sojourn across Western Europe, Australia, and North America, several people of various genders, nationalities, and species had shared their bed. Lily called it "a last dip in the pool of hedonism before our return to responsibility". James just called it "fun". Whatever the case, they realized very quickly that there was a distinct possibility that James was not the baby's father.

Lily was horrified. James was mildly worried, but swore that he'd blood-adopt the baby anyway, and he or she would be just like their biological child. He would even make the baby his Heir in blood and magic, even if he or she was not born of Potter blood.

When Lily was four months along, the baby had developed enough for the spells to detect its gender and parentage. They decided to test the gender first, and were given the news that they were expecting a daughter.

The second test did not have such pleasant results.

While Lily Margaret Evans-Potter was listed as the mother, the father was listed as Meallán Bolt.

All three present stared at the name.

Finally, Sirius asked, "Do you even remember Meallán Bolt?"

Lily slapped his arm. "Ow!" the man yelled. "Why are you hitting so hard?"

"That would be Lily's way of saying, 'Yes, Padfoot, we remember Meallán Bolt. We vetted everyone before we slept with them. We didn't want to accidentally sleep with a Death Eater, after all,' James sighed. "Meallán Bolt was a half-blood, the son of an Irish wizard and an aura, a Greek wind elemental. We met with him in Australia, of all places, and spent a few days hanging out with him."

"And now he's the father of your kid," Sirius said with a nod. "You going to tell him?"

"How are we supposed to find him? It's not like we exchanged contact information," Lily said,
frustrated.

"It'll be better if we don't," James said with a nod. "Besides, after the blood adoption, she'll be as good as mine anyway. Just because she doesn't have my blood doesn't make her any less my daughter. I love her, and that's what matters."

Lily looked at her husband with teary, adoring eyes.

"Oh, James," she said. He wrapped his arms around her, and she practically melted into his embrace.

"I still get to be the godfather, right?" Sirius asked.

Without leaving James' arms, Lily reached out and smacked him.

"OW!"

CHRYSOCOMÈKATACHTHONIA

When she was born, she was perfect.

The newest addition to the family had messy black curls, pale skin, and emerald green eyes. With her coloring, and the fact that James' mother had curly hair, they were easily able to pass little Amaranth off as James' daughter.

They did not fully segregate her from her conception. Since her biological father was the son of a Greek nymph, Lily suggested that they give their little princess a Greek middle name. Sirius suggested Chrysocomê, which was simply a translation of Amaranth into Ancient Greek. Therefore, their little darling was named Amaranth Chrysocomê Potter.

Their life was perfect.

Then Dumbledore showed up and told them that Amaranth was one of two possibilities for a child prophesied to destroy Voldemort, and that the Dark Lord was fully aware of that fact.

They had left their home almost immediately to go on the run, and they had remained on the run for more than a year. Finally, shortly before Amaranth's first birthday, Dumbledore brought forward the idea using something called the "Fidelius Charm". It would allow them to remain in one place to raise their daughter, and they would not have to be constantly looking over their shoulders.

They agreed, and told everyone that they were choosing James' best friend, and Amaranth's godfather, Sirius Black, as the Secret-Keeper.

Just before they were ready to do the spell, Sirius came to them and recommended a different course of action. Instead of using him as the Secret-Keeper, they would use Peter Pettigrew, but not tell anyone. That way, Voldemort would only think to target Sirius, and Peter and the Potters would be safe.

It had been the perfect plan, Lily thought as she ran up the stairs. Except for the fact that Peter – sweet, shy Peter – was the spy who had been leaking information to Voldemort.

From below her, she heard Voldemort yell, "Avada Kedavra!"

She felt tears began to fall down her cheeks as she heard the thump that was her husband's body hitting the floor.

She quickly made her way into the nursery and placed her daughter within her crib.
"I love you, Amaranth," she said, tears choking her up. "Mummy and Daddy love you very much, and we're so very sorry that we're not going to be able to see you grow up."

She closed her eyes, took a deep breath, and invoked, "Zeus Olympios, O Great God Zeus, ruler of the heavens and earth, son of Kronos, son of Rhea, come to me. Lord of Thunderbolts, I invoke thee, Great God Zeus. I am Lily Potter, and my child is yours also. She is going to be killed. I offer my life as a blood sacrifice for hers. Please, protect my daughter."

She heard footsteps behind her, and whirled around to see Voldemort entering the room, wand out and pointed at her.

"Step aside," he ordered her.

"Not Amy! Please…have mercy…" she begged, hands clutching the railing of the crib behind her.

"Step aside, you foolish girl," Voldemort hissed. "Step aside!"

"Have mercy…Not Amy! Not Amy! Please – I'll do anything!" Lily pleaded.

Voldemort sneered.

"Then die! Avada Kedavra!"

A green light rushed toward her, then Lily Potter knew no more.

CHRYSOCOMÈKATAKATHONIA

Voldemort pushed the mudblood's body out of the way with his foot, the moved forward to look at the child prophesied to be his doom.

"Pitiful," he sneered as he took in the jet-black curls and emerald green eyes. "Such a little thing is supposed to be able to oppose me? ME? I am starting to believe that the supposed "Seer" was merely a drunkard. But no matter. You will not be a problem any longer."

He pointed his wand at the babe, and called out, "Avada Kedavra!"

Before the spell could reach the child, the image of lightning appeared before her. The spell struck the lightning, and while part of it was pushed back against the babe's brow, causing her to cry out, even as the rest of the spell reflected on him, turning his body to dust.

The last thing he saw before his spirit was forced out of the house was the inflamed cut in the shape of a lightning bolt on the child's forehead.

Chapter End Notes

So...this was short. Really short. I promise that everything else is at least twice this length.

Originally, this was the prologue to the "Amaranth Potter" part of the story, which would alternate chapters with the Chrysa plotline. It's still the prologue to the Amaranth Potter plot, but I don't actually have any interest in writing the Amaranth Potter plot, so...I won't. The next chapter is the SparkNotes version of the Amaranth Potter plot, which is mostly similar to the actual Harry Potter plot.
Chapter Summary

The SparkNotes version of the Amaranth Potter version of the Harry Potter books

Chapter Notes

Because I don't really feel like writing it out. So this is the SparkNotes version. If I don't say it, assume it happened as it did in canon. Sorry if the wording is sometimes weird, I pretty much just copy/pasted this from my timeline notes. Once I get through this, we get to the real story. At one point I was going to actually write it, at one point I was going to leave it out entirely, so I decided on the happy medium of summarizing. Honestly, third year and fourth year are the longest sections. I may eventually write some of this and post it separately.

Amaranth Potter and the Philosopher's Stone

Dumbledore left Amaranth Potter – known to the Wizarding World as Amy Potter, the Girl-Who-Lived – with the Dursleys. They mistreat her, but whenever they attempt to physically abuse her, they receive electric shocks. Amaranth grows up loving heights, and the one time she accidentally Apparates onto the roof of the school is not the only time she ends up there, it's just the only time she's caught. She still lives in the cupboard-under-the-stairs and cooks for the Dursleys. She does not garden, as she has the opposite of a green thumb.

Hagrid delivers her letter to her directly on the Hut-on-the-Rock-by-the-Sea. She immediately informs Hagrid that she prefers "Amaranth" to "Amy". He takes her to Diagon Alley the next morning. As a birthday present, Hagrid buys her a Madagascan serpent eagle that she names "Hedwig". She picks Hedwig as her eagle because she can understand Hedwig when she speaks. Hedwig addresses her as "Little Lady".

She becomes friends with Ron and Hermione on the train, and is Sorted into Gryffindor. She joins the Quidditch team during their first flying lesson. She is able to subconsciously manipulate the winds to aid her while flying. She still absolutely adores flying. When Quirrell tries to knock her off her broom, she uses the winds to give herself a boost back onto her broom.

During the troll incident, it is Amaranth who directs the troll's club with her wind powers to save Hermione, who had cried there after being insulted by Draco Malfoy.

In the Mirror of Erised, she sees the Evans family, which she recognizes from photo albums Petunia Dursley keeps in the attic; James Potter, Sirius Black, Remus Lupin, and the Olympians, most prominently Zeus and Hades. She also clearly sees Metis, Amphitrite, Nico, Bianca, and Thalia, though she doesn't know who they are.
When Norbert the Dragon hatches, Amaranth is just as entranced as Hagrid. Norbert listens to Amaranth and half-considers her his "mother".

When facing down Voldemort and Quirrell, Amaranth destroys them with the electrifying protection granted to her by her father and her mother's blood sacrifice.

**Amaranth Potter and the Chamber of Secrets**

Starts pretty much the same as canon.

Due to the barrier closing, Amaranth and Ron cannot get through. Through Ron suggests they take the flying car, Amaranth instead recommends they wait for the Weasleys to come back. Mr. and Mrs. Weasley eventually find them and take them back to the Burrow. While Mrs. Weasley feeds them lunch, Mr. Weasley Floos Hogwarts to inform Professor McGonagall of what has happened. They go through the Floo to Hogwarts that evening and arrive in time for the Welcoming Feast.

Lockhart assigns Amaranth multiple detentions for various inane reasons. He makes sexual advances towards her in the detentions, before raping her on Halloween.

Other than Lockhart continuing to rape Amaranth throughout the school year, the school year proceeds canonically. Ron, Amaranth, and Lockhart go into the Chamber of Secrets. Lockhart is Obliviated while trying to Obliviate Ron and Amaranth. Amaranth defeats the basilisk with the aid of Fawkes and the Sword of Gryffindor. The basilisk is really a drakon.

A week after Amaranth returns to the Dursleys', Ron attempts to call her over the telephone. It goes badly, and Vernon is angry enough that he rapes Amaranth afterwards. He calls her a whore since she was not a virgin and continues to rape her for the rest of the summer.

**Amaranth Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban**

Starts pretty much the same as canon, but Amaranth is taking Arithmancy and Runes instead of Divination. She is still taking Care.

On the train, Amaranth, Ron, and Hermione sit with Professor Lupin. Due to what happened with the last professor, Amaranth makes sure that Ron is sitting between her and him. As the train approaches Hogwarts, it stops, and a Dementor enters the compartment. Professor Lupin drives it back, but Amaranth faints. She hears "Avada Kedavra!" and sees a green light that is intercepted by a lightning bolt as she hears thunder.

During their first Care of Magical Creatures class, Amaranth instantly bonds with the hippogriff (being part eagle, they recognize her as their lady). She is able to save Malfoy from being mauled by Buckbeak, though she herself is injured when the creature's talons rip through her back. She is used to pain, and proceeds to slap Malfoy and give him a five-minute tongue-lashing before allowing Hermione and Ron to take her to the nurse. Buckbeak is very apologetic.

Professor Lupin does not allow Amaranth to face the boggart in DADA, but she stays after so she can try it. Ron and Hermione do not stay. Her biggest fear looks like a cross between Gilderoy Lockhart and Uncle Vernon, and says sexually demeaning things to her. Amaranth is petrified, and is unable to cast the *Riddikulus* spell. Professor Lupin defeats the Boggart, then gently asks her if either
of the men had followed through with their threats. Amaranth is too worried to answer another man. Professor Lupin tells her that he was a friend of James and Lily's, and he would never do anything to hurt their baby girl. He saw her as a daughter figure. She is still unsure. Lupin takes out his wand and swears a magical oath that he will never make any sexual advances towards her, and he will do his very best to protect her from any more unwanted sexual advances. Over tea, she slowly admits everything that happened over the past year, between Lockhart and her uncle. Remus gently hugs her and promises to help her. He asks if she would be willing to go to McGonagall or Pomfrey, but she refuses at that time. After that, they begin regular tea-and-talks.

Fred and George give Amaranth the Marauder's Map. She recognizes the names, as Remus had told her about the Marauders, though not their identities. She sneaks into Hogsmeade under her Invisibility Cloak and hears the story of Sirius Black's double-cross from McGonagall. She storms back into Hogwarts and confronts Remus about it. He confirms the story, then apologizes to her for not telling her. He did not want to overshadow their time together with death and betrayal. Lupin warns Amaranth not to sneak out to Hogsmeade without telling him she is doing so, as it's not safe for her to go.

After the Gryffindor-Ravenclaw match, Lupin and Amaranth go to McGonagall, and Amaranth shakily admits that Lockhart sexually abused her the entire previous school year. She also admits that her uncle continued the abuse over the summer. McGonagall takes the Lockhart case to Dumbledore, and agrees to keep the Vernon Dursley part quiet for the moment. McGonagall makes an announcement at dinner that a student has come forward admitting to be a victim of sexual abuse at the hands of Gilderoy Lockhart. She urges anyone else that was a victim to come to either her or their head of house so that they can receive justice. Second-year Luna Lovegood comes forward as one of Lockhart's victims, and she and Amaranth become friends.

Ronald Weasley hears Trelawney make her second true prediction during his Divination exam. That night, Sirius kidnaps Ron and Scabbers, and is followed by Hermione and Amaranth. Amaranth nearly electrocutes him to death, but is stopped by Lupin, who saw Pettigrew on the map. The real story comes out about Pettigrew and Sirius. Sirius offers to let Amaranth live with him once he's cleared. After checking with Remus, she agrees. Amaranth realizes that it's the full moon and Remus hasn't taken his potion. She stuns Pettigrew, has Sirius force him back into his rat form, and has Remus transfigure an Unbreakable jar. She shoves the rat inside, and has carries him while she Levitates Ron and Hermione Levitates Snape. They go down the tunnel and leave Lupin to transform in the Shrieking Shack with Sirius in his Animagus form. They take Ron and Snape to the Hospital Wing, then go straight to Dumbledore's office, where Cornelius Fudge still is. They tell their story, with the rat as proof, and Fudge immediately rescinds the Kiss-on-Sight order for Sirius. He takes the rat to Amelia Bones directly, and the DMLE gets the whole story out of him. Sirius turns himself in at the request of the DMLE.

The Hogwarts Express goes back to London. Amaranth is picked up at the train station by Sirius (who has been freed), Remus, and McGonagall. They take her directly to the Little Whinging train station, so Amaranth can give her in-person report about her abuse at the hands of Vernon Dursley. During the questioning, she also admits to physical abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect at the hands of Vernon and Petunia Dursley. The social worker advises that she be removed from their care immediately. Sirius steps up and says that he is her godfather, and he had just started the process of trying to reclaim custody of her after being wrongfully imprisoned. The social worker signs her over to Sirius's custody. She, Sirius, and Remus are staying at a high-end hotel for a few days while they find a proper house. Vernon and Petunia Dursley are arrested. When police try to take Dudley to Marge Dursley, they arrest her as well for cruelty to animals. Dudley goes into foster care. Sirius, Remus, and Amaranth move into Black Manor.

Amaranth Potter and the Goblet of Fire
Amaranth has her fourteenth birthday. She has a birthday party attended by the Weasleys, the other Gryffindors in her year, Luna Lovegood, Sirius, Remus, Sirius's favorite cousin Andromeda, her husband Ted, and her daughter Nymphadora. Dora brings along Alastor Moody, a former Auror who knew her parents and was James's Auror trainer as well as Dora's. He tells her stories of James. Later that night, Sirius tells Amaranth that James was not her biological father, though he did blood-adopt her. He told her that her parents got very, very drunk on their honeymoon and had a threesome with a man called Meallán Bolt, which is how Amaranth was conceived. He assures her that neither he nor James nor Remus ever loved her any less for not being James's biological daughter.

Amaranth sees Voldemort kill Frank Bryce in a vision and wakes very early. She goes and wakes up Sirius, and tells him what happened. Later that day, Amaranth visits the Weasleys' house to spend the day with them.

The Weasleys, Hermione, Sirius, Remus, and Amaranth go to the Quidditch World Cup. They all have seats for the Top Box. They are sharing a campsite, with Amaranth, Hermione, and Ginny in one tent, and the males in the other. They enjoy the World Cup, meet Viktor Krum, and Sirius decides to invest in the twins' joke shop, with the condition that they finish Hogwarts before opening up a storefront. That night, there is a riot with Death Eaters. Sirius sends Amaranth and the other children to Black Manor using their emergency portkeys. It is later discovered that it was Ron's wand used to cast the Dark Mark, though he obviously did not do it, as he was at Black Manor at the time.

When the Gryffindors have their first DADA lesson with Moody, he teaches the Unforgiveable Curses. Amaranth takes Neville out of the class after giving a sharp warning to Moody that he should have warned that potentially traumatic materials were being taught, and asked if he had permission from the students' guardians to teach them such things. Hermione founds SPEW.

Amaranth's name comes out of the Goblet of Fire. Amaranth pulls out her wand in front of everyone and swears a magical oath that she did not willingly enter the Triwizard Tournament, and that she was entered against her will. When she goes into the side room, she demands that Dumbledore summon Sirius and Remus. McGonagall does so for her. After much debate, it is determined that she cannot be removed from the Tournament. When Rita Skeeter tries to do an article on Amaranth at the Weighing of the Wands, she is forced to interview her with Sirius present, and is warned that the Black family lawyers are on call.

When Hagrid shows Amaranth the dragons, the dragons notice her, even with the Invisibility Cloak, and instantly fall in love with her. Amaranth tells Sirius and Remus that the task is dragons. Amaranth flies against the Hungarian Horntail. She starts the event by telling the dragon what is going on, and that it is a fake egg she is after, and then asks her to help her make it look good. Amaranth receives top points.

Cedric Diggory writes to Sirius asking permission to take Amaranth to the Yule Ball. After discreetly querying Amaranth, Sirius gives Cedric permission to ask Amaranth to the Yule Ball. Amaranth agrees to go with Cedric to the Yule Ball. For the ball, Amaranth receives a gorgeous ball gown and jewelry. The gown is scarlet with silver accents. The jewelry includes a necklace, earrings, and tiara, all in silver with embedded rubies.

When Professor Grubbly-Plank tries to teach about unicorns in the new year, Amaranth refuses to go near them, as they will know she is not a virgin.

Cedric gives Amaranth a clue to the egg. She sees Crouch in Moody's office on the Map. She tells Sirius and Remus about it. She also tells them that she needs to know some way to breathe.
underwater. Sirius and Remus tell her about gillyweed and promise to get her some.

Amaranth brings in the Dark Detector Moody gave her for her birthday to class to ask Moody what it specifically does. He tells her, then asks who gave it to her. She tells him that Sirius did, then goes straight to McGonagall. McGonagall recruits Flitwick and Snape to go with her to confront Moody. He is defeated, revealed to be Bartemius Crouch, Jr., and the real Moody is rescued. Defense class is cancelled for the next week. Sirius Black is then introduced as the new DADA professor.

Amaranth uses the gillyweed to dive into the lake and rescue Sirius. She is unwilling to leave any of the hostages down there, so she waits. Cedric refuses to leave her down there, so he waits with her until Krum takes his hostage and it is obvious that Fleur is not coming. They go up together with Sirius, Mrs. Diggory, and Gabrielle Delacour. Due to their "moral fiber", they are given extra points, leaving Amaranth in first place and Cedric tying with Krum.

Rita publishes an article in Witch Weekly about Gilderoy Lockhart, and specifically names Amaranth as one of his victims. Amaranth hides in Sirius's rooms all day. When Amaranth is finally convinced to leave Sirius' rooms, she receives her first mail about the incident, mostly sympathetic letters, though there are some that call her a whore and accuse her of "defaming the name of a good man". She goes back to hide in Sirius's rooms for another couple days. The teachers let her. Cedric goes to Sirius, since he still can't find Amaranth, and asks him to tell her that he still loves her and what happened to her was not her fault, and he doesn't blame her for anything. She is listening, and steps out to talk to him. Their talk helps Amaranth to come out of hiding.

When Bagman tells the Champions what the first task is, Krum asks to speak with Amaranth, but Cedric won't let her go alone. Crouch, Sr. appears on the grounds, apparently insane. Amaranth stuns him and levitates him to the Hospital Wing, guarded by Krum and Cedric.

During the third task, Voldemort is resurrected and Amaranth watches her boyfriend die.

When the Hogwarts Express returns to London, Amaranth is picked up by Sirius, Remus, Tonks, and Moody, who escort her to the newly Fidelius-ed Grimmauld Place for her protection. She is informed that the Weasleys will be there in a few days.

**Amaranth Potter and the Order of the Phoenix**

Starts with everyone at Grimmauld Place. Ron and Hermione are the prefects. Sirius is still the DADA professor. There is no dementor incident.

At the Welcome Feast, Dolores Umbridge is introduced as Ministerial oversight. She gives Amaranth detention in the first DADA class for claiming that Voldemort has returned. Amaranth has her first detention with Umbridge, who uses a blood quill on her. She goes straight to Sirius, who goes straight to the woman and threatens her if she ever uses a blood quill on a student again. Sirius sends copies of the evidence to Remus, along with a letter from himself to send to Amelia Bones if things get bad. Umbridge cancels the rest of Amaranth's detentions.

The Gryffindor Quidditch team has Quidditch tryouts. Ron becomes the Gryffindor Keeper. Ginny is selected as the reserve Chaser/Seeker.

At the suggestion of both Hermione and Sirius, who cannot fully teach DADA due to Umbridge, Amaranth agrees to teach a Defense study group.

The Gryffindor-Slytherin Quidditch match occurs. Amaranth catches the Snitch, preventing Ron's
mistakes from being too embarrassing. Fred and George are banned from Quidditch by Umbridge. Umbridge tries to ban Amaranth, but all she did was insult Malfoy, as he did her.

Amaranth dreams about Mr. Weasley being attacked by Nagini. Hermione informs McGonagall, who sends the Weasleys and Amaranth to Remus at Grimmauld Place.

Amaranth, Hermione, and the Weasleys visit Mr. Weasley in St. Mungo's. Amaranth, Hermione, Ron, and Ginny see Neville and the Longbottoms there. They also see Lockhart, who calls Amaranth "pretty girl", which causes a panic attack, as that was what he called her when he raped her.

Amaranth narrowly wins the Gryffindor-Hufflepuff Quidditch game (250-240).

The Defense Association is discovered. Instead of Amaranth being expelled, Sirius withdraws her from Hogwarts. He takes her back to Remus at Grimmauld Place. Tonks is also living there, as it is safer than her flat. Sirius continues as the Defense teacher.

Fred and George set off Weasleys' Wildfire Whiz-Bangs. The prank attack on Umbridge begins, aided and abetted by Sirius, Remus, and Amaranth. Remus and Amaranth spend a good portion of their tutoring time coming up with new pranks, which are then distributed to member of the DA through Sirius.

When Amaranth returns to Hogwarts for her OWLs, much to the delight of the school, she stays in Sirius' spare bedroom.

Amaranth has a vision of Voldemort at the Department of Mysteries. She tells Sirius, who tells Dumbledore, who sends the Order. Sirius and Remus escort Amaranth through as well, so that she can take the Prophecy. They are caught up in the fighting. Amaranth watches as Bellatrix sends Tonks through the Veil. Amaranth duels Bellatrix, then Voldemort, who attempts to possess her, but is driven off by her "electric personality". Dumbledore duels Voldemort away, but the Ministry sees that he has returned. Dumbledore explains the prophecy to Sirius, Remus, and Amaranth, while Fudge announces the return of Voldemort.

When they return to Grimmauld Place after the school year is over, they learn that Ted and Andromeda Tonks have joined the Order. Andromeda is the spitting image of her sister, Bellatrix Lestrange. Andromeda and Ted have sworn to avenge their daughter.

**Amaranth Potter and the Half-Blood Prince**

Amaranth has her sixteenth birthday party at the Burrow. Fred kisses her for the first time.

Amaranth acquires the potions book formerly owned by the "Half-Blood Prince". She tells Sirius and Remus about it. They tell her that Severus Snape is the Half-Blood Prince, and advise her to copy the instructions in the book, then return it to Snape. Amaranth does so.

Fred Weasley escorts Amaranth to Slughorn's Christmas party. Everyone spends Christmas at Grimmauld Place, with the exception of Christmas dinner, which is done at the Burrow. During Christmas dinner at the Burrow, Percy and Scrimgeour arrive so the Scrimgeour can try to convince Amaranth to support the Ministry. She refuses to speak with him without Sirius present, and refuses to support the Ministry until they conduct fair trials under Veritaserum.

Snape kills Dumbledore. Amaranth breaks up with Fred for his own protection. Hermione and Ron
pledge to go with her on her Horcrux quest. The Hogwarts Express returns to London from Hogsmeade. The Weasleys, Hermione, and Amaranth go to Grimmauld Place.

**Amaranth Potter and the Deathly Hallows**

Sirius Black and Remus Lupin get married.

Mad-Eye Moody is killed in a skirmish with Death Eaters. The Battle of the Seven Potters doesn't happen, so Hedwig lives. Everyone transfers to the Burrow in preparation for Bill and Fleur's wedding.

The trio have dinner with the Order. They inform the Order that Dumbledore gave Amaranth a task from Dumbledore that will help defeat Voldemort, but secrecy is their best helper. After dinner, Sirius and Remus inform Amaranth that Sirius is pregnant, and they are going to move back to Black Manor for the duration of the pregnancy, leaving Grimmauld Place to her if she needs a safe spot.

The trio goes to Godric's Hollow. They visit James and Lily's graves and visit Bathilda Bagshot, who is actually Nagini. They escape, but Amaranth's wand breaks. Thankfully, due to Sirius and Remus, she has a backup, though it does not work quite as well for her. The trio relocates to the Forest of Dean. Amaranth follows a silver doe to find Gryffindor's sword in a frozen lake. She nearly drowns, even though she cannot drown, but Ron saves her and destroys the locket Horcrux.

Edward Remus Lupin-Black is born. Amaranth is named godmother.

Amaranth, Hermione, Ron, and Griphook break into Gringotts. They steal Hufflepuff's Cup, lose Gryffindor's Sword, and escape on the back of a dragon. They return to Hogsmeade, the Hog's Head, and Hogwarts. Hogwarts prepares for battle. Hermione and Ron destroy Hufflepuff's cup while Amaranth looks for Ravenclaw's Diadem.

The Battle of Hogwarts begins at midnight. The Diadem and Crabbe die in Crabbe's Fiendfyre. Amaranth watches Fred die when a wall explodes. Andromeda sacrifices her life to save Sirius. Amaranth becomes Master of the Hallows and is killed by Voldemort. She meets Thanatos, who informs her that there are other conditions that he will relate to her after she has defeated Voldemort concerning her Mastery of the Hallows. Amaranth returns to life. Neville kills Nagini. Sirius kills Bellatrix Lestrang. Amaranth destroys Voldemort. Amaranth meets Thanatos and Persephone in her dreams. They explain to her that becoming Master of the Hallows shows that she is the destined companion and second consort of Hades, Lord of the Underworld, to keep him company during the summer months. They also tell her that she is the daughter of Zeus and a great-granddaughter of Poseidon. They then discuss Camp Half-Blood, the Great Prophecy that she is now ineligible for, and the Pact of the Big Three.

Amaranth returns with Sirius to Black Manor, where she reunites with Remus and meets Teddy for the first time. She explains the true story of her divine heritage. She also explains that she accidentally became the consort of a god the same day her boyfriend died.

Amaranth meets Persephone in person for the first time. They get along famously. Amaranth decides to use her Greek name, Chrysocomê, while interacting with the divine world. Persephone nicknames her "Chrysa".

Amaranth moves from Potter Manor in England to an upscale apartment building she owns in New York City. She has the penthouse.
When Zeus realized his Master Bolt was missing the morning after the Winter Solstice, his first response was to summon his children to look for it. Apollo, Artemis, Athena, and Ares were sent out, though the rest of the gods were instructed to keep an eye out for it anyway. After the temper tantrum Zeus had thrown, everyone on Olympus knew about the Master Bolt.

When his godly children returned and reported the there was no sign of the Master Bolt, Zeus’ next response was to blame his brothers, Poseidon more so than Hades, as Poseidon had actually been present for the night the Bolt went missing. The God of the Underworld had not bothered to stay for the winter solstice this year. He had made a perfunctory appearance during the Council meeting, but he had not stayed long. Hades was not above suspicion, however, so Zeus summoned the only person that he had power over with a connection to the Underworld.

“You wanted to see me, Father?” Chrysa Potter asked.

Chapter Notes

And so the real plot begins!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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"You wanted to see me, Father?" Chrysa Potter asked as she entered the room, her emerald green robes showing exactly where she had been when she received Zeus' letter.

The king of the gods drank in the sight of his demigod daughter, the oldest he had still alive. Chrysa was just as beautiful as any of his godly daughters, with long black hair and stunning emerald eyes that stood out against her pale skin. Though she did not have the same death-like pallor that Hades had, she was still far paler than normal, due to spending the winter months inside and the summer months in the Underworld. Zeus and his siblings often noted how much the demigoddess was coming to resemble Leuke, her previous incarnation, the older she became. She did not age due to
Thanatos' patronage, but she still changed slightly as the years passed.

"Yes, Chrysocomê," Zeus said with a nod, his voice gentler than it would be with anyone but Artemis.

The young woman looked like she was barely resisting rolling her eyes.

"It's Chrysa, Father. I'm only Chrysocomê in official situations between the months of March and September. And it's still December."

Zeus sighed.

"As you wish, daughter. I will cut straight to the point. My Master Bolt has been stolen…"

"And the immediate suspects are your brothers, so you want me to find out whether Hades took the Master Bolt," Chrysa deduced.

Zeus nodded, not even caring that she had interrupted him. He favored her too much for that.

Chrysa sighed.

"Fine. I'll ask Hades if he has it. And then I'll ask Persephone if I think he's lying. Give me an hour or so to talk to them both. I just know that I'll somehow get roped into doing some of the paperwork while I'm down there. How do you feel about meeting at that Thai place on East Twenty-eighth street? I haven't had lunch yet."

"I will meet you there," Zeus promised.

Chrysa bowed to her father and stepped away into the shadows, which came up to cover her as she disappeared.

"Her powers grow stronger," a voice came from behind him. "Leuke returns to us at last."

Zeus did not turn as his eldest sister came to stand beside him.

"I lose my daughter to Leuke," Zeus said quietly. "For once she fully remembers herself as Leuke, she will no longer think of me as her father, but as the child she raised to rescue his siblings and overthrow his father."

"You will always be her father," Hestia soothed, laying a calming hand on Zeus' arm. "She was born as Chrysa Potter, and her hold on this life will be strong. That does not mean that either of her other lives will be less important; nay, she has strong ties to them as well. Her children from when she was Maria in the next life. She died for those children, brother."

"You mean I killed her because of those children," Zeus said glumly. "She is not likely to forgive that."

"She already has," Hestia said calmly. Zeus looked at her in shock. Hestia explained, "The first thing she remembered was her death as Maria di Angelo. She knew then that the god who killed her in her second life was her father in the third. She had difficulty with that, for a bit, but she has long since forgiven you. Though perhaps an oath on the Styx not to harm her children, from any life, would not be amiss and would greatly soothe her nerves in regards to you."

"I will think on that," Zeus said softly. The siblings were silent for a long moment, until Zeus asked, "What ties her to Leuke?"
"Nowadays? Very little. Leuke and Hades' only child was born after her death, the world is greatly
changed from when Leuke died, and the Council is completely changed from when Leuke sat upon
it. She and her sisters are no longer on it; Metis is no longer with us, and Amphitrite rarely leaves
Atlantis. She is more inheriting Leuke's domain than she is becoming Leuke herself. You will still
have your daughter, little brother," Hestia said, embracing Zeus and turning to leave.

Just before she stepped back into the fire, Hestia turned and said with a slight smile, "You may wish
to slightly wary though. The more of Leuke's memories Chrysa gains, the more of Leuke's stash of
blackmail material she gains. And Hecate's Blessed have a spell that allows them to turn memories
into photographs."

Zeus groaned at the reminder, before transporting himself to the Thai place Chrysa liked so he could
get a table.

The staff at Jaiya seemed surprised to see him.

"Mr. Bolt!" the hostess greeted. "We weren't expecting you for another week! Table for two, I
presume?"

"Yes," Zeus said smoothly. "My daughter will be joining me shortly."

"Your usual drinks, sir?" the hostess asked as she led Zeus to his usual table.

"Please," the sky god said.

The hostess smiled politely and left to place the order with the bartender.

Just after the waitress brought their drinks, a scotch for Zeus and a Dr. Pepper for his daughter, he
felt the aura of both his daughter and his brother enter the restaurant.

He caught the waitress's arm as she walked past.

"Excuse me, but would it be possible to change to a different table? My daughter is apparently
bringing her beau with her to lunch, and I would prefer to be at a larger table."

"Of course, Mr. Bolt," the waitress said with a nod and a smile. "Let me get your drinks, and I'll
move you right now. Do you happen to know the drink preference of Miss Bolt's escort?"

"I am unsure what he will wish for at the moment," Zeus replied evenly, even as he took his seat on
one side of the square table.

A moment later, Chrysa came around the corner on Hades' arm. Zeus rose to greet them.

"Father! I hope you don't mind that I brought my boyfriend with me, but I really do think that you
need to talk to him," Chrysa said as she embraced her father.

Zeus returned the embrace warmly, noting Hades' raised eyebrows at the public display of affection
between father and daughter.

"As you say, darling," Zeus replied, releasing his daughter. He nodded coolly towards his brother.
"Hades."

"Zeus," Hades replied, equally cool.

"Both of you, behave!" Chrysa scolded as she sat down at an angle to her father. She dragged Hades
into the seat across from Zeus.
The waitress from before chose that moment to show up.

"Hello, Angela," Chrysa greeted.

"Good afternoon, Miss Bolt," the waitress – Angela – replied. "It's a pleasure to see you again so soon. Is this your boyfriend?"

"Indeed I am," Hades said in his deep voice, reaching out a hand to lay atop Chrysa's clasped ones.

"This is Mr. Mortimer d'Arque," Chrysa introduced.

"Would you care to take a look at our drink menu, Mr. d'Arque?" Angela asked.

"Water, please. With lime," Hades replied.

"Certainly, sir," the waitress replied as she left.

Zeus gave his brother a look.

"Mortimer Dark? Really?"

"It's, d'ARK, not DARK, Zeus, do keep up," Hades replied snidely.

"What did I say about behaving?" Chrysa asked warningly.

Both men wisely shut up.

"Now," Chrysa continued calmly. "You are both here because of what happened on the Winter Solstice. Father's Master Bolt was stolen. Hades' Helm of Darkness was stolen."

Zeus' head jerked towards his brother.

"Your Helm was stolen?" he asked incredulously.

"Yes," Hades replied irritably. "And keep it down! Unlike you, I do not plan on broadcasting the fact that my symbol of power is missing."

"With both of our symbols of power missing, Poseidon is the main suspect," Zeus said. "And I believe that he has a son. Chiron has been personally observing an exceptionally powerful demigod since September. He could very well be Poseidon's son."

"We should act imme –" Hades began, only to be cut off by Chrysa.

"We should not act rashly. Send Alecto to begin as a teacher at the boy's school for the spring semester. How old is this boy, Father?"

"Twelve," Zeus replied. "His name is Perseus Jackson."

Chrysa snorted.

"Well, that's a giveaway that he's a demigod. No one uses ancient Greek to name their children unless they're demigods. That's how I got my name, after all. Mortal parents give their children such names so that they can "connect with their heritage", not realizing that they're basically putting up a giant flashing sign that says, 'I'm a demigod! Come kill me!'"

"Says the woman who named her daughter 'white' and 'life' and her son 'victory of the people' and
'savior',” Zeus pointed out.

Chrysa pointed a fork at him. "Not Ancient Greek names. They don't count. Not even Italian versions of Ancient Greek names, though I did consider Achille and Cesare for my son's middle name."

"What do you propose Alecto do?" Hades asked her, changing the subject.

"Watch the boy. If the opportunity comes up where she can separate him from Chiron and whoever his satyr is, confront him. But she must summon me when she does so, in order that I may observe. If he's lucky, Alecto will take the fast route back to the Underworld. If he's unlucky, we'll have full authority to interrogate him. If he does survive, Chiron and the satyr will whisk him off to Camp Half-Blood as soon as possible. Once he's at Camp Half-Blood, I'll have full access to him." She turned to look at Hades. "Sorry, dear, it looks like I'll be abandoning you for a few weeks."

Hades leaned over to her and kissed her chastely.

"I'll miss you, just as I always miss you. I'll be fine. I'll drown myself in paperwork."

Chrysa laughed.

"That's the spirit!"

"Brother, please do not kiss my daughter in front of me," Zeus said stiffly. "While I am aware of your relationship, I prefer to pretend that it does not exist. Indulge me."

Hades looked towards Chrysa, who nodded.

"It's the least we can do," she shrugged. "He hasn't tried to forbid us from seeing each other. He's actually been very good about the whole thing, though that's probably because he knows that I remember what he looked like in diapers."

"How far have you gotten back, anyway?" Zeus asked.

"I'm nearing the beginning of my time on Mount Othrys," Chrysa replied. "It's amazing, looking back at it, how much Kronos trusted me with. It also shocks me how...ruthless I was. I didn't even flinch when Kronos retold the story of how he killed Ouranos. I wasn't fearful, horrified, or sympathetic. I was...annoyed...that I hadn't been called to join," she admitted. "If Grandmother had asked me, I would have done the job myself."

"We did know Leuke," Zeus said carefully. "We do know her...dark side."

"Darling, all of our domains have a dark side. For me, it is the fact that I govern the Fields of Punishment alongside Elysium. For Zeus, it is that justice causes death as much as order. For Ares, it is the bloodlust he loses himself to. For Aphrodite, it is the sexual lust she inspires. Your dark side just happens to be a bit darker than most," Hades said comfortingly.

"Considering I'm a goddess of darkness, I suppose it's only to be expected that my dark side is darker than most. After all, I was raised by Darkness and Night themselves. Compassion for lesser beings wasn't exactly promoted in the House of Night," Chrysa replied with a sigh. "Even though I don't remember it yet, I know what lessons I was taught there."

"You weren't entirely awful," Zeus pointed out. "You always did your best to help your sisters and mine, especially Hera."
Zeus' wife and demigod daughter had an...interesting relationship, to say the least. On one hand, Zeus had cheated on Hera in order to bring about Chrysa's conception. On the other hand, Chrysa was the reincarnation of Leuke, a woman Hera had greatly admired growing up, a woman whom she had considered family. In the end, Hera treated Chrysa differently than she did Leuke, but with nowhere near the hostility shown to Thalia, Heracles, and even Hermes, Apollo, and Artemis. In some ways, Hera acted as a maternal figure for Chrysa, and occasionally came along on their monthly "family outings". Still, the pair were remarkably close, and grew closer with each new thing Chrysa remembered about their previous relationship.

"I was still mad at you for what happened to Metis," Chrysa replied drily. "I was keeping an eye on Hera to make sure she didn't end up like Rhea."

"So are we in agreement then?" Hades asked, changing the subject before it could get heated. "Do nothing but observe and search discreetly for the moment, and have Alecto and Chrysa spy on the boy?"

"And preferably not completely screwing with the weather because you're arguing with Poseidon, Father," Chrysa put in. "At least try to keep it calm until late March. I'd like to get a bit of sun instead of a constant thunderstorm."


"I assume you ordered food for us in order to convince us to stay?" Zeus asked drily.

"You would have stayed, Father. You like Jaiya too much. But Hades would not have stayed since you were staying, and if I tried to convince him to stay, you would leave. Now you are both staying and eating lunch with me without threatening or insulting each other. Off-limits topics include my relationships with the two of you, this robbery mess, Persephone, the di Angelos, and Thalia."

Hades looked towards his brother.

"Is this how all of your dinners go?"

"Usually," Zeus admitted. "Though there's usually fewer restrictions. It prevents us from arguing. Not yours?"

"We avoid controversial topics over dinner. We argue about them at other times," Hades replied.

"What all do you know about this possible son of Poseidon's?"

"His name is Perseus Richard Jackson. He attends boarding school at Yancy Academy in upstate New York. That is his sixth school in six years. When not in school, he lives with his mother, Sally Jackson, and her husband, Gabriel Ugliano. Sally Jackson works at the candy store "Sweet on America". Gabriel Ugliano is the manager at an electronics mega mart. Gabriel Ugliano appears to
be abusive towards Sally Jackson. They live in an apartment in the Upper East Side. Perseus appears to go by the name "Percy", and has ADHD and dyslexia, as is typical for demigods."

"I am so very glad that my magic corrected the dyslexia," Chrysa said. "School was bad enough without being unable to read and write properly. I would have never passed my OWLs and NEWTs."

"Didn't you mention the other day that you were considering attending mortal college, daughter?" Zeus asked.

"I have been considering it, yes," Chrysa admitted, glancing at Hades. "I would not live on campus, so I shouldn't miss too much of our time together when the school year overlaps."

"I know how much you've wanted something else to do with your time, dearest," Hades said, taking Chrysa's hand tenderly. "I could never object to anything that makes you happy. Especially if you're only gone for classes and still spend the rest of your time during the spring and summer months with me."

Chrysa pressed a quick, chaste kiss to Hades' cheek.

"Thank you, darling. I really have been wishing for something else to do with my time. Certainly, I have my Wizengamot meetings, and the political balls and dinners, as well as the guest-speaking I do at Hogwarts, along with babysitting the newest generation of Weasleys, and helping George and Ron in the shop, spending time at Camp Half-Blood…"

"Why do you want more to do again?" Zeus asked.

"All of those things are short-term. Nothing takes more than a few hours. Besides, I want to be able to establish a presence in the Muggle world in case I ever end up there again. For example, if Hades and I have children, then they will be demigods. I can't just drag any children we might have all around the world like I'm living now. Short visits into the Wizarding World, yes. This constant movement that I seem to have adopted during the winter months? No. Children need stability. Demigod children need stability in the mortal world. For that, I need to exist in the mortal world. Papers are easily snapped up, but I want to have credentials to back up anything I snap up. I've been catching up on my mortal education through secondary school with the help of private tutoring, so I'm certain I will be prepared to begin college classes," Chrysa explained.

"When have you had the time to find a private tutor?" Hades asked.

"I borrowed some dead people," Chrysa replied nonchalantly, as if it explained everything. Hades seemed to accept that. Zeus did not.

"They listen to you?" he exclaimed.

Chrysa raised an eyebrow at him.

"I am the legally recognized Lady Regnant of the Underworld. I'm not Seph. She is the Queen Consort. Our original bond named me as the equal ruler of the Underworld alongside Hades. However, I was never named Queen, so Hades made Persephone the Queen Consort when she married him. I am still the Lady Regnant, equal to Hades in power. With Persephone, her word is Hades' word. With me, my word is my own, but it has equal weight to Hades' word," Chrysa explained.

Their appetizer and salads had arrived, so all three devoted the next several minutes to eating.
Finally, Chrysa asked, "If Poseidon was responsible, will Amphitrite be affected?" she asked quietly.

Zeus was silent for a long moment.

"That depends on whether she stands by her husband," he finally said. "You are more than welcome to convince her otherwise."

"Trite won't talk to me if I open the conversation by accusing her husband of thievery. And I shouldn't go down to see her, not with the trouble brewing between you and Poseidon. I'll think on it," Chrysa replied.

The rest of the meal proceeded in similar conversation, though the weight of the current situation was constantly hanging over them. There were no major arguments between the two brothers, so the meal ended with relative success.

On the street outside, they parted ways: Zeus returned to Olympus, Hades to the Underworld, and Chrysa to Britain to prepare for the ball she was supposed to attend that night.

Chapter End Notes

So, now that the prologue(s) is (are) over, and ignoring the fact that there ended up being three of them, the story is going to stay in Chrysa’s POV. I may end up doing one-shots in someone else’s POV, but Chrysa is the focus here. As such, I may ignore canonical knowledge because there is no feasible way for Chrysa to know it.
At the beginning of May, Alecto reported that the class that included Percy Jackson would be taking a field trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. She and Chiron would be the two chaperones on the trip. She thought that it could provide the perfect opportunity to separate the boy from Chiron and his satyr protector so that she could question him.

Chrysa made sure that all her paperwork was completed several days in advance, packed herself a lunch in an overly large purse, made sure she had her daggers and throwing knives, then left the Underworld for a day at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Nothing happened for the next three months. Alecto sent in daily reports to both Hades and Chrysa. Chrysa forwarded hers to Zeus through her shadows. By the time that Chrysa travelled down to the Underworld, the weather had begun getting worse, especially in New York. With the barrier of the northern Atlantic between her and Olympus, she had been able to see some sun, as rare as it was in London.

"Any news from Father?" Persephone asked as she entered the dining room for their customary lunch.

"Nothing," Chrysa replied, taking her seat at Hades' right and across from Persephone. "He's still blaming Poseidon, Poseidon is still denying it, and Alecto hasn't seen anything with the half-blood to indicate that he had anything to do with the theft or even that he is actually Poseidon's son. I believe she may be leaning towards more desperate measures soon enough."

Desperate measures came a month and a half later, at the beginning of May. Alecto reported that the class that included Percy Jackson would be taking a field trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. She and Chiron would be the two chaperones on the trip. She thought that it could provide the perfect opportunity to separate the boy from Chiron and his satyr protector so that she could question him.

Chrysa made sure that all her paperwork was completed several days in advance, packed herself a lunch in an overly large purse, made sure she had her daggers and throwing knives, then left the Underworld for a day at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It was nearly noon before the hint of other pinged on her senses. She followed it all the way back to the main hall of the museum, to the wing on the left and just inside the front doors. This was the Greek and Roman art, which she had been avoiding as she knew that she would probably see it later. Besides, she had seen it all before. She had been alive for a good portion of the Greek period, and she had studied Roman art extensively as Maria di Angelo.

She spotted a group of thirty middle-schoolers being led by a middle-aged man in a motorized wheelchair. The man had thinning hair and a scruffy beard. This man was the human mask of the centaur Chiron, trainer of heroes. Nearby, wearing a black leather jacket, was Alecto. The Fury subtly looked towards her once she entered the hall and gave her a nod of acknowledgment.

Chrysa loitered near the group as they stopped near a stele so that the disguised Chiron could explain
Greek funeral art. About halfway through the presentation, a freckled red-head snickered about the nudity of one of the carvings on the statue.

A dark-haired boy turned to her and burst out, "Will you shut up?"

It came out very loudly. The whole group laughed at him. Chrysa herself held back a snicker.

Chiron turned to the boy and said, "Mr. Jackson, do you have a comment?"

Chrysa's eyes went immediately to her target. This boy was the infamous Percy Jackson, potential son of Poseidon and Lightning Thief.

The boy blushed.

"No, sir."

Chiron pointed to a carving of Kronos and his children.

"Perhaps you'll tell us what this picture represents?"

The boy studied the carving for a moment, and then said, "That's Kronos eating his kids, right?"

"Yes," Chiron said leadingly, "and he did this because…"

"Well," Jackson said, "Kronos was the king god, and…"

"God?" Chiron cut Jackson off.

"Titan," the boy corrected.

Chrysa relaxed from where she had unconsciously tensed at the insult.

Jackson continued, "And…he didn't trust his kids, who were the gods. So, um, Kronos ate them, right? But his wife hid baby Zeus, and gave Kronos a rock to eat instead. And later, when Zeus grew up, he tricked his dad, Kronos, into barfing up his brothers and sisters—"

"Eew!" one of the girls in the group exclaimed.

Jackson continued without pausing. "—and so there was this big fight between the gods and the Titans, and the gods won."

Others in the group snickered, and the freckled red-head from before muttered, "Like we're going to use this in real life. Like it's going to say on our job applications, 'Please explain why Kronos ate his kids.'"

Chiron obviously heard her.

"And why, Mr. Jackson, to paraphrase Miss Bobofit's excellent question, does this matter in real life?"

"Busted," another kid muttered. From his wispy beard and crutches, Chrysa assumed he was the satyr. He looked familiar. Chrysa studied him the best she could without appearing to be watching the students.

Suddenly, it struck her – this was the satyr who had found Annabeth, Luke, and Thalia. This was the satyr who had failed to get her sister safely to camp.
"Of course it had to be *that* satyr," she muttered to herself.

Meanwhile, she had missed Jackson's reply to the question. Oh well. If he was a demigod – and he had the aura of a demigod, though an unclaimed one – he would find out soon enough.

"Well, half credit, Mr. Jackson," Chiron told him. "Zeus did indeed feed Kronos a mixture of mustard and wine…"

"Nectar, actually," Chrysa muttered to herself. "Get it right, nephew."

"…which made him disgorge his other five children, who, of course, being immortal gods, had been living and growing up completely undigested in the Titan's stomach. The gods defeated their father, sliced him to pieces with his own scythe, and scattered his remains in Tartarus, the darkest part of the Underworld. On that happy note, it's time for lunch. Mrs. Dodds, would you lead us back outside?"

Chrysa stood still as the class began drifting out of the gallery. The girls were holding their stomachs, the guys were pushing each other around, acting like typical middle schoolers.

Jackson and the satyr looked ready to follow them when Chiron said, "Jackson."

He seemed to tell the satyr to go on without him before turning to the centaur in disguise.

"Sir?" he asked.

"You must learn the answer to my question," Chiron said mysteriously.

"About the Titans?" the boy asked in confusion.

"About real life. And how your studies apply it," Chiron replied.

"Oh," the boy said articulately.

"What you learn from me," Chiron said, "is vitally important. I expect you to treat it as such. I will accept only the best from you, Percy Jackson."

The boy did not look very happy about that.

"He doesn't seem to know," Chrysa whispered to herself, even as the boy mumbled something, probably about doing better.

Chiron directed the boy to go outside with the rest of his classmates, and then wheeled himself after him.

Chrysa stayed put. Alecto had a sense for the dramatic, so she would definitely bring the boy back into this section. While she waited, she magically compelled everyone currently in the wing to leave, and then set up wards on all the entrances that would prevent mortals from entering.

Even so, it still took several minutes for Alecto to return, followed by Percy Jackson. Alecto stopped in front of a marble frieze of the gods, then turned to face her wayward student. She began to growl sub vocally.

Chrysa watched as the boy twitched uncomfortably.

"You've been giving us problems, honey," Alecto finally said.

"Yes, ma'am," Jackson said in a subdued voice, though his eyes were anything but submissive.
Alecto glared at him as she tugged on the cuffs of her leather jacket.

"Did you really think you would get away with it?" she demanded.

Jackson looked nervous. Whether from guilt or because Alecto was terrifying, even in human form, Chrysa didn't know.

"I'll – I'll try harder, ma'am," the boy stammered.

Thunder shook the building, proving that Zeus was indeed keeping an eye on the conversation. Chrysa felt a slight tremor under her feet. Hades was also watching.

"We are not fools, Percy Jackson," Alecto said. "It was only a matter of time before we found you out. Confess, and you will suffer less pain."

Percy Jackson looked terribly confused, and slightly panicky. If he was a typical dyslexic, ADHD demigod, he was probably thinking about some homework that he had cheated on.

"Well?" Alecto demanded.

"Ma'am, I don't..." Percy Jackson began, still looking lost.

"Your time is up," Alecto hissed as she began to transform.

Her eyes began to glow like barbecue coals. Her fingers stretched, turning into talons. Her jacket melted into large, leathery wings. She opened her mouth, exposing her large yellow fangs.

Of course, Chiron chose that moment to interfere. Still in his mortal disguise, he rolled his wheelchair into the doorway of the gallery, pen in hand.

"What ho, Percy!" he yelled, tossing the pen through the air.

Alecto lunged towards the boy.

He yelped, dodged, and managed to snatch the sword-that-was-formerly-a-pen out of the air. He looked at it in shock.

Alecto turned back towards Jackson with a murderous growl. The boy did not look good. He looked extremely nervous, unsteady on his feet, and about ready to drop the sword.

Alecto snarled, "Die, honey!" and flew straight towards him.

The boy did the smart thing and swung the sword. It hit her shoulder and passed through her body as she immediately turned into dust.

Chiron snapped his fingers, and the Mist took care of the rest. The centaur moved quickly away, leaving Percy Jackson seemingly alone in the Greek and Roman art gallery with a ballpoint pen in his hand.

The boy was still trembling. He looked absolutely terrified at what happened, before shaking his head slightly and going back outside.

Once he was gone, Chrysa dropped her wards and said to herself, "Well, that was interesting."

She turned on a heel and Apparated away.
She reappeared at an Italian restaurant she favored in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

"Table for four, please," she told the hostess. "Under the name Theos. The rest of my party will be here in a few minutes, so please direct them to my table when they arrive."

"Of course, ma'am," the hostess agreed before leading her to a table.

It was only a few minutes later that Zeus showed up, Hera on his arm.

"Good afternoon, Father, Hera," Chrysa greeted. "I assume you were watching?"

"Yes, but I would like to hear your perspective as well," Zeus said as he helped Hera into her chair. "Being there in person is much different from watching from above."

"Is my eldest brother coming?" Hera asked stiffly. The goddess of marriage and family was not fond of the eldest of her brothers in the first place, and the fact that he was consistently breaking his marriage vows, even with mutual consent, did not sit well with her. According to Zeus, Hera also thought of Leuke as Hades' proper wife, and disapproved that she and Hades had never been truly married. Their entire branch of the family tree annoyed her greatly.

"He'll be here shortly; I hear whispers that he is trying to calm Alecto down before she sets Megaera and Tisiphone off and they burn down part of his palace," Chrysa replied calmly.

The waitress had arrived, collected their drink orders, and returned with all four drinks (Chrysa had ordered for Hades) before the man in question showed up. He arrived just as the waitress was delivering bread and asking about appetizers.

"...the mozzarella alla caprese, please," Chrysa said charmingly.

Hades waited until she had left before taking his seat beside Chrysa.

"My apologies for my tardiness; Alecto was most wroth that she had spent so many months as a schoolteacher only to be defeated by a twelve-year-old touched by Tyche," the dark god said smoothly.

Chrysa pressed a quick kiss to his cheek in greeting.

"I heard something through the shadows about Tisiphone and Megaera and potential structural damage…?" she questioned.

Hades sighed.

"We managed to avoid any major structural damage, but I would recommend avoiding the East Wing until its fully repaired," he replied. "I sent the sisters to the Fields of Punishment to calm down. I think they were going to search out Riddle and Dumbledore again. Hecate promised to keep an eye on them."

"Now that we're all here," Hera said, "can we get started?"

"Really, sister dear," Hades drawled, "some of us have jobs."

Surprisingly, it was Zeus who cut them off before it could descend into a full-blown argument.

"You wanted to report on your encounter with the boy?" he asked Chrysa.

"Yes, Father. From my observations so far, I do not think – to put it bluntly – that Percy Jackson had
anything to do with the theft."

Both Hades and Zeus froze. Hades actually choked slightly on his drink.

"Why do you say that?" Hera pressed.

"He had no idea what Alecto was talking about when she accused him of being a thief. He was in complete shock that she turned into a monster, and not just the typical demigod oh-snap-my-teacher's-a-monster shock. He had no idea what was going on. Even if he did steal the missing items, he did not know what was going on," Chrysa stated, before smiling at the waitress who had just returned with their appetizer.

"Are you ready to order the main course?" the waitress asked.

"I would like the vitello osso buco, and my husband would like the modina d'agnello," Hera said, shutting her menu firmly and passing it to the waitress.

"I'll take the penne arrabiata with lobster," Chrysa said with a smile.

"And I would like the pasta al nero di seppia," Hades finished, handing his and Chrysa's menus to the waitress.

"Thank you, sir," the waitress said with a smile before turning to head back to the kitchen.

"You think Poseidon is innocent?" Zeus asked dubiously.

"In the best-case scenario, this is Poseidon throwing a fit again and he convinced his son to steal the bolt without telling him what it was about. Second-best scenario, it's still Poseidon and he convinced some other demigod to steal the items. However, Poseidon has declared his innocence in this event, so we need to be prepared for this to be something much bigger than a spat between brothers," Chrysa warned.

"What else could it be?" Hera asked incredulously.

"I don't know," Chrysa said seriously. "I'll try to find out. Secrets are my specialty, after all."

"Are you still planning on going to Camp Half-Blood?" Hades asked.

"Yes, dear. Whoever has done this, Percy Jackson is involved somehow. Whether he is the culprit or just a scapegoat, he will be involved further. With the escalating situation between Father and Poseidon, I would not be surprised if Chiron grants the boy the quest to find the Master Bolt. If he finds the Bolt, he will find the Helm. Either way, it will be most convenient for me to spend June at Camp Half-Blood, until after the solstice."

"But you'll be home until then?" Hades asked hopefully.

Chrysa pressed a quick kiss to his cheek. "Of course, darling. Barring any unforeseen circumstances. Yancy Academy's school term ends on June 3rd. I'll arrive at Camp Half-Blood that morning. Chiron and the satyr won't wait too long to bring him to camp. They have to know that he's in danger, especially after Alecto's attack today."

"So until then, all we need to do is make Poseidon sweat?" Zeus asked.

"And keep an eye out for any other possible culprits," Hera added. "At this point, everyone is suspect, even family."
All three turned to look at her in surprise.

She raised an eyebrow at them.

"As the goddess of family, I am very aware that ours does not get along. There are certain members that I wouldn't be too surprised to find that they had stolen the Master Bolt. Now, since we've decided our course of action, on to more pleasant subjects. How are your classes going, Chrysocomê?" she asked, redirecting attention to the demigoddess.

Between Zeus and Hades, they had pulled enough strings so that Chrysa had been accepted into Columbia University for the spring semester. With the current situation, she had wanted the proximity to Olympus.

"Everything is going very well so far, as expected. It's a bit of a joke, taking Ancient Greek when you're already fluent in it," Chrysa replied. "I also have some general studies courses: English, Mathematics, History. English and History are fine; I'm used to research and writing essays from Hogwarts, but Math is a different story. It's the only class I have trouble in. I keep recruiting Gottfried Leibniz and Isaac Newton to tutor me."

Their food arrived, and they spent a few minutes exchanging more pleasantries with the waitress. Once she was gone, Hades asked, "What is your history course focused on?"

"Ancient Rome," Chrysa responded promptly. "You all lived through it. I did not. I need to catch up. And before you ask, Father, I have been informed about the Greek/Roman split and the different aspects of all the gods' personalities."

"How did you find out?" Zeus asked, looking slightly alarmed before giving his brother an angry look.

"Hades didn't tell me," Chrysa soothed. "I just…found out. Nothing really stays secret for very long in the Underworld. The dead have no need for secrets, and they are physically incapable of lying to me. Additionally, I am – was – the goddess of secrets, so I'm very good at ferrying out such things."

"You're still the goddess of secrets and shadows, even if you're no longer immortal," Hera said sharply. "You're family, Leuke, and rebirth and temporarily missing memory doesn't change that. Shadows still come at your call. Secrets still come to your ear. No matter your form, human, Titaness, or half-blood, you will always be the goddess of shadows and secrets."

She nodded sharply, effectively dismissing the topic, and returned to her meal.

Her brothers stared at her, dumbfounded.

"Hera's right," Zeus said finally. "You're still a goddess, even if you're not immortal. Apollo and Poseidon were still gods when I sent them to earth as mortals as punishment. You're a reborn goddess, which makes you a goddess."

Chrysa did her best to hide her shock, but doing so while eating lunch with three deities capable of telepathy probably rendered it less effective than she hoped. Still, they were kind enough not to mention anything.

The rest of the meal passed in idle conversation, probably due to Chrysa's tumultuous feelings. They forewent dessert, and left the restaurant as a group. Zeus and Hera transported themselves back to Olympus, while Chrysa and Hades went through the shadows to the Underworld.

Once they were safely ensconced in their rooms, Chrysa pushed Hades onto the couch and curled up
beside him so that she was nearly on his lap. She was quiet for several minutes, simply enjoying the comfort that contact brought.

"I know you still consider me to be the goddess of secrets and shadows, and that our court does the same, but I didn't expect Father and Hera to think so," she said quietly.

"You are yourself, and your domain is a part of your very being," Hades said. "You are not simply Leuke, as some on Olympus might think. Nor are you simply Maria di Angelo, or Amaranth Potter. You are Chrysa, and you are all three of those things, all at the same time. Titaness, mortal, demigod – you have been all three. You have ruled and still do rule the Underworld. You were the strongest witch since Morgana Le Fay. You were and are still a mother, even if our children are hidden for their own protection. Perhaps, with this new son of Poseidon's, the Great Prophecy will be fulfilled so that we can bring our children home. But I digress: your power is in secrets and shadows, and there is never a shortage of either across the world. Zeus knows this. Hera knows this. Hestia, Demeter, and Poseidon know this. You have all your powers without being truly immortal. You are a goddess, Chrysa,omê."

At that, Chrysa burst into tears. Hades pulled her impossibly closer to himself and soothed her with gentle noises while stroking her black hair.

As her sobs quieted to sniffling, Hades pulled away slightly so he could look into her face.

"Feel better?" he asked.

She nodded, eyes still red and cheeks still wet.

"Much," she said. "It's just…nine years, and it's finally hit me that everyone cares about who I am now, not who I used to be."

She saw Hades look like he meant to protest.

"Not you, Hades! Maybe at the beginning, I wondered if you were really seeing me, or whether you were seeing Leuke or Maria, but I live with you six months out of the year. I know you love me for me. Father I also see rather often, so I know he loves me as his daughter and not just as his former teacher. Despite that, I thought Hera and all the others would simply think of me as Leuke's reincarnation. But Hera thinks of me as me, not as Leuke, just…me. Husband's bastard daughter and all."

"As you said a few months ago, Leuke could be a bit cold. You're much nicer. I'm not sure anyone can know you and not love you, my darling," Hades replied, pressing a kiss to his consort's lips.

There were no words needed for a long time afterwards.
Camp Half-Blood

Chapter Summary

Chrysa smiled at the curly-haired blonde girl as she leaned in to embrace her.

“Hello, Annabeth. It’s good to see you again.”

“It’s good to see you too, Chrysa,” the grey-eyed daughter of Athena replied. “What are you doing here? It’s the middle of summer! I thought you had a job…?”

“I do,” Chrysa nodded. “With the current – Olympian – situation, my father and my superior agreed that it would be best for me to come to Camp for the next few weeks.”

The rest of May went by in a flash, and soon the date for Chrysa’s departure was upon them. June 3rd was the last day of school at Yancy Academy, where Percy Jackson attended, so they had determined that June 3rd would be the best day for Chrysa to make her appearance at Camp Half-Blood.

She shadow-traveled into Camp, arriving inside her cabin and leisurely unpacking her bags. She had eaten breakfast in the Underworld with Hades, followed by a rather – passionate goodbye. She had managed to time her arrival at Camp to give herself just enough time to unpack before heading to the pavilion for lunch.

Zeus Cabin was intimidating at first glance. A massive statue of the god stood in the center of the temple-like construct. The alcoves that lines the room were filled with bronze eagle statues. The domed ceiling was constantly moving with clouds and lightning-bolts. It also constantly thundered, which was why Chrysa had set up a permanent silencing charm her first night there.

Early on, Chrysa had Vanished one of the eagle statues and turned the alcove it had previously resided in into her ‘bedroom’ of sorts. Her bed was along the back wall, with a dresser on one side of it and a series of shelves on the other. She did not keep very many items in her cabin, due to her easy access via Apparition or shadow-travel to her bedrooms at any of her numerous residences.

She quickly unpacked the two bags she had brought with her and double-checked to make sure she was armed. Even within the boundaries of Camp, she didn't like to go out without a weapon. With her magic and her shadow powers, she was never truly defenseless, but it was comforting to have her wand in its arm-holster and several knives in various places on her person. The only visible two were a celestial bronze knife belted on her left hip and a steel dagger belted on her right. Chiron had tried several times to dissuade her from carrying weaponry that could injure mortals, but she had promptly informed him that she still ran into people upset with how she'd dealt with Voldemort, and she preferred having a readily available weapon that could actually hurt them.

When the lunch bell rang, Chrysa left the cabin and made her way to the dining pavilion, head held high. She received several looks from many of the campers there. Only the year-rounders knew her, since she was usually only there between the months of September and March. She knew she made quite a sight, with her leather braces and orange Camp Half-Blood t-shirt, skinny jeans, and knee-high combat boots.
Surprisingly, one camper decided to approach her. Unsurprising was which camper decided to approach her.

Chrysa smiled at the curly-haired blonde girl as she leaned in to embrace her.

"Hello, Annabeth. It's good to see you again."

"It's good to see you too, Chrysa," the grey-eyed daughter of Athena replied. "What are you doing here? It's the middle of summer! I thought you had a job…?"

"I do," Chrysa nodded. "With the current – Olympian – situation, my father and my superior agreed that it would be best for me to come to Camp for the next few weeks."

Annabeth glanced skywards, then briefly in the direction of the sea.

"I can guess why. Well, I guess we'll have time to introduce you to the three-quarters of Camp who don't know you. Are you eating at the Head Table today?"

"I think so. I'll speak with Mr. D. during lunch, and Chiron will probably want to talk to me at dinner," Chrysa replied.

Annabeth's face lit up.

"Chiron's coming back today?"

"I think so," Chrysa replied. "From my information, it'll be within the next couple of days, if it's not today. But my money's on today. I'll talk to you later, Annabeth, alright? I'll try to stop by your cabin later?"

"I'd like that," the younger girl said with a nod.

Chrysa smiled in reply and moved on toward the dining pavilion. She had a great fondness for the young girl her sister had died to protect. She held some fondness for Luke Castellan as well, but he had changed after his failed quest to the Garden of the Hesperides. He had withdrawn from her – from everyone, really – and nothing she had done had managed to bring him out again. Hopefully, it was just a matter of growing up, and he'd come out of it. After all, he was physically older than her now.

She walked into the dining pavilion and made her way to the head table. Dionysus sat in the center of the table, wearing his usual leopard-pattern Hawaiian shirt, walking shorts, and tennis shoes with black socks. There was a nervous looking satyr behind him, peeling grapes and then passing them to the god. The space to the right of Dionysus, were Chiron normally stood, was empty.

Chrysa moved around to Dionysus' left and conjured a chair. She took her seat beside him.

"I see you're back," he commented idly. "Bad weather at home this time of year?"

There was a slight mocking edge to his voice.

Dionysus was much, much younger than Leuke, and both of them knew it. He had not even been born at the time of Leuke's death, so he, unlike the other Olympians, had no long-held affection or awe of her. However, he did know how powerful she was, and he did respect her for that. She was his sister, which granted her the respect of him not pretending to forget her name, but she was also a hero, which he disliked on principle. Thus, the interesting dynamic between the two of them.
"Not particularly," Chrysa replied as she began to serve her food. "It's more the weather here that I'm concerned by, if you catch my meaning. Father asked me to stay here until after the solstice deadline. My Lord agreed."

She took the best piece of meat from her place and floated it over to the bronze braziers. As she dropped it into the fire, she thought, To my beloved Aiôneus, so that you do not feel so alone.

"Does Chiron know you're coming?" Dionysus asked lazily, popping a peeled grape into his mouth.

"Not that I know of. I am quite interested in whatever little protégé he's been keeping an eye on though. I ran into them in New York a few months ago, but I'm afraid I did not have the chance to say hello," Chrysa replied with a smirk.

"Oh?" Dionysus said with a matching smirk. "Do tell."

Chrysa glanced around the dining hall at the eyes watching them closely.

"Not the time or place, I don't think. I'll be sure to share later though."

"I'll hold you to it," Dionysus replied, tipping his Diet Coke in her direction.

The rest of the meal passed in a minor battle of wits, Chrysa's sharp tongue easily matching Dionysus' drawling sarcasm.

At the end of the meal, Dionysus rose from his seat to address the campers.

"As most of you have noticed, we have a visitor," he drawled. "While the year-rounders will recognize her, the rest of you are probably unfamiliar with her. This is Chrysa Potter, daughter of Zeus."

There were gasps throughout the pavilion. Dionysus waved a dismissive hand.

"Yes, yes, we know, she's technically forbidden, we hashed this out years ago. Chrysa Potter usually only stays here during the winter months, but she'll be here for the next few weeks this time. Make her feel welcome, blah, blah, blah. Well, that's done. Feel free to leave whenever."

Many campers chose that moment to leave. Dionysus turned to Chrysa and asked, "Poker? I haven't had anyone decent to play with since Chiron's been gone."

"Certainly," Chrysa replied. She had to tell Dionysus the story of the Fury attack anyway.

It was nearly dinnertime when Chiron arrived at the Big House. He obviously came to find Dionysus first and report that he had returned. He seemed shocked to see Chrysa sitting with him.

"Oh, you're back," Dionysus said dismissively, keeping his attention on the Exploding Snap game that the pair were playing.

"Hi Chiron," Chrysa said with a wave, before reaching out to slap a matching pair of cards.

"Hello, Chrysa," the centaur replied. "What are you doing here?"

"Visiting. Father and Lord Hades agreed that it would be safest for me to be here for the moment, until this Master-bolt matter is solved. Both for my safety and the safety of the campers. I arrived shortly before lunch today. Where's your house-call?" she asked.

"His mother doesn't want him sent to camp yet," Chiron admitted. "He's powerful though. He's not
going to last much longer in the outside world. Grover's keeping an eye on him. He's going to try to convince Mrs. Jackson to send her son to Camp."

"Grover? As in the satyr-who-let-my-sister-die Grover?" Chrysa asked, her voice going cold, even though she already knew the answer.

"Yes, that Grover. Grover Underwood is his full name," Chiron replied.

"What's your protégé's name?" Chrysa asked, despite knowing the answer full-well.

"Percy Jackson. You'll hopefully be meeting him in the next few days."

As it turned out, Chrysa met him that very night, as a raging thunderstorm swept around Camp. She was embroiled in a fierce poker tournament with Chiron, Dionysus, and Annabeth when Dionysus tilted his head and said, "There's something happening outside the wards."

Chrysa immediately covered her cards and closed her eyes, casting her senses outward through the shadows, toward Half-Blood Hill. What she saw was shocking and somewhat horrifying.

The Minotaur was there, along with the satyr Grover, Percy Jackson, and a clear-sighted mortal woman who must have been Jackson's mother. The Minotaur had charged Mrs. Jackson, and was just closing his fists around her neck when the woman dissolved into golden light. She knew instantly what that meant. Hades had taken her.

The Minotaur was leaning over the unconscious satyr when Jackson yelled, "Hey!" and started waving his red rain jacket.

"Hey, stupid!" the boy yelled. "Ground beef!"

The Minotaur roared and shook its fists at the young demigod before charging. Instead of jumping to the side like the matador he was imitating, Jackson leapt forward, kicked off the monster's head, turned in midair, and landed on its neck. He locked his arms around the horns in order to keep from being thrown off.

"Impressive," Chrysa whispered.

"Chrysa?" Chiron asked. "What is it?"

"Shh!" she exclaimed. "I'm watching the show."

In the meantime, the satyr moaned something and attracted the Minotaur's ire. He was getting ready to charge when Jackson snapped one of its horns off.

The monster screamed in fury and threw Jackson through the air. He landed on his back and seemed to crack his head rather hard on a rock, but he had managed to hold onto the horn.

The Minotaur charged, but Jackson rolled to one side and came up kneeling. As the monster barreled past him, the demigod drove the broken horn straight into the Minotaur's side, right up under his furry rib cage.

As with all monsters, the Minotaur crumpled into dust.

"Chrysa?" Chiron asked again. "Does someone need our help?"

"He's not quite past the boundary yet," Chrysa replied, opening her eyes. "He'll probably need help making it to the Big House; he cracked his head rather hard on a rock, and the satyr appears to be
semi-conscious. They ought to be fine in a few days though."

"Who, Chrysa?" Chiron urged.

"Your little protégé and Grover Underwood," Chrysa replied, placing her cards down face up. "A royal flush. The laurels, if you will, Mr. D.?"

Dionysus grudgingly handed over the golden laurels that signified the winner of the previous game.

"I suppose we have to stop now to go see the boy?" he drawled.

"I would prefer we did," Chiron said.

By the time they were all up and made it to the front porch, Percy Jackson had already collapsed there. It appeared that he had carried Grover Underwood there from Half-Blood Hill.

"He's the one," Annabeth said. "He must be."


Annabeth looked to Chrysa, who had her wand in hand with a flick of her wrist. She did a familiar swish-and-flick motion, and both bodies levitated themselves before them into the hospital wing. She and Annabeth remained there in order to aid Chiron in healing the pair.

Grover was up again within the hour, twisting his hands and bemoaning the fact that he had failed to get Percy into Camp unharmed. He genuinely seemed to care for the boy, and winced when Chrysa made a snide comment about his bad record for keeping demigods safe.

Percy Jackson, on the other hand, was out for two days. Chrysa had given up on babysitting duty by the time he came to, and had returned to playing games with Chiron and Dionysus to pass the time. Annabeth joined them when she wasn't watching the Jackson boy.

Percy Jackson finally chose to wake up during one of the times that Chrysa, Chiron, and Dionysus were playing poker. Much to Dionysus' dismay, either Chrysa or Chiron had won every hand. Annabeth was leaning on the porch rail next to them. The boy announced his approach by crying out, "Mr. Brunner!"

Chiron turned to smile at the boy.

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

Chiron gestured to the chair across from Chrysa, to Dionysus' right.

The god looked at Jackson and heaved a great sigh.

"Oh, I suppose I must say it. Welcome to Camp Half-Blood. There. Now, don't expect me to be glad to see you."

"Uh, thanks," the boy said as he scooted his chair slightly further away from him.

"Annabeth?" Chiron called, gesturing the younger girl forwards.

Chiron introduced, "This young lady nursed you back to health, Percy. Annabeth, my dear, why don't you go check on Percy's bunk? We'll be putting him in Cabin Eleven for now."

"Sure, Chiron," Annabeth said. She looked at the Minotaur horn in the boy's hands, then back at
him. She told him, "You drool when you sleep," before sprinting off towards the cabins.

"And this, Percy, is Chrysa. She's one of our oldest campers, though this is the first time she's spent the summer with us."

"Pleasure to meet you," Chrysa said, extending her hand to the boy.

"You're British?" he asked curiously.

Chrysa let out a small laugh. "Born and raised, I'm afraid, though I've lived in the States for eight years now."

"So," Jackson said, looking nervous, "you, uh, work here, Mr. Brunner?"

"Not Mr. Brunner," Chiron said. "I'm afraid that was a pseudonym. You may call me Chiron."

"Okay," the boy said, looking completely befuddled. He looked over at Dionysus. "And Mr. D… does that stand for something?"

Dionysus stopped shuffling the cards and gave the boy a look.

"Young man, names are powerful things. You don't just go around using them for no reason."

"Oh. Right. Sorry," Jackson said, still sounding confused.

"I must say, Percy," Chiron said, "I'm glad to see you alive. It's been a long time since I've made a house call to a potential camper. I'd hate to think I've wasted my time."

"House call?" Jackson questioned.

"My year at Yancy Academy, to instruct you. We have satyrs at most schools of course, keeping a lookout. But Grover alerted me as soon as he met you. He sensed you were something special, so I decided to come upstate. I convinced the other Latin teacher to…ah, take a leave of absence."

"You came to Yancy just to teach me?" Jackson asked warily.

Chiron nodded. "Honestly, I wasn't sure about you at first. We contacted your mother, let her know we were keeping an eye on you in case you were ready for Camp Half-Blood. But you still had so much to learn. Nevertheless, you made it here alive, and that's always the first test."

"Even if some people wanted to interfere with the entrance exam," Chrysa said, glaring slightly at Chiron.

"Are we playing or not?" Dionysus demanded. He turned to eye Jackson suspiciously. "You do know how to play pinochle?"

"I'm afraid not," the boy said.

"I'm afraid not, sir," Dionysus corrected.

"Sir," Jackson parroted with a slightly angry look.

"Well," Dionysus said, "it is, along with gladiator fighting and Pac-Man, one of the greatest games ever invented by humans. I would expect all civilized young men to know the rules."

"I'm sure the boy can learn," Chiron said.
"Please," the boy said, "what is this place? What am I doing here? Mr. Brun – Chiron – why would you go to Yancy Academy just to teach me?"

"I asked the same question," Dionysus said with a snort.

"So did I," Chrysa added. Dionysus gestured to her with his can of Diet Coke, and they clinked their soda cans together. He then dealt the cards.

Chiron smiled sympathetically at Jackson.

"Percy," he said, "did your mother tell you nothing?"

"She said…she told me she was afraid to send me here, even though my father had wanted her to. She said that once I was here, I probably couldn't leave. She wanted to keep me close to her," the boy said.

"Typical," Dionysus said. "That's how they usually get killed. Young man, are you bidding or not?"

"What?" Jackson asked.

Dionysus impatiently explained how to bid in pinochle, and Jackson proceeded to make his bid.

"I'm afraid there's too much to tell," Chiron said. "I'm afraid our usual orientation film won't be sufficient."

"It would still help," Chrysa pointed out. "You had me watch it, and I already knew most of this."

"Orientation film?" the boy asked.

"No," Chiron decided. "Well, Percy. You know your friend Grover is a satyr. You know that you have killed the Minotaur," he said, pointing to the shoebox the boy held. "No small feat, either, lad. What you may not know is that great powers are at work in your life. Gods – the forces you call the Greek gods – are very much alive."

The boy stared blankly at them.

Dionysus interrupted the silence by yelling, "Oh, a royal marriage. Trick! Trick!" He cackled as he tallied up his points.

"Mr. D," Grover asked timidly, "if you're not going to eat it, could I have your Diet Coke can?"

"Eh? Oh, all right."

The satyr bit a large chunk out of the aluminum can and chewed it mournfully.

"Wait," Jackson said, "you're telling me there's such a thing as God."

"Well, now," Chiron said, "God – capital G, God. That's a different matter altogether. We shan't deal with the metaphysical."

"Metaphysical?" the boy asked, bewildered. "But you were just talking about…"

"Ah, gods, plural, as in, great beings that control the forces of nature and human endeavors: the immortal gods of Olympus. That's a smaller matter."

"Smaller?" the boy questioned.
"Yes, quite. The gods we discussed in Latin class."

"Zeus. Hera. Apollo. You mean them," the boy said, dumbfounded.

There was thunder in the distance.

"Why do some Latin teachers choose to use the Greek names in Latin class? My first Latin teacher did the same," Chrysa said. "They're not even words in Latin. We had to learn the Roman names later in order to translate properly."

"I kept the names Greek in order to not confuse Percy here," Chiron explained. "I can't speak for other Latin teachers."

"Young man," Dionysus said, addressing Jackson, "I would really be less casual about throwing those names around, if I were you."

"But they're stories!" the boy protested. "They're – myths, to explain lightning and the seasons and stuff. They're what people believed before there was science."

"Science!" Dionysus scoffed. "And tell me, Perseus Jackson," – the boy flinched when his full name was said – "what will people think of your 'science' two thousand years from now? Hmm? They will call it primitive mumbo jumbo. That's what. Oh, I love mortals – they have absolutely no sense of perspective. They think they've come so-o-o far. And have they, Chiron? Look at this boy and tell me."

"Well," Chrysa pointed out, "they're not hiding in dark caves anymore. I think that in and of itself counts as development."

"Percy," Chiron said, "you may choose to believe or not, but the fact is that immortal means immortal. Can you imagine that for a moment, never dying? Never fading? Existing, just as you are, for all time?"

"You mean, whether people believed in you or not," Jackson said.

"Exactly," Chiron agreed. "If you were a god, how would you like being called a myth, an old story to explain lightning? What if I told you, Perseus Jackson, that someday people would call you a myth, just created to explain how little boys can get over losing their mothers?"

The boy opened his mouth to speak, the shut it again. Finally, he said, "I wouldn't like it. But I don't believe in gods."

"Oh, you'd better," Dionysus muttered. "Before one of them incinerates you."


"A lucky thing, too," Dionysus grumbled. "Bad enough I'm confined to this miserable job, working with boys who don't even believe!"

He waved his hand and a goblet appeared on the table. It filled itself with red wine.

"Mr. D," Chiron warned, barely looking up, "your restrictions."

Dionysus looked at the goblet and feigned surprise.

"Dear me." He looked at the sky and yelled, "Old habits! Sorry!"
It thundered briefly.

Before he could change it into a Diet Coke, Chrysa reached over and snagged the wine glass.

Dionysus glared at her.

She huffed haughtily.

"I'm not the one on probation. And you always summon the best wines."

She lightly sniffed the glass, then asked, "Cabernet?"

Dionysus nodded, looking slightly appeased by her flattery. "It's the 1945 Mouton-Rothschild."

"Wonderful," Chrysa agreed, taking a sip.

Dionysus sighed and summoned up a can of Diet Coke, popped the top, and went back to the card game.

Chiron winked at Jackson.

"Mr. D offended his father a while back, took a fancy to a wood nymph who had been declared off-limits."

"A wood nymph," the boy said flatly, still staring between Dionysus' Diet Coke and the goblet of wine that Chrysa had stolen.

"Yes," Dionysus confessed. "Father loves to punish me. The first time, Prohibition. Ghastly! Absolutely horrid ten years! The second time – well, she really was pretty, and I couldn't stay away – the second time, he sent me here. Half-Blood Hill. Summer camp for brats like you. 'Be a better influence,' he told me. 'Work with youths rather than tearing them down.' Ha! Absolutely unfair."

He sounded like a pouting little kid, though Chrysa kept that thought to herself.

"And..." the boy stammered, "your father is..."

"Di immortales, Chiron, I thought you taught this boy the basics!" Dionysus exclaimed. "My father is Zeus, of course."

Chrysa could practically see Jackson running through D names in Greek mythology in his mind.

"You're Dionysus," he finally said. "The god of wine."

Dionysus rolled his eyes. "What do they say, these days, Grover? Do the children say, 'Well, duh!'?"

"Y-yes, Mr. D," the satyr stammered.

"Then, well, duh! Percy Jackson. Did you think I was Aphrodite, perhaps?"

"You're a god," the boy said flatly.

"Yes, child."

"A god. You."

Dionysus looked Jackson straight in the eyes, then asked quietly, "Would you like to test me, child?"
"No. No, sir," the boy replied.

He turned back to the card game.

"I believe I win."

"Actually, I win," Chrysa said, laying down her hand. "And Chiron takes second, if I'm not mistaken."

Dionysus sighed through his nose, then got up from his chair. Grover leapt up from his position leaning on the porch rail.

"I'm tired," Dionysus declared. "I believe I'll take a nap before the sing-along tonight. But first, Grover, we need to talk, again, about your less-than-perfect performance on this assignment."

The satyr looked like he was sweating. Chrysa hid her smirk.

"Y-yes, sir," he replied.

Dionysus turned to Jackson and said, "Cabin eleven, Percy Jackson. And mind your manners," before sweeping into the farmhouse, followed closely by the satyr.

"Will Grover be okay?" the boy asked.

Chiron nodded, looking slightly troubled.

"Dionysus isn't really mad. He just hates his job. He's been…ah, grounded, I guess you would say, and he can't stand waiting another century before he's allowed to go back to Olympus."

"Mount Olympus," the boy said. "You're telling me there really is a palace there?"

"Well, now, there's Mount Olympus in Greece. And then there's the home of the gods, the convergence point of their powers, which did indeed used to be on Mount Olympus. It's still called Mount Olympus, out of respect to the old ways, but the palace moved, Percy, just as the gods do."

"You mean the Greek gods are here? Like...in America?" the boy asked in shock.

"Well, certainly. The gods move with the heart of the West."

"The what?" the boy asked.

"Come now, Percy. What you call 'Western civilization.' Do you think it's just an abstract concept? No, it's a living force. A collective consciousness that has burned bright for thousands of years. The gods are part of it. You might even say they are the source of it, or at least, they are tied so tightly to it that they couldn't possibly fade, not unless all of Western civilization were obliterated. The fire started in Greece. Then, as you well know -- or as I hope you know, since you passed my course -- the heart of the fire moved to Rome, and so did the gods. Oh, different names, perhaps – Jupiter for Zeus, Venus for Aphrodite, and so on -- but the same forces, the same gods."

"And then they died," the boy said flatly.

"You did just meet Dionysus, you know," Chrysa pointed out.

"Died? No. Did the West die? The gods simply moved, to Germany, to France, to Spain, for a while. Wherever the flame was brightest, the gods were there. They spent several centuries in England. All you need to do is look at the architecture. People do not forget the gods. Every place they've ruled,
for the last three thousand years, you can see them in paintings, in statues, on the most important buildings. And yes, Percy, of course they are now in you United States. Look at your symbol, the eagle of Zeus. Look at the statue of Prometheus in Rockefeller Center, the Greek facades of your government buildings in Washington, D.C. I defy you to find any American city where the Olympians are not prominently displayed multiple places. Like it or not – and believe me, plenty of people weren't very fond of Rome, either – America is now the heart of the flame. It is the great power of the West. And so Olympus is here. And we are here."

"Not that they are bound to America or anything. After all, I'm from Britain, and I've been reliably informed that I was conceived in Australia," Chrysa put in.

Jackson was just sitting in shocked silence. Finally, he asked, "Who are you, Chiron? Who…who am I?"

Chiron smiled, and shifted his weight as he prepared to get out of his chair.

"Who are you?" he mused. "Well, that's the question we all want answered, isn't it? But for now, we should get you a bunk in cabin eleven. There will be new friends to meet. And plenty of time for lessons tomorrow. Besides, there will be s'mores at the campfire tonight, and I simply adore chocolate."

He rose from his wheelchair, revealing his horsey lower half.

"What a relief," he said. "I'd been cooped up in there so long, my fetlocks had fallen asleep. Now come, Percy Jackson. Let's meet the other campers. Are you coming, Chrysa?"

"Certainly," the immortal demigoddess replied. "I might as well, since all of my gaming friends are leaving me."

She rose from her seat and stood on Chiron's right as he began the tour of the camp.

As they passed the volleyball pit, several campers nudged each other and pointed to the Jackson boy's minotaur horn. One said, "That's him."

The boy looked slightly uncomfortable at the attention, most of which was from teenagers years older than he was. A good percentage looked older than Chrysa as well, but the word had spread about her suspected age, since she had never confirmed or denied anything, and no one had attempted anything against her yet.

"What's up there?" the boy asked, pointing towards the attic of the Big House.

Chiron's smile faded slightly.

"Just the attic," he replied.

"Somebody lives there?" the boy persisted.

"No," Chiron said with finality. "Not a single living thing. Come along, Percy."

They continued the tour through the strawberry fields. Some members of Demeter cabin were picking strawberries while a satyr played a tune on a reed pipe.

"Grover won't get in too much trouble, will he?" Jackson asked. "I mean…he was a good protector. Really."
Chiron sighed while Chrysa scowled. She did not agree that Grover Underwood was a fit protector for anyone.

Chiron removed his tweed jacket and draped it over his horse's back like a saddle.

"Grover has big dreams, Percy. Perhaps bigger than are reasonable. To reach his goal, he must first demonstrate great courage by succeeding as a keeper, finding a new camper and bringing him…"

"Or her," Chrysa cut in.

"Or her," Chiron agreed, "safely to Half-Blood Hill."

"But he did that!" the boy exclaimed.

"I might agree with you," Chiron said. "But it is not my place to judge. Dionysus and the Council of Cloven Elders must decide. I'm afraid they might not see this assignment as a success. After all, Grover lost you in New York. Then there's the unfortunate…ah…fate of your mother. And the fact that Grover was unconscious when you dragged him over the property line. The council might question whether this shows any courage on Grover's part."

The boy looked very guilty.

"He'll get a second chance, won't he?" Jackson asked in a small voice.

Chiron winced.

"I'm afraid that was Grover's second chance, Percy. The council was not anxious to give him another, either, after what happened the first time, five years ago. Olympus knows, I advised him to wait longer before trying again. He's still so small for his age…"

"How old is he?" the boy asked curiously.

"Oh, twenty-eight," Chiron said nonchalantly.

"What! And he's in the sixth grade?" Jackson demanded.

"Satyrs mature half as fast as humans, Percy. Grover has been the equivalent of a middle school student for the past six years."

"That's horrible," the boy said flatly.

"Quite," Chiron agreed. "At any rate, Grover is a late bloomer, even by satyr standards, and not yet very accomplished at woodland magic. Alas, he was anxious to pursue his dream. Perhaps now he will find some other career…"

"That's not fair," the boy objected. "What happened the first time? Was it really so bad?"

Before Chiron could answer, Chrysa cut in.

"You can bet it was 'so bad',' she nearly growled. "And neither Father nor I have forgotten it. My little sister died because of Grover Underwood, and none of us are particularly anxious to forgive him."

"Someone…died?" Percy asked quietly.

Chrysa sighed, then began to explain.
"My little sister. Thalia. She wasn't supposed to exist – neither of us are – but there are…extenuating circumstances with me that protect me from any repercussions. Thalia wasn't so lucky. Your little satyr friend found Thalia and the two demigods she was traveling with and tried to get them back to Camp. The thing was, his orders were to bring Thalia and only Thalia. Thalia wouldn't leave her friends though, so they all moved towards Camp Half-Blood together. Your little satyr friend didn't think to call for backup, so by the time anyone knew something was wrong, they had half the monsters of the Underworld on their tails. They were almost to camp, on the border actually."

She turned and pointed to the tall pine tree atop Half-Blood Hill.

"Thalia told her friends to go on without her. Grover Underwood brought the other two demigods into camp, while Thalia made her last stand – alone – atop Half-Blood Hill. Father had pity on her as she was about to die, and turned her into a pine tree in order to protect her. Her life force powers the wards around camp to this day," Chrysa said grimly.

The boy was silent for a moment, before asking, "Who…who is your father?"

Chrysa smiled somewhat nastily at him. "Why, you've heard his name already today. My father is Zeus, Lord of the Skies and King of the Gods. And the Lord of Olympus is not happy about what happened to his youngest daughter. Neither am I. Your satyr friend was this close," she said, holding her fingers a millimeter apart, "to be deep-fried goat. This close. And he and the Council of Cloven Elders both know it. The chances of him getting a third try…well, let's just say it'll happen around the same time that Sisyphus gets that rock to the top of the hill."

"Why don't we go see the woods?" Chiron said, pushing them back to lighter conversation. Chiron continued his tour-guide speech.

"The woods are stocked, if you care to try your luck, but go armed."

"Stocked with what?" Jackson asked. "Armed with what?"

"You'll see. Capture the flag is Friday night. Do you have your own sword and shield?"

"Chiron, he's known about this for an entire half-hour, of course he doesn't have his own sword and shield," Chrysa snorted.

"Right. I think I size five will do. I'll visit the armory later."

The tour continued to the archery range, the canoe lake, the stables, the javelin range, the sing-along amphitheater, and the sword-fighting arena.

"Sword and spear fights?" the boy asked.

"Cabin challenges and all that," Chiron explained. "Not lethal. Usually. For the most part, this is where you'll find Chrysa, when she's here. She likes to referee the matches, and she teaches lessons as well. Oh, yes, and there's the mess hall."

Chiron pointed to the dining pavilion.

"What do you do when it rains?" Jackson asked.

Chiron and Chrysa both gave him weird looks.

"We still have to eat, don't we?" Chiron said.
Finally, they made it to the cabins. At the central firepit was a young girl tending the flames. Chrysa knew it was Hestia, and resolved to speak with her later.

The boy pointed to Cabins One and Two.

"Zeus and Hera?" he asked.

"Correct," Chiron said.

"Their cabins look empty," the boy pointed out.

"Several of the cabins are. That's true. No one ever stays in cabin two, and Chrysa is the only person who stays in cabin one. And she is not always there."

Jackson stopped in front of Cabin Three – Poseidon's cabin – and peered inside.

"Oh, I wouldn't do that!" Chiron said. He pulled the boy back, saying, "Come along, Percy."

Chrysa raised an eyebrow at the display. If that wasn't a hint to the boy's heritage, she didn't know what was."

As they passed Cabin Five, Clarisse LaRue seemed to zero in on Jackson, though Chrysa's warning look seemed to scare her off slightly. The girl was a year-round camper and knew exactly what she was capable of.

"We haven't seen any other centaurs," Jackson pointed out.

"No," Chiron said sadly. "My kinsmen are a wild and barbaric folk, I'm afraid. You might encounter them in the wilderness, or at major sporting events. But you won't see any here."

"You said your name was Chiron. Are you really..." the boy trailed off.

Chiron smiled down at him.

"The Chiron from the stories. Trainer of Heracles and all that? Yes, Percy, I am."

"But, shouldn't you be dead?"

Chiron paused, as if the question intrigued him, but Chrysa knew the real reason why he was still alive. She had been present at his birth, after all.

"I honestly don't know about should be. The truth is, I can't be dead. You see, eons ago the gods granted my wish. I could continue the work I loved. I could be a teacher of heroes as long as humanity needed me. I gained much from that wish...and I gave up much. But I'm still here, so I can only assume I'm still needed."

"Doesn't it ever get boring?" Jackson asked.

"No, no," Chiron replied with a shake of his head. "Horribly depressing, at times, but never boring."

"Why depressing?" the boy asked.

Chrysa rolled her eyes. He hadn't caught on yet.

"Oh, look," he said. "Annabeth is waiting for us."
They continued on to cabin eleven, where Annabeth was reading an architecture book.

"Annabeth," Chiron said, "I have a masters' archery class at noon, and I believe Chrysa also has someplace to be. Would you take Percy from here?"

"Yes, sir," Annabeth replied.

"Cabin eleven," Chiron told the boy, gesturing towards it. "Make yourself at home."

He turned and galloped off towards the archery fields.

Chrysa checked her watch.

"He was right. I do have someplace to be. I'll talk to you later, Annabeth, Percy. I'll probably see you in the sword arena, actually. Cabin eleven has a lesson the day after tomorrow, and Luke's asked me to help out."

She turned around and jogged back to cabin one, so she could Iris-message her father and beloved in peace.
Watching and Waiting

Chapter Summary

"Don't worry, Annabeth. My being here is just a precaution. Poseidon is my great-grandfather on my mother's side, so we don't think anything will actually happen to me. Me staying here is to keep me out of the way more than anything."

The next two days, she spent her time alternating between watching Percy Jackson and helping out in the sword-fighting arena. On Thursday afternoon, Luke asked her to help with Cabin Eleven. While he was probably Camp's best swordfighter, twenty people was a little much for him to manage on his own. Especially with a true newbie there.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Due to her brief Iris-message to her father and much longer one to Hades, Chrysa completely missed the incident involving Clarisse, Annabeth, Percy, and toilet water. She still did not know entirely what happened, but she entirely planned to corner Annabeth later in order to speak with her.

She had moved to the sword-fighting arena and was training with some enchanted dummies when the conch shell sounded, summoning everyone to dinner.

With a quick movement of her daggers, she slit one dummy's throat before throwing the same dagger into the eye of another. With her other dagger, she gutted the third. A wave of her wand cleaned up the mess she had left, and she made her way to the dining pavilion for dinner.

As she took her seat to Dionysus' left at the head table, she noted that Percy Jackson was shoved in at Cabin Eleven's table, almost falling off of the bench. As always, the tables belonging to Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, and Artemis were empty.

Once everyone was settled, Chiron pounded his hoof against the marble floor of the pavilion, causing everyone to fall silent. He raised his glass and called out, "To the gods!"

Everyone else, including Chrysa and Dionysus, raised their glasses as well. "To the gods!" they echoed.

The traditional toast done, the wood nymphs came forward bearing platters of food: grapes, apples, strawberries, cheese, fresh bread, barbecue – all typical Camp Half-Blood fare.

Chrysa filled a plate with food and made her way to the brazier. She offered an apple, several strawberries, a piece of bread, and some cheese to Hestia before sacrificing some of her brisket in for Hades. She made her way back to her seat and promptly engaged Chiron in a lively debate about swords vs. knives (with random input from Dionysus) that occupied them for the rest of the meal.

Once everyone was done, Chiron pounded his hoof again to gain everyone's attention.

Dionysus stood with a huge sigh.

"Yes, I suppose I'd better say hello to all you brats. Well, hello. Our activities director, Chiron, says
that the next capture-the-flag is Friday. Cabin five presently holds the laurels."

The campers from Ares cabin began to cheer.

"Personally," Dionysus continued, "I couldn't care less, but congratulations. Also, I should tell you
that we have a new camper today. Peter Johnson."


"Er, Percy Jackson," Dionysus corrected. "That's right. Hurrah and all that. Now run along to your
silly campfire. Go on."

Everyone cheered and began to head down to the amphitheater for the nightly sing-along. Chrysa
hurried and managed to end up next to Annabeth.

"So, what's this I hear about toilet water?" she asked pleasantly, taking a seat beside the blonde.

Annabeth shrugged.

"I was showing Percy around the camp a bit more. Clarisse interrupted with some of her siblings and
decided to 'initiate' Percy. She took him to the girls' toilets and was going to shove his head in the
toilet. Then all the pipes just – exploded."

"Oh really?" Chrysa questioned idly. "That must have been a sight. Have the bathrooms been
fixed?"

Annabeth sighed.

"Not the last time I checked, and that was slightly before dinner."

Chrysa wrinkled her nose.

"Well, I can't not shower tonight. I guess I'll nip home for a bit. If Chiron's looking for me and can't
find me, that's where I am, but I won't be gone long."

"Is that safe?" Annabeth asked, worried.

Chrysa laughed.

"Don't worry, Annabeth. My being here is just a precaution. Poseidon is my great-grandfather on my
mother's side, so we don't think anything will actually happen to me. Me staying here is to keep me
out of the way more than anything."

They had no more time to speak, as Apollo Cabin began a rousing rendition of 'This Land is Minos'
Land'.

The next two days, she spent her time alternating between watching Percy Jackson and helping out
in the sword-fighting arena. On Thursday afternoon, Luke asked her to help with Cabin Eleven.
While he was probably Camp's best swordfighter, twenty people was a little much for him to manage
on his own. Especially with a true newbie there.

Everyone gathered in the big circular arena.

"Alright, everyone, I've asked Chrysa if she'd be willing to help out with this lesson. I'm sure you've
all heard that she's been helping out the cabins who aren't that great at sword-fighting. I may be good
with a sword, but so is she, and if we let her have her knives, she could take me out easily. If she
went all out – well, I don't think I'd last a minute."

"Aw, don't be so hard on yourself, Luke," Chrysa teased, a smile on her face. "I'd give you at least ninety seconds."

The campers from Hermes cabin joined their laughter.

"Okay, to start off, I'd like everyone to go practice basic stabbing and slashing with the dummies. I'm going to try to get Percy set up with a blade. Chrysa's going to make sure none of you kill yourselves."

Chrysa moved with the rest of the campers to the side of the arena, where the straw-stuffed dummies in Greek armor were. She kept one eye on Percy and Luke as they tried to find a proper sword for Percy. Eventually, they seemed to give up and Luke quickly showed Percy the best stabbing and slashing maneuvers.

"Alright, everyone! We're going to move on to dueling in pairs. I'll be partnering with Percy, since it's his first time. Again, Chrysa is going to be supervising, so don't be afraid to go to her with any problems."

"I promise I don't bite," Chrysa promised.

She heard one of the older campers tell Percy, "Good luck. Luke's the best swordsman in the last three hundred years."

"Maybe he'll go easy on me," Percy replied.

The camper snorted. Chrysa barely avoided it. She and Luke were both firm believers in teaching by bruising.

It was entertaining to watch Luke teach Percy. It was the same way she had been taught. It was probably harsher than the way Luke had first been taught. After all, he had learned to fight while facing monsters, no aid in sight except for Thalia. Leuke had at least known that no one was going to attempt to kill her. That was her job, after all.

Finally, she decided to call for a break to give Percy a break. Everyone swarmed the drinks cooler. Both Luke and Percy chose to poor ice water over their heads.

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

It was obvious that Percy did mind, but he wasn't going to complain.

All the members of Hermes cabin circled around the pair. Chrysa chose to hang further back, seeing no need to get close to the sweaty people and their stench if she didn't have to.

"I'm going to demonstrate a disarming technique," Luke announced. "How to twist the enemy's blade with the flat of your own sword so that he has no choice but to drop his weapon. This is difficult," he emphasized. "I've had it used against me. Chrysa actually taught me this move by using it against me. Repeatedly."

Everyone laughed.

"No laughing at Percy, now," Luke ordered. "Most swordsmen have to work years to master this technique."
Luke demonstrated the move on Percy in slow motion. He easily knocked Percy's sword out of his hand.

"Now in real time," he said, gesturing for Percy to pick up his sword. "We keep sparring until one of us pulls it off. Ready, Percy?"


Percy blocked. He countered Luke's attack, then tried a thrust of his own.

Chrysa saw the look in Luke's eyes when he realized that something had clicked for Percy, and he increased his attacks.

Percy hit his blade against the base of Luke's and twisted, putting his weight into a downward thrust. Luke's sword clattered to the ground. Percy's sword was an inch from his undefended chest.

Everyone was silent. Chrysa could tell that her own eyes were wide.

Percy lowered his sword and shifted slightly on his feet.

"Um, sorry," he said.

For a moment, Luke was too stunned to speak.

"Sorry?" he said, grinning. "By the gods, Percy, why are you sorry? Show me that again!"

From the look on his face, Percy didn't think he could, but he got into the ready position anyway. Luke knocked his blade out of his hand in less than a second.

Everyone stared in silence. Finally one of the Hermes campers suggested, "Beginner's luck?"

Luke wiped the sweat off his brow as he stared at Percy.

"Maybe," he said. "But I wonder what Percy could do with a balanced sword…"

"We'll have to find out, won't we?" Chrysa said, moving forward. The circle of campers parted before her, allowing her to step into the center with Luke. "But I think that it's time for another lesson, isn't it Luke. Another lesson…and another demonstration."

Luke sent her a cocky grin, and gestured for Percy to leave the circle.

Chrysa turned to address the group of campers, though she kept one eye on Luke. "Normally, we teach you how to fight monsters, or how to fight duels. While all this is well and good, there may come a time where you need to fight for your life. Yes, you fight for your life while fighting monsters, but for the most part, monsters are easy for demigods and can be fought with very little training. Take Mr. Jackson's entrance to Camp for example. He did not even know he was a demigod, but he was able to kill Pasiphaë's son. The same holds true for a large number of monsters. However, dueling a fellow demigod – or even a nymph or other minor immortal – without restraint is a different matter."

"It's not like a friendly or even not-so-friendly fight in the arena," Luke said. "We're talking about fighting for your life."

"In that case, you can't let something like honor slow you down," Chrysa chided. "Winning is more about outwitting your enemy as it is being the better fighter. You must be utterly ruthless in your
movements, and if you see an opening, you take it. But don't be overhasty. Sun Tzu said, 'He will win who knows when to fight and when not to fight.' I like to think of it as 'He will win who knows when to strike and when not to strike.' Ready, Luke?"

The blonde saluted her with his sword.

"At your word, my…"

Before he could finish his statement, Chrysa leapt at him, her sword aimed for his throat.

Luke managed to bring his blade into a position to block her in time, but the force behind her blow knocked him off his balance slightly. Chrysa took advantage of that, and continued with the harsh strikes of the sword while pulling a dagger from its sheath at the small of her back with her left hand. She kept her hand behind her back so Luke did not see it.

They continued trading blows, and Chrysa made sure to keep Luke on the defensive.

Finally, the opening she was waiting for occurred. Their blades locked together, putting them only a few feet away from each other.

Chrysa's other hand flew from behind her back to press her dagger against Luke's throat.

"Do you yield?" she asked.

Luke made as to move away, but Chrysa pressed the sharp edge of the dagger further into Luke's throat, drawing a thin trickle of blood.


"Properly," Chrysa insisted.


"I, Luke – I don't use my last name, are you sure I have to do this?"

Chrysa raised an eyebrow at him. "Yes. Would you prefer I make it so no one else can hear us?"

"Yes."

Chrysa flicked a finger on the hand holding the sword, and felt the charm go up.

"It's up," she stated.

Luke sighed again.

"I, Luke Castellan, son of Hermes, do formally submit myself to Chrysa Potter, daughter of Zeus, as the champion of this duel."

"I, Chrysa Potter, accept your submission," Chrysa said, before stepping back from Luke and dropping the silencing charm.

Both sheathed their weapons before turning to face their students.

"Now, what did I do differently from a traditional duel?" she asked.

One of Stoll brothers – Chrysa thought it was Travis – said, "You didn't have rules. You drew a
dagger on Luke even though it was a sword fight."

"You also didn't use either of the daggers that Luke could see," the other Stoll brother offered. "You used one that was hidden, so he didn't know it was coming."

"Correct, both of you," Luke said with a nod as he wiped the sweat off his brow with the corner of his t-shirt. "Chrysa did not hold to any rules of a duel, except that she did not go instantly for the kill. She could easily killed me – or at least seriously injured – with that dagger several times before she actually brought it out."

The lesson was over shortly after that, with Luke and Chrysa sending everyone back to their cabin to shower before dinner.

That was the most excitement Chrysa had before the Capture-the-Flag game. There wasn't usually a game during the winter when she was there, as there were too few campers, but she couldn't play this time since she was keeping an eye on Percy Jackson. Still, she was excited for the game.

When all the plates were cleared away at the end of Friday's dinner, the conch horn sounded and everyone stood from their seats at the tables – with the exception of Dionysus, who simply looked bored with the entire thing.

Campers yelled and cheered as Annabeth and two of her siblings ran into the pavilion carrying a silk banner. It was about ten feet long, glistening gray, with a painting of a barn owl above an olive tree. Chrysa made sure to keep her applause subtle. Since she was helping referee, she didn't want to be accused of favoritism.

From the other side of the pavilion, Clarisse and two of her siblings ran in with another banner, of identical size, but gaudy red, painted with a bloody spear and a boar's head.

Chiron hammered his hoof on the marble.

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

He spread his hands, and the tables were suddenly covered with equipment: helmets, bronze swords, spears, oxhide shields coated in metal. Everyone on Athena's side – Athena, Apollo, and Hermes cabins – had helmets with blue horsehair plumes on top. Ares and their allies – Dionysus, Demeter, Aphrodite, and Hephaestus – had red plumes.

Chrysa flicked her wrist, and minimalistic armor formed around her. It was not her preferred set of shadow armor: the armor had been Leuke's, originally, and Hades had kept it since then. That armor was made of Stygian iron. This armor was simply hardened leather, though it was hand-stitched with golden thread in scenes of her adventures. It consisted of a breastplate-backplate, pauldrons, greaves, bracers, and a matching belt for her dagger sheaths to attach to. She was already heavily armed with daggers, though she also attached her sword to the belt. Unlike the rest of the campers, she did not where a helmet, though she did have a black cape that fell to her knees.

She watched as the campers kitted themselves. Due to their lack of magic, it took them quite a bit longer than it took her.

Finally, Annabeth yelled, "Blue team, forward!"
The team cheered and shook their swords as they marched off to the south woods. The red team yelled taunts at them as they headed towards the north.

Chrysa turned to Chiron.

"Where do you want me?"

"You can fly, correct?" the centaur asked.

Chrysa nodded.

"How long can you sustain it?"

"I've never flown for more than half an hour before, but I didn't feel tired when I stopped. I can probably hold it at least an hour. And if I do get tired, I can always summon my broom and fly on that. I assume you want me flying over the woods, keeping an eye on things?"

Chiron nodded.

"Do you mind if I make an announcement not to shoot me?"

Chiron chuckled.

"Go ahead."

Chrysa flicked her wrist so that her wand was in hand. She tapped it to her throat, saying, "Sonorus."

She took a deep breath and called, "Attention campers! This is Chrysa Potter speaking. Just so you are aware, I will be flying above the woods in order to keep an eye on things. I am wearing a black cape. If you shoot me, I will electrocute you. If I have already been struck with an arrow and/or another thrown projectile, I am less likely to control the voltage of the lightning bolts."

She pointed her wand at her throat again and whispered, "Quietus."

Chiron gave her a mildly disapproving look.

"You could have been a bit nicer about it," he said.

She shrugged.

"Now they really won't want to hit me," she replied.

Before Chiron could lecture her, she took off into the air and flew towards the creek that divided the woods. She knew Annabeth was posting Percy as a border guard to draw out Clarisse and her siblings, and she wanted to keep an eye on him. After all, it was very unfair to gang up on a twelve-year-old boy who hadn't even known about the gods for a week.

She found Percy easily enough, and was just in time to settle into a tree before the conch horn blew and the fight began. She watched as one of the Apollo campers ran past Percy and into enemy territory.

Percy hadn't noticed her, but she was positioned slightly behind him, so it was easy to miss her.

Suddenly, she heard a low canine growl from the forest below her. Percy had obviously heard it too, as he raised his shield defensively.
Chrysa flared her aura, projecting her Underworld power and her intention to protect Percy Jackson. The beast – most likely a hellhound – moved away.

On the other side of the creek, the underbrush exploded. Five Ares warriors came yelling and screaming out of the dark.

"Cream the punk!" Clarisse screamed as she brandished her electric spear.

They charged across the stream.

Percy managed to sidestep the first kid's swing, but the Ares warriors were wise enough to surround the boy. Clarisse thrust at him with her spear. Percy managed to deflect the point with his shield, but the electricity obviously shocked him, and he fell back.

Chrysa felt sorry for him, and did her best to reroute most of the electricity from Clarisse's spear, which she affectionately called "Maimer".

Chrysa had heard campers from other cabins call it "Lamer".

Another Ares camper slammed Percy in the chest with the butt of his sword, causing the younger boy to fall to the ground.

All five burst out laughing.

"Give him a haircut," Clarisse said. "Grab his hair."

Percy somehow managed to get to his feet and raised his sword. Clarisse slammed it aside with her spear. The electricity was lessened that time, thanks to Chrysa's assistance, but she could still feel that a painful amount had reached her probable-cousin.

"Oh, wow," Clarisse mocked. "I'm scared of this guy. Really scared."

"The flag is that way," Percy said with a gesture, obviously trying to get out of the situation with the least amount of pain.

"Yes," one of other campers – Chrysa thought his name was Mark – said. "But see, we don't care about the flag. We care about a guy who made our cabin look stupid."

"You do that without my help," Percy shot back.

Chrysa winced. That was not the smartest thing to say.

Two of the Ares campers charged Percy. He backed up towards the creek and tried to raise his shield, but Clarisse was too fast. Her spear struck Percy in the ribs. He would have been dead if he hadn't been wearing an armored breastplate. He was obviously electrocuted as well.

Possibly-Mark slashed his sword across Percy's arm, leaving a good-sized cut.

"No maiming," Percy said dizzily.

"Oops," possibly-Mark replied. "Guess I lost my dessert privileges."

He pushed Percy into the creek, causing the Ares campers to laugh again. As the campers wandered into the creek to get Percy, the boy managed to stand up to meet him. He looked stronger than before.
"Of course," Chrysa muttered to herself. "Son of Poseidon. He gains power from the water."

Percy swung the flat of his sword against the first camper's head and knocked his helmet off. He crumpled into the water.

The second and third campers came at Percy as a pair. The boy slammed one in the face with his shield and used his sword to cut through the other's horsehair plume. Both of them backed up quickly. The fourth camper did not look anxious to attack, but Clarisse moved forward with all the anger of a rampaging boar.

She thrust her spear, but Percy caught the shaft between the edge of his shield and his sword, and snapped it like a twig.

"Ah!" she screamed. "You idiot! You corpse-breath worm!"

She probably would have gone further, but Percy smacked her between the eyes with his sword-butt and sent her stumbling backward out of the creek.

Chrysa could hear yelling approaching. From her perch in the tree, she could see Luke racing towards the boundary line with the red team's banner lifted high. He was flanked by Travis and Connor Stoll, followed by some of the Apollo campers, who were fighting off Charles Beckendorf and his siblings.

The Ares campers got up, and Clarisse muttered a dazed curse.

"A trick!" she shouted. "It was a trick."

They staggered towards Luke, but it was too late. Everyone converged on the creek as Luke ran across into friendly territory. The blue team exploded into cheers as the red banner shimmered and turned to silver. The boar and spear were replaced by a caduceus, the symbol of Hermes. Everyone on the blue team continued to cheer as they picked Luke up and started carrying him on their shoulders. Chiron cantered out from the woods and blew the conch horn.

Chrysa flew down and landed near Percy in the creek.

She could hear Annabeth begin to speak.

"Not bad, hero," she told Percy.

The boy started looking around wildly for her.

"Where the heck did you learn to fight like that?" Annabeth asked as she took off her Yankees cap.

Percy looked angry.

"You set me up. You put me here because you knew Clarisse would come after me, while you sent Luke around the flank. You had it all figured out," he said.

Annabeth shrugged.

"I told you, Athena always, always has a plan."

"A plan to get me pulverized. I came as fast as I could. I was about to jump in, but…" she shrugged. "You didn't need the help. And don't worry about them getting punished. I wasn't the only one keeping an eye on you," she said, pointing her thumb towards Chrysa.
Percy started as he noticed her.

"How long were you there?" he demanded.

"I was up in a tree the entire time. I thought that Annabeth might capitalize on Clarisse's hatred for you, so I made sure to come and find you first. I've been up in a tree since the game started," Chrysa said. "As a referee, I couldn't help you officially. I can step in, but not until after a certain level of injuries have incurred. Once you ended up in the creek, I knew you'd be fine."

Annabeth seemed to notice Percy's rapidly healing arm.

"How did you do that?" she asked.

"Sword cut," Percy replied confusedly. "What do you think?"

"No. It was a sword cut. Look at it."

The arm had already sealed itself together. As they watched, it faded into a scar and disappeared.

"I – I don't get it," Percy said, bemused.

Annabeth was thinking hard. Chrysa could almost see the gears turning. She looked down at Percy's feet, then at Clarisse's broken spear, and said, "Step out of the water, Percy."

Chrysa let out a small smile. Annabeth had figured it out.

"What…" Percy began to ask, but Annabeth interrupted him.

"Just do it."

Percy came out of the creek and seemed to immediately sag. He almost fell over, but Annabeth steadied him.

"Oh, Styx," she cursed. "This is not good. I didn't want…I assumed it would be Zeus…"

Before she could continue, the probable-hellhound growled again. A howl ripped through the forest. The campers' cheering died out instantly. Chiron shouted in Ancient Greek, "Stand ready! My bow!"

Annabeth drew her sword.

Chrysa flicked her wrist, and a Stygian iron throwing knife was in her hand. She moved to stand in front of Percy.

There on the rocks just above the creek was a hellhound. Like most of its kind, it was the size of a rhinoceros and had lava-red eyes and dagger-like fangs. It was completely focused on Percy.

Annabeth yelled, "Percy, run!" as she moved to join Chrysa.

The hellhound leapt over both of them, headed for Percy. As it passed over them, Chrysa threw her knife into its heart. The hellhound screamed with fury, but just before it died, it managed to rip through Percy's armor with its claws.

Chrysa moved quickly over to the hellhound. She grabbed her knife and drew it across the hellhound's throat, causing it to disintegrate all the faster. She used her shadow power to drag its carcass back to the Underworld even as she sheathed her knife.
Chiron trotted over to them, his bow in hand, face grim.

"Di immortales!" Annabeth cursed. "That's a hellhound from the Fields of Punishment. They don't...they're not supposed to..."

"Someone summoned it," Chrysa whispered, but it was silent enough in the clearing that it carried throughout. "Someone at Camp Half-Blood summoned a monster from the Underworld to attack Perseus Jackson."

Luke came over as well, his moment of glory gone, even as Clarisse yelled, "It's Percy's fault! Percy summoned it!"

"Be quiet, child," Chiron told her.

"You're wounded," Annabeth told Percy. "Quick, Percy, get in the water."

"I'm okay."

"No, you're not," Chrysa snapped. "Listen to Annabeth, child. She clearly has more common sense than you do."

Percy stepped back into the creek, the whole camp gathering around him. He perked up immediately upon entering the water. The cuts on his chest started healing.

At that moment, a glowing green trident appeared above his head.

Some of the campers gasped.

"Look, I – I don't know why," Percy said, sounding both confused and apologetic. "I'm sorry..."

"Percy," Annabeth said, pointing upwards. "Um..."

Percy looked up, but the trident was already fading.

"Your father," Annabeth murmured. "This is really not good."

"It is determined," Chiron announced.

The campers knelt, with the exception of Chrysa. As was her right as a daughter of Zeus (and as a not-quite-immortal goddess in her own right), she did not kneel. She kept her head high, and sunk into a deep curtsy.

"My father?" Percy asked, sounding bewildered.


After that, no one seemed to be in any state of mind to help out the completely confused and bewildered boy. Chiron dismissed the campers, and they all wandered off in a sort of daze. Chiron, Annabeth, and Chrysa were the only three to stay. Before Luke left, Chrysa grabbed him by the arm and asked him, in a low voice, to bring Percy's things to Cabin Three, so she could get him moved in. He had nodded and promised to do so.

Chrysa then turned to Chiron.

"You need to get back to the main camp," she said firmly. "Pass on the news to Dionysus, though
I'm sure he already knows. I know the gods all watch their children in the Capture-the-Flag game. I'll get Percy back to camp. You can stay if you wish, Annabeth, but I'm sure you have a celebratory party for winning the game back at your cabin."

"I'll stay," the girl quickly said.

"I leave this in your capable hands," Chiron replied before galloping off.

Percy tried to leave the creek, but Chrysa grabbed his hand.

"Not yet, little cousin. Wait until I'm sure you're healed. You're not going to be feeling too great once you're out of there, and I'd like you in the best shape possible before we get you to your new cabin."

"New cabin?" Percy asked.

"That's right," Chrysa replied, forcing herself to be cheerful. "You'll be in Cabin Three now. I think you'll like it there. You'll have your own bed, with nice silk sheets. You'll be able to go to sleep to the sound of the sea. That sound nice?" she asked gently.

"Yeah," Percy said dazedly.

After enough time had passed, Chrysa gently led him out of the creek, supporting him on one side while Annabeth had the other, and they began a slow walk back to camp. Thankfully, their position allowed them to go directly to Poseidon's cabin without having to skirt any of the other cabins.

Luke met them at the doorway of Cabin Three, holding a small bag with Percy's things.

Chrysa stopped at the doorway of the cabin and said, "I, Chrysa Potter, great-granddaughter of Poseidon, give you, Luke Castellan and Annabeth Chase, permission to enter Cabin Three."

She then stepped inside and continued walking, guiding Percy to the nearest bed. If he didn't like it, he could change later. He wasn't exactly likely to have siblings anytime soon. He seemed to fall asleep as soon as his head hit the pillow.

"Set his things over there, Luke," Chrysa ordered. "Annabeth, you head back to your cabin and get some rest. I'll take care of my little cousin."

While other demigods might have been cautious about leaving a weakened son of Poseidon in the hands of a daughter of Zeus given the current political situation, Annabeth and Luke both knew how much family meant to her. After all, she looked after both of them because they had been family to the little sister she was unable to help. By calling Percy her cousin, she claimed him as her family, and promised not to hurt him without just cause.

Both nodded and moved to leave the room.

"Annabeth, you'll still be helping Percy with Greek in the mornings, correct?" Chrysa asked.

"I don't mind doing it," the girl promised.

"And Luke…well, Hermes cabin is going to be scared of him. Most of camp's going to be scared of him. Would you be willing to give him one-on-one sword lessons?" Chrysa asked.

Luke raised an eyebrow.

"Why not you?"
Chrysa shrugged and glanced at her snoozing cousin.

"He's going to need a male role model. Annabeth seems pretty determined to be his friend, and the satyr probably will as well, and I'll be there for him, but he's a twelve-year-old boy. He needs guidance. *Male* guidance. And Chiron doesn't count."


"Sure, Chrysa. I'll meet him every afternoon."

Chrysa nodded decisively. "Good."

Luke turned and left the room. Chrysa waved her hand, and the door closed behind him.

Using a mixture of magic and aerokinesis, Chrysa managed to maneuver Percy enough to get him out of his armor and shoes. She cast a cleaning charm and an air-freshening charm on him, then maneuvered him under the covers. She placed the Minotaur horn on his nightstand, and then placed his pitiful clothing selection (a single change of clothes) into a drawer with his toiletry bag.

Before she closed the door, she conjured a sheet of paper and a pencil and scribbled down his clothing sizes. She also copied down his shoe size after taking a second look at his ragged trainers. She quickly conjured a second sheet of paper and wrote him a quick note, telling him that his lessons with Annabeth were still on and that he would be having one-on-one sword lessons with Luke in the afternoons, and that he should go to Luke for the exact time. However, he should feel free to cancel either or both lessons if he still wasn't feeling well the next morning.

She scribbled her signature after writing, "Love, your cousin," and returned to her own cabin for a good night's rest after a long day.

Chapter End Notes

So, canon Harry was majorly protective of those he loved. Chrysa kept that trait, plus a massive maternal instinct that was intensified after (sort of) losing her children as Maria di Angelo. She mothers people, especially those younger than her. Percy is currently the same age as Bianca was when Maria died. He's also Chrysa's cousin, which means he has massively set off her protective maternal instincts.
"Look, Percy… I don't have much family. My mortal parents were murdered when I was fifteen months old, and I was sent to my aunt and uncle, who hated me. They were the worst sort of people, and they hated me for being different. They made sure to show it too. I was removed from their care when I was thirteen, and my godfather took custody. He, his husband, and their son, my godson, are the only non-godly family I have left, along with some friends back in England who are as good as family. But the point is, I grew up without family, so when I find family, I do whatever I can to take care of them. I wasn't able to help Thalia. I didn't even know she existed until three months after she'd been turned into a tree. But I can help you."

The next morning, Chrysa walked into breakfast, told Chiron that she'd be back by dinner, and left camp.

Armed with the list she had made of Percy's sizes, she spent the day at Roosevelt Field, one of the largest malls in the country, and the closest to camp. She was determined that her cousin would not have such a pitiful amount of possessions at camp any longer! Especially since she was now relatively certain that he was not the Lightning Thief. Besides, from what they had discovered while investigating the boy, he was from a lower-class family and didn't have that much to spend on clothes anyway.

She barged into Cabin Three shortly before dinner, arms filled with bags, causing Percy to almost fall off his bed.

"Chrysa?" he asked bemused. "What's all this?"

"The state of your wardrobe was pitiful," she told him bluntly. "I simply decided to rectify that. I copied down your sizes last night, and I went shopping earlier."

"But I – I don't have any money!" Percy burst out. "I can't pay for all this!"

"You don't need to," Chrysa said briskly, pulling clothing items out of bags and placing them on another bed. "I already did. I bought all of this for you. And don't start saying you can't accept charity," she said, whirling around and pointing a finger at Percy, who had his mouth open to protest.

Percy shut his mouth.

Chrysa put her finger down and smiled at him.

"Look, Percy… I don't have much family. My mortal parents were murdered when I was fifteen months old, and I was sent to my aunt and uncle, who hated me. They were the worst sort of people, and they hated me for being different. They made sure to show it too. I was removed from their care when I was thirteen, and my godfather took custody. He, his husband, and their son, my godson, are the only non-godly family I have left, along with some friends back in England who are as good as family. But the point is, I grew up without family, so when I find family, I do whatever I can to take care of them. I wasn't able to help Thalia. I didn't even know she existed until three months after
she'd been turned into a tree. But I can help you, and if that means buying you a new wardrobe, then I am going to buy you a new wardrobe."

She shrugged.

"Besides, I inherited a literal fortune and a Lordship from my adoptive father. I could spend thousands of dollars every day still be rich. So shut up and accept that your wardrobe has been expanded."

Percy closed his mouth.

By the time they had finished putting Percy's new clothes away, the horn was blowing for dinner. Chrysa walked Percy to the dining pavilion, and instead of making her way to the head table, plopped down across from him at the Poseidon table.

He stared at her in shock.

Everyone else did too.

Chrysa sighed and raised her voice.

"My mother was the daughter of the demigod son of Hecate and the demigod daughter of Poseidon. As a great-granddaughter of Poseidon, I am allowed to sit at cabin three's table if I so choose."

The noise level slowly returned, but Percy still looked shocked. Chrysa began placing food on both of their plates.

"But why would you want to sit with me?" Percy asked hesitantly.

"I told you, you're family. I know how lonely it is, sitting at a table all on your own. That's why I sit at the head table instead of cabin one's table. You're not old enough to sit at the head table though, and you don't have my leverage. So I just had to come to you," she replied.

"What kind of leverage?" Percy asked.

Chrysa smirked.

"I told Chiron and Dionysus, that since Dionysus was the son of Zeus and Semele, that meant he was also supposed to sit at cabin one's table with me. I could sit at the head table, or I could drag him to sit amongst the campers."

Percy stared at her, wide-eyed. "How did you get away with that?"

"Dionysus is here in the first place because he's being punished. Father isn't too happy with him right now. Besides, I'm Daddy's favorite."

"You call the King of Olympus Daddy?" Percy demanded in a low voice.

"Not usually. He's usually Father. But Father has always favored his daughters more than his sons: Artemis, Athena…they pretty much always got what they wanted in the myths. I'm just following their example. Besides, Father is still upset over Thalia, and he does his best to keep me safe and happy because of that," Chrysa replied quietly.

"What was she like?" Percy asked. "Thalia, I mean."

Chrysa sighed.
"I only know second-hand, I'm afraid. Not personally. Thalia was already a tree by the time I learned of her existence. From what I know of her, she was brave, protective, and a natural leader. She loved her friends very dearly. "Greater love hath no man than this: that a man lay down his life for his friends." Thalia did that. She sacrificed herself to the teeth and claws of the worst monsters, all so her friends could live," Chrysa said.

Percy was quiet for a moment.

"Was that Shakespeare?" he finally asked.

"The Bible, actually. John 15:13."

"You know the Bible?"

"My aunt was very determined to be normal. She was also convinced I was demon spawn. We were in church every Sunday. I don't think anyone else in her family was listening to the sermons, but I enjoyed it."

Chrysa picked up her food and made her way to the brazier. Her sacrifice at this meal was to Hecate and Thanatos, and she threw in a bar of chocolate she'd picked up at the mall for Hades. Percy followed her there. She heard him whisper, "Poseidon."

Dinner went well, and Chrysa walked Percy back to his cabin afterwards.

"I know how isolating it is," she confessed as they walked. "You and I…we're not supposed to exist. That's why I only stay for a couple months in the fall. Most people avoid me too. Annabeth and Luke are better than most – Luke and Thalia were on the streets together for two years, and they raised Annabeth for six months of that. Neither of them have any problems dealing with demigods who aren't supposed to exist. But it'll get better. They'll get used to you, and while you might still be on a pedestal, you won't be a pariah anymore."

Her words were discounted as soon as they walked into Cabin Three. There was a copy of the New York Daily News on the floor, opened to the Metro page. The headline of the article read, "Boy and Mother Still Missing After Freak Car Accident." Percy picked it up and began to read. Chrysa read it over his shoulder.

She was fuming after she read it, but didn't say anything as Percy was still reading. After several more minutes of him looking frustrated, she said, "You're dyslexic, aren't you?"

Percy flushed.

"Yeah."

"Do you want me to read it to you? I'm one of the few demigods who didn't get that trait," Chrysa offered.

Percy looked torn between accepting the help and admitting his weakness.

"I can also cast a spell that will translate it into Ancient Greek," Chrysa said. "I do it for Annabeth all the time."

Percy looked relieved.

"Please."
Chrysa pulled out her wand and cast the translation spell. Percy returned to the article and made it through much faster that time. He looked more fatigued than angry when he was done.

"People have always been cruel at all my different schools, but I thought it would be different here," he said quietly as he wadded the paper up and threw it away. He flopped down on his bed.

"People are fickle. And you're young. Once they spend more time with you, once they get to know you better, they'll see what I see," Chrysa replied comfortingly, laying a gentle hand on his shoulder.

Percy looked up at her.

"What do you see?"

Chrysa smiled as she brushed his hair away from his face.

"A charming young man who has the potential to be a great hero one day." She kissed the top of his head. "Get some rest. Tomorrow's probably going to be a long day."

For her at least, the day started early. Chiron came by her cabin before dawn.

"Mr. D is going to call Percy Jackson to the Big House today," he said. "Since I'm certain that you're here to watch him because of this whole Lightning Thief problem, I thought you might like to be there. Besides, Mr. D misses having more people to play pinochle with."

"I'll be there in a few minutes," Chrysa promised.

As soon as she closed the door behind him, she waved her hand to summon her new Gucci purse, while flicking her other wrist to bring her wand into her hand. A wave of her wand had supplies flying from around the room into the bottomless compartment of her purse. She filled it with everything from food and water to ambrosia, drachmas, sleeping bags, blankets, pillows, changes of clothing, two jackets, flashlights, batteries, extra weapons, her armor, etc. The non-expanded portion of her purse contained her wallet, car keys, and magical cell phone.

She double-checked that she had everything, laced up her boots, and made her way to the Big House porch. Chiron and Dionysus were waiting for her to start the game.

It was several hours later, long past dawn, when the satyr showed up, Percy Jackson in tow.

"Well, well," Dionysus said without looking up. "Our little celebrity."

Percy was silent.

"Come closer," Dionysus ordered. "And don't expect me to kowtow to you, mortal, just because old Barnacle Beard is your father."

A net of lightning flashed across the clouds. Thunder shook the windows of the house.

"Blah, blah, blah," Dionysus said.

Chrysa and Chiron were both studiously attending their pinochle cards. The satyr was cowering by the railing, his hooves clapping back and forth.

"If I had my way," Dionysus said, "I would cause your molecules to erupt in flames. We'd sweep up the ashes and be done with a lot of trouble. But Chiron seems to feel this would be against my
mission at this cursed camp: to keep you little brats safe from harm."

"Spontaneous combustion is a form of harm, Mr. D," Chiron put in.

"Nonsense," Dionysus said. "Boy wouldn't feel a thing."

Chrysa put down her cards and looked at her half-brother.

"Have you ever been spontaneously combusted? I promise you, it's not pleasant. Even if you die really, really quickly, you still remember it when you wake up in the Underworld," she pointed out. "It could be worse, yes, but it still hurts."

Dionysus sighed. "Fine." He turned his attention back to Percy. "Nevertheless, I've agreed to restrain myself. I'm thinking of turning you into a dolphin instead, sending you back to your father."

"Mr. D –" Chiron warned.

"Oh, all right," Dionysus relented. "There's one more option. But it's deadly foolishness."

He rose, and his cards dropped to the table. "I'm off to Olympus for the emergency meeting. If the boy is still here when I get back, I'll turn him into an Atlantic bottlenose. Do you understand? And Perseus Jackson, if you're at all smart, you'll see that's a much more sensible choice than what Chiron feels you must do."

Dionysus picked up a playing card, twisted it, and it became his Olympus security pass. He snapped his fingers and disappeared to Olympus, leaving only the smell of fresh-pressed grapes behind.

Chiron smiled at Percy, but he looked tired and strained.

"Sit, Percy, please. And Grover."

Both sat. Percy took Dionysus' vacated seat, and the satyr was across from Chrysa. She avidly avoided looking at him.

Chiron laid his cards on the table. It was a winning hand.

Chrysa cursed as she laid her lesser hand down, then took the laurels off her head and tossed them to Chiron. He smiled briefly at her.

"Tell me, Percy," he said, "what did you make of the hellhound?"

"It scared me," Percy admitted. "If Chrysa hadn't killed it, I'd be dead."

"You'll meet worse, Percy. Far worse, before you're done," Chiron said ominously.

"Done…with what?"

"Your quest, of course. Will you accept it?"

Percy glanced at the satyr, who appeared to be crossing his fingers.

"Um, sir," Percy said. "You haven't told me what it is yet."

Chiron grimaced. "Well, that's the hard part, the details."

Thunder rumbled across the valley. Chrysa glanced toward the ocean, and could see that the storm had reached the edge of the beach.
"Poseidon and Zeus," Percy said. "They're fighting over something valuable…something that was stolen, aren't they?"

Chrysa gave Percy a sharp look. She didn't think he was the thief, but there was no way he could have known that.

Chiron sat forward in his wheelchair.

"How did you know that?" he asked.

Percy flushed.

"The weather since Christmas has been weird, like the sea and the sky are fighting. Then I talked to Annabeth, and she'd overheard something about a theft. Everyone was completely shocked that Chrysa would go anywhere near me, let alone be nice to me. And…I've also been having these dreams."

"I knew it," the satyr said.

"Hush, satyr," Chiron ordered.

"But it is his quest!" the satyr exclaimed, eyes bright with excitement. "It must be!"

"Only the Oracle can determine," Chiron said as he stroked his bristly beard. "Nevertheless, Percy, you are correct. Your father and Zeus are having their worst quarrel in centuries. They are fighting over something valuable that was stolen. A lightning bolt, to be precise."

Percy laughed nervously.

"A what?"

"Do not take this lightly," Chiron warned. "I'm not talking about some tinfoil-covered zigzag you'd see in a second-grade play. I'm talking about a two-foot-long cylinder of high-grade celestial bronze, capped on both ends with god-level explosives."

"Oh."

"Zeus' Master Bolt," Chiron said, getting worked up now. "The symbol of his power, from which all other lightning bolts are patterned. The first weapon made by the Cyclopes for the war against the Titans, the bolt that sheered the top off Mount Othrys and hurled Kronos from his throne; the Master Bolt, which packs enough power to make mortal hydrogen bombs look like firecrackers."

"And it's missing?" Percy asked.

"Stolen," Chiron said.

"By who?"

"By whom," Chiron corrected. Once a teacher, always a teacher.

"By you," Chrysa said quietly.

Percy's mouth fell open.

"At least, that's the main theory. I've spoken with Father about this multiple times since the theft. During the winter solstice, when all the gods gather together for a council on Olympus, Father and
Poseidon had an argument. It wasn't anything major, just two brothers sniping at each other: 'Mother Rhea always liked you best,' 'Air disasters are more spectacular than sea disasters,' et cetera. Afterward, Father realized his Master Bolt was missing, taken from the throne room under his very nose. He immediately blamed Poseidon," Chrysa explained.

Chiron took over from there.

"Now, a god cannot usurp another god's symbol of power directly – that is forbidden by the most ancient of divine laws. But Zeus believes your father convinced a human hero to take it."

"But I didn't…" Percy began.

"Patience and listen, child," Chiron said. "Zeus has good reason to be suspicious. The forges of the Cyclopes are under the ocean, which gives Poseidon some influence over the makers of his brother's lightning. Zeus believes Poseidon has taken the Master Bolt, and is now secretly having the Cyclopes build an arsenal of illegal copies, which might be used to topple Zeus from his throne. The only thing Zeus wasn't sure about was which hero Poseidon used to steal the bolt. Now Poseidon has openly claimed you as his son. You were in New York over the winter holidays. You could have easily snuck into Olympus. Zeus believes he has found his thief."

"But I've never even been to Olympus! Zeus is crazy!" Percy burst out.

Chiron and the satyr glanced nervously at the sky.

"Please do not call my father crazy," Chrysa put in coolly.

"We don't really use the c-word to describe the Lord of the Sky," the satyr said.

"Perhaps paranoid," Chiron suggested, glancing at Chrysa.

She thought a moment, then nodded. "I'll accept that."

"Then again, Poseidon has tried to unseat Zeus before. I believe that was question thirty-eight on your final exam…" He looked at Percy as if he expected him to remember question thirty-eight. Chrysa had a sudden flashback of Hermione doing the exact same thing after the OWLs.

"Something about a golden net?" Percy asked. "Poseidon and Hera and a few other gods…they, like, trapped Zeus and wouldn't let him out until he promised to be a better ruler, right?"

"Correct," Chiron said. "And Zeus has never trusted Poseidon since."

"Even though he really did need the kick," Chrysa pointed out. "He was well on his way to Kronos-level tyranny."

"Of course, Poseidon denies stealing the Master Bolt. He took great offense at the accusation. The two have been arguing back and forth for months, threatening war. And now, you've come along – the proverbial last straw."

"But I'm just a kid!" Percy exclaimed.

"Percy," the satyr cut in, "if you were Zeus, and you already thought your brother was plotting to overthrow you, then your brother suddenly admitted that he had broken the sacred oath he took after World War II, that he's fathered a new mortal hero who might be used as a weapon against you….Wouldn't that put a twist in your toga?"
"But I didn't do anything. Poseidon – my dad – he didn't really have this Master Bolt stolen, did he?"

Chiron sighed.

"Most thinking observers would agree that thievery is not Poseidon's style. But the Sea God is too proud to try convincing Zeus of that. Zeus has demanded that Poseidon return the bolt by the summer solstice. That's June twenty-first, ten days from now. Poseidon wants an apology for being called a thief by the same date. I hoped that diplomacy might prevail, that Hera or Demeter or Hestia would make the brothers see sense. But your arrival as inflamed Zeus' temper. Now neither god will back down. Unless someone intervenes, unless the master bolt is found and returned to Zeus before the solstice, there will be war. And do you know what a full-fledged war would look like, Percy?"

"Bad?" he asked.

"Imagine the world in chaos. Nature at war with itself. Olympians forced to choose sides between Zeus and Poseidon. Destruction. Carnage. Millions dead. Western civilization turned into a battleground so big it will make the Trojan War look like a water-balloon fight."

"Bad," Percy repeated.

"And you, Percy Jackson, would be the first to feel Zeus' wrath."

It started to rain. Volleyball players stopped their game and stared in stunned silence at the sky.

Chrysa let out a groan and reached out a hand towards the sky, pushing the storm away, pushing the clouds away from Camp Half-Blood in a reminder to her father that yes, his brother's son was at Camp Half-Blood, but she was here too and she did not appreciate getting wet!

"Thank you, Chrysa," Chiron said as the storm disappeared.

"Zeus is very unhappy," he told Percy. "Chrysa is here for her own protection, yes, but I would not doubt that she also has orders from her father to keep an eye on the campers for potential thieves and you in particular."

When Percy looked at her, Chrysa nodded.

"He's right. Father has suspected you might be Poseidon's son since Chiron first went to Yancy Academy. Since Father had previously broken the Oath – twice – he wasn't going to say anything. When the Master Bolt went missing, he had a full dossier on you the next day. You have been the prime suspect since December 23rd. He's had me keeping an eye on you since. I told him back in April that I did not think that you were the thief. I have only become firmer in that opinion since you arrived at camp, and by the time you were claimed, I told Father in no uncertain terms that you were not the Lightning Thief. However, he still blames Poseidon, and Father's wrath will still fall on you if a war begins," Chrysa said.

"You've been watching me since December?" Percy asked, dumbfounded.

"Not constantly, or anything," Chrysa said. "I do have my own life to live, and you were at Yancy for most of that. I did follow you around the mall one day when you were there while your mother was working. I've visited the candy shop she worked at several times during the school year. I was at the Metropolitan Museum of Art when Alecto attacked you."

"Who?"

"Mrs. Dodds," the satyr put in.

"You were there?" Chiron asked. "I didn't see you?"

"I spent most of my time in the other wings of the museum until you all showed up. I didn't catch up to you until you were explaining about the **stele**. I was visible, but I had a Notice-Me-Not charm up. Good job with Alecto though, Percy. But other than those occasions, I haven't been following you. Keeping an eye on you, yes. Following you, no. And nothing I've done since you've been claimed was to try to spy on you for my father. I told you, I don't believe you stole the Bolt. I've been helping you because I want to," Chrysa said firmly.

Percy still looked furious, but he didn't appear to be angry at Chrysa.

"So I have to find the stupid bolt and return it to Zeus," Percy said.

"What better peace offering," Chiron said, "than to have the son of Poseidon return Zeus' lost property?"

"If Poseidon doesn't have it, where is the thing?" Percy asked.

"I believe I know," Chiron said, his expression dark. "Part of a prophecy I had years ago...well, some of the lines make more sense to me, now. But before I can say more, you must officially take up the quest. You must seek the counsel of the Oracle."

"Why can't you tell me where the bolt is beforehand?"

"Because if I did, you would be too afraid to accept the challenge."

Percy swallowed visibly.

"Good reason."

"You agree then?" Chiron questioned.

Percy looked at the satyr, who nodded encouragingly. He then looked at Chrysa.

"It may be the only way to save your life," she said quietly.

Percy gulped again, then turned to Chiron.

"Alright. It's better than being turned into a dolphin."

"Then it's time you consulted the Oracle," Chiron said. "Go upstairs, Percy Jackson, to the attic. When you come back own, assuming you're still sane, we'll talk more."

The table was quiet once Percy left. Chrysa occupied herself by putting the playing cards back into a neat stack.

Finally, Chiron asked her, "Do you have orders to kill Percy Jackson after the summer solstice?"

Chrysa glared at him.

"First of all, I wouldn't even if I did, but no. Father's only orders were to keep an eye on him. Keeping me safe at Camp Half-Blood was just a bonus. I think we both know that I could be safe from Poseidon even if I wasn't here. But I will not harm my cousin. Barring cases of possession, mind-control, or induced psychopathy, of course."
There was more silence at the table, before Chiron stated, "I apologize if I have offended you."

"You have," Chrysa replied. "I understand why you asked though, so you're forgiven."

Several minutes of awkward silence later – only broken by the sounds of the satyr chewing a Diet Coke can – Percy came back.

"Well?" Chiron asked.

Percy slumped into the empty chair at the pinochle table.

"She said I would retrieve what was stolen," Percy said.

The satyr sat forward and exclaimed, "That's great!"

"What did the Oracle say exactly?" Chiron pressed. "This is important."

"She…she said I would go west and face a god who had turned. I would retrieve what was stolen and see it safely returned."

"I knew it," the satyr said, almost crowing in glee.

Chiron and Chrysa exchanged glances. Prophecies were never that short.

"Anything else?" Chiron asked.

"No," Percy replied. "That's about it."

Chiron stared intently at him.

"Very well, Percy. But know this: the Oracle's words often have double meanings. Don't dwell on them too much. The truth is not always clear until events come to pass."

"Okay," Percy said. "So where do I go? Who's this god in the west?"

"Ah, think Percy," Chiron said. "If Zeus and Poseidon weaken each other in a war, who stands to gain?"

"Somebody else who wants to take over?" Percy guessed.

"Yes, quite. Someone who harbors a grudge, who has been unhappy with his lot since the world was divided eons ago, whose kingdom would grow powerful with the deaths of millions. Someone who hates his brothers for forcing him into an oath to have no more children, an oath that both of them have now broken," Chiron said.

Chrysa fumed inwardly at the defamation of her beloved's character. Hades had been perfectly fine taking the Underworld as his lot. He wasn't the biggest fan of water, and he felt more comfortable on or under the ground anyway. Besides, Leuke had grown up in the House of Nyx, in Tartarus, and she had always seen visits to the Underworld as happy vacations. She had been happy there, and what made her happy made him happy. Yes, Hades harbored a grudge against his brothers, but it was more a grudge that everyone had pretty much abandoned him when Leuke died, with the exception of his mother and Hestia. He didn't want to harm his family. And while the deaths of millions would increase the number of subjects in Hades' kingdom, he already had billions. Adding millions more would be a hassle and require more renovations of the Underworld. Hades did not hate his brothers for forcing him into the oath, he severely disliked Zeus for killing Maria di Angelo and attempting to kill Nico and Bianca. Even then, his dislike had mostly dissipated now that Maria had
returned to him in the form of Chrysa, Zeus' daughter.

"Hades," Percy said.

Chiron nodded.

"The Lord of the Dead is the only possibility."

A scrap of aluminum fell out of the satyr's mouth.

"Whoa, wait. Wh-what?" he asked.

"A Fury came after Percy," Chiron reminded the satyr. "She watched the young man until she was sure of his identity, then tried to kill him. Furies obey only one lord: Hades."

"Yes, but – but Hades hates all heroes," Grover protested. "Especially if he found out that Percy is a son of Poseidon…"

"A hellhound got into the forest," Chiron continued. "Those can only be summoned from the Fields of Punishment, and it had to be summoned by someone within the camp. Hades must have a spy here. HE must suspect Poseidon will try to use Percy to clear his name. Hades would very much like to kill this young half-blood before he can take on the quest."

"Great," Percy muttered. "That's two major gods who want to kill me."

"But a quest to..." the satyr swallowed. "I mean, couldn't the Master Bolt be in some place like Maine? Maine's very nice this time of year."

"Hades sent a minion to steal the Master Bolt," Chiron insisted. "He hid it in the Underworld, knowing full well that Zeus would blame Poseidon. I don't pretend to understand the Lord of the Dead's motives perfectly, or why he chose this time to start a war, but one thing is certain. Percy must go to the Underworld, find the Master Bolt, and reveal the truth."

The satyr was trembling. He had started to eat Chrysa's neatly-stacked pinochle cards like potato chips.

"Look, if we know it's Hades, why can't we just tell the other gods? Zeus or Poseidon could go down to the Underworld and butt some heads," Percy said.

"Suspecting and knowing are two different things," Chrysa said sharply. "Hades is the best guess based upon the information we have. However, even if it is not Hades, someone is still trying to start a war, and they would suspect us to think what we do. The truth will come out."

"Besides, even if the other gods suspect Hades – and I imagine Poseidon does – they couldn't retrieve the bolt themselves. Gods cannot cross each other's territories except by invitation. That is another ancient rule. Heroes, on the other hand, have certain privileges. They can go anywhere, challenge anyone, as long as they're bold enough and strong enough to do it. No god can be held responsible for a hero's actions. Why do you think the gods always operate through humans?" Chiron asked.

"You're saying I'm being used," Percy said flatly.

"I'm saying it's no accident Poseidon has claimed you now. It's a very risky gamble, but he's in a desperate situation. He needs you."
Percy looked at Chiron.

"You've known I was Poseidon's son all along, haven't you?"

"I had my suspicions, as did Zeus apparently. As I said...I've spoken to the Oracle too," Chiron replied.

"So let me get this straight," Percy said. "I'm supposed to go to the Underworld and confront the Lord of the Dead."

"Check," Chiron said.

"Find the most powerful weapon in the universe."

"Check."

"And get it back to Olympus before the summer solstice, in ten days."

"That's about right."

Percy looked at the satyr, who gulped down an ace of hearts.

"Did I mention that Maine is very nice this time of year?" he said weakly.

"You don't have to go," Percy told him. "I can't ask that of you."

"Oh..." He shifted his hooves. "No...it's just that satyrs and underground places...well..."

He took a deep breath, then stood, brushing the shredded remains of his snacking off his t-shirt.

"You saved my life, Percy. If...if you're serious about wanting me along, I won't let you down."

Percy looked incredibly thankful.

"All the way, G-man," he replied. He turned to Chiron. "So where do we go? The Oracle just said to go west."

"The entrance of the Underworld is always in the west. It moves from age to age, just like Olympus. Right now, it's in America."

"Where?" Percy asked.

Chiron looked surprised.

"I thought it would be obvious enough. The entrance to the Underworld is in Los Angeles."

"Oh," Percy said. "Naturally. So we just get on a plane..."

"No!" the satyr shrieked, sounding surprisingly girlish for someone in his sixth year of middle school. "Percy, what are you thinking? Have you ever been on a plane in your life?"

He shook his head.

"Percy, think," Chiron said. "You are the son of the Sea God. Your father's bitterest rival is Zeus, Lord of the Sky. Your mother knew better than to trust you in an airplane. You would be in Zeus' domain. You would never come down again."
"At least, not alive and most likely not in one piece," Chrysa said. "The only reason I can go swimming is the fact that Poseidon is my great-grandfather."

"Okay," Percy said. "So I'll travel overland."

"That's right," Chiron said. "Two companions may accompany you. Grover is one. The other has already volunteered, if you will accept her help."

"Gee," Percy said, feigning surprise. "Who else would be stupid enough to volunteer for a quest like this?"

The air shimmered behind Chiron, and Annabeth became visible, stuffing her Yankees cap into her back pocket.

"I've been waiting a long time for a quest, Seaweed Brain," she said. "Athena is no fan of Poseidon, but if you're going to save the world, I'm the best person to keep you from messing up."

"If you do say so yourself," Percy said. "I suppose you have a plan, Wise Girl?"

She blushed. "Do you want my help or not?" she demanded.

"A trio," Percy said. "That'll work."

"Excellent," Chiron said. "Chrysa has volunteered to chaperone."

All three campers looked at her in surprise. She leaned forward on the table.

"As I won't be an official member of the quest, I can't help you with your quest directly. However, I can be around so no one tries to call the police about the three twelve-year-olds who are running around unaccompanied. I can protect myself, though I can't fight your battles for you. I can keep Zeus from deciding to randomly smite Percy in a fit of anger, because I'll be there too and he won't kill me. Oh, and I can drive, until the first monster attacks my car and it gets totaled. I've lost so many good cars that way." She shook her head. "My poor Lamborghini only lasted a week and a half."

"This afternoon, we will take you as far Manhattan, so that Chrysa can pick up her car. After that, you are on your own," Chiron said. "No time to waste. I think you should all get packing."
The Quest Begins

Chapter Summary

They had made it through the Lincoln Tunnel, onto a rural New Jersey Road, before the Furies attacked.

Granted, Chrysa was expecting the attack. She knew that Hades would be sending Alecto, Megaera, and Tisiphone after them in order to keep up the ruse that he blamed Percy for the missing Helm of Darkness.

She was not expecting them to total her car that quickly.

Argus dropped them off in front of the upscale Manhattan apartment building that Chrysa owned.

"Why are we here?" Percy asked.

"My cars are in the parking garage below it," Chrysa said. "I own the building."

"Wow," Annabeth said.

Chrysa led them down to the parking garage.

"Now, the Bentley and the Rolls-Royce are back in England, the Porsche, the Audi, and the Mercedes are in California, and the Ferrari only seats two, so I guess we're taking the Maserati," she explained as she walked them to the VIP section.

"You have seven cars?" Annabeth demanded, even as Percy and the satyr burst out, "You have a Ferrari?"

"I have seven cars that I use on a regular basis. I have several more in storage, in case I need them. Yes, boys, I have a Ferrari. My boyfriend gave it to me for our anniversary."

She fished the keys to her Maserati Quattroporte out of her purse and clicked the unlock. The lights flashed, and the kids hurried over to it. Before anyone could say anything, Chrysa called, "Girls in the front seat, boys in the back!"

Both the satyr and Percy sighed, but moved obediently back. Annabeth smugly took shotgun.

A few minutes later, they were driving out of Manhattan. As they drove through Upper East Side, Chrysa could see Percy staring longingly towards where his mother's apartment was in the rearview mirror.

"You want to know why she married him, Percy?" the satyr asked him.

Percy turned to stare at the satyr.

"Were you reading my mind or something?"

"Just your emotions," the satyr replied with a shrug. "Guess I forgot to tell you satyrs can do that. You were thinking about your mom and stepdad, right?"
Percy nodded.

"Your mom married Gabe for you," the satyr told him. "You call him, 'Smelly', but you've got no idea. The guy has this aura…Yuck. I can smell him from here. I can smell traces of him on you, and you haven't been near him for a week."

"Thanks," Percy said. "Where's the nearest shower?"

"You should be grateful, Percy. Your stepfather smells so repulsively human he could mask the presence of any demigod. As soon as I took a whiff inside his Camaro, I knew: Gabe has been covering your scent for years. If you hadn't lived with him every summer, you probably would've been found by monsters a long time ago. Your mom stayed with him to protect you. She was a smart lady. She must've loved you a lot to put up with that guy – if that makes you feel any better."

Percy was silent for a long time after that.

Chrysa sighed and asked Annabeth how her architecture studies were going. It was a surefire way to fill the car with conversation – even one-sided conversation – in two seconds flat.

They had made it through the Lincoln Tunnel, onto a rural New Jersey Road, before the Furies attacked.

Granted, Chrysa was expecting the attack. She knew that Hades would be sending Alecto, Megaera, and Tisiphone after them in order to keep up the ruse that he blamed Percy for the missing Helm of Darkness.

She was not expecting them to total her car that quickly.

The car flipped several times before slamming into a tree. Thanks to the numerous ward and charms on the car, no one was harmed.

"Out!" Chrysa barked. "Get out of the car now! You're sitting ducks!"

The three were out of the car in seconds, abandoning all of their things. Chrysa took a little longer, as she wasn't actually allowed to help.

"Perseus Jackson," she heard Alecto say. "You have offended the gods. You shall die."

"I liked you better as a math teacher," Percy fired back.

Chrysa watched out of the corner of her eye as Percy drew the same pen-sword he had wielded against Alecto in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

"Submit now," Alecto hissed, "and you will not suffer eternal torment."

"Nice try," Percy replied.

"Percy, look out!" Annabeth cried.

Alecto lashed her whip around Percy's sword hand while Megaera and Tisiphone lunged at him. Percy hit Megaera with the sword hilt, before turning and slicing Tisiphone's neck with the blade. She screamed and exploded into dust as the celestial bronze touched her neck.

Annabeth managed to get Alecto in a wrestler's hold and yank her backwards while the satyr ripped the whip out of her hands.
"Ow!" he yelled. "Ow! Hot! Hot!"

Megaera charged Percy again, but he swung the sword and she turned to dust.

Alecto was furiously trying to escape Annabeth, but the daughter of Athena held on tightly. The satyr managed to tie Alecto's legs in her on whip, before shoving her into a bush. She tried to get up, but her wings kept running into the bush.

"Zeus will destroy you!" Alecto yelled at Percy, keeping up the act. "Hades will have your soul!"

Percy yelled something – probably an insult – in Latin, but Chrysa didn't catch it. While she could read Latin due to Hogwarts, she was not fluent in spoken Latin. She had died before it had come to exist, after all.

Thunder shook the sky overhead while an earthquake shook the ground.

Chrysa decided she really needed to get out of the car. She had just made it over to the kids when lightning shredded her car and destroyed the woods around them. One hit near Alecto, but she was unharmed.

"Our bags!" the satyr cried. "We left our…"

The Fury began to shriek.

"Run!" Annabeth yelled. "She's calling for reinforcements!"

All four plunged into the woods as rain began to pour, the car in flames behind them.

By the time they made it to the bank of the Hudson River, Chrysa felt like it was safe to talk. None of the three kids looked well, but Annabeth looked the best out of the three. After what she'd gone through during the month she spent alone on the streets, and the six months she spent with Luke and Thalia, Chrysa wasn't surprised. Out of all of them, she had the most experience with monster attacks.

The satyr was shivering and braying, goat eyes turned slit-pupiled and full of terror.

"Three Kindly Ones," he said. "All three at once."

Annabeth was pulling them along.

"Come on! The farther away we get, the better," she urged.

"All our money was back there," Percy reminded. "Our food and clothes. Everything."

"Well, we don't have much of a choice now!" she snapped.

"Tin cans," the satyr brayed mournfully. "A perfectly good bag of tin cans."

"Shut up, goat boy," said Annabeth.

They were silent for a long moment, before Chrysa spoke up.

"Well, someone owes me a car," she sighed. "I'm definitely charging someone for that. I haven't decided who I'm charging, but I'm definitely billing either Father or the Lord of Riches for that."

"The Lord of Riches?" Percy asked, confused.
"Our mutual uncle," Chrysa replied.

All three kids stopped and stared at her.

"You're going to bill your uncle, the absolutely terrifying Lord of the Underworld that we're on our way to confront, for the car that his pet monsters destroyed," Annabeth deadpanned.

"Absolutely. The Lord likes me. We have similar senses of humor."

They continued sloshing across mushy ground, through nasty twisted trees that smelled like sour laundry.

Annabeth eventually fell in next to Percy.

"Look, I…" Her voice faltered. "I really appreciate you stepping in front of us, okay? That was really brave."

"We're a team, right?" Percy replied.

Annabeth was silent for a few more steps.

"It's just that if you died…aside from the fact that it would really suck for you, it would mean the quest was over. This may be my only chance to see the real world."

"You haven't left Camp Half-Blood since you were seven?" Percy asked, surprised.

"No…only short field trips. Camp does group trips for the year-rounders. And Chrysa takes Luke and I out sometimes. But my dad…"

"The history professor."

"Yeah. It didn't work out for me living at home. I mean, Camp Half-Blood is my home." She was rushing her words out now, as if she were afraid somebody might try to stop her. "At camp, you train and train. And that's all cool and everything, but the real world is where the monsters are. That's where you learn whether you're any good or not."

It was only because she knew her so well that Chrysa could hear the doubt in her voice.

"You're pretty good with that knife," Percy said.

"You think so?" Annabeth asked.

"Anybody who can piggyback-ride a Fury is okay by me," Percy replied.

"Chrysa's been helping me. Have you ever seen her fight with her knives?"


"That doesn't count. She was using her knife as part of a swordfight. When she goes all out with her knives…it's beautiful."

"Why thank you, Annabeth," Chrysa said, raising her voice so the pair could hear her.

Both jumped and turned around.

"Gods, Chrysa, how are you this quiet? I forgot you were here!" Annabeth exclaimed.
Chrysa let out a small laugh.

"I'm good in the shadows. Always have been."

Any further conversation was interrupted by a shrill *toot-toot-toot*, like the sound of an owl being tortured.

"Hey, my reed pipes still work!" the satyr cried. "If I could just remember a 'find path' song, we could get out of these woods!"

He puffed out a few notes, but the tune sounded suspiciously like Hilary Duff.

Instead of finding a path, it confused Percy enough that he slammed into a tree and got a nice-sized knot on his head.

"Satyr, if you do not remember the 'find path' song, do not attempt to play it!" Chrysa barked. She saw him wilt from ahead of her. He probably didn't think she could see it.

For the next mile or so, Chrysa watched in amusement as the kids tripped and cursed their way through the woods. Since she had perfect night vision, she did not have the same problem.

Then, finally, the colors of a neon sign appeared ahead of them. The smell of fried, greasy food wafted its way to them.

They continued walking until they saw a deserted two-lane road through the trees. On the other side was a closed-down gas station, a tattered billboard for a 1990s movie, and one open business, which was the source of the neon light and the smell of food. There was a neon sign that displayed the name in red cursive.

"What the heck does that say?" Percy asked.

"I don't know," Annabeth said.

"Aunty Em's Garden Gnome Emporium," the satyr translated.

Two cement garden gnomes, ugly bearded runts, flanked the entrance, smiling and waving, as if they were about to get their pictures taken.

Chrysa scoffed.

"Garden gnomes do not look like that. I have never in my life seen a garden gnome smile, and I have had to help de-gnome my best friend's mother's garden many, many times."

Percy crossed the street and moved towards the building.

"Hey…" the satyr warned.

"The lights are on inside," Annabeth pointed out. "Maybe it's open."

"Snack bar," Percy said wistfully.

"Snack bar," Annabeth agreed.

"Are you two crazy?" the satyr asked. "This place is weird!"
Chrysa could feel the persuasive magic beating against her Occlumency shields. She plastered a smile on her face and followed Percy and Annabeth into the clearing.

The front lot was a forest of statues: cement animals, cement children, even a cement satyr playing the pipes, which the satyr objected to.

"Bla-ha-ha!" he bleated. "Looks like my uncle Ferdinand!"

They stopped at the warehouse door.

"Don't knock," the satyr pleaded. "I smell monsters."

"Your nose is clogged up from the Furies," Annabeth told him. "All I smell is burgers. Aren't you hungry?"

"Meat!" the satyr said scornfully. "I'm a vegetarian."

"You eat cheese enchiladas and aluminum cans," Percy reminded him.

"Those are vegetables. Come on. Let's leave. These statues are...looking at me."

The door creaked open, revealing a tall woman wearing a long black gown, her head completely veiled. Her eyes glinted behind a curtain of black gauze, but that was all Chrysa could make it. Her coffee-colored hands looked old, but well-manicured and elegant.

Chrysa froze inwardly, making the connection of who this must be. She cursed mentally, wishing she was more than a chaperone so she could tell the kids who they were about to face.

The woman – Medusa – said, "Children, it is too late to be out all alone. Where are your parents?"

"I'm their guardian for the moment," Chrysa said, stepping forward and offering her hand for the woman to shake. "I'm Chrys, and is my nephew, Percy, and his best friends, Anna and Grover. We'd been on a day trip to New York, when my car malfunctioned shortly after the Lincoln Tunnel. We flipped several times, and shortly after we were out of the car, it exploded, taking my cell phone with it. We've been looking for someplace for several hours now. I'm afraid we're a bit lost."

"Is that food I smell?" Percy asked.

"Oh, my dears," Medusa said. "You must come in, poor children. I am Aunty Em. Go straight through to the back of the warehouse, please. There is a dining area."

"Thank you, ma'am," Chrysa said, echoed by the kids.

The warehouse was filled with more statues – people in all different poses, wearing all different outfits and with different expressions on their faces. Chrysa was pretty sure she'd seen similar ones in Persephone's gardens.

Percy and Annabeth obviously did not notice the satyr's nervous whimpers, the way the statues' eyes seemed to follow them, or that "Aunty Em" had locked the door behind them.

At the back of the warehouse was a fast-food counter with a grill, soda fountain, a pretzel heater, and a nacho cheese dispenser.

"Please, sit down," Medusa said.

"Awesome," Percy said.
"Um," the satyr said reluctantly. "We don't have any money, ma'am. It was all in the car."

"No, no, children. No money. This is a special case, yes? It is my treat, for such nice children."

"That's very kind of you, ma'am. Do you have a phone I could use to call my boyfriend? I'm sure he can come pick us up, and he'll pay you as well," Chrysa said, hoping to remind the kids that something wasn't right.

"Of course, dear, but why don't you sit down and eat first. I'm sure you must be hungry."

"Thank you, ma'am," Annabeth said.

Medusa stiffened, but only for a second before saying, "Quite all right, Annabeth. You have such beautiful gray eyes, child."

Chrysa was the only one who caught that she had introduced Annabeth as "Anna", yet "Aunty Em" had known her real name.

Medusa disappeared behind the snack bar and started cooking.

"The phone is right around that corner, dear, if you want to call your boyfriend," Medusa said helpfully.

Sure enough, there was an old payphone around the corner. Chrysa had to dig around in her purse for quarters, but she eventually found enough and dialed Hades' phone number.

Most people were quite surprised to find out that the Underworld not only had both landlines and cell service. All the deities and daimons who lived there had cell phones, and there was a landline in every office. Chrysa chose to call Hades' office phone. It was still early enough in California.

"Hello?" he answered.

Chrysa flicked her wand and silently cast the *Muffliato* charm.

"Hi darling," Chrysa replied.

"Love? Why are you calling? Has something happened?" Hades asked worriedly.

"No, dear, everything's fine. Mostly, anyway. I'm chaperoning the quest that Percy Jackson is taking to confront you in the Underworld about the missing Master Bolt. The Furies totaled my car, which I'm fining you for, by the way, and we ended up at "Aunty Em's Garden Gnome Emporium."

Hades responded slowly.

"Chrysa, love, you do know that the emporium is run by Medusa?" he asked.

"I figured that out on my own, thank you. But, I told her that our car crashed and I needed to call my boyfriend to pick us up. I don't need you to pick us up, but I still decided to call my boyfriend. I miss you, after all."

"I miss you too, my love. I'll see you in a few days?"

"No later than the twenty-first," Chrysa promised. "I love you."

"I love you too. Don't get turned into a statue."
"I won't. Don't drown in paperwork."

"I won't. Good night."

"Good night, dear."

She hung up the phone, took down the charm, and returned to the main part of the warehouse.

By the time she got back, Medusa had brought them all plastic trays heaped with double cheeseburgers, vanilla shakes, and extra-large servings of French fries.

Percy was devouring his burger. Annabeth slurped her shake. The satyr was picking at his fries an eying the waxed paper liner as if he might eat that instead, but he still looked too nervous to eat.

"What's that hissing noise?" he asked.

Percy and Annabeth listened, but didn't hear anything. Chrysa listened, and faintly heard the sound of snakes whispering to each other.

"I hope Mistress finishes with them soon."

"I want to get out of this blanket!"

"I want to see light again."

"I want dinner."

Chrysa shook her head slightly, trying to get the hissing voices out of her mind. She distantly realized that she was hearing the snakes atop Medusa's head speak in Parseltongue.

"Hissing?" Medusa asked. "Perhaps you hear the deep-fryer oil. You have keen ears, Grover."

"I take vitamins. For my ears," the satyr said.

"That's admirable," Medusa said. "But please, relax."

Chrysa resisted the urge to snort. The woman was literally staring at them as they ate her food, yet she made no moves to eat anything himself.

Though, Chrysa admitted to herself, for a monster, Medusa was a pretty good cook, even if her food had far too much grease in it. It actually reminded her of Ginny's cooking; the woman couldn't do any of her mother's recipes, but she could deep fry anything. It made her a favorite of the newest generation of Weasleys.

"So, you sell gnomes," Percy said, trying to make small talk while Chrysa continued her meal.

"Oh, yes," Medusa said. "And animals. And people. Anything for the garden. Custom orders. Statuary is very popular, you know."

"A lot of business on this road?" Percy asked.

"Not so much, no. Since the highway was built...most cars, they do not go this way now. I must cherish every customer I get."

Percy turned to look at the statue of a young girl holding an Easter basket. Her face was terrified. She had obviously seen her doom before it happened.
"Ah," Medusa said sadly. "You notice some of my creations do not turn out well. They are marred. They do not sell. The face is the hardest to get right. Always the face."

"You make these statues yourself?" Percy asked.

"Oh, yes. Once upon a time, I had two sisters to help me in the business, but they have passed on, and Aunty Em is alone. I have only my statues. This is why I make them, you see. They are my company."

She sounded truly sad at the loss of her sisters. Apparently monsters could feel loss.

"I'm so very sorry about your sisters," Chrysa said sympathetically. "I lost my own sister a few years ago, and another sister when I was much younger."

"The bond between sisters is so hard to replace, isn't it?" Medusa sighed.

Annabeth stopped eating. She sat forward and asked, "Two sisters?"

"It's a terrible story," Medusa said. "Not one for children really. You see, Annabeth, a bad woman was jealous of me, long ago, when I was young. I had a…a boyfriend, you know, and this bad woman was determined to break us apart. She caused a terrible accident. My sisters stayed by me. They shared my bad fortune as long as they could, but eventually they passed on. They faded away. I alone have survived, but at a price. Such a price."

Percy seemed to be falling asleep. Annabeth shook him to get his attention.

"Percy?" she said tensely. "Maybe we should go. I mean, our parents are probably worried about us."

"Such beautiful gray eyes," Medusa told Annabeth. "My, yes, it has been a long time since I've seen gray eyes like that."

She reached out as if to stroke Annabeth's cheek, but Annabeth stood up sharply.

"We really should go," she insisted.

"Yes!" Grover exclaimed. "Our parents will be worried! Right!"

"Please, dears," Medusa pleaded. "I so rarely get to be with children. Before you go, won't you at least sit for a pose?"

"A pose?" Annabeth asked warily.

"A photograph. I will use it to model a new statue set. Children are so popular, you see. Everyone loves children."

Annabeth shifted her wait from foot to foot.

"I don't think we can, ma'am. Come on, Percy…"

"Sure we can," Percy said. "It's just a photo, Annabeth. What's the harm?"

"Yes, Annabeth," Medusa purred. "No harm."

Annabeth obviously didn't like it, but went along as Medusa led them back out the front door, into the garden of statues.
Medusa directed them to a park bench next to the stone statue.

"I'll sit over here, so I don't mess up the photo of the children!" Chrysa said cheerfully, taking a seat on the other side of the garden.

Medusa looked annoyed, until Chrysa flared her aura. The Gorgon flinched and quickly waved her acquiescence. Thanatos' mark on her soul was hard to ignore, if you knew what to look for.

"Now," she said, "I'll just position you correctly. The young girl in the middle, I think, and the young gentlemen on either side."

"Not much light for a photo," Percy pointed out.

"Oh, enough," Medusa said. "Enough for us to see each other, yes?"

"Where's your camera?" Grover asked.

Medusa stepped back, as if to admire the shot.

"Now, the face is the most difficult. Can you smile for me please, everyone? A large smile?"

The organic satyr glanced at the cement satyr next to him and mumbled, "That sure does look like Uncle Ferdinand."

"Grover," Medusa chastised, "look this way, dear."

Chrysa pulled a large mirror out of her purse and angled it so that she could see Medusa in it. She drew a knife with her other hand. None of the kids could see her.

"Percy…" Annabeth said.

"I will be just a moment," Medusa said. "You know, I can't see you very well in this cursed veil…"

"Percy, something's wrong," Annabeth insisted.

"Wrong?" Medusa asked, reaching up to undo the wrap around her head. "Not at all, dear. I have such noble company tonight. What could be wrong?"

"That is Uncle Ferdinand!" the satyr gasped.

"Look away from her!" Annabeth shouted. She yanked her Yankees cap from her back pocket and vanished. Her invisible hands pushed both Percy and the satyr off the bench.

The satyr scrambled off in one direction, Annabeth in another. Percy remained lying at Medusa's sandaled feet. By this point, her hands had turned gnarled and warty, with sharp bronze talons for fingernails. He was about to look higher when Annabeth yelled, "No! Don't!"

"Run!" the satyr bleated. "Maia!" he yelled, activating the flying shoes that Luke had given Percy.

Percy remained motionless.

"Such a pity to destroy a handsome face," Medusa cooed. "Stay with me, Percy. All you have to do is look up."

Percy managed to look to one side instead. Chrysa could see the moment when he caught Medusa's reflection in one of the glass spheres that decorated the lawn.
"The Gray-Eyed One did this to me, Percy," Medusa said. "Annabeth's mother, the cursed Athena, turned me from a beautiful woman into this."

"Don't listen to her!" Annabeth shouted from somewhere in the statuary. "Run, Percy!"

"Silence!" Medusa snarled.

"To be fair, you were the one who allowed you godly boyfriend to convince you to have sex in a temple dedicated to Athena, a virgin goddess," Chrysa pointed out.

Medusa ignored Chrysa, her voice modulating back to a comforting purr. "You see why I must destroy the girl, Percy. She is my enemy's daughter. I shall crush her statue to dust. But you, dear Percy, you need not suffer."

"No," Percy muttered. His legs twitched as he tried to get up and run.

"Do you really want to help the gods?" Medusa asked. "Do you understand what awaits you on this foolish quest, Percy? What will happen if you reach the Underworld? Do not be a pawn of the Olympians, my dear. You would be better off as a statue. Less pain. Less pain."

"Percy!" the satyr yelled as he flew towards the Gorgon. "Duck!"

Percy managed to turn, even as the satyr flew in, eyes shut tight, clutching a tree branch the size of a baseball bat.

"Duck!" the satyr yelled. "I'll get her!"

Percy dove to one side, and the satyr beamed Medusa with a loud, "Thwack!"

Medusa roared with rage.

"You miserable satyr!" she snarled. "I'll add you to my collection!"

"That was for Uncle Ferdinand!" the satyr yelled back.

Chrysa watched closely in her mirror as Percy scrambled away and hid in the statuary. Grover swooped down for another pass, hitting Medusa with a loud, "Ker-whack!"

"Arrgh!" the Gorgon yelled. Her snake hair was hissing and spitting.

Annabeth took off her Yankees cap and became visible next to Percy.

"You have to cut her head off," she told him.

"What? Are you crazy? Let's get out of here."

"Medusa is a menace. She's evil. I'd kill her myself, but…" Annabeth swallowed. "But you've got the better weapon. Besides, I'd never get close to her. She'd slice me to bits because of my mother. You – you've got a chance."

"What?" Percy demanded. "I can't…"

"Look, do you want her turning more innocent people into statues?"

Annabeth pointed to a pair of statues lovers, their arms around each other. She grabbed a green gazing ball from a nearby pedestal.
"A polished shield would be better," she complained as she studied the sphere. "The convexity will cause some distortion. The reflection's size should be off by a factor of…"

"Would you speak English?" Percy demanded.

"I am!" Annabeth insisted, tossing Percy the glass ball. "Just look at her in the glass. Never look at her directly."

"Hey, guys!" the satyr yelled. "I think she's unconscious!"

"Roooaarrr!"

"Maybe not," the satyr corrected. He went in for another pass with the tree branch.

"Hurry," Annabeth said. "Grover's got a great nose, but he'll eventually crash."

Percy uncapped his new sword-pen. The bronze blade appeared in his hand. He moved towards Medusa, eyes locked on the glass ball.

Even as he moved, the satyr attempted another pass with his stick. However, he flew too low and Medusa was able to grab the stick and pull him off course. The satyr tumbled through the air and crashed into the arms of a stone grizzly bear with a painful "Ummphh!"

Medusa was about to lunge at him when Percy yelled, "Hey!"

She turned to look at him. She let Percy approach instead of charging him, even though Percy was obviously looking at the glass ball in his hand and not at her.

"You wouldn't harm an old woman, Percy," Medusa crooned. "I know you wouldn't."

"Percy, don't listen to her!" the satyr yelled.

"Too late!" Medusa cackled, before lunging at Percy with her talons.

Percy slashed upwards with his sword and managed to cut Medusa's head off. It fell to the ground next to his foot with a plop, even as the body disintegrated.

"Oh, yuck," the satyr said. "Mega-yuck."

Annabeth walked over to Percy, eyes skyward, holding Medusa's black veil.

"Don't. Move," she ordered Percy.

Very carefully, she knelt and draped the monster's head in black cloth before picking it up. It was still dripping green juice.

"Are you okay?" Annabeth asked Percy, voice trembling.

"Yeah," Percy replied. "Why didn't…why didn't the head evaporate?"

"Once you sever it, it becomes a spoil of war," Chrysa called as she got up from her bench. "Same as the Minotaur horn. With Medusa, you get the head. With her sisters, you got vials of Gorgon blood. Blood from one side of the Gorgon heals practically anything, blood from the other side is a poison that can kill practically everything. When I was twelve, I killed a drakon that left its entire carcass behind. Drakon meat used to be considered a delicacy. I still have clothes made from the skin, and a few of my knives are embedded with the venom. But I digress. Don't unwrap the head. It can still
petrify you. And we really don't have the time for me to unpetrify you."

"You know how to unpetrify people? I thought it was impossible!" Annabeth exclaimed.

"Not impossible, just very difficult. I'll probably sublet the job to some friends back in Britain. I'll see what I can do once this quest is over."

The satyr moaned as he climbed down from the grizzly statue. He had a big welt on his forehead.


The satyr managed a bashful grin.

"That really was not fun, though. Well, the hitting-her-with-a-stick part, that was fun. But crashing into a concrete bear? Not fun."

The satyr snatched his shoes out of the air. Percy recapped his sword. The three made their way back into the warehouse, Chrysa wandering close behind.

Chrysa found some old plastic grocery bags behind the snack counter and double-wrapped Medusa's head, before charming it sealed. The three kids collapsed in the table around it, too exhausted to speak.

"You did well," Chrysa said quietly. "When the original Perseus was given the quest, he had the aid of Hermes, Athena, and Hades. He also snuck up on her when she was asleep. You have all surpassed him this day."

"Did you know?" Annabeth asked quietly.

Chrysa hummed to herself.

"Not immediately, but I figured it out very quickly. It's not my place to intervene though. I can't intervene without jeopardizing the quest. If I do too much, Father could say that I found the Master Bolt, not Percy, and the war might still begin."

Everything fell silent once more.

Finally, Percy asked, "So we have Athena to thank for this monster?"

Annabeth glared at Percy.

"Your dad, actually. Don't you remember? Medusa was Poseidon's girlfriend. They decide to meet in my mother's temple. That's why Athena turned her into a monster. Medusa and her two sisters who had helped her get into the temple, they became the three gorgons. That's why Medusa wanted to slice me up, but she wanted to preserve you as a nice statue. She's still sweet on your dad. You probably reminded her of him."

"To be fair, Athena had turned Poseidon's previous girlfriend, Coronis, into a raven. It really was a constant back-and-forth between the two. Still is, actually," Chrysa said helpfully.

"So now it's my fault we met Medusa," Percy said sarcastically.

Annabeth straightened. In a bad imitation of Percy's voice, she said, "It's just a photo, Annabeth. What's the harm?"

"Forget it," Percy said. "You're insufferable."
"You're…" Annabeth began, before Chrysa cut in.

"Acting like little children. Shut up. Just because your parents are rivals doesn't mean you have to be. I'm not arguing with Percy, am I Annabeth? And my father is threatening to start a war with his father. So shut up."

There was silence for a moment, before the satyr asked, "What are we going to do with the head?"

All four stared at the head. Percy got up suddenly.

"I'll be back," he said.

"Percy," Annabeth said, "What are you…"

He came back a few minutes later with a box and a packing slip. He filled out the delivery slip:

The Gods
Mount Olympus
600th Floor
Empire State Building
New York, NY

"They're not going to like that," the satyr warned. "They'll think you're impertinent."

"I am impertinent," Percy replied, pouring golden drachmas into the pouch attached to the packing slip. As soon as he sealed it, there was a sound like a cash register. The package floated off the table and disappeared.

"Come on," Annabeth muttered. "We need a new plan. And I certainly don't want to sleep here tonight."

"That won't be a problem," Chrysa said. "We just need to find a nice clearing in the woods, and I can set up my tent."

"Chrysa, all our things burnt up in your car," Percy pointed out.

Chrysa gestured to the purse still hanging over her shoulder.

"All your things burnt. The only thing of mine that burnt was the car."

"You're telling me you have an entire tent in that little, tiny purse," Percy said dubiously.

"I've seen her do some really weird things with magic," Annabeth sighed. "I'd believe her. Come on, let's find a place to stay."

They tromped out into the woods, and found a marshy clearing only twenty minutes later. It was about a hundred yards from the main road and had obviously been used by local kids for parties. The ground was littered with beer cans and cigarette butts.

Chrysa pulled the folded-up tent out from her bag. Like this, it looked like a handkerchief.

"I don't think that's a tent," the satyr said.
Chrysa dropped the tent on the ground, pulled out her wand, and tapped the tent. It sprung up into a fully-formed tent, looking just like a Muggle camping tent.

"In you go!" Chrysa said with a smile. "Boys on the left, girls on the right!"

She opened the tent flap, and gestured for the three to enter.

She heard them gasp as soon as they were inside.

Unlike the tent she, Ron, and Hermione had used during the Horcrux hunt, this tent was much more expensive. It had ten rooms, including two bathrooms and a kitchen, all of which were fully functioning.

"There are four bedrooms, two to the right and two to the left. You boys will be staying on the left-hand side. Annabeth and I will stay on the right-hand side. There is a bathroom on each hallway. The kitchen cupboards should be fully stocked if you wake up before I do. I am going to set up wards so that nothing can attack us overnight. Sleep well, everyone. If anyone wakes me up before seven, I reserve the right to stab you. If you are not up by eight, I reserve the right to dump cold water on you."

With those parting words, she cast her spells around the tent and made her way to her bedroom for some much-needed rest. It had been a long day.
The next morning, only Percy required the bucket of water dumped on him. He woke, trembling, eyes wary.

Chrysa was immediately concerned.

"Percy?" she asked, kneeling beside his bed. "Did you have a dream?"

"N-no," he tried to say.

Chrysa gave him a look.

"Percy, demigod dreams are often not just dreams. Tell me, what did you see?"

He was silent for a moment, before admitting, "I was in a dark cavern. There was a gaping pit right in front of me. The spirits of the dead were all around me, tugging at my clothes, trying to pull me away from the pit. I don’t listen though. I walked to the very edge. It was so dark…bottomless. There was something in it, something trying to get out, something huge and evil."

Chrysa felt her blood go cold.

"There was a voice…it was ancient – cold and heavy. It told me I was weak, and young, and it offered me my mother if I would help it rise. It wanted the Master Bolt. It tried to use me to pull itself out. The spirits of the dead woke me up," Percy confessed.

Chrysa felt herself go pale.

"Are you certain, Percy? The spirits of the dead were around you at the entrance to a bottomless, black pit?" she asked urgently.

He nodded, then asked, "That…thing…in the pit. What was it?"
Chrysa remained silent for a long moment, lost in thought.

"Evil," she finally told him. "Evil that I will not speak of here, not while we are in danger. Even saying its name could summon a host of monsters."

She stood from her kneeling position and offered Percy a hand up. He took it.

"I've made breakfast," she offered. "There's fresh clothes in the dresser. Take a shower, too. Make it fast, though. There's an Amtrak station nearby, and we need to be on the train leaving at noon."

Unfortunately, they were too late to get berths in the sleeper car, but Chrysa was still able to get them a row of seats each. That would allow them to stretch out while they slept.

Since all their things had been destroyed, all three kids were very bored staring at the scenery for hours on end. Chrysa quickly produced multiple board games from her bottomless bag so that the ADHD kids would not drive her crazy.

It was during their first night on the train that she overheard a conversation between Percy and Annabeth. Chrysa did not sleep well in moving vehicles, and the shadows only gave her strength, so she was only pretending to nap.

"So," Annabeth asked, "who wants your help?"

"What do you mean?" Percy tried to evade.

"When you were asleep just now, you mumbled, 'I won't help you.' Who were you dreaming about?"

Percy quietly related his story of the voice in the pit. Annabeth was silent for a long moment.

"That doesn't sound like Hades," Annabeth finally said. "He always appears on a black throne, and he never laughs."

"He offered my mother in trade. Who else could do that?" Percy questioned.

"I guess...if he meant, 'Help me rise from the Underworld.' If he wants war with the Olympians. But why ask you to bring him the Master Bolt if he already has it?"

There was slight movement behind her, as if Percy was shaking his head.

The satyr mumbled something about vegetables in his sleep.

"Percy, you can't barter with Hades," Annabeth said firmly. "You know that, right? He's deceitful, heartless, and greedy."

Chrysa clenched her fists at the slander towards her beloved.

"I don't care if his Kindly Ones weren't as aggressive this time..."

"This time?" Percy asked. "You mean you've run into them before?"

_Thalia_, Chrysa thought, heart aching slightly at the mention of her lost sister.

"Let's just say I've got no love for the Lord of the Dead. You can't be tempted to make a deal for your mom," Annabeth warned.
"What would you do if it was your dad?" Percy demanded hotly.

"That's easy," Annabeth replied. "I'd leave him to rot."

"You're not serious?" Percy asked in shock.

"My dad's resented me since the day I was born, Percy," Annabeth said, voice steely. "He never wanted a baby. When he got me, he asked Athena to take me back and raise me on Olympus because he was too busy with his work. She wasn't happy about that. She told him heroes had to be raised by their mortal parent."

"But how…I mean, I guess you weren't born in a hospital…." Percy stammered.

"I appeared on my father's doorstep, in a golden cradle, carried down from Olympus by Zephyros, the West Wind. You'd think that my dad would remember that as a miracle, right? Like, maybe he'd take some digital photos or something. But he always talked about my arrival as if it were the most inconvenient thing that had ever happened to him. When I was five he got married and totally forgot about Athena. HE got a 'regular' mortal wife, and had two 'regular' mortal kids, and tried to pretend I didn't exist."

Percy was silent for a long moment.

"My mom married a really awful guy," he finally said. "Grover said she did it to protect me, to hide me in the scent of a human family. Maybe that's what your dad was thinking."

"He doesn't care about me," Annabeth replied. "His wife – my stepmom – treated me like a freak. She wouldn't let me play with her children. My dad went along with her. Whenever something dangerous happened – you know, something with monsters – they would both look at me resentfully, like 'How dare you put our family at risk.' Finally, I took the hint. I wasn't wanted. I ran away."

"How old were you?"

"Same age as when I started camp. Seven."

"But…you couldn't have gotten all the way to Half-Blood Hill by yourself."

"Not alone, no. Athena watched over me, guided me toward help. I made a couple of unexpected friends who took care of me, for a short time, anyway."

That seemed to end the conversation.

Chrysa sighed, sat up, and turned to face them.

"I know where you're coming from, Annabeth. And I know where you're coming from, Percy. When my mother and adoptive father were murdered, I was left on the doorstep – literally left on the doorstep, all night long at the beginning of November. The Dursleys – my biological aunt and uncle – hated me with a burning passion. They hated that I was magical. They hated that I was beautiful. They hated that I outshone their fat pig of a son on all occasions. If they were in the Underworld, I would let them rot. When I was thirteen – almost fourteen, but my birthday's midsummer, my godfather gained custody of me. The abuse suit against the Dursleys went through. I know Vernon's still in prison; he had a life sentence plus fifty years. I think Marge is out, she only had ten years. I'm not sure about Petunia, she had at least ten years, but I'm not really sure about the charges. Child abuse and child neglect, most likely. If the Dursleys were in the Underworld? I wouldn't save them. If my godfather, his husband, or their son were there? I'd give everything to save them. What would
you do if it was Luke, Annabeth?"

The girl colored, before finally admitting, "I'd want to save Luke."

"See?" Chrysa said. "It all depends on who we consider our family. You see your dad as your parent, but not family, so you wouldn't save him. Luke you see as your family, so you want to protect him."

Her words of wisdom shared, Chrysa laid back down and attempted to sleep once more. She heard the other two do the same.

The next afternoon, they arrived in St. Louis. Chrysa watched as Annabeth craned her neck to stare at the Gateway Arch.

"I want to do that," she sighed.

"What?" Percy asked.

"Build something like that. You ever see the Parthenon, Percy?" she questioned.

"Only in pictures," Percy replied.

"Someday, I'm going to see it in person. I'm going to build the greatest monument to the gods, ever. Something that'll last a thousand years," Annabeth said dreamily.

Percy laughed. "You? An architect?"

Chrysa winced. Insulting Annabeth's passion was the fastest way to set her off.

Annabeth flushed.

"Yes, an architect. Athena expects her children to create things, not just tear them down, like a certain god of earthquakes I could mention."

Percy turned to look at the churning water of the Mississippi River below them.

"Sorry," Annabeth said. "That was mean."

"Can't we work together a little?" Percy asked. "I mean, didn't Poseidon and Athena ever cooperate?"

"The chariot," Chrysa put in. "Athena invented the chariot itself, but Poseidon created horses out of the crests of waves. They had to work together to make it complete."

"See?" Percy said, nodding to Chrysa before looking at Annabeth. "They worked together. So we can cooperate too, right?"

Annabeth was intently watching the Gateway Arch again.

"I suppose," she finally said.

As they pulled into the Amtrak station in downtown St. Louis, the intercom announced that they had a three-hour layover before continuing on to Denver, Colorado.

The satyr stretched, moaning, "Food," as he woke up.

"Sightseeing?" the satyr asked.

"The Gateway Arch," Annabeth said. "This may be my only chance to ride to the top. Are you coming or not?"

The satyr and Percy exchanged looks. Percy looked to Chrysa.

"Are you going?"

Chrysa nodded.

"I've gone on most of Annabeth's architecture expeditions. Might as well join this one."

The satyr shrugged.

"As long as there's a snack bar without monsters."

"That's the kicker, isn't it," Chrysa said. "Do you remember that time in Barcelona, Annabeth?"

The girl groaned.

"How could I forget that time in Barcelona? We almost died a dozen times! In one day!"

Percy and the satyr both turned to stare at Chrysa. She shrugged.

"I promised Annabeth a trip to Barcelona for her last birthday. It was Luke, Annabeth, her brother Malcolm, and I who went. We spent the whole time looking at architecture. The first two days were fine, but the third day we were attacked by monsters every time we breathed. Chiron was furious with me when we got back."

"She didn't tell Chiron she was borrowing us for three days," Annabeth said helpfully. "And we came back with scrapes and bruises."

Chrysa waved a hand in dismissal as they disembarked the train.

The Arch was about a mile from the train station. Late in the day, the lines to get in were not very long. They threaded their way through the underground museum, looking at covered wagons and other artifacts from the 1800s. Percy and the satyr both looked bored, but Chrysa was reading the information on nearly every card, sometimes aloud so that Annabeth could hear as well. The daughter of Athena kept commenting with interesting facts about how the Arch was built.

Percy seemed to be examining all the other people in line with them.

"You smell anything?" Chrysa heard him ask the satyr.

The satyr sniffed.

"Underground," he said distastefully. "Underground air always smells like monsters. Probably doesn't mean anything."

"Guys," Percy finally said. "You know the gods' symbols of power?"

Chrysa had been in the middle of reading Annabeth information about the construction equipment used to build the Arch, but they both looked over.
"Yeah?" Annabeth asked.

"Well, Hade…" Percy began, but the satyr cleared his throat.

"We're in a public place," he reminded. "You mean, our friend downstairs?"

"Um, right," Percy said. "Our friend way downstairs. Doesn't he have a hat like Annabeth's?"

"You mean the Helm of Darkness," Annabeth said. "Yeah, that's his symbol of power. I saw it next to his seat during the winter solstice council meeting."

"He was there?" Percy asked.

Annabeth nodded.

"It's the only time he's allowed to visit Olympus – the darkest day of the year. But his helm is a lot more powerful than my invisibility hat, if what I've heard is true…"

"It allows him to become darkness," the satyr confirmed. "He can melt into shadow or pass through walls. He can't be touched, or seen, or heard. And he can radiate fear so intense it can drive you insane or stop your heart. Why do you think all rational creatures fear the dark?"

"But then… how do we know he's not here right now, watching us?"

Annabeth and the satyr exchanged looks.

"We don't," the satyr said.

"Thanks, that makes me feel a lot better," Percy said. "Got any blue jelly beans left?"

The satyr passed him more jelly beans.

"There is a very low probability that he is here," Chrysa stated with a roll of her eyes. "The Lord has much better things to be doing than watching us. Besides, the umbrakinesis isn't just from his helm."

"Really?" Annabeth asked.

Chrysa nodded.

"Oh, yes," she said. "Control of the Underworld comes with some propensity for shadows, but the most powerful users of shadows are Nyx and Erebus, of course, being the Protogenoi of Night and Darkness. But the goddess of shadows – Titaness, originally, was Leuke. Leuke was Hades' first consort, which automatically gave him some control of her domain. When she died, most of her power went to Hades as her Consort."

"I thought Persephone was Hades' wife?" Percy asked in confusion.

"Of the Big Three, Poseidon is the only one who still has his first wife," Chrysa stated. "In the first war against the Titans, three of Rhea's attendants, Titanesses all, aided Zeus from the beginning. They were sisters, Oceanides, daughters of Oceanus and Tethys. Amphitrite was the youngest, the Titaness of saltwater and sea creatures. Metis was one of the middle children, the Titaness of good counsel." She turned to look at Annabeth. "Metis was the consort of Zeus, and your grandmother, Annabeth."

"I know that story," Percy said, face scrunched slightly. "Zeus turned her into a fly and swallowed her, and then Athena was born from Zeus' skull."
"That's right, Percy," Chrysa praised. "The eldest of the Oceanides, however, was Leuke. She was raised by Gaea and fostered by Nyx and Erebos. She was the Titaness of shadows and secrets, and was once counted first among the Council of Olympus."

"What happened to her?" Percy asked.

Chrysa was silent for a moment.

"She died," she finally said. "And Hades changed. Olympus changed. Metis was dead by that point. Amphitrite and Hades were both kicked off the Council. Hades grew withdrawn. He stopped leaving the Underworld. He grew bitter that no one helped him after Leuke's death. Very few on Olympus will speak of her. She was greatly missed."

They made it through the elevator queue, and ended up shoved inside with a fat lady and her Chihuahua. Chrysa could sense the aura of 'monster' about them.

"No parents, dears?" the lady asked as they were about halfway up.

In her mortal guise, she had beady eyes; pointy, coffee-stained teeth; a floppy denim hat, and a denim dress that bulged s much, she looked like a blue-jean blimp.

"I am adult enough to watch over my cousins," Chrysa said with a smile.

The Chihuahua growled.

The woman said, "Now, now, sonny. Behave."

The dog had beady eyes like its owner, intelligent and vicious.

"Sonny," Percy said. "Is that his name?"

"No," the lady said with a smile.

The observation deck at the top of the arch was similar to a tin can with carpeting. Rows of tiny windows looked out over the city on one side and the river on the other.

Annabeth was talking about structural supports, and how she would have made the windows bigger, and designed a see-through floor. She was interrupted when the park ranger announced that the observation deck would be closing in a few minutes.

Percy steered Annabeth and the satyr towards the exit and loaded them into the elevator. There was no more room for him and Chrysa, as there were already three other tourists inside.

"Next car, sir," the park ranger said.

"We'll get out," Annabeth said. "We'll wait for you."

Percy glanced at Chrysa beside him before saying, "Naw, it's okay. I'll see you guys at the bottom."

The pair in the elevator looked nervous, but they let the elevator door slide shut. Their car disappeared down the ramp.

The only people left on the observation deck were Chrysa, Percy, a little boy with his parents, the park ranger, and the probable-monster-lady and her probable-monster-Chihuahua.

Percy smiled uneasily at the lady. She smiled back, her forked tongue flickering between her teeth.
The Chihuahua immediately jumped down and started yapping at Percy.

"Now, now, sonny," the lady said. "Does this look like a good time? We have all these nice people here."

"Doggie!" said the little boy. "Look, a doggie!"

Before he could get any closer to the monster, his parents pulled him back.

The Chihuahua bared his teeth at Percy, foam dripping from his black lips.

Chrysa flicked her wrists, and she had her wand in one hand and a dagger in the other in a second.

"Well, son," the fat lady sighed. "If you insist."

"Um, did you just call that Chihuahua your son?" Percy asked.

"Chimera, dear," the fat lady corrected. "Not a Chihuahua. It's an easy mistake to make."

Chrysa cursed inwardly. The Chimera and Echidna. How did Percy keep facing the worst monsters possible on his first quest?

Echidna rolled up her denim sleeves to reveal her scaly green arms. She smiled, and her fangs were revealed. The glamour on her face melted away, showing that the pupils of her eyes were reptilian slits.

The Chimera barked louder, and with each bark, it grew. First to the size of a Doberman, then to a lion. The bark became a roar.

The little boy screamed. His parents pulled him back towards the exit, straight into the park ranger, who stood, paralyzed, gaping at the monster.

The Chimera grew to be so tall that its back rubbed against the roof. It had the head of a lion with a blood-caked mane, the body and hooves of a giant goat, and a ten-foot-long diamondback for a tail. The rhinestone dog collar still hung around its neck, and the plate sized dog tag was now easy to read: Chimera – rabid, fire-breathing, poisonous – if found, please call Tartarus – ext. 954.

Percy was so shocked, he hadn't even uncapped his sword. Chrysa nudged him and hissed, "Sword! According to the laws, I can't help you until it attacks me personally!"

Echidna hissed in laughter.

"Be honored, Percy Jackson. I am so rarely allowed to test a hero with one of my brood. For I am the Mother of Monsters, the terrible Echidna!" she proclaimed.

Percy stared at her, before asking, "Isn't that a kind of anteater?"

The monster's face turned brown and green with rage and – embarrassment?

"I hate it when people say that!" she howled. "I hate Australia! Naming that ridiculous animal after me. For that, Percy Jackson, my son shall destroy you!"

The Chimera charged at Percy, its lion teeth gnashing. Percy managed to leap aside and narrowly dodge the bite. However, that caused the Chimera to hit Chrysa, its teeth scraping her shoulder. Chrysa shadow-traveled over to where Percy was. He had ended up next to the family and the park ranger, all of whom were screaming as they tried to pry open the emergency exit doors.
"Go!" Chrysa yelled to him. "I'll get them out of here! You distract it!"

Percy uncapped his sword, ran to the other side of the deck, and yelled, "Hey, Chihuahua!"

The Chimera turned rapidly to face Percy and breathed a column of poisonous fire towards him.

Chrysa did not look to see if her cousin had escaped the flames. She trusted his reflexes. Instead, she snapped her fingers in front of the poor mortals trapped there.

"You were trapped up here when a madwoman and her dog attacked a boy and a teenager girl. You managed to escape down the emergency exit, but you don't know what happened to the boy and girl," she ordered, manipulating the Mist to change their memories.

As soon as their eyes slipped into that glassy state, Chrysa waved her wand and magically unlocked and opened the emergency exit door. As soon as the park ranger and his family were out, she sealed the door again.

She heard Echidna cackling, "They don't make heroes like they used to, eh, son?"

She turned around to see Percy standing just in front of a hole in the Arch that looked like it had been made by the Chimera's breath. There was blood from a snakebite dripping down Percy's leg. His sword was nowhere to be seen.

The monster growled.

"If you are the son of Poseidon," Echidna hissed, "you would not fear water. Jump, Percy Jackson. Show me that water will not harm you. Jump and retrieve your sword. Prove your bloodline."

Percy glanced down at the water, then back to Echidna. The Chimera's mouth glowed red, heating up from another attack.

"You have no faith," Echidna taunted. "You do not trust the gods. I cannot blame you, little coward. Better you die now. The gods are faithless. The poison is in your heart."

"Percy," Chrysa said firmly, drawing everyone's attention to her. She had daggers in either hand, one of celestial bronze and one of Stygian iron.

"Jump," she ordered your cousin. "Into the water. You are the son of the Sea God. Water cannot harm you. Go!"

Percy gave her a searching glance, then swallowed heavily. He turned and jumped out of the Gateway Arch even as the Chimera sent a column of flame towards him. His clothes caught fire, but Chrysa expected that the wind and the water would put them out soon enough.

Before the monster could turn and charge her, Chrysa charged it.

She threw the bronze knife into the monster's left eye. As it let out a terrible roar, her knife of Stygian iron landed perfectly in Echidna's throat. The Mother of Monsters screamed as her essence was absorbed into the blade.

By the time the Chimera realized what was happening, Chrysa was upon it and had summoned the knife back to her hand. She leapt onto the monster's back and slammed the knife its skull. The monster roared again, even as it dissolved into dust and its essence was absorbed into the blade.

Chrysa quickly replaced both knives in their sheaths, then moved into the shadows of the Arch. She
cast an unlocking spell on the emergency exit door, then melted into the shadows as the door slammed open.

She wandered through the shadows back down to the ground, and remained in them as she searched for her company.

A policeman shouting, "Gangway!" caught her attention. Chrysa melted out of the shadows to join the crowd as they parted, and a pair of paramedics came through, rolling a woman on a stretcher. Chrysa immediately recognized her as the mother of the little boy who had been on the observation deck.

She was saying, "And then this huge dog, this huge fire-breathing Chihuahua…"

Chrysa winced. She thought her skills at memory manipulation were a bit better. Maybe this was just a woman capable of seeing through the Mist.

"Okay, ma'am," the paramedic said. "Just calm down. Your family is fine. The medication is starting to kick in."

"I'm not crazy!" the woman exclaimed. "The monster was attacking the boy and girl… the boy was distracting it while the girl got us out, but those kids were still up there." Something on the other side of the crowd caught her attention. "There he is!" she yelled, pointing away from her. "That's the boy!"

Chrysa looked intently, and caught sight of Percy, Annabeth, and the satyr, moving rapidly away from the area. She followed close behind.

"What's going on?" Annabeth asked, just before she reached them. "Was she talking about the Chihuahua on the elevator?"

"Yeah, it was actually the Chimera, and the lady was actually Echidna, and Chrysa's still up there, we have to do something!" Percy exclaimed.

"It's alright, Percy," Chrysa said. "I'm fine."

All three jumped and whirled around to face her. Annabeth's hand had gone to her knife, while Percy had his pen in hand again. He quickly shoved it back into his pocket and then leapt at her, wrapping his arms around her tightly.

"I thought you were gone," he said, his voice muffled by her shirt. "I didn't want to lose more family."

Chrysa wrapped her arms around him in reply and kissed the top of his head.

"It's alright, Percy. I'm fine. Your distraction helped quite a bit. I was able to stab and kill both of them before they could react. Then I just charmed myself invisible and flew down to join you all," she said.

"Did you say you flew?" Percy asked with interest, leaning away slightly so he could look up at her face.

"I did," Chrysa confirmed. "I can show you later. What happened when you jumped?"

Percy quickly related the story – backing up slightly in the telling in order to explain what happened on the Arch platform to Annabeth and the satyr – of how he jumped off the Gateway Arch and met
an underwater lady who was a messenger from his father.

"Whoa," the satyr said. "We've got to get you to Santa Monica! You can't ignore a summons from your dad."

Before either Annabeth or Chrysa could say anything, they passed a reporter doing a news break. What he said almost caused them to freeze in shock.

"Percy Jackson. That's right, Dan. Channel Twelve has learned that the boy who may have caused this explosion fits the description of a young man who went missing in a New York car crash nine days ago. Both Percy Jackson and his mother, Sally, have been missing ever since. There was also said to be a teenage girl on the platform, also involved in the incident. Preliminary reports say that her appearance matches that of Amy Potter-Black, the young heiress whose car was found totaled in New Jersey three days ago. While not a teenage girl as was initially reported, Amy Potter-Black has been noted for her youthful appearance. Jackson and Potter-Black appear to be travelling west. For our viewers at home, here are photos of both Percy Jackson and Amy Potter-Black."

The four ducked around the news van and slipped into an alley.

"First things first," Percy stated. "We've got to get out of town!"

He looked over at Chrysa.

"Is Amy Potter-Black you?"

Chrysa sighed and nodded.

"My full name is Amaranth Chrysocomê Potter-Black-Lupin. Since Potter and Black are the two Noble Houses I'm a part of, the media usually refers to me just as Amaranth, or Amy, Potter-Black. I really hate being called Amy though. If you have to use my first name, it's Amaranth, not Amy," she stated. "We'd better hurry. The train will be pulling out soon."

Somehow – through liberal use of Notice-Me-Not charms – they managed to get back to the Amtrak station without being spotted. They made it on board the train just before it pulled out for Denver. The train trundled west as darkness fell, police lights still pulsing against the St. Louis skyline behind them.

They didn't reach Denver until the next afternoon. Continued use of Notice-Me-Not charms had kept the train staff from identifying either Percy or Chrysa as the missing persons reported for being somehow involved in an explosion at the Gateway Arch.

Thanks to Chrysa's magical purse, they were well-fed, but they still hadn't showered since Half-Blood Hill, and it was beginning to become obvious.

"Let's try to contact Chiron," Annabeth said to Percy as they got off the train. "I want to tell him about your talk with the river spirit."

"We can't use phones, right?" Percy asked.

"I'm not talking about phones," Annabeth replied.

"Ah yes, we haven't introduced Percy to the wonders of Iris-messaging yet," Chrysa said with a smile.

"Iris-messaging?" Percy asked, looking even more confused.
"You'll see," the other three chorused.

They wandered around downtown Denver for half an hour before finding an empty do-it-yourself car wash. They veered toward the stall farthest from the street, keeping their eyes out for patrol cars. Hanging out at a car wash without a car was slightly suspicious, especially when everyone involved looked like teenagers.

"What exactly are we doing?" Percy asked as the satyr took out the spray gun.

"It's seventy-five cents," he grumbled. "I've only got two quarters left."

Before he could say anything more, Chrysa handed him a full roll of quarters.

All three people stared at her.

"You carry that around in your purse?" Annabeth asked incredulously.

"Heiress," Chrysa reminded. "Filthy, stinking rich over here. And my boss is literally a god. He can afford to pay me a high salary."

The satyr shrugged and dropped three quarters into the machine.

"We could do it with a spray bottle, of course, but the connection isn't as good, and my arm gets tired of pumping."

"What are you talking about?" Percy demanded.

The satyr turned the settings dial to fine mist.

"I-M'ing," the satyr stated.

"Instant messaging?" Percy asked, still looking horribly confused.

"Iris-messaging," Annabeth corrected. "The rainbow goddess Iris carries messages for the gods. If you know how to ask, and she's not too busy, she'll do the same for half-bloods."

"You summon a goddess with a spray gun?"

The satyr pointed the nozzle in the air and water hissed out in a thick white mist.

"Unless you know an easier way to make a rainbow."

"At some point, Percy will most likely be fully capable of manipulating water molecules in the air to form a rainbow, but he's still a few years away from that," Chrysa pointed out.

The late afternoon light filtered through the vapor and broke into colors.

Chrysa fished a drachma out of her purse and announced, "O, Iris, goddess of the rainbow, please accept our offering."

She tossed the drachma into the rainbow and it disappeared in a golden mist. She then gestured for Annabeth to take the lead.


The mist melted into an image of strawberry fields and the Long Island Sound in the distance. The
image was being projected from the porch of the Big House. Standing with his back to them was Luke. He was dressed in shorts and an orange tank-top, and had a bronze sword in his hand. He was staring intently at something down in the meadow.

"Luke!" Percy called.

Luke turned, eyes wide.

"Percy!" he cried, breaking into a grin. "Is that Annabeth too? And Chrysa? Thank the gods! Are you guys okay?"

"We're…uh…fine," Annabeth stammered.

She was madly straightening her t-shirt and trying to comb the loose hair out of her face.

"We thought – Chiron – I mean…" she said.

"He's down at the cabins," Luke said, smile fading. "We're having some issues with the campers. It's probably a good thing neither Percy nor Chrysa are here. Listen, is everything cool with you? Is Grover all right?"

"I'm right here," the satyr called. He held the nozzle to one side and stepped into Luke's line of vision. "What kind of issues?"

Just then, a big Lincoln Continental pulled up, stereo blaring some hip-hop music.

Chrysa pulled out her wand and cast a Notice-Me-Not and a silencing charm around their area.

"Chiron had to break up a fight," Luke said. "Things are pretty tense here. Word leaked out about the Zeus-Poseidon standoff. We're still not sure how – probably the same scumbag who summoned the hellhound. Now the campers are starting to take sides. It's shaping up like the Trojan War all over again. Aphrodite, Ares, and Apollo are backing Poseidon, more or less. Athena is backing Zeus. I don't know if it would be better or worse if Percy and Chrysa were here."

"I shudder to think that Clarisse's cabin would ever be on my dad's side for anything," Percy said drily.

"It happens," Chrysa shrugged. "Ares is pretty back and forth where wars are concerned. He usually likes to back whoever will be the most inflammatory."

"So, what's your status?" Luke asked. "Chiron will be sorry he missed you."

Percy began relating everything that had happened to them on their journey, including his dreams, which Chrysa did not think was the best idea. Yes, she had known Luke for several years, but Wormtail was the perfect example of how a traitor could still be someone you've known for years. And Luke had plenty of cause to hate the gods. Chrysa didn't think he had done anything, but it was still better to be safe than sorry.

"I wish I could be there," Luke said after Percy finished. "We can't help much from here, I'm afraid, but listen…it had to be Hades who took the Master Bolt. He was there at Olympus at the winter solstice. I was chaperoning a field trip and we saw him."

"But Chiron said the gods can't take each other's magical items directly," Percy pointed out.

anybody else sneak into the throne room and steal the Master Bolt. You'd have to be invisible."

Everyone seemed to realize what he said at the exact same moment. Annabeth was fuming.

"Hey," Luke protested. "I'm sorry, Annabeth, I didn't mean you. I've known you for forever, you would never do anything like that. You're like a little sister to me."

"Thanks, Luke," Annabeth said unhappily. "I'm going to go buy a soda. Grover, give the nozzle to Chrysa and come on."

The satyr handed over the nozzle, and the pair walked quickly to the vending machines on the other side of the parking lot.

"I did not mean it that way," Luke said guiltily. "I love Annabeth."

"We know, Luke," Chrysa replied gently. "Our time's almost up," she reported.

"Percy, listen," Luke said quickly. "Are you wearing the flying shoes? I'll feel better if I know they've done you some good."

"Oh…uh, yeah!" Percy said, even though Chrysa was perfectly aware that it was the satyr wearing the flying shoes, not her cousin. "They've come in handy."

"Really?" Luke grinned. "They fit and everything?"

The water shut off. The mist started to evaporate.

"Well, take care of yourself out there in Denver," Luke called. "And tell Grover it'll be better this time! Nobody will get turned into a pine tree if he just…"

The mist disappeared and Luke's image faded to nothing.

"He should not have brought that up," Chrysa growled as Annabeth and Percy came around the corner, drinks in hand.

They stopped short upon seeing their companions' faces.


"He just brought up things he shouldn't have brought up," Chrysa muttered. "Come on, let's find some dinner."

A few minutes later, they were sitting at a booth in a gleaming chrome diner. They were surrounded by families eating burgers and drinking malts and sodas.

Finally, the waitress came over. She raised her eyebrow skeptically. "Well?"

"We, um, want to order dinner," Percy said.

"You kids have money to pay for it?" the waitress asked.

"Do you accept credit cards?" Chrysa asked sweetly, flashing her black AmEx card.

The waitress's eyes widened. "Y-yes…ma'am. What can I get for you?"

Suddenly, a rumble shook the whole building; a motorcycle the size of a baby elephant had pulled up
to the curb.

All conversation in the diner stopped. The motorcycle's headlight glared red. Its gas tank had flames painted on it, and a shotgun holster riveted to either side, complete with shotguns. The sea was leather – but leather that looked like Caucasian human skin.

The man on the bike would have made pro-wrestlers run for Mama. He was dressed in a red muscle shirt and black jeans and a black leather duster, with a hunting knife strapped to his thigh. He wore red wraparound sunglasses and had the cruelest, most brutal face to ever exist. He was handsome, but wicked, with an oily black crew cut and cheeks that were scarred from many, many fights.

Chrysa knew immediately who it was.

"Annabeth, dear, go sit by Percy," she ordered with a steely voice.

The girl looked confused, but had just relocated to sit alongside Percy and the satyr on the other side of the table when the man walked into the diner.

A hot, dry wind blew through the place at his entrance. All the people – besides their table – rose, as if they were hypnotized, but the biker waved his hand dismissively and they all sat down again. Everyone resumed their previous conversations as if nothing had happened.

The waitress blinked, as if somebody had just pressed the rewind button on her brain. She asked again, "What can I get for you?"

"A little of everything, I think," Ares said as he took Annabeth's previous seat beside Chrysa.

She was forced to move closer to the window to avoid being touched by her odious elder brother.

Ares looked up at the waitress, who was gaping at him, and said, "Are you still here?"

He pointed at her, and she stiffened. She turned as if she'd been spun around, then marched back toward the kitchen.

Ares looked at Percy. Chrysa could see Ares' usual emotional manipulation flash over Percy's features.

"So, you're old Seaweed's kid, huh?" Ares asked.

"What's it to you?" Percy asked hotly.

Annabeth's eyes flashed.

"Percy, this is…" she began.

Ares raised his hand.

"S'okay," he said. "I don't mind a little attitude. Long as you remember who's the boss. You know who I am, little cousin?"

Percy studied him for a moment before saying, "You're Clarisse's dad. Ares, god of war."

Ares grinned and took of his shades.

"That's right, punk. I heard you broke Clarisse's spear."
"She was asking for it," Percy shot back.

"Probably. That's cool. I don't fight my kids' fights, you know? What I'm here for – I heard you were in town. I got a little proposition for you."

The waitress returned at that moment with heaping trays of food – cheeseburgers, fries, onion rings, and chocolate shakes.

Ares handed her a few gold drachmas.

She looked nervously at the coins. "But, those aren't…"

Ares pulled out his huge knife and started cleaning his fingernails.

"Problem, sweetheart?" he asked.

The waitress swallowed, then left with the gold.

"I could have paid for that," Chrysa pointed out.

"You're officially missing, li'l sis. You really want the cops hunting you down because you used your AmEx?" Ares asked.

"You can't just threaten people with a knife!" Percy exclaimed.

Ares laughed.

"Are you kidding? I love this country. Best place since Sparta! Don't you carry a weapon, punk? You should. Dangerous world out there. Which brings me to my proposition. I need you to do me a favor."

"What favor could I do for a god?" Percy asked warily.

"Something a god doesn't have time to do himself. It's nothing much. I left my shield at an abandoned water park here in town. I was going on a little…date with my girlfriend. We were interrupted. I left my shield behind. I want you to fetch it for me."

"Why don't you go back and get it yourself?" Percy asked hotly.

Ares' eyes glowed fierily.

"Why don't I turn you into a prairie dog and run you over with my Harley? Because I don't feel like it. A god is giving you a chance to prove yourself, Percy Jackson. Will you prove yourself a coward?" Ares asked, leaning forward. "Or maybe you only fight when there's a river to dive into, so your daddy can protect you."

"We're not interested," Percy said, clearly trying to clamp down on his Ares-inspired anger.

Even when the war god wasn't intentionally manipulating others' emotions, he still inspired the feeling of wanting to punch him in the face. Leuke had given in to it several times, and Chrysa had once. Ares probably hadn't forgotten that.

"We've already got a quest," Percy continued.

Ares snorted.
"I know all about your quest, punk. When that item was first stolen, Zeus sent his best out looking for it: Apollo, Athena, Artemis, and me, naturally." He glanced over at Chrysa, and jerked a thumb in her direction. "And the halfling. Probably why she came along this time. If I couldn't sniff out a weapon that powerful…” he said, licking his lips. "Well, if I couldn't find it, you got no hope. Nevertheless, I'm trying to give you the benefit of the doubt. Your dad and I go way back. After all, I'm the one who told him my suspicions about old Corpse Breath."

"You told him Hades had the Bolt?" Percy asked.

Chrysa mentally catalogued that information. Ares shouldn't have said that in front of her. It was just like him to attempt to start a war though.

"Sure," Ares said. "Framing somebody to start a war. Oldest trick in the book. I recognized it immediately. In a way, you got me to thank for your little quest."

"Thanks," Percy grumbled.

"Hey, I'm a generous guy. Just do my little job, and I'll help you on your way. I'll arrange a ride west for you and your friends."

"We're doing just fine on our own," Percy replied.

"Yeah, right. Money you can't spend without being tracked. No wheels. No clue what you're up against. Help me out, and maybe I'll tell you something you need to know. Something about your mom."

That caught Percy's attention immediately.

"My mom?" he questioned.

Ares grinned. "That got your attention. The water park is a mile west on Delaney. You can't miss it. Look for the Tunnel of Love ride."

"What interrupted your date?" Percy asked.

Ares bared his teeth, but it wasn't as menacing as he hoped.

"You're lucky you met me, punk, and not one of the other Olympians. They're not as forgiving of rudeness as I am. I'll meet you back here when you're done. Don't disappoint me. And for a little extra insurance…I think little sister here is going to stick with me for the time being."

Ares grabbed Chrysa's arm roughly and flashed away.

Chapter End Notes

I'm really looking forward to the next chapter. There's a lot of family feels and it's my favorite chapter that I've written so far.
“Poseidon,” she greeted. “What can I do for you?”

“I would have a word with you, Leuke Chrysocomê,” the sea god stated.

Chrysa raised an eyebrow at him.

“Need I be worried for my safety?”

Poseidon looked like he was resisting the urge to roll his eyes.

“I already have one brother threatening to start a war. I don’t need my other brother and my wife against me as well.”

Chrysa had just enough warning to close her eyes when Ares flashed them away.

While seeing a god’s true form wouldn’t kill her, it was still somewhat uncomfortable in her halfway-in-between state.

They reappeared in what Chrysa recognized as Ares’ temple on Olympus.

She wrenched her arm out of the god’s grasp and quickly moved several steps away, knives already in her hands.

“Don’t touch me,” she warned. “Don’t you dare touch me. You know what’ll happen if you do.”

Ares sneered at her.

“Don’t worry, little sister. I’ve got no plans of making Father upset for hurting Daddy’s little girl.”

“Well, if you’ll excuse me, I’m going to go find Father for the duration of this little exercise,” Chrysa growled, “since I assume you won’t allow me to go back to Denver until they’ve done what you’ve asked.”

“Bingo,” Ares smirked. He waved a hand, as if he could dismiss her. “Go on, little sister. Go complain to Daddy. He’s a bit busy at the moment.”

Chrysa stormed out of the temple and took a moment to orient herself on the streets of Olympus.

Chapter Notes

This is one of my favorite chapters so far. Hope you enjoy! And sorry about how long it's been. I usually remember to update over of FF, I tend to forget over here. Which is why I'm binge-posting.
outside. She sheathed her knives as she moved towards the throne room, where she expected her father to be.

As she walked, her t-shirt and jeans ensemble was encased in shadows and replaced with something more appropriate for an Olympus on the verge of war. The shadows formed into her Stygian iron breastplate, bracers, and greaves, which took their place over soft black clothing suitable for sneaking around in. There were six visible knives on her person: two belted to her waist, two strapped to her thighs, and two ones on her forearms. There were many other weapons on her person, but those were the only visible ones.

Before Chrysa could enter the throne room, she was intercepted by a man in a Hawaiian shirt, Bermuda shorts, and Birkenstocks.

She inclined her head to him, but kept her eyes on him warily.

“Poseidon,” she greeted. “What can I do for you?”

“I would have a word with you, Leuke Chrysocomê,” the sea god stated.

Chrysa raised an eyebrow at him.

“Need I be worried for my safety?”

Poseidon looked like he was resisting the urge to roll his eyes.

“I already have one brother threatening to start a war. I don’t need my other brother and my wife against me as well.”

Chrysa inclined her head in agreement and gestured for him to lead the way.

To her surprise, Poseidon did not lead them to his temple, where he would be the safest, but instead towards a small garden behind the throne room. While the garden had no proper name, it was often called “Kepos Triadelphes” or the “Garden of the Three Sisters” due to the monument that stood there.

The monument was a tribute to Leuke, Metis, and Amphitrite for their aid in the War of the Titans. They had been the first of the Titans to convert to the side of the gods, and all six children of Kronos and Rhea knew that without them, the battle would not have been won. The monument had been set up after Leuke’s death, so that no one would forget the three Oceanids who built Olympus.

It was shaped much the same as a temple, except it was missing the front wall and had no roof. Each of the three walls had images of Leuke, Metis, and Amphitrite. Metis’ wall was on the left, Amphitrite’s was on the right, and Leuke’s wall was at the back of the monument. It was the largest of the three walls, depicting her long life and her mysterious death.

“Amphitrite comes here every time she is on Olympus,” Poseidon said, breaking the silence. “It pains her to see the images of her lost sisters, but she comes here anyway. She does not want to forget you or Metis.”

“Well, I am alive again. I’ll be a bit harder to forget now,” Chrysa pointed out.

“But she does not see you often,” Poseidon replied. “She does not say so, but she often wishes that you would visit more. She thinks that your memories are not strong enough for you to still consider her your sister.”
Chrysa’s eyes widened in surprise.

“I have always seen Amphitrite as my sister. I did not want to overstep my boundaries by acting as such with her though. I thought she only considered me a partial replica of her sister.”

“She still loves you, and she misses you dearly. She knows that you are not the same now as you were then. Neither is she the same now as she was when you were first alive. Time tends to change people, even gods.”

“We have both suffered much since we were born as sisters,” Chrysa said quietly, taking a seat at one of the benches that lined the central walkway of the hall.

Poseidon took the bench across from her.

“I did not take the Master Bolt,” he said bluntly after a short silence.

“I did not think you did,” Chrysa replied calmly. “Nor do I think Hades did, despite what Ares may have claimed.”

“It did not seem like something Hades would do,” Poseidon admitted. “He would rather avoid us than have Zeus’ symbol of power stolen. Besides, he has you back, and he’s happier than I’ve seen him since you died.”

“None of you attempt to see him very often, so I’m not surprised you say that,” Chrysa said icily. “But I digress. Why have you called me here, Poseidon?”

The sea god took a deep breath, before rushing out, “Iwanttoknowaboutmyson.”

Chrysa took a moment to rewind that sentence in her mind.

“Percy, I assume?”

Poseidon nodded.

Chrysa smiled slightly.

“He’s a good kid. He’s naturally talented with a sword, and he has the best battle instincts I’ve seen in a long time. He cares very deeply for his mother, and he despises his stepfather. I don’t doubt that his stepfather is abusive towards both Percy and his mother.”

Poseidon was visibly furious.

Chrysa gave him a look.

“There is nothing you can do about it at the moment,” she lectured.

Poseidon took a deep breath and let it out again.

“He also wants your attention,” Chrysa offered. “He wants to know that you didn’t just sire him and then forget about him.”

“I was there when Medusa’s head arrived,” Poseidon admitted. “I thought it was hilarious. Your father was not quite as amused.”

“I was wondering what the reactions would be to that,” Chrysa replied. “I thought it was funny too.”
The pair shared a smile.

“I know you’re officially not supposed to interact with him, but you should do something to show him that you care,” Chrysa pointed out.

Poseidon thought a moment, and then a mad grin spread on his face.

“What if – once this whole mess is over and done with – I send Medusa’s head back to him so he can deal with his stepfather?”

Chrysa’s face lit up.

“Wonderful idea! I know I’d love to be able to petrify my mortal relatives. We’ll have to wait until this mess is over though.”

Suddenly, a loud voice announced across Olympus, “Attention everyone. Hephaestus TV will begin rolling in ten seconds… nine… eight…”

Poseidon snapped his fingers and a television screen appeared in front of them. On the screen were Annabeth and Percy, inside what Chrysa suspected was the “Tunnel of Love” ride that Ares had sent them to.

“I knew Ares was up to something,” Chrysa grumbled.

“When did you meet Ares? And why aren’t you with Percy in the first place?” Poseidon asked.

“Ares kidnapped me in order to get Percy, Annabeth, and the satyr to do his dirty work,” Chrysa said bluntly. “We’re apparently watching said dirty work now. The girl is Annabeth Chase, daughter of Athena.”

Water exploded around the pool the pair was in, drenching them and washing away the metallic spiders that were coating everything. Percy pulled Annabeth into the seat next to him and fastened her seat belt just before the tidal wave slammed into their boat. The boat turned, lifted in the flood, and spun in circles around the whirlpool. Then the boat’s nose turned toward the tunnel and they rocketed into the darkness.

Hephaestus TV only caught rapid flashes of Percy and Annabeth screaming as the boat hurtled around curves and corners and took forty-five-degree plunges past pictures of Romeo and Juliet and miniature Cupids.

“You should be proud of him,” Chrysa noted. “He’s only known he’s your son for a week and he’s already controlling water.”

“I am proud of him,” Poseidon said, and Chrysa could see it in every aspect of his being. He truly loved and was proud of Percy. “Will you tell him so?” the sea god asked.

“I will,” Chrysa said.

They watched as Percy and Annabeth rocketed towards the exit of the ride, which was chained shut. Percy and Annabeth unfastened their seatbelts and argued about jumping for it. Thankfully, Percy gave in to Annabeth. She was probably better at physics anyway.

They jumped out of the boat even as it struck the sealed gates. They were thrown through the air, straight over the gates, over the pool at the end of the ride, and down toward solid asphalt.
Miracle of miracles, the satyr managed to catch them, even if he was unable to completely stop their fall due to their combined wait. He was able to slow it, though, and while the pair were banged up upon hitting the ground, they looked fine overall. Percy still had Ares’ shield on his arm.

The pair got the satyr out from where he had crashed into a photo board, and then turned back towards the cameras and spotlights.

Percy waved at them.

“Show’s over!” he yelled. “Thank you! Good night!”

The screen went black.

“Well, that was amusing,” Chrysa said.

“I suppose so,” Poseidon said. “Even if it was a child of Athena with Percy.”

Chrysa stared at her uncle for a moment, then stated, “I’m going to laugh at you if those two get together. Repeatedly. While following you around your palace. Trite will let me.”

Poseidon sighed.

“Fine. If they get together, which I highly doubt, you have bragging rights.”

Any more conversation was interrupted by a loud voice bellowing, “POSEIDON!”

“I think Father’s realized we’re both here,” Chrysa said drily.

Zeus stormed in a moment later, eyes fixed on Poseidon, looking absolutely furious.

“What is the meaning of this, brother? Why have you absconded with my daughter? Do you mean to do her harm?” he demanded.

“Father, Father,” Chrysa soothed, standing up and gesturing towards herself. “I’m fine. Poseidon and I were simply talking about Amphitrite. We’ve planned a visit once this little mess is over.”

Zeus still looked suspicious, even as his eyes scanned Chrysa for any harm.

“When are you planning to visit?” he asked.

Chrysa glanced at Poseidon.

“June 23rd? I can’t do the 22nd, I’m hosting a dinner party. And I’m supposed to be in England on the 24th. Anti-Voldemort rallies and all that.”

“The 23rd sounds good to me,” Poseidon agreed with a smile.

“What dinner party are you hosting on the 22nd?” Zeus asked. “And why am I not invited?”

“You are. Hera knows. It’s her job to get you there. It’s black tie, by the way. Trite’s bringing you, Poseidon.”

Both gods stared at her.

“I think I may be busy that day…” Zeus hedged.
“Rhea’s coming.”

“I’ll clear my schedule,” Zeus said quickly.

“Me too,” Poseidon added.

Chrysa smirked at them.

“Your wives cleared them for you,” she replied sweetly.

Both gods groaned.

Chrysa mentally checked the time.

“Well, I do have to get back to Denver. Please don’t attempt to murder each other once I’m gone. I will be very upset if either of you miss my dinner party.”

The shadows came up from around her and transported her back to the diner parking lot in Denver. Ares was already there, leaning against his motorcycle.

“Might want to change, sweetheart,” Ares said, giving her a leering once-over. “Ancient Greek assassin isn’t exactly the fashion choice around here.”

“Ha-ha,” Chrysa deadpanned, even as the shadows came up to return her t-shirt, jeans, and combat boots.

It was a good thing that she came back when she did, because as soon as she was dressed again, Percy, Annabeth, and the satyr rounded the corner.

“Well, well,” Ares said. “You didn’t get yourself killed.”

“You knew it was a trap,” Percy accused.

Ares grinned wickedly.

“Bet that crippled blacksmith was surprised when he netted a couple of stupid kids. You look good on TV,” he mocked.

Percy shoved his shield at him.

“You’re a jerk,” he said firmly.

Annabeth and the satyr held their breaths.

Ares grabbed his shield and spun it in the air. It melted into a bulletproof vest, which he slung across his back.

“See that truck over there?” he asked, pointing to an eighteen-wheeler parked across the street from the diner. “That’s your ride. Take you straight to L.A., with one stop in Vegas.”


“You’re kidding,” Percy said.

Ares snapped his fingers, and the back door of the truck unlatched.
“Free ride west, punk. Stop complaining. And here’s a little something for doing the job.”

He grabbed a blue nylon backpack off the handlebars of his motorcycle and tossed it to Percy, who looked inside.

“I don’t want your lousy…” Percy began, but the satyr interrupted him.

“Thank you, Lord Ares,” he said, giving Percy a warning look. “Thanks a lot.”

Percy was gritting his teeth, looking like he was trying not to explode.

“You owe me one more thing,” Percy told the war god. “You promised me information about my mother.”

“You sure you can handle the news?” Ares said, kick-starting his motorbike. “She’s not dead.”

Percy looked shocked.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean she was taken away from the Minotaur before she could die. She was turned into a shower of gold, right? That’s metamorphosis. Not death. She’s being kept,” Ares stated.


“You need to study war, punk. Hostages. You take somebody to control somebody else,” Ares pointed out.

“Nobody’s controlling me,” Percy said angrily.

Ares laughed. “Oh, yeah? See you around, kid.”

Percy balled his fists.

“You’re pretty smug, Lord Ares, for a guy who runs from Cupid statues.”

Ares’ eyes glowed red. A hot wind blew all around them.

“We’ll meet again, Percy Jackson. Next time you’re in a fight, watch your back.”

He revved his Harley, then roared off down Delancey Street.

“That probably wasn’t the smartest thing to do, Percy,” Chrysa pointed out.

“I don’t care,” the boy replied.

“You don’t want a god as your enemy. Especially not that god,” Annabeth said.

“Hey, guys,” the satyr said, “I hate to interrupt, but…”

He pointed towards the diner, where two men in Kindness International uniforms were paying their check.

“If we’re taking the zoo express, we need to hurry,” the satyr said.

The four ran across the street and climbed in the back of the big rig, closing the doors behind them.
The stench was immediate. It smelled like no one had bothered to clean the refuse out of the truck in
days.

Chrysa whipped out her wand and ordered, “*Lumos!*”

The tip of the wand lit up, illuminating a row of filthy metal cages holding pathetic looking zoo
animals: a zebra, an albino lion, and an antelope.

“This is kindness?” the satyr yelled. “Humane zoo transport?”

Before he could say anymore, the truck’s engine roared to life and the trailer started shaking. They
were forced to sit before they fell down.

Chrysa dug deep into her purse and pulled out three camping lanterns. She gave one to each of the
children.

“Here, turn these on. I’m going to need my wand.”

Once the lanterns were on, Chrysa ordered, “*Nox!*” before casting an air-freshening spell. She then
used her wand to levitate the correct food to each animal, before going over to sit by the lion.

“Hello,” she said. “My name is Chrysocômê. Do you have a name?”

“No, lady,” the lion replied. “*They never needed to give us names, though one of the drivers has
been calling me ‘Snowy’./*”

“May I give you a name?” Chrysa murmured, reaching into the cage to stroke his tangled mane.

The lion bowed his head.

“I would be honored, lady.”

Chrysa thought for a moment before asking, “How about Kyrios? It means ‘lord.’”

“It is an honor for the lady to name me a lord,” the lion replied.

“I found a water jug, if we want to refill their bowls,” Percy said quietly.

Chrysa jumped slightly. She hadn’t realized he had come up behind her.

“I wouldn’t trust anything that came from this place,” she said scornfully. She cast a scouring charm
on the lion’s water bowl and then ordered, “*Aguaménti!*” The bowl filled with fresh, clean water.
Chrysa moved around the room and did the same to the water bowls of the zebra and the antelope.

The satyr had calmed the antelope down, and Annabeth was in the process of cutting the balloon off
its horn.

“Can we get the gum out of the zebra’s hair?” Percy asked.

Annabeth looked regretful. “I think it’s too risky, with all the bumping around we’re doing.”

“I promise we’ll help you more in the morning,” Chrysa whispered to the lion, stroking his mane.
“We can’t do much right now. We’re stuck here too.”

“That’s alright, lady,” Kyrios the lion replied. “It is enough.”
The lion seemed to share her opinion that it was time to sleep.

The satyr curled up on a turnip sack; Annabeth opened the bag of Double-Stuf Oreos from Ares. Percy settled down beside her. Chrysa stayed next to the lion, fingers tangled in his mane, as she curled up on the ground.

She was almost asleep when Annabeth began to talk.

“Hey,” she said, “I’m sorry for freaking out at the water park, Percy.”

“That’s okay,” the boy replied.

“It’s just…” she shuddered. “Spiders.”

“Because of the Arachne story,” Percy guessed. “She got turned into a spider for challenging your mom to a weaving contest, right?”

Chrysa couldn’t see her, but she assumed Annabeth nodded.

“Arachne’s children have been taking revenge on the children of Athena ever since. If there’s a spider within a mile of me, it’ll find me. I hate the creepy little things. Anyway, I owe you.”

“We’re a team, remember?” Percy said. “Besides, Grover did the fancy flying.”

“I was pretty amazing, wasn’t I?” the satyr mumbled.

Annabeth and Percy laughed.


“He said you and he go way back. He also said Grover wouldn’t fail this time. Nobody would turn into a pine tree.”

The satyr let out a mournful bray.

“I should’ve told you the truth from the beginning,” the satyr said, voice trembling. “I thought if you knew what a failure I was, you wouldn’t want me along.”

“I’ve known that you were the satyr who tried to rescue Thalia,” Percy replied. “Chrysa told me my first day of camp.”

“She still blames me,” the satyr said glumly.

“And the other two half-bloods Thalia befriended, the ones who got safely to camp…that was you and Luke, wasn’t it?” Percy asked, presumably directing the question to Annabeth.

“Like you said, Percy, a seven-year-old half-blood wouldn’t have made it very far alone. Athena guided me toward help. Thalia was twelve. Luke was fourteen. They’d both run away from home, like me. They’d been working together for almost two years before they found me. They were happy to take me with them. They were…amazing monster-fighters, even without training. We traveled north from Virginia without any real plans, fending off monsters for about four months before Grover found us.”

“I was supposed to escort Thalia to camp,” the satyr said, sniffling. “Only Thalia. I had strict orders from Chiron: don’t do anything that would slow down the rescue. We knew Hades was after her, see, but I couldn’t just leave Luke and Annabeth by themselves. I thought…I thought I could lead
all three of them to safety. It was my fault the Kindly Ones caught up with us. I froze. I got scared on the way back to camp and took some wrong turns. If I’d just been a little quicker…”

“Stop it,” Annabeth said. “No one blames you. Thalia didn’t blame you either.”

“She sacrificed herself to save us,” the satyr said miserably. “Her death was my fault. The Council of Cloven Elders said so. Chrysa says so.”

Chrysa sighed and sat up abruptly.

“I don’t truly blame you, Grover Underwood,” she stated tiredly.

The three jumped at the sound of her voice.

“You…you don’t?” the satyr asked in a small voice.

“Not entirely. A piece of the blame rests on you, but it also rests on Father, Hades, and me.”

Chrysa sighed and looked down at her lap.

“Thalia ran away from home in March of 1998. I learned about the gods in May of 1998, and I first spoke to Father in December of that same year. December 22, to be exact. Thalia’s birthday. But Father didn’t tell me I had a little sister out there, a little sister that I could have saved had I known. I didn’t learn about Thalia’s existence at all until I arrived at camp until September of 2002, three months after she died. I could have helped her. But if I’d known about Thalia as soon as I knew about the gods, she never would have met Luke and Annabeth. They both would have died before making it to camp.”

“That’s right,” Annabeth said. “I wouldn’t be here today if it weren’t for Thalia and Grover. Neither would Luke. We don’t care what the council says.”

“It’s just my luck,” the satyr sniffled. “I’m the lamest satyr ever, and I find the two most powerful half-bloods of the century, Thalia and Percy.”

“You didn’t find me,” Chrysa pointed out. “But I got directions from my boss, so there were no satyrs involved.”

“Your boss?” Percy asked in confusion.

“I never told you?” Chrysa asked in surprise. “I have a summer job working for one of the gods. My contract doesn’t allow me to speak of who I work for, but I’m pretty much an administrative assistant between the months of March and September. This is my first time being at camp during the normal summer season. That’s why only the year-rounders know me. My boss and I are…friends, of a sort, as much as you can be friends with a god, so he tells me things. Current Olympian gossip, information on potential enemies, where to find Camp Half-Blood…”

“Back to the original subject, you’re not lame, Grover,” Annabeth insisted. “You’ve got more courage than any satyr I’ve ever met. Name one other who would dare go to the Underworld. I bet Percy is really glad you’re here right now.”

Chrysa saw her foot shift, presumably kicking Percy for his response.

“Yeah,” Percy said. “It’s not luck that you found Thalia and me, Grover. You’ve got the biggest heart of any satyr ever. You’re a natural searcher. That’s why you’ll be the one to find Pan.”
“If you manage to find a child of Hades though, we’re going to have to rethink your talents,” Chrysa added.

The satyr let out a deep, satisfied sigh. They waited for him to say more, but he started snoring instead.

“How does he do that?” Percy marveled.

“I don’t know,” Annabeth said. “But that was a really nice thing you told him.”

“I meant it,” Percy replied.

Annabeth rubbed her necklace like she was thinking deep, strategic thoughts.

“That pine-tree bead,” Percy said. “Is that from your first year?”

She looked down. She hadn’t realized what she was doing.

“Yeah,” she said. “Every August, the counselors pick the most important event of the summer, and they paint it on that year’s beads. I’ve got Thalia’s pine tree, a Greek trireme on fire, a centaur in a prom dress – now that was a weird summer….”

“And the college ring is your father’s?” Percy asked.

“That’s none of your…” Annabeth stopped herself. “Yeah. Yeah, it is.”

“You don’t have to tell me,” Percy said.

Annabeth glanced at Chrysa.

“Chrysa already knows the story. I kinda rant to her a lot,” Annabeth said. “I don’t mind telling you.”

She took a shaky breath.

“My dad sent it to me folded up in a letter, two summers ago. The ring was, like, his main keepsake form Athena. He wouldn’t have gotten through his doctoral program at Harvard without her….That’s a long story. Anyway, he wanted me to have it. He apologized for being a jerk, said he loved me and missed me. He wanted me to come home and live with him.”

“That doesn’t sound so bad,” Percy pointed out.

“Yeah, well…the problem was, I believed him. I tried to go home for that school year, but my stepmom was the same as ever. She didn’t want her kids put in danger by living with a freak. Monsters attacked. We argued. Monsters attacked. We argued. I didn’t even make it through winter break. I called Chiron, who sent Chrysa to bring me right back to Camp Half-Blood.”

Percy looked over at Chrysa, who shrugged.

“I talked to Annabeth’s parents while she was at school. They technically signed over custody of her to me. Apparently I’m a bit more comforting than a man in a wheelchair who turns into a centaur.”

“You think you’ll ever try living with your dad again?” Percy asked Annabeth.

“Please, I’m not into self-inflicted pain,” Annabeth replied, though she wouldn’t meet Percy’s eyes.
“You shouldn’t give up,” Percy told her. “You should write him a letter or something.”

“Thanks for the advice,” Annabeth said coldly, “but my father’s made his choice about who he wants to live with.”

They passed another few minutes in silence.

“So if the gods fight,” Percy said, “will things line up the way they did with the Trojan War? Will it be Athena against Poseidon?”

Annabeth leaned her head against the backpack from Ares and closed her eyes. “I don’t know what my mom will do. I just know I’ll fight next to you.”

“Why?” Percy asked.

“Because you’re my friend, Seaweed Brain. Any more stupid questions?”

Annabeth fell asleep before Percy could respond.

“Don’t worry, Percy,” Chrysa said with a yawn as she laid back down. “If things turn into a war, I’ll kidnap you and Annabeth and we can go live on my private island.”

“You have a private island?” Percy asked.

“I told you, I’m filthy rich. Now go to sleep.”

The next morning, it took both Annabeth and the satyr shaking Percy to get him to wake up.

“The truck’s stopped,” the satyr said. “We think they’re coming to check on the animals.”

“Hide!” Annabeth hissed. She pulled her Yankees cap onto her head.

Percy and the satyr dived behind feed sacks. Chrysa cast Disillusionment spells on them, then backed into the shadows, which came up to hide her.

The trailer doors creaked open. Sunlight and heat poured in.

“Man!” one of the truckers said, waving his hand in front of his nose. “I wish I hauled appliances.”

He climbed inside and poured some water from a jug into the animals’ dishes.

“You hot, big boy?” he asked Kyrios, before splashing the rest of the jug into the lion’s face.

Kyrios roared in indignation. Chrysa resisted the urge to do the same, or better yet, curse the man into oblivion. However, cursing Muggles was still illegal, especially in the US.

“Yeah, yeah, yeah,” the man said.

The trucker threw the antelope a squashed-looking Happy Meal bag. He smirked at the zebra.

“How ya doin’, Stripes? Least we’ll be getting rid of you this stop. You like magic shows? You’re gonna love this one. They’re gonna saw you in half!”

The zebra was wide-eyed with fear.

There was a loud knock, knock, knock on the side of the trailer.
The trucker inside yelled, “What do you want, Eddie?”

Eddie yelled back, “Maurice? What’d you say?”

“What are you banging for?”

Knock, knock, knock.

“What banging?” Eddie yelled in response.

Maurice rolled his eyes and went back outside, cursing at Eddie all the while.

Annabeth pulled off her cap, appearing beside Percy. Chrysa stepped out of the shadows and cancelled the Disillusionment charms.

“This transport business can’t be legal,” Annabeth said.

“No kidding,” the satyr replied.

“They’re animal smugglers, lady,” Kyrios said.

“Kyrios says that they’re animal smugglers,” Chrysa volunteered.

“Who’s Kyrios?” Annabeth and Percy asked.

“The lion,” Chrysa replied.

“We’ve got to free them!” the satyr insisted.

Percy grabbed his sword and slashed the lock off the zebra’s cage. It burst out, then turned to Percy and bowed.

The satyr held his hands up and said a blessing in goat-speak.

Maurice poked his head back inside to check the noise, but the zebra was faster. It leapt over his head and into the street. There was yelling and screaming and cars honking. All four rushed to the doors of the trailer in time to see the zebra galloping down a wide boulevard lined with hotels and casinos and neon signs.

Maurice and Eddie ran after it, with a few policemen running after them shouting, “Hey! You need a permit for that!”

“Now would be a good time to leave,” Annabeth pointed out.

“The other animals first,” the satyr said firmly.

Percy cut the locks with his sword. The satyr raised his hands and spoke the same goat-blessing he’d used for the zebra.

“Good luck,” Percy told the animals.

The antelope and the lion burst out of their cages. The antelope jumped out of the truck immediately, but the lion stayed to nudge Chrysa’s waist.

“Thank you, lady,” he said.

“Do you want me to send you to my father instead?” Chrysa asked, kneeling down to wrap her arms
around the zebra’s neck. “He’ll take care of you.”

Kyrios hesitated.

“I would like that, lady.”

Chrysa turned to the other three, who were watching them.

“Go on,” she said. “I’ll catch up once I take care of him.”

They looked hesitant, but grabbed Ares’ backpack and stumbled out of the trunk.

Chrysa, keeping her arms wrapped around the lion, pulled the shadows around them both and transported them to Mount Olympus.

As expected, Zeus was in the throne room.

“Father!” Chrysa exclaimed. “Could you take care of this lion for me? Please? I know lions are one of your less well-known symbols, but he really needs help!”

The Lord of the Sky looked slightly stunned that his daughter had just randomly appeared with a half-starved albino lion.

“As you wish, daughter,” he said. He opened his mouth to speak again, but Chrysa was faster.

“I have to get back to Vegas now. Love you! Bye!”

The shadows enveloped her again, and she reappeared in Percy’s shadow as they walked through Vegas.

“Kyrios is all taken care of,” she announced.

All three jumped.

“Stop. Doing. That!” Annabeth exclaimed, clutching her heart. “You’re going to give me a heart attack before I’m thirty!”

Chrysa shrugged. “Sorry. I can’t help it.”

They continued walking through Vegas, passing Monte Carlo, the MGM, pyramids, a pirate ship, and the miniature Statue of Liberty.

They somehow ended up standing at a dead end in front of the Lotus Hotel and Casino. Chrysa had never actually seen the entrance before – it was a huge neon flower, the petals lighting up and blinking – as she and Hades always shadow-travelled in when they wanted to visit their kids.

The doorman smiled at them.

“Hey, kids. You look tired. You want to come in and sit down?”

Chrysa knew what a bad idea it was, but, just like with Medusa, she couldn’t tell them that.

“Whoa,” the satyr said as they stepped inside.

Just like every other time she had visited the casino, Chrysa was impressed. The whole lobby was as giant game room. There was an indoor waterslide around the glass elevator, which went straight up
for at least forty floors. There was a climbing wall on one side of the building, and an indoor bungee-jumping bridge. There were virtual reality suites with working laser guns, and hundreds of video games, each one the size of a widescreen TV. Waitresses and snack bars served every kind of food one could imagine. It was any teenager’s paradise.

“Hey!” a bellhop said as he approached them. He wore a white-and-yellow Hawaiian shirt with lotus designs, shorts, and flip-flops. “Welcome to the Lotus Casino,” he said. “Here’s your room key.”

“Um, but…” Percy stammered.

“No, no,” the bellhop laughed. “The bill’s taken care of. No extra charges, no tips. Just go on up to the top floor, room 4001. If you need anything, like extra bubbles for the hot tub, or skeet targets for the shooting range, or whatever, just call the front desk. Here are your LotusCash cards. They work in the restaurants and on all the games and rides.”

“How much is on here?” Percy asked as he took his green plastic credit card.

“What do you mean?” the bellhop asked, his eyebrows knitting together.

“I mean, when does it run out of cash?” Percy questioned.

The bellhop laughed.

“Oh, you’re making a joke. Hey, that’s cool. Enjoy your stay.”

“I would like a separate room,” Chrysa said quickly.

The bellhop startled, but handed her another room-key.

“4002, right next door to theirs,” the bellhop stated.

The four rode up the elevator to the 40th floor, where their rooms were. The other three were in a three-bedroom suite, complete with a fully-stocked snack bar.

“Oh, goodness,” Annabeth said. “This place is…”

“Sweet,” the satyr said. “Absolutely sweet.”

“Showers, then meet back here?” Percy offered.

“My suite is right through there,” Chrysa said, pointing at a door in the living room. “I’ll be right out, if you need me.”

She went into her suite and bathed in a shower that could have held four people. There were windows in the bathroom that let in the natural sunlight, so Chrysa wrapped a towel around herself and tossed a drachma into the rainbow the water created.

“Oh Iris, goddess of the rainbow, accept my offering,” she said. “Hades, in the Underworld.”

The image formed of Hades, sitting at his desk, scribbling furiously at his paperwork. Thankfully, he was alone.

“Aidôneus,” she called teasingly.

Hades looked up, eyes immediately finding her barely-dressed form.
“Hello, darling,” he said in a low voice, nearly purring. “What’s this call? I thought you were on a quest with the little sea-child.”

“I am,” Chrysa replied with a smile. “We took a detour to the Lotus Casino. It’ll take them a bit to figure out what’s going on. I was wondering if you’d like to stop by for a bit? Then maybe we could go spend some time with the kids?”

Hades began to smile.

“I’ll be right over.”

“Actually, finish whatever paper you’re working on. I need to make sure that the kids actually go play some games,” Chrysa said with a sigh. “You can come over when you’re done, and I’ll be back up here once I’m sure they’re busy.”

Hades glanced down at the pile of paperwork in front of him.

“It may take a few minutes,” he admitted.

Chrysa blew him a kiss.

“I’ll be waiting,” she teased, just before slashing her hand through the water to end the connection.

She quickly got dressed in the hotel-provided clothing – a silky emerald blouse that brought out her eyes and a pair of black leather Daisy Dukes, completed by a pair of black, lace-up, thigh-high boots with stiletto heels. She quickly pulled her hair away from her face and added on a bit of hotel-provided makeup before returning to the kids’ living room.

Thanks to the hotel’s magic, they said nothing about her appearance. Grover was eating a bag of potato chips while Annabeth watched National Geographic.

Percy came out from his room, hair still wet from his own shower, and immediately asked Annabeth, “All those stations, and you turn on National Geographic. Are you insane?”

“It’s interesting,” Annabeth defended.

“I feel good,” the satyr said. “I love this place.”

Without his even realizing it, the wings sprouted out of his shoes and lifted him a foot off the ground, then back down again.

“So what now?” Annabeth asked. “Sleep?”

Percy and the satyr looked at each other and grinned. They held up their green plastic casino cards.

“Play time,” Percy said.

After that, it was a mad rush for the kids to get to the elevator. Chrysa returned to her room to find Hades waiting for her.

She closed the door behind her and made sure the door from her living room to the kids’ was locked.

She used her shadows to make her movement to Hades immediate.

“So, darling,” Chrysa said, trailing a hand down Hades’ chest. “Ready for a little play time of our own?”
His only response was a passionate kiss.

A few hours later – in real time, not Lotus Casino time – they were dressed in more proper clothes and went off through the hotel to track down Nico and Bianca. The other guests of the hotel somehow sensed Hades’ power and moved out of his way without consciously realizing what they were doing.

They found Nico where they usually found him: at the Mythomagic table. A wave of Hades’ hand freed him from the hold the hotel had on him.

His face lit up upon seeing them.

“Mamma! Papà!” he cried out excitedly.

Nico abandoned his Mythomagic cards in order to embrace his parents.

“I’ve missed you! How were your meetings these past few days? Are we going to leave soon?” he babbled excitedly.

“Soon, Niccòlo,” Chrysa said as she hugged her son tightly. “It won’t be too much longer now. A few days. A week at most, I think. Then we’ll be able to be a family again.”

She gave her son one last hug, then pulled away, allowing Hades to do the same.

“Do you know where your sister is, Tesoro?” Chrysa asked, a hint of an Italian accent coloring her words.

“She’s playing the archery game again,” Nico said, his shoulders drooping slightly. “She never wants to play with me anymore.”

Chrysa leaned down so she was at eye level with her son.

“Bianca loves you very much, my Niccòlo. She just needs some time to herself every now and then. She’s almost a teenager after all,” she said with a smile and a small laugh.

Nico smiled in reply.

“Alright, Mamma. Are we having family time?” he asked, looking up at his father.

“Indeed we are,” Hades rumbled, a smile on his face as well.

Nico ran ahead through the casino, dodging through the people and games like he had been there for years, even though it was only seven weeks in his mind.

As Nico had said, Bianca was at an archery game, firing arrows into different things – targets, animals, random flying things – with near-perfect accuracy.

“Can we make bows of Stygian iron?” Chrysa whispered in Hades’ ear. “Because I think she needs one.”

“I’ll set the spirits on it,” Hades promised. He waved his hand, and Bianca was also freed from her trance, though her attention remained on the game.

“Bianca!” Nico yelled.

“Quiet, Nico, I almost beat my high score!” the older girl scolded. She was twelve years old, the
same age as Percy and Annabeth. Deep inside, Chrysa knew her desperation to keep her cousin alive was so that her children could one day be free of this place.

“But Bianca…” Nico whined, but she cut him off again.

“I don’t care about your Mythomagic game, Nico, I want to finish this!”

“But Mamma and Papà are here!”

Bianca froze, and the split second of inattention caused her to miss one of her targets. She set the game controllers down and turned around. Like Nico, her face lit up and she flung herself at them.

“Mamma! Papà!”

Unlike her brother, Bianca managed to catch both of her parents in one hug. She clutched their necks tightly as they embraced her in turn.

“We’re having a family day, Bianca!” Nico exclaimed happily. “You, me, Mamma, and Papà! All four of us!”

Even before they had been in the Lotus Hotel and Casino, family days with all four of them had been very rare.

“Are we staying at the hotel, or going out?” Bianca asked.

Hades and Chrysa exchanged glances. Twice now, they had snuck the children out of the hotel and done “family days” somewhere else. One of the times, they had a week at Disney World. Chrysa had spoken to Zeus first, and they had exchanged oaths that Zeus would not harm them as long as Hades and Chrysa took the pair back to the casino when they were done.

“Inside this time, I think,” Chrysa said slowly. She needed to be here in case Percy, Annabeth, or the satyr managed to snap out of the Lotus-eaters’ control. “Papà will only be here today, but I’ll be staying a little while longer. What would you like to do first?”

“Mythomagic!” Nico exclaimed, just as Bianca exclaimed, “Shooting range!”

“How about we go to lunch first?” Hades said smoothly. “I’m feeling a bit peckish.”

The children exchanged glances.

“Lunch sounds good,” Bianca said, and Nico nodded.

Eventually, they did get to both the shooting range and Mythomagic, as well as swimming in the pool, going bowling, and playing Monopoly. They ended the day by watching _Bambi II_ in Nico and Bianca’s bedroom, all curled up together on the bed. All four of them had gone together to see the original _Bambi_ in theatres in 1942, just as they had every other Disney animated film released before Maria’s death. The last film they had seen together was _The Three Caballeros_ in February of 1945.

Once they had put the children to bed, Hades destroyed his block on the hotel’s powers, leaving them unchanging and unaware of the passage of time.

He turned to Chrysa and kissed her sweetly.

“I’ll see you soon, I hope,” he whispered against her lips.

“Hopefully my cousin will be able to break the spell so we can get out of here,” Chrysa replied,
before kissing him again.

“Anything that returns you to my side is something that I can get behind,” Hades said.

“Feel free to send me my paperwork. I’m sure I’ll be here for a few more days. If the solstice passes, I’m getting myself out,” she replied.

“Fair enough,” Hades said. “I’ll see you on the solstice then.”

“I’ll see you on the solstice,” Chrysa repeated.
“Percy,” she asked in a low voice. “The name the servant called the thing in the pit by…was it perhaps the Crooked One?”

Percy’s face lit up.

“Yeah! That was it!”

Chrysa felt her already pale skin pale further. Annabeth and the satyr both looked on the verge of shock.

“But…he’s…he’s dead!” the satyr exclaimed.

Chrysa shook her head.

“Not dead. Just dissipated. It’s always possible to reform in Tartarus, just as the monsters reform in Tartarus. This time, it just took a really, really long time. Ancient things are awakening, things that haven’t been seen since the ancient days…” her voice trailed off as her mind drifted to what other ancient things might be returning. Her uncles, certainly. Potentially followed by her grandmother.

“This is bigger than we know,” she said abruptly. “We must continue to the Underworld, but this quest will not proceed as we expected it to. If at any point I tell you to run, I expect you to run away and not look back, understand?”

By Chrysa’s count, it was June 20th by the time that Percy figured out something was wrong. He had already freed Annabeth and the satyr – though the satyr still looked half-entranced and had his arms held tightly by Annabeth and Percy – when he found her at playing Mythomagic with Nico. Bianca, unfortunately, was elsewhere in the casino.

“Chrysa!” Percy exclaimed. “We need to go. This place is a trap!”

Chrysa laid down her cards and stood up swiftly.

“I was wondering when you’d figure it out. I’m ready if you are.”

Nico looked heartbroken.

“You’re leaving already?” he asked despondently.

Chrysa smiled sadly at him and carded her fingers through his hair.

“It’s all right, Nico. I’ll come back and see you soon. Tell your sister, alright?”

“Alright,” Nico said, standing up and embracing Chrysa. “I’ll miss you.”
“I’ll miss you too, Tesoro,” Chrysa whispered into his ear. “I love you very much. Tell your sister I love her?”

“Of course,” Nico said with a smile.

Chrysa waved goodbye to him as she walked away.

“I’ll see you soon!” she called.

The Lotus bellhop hurried up to them when they hit the lobby.

“Well, now, are you ready for your platinum cards?” he asked.

“We’re leaving,” Percy said firmly.

“Such a shame,” he said earnestly. “We just added an entire new floor full of games for platinum-card members.”

He held out the cards. The satyr reached for one, but Annabeth yanked back his arm and said, “No, thanks.”

They walked out of the door, and into much different weather than they’d walked in under. It was still midafternoon, but not it was stormy, with heat lightning flashing out in the desert.

Percy ran to check the nearest newspaper stand. Chrysa noted that Ares’ backpack was now on his shoulder. The other three followed close behind him.

“It’s been five days,” he told them. “We only have one day left. What should we do?”

Annabeth pulled out the green LotusCash card and held it up.

“We take a taxi,” she replied.

All four of them got into a taxi-van, and Annabeth told the driver, “Los Angeles, please.”

“That’s three hundred miles,” the cabbie said as he chewed his cigar. “For that, you gotta pay up front.”

“You accept casino debit cards?” Annabeth asked.

He shrugged.

“Some of ‘em. Same as credit cards. I gotta swipe ‘em through first.”

Annabeth handed him her green LotusCash card. He looked at it skeptically.

“Swipe it,” Annabeth invited.

He did, and the meter machine began rattling. Finally, an infinity symbol came up next to the dollar sign.

The cigar fell out of the driver’s mouth, and he looked back at them with widened eyes.

“Where to in Los Angeles…uh, Your Highness?”

“The Santa Monica pier,” Annabeth instructed, sitting up a little straighter. “Get us there fast, and you can keep the change.”
The cab’s speedometer never dropped below ninety-five the entire way through the Mojave Desert. Once the privacy shield was up, Percy said, “I had another dream, but I can’t remember it all.”

“Tell us, Percy,” Chrysa urged.

“I was back in the dark cavern, spirits of the dead everywhere. The thing in the pit was speaking again, but it wasn’t talking to me this time. There was a throne room, too. It asked if someone – a ‘he’ – suspected anything, and it had this invisible servant that said no. The servant, I think it was a male, it sounded like someone I know, but I don’t know who. The servant called the monster in the pit something other than “my lord”…some special title or name…” Percy said, his voice trailing off.


“Maybe,” Percy replied, though he sounded doubtful.

“That throne room sounds like Hades’,” the satyr said. “That’s the way it’s usually described.”

Percy shook his head.

“Something’s wrong. The throne room wasn’t the main part of the dream. And that voice from the pit…I don’t know. It just didn’t feel like a god’s voice.”

Something was niggling in the back of Chrysa’s mind. More specifically, something was niggling in the back of Leuke’s mind. She decided to let the children finish their thoughts first. Maybe she could make some more connections.

Annabeth’s eyes widened.

“What?” Percy asked.

“Oh…nothing. I was just – No, it has to be Hades. Maybe he sent this thief, this invisible thief, to get the Master Bolt, and something went wrong…”

“Like what?” Percy questioned.

“I-I don’t know. But if he stole Zeus’ symbol of power from Olympus, and the gods were hunting him, I mean, a lot of things could go wrong. So this thief had to hide the bolt, or he lost it somehow. Anywya, he failed to bring it to Hades. That’s what the voice said in your dream, right? The guy failed. That would explain what the Furies were searching for when they came after us on the bus. Maybe they thought we had retrieved the Bolt.”

“But if I’d already retrieved the bolt,” Percy said, “why would I be traveling to the Underworld?”

“To threaten Hades,” the satyr suggested. “To bribe or blackmail him into getting your mom back.”

Percy whistled.

“You have evil thoughts for a goat.”

“Why, thank you,” the satyr replied.

“But the thing in the pit said it was waiting for two items,” Percy said. “If the Master Bolt is one, what’s the other?”

The satyr shook his head. Annabeth looked a bit paler. Chrysa knew what the second item was.
“Percy,” she asked in a low voice. “The name the servant called the thing in the pit by… was it perhaps the Crooked One?”

Percy’s face lit up.

“Yes! That was it!”

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“But… he’s… he’s dead!” the satyr exclaimed.

Chrysa shook her head.

“Not dead. Just dissipated. It’s always possible to reform in Tartarus, just as the monsters reform in Tartarus. This time, it just took a really, really long time. Ancient things are awakening, things that haven’t been seen since the ancient days…” her voice trailed off as her mind drifted to what other ancient things might be returning. Her uncles, certainly. Potentially followed by her grandmother.

“This is bigger than we know,” she said abruptly. “We must continue to the Underworld, but this quest will not proceed as we expected it to. If at any point I tell you to run, I expect you to run away and not look back, understand?”

All three looked confused.

“But what if you need help?” Percy asked.

“Then I will get it. But if it comes to the point where I need help, you will not be able to aid me. You will need to run. Run far, run fast. Run to the ocean, if you can. It will protect you, Percy, and you can use it to protect Annabeth and…” she glanced at the satyr, before wincing and saying, “Grover. Trust me on this.”

“Alright,” Percy said confused.

“The answer is in the Underworld,” Annabeth said. “You saw the spirits of the dead, Percy. There’s only one place that could be. We’re doing the right thing.”

The cab continued to speed west, and they spent most of the rest of the journey in awkward conversations about the Land of the Dead. Chrysa spent it in silence hoping – praying that Kronos was not well on his way to returning.

They arrived at the beach at Santa Monica around sunset and walked down to the edge of the surf.

“What now?” Annabeth asked.

“Now Percy and I go talk to a sea-nymph,” Chrysa said, kicking off her shoes and tying her hair back.

“You? But – you’re the daughter of the Lord of the Sky. Should you really be going into the ocean while Zeus and Poseidon are on the verge of war?” Annabeth asked.

“I’m also Poseidon’s great-granddaughter. Besides, Uncle and I had a short chat when Ares kidnapped me. He bears no ill feelings towards me,” Chrysa said.

Percy turned violently to Chrysa. “You talked to my dad?”
Chrysa smiled at him.

“Walk and talk, Percy. We don’t have much time.”

They walked into the surf together, past their ankles, up to their waists, up to their chests. Annabeth called after them, “You know how polluted that water is? There’s all kinds of toxic…” Their heads went under.

Chrysa could tell that Percy was still holding his breath. She was far more used to breathing underwater than he was.

They walked down into the shoals and beds of sand-dollars. A pair of mako sharks met them there.

Chrysa grabbed onto the fin of one mako shark and watched Percy grab onto the other. The sharks deposited them at the edge of the ocean proper, where the sand bank dropped off into a huge chasm. The surface shimmered a hundred and fifty feet above them.

A Nereid glimmered in the darkness below them. “Percy Jackson,” she called. She had flowing black hair, a dress made of green silk, and rode a stallion-sized seahorse.

She dismounted, and the seahorse went off to play with the mako sharks. She only looked mildly surprised to see Chrysa.

“We were wondering whether you would come, little cousin.”

“I’m here,” Chrysa said, extending her arms and gesturing towards herself. “I am chaperoning this adventure. I’m chaperoning Percy to make sure you are a Nereid sent by Lord Poseidon and not a clever trap to kill him.”

The Nereid looked offended.

“Nothing in the ocean would kill our Sea Prince.”

“You have yet to tell us your name,” Chrysa pointed out.


He bowed to her, looking slightly bewildered.

“You’re the woman who spoke to me in the Mississippi River,” he said.

“Yes, child. I am a Nereid, a spirit of the sea. It was not easy to appear so far upriver, but the naiads, my freshwater cousins, helped sustain my life force. They honor Lord Poseidon, though they do not serve in his court,” Iphianassa said.

“And…you serve in Poseidon’s court?” Percy asked.

She nodded.

“It has been many years since a child of the Sea God has been born. We have watched you with great interest.”

“If my father is so interested in me,” Percy said, “why isn’t he here? Why doesn’t he speak to me?”
“Do not judge the Lord of the Sea too harshly,” Iphianassa said. “He stands at the brink of an unwanted war. He has much to occupy his time. Besides, he is forbidden to help you directly. The gods may not show such favoritism.”

“Even to their own children?” Percy asked.

“Especially to them. The gods can work by indirect influence only. That is why I give you a warning, and a gift.”

She held out her hand and extended three white pearls to Percy.

“I know you journey to Hades’ realm,” she said. “Few mortals have ever done this and survived: Orpheus, who had great music skill; Hercules, who had great strength; Houdini, who could escape even the depths of Tartarus. Do you have these talents?”

“Um…no, ma’am.”

“Oh, but you have something else, Percy. You have gifts you have only begun to know. The oracles have foretold a great and terrible future for you, should you survive to manhood. Poseidon would not have you die before your time. Therefore take these, and when you are in need, smash a pearl at your feet.”

“What will happen?” Percy asked.

“That,” she said, “depends on the need. But remember: what belongs to the sea will always return to the sea.”

“What about the warning?” Percy asked.

Her eyes flickered with green light.

“Go with what your heart tells you, or you will lose all. Hades feeds on doubt and hopelessness. He will trick you if he can, make you mistrust your own judgment. Once you are in his realm, he will never willingly let you leave.”

Chrysa bristled at the insult to her husband. He did not keep people in the Underworld unjustly. Except Seph, but that was a different story.

“Keep faith,” the Nereid instructed. “Good luck, Percy Jackson.”

She summoned her sea horse and rode toward the void.

“Wait!” Percy called. “At the river, you said not to trust the gifts. What gifts?”

“Goodbye, young hero,” she called back. “You must listen to your heart. And Lady Chrysa? There are some who would speak to you if you would wait behind.”

“I’ll wait,” Chrysa called back, but Iphianassa had already faded into a spot of green light. “Go on back, Percy. I’ll catch up, no matter where you are.”

“Okay,” Percy said uncertainly, before kicking back towards shore.

It wasn’t until he had disappeared onto land that the others appeared.

Chrysa felt tears begin to fall at the sight of them. She had not seen her first family in a long, long time.

Four Oceanides and two Titans stood before her. A fifth swam up, with a fishtail instead of legs.

“Sorry I’m late,” she said, but that was all it took for Chrysa to throw herself into her dark-haired sister’s arms.

“Amphitrite! I thought I wouldn’t see you until the dinner party!”

Amphitrite wrapped her arms around her older/younger sister in turn.

“That was the plan, but Poseidon told me about the conversation you two had a few days ago, and when I received word that you were here…” she shrugged. “I had to come see my favorite sister.”

“That’s hurtful, Trite,” Pleione said. “Really hurtful. What are we, chopped liver?”

“Fish guts, actually,” Amphitrite replied promptly, causing all of them to laugh.

“But seriously, what are all of you doing here?”

“We’ve missed you, daughter,” Oceanus rumbled.

“It’s been a very long time, Leuke,” Tethys added.

The sight of her parents reminded her on the threat they might soon be facing.

“Mother. Father. If Kronos returns and attempts to take back his throne…will you join him?”

Tethys immediately looked offended that she had to ask, but Oceanus was much harder to read.

“I don’t know,” he said finally. “It depends on what offer he makes me.”

“If you do,” Chrysa said slowly, “as your firstborn daughter, could you at least do me the favor of warning me – preferably from a distance – before you try to kill me?”

“If he won’t, I will,” Tethys said firmly, giving her husband a sharp glare.

Distant or not, Leuke was and always would be their firstborn. She was probably one of their most-liked children as well, due to having a brain and not taking over her parents’ domain. That instead lay in the hands of Amphitrite.

“How long can you stay?” Philyra asked.

Philyra was the second-youngest of the Oceanides – Amphitrite being the youngest – but one of the least intelligent. It was Philyra who had been seduced by Kronos in the form of a horse, which had caused her to later give birth to the first centaur, Chiron.

Chrysa glanced at her Rolex.

“No later than midnight,” she said finally. “I’m babysitting, and I don’t want those kids getting into any more trouble.”

“That still gives us more than three hours,” Hesione pointed out. “We’ve got you until then.”

Chrysa smiled at her sisters and her parents.

“You’ve got me until then,” she confirmed.
It was with a heavy heart that Chrysa left them behind several hours later. Philyra had whined and cajoled her to stay longer, but Chrysa had been firm in her decision to leave precisely at midnight.

It hadn’t taken more than a minute to get back to shore, and a Drying Charm took care of her dripping clothes. She cast a quick tracking charm, and followed the invisible tug all the way to the entrance of the DOA Recording Studios.

She walked in with confidence, and was unsurprised to see that none of the kids were there. Charon was though, and he told her, “I just took them down, Lady. If you hurry, you’ll catch up.”

“How did you get here so quickly?” Percy asked. “We wandered around LA for half the night!”

Chrysa shrugged. “Part of my job is to know where to find the gods. I knew where the DOA Recording Studios was. Any issues?”

“We ran into Procrustes the Stretcher, but he won’t be hurting anyone for a while,” Annabeth said firmly.

It took Chrysa a minute to recall that myth.

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“Ah. Who chopped his head off?”

“Percy,” Annabeth said.

The satyr still looked panicked.

“I don’t know how…” he panted. “I didn’t…”

There was a whisper in the darkness.

"Percy, this place…" Annabeth began.

"Shh," Percy ordered, standing up.

The sound was getting louder, a muttering, evil voice from far, far below us. It was coming from the pit.

Chrysa recognized the words it said – rather, Leuke recognized the words it said. She recognized the voice too, but she knew better than to say his name when he was so close.

“What’s that noise?” the satyr asked, sitting up.


Percy uncapped his sword, and the voice faltered for a moment, before resuming his chant.

“Magic,” Percy whispered.

“We have to get out of here,” Annabeth said.

Chrysa drew her sword – her proper sword, not the celestial bronze one on her belt. The Stygian iron blade was enough to make the monster in the pit think twice.

“Go,” she ordered. “Go now. I’ll be right behind you.”

Annabeth and Percy dragged the satyr up and started back up the tunnel. The voice grew louder and angrier, and all four broke into a run.

A cold wind pulled at them, as if the pit itself were inhaling. Knowing Tartarus, he probably was.

Percy lost his balance for a moment, but Chrysa dragged him up with superhuman strength and pushed him towards the exit.

They finally reached the top of the tunnel and broke out into the Fields of Asphodel. The wind died. A wail of outrage echoed from deep in the tunnel. He was not happy that they’d gotten away.

“What was that?” the satyr panted. “One of Hades’ pets?”

“Something much worse,” Chrysa replied grimly as they collapsed in the relative safety of a grove of white poplar.

The white poplar trees both amused and annoyed Chrysa. On one hand, they were a monument of Hades’ affection for her. On the other hand, she’d been turned into a tree and did not like the reminder of it.

They only rested for a few minutes more. Percy capped his sword and put the pen back into his pocket.

“Let’s keep going,” he said. He looked at the satyr. “Can you walk?”

The satyr gulped. “Yeah, sure. I never liked those shoes anyway.”

Even as they walked, Chrysa kept her senses focused outwards, searching for any remainder of the threat in the pit. He had many allies, if he was returning.
They made their way into Hades’ palace. The Furies were circling the parapets. The outer walls of the fortress glittered black, and the two-story-tall bronze gates stood wide open. They continued on into the gardens of Persephone, which were a strange arrangement of flowers and jewels and poisons, all held together in a display of macabre beauty.

They walked up the steps of the palace, between black columns, through a black marble portico, and into the palace. The entry hall had a polished bronze floor that seemed to boil in the reflected torchlight. There was no ceiling on this part of the palace, just the cavern roof far above. The guards stood at the doorways, grotesque skeletons in multiple centuries of military armaments. The main doors were guarded by skeletal Marines with rocket-propelled grenade launchers.

“You know,” the satyr mumbled, “I bet Hades doesn’t have trouble with door-to-door salesmen.”

“Well, guys,” Percy said. “I suppose we should…knock?”

Chrysa nodded distractedly, and gestured discreetly. A hot wind blew down the corridor and the doors swung open. The guards stepped aside.

“I guess that means *entrez-vous,*” Annabeth said.

The throne room looked as it always did, and Hades looked as magnificent on his throne as ever. He was ten feet tall at the moment – probably to impress the kids – and wore black silk robes and a crown of braided gold. His skin was paler than Chrysa’s own, his hair shoulder-length and the same jet-black. He radiated power as he lounged on his throne fused of human bones, looking lithe, graceful, and dangerous as a panther.

“You are brave to come here, Son of Poseidon,” Hades said, his voice smooth and oily. It nearly made Chrysa weak at the knees. “After what you have done to me, very brave indeed. Or perhaps you are simply very foolish.”

Hades glanced at Chrysa, as if he knew what his voice was doing to her. The glimmer in his eyes said he did. The slight twitch of his face when Percy stepped forward told her that he wanted to hear Percy out before he heard Chrysa’s report.

“Lord and Uncle, I come with two requests,” Percy said bravely.

Hades raised an imperious eyebrow.

“Only two requests?” he scoffed. “Arrogant child. As if you have not already taken enough. Speak, then. It amuses me not to strike you dead yet.”

Percy swallowed and glanced at the black flower-throne to Hades’ left. That one belonged to Persephone. There was another throne to Hades’ right, this one made of black stone, the shadows twisting all around it. According to Hades and Persephone, no one had ever removed Leuke’s throne from its position beside Hades’, though her shadows has stilled for as long as she had been dead. Hades said that it was a comfort to see her shadows move around her throne, even when she was not present.

Annabeth cleared her throat and prodded Percy in the back.

“Lord Hades,” Percy began again. “Look, sir, there can’t be a war among the gods. It would be…bad.”

“Really bad,” the satyr added helpfully.
“Return Zeus’ Master Bolt to me,” Percy said. “Please sir. Let me carry it to Olympus.”

Hades’ eyes grew dangerously bright. Chrysa moved one of her shadows to run a soothing touch down his back, in an attempt to keep him from murdering her new favorite cousin.

“You dare keep up this pretense, after what you have done?” he demanded.

“Um…Uncle,” Percy said. “You keep saying, ‘after what you’ve done.’ What exactly have I done?”

The throne room shook with a tremor strong enough that they probably felt it in the city above. Hundreds of skeletal warriors marched in and lined the perimeter of the room, blocking the exits.

“Do you think I want war, godling?” Hades bellowed.

“You are the Lord of the Dead,” Percy said carefully. “A war would expand your kingdom, right?”

“A typical thing for my brothers to say!” Hades spat. “Do you think I need more subjects? Did you not see the sprawl of Asphodel Fields?”

“Well…”

“Have you any idea how much my kingdom has swollen in this past century alone, how many subdivisions I’ve had to open?” Hades demanded. He was making his way into a familiar rant – familiar to Chrysa, at least.

“More security ghouls,” Hades moaned. “Traffic problems at the judgment pavilion. Double overtime for the staff. I used to be a rich god, Percy Jackson. I control all the precious metals under the earth. But my expenses!”

“Charon wants a pay raise,” Percy blurted out.

Chrysa winced. That was a whole other rant waiting to happen.

“Don’t get me started on Charon!” Hades yelled. “He’s been impossible ever since he discovered Italian suits! Problems everywhere, and I’ve got to handle them all! The commute time alone from the palace to the gates is enough to drive me insane! And the dead keep arriving. No, godling. I need no help getting subjects! I did not ask for this war.”


“Lies!” Hades yelled as the throne room rumbled once more. “Your father may fool Zeus, boy, but I am not so stupid. You and the satyr have been helping this hero – coming here to threaten me in Poseidon’s name, no doubt – to bring me an ultimatum. Does Poseidon think I can be

“His plan?”

“You were the thief on the winter solstice. Your father thought to keep you his little secret. HE directed you into the throne room on Olympus. You took the Master Bolt and my helm. Had I not sent my Fury to discover you at Yancy Academy, Poseidon might have succeeded in hiding his scheme to start a war. But now you have been forced into the open. You will be exposed as Poseidon’s thief, and I will have my helm back!”

“But…” Annabeth said, “Lord Hades, your Helm of Darkness is missing too?”

“Do not play innocent with me, girl. You and the satyr have been helping this hero – coming here to threaten me in Poseidon’s name, no doubt – to bring me an ultimatum. Does Poseidon think I can be
blackmailed into supporting him?”

“No!” Percy exclaimed. “Poseidon didn’t – I didn’t…”

“My Lord Hades,” Chrysa said, stepping forward and bowing slightly. Technically, as a demigod before one of the Elder Gods, she should have bowed much more deeply, but she was Leuke Chrysocomê, and she would never bow subserviently to her Consort.

“I have been observing Perseus Jackson, as instructed, since his arrival at Camp Half-Blood and for the entirety of his quest. He did not steal the Master Bolt. He did not steal the Helm of Darkness. I knew that you also had no compliance in the theft, but there were other forces that wanted us to think that you did. When we entered Asphodel Fields, a pair of magical flying shoes given to satyr Grover Underwood – malfunctioned, I suppose you could say – and attempted to drag him away.”

She paused a moment for dramatic effect.

“The shoes were attempting to drag him into Tartarus. A voice spoke from the depths of Tartarus in the Tongue of the Old Times, chanting a ritual of claiming, attempting to consume all four of us. Lord Tartarus himself attempted to breath us into his depths. I know the voice that spoke to us, my Lord. You know his name as well. It was Him.”

Hades still looked furious, but he sat back down on his throne.

“I do not doubt what happened, but Perseus Jackson was involved in the theft of your father’s Master Bolt, daughter of Zeus.”

Chrysa winced inwardly as Hades spoke. He was probably wincing too. They rarely ever acknowledged that she was Zeus’ daughter now, except on occasions when it was necessary, such as their lunch meetings with him.

“Can you not sense it, daughter of Zeus? Can you not sense your father’s power?”

“My senses have been a bit busy trying to ward off creatures from the depths of Tartarus,” Chrysa said irritably, but she dropped her extended senses and brought them back in. Suddenly, she realized what Hades was saying.

She walked over to Percy, bodily turned him around, and opened his backpack. Inside was a two-foot-long metal cylinder, spiked at both ends, humming with energy.

Chrysa pulled the bolt out of the backpack.

“Percy,” Annabeth asked. “How…”

“I – I don’t know,” Percy said. “I don’t understand.”

“You heroes are always the same,” Hades scoffed. “Your pride makes you foolish, thinking you could bring such a weapon before me. I did not ask for Zeus’ Master Bolt, but I am sure it will make an excellent bargaining tool. Now, my helm. Where is it?”

Percy looked speechless. Chrysa stepped forward again, Master Bolt still in her hand.

“My Lord Hades,” she said. “Percy did not gain this backpack on his own. It was given to him by Ares after Percy did him a favor in Denver.” She reached out with her magic and touched the backpack.
“The backpack is the Master Bolt’s sheath,” she stated, “reforged to look like something innocuous. I do not know what enchantment kept the Master Bolt from returning to its sheath until now, but I swear to you that the Master Bolt was not in the backpack before the children entered the Underworld. I would have sensed it.”

“Why did you not sense it as soon as it returned?” Hades asked.

“We entered the Underworld at separate times,” Chrysa said. “I stopped to speak with some sea-nymphs.”

From the look in Hades’ eyes, he knew exactly who she had stopped to speak with.

“You claim that Ares has my Helm,” Hades asked, attention focused solely on Chrysa. “Are you certain of this?”

“I am certain that there are far-reaching implications of this that we do not know,” Chrysa said quietly. “There is something wrong here, my Lord.”

Hades leaned back against his throne and raised a hand to stroke his chin.

“I will take your word for it, daughter of Zeus. Return the Master Bolt to its sheath.”

Chrysa turned around, and Percy handed her the backpack. She slid the Master Bolt inside and sealed the backpack tightly. A quick bit of magic made it so that it would only be opened in the presence of Zeus.

“I will allow you to leave, demigods,” Hades said. “You will use your little gifts to return to the surface. You will find Ares. You will return my Helm of Darkness. If you do not complete your quest and fix this mess, I will kill you myself. When everything is fixed, I will return Sally Jackson to life. Understand?”

All three kids looked pale.

“Yes, sir,” Percy said, echoed by Annabeth and the satyr.

Percy pulled the pearls out of his pocket.

“Wait,” he said. “There’s three pearls and four of us.”

“The daughter of Zeus has her own way out,” Hades said in a bored voice.

The kids looked at Chrysa.

“I’ll be fine,” she promised. “Go.”

Percy passed the pearls to Annabeth and the satyr, and they smashed them at their feet.

For a scary moment, nothing happened, but then the pearl fragments exploded with a burst of green light and gust of fresh sea wind. All three were encased in milky white spheres, which began to float up towards the stalactites.

Once all three had gone through the cavern ceiling, Hades dismissed the guards and came down from his throne, shrinking as he walked towards Chrysa. By the time he reached her, he was human-sized and easily able to lean down and kiss her.

“It was Ares?” he asked against her lips.
“The whole time,” Chrysa confirmed. “I thought something was off when we encountered him in Denver. The things he said…they didn’t quite make sense. But Ares couldn’t have been the original thief, he’s a god. I don’t know who stole the items in the first place. Ares must have caught the thief, whoever he was. But Ares did not instigate this. Uncle was expecting the bolt. He has been in Percy’s dreams this entire quest. It was your father behind this entire thing.”

It should have been impossible for Hades to pale, considering his skin was already paper white, but he managed to do so anyway.

“It can’t be,” he said.

“It is,” Chrysa said firmly. “Percy Jackson you can doubt, beloved, but you cannot doubt me. I knew Kronos for far longer and far better than any other still living free, except perhaps for Rhea. And even then, it could be argued that I know him best.”

Hades sighed and kissed her again.

“I know,” he said. “You should probably head upstairs. Find Ares. Return my Helm. Get the Master Bolt back to your father before he throws an even bigger hissy fit.”

Chrysa laughed at that.

“I will. I’ll be back soon, love. No more than a week. And you’ll be at my party tomorrow evening?”

“Of course,” Hades confirmed. “If you’d come back once everything is fixed, I’d appreciate it.”

Chrysa smirked at him before she disappeared into the shadows.

“I’ll send you an Iris-message.”

She found herself on the beach a moment later. She could see Percy, Annabeth, and the satyr down the beach, facing a bulky man beside a motorbike. As Chrysa watched, the man pulled a black ski cap out of his pocket and placed it between the handlebars of his bike. It turned into an elaborate bronze war helmet that Chrysa immediately recognized as her consort’s.

Chrysa cloaked herself in shadows and moved closer. Ares wouldn’t be able to sense her. Only Nyx and Erebos could find her when she was cloaked in shadows, and even they could not do it consistently.

“I didn’t want the trouble,” she heard Ares say. “Better to have you caught red-handed, holding the thing.”

“You’re lying,” Percy replied. “Sending the bolt to the Underworld wasn’t your idea, was it?”

“Of course it was!” Ares growled. Smoke drifted up from behind his sunglasses.

“You didn’t order the theft,” Percy said confidently. “Someone else sent a hero to steal the two items. Then, when Zeus sent you to hunt him down, you caught the thief. But you didn’t turn him over to Zeus. Something convinced you to let him go. You kept the items until another hero could come along and complete the delivery. That thing in the pit is ordering you around.”

“I am the god of war! I take orders from no one! I don’t have dreams!”

Percy hesitated, then said, “Who said anything about dreams?”
Ares attempted to cover his agitation with a smirk, but he wasn’t a very good actor.

“Let’s get back to the problem at hand, kid. You’re alive. I can’t have you taking that bolt to Olympus. You just might get those hardheaded idiots to listen to you. So I’ve got to kill you. Nothing personal.”

He snapped his fingers and the sand exploded at his feet. Out charged a wild boar, even larger and uglier than the one whose head hung above the door of Ares Cabin at Camp.

Percy stepped into the surf.

“Fight me yourself, Ares,” he demanded.

Ares laughed, but there was an uneasy edge to it.

“You’ve only got one talent, kid, running away. You ran from the Chimera. You ran from the Underworld. You don’t have what it takes.”

“Scared?” Percy taunted.

“In your adolescent dreams,” Ares scoffed. “No direct involvement. Sorry, kid. You’re not at my level.”

“Percy, run!” Annabeth cried.

The giant boar charged. As the boar rushed past him, Percy uncapped his sword and sidestepped. The boar’s severed tusk fell at his feet while the disoriented animal charged into the sea.

“Wave!” Percy shouted.

Immediately a wave surged up from nowhere and engulfed the boar, wrapping around it like a blanket. The beast squealed once in terror before it was swallowed up by the sea.

Percy turned back to Ares and taunted, “Are you going to fight me now? Or are you going to hide behind another pet pig?”

Ares’ face was purple with rage.

“Watch it, kid. I could turn you into…”

“A cockroach,” Percy cut in. “Or a tapeworm. Yeah, I’m sure. That’d save you from getting your godly hide whipped, wouldn’t it?”

“Oh, man, you are really asking to be smashed into a grease spot,” Ares said as flames danced across the top of his glasses.

“If I lose, turn me into anything you want. Take the bolt. If I win, the helm and the bolt are mine and you have to go away,” Percy said.

Ares sneered and swung his baseball bat.

“How would you like to get smashed: classic or modern?”

Percy held out his sword.

“That’s cool, dead boy,” Ares said. “Classic it is.”
The baseball bat in his hands changed into a two-handed sword. The hilt was a large silver skull with a ruby in its mouth.

“Percy, don’t do this. He’s a god,” Annabeth said.

“He’s a coward,” Percy replied hotly.

Annabeth swallowed.

“Wear this, at least. For luck.”

She took off her camp necklace and tied it around Percy’s neck.

“Reconciliation,” she said. “Athena and Percy together.”

“Thanks,” Percy said with a smile, flushing slightly.

“And take this,” the satyr said, handing him a flattened tin can. “The satyrs stand behind you.”

“Grover…” Percy said. “I don’t know what to say.”

The satyr patted him on the shoulder as Percy stuffed the tin can in his back pocket.

“You all done saying good-bye?” Ares said, heading towards them. “I’ve been fighting for eternity, kid. My strength is unlimited and I cannot die. What have you got?”

Chrysa used Ares’ distraction to shadow to his motorcycle and take the Helm of Darkness. She turned it back into a ski cap and stuffed it into her bra.

Ares struck down at Percy, but Percy was no longer there. Percy catapulted over the war god, slashing as he came down. But Ares was just as quick. He twisted, and the strike that should have caught him directly in the spine was deflected off the end of his sword hilt.

“Not bad, not bad,” Ares said with a grin.

He slashed again, and Percy was forced to jump onto dry land. Percy attempted to get back to the water, but Ares blocked him at every move. When Percy tried to get in close with a sword thrust, Ares knocked the blade out of his hand and kicked him in the chest, sending him flying thirty feet away. Thankfully, Percy landed in a sand dune.

“Percy!” Annabeth yelled. “Cops!”

There were red and blue lights flashing on the shoreline boulevard, and car doors were slamming.

“There, officer!” someone yelled. “See?”

A gruff cop voice said, “Looks like that kid on TV…what the heck…”

“That guy’s armed!” another cop called. “Call for backup!”

Percy rolled to one side as Ares’ blade slashed the sand. He ran for his sword, scooped it up, and launched a swipe at Ares’ face that was again deflected.

Percy stepped back into the surf, forcing Ares to follow him.

“Admit it, kid,” Ares said. “You got no hope. I’m just toying with you.”
More sirens arrived.

“Drop the guns!” yelled a police officer through a megaphone. “Set them on the ground. Now!”

Ares turned to glare at the spectators, and bellowed, “This is a private matter! Be gone!”

He waved his hand, and a wall of red flame rolled across the patrol cars. The police barely had any time to dive for cover before their vehicles exploded. The crowd behind them scattered, screaming.

Ares laughed.

“Now, little hero! Let’s add you to the barbeque!”

He slashed, but Percy managed to deflect his blade. Percy tried to feint, but Ares knocked the blow aside.

Chrysa noticed that the water behind Percy was receding.

Ares went towards Percy, grinning with confidence. Percy lowered his blade, as if he were too exhausted to go on. Ares raised his sword, and Percy jumped straight over Ares on a wave, which smashed him full in the face, leaving him cursing and sputtering with a mouth full of seaweed.

Percy landed behind him with a splash and feinted toward Ares’ head. Ares turned in time to raise his sword, but he didn’t catch Percy’s feint. Percy changed direction, lunged to the side, and stabbed Riptide straight down into the water, sending the pint through the god’s heel.

Ares roared in fury, blasting the sea away from him in a fifty-foot circle. Percy was blasted back as well, but Chrysa cushioned his fall.

Ichor fell to the sand. Ares’ face was a mask of pain, shock, and complete disbelief that he’d been wounded.

As he limped towards Percy, muttering curses in ancient Greek, something stopped him. A dark power overtook the area, slowing time, dropping the temperature to freezing, and exuding an aura of extreme despair.

Chrysa gasped. She knew that aura. He shouldn’t be so powerful yet.

The darkness lifted, and Ares looked stunned. Still, he lowered his sword.

“You have made an enemy, godling,” Ares told Percy. “You have sealed your fate. Every time you raise your blade in battle, every time you hope for success, you will feel my curse. Beware, Perseus Jackson. Beware.”

His body began to glow.

“Percy!” Annabeth shouted. “Don’t watch!”

Percy was still too stunned to move, but Chrysa tackled him to the ground, being sure to cover his face as the golden light filled the area.

When the light died, Chrysa got off of Percy, who looked slightly embarrassed to have been in that position with his much older, female cousin.

“The Helm!” Annabeth exclaimed. “It’s gone!”
“It’s fine,” Chrysa said. “I have it.” She pulled the ski cap out of her bra.

“Where did you…never mind, I don’t want to know,” Percy said.

The Furies chose that moment to land in front of them.

“We saw the whole thing,” Alecto hissed, addressing Percy. “So…it truly was not you?”

“No,” Percy said.

“I will personally return your master’s helm to him,” Chrysa told Alecto, winking slightly. “I need to take care of the mortals first, and make sure these three get on their way back home, but I swear on the River Styx that I will return the Helm of Darkness to Lord Hades.”

Thunder rumbled to confirm her oath.

The Furies hissed, keeping with their part.

“Very well,” Alecto said. She turned back to Percy and ran a forked tongue over her green, leathery lips. “Live well, Percy Jackson. Become a true hero. Because if you do not, if you ever come into my clutches again…”

She cackled as she and her sisters rose on their bats’ wings, fluttering into the smoke-filled sky and disappearing.

The satyr and Annabeth had walked over to them.

“Percy,” the satyr said. “That was so incredibly…”

“Terrifying,” Annabeth put in.

“Cool!” the satyr corrected.

“Did you guys feel that…whatever it was?” Percy asked.

Both nodded uneasily.

“Must’ve been the Furies overhead,” the satyr said.

“It was not the Furies,” Chrysa said. “It was something that even I dare not speak of here. It was evil, Percy Jackson, Annabeth Chase…Grover Underwood. If the evil is coming back, I fear that you will have to face it again. But now, you need to get back to New York. Tonight.”

“That’s impossible!” Annabeth said. “Unless we…”


Annabeth and the satyr both stared at him.

“Fly, like, in an airplane, which you were warned never to do lest Zeus strike you out of the sky, and carrying a weapon that has more destructive power than a nuclear bomb?” Annabeth asked incredulously.


“I will make sure you get safely on a flight,” Chrysa promised. “And my father daren’t strike you
down while you carry the Master Bolt.”

“That’s a relief,” the satyr said. “Why aren’t you coming?”

“I need to return the Helm to Lord Hades. Percy doesn’t have the time, and having another child of the Big Three return it is a peace gesture.”

“What about the mortals?” Annabeth asked. “They think Percy’s a criminal!”

Chrysa smirked.

“Leave that to me.”
“Leuke, darling, you look wonderful!” she said as she embraced her former companion.

“Well thank you, my Queen,” Chrysa replied with a dazzling smile.

Her emerald green gown was of the finest silk, and had a thigh-high slit on the left side, exposing acres of pale skin. The gown was trimmed in gold at the top, and thin gold chains also made up the only straps of the dress. She wore a gold and emerald necklace, and had gold chandelier earrings hanging from her ears. The outfit was completed by elbow-length emerald gloves and a black silk drape.

The rest of their party arrived soon after. All in all, there were ten of them: Chrysa, Hades, Rhea, Amphitrite, Poseidon, Hera, Zeus, Hestia, Demeter, and Persephone.

Rhea sat at the head of the table with Chrysa to her right and Amphitrite to her left. Hades was beside Chrysa, with Persephone beside him and Demeter beside her. Poseidon sat beside Amphitrite, then Hestia, then Hera. Zeus took the foot of the table.

Conversation remained light until after the main course had been served. Then, Chrysa took charge.

“Kronos is returning,” she said bluntly.

It was very simple to manipulate the mortals’ minds into a plausible story that did not involve monsters, magic, or gods.

According to the L.A. news, the explosion at the Santa Monica beach was caused when a crazy kidnapper fired a gun at a police car. He accidentally hit a gas main that had ruptured during the earthquake. This crazy kidnapper (a.k.a. Ares) was the same man who had abducted Percy, his mother, and his two best friends from New York, followed by the abduction of heiress Amy Potter-Black, before bringing them across the country on a ten-day odyssey of terror.

Poor little Percy Jackson wasn’t an international criminal after all. The crazy criminal had caused the explosion at the St. Louis Arch when Percy nearly got away from him. A concerned waitress in Denver had seen the man threatening his abductees inside and outside her diner, with Amy being prevented from using her credit card, as it could be used to track them. The waitress had a friend take a photo and then had notified the police.

Finally, brave Percy Jackson had stolen a gun from his captor in Los Angeles and battled him shotgun-to-rifle on the beach. Police had arrived just in time. But in the spectacular explosion, five police cars had been destroyed and the captor had fled. No fatalities had occurred. Amy Potter-Black, Percy Jackson, and his two friends were safely in police custody.

Chrysa played the reporters the entire time, leaving the kids the only job of acting tearful and exhausted victims.

“What was this man’s motive?” one of the reporter asked.
“I was taken because of both my money and a family heirloom that only I know the location of. It’s here in Los Angeles, which is why that man dragged us all the way across the country. Percy and his friends were kidnapped as hostages to convince me to give up the item,” Chrysa said.

“But why these kids?” another reporter demanded.

Chrysa wiped away a tear that had fallen.

“Percy’s father was my father’s long-lost brother. Percy never met his father, nor did I meet my uncle, and my father died as a baby, so I didn’t know that he existed until recently. Percy and his mother were on their way to meet up with me for the first time when they were kidnapped. They’re my only living family, so Percy was taken, and his best friends were taken with them, as they were spending the weekend together,” she announced. “The man’s other thugs kept Sally back in New York, and I hope that my aunt will be returned home safely. But now, I need to get my cousin and his friends back home to their families. I’m taking them to the airport right away.”

They had to go through another round of questioning at LAX, but Chrysa got all three of them on the plane. When reporters asked her what she was doing, she replied, “I’m going to my LA house, showering, changing, eating, and then I’m going to move the artifact my kidnapper was after so he’ll never be able to find it again.”

That wasn’t quite the truth. She did go to her LA house, but only so the reporters would stop following her. Once inside, she immediately shadow-travelled back to the Underworld.

Hades was waiting for her, looking much calmer now.

“What do we do now?” he asked as he took the Helm of Darkness from her and wrapped her in an embrace.

“Well, the kids’ flight doesn’t take off for another hour, and it’s a six-hour flight from here to New York City, so I’d say we have about six hours to do whatever we want before I have to give my report to Zeus and Poseidon,” Chrysa said teasingly, before she pressed her lips to his.

Seven hours later, Chrysa was dressed to the nines in a white chiton edged in gold, golden jewelry around her neck, and golden flowers in her hair.

“You look beautiful,” Hades murmured in her ear as he came up behind her. He wrapped his arms around her and kissed her cheek.

“Why thank you,” Chrysa replied. “But I’ll never make it to Olympus if you don’t let go.”

“I don’t want you to go to Olympus,” Hades pouted.

Chrysa laughed and kissed his cheek.

“I’ll be back before you know it. Tonight I’ll go to Olympus and back to Camp Half-Blood, tomorrow’s my dinner party, and I’ll come back home in a week.”

Hades sighed with exaggerated despondence.

“I supposed I’ll survive.”

Chrysa pulled him in for one last kiss – a long, lingering one – before saying, “I’ll see you soon, my love,” and shadow-travelling back to Olympus.
She appeared in the throne room. Only Zeus and Poseidon were present, arguing back and forth as they waited for Percy Jackson to arrive.

Zeus, as usual, was dressed in a pinstriped, three-piece suit. Poseidon wore a slightly tacky Hawaiian shirt, shorts, and Beachcombers.

“Father, Uncle,” Chrysa greeted with a bow. “It is a pleasure to see you again.”

“Daughter,” Zeus greeted with a nod. “I assume you have returned Hades’ missing item to him.”

“I have,” Chrysa said with a smile. “I assume you have been watching?”

Both gods frowned.

“Our vision has been clouded,” Poseidon admitted. “What happened? Who had the Master Bolt?”

“Ares,” Chrysa said.

“Ares?” both gods asked in shock.

“He was not the original thief,” Chrysa said. He found the thief, reclaimed the Master Bolt and the Helm of Darkness, but was convinced by the thief’s original commander to keep the items in order to start a three-way war between the gods. He very nearly succeeded.”

“Who was the original thief’s commander?” Zeus asked sharply. “And who was the original thief?”

“I do not know who the original thief was,” Chrysa admitted. “I do know his commander, and it is ill news.”

“Who, Chrysa?” Poseidon urged.

“Kronos,” Chrysa said firmly.

Both gods looked shocked.

“It cannot be Kronos,” Zeus said.

“It is.”

“He is dead! Destroyed! I chopped him to pieces myself! You were there!” Zeus exclaimed, rising from his chair.

“I was. I was also there for the four thousand years of Kronos’ life before you were born, so I hope you believe me when I say I know what I saw.”

“It cannot be,” Zeus nearly whispered, slumping back onto his platinum throne.

“She is correct, brother. Of all those living, only Leuke and Rhea are likely to be able to identify Kronos so easily,” Poseidon pointed out. “She would know better than we would if Father was returning.”

Zeus still looked uneasy.

“I would hear Perseus Jackson’s report,” he finally said. “He has already entered Mount Olympus. He will be here shortly.”
“I will hide myself,” Chrysa said, stepping around the thrones to conceal herself behind Zeus’. As the thrones were sized for ten-foot-tall immortals, and she was only five and a half feet, it was easy to stand behind the platinum monstrosity.

Chrysa soon heard footsteps as Percy entered the room. She expected he went to Poseidon’s throne first.

“Father,” he greeted.

“Should you not address the master of this house first, boy?” Zeus questioned.

“Peace, brother,” Poseidon said. “The boy defers to his father. That is only right.”

“You still claim him, then?” Zeus asked menacingly. “You claim this child whom you sired against our sacred oath.”

“I have admitted my wrongdoing,” Poseidon said. “Now I would hear him speak.”

“I have spared him once already,” Zeus grumbled. “Daring to fly through my domain…pah! I should have blasted him out of the sky for his impudence.”

“And risk destroying your own Master Bolt?” Poseidon asked calmly. “Let us hear him out, brother.”

Zeus grumbled a bit more.

“I shall listen,” he decided. “Then I shall make up my mind whether or not to cast this boy down from Olympus.”

“Perseus,” Poseidon said. “Look at me.”


Percy began his recounting, telling everything that had happened since the attack by Alecto at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Chrysa could hear the point where Percy removed the Master Bolt from his backpack and laid it at Zeus’ feet. The weapon crackled with immense power.

There was a long silence after that, broken only by the hearth fire. Finally, the crackling that heralded Zeus reclaiming his bolt occurred.

“I sense the boy tells the truth,” Zeus muttered. “But that Ares would do such a thing…it is most unlike him.”

“He is proud and impulsive,” Poseidon said. “It runs in the family.”

If that wasn’t a jab at Zeus’ ego, Chrysa didn’t know what was.

“Lord?” Percy asked.

“Yes?” both answered.

“Ares didn’t act alone. Someone else – something else – came up with the idea.”

Percy described his dreams, and the feeling he’d had on the beach, the momentary breath of evil that
had seemed to stop the world and prevented Ares from killing him.

“In the dreams,” Percy said, “the voice told me to bring the bolt to the Underworld. Ares hinted that he’d been having dreams, too. I think he was being used, just as I was, to start a war.”

“You are accusing Hades, after all?” Zeus questioned.

“No,” Percy said. “I mean, Lord Zeus, I’ve been in the presence of Hades. This feeling on the beach was different. It was the same thing I felt when I got close to that pit. That was the entrance to Tartarus, wasn’t it? Something powerful and evil is stirring down there...something even older than the gods.”

“It IS Father,” Poseidon said in Ancient Greek. “It has to be.”

“How could he have reformed so much without us knowing?” Zeus questioned in the same language.

“It’s not like we have a Tartarus prison check,” Poseidon scoffed. “Even we hesitate to go down there, brother. I doubt Hades would have gone without Leuke, and I am under the impression that they have other things on their minds when they are together. Perhaps we could…”

Zeus cut him off. “I don’t think that’s necessary.”

“But we need to be prepared in case of a war!” Poseidon argued.

“We will speak of this no more,” Zeus said, returning to English. “I must go personally to purify this thunderbolt in the waters of Lemnos, to remove the human taint from the metal.”

He rose from his seat.

“You have done me a service, boy,” Zeus said. “Few heroes could have accomplished as much.”

“I had help, sir,” Percy said. “Grover Underwood and Annabeth Chase and Chrysa Potter – Chrysa said she’d meet me here, but the last thing I knew, she was back in the Underworld. Is she okay?”

“I’m fine, Percy,” Chrysa said, stepping out from behind her father’s throne and striding forward to embrace her cousin. He returned it tightly.

“I was worried,” he said quietly. “It was dangerous for you to go to the Underworld alone.”

“Hades knows better than to keep me there against my will,” Chrysa said firmly.

“If we are done...?” Zeus said drily. “To show you my thanks, boy, I shall spare your life. I do not trust you, Perseus Jackson. I do not like what your arrival means for the future of Olympus. But for the sake of peace in the family, I shall let you live.”

“Um...thank you sir,” Percy said.

“Do not presume to fly again. Do not let me find you here when I return. Otherwise you shall taste this bolt. And it shall be your last sensation. Chrysa, Brother, I shall see you at dinner tomorrow.”

Thunder shook the palace. With a blinding flash of lightning, Zeus was gone.

“Your uncle,” Poseidon told Percy, “has always had a flair for dramatic exits. I think he would have done well as the god of theater.”
An uncomfortable silence ensued.

Chrysa leaned over and kissed the top of Percy’s head.

“I’ll wait outside. You two need to talk. Uncle, I’ll see you tomorrow. Percy, I’ll be right outside to take you to see your mom.”

“She’s back?” Percy said, face brightening.

Chrysa nodded.

“Hades returned her. I saw him do it. I’ll see you in a bit.”

She walked out the main entrance to the throne room and shut the doors behind her.

Percy and Poseidon’s conference did not last long. When Percy came out, he seemed to be in a kind of daze. Chrysa simply grasped his arm and led him through the streets of Olympus, back to the Empire State Building entrance.

As they walked by, conversations stopped. The Muses paused their concert. People and satyrs and naiads all turned towards them, their faces filled with respect and gratitude, and they knelt as they passed, honoring Percy as a hero.

It took fifteen minutes to get back to the streets of Manhattan from the throne room. Chrysa hailed a taxi, bundled Percy inside, and then told the driver the address of Percy’s mother’s apartment. Percy was still too out of it to even realize that she shouldn’t know where she lived.

Percy rang the doorbell, and a woman opened the door, weariness and worry evaporating from her face as soon as she saw him.

“Percy! Oh, thank goodness! Oh, my baby.”

She embraced Percy in a tight hug as they both cried. Sally Jackson was running her fingers through Percy’s hair as Percy shook in her arms. Chrysa stayed a respectful distance away.

When they finally broke apart somewhat, Sally noticed Chrysa.

“Who’s this?” she asked with a smile.

“Chrysa Potter, Mrs. Jackson,” Chrysa said with a smile, extending her hand. “I’m Percy’s cousin on his father’s side.”

Sally froze slightly.

“Oh?” she asked. “May I ask who your parent is?”

“My father is the Sky Lord,” Chrysa replied. “I’ve been looking after Percy these past few weeks. Do you know what has happened?”

Sally shook her head.

“I appeared at the apartment this morning. I think I scared Gabe half out of his wits – Gabe’s my husband…”

“I know,” Chrysa said gently. “Percy told me.”
“I don’t remember anything since the Minotaur. Gabe told me that Percy was a wanted criminal, traveling across the country, blowing up national monuments. I didn’t want to believe him. I’ve been going out of my mind with worry all day. Gabe made me go to work. He said that I have a month’s salary to make up, and I needed to get started.”

Percy looked like he was trying to hold back his anger. Chrysa felt the same way, but she was much more adept at hiding her true emotions. Percy began to relate the story of his own quest. He was blurring the details, trying to make it seem less scary, but it didn’t help much. He had just reached the fight with Ares when a man’s voice called, “Hey, Sally! That meat loaf done yet or what?”

Sally closed her eyes.

“He isn’t going to happy to see you, Percy. He seemed gleeful that you were thought of as a criminal.”

“Maybe my presence will curb his temper a bit?” Chrysa offered. “It’s not the best idea to anger your stepson’s wealthy cousin, and I’m sure Gabe has seen that news. It has been playing on all the news channels.”

Sally smiled weakly at her.

“Percy, just don’t make him angrier, all right? Come on.”

Sally led them into the apartment, which looked like it had been in the possession of a male slob for a month – which it had. Chrysa subtly cast a charm around her head to block out the smell. She did the same for Percy, who looked towards her gratefully.

A man Chrysa identified as Gabe Ugliano was playing poker at the table with three large friends. When Gabe saw Percy, his cigar dropped out of his mouth and his face turned a brilliant shade of red.

“You got nerve coming here, you little punk. I thought the police…”

“You got nerve coming here, you little punk. I thought the police…”

“He’s not a fugitive after all,” Sally interjected. “Isn’t that wonderful, Gabe?”

Gabe looked between the two of them, but he did not notice Chrysa as she stood in the background.

“Bad enough I had to give back your life insurance money, Sally,” Gabe growled. “Get me the phone. I’ll call the cops.”

“Gabe, no!”

The brute of a man raised his eyebrows.

“Did you just say ‘no’? You think I’m gonna put up with this punk again? I can still press charges against him for ruining my Camaro.”

“But…” Sally said.

Gabe raised his hand, and Sally flinched.

Chrysa chose that moment to intervene, stepping out of the shadows and into the light.

“Excuse me,” she said frostily, stepping forward. “But if I see one more implication of domestic
abuse, then it will be *me* pressing charges on behalf of Sally and Percy.”

“Who’re you?” Gabe growled.

“Amaranth Potter-Black,” Chrysa shot back. “I’m sure you’ve heard my name in connection with my cousin’s –” she gestured towards Percy “– on the news channels?”

Gabe had paled.

“I wasn’t really – I mean…” he stammered.

“I don’t believe you,” Chrysa replied frostily. “However, I will not press charges if Sally does not want me to.”

She glanced over at the woman, who hesitated, then shook her head. Chrysa nodded in response, then turned back to Gabe.

“Percy Jackson is not a fugitive anymore,” Chrysa stated. “He was cleared earlier after I gave my statement that my cousin, his best friends, and I were kidnapped by a man seeking an heirloom of my family. Sally was also kidnapped, but she was kept sedated here in New York while my cousin, his friends, and I were dragged across the country by the madman. The police have the story. Most of the news channels are playing it. Percy is a hero – he managed to steal a gun from our captor and went toe-to-toe with him, pistol on rifle, in Santa Monica. If you would refrain from further impinging on my cousin’s honor, I would be much obliged.”

Gabe sat there, dumbfounded.

“Why don’t you show me your room, Percy?” Chrysa said, turning to her cousin. Percy nodded, looking pleased at what she had done. Chrysa took Sally’s arm as well and pulled her along with them.

Percy’s room had been filled completely with things that belonged to Gabe Ugliano. There were stacks of used car batteries, beer cans, and a rotting bouquet of sympathy flowers with a card from someone who had seen the Barbara Walters interview.

“Gabe is just upset, honey,” Sally told Percy. “I’ll talk to him later. I’m sure it will work out.”

“Mom, it’ll never work out. Not as long as Gabe’s here,” Percy said.

Sally wrung her hands nervously.

“I can…I’ll take you to work with me for the rest of the summer. In the fall, maybe there’s another boarding school…”

“Mom,” Percy cut her off.

She lowered her eyes. “I’m trying, Percy. I just…I need some time.”

Chrysa noticed a package appear on Percy’s bed. She recognized it.

“Percy,” she said. When he looked over at her, she gestured towards the bed.

The battered cardboard box that Percy had used to ship Medusa’s head to the Olympians now sat on his bed. The address on the mailing slip was the same one Percy had written, but another hand had written over it – Chrysa recognized Poseidon’s handwriting. The black marker had the apartment on it and the words: Return to Sender.
Percy looked up at his mother.

“Mom, do you want Gabe gone?”

“Percy, it isn’t that simple. I…”

“Mom, just tell me. That jerk has been hitting you. Do you want him gone or not?”

She hesitated, then nodded almost imploringly.

“Yes, Percy. I do. And I’m trying to get up my courage to tell him. But you can’t do this for me. You can’t solve my problems.”

Percy hesitated, then said, “I can do it. One look inside this box, and he’ll never bother you again.”

Sally glanced at the package, and seemed to understand immediately.

“No, Percy,” she said, stepping away. “You can’t.”

“Poseidon called you a queen,” Percy insisted. “He said he hadn’t met a woman like you in a thousand years.

Her cheeks flushed.

“Percy…”

“You deserve better than this, Mom,” Percy said. “You should go to college, get your degree. You can write your novel, meet a nice guy maybe, live in a nice house. You don’t need to protect me anymore by staying with Gabe. Let me get rid of him.”

Sally wiped a tear off her cheek.

“You sound so much like your father,” she said. “He offered to stop the tide for me once. He offered to build me a palace at the bottom of the sea. He thought he could solve all my problems with a wave of his hand.”

“What’s wrong with that?” Percy asked.

“I think you know, Percy,” Sally said gently. “I think you’re enough like me to understand. If my life is going to mean anything, I have to live it myself. I can’t let a god take care of me…or my son. I have to…find courage on my own. Your quest has reminded me of that.”

Those in the room were quiet for a moment, but the sounds of poker chips, swearing, and ESPN filtered into the room.

“I’ll leave the box,” Percy said. “If he threatens you…”

She looked pale, but she nodded and asked, “Where will you go, Percy?”

“Half-Blood Hill.”

“For the summer…or forever?”

“I guess that depends,” Percy replied.

They locked eyes, and Chrysa could see the unspoken agreement that passed between them.
Sally kissed Percy’s forehead.

“You’ll be a hero, Percy. You’ll be the greatest of them all.” She looked over at Chrysa. “You’ll watch out for him? For me?”

“Of course,” Chrysa said firmly. “He’s family. And I don’t have much of that.”

Sally nodded.

Chrysa reached into her purse and pulled out a business card. She handed it over to Sally.

“That’s my personal cell number on that,” she said. “When you get rid of the jerk, give me a call. I can help you get set up on your own. I know you want to live your own life, but there’s nothing wrong with getting a little help.”

Sally nodded again, a small smile on her face.

“I’ll remember that.”

Percy grabbed a few things from his bedroom and embraced his mother once again. Then, all three walked to the front door.

“Leaving so soon, punk?” Gabe called after them. “Good riddance.”

Percy looked angry.

“Hey, Sally,” Gabe yelled. “What about that meat loaf, huh?”

A steely look of anger flared in Sally Jackson’s eyes.

“The meat loaf is coming right up, dear,” Sally said. “Meat loaf surprise.”

She looked at Percy and winked. The last thing Percy and Chrysa saw before the door swung closed was Sally staring at Gabe, as if she were contemplating how he would look as a garden statue.

Instead of taking a taxi back to Camp Half-Blood, Chrysa offered an alternate transportation route.

“Most people feel ill on their first try,” she told him. “It’s going to be a sharp twisting sensation, and then you’ll feel like your whole body is being dragged through a straw. It’s uncomfortable, but practically instantaneous. You up for it?”

“Sure,” Percy agreed.

Chrysa took his arm and twisted on her heel, immediately Apparating to Half-Blood Hill, just outside the wards.

Percy stumbled as they landed.

“That was awful,” he said, looking queasy.

“I warned you,” Chrysa shrugged.

“How do you do that all the time?” he demanded.

“Practice. Plus, it’s easier to do it yourself than it is to be dragged along with someone else.”

Annabeth and the satyr were waiting for them with Chiron at the Big House. Dionysus was there is
“Oh, you survived,” he said with a sigh. “Oh well.”

Chiron ignored him.

“Congratulations, Percy, on your successful quest. Annabeth and Grover have told me what happened, but I would like to know your side of the story.”

For the third time that day, Percy related his story. He concluded by saying, “My dad said that the thing in the pit was Kronos, but Zeus didn’t seem to think so.”

“My father does not like admitting it when there are threats to his power,” Chrysa said. “Trust me, Percy, when I say he believed it. He does not want to cause panic though. The Elder Gods will meet within the next few days to discuss this, possibly with the Olympian Council being brought in afterwards. But it will be those who fought Kronos the first time who convene first.”

“You are certain it was Kronos?” Chiron asked her.

“Positive. I also spoke with Lord Hades when I returned the Helm of Darkness. He admitted that things in the pit have been stirring of late.”

“That is ill news,” Chiron said, stroking his beard. “We will see what we need to do to prepare.”

“War is coming,” Chrysa said. “Everyone must be ready to fight.”

“I’ll see to it,” Chiron promised.

An unspoken agreement passed between them.

“Well, now I believe that there is a feast waiting for our returning heroes, followed by a processional and the burning of the shrouds,” Chiron said. “We should probably get to it.”

Chrysa sat with Percy at the feast and tried to keep his mind on light topics, rather than his mother’s situation and the upcoming war. Annabeth, Percy, and the satyr all had golden laurels. Someone had tried to give laurels to Chrysa as well, but she had declined them, saying that it wasn’t her quest.

At the burning of the shrouds, there were only three. Annabeth’s was a beautiful grey silk with embroidered owls. The satyr’s was brown with leaves on it. Percy’s had been created by Ares cabin, who had taken an old bedsheet and painted smiley faces with X’ed out eyes around the border, and the word Loser painted across the center. Percy looked like he enjoyed burning it.

Dionysus’ welcome-home speech was lacking.

“Yes, yes, so the little brat didn’t get himself killed and now he’ll have an even bigger head. Well, huzzah for that. In other announcements, there will be no canoe races this Saturday…”

The next evening, Chrysa found herself dressed to the nines on Hades’ arm as they entered the five-star Greek restaurant Nerai. She had spent most of the day with Sally Jackson, who had indeed used Medusa’s head on Gabe Ugliano. Chrysa arranged for the statue to be sold to an art museum, and moved all of Sally and Percy’s things into an apartment in Chrysa’s building before Sally could say a word in protest.

“I own the building, so your rent and utilities are free,” Chrysa said as she carried the last box inside, a dumbfounded Sally behind her. “You’ll still need to buy groceries and such, but if you ever need
help with anything, just call me. It won’t be a problem, unless I’m working. I work for an unnamed god between the months of March and September, normally, so I won’t always be available if you try to contact me then, but I’ll come as soon as I can. The apartment has three bedrooms and two bathrooms. The master bedroom also has an attached study, which I believe you’ll find useful for your writing. Percy has to share a bathroom with any guests, so I’d recommend keeping an eye on that. Everyone who works in the building knows you’re family, so they should treat you with all the respect you deserve,” she finished.

Sally still seemed in shock.

“I can’t – I can’t accept this,” she finally said.

“Of course you can,” Chrysa replied. “Take the money from Gabe’s statue and use it to go to school. Get your degree. Write like you’ve always wanted to. Meet a nice guy. Fall in love. Be happy, Sally.”

The woman took a fortifying breath.

“Alright,” she said, gathering her strength. “I can do that.”

That evening, Hades and Chrysa entered the restaurant together.

“Good evening,” Chrysa greeted the hostess. “We have a reservation for a private room under the name Theos.”

The hostess checked her list.

“Yes, of course. Is the rest of your party here?”

“No, they will be arriving separately,” Hades said smoothly.

The hostess led them to the private room, which had an extensive collection of wines on one wall. Hades moved over to look at them.

The next to arrive was Rhea.

“Leuke, darling, you look wonderful!” she said as she embraced her former companion.

“Why thank you, my Queen,” Chrysa replied with a dazzling smile.

Her emerald green gown was of the finest silk, and had a thigh-high slit on the left side, exposing acres of pale skin. The gown was trimmed in gold at the top, and thin gold chains also made up the only straps of the dress. She wore a gold and emerald necklace, and had gold chandelier earrings hanging from her ears. The outfit was completed by elbow-length emerald gloves and a black silk drape.

The rest of their party arrived soon after. All in all, there were ten of them: Chrysa, Hades, Rhea, Amphitrite, Poseidon, Hera, Zeus, Hestia, Demeter, and Persephone.

Rhea sat at the head of the table with Chrysa to her right and Amphitrite to her left. Hades was beside Chrysa, with Persephone beside him and Demeter beside her. Poseidon sat beside Amphitrite, then Hestia, then Hera. Zeus took the foot of the table.

Conversation remained light until after the main course had been served. Then, Chrysa took charge.

“Kronos is returning,” she said bluntly.
All conversation stopped and focused on her.

“I have felt him. He influenced the thief who stole both the Master Bolt and the Helm of Darkness. He tried to pull Percy Jackson, Annabeth Chase, satyr Grover Underwood, and myself into Tartarus. He spoke to Percy in dreams. I felt his presence. He is returning,” she stated firmly.

Hades nodded.

“I concur. The inhabitants of Tartarus have grown much more active of late.”

“Father is the only one able to cause the circumstances Leuke described,” Poseidon volunteered.

Rhea gave Chrysa a considering look.

“If what you say is true, you are in grave danger, my dear,” she said quietly.

Chrysa ducked her head involuntarily.

“I know.”

“If Father is returning, we are all in grave danger,” Demeter pointed out.

“But the rest of you are merely usurpers,” Rhea said. “Leuke, Amphitrite, and I…we are traitors.”

“And Leuke is the biggest traitor of us all,” Amphitrite added.

Hestia, Hera, Demeter, and Persephone looked confused.

“I don’t understand,” Hera said.

“You weren’t there when we finished Kronos off,” Zeus said tiredly. “We had toppled Mount Othrys, yes, but Kronos was still powerful. He could have still fought enough to stop us, except Leuke finally revealed her true loyalties.”

“I stood at Kronos’ side through the entirety of the Titanomachy,” Chrysa explained to Persephone. “I was the spy, the informant. In the end, I was also the assassin.”

“Leuke carved Kronos’ heart out of his chest,” Hades told the assembled company. “He didn’t even know she had betrayed him until she started cutting into him.”

“He was still alive when I did it,” Chrysa said in a subdued voice. “My shadows held him down. He couldn’t escape. He talked the entire time. He told me that maybe they should have waited to kill Ouranos until I was there, because then he wouldn’t have had to rely on his brothers. Not when he had such a valuable weapon at his disposal. When he realized that I truly was betraying him, he named me Leuke Prodotis and declared, ‘Shadows and secrets have ever been your domain, but from now until the end of days, you will ever be the patron of traitors, so that all may remember that treachery is in your name.’”

“He will hunt you,” Rhea stated.

“He will,” Chrysa agreed with a sigh. “The worst is, we can’t even know if he knows I’m alive again. He could have acquired the fact from Ares’ mind. He could have been told by someone on the Dark Council. We don’t know.”

“The Dark Council?” Hera asked. “What’s the Dark Council?”
“It’s the council for all the darker deities,” Chrysa explained. “Unlike the High Council, we don’t limit ourselves to twelve members, but we also don’t care if you never show up. Most people don’t show up, actually. We usually only have twelve sitting members, but everyone else is allowed to show up.”

“How long has that been going on?” Zeus asked, flabbergasted.

“The only member of the Council younger than me is Melinoe,” Hades deadpanned.

Jaws dropped all over the table.

“Most of the council members are the children of Nyx and the children of Eris,” Chrysa explained. “Chaos, Nyx, Erebos, and Tartarus all have seats on the council, but I don’t think any of them have shown up since before I died. The usual members are myself, Hades, Melinoe, Hecate, Pallas, Perses, Eris, Nemesis, Styx, Dolos, Hypnos, and Thanatos. But others have shown up since I’ve been back. All of Nyx’ and Eris’ children know I’m back. Any one of them could have told Kronos if he’s made them a nice enough offer.”

“As soon as Kronos knows Leuke is back, she will be a target,” Rhea said firmly. “As soon as he knows her mortal identity, she will be even more of one. Do any of the campers know who you are, Leuke?”

“The only people to know that Leuke is Chrysa Potter are the Olympian Council and those in this room,” Chrysa said firmly.

“Our parents and some of our sisters have seen her, but she did not give them her name,” Amphitrite added.

“I am as safe as I can be,” Chrysa sighed. “And I doubt I truly need to worry until Kronos himself or at least my uncles rise. It is very difficult to get the drop on me, and it requires cutting me off from the shadows as well as overwhelming force to defeat me. I know that from personal experience.”

Everyone winced at the reminder of Leuke’s first death.

“I know it was the Giants, but which ones?” Hestia asked quietly. “You’ve never told us.”

Chrysa was quiet for a moment.

“Alcyoneus struck the killing blow,” she finally said. “But only because I’d already killed the other two. Their names were Chthonion and Hyperbios. Chthonion was my counter. Hyperbios was Thanatos’.”

“We never encountered them later…” Poseidon asked, confused.

Chrysa drew her favorite knife from its hidden sheath on her thigh. The black blade seemed to absorb the candlelight around them, and a wisp of shadows danced around its edge.

“Stygian Iron,” she said. “They were absorbed. Gaea might be able to reclaim them, if the rest come back, the pair might be with them, but I don’t know. I don’t know what she can do with Stygian Iron. There are so few of us that use it, we haven’t really gotten beyond the monsters-don’t-come-back part. In theory, being the primordial of the Earth, there is a chance that Gaea can bring them back.”

“Even if they never come back, you are forgetting one thing, Leuke,” Hades said, his hand grasping Chrysa’s own tightly. “You’re not truly immortal anymore.”
“I know,” Chrysa said. “I’ll be careful. I’ll keep my guard up.”

“Even at Camp and home?” Hades questioned, a hint of fear entering his voice.

Chrysa laid her hand on his cheek and turned her face to his. She kissed him chastely – once, twice, three times, allowing the last kiss to linger.

“Even at Camp and at home, darling. I won’t make you lose me again.”

The rest of the table had politely looked away, with the exception of Persephone and Rhea. Persephone was a bit of a voyeur when it came to her husband and his consort. Rhea just liked witnessing happy, loving relationships, given that she was deprived of one herself.

“He’s not the only one who would miss you, Leuke,” Hestia said quietly. “You mean a great deal to all of us.”

Chrysa blushed slightly as everyone around the table nodded in agreement.

“I shudder to think what my brother – both of my brothers – would be like if you died once more,” Poseidon said drily.

“I will be careful,” Chrysa promised again. “As long as I am watching, there is nothing that can get past me. Shadows are everywhere, after all.”
Revelations

Chapter Summary

"Do you have to go?" Percy asked sadly.

Chrysa laughed as she hugged her cousin.

"I do, little cousin. Don't worry. You'll see me again. I'll be back in two weeks for Annabeth's birthday, then a few weeks after that for my birthday, and I'll be sure to visit for your birthday as well. Besides, we live in the same city for six months out of the year. I'll be sure to visit you. But I have to get back to my job. I've missed nearly four weeks of work already, and I'm sure the paperwork stack reaches the ceiling. That reminds me..."

Chapter Notes

So... I thought that I had already posted this, because I posted it on FF.net forever ago... Oops?

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chrysa Potter left Camp Half-Blood, much to the dismay of Percy and Annabeth, on June 28th, less than a week after they'd returned. Even then, she had been absent much of the previous week, having spent the 22nd preparing for her dinner party, the 23rd with Amphitrite, and the 24th helping Sally Jackson move hers and Percy's things into a new apartment in the building Chrysa owned.

"Do you have to go?" Percy asked sadly.

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"I do, little cousin. Don't worry. You'll see me again. I'll be back in two weeks for Annabeth's birthday, then a few weeks after that for my birthday, and I'll be sure to visit for your birthday as well. Besides, we live in the same city for six months out of the year. I'll be sure to visit you. But I have to get back to my job. I've missed nearly four weeks of work already, and I'm sure the paperwork stack reaches the ceiling. That reminds me..."

She turned to Annabeth, "So, what do you want to do for your birthday?"

Annabeth laughed.

"I think I'd just like to stay at camp this time. I've had enough excitement for one summer."

"I assume you want a birthday cake? And maybe ice cream?" Chrysa asked.

"Chocolate cake, chocolate ice cream, and as much junk food as you can bring," Annabeth decided. Chrysa laughed. "I'll see it done, Annabeth. Goodbye to all of you now, I'll be back in two weeks!"
She twisted on her heel and Apparated away. In truth, she only Apparated out of their line of sight, so that she could take the easier route of shadow-travelling back to the Underworld.

Hades was waiting for her.

"The paperwork's done, both yours and mine, and barring a prison break, we have the next two days all to ourselves," he said with a smile.

Chrysa grinned and leapt into his arms.

In the end, she wasn't able to make Annabeth's birthday, or her own. At Zeus' request, Demeter had returned Persephone to the Underworld for a time so that Chrysa and Hades could venture into Tartarus to ascertain the state of the elder Titans' prisons. It had to be them to go. They were the only ones who knew where in Tartarus the Elder Titans were hidden.

Despite the fact that they started into Tartarus only two days after Chrysa returned to the Underworld, it was no easy task that they undertook. Tartarus was the home to all the worst of monsters, all of which were very attracted to trying to kill them.

Added to that, Tartarus himself disliked Hades and really hated Leuke. They had to be constantly on guard, even though Hades had on his Helm of Darkness and Chrysa was constantly cloaked in shadows. Their only respite were the few days they spent recovering in the House of Nyx.

Nyx and Erebos had never been entirely thrilled with Leuke's choice of consort, but they did like him enough to not throw him out while Chrysa was recovering from several days of being constantly attacked by monsters.

Chrysa took the time to tell her foster-parents about her new family members.

"Percy's only twelve at the moment, but he's my first cousin in my newest form - otherwise he's my step-nephew through Amphitrite or simply my nephew through Hades," Chrysa explained to Nyx. "Or he's my first cousin once removed, since Poseidon was my first cousin as Leuke. I think he'll grow up quite well; he's already good friends with Annabeth - that's my foster-daughter. She's my granddaughter through Metis, and she was the ward of my half-sister, so I felt responsible for her when I first met her. Her mortal father and stepmother signed over custody to me a few years ago, but I think I'm going to be giving it back at the end of the summer. Percy seems determined to convince Annabeth to mend things with her family."

"Do you think she will?" Eris asked. The goddess of strife had been avidly listening to Chrysa's stories the entire time.

"I think she'll try," Chrysa replied. "She wants a closer relationship with her family, she just can't get over her the fact that her father and stepmother didn't believe her for when spiders were attacking her nightly. To be fair, most people wouldn't believe it, especially when the only evidence was the spider bites. Mrs. Chase was also busy with a pair of one-year-old twins and didn't have time for what she saw as the imaginings of a seven-year-old. But try to explain the reasoning to Annabeth and she'll shut down on you."

"Ah, the stubbornness of foster children who think they know better than you," Nyx said knowingly. "That sounds familiar. She'll get over it. You did."

"And it took me three thousand years," Chrysa pointed out.

Nyx waved a dismissive hand.
"You were stubborn."

They finally determined that the four eldest Titans were still locked tightly away, guarded by the three Hekatonkheires. The chains to the door of the maximum-security section of Tartarus were slightly looser than they had been thousands of years beforehand, but the Titans would not be escaping on their own. Kronos was another story.

While the Titan had been chopped into pieces and scattered across Tartarus, the biggest piece - his head and torso - had been locked up in a stone vault and chained with Stygian iron. Now, the chains were half-melted and shattered and the door had been blasted to pieces. The head and torso were gone.

"He shouldn't have been able to do that," Chrysa said with a sigh, leaning her head tiredly back onto Hades' chest.

The god rested his chin on her head.

"He shouldn't have. Do you still have the heart?"

"It was safe before we left. I'm planning on moving it someplace they're less likely to look though. Not having his heart won't stop him from reforming, but it'll slow him down," Chrysa replied.

In the end, they did not make it out of Tartarus until the last day of camp.

"I expect a very nice birthday present for this," Chrysa told her father as she reported in to him. "I had to spend my birthday in Tartarus because of you."

"You have my abject apologies, daughter," Zeus replied. "Would you like your present?"

He waved his hand, and a wrapped box appeared in front of her, floating midair. By the size of it, it was jewelry.

She opened the box to find a silver bracelet shaped like a lightning bolt, covered entirely with what looked like one-carat white diamonds. The diamond at the tip of the lightning bolt was black.

"It's beautiful," Chrysa said admiringly, taking it out of the box and putting it on her wrist.

"It's Olympian silver," Zeus stated. "And tap the black diamond."

Chrysa did, and the bracelet exploded outwards into an Olympian silver shield, decorated with lightning bolt designs and edged in diamonds.

"I know you don't normally use a shield, but I thought there might be an occasion for one eventually," Zeus said. "If it's already on your wrist, you won't have the problem of needing one but not having one."

Chrysa smiled brightly.

"Thank you, Father. I love it."

Zeus smiled in return.

"I'm glad. Now, you might want to get to Camp Half-Blood. Everyone's leaving shortly, after all."

Chrysa bowed to her father, then the shadows came up to cover her.
She reappeared on the front porch of the Big House, next to Dionysus' game table. Chiron wasn't present.

"Oh," he said, taking a sip of Diet Coke. "You're back. How was Tartarus?"

"Dark, gloomy, and filled with monsters," Chrysa replied. "Same as ever. How was camp?"

"Bright, sunny, and filled with monster-killing brats," Dionysus replied. "Oh, the Sea Brat got stung by a pit scorpion an hour ago. Chiron and Annabeth are in with him now."

"You really should have led with that, Dionysus!" Chrysa called over her shoulder as she rushed into the infirmary.

Percy was safely ensconced in one of the infirmary beds. Chiron was in wheelchair form at the foot of the bed. Argus was standing guard in the corner. Annabeth was sitting next to the bed, holding a glass of nectar that was connected to Percy's mouth by straw.

"Chrysa!" Annabeth exclaimed, looking like she wanted to get up and hug her but staying put so she didn't jostle Percy.


"How was your trip?" Chiron asked. "You don't look like you've seen much sun."

"I haven't," Chrysa said flatly. "How is he? What happened? Dionysus just said he was stung by a pit scorpion."

"We don't know yet," Chiron replied.

A low groan from Percy caused them to look his direction. He had blinked his eyes open and was looking up at Annabeth.

"Here we are again," he said.

"You idiot," Annabeth said. "You were green and turning gray when we found you. If it weren't for Chiron's healing-"

"Now, now," Chiron said, "Percy's constitution deserves some of the credit. How are you feeling, Percy?"

"Like my insides have been frozen, then microwaved," Percy replied.

"Apt, considering that was pit scorpion venom," Chiron replied.

Percy chose that moment to notice Chrysa was there.

"You're back!" he exclaimed.

She smiled sadly at him.

"For all of ten minutes. I really didn't want to come back to find out that my favorite cousin was in the infirmary after being stung by a pit scorpion. What happened, Percy?"

The younger demigod took a deep breath.

"I was still trying to decide whether I was going home or not," Percy said, taking a sip of nectar. "I'd
gone down to the sword arena and I met Luke there. He'd been practicing with a new sword. He invited me to go out to the woods with him and drink some cans of Coke. We went out to the spot by the river where I got ambushed in the Capture-the-Flag game. He was...angry.

"He asked if I missed being on a quest, and I said I did. When I asked if he felt the same, he said he trained and he trained, and never got to be a normal teenager and had one quest and then was told that it was over, have a nice life. He said he wasn't going to end up like the dusty trophies in the Big House attic. He said he was leaving, and that he'd brought me out there to say goodbye. He snapped his fingers and the scorpion crawled out of a whole in the ground at my feet.

"Luke was the traitor. He said that the gods were useless, that Western civilization was a disease. He serves Kronos. Kronos spoke to Luke in his dreams and gave him instructions. Luke stole the master bolt and the helm. Ares caught him in New Jersey, but Kronos helped Luke convince Ares to hold onto them in order to start a war instead. Luke summoned the hellhound in the forest to make Chiron think Camp wasn't safe for me. I tried to talk him out of it, but he said goodbye, slashed his sword, and disappeared in a ripple of darkness. Then the scorpion lunged and I cut it in half. But I wasn't fast enough. It stung me. I tried to get back to camp, but I passed out right when the nymphs found me."

The room was quiet for a long time before Chrysa exploded.

"When I get my hands on that bastard, he's going to wish he never lived through his quest," Chrysa growled. "After all, if he died on the quest he would've ended up in Elysium. I'm going to make sure it takes him a while to make it to the Fields of Punishment."

"I can't believe that Luke..." Annabeth said, voice faltering. Her expression turned angry and sad. "Yes. Yes, I can believe it. May the gods curse him.... He was never the same after his quest."

"This must be reported to Olympus," Chiron murmured. "I will go at once. You will stay with them, Chrysa?"

"I'll guard them with my life," she swore.

"Luke is out there right now," Percy said. "I have to go after him."

Chiron shook his head.

"No, Percy. The gods..."

"Won't even talk about Kronos," Percy snapped. "Zeus declared the matter closed!"

"In front of you, Percy," Chrysa replied quietly. "Trust me, the matter is not closed. I haven't been off for the past couple months on a pleasure trip. We're doing everything we can to stop Kronos."

"I know this is hard," Chiron said. "But you must not rush out for vengeance. You aren't ready."

Percy looked down at his heavily bandaged hand.

"Chiron...your prophecy from the Oracle...it was about Kronos, wasn't it? Was I in it? And Annabeth?"

Chiron glanced nervously at Chrysa, then at the ceiling.

"Percy, it isn't my place..."
"You've been ordered not to talk about it, haven't you?" Percy asked discerningly.

"We all have," Chrysa said quietly. "Not yet. Not until you're older."

Chiron's eyes were sympathetic, but sad.

"You will be a great hero, child. I will do my best to prepare you. But if I'm right about the path ahead of you..."

Thunder boomed overhead, rattling the windows.

"All right!" Chiron shouted. "Fine!" He sighed in frustration. "The gods have their reasons, Percy. Knowing too much of your future is never a good thing."

"We can't just sit back and do nothing!" Percy protested.

"Percy," Chrysa said with a sigh, "you're just a child."

"I'm not a child!" Percy burst out.

"Yes, you are," Chrysa said sternly. "You're twelve. Almost thirteen. You're still a child. You can sit back and do nothing. I've been in your shoes. I know it sucks. But for the moment, please, just leave it to the adults."

"We will not sit back," Chiron promised. "But you must be careful. Kronos wants you to come unraveled. He wants your life disrupted, your thoughts clouded with fear and anger. Do not give him what he wants. Train patiently. Your time will come."


"You'll have to trust me, Percy. You will live. But first you must decide your path for the coming year. I cannot tell you the right choice....But you must decide whether to stay at Camp Half-Blood year-round or return to the mortal world for seventh grade and be a summer camper. Think on that. When I get back from Olympus, you must tell me your decision. I'll be back as soon as I can. Argus will watch over you, and I suspect Chrysa will stay as well."

"Of course," Chrysa said firmly. "My boss had me for two months, including the two days I asked for off months in advance. And the past two months were not fun. I have the next week off."

Chiron looked over at Annabeth.

"Oh, and, my dear...whenever you're ready, they're here."

"Who's here?" Percy asked.

Chrysa was wondering the same thing, but nobody answered.

Chiron wheeled himself out of the room and down the front steps of the Big House.

Annabeth was staring intently at the ice in Percy's drink.

"What's wrong?" Percy asked.

"Nothing," she replied. She set the glass down on the table. "I...just took your advice about
something. You...um...need anything?"

"Yeah," Percy said. "Help me up. I want to go outside."

"Percy, that isn't a good idea," Chrysa pointed out.

Percy slid his legs out of bed. Annabeth and Chrysa caught him before he could crumple to the floor.
Annabeth said, "Chrysa told you..."

"I'm fine," Percy insisted. He managed a step forward, then another, still leaning between Annabeth and Chrysa.

By the time they made it to the front porch, Percy's face was beaded with sweat. They made it to the railing and looked out over the camp.

"What are you going to do?" Annabeth asked Percy.

"I don't know," Percy replied. "I get the feeling Chiron wants me to stay year-round, to put in more individual training time, but I'm not sure that's what I want. I'd feel bad leaving you alone though, with only Clarisse for company."

Annabeth pursed her lips and said quietly, "I'm going home for the year, Percy."

Percy turned to stare at her. Chrysa did as well.

"You mean, to your dad's?" Percy asked.

She pointed toward the crest of Half-Blood Hill, where a tall man stood with two little children and a woman. Chrysa recognized them as Professor and Mrs. Chase from the time she had 'rescued' Annabeth. Professor Chase was holding the backpack Annabeth had acquired in Waterland.

"I wrote him a letter when we got back," Annabeth said. "Just like you suggested. I told him...I was sorry. I'd come home for the school year if he still wanted me. He wrote back immediately. We decided...we'd give it another try." She looked over at Chrysa. "I wanted to get in contact with you, since you have custody officially, but Chiron said he got in contact with your lawyer."

Chrysa shrugged. "He probably did. I wouldn't know; I've been out of contact. Do you want me to come with you to say goodbye?"

"No...I - I think I've got it," Annabeth said.

"You've got my cell phone number, in case of emergencies?" Chrysa pressed.

Annabeth nodded. "Use that to contact you if I need to?"

"If I don't answer, I'm either sleeping, showering, or having sex, and I'll contact you as soon as I'm done," Chrysa said with a nod.

Annabeth wrinkled her nose. "I did not need to know that."

"It took guts, what you did," Percy told Annabeth.

She pursed her lips.

"You won't try anything stupid during the school year, will you? At least...not without sending me
an Iris-message?"

Percy smiled at her.

"I won't go looking for trouble. I usually don't have to."

"When I get back, next summer," Annabeth said, "we'll hunt down Luke. We'll ask for a quest, but if we don't get approval, we'll sneak off and do it anyway. Agreed?"

"Sounds like a plan worthy of Athena," Percy praised.

The pair shook on it.

"Take care, Seaweed Brain," Annabeth said. "Keep your eyes open."


Chrysa hugged her.

"Remember, I'm just a phone call away. Even if you just want me to drop by and visit, I will...after September 21. I might drop by anyway," she said with a smile.

Annabeth smiled back.

"I'd like that."

Chrysa and Percy watched as Annabeth walked up Half-Blood Hill to join her family. She gave her father an awkward hug and looked back at the valley one last time. She touched Thalia's pine tree, then allowed herself to be led over the crest of the hill and back into the mortal world.

Chrysa glanced at Percy, who had a look of firm determination on his face.

"You've made your decision, then?" she asked.

Percy nodded firmly.

"I'll be back next summer," he said. "I'll survive until then. Help me to cabin three?"

"Of course."

It took them several long minutes, but with Argus' help, they eventually made it back to Cabin Three. There, it turned out to be a good thing Chrysa came with him, because Percy did not have anything to pack his belongings into. Chrysa, of course, was capable of conjuring a trunk for him to load everything into.

Chiron met them there.

"I see you're going home," he said. There was a slight hint of disapproval in his voice, but Percy didn't appear to notice.

"I miss my mom," he said firmly. "She said she has a down payment on a school in the city for me to go to. I'll survive until next year."

"Very well then. I can have Argus drive you back to the city..."

"No need," Chrysa cut in. "I'm headed back to the city tonight. I can take him. Besides, I know
where his mom's new apartment is. He doesn't."

"How do you know?" Percy asked, halting his packing to turn to look at her.

"I helped her move in," Chrysa said drily. "Keep packing. The sooner you're done, the sooner we can get you home."

"Have a good school year, Percy," Chiron offered before trotting out of the cabin.

It didn't take long for Percy to pack everything, even with the two breaks he had to take due to the pit scorpion venom making him dizzy.

"Ready?" Chrysa asked him.

He nodded.

"Alright. Take hold of one of the trunk handles. I'm going to magically transport us to my apartment. From there, I can get you to your mom's place."

She tapped the top of the trunk with her wand and ordered, "Portus." In an instant, they were in Chrysa's Manhattan penthouse.

Percy wobbled dizzyly. Chrysa waved her wand again, and her desk chair zoomed out of her office and planted itself behind Percy for him to collapse into.

"Well, on the bright side, the chair has wheels," Chrysa said.

She tapped the top of the trunk, and it began to hover just above the ground. She moved behind Percy, and began to push the chair towards the elevator.

"Are you planning to push me all the way to my mom's apartment?" Percy asked once they were in the elevator.

Chrysa pushed the button for the tenth floor.

"Yep."

A wave of her wand had the trunk leaving the elevator when they reached the tenth floor. Chrysa only had to push Percy a few doors down before stopping and knocking.

A moment later, the door was opened by Sally Jackson.

"Mom!" Percy exclaimed, getting up and hugging his mother.


"He'll be fine," Chrysa said. "He might get dizzy at random for the next few days, so try to keep him inside as much as possible. He was stung by a pit scorpion this morning. Chiron healed him up though. It's just the after-effects now."

"Oh, I'm sorry, Chrysa, I didn't see you there," Sally said with a smile. "Would you like to come in? I've just finished dinner and we have plenty."

"That would be lovely, thank you, Sally," Chrysa said with a smile.

"Is Percy fine to set the table?" Sally asked her.
"Should be," Chrysa replied.

"Percy, set the table," Sally ordered.

"Yes, Mom," the demigod replied.

Chrysa took a seat while Percy set the table and Sally finished dinner.

"We're having spaghetti tonight, I hope that's alright," Sally said from the kitchen.

"It sounds wonderful," Chrysa called back.

"What would you like to drink?" Percy asked her. "We have water, Dr. Pepper, Coke, and Sprite."

"Water's good," Chrysa told him.

A few minutes later, they were all seated and having dinner. Most of the time was filled with aimless chatter between Percy and Sally, until Percy asked, "So, Chrysa, where were you the past couple months?"

"I was on a mission with my boss for my father," she replied. "We were checking on things related to the Titans."

Percy hesitated, then said, "I haven't asked before. No one seems to know who your boss is. But...you work for Hades, don't you?"

Chrysa's eyebrows shot up. She set her fork back down on her plate.

"You're the first person to figure that out, Percy," Chrysa replied. "I think Chiron suspects, but as far as he knows, I work with Thanatos, the god of Death. He hasn't said anything about me working directly for Hades. But yes, I work for Hades. How did you figure it out?"

"You were always a lot more respectful towards him than the rest of us," Percy said. "And you weren't scared. You knew exactly where the Underworld is, and you made it inside really quickly. In Hades' throne room, he was listening to you. We were annoyances, but he listened to you. And you made it out again. You were already on Olympus by the time I got there, even though you took the Helm of Darkness back personally. Plus, what kind of summer job lasts exactly from the spring equinox to the fall equinox?"

Chrysa laughed, then tipped her glass towards Percy.

"Kudos to you. Like I said, no one else has figured it out. Everyone who frequents the Underworld knows, obviously, and the Olympian Council knows, but they were all told. Yes, I work with Lord Hades, helping him out when Persephone isn't in the Underworld. There's a lot of paperwork involved in ruling a kingdom, especially one that has a constant immigration rate without any emigration. The second pair of hands keeps him from stressing so much. I take care of Persephone's duties."

"Do you take care of Persephone's...other duties?" Sally asked hesitantly.

"Are you asking if I'm sleeping with him?" Chrysa shot back.

Sally nodded.

"I am," Chrysa admitted freely. "It's how I knew that Hades didn't steal the Master bolt. Pretty hard to hide something like that. Persephone knows, of course. I'm pretty much permanently attached to
the Underworld court now. It was actually the combined idea of Persephone and Thanatos to find Hades a concubine in the first place. She had to approve of me before I took up the position."

Percy’s nose was wrinkled.

"You're sleeping with our uncle?” he asked.

Chrysa shrugged.

"Gods don't have DNA. Dating within the godly pantheon is perfectly acceptable. At Camp Half-Blood, it's frowned upon to sleep with your half-siblings, but I could sleep with half of the godly pantheon and they'd be my half-siblings. I'd also like to point out that Persephone is my half-sister, and she's Hades' wife."

Percy slumped.

"I see your point. It's still weird."

"I try not to think about it," Chrysa replied. "Honestly, most of us try not to think about it a lot of the time. Our family tree is weird."

"What were you doing for the past two months?” Percy asked again.

"Hades and I went to Tartarus to ascertain the state of the Elder Titans' prisons,” Chrysa said bluntly. "Tartarus...you don't just go to Tartarus, Percy. Not even the gods will go there outside of the direst need. And of the gods, none but the Elder Gods would dare, and they prefer not to. You can't go into Tartarus alone. Well, you can, of course, but it's a very bad idea. Tartarus sucks everything out of you. Without having someone else there with you, it's very easy to give into despair. We've been out of the pit itself for a week or so, but...it's hard. Very hard. We've been recovering since then. Hades was up sooner than I was, of course. He is one of the Big Three. I'm no slouch when it comes to power, but it was his power that kept me alive down there, and I'm not afraid to admit it. Anyway, it took us awhile to get through Tartarus to max-sec, and then to the spot where the biggest chunk of Kronos used to be."

"Biggest chunk?" Sally asked, at the same time Percy said, "Used to be?"

"Zeus and his brothers chopped Kronos up before they tossed him into Tartarus," Chrysa explained to Sally. "But the biggest piece, his head and the majority of his torso, they locked up. All the little parts were just kind of scattered around the rest of Tartarus. But yes, Percy, used to be. He's not there anymore, and we don't know how long he's been out."

"Does that mean he's coming back?" Sally asked fearfully.

"He is," Chrysa nodded. "But he can't come back all at once. Like I said, most of his torso was in that tomb, but the most important part wasn't. His heart was carved out before he was tossed into Tartarus, and very few people know where it was hidden. Without his heart, reforming is going to be a lot slower."

"Where's his heart?" Percy asked.

Chrysa shook her head.

"Hades knows. That's all I can tell you," she said. She turned to Sally and asked, "So, what school is it you've enrolled Percy in for next year?"
Sally didn't protest the change of subject.

"It's called Meriwether College Prep. It's a progressive school in downtown Manhattan. It's supposed to be good for kids with ADHD and dyslexia, like Percy," she explained.

"Speaking of dyslexia, if you want me to, I can give you something that will translate your homework into Ancient Greek and then back to English when you're done," Chrysa told Percy. "It'll help a lot in school if you can actually read what they're giving you."

"You can...you can give me something that will help me read?" Percy asked, hope trickling into his voice.

Chrysa smiled at him.

"Not just read. You'll be able to write your responses in ancient Greek, and then whatever I give you will translate them back to English so you can turn it in. I'll see if I can make it a mechanical pencil or something, so you can take it to school and no one will notice your papers or textbooks mysteriously changing languages."

"That would be amazing," Sally breathed.

"I've figured out the spell combos before; Annabeth asked me to the semester she was at home," Chrysa replied.

The rest of dinner consisted of much more boring topics, such as how Sally got this apartment (Chrysa) or how Chrysa moved to the US.

"Dinner was wonderful, Sally," Chrysa said with a smile as she left. "Thank you for having me."

"Thank you for coming," Sally replied.

"I'm going to be back in two days. I'm taking you both out to lunch for Percy's birthday. Anywhere you want to go, Perce, anywhere in the world. And remember, I'm rich and can teleport, so there really are no limits," Chrysa called as she walked out of the apartment and closed the door behind them.

Two days later, they were having lunch at a Greek restaurant Percy had seen while wandering around Los Angeles. It wasn't just the three of them, though. Last minute, Chrysa had brought along her godson and adoptive brother, Teddy Lupin-Black.

"Teddy's parents live in London, but they had some sort of emergency involving warring vampire clans and a star-crossed romance between a werewolf and a vampire. It all sounded terribly complicated, but the gist of it was that they needed me to watch Teddy for the day," Chrysa explained when she knocked on Percy and Sally's apartment door with the nine-year-old in tow. "The babies got shipped off to the distant cousins to play with the other babies, but Teddy's the oldest, so I'm stuck with the little brat."

"Hey! I'm not that bad," Teddy protested.

Chrysa ruffled his teal hair.

"Hay is for horses, cub, and I know your parents have told you that. At least Remus has. I know Sirius still tries to pretend he's never had elocution training."

Despite the three-year age difference, Teddy and Percy were still close enough in age that they could
figure out things to talk about, despite living in two completely different worlds: Percy as a demigod and Teddy as a half-warewolf wizard.

"Oh yes, full moons are fun," Teddy explained to an avidly listening Percy. "Humans can't be around us, but humans in the form of animals are fine. Since I'm just half, I don't have to shift. It's more like an Animagus form, except it only happens at the full moon."

"Animagus?" Percy asked curiously.

"A witch or wizard who can turn into an animal. Dad's a dog. Professor McGonagall's a cat. James, Amaranth's first dad, turned into a stag. Amaranth turns into a screech-owl," Teddy explained.

Percy's brow furrowed.

"Amaranth?" he asked.

"Me, Percy," Chrysa clarified. "Amaranth is my first name. Chrysa comes from Chrysocomê, my middle name."

A look of comprehension dawned on Percy's face.

"Right. The media kept calling you Amy Potter-Black."

Amaranth made a face.

"I do not like being called Amy."

"Dad and Papa have started suing the papers back home every time they call her 'Amy Potter.' Or 'The Girl-Who-Lived.' Or 'The Woman-Who-Conquered.' Pretty much any time they call her anything but Amaranth Potter-Black," Teddy added helpfully. "We donate the proceeds to different charities."

"Which charity we donate to depends on the month," Amaranth mentioned. "We couldn't decide on a single charity, so we picked twelve and set up a rotation. This month is the British National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. Unfortunately, the media outlets in the US used 'Potter-Black' as my last name, which means we can't sue."

"Actually, Papa found one TV station that said 'Amy Potter'. Turns out that the anchor who was talking was a squib who knew about you. Aunt Andy's already working on the court case," Teddy said.

"Ah," Chrysa said with a nod.

Percy hesitated, then glanced at Teddy before looking back at Teddy.

"How much does he know...about our side of things?" he asked.

"You mean the fact that Amaranth's the demigod daughter of Zeus, the Blessed of Hecate, the Champion of Thanatos, and the girlfriend of Hades?" Teddy said with a grin. "Pretty much all of it."

"We don't keep secrets in my family," Chrysa stated. "It was one of the rules that Sirius, Remus, and I came up with when they originally adopted me. I'd had enough of secrets. So we agreed no secrets. Unless it concerned our sex lives. I assured them that I didn't want to know."

"I don't want to know," Teddy and Percy said together.
Sally and Chrysa laughed.

"Well, I don't feel the need to share," Chrysa replied. "You're still a bit young for that."

"Anyway, new topic," Percy said quickly. "What do you do when you're not in the Underworld or at Camp? I know you're only in the Underworld for six months, and Annabeth said you don't spend that much time at Camp..."

"I'm currently going to college, actually," Chrysa said. "Columbia. Father pulled some strings to get me in. I'm double-majoring in English and Classical Studies. Considering I'm fluent in ancient Greek, modern Greek, and Latin, it hasn't been very difficult so far. I also spend time back in England, guest-lecture in Scotland, and attend charity events all over the world. It's only a few hours a day, so I can attend classes even during my...summer job."

"Aren't you a little young for college?" Sally asked curiously.

Chrysa laughed.

"A little old, actually. My body is permanently seventeen, but I turned twenty-seven this past July."

"Aunt Hermione and Aunt Fleur and Aunt Ginny are all really jealous that Chrysa still looks so good," Teddy put in.

"I don't know why. I'm permanently seventeen, and I look more like fourteen or fifteen unless I do my make-up a certain way," Chrysa grumbled.

Sally patted her arm consolingly.

"Well, at least you don't have to worry about your boyfriend potentially being a pedophile. Though, considering the age difference..."

Chrysa snickered. Little did Sally know that she was actually older than Hades. They weren't entirely sure, but their best guesses said she was mentally still about a thousand years older than Hades, even after being dead for four thousand years.

Their lunch date wrapped up quickly after that. Chrysa presented Percy with his present, a celestial bronze trident necklace that would turn into an actual trident when pulled off of his neck. It was also enchanted to not come off.

"I know that your magic sword always returns to your pocket, but this way you have something if you don't have pockets. Like if you're sleeping. Or working out. Be careful practicing with it. I'm sure your mother would like to keep her curio cabinet intact."

Mid-October, Sally would be asking Chrysa to magically repair her curio cabinet after Percy destroyed it while practicing with the trident.

After dropping Teddy off back in England (and spending the next few hours playing board games), Chrysa finally returned to her empty New York apartment. She was only there for five minutes before shadow-travelling again.

She reappeared in the Underworld, just outside of Hades' office. Even though it was late, she could still hear the sound of his pen scratching at the documents he was signing.

Chrysa slipped inside of the office, shadows covering her so that she was still unseen, even to Hades. She moved silently over to his chair and released her hold on the shadows as she situated herself on
his lap, curling her head into his shoulder so that she could hear his heartbeat.

She heard the pen stop scratching.

Hades leaned down and breathed his question into her ear.

"I thought you were staying topside for a few more days?"

Chrysa moved her head from his chest in order to look into his dark eyes. His face was just inches from her own.

"I missed you," she said simply, leaning in to press a brief kiss to his lips. "I realized that school starts again soon, and I'll be separated from you again, and then September will come and we'll really be separated. So I came home, beloved."

Hades' arms tightened around her.

"That's right. You're home."

"Home," Chrysa mumbled contentedly, leaning back into Hades' embrace and letting herself drift off to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

1. Well, this is the last chapter of The Lightning Thief. After this, it's on to Sea of Monsters, which will be much shorter.

2. Teddy surprised me by showing up. I didn't know until it happened. But yes, in case anyone was wondering, Chrysa/Amaranth is still very much in contact with her friends and family in the British Wizarding World. As for the Statute of Secrecy and MACUSA's strict laws about magic...well, it doesn't really apply to demigods. Plus she's a fantastically wealthy celebrity, so she's the exception.
The Sea of Monsters

Chapter Summary

Chrysa Potter returns to Camp Half-Blood on a joint mission for her father and consort - babysitting her annoying, dead half-brother.

There were several things that Chrysa did not enjoy being woken up by in the mornings. The list included cold water, Aunt Petunia, and crying babies. As of June 3, 2008, that list grew to include her father barging into her bedroom on an emergency and then flipping out that she and Hades were both naked.

Chapter Notes

Welcome to my very, very short version of the Sea of Monsters. Since my version is so short, this chapter is rather long. Enjoy!

In addition, there seems to be a minor problem with Ao3 turning all my ellipses and em dashes into weird character scrambles. I think I caught them all, but if I didn't, I apologize.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There were several things that Chrysa did not enjoy being woken up by in the mornings. The list included cold water, Aunt Petunia, and crying babies. As of June 3, 2008, that list grew to include her father barging into her bedroom on an emergency and then flipping out that she and Hades were both naked.

"Really, Father, what did you expect when you barged into our bedroom when we were both asleep?" Chrysa asked as she strolled into the throne room with Hades twenty minutes later.

"Not that," Zeus grumbled.

"What's the emergency?" Hades asked irritably. "You haven't been down here in nearly a century."

"Thalia has been poisoned," Zeus stated glumly. "Chiron hasn't found a cure. I've already fired Argus. The camp borders are failing as well."

"And this concerns us, how?" Hades asked, sounding bored.

Chrysa smacked her consort's shoulder.

"Hades! That's my sister you're talking about! And the kids at camp!"

"Sorry, dear," Hades replied, pressing an apologetic kiss to her cheek.

Chrysa sighed, gave him a brief smile, and then turned to look at her father.
"I'm glad to hear the news from you directly, but is there a specific reason you've come here?"

"Chiron will probably be fired tonight, if he can't do something for Thalia," Zeus said. "I want to send Tantalus as the new activities director, with Chrysa as the warden."

"Tantalus?!" Chrysa and Hades exclaimed in unison.


"That's the one," Zeus sighed.

"Why?" Hades asked.

"Hera was going on and on about how we have to give family for even the most grievous of sins - I think she was actually referring to the fact that I cheated on her to have Thalia in the first place, but I started thinking about my children, and Tantalus, and how he's been starving for the past four thousand years. Also, I thought you," he said, turning to Chrysa, "might like a reason to be there for your sister."

"I would like that very much," Chrysa said, before Hades could protest. "There might be something I can do for her, depending on what she was poisoned with. I am rather familiar with poisons. It goes with the 'patroness of assassins' bit. And growing up with Akhlys."

Hades shrugged.

"She's threatened to poison me before. Leuke actually went through with it on two separate occasions."

"It wasn't deadly!" Chrysa protested. "It just caused you to marry the latrine for a week."

Zeus looked alarmed.

"What did you do? And Chrysa, dear, please don't teach Hera how to do that."

"What makes you think she doesn't already know?" Chrysa asked sweetly.

Zeus paled.

"I may have made a comment about the proper place of women in Leuke's hearing," Hades said delicately. "She wasn't amused."

"Well, on that happy note, I'm going to go tell Prisoner 0001 about his potential parole. If I'm the warden, do I get to continue his food and drink problem?" Chrysa asked curiously.

Zeus shrugged.

"If he deserves it."

Chrysa smirked.

"Do I also get to send him back to the Fields when we save Thalia and Chiron returns?"

"If you want to," Hades sighed. "Don't stay gone as long, this time?"

"I'll try, darling," Chrysa said, kissing Hades' cheek. "But think about it this way: you don't have to
worry about poison in your food for offending me for as long as I'm gone!"

Before either god could respond to that, she disappeared into the shadows. She didn't entirely leave though. She wanted to know how they would respond to that.

Zeus looked at his brother.

"And you sleep in the same bed with her," he pointed out.

Hades sighed, an almost dreamy tone to his voice.

"I know. The things we do for love."

Chrysa had to hide her snickers as she shadow-travelled to the entrance to the Fields of Punishment.

The next day, they were all set to go. Chiron had indeed been fired the previous night, and Zeus had sent a message via Iris that Dionysus was expecting them that morning.

"Now Tantalus," Chrysa said sternly. She yanked at the chain she held, causing the former king of Lydia to stumble. While the chains would only be visible to Underworld denizens or descendants outside of the Underworld, they would be no less powerful. Hades had not explained why they had magical chains for prisoners to visit the Underworld in, instead saying that it was a long story and he would tell her when she was back.

"We're going to go to Camp Half-Blood, and you're going to be nice to the kids. Got that? Nice to the kids. You will not stab kids, chop kids up, or make kids into food. You will especially not eat the kids. Capisce?"

"Since when are you Italian?" Tantalus grumbled, only to be tugged off his feet again.

"Be nice, brother dear," Chrysa said, her voice sickly sweet. "And one more thing: mention my position in the Underworld to anyone and you get sent back immediately, and I turn your lake to acid and set the Furies on you."

Tantalus gulped.

"I understand."

"Good," Chrysa said with a smile that was more teeth than anything. "Now, off we go to Camp Half-Blood!"

A shadow appeared in front of them and Chrysa jumped into it, pulling Tantalus behind her. She and Hades had said their goodbyes privately before she had fetched the infamous Prisoner 0001. There were some forms of public displays of affection that they found distasteful. Making out in front of the prisoners was one of them.

They reappeared in the shadow of the North Woods, near the dining pavilion. Chrysa landed on her feet. Tantalus landed in a heap of too-thin limbs.

Chrysa sighed.

"I don't have all day, you know. Up you get. Don't trip on anything."

She was almost certain that Tantalus was sneering at her as soon as she turned her back.

They made it all the way to the Big House, Chrysa tugging on Tantalus' chain and causing him to
Dionysus was on the porch, as usually, playing pinochle with invisible players.

"Hello, Dionysus," Chrysa called cheerfully. "I've brought our brother to replace Chiron. Father really is trying to fill every position with his offspring, isn't he?"

"Hello, Chrysa," Dionysus drawled. "I see you've got him a bit chained up. You can control him?"

Chrysa yanked on the chain again as an example causing the undead man to fall sideways and glare angrily at her.

"He's stuck with me," Chrysa confirmed. "I'm the warden and the parole officer, and I can send him back at any time I want to, for any reason I deem necessary. I'm sure we've got some other relations in the Fields of Punishment somewhere that would like a short break. If I'm not mistaken, Sisyphus is your second cousin, thrice removed."

"He'd figure out some way to slip the chains and we'd be hunting him down for the next decade," Dionysus grumbled. "No, we can deal with this one. At least it's not Hitler or Mussolini."

"Or any of the other, frankly terrifying, members of the family," Chrysa added. "Why don't you try to teach Tantalus pinochle? I'm going to go talk to Chiron."

"What about the chains?" Dionysus asked idly.

"They extend," Chrysa shrugged. "Proximity isn't really an issue."

She continued into the Big House, going straight to Chiron's apartment. The centaur was in the midst of packing. His back was towards her, but he turned around when she knocked on the doorframe to announce her entrance.

He smiled sadly at her.

"Hello, Chrysa. I assume my replacement has arrived?" he asked.

Chrysa snorted.

"I give him two weeks. Tops. Then you'll be back here and everything will be hunky-dory."

"Chrysa, child, I hate to tell you this, but no one says hunky-dory anymore," Chiron told her.

Chrysa rolled her eyes.

"I don't care. You'll be back here before you know it. Look at it like a vacation."

The centaur laughed and moved to wrap an arm around her shoulders in a slight embrace.

"I'll do that. Thank you, Chrysa. You'll keep an eye on things?"

"Of course," she replied. "I'll do whatever I can for Thalia. Maybe my summer job will give me some insight into the poison that you haven't found."

"Would you like to see what I have found?" the centaur asked.

"Very much so."
Despite their hard work, Chiron and Chrysa could do nothing more for Thalia's tree that night. The next morning, Chiron informed Chrysa at breakfast that he had contacted Sally Jackson and advised that Percy not come to camp.

Chrysa scoffed and told him, "He loves Camp. He won't see why. He'll be here this afternoon."

She turned out to be right.

She was in the middle of a pinochle game with Dionysus and Tantalus when the wards flared at the act of someone granting someone else - or something else - passage into the camp. Chrysa reached out through the shadows in order to discover what was going on.

It turned out that the border patrol was facing two mechanical bronze bulls - forged by Hephaestus, if the Eta on their flanks said anything. Alongside the border patrol were Annabeth, Percy, and a baby Cyclops. With the help of the Cyclops, the group managed to dispatch the bulls. Clarisse told Annabeth and Clarisse the bare bones of what had happened, using the image of Thalia's dying tree as proof.

Chrysa continued to watch as Annabeth, Percy, and the baby Cyclops traveled through camp. They ended up in Chiron's apartments.

"Pony!" the Cyclops exclaimed.

Chiron turned to face them.

"I beg your pardon?" he asked, offended.

Annabeth ran up and hugged him.

"Chiron, what's happening? You're not...leaving?" she asked shakily.

Chiron ruffled her hair and smiled kindly at her.

"Hello, child. And Percy, my goodness. You've grown over the year!"

Percy swallowed, looking nervous.

"Clarisse said that you were..."

"Fired," Chiron said. He didn't sound angry, merely resigned. "Ah, well, someone had to take the blame. Lord Zeus was most upset. The tree he'd created from the spirit of his daughter, poisoned! Mr. D. had to punish someone."

"Besides himself, you mean," Percy growled.

"But this is crazy!" Annabeth exclaimed. "Chiron, you couldn't have had anything to do with poisoning Thalia's tree!"

"Nevertheless," Chiron sighed, "some in Olympus do not trust me now, under the circumstances."

"What circumstances?" Percy asked, looking confused.

Chiron's face darkened. The baby Cyclops interrupted the dark mood by asking, "Pony?"

"My dear young Cyclops," Chiron sniffed haughtily. "I am a centaur."
"Chiron," Percy said gravely. "What about the tree? What happened?"

The old centaur shook his head.

"The poison used on Thalia's pine is something from the Underworld, Percy. Some venom even I have never seen. It must have come from a monster quite deep in the pits of Tartarus."

"Then we know who's responsible," Percy said. "Kro..."

"Do not invoke the Titan Lord's name, Percy. Especially not here, not now," Chiron warned.

"But last summer he tried to cause a civil war in Olympus! This has to be his idea. He'd get Luke to do it, that traitor," Percy growled.

"Perhaps," Chiron said. "But I fear I am being held responsible because I did not prevent it and I cannot cure it. The tree has only a few weeks of life left unless..."

"Unless what?" Annabeth asked, perking up slightly.

"No," Chiron said. "A foolish thought. The whole valley is feeling the shock of the poison. The magical borders are deteriorating. The camp itself is dying. Only one source of magic would be strong enough to reverse the poison, and it was lost centuries ago."

"What is it?" Percy asked. "We'll go find it!"

Chiron closed his saddlebag and turned off his boombox. He turned and rested a hand on Percy's shoulder.

"Percy, you must promise me that you will not act rashly. I told your mother I did not want you to come here at all this summer. It's much too dangerous. But now that you are here, stay here. Train hard. Learn to fight. But do not leave."

"Why?" Percy asked. "I want to do something! I can't just let the borders fail. The whole camp will be..."

"Overrun by monsters," Chiron said. "Yes, I fear so. But you must not let yourself be baited into hasty action! This could be a trap of the Titan Lord. Remember last summer! He almost took your life!"

Chiron brushed a tear from Annabeth's cheek.

"Stay with Percy, child," he said. "Keep him safe. The prophecy - remember it!"

"I-I will," Annabeth promised.

"Um..." Percy said, raising his hand. "Would this be the super-dangerous prophecy that has me in it, but the gods have forbidden you to tell me about?"

Chiron and Annabeth were both silent.

"Right," Percy muttered. "Just checking."

"Chiron..." Annabeth said. "You told me the gods made you immortal only so long as you were needed to train heroes. If they dismiss you from camp..."

"Swear you will do your best to keep Percy from danger," Chiron insisted, changing the subject.
"Swear upon the River Styx."

"I-I swear it upon the River Styx," Annabeth replied shakily.

Thunder rumbled in response to her promise.

"Very well," Chiron said, relaxing slightly. "Perhaps my name will be cleared and I shall return. Chrysa certainly seems to think so. We have money riding on it. Until then, I go to visit my wild kinsmen in the Everglades. It's possible they know of some cure for the poisoned tree that I have forgotten. In any event, I will stay in exile until this matter is resolved...one way or another."

Annabeth stifled a sob, and Chiron patted her shoulder.

"There, now, child. I must entrust your safety to Mr. D and the new activities director. We must hope... well, with Chrysa watching them, perhaps they won't destroy the camp as quickly as I fear," Chiron said.

"Who is this Tantalus guy, anyway?" Percy demanded. "Where does he get off taking your job? Wait...did you say Chrysa was here?"

The conch horn blew for dinner.

"Go," Chiron told them. "Tantalus and Chrysa will both be in the pavilion. I will contact your mother, Percy, and let her know you're safe. No doubt she'll be worried by now. Just remember my warning! You are in grave danger. Do not think for a moment that the Titan Lord has forgotten you!"

Chiron clopped out of the apartment and down the hall, the baby Cyclops calling after him, "Pony! Don't go!"

Chrysa jerked back into her body and stood up. Dionysus and Tantalus were watching her expectantly.

"You lost," Tantalus jeered, gesturing towards the pinochle hands on the table.

Chrysa glanced down at her cards.

"Actually, I win," she said, laying down her perfect hand. Dionysus grumbled good-naturedly and passed over the laurels.

Despite the fact that they left from the same place, Chrysa, Dionysus, and Tantalus still managed to make it to the head table in the dining pavilion before Percy, Annabeth, and the baby Cyclops got close. Several whispers from the campers erupted as Percy led the baby Cyclops to the center of the pavilion.

"Well, well," Dionysus drawled, "if it isn't Peter Johnson. My millennium is complete."

"Percy Jackson...sir," Percy said behind gritted teeth.

Chrysa subtly elbowed him beneath the table.

"This boy," Dionysus said, turning to Tantalus, "you need to watch. Poseidon's child, you know."

"Ah!" Tantalus said. "That one!" His cold eyes narrowed on Percy. "I am Tantalus," he said with a cold smile. "On special assignment here until, well, my Lord Dionysus decides otherwise. And you, Perseus Jackson, I do expect you to refrain from causing any more trouble."
"Trouble?" Percy demanded.

Dionysus snapped his fingers and caused the front page of the New York Post to appear on the table. Percy's yearbook picture was on it and the article announced how Percy had blown up his school gymnasium.

"Yes, trouble," Tantalus said, smiling like the cat who got the canary. "You caused plenty of it last summer, I understand."

"Brother dear," Chrysa purred dangerously. Anyone who had known Leuke would have known that that tone of voice meant someone was either going to start dying, running, or blubbering in very short order.

Tantalus twitched. Even if he didn't know how much danger he was it, he did know there was something.

"Yes?" he asked, trying to sound casual.

"Don't forget who holds the chains here," Chrysa purred. "And don't forget who can send you back to your little lake with just a snap of her fingers." She held her hand up, fingers poised to snap.

Tantalus paled.

"Now, why don't we stop tormenting my favorite cousin and move on?" Chrysa asked, yanking the chain around Tantalus' neck again for good measure.

The prisoner jerked towards her, then nodded and turned back to his plate, rubbing his neck in the meantime. A satyr had just set down a plate of barbeque in front of him.

Tantalus looked at his goblet and ordered, "Root beer. Barq's special stock. 1967."

His glass filled with foamy liquid. Tantalus hesitantly stretched out his hand toward the goblet.

"Go on, then, old fellow," Dionysus said, a glimmer of mischief in his eye. Over the past few hours, he and Chrysa has bonded further over their mutual fun in tormenting Prisoner 0001. "Perhaps now it will work," Dionysus offered.

He glanced at Chrysa, who shook her head slightly.

Tantalus grabbed for the glass, but it scooted away before he could touch it. A few drops of root beer spilled, and he tried to dab them up with his fingers, but the drops rolled away like quicksilver before he could touch them. He growled and turned toward the plate of barbeque. He picked up a fork and tried to stab a piece of brisket, but the plate skittered down the table and flew off the end, straight into the coals of the brazier.

"To our father, Lord Zeus," Chrysa called out merrily.

"Blast!" Tantalus muttered.

"Ah, well," Dionysus said with false sympathy. "Perhaps a few more days. Believe me, old chap, working at this camp will be torture enough. I'm sure your old curse will fade eventually."

"Eventually," Chrysa agreed cheerfully. "Once you've proven yourself."

"Eventually," Tantalus repeated. His eyes were locked on Dionysus' Diet Coke. "Do you have any idea how dry one's throat gets after three thousand years?"
"Enough that it's surprising you can still talk," Chrysa quipped.

Dionysus snorted into his glass.

"You're that spirit from the Fields of Punishment," Percy said. "The one who stands in the lake with the fruit tree hanging over you, but you can't eat or drink."

Tantalus sneered at him, until Chrysa pulled his chain waringly. He looked pained about it, but he schooled his features into something more neutral.

"A real scholar, aren't you, boy?" he asked.

"You must've done something really horrible when you were alive," Percy said. "What was it?"

Tantalus' eyes narrowed. Before he could say anything, Chrysa did.

"He killed his son and tried to feed him to the gods," Chrysa said in a bored tone. "Cannibalism and kin-slaying are both big no-nos. That's why I'm here. I'm the warden. And the parole officer. If my dear older brother steps one foot out of line, he's back in Hades before he can blink."

Tantalus glared at her, then nearly fell out of his chair as she pulled on his chain. Once he righted himself, he sniffed haughtily toward Percy and said, "I'll be watching you, Percy Jackson. I don't want any problems at my camp."

"Your camp has problems already...sir."

"Oh, go sit down, Johnson," Dionysus sighed. "I believe that table over there is yours - the one where no one else ever wants to sit at."

Percy's face turned red. He looked like he was trying very hard not to talk back.

Chrysa elbowed Dionysus in the ribs hard enough that it was obvious to the campers.

"Behave!" she ordered.

Dionysus turned to look at her.

"That hurt!" he complained.

"It was supposed to," Chrysa drawled.

"Give me one good reason why I shouldn't smite you right now," Dionysus threatened.

"I'll give you one and let you figure out the second on your own," Chrysa said, raising her eyebrows at her half-brother.

She raised one finger. "Daddy."

She raised a second finger and waited.

Dionysus thought a moment, and then paled drastically. He obviously figured out that Hades was the second reason.

"Fine," he groaned.

"Go sit down, Percy," Chrysa said gently.
"Come on, Tyson," Percy said to the baby Cyclops.  

"Oh, no," Tantalus said. "The monster stays here. We must decide what to do with it."

"Him," Percy snapped. "His name is Tyson."

Tantalus raised an eyebrow.

"Tyson saved the camp," Percy continued. "He pounded those bronze bulls. Otherwise they would've burned down this whole place."

"Yes," Tantalus sighed, "and what a pity that would've been."

Dionysus snickered.

Chrysa retaliated by pulling Tantalus' chain with both hands and stomping on Dionysus' foot. The god hissed, and the undead demigod fell out of his chair.

Chrysa sat patiently while they composed themselves. Percy looked like he was holding back a laugh.

"Go sit down, Percy," Chrysa repeated. "We'll take care of this."

"You can't let them hurt him!" Percy insisted.

"I won't," Chrysa soothed. "Go sit down."

Percy turned to the baby Cyclops - Tyson - who looked terrified.

"I'll be right over there, big guy," Percy told him. "Don't worry. We'll find you a good place to sleep tonight."

The baby Cyclops nodded.

"I believe you. You are my friend."

Percy trudged over to his table, accepted his pizza from a wood nymph, and dumped the customary portion into the brazier.

Tantalus ordered a satyr to blow the conch horn for announcements, as if the entire camp wasn't already watching them.

"Yes, well," Tantalus said, "another fine meal! Or so I am told."

As he spoke, he inched his hand toward his refilled dinner plate, as if the food would not notice what he was doing. The plate shot down the table as soon as Tantalus got within six inches.

"And here on my first day of authority," Tantalus continued, "I'd like to say what a pleasant form of punishment it is to be here. Over the course of the summer, I hope to torture, er, interact with each and every one of you children. You all look good enough to eat."

Chrysa stood up swiftly, walked over to Tantalus' chair, grabbed his ear, leaned down, and growled, loudly enough for the entire pavilion to hear, "What did we say about eating children, Tantalus?"

"Eating children means Fields of Punishment," the prisoner sighed.
"And what other interactions with children have we forbidden?" Chrysa asked sweetly.

Tantalus looked out at the campers.

Chrysa grabbed the chain right next to his neck and pulled upwards. Tantalus' hands scrabbled helplessly at the collar around his neck. It probably looked very odd to outsiders, seeing as the chain could only be seen by gods and Underworld denizens. Chrysa only held it for a few more seconds before dropping it. Tantalus gasped for air.

"No stabbing...children...no...chopping up...children, no...cooking children," Tantalus choked out.

"That's right," Chrysa said sweetly. "You're here for redemption. Act like it, and Lord Hades may be merciful enough to let you go spend time in Asphodel instead."

"Yes...la- sister," Tantalus said, correcting himself last-minute.

Dionysus clapped as Chrysa returned to her seat, followed by several of the campers. The rest still seemed too shocked to do anything.

"And now some changes!" Tantalus said, faking recovery with a crooked smile. "We are reinstituting the chariot races!"

Murmuring broke out at all the tables â€“ excitement, fear, disbelief.

"Now I know," Tantalus continued, raising his voice, "that these races were discontinued some years ago due to, ah, technical problems."

"Three deaths and twenty-six maimings," Michael Yew from Apollo Cabin called.

"Yes, yes!" Tantalus said. "But I know that you will all join me in welcoming the return of this camp tradition. Golden laurels will go to the winning charioteers each month. Teams may register in the morning! The first race will be held in three days' time. We will release you from most of your regular activities to prepare your chariots and choose your horses. Oh, and did I mention, the victorious team's cabin will have no chores for the month in which they win?"

There was an explosion of excited conversation at all the tables. The campers seemed excited at the prospect of no kitchen patrol or stable cleaning. It didn't really matter to Chrysa. When she was here, she simply did the chores with magic. When she and Percy were here at the same time, their cabins were paired together, so neither of them had to do much. The only true chore they had was working in the strawberry fields, because picking strawberries had to be done by hand. However, neither of them was good with plants, and Demeter and Dionysus cabin both preferred them to stay away from their fields.

"But, sir!" Clarisse said, looking nervous as she stood up to speak from Ares table. "What about patrol duty? I mean, if we drop everything to ready our chariots..."

"Ah, the hero of the day!" Tantalus exclaimed. "Brave Clarisse, who single-handedly bested the bronze bulls!"

Clarisse blinked, the blushed and said, "Um, I didn't..."

"And modest, too," Tantalus said with a grin. "Not to worry, my dear! This is a summer camp. We are here to enjoy ourselves, yes?"

"But the tree..." Clarisse said, shooting Chrysa a helpless look.
Chrysa could only shrug. She really couldn't do anything to counteract Tantalus' orders. She could just threaten him into compliance with her ideas.

"And now," Tantalus said, even as Clarisse's half-siblings pulled her back into her seat, "Before we proceed to the campfire and sing-along, one slight housekeeping issue. Percy Jackson and Annabeth Chase have seen fit, for some reason, to bring this here."

Tantalus waved a hand toward Tyson.

Uneasy murmuring spread across the campers. Chrysa kept her face impassive. She knew several good Cyclopes: Brontes, Steropes, and Arges chief among them. Honestly, they were probably her favorite uncles as Leuke. The rest were jerks.

"Now, of course," Tantalus continued, "Cyclopes have a reputation for being bloodthirsty monsters with a very small brain capacity. Under normal circumstances, I would release this beast into the woods and have you hunt it down with torches and pointed sticks. But who knows? Perhaps this Cyclops is not as horrible as its brethren. Until it proves worthy of destruction, we need a place to keep it! I've thought about the stables, but that will make the horses nervous. Hermes' cabin, perhaps?"

Travis and Connor Stoll developed a sudden interest in the tablecloth.

"Come now," Tantalus chided, "the monster may be able to do some menial chores. Any suggestions as to where such a beast should be kenneled?"

Before Chrysa could say a word on the child's behalf, a glowing green hologram appeared over Tyson's head in the shape of a trident.

Tantalus roared with laughter.

"Well! I think we know where to put the beast now. By the gods, I can see the family resemblance!"

Everyone followed Tantalus' lead and laughed, with the exception of Dionysus, Chrysa, Annabeth, and a few of Percy's other friends.

"I'm seeing a family resemblance as well," Chrysa said thoughtfully to Dionysus. Her voice was loud enough that the entire pavilion could hear her. Everyone fell silent to see if she was really speaking against Percy, whom everyone knew to be her favored cousin.

"I do believe our dear brother inherited Grandfather's sociopathic gene," Chrysa continued conversationally. "And his hatred of Cyclopes. After all, it was Kronos who threw the Elder Cyclopes into Tartarus, from which they were rescued by Father and his siblings. The Elder Cyclopes - Brontes, Steropes, and Arges - then proceeded to construct the greatest weapons of all time: Zeus' Master Bolt, Poseidon's trident, and Hades' Helm of Darkness. Their lesser-known works include Demeter's golden sickle, Hera's spear, Amphitrite's sword, and Leuke's knives. Cyclopes are natural craftsmen, and they often assist Lord Hephaestus in his forges, when they are not at their own forges under the sea."

"What about all the Cyclopes that kill and eat demigods?" Tantalus blustered.

Chrysa smirked at him.

"They also inherited Grandfather's sociopathic gene," she said helpfully. Before he could respond, she turned to Tyson and said gently, "Go sit with Percy, little cousin. He'll help you out."
The Cyclopes went over and sat beside Percy at the Poseidon table. A wood nymph hesitantly brought him some pizza which he accepted with a blush and a quiet, "Thank you."

The dining pavilion remained silent.

"I do think that's quite enough excitement for one evening," Chrysa announced. "So, to recap, chariot races in three days, winner has no chores until they lose the laurels. Also, for those of you who missed the lunchtime announcement, I am here because I am acting as Tantalus' warden and parole officer. He says anything to you about hurting you, killing you, or turning you into stew, you come straight to me. I'll be spending most of my time trying to help Thalia, so I won't be aiding sword lessons this summer. Thank you all, and have a nice evening."

Much to her dismay, she didn't see much of Percy and Annabeth over the next few days. She spent all of her time with Thalia's tree or in her cabin brewing potions to slow the progression of the poison. Between Akhlys and her sponsored profession, she was adept in poisoning people. She was somewhat less adept in curing poisons, but she did know how to delay them long enough to figure out another solution. Due to her busyness, she was only peripherally aware of the argument between Annabeth and Percy. Both of them had come to her to rant about it, but she had not paid too much attention besides that it was teenage drama.

Honestly, it was Ron and Hermione third year all over again.

The morning of the race was hot and humid. Fog lay low on the ground like sauna steam. Millions of birds were roosting in the trees - fat gray-and-white pigeons, except they didn't coo like regular pigeons. They made annoying metallic screeching sounds that were reminiscent of submarine radar.

If Chrysa had gotten more than two hours of sleep the night before, she might have noticed that something was wrong. As it was, she'd been up most of the night working on a potion that had to be begun at midnight and finished before dawn. Most potioneers only made it in the winter, when night was longer, but Chrysa only had five and a half hours. It was a horrendous task, especially since she was doing it alone. She had applied the potion at dawn, and it seemed to slow the poison of Thalia's tree somewhat. She had arrived at the racetrack in an almost trancelike state.

The racetrack had been built in a grassy field between the archery range and the woods. Hephaestus' cabin had used the bronze bulls, which were completely tame since they'd had their heads smashed in, to plow and oval track in a matter of minutes.

There were rows of stone steps for the spectators - Tantalus, Chrysa, the satyrs, a few dryads, and all the campers who weren't participating. Dionysus did not come. He never got up before ten o'clock if he could help it, which forced Chrysa to pass on sleep in order to supervise Tantalus' supervision of the race.

"Right!" Tantalus announced as the teams began to assemble. A naiad had brought him a big platter of pastries, and as Tantalus spoke, his right hand chased a chocolate éclair across the judge's table. Chrysa grabbed it just before it ran off the table and took a large bite, hoping that the sugar might help wake her up.

"You all know the rules!" Tantalus continued. "A quarter-mile track. Twice around to win. Two horses per chariot. Each team will consist of a driver and a fighter. Weapons are allowed. Dirty tricks are expected. But try not to kill anybody!"

Tantalus smiled at them as though they were all naughty children.

"Any killing will result in harsh punishment. No s'mores at the campfire for a week! Now ready your
Chrysa lazily cast a *Sonorus* charm so she didn't have to yell.

"If you kill anyone, you then have to deal with me. Don't expect me to be nice."

She cancelled the charm as Beckendorf led the Hephaestus team onto the track. Their chariot was made of bronze and iron - even the horses, which were magical automatons. The chariot most likely had all kinds of mechanical traps and more fancy options than any of Chrysa's luxury cars.

The Ares chariot was blood red, pulled by two grisly horse skeletons. Clarisse climbed aboard with a batch javelins, spiked balls, caltrops, and other nasty toys.

Apollo's chariot was trim and graceful and completely gold, pulled by two graceful palominos. Their fighter - Lee Fletcher - was armed with a bow, though he had promised not to shoot regular pointed arrows at the opposing team's drivers.

Hermes' chariot was green and old-looking, as if it hadn't been out of the garage in years. It didn't look like anything special, but it was manned by the Stoll brothers, who were the masters of dirty tricks.

The last two chariots were Percy's and Annabeth's. Chrysa vaguely noticed that Percy approached Annabeth before the race - possibly to apologize - but she seemed to blow him off, and he returned to his chariot.

By the time the chariots finished lining up, more shiny-eyed, shiny-beaked pigeons had gathered in the woods. They were screeching so loudly that Chrysa knew that her chances of napping through the race were gone. There was something about metallic shrieking birds niggling in the back of her mind, but she was too tired to pursue the thought. The campers were glancing nervously at the trees, but Tantalus didn't seem concerned. However, he had to speak up to be heard over the noise of the birds.

"Charioteers!" he shouted. "Attend your mark!"

He waved his hand, and the starting signal dropped. The chariots roared to life. Hooves thundered against the dirt. The crowd cheered.

Almost immediately, there was a loud, nasty *crack!* Hermes chariot had rammed into Apollo chariot, causing it to flip over. The riders were thrown free, but the panicked horses dragged the golden chariot diagonally across the track. The Stoll brothers were laughing at their good luck, until the Apollo horses crashed right in front of theirs, and the Hermes chariot flipped as well, leaving a pile of broken wood and four rearing horses in the dust.

Annabeth was by far in the front, followed by Percy, then Beckendorf and Clarisse.

Hephaestus chariot pulled up beside Poseidon's.

"Sorry, Percy!" Beckendorf yelled as he pressed a button on his chariot. A panel opened on the side, and three sets of balls and chains shot straight toward the wheels. Tyson managed to whack them aside with his pole, and then shoved Hephaestus chariot sideways.

The pigeons rose from the trees and began spiraling almost like a tornado, a tornado that was headed directly for the track.

Chrysa glanced up at them and wracked her brain, trying to figure out why this was so familiar. As a
precautionary measure, she cast a shield charm around her.

Just because she couldn't die didn't mean it wouldn't hurt if those birds started attacking.

She was just in time. Percy had just made his first turn when the pigeons swarmed and began dive-bombing the spectators, as well as the chariots and their charioteers. Beckendorf's chariot was driven off course and plowed through the strawberry fields, the mechanical horses steaming. Clarisse's fighter - Chrysa was pretty sure it was Mark - managed to throw a screen of camouflage netting over their chariot basket. The birds were pecking and clawing at his hands, but Clarisse just kept driving. As their horses were skeletons, they had no problems there.

The other spectators were not so lucky. The birds were slashing at any bit of exposed skin and driving everyone into a panic. A veritable swarm was targeting Chrysa's shield. Close up, the birds' eyes appeared beady and evil-looking. Their beaks were made of bronze and appeared to be razor-sharp.

"Stymphalian birds!" Chrysa said to herself. Due to the noise, it was quiet to her ears, even though she was speaking normally.

"Everything's under control!" Tantalus yelled. "Not to worry!"

Chrysa wandlessly cast a slightly smaller shield charm right inside the other one, cancelled the outer charm with her wand, muffled her ears, and cast a noise charm loud enough to (figuratively) wake the dead.

The demon pigeons went nuts. They started flying in circles, running into each other like they wanted to bash their own brains out. Then they abandoned the track altogether and flew skyward in a huge dark wave.

"Now!" she shouted. "Archers!"

With clear targets, Apollo's archers were much more effective. They had flawless aim, and most of them could nock five or six arrows at once. Even the smallest Apollo camper - eight-year-old Kayla Knowles - could fire three arrows at once and still hit every target. Within minutes, the ground was littered width dead bronze-beaked pigeons, and the survivors were a distant trail of smoke on the horizon.

The camp was saved, but the wreckage wasn't pretty. Most of the chariots had been completely destroyed. Almost everyone was wounded, bleeding from multiple bird pecks. The kids from Aphrodite's cabin were screaming because their hairdos had been ruined and their clothes pooped on.

"Bravo!" Tantalus said, walking towards the finish line. "We have our first winner!"

He awarded the golden laurels to a stunned-looking Clarisse.

Then he turned and glared at Annabeth and Percy.

"And now to punish the troublemakers who disrupted this race."

Somehow, Tantalus had managed to decide that Percy, Tyson, and Annabeth were at fault. He blamed them for aggravating the birds with their bad chariot driving, and claimed that the birds would have left everyone alone otherwise.

It was lousy reasoning, but Chrysa was now doubly exhausted from her sleepless night and the magic usage, and really didn't care enough to argue with him. She didn't have a chance to, though,
because Percy told Tantalus to go chase a doughnut, which simply made him angry. He sentenced the three to kitchen patrol that afternoon - after the celebratory feast for Clarisse's victory.

The meal was delicious. Who knew country-fried Stymphalian death-bird could taste so good?

Afterwards, Chrysa continued going to magically aid Percy, Annabeth, and Tyson with the dishes, but decided she was too tired and they needed to talk anyway. She returned to her cabin and slept instead.

She only woke up shortly before dinner ended. She'd managed to get there in time to scarf down another plate of death-bird, before travelling with the rest of the camp to the campfire.

She had never seen the camp so dismal. The fire was only five feet high and the color of lint, when normally it was at least ten feet, and on good nights twenty.

Dionysus left after only a few songs.

"Even pinochle with Chiron was better than this," he muttered as he glared distastefully at Tantalus. He swept off in a huff toward the Big House.

After the last song, Tantalus said, "Well, that was lovely!"

He came forward with a toasted marshmallow on a stick and tried to casually pluck it off. Before he could touch it, the marshmallow flew off the stick. Tantalus made a wild grab for it, but the marshmallow committed suicide, diving into the flames.

Tantalus turned back to the campers, smiling coldly.

"Now, then!" Some announcements about tomorrow's schedule."

"Sir," Percy spoke off.

Tantalus' eye twitched.

"Our kitchen boy has something to say?"

Some of the Ares campers snickered, but Percy didn't seem deterred. He stood up and looked over to Annabeth, who also stood.

"We have an idea to save camp," Percy said.

The campers were dead silent, but the campfire flared a bright yellow.

"Indeed," Tantalus said blandly. "Well, if it has anything to do with chariots..."

"The Golden Fleece," Percy said, cutting him off. "We know where it is."

The flames burned orange. Before Tantalus could say anything, Percy blurted out an entire story about his dreams of Grover and Polyphemus' island. Annabeth stepped in and reminded everyone what the Fleece could do. It was a good thing, as she was a more convincing speaker than Percy.

"The Fleece can save the camp," Annabeth concluded. "I'm sure of it."

"Nonsense," Tantalus said. "We don't need saving."

"You're an idiot," Chrysa drawled, adding a bit more of her British accent to her words and sounding
remarkably like a Malfoy. "If this is what you're going to say anytime someone suggests a way to
save my sister, I am going to recommend that you be returned to your little lake posthaste. Do
remember that it is my opinion that is going to determine whether you receive a lesser punishment or
not. Arguing against saving my sister is not the way to get in my good books."

Tantalus paled slightly, then said, "The Sea of Monsters his hardly an exact location. They wouldn't
even know where to look!"

"Yes, I would," Percy blurted out.

Everyone stared at him, including Annabeth.

"30, 31, 75, 12," Percy said.

"Ooo-kay," Tantalus said. "Thank you for sharing those meaningless numbers."

"They're sailing coordinates," Percy said. "Latitude and longitude. I, uh, learned about it in social
studies."

Everyone looked impressed, to include Annabeth.

"30 degrees, 31 minutes north, 75 degrees, 12 minutes west. He's right! The Grey Sisters gave us
those coordinates. That'd be somewhere in the Atlantic, off the coast of Florida. The Sea of
Monsters. We need a quest!"

"Wait just a minute," Tantalus said, but the campers were already taking up the chant.

"We need a quest!" they yelled. "We need a quest!"

The campfire flames rose higher.

"It isn't necessary!" Tantalus insisted once more.

"WE NEED A QUEST! WE NEED A QUEST!"

"Fine!" Tantalus shouted, his eyes blazing with anger. "You brats want me to assign a quest!"

"YES!"

"Very well," he agreed. "I shall authorize a champion to undertake this perilous journey, to retrieve
the Golden Fleece and bring it back to camp. Or die trying. I will allow our champion to consult the
Oracle!" Tantalus announced. "And choose two companions for the journey. And I think the choice
of champion is obvious."

Tantalus glared at Annabeth and Percy.

"The champion should be one who has earned the camp's respect, who has proven resourceful in the
chariot races and courageous in the defense of the camp. You shall lead this quest...Clarisse!"

The fire flickered a thousand different colors. The Ares cabin started stomping and cheering.

"CLARISSE! CLARISSE!"

Clarisse stood up, looking stunned. Then she swallowed, and her chest swelled with pride.

"I accept this quest!"
"Wait!" Percy shouted. "Grover is my friend. The dream came to me."

"Sit down!" Mark yelled. "You had your chance last summer."

"Yeah, he just wants to be in the spotlight again!" Sherman Yang said.

Clarisse glared at Percy.

"I accept the quest!" she repeated. "I, Clarisse, daughter of Ares, will save the camp!"

The Ares campers cheered even louder. Annabeth protested, and the other Athena campers joined in. Everyone else started taking sides - shouting and arguing and throwing marshmallows. It was nearly to the point of becoming a full-fledged s'more war when Tantalus shouted, "Silence, you brats!"

His tone stunned the campers into submission. For that, Chrysa decided not to reprimand him.

"Sit down!" he ordered. "And I will tell you a ghost story."

Tantalus was practically radiating 'evil aura'. It was nearly as bad as Voldemort at the height of the Wizarding War.

"Once upon a time there was a mortal king who was beloved of the gods," Tantalus said, putting his hand on his chest.

Chrysa rolled her eyes.

"This king," he continued, "was even allowed to feast on Mount Olympus. But when he tried to take some ambrosia and nectar back to earth to figure out the recipe â€“ just one little doggie bag, mind you â€“ the gods punished him. They banned him from their halls forever! His own people mocked him! His children scolded him! And, oh yes, campers, he had horrible children. Children -just - like - you!"

He pointed a crooked finger at several people in the audience, including Percy, Annabeth, and the Stoll brothers.

"Do you know what he did to his ungrateful children?" Tantalus asked softly. "Do you know how he paid back the gods for their cruel punishment? He invited the Olympians to a feast at his palace, just to show there were no hard feelings. No one noticed that his children were missing. And when he served the gods dinner, my dear campers, can you guess what was in the stew?"

No one dared answer. The firelight glowed dark blue, reflecting evilly on Tantalus' crooked face.

"Oh, the gods punished him in the afterlife," Tantalus croaked. "They did indeed. But he'd had his moment of satisfaction, hadn't he? His children never again spoke back to him or questioned his authority. And do you know what? Rumor has it that the king's spirit now dwells at this very camp, waiting for a chance to take revenge on ungrateful, rebellious children. And so...are there any more complaints, before we send Clarisse off on her quest?"

The camp was silent.

Tantalus nodded at Clarisse.

"The Oracle, my dear. Go on."

She shifted uncomfortably, probably not wanting the glory at the price of being Tantalus' pet. Chrysa couldn't blame her.
"Sir..."

"Go!" Tantalus snarled.

Clarisse bowed awkwardly and hurried off toward the Big House.

"What about you, Percy Jackson?" Tantalus asked. "No complaints from our dishwasher?"

Percy remained silent.

"Good," Tantalus said. "And let me remind everyone - no one leaves this camp without my permission. Anyone who tries...well, if they survive the attempt, they will be expelled forever, but it won't come to that. The harpies will be enforcing curfew from now on, and they are always hungry! Good night my dear campers. Sleep well."

Tantalus waved his hand and extinguished the fire before walking back to the Big House with a skip in his step. Chrysa waited, then spoke to the remaining campers - which was most of them, as they seemed to still be in shock.

"He can't hurt you," she said. "That's why I'm here. Father sent me to keep an eye on him, to prevent anything from happening like happened before. He can allow the harpies to hurt you though, so I would suggest staying inside your cabins after dark. I'll try to keep Tantalus on a tighter leash. Good night, everyone. Sweet dreams."

As soon as she was safely inside Zeus cabin, she stepped into a shadow and fell through to the Underworld. Hades wasn't in their bedroom, so she kicked off her shoes and padded through the corridors with bare feet, following the whispers of the shadows that said that Hades was still in his office.

She leaned on the doorframe of the office and crossed her arms. Hades was busy working on paperwork and hadn't noticed her.

"Hey you," she said softly, a gentle smile on her face. "Fancy seeing you here."

Hades looked up at her, a large smile on her face. He got up quickly and moved to embrace her, pressing his lips to hers in a chaste kiss.

"What are you doing here?" he asked against her lips.

"Tantalus is a first-class jerk and completely deserves to stay within the Fields of Punishment until the end of time," Chrysa said seriously. "I need some stress-relief so I don't automatically murder him the next time I see him.

"The exciting kind of sex relief, or the calming kind of sex relief?" Hades asked gently, his hands moving up to rub her back.

Chrysa practically melted into the pressure.

"The relaxing kind. Preferably with lots of cuddles and some romantic comedy we can make fun of."

It was five hours, seven bags of popcorn, and two rom-coms later that Chrysa finally returned to Zeus Cabin. There was a man in a track suit with salt-and-pepper hair standing in the middle of the room, looking up at the statue of Zeus.

"Lord Hermes," Chrysa greeted, slightly wary as to why there was a god in her cabin at two o'clock
in the morning. "May I ask why you're here?"

"I didn't want you to worry in the morning," Hermes said. "I encouraged Percy to go on the quest, along with Annabeth and the Cyclops. I sent them to the ship that Luke's sailing on. I just want..." His voice trailed off.

"You want them to try to save Luke," Chrysa said gently.

Hermes finally turned to look at her, and the look on his face was pained.

"Exactly," he said. "If anyone can do it, Annabeth and Percy can. And they need to go on the quest. The daughter of Ares doesn't have a chance without them, but she won't take them with her."

"She's too proud for that," Chrysa agreed. "So, Percy, Annabeth, and Tyson are gone?"

Hermes nodded.

"I gave them the four winds and special Hermes vitamins. Just in case. They managed to evade the harpies and Tantalus. The guy's a douche."

Chrysa snorted. "Don't I know it. If this wasn't keeping me near Thalia, I would have shipped him back to the Fields of Punishment and gone home already. As it is, I want to stay here until Thalia is either cured, or joins me in the Underworld."

"She'll get Elysium if she dies," Hermes pointed out.

"She'd better," Chrysa agreed. "But I'd prefer her alive. Having spent time as a tree, it's pretty much a state of suspended animation. You are aware that time is passing, you just don't feel the passage of time. I was a tree for what, almost four thousand years?"

"Something like that," Hermes agreed. "You missed three incarnations of the Olympian Council."

Chrysa raised an eyebrow at him.

"You weren't even on the Council yet. You weren't added until Hades left after I died. You've only been on two incarnations of the Olympian Council. And the eighth incarnation barely counts. It took Hades what, a year to decide that he didn't want to be on the Olympian Council without me?"

"Eighteen months," Hermes supplied.

"Still barely counts," Chrysa said. "The fourth Council doesn't count either; Rhea was only there for a short time to fill the void left when Themis stepped down as Zeus' consort. It wasn't long before she stepped away again so Artemis could join."

"Since I hadn't been born yet, I can neither agree nor disagree," Hermes said.

His phone vibrated from his pocket, and he pulled it out to check whatever message had just come through.

"Hello, George, Martha," Chrysa hissed.

"Hello, Lady Chrysocomè," Martha replied.

"She likes to be called Chrysa!" George argued.

Before it could break out into a full-fledged argument between the pair, Chrysa intervened.
"I do normally call myself Chrysa, but as it is summer, Lady Chrysocomê is a proper title. You're both right."

"I've got to go," Hermes said apologetically. "Aphrodite's demanding her new hair care supplies yesterday."

"Have a good night, Hermes," Chrysa said. "I hope everything works out with Luke."

"Good night, little sister," Hermes replied. "I hope everything works out with Thalia."

With that, he disappeared into the night. Chrysa remained standing in the center of the cabin for a moment, staring up at her father's statue.

"I hope we can save her, Father," she said. "Out of everyone, Percy Jackson has the best chance of finding the Fleece. I'll do everything I can to give him as much time as possible."

Chapter End Notes

Something I realized while writing this chapter: Chiron was born when Kronos took the form of a stallion and slept with the Oceanid Philyra. However, Poseidon invented horses. How did Kronos take the form of an animal that hadn't been invented yet in order to sleep with a nymph and then pop out a half-horse baby? Has that occurred to anyone?

This chapter is as long as it is because Chrysa's role in Sea of Monsters has two parts: before the quest, and after the quest. Then it's on to Titan's Curse.
Predictably, Tantalus threw a fit the next morning when neither Percy nor Annabeth nor Tyson showed up for breakfast. Chrysa only managed to calm him down by shoving a pastry into his mouth, which then proceeded to choke him in its escape. Before Tantalus could say another word, Chrysa calmly informed him that if he said another word on the subject, she would double the time his curse lasted every time he spoke.

Needless to say, Tantalus was predictably silent after that.

Clarisse left right after breakfast, summoning a Confederate iron-side ship manned by skeletal warriors to travel in. To everyone's surprise, she chose to travel alone.

Chrysa approached her right before she left.

"I don't know what the Oracle said that kept you from taking people with you," she said in a low voice, "but don't let that control you. The Oracle always speaks in riddles. If you run into each other, let them help you."

Clarisse frowned, but didn't speak against her.

The next few days were relatively boring in comparison. There were several more monster attacks, most of which occurred at the boundary line while Chrysa was tending Thalia's tree. As usual, her scent was the strongest one around. As long as she was on the outskirts of the camp instead of the center, she always attracted the monsters first.

Most of the time, she was alone, so she didn't hesitate to use the full force of her powers (and her full collection of Stygian iron weaponry) to kill her attackers with a near-terrifying efficiency. She had spent her adolescence in Tartarus. She knew how to deal with monsters.

Ten days after Percy, Annabeth, and Tyson had left camp, an Iris-message appeared in the middle of dinner. Percy was the one facing them, but they could see the backs of Luke, Annabeth, Tyson, and Grover. Annabeth and Grover were being held by some strange half-bear appeared to be on a cruise ship, probably docked in Miami. Everything weird ended up in Miami. Clarisse was nowhere in sight, nor was the Golden Fleece.

Percy uncapped his sword.
"This is no time for heroics, Percy," Luke said scornfully. "Drop your puny little sword, or I'll have you killed sooner rather than later."


"I did, of course," the treacherous demigod snarled. "I already told you that. I used elder python venom, straight from the depths of Tartarus."

"Chiron had nothing to do with it?" Percy pressed.

"Ha! You know he would never do that. The old fool wouldn't have the guts."

"You call it guts? Betraying your friends? Endangering the whole camp?"

Luke raised his sword.

"You don't understand the half of it. I was going to let you take the Fleece...once I was done with it."

Percy hesitated, then accused, "You were going to heal Kronos."

"Yes!" Luke exclaimed. "The Fleece's magic would've sped his mending process by tenfold. But you haven't stopped us, Percy. You've only slowed us down a little."

"And so you poisoned the tree, you betrayed Thalia, you set us up - all to help Kronos destroy the gods," Percy said. Though his focus was on Luke, he glanced towards the Iris-message where Dionysus, Tantalus, and Chrysa were sitting.

"You know that!" Luke growled. "Why do you keep asking me?"

"Because I want everybody in the audience to hear you," Percy said smugly.


He suddenly looked backwards to see the Iris-message of the entire camp dining pavilion. He gasped and stumbled back.

"Well," Dionysus said drily. "Some unplanned dinner entertainment."


Dionysus sighed.

"I suppose not."

"The Iris-message could be a trick," Tantalus suggested, but his attention was mostly on his cheeseburger, which he was trying to corner with both hands.

"I fear not," Dionysus said, looking distastefully at Tantalus. "It appears I shall have to reinstate Chiron as activities director. I suppose I do miss the old horse's pinochle games."

Tantalus grabbed the cheeseburger. It didn't bolt away from him. He lifted it from the plate and stared at it in amazement, as if it were the largest diamond in the world.

"I got it!" he crowed.
"We are no longer in need of your services, Tantalus," Dionysus announced. "Chrysa, if you would?"

Tantalus looked stunned.

"What? But..."

"Continuation of your punishment will be discussed in a committee," Chrysa said, trying desperately to keep the gleeful smile off her face. "You are to return to the Underworld."

She raised her hand and snapped her fingers.

"No!" Tantalus cried as be dissolved into mist. "But - Nooooooooooo!"

He tried desperately to bring the cheeseburger to his mouth, but it was too late. He disappeared and the cheeseburger fell back onto its plate. The campers exploded into cheering.

Luke bellowed with rage and slashed his sword through whatever it was creating the rainbow. The Iris-message disappeared.

Chrysa wiped her mouth with her napkin and stood from her seat, laying the napkin on the table.

"If you'll excuse me, Dionysus, it seems I need to make a short trip to Miami."

"Don't die," the god said. "And when you see Chiron, tell him he's expected back here immediately."

Chrysa saluted him, then turned on her heel to Apparate away.

She reappeared on the deck of the cruise ship, thankfully not in Luke's direct line of sight. Percy, Annabeth, Tyson, and the satyr were in the center of a group of a dozen armed spearmen.

"...never leave this boat alive," Luke told the group of four nastily.

"One on one," Percy challenged. "What are you afraid of?"

Luke curled his lip. The soldiers surrounding the four hesitated.

Before he could say anything, one of the bear-men burst onto the deck leading a pure-black pegasus stallion.

"Sir!" the bear-man called as he dodged a pegasus hoof. "Your steed is ready!"

Luke's eyes were focused on Percy.

"I told you last summer, Percy," he said. "You can't beat me in a fight."

"And you keep avoiding one," Percy shot back. "Scared your warriors will see you get whipped?"


"I'll kill you quickly," Luke said, raising his sword. The half-steel, half-celestial bronze weapon was a foot longer than Percy's Riptide, grey and gold and built by evil.

Luke whistled to one of his men, who threw him a round leather-and-bronze shield.

He grinned wickedly at Percy.
"Luke," Annabeth said, "at least give him a shield."

"Sorry, Annabeth," Luke replied. "You bring your own equipment to this party."

"Well, I suppose it's a good thing I'm here," Chrysa said, walking straight towards Luke, knives already in each hand.

The soldiers working for Luke parted before her, giving her a straight path to the confrontation.


Chrysa smiled sweetly at him.

"Given how much younger Percy is than you, I don't think it would quite be a fair fight. Don't you agree?"

"You're older than me," Luke pointed out.

"Yes, but we're both adults now, Luke. It's different. Percy's still a child."

"Hey!" the boy protested.

"Quiet, little cousin," Chrysa replied. "Besides, Luke, we haven't gotten to play with our new weapons yet. You have your little halfling sword, and I got a present for babysitting Tantalus. Have you yet felt the sting of Stygian iron?"

She drew the inky black blade from its sheath at her side.

"Do you like it?" she asked. "I'm thinking about calling it Melaina," she continued cheerfully, trying to delay the inevitable. Her shadows told her help was on the way.

Luke growled wordlessly and lunged at her. As soon as their blades met, he yelled, "Dinner, Oreius! Bon appetit!"

The bear-man holding Annabeth and the satyr laughed sinisterly.

"He-he! He-he!"

Chrysa continued to occupy Luke, knowing that it would only be another moment...

Whish!

A red-feathered arrow sprouted from Oreius' moth. With a surprised look on his hairy face, he crumbled to the deck.

"Brother!" the other bear-man wailed. He let the pegasus' reins slacken just enough for the stallion to kick him in the head and fly away free over Miami Bay.

For a split second, Luke and his guards were stunned as they watched the bear-twins dissolve into smoke.

Then there was a wild chorus of war cries and hooves thundering against metal. A dozen centaurs charged out of the main stairwell, just as the shadows warned her.

"Ponies!" Tyson cried with delight.
Chiron was amongst the dozen centaurs, but his relatives were nothing like him. There were centaurs with black Arabian stallion bodies, others with gold palomino coats, others with orange-and-white spots like paint horses. Some wore brightly colored t-shirts with Day-Glo letters that said Party Ponies: South Florida Chapter. Some were armed with bows, some with baseball bats, some with paintball guns. One had his face painted like a Native American warrior and was waving a large orange Styrofoam hand making a big Number 1. Another was bare-chested and painted entirely green. A third had googly-eye glasses with the eyeballs bouncing around on Slinky coils, and one of those baseball camps with soda can and straw attachments on either side.

They exploded onto the deck with such ferocity and color that even Luke was stunned. Chrysa took the opportunity to disarm him with the same maneuver he had once taught Percy, and then kicked him in the chest, throwing him back into the swimming pool.

Luke's warriors scattered. Chrysa couldn't blame them. Facing the hooves of a rearing stallion is scary enough, but when it's a centaur, armed with a bow and whooping it up and a soda-drinking hat, even the bravest warrior would retreat.

"Come and get some!" one of the party ponies yelled.

They let loose with their paintball guns. A wave of blue and yellow exploded against Luke's warriors, blinding them and splattering them from head to toe. They tried to run, only to slip and fall.

Chiron galloped towards Annabeth and the satyr, neatly plucked them off the deck, and deposited them on his back. Another pony grabbed Percy even as Luke crawled out of the pool.

"Attack, you foo...umph!" he yelled as Chrysa pushed him back under.

It was too late, however. An alarm bell went off below decks.

"Retreat, brethren!" Chiron yelled.

The palomino centaur holding Percy ordered, "Dude, get your big friend!"

Tyson was in the midst of throwing warriors off the side of the boat.

"Tyson!" Percy yelled. "Come on!"

Tyson dropped the two warriors he was about to tie into a knot and jogged after them. He jumped onto the centaur's back.

"Dude!" the centaur groaned. "Do the words 'low-carb diet' mean anything to you?"

Chrysa didn't hear any more, because she had just been scooped up into the arms of the green-painted centaur.

"Sorry, lady, no time to let you do this the easy way," the centaur apologized. "You might want to put that sword away though."

Chrysa somehow managed to sheathe her sword while being carried bridal-style by a bare-chested green centaur, just before they galloped over the guardrail and plummeted ten stories to the pavement. The centaurs all hit the asphalt with barely a jolt and galloped off, whooping and yelling taunts at the cruise ship as they raced into the streets of downtown Miami.

The streets and buildings began to blur as the centaurs picked up speed. In just a few minutes, they found themselves in a trailer park at the edge of a lake. The trailers were all horse trailers, tricked out...
with televisions and mini-refrigerators and mosquito nets. It was a typical centaur camp.

"Dude!" one of the party ponies said as he unloaded his gear. "Did you see that bear guy? He was all like: 'Whoa, I have an arrow in my mouth!'"

The centaur with the googly-eye glasses laughed. "That was awesome! Head slam!"

The two centaurs charged at each other full-force and knocked heads, then went staggering off in different directions with crazy grins on their faces.

"Could you please put me down now?" Chrysa asked the centaur holding her.

"Sure, lady. But hey, I can't say that I mind carrying a beautiful woman around," he said with a wink as he set her down on the ground.

"Thank you, but I'm engaged," Chrysa replied, before walking over to where Percy, Annabeth, and the satyr were sitting on a picnic blanket by Chiron.

"I really wish my cousins wouldn't slam their heads together. They don't have the brain cells to spare," the elder centaur sighed.

"Chiron," Percy said, looking stunned. "You saved us. And Chrysa. How'd you get there so fast?"

"Magic," Chrysa said, flicking her wrist so she could hold up her wand before putting it away again.

Chiron smiled drily.

"Well now, I couldn't very well let you die, especially since you've cleared my name."

"But how did you know where we were?" Annabeth asked.

"Advanced planning, my dear. I figured you would wash up near Miami if you made it out of the Sea of Monsters alive. Almost everything strange washes up near Miami."

"Gee, thanks," the satyr mumbled.

"No, no," Chiron said. "I didn't mean...Oh, never mind. I am glad to see you, my young satyr. The point is, I was able to eavesdrop on Percy's Iris-message and trace the signal. Iris and I have been friends for centuries. I asked her to alert me to any important communications in this area. It then took no effort to convince my cousins to ride to your aid. As you see, centaurs can travel quite fast when we wish to. Distance for us is not the same as distance for humans."

Percy glanced over to where three of the Party ponies were teaching Tyson how to use a paintball gun, then back at Chiron.

"So what now?" he asked. "We just let Luke sail away? He's got Kronos aboard that ship. Or parts of him, anyway."

"At least we know where the body is now?" Chrysa said. "That's honestly better than it being carted around everywhere. At least this way its evil is contained."

Chiron knelt, carefully folding his legs under him.

"I'm afraid, Percy, that today has been something of a draw. We didn't have the strength of numbers to take that ship. Luke was not organized enough to pursue us. Nobody won."
"But we got the Fleece!" Annabeth said. "Clarisse is on her way back to camp with it right now."

Chiron nodded, though he still looked uneasy.

"You are all true heroes. As soon as we fix up all your scrapes and bruises, you must return to Half-Blood Hill. The centaurs shall carry you."

"You're coming too?" Percy asked.

"Oh yes, Percy. I'll be relieved to get home. My brethren here simply do not appreciate Dean Martin's music. Besides, I must have some words with Mr. D. There's the rest of the summer to plan. So much training to do. And I want to see...I'm curious about the Fleece."

A thought struck Chrysa.

"Oh," she said. "You're hoping that the Fleece might fully heal Thalia."

"Hoping? I'm not sure. If Thalia were to return, Kronos would have a much better chance of getting a child of the Big Three on his side. You seem to be quite firm in your position, as does Percy. Thalia, however...Luke might be able to persuade Thalia to his side," Chiron sighed.

"Thalia wouldn't!" Annabeth protested.

"Luke did," Chrysa pointed out. "Don't get me wrong, I would love to meet my sister. I just don't know if that's possible."

Over by the campfire, Tyson let loose with his paintball gun. A blue projectile splattered against one of the centaurs, hurling him backward into the lake. The centaur came up grinning, covered in swamp muck and blue paint, and gave Tyson two thumbs up.

"Annabeth," Chiron said, "perhaps you and Grover would go supervise Tyson and my cousins before they, ah, teach each other too many bad habits?"

Annabeth met his eyes, and some kind of understanding passed between them.

"Sure Chiron," Annabeth said. "Come on, goat boy."

"But I don't like paintball," the satyr protested.

"Yes, you do," Annabeth said, hoisting Grover to his hooves and leading him off toward the campfire.

Chiron bandaged up a scrape on Percy's leg he'd received in the battle-that-wasn't.

"Percy, I had a talk with Annabeth on the way here. A talk about the prophecy."

"It wasn't her fault," Percy said. "I made her tell me."

His eyes flickered with irritation, but then his look turned to weariness.

"I suppose I could not expect to keep it secret forever," he sighed.

"So am I the one in the prophecy?" Percy asked.

Chiron tucked his bandages back into his pouch.
"I wish I knew, Percy. You're not yet sixteen. For now we must simply train you as best we can, and leave the future to the Fates."

"That's what it meant," Percy said.

Chiron frowned.

"That's what what meant?"

"Last summer. The omen from the Fates, when I saw them snip somebody's life string. I thought it meant I was going to die right away, but it's worse than that. It's got something to do with your prophecy. The death they foretold - it's going to happen when I'm sixteen."

Chiron's tail whisksed nervously in the grass.

"My boy, you can't be sure of that. We don't even know if the prophecy is about you."

"But there isn't any other half-blood child of the Big Three! Besides Chrysa." He looked at her quizzically. "Why weren't you the child of the prophecy?"

"I had my own prophecy," Chrysa replied. "Which I've already fulfilled, thank you very much. Already dealt with that war and death and destruction. Plus, I'm one of Hecate's Blessed, which throws off my half-blood status a bit. And I'm more of a three-quarters-blood anyway."

"You two are the only children of the Big Three that we know of," Chiron said calmly. "As Chrysa said, the Golden Fleece may be able to bring back Thalia."

"But Kronos is rising! He's going to destroy Mount Olympus!"

"He will try," Chiron agreed. "And Western Civilization along with it, if we don't stop him. But we will stop him. You will not be alone in that fight."

"I'm just a kid, Chiron," Percy said miserably. "What good is one lousy hero against something like Kronos?"

Chiron managed a smile.

"'What good is one lousy hero'? Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain said something like that to me once, just before he single-handedly changed the course of your Civil War."

He pulled an arrow from his quiver and turned the razor-sharp tip so it glinted in the firelight. "Celestial bronze, Percy. An immortal weapon. What would happen if you shot this at a human?"

"Nothing," Percy said. "It would pass right through."

"That's right," he said. "Humans don't exist on the same level as immortals. They can't even be hurt by our weapons. But you, Percy - you are part god, part human. You live in both worlds. You can be harmed by both, and you can affect both. That's what makes heroes so special. You carry the hopes of humanity into the realm of the eternal. Monsters never die. They are reborn from the chaos and barbarism that is always bubbling underneath civilization, the very stuff that makes Kronos stronger. They must be defeated again and again, kept at bay. Heroes embody that struggle. You fight the battles humanity must win, every generation, in order to stay human. Do you understand?"

"I...I don't know," Percy stammered.

"You must try, Percy. Because whether or not you are the child of the prophecy, Kronos thinks you
might be. And after today, he will finally despair of turning you to his side. That is the only reason he hasn't killed you yet, you now. As soon as he's sure he can't use you, he will destroy you."

"You talk like you know him," Percy said, confused.

Chiron pursed his lips.

"I do know him."

Percy stared dumbly at Chiron.

"Is that why Mr. D blamed you when the tree was poisoned? Why you said some people don't trust you?"

"Indeed."

"But, Chiron...I mean, come on! Why would they think you'd ever betray the camp for Kronos?"

Chiron looked very sad.

"Percy, remember your training. Remember your study of mythology. What is my connection to the Titan Lord?"

Percy looked confused as he shook his head.

"You, uh, owe Kronos a favor or something? He spared your life?"

"Percy," Chiron said, his voice impossibly soft. "The titan Kronos is my father."

"It's still dumb of people to automatically accuse you of being a traitor because of that," Chrysa scoffed. "In case anyone's forgotten, Hestia, Demeter, Hera, Hades, Poseidon, and Zeus are all Kronos' children as well. Are you both ready to leave, Chiron, Percy?"

"Indeed," Chiron said, standing up and helping Percy to his feet. "Are you travelling back with us, Chrysa, or taking your own way?"

"I'll be Apparating. Much faster, and I won't have to deal with your cousins' flirting. My lover and I are quite happy together, and he gets a bit angry when people flirt with me. I'll see you both at camp. Percy, I expect full disclosure on what happened on your trip. Oh, and your mother says hello, we've cleared your Meriwether Prep record, and she's already found a school for you for next year. Your mother also wanted me to tell you that you're grounded for leaving camp without telling her. I'm supposed to enforce a no-dessert rule for a week."

Before Percy could reply, she Apparated back to camp.

Dionysus met her on the front porch of the Big House.

"I assume everything worked out?" he asked.

"Clarisse is on her way with the Golden Fleece. Chiron is bringing Annabeth, Percy, Tyson, and the satyr back. They'll be here shortly. I'd meet Clarisse at the airport, but I don't know if she's flying into JFK or LaGuardia."

"Well, we might as well assemble on Half-Blood Hill, then. Would you summon everyone?"

Chrysa tapped her throat with her wand.
"Sonorus."

Her voice boomed across camp.

"Attention, all campers. If you are not wounded or tending to the wounded, please report to Half-Blood Hill while we await the return of the Fleece. We don't know how long it will take, so feel free to bring something to occupy yourselves."

She tapped her throat again.

"Quietus."

Dionysus began to move towards Half-Blood Hill, then stopped, sighed, and offered her his arm in a lackluster display of chivalry.

"Shall we?" he asked.

"Might as well," Chrysa replied, taking her half-brother's arm.

They were only on the hill for a short time before Chiron and the Party Ponies showed up with Annabeth, Percy, Tyson, and the satyr. It was only a few moments before a taxi pulled up at the base of Half-Blood Hill to release Clarisse with her precious cargo.

The moment Clarisse draped the Golden Fleece over the lowest bough of Thalia's tree, the moonlight seemed to brighten, turning from gray to liquid silver. A cool breeze rustled in the branches and rippled through the grass, all the way into the valley. Everything came in to sharper focus - the glow of the fireflies down in the woods, the smell of the strawberry fields, the sound of the waves on the beach.

Gradually, the needles on the pine tree started turning from brown to green.

Everyone cheered. It was happening slowly, but there could be no doubt - the Fleece's magic was seeping into the tree, filling it with new power and expelling the poison.

Chiron ordered a twenty-four/seven guard duty on the hilltop, at least until he could find an appropriate monster to protect the Fleece. He said he'd place an ad in Olympus Weekly right away.

In the meantime, Clarisse was carried on her cabin mates' shoulders down to the amphitheater, where she was honored with a laurel wreath and a lot of celebrating around the campfire. Everyone ignored the fact that Annabeth, Tyson, and Percy had been absent from camp after sneaking out for two weeks. Though technically, they did have the permission of a god, so it was somewhat approved.

The next morning, it was announced that the chariot races would go on as planned. Chrysa was pleased to see that Annabeth and Percy were working together again. They had recruited Tyson as their pit crew.

The morning of the chariot races, Chrysa had breakfast with Percy at the Poseidon table. He was fidgeting for most of breakfast, until Chrysa asked him, "What's wrong?"

"I saw Hermes last night," he blurted out. "We talked about Luke, and my dad, and messy immortal families, and then he gave me a letter from my dad."

"What did it say?" Chrysa asked calmly, sensing that was where Percy was going with that.

"Just two words," Percy said with a bitter laugh. "Brace yourself."
"The worst has yet to come," Chrysa said with a nod. "Kronos is biding his time until it's appropriate for him to rise. I suspect that he'll be able to return sometime next summer, but he won't be ready to attack until your sixteenth birthday - or close to it, anyway."

Percy nodded slowly.

"Hermes said that if I wanted an example of messy immortal families, to ask you. What did he mean?"

Chrysa was saved by the conch shell that announced the race was about to start.

"I'll talk to you after the race," she replied. "Good luck!" She pressed a kiss to the top of his head before hurrying off to her seat beside Dionysus'.

Percy and Annabeth won the race, with some help from Tyson. Chrysa was incredibly proud of Percy when he identified Tyson as his 'baby brother'. She barely managed to congratulate the three of them before they were whisked off by the rest of the campers to the laurel ceremony.

Unfortunately, she never had time for the planned chat with Percy. Right after the laurel ceremony, she received a message from her father with an assignment she needed to take care of. She quickly said goodbye to Chiron, Percy, Annabeth, and Tyson, noting that she would be back later, and then hurried off to Zeus cabin where she could shadow-travel in peace.

Once she was safely ensconced in her cabin, the shadows coalesced around her body, forming into what Hades had deemed her "work clothes": black jeans, black turtleneck, black boots, black gloves. The dark colors made it easier for her to blend in with the shadows. If she was going to be stalking her mark through them for the next few days, she'd need it.

It took four days before her mark and several of his close associates were dead, and the evidence of their elicit activities left where the police would find them. One quick call to emergency services, and Chrysa was free to shadow-travel back to the Underworld.

She was still in the shower, washing the blood and grime off, when Hades came in.

"If you're thinking about joining me, dear, you'd best wait until I'm clean," she called out to him.

"Actually, I have news for you. You're probably going to head straight to Camp after this," Hades said.

That caught Chrysa's attention.


"No, everyone's fine," Hades soothed through the glass door of the shower. "More than fine, actually. Chrysa...Thalia's awake."

Chrysa froze.

"Awake as in aware-awake or awake as in human-body-no-longer-a-tree awake?" she asked, hope rising in her breast.

"Awake as in human-body-no-longer-a-tree awake," Hades confirmed. "Do you want a camp shirt and jeans?"

"Please," Chrysa replied, returning to her scrubbing with vigor. It had been six years. She wanted to
meet her sister.

Thirty minutes later, she was knocking on the door to the Big House. It didn't matter that she hadn't slept in four days, or eaten since the day before. She had to see Thalia.

"In the back!" Chiron called.

Chrysa power-walked around the wraparound porch to where Chiron and Dionysus were playing pinochle.

"I see you heard the news," Chiron said, rising to greet her.

"It's true then?" Chrysa asked shakily.

"Thalia has returned to us," Chiron confirmed.

Chrysa had to steady herself on the railing of the porch at the news. She had believed Hades, but hearing Chiron confirm it allowed the realization to truly set in.

"Can I see her?" Chrysa asked. "Where is she?"

Chiron smiled at her.

"She was released from the infirmary this morning. Percy and Annabeth are showing her around camp," Chiron said calmly. "I believe you should wait until you can stand up properly before going to find her, however."

"I'm good," Chrysa insisted, releasing the railing and forcing her legs to bear her weight. Which way did they go?"

"Towards the cabins," Chiron replied, and before he can say anything more, Chrysa was running, running towards the cabins, running towards the sister she'd always blamed herself for not saving.

As soon as she crested the hill leading towards the cabins, she spotted three heads near Cabin One - two black and one blonde. She changed directions slightly and continued running toward them.

Chrysa had always been in relatively good shape. She had plenty of experience in running - both cross-country and sprinting - in running from Dudley as a girl. She'd also continued running during Quidditch training while at Hogwarts, and it was part of the exercise routine she'd kept up since receiving her memories. Granted, she had just enough immortal blood to stay naturally fit, but it was always more convenient to fight monsters - and run away from monsters - when you had the training to do so.

All three obviously heard her coming and turned around to meet her. Chrysa stopped several feet short of the trio.

Annabeth and Percy stood on either side of Thalia, but Chrysa barely noticed them. Her entire focus was on the black-haired, blue-eyed teenager.

"Thalia," she said quietly. "By the gods, Thalia."

The girl looked confusedly at Annabeth.

"Thalia, this is your sister, Chrysa Potter," Annabeth introduced, once it became clear that Chrysa was in no position to say anything more.
Chrysa took a few shaky steps toward her sister.

"I've wanted to meet you for so long," she said quietly. "I blamed myself, you know? You'd been out there, on your own, for all that time...I could have protected you. I could have gotten you to camp, if I'd just known you existed...."

"Annabeth and Percy have told me a lot about you," Thalia said slowly. "Annabeth says that you looked out for her and...and Luke, once you were here. She said that you took care of them since you couldn't take care of me."

"They were your family, weren't they?" Chrysa asked, tilting her head slightly. "You're my sister. That made them my family by extension. Family looks after one another."

Thalia ducked her head.

"I wouldn't know," she muttered.

Chrysa took another step forward so that they were face to face. She grabbed her sister's chin gently and tilted it up so that she could look into her eyes.

"I swear to you, Thalia, I swear on the River Styx that family is the most important thing in the world to me, and I will do everything in my power to ensure that you are safe and happy. Family is my first priority, as Percy can tell you. The fact that you're alive...that you're no longer a tree...it means the world to me."

There were tears in Thalia's eyes. Chrysa was sure that her eyes looked similar.

"Can...can I hug you?" Thalia asked in a small voice.

Chrysa opened her arms widely.

"I'd love that," she replied, just before receiving an armful of teenaged girl.

The rest of the summer flew by. Much as she would have liked to spend all her time with her newfound sister, Chrysa couldn't abandon Hades for the rest of the summer. Instead, she arranged to visit during the weekends so she could get to know Thalia.

Despite the embrace at their first meeting, building their relationship wasn't easy. Thalia had spent a third of her life on the streets and had a great mistrust for adults. Besides that, her entire world had changed as an instant. She woke up to find that six years had gone by and she was three (or so) years older. Her best friend was declared a traitor and tried to kill her. The little girl she had taken care of was older than she remembered being. She suddenly had a sister, a sanctuary, and a cousin. She suddenly had an offer for home and the potential to return to school. It was overwhelming for her.

Still, Chrysa, Annabeth, and Percy did their very best to help Thalia reintegrate to life. Chrysa stayed with her for the first few days, so that she wouldn't be alone at night or at mealtimes. She also shrunk both Zeus table and Poseidon table so that Percy and Thalia could push them up against each other and pretend they weren't alone.

By the end of the summer, Chrysa had arranged for Thalia and Annabeth to attend the same New York all-girls private school, the sister school to the all-boys school that Percy would be attending in the fall. Annabeth's family was moving to San Francisco, and Annabeth refused to go with them. Both girls would be staying in Chrysa's apartment, though they would mostly be on their own with Sally's supervision until Chrysa returned from the Underworld.
"I've already taken enough time off my job," she told Thalia apologetically. "My boss has been nice enough to give me this much time to spend with you. I can't leave an entire month early when I've already been at Camp so much of the summer. Especially after I took three days to go visit my new goddaughter. You should be fine though. You're physically fifteen, and while you may only remember twelve years of your life, living on the streets made you more mature than that. I think I can trust you to get yourselves to school and back, and not burn the building down. Besides, Percy and Sally are just a couple floors down, and I'm sure Sally would be willing to have you over for dinner every night until I'm back."

Though Thalia had pressed her about her job, Chrysa had never revealed more than the fact that her boss was a god who paid extremely well for her assistance. Hades was mostly responsible for Thalia being turned into a tree (except for the actual turning part) and Chrysa did not want to unleash the anger that would come with revealing that fact.

All things considered, their first explorations into sisterhood went extremely well.

Chapter End Notes

I really hated this ending. I just got kind of stuck on it and ended it quickly so I could move on to Titan's Curse. I know everyone's looking forward to it.
Chapter Summary

Everything was going great - until Percy got a distress call from the satyr just before winter break began. He had immediately run up two flights of stairs and burst into Chrysa, Annabeth, and Thalia's shared apartment.

"Grover's in trouble," he exclaimed as all three looked up from their homework.

"He's at a place called Westover Hall in Bar Harbor, Maine," Percy said. "He said that they're having a dance tomorrow night, and that would be the best chance to get them out without attracting attention from who - or what - ever it is that he's concerned about.

Chrysa sighed.

"All three of you, go pack. We leave tomorrow morning. Percy, ask for permission from your mother first. Tell her I'll be there and I'll try to have you back by Christmas. All of you make sure to pack for cold weather, slightly warmer weather, and battle. I have a feeling that this is going to get ugly quickly. And pack for quests as well. Just in case."

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Somehow, some way, Thalia's first semester back in school went relatively smoothly. Even with the help of the private tutors Chrysa had hired, she was still a couple of years behind her physical age in school, and several years behind her actual age. She was placed in the eighth grade alongside Annabeth and Percy, which was pretty good for someone who had dropped out of school to run away from home before the end of second grade. She had both Annabeth and Chrysa to help her with her schoolwork, and the scent-scrambling spells Chrysa had cast on all three demigod teenagers seemed to work to keep the monsters away.

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"Grover's in trouble," he exclaimed as all three looked up from their homework.

"Wait, I thought he was searching for Pan?" Thalia said, her nose scrunching up.

"No, after what happened with Polyphemus, the Council of Cloven Elders told him to spend a year as a keeper while he recovered from the 'trauma'," Annabeth replied. "Though it must be pretty serious if he's calling for backup.

"He's at a place called Westover Hall in Bar Harbor, Maine," Percy said. "He said that they're having a dance tomorrow night, and that would be the best chance to get them out without attracting attention from who - or what - ever it is that he's concerned about.

Chrysa sighed.
"All three of you, go pack. We leave tomorrow morning. Percy, ask for permission from your mother first. Tell her I'll be there and I'll try to have you back by Christmas. All of you make sure to pack for cold weather, slightly warmer weather, and battle. I have a feeling that this is going to get ugly quickly. And pack for quests as well. Just in case."

Less than twenty-four hours later, they were on the road to Bar Harbor, Maine. Chrysa had managed to not only enroll Percy, Thalia, and Annabeth in Westover Hall for the next semester, but she had also finagled an invitation for them to attend Westover Hall's annual end-of-term party while Chrysa spoke with the administration. It gave them a legitimate reason to be at Westover as well as allowed Chrysa to distract the administration while the younger three snooped around and found Grover and his charge.

"How did you manage that?" Percy asked in awe after Chrysa explained the plan while navigating the Manhattan streets.

"You'd be surprised what all you can get people to do when you're rich," Chrysa said drily. "I just threw the name 'Lady Amaranth Potter-Black' around, and the headmistress was much more amenable to my plans."

"We're not really attending next semester, are we?" Annabeth asked.

Chrysa scoffed.

"Of course not. You're attending for one day and one day only, and just to get Grover and the new person out of there. We're all powerful demigods who know about our heritage; we smell very obvious to monsters. I already took off the scent-scrambling spells. We should confuse whatever monster is there long enough to get the new person out, no matter how powerful they are."

It was an eight-hour drive from Manhattan to Bar Harbor. Due to an extremely liberal interpretation of traffic laws, Chrysa made it in six. Due to the time of year, and the miserable weather, it was already getting dark when they arrived.

Thalia wiped the fog off the car window and peered outside.

"Oh yeah. This'll be fun," she said drily.

"Don't get fingerprints on my windshield," Chrysa scolded mildly as she ran a critical eye over the military school. "This Porsche isn't being released to the general public for three more weeks."

Westover Hall looked like an evil knight's castle. It was built entirely of black stone, with towers and slit windows and a big set of wooden double doors. It stood on a snowy cliff overlooking a large frosty forest on one side and the grey churning ocean on the other. All that was missing was a moat and portcullis.

"We'd better get inside," Annabeth said. "Grover will be waiting."

Thalia looked at the castle and shivered.

"You're right. I wonder what he found here that made him send the distress call."

"Nothing good," Percy replied, staring up at the dark towers.

"As much as I hate to leave my nice warm car, we do have to brave the snow if we want to help," Chrysa pointed out.
All four grudgingly made their way outside. The wind was strong enough to blow straight through Chrysa's coat and warming charms like icy daggers.

"I'm having flashbacks to Scottish winters," Chrysa muttered as they made their way to the large oak doors.

The doors groaned open, and they stepped into the entry hall in a swirl of snow.

"Whoa," Percy said.

The hall was probably impressive to the younger three; it was relatively large and had walls lined with battle flags and weapon displays.

Chrysa sniffed haughtily.

"This has nothing on Hogwarts."

"Yeah, well, not all of us spent seven years at boarding school in a literal ancient Scottish castle," Thalia griped.

"There's something here," Percy said quietly. His hand was lingering next to the pocket where he kept his ballpoint pen/sword, Riptide. Thalia was rubbing her silver shield bracelet.

"There's a fight coming," he continued.

Annabeth started to say, "I wonder where-" when the doors slammed shut behind them.

"Oo-kay," Percy mumbled. "Guess we'll stay awhile."

There was dance music echoing from the other end of the hall.

"That way. I guess," Chrysa said, gesturing forwards. "You three are supposed to be visiting the dance. "I'm sure I'll find the principal eventually."

They had barely taken two steps before Chrysa felt the presence of two people approaching them from the shadows. Their footsteps were audible next, but it took several moments for the man and woman to step out of the shadows to intercept them.

Both had short grey hair and black military-style uniforms with red trim. The woman had a wispy mustache, while the man was clean-shaven. Both walked stiffly, with military precision.

"Well?" the woman demanded. "What are you doing here?"

"Visitors are not allowed at the dance!" the man exclaimed. "You shall be ee-jected!"

He had a strange accent that Chrysa could barely place - Farsi, maybe? He was tall, with a hawkish face. His nostrils flared when he spoke, and his eyes were two different colors - one brown, one blue - like an alley-cat's.

Chrysa stepped forward with a polite smile on her face.

"Hello, my name is Amaranth Potter-Black. I spoke on the phone with the headmistress - Mrs. Gottschalk? - about enrolling my sister and my two cousins here. She was kind enough to invite us to visit today, so that my sister and cousins could interact with the rest of the student body in a more relaxed setting while I tour the school. Where can I find Mrs. Gottschalk?"
"I am Mrs. Gottschalk," the woman said. "I apologize, Miss Potter-Black, for the inconvenience. The gymnasium is right through there, and that is where our students are congregating. Dr. Thorn and I will be happy to show you around the school."

Just then, there were more footsteps, and the satyr ran up, breathless.

"You made it!" he exclaimed. "You-

He stopped short when he saw the teachers. "Oh, Mrs. Gottschalk. Dr. Thorn. I, uh-

"What is it, Mr. Underwood?" the man said. His tone made it clear that he detested Grover. "Do you know these students? How can you, when they've just arrived?"

"Grover attended school with my cousin Percy two years ago," Chrysa volunteered smoothly. "They became friends there. His father was the one to recommend Westover Hall to me for my wards. Mr. Underwood, why don't you show Percy, Annabeth, and Thalia to the gym while your teachers give me the tour of the school?"

All four children quickly left the area, with several 'Yes, ma'ams' and 'Yes, sirs' and a few salutes. Chrysa nearly rolled her eyes, but it was a military academy, after all.

As soon as they were safely ensconced in the gym, she turned her charming smile back to Mrs. Gottschalk and Dr. Thorn.

"Shall we?" she offered.

"I am supposed to be chaperoning ze dance," Dr. Thorn said.

"Are you sure, Malcolm?" Mrs. Gottschalk asked. "After all, Miss Potter-Black has already offered to make an extremely generous donation to our school. We wouldn't want one of our best sponsors to be disappointed, would we?"

"Of course not," Dr. Thorn said smoothly. "Just a brief check-in with the other chaperones, and then we'll be off."

The pair of teachers escorted Chrysa to another entrance to the gymnasium, where Dr. Thorn stepped inside for a brief moment while Mrs. Gottschalk explained the levels of physical education offered at Westover Hall and what facilities they had to accompany them. Chrysa hummed and nodded in the correct places without truly listening, a skill she had developed after attending several pureblood and Ministry balls.

Unfortunately, Dr. Thorn managed to bow out when his cell phone rang halfway through the tour, citing 'urgent business'. Chrysa growled inwardly as he walked out of sight, the phone to his ear, even as Mrs. Gottschalk continued rambling about the premier education offered by Westover teachers.

Chrysa only lasted five minutes after Thorn disappeared before whipping out her wand and putting the chatty headmistress to sleep. One quick memory-modification later, and Mrs. Gottschalk was convinced that she completed the tour and saw Chrysa out before heading back to her own quarters for a nightcap.

Chrysa hurriedly made her way back to the gymnasium, but when she arrived, she found Thalia, Annabeth, and the satyr looking around frantically.

"Chrysa!" her sister explained, running up to her. "Percy and the two demigods are gone! So's Dr.
Thorn, and he's the monster!"

"I know," Chrysa said grimly. "I tried to keep him on the tour with me, but he managed to bow out a few minutes ago. I'm assuming he took the two demigods and Percy went after them?"

Thalia nodded.

"Probably got himself captured," Annabeth griped as she and the satyr joined them.

"Our priority is to get all three of them away from Dr. Thorn," Chrysa said calmly, pushing away the fear and anger that came with the revelation of Percy's stupidity. She was no stranger to these things. Emotions could be deadly if they came out at the wrong time. "Do you know what kind of monster he is?" she asked, directly the question towards the satyr.

He shook his head.

"No, but he's old, and powerful. Could you place his accent?"

"I think it was Farsi - Persian - but I'm not positive. Most of my travels have been in Europe and the US. But I'm definitely leaning towards Middle Eastern," Chrysa stated. "Unfortunately, I can't name any Middle Eastern monsters off the top of my head without drifting into Egyptian mythology, and that's a whole different ball game."

"Percy's contacting me," the satyr interrupted. "The empathy link I set up last summer...it's still active. He's pushing fear and danger through. I'm getting a few words - 'kidnapping', 'poisonous', and 'help'."

"He wouldn't be so panicked if they were still in the area. They're probably already outside," Chrysa deduced. "We have to move quickly. Grover, are you getting any sense of direction from Percy?"

The satyr closed his eyes for a moment, then pointed blindly.

"That's where the cliff is," Chrysa said in realization. "They've gone high-tech."

"What do you mean?" Thalia asked.

"They've either got a helicopter coming in, or Dr. Thorn can fly," Chrysa replied. "I'm leaning towards the former. Annabeth, get your cap on and get as close to Percy and the kids as you can. I'm going to need you to push them out of the way when we come in. Thorn's first instinct is going to be to go for them. Get them down, and then get ready to protect them. Grover, your job is to get the kids out of there. Them first, then Percy. Your priority is the kids. Even if someone took Percy's sword, he should have other weapons on him. Hopefully. Unless he's an idiot."

Thalia and Annabeth exchanged glances and then chorused, "He's an idiot."

Chrysa sighed good-naturedly.

"I know. He'll grow out of it."

She pulled out one of her celestial bronze knives and pressed it into Annabeth's hands.

"Try to get this to Percy. One weapon is better than none, even if he's more used to a sword than a knife. Riptide should have returned to his pocket by now, but just in case."

"Understood," Annabeth nodded, tucking the knife into her belt.
"Thalia, you're going to be the distraction. You've got your spear and shield. They're big. They're obvious. Use it. Keep the monster's attention. I'll be helping you for the most part, but I'm not as suited for big, obvious displays, so you'll take the lead," Chrysa instructed.

"Got it," Thalia said. She pulled the collapsible Mace canister from her back pocket and expanded it into a spear before tapping her silver bracelet to reveal the Aegis shield.

"We need to hurry," Chrysa said. "Come on."

She lead them swiftly out of the school and through a small stretch of woods to the cliff, her footsteps making no sound on the fallen snow. The tracks from the monster and demigod were obvious in the sea of white, so they knew they were going the right way.

"The tracks are fresh," she whispered. "Quickly now!"


The three demigods had their backs to the cliff and were facing Dr. Thorn. Percy stood protectively in front of the other two. From their position, they could see the spiked tail Dr. Thorn had.

"Of course he's a manticore," Thalia groaned.

Chrysa nodded to Annabeth, who put her magical Yankees cap on her head and disappeared. Chrysa could see the slight indents in the snow where Annabeth stepped as she snuck towards Percy.

"You have no idea what is happening, Perseus Jackson," Thorn said distastefully. "I will let the General enlighten you. You are going to do him a great service tonight. He is looking forward to meeting you."

"The General?" Percy asked. "I mean, whoâ€™s the General?"

Chrysa paled. 'The General' only referred to one person among the Titans. Kronos' right-hand and premier enforcer.

Thorn did not answer Percy, instead looking towards the horizon.

"Ah, here we are. Your transportation."

Before she saw the searchlight, Chrysa could sense the movement of the helicopter as it moved across the bay toward the cliff. Slowly, the rhythmic chopping of helicopter blades became audible.

"Where are you taking us?" the male demigod asked. His terrified voice sounded somewhat familiar, but Chrysa attributed it to all the children in crisis she'd known.

"You should be honored, my boy," Thorn said. "You will have the opportunity to join a great army! Just like that silly game you play with cards and dolls."

"They're not dolls! They're figurines!" the boy protested. "And you can take your great army and-"

"Now, now," Thorn cut him off warningly. "You will change your mind about joining us. And if you do not, well...there are other uses for half-bloods. We have many monstrous mouths to feed. The Great Stirring is underway."

"The Great what?" Percy asked.

It was wise of Percy to keep him talking. It gave Annabeth more time to sneak into place, and
distracted Thorn so he didn't notice her. Not that Percy knew that, but it worked out anyway.

"The stirring of monsters," Dr. Thorn said with an evil smile. "The stirring of all the ancient things. The worst of them, the most powerful, are now waking. Did you really think that it was just our Lord? All of the lost ones are awakening. The ancient Titans who once ruled the world. The lesser immortals who were forced out by younger deities. Monsters that have not been seen in thousands of years. They will cause death and destruction the likes of which mortals have never known. And soon we shall have the most important monster of all - the one that shall bring about the downfall of Olympus!" he gloated triumphantly.

Annabeth chose that moment to dive into Percy and the demigods, forcing them to the ground. The manticore was taken by surprise, and his first volley of poisonous spikes flew over the four demigods' heads, falling over the cliff into the sea.

Thalia and Chrysa moved in on Thorn while Grover moved around the edge of the clearing towards the others.

"For Zeus!" Thalia yelled, moving in with her spear. She jabbed at Thorn's head, but he snarled and swatted the spear aside. His hand changed into an orange paw, with long, nasty-looking claws that sparked against Thalia's shield as he slashed. Thalia managed to block the claws with Aegis, roll backward, and land on her feet.

Thorn launched another volley of missiles at Thalia. She shielded herself with Aegis, but the force of the projectiles knocked her to the ground. He attempted to launch himself at her, but was blocked by Chrysa as she stepped into his way.

He snarled at her.

"Well, if it isn't Zeus' little *poutana*. Still spreading your legs to everyone daddy needs to apologize to?" he sneered at her.

"My father has never had any input on my sex life, and I prefer to keep it that way," Chrysa replied primly before smoothly dodging a slashing claw.

This would be difficult. The manticore was deadly at both close range and long. In order to avoid his poisonous spikes, she would need to be close enough to him that he couldn't fire without risking himself, but doing so would bring her within range of his lion's claws. She had no desire to be mauled or poisoned. Hagrid's Blast-Ended Skrewts had been bad enough in her fourth year, and those were merely descendants of this creature. As the original, this one would be much deadlier.

Though speaking of Blast-Ended Skrewts, magic had been an effective deterrent against them...

Chrysa flipped her dagger into her left hand and twisted her right wrist to release her wand from its holster.

"*Impedimenta!*" she cast.Â The brilliant turquoise light shot out of her wand and hit the manticore, who was blasted backwards.

Thorn roared and began to change. His body grew larger as it morphed into that of a giant lion. His leathery, spiky tail whipped deadly thorns in all directions.

"A manticore!" Chrysa heard Annabeth exclaim from her position near the cliff. She risked a brief glance over to see Grover helping Annabeth up. Her Yankees cap was still on the ground.

"Who *are* you people?" the female demigod demanded, sounding somewhat hysterical. "And what
"A manticore?" the male demigod gasped. "He's got three thousand attack power and plus five to saving throws!"

Chrysa nearly snorted. She recognized what he was talking about from the time she'd spent playing with Nico. Apparently the young demigod was a fan of Mythomagic.

"Get down!" Annabeth yelled as the manticore turned suddenly. She knocked the new demigods to the ground while Percy knelt over them and activated the shield/wristwatch that Tyson had given him the previous summer. The thorns impacted the shield and forcibly dented the metal.

A second attack forced Grover to dive to the ground instead of getting the young demigods out of the way.

Thorn's third attack was launched at Chrysa, who barely had time to tap the black diamond on the tip of her lightning bolt bracelet, causing the shield to spiral outward in an explosion of Olympian silver.

"Yield!" the monster roared.

"Never!" Thalia yelled back from across the field. She charged the monster. Chrysa tried to aid her by sneaking up behind him while he was distracted by Thalia.

Suddenly, there was a thunderous noise, and a blinding light struck them both. Chrysa cried out in pain as the darkness was stripped away from her, staggering backwards into a snow drift. She couldn't see it, due to the shock of light, but she could sense the helicopter hovering in the air at the edge of the cliff. She heard the manticore swat Thalia away, and felt her weapons fly away from her as she fell into the snow.

"No!" Percy cried. Chrysa heard him run out - presumably to stand in front of her sister - as she desperately tried to blink the blindness from her eyes.

The manticore laughed.

"Now do you see how hopeless it is? Yield, little heroes."

Any answer they might have given was cut off by the clear call of a hunting horn blowing through the woods.

Chrysa resisted the urge to sag in relief as she forced herself to stand.

"No," Thorn said. "It cannot be..."

He was cut off by a streak of moonlight - which Chrysa assumed to be her blurred vision's interpretation of a silver arrow - that embedded itself in his shoulder. He staggered backward, wailing in agony.

"Curse you!" he cried.

Chrysa saw him launch blurs of black towards the woods, which were obvious against the white background of the snowy woods. Each black blur - she assumed they were his spikes - was intercepted by a silver streak midair.

The manticore pulled the silver arrow out of his shoulder with a howl of pain. His breathing was heavy. Percy's blurred figure swiped at him with his glowing bronze sword, but the manticore
dodged and slammed his tail into Percy's shield, knocking him aside.

The Hunters emerged from the woods then, dressed in silver coats and jeans, all armed with bows.

"The Hunters!" Annabeth cried.

One of the taller figures stepped forward with her bow drawn. She was tall, with coppery colored skin and a silver circlet braided into her dark hair. As her vision finally cleared, Chrysa recognized her. Though Leuke was the one who was most familiar with Zoë Nightshade, Chrysa had taken the opportunity to speak with her niece when she had accompanied Artemis to Olympus.

"Permission to kill, my lady?" Zoë asked, eyes not leaving the manticore.

Chrysa's eyes quickly searched the rest of the group, immediately finding the auburn-haired form of her half-sister Artemis.

Thorn wailed, "This is not fair! Direct interference! It is against the Ancient Laws!"

"Not so," Artemis replied. "The hunting of all wild beasts is within my sphere. And you, foul creature, are a wild beast." She looked over to her lieutenant. "Zoë, permission granted."

The manticore growled. "If I cannot have these alive, then I will have them dead!"

He leapt - but not towards Percy and Thalia, who stood before him. Instead, he leapt towards the young male demigod, who had been crawling away from the helicopter - which unfortunately put him far too close to the manticore.

"No!" the female demigod yelled, and she charged the monster. The bronze knife Chrysa had given to Annabeth was clutched in her fist.

Annabeth followed the girl, even as Chrysa moved to the boy's side and pulled him away from the battle.

"Get back, half-bloods!" Zoë said. "Get out of the line of fire!"

Neither girl was listening. The younger female demigod leapt onto the monster's back and drove her knife into its mane. Annabeth grabbed one of the manticore's flailing arms as it tried to dislodge the younger demigod and forced her own knife into its shoulder.

The monster howled, turning in circles with his tail flailing while Annabeth and the other demigod held on for dear life.

"Fire!" Zoë ordered.

"No!" Percy screamed.

"No!" The first of the Hunters' arrows caught the manticore in the neck. Another hit his chest. The manticore staggered backward, wailing, "This is not the end, Huntress! You shall pay!"

Before anyone could react, the monster, Annabeth and the other demigod still on its back, leapt over the cliff and tumbled into darkness.

Chrysa distantly heard Percy yell, "Annabeth!" but it was far overshadowed by the boy in her arms shrieking, "Bianca!"

"Bianca?" Chrysa whispered in horror, a cold feeling of dread spreading through her heart.
She looked down at the boy she had pulled away from the fighting, the boy that she still had one arm wrapped around. She recognized those black silky curls, olive skin, and green, green eyes. She raised a trembling hand to his cheek.

"Nico?" she asked, her voice breaking.

Recognition flared in the young demigod's eyes as soon as her skin touched his.

"Mamma?"

Chrysa could only nod as she pulled her son - her son - into a crushing embrace, even as her eyes remained fixed on the cliff that her daughter had just disappeared from. She did not know what magic Kronos had engineered to provide Thorn with such a rapid escape route, but she knew that they were no longer there.

There were shadows under the cliff. Thorn and his unwitting passengers had left them as soon as they had entered.

Their reunion was cut off by the sound of gunfire from the helicopter. Chrysa instinctively pushed Nico to the ground and held her shield above him. Most of the Hunters scattered, but Artemis looked calmly up to the helicopter.

"Mortals," she announced, "are not allowed to witness my hunt."

She thrust out her hand, and the helicopter exploded into a flock of black ravens, which scattered into the night.

Chrysa sent her shield back to bracelet form and helped Nico to his feet, keeping him wrapped protectively into her side as the Hunters advanced on them, even though they were the furthest from the group.

Zoë stopped short when she saw Thalia. "You," she said with distaste.

"Zoë Nightshade," Thalia replied, her voice trembling with anger. "Perfect timing, as usual."

Zoë scanned the rest of them, eyes widening as she spotted Chrysa.

"Three half-bloods, a satyr, and Lady Chrysocomê, my lady," she reported to Artemis.

"Yes," the Huntress said. "Some of Chiron's campers, I see."

"Annabeth!" Percy yelled. "You have to let us save her!"

Artemis turned to face Percy.

"I am sorry, Percy Jackson, but your friend is beyond help."

Percy tried to struggle to his feet, but two of the Hunters held him down.

"Let me go!" he demanded. "Who do you think you are?"

Zoë stepped forward as if to smack him.

"No," Artemis ordered. "I sense no disrespect, Zoë. He is simply distraught. He does not understand."
She looked directly at Percy.

"I am Artemis, Goddess of the Hunt," she announced.

"Um...okay," Percy stammered.

The satyr gasped, then knelt hastily in the snow and started yammering.

"Thank you, Lady Artemis! You're so...you're so...Wow!"

"Get up, goat boy!" Thalia snapped. "We have other things to worry about! Annabeth is gone!"

"And Bianca with her," Chrysa said quietly, pulling Nico closer to her side.

"They were brave maidens," Artemis said. "If they can be found, I will find them."

"Then why won't you let us go look for her?" Percy asked desperately.

"They're gone, Percy," Chrysa said dully. "You would've sensed it if they'd hit the water. I would have sensed it. But they disappeared from midair. I don't know what kind of magic they were using, but they're gone."

Her arms tightened around her son.

Nico looked up at her. There were tears falling down his face.

"Mamma, what's going on? Who are these people? Why would that-that thing take Bianca?" he asked, his breath hitching.

Chrysa pressed a helpless kiss to the top of his head.

"I don't know why she was taken, tesoro. But I promise you that I will do everything in my power to find your sister. I swear it, tesoro," she said.

"Um...Chrysa?" the satyr asked, causing her to look up at the others, all of whom were staring at her. "How do you know Nico di Angelo?"

Chrysa glanced down at her son, then back up to the group. She shrugged helplessly.

"He's my son."

Artemis seemed to make a quick decision.

"Zoë, we will rest here for a few hours. Raise the tents. Treat the wounded. Retrieve our guests' belongings from the school."

"Yes, my lady."

"Chrysocomê, come with me. I would like to speak with you," the goddess said, her voice carefully neutral.

"What about me?" Nico asked in a small voice.

Artemis considered the boy.

"Perhaps you can show Grover how to play that card game you enjoy. I'm sure Grover would be happy to entertain you for a while...as a personal favor to me?"
The satyr nearly tripped over himself getting up.

"You bet! Come on, Nico!"

Before Nico could move, Chrysa stepped smoothly away from her son over to the satyr and grabbed the front of his coat, tugging his face close to hers.

"Listen closely and listen well, Grover Underwood. I do not like you. You know this. I have tentatively forgiven you for your failure to protect Thalia, given that she has survived her ordeal. However, you also know how very close to being fried you were when she was lost six years ago. If anything - anything - happens to Nico on your watch, there is nothing stopping me from turning you into chevon. Capisce?"

The satyr gulped and nodded furiously.

Chrysa released him and smiled coldly.

"Good."

She turned back to her son with a much warmer smile and carded her fingers through his hair.

"Nico, darling, stay with Grover. I won't be far away. Don't go into the woods. If you need me, I'll be right over there," she said, pointing towards the cliff.

"Alright, Mamma," the boy said hesitantly, before walking away with the satyr.

Chapter End Notes

Bet no one thought I was going there, huh? Warning, there is only one more chapter written after this. I'm working on the chapter after that, but it's surprisingly difficult to turn your usually nice, family-oriented character into a psychotic assassin intent on revenge for the kidnapping of her daughter, who's willing to do anything and kill everyone who gets in her way. I may have to raise the rating simply for that chapter. It's not going to be pretty. Hope you enjoyed this chapter and the return of Nico and Bianca!
"Situation? I do not think you understand, Lady Artemis. As long as he has Bianca, Kronos holds the key to mine and my consort's participation in this war. My consort is the key to his wife's participation. His wife is the key to her mother's participation. We are all powerful in our own rights. If Bianca is used as a hostage against us, it could be extremely detrimental to the coming war. If the Titan Lord finds out that I am her mother and my consort is her father, there will be one thing and one thing only that he asks for in trade for Bianca's life."

Artemis raised an eyebrow.

"And what would that be?"

"My head," Chrysa said bluntly. "Probably the rest of me too, as long as I'm in pieces. You have never met the Titan Lord, Artemis. I can tell you that the familial talent for holding grudges did not start with the gods."

Artemis gestured to Chrysa, and they walked over to the cliff together, so that they were far enough away to avoid any eavesdroppers.

"Your son?" Artemis asked carefully. "I presume you refer to your children from your previous incarnation?"

Chrysa nodded stiffly.

"I presume your...consort...is the father?"

Chrysa glared at the goddess.

"I know that I have not been a virgin since long before you were born, but do not presume that I give myself away easily! My consort is the only person who has touched me since long before you were born, godling."

The goddess held up her hands in surrender, obviously recognizing how tense Chrysa was. The demigoddess was glad. Normally a goddess like Artemis wouldn't put up with such an insult, but apparently having her child kidnapped in front of her granted her some leeway.

"I know that you are stressed because of the situation-"

Chrysa scoffed.

"Situation? I do not think you understand, Lady Artemis. As long as he has Bianca, Kronos holds the key to mine and my consort's participation in this war. My consort is the key to his wife's participation. His wife is the key to her mother's participation. We are all powerful in our own rights. If Bianca is used as a hostage against us, it could be extremely detrimental to the coming war. If the Titan Lord finds out that I am her mother and my consort is her father, there will be one thing and one thing only that he asks for in trade for Bianca's life."
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"You are concerned that he is rising?" Artemis questioned, brow furrowed.

"I know he is," Chrysa replied. "I can sense it. Besides Rhea, and possibly even including Rhea, I am the person who knew him best. I can sense the malevolence of his presence if I pass near Tartarus. I can see his hand in organizing the schemes of late. Besides, my consort and I confirmed it the summer before last: the main part of his body is not where we left it. The chains were melted. The doors were broken and shattered. He is coming. I would recommend you speak with Percy Jackson. He was with Thorn longer than I. Thorn - the manticore - seemed to be monologuing. We should know what information he revealed.

Artemis nodded. "I will do so. Will you come with me?"

Chrysa sighed.

"They're going to have questions. No one knows about my past lives. But I can't tell them anything. Not until Bianca is safe. There's a spy at camp, but I don't quite know who. I'm only partially a goddess."

Artemis tilted her head in puzzlement, before something dawned on her and her face cleared.

"Patron goddess of spies," she said in realization.

Chrysa simply nodded.

"Careful what you say. There are ears everywhere, and not all of them are mine."

Together they went back to the camp site that the Hunters had constructed in minutes. Seven large tents, all of silver silk, curved in a crescent around one side of a bonfire. A dozen white wolves patrolled the camp like guard dogs. The Hunters walked among them and fed them treats, completely unafraid, but Percy, Grover, and Nico stood close to the tents. Falcons watched the camp from the trees, eyes flashing in the firelight, doing their own job as guards. The weather had calmed, and the lack of wind and snow made it a much more pleasant campsite.

"If you would collect the boy, I would bring Zoë to join us," Artemis said quietly.

Chrysa nodded her assent, then stated, "I will be bringing my son with me as well. With his sister snatched before his eyes...he should not be alone."

"Very well," the goddess nodded. "The largest tent is mine. I will meet you there."

She drifted off to the left to collect her lieutenant. Chrysa moved towards the boys.

All three had their bags with them now, so Chrysa assumed that the Hunters had managed to collect them from inside the school. Nico was rummaging through his and pulling out the Mythomagic cards and figurines.

"Big collection," she heard Percy comment.
Nico smiled, though it was weaker than his usual grin.

"I've got almost all of them, plus their holographic cards. Well, except for a few of the really rare ones."

"You've been playing this game for a long time?" Percy asked.

"Just this year," Nico stated. "Before that..." he said as his eyebrows knitted themselves together.

"What?" Percy asked.

"I forget. That's weird."

"Nico," Chrysa said quietly.

The boy's face instantly shot towards her, and his body followed not far behind. He crashed into her arms with the force of a missile, and Chrysa barely managed to keep upright.

"Mamma," he said into her chest.

She kissed the top of his head, then looked over at her cousin.

"Percy, if you would come with me, the Lady Artemis wishes to speak with you."

"Chrysa, what's going on?" Percy asked.

Chrysa sighed.

"I can't answer that, Percy. You're just going to have to trust me for a little while.

Percy looked troubled, but he nodded anyway and followed her to the last tent in the crescent. The inside of the tent was warm and comfortable. Silk rugs and pillows covered the floor. In the center, a golden brazier of fire seemed to burn without fuel or smoke. Artemis was seated on the far side of the tent, with Zoë Nightshade to her right and a white-haired girl who looked to be a bit younger than Artemis to her left. Behind the goddess, on a polished oak display stand, was her huge silver bow, carved to resemble gazelle horns. The walls were hung with animal pelts: black bear, tiger, jaguar, leopard, and more. A deer with glittering fur and silver horns sat with its head in Artemis' lap and its body between the goddess and the white-blond Hunter.

Chrysa took a closer look at the white-blond Hunter, whose hair was braided back from her face, revealing her familiar green eyes.

"Rhanis," she greeted in surprise. "I haven't seen you in...a very long time. It's been what, seven years?"

"Something like that," the Oceanid replied. "It was your first solstice back on Olympus. It's good to see you again, though I regret the circumstances."

Chrysa sighed. "As do I." She took a seat across from Artemis and pulled Nico and Percy down to either side of her.

Artemis stared intently at Percy. He shifted uncomfortably.

"Are you surprised by my age?" she asked him.

"Uh...a little."
"I could appear as a grown woman, or a blazing fire, or anything else I want, but this is what I prefer. This is the average age of my Hunters, and all young maidens for whom I am patron, before they go astray."

"Go astray?" Percy asked, brow furrowed at the terminology.


"Oh," Percy said.

Zoë was glaring at Percy from Artemis' right. Percy shifted uncomfortably once more.

"You must forgive my Hunters if they do not welcome you," Artemis said. "It is very rare that we would have boys in this camp. Boys are usually forbidden to have any contact with the Hunters. The last one to see this camp..." She looked at Zoë. "Which one was it?"

"That boy in Colorado," Zoë said. "You turned him into a jackalope."

"Ah yes," Artemis nodded, satisfied. "I enjoy making jackalopes. At any rate, Percy, I've asked you here so that you might tell me more of the manticore. Chrysa has repeated some of the things the monster said, but she was not there the entire time. I'd like to hear the story from you."

Percy hesitated and glanced at Chrysa, who nodded.

"He didn't really say anything until we got to the cliff. Just yelling at us. Once we got to the cliff, he pulled out a phone and used some sort of walkie-talkie mode to say that the package was ready to deliver. I couldn't hear what the other side replied. I considered jumping off the cliff with the di Angelos, but Thorn said he'd kill me before we reached the water, but we were unfortunately wanted alive if possible. Bianca said that she and Nico didn't have any family, so Thorn wouldn't get a ransom...?" he questioned, looking at Chrysa.

"It's complicated," she said. "To make a long story short, Nico and Bianca's memories were...clouded. They wouldn't remember me until I touched them. It was an enchantment for their own protection.

Percy's eyebrows knitted together.

"Does that mean their father's not a god?"

"No," Chrysa sighed dully. "Their father is a god. That's how the monsters found them so easily. They're very powerful."

Percy nodded in understanding and continued the story.

"Thorn said that we'd be meeting his employer soon enough, and then Nico and Bianca would have a new family. I said he worked for Luke, but he didn't look happy about that. He said that I had no idea what was happening, and he would let the General enlighten me. He said I was going to do him a great service tonight, and that he was looking forward to meeting me. Then the helicopter showed up. Nico asked where Thorn was taking us, and Thorn told him that he should be honored, because he would have the opportunity to join a great army, just like his Mythomagic game. Nico argued with him, but Thorn said that he would change his mind about joining them, and if he didn't, there were other uses for half-bloods, and that the Great Stirring was underway."

"I was there by that point," Chrysa said quietly. "When Percy asked what the 'Great Stirring' was,
he said that it was, and I quote, "the stirring of monsters, the stirring of all the ancient things. The worst of them, the most powerful, are now waking. Did you really think that it was just our Lord? All of the lost ones are awakening. The ancient Titans who once ruled the world. The lesser immortals who were forced out by younger deities. Monsters that have not been seen in thousands of years. They will cause death and destruction the likes of which mortals have never known. And soon we shall have the most important monster of all - the one that shall bring about the downfall of Olympus!" After that, we attacked."

Artemis put her hand thoughtfully on her silver bow.

"I feared this was the answer," she said gravely.

Zoë sat forward.

"The scent, my lady?"

"Yes."

"What scent?" Percy asked.

"Things are stirring that I have not hunted in millennia," Artemis murmured. "Prey so old I have nearly forgotten."

She stared intently at Percy. "We came here tonight sensing the manticore, but he was not the one I seek. Tell me again, exactly what Dr. Thorn said."

"Um, 'I hate middle school dances,'" Percy said.

"No, no, after that."

"He said somebody called the General was going to explain things to me."

Zoë's face paled. She turned to Artemis and started to say something, but Artemis raised her hand.

"Go on, Percy," the goddess said.

"Well, then Thorn was talking about the Great Stir Pot -"

"Stirring," Chrysa corrected.

"Yeah. And he said, 'Soon we shall have the most important monster of all - the one that shall bring about the downfall of Olympus."

Artemis was so still that she could have been a statue.

"Maybe he was lying?" Percy offered weakly.

Artemis shook her head.

"No. He was not. I've been too slow to see the signs. I must hunt this monster."

Zoë looked like she was trying very hard not to be afraid, but she nodded.

"We will leave right away, my lady."

"No, Zoë. I must do this alone."
"But, Artemis..."

"This task is too dangerous even for the Hunters. You know where I must start my search. You cannot go there with me."

"A...as you wish, my lady."

"I will find this creature," Artemis vowed. "And I shall bring it back to Olympus by the winter solstice. It will be all the proof I need to convince the Council of the Gods of how much danger we are in."

"You know what the monster is?" Percy asked.

Artemis gripped her bow.

"Let us pray I am wrong."

"Can goddesses pray?" Percy asked.

A flicker of a smile played across Artemis' lips.

"Before I go, Percy Jackson, I have a small task for you."

"Does it involve getting turned into a jackalope?" Percy asked warily.

"Sadly, no. I want you to escort the Hunters back to Camp Half-Blood. They can stay there in safety until I return."

"What?" Zoë blurted out. "But, Artemis, we hate that place. The last time we stayed there..."

"Yes, I know," Artemis said. "But I'm sure Dionysus will not hold a grudge just because of a little, ah, misunderstanding. It's your right to use Cabin Eight whenever you are in need. Besides, I hear they rebuilt the cabins you burned down."

Zoë muttered something about foolish campers.

"I would ask something of you as well, Percy, and of you, Zoë Nightshade and Rhanis Oceanis," Chrysa said gravely. "While Lady Artemis hunts this monster, I also must hunt. I leave to hunt for the monster that has stolen my daughter. I will not rest until she is returned. Until that point, I ask of you to escort my son to Camp, and guard him while you remain there."

"What?" Nico demanded. "You're leaving me?"

"I have to find your sister, Nico," Chrysa soothed. "I am the only one who can. You will be safe at Camp, with Percy and Thalia and the Hunters."

Rhanis bowed her head to Chrysa and intoned, "As it remains in my power, so shall it be done. You have my oath."

"And mine," Zoë said.

"And mine," Percy added, looking slightly out of his depth.

"I thank you," Chrysa replied formally, bowing her head to each of them in turn.

"How are we supposed to get to camp?" Percy asked.
Artemis closed her eyes.

"Dawn is approaching. Zoë, Rhanis, break camp. You must get to Long Island quickly and safely. I shall summon a ride from my brother."

Neither Zoë nor Rhanis looked happy about the idea, but both stood and left the tent, leaving Percy, Nico and Chrysa alone with the twelve-year-old goddess.

"So," Percy said glumly, "we're getting a ride from your brother, huh?"

Artemis' silver eyes gleamed.

"Yes, boy. You see, Bianca di Angelo is not the only one with a younger brother. It's time for you to meet my irresponsible twin, Apollo."

"My favorite thing," Chrysa said drily. "Dealing with flirts before dawn."

Artemis raised an eyebrow.

"He flirts with you as well? Your consort does not deter him?"

"He doesn't go out of his way to flirt with me, but he does it all the same. It seems to be his default setting. I can see how he has so many lovers," Chrysa said as they exited the tent. She still had her arm wrapped tightly around Nico, relishing the small time she had left with him before she would leave on her self-imposed quest. Percy followed behind them and immediately shivered.

"H-how long 'til we leave?" he asked, teeth chattering.

"Not long," Artemis assured. "Dawn is coming."

The Hunters broke camp as quickly as they set it up. Percy stood shivering in the snow with the satyr and Thalia, while Artemis stared into the east. Chrysa moved off to the side with Nico.

"Do you have to leave?" he asked sadly.

"I must, tesoro. I go to find your sister. I will find her, Niccoló. I swear it on the River Styx."

Thunder rumbled to confirm her claim.

Nico's brow furrowed.

"What does that mean?"

Chrysa smiled at him.

"The River Styx is the boundary of the Underworld. Styx, the river goddess, is also the goddess of oaths. An oath sworn on the River Styx has to be honored, or there will be dire consequences. For mortals, the consequence is usually death. For gods...well, the Lady Styx is rather vengeful and is always willing to extract some form of punishment from oathbreakers."

Nico's eyes widened with fright.

"I don't want you to get hurt if you can't find Bianca!"

"I will find your sister, tesoro. Do not worry about that. I want you to focus on staying safe. Don't leave camp. Learn all you can. Don't worry that your father won't claim you immediately; he can't
yet. Listen to Percy and Thalia, they'll protect you. If Percy and Thalia fight, don't get in the middle. I'll be back as soon as I can."

She embraced him tightly and kissed the top of his head. He returned the embrace just as fiercely.

Shortly afterwards, the sky began to lighten.

"About time," Artemis muttered. "He's so-o-o lazy during the winter."

"You're, um, waiting for sunrise?" Percy asked.

"For my brother. Yes."

Percy looked confused.

"It's not exactly as you think," Artemis said.

"Oh, okay," Percy said, relaxing a bit. "So, it's not like he'll be pulling up in a -"

There was a sudden burst of light on the horizon, accompanied by a blast of warmth. Chrysa turned away from the light and pulled Nico with her, protecting his face from the brightness of Apollo's chariot.

"Don't look," Artemis advised. "Not until he parks."

When the light finally died, Chrysa turned around to see a red convertible Maserati Spyder glowing as it sat beside the cliff. The snow had melted around the car in a perfect circle.

Apollo stepped out of the car, dressed in jeans, loafers, and a sleeveless t-shirt. He had sandy hair and outdoorsy looks, similar to Luke's, but smiled brightly instead of sneering. He also appeared younger than Luke, at only seventeen years old.

"Wow," Chrysa heard Thalia mutter. "Apollo is hot."

"He's the sun god," Percy said.


"Little sister!" Apollo called. "What's up? You never call. You never write. I was getting worried!"

Artemis sighed. "I'm fine, Apollo. And I am not your little sister."

Apollo pouted.

"Who says I was talking to you? I could have been talking to Chrysocomê."

"You weren't," Artemis and Chrysa said in unison.

Apollo continued pouting.

"Hey, I was born first!"

"We're twins!" Artemis retorted. "How many millennia do we have to argue..."

"So, what's up?" Apollo asked, interrupting their age-old argument. "Got the girls with you, I see. You all need some tips on archery?"
Artemis gritted her teeth.

"I need a favor. I have some hunting to do, alone. I need you to take my companions to Camp Half-Blood."

"Sure, sis!" Apollo agreed, before raising his hands in a stop everything gesture. "I feel a haiku coming on."

The Hunters all groaned. Apollo cleared his throat and held up one hand dramatically.

"Green grass breaks through snow.
Artemis pleads for my help.
I am so cool."

He grinned at them, obviously waiting for applause.

"That last line was only four syllables," Artemis pointed out.

Apollo frowned.

"Was it?"

"Yes. What about I am so big-headed?"

"No, no, that's six syllables. Hmm."

"May I suggest Off to Camp Half-Blood?" Chrysa offered.

Apollo nodded slowly.

"That could work. But I don't think it really shows my awesomeness enough."

"But this is an action haiku," Chrysa said. "You can't have the first two lines be action lines and leave the third as a descriptor."

Apollo sighed.

"Alright then. I'll talk about my greatness another day. And now, sis. Transportation for the Hunters, you say? Good timing. I was just about ready to roll."

"These demigods will also need a ride," Artemis said, pointing to Percy, Thalia, and the satyr. "Some of Chiron's campers, and Chrysocomê's son."

Apollo's eyes immediately went to Nico.

"Is he..."

"Yes," Chrysa cut him off.

"And you're..."

"Yes," Chrysa said.

"Are you..."
"All of this will be discussed in council on the solstice," Chrysa said firmly. "It is not relevant right now, except for the fact that you are taking him to Camp Half-Blood."

Apollo shrugged. "No problem."

His attention turned to the other campers.

"Let's see...Thalia, right? I've heard all about you."

Thalia blushed.

"Hi, Lord Apollo."

"Zeus' girl, yes? Makes you my half-sister. Used to be a tree, didn't you? Glad you're back. I hate it when pretty girls turn into trees. Man, I remember one time..."

"Brother," Artemis interrupted. "You should get going."

"Oh, right," he said. Then he looked at Percy, and his eyes narrowed. "Percy Jackson?"

"Yeah. I mean...yes, sir."

Apollo studied him wordlessly, before rubbing his hands together and saying, "Well! We'd better load up, huh? Ride only goes one way - west. And if you miss it, you miss it."

"Cool car," Nico piped up.

"Thanks, kid," Apollo said.

"But how will we all fit?" Nico pointed out.

"Oh," Apollo said, seeming to notice the problem for the first time. "Well, yeah. I hate to change out of sports-car mode, but I suppose..."

He took out his car keys and beeped the security alarm button. Chirp, chirp.

For a moment, the car glowed brightly again. When the glare died, the Maserati had been replaced by a Turtle Top shuttle bus.

"Right," he said. "Everybody in."

Zoë ordered the Hunters to start loading. She picked up her camping pack, and Apollo said, "Here, sweetheart. Let me get that."

Zoë recoiled, and her eyes flashed murderously.

"Brother," Artemis chided. "You do not help my Hunters. You do not look at, talk to, or flirt with my Hunters. And you do not call them sweetheart."

Apollo spread his hands.

"Sorry. I forgot."

Only millennia of mediating arguments between six thousand brothers and sisters allowed Chrysa to see the teasing glint in his eyes. Apollo knew exactly what he was doing. He was simply being a little brother and annoying his sister as a minor revenge for her ignoring him.
"Hey, sis," Apollo said. "Where are you off to anyway?"

"Hunting," Artemis said. "It's none of your business."

"I'll find out. I see all. Know all."

Artemis snorted.

"Just drop them off, Apollo. And no messing around!"

"No, no! I never mess around," Apollo said, looking faux-solem and holding his hand up like a Boy Scout.

Artemis rolled her eyes, then looked at the group preparing to depart.

"I will see you by winter solstice. Zoë, you are in charge of the Hunters. Do well. Do as I would do."

Zoë straightened.

"Yes, my lady."

Artemis knelt and touched the ground as if looking for tracks. When she rose, she looked troubled. "So much danger," she said. "The beast must be found."

She sprinted toward the woods and melted into the snow and shadows.

Apollo turned and grinned, jangling the car keys on his finger.

"So," he said. "Who wants to drive?"

"With my son in your safe-keeping, it had better be you, Apollo," Chrysa said, a hint of warning in her voice. "Do not underestimate what I will do to you if a hair on his head is harmed."

Apollo clutched the keys in his hand.

"Noted. Alright, everybody on the bus!"

Chrysa leaned down slightly so she was closer to Nico's eye level. He was less than a foot shorter than her, so it wasn't difficult, except for the fact that he seemed intently focused on the ground.

"Look at me, Niccolò," she said softly, but firmly, placing her finger under his chin and tilting it up so that his face was to hers. When he finally looked at her, the fear in his eyes was plain.

"There is nothing in this world that I love more than you or your sister, my treasure," she said quietly. "I love you, and I promise I will come back to you, with your sister in tow. Then, perhaps, we shall go see your Papà and celebrate Natale together. How about that?"

Nico nodded, even as he sniffled slightly.

"I - I'd like that, Mamma."

Chrysa smiled sadly as she embraced him one last time before ushering him onto the bus. The Hunters had seated themselves as far away from Apollo as possible, leaving Nico, Percy, Thalia, and the satyr in the front seats. Nico sat with Percy behind the driver's seat while Thalia and the satyr sat across from them.
To Chrysa's surprise, Rhanis was seated directly behind Nico, with Zoë seated beside her.

At Chrysa's raised eyebrow, Zoë said, "You asked us to look after your son, Lady Chrysocomêª. We shall do our best to do so."

Chrysa smiled and bowed her head in their direction as a silent thanks.

"Everyone not leaving on the Sun Express needs to vacate the vehicle!" Apollo called out. "It's time to get this thing on the road!"

Chrysa pressed another kiss to Nico's brow as she hugged him tightly, hugged Percy and Thalia, and left the bus. She was forced to turn away as the sun bus brightened as it took off, but she did not leave until it was gone, speeding away to Camp Half-Blood.

She stepped back into the shadows of the woods and cloaked herself in darkness.
Chapter Summary

There was nothing that mattered more to her than Bianca at the moment. All sides of her - Leuke, Maria, and Amaranth - agreed on that. Her children would always be her first priority, and woe to anyone who stood in her way.

Amaranth Potter may have taken the high road in her defeat of Voldemort and the Death Eaters, but the eighteen years she had lived before regaining the memories of her past lives paled in comparison to the millennia she had spent as Leuke.

Not even Zeus was willing to stand in the way of Leuke on the warpath.

Her usual domain might have been shadows and secrets, which made her the patroness of spies, but there was little difference in spies and assassins, as many enemies had learned to their detriment. There were many Titans whose names had never been recorded, as they had been killed on Kronos' orders before the rise of the gods. The Greeks had never known their names needed to be recorded.

Chapter Notes

a.k.a. Chrysa Goes Psycho

See the end of the chapter for more notes

She took a deep breath in, then allowed her bulky winter clothing to melt into shadow, only to be replaced by Leuke's familiar armor. The black assassin's armor had not been used in battle since Leuke had called it to her on the day of her death. Hades had taken it from her corpse, had it repaired, and returned it to their shared rooms in his palace.

After Leuke's death, Hades had changed rooms, unable to continue sleeping in the place his beloved had once occupied. Everything had remained exactly as it had on the day of Leuke's death until Chrysa ventured into the rooms once more.

The armor was lighter than most; only the breastplate was true Stygian iron, while the rest of the armor was a combination of katobleps leather, Stygian iron chain mail, and drakon skin. The leather was primarily padding to keep the metal in the armor from making noise. It was entirely black, from the leather to the metal, and covered her from her neck to her split-toe boots. Fingerless gloves allowed her full usage of her fingers, though her wrists and forearms were encased in drakon-skin vambraces. The entire armor was streamlined, with no extra fabric loose anywhere that could become caught on something.

There were several Stygian iron knives in hidden sheaths around her body, not counting those that she could call instantly through the shadows. Her sword was not with her; Stygian iron was hard to enchant into other forms, and it was too easy for the sword get caught on things for her to wear it during her...specialty assignments. She also had several more modern weapons - or at least, weapons
that weren't ancient Greek. She had developed a great fondness for throwing knives, stars, and needles, all of which were easily concealed in special sheaths in her armor. All were also poisoned, and since Chrysa had gone to Akhlys for the poison, it was unlikely there was a cure.

She also had a gun that was enchanted to have unlimited Stygian iron bullets, but she preferred not to use it. Guns could be so clumsy and random. Blades were more elegant weapons from a more civilized age.

Still, she was an armored figure dressed entirely in black. Combined with the facemask that Chrysa currently wore around her neck, it was an altogether terrifying ensemble.

Chrysa closed her eyes and took a deep breath.

"I walk with Death this night," she whispered, before allowing herself to fall back into the shadows.

Noise and sensation accosted her senses as the information from every shadow in the world entered her mind at the same moment. With the ease of long practice, Chrysa separated herself from the noise, though it was much harder now as a mortal than it had ever been as a goddess. Even as an immortal demigod, she was still human and mentally was not as capable of handling the constant stream of information that the shadows would present her with given the opportunity.

Now detached enough from the original information superhighway to think, Chrysa began to sift through the flow, looking for information - any information - on where Bianca could possibly be.

There was nothing that mattered more to her than Bianca at the moment. All sides of her - Leuke, Maria, and Amaranth - agreed on that. Her children would always be her first priority, and woe to anyone who stood in her way.

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Leuke had continued her side-duty for Zeus, which was why the Titan Rebellion, composed mainly of the second- and third-generation Titans who had lost many rights when the gods took over, had never fully taken off. Leuke's murder of their leaders - though there was no evidence as to her involvement - had been quick and permanent. The Greeks had never known it had occurred, and continued to refer to Helios and Selene for many centuries after their deaths, despite the fact that Apollo and Artemis had already taken up their roles as deities of the sun and moon.

"Where did Thorn take Bianca?" Chrysa asked the shadows.

Images flashed through her mind almost too fast to comprehend.

Thorn with Bianca and Annabeth clinging to him, calling out for someone to transport them...the shadows coming up around them and pulling them through...the seemingly abandoned warehouse where they landed...

It only took that before Chrysa was falling through the shadows, the only indication of movement the
sudden pressure on her skin and the chilling cold that struck her to the bone. It was a sensation she had felt many times before.

She arrived in the old warehouse still cloaked in shadow, though she wouldn't be for long. There were monsters here, many, many monsters. There were nearly a dozen demigods as well, walking in between the monsters, conversing amicably with their leaders. Some of them were faces she recognized from Camp Half-Blood the previous two summers.

"Traitors," Chrysa hissed under her breath. An unintentional flick of her powers marked them as traitors for all (immortals) to see. The demigods had betrayed their own, had betrayed their parents and their gods, and they would suffer the consequences.

Every demigod shivered simultaneously as their auras were permanently marked with the inverted form of Leuke's sigil.

The marks claimed by astrologers and astronomers to symbolize the celestial bodies were in no way new. Each mark was originally associated with a Greek god. Very rarely had the marks been lost, though they were often repurposed. Metis' mark had become Athena's. An adaptation of Leuke's mark had been adopted by occult circles around the world. Funnily enough, Thanatos and Persephone had perverted Leuke's mark when designing the Deathly Hallows. Her original mark was nearly identical, with the exception of the triangle being within the circle as opposed to the circle being within the triangle.

Due to her status as the patroness of traitors, the inverted form of Leuke's sigil had been used to mark traitors to the gods since the gods began their rule. It was more than just a simple mark; it was a brand on their souls that would be visible to everyone in the Underworld, and was cause for immediate fast-track to the Fields of Punishment.

A god was the only one who could mark someone with their sigil after all. If the Lady of the Underworld named someone a traitor, a traitor they would be punished as.

Her favorite Stygian iron dagger melted into her hand from the shadows. She pressed her lips to the flat of the blade, took two steps through shadow, and slit the first demigod's throat. Before anyone registered he was dead, she had already slit another demigod's throat and shot four different dracaenae with her magically-silenced pistol.

She stepped into shadow again and came back out between two more demigods. She slit the throat of one and threw a knife into the throat of the other, even as she dropped to one knee to avoid the arterial blood that sprayed over her head, dripping onto her black hair. She cocked the gun and fired swiftly at every monster in sight, each and every shot a head-shot.

Another demigod ran at her, sword raised to bring it down upon her head. She somersaulted to her feet, going through shadow mid-roll, so she ended up behind him and was able to stab a needle through base of his skull to his spinal cord.

Another throwing knife ended up embedded in the forehead of demigod number seven, causing demigod number eight to let out a screech of rage. She fired an arrow at Chrysa, which the elder mortal goddess easily avoided with a tilt of her head, before taking a step through shadow. She reappeared behind the girl, knife held point-down. She kicked out the back of the girl's knees, sending her into a kneeling pose, before wrapping her arm around the demigod's neck and slitting her throat.
The other four demigods were trying to leave through the far door, but the shadows came up to stop them, slamming the door shut just before they could reach it.

Chrysa clucked her tongue at them.

"You didn't really think you would make it out of here, did you?"

"Please, please, just don't...don't kill us," a boy who looked to be the youngest of them pleaded.

"Who's in charge here?" Chrysa demanded.

The boy pointed at demigod number five - the one Chrysa had killed with a needle.

"The girl you just killed was his second," the boy said helpfully. "The one before her was her boyfriend."

"Let's see if you can help me before I decide your fate," Chrysa said decisively. She held up the knife in her hand, still dripping blood. "Did the manticore come here?"

The boy looked up at what looked to be the eldest of the remaining demigods.

"...Yes," the other boy said. "He was only here for twenty minutes before he left in a helicopter."

"And the two girls with him?" Chrysa demanded, taking two steps through shadow so that she stood directly in front of them. "What about them? There should have been a blonde and a black-haired girl."

"He took them with him," the boy said quickly, looking warily at her knife. "He knocked them out - drugged them - and then had us load them into the plane to headquarters."

"Where is headquarters?" Chrysa questioned, raising her knife to the boy's throat.

The boy's eyes were wide with fear.

"I-I don't know! Only the leaders knew!"

Chrysa looked into his eyes, using her less-than-stellar Legilimency abilities to confirm his words.

"You speak the truth," she said bluntly. "For that, you will live. But I'm afraid you won't be remembering any of this."

A flick of her wrist summoned the Elder Wand to her hand. Normally she cast with the holly-and-phoenix-feather wand she had received from Ollivander, but when she cast with the Elder Wand, she was able to tap into her immortal powers and permanently wipe the memories of this encounter.

Neither Atlas nor Kronos would be kind to them if he knew they'd given her information.

She pointed the Elder Wand and rapidly cast four Stunners. With all four prone on the ground, she pointed at the first and cast, "Obliviate."

It took a great deal of effort to wipe someone's mind thoroughly. There were two kinds of memory modification: the razor method, which required a skilled Legilimens who could examine specific memories and cut out the pieces they wanted removed, and the blunt-force method, in which the entirety of a certain period of time was removed.

Despite Hermione's erstwhile efforts to teach her, Chrysa was terrible at Legilimency. After having
her mind invaded so many times, she had a mental block that prevented her from progressing in the subject. She was really only good enough to read emotions. Her Occlumency skills were now excellent, though. Combining wizard magic and immortal magic had made her shields impenetrable to both worlds.

Well, Hecate could probably break in. But Hecate liked both Leuke and Chrysa, so that wasn't really an issue.

Anyways, Chrysa was usually only good with the blunt-force method of Obliviation. She was powerful enough to just throw magic at it until it was erased for good. All in all, she preferred to leave any necessary Obliviation to Hermione or a Ministry Obliviator, but there was no time for that now.

She quickly managed to erase the entirety of the day from all four demigods' minds, before leaving them crumpled on various parts of the ground with lumps on their head. It wouldn't do for anyone to figure out that they had been knocked out with magic.

Chrysa did promise Hades to do her best to stay safe, and the longer the identity of the reincarnated Leuke could be separated from Chrysa Potter, the better. Magic would be too much of an indicator, especially when there was so much evidence of Underworldly heritage. Only denizens of the Underworld and their children could use shadow travel. Only Leuke and her foster parents could make use of it as frequently as she had.

With her victims lying prone in a corner, Chrysa took the time to move through the room and look for any papers that seemed important. When she found one, she magically copied it and shoved it through the shadows back to her New York penthouse.

The most interesting thing she found was a list of demigods, complete with names, parentages, and locations. Some of the names she recognized. Others she did not. The frightening part was that a great deal of the list was either located 'aboard the Princess Andromeda' or at 'Headquarters.' Chrysa made sure to copy the list twice, sending one copy to her apartment and the other to her chambers in the Underworld.

Finally, the building cleared, Chrysa stepped into the shadows once more. Again, she was surrounded by the overwhelming flood of information as every shadow began screaming its secrets into her mind at the same moment. She had moved into it faster this time, and it took longer to separate herself from the information waterfall.

At least, it seemed to take longer. Time was always skewed while standing in shadows.

"Where is Bianca?" she asked.

An image formed in her mind of a familiar, broken palace shrouded in darkness. Like many of the ruins in ancient Greece, the black marble palace still held faint hints of its former glory. It had been a terrible and beautiful place once, built in fear and shadow. There were very few people who remembered it as it once stood, but Leuke was one of them.

Mount Othrys had been her home for almost three thousand years, after all.

There was a sudden pressure against her skin, almost to the point that her skin was peeling off, along with a flash of cold, and then she was there.

She remained cloaked in shadow, which was easy among the dim lighting of the fallen fortress. This close to where the sky yearned to kiss the earth...there was rarely any great light. Neither Apollo nor
Artemis drove their chariots Atlas' way. There was no need to give light to the prisoner of five ages.

...the prisoner who was currently in the throne room and most definitely not pinned under the sky where he belonged.

Chrysa forced herself to melt further into the shadows at the sight. Of the living Titans, Atlas was the one she had worked with the most. Kronos' right hand and his left had often worked in conjunction both before and during the war with the gods.

Leuke had also literally stabbed him in the back in order to incapacitate him before he was shoved under the sky, so there was that.

Chrysa slipped through shadow to stand behind a half-destroyed black marble pillar.

"Is the girl in place?" Atlas asked.

"Yes, my lord," a voice she recognized as Dr. Thorn replied. "I left her close to the summit. She will no doubt find him there shortly."

"Good," the Titan rumbled. "And the other one?"

"In the dungeons. I thought we should let her stop screaming abuses at us before we attempt to speak with her again," the manticore reported.

The Titan hummed thoughtfully.

"We shall give her a half-hour to get it out of her system. Then, I shall speak with the brat."

Chrysa silently gritted her teeth. There was no way Atlas was getting anywhere near her daughter. Bianca looked too much like Leuke for him not to suspect anything. Even if he did not determine she was Leuke's daughter, he would know she was Hades'. The Lord of the Underworld was quietly known for his tendency to take lovers who reminded him of his first.

"Do we know who her parent is?" Atlas asked.

"No, my lord. She claimed to be an orphan, but she also claimed to remember both of her parents. However, neither of the children spoke of their parents," Thorn revealed.

"Whoever the mortal parent was must have been a good lay if the godly parent came back for more," Atlas said. "Perhaps I should find a mortal partner to entertain me. It's not like anyone has seen my wife recently."

Chrysa made a mental note to Iris-message Pleione once she had Bianca home.

The sound of approaching footsteps caused her to shrink further into the shadows. The sight of the approaching figure almost made her growl.

"Ah, young Luke," Atlas greeted. "I take it the girl took the bait?"

"Yes, my lord," Luke said. He was breathing heavily, and appeared to be in pain. "She is trapped beneath the sky and awaiting the arrival of the goddess."

"Our forces have already reported the successful capture of Artemis," Atlas stated. "She will be here within the day."

"I'm not sure how long the girl will last," Luke said, still obviously trying to control his breathing.
"She can last twenty-four hours, certainly," Atlas said dismissively. "You said she is strong-willed? She will survive. You lasted three days."

"I serve at our master's pleasure," Luke replied.

Atlas laughed coldly.

"Indeed you do. Go. Rest your mortal frame. You will want to be there when we trap the goddess."


"Yes, my lord."

He turned on a heel and left the throne room, presumably to return to whatever quarters he was in.

Chrysa crept quietly through the hall. This close to the Titan, she did not dare shadow-travel. While the Titan of Strength was probably still too weak to sense it, she would not take the chance when it was her daughter's life on the line.

It took an achingly slow amount of time, but she finally exited the throne room down the hall that would lead to the dungeons. It took a long time to travel the steps. While the palace had been constructed on the summit of Mount Othrys, the dungeons were deep within the mountain itself. The only way out was through the throne room. They were warded against every form of magical travel but one.

Kronos had found it amusing when Leuke used her shadows to torture prisoners. Since her shadows were not blocked from the dungeons, shadow travel was still possible. She could get Bianca out of the dungeons. She just had to free her first.

Finding Bianca was easy enough. Thorn has simply shoved her into the first open cell. The fact that so many of the cells were filled was concerning, even more so that they were filled by demigods. Several had familiar enough facial features that she could pinpoint their parent. A couple she recognized from Camp Half-Blood.

Amaranth Potter probably would have tried to save them. Leuke merely felt a brief twinge of pity for those trapped in Kronos' net, but ultimately her focus remained on her objective: Bianca. Nothing mattered more than Bianca.

Bianca was in the eighth cell on the left from the stairwell, on the topmost level of dungeons. These were the nicest dungeons, used for the prisoners that Kronos was angered by, but still needed on his side. Leuke had nominally spent a half-century in the upper level of the prison between all the different times she had rejected Kronos' advances.

Chrysa stopped at the door to Bianca's cell and pulled her lock-picks from her left boot. While magic would be the most efficient way in, Chrysa didn't know if Hecate had re-enchanted the cells to counter modern magic. If she had, simply attempting Alohomora could set something off. Opening the cell at all would probably set something off, but Chrysa just needed to get to Bianca. Thorn hadn't even bothered chaining her down. This one door was the only thing between her and her daughter.

It took longer than she would want to admit to for her to get in. Every minute ticked anxiously by as the time for Atlas to visit drew nearer. It had been a long time since Chrysa had needed to manually pick locks. She was out of practice. She silently vowed to resolve that once this mess was over.
Finally, the lock opened with a decisive *snick*. Chrysa wasted no time in opening the door to the tiny cell.

Bianca sat on the cot in the corner, arms wrapped around her knees. She was in the corner furthest from the door, and she had jerked toward it as soon as the lock had opened.

"Bianca," Chrysa said in relief, moving towards her daughter.

Bianca shrunk away from her. "Who are you? What do you want from me? I don't want to hurt anyone!"

"Bianca, the only thing I want is to get you out of here and reunite you with your family," Chrysa said firmly. "But I can't do that unless you're willing to trust me. Can you do that for a few minutes?"

Bianca hesitated.

"They probably know that I'm here now," Chrysa said warningly.

Bianca nodded slowly. "Okay. What do I need to do?"

Chrysa reached out for her.

"Take my hand," she said.

She could hear angry shouts and a multitude of footsteps rapidly approaching the cell, Atlas' clumping prominent among them. They were too late.

Bianca uncurled her arms from around her legs and reached out to take Chrysa's hand.

There was a flash of recognition as soon as she did so.

"Mamma?" she asked in awe.

Chrysa smiled quickly for her before taking two steps forward and wrapping her arms around her daughter.

"This might be a little uncomfortable," she warned.

She dragged her daughter into the shadows just before Atlas reached the cell. As they traveled, the shadows relayed Atlas' roar of rage at losing his prize prisoner.

A few steps through the biting cold, and they were in a bedroom richly decorated in red and gold. Chrysa wandlessly summoned a wastebasket and placed it in front of her daughter just before the contents of her stomach made an abrupt reappearance.

"I apologize, *passerotta*, I would not normally force shadow-travel on someone so unexpectedly. But we needed to leave before anyone appeared to stop us," Chrysa said quietly.

"Mamma, what was that? Where are we? What was that - that thing that took me? Why did it take me?" Bianca asked helplessly.

Chrysa quickly moved to wrap her arms around her overwhelmed daughter. She pulled her away from the wastebasket - the contents of which she quickly vanished - and onto the bed where she could hold her daughter in her lap. Bianca curled impossibly smaller into her lap as she leaned her head against her mother's shoulder, desperately trying to draw in the comfort she needed after such a
terrifying twelve hours. It was only then that she started to cry.

Chrysa didn't try to stop her. She had been kidnapped before. She had been tortured before. She knew that this first time was overwhelming. All she did was hold her daughter and rock her slightly, reassuring her that she was there, that Mamma had her, that none of the monsters she'd so recently learned existed would appear to pull her away from her mother's arms.

It took several long minutes for the sobs to die down. Chrysa was thankful that the Silencing charms around her room would keep any of the house's other occupants from being disturbed.

When Bianca was finally able to look up at her again, Chrysa pulled a handkerchief out of her nightstand and used it to dry her daughter's face. She put the handkerchief up to Bianca's nose and ordered, "Blow." Bianca did so. Chrysa tossed the used handkerchief onto the bedside table and tapped her daughter's nose.

"Feel better?" she asked.

Bianca nodded slowly.

"Well, I suppose I'll start on your questions then, passerotta. Which one first?"

"Where are we?" Bianca asked.

Chrysa smiled. "This is my bedroom at my adoptive fathers' house. We're in London. I wanted to get you as far away from that place as possible. While not quite on the opposite side of the world from San Francisco, here's the furthest safe place away I knew of."

"Adoptive father?" Bianca asked in confusion.

Chrysa sighed. She'd been hoping to avoid this for a little while longer, but Bianca (and Nico) needed to know.

"I was hoping to tell you and your brother this at the same time, but you need to know. Passerotta, what do you remember about the last day you, your brother, and I were together as a family?" she asked.

Bianca's brow furrowed.

"We were...we were living in the hotel in D.C. Papà wasn't always with us, but he came to visit us all the time. We'd been living there almost two years. The war was over in Europe, but there was still war with Japan. You hoped that we might be able to go back home soon. Then...one day...Papà was visiting us. You were talking with him while Nico and I played cards. It was your birthday. Papà wanted to take us to go somewhere else to stay. You said that you'd discuss it more over lunch, and then you went to get your purse. Then...then..." her voice trailed off, and she looked confused. "I don't remember," she said.

Chrysa sighed.

"You're not supposed to. Your father bound your memories. It's why you only recognized me when I touched you. Bianca...that day in the hotel...Bianca, there was an explosion. Your father managed to save you and Nico, but I died."

Bianca's face paled dramatically.

"What? But...you're right here!"
Chrysa smiled sadly.

"Bianca, your father was no mortal man. Your father is an actual Greek god."

"But...that's impossible," Bianca said, her voice quavering. "This is not cool. This isn't Nico's stupid game, Mamma. There are no gods."

Chrysa ran her hand over her daughter's hair.

"I know it's hard to believe, passerotta. But the gods are still around. They're immortal. And whenever they have children with mortals, children like you...the children live dangerous lives. You've seen that already. You were kidnapped by the manticore and taken to the dungeons of Mount Othrys, the stronghold of the Titan Lord Kronos, who seeks to destroy the gods."

"What - what did he want from me?" Bianca said with a gulp.

"Your allegiance, I suspect. If he had known your parentage, he would have used you as a weapon against your father and I. We would not fight if your life was in danger."

"If Papà is a god, who is he?" Bianca asked.

Chrysa pressed a kiss to her daughter's forehead.

"I can't tell you that, passerotta. Only he can do so, and I expect he will wish to tell both you and her brother at the same time. Tell me, how long has it been since you were in the Lotus Hotel and Casino?"

"The lawyer came and got us at the end of July," Bianca replied. "He took us to D.C. for a few weeks, and then up to Westover Hall. He said that it wasn't safe for us to be with you, but that you'd come get us when you could."

"I am going to murder your father," Chrysa said tightly. "He didn't tell me that he'd sent someone to let you out. It wasn't safe for you before. Your father - your father is powerful, figlietta, powerful enough that even his own family does not trust his children to be free. The Lotus Hotel is magic, Bianca. As long as you remain there, you do not age, nor do you notice the passing of time. How long did it seem like you were there?"

"A month," Bianca said hesitantly.

There was no easy way to break this to her.

"Bianca, you were in the Lotus Hotel for sixty-three years," Chrysa said bluntly.

The girl gasped.

"But...but how are you here then, Mamma? You don't look any older!"

"I'm not older, figlietta, I'm younger. I told you, there was an explosion at the hotel we lived in. I died in that explosion. I died, and was reincarnated as I am now. My name isn't Maria di Angelo anymore. I am Amaranth Chrysocomê Potter-Black. I was born twenty-eight years ago to James and Lily Potter, but in truth my father was Zeus, Lord of the Skies. I was born a witch blessed by Hecate, goddess of magic, and at the age of seventeen I defeated a dark lord of magic and achieved the title of 'Master of Death', which brought with it quasi-immortality. I reunited with your father and remain his lover to this day. This house we are in is the house of my godfather, Sirius Black, and his husband, Remus Lupin-Black. They adopted me as their own when I was fourteen years old. When
I was eighteen, I got my memories of you and your brother back. That's when your Papà and I started visiting you in the Lotus Hotel. It was too dangerous for you to leave, but I tried to visit as often as I could."

Bianca sniffled.

"If you were reincarnated, does that mean...does that mean I'm not your daughter anymore?"

Chrysa immediately wrapped her arms around her softly crying child.

"Oh, no, my sweet, it doesn't work that way. Well, it can, but it doesn't work that way for those of us who are 'divinely-involved.' The Fates make sure of that. This is my third life. In my first life, I was a nymph, and your father's lover, but I was killed and turned into a tree. In my second life, I was clear-sighted, a mortal capable of seeing through the Mist. Again, I was your father's lover, and I had you and your brother as my children. In this life, I was born a demigod, and I achieved my own form of immortality. If someone checked my DNA against yours, I would still register as your mother. I am your mother in body and soul, even if this is not the body that birthed you."

Suddenly, there was a loud pop and a small, hunched-over figure appeared on the ground in front of the bed. Bianca let out a small shriek and curled further into Chrysa's arms. Chrysa squeezed her briefly in reassurance, before saying, "Good morning, Kreacher."

"Will Mistress Amaranth and her guest be joining the family for breakfast?" the house-elf asked.

Chrysa looked down at her still-fearful daughter.

"What do you think, passerotta? Shall we go to breakfast with my godfathers and godchildren?"

Bianca bit her lip as her stomach let out a low growl.

"We can eat in here if you don't want to meet new people right now," Chrysa offered gently.

"No," Bianca said decisively. "I want to meet them."

Chrysa smiled at her bravery.

"Alright then. Breakfast it is. Two more for breakfast, Kreacher. Oh, and this is my daughter, Bianca di Angelo. She is a member of this family and should be treated as such."

Kreacher bowed.

"Yes, Mistress, Little Mistress."

There was another pop, and the house-elf was gone.

"What was that?" Bianca asked quietly.

Chrysa laughed.

"That was a house-elf. They're magical creatures. They live to serve wizard families. Kreacher has served the House of Black for more than half a century. We didn't get along at first, but we managed to sort out our differences."

"You sound British, Mamma," Bianca pointed out.

Chrysa laughed again. "I was born in Britain, dear one. Coming home tends to bring my accent
back, just as being with you and your brother brings my Italian accent back. Now, come. Let's get ourselves cleaned up and ready for breakfast."

Chrysa ushered Bianca into her attached bathroom to shower, and banished her armor back through the shadows as soon as the door was shut. A quick hunt through her drawers procured t-shirts and jeans for both of them. She knew that liberal use of resizing charms would allow the clothes to fit her daughter. At twelve, Bianca wasn't much smaller than she was. No matter what life she lived in, she was always cursed to be short.

Bianca only took a few minutes in the shower, obviously not wanting to be away from Chrysa for very long. Chrysa merely handed her clothing and promised to leave the door cracked while she was in the shower. Less than half an hour after Kreacher had originally appeared, both were ready to face breakfast in Black Manor.

They were just in time to, as Kreacher popped in just long enough to say, "Breakfast is ready, Mistress, Little Mistress."

Chrysa held her daughter's hand as they left the room and traveled down the stairs to the family dining room.

No one else had made it there yet, confirming Chrysa's suspicions that Kreacher hadn't actually told anyone that she was here. If they'd known, they would have made it already.

Chrysa took her usual seat at Sirius' right and placed Bianca next to her. Between sitting beside one of her godfathers and one of the children, she suspected Bianca would find the children less threatening. Especially if it was Teddy. Her eldest godson was the same age as Nico.

The teal-haired ten-year-old let out a loud, "You're here!" as he entered the room, before running to hug Chrysa.

Chrysa laughed joyfully as she embraced him.

"Yes, I am! Just for breakfast though. I have to get back to Camp Half-Blood."

Teddy then noticed the silent girl beside her. He tilted his head.

"Who's this?"

Chrysa smiled and took her daughter's hand.

"Teddy, this is my daughter, Bianca."

Teddy's face brightened. "di Angelo?" he questioned, looking to Bianca for confirmation.

She nodded.

"I'm so glad to finally meet you!" Teddy said, reaching out and grabbing her in a surprise hug. "Amaranth mentioned we might get to meet you someday, and I always hoped we would! I'm Teddy, by the way. Edward Remus Lupin-Black, if we're being proper about it, but I've always just gone by Teddy."

"Why's that?" Bianca asked curiously.

"Well, I was named after Aunt Andromeda's husband," Teddy said. "His name was Edward, but he went by Ted, and he died in the War shortly before I was born. When I was born, Dad asked Aunt
Andy if she'd mind, and she didn't, so they named me after Uncle Ted. Then my middle name is Remus after Papa. It's a family tradition, you see, to give the eldest son the name of his father a middle name. My younger brother's middle name is Sirius, after Dad."

"Teddy is the oldest of my godfathers' four children," Chrysa explained. "Teddy's ten. Next is James Sirius, named after my adoptive father, James Potter, and Sirius. He's five. Then is Albus Severus, after two of the bravest men we knew who died in the War. Albus is two-and-a-half, and Lily Nymphadora just turned four months old. She was named after my mother, Lily Evans-Potter, and Aunt Andromeda's daughter, Nymphadora Tonks, who died saving mine and Sirius' lives."

Just then, they were footsteps clomping down the stairs.

"Speak of the devils, and they shall appear," Chrysa called out merrily.

"Well, if it isn't my favorite adopted daughter," Sirius called back as he swooped into the room, Albus in his arms and James clutching the hem of his pants. Remus was on his heels, carrying Lily. "And a guest! What brings you two to England this fine morning?"

Sirius walked the long way around the table, past Chrysa, so that he could stop and drop a kiss on the top of her head before continuing around to deposit James and Albus in their chairs. Teddy took the seat next to Bianca. Remus chose to situate Lily in her seat beside his first, before coming to embrace his adopted daughter.

"It's good to see you, Amaranth," he said warmly. "But we weren't expecting you until Christmas Eve!"

"We're just here for breakfast," Chrysa apologized. "Dad, Papa, this is my daughter, Bianca di Angelo. She had a bit of a traumatic experience, so I brought her here to cry it out before we went back to Camp Half-Blood to get her brother."

Remus raised an eyebrow while Sirius' face lit up.

"I'm a grandfather!" he announced. "I'm too young to be a grandfather!"

"You're forty-nine years old," Chrysa shot back. "Plenty of people are grandparents by the time they hit forty-nine."

"I also just had a baby," Sirius shot back. "I'm too young to be a grandfather."

Chrysa merely rolled her eyes.

Remus turned a gentle smile to Bianca.

"It's good to finally meet you, Bianca," he greeted. "We've been looking forward to it. Have you been introduced to everyone?"

She hesitated.

"You're...either Sirius or Remus," Bianca finally said.

Remus let out a small laugh. "I'm Remus. The knucklehead at the other end of the table is Sirius."

"Hey!" Sirius protested. Remus ignored him with the ease of long practice.

"I'm sure Teddy introduced himself since he was already down here. James is the one across from you. Albus is between Sirius and James, and this little lady is Lily," he said, reaching over to tickle
the baby's chin. She nearly bit his finger off with exceptionally sharp teeth. Remus dodged in a well-practiced gesture.

Before anyone could say anything else, platters of breakfast food appeared on the table. Today Kreacher had gone for a French breakfast rather than an English one, which was more in line with what Bianca was used to.

"Just grab whatever looks good, Bianca," Sirius offered. "We tend to eat a lot in this house; Remus is a werewolf and all the kids have the gene, even if none but Lily seem to show it actively. But it still means they eat a lot. And I turn into a dog and Amaranth...I don't know why Amaranth eats so much."

Chrysa playfully swatted her godfather's shoulder, causing him to jump in fake-surprise.

Breakfast was mostly peaceful, with most of the conversation filled by Teddy and James. Remus directed few questions to Bianca, but seemed to respect the obviously overwhelmed air she was giving off. The only interruption was the arrival of the post-owls, including the *Daily Prophet* for Remus and the *Quibbler* for Sirius.

"Are you going to the Ministry Yule Ball?" Sirius asked Chrysa, not looking up from where he was reading the Quibbler upside-down.

"I said that I would, but it depends on how hectic things are with Camp and Nico and Bianca," she replied.

"Bill, Fleur, Charlie, George, and Angelina have promised to babysit all the kids, since they're the only ones not required to go to the ball. Arthur, Molly, Percy, Audrey, Ron, Hermione, Ginny, Dean, Remus, and I are all going. They're already at eighteen kids, I'm sure they won't mind bringing it up to an even twenty if you bring Nico and Bianca," Sirius replied quietly.

Chrysa hesitated.

"I'll probably have Thalia too."

"The more the merrier!" Sirius said cheerily. His face sobered and he leaned toward her to say in a low voice, "I don't know what's happening with all your godly stuff. It isn't my place to ask, and it isn't my place to know. Just remember, if you ever need a safe place - for you or your kids or that sister of yours - you've got one here."

Chrysa reached one arm over to hug her godfather.

"Thank you, Sirius."

Chapter End Notes

Sorry about the wait, this chapter did not want to be written. Except between the hours of midnight and 3 a.m. If anything seems weird, it's because I was only able to conquer writer's block when I was exhausted.

Italian terms of endearment: Chrysa calls Nico tesoro, which means treasure. She calls Bianca passerotta, little sparrow, and figlietta, little daughter.
Interlude: Percy and the Hunters

Chapter Summary

While Chrysa is off rescuing her daughter, Percy and Thalia escort Nico and the Hunters back to Camp Half-Blood...

Chapter Notes

This is a side-story of what's going on with Percy and Nico, etc. while Chrysa's hunting down Bianca. It follows canon, mostly, and is from Percy's point of view. Sorry how long it took to get out...it's apparently been sitting here in draft form for the past month. I may have forgotten to actually publish it? My apologies to everyone.

The Hunters piled into the van, all crammed into the back so that they’d be as far away as possible from Apollo and the rest of us highly infectious males. Chrysa ushered Nico into the seat next to me, directly behind the driver’s seat, while Thalia and Grover took the seat across from us. To my surprise, Zoë and the white-haired Hunter, Rhanis, were sitting right behind us. Chrysa raised an eyebrow in surprise.

“You asked us to look after your son, Lady Chrysocomê,” Zoë said. “We shall do our best to do so.”

Chrysa smiled and bowed her head in their direction, looking thankful.

“Everyone not leaving on the Sun Express needs to vacate the vehicle!” Apollo called out as he climbed onto the bus and into the driver’s seat. “It’s time to get this thing on the road!”

Chrysa hugged Nico tightly and kissed his forehead. She then hugged me, somewhat awkwardly as she had to lean over Nico to do it, and then moved over to hug Thalia. She nodded to Grover, then walked out of the bus. Through the window of Grover and Thalia’s seat, I could see her move a safe distance away before turning to watch us.

I looked over to the downtrodden boy beside me.

“Hey, Nico, don’t worry,” I said, trying to be comforting. “It’ll be okay. Chrysa will get your sister back.”

The boy’s forehead furrowed.

“Chrysa?” he asked.

I jerked my thumb toward Thalia and Grover’s window.

“Your mom.”

“Oh,” the boy said. “But it’s not safe for Mamma to go.”
“Little man, I’ve seen your mom face down a god. She’s also faced down a magical dark lord who tried to kill her off for seventeen years. And she’s literally friends with Death. I don’t think there’s anything that can stop her. She’s going to be just fine.”

Nico looked up at me shyly. “Promise?”

I nodded solemnly. “I promise.”

That one promise seemed to completely turn the boy’s demeanor. As the sun chariot rose from the ground, he began bouncing up and down in his seat.

“This is so cool!” he said. “Is this really the sun? I thought Helios and Selene were the sun and moon gods. How come sometimes it’s them and sometimes it’s you and Artemis?” he asked Apollo.

“Downsizing,” the god replied. “The Romans started it. They couldn’t afford all those temple sacrifices, so they laid off Helios and Selene and folded their duties into our job descriptions. My sis got the moon. I got the sun. It was pretty annoying at first but at least I got this cool car.”

“But how does it work?” Nico asked. “I thought the sun was a big fiery ball of gas!”

Apollo reached back and ruffled Nico’s hair. “That rumor probably got started because Artemis used to call me a big fiery ball of gas. Seriously, kid, it depends on whether you’re talking astronomy or philosophy. You want to talk astronomy? Bah, what fun is that? You want to talk about how humans think about the sun. Ah, now that’s interesting. They’ve got a lot riding on the sun…er, so to speak. It keeps them warm, grows their crops, powers engines, makes everything look, well, sunnier. This chariot is built out of the human dreams about the sun, kid. It’s as old as Western Civilization. Every day, it drives across the sky from east to west, lighting up all those puny little mortal lives. The chariot is a manifestation of the sun’s power, the way mortals perceive it. Make sense?”

Nico shook his head. “No.”

“Well then, just think of it as a really powerful, really dangerous solar car.”

“Can I drive?”

Apollo snorted.

“Your mom would kill me.”

“You’re a god! You’d survive!” Nico protested.

“Kid, have you met your mother? Even Dad’s scared of her when she’s angry. I am not getting on her bad side by letting you do something dangerous. And no one else is driving either. Dad’s already had to shoot this thing out of the sky once before when a kid decided to drive. I’m not risking you getting shot down after your mother already threatened me,” Apollo said.

Nico sighed. “Oh well.”

“Even gods are scared of Chrysa when she’s angry?” Thalia asked, intrigued. She was gripping the armrests of her seat tightly. I suppose she didn’t trust Apollo’s driving.

“The Lady Chrysocomê is a most terrifying opponent,” Zoë said from behind me. “She is not one to be taken lightly, even by gods. That she holds favor with Lord Thanatos only increases her fearfulness.”
It was only a few minutes later that we landed easily at Camp Half-Blood, just in front of the Big House. I’d never seen Camp Half-Blood in the winter before, and the snow surprised me.

See, the camp has the ultimate magic climate control. Nothing gets inside the borders unless the director wants it to. I thought it would be warm and sunny, but instead the snow had been allowed to fall lightly. Frost covered the chariot track and the strawberry fields. The cabins were decorated with tiny flickering lights, like Christmas lights, except they seemed to be balls of real fire. More lights glowed in the woods, and weirdest of all, a fire flickered in the attic window of the Big House, where the Oracle dwelt, imprisoned in an old, mummified body. I wondered if the spirit of Delphi was roasting marshmallows up there or something.

There was a perfect, cleared circle around the sun bus from the landing.

“Whoa,” Nico said as he climbed off the bus. “Is that a climbing wall?”

“Yeah,” I said.

“Why is there lava pouring down it?”

“Little extra challenge,” I replied. “Come on. I’ll introduce you to Chiron. Zoë, have you met…”

“I know Chiron,” Zoë said stiffly. “Tell him we will be in Cabin Eight. Hunters, follow me.”

“I’ll show you the way,” Grover offered.

“We know the way.”

“Oh, really, it’s no trouble. It’s easy to get lost here, if you don’t” – he tripped over his own feet and came up still talking – “like my old daddy goat used to say! Come on!”

Zoë rolled her eyes, but I guess she figured there was no getting rid of Grover. The Hunters shouldered their packs and their bows and headed off toward the cabins.

“Take care, sweethearts!” Apollo called after the Hunters. He winked at me. “Watch out for those prophecies, Percy. I’ll see you soon.”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

Instead of answering, he hopped back in the bus.

“Later, Thalia,” he called. “And, uh, be good!”

He gave her a wicked smile, as if he knew something she didn’t. Then he closed the doors and revved the engine. I turned aside as the sun chariot took off in a blast of heat. When I looked back, the snow had been burned away from the take-off point even further. A red Maserati soared over the woods, glowing brighter and climbing higher until it disappeared in a ray of sunlight.

Nico was back to looking depressed. I supposed that the shock of meeting someone out of card game had worn off.

“Who’s Chiron?” he asked, sounding like he was forcing himself to be cheerful. “I don’t have his figurine.”

“Our activities director,” I said. “He’s…well, you’ll see. Your mom seems to like him.”

“That’s good enough for me,” Nico said, trying and failing to smile. “Let’s go.”
The second thing that surprised me about camp was how empty it was. I mean, I knew that most half-bloods only trained during the summer. Just the year-rounders would be here – the ones who didn’t have homes to go to, or would get attacked by monsters too much if they left. But there didn’t even seem to be many of them, either.

I spotted Charles Beckendorf from the Hephaestus cabin stoking the forge outside the camp armory. The Stoll brothers, Travis and Connor, from the Hermes cabin, were picking the lock on the camp store. A few kids from the Ares cabin were having a snowball fight with the wood nymphs at the edge of the forest. That was about it. Even my old rival from the Ares cabin, Clarisse, didn’t seem to be around.

The Big House was decorated with strings of red and yellow fireballs that warmed the porch but didn’t seem to catch anything on fire. Inside, flames crackled in the hearth. The air smelled like hot chocolate. Mr. D, the camp director, and Chiron were playing a quiet game of cards in the parlor.

Chiron’s beard was shaggier for the winter. His curly hair had grown a little longer. He wasn’t posing as a teacher this year, so I guess he could afford to be casual. He wore a fuzzy sweater with a hoofprint design on it, and he had a blanket on his lap that almost hid his wheelchair completely.

He smiled when he saw us. “Percy! Thalia! Ah, and this must be…”

“Nico di Angelo,” I said. “He and his sister are half-bloods.”

Chiron breathed a sigh of relief.

“You succeeded, then.”

“Well…”

His smile melted. “What’s wrong? And where is Annabeth? And Chrysa? I thought she was driving you?”

“Oh, dear,” Mr. D said in a bored voice. “Not another one lost.”

I’d been trying not to pay attention to Mr. D, but he was kind of hard to ignore in his neon orange leopard-skin warm-up suit and his purple running shoes. (Like Mr. D had ever run a day in his immortal life.) A golden laurel wreath was tilted sideways on his curly black hair, which must’ve meant he’d won the last hand of cards.

“What do you mean?” Thalia asked. “Who else is lost?”

Just then, Grover trotted into the room, grinning like crazy. He had a black eye and red lines on his face that looked like a slap mark.

“The Hunters are all moved in!” he announced.

Chiron frowned. “The Hunters, eh? I see we have much to talk about.” He glanced at Nico. “Grover, perhaps you should take our young friend to the den and show him our orientation film.”

“But…Oh, right. Yes, sir.”

“Orientation film?” Nico asked. “Is it G or PG? ‘Cause Bianca is kinda strict, and I don’t know what Mamma would say…”

“It’s PG-13,” Grover said.
“Cool!” Nico said as he followed the satyr out of the room.

“No,” Chiron said to Thalia and me, “perhaps you two should sit down and tell us the whole story.”

Thalia and I exchanged looks as we took our seats. Unfortunately, she claimed the seat next to Chiron, so I ended up by Mr. D.

“He’s Chrysa’s son,” I blurted out as soon as we were seated.

Chiron’s face went blank. Mr. D’s eyes widened.

“What?” Chiron asked, putting his cards down.

“Nico – he’s Chrysa’s son. She said so. He didn’t recognize her at first, until she touched him. Chrysa said that his memories were clouded for his own protection, because his father is a god and Nico and his sister are both powerful. Nico’s sister, Bianca, got kidnapped by the monster with Annabeth. He jumped off a cliff with them holding onto him and they all just disappeared. Chrysa went after them to get Bianca back – and Annabeth, I hope,” I blurted out all at once.

Thalia nodded.

“I’ve never seen Chrysa so scary. She threatened Grover if anything happened to Nico.”

“She made Zoë Nightshade and that other Hunter swear to protect him,” I added.

Chiron frowned.

“I think you should start at the beginning.”

When we were done, Chiron turned to Mr. D. “We should launch a search for Annabeth and Bianca di Angelo immediately.”

“I’ll go,” Thalia and I said at the same time.

Mr. D sniffed.

“Certainly not!”

Thalia and I both started complaining, but Mr. D held up his hand. He had that purplish angry fire in his eyes that usually meant something bad and godly was going to happen if we didn’t shut up.

“From what you have told me,” Mr. D said, “we have broken even on this escapade. We have, ah, regrettably lost Annie Bell…”

“Annabeth,” I snapped. She’d gone to camp since she was seven, and still Mr. D pretended not to know her name.

“Yes, yes,” he said. “And you procured a small, annoying boy to replace her. So, I see no point risking further half-bloods on a ridiculous rescue. The possibility is very great that this Annie girl is dead.”

I wanted to strangle Mr. D. It wasn’t fair Zeus had sent him here to dry out as camp director or a hundred years. It was meant to be a punishment for Mr. D’s bad behavior on Olympus, but it ended up being a punishment for all of us.
“Annabeth may be alive,” Chiron said, but I could tell he was having trouble sounding upbeat. He’d practically raised Annabeth all those years she was a year-round camper, before she’d given living with her dad and stepmom a second try. “She’s very bright. If…if our enemies have her, she will try to play for time. She may even pretend to cooperate.”


“In which case,” said Mr. D, “I’m afraid she will have to be smart enough to escape on her own. You say Chrysocomê is looking for them? Let her look. If what you say is true and it is Chrysocomê’s daughter…well, if it was with her usual partner, we’d probably be best off if she was dead, though I’m told I wouldn’t want to see her in a rage. Chrysocomê might just defeat our enemies single-handedly in order to revenge her child.”

I got up from the table in a rage. Not only was Mr. D refusing to rescue Annabeth, he was wishing that Bianca di Angelo – Chrysa’s daughter – was dead. Granted, since I knew Chrysa was regularly sleeping with Hades, I could understand why. Children of the Underworld didn’t have the best rep. But it was still Chrysa’s daughter.

“Percy,” Chiron said warningly.

In the back of my mind, I knew Mr. D was not somebody to mess with. Even if you were an impulsive ADHD kid like me, he wouldn’t give you any slack. But I was so angry that I didn’t care.

“You’re glad to lose another camper,” I said. “You’d like it if we all disappeared!”

Mr. D stifled a yawn.

“You have a point?”

“Yeah,” I growled. “Just because you were sent here as a punishment doesn’t mean you have to be a lazy jerk! This is your civilization, too. Maybe you could try helping out a little!”

For a second, there was no sound except the crackle o the fire. The light reflected in Mr. D’s eyes, giving him a sinister look. He opened his mouth to say something – probably a curse that would blast me to smithereens – when Nico burst into the room, followed by Grover.

“SO COOL!” Nico yelled, holding his hands out to Chiron. “You’re…you’re a centaur!”

Chiron managed a nervous smile.

“Yes, Mr. di Angelo, if you please. Though, I prefer to stay in human form in this wheelchair for, ah, first encounters.”

“And whoa!” Nico said, looking at Mr. D. “You’re the wine dude? No way!”

Mr. D turned his eyes away from me and gave Nico a look of loathing. The boy obviously didn’t recognize it.

“The wine dude?” the god asked drily.

“Dionysus, right? Oh, wow! I’ve got your figurine.”

“My figurine,” Mr. D deadpanned.

“In my game, Mythomagic. And a holofoil card, too! And even though you’ve only got like, five hundred attack points and everybody thinks you’re the lamest god card, I totally think your powers
“Ah,” Mr. D seemed truly perplexed, which probably saved my life. Leave it to Chrysa’s son to save my life by talking about a card game. “Well, that’s…gratifying.”

“Percy,” Chiron said quickly, “you and Thalia go down to the cabins. Inform the campers we’ll be playing capture the flag tomorrow evening.”

“Capture the flag?” I asked. “But we don’t have enough…”

“It is tradition,” Chiron said. “A friendly match, whenever the Hunters visit.”

“Yeah,” Thalia muttered. “I bet it’s real friendly.”

Chiron jerked his head toward Mr. D, who was still frowning as Nico talked about how many defense points all the gods had in his game.

“Run along now,” Chiron told us.

“Oh, right,” Thalia said. “Come on, Percy.”

She hauled me out of the Big House before Dionysus could remember he wanted to kill me.

“You’ve already got Ares on your bad side,” Thalia reminded me as we trudged towards the cabins. “You need another immortal enemy?”

She was right. After the fight I’d gotten in with Ares my first summer, he and all his children now wanted to kill me. I didn’t need to make Dionysus mad, too.”

“Sorry,” I said. “I couldn’t help it. It’s just so unfair.”

Thalia stopped by the armory and looked out across the valley, toward the top of Half-Blood Hill. Her pine tree was still there, the Golden Fleece glittering in its lowest branch. The tree’s magic still protected the borders of camp, but it no longer used Thalia’s spirit for power.

“Percy, everything is unfair,” Thalia muttered. “Sometimes I wish…”

She didn’t finish, but her tone was so sad I felt sorry for her. With her ragged black hair and her black punk clothes, an old wool overcoat wrapped around her, she looked like some kind of huge raven, completely out of place in the white landscape.

“We’ll get Annabeth back,” I promised. “If Chrysa can’t do it, we will. I just don’t know how yet.”

“First, I found out that Luke is lost,” Thalia said. “Now Annabeth…”

“Don’t think like that,” I scolded. “Chrysa’s out there looking. Between her magic and her powers, I’m pretty sure she can find anything.”

“You’re right.” She straightened up. “She’ll find a way. And if she doesn’t, we will.”

Over at the basketball court, a few of the Hunter were shooting hoops. One of them was arguing with a guy from the Ares cabin. The Ares kid had his hand on his sword and the Hunter girl looked like she was going to exchange her basketball or a bow and arrow any second.

“I’ll break that up,” Thalia said. “You circulate around the cabins. Tell everybody about capture the flag tomorrow.”
“All right. You should be team captain.”

“No, no,” she said. “You’ve been at camp longer. You do it.”

“We can, uh…co-captain or something.”

She looked about as comfortable with that as I felt, but she nodded.

As she headed for the court, I said, “Hey, Thalia?”

“Yeah?”

“I’m sorry about what happened at Westover. I should’ve waited for you guys.”

“’S okay, Percy. I probably would’ve done the same thing.” She shifted from foot to foot, like she was trying to decide whether or not to say more. “You know, you asked about my mom and I kinda snapped at you. It’s just…I went back to find her after seven years, and I found out she died in Los Angeles. She, um…she was a heavy drinker, and apparently she was out driving late one night about two years ago, and…” Thalia blinked hard.

“I’m sorry.”

“Yeah, well. It’s…it’s not like we were ever close. I ran away when I was eight. Best two years of my life were when I was running around with Luke and Annabeth, though it’s been really…nice, living with Chrysa and Annabeth, and you and your mom just a few floors down. But still…”

“That’s why you had trouble with the sun van.”

She gave me a wary look. “What do you mean?”

“The way you stiffened up. You had the armrests in a death grip. You must’ve been thinking about your mom.”

I was sorry I’d said anything. Thalia’s expression was dangerously close to Zeus’, the one time I’d seen him get angry – like any minute, her eyes would shoot a million volts.

“Yeah,” she muttered. “Yeah, that must’ve been it.”

She trudged off toward the court, where the Ares camper and the Hunter were trying to kill each other with a sword and a basketball.

I went off to make the rounds amongst the cabins, telling everyone about capture the flag. I woke up some Ares kid from his midday nap, and he yelled at me to go away. When I asked him where Clarisse was, he said, “Went on a quest for Chiron. Top secret!”

“Is she okay?” I asked.

“Haven’t heard from her in a month. She’s missing in action. Like your butt’s gonna be if you don’t get outta here!”

I decided to let him go back to sleep.

Finally, I got to Cabin Three, Poseidon cabin. It was a low, gray building hewn from sea stone, with shells and coral fossils imprinted in the rock. Inside, it was just as empty as always, except for my bunk. A Minotaur horn hung on the wall next to my pillow.
I took Annabeth’s baseball cap out of my backpack and set it on my nightstand. I’d give it to her when I found her. And I would find her.

I took off my wristwatch and activated the shield. It creaked noisily as it spiraled out. Dr. Thorn’s spikes had dented the brass in a dozen places. One gash kept the shield from opening all the way, so it looked like a pizza with two slices missing. The beautiful metal pictures that my brother had crated were all banged up. In the picture of me and Annabeth fighting the Hydra, it looked like a meteor had made a crater in my head. I hung the shield on its hook, next to the Minotaur horn, but it was painful to look at now. Maybe Beckendorf from the Hephaestus cabin could fix it for me. He was the best armor smith in the camp. I’d ask him at dinner.

I was staring at the shield when I noticed a strange sound – water gurgling – and I realized there was something new in the room. At the back of the cabin was a big basin of grey sea rock, with a spout like the head of a fish carved in stone. Out of its mouth burst a stream of water, a saltwater spring that trickled into the pool. The water must’ve been hot, because it sent mist into the cold winter air like a sauna. It made the room feel warm and summery, fresh with the smell of the sea.

I stepped up to the pool. There was no note attached or anything, but I knew it could only be a gift from Poseidon.

I looked into the water and said, “Thanks, Dad.”

The surface rippled. At the bottom of the pool, coins shimmered – a dozen or so golden drachma. I realized what the fountain was for. It was a reminder to keep in touch with my family.

I opened the nearest window, and the wintry sunlight made a rainbow in the mist. Then I fished a coin out of the hot water.

“Iris, O Goddess of the Rainbow,” I intoned, “accept my offering.”

I tossed the coin into the mist and it disappeared. Then I realized I didn’t know who to contact first.

My mom? That would’ve been the “good son” thing to do, but she wouldn’t be worried about me yet. She was used to me disappearing for days or weeks at a time. Plus, she’d left me with Chrysa, and she trusted my cousin not to let anything happen to me.

My father? It had been way too long, almost two years, since I’d actually talked to him. But could you even send an Iris-message to a god? I’d never tried. Would it make them mad, like a sales call or something?

Chrysa wasn’t a choice. She was off on her mission to find Annabeth and Bianca, though I was certain that she was more focused on the latter. I knew she would look for Annabeth – she’d spent years as her legal guardian, after all – but from the look on her face when speaking of going hunting, and how she’d made Thalia, the Hunters, and I swear to protect Nico, she definitely had a priority.

I hesitated. Then I made up my mind.

“Show me Tyson,” I requested. “At the forges of the Cyclopes.”

The mist shimmered, and the image of my half-brother appeared. He was surrounded by fire, which would’ve been a problem if he weren’t a Cyclops. He was bent over an anvil, hammering a red-hot sword blade. Sparks flew and flames swirled around his body. There was a marble-framed window behind him, and it looked out onto dark blue water – the bottom of the sea.

“Tyson!” I yelled.
He didn’t hear me at first because of the hammering and the roar of the flames.

“TYSON!”

He turned, and his one enormous eye widened. His face broke into a crooked, yellow grin.

“Percy!”

He dropped the sword blade and ran at me, trying to give me a hug. The vision blurred, and I instinctively lurched back.

“Tyson, it’s an Iris-message. I’m not really here.”

“Oh,” he said as he came back into view, looking embarrassed. “Oh. I knew that. Yes.”

“How are you?” I asked. “How’s the job?”

His eye lit up. “Love the job! Look!”

He picked up the hot sword blade with his bare hands. “I made this!”

“That’s really cool.”

“I wrote my name on it. Right there,” he continued, pointing at the chicken-scratch ‘Tyson’ in Greek letters.

“Awesome. Listen, do you talk to Dad much?”

Tyson’s smile faded.

“Not much. Daddy is busy. He is worried about the war.”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

Tyson sighed. He stuck the sword blade out the window, where it made a cloud of boiling bubbles. When Tyson brought it back in, the metal was cool.


I sort of knew what he was talking about. He meant the immortals who ruled the oceans back in the days of the Titans. Before the Olympians took over. The fact that they were back now, with the Titan Lod Kronos and his allies gaining strength, was not good.

“Is there anything I can do?” I asked.

Tyson shook his head sadly.

“We are arming the mermaids. They need a thousand more swords by tomorrow. Lady Chrysa was here a few weeks ago. She and Lady Trite were talking with Oceanus. They got him to agree not to fight with the old spirits. But he won’t fight them either.” Tyson looked down at his sword blade and sighed. “Old spirits are protecting the bad boat.”


“Yes. They make it hard to find. Protect it from Daddy’s storms. Otherwise he would smash it.”

“Smashing it would be good,” I commented.
Tyson perked up, as if he’d just had another thought.

“Annabeth! Is she there?”

“Oh, well…” My heart felt like a bowling ball. Tyson thought Annabeth was just about the coolest thing since peanut butter (and he seriously loved peanut butter). I didn’t have the heart to tell him she was missing. He’d start crying so bad he’d probably put out his fires. “Well, no…she’s not here right now.”

“Tell her hello!” he beamed. “Hello to Annabeth!”

“Okay,” I said, fighting back a lump in my throat. “I’ll do that.”

“And, Percy, don’t worry about the bad boat. It is going away.”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“Panama Canal! Very far away.”

I frowned. Why would Luke take his demon-infested cruise ship all the way down there? The last time we’d seen him, he’d been cruising along the East Coast, recruiting half-bloods and training his monstrous army.

“All right,” I said, not feeling reassured. “That’s…good. I guess.”

In the forges, a deep voice bellowed something I couldn’t make out. Tyson flinched.

“Got to get back to work! Boss will get mad. Good luck, Brother!”

“Ok, tell Dad…”

But before I could finish, the vision shimmered and faded. I was alone again in my cabin, feeling even lonelier than before.

I continued the feeling that night at dinner.

The food was excellent as usual. You can’t go wrong with barbecue, pizza, and never-empty soda goblets. The torches and braziers kept the outdoor pavilion warm, but we all had to sit with our cabin mates, which meant I was alone at the Poseidon table. Thalia sat alone at the Zeus table, but we couldn’t sit together. Camp rules. At least the Hephaestus, Ares, and Hermes cabins had a few people each. Nico sat with the Stoll brothers, since new campers always got stuck in the Hermes cabin in their Olympian parent was unknown. He looked somewhat depressed and was only picking at his food. The Stoll brothers seemed to be trying to draw him out of it by convincing him that poker was a much better game than Mythomagic. I hoped Nico didn’t have any money to lose.

The only table that really seemed to be having a good time was the Artemis table. The Hunters drank and ate and laughed like one big, happy family. Zoë sat at the head like she was the mama. She didn’t laugh as much as the others, but she did smile from time to time. Her silver lieutenant’s band glittered in the dark braids of her hair. I thought she looked a lot nicer when she smiled. Rhanis, the white-haired Hunter, was arm-wrestling with the big girl who’d picked a fight with the Ares kid on the basketball court. Despite the fact that she looked nine and the other girl seemed closer to fifteen, Rhanis was winning relatively often. The other girl didn’t seem to mind.

When we’d finished eating, Chiron made the customary toast to the gods and formally welcomed the Hunters of Artemis. The clapping was pretty half-hearted. Then he announced the “good will”
capture-the-flag game for tomorrow night, which got a lot better reception.

Afterward, we all trailed back to our cabins for an early, winter lights-out. I was exhausted, which meant I fell asleep easily. That was the good part. The bad part was, I had a nightmare, and even by my standards it was a whopper.

Annabeth was on a dark hillside, shrouded in fog. It almost seemed like the Underworld, because I immediately felt claustrophobic and I couldn’t see the sky above – just a close, heavy darkness, as if I were in a cave. Annabeth struggled up the hill. Old, broken Greek columns of black marble were scattered around, as though something had blasted a huge building to ruins.

“Thorn!” Annabeth cried. “Where are you? Why did you bring me here? Where’s Bianca?” She scrambled over a section of broken wall and came to the crest of the hill.

She gasped.

There was Luke. And he was in pain.

He was crumpled on the rocky ground, trying to rise. The blackness seemed to be thicker around him, fog swirling hungrily. His clothes were in tatters and his face was scratched and drenched with sweat.

“Annabeth!” he called. “Help me! Please!”

She ran forward.

I tried to cry out: *He’s a traitor! Don’t trust him!*

But my voice didn’t work in the dream.

Annabeth had tears in her eyes. She reached down like she wanted to touch Luke’s face, but at the last second, she hesitated.

“What happened?” she asked.

“They left me here,” Luke groaned. “Please. It’s killing me.”

I couldn’t see what was wrong with him. He seemed to be struggling against some invisible curse, as though the fog were squeezing him to death.

“Why should I trust you?” Annabeth asked. Her voice was filled with hurt.

“You shouldn’t,” Luke said. “I’ve been terrible to you. But if you don’t help me, I’ll die.”

*Let him die,* I wanted to scream. Luke had tried to kill us in cold blood too many times. He didn’t deserve anything from Annabeth.

Then the darkness above Luke began to crumble, like a cavern roof in an earthquake. Huge chunks of black rock began falling. Annabeth rushed in just as a crack appeared, and the whole ceiling dropped. She held it somehow – tons of rock. She kept it from collapsing on her and Luke just with her own strength. It was impossible. She shouldn’t have been able to do that.

Luke rolled free, gasping.

“Thanks,” he managed.
“Help me hold it,” Annabeth groaned.

Luke caught his breath. His face was covered in grime and sweat. He rose unsteadily.

“I knew I could count on you,” he said. He began to walk away as the trembling blackness threatened to crush Annabeth.

“HELP ME!” she pleaded.

“Oh, don’t worry,” Luke said. “Your help is on the way. It’s all part of the plan. In the meantime, try not to die.”

The ceiling of darkness began to crumble again, pushing Annabeth to the ground.

I sat bolt upright in bed, clawing at the sheets. There was no sound in my cabin except the gurgle of the saltwater spring. The clock on my nightstand read just after midnight.

Only a dream, but I was sure of two things: Annabeth was in terrible danger. And Luke was responsible.

The next morning before breakfast, I told Grover about my dream. We sat in the grass near the dining pavilion, waiting for the conch call that would announce the meal.

When I told Grover my nightmare, he started twirling his finger in his shaggy leg fur.

“A cave ceiling collapsed on her?” he asked.

“Yeah. What the heck does that mean?”

Grover shook his head. “I don’t know. But after what Zoë dreamed…”

“Whoa. What do you mean? Zoë had a dream like that?”

“I…I don’t know, exactly. About three in the morning, she came to the Big House and demanded to talk to Chiron. She looked really panicked.”

“Wait, how do you know this?” I asked.

Grover blushed. “I was sort of camped outside the Artemis cabin.”

“What for?”

“Just to be, you know, near them.”

“You’re a stalker with hooves,” I remarked.

“I am not!” he protested. “Anyway, I followed her to the Big House and hid in a bush and watched the whole thing. She got real upset when Argus wouldn’t let her in. It was kind of a dangerous scene.”

I tried to imagine that. Argus was the head of security for camp – a big, blond dude with eyes all over his body. He rarely showed himself unless something serious was going on. I wouldn’t want to place bets on a fight between him and Zoë Nightshade.

“What did she say?” I asked.
Grover grimaced. “Well, she starts talking really old-fashioned when she gets upset, so it was kind of hard to understand. But something about Artemis being in trouble and needing the Hunters. And then she called Argus a boil-brained lout…I think that’s a bad thing. And then he called her…”

“Whoa, wait. How could Artemis be in trouble?”

“I…well, finally, Chiron came out in his pajamas and his horse tail in curlers and…”

“He wears curlers in his tail?”

Grover covered his mouth.

“Sorry,” I said. “Go on.”

“Well, Zoë said she needed permission to leave camp immediately. Chiron refused. He reminded Zoë that the Hunters were supposed to stay here until they received orders from Artemis. And she said…” Grover gulped. “She said, ‘How are we to get orders from Artemis if Artemis is lost?’”

“What do you mean lost? Like she needs directions?”

“No. I think she meant gone. Taken. Kidnapped.”

“Kidnapped?” I tried to get my mind around that idea. “How would you kidnap an immortal goddess? Is that even possible?”

“Well, yeah,” Grover said. “I mean, it happened to Persephone.”

“But she was like, the goddess of flowers.”

Grover looked offended.

“Springtime,” he corrected.

“Whatever. Artemis is a lot more powerful than that. Who could kidnap her? And why?”

Grover shook his head miserably.

“I don’t know. Kronos?”

“He can’t be that powerful already. Can he?”

The last time we’d seen Kronos, he’d been in tiny pieces. Well…we hadn’t actually seen him. Thousands of years ago, after the big Titan-God war, the gods had sliced him to bits with his own scythe and scattered his remains in Tartarus, which is like the gods’ bottomless recycling bin for their enemies. Two summers ago, Kronos had tricked us to the very edge of the pit and almost pulled us in. Then last summer, on board Luke’s demon cruise ship, we’d seen a golden coffin, where Luke claimed his was summoning the Titan Lord out of the abyss, bit by bit, every time someone new joined their cause. According to Chrysa, he couldn’t do much more than that unless they found Kronos’ heart, which was hidden someplace that only Hades knew. Kronos could influence people with dreams and trick them, but I didn’t see how he could physically overcome Artemis is he was still a pile of evil bark mulch.

“I don’t know,” Grover said. “I think somebody would know if Kronos had re-formed. The gods would be more nervous. But still, it’s weird, you having a nightmare the same night as Zoë. It’s almost like…”
“They’re connected,” I said.

I thought about Zoë’s nightmare, which she’d had only a few hours after mine.

“I’ve got to talk to Zoë,” I said.

“Um, before you do…” Grover took something out of his coat pocket. It was a three-fold display like a travel brochure. “You remember what you said – about how it was weird the Hunters just happened to show up at Westover Hall? I think they might’ve been scouting us.”

“Scouting us? What do you mean?” I asked.

HE gave me the brochure. IT was about the Hunters of Artemis. The front read, A Wise Choice for Your Future! Inside were pictures of young maidens doing Hunter stuff, chasing monsters, shooting bows. There were captions like: Health Benefits: Immortality and What It Means For You! and A Boy-Free Tomorrow!

“I found that in Annabeth’s backpack,” Grover said.

I stared at him. “I don’t understand.”

“Well, it seems to me…maybe Annabeth was thinking about joining.”

I’d like to say I took the news well.

The truth was, I wanted to strangle the Hunters of Artemis one eternal maiden at a time. The only thing that stopped me from doing something drastic was the conch horn sounding, summoning us all to breakfast.

I trudged into the dining pavilion and sat down at my table with more force than necessary. I was glum as the nymphs served pancakes, eggs, and sausage.

This meal, even the Hunters seemed depressed. They’d obviously heard about Zoë’s dream.

All of breakfast was quiet…until Chrysa walked in, her arm wrapped around Bianca di Angelo.
They ended up spending several hours in Black Manor while they waited for morning to come to Camp Half-Blood. Bianca spent most of it napping on Chrysa’s lap while the elder demigod played with her godchildren.

Finally, shortly after lunch, Chrysa deemed it late enough to return to New York.

“It’s one o’clock here, so it’s eight in the morning in New York,” she explained to a yawning Bianca, who was being mobbed by her newfound godbrothers. Lily was currently down for her nap.

Sirius took the opportunity to hug her.

“We’ll miss you.”

She laughed. “Dad, you’ll see me again in less than two weeks, and I plan on staying here for all of break.”

Sirius huffed. “Well, that’s something at least. We don’t see you nearly as often anymore.”

Chrysa looked down guiltily. “You know I’m supposed to be with Had…” she glanced over towards Bianca and abruptly changed her words, “…him for the summer. And this year, with both Thalia and Annabeth living with me, since Annabeth’s mortal family moved to California…”

“Hey, hey, Prongslet, I know you’ve been busy. I’m just saying, we’re wizards. We’re magical, you more so than most. It doesn’t take much for you to come over here for a bit. This is Teddy’s last year before Hogwarts. Come by a bit more, spend some time with him. Soon enough, he’s going to be full-grown. You don’t want to miss it.”

“I remember,” Chrysa whispered. “Nico’s the same age as Teddy, and Bianca’s two years older. I can’t imagine them leaving me for boarding school. Which reminds me, I need to talk to them and see if they want to stay at Camp year-round, or if they’d rather live with me. I want them with me. They’re my children, they’ll be able to shadow-travel. Once they’re used to it, I bet I can send them to school from the Underworld.”

Sirius laughed.

“I bet you can. I thought you said it was difficult for most people though?”

“If they were normal…” she glanced back at Bianca and whispered, “children of Hades, then yes, it would be very difficult for them. But they’re also my children, and even though I wasn’t a goddess at the time, their souls recognize that they are the children of the shadow goddess. They will be stronger in shadow powers than any other children of the Underworld, even if they will be weaker than if they were full gods.”
"Is that how your immortal daughter is? Melanie?"

"Melinoe," Chrysa corrected with a slight laugh. "I suppose so. I don’t really know her. Hades created her by taking the fragments of my mostly-exploded-and-technically-deceased divine essence and combining it with his own. That’s how the goddess of ghosts was created: the god of the Underworld made her out of fragments of her deceased mother. It was slightly shocking for her, my turning up again alive. She didn’t really know how to react to me. I don’t really know how to react to her either. We’re polite enough, whenever we happen to meet, but she avoids me for the most part. And I haven’t gone out of my way to seek her out."

"Why not? She’s your daughter, isn’t she?" Sirius asked.

Chrysa sighed.

"She is. But she’s also a goddess. She grew up knowing her mother was a destroyed goddess, and she grew up in the time that her father was becoming the least-liked of the gods. Hades was also… not emotionally available, from what I understand, for a long time after I died. Persephone helped, but by then Melinoe was an adult. Her childhood was not happy. But now, suddenly she had a mother again, not just a stepmother, and her mother is not even a goddess, but instead an immortal demigod? She’s not really sure what to do with me."

"And you’re not really sure what to do with her," Sirius concluded.

"Exactly," Chrysa sighed. "Especially with the coming war…I know she’ll be approached, if she hasn’t been already.

Sirius wrapped an arm around her shoulders and squeezed her tightly.

"I don’t like the idea of you being involved in another war," he said quietly.

Chrysa smiled sadly.

"Dad, I’ve been involved in this war since I decided to help Queen Rhea save her youngest child from Kronos. It’s been more than nine thousand years."

Sirius startled slightly.

"I forget, sometimes, that you’re so many years older than me, even though you’re still the baby I held the day you were born."

Chrysa smiled sadly at her mortal father-figure.

"I’ll always love you," she said softly.

He smiled back at her, equally sad.

"And I you."

Remus interrupted them.

"If you want to get back to Camp in time for breakfast, Amaranth, you need to leave now."

Chrysa sighed.

"I suppose so. Last round of hugs!" she called, and her three godchildren went from mobbing her daughter to mobbing her.
Chrysa laughed as she wrapped her arms around them tightly.

“I’ll see you soon, Teddy, James, Albus. Give your sister lots of hugs for me when she wakes up.”

“We will,” James said, his voice muffled in the fabric of her jeans.

“Will you bring Bianca back with you, when you come?” Teddy asked hopefully. “And Nico?”

“As long as they want to come,” Chrysa promised.

“I…I think I will,” Bianca said quietly.

Teddy beamed at her.

“Are you ready, passerotta?” Chrysa asked.

“Is this going to make me sick again,” Bianca asked uncertainly.

“Probably,” Chrysa admitted. “You’ll get used to it.”

Bianca grimaced, but took Chrysa’s outstretched hand.

With one final wave good-bye to her mortal family, Chrysa brought the shadows up around them and transported them to what-was-no-longer Thalia’s pine tree.

Once Bianca had gotten over her nausea, she took one look at Peleus and the Golden Fleece hanging from the tree and demanded, “What is that?”

“Golden Fleece,” Chrysa said promptly. “And a dragon. His name is Peleus. He’s still a baby; only six months old.”

Bianca eyed the dragon, which was as thick as her waist and twenty feet long.

“That’s a baby?”

Chrysa hummed her agreement.

“Don’t worry, he’s very friendly to campers. Just don’t try to touch the Fleece without Chiron or Mr. D present.”

“Who are they?” Bianca asked as Chrysa led her down the hill and into the camp proper.

“Chiron is the camp activities director. Mr. D is the director for the next hundred years or so. He’s a god. He made his father mad and got banished here for the foreseeable future.”

“What is this place?” Bianca asked, eyes darting between the temple-like cabins, the open-air dining pavilion, and the lava-spewing climbing wall.

“This, passerotta, is Camp Half-Blood. It’s the safest place on Earth for half-bloods like you and I,” Chrysa explained. “There aren’t too many people about at the moment; most of the campers just come during the summer, but there’s a few year-rounders, along with your brother and the rescue team. There’s only a dozen or so people here at the moment.”

Bianca had perked up.

“Nico’s here?”
Chrysa laughed.

“Of course, _figlietta_. Do you think that I would leave him alone if he were anywhere but the safest place on earth?”

Bianca shook her head.

“Where is he?” she asked, nearly frantic.

“Calm down, _passerotta_. We’ll find him. He’s probably still at breakfast. Everyone’s probably at breakfast, honestly, so we’ll probably make a bit of a scene when we come in.”

Bianca hesitated.

“But it’s the fastest way to see Nico?”

“It’s the fastest way to see Nico,” Chrysa confirmed.

Bianca squared her shoulders.

“Let’s go then.”

Chrysa smiled as she wrapped her arm around her daughter’s shoulders and led her to the dining pavilion, giving a brief tour of camp along the way.

“Big House, arts & crafts, volleyball court. Strawberry fields, forge, armory, sword-fighting arena, pegasus stables, and monster-filled forest are off to the left. Canoe lake, lava climbing wall, and amphitheater to the right. Showers and toilets are here, cabins are there. Cabins are based on your immortal parent. You won’t know that until your father claims you, which he won’t be doing until after he and I have words, so until then you’ll be in Hermes cabin. Hermes is the god of travelers, so his cabin hosts all the unclaimed. In the summer, it’s a madhouse, but there probably aren’t too many people there at the moment.”

“Nico will be there?” Bianca asked.

“He’ll be there,” Chrysa confirmed. “I won’t, I’ll be in my father’s cabin with my half-sister, but if you need me for anything – anything – you can come get me at any time.”

“Which cabin’s yours?” she asked.

“Big white one at the end. Cabin One,” Chrysa replied. “Look, we’re here.”

She pulled her daughter over the crest of the hill and into the dining pavilion. Everyone seemed rather depressed.

“Good morning, campers and Hunters!” she said cheerfully. “Chiron, Dionysus. Good to see you again.”

Before she could continue, Nico was on his feet and running to them from the Hermes table.

“Bianca!” he yelled, eyes watering.

Bianca met him halfway, wrapping her arms around him as tightly as his were wrapped around her. Chrysa didn’t run, but she did move forward to join them, wrapping her arms around both of them, even though neither was much shorter than her. She knew that as much as she wanted to, she couldn’t stay with her children all day. She had to meet with both Hades and her father at some
point today. They had to know what she’d learned. The rest of the Olympian Council would be informed at the Winter Solstice, though she should probably warn Apollo and Leto about Artemis before then.

They only had a moment’s peace in their family hug before they were interrupted.

“Chrysa, I see you’ve returned safely. I presume this is Bianca di Angelo?”

Chrysa closed her eyes and took a deep breath. She opened them and released her children from her embrace, straightening up and looking at Chiron.

“You would be correct. This is my daughter, Bianca di Angelo, and you’ve obviously met my son already.”

Chiron looked confused. Dionysus looked bored, though she could tell he was actually paying close attention.

“May I ask how this is possible?”

Chrysa glanced around the open-air pavilion. Everyone was shamelessly eavesdropping.

“Later,” she said. “It’s a long story.”

“Did you find Annabeth?” Percy asked, rising from the Poseidon table. Thalia rose as well.

“I know where she is, but I did not see her,” Chrysa said. “I would not have left her if I could have saved her. I have information, but I cannot share it with you yet. There are others I must speak to first.”

Chiron gestured toward the tables.

“Sit down. You must be hungry.”

“We just had lunch, actually. Bianca will stay here. I have others I must speak to.” She looked around the room, making eye contact with Thalia, Percy, Zoë, and Rhanis.

“I trust that your promise of protection extends to my daughter as well as my son?”

Zoë bowed her head.

“Of course, Lady Chrysocomē.”

Rhanis, Thalia, and Percy nodded in agreement.

Chrysa bowed her head in thanks.

“You’re leaving already?” Bianca asked in a small voice.

Chrysa smiled sadly at her daughter and laid one hand on her cheek and one on Nico’s.

“I have to, my darlings. Your rescue, Bianca, while the main purpose of my trip, was not the only thing I accomplished. I must report to others. In addition, I need to go yell at your father. He was supposed to tell me when it was time to get you. I was not supposed to find out accidentally from a satyr.”

“You know who their father is?” Chiron asked in surprise.
Chrysa gave him a dry look.

“They weren’t simply delivered by the stork, you know. I’m no blind mortal. Of course I know who their father is. It’s a bit difficult to disguise the fact that you’re a god when you’re sleeping with someone on a regular basis, especially when the someone in question is an immortal demigod.”

Chiron winced at her rebuke, even as Dionysus snickered and Thalia, Percy, Nico, and Bianca made faces at the thoughts of her sex life.

“I trust you with my children, Chiron. Make sure that they are not harmed, or my father’s wrath this past summer will pale in comparison to mine,” she said ominously.

Chiron bowed his head in acquiescence.

Chrysa nodded once, hugged her children once more, then turned on a heel and Apparated away.

She didn’t go far, only to her cabin, so that she could shadow-travel to the Underworld. She had a lover to yell at.

She arrived in the Underworld in her office. It was dark and spacious, the only illumination being green fire from torches mounted on the walls. They cast deep shadows all around the room, only deepening the blackness. The walls and floor were of black marble, though there was a large rug covering most of the floor, in a black-on-black map of Tartarus. The large desk that dominated the room was carved from ebony, with elaborate depictions of suffering souls carved into it. The office chair was the most modern thing in the room: it was a black leather chair that Chrysa had found online and bought, deeming it much more comfortable than her previous chair. Plus, this one had wheels, and she could spin around in it while she was thinking if she so chose.

There were a few files in her inbox. It had been three months since she had gone through her paperwork, and it would probably be three more before she actually went through it. There were always some papers that ended up with her over Persephone, simply because – despite her long absence – she still had more experience than Persephone as the Lady of the Underworld and the darker deities. However, if it was urgent, someone would have contacted her directly – Angelos served as the messenger deity for the darker deities, and was always willing to carry messages to Chrysa when she was outside the Underworld.

There was no time for that now, though. Chrysa had a conniving, secret-keeping lover to put in the dog house. Persephone would most likely help.

She glanced down at her outfit. Emerald skinny jeans and a black, flowy top wasn’t the most intimidating of outfits, but she was probably scary enough without it.

The ancient Greeks may have given her title of Brimô to Persephone, but she was the original ‘terrifying one.’

She left her office and stormed down the hallway to Hades’ bedchamber. It was only five o’clock in the morning in California. And neither Hades nor Persephone was an early riser.

Chrysa moved quickly through the halls, passing through doors instead of waiting for the skeletal staff to open them. They shrank away from her as she proceeded on silent feet.

She paused outside the door to Hades’ bedchamber. She took a deep breath, then slammed the door open.

Both figures on the bed startled out of their sleep, looking up at her with bleary eyes.
“Chrysa?” Persephone asked warily, even as Chrysa opened her mouth.

“AÏDÔNEUS NECRODEGMON, YOU ARE IN SO MUCH TROUBLE!” she yelled.

Persephone yawned and climbed out of the bed.

“Tell me what he did at breakfast,” she offered sleepily as she grabbed her robe and wrapped it around herself. “I’m going to my chambers and going back to sleep.”

Chrysa waited patiently for the half-asleep goddess to leave the room, before taking a deep breath and yelling, “HOW COULD YOU BE SO STUPID!!?”

“Chrysa, love,” Hades started, but she pointed angrily at him.

“You don’t get to talk,” she ordered. “After what you’ve done…if it weren’t for the fact that your asshole of a father is trying to start a new war, I would tie you up and throw you into Tartarus. Better yet, I’d tell my trophós and dump you on her front porch and let her deal with you.

Hades still looked confused, but he shivered at the thought of being sent to the House of Nyx so that the primordial could ‘deal with him’.

Chrysa glared at him.

“You haven’t even figured out what you’ve done, have you?”

Hades winced.

“I…forgot our anniversary?”

Chrysa blinked.

“Well, if you’re talking about the day that you first met Amaranth Potter, than yes, you did forget our anniversary, it was a week and a half ago. But that’s not why I’m mad.”

She was right beside his bed now. She leaned over him, her nose mere inches from his.

“You released our children from the Lotus Hotel and sent them off to boarding school WITHOUT TELLING ME!” she exclaimed, her voice starting off as a hiss and ending as a yell. “Bianca almost died, Hades! She was kidnapped by a manticore working for Kronos! It took me twenty-four hours to find her! If I’d been less than half an hour later, she would have been tortured by Atlas. Atlas! Our twelve-year-old daughter was almost tortured by the Kronos’ chief enforcer! I rescued her from the dungeons of Mount Othrys! Mount Othrys! We were so close to losing her – to losing them both – and it could have all been prevented if you’d simply told me that they were free!”

Hades had shut his eyes in a grimace.

“I couldn’t!”

“Why not?” Chrysa begged desperately. “They’re my children!”

“Lachesis told me not to!” Hades exclaimed.

Chrysa froze. It was rare that one of the Fates stooped to tell the gods something now. Usually, warnings like that would be distributed through Apollo or one of his Oracles. For the Fates to personally tell Hades…
“Personally, or did she send a messenger?” Chrysa asked skeptically.

“She texted,” Hades stated.

Chrysa blinked.

“Lachesis has a cell phone?”

“An iPhone 3GS,” Hades confirmed with a nod. “Clotho is still stuck with the 3G. Atropos already has the iPhone 4.”

“It hasn’t even been announced yet,” Chrysa said, bemused.

Hades shrugged.

“Past, present, future,” he said. “But I got a text saying…actually, let me show you. You’re going to have to see it to believe it.”

He pulled his iPhone out of his nightstand and opened up his messages. Scrolling through, he found the one he was looking for and handed it to Chrysa.

The message read, ‘dnt tel ur gf wen u rm ur kdz frm lh&c. nEdz 2 hpn dis wa. Its f8!!! <3 Lachesis.’

Chrysa stared at it for a long moment.

“I really don’t know what to say to this,” she finally said. “I barely know how to read this.”

Hades sighed and rubbed at his face with one hand.

“I didn’t either,” he replied. “And so I spent the next two weeks trying to track her down before finally giving in and doing what she said. She came back after that. Turns out that she was on a cruise in the Caribbean.”

“I can’t imagine the Moirai on a cruise in the Caribbean,” Chrysa said.

“It was just Lachesis, actually. Apparently, it was a senior singles’ cruise,” Hades deadpanned.

They stared at each other for a moment before they both burst out laughing.

When they’d calmed down, Chrysa fixed her gaze on Hades and said, “I’m still mad at you.”

Hades sighed.

“I’m mad at me too. Can you explain everything now?”

Chrysa sighed and sat down on the bed.

“Get ready. After I tell you, I then need to go tell Zeus.”

Hades made a face, but got out of bed to get dressed anyway.

Once he was up and moving, Chrysa started talking.

“Percy got an SOS from his satyr friend three days ago. Two days ago, I drove Percy, Annabeth, and Thalia up to Westover Academy in Maine to meet the satyr. I was supposed to distract the administration while they got information from the satyr and extracted the demigod. I didn’t find out
that there were two demigods until later. There was a manticore there trying to kidnap – yes, kidnap, not kill – the two demigods. Percy got himself capture and the manticore took all three of them to a cliff. Thalia, Annabeth, the satyr, and I pursued them there. We were all bundled rather heavily, it being winter in Maine. I didn’t realize who the demigods were. The manticore ended up jumping off the cliff with Annabeth and the female demigod attached to him. It was only then that I realized that it was Nico and Bianca with us. Oh, and Artemis and her Hunters showed up to fight as well. I released Nico’s memories and revealed that I was his mother to those gathered. Artemis and I conferred about some troubling things the monster had said. We then sent off the Hunters and campers with Apollo to get back to Camp Half-Blood. Artemis left to hunt down the monster the manticore spoke of. I went to find Bianca. I destroyed one of Kronos’ bases. I found troubling information. I found Bianca in the dungeons of Mount Othrys. I overheard Luke Castellan speaking with Atlas. He’s out. They’ve captured Artemis. I rescued Bianca. I was not very subtle. We need to talk to my father.”

Hades grimaced, but didn’t argue her point as he smoothed his hair out into something acceptable.

“I’ll go tell Seph we’re going out,” he said.

“And that you’re on the couch for the next week,” she called after him. Hades groaned, but nodded in agreement.

“I’m going to tell Father. Meet me at the Clinton Street Baking Company in New York,” Chrysa instructed before stepping into shadow.

She stepped out in an out-of-the-way hallway on Olympus.

“Ganymede!” she called, recognizing the blond cupbearer in the hall ahead of her.

He turned to face her, and his eyes widened in surprise.

“Lady Chrysocomê,” he greeted with a shallow bow. Like Dionysus, Ganymede was too young to remember her as Leuke, and did not have the same respect for her the elder deities did.

“Where is my father?” she questioned. “I must speak with him.”

“Zeus and Queen Hera are in their private dining hall,” her father’s lover reported. “I am to attend them now.”

“Lead me there,” Chrysa ordered. “I have news that my father must know.”

“As you wish,” the god replied, before resuming his walk.

The rest of their trip was silent, Ganymede easily guiding her through the unfamiliar halls of the palace on Mount Olympus. Though this palace and Hades’ were quite similar on the outside, they had vastly different interiors, in both design and layout.

When Ganymede finally entered the double-doors that led to Zeus and Hera’s private dining room, he announced, “Lady Chrysocomê is here, Your Majesties.”

“Come in, daughter,” Zeus called, not that it was necessary, as she was already halfway across the room.

Instead of exchanging pleasantries, she barely waited until the doors were closed to bluntly state, “Kronos is on the move. Mount Othrys is rising. Atlas is no longer under the sky. Artemis has been kidnapped. They plan to put her in Atlas’ place, if they haven’t already done so. Oh, and Kronos’
army has the names and locations of every demigod above the age of ten in the United States – and some in Canada.”

Zeus choked on his nectar. Hera dropped her goblet. Ganymede looked faint.

“How do you know this?” Zeus demanded as soon as he’d recovered his composure, rising from his chair.

“My daughter was kidnapped by a manticore working for Kronos,” Chrysa replied. “I found her on Mount Othrys. I managed to overhear Atlas speaking with Luke Castellan to hear what they planned for Artemis and my daughter. As for the other information, during my search for Bianca, I came across one of the bases used by Kronos’ forces. I cleared it out and managed to copy most of their files. They had a list, a list of every demigod and their location. They didn’t have most of the younger ones, but they have most – if not all – of the demigods above the age of ten.”

Zeus sunk back into his chair.

“We will need to bring this before the council on the Solstice,” he said heavily.

“Indeed,” Hera said, looking grave. “If Father has risen so much as to contrive Atlas’ freedom…”

“He can’t rise yet,” Chrysa reminded firmly. “He doesn’t have his heart.”

“You’ve checked? You know it’s secure?” Zeus asked.

“Yes,” Chrysa said firmly. Not only was the heart hidden, it’s hiding place was also enchanted. There was no way to remove it without her knowledge. “Hades is waiting for us at the Clinton Street Baking Company,” she stated. “We have more planning to do.”

Hera sighed and Zeus grimaced, but both stood up from the table, their outfits changing to something much more appropriate for December in New York.

“I’ll tell Ganymede we’re leaving,” Hera told her husband. “That way you can get your pre-meeting quarrel with Hades out of the way before I get there.”

Zeus grimaced again.

“Yes, dear.”
“We can’t stop him from rising,” Chrysa said bluntly once their eggs, pancakes, waffles, bacon, and mimosas had been delivered and the appropriate spells set up to deter attention. “He’s come too far. He spent too much time building up in the shadows before we noticed. Ancient things are waking…”

“Grandmother became restless back during the second World War,” Hades pointed out. “She summoned my Roman form’s lover and daughter to Alaska, beyond our reach, and nearly managed to raise Alcyoneus again. My daughter Hazel died stopping her.”

“Alaska, as you said, is beyond our reach,” Hera mused. “If the Giant did manage to rise once more, we wouldn’t know it.”

“It’s been more than sixty years,” Chrysa said grimly. “If Alcyoneus nearly rose back then, I have no doubt that he’s managed to drag himself out of the grave again, cockroach that he is. Has anyone from either side been up to Alaska since then?”

“There was a Roman expedition in the eighties,” Zeus said slowly. “The entire Fifth Cohort disappeared, along with the praetor who led them there, and the legion’s eagle was lost.”

“Their souls never made it to the Underworld,” Hades confirmed. “Alcyoneus would have had the power to hold them there.”

“Could it have been because Alaska is beyond the gods?” Hera asked.

“No,” Chrysa said, shaking her head. She quickly swallowed her bite of waffle. “Alaska is beyond the influence of the gods, but not the influence of the Protogenoi.”

“Hazel and her mother died in Alaska, but they made it to the Underworld,” Hades nodded. “If their spirits are still there, it’s because they’re held there by the influence of a god, much the same as the shades of Hecate’s Blessed can choose to remain within the Wizarding World.”

Chrysa wasn’t privy to all the details concerning the deaths of Marie and Hazel Levesque, but Hades had shared the story with her. He didn’t usually bring up things that happened in his Pluto aspect up around her – Leuke had no Roman aspect, having been dead for nearly two centuries by the time Aeneas, considered the first Roman demigod, was born.

“If Grandmother was strong enough to be able to communicate long-term with Marie Levesque, and then possess her nightly for seven months, she would have had to have been stirring for years,” Chrysa said slowly. She froze when the realization struck her.

“What is it?” Zeus asked urgently.

“I started this,” Chrysa said, her voice barely a whisper. “The manticore in Maine, he said, ‘The Great Stirring is underway…the stirring of monsters… the stirring of all the ancient things. The worst of them, the most powerful, are now waking. Did you really think that it was just our Lord? All of the lost ones are awakening.’ All the lost ones. I was reborn as Maria on July 31, 1913. I was the first lost one to awaken, even if we didn’t know it at the time. I started this.”

“We’re cyclical creatures, Leuke,” Hera said brusquely. She sipped her mimosa. “It was going to happen anyway. We can’t stop the hands of Fate. As it is, I would prefer this happen with you here than without you. You were invaluable last time.”
“I’m not a double agent this time,” Chrysa sighed. “I don’t know how much help I’ll be.”

“Nonsense,” Hera said. “You still have your shadows. You still hear secrets. You still have the most terrifying attendants in the pantheon. You still know Father better than we do. You know how he thinks, how he operates, how he chooses to attack and when to hold back. You are still just as deadly now as you were in the past – perhaps more, since your repertoire has expanded while Father has remained in pieces.”

“What we need to do now is determine how to proceed,” Hades stated as he took a large bite of pancake.

“We can’t do anything until the Council meeting on the winter solstice,” Zeus pointed out. “Not anything major.”

“And we can’t hold the Council without Artemis, even if Leuke, Hestia, and I all sit – and I believe, this time, we must,” Hades said with a pointed look at Chrysa. Since her return, she had refused to take her former seat on the Council as Leuke, even though the Winter Solstice Council held more than twelve members and Hestia and Hades both reclaimed their thrones on the occasion.

“So, Artemis must be found before the Winter Solstice meeting at sundown in…five days,” Chrysa said. “The quest will probably leave Camp Half-Blood tomorrow morning.”

“The heart is still safe?” Zeus asked urgently.

“\textbf{Yes,} Father. I moved it the summer before last. And based on where I put it, even if I give up its location under duress, it will still take a while to find it. I have enough magic mufflers on it that you wouldn’t recognize it as magical if you were holding it in your hand. Plus, it’s warded strongly enough that if anyone looking for it comes within a mile of it, I’ll know.”

“The campers won’t be able to face Atlas alone,” Hades pointed out. “You’ll need to go.”

“I might be revealed as myself if I do,” Chrysa cautioned.

“It may be the only way,” Zeus said. “Atlas can’t be matched with strength, but no one can match you in speed and stealth.”

“I’ve taken him down before, I can do so again,” Chrysa nodded. “But there’s one other thing we’ve not mentioned. Thalia’s birthday is the day after the solstice.”

“She’s turning sixteen,” Hera said. “She could be the prophecy child.”

\textit{Could} being the operative word,” Zeus said. “The prophecy says ‘a’ half-blood shall reach sixteen. As Chrysa already proved, the first demigod child of ours to reach sixteen does not necessarily have to be the prophecy child.”

“Prophecies have a way of working themselves out,” Chrysa pointed out. “I’m sure that if she chooses to, Thalia could make the choice to raze Olympus for her sixteenth birthday. We’ve been trying to counteract it over the past few months, but she does not have the biggest reasons to trust the gods. She lost her brother to Juno, and her mother to obsession caused by Zeus. She spent four years on the streets without aid. Luke was her everything for two years. Six months may not have been enough to break that bond enough. I know that if Ron and Hermione had asked me to turn against Sirius and Remus those first few months I was living with them, I would have done it. I would have hesitated, but they’d proved themselves to me more than any adults ever had. Luke has
proved himself to Thalia more than the gods ever have.”

She noticed Hera and Hades open their mouths at the same time. She quickly raised a hand to silence them.

“We are not killing her.”

Both slumped slightly in their seats.

“We are not killing anyone, including but not limited to, Thalia, Percy, and Nico and Bianca.”

Her hard gaze went to her father on those last words.

His voice was firm, but sincere as he said, “I swear on the River Styx that I will never again attempt to harm your children, Leuke Chrysocomê.” Thunder rumbled in confirmation of his oath.

“Thank you,” Chrysa said quietly, looking down at her lap. “I’ve just gotten them back…I can’t lose them again.”

“I assume they will not be going on this quest?” Hera asked with an arched eyebrow.

“No. Later, they might, but now they have no training. I don’t want them going out unprepared. That’s how demigods die,” Chrysa stated.

“You can’t protect them forever,” Zeus reminded.

“But I can protect them for a little while longer,” Chrysa said firmly. “I’m going back to Camp Half-Blood. I’ll see you on the Solstice. You may wish to figure out how you plan to tell Apollo about his sister. And Leto about her daughter.”

She grabbed the last piece of bacon of her plate and downed the last of her mimosa before stepping back into the shadow cast by her chair and out into her alcove in Zeus Cabin.

Chrysa hesitated only a moment before heading out of the cabin and down to the beach. She wanted to see her children, but there was someone else she needed to talk to first.

Due to the weather, there was no one on the sands. Chrysa flicked her wrist to draw her wand and waved it at the sea. An arc of water flew upwards, making a rainbow under the midday sun. She pulled a golden drachma from her pocket and tossed it in.

“O Iris, Goddess of the Rainbow, accept my offering,” she said. “Show me Pleione, daughter of Oceanus.”

The rainbow rippled, and her dark-haired, dark-eyed sister appeared in the water. Pleione looked a great deal like her daughter, Zoë, though the youngest of the Hesperides actually resembled her father more. The younger Oceanid was looking out the window of the undersea room.

“Sister,” Chrysa called.

The Oceanid smiled when she turned around.

“Leuke! What has you calling today?”

“Not good news, I’m afraid, sister. As a part of our uncle’s plan to rise, your husband is no longer trapped beneath the sky. He may come looking for you,” Chrysa warned.
Pleione paled.

“He won’t be able to reach me so long as I remain in Atlantis,” she said. “But my children...are they safe? Will he harm them?”

“The Hesperides were loyal to him. So long as the Hyades and Pleiades stay away from him, they should be safe,” Chrysa stated. “But Atlas has captured Artemis, and Zoë intends to look for her. Stay away from the West Coast for a while? Pass it on to the others?”

“I will,” Pleione said with a nod. “Things are getting tense down here too, though. I know you and Trite talked to Father about remaining neutral, but Aigaios and Thaumas are causing problems. Phorcys and Keto have been suspiciously quiet, and Nereus has been crabbiest than usual. Some of the younger immortals are making noise too. The forges have been working night and day on new weapons for the mermaids.”

“Are you or any of our sisters fighting?” Chrysa asked.

“I’m prepared to,” Pleione nodded. “I had a new set of armor commissioned last summer. I’m not going to sit idly by this time. I like my life the way it is now. I don’t want Kronos or Atlas back. I’m willing to fight to keep it that way. I’m not sure about the others; I’ve never been able to keep track of them like you and Trite could. I’m sure some of our brothers are fighting, but on which side, I can’t say.”

“I’ll try to keep informed, but I’ll be busy with the land-based war. Besides, I was never much of a water goddess,” Chrysa said with a small, sad smile.

Pleione laughed lightly, though the emotions were the same.

“You were too old for it. Everything was too fluid back then – no one had quite decided who they were meant to be. And you didn’t even have the benefit of being raised under the sea like the rest of us did.”

“Mother and Father hadn’t even decided to move under the sea yet,” Chrysa said softly.

Pleione tilted her head.

“You remember everything, then? You didn’t the last time I saw you.”

“Almost,” Chrysa confirmed. “I’m only missing the first two hundred-sixty years or so. I should remember everything by the spring equinox. I remember your birth, and most of our sisters. I was quite a bit older than Clymene, considering the insignificant gaps between the rest of our siblings.”

“You're...two hundred years older than Clymene?” Pleione asked, face scrunched.

“Four hundred,” Chrysa sighed. “Grandmother wanted Mother to grow up more before having more children. I was the ‘happy accident’, so to speak. There’s a reason Mother and Father handed me off to Grandmother to raise, and it wasn’t just because Kronos was just younger than me.” She glanced down at her watch.

“I should probably go,” she said reluctantly. “The Quest to help Artemis will probably leave in the morning, and I don’t doubt that I’ll be a part of it. Even if I’m not, I’m sure I’ll be needed at some point today to mediate between the campers and the Hunters.”

“Is...is Zoë there?” Pleione asked hesitantly.
“She is,” Chrysa confirmed.

“Tell her I still love her?” Pleione asked hopefully.

Chrysa smiled.

“Of course, sister.”

She waved her wand, and the suspended water droplets fell back into the sea, dissolving the rainbow and ending the Iris-message.

Chrysa sighed as she sat down, staring off at the ocean. When she was younger, just looking at the ocean had been calming, since it reminded her of her parents and sisters. Now, it’s choppy waters were just a mirror for her internal turmoil. This entire thing was just one giant mess. Besides the martial implications, there were too many emotions wrapped in this entanglement for it to be in any way easy.

The soft sound of footsteps on the sound heralded the arrival of another person, who stopped a few feet away from her.

“Would you like to sit, Percy?” she asked quietly.

There was no sound for a moment, but then the footsteps continued until Percy sat down beside her.

“You have children,” he finally said, breaking the silence, though he still stared out at the sea.

“I do,” Chrysa replied quietly.

“You never told me.”

“I know.”

Percy finally turned to look at her, anger evident on his face.

“You can’t do this, Chrysa. I understand you have your secrets – about whatever it is you do for Hades, and Thanatos, and the stuff you’re involved in that you can’t talk about with us demigods, but the fact that you have kids? You said we were family. That’s not the kind of secret you keep from family.”

“It’s not,” Chrysa said quietly. “But there’s more going on here than you know about. Nico and Bianca…they were a secret for a reason. There is so much that could be gained from keeping them hostage, Percy. Their father…he doesn’t have children often. Not like the others. Before the Oath the Big Three made not to have children, during World War II – Zeus and Poseidon had close to a dozen children each fighting. That doesn’t even count the ones who lived longer. Hades had one son, one grandson, and one great-great-grandson. I may have forgotten a great though. He doesn’t have children often. More than one a century is rare, and it usually takes longer. Never more than one a generation. Nico and Bianca were the first time he had two demigod children with the same mother. As hostages in this coming fight, Nico and Bianca are so very valuable, both as their father’s children and as mine. If Kronos has even one of them, he can stop both of us in our tracks. It was safest for everyone that no one knew about them.”

“I wouldn’t have told anyone,” Percy said petulantly.

“Spies are always a problem,” Chrysa said solemnly. “The more people that know the information, the more likely it is that it’s going to get out. Nico and Bianca are the most important thing to me.
There is nothing I would not do to protect them. I will lie, steal, and murder if that’s what it takes to keep them safe. You’ll understand when you have children.”

“If I live that long,” Percy said glumly.

“I’ll do my best to make sure you do,” Chrysa replied.

They lapsed back into silence.

“Did you choose to save Bianca over Annabeth?” Percy asked abruptly.

Chrysa winced inwardly.

“Not…not in such simple terms. From what I overheard when I was there, Annabeth was taken to be used as part of a trap for Artemis. She was already in place when I got there. If I had waited longer, then I might have been able to save Annabeth as well, but not before the General planned to visit Bianca. I don’t know how that meeting would have gone, but I was unwilling to risk it. So, I took Bianca out as soon as possible.”

Percy’s face flashed angrily.

“So you just left her there to die?! I thought you had guardianship of her? Doesn’t that make her your child as well?”

“It’s not so simple, Percy,” Chrysa tried to explain.

“Hades it is! You picked Bianca over Annabeth!”

“I chose strategically!” Chrysa snapped back. “Annabeth has the best chance of surviving unharmed! Your closest friend she may be, but she was Luke’s ward first. He’ll protect her. He won’t just allow them to kill her. He’ll do everything he can to keep her safe. Annabeth is smart. She won’t antagonize them. She will do everything in her power to come back to us alive. Bianca would be helpless in that situation. She didn’t even know her father was a god, much less the rest of the situation!”

“You have a twelve-year-old daughter and you never told your kids that their dad was a god? You’re still with him!” Percy nearly shouted.

“It’s more complicated than that, Percy!” Chrysa yelled back. She sighed as she deflated. Much quieter, she repeated, “It’s much more complicated. I’ll explain tonight. We’ll have a council meeting, after the Capture-the-Flag game. Now, do you want to talk about whatever else is on your mind?”

Percy grimaced.

“Grover said…he said the Hunters might have been scouting us. He found a brochure in Annabeth’s backpack about joining the Hunters.”

“And you like Annabeth, so the fact that she might have been leaving you is hurting you on top of the fact that she’s missing,” Chrysa deduced.

“I – I don’t like her!” Percy sputtered. “Well, I like her, but I don’t like-like her!”

the same gender, if that’s where your tastes lie, though I don’t think they do – without being in love with them yet. But that doesn’t change the fact that you might eventually be in love. You care about Annabeth, and it could one day blossom into something more. But today, it’s okay to just be upset that she’s missing.”

Percy buried his face in his hand. His voice came out muffled when he said, “I want to strangle the Hunters of Artemis one eternal maiden at a time. I’ve been useless today. I made a hole in an Ares kid’s pants during javelin-throwing class. He already didn’t like me after I woke him up from his nap yesterday afternoon. Silena was having an argument with a Hunter in the pegasus stables, so that wasn’t calming. I even went up to the Big House to try to talk to the Oracle, but nothing happened.”

“It wasn’t your quest,” Chrysa said quietly. “Or you didn’t ask the right question. The answer you get depends on the question you ask. Plus, prophecies tend to just be weird in general. I once got one in haiku form. Granted, I think Apollo may have been high when that happened, but it was still a legitimate prophecy. Granted, he just told me not to eat the sushi at dinner. Unfortunately, he didn’t specify which dinner, and it turned out to be one six weeks after he told me that, two weeks after I started eating sushi again. Food poisoning is not fun, and is unfortunately one of the few things magic can’t deal with. I just had to wait it out.”

“Apollo gives haiku prophecies?” Percy asked.

“Occasionally. That happened at a Winter Solstice afterparty, which can get kind of wild on the godly side of things. It’s the only time when everyone’s allowed on Olympus, so people tend to get gossipy. And drunk. It’s fun for everyone.”

“How do you even give a prophecy in haiku form?” Percy questioned, still looking confused.

“I think it went something like –

“Don’t eat the sushi,
I give this warning to you.

Food poisoning comes.”

“That was…blunt,” Percy stated.

Chrysa shrugged.

“It’s a haiku. It’s hard to be obscure when you only have seventeen syllables. You should have heard some of the sonnet prophecies that have been spouted. Have you covered Shakespearean sonnets in English yet?”

“That was the whole ‘Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day? Thou…’ I don’t remember the rest,” Percy said.

“Thou art more lovely and more temperate. Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May, and summer’s lease hath all too short a date; sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines, and often is his gold complexion dimm’d; and every fair from fair sometimes declines, by chance or nature’s changing course untrimm’d; but thy eternal summer shall not fade, nor lose possession of the fair thou ow’st; nor shall death brag thou wand’st in his shade, when in eternal lines to time thou grow’st: So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, so long lives this, and this gives life to thee.’ Fourteen lines, alternating rhyme scheme until the couplet at the end. Now imagine a prophecy in the form of a Shakespearean sonnet, before sonnets had been invented, given in Ancient Greek.”
Percy winced noticeably.

“Exactly,” Chrysa said. “Thankfully, Pythia has always been a relatively straightforward Oracle, even if people don’t pay attention to what she says.”

“Pythia?”


“Why wouldn’t she tell me how to save Annabeth?” Percy demanded. “I dreamt about her! The whole ceiling fell on her and Luke, but she stopped it and Luke left her there!”

Chrysa sat up straighter.

“You dreamt about Annabeth?”

“And Zoë dreamt about Artemis, I think,” Percy said. “Grover said she had a screaming match with Chiron really early this morning.”

“I shall have to speak with her,” Chrysa frowned. “If we are to act, we must have all the information.”

“Who’s we?” Percy asked.

“I don’t know yet, but I need to speak with Zoë. And then I need to talk to Nico. I’ll explain everything – at least everything relevant – later today, but Nico and Bianca deserve to be the first to know.”

Before Percy could reply, Chrysa slipped to her feet and hurried off the beach. She made her way to the cabins silently, keeping to the shadows the best she could despite the midday sun, and knocked on the door of the silver wood cabin. A Hunter Chrysa recognized but didn’t know answered the door – she was somewhat beefy, and was shockingly ginger.

“Is Zoë here?” she asked immediately.

“She is with some of the others on the archery fields, Lady Chrysocomê,” the Hunter replied. “But they planned to return before lunch, so she will not be long there. Would you like to wait for her?”

“I would,” Chrysa nodded. “I need to speak with her.”

“As your niece, or as Artemis’ lieutenant?” the Hunter asked curiously, even as she stepped aside to allow Chrysa into the Hunters’ abode.

The cabin was rustic inside – just a normal cabin in the woods, if a normal cabin in the woods had archery targets on every wall and trophies mounted between them and exotic animal skin rugs on the floor. She was relatively certain she was standing on yale skin.

Chrysa tilted her head as her eyes glazed over, her sight falling into the divine sight that allowed her to see auras as she looked at the Hunter before her.

“You’re older than I expected,” she stated. “Not that I should be surprised, with my own niece and sister as Hunters, when they have been alive millennia. But you were born mortal, weren’t you?”

“I was,” the Hunter confirmed. “I am Phoebe, daughter of Leda and Tyndareus.”

“Sister of the Dioscuri, Clytemnestra, and Helen,” Chrysa recognized.
“And Timandra and Philonoe,” Phoebe said. “But most forget them. Most forget me. My brothers died young, and my sisters deserted their husbands, but Philonoe and I were taken in by Artemis and remain with her to this day.”

“Is your sister here as well?” Chrysa asked curiously.

“No, she stands as the lieutenant in charge of one of our stations on the other side of the country,” Phoebe said. “Only ten or twenty of us travel with Artemis at a time. The others are stationed around the country to join us if we have the need. Philonoe is currently in Montana.”

“There was a monster infestation up there a few years back, wasn’t there?”

Phoebe nodded excitedly.

“Oh yes. We spent several months in the wilds there. Afterwards, Lady Artemis left a few of us up there to keep things under control. Your sister Phiale is there as well.”

Further conversation was interrupted by the return of the other Hunters.

“Sister,” Rhanis greeted, moving forward to embrace Chrysa properly, since they were no longer under the gaze of demigods. “What brings you to see us so soon? I assure you, your children are safe, and we haven’t managed to bring your daughter into our fold quite yet.”

“I was told that our niece had a dream,” Chrysa said, leveling her gaze on Zoë Nightshade, who paled, but stood resolute.

“I did,” the Hunter confirmed. “My lady Artemis is lost to the dark forces we face.”

“Your father is freed from his prison, niece,” Chrysa said bluntly. “The General is behind this current plot to capture your mistress. I have already informed your mother, and she sends her love.”

If possible, Zoë paled further.

“If my father is behind this, I willingly go to face him to save my lady,” Zoë vowed.

“Not yet, Zoë,” Chrysa cautioned. “There will be a quest. We must retrieve Artemis before the winter solstice, but not yet. The timing isn’t right yet. For now, focus on the game tonight.”

Zoë’s serious demeanor broke as she snorted.

“The campers have not defeated us in Capture-the-Flag since Camp Half-Blood was still in Europe,” Zoë scoffed.

“There’s a first time for everything,” Chrysa said pleasantly. “Including Capture-the-Flag. I’ve never gotten to play before, but I think I will today.”

“No shadow travel,” Rhanis said with a glare. “That’s cheating.”

“It’s only cheating if you’re caught,” Chrysa shrugged. “And I highly doubt Chiron is going to try to take away my dessert privileges. Even if he does, I can always pop off anywhere in the world to get dessert.”

“No. Cheating.” Rhanis repeated.

Chrysa sighed good-naturedly. “Fine. No shadow-travel. Besides, the campers don’t know about that ability anyway. I will be nothing more than who they know Chrysa Potter to be: demigod
daughter of Zeus.”

She walked out of the cabin, then paused to poke her head back inside.

“And did I mention I’m also a witch?”

She stepped into the shadows outside their cabin before they could reply, reappearing in the dining pavilion as the conch horn sounded to summon the campers. Unfortunately, there was almost no way to avoid awkward conversation at this meal: if she sat with Thalia, her sister would question her; if she sat with Percy, they’d need to talk when he probably needed more time to think; if she sat at the Head Table, Chiron would start pressing.

Chiron, while the most dangerous of potential conversationalists, was also the most patient and least likely to press in public, which made him the best choice of the three.

She still made sure Dionysus would be between them.

Everyone was not-so-subtly watching her as she deftly avoided Chiron’s probing questions about how in the world she had ten- and twelve-year-old children when he knew she was only twenty-eight years old. Thankfully, her age wasn’t common knowledge around camp, besides ‘older-than-she-looks.’

Dionysus finally interrupted, saying, “She will explain later, Chiron. It was a secret for a reason, and those of us who needed to know knew.”

“There’s more going on here than you know,” Chrysa added quietly. “Later. Tonight. After the game. I need to speak with my children first.”

“They are your children then?”

“I definitely remember giving birth to them,” Chrysa said drily. “I can give more detail if you’d like? With Bianca, it was just me and a midwife in my house, but with Nico I was in labor for three days, and he was breech, so the midwife had to call in a doctor and…”

“That’s enough,” Chiron said hurriedly.

Graphic details of childbirth were such a good way to get men to stop talking to you. That and details of menstruation. She’d used both before, on both mortals and gods, and it affected them the same way.

Lunch finished quietly, and Chrysa dodged around the other campers in order to grab Nico and Bianca before they could leave.

“I think it’s time I explained things to you properly,” she said quietly.

Both nodded, and she wrapped an arm around each of her children as she led them from the pavilion. As soon as they were far enough away not to be seen, she cast a spell to make sure they had no watchers. Once it came up clear, she said, “Bianca, I’m going to do that thing again.”

Her daughter groaned. Nico looked confused.

“I’m going to use a form of magical travel to take us somewhere we can talk that’s truly private. However, most forms of magical travel are nauseating until you get used to it. This one’s a bit worse than some of the others, but it’s the only way to get where we’re going,” Chrysa explained. “Hold your breath. It sometimes makes it easier.”
Both children did as instructed, even as Chrysa grabbed their shoulders and pulled them through the shadows into her boudoir in Hades’ palace. She conjured up waste basins for both of her children, though only Nico used his. Bianca looked green, though that could have been due to the lighting. Though Hades had finally had electric lights installed throughout the palace – barring the public areas, which apparently had to keep the magical green fire torches so that Hades could continue with his terrifying aesthetic – there were still green torches in every room, and they had a tendency to taint the lighting a bit.

“What was that, Mamma?” Nico asked with a cough.

Chrysa conjured a handkerchief and a glass of water, wiped Nico’s mouth clean, and handed him the glass. He took a long drink to wash the bile out of his mouth.

“That was called shadow travel,” Chrysa explained. “It’s a special ability of mine, and some other people’s, though I’m the best at it.”

“Will we be able to do that?”

“Probably,” Chrysa allowed. “Most people find it very difficult though.”

“Can Papà do it?” Bianca asked.

“He can,” Chrysa nodded. “I taught him how.”

“But you said Papà is a god,” Bianca asked, obviously confused. “How did you know how to do this first?”

Chrysa sighed.

“Let’s sit down.”

Instead of taking a seat on one of the upholstered chairs or sofas, she pulled her children with her to the large bearskin rug in front of the fireplace, where she sat down with them across from her, almost knee-to-knee in a small circle.

“Where to begin,” she mused aloud. “Tesoro, do you remember the last day we spent together as a family in D.C.?”

“Bianca and I were playing cards while you talked to Papà,” Nico said. “I was annoyed because I had to skip my Cub Scouts meeting. Then you went to get your purse before Papà took us somewhere, and then…we were at the Lotus Hotel. Papà said that we needed to stay for a while, for safety, and he’d see us soon. You and Papà came to visit a few weeks later.”

“Niccolò, in the hotel that day…there was an explosion. Your Papà was able to protect you with his power, but I was too far away. I died that day, tesoro.”

“But you’re right here!” Nico exclaimed confusedly.

“When a soul enters the Underworld and is judged a hero, they are sent to Elysium. When they are there, they are given the option of being reborn. I was reborn – I’ve been reborn twice now, in all. This is my third life. My name now is Amaranth Chrysocomê Potter-Black, but post people know me as Chrysa Potter. It was in my last life that I was Maria di Angelo.”

Nico was quiet for a long moment.
“But you’re still our Mamma?” he asked in a small voice.

Chrysa leaned forward immediately and wrapped both of her children in a hug.

“Of course I am,” she said quietly. “The way rebirth works for those of us ‘in-the-know’, so to speak – we are literally born again as we were before. I will always be your mother, and I will always love you just the same.”

“As will I,” Hades said from the doorway.

“Papà!” the children chorused, even as Hades joined their embrace.

“Hello, bambini,” Hades greeted. “Chrysa.” He pressed a quick kiss to her cheek.

“Mamma said you were a god?” Bianca asked.

“I am,” Hades nodded.


“I did,” Chrysa said. “As I mentioned before, the lifetime where I was your mother was my second life. In my first life, I was a goddess myself.”

“But if you were reborn, you had to die first,” Nico pointed out. “How could you kill a goddess?”

Hades and Chrysa exchanged glances. There were many ways to kill a god. Deicide was a practice Leuke had been intimately familiar with, even before she herself had died.

“There is nothing that is truly unkillable,” Chrysa said slowly. “With deities, it tends to be more of a problem to make them stay dead than anything else. As evidenced, I didn’t. I was reincarnated in mortal form, as my connection to my immortal power was severed before I died. Upon my second reincarnation, I became immortal through a series of coincidences and journeyed to the Underworld. Upon crossing the River Styx, I regained my memories of my life as Maria di Angelo, my immortal domain, and the end of my memories of my first life. Over the past ten years, I have regained more and more of my memories, and I’m now missing just the earliest years of my first life.”

“So you’re a goddess?” Bianca asked.

“No, I’m an immortal demigod, currently. A demigod is half-human, half-god – just as you two are. While my soul has always been that of a goddess, I was mortal when you two were born, so you are also mortal – though you carry divine blood in your veins.” Chrysa sighed and looked over at her lover.

“I think we need to start at the beginning,” she said.

Hades nodded and settled down beside her as their circle on the floor expanded. He looked at their children and said, “You knew me as Orfeo Nascosto, but in truth I am Hades, Lord of the Underworld and Greek God of the Dead and Wealth.”

“You’re Hades?” Nico gasped. “You have five thousand attack power! Only if your opponent attacks first though. Yours is the only figurine I don’t have!”

Hades smiled slightly and held out his hand to Nico. Shadows swirled around it, and when they dissipated, a black figurine rested there. Nico took it carefully.

“It’s made of Stygian Iron,” Hades explained as Nico examined the figure. “The metal can only be
created here in the Underworld, and is almost completely restricted to the deities who reside here. I also have a sword ready for you, once you choose to use it.”

He looked over at Bianca.

“We never managed to figure out how to make a bow of Stygian iron for you, but we do have a ridiculous amount of white poplar arrows with Stygian iron heads for you. The bow is a composite that I commissioned from Hephaestus, and he did include Stygian iron in the backing material.”

“How did you…” Bianca began.

“We saw how much you enjoyed that hunting game,” Chrysa interrupted with a smile. “We knew that we’d get you out eventually. We’ve been preparing things for years.”

“The beginning?” Hades reminded her.

“Right,” Chrysa said. She took a deep breath.

“More than thirteen thousand years ago, I was born as Leuke, eldest child of Oceanus, Titan of the Seas, and Tethys, Titaness of Water….”
It took all afternoon to tell her children everything. While she skimmed the details of many things—such as what her jobs for Zeus really were—she and Hades answered every question they asked as truthfully as she could, even the awkward ones—“Aren’t you married?” “Yes. My wife, Persephone, is actually the one who set us up again before we knew that Chrysa was Leuke.” “Wow.”—and did their best to make up for all the secrets they’d kept hidden from their children over their lives. Nico took the revelation of how long they’d been in the Lotus Hotel better than Bianca did, only asking two questions ("How did the war end?" “The US used two really big bombs and dropped them on the Japanese cities. A lot of people died, and Japan surrendered. It happened just a couple weeks after I died.” and “Is that why Mamma wears pants now?” “Yes.”).

They even had dinner together, though they had it in the dining room and were joined by Persephone, Thanatos, Hecate, Makaria, and Zagreus, the latter two of whom were delighted to meet their half-siblings.

(Father isn’t like Uncle Zeus or Uncle Poseidon,” Makaria later confessed. “He doesn’t have a zillion demigod children running around. Nico’s only number twenty in the past three thousand years. Plus, they’re not psychopaths, unlike the last few, so they’re fun to be around.”)

Chrysa also impressed on her children how important it was to keep their parentage a secret.

“Your father is the most feared of the gods. Death is not something that anyone, even gods, understand, so the Ruler of the Dead is not someone that the Olympians make time to understand,” Chrysa explained. “They will be wary of you. Their children will be wary of you. And there is a war brewing. It was prophesied that a child of Zeus, Poseidon, or Hades would make a decision to either save or destroy Olympus. They would not trust you to choose to save it. It’s why I died as Maria. Zeus killed me.”

“But I thought Zeus was your father?” Nico asked.

“He is now,” Chrysa confirmed. “And he has sworn to me that you will suffer no harm from his hands or his words. You are my children, and I am his daughter. He had promised to do me no harm. However, you must also keep my previous identity secret. When I was Leuke, I was more feared than your father. I was dangerous, and still am. No secret is outside my knowledge. However, in my mortal frame…they sometimes take a little longer to find.”

Nico looked pale.

“No secret?” he asked in a small voice.

Chrysa rested her hands on her son’s face and smiled gently at him.

“Tesoro, I do not care who you choose to love. You are my son, and for that I will always love and accept you, just as your father will. And one thing I should mention about the change in decades is that it is no longer seen as abominable to prefer those of your own gender. Yes, there are some who will still curse you, but you are free to love whoever you love. In some states, you can even get married, though I hope that day is still some ways away.”

Nico was finally able to smile back as Chrysa embraced him, soon after joined by Hades and Bianca.

Finally, Hades broke away and said, “It’s time for you to return to camp. You’ve been gone all
day.”

Chrysa kissed him quickly before grasping her children’s hands and shadow-traveling away.

They arrived back at Camp Half-Blood just in time for the Capture-the-Flag game.

“We weren’t sure you were going to make it,” Thalia greeted as they entered the pavilion.

“I’ve never been able to play before,” Chrysa said. “I wouldn’t miss this.”

She had already provided her children with celestial bronze armor and weapons in preparation for this event. While they had Stygian iron weapons and armor prepared, they shouldn’t use that unless they were trying to broadcast their parentage.

She did make sure that each of her children had a Stygian iron knife at hand. Just in case.

It was going to be a small game. There were only a dozen Hunters and sixteen campers. Zoë kept glancing resentfully at Chiron, like she couldn’t believe he was making her do this. The other Hunters didn’t look too happy either.

On their team, they had Charles Beckendorf and two other Hephaestus campers, three from Ares cabin (though still no Clarisse), the Stoll brothers, Silena Beauregard and two of her siblings from Aphrodite cabin, Percy, Thalia, Bianca, Nico, and herself.

Honestly, with five children of the Big Three on their side, they should be able to pulverize the Hunters. Except for the fact that the Hunters were immortal and had more experience than anyone on the campers’ side but Chrysa herself.

It was unusual that the Aphrodite campers were participating, as they usually sat on the sidelines, chatted, and checked their reflections in the river, but from how Silena Beauregard was grumbling, “I’ll show them ‘love is worthless.’ I’ll pulverize them!” as she strapped on her armor, Chrysa could guess why the children of the love goddess were finally showing an interest in the game.

“Thalia and I were going to co-captain, but you’ve got more experience than both of us,” Percy said to her. “So, what’s the plan?”

Thoughts and plans began forming in her mind, but before she did anything, she looked over at her half-sister.

“Are you alright with that?”

Thalia nodded.

“I’ll explain the plan once the game officially begins,” Chrysa said. “For now, make sure everyone has their armor and weapons on properly.

“Cool,” Thalia said as she went off to help the Aphrodite kids, who appeared to be having difficulties putting their armor on without breaking their nails.

Chiron’s hoof thundered on the pavilion floor.

“Heroes!” he called out. “You know the rules! The creek is the boundary line. Blue team – Camp Half-Blood – shall take the west woods. Hunters of Artemis – red team – shall take the east woods. I shall serve as referee and battlefield medic. No intentional maiming, please! All magic items are allowed. To your positions!”
“Blue team, follow me!” Chrysa called out. The campers cheered and followed her out of the pavilion and into the woods.

They set their flag at the top of Zeus’ Fist, a cluster of boulders in the middle of the west woods that, if you looked at it the right way, looked like a huge fist sticking out of the ground. If you looked at it any other way, it looked like a pile of deer droppings, but Percy had passed on that Chiron refused to let them call it the Poop Pile, especially after it had been named after Zeus. Chrysa agreed with the wisdom of that decision; her father didn’t have the best sense of humor.

It was a good place to set the flag. The top boulder was twenty feet tall and really hard to climb, so the flag was clearly visible, like the rules said it had to be, and it didn’t matter that the guards weren’t allowed to stand within ten yards of it.

“Percy, I know you have bad experiences with it, but I want you on the border,” Chrysa instructed first. “The creek is the boundary. You’re the son of the sea god. Use it. Knock the Hunters in if you get the opportunity. Soaking wet arrows can’t fly very well.”

“No problem,” Percy agreed.

“Let’s not get attacked by a Cerberus this time, shall we?” she teased with a light smile. The other campers laughed as Percy blushed.

“Travis, Connor, Nico, and Bianca: you’re guarding the flag. Bianca, you’ve got your new bow, I want you in the trees. Stoll and Stoll, set up whatever trip wires, snares, and traps you can come up with around the place, just remember to warn Nico and Bianca where you’re putting them first.”

The brothers jumped into military position and saluted. Chrysa held back a laugh.

“Nyssa and Lucas are going to be our scouts on our side,” she continued, nodding to the daughter of Hephaestus and son of Aphrodite.

“Silena, you’re going to lead the leftward decoy,” Chrysa said.

“Got it!”

“Take Laurel and Jake. They’re good runners. Make a wide arc around the Hunters, attract as many as you can. Thalia, you’re going to lead the others around to the right.”

“To catch them by surprise?” Thalia asked.

“Oh no, they’ll know you’re coming,” Chrysa said, a smirk playing across her lips. “But we want them to think that you think you’re going to take them by surprise. You have your shield. It’s a bit obvious. Your job is to attract everyone else.”

“I don’t get it,” Percy said.

“The Hunters think we’re stupid. With the numbers we have, they’ll expect us to keep about half our campers back, then send a decoy and a main party. We’re doing that, and then I’ll go after the flag.”

“Why are you the one going after it?” Travis Stoll asked.

Chrysa raised an eyebrow.

“Of everyone here, can anyone else a. turn invisible, and b. fly?” she asked, using the winds to raise
herself several inches off the ground before disappearing from view amid the shocked whispers.

“Can you do that?” Percy turned and asked Thalia.

“I’ve never tried,” she replied.

“It isn’t for everyone,” Chrysa said, reappearing behind the pair, who both jumped. “I spent seven years of school on a sports team that used flying broomsticks that flew upwards of a hundred and fifty miles per hour. I am more than used to insane tricks in the sky. I even subbed in for the English Seeker during the Quidditch World Cup a couple years ago when he got a head injury after a bad Wronski Feint, though we lost to Burkina Faso in the Semifinals.”

She received several blank stares for that. She sighed and said, “I’m really, really good at flying.”

“Ohhhh.”

“Is everybody clear?” Chrysa asked.

Everyone nodded and broke into their smaller groups. The horn sounded, and the game began.

Silena’s group disappeared into the woods on the left. Thalia’s group gave it a few seconds, then darted off toward the right. Chrysa jogged with Percy to the border.

“Remember, no hellhounds,” she said, trying to look sincere.

This time, Percy just rolled her eyes.

“Let’s just beat these Hunters. Get going.”

Chrysa laughed as she stepped up into the air, disappearing as she went. Thanatos’ Invisibility Cloak was certainly good for situations when she’d promised not to use her shadow powers.

She soared at a low altitude over the forest, keeping an eye out for the silver flag the Hunters were using. Among the dark trees, it was easy enough to find. It wasn’t cheating to use her divinely perfect night vision. She couldn’t exactly turn it off.

There was only one guard near the flag, and from the shock of white hair, it was Rhanis. Her hair was probably the reason she was assigned to guard the flag. She wasn’t exactly the subtlest, and hair dye was too troublesome for something as simple as a game.

Chrysa landed next to the flag and cast a silencing charm on the Hunter. Rhanis instantly nocked an arrow upon feeling the magic.

Chrysa became visible before saying, “Your sensitivity is amazing. I wasn’t sure if you’d feel it or not.”

Rhanis fired her arrow, but Chrysa reacted faster.

“Protego!” she ordered.

The arrow bounced off her shield.

“I’ll take this,” Chrysa said, grabbing the flag. “And we said no shadow travel. We said nothing about no magic.”

She turned on a heel and Apparated to the creek, though still on the Hunters’ side. She could see
Percy a short distance away as she jumped across.

The flag shimmered in her hands. The silver material turned blue, and the embroidered moon and arrows of Artemis were replaced by the lightning bolt of Zeus.

The campers cheered as they converged on the creek. The Hunters looked sullen.

“Cheater,” Rhanis mouthed as she appeared on the other side of the creek, before gesturing for Chrysa to take the spell off, which she did with a wave of her wand.

“Magical items are allowed,” Chrysa reminded, trying to keep the gleeful tones out of her voice. From the looks on the others’ faces, she wasn’t doing a very good job. She held out her wand.

“Magical item one.” She willed the Cloak of Invisibility to become visible around her shoulders.

“Magical item two.”

Chiron appeared out of the woods, looking both worried and pleased. He had the Stoll brothers on his back, and it looked as if both of them had taken some nasty whacks to the head. Connor Stoll had two arrows sticking out of his helmet like antennae.


Zoë, who had appeared behind Chiron, looked ready to argue, but then something else behind them caught her attention. Chrysa turned to see what she was looking at.

Someone…something was approaching. It was shrouded by a murky green mist, but as it got closer, the campers and Hunters gasped.

“This is impossible,” Chiron aid. Chrysa hadn’t heard him sound so nervous since she was Leuke.

“It…she has never left the attic. Never.”

And yet, the withered mummy that held the Oracle of Delphi shuffled forward until she stood in the center of the group. Mist curled around everyone’s feet, turning the snow a sickly shade of green.

No one dared move. Then her voice hissed inside Chrysa’s head. Apparently everyone could hear it, because several people clutched their hands over their ears.

*I am the spirit of Delphi,* the voice said. *Speaker of the prophecies of Phoebus Apollo, slayer of the mighty Python.*

The Oracle regarded Percy with its cold, dead eyes. Then she turned unmistakably toward Zoë.

*Approach, Seeker, and ask.*

Zoë swallowed. “What must I do to help my goddess?”

The Oracle’s mouth opened, and green mist poured out. The vague image of a mountain, and a girl standing at its barren peak, appeared. It was Artemis, but she was wrapped in chains, fettered to the rocks. She was kneeling, her hands raised as if to ward off an attacker, and she appeared in pain. There was no doubt she was, if she was trapped beneath the weight of the sky.

The Oracle spoke:

*Five shall go west to the goddess in chains,*

*One shall be lost in the land without rain,*
The bane of Olympus shows the trail,

Campers and Hunters combined prevail,

The Titan’s curse must one withstand,

And one shall fall by a father’s hand.

Then, as they continued to watch, the mist swirled and retreated like a great green serpent into the mummy’s mouth. The Oracle sat down on a rock and became as still as she’d been in the attic, as if she might sit by this creek for a hundred years.

Dionysus called a council of cabin leaders as soon as the Oracle had been carried back to the attic. Somehow, Percy and Grover had gotten the honor. Chrysa wasn’t going to argue about it, not when she had other things to think of.

The council was held around a Ping-Pong table in the rec room. Dionysus waved his hand and supplied snacks: Cheez Whiz, crackers, and several bottles of red wine. Then Chiron reminded him that wine was against his restrictions and that most of the people present her underage. Dionysus sighed. With a snap of his fingers, the wine turned to Diet Coke. No one seemed enthused to drink that either.

“Can I have something stronger?” Chrysa asked.

“If I can’t drink, you can’t drink,” he replied petulantly.

Chrysa sighed.

Dionysus and Chiron (in wheelchair form) sat at one end of the table. Zoë and Rhanis took the other end. Chrysa sat beside her sister, with Thalia, Percy, and Grover lining the rest of the right side of the table. Beckendorf, Silena Beauregard, and the Stoll brothers sat on the left. Somehow, all of the Ares kids had managed to get broken limbs during capture the flag, courtesy of the Hunters. They were resting up in the infirmary.

Zoë started the meeting off on a positive note.

“This is pointless.”

“Cheez Whiz!” the satyr exclaimed. He began scooping up crackers and Ping-Pong balls and spraying them with the topping.

“There is no time for talk,” Zoë continued. “Our goddess needs us. The Hunters must leave immediately.”

“And go where?” Chiron asked.

“West!” Rhanis exclaimed. “You heard the prophecy. Five shall go west to the goddess in chains. We shall take five Hunters and go.”

“Yes,” Zoë agreed. “Artemis is being held hostage! We must find her and free her.”

“You’re missing something, as usual,” Thalia said snarkily. “Campers and Hunters combined prevail. We’re supposed to do this together.”

“No!” Zoë said. “The Hunters do not need thy help.”
“Your,” Thalia grumbled. “Nobody has said *thy* in, like, three hundred years, Zoë. Get with the times.”

Zoë hesitated, like she was trying to form the word correctly.

“*Yerr.* We do not need *yerr* help.”

Thalia rolled her eyes. “Forget it.”

“I fear the prophecy says you *do* need our help,” Chiron said. “Campers and Hunters must cooperate.”

“Or do they?” Dionysus mused, swirling his Diet Coke under his nose like it had a fine bouquet. “*One shall be lost. One shall fall.* That sounds rather nasty, doesn’t it? What if you fail *because* you try to cooperate?”

“Mr. D,” Chiron sighed, “with all due respect, whose side are you on?”

Dionysus raised his eyebrows. “Sorry, my dear centaur. Just trying to be helpful.”

“We’re supposed to work together,” Thalia said stubbornly. “I don’t like it either, Zoë, but you know prophecies. You want to fight against one?”

Zoë grimaced. Thalia had scored a point.

“We must not delay,” Chiron warned. “Today is Sunday. This very Friday, December twenty-first, is the winter solstice.”

“Oh, joy,” Dionysus muttered. “Another dull annual meeting.”

“Artemis must be present at the solstice,” Zoë said. “She has been one of the most vocal on the council arguing for action against Kronos’ minions. If she is absent, the gods will decide nothing. We will lose another year of war preparations.”

“Are you suggesting that the gods have trouble acting together, young lady?” Dionysus asked.

“Yes, Lord Dionysus.”

He nodded. “Just checking. You’re right, of course. Carry on.”

“I must agree with Zoë,” Chiron said. “Artemis’ presence at the winter council is critical. We have only a week to find her. And possibly even more important: to locate the monster she was hunting. Now, we must decide who goes on this quest.”

“Three and two,” Percy said.

Everyone looked at him.

“We’re supposed to have five,” Percy said. “Three Hunters, two from Camp Half-Blood. That’s more than fair.”

Thalia and Zoë exchanged looks.

“*Well,*” Thalia said. “*It does make sense.*”

Zoë grunted.
“I would prefer to take all the Hunters. We will need strength of numbers.”

“You’ll be retracing the goddess’ path,” Chiron reminded her. “Moving quickly. No doubt Artemis tracked the scent of this rare monster, whatever it is, as she moved west. You will have to do the same. The prophecy was clear: The bane of Olympus shows the trail. What would your mistress say? ‘Too many Hunters spoil the scent.’ A small group is best.”

Zoë picked up a Ping-Pong paddle and studied it like she was deciding who she wanted to whack first. “This monster – the bane of Olympus. I have hunted at Lady Artemis’ side for many years, yet I have no idea what this beast might be.”

Everyone looked at Dionysus, probably because he was the only (known) god present, and gods are supposed to know things. He was flipping through a wine magazine, but when everyone got silent, he glanced up.

“Well, don’t look at me, I’m a young god, remember? I don’t keep track of all those ancient monsters and dusty titans. They make for terrible party conversation. Ask the people older than me at this table.”

“Well, don’t look at me, I’m a young god, remember? I don’t keep track of all those ancient monsters and dusty titans. They make for terrible party conversation. Ask the people older than me at this table.”

“Who?” Thalia asked, confused.

“I am as old as Lady Artemis,” Rhanis offered. “I was one of the original Hunters, along with fifty-nine of my sisters. Most of us have passed on by now. I am the eldest in our present company.”

“And I am elder to Rhanis, though she is my mother’s sister,” Zoë said. “But she has been a Hunter more than a thousand years longer than I.”

“Chiron is the third,” Chrysa offered.

“Chiron, Percy said, “you don’t have any ideas about the monster?”

Chiron pursed his lips. “I have several ideas, none of them good. And none of them quite make sense. Typhon, for instance, could fit this description. He was truly a bane of Olympus. Or the sea monster Keto. But if either of these were stirring, we would know it. They are ocean monsters the size of skyscrapers. Your father, Poseidon, would already have sounded the alarm. I fear this monster may be more elusive. Perhaps even more powerful.”

“That’s some serious danger you’re facing,” Connor Stoll said. “It sounds like at least two of the five are going to die.”

“One shall be lost in the land without rain,” Beckendorf said. “If I were you, I’d stay out of the desert.”

There was a muttering of agreement.

“And the Titan’s curse must one withstand,” Silena said. “What could that mean?”

Chrysa exchanged a nervous look with Zoë and Rhanis. They knew exactly what the Titan’s curse was.

“One shall fall by a father’s hand,” the satyr said in between bites of Cheez Whiz and Ping-Pong balls. “How is that possible? Whose dad would kill them?”

There was heavy silence around the table. Chrysa glanced worriedly at Zoë. Her father would most certainly be willing to kill her.
“There will be deaths,” Chiron decided. “That much we know.”

“Oh, goody!” Dionysus exclaimed.

Everyone looked at him. He glanced up innocently from the pages of *Wine Connoisseur* magazine. “Ah, pinot noir is making a comeback. Don’t mind me.”

“Percy is right,” Silena Beauregard said. “Two campers should go.”

“Oh, I see,” Zoë said sarcastically. “And I suppose you wish to volunteer?”

Silena blushed.

“I’m not going anywhere with the Hunters. Don’t look at me!”

“A daughter of Aphrodite does not wish to be looked at,” Zoë scoffed. “What would thy mother say?”

Silena started to get out of her chair, but the Stoll brothers pulled her back.

“Stop it,” Beckendorf said. He was a big guy with a bigger voice. He’d also had a crush on Silena that the whole camp (including Silena) knew about for more than two years now. He didn’t talk much, but when he did, people tended to listen. “Let’s start with the Hunters. Which three of you will go?”

Zoë stood. “I shall go, of course, and I will take Phoebe. She is our best tracker.”

“The big girl who likes to hit people on the head?” Travis Stoll asked cautiously.

Zoë nodded.

“The one who put the arrows in my helmet?” Connor added.


“Oh, nothing,” Travis said, a little too innocently to be believable – at least for anyone who’d grown up with Fred and George Weasley. “Just that we have a t-shirt for her from the camp store.” He held up a big silver t-shirt that said Artemis the Moon Goddess, Fall Hunting Tour 2002, with a huge list of national parks and stuff underneath. “It’s a collector’s item. She was admiring it. You want to give it to her?”

Zoë sighed and took the t-shirt.

“As I was saying, I will take Phoebe. Rhanis as well.”

“Are you sure, Zoë? With you gone, I am second in command,” Rhanis reminded.

“The other Hunters will remain here until we return with Artemis,” Zoë insisted. “They will be fine. I would not wish to have anyone else at my side. You have the most experience of any of us.”

“And for campers?” Chiron asked.

“Me!” the satyr said, standing up so fast he bumped the Ping-Pong table. He brushed cracker crumbs and Ping-Pong ball scraps off his lap. “Anything to help Artemis!”

Zoë wrinkled her nose.
“I think not, satyr. You are not even a half-blood,” she said shortly, leaving no room for discussion.

“I’m going,” Chrysa said. The whole table looked at her, but Chrysa looked at Zoë. “You know where we’ll probably go – who we’ll face. You need me, Zoë, though I know the Hunters traditionally will not travel with anyone not a maiden.”

“Very well,” Zoë said. “And the second camper?”

“I’ll go,” Thalia said, standing and looking around, as if daring anyone to question her.

“Whoa, wait a sec,” Percy said. “I want to go too.”

“The Hunters will not travel with a male, Percy,” Chrysa said gently. “Traveling with me is pushing it, but I’m at least female, though I haven’t been a maiden in a long time. It is Zoë’s quest, and therefore her right to choose her companions.”

Percy grimaced, but backed down.

“So be it,” Chiron concluded. “Thalia and Chrysa will accompany Zoë, Rhanis, and Phoebe. You shall leave at first light. And may the gods – he glanced at Dionysus – “present company included, we hope – be with you. Now, I believe Chrysa has promised us an explanation.”

Chrysa sighed, picked up a Ping-Pong ball, and threw it at Dionysus. It bounced off the center of his forehead. He lowered his magazine to glare at her, though there wasn’t much heat to it. They’d become something resembling friends after dealing with Tantalus, after all.

“I want my alcohol now,” she said.

The god rolled his eyes, but waved his hand. Three shot glasses containing three different liquors appeared in front of her.

Chrysa raised an eyebrow.

“Absinthe, ouzo, and vodka? Are you trying to get me drunk?”

Dionysus waved dismissively.

Chrysa knocked back the ouzo, relishing the burn as it went down her throat.

She sighed and looked around the table.

“Well, to cut a long story short, when I became quasi-immortal, it set off a reaction that allowed me to figure out that this isn’t my first life.”

“What do you mean?” Thalia asked.

A light seemed to dawn in Chiron’s eyes.

“I mean that I have twice before died and been counted as a hero, and I have twice been reincarnated. When I achieved quasi-immortality, I started the process of remembering my previous lives. At this point, I have almost remembered all the way back to the beginning of my first life.”

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“I mean that I have twice before died and been counted as a hero, and I have twice been reincarnated. When I achieved quasi-immortality, I started the process of remembering my previous lives. At this point, I have almost remembered all the way back to the beginning of my first life.”

“Are you saying that Nico and Bianca are your kids from a different life?” Travis Stoll asked.

“Yes,” Chrysa said. She sighed again. “In 1913 – on July 31, my birthday is still the same – I was born in Switzerland. My father was French, my mother was Italian, so while my mother called me
Maria, and that was the name I used for most of my life, my birth certificate actually read Marie Olympe. My father died when I was four, and my mother remarried to Michele di Angelo, the Italian ambassador to the United States, less than a year later. It was well known that my parents’ marriage was unhappy, so rumors followed me all my life that Michele di Angelo was my biological father. I referred to myself as Maria di Angelo most of my life, though it was never legally my name.”

She grabbed the vodka and knocked it back as well, knowing that the next bit was the fun part.

“When I was eighteen, I met a god at the ball that was being held in honor of my eighteenth birthday. I’d always been able to see through the Mist – all demigods who are reincarnated as mortals are clear-sighted – so I immediately knew there was something different about him. I struck up a conversation, he asked me to dance, and he continued to court me after the ball had ended. He was handsome, kind, and the perfect gentleman. More than a year later, I found out that I was pregnant. My parents were in the public eye enough that I couldn’t be seen as pregnant out of wedlock, so I went to my lover’s demigod son, who worked in the Italian government, and he was able to hide me as Maria di Angelo. Bianca was born the next May. Nico was born two years later.”

“The god continued seeing you for that long?” Silena asked, stunned.

Chrysa smiled wistfully.

“He never stopped seeing me. Not while I was alive anyway. World War II started in 1939, and as you all know, there were demigods fighting on either side. When it became too dangerous to remain in Italy, I used my adoptive father’s connections to gain sanctuary in America, and my lover got us all out. We spent the next two years living in Washington, D.C. When Nico was ten and Bianca twelve, I died on my thirty-second birthday. My lover sent Nico and Bianca to the Lotus Hotel and Casino for their protection.”

“Time doesn’t pass there,” Percy said. “Wait, when we were there on our quest…”

“I wasn’t affected,” Chrysa confirmed. “I’m protected from the magic of the Lotus-eaters. But I spent my time with Nico and Bianca. It’s where Nico first learned Mythomagic. Bianca learned archery, and she’s rather good at it. So I spent my time with my children. I didn’t get to see them often.”

“You’ve known where they were the whole time?” Chiron asked. “Why didn’t you get them out?”

“It wasn’t safe,” Chrysa said quietly. “It’s still not safe. I would have preferred they stay inside until Kronos’ rise plays out. But the Fates told my lover to bring them out of the hotel, and not to tell me.”

“How long were they there?” Connor Stoll asked.

“Sixty-three years,” Chrysa said. “I’ve known for the past ten. But I wanted to keep them safe.”

“If Maria di Angelo was your second life, what was your first?” Beckendorf asked.

“I was a nymph,” Chrysa said quietly. “I was killed about a hundred years before Dionysus was born.”

“Wait,” Grover said. “Nymphs and satyrs – when we die, we’re reincarnated as flowers and plants. How could you be reborn as a mortal?”

Chrysa winced.
“It had to do with the nature of how I died – suffice to say, it was very painful, and they did not kill me before first stripping my immortality from me. I died as a mortal, so my spirit was sent to the Underworld. However, I also counted as a hero, so I was able to go to Elysium and be reborn. As Maria, I helped many young demigods who were affected by the war, and I saved my own children’s lives repeatedly, so again, I was sent to Elysium.”

“How could you lose your immortality?” Silena Beauregard questioned.

Chrysa paused a moment to think – there were two ways to answer this: the fast way that didn’t actually answer the question but would most likely shut them up, or the slower way that involved a lot more verbal maneuvering and might give something away.

She chose option one.

Chrysa stood from the table and lifted the hem of last year’s Weasley sweater, which she had changed into after removing her armor after the game. She lifted it to just below her bra line, then tapped her wand on her stomach, dissipating the glamour that covered the horrific array of scarring below.

The room gasped as the old injuries were revealed.

“We’re not sure why these scars reappeared once I got my memories back. None of the others I achieved in either of my lives did. Even most of my scars that I gained in this life disappeared when I gained my quasi-immortality. But every line is where they cut into me as they pulled my immortality from me piece by piece.”

“They?” Rhanis asked quietly, her voice smaller than Chrysa had heard it since she was actually nine.

“There were three of them,” Chrysa said shortly. “I managed to kill two before I died – and they won’t be reforming – but the third might. He was eventually killed, but it took a while.”

She put her shirt down, hiding the scars that carved their way across her stomach and up her ribs to her heart – Alcyoneus hadn’t had the chance to carve her heart out of her chest like he’d planned, but if the trio had put a little less effort into torture and more into ensuring her death, Leuke would have never returned – and returned to her seat. She then grabbed the absinthe and downed it as well. Her hangover was going to be terrible in the morning, but that’s what hangover potions were for.

“That’s how I have two children. It’s how I know places I’ve never been, information I’ve never learned, languages I’ve never taught.”

“How many languages do you know?” Connor Stoll asked curiously.

“And how many can you teach us to curse in?” Travis added, a bit too excitedly.

“My first life was pretty much just Ancient Greek, though I traveled a bit and was passable in a few other ancient languages,” Chrysa said slowly, thinking back. “As Maria, my parents were French and Italian, so I had both of those from birth. My biological father was a retired officer in the Russian army, and we lived in Switzerland, so I also grew up with German and Russian, though my biological father died before I turned five. My mother thought it was useful though, so I always kept up with the languages. My stepfather was the Italian ambassador to America, and my mother and I traveled with him, so I was also fluent in English by the time I was seven. I learned Serbian as a teenager, so I could speak with my aunt in her native tongue, Dutch a little while later for my
cousin’s new wife, and Bulgarian after that for his sister’s husband. I was also relatively fluent in
Latin, though I wouldn’t have tried speaking it. Oh, and I learned Arabic while I was pregnant with
Nico from a next-door neighbor who was a veteran of Mussolini’s African campaigns. In this life,
I’m halfway decent at Scots Gaelic, and I know a bit of Welsh and Irish Gaelic. Mostly curse words,
if we’re being honest. And I’m not teaching you any, in any language.”

Both brothers pouted.

“I would ask that you keep the information I’ve shared with you private,” Chrysa said quietly. “It’s
– it’s personal. And if war is coming, weaknesses should not be handed out freely.”

“You’re calling the di Angelos weaknesses?” Percy asked. The rest of the room – barring the
Hunters, Dionysus, and Chiron – looked as if they agreed.

Chrysa smiled sadly.

“Most of you have never been parents. As a parent, unless you’re a terrible one, your greatest
weakness will always be your children. Keeping Nico and Bianca in the Lotus Hotel wasn’t just
keeping them safe – it was keeping me safe too.”

“Do you know what the bane of Olympus is?” Zoë asked, not trying to be subtle at changing the
subject. “You were older than I.”

“I believe I do,” Chrysa said thoughtfully, thinking back to when she still stood at Kronos’ side. It
was a little-known story, but Phoebe – the Titaness, not the Hunter – had made a prophecy that if a
creature known as the Ophiotaurus was killed and the entrails burnt, then the one who did so would
have the power to destroy Olympus. Leuke had managed to pass along the information to Zeus, and
when she had killed the beast, Zeus had sent an eagle to snatch the entrails away before she could
burn them.

“It’s not information that should be shared though, especially if I’m wrong. If the ‘bane of Olympus’
is going to show the trail, I assume it will show up along our quest. I’ll let you know when I see it,”
she continued.

Things were quiet for a long moment, before Chiron clapped his hands together and said, “If no one
else has any questions, several people here will be leaving at first light, and need to get to bed.”

No one said a word, though Thalia and Percy were both giving her looks that meant they wanted to.

“So be it,” Chiron said. “And may the gods,” he glanced at Dionysus, “present company included,
we hope, be with you.”

The walk back to the cabins was subdued. Thalia and Percy were still shooting Chrysa curious
looks, but they didn’t say anything. Even once they’d split to go to their separate cabins, Thalia still
didn’t say anything.

It wasn’t until they’d removed all their armor, put their weapons away, changed into their pajamas,
and gotten into bed with the lights off that she finally said something.

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“It wasn’t safe.”

Thalia sat up in her bed, which was across the cavernous hall from Chrysa’s.
“No. Just no. You don’t get to say that. We’re demigods. Our lives are never safe. Nothing you can do can change that. I’m your sister. You said we were family. Family doesn’t keep things like this from each other,” Thalia argued.

“We both have things we haven’t told each other,” Chrysa tried to soothe.

“Not the fact that you have kids! That’s something I deserve to know!” Thalia shouted.

“You never told me about Jason!” Chrysa yelled back.

Thalia was silent. The moonlit room didn’t offer much visibility, but Chrysa’s impeccable night vision allowed her to see the tears falling down her sister’s cheeks.

“You…you know about Jason?” she asked, her voice subdued.

Chrysa’s tone shifted to match.

“Your baby brother,” she replied. “You were five and half years older than him. When you were eight and Jason was two, your mother took you on a field trip and Jason disappeared. You never forgave her, and you ran away shortly afterwards. I guessed you didn’t want to talk about it, so I never said anything. You don’t talk about family. You don’t even use your mother’s last name.”

“I didn’t want to be a Grace, after she lost Jason,” Thalia muttered. “It’s why I asked to be enrolled in school with your last name.”

“There’s things that neither of us want to talk about,” Chrysa said quietly. “I haven’t asked about yours. Please do the same for me.”

Thalia didn’t reply. She laid back down on her bed and rolled over so that she was no longer facing her sister.

Chrysa sighed internally and laid down herself. They had to be up way too early in the morning for to not at least try to get some sleep.
Even once they woke up the next morning, Thalia was obviously still not talking to her. The younger girl got dressed and finished packing her things all without looking at Chrysa.

Chrysa grimaced and did the same. It was probably best for Thalia to be the one to initiate conversation in this situation.

Once they made it to the Big House to meet up with the Hunters, there was more bad news.

“Phoebe won’t be coming with us,” Zoë said grimly. “It was a foolish prank. Those Stoll boys from the Hermes cabin sprayed the inside of the Artemis Hunting Tour t-shirt with centaur blood. She will be bedridden for weeks with hives. There is no way she can go.”

“Have you chosen another Hunter then?” Thalia asked.

“There is no time,” Zoë said. “We leave immediately. Besides, the prophecy said we would lose one.”

“In the land without rain,” Rhanis pointed out. “That cannot be here.”

“The magic borders do not let anything in without permission, not even weather,” Zoë said. “This could be a land without rain.”

“Don’t tell me you actually believe that,” Chrysa said dubiously.

“If we choose a fifth, I feel that their end will be worse than Phoebe’s,” Zoë said softly. “This is the only way. Besides, it is time to go.”

“Are you driving, or am I?” Chrysa asked with a yawn.

“You are still tired,” Zoë declared. “I will drive.”

“I’ll take over later,” Chrysa said. “After all, I’m the only person here who aged past sixteen. And the only one with a valid driver’s license.”

Zoë sniffed.

“I have been driving since automobiles were invented.”

“Not regularly,” Chrysa replied, climbing into the white camp van and situating herself in the back seat. “I do. I own more than a dozen luxury cars. My driver’s license is valid in the US and most of Europe. I’ll take over later. Wake me up in a few hours.”

She woke up when Zoë stopped at a gas station in Maryland around noon. While the others went inside to use the bathroom and buy lunch, Chrysa performed a quick tracking spell so they could follow Artemis’ path. The signs pointed to Washington, D.C., her one-time home in the 1940s.

“Are you sure?” Thalia asked as they stood in line at the gas station’s register. Apparently they were talking to each other again.

“ Mostly,” Chrysa replied. “The spell is sometimes wrong, but rarely. D.C. is about sixty miles from here.”
“I dislike this,” Zoë said. “We should go straight west. The prophecy said west.”

“Oh, like your tracking skills are better?” Thalia growled.

Zoë stepped toward her. “You challenge my skills, you scullion? You know nothing of being a Hunter!”

“Oh, scullion? You’re calling me a scullion? What the heck is a scullion?”

“You two, no fighting,” Chrysa said sharply. “If you don’t stop, you don’t get snacks.”

Both girls looked annoyed, but were quiet as they placed their choices at the register. Chrysa swiped her AmEx to pay for the collection they’d acquired.

“Chrysa’s right,” Rhanis said. “D.C. is our best bet.”

Zoë didn’t look convinced, but she nodded reluctantly.

“Very well. Let us keep moving.”

They exited the gas station together, though Chrysa and Rhanis made sure to stand between Zoë and Thalia.

“Thank you,” Rhanis whispered in Chrysa’s ear. “They’ve been doing this all morning. I don’t know how you slept through it.”

“I had silencing charms up,” Chrysa admitted. “It was the first thing I learned to do in boarding school. I can’t sleep unless it’s quiet.”

She raised her voice to address everyone.

“I’m driving now. Thalia, you’re in the passenger seat. Zoë and Rhanis, you take the back.”

Despite the relatively short distance, the combination of holiday traffic and D.C. traffic meant that it took them more than two hours to make it to center of the nation’s capital. Through the will of the gods, Chrysa somehow managed to find a parking space right outside the National Air and Space Museum, the very museum that her spell had tracked Artemis to.

“The last time I visited the Smithsonian, it was just four buildings and the National Zoo,” Chrysa commented as she climbed out of the car. “This was the National Air Museum back then, but it didn’t open until the year after I died.”

“Where to now?” Thalia asked.

“I suppose we just look around for a while,” Chrysa offered with a helpless shrug. “I’m sure we’ll find something. How hard could it be?”

After everything she’d gone through at Hogwarts, she really should have learned not to ask that question. As Chrysa soon learned from one of the information signs that were everywhere in the museum, the National Air and Space Museum was the largest of the sixteen Smithsonian museums in Washington, D.C., and the most-visited museum in the United States. Even though it was holiday season, the crowds were still substantial.

They were on their way back to the lobby from the top-floor balcony when Thalia was bowled into and slammed into an Apollo space capsule.
It only took Chrysa a second to recognize the interloper.

“Perseus Richard Jackson!” she scolded. “You’re not supposed to be here!”

Zoë and Rhanis already had arrows pointed at his chest, but even Chrysa’s recognition didn’t seem to soothe them. Neither seemed anxious to lower their bows.


Thalia put her hand on her silver bracelet. “Where?”

“In the Natural History Museum – I followed Dr. Thorn, he’d been following you in a black SUV for ages. The whole place was closed for a private event, with security guards and everything. Thorn met Luke and some guy called the General there,” Percy reported, still out of breath.


“Why would I lie? Look, there’s not time. Skeleton warriors –”


“Twelve,” Percy said. “And that’s not all. That guy, the General, he said he was sending something, a ‘playmate’, to distract you over here. A monster.”

Chrysa exchanged looks with her sister.

“We were following Artemis’ trail,” Chrysa said. “My spells said it led here. Some powerful monster scent…She must’ve stopped here, looking for the bane. But we haven’t found anything yet.”

“Zoë,” Rhanis said nervously. “If it is the General…”

“It cannot be!” Zoë snapped. “Percy must have seen an Iris-message or some other illusion.”

“Illusions don’t crack marble floors,” Percy replied.

Zoë took a deep breath, trying to calm herself. Chrysa was trying not to show that she needed to do the same. Atlas was one of the worst possible Titans to have been freed. Aside from Kronos himself, and possibly Hyperion, he would be the hardest for her to face.

“If Percy is telling the truth about the skeleton warriors,” Zoë said, “we have no time to argue. They are the worst, the most horrible…We must leave now.”

“Good idea,” Percy said.

“I was not including thee, boy,” Zoë said. “You are not part of this quest.”

“Hey, I’m trying to save your lives!”

“You shouldn’t have come, Percy,” Thalia said grimly. “But you’re here now. Come on. Let’s get back to the van.”

“That is not thy decision!” Zoë snapped.

Thalia scowled at her. “You’re not the boss here, Zoë. I don’t care how old you are! You’re still a conceited little brat!”
“You never had any wisdom when it came to boys,” Zoë growled. “You never could leave them behind!”

Thalia looked like she was about to hit Zoë. Then everyone froze. A growl so loud that it could have been one of the rocket engines starting up echoed through the hall.

Below them, a few adults screamed. A child screeched with delight: “Kitty!”

Something enormous bonded up the ramp. It was the size of a pick-up truck, with silver claws and golden glittering fur. Chrysa had glimpsed it briefly from a train, two years previously, but now, up close and personal, it looked even bigger.


The lion roared so loud that their hair moved. Its fangs gleamed like stainless steel.

“Separate on my mark,” Zoë said. “Try to keep it distracted.”

“Can you handle this on your own?” Chrysa asked. “I want to see if I can find the General before they leave the area.”

“Go ahead,” Thalia said. “We’ve got this.”

“Ready,” Zoë said. “Go!”

Percy uncapped his sword and rolled to the left. Zoë and Rhanis began firing arrows as they climbed the Apollo capsule, all of which shattered harmlessly against the lion’s metallic fur. Chrysa did a backflip into the shadows and came out in the Natural History Museum, still encased in shadows.

The first thing she spotted was the crack in the floor Percy had mentioned.

Definitely not an illusion, then.

The next things she noticed was Atlas, standing with Luke and definitely not under the sky like he was supposed to be.

“Now that the spartoi have Jackson’s scent instead of the Hunters, we’ll have more trouble with their little quest,” Luke pointed out.

Atlas didn’t seem too concerned.

“Even if my darling daughter manages to survive this quest, she won’t manage to rescue Artemis. Thorn, tell us more about the other Hunter and the other girl.”

“The Hunter had white hair, though she looked very young,” Thorn reported. “She felt older though.”

Atlas hummed.

“One of the original nymphai artemisiai, I expect. One of my wife’s sisters. Perhaps I’ll take her as a replacement if she makes it all the way to her mistress,” Atlas said with a laugh.

Chrysa’s hand tightened on the hilt of her dagger, still sheathed. Atlas had already taken one of her sisters, and while Pleione had survived the experience mostly unscathed, she would not allow another one of her sisters to be taken by the monster she knew Atlas was. Rhanis had chosen her life of maidenhood. Unlike most of their other sisters, she had neither died nor chosen to leave Artemis’
service. She had chosen eternal maidenhood, and Chrysa would do whatever she could to protect that.

Leuke had never forgiven herself for allowing Philyra to be taken by Kronos. Her younger sister was a bit dimwitted, but Kronos had taken her because Leuke had refused him. Philyra and Leuke had looked amazingly similar, so much so that they could have been twins were it not for the four hundred years that separated them. Leuke had stopped Kronos when he tried to get more than just a few nights of pleasure. Philyra was unable to do the same.

Chrysa would not allow another sister to be taken against her will.

“What of the last girl?” Atlas asked.

“She was the other one who was at Westover Hall,” Thorn reported. “The older one. Amaranth Potter-Black.”

“Chrysa,” Luke said with a sneer. “She goes by Chrysa Potter. She’s a daughter of Zeus, and one of Hecate’s Blessed. She works for one of the gods – which one, I never learned, and she’s an immortal demigod. She’s been seventeen longer than I was at camp. She only comes to camp during winter, for the most part, and she doesn’t stay very long, normally. I’m surprised they let her go, since she’s not a typical camper.”

“Two daughters of Zeus on one quest?” Atlas asked. “And the son of Poseidon as well? They certainly seem to be trying their hardest. Could this one be turned to our side?”

“She’s probably going to be our biggest obstacle,” Luke admitted. “She was close to Jackson, and she is probably the same with Thalia. She considers family very important. She took care of Annabeth and me simply because we were Thalia’s friends, and Thalia was her half-sister. But she’s loyal to the gods. The only grudge she ever held was Zeus not telling her about Thalia.”

“We might be able to use that,” Atlas considered, stroking his chin. “But for now, we need to keep track of the questers. They’ve taken care of the playmate I sent them.” He looked over at the mortal paramilitary types who were guarding the doors. “Send out the helicopters after their van!” he called. “Don’t let them get away!”

The mortals saluted and ran off to follow his orders. Atlas grabbed his chin and cracked his neck forcefully.

“Ah, that’s better. Come, young Luke. It’s time we head back to headquarters.”

“Yes, sir,” Luke replied. The pair strolled out of the room, followed closely by Dr. Thorn, a pair of dracaenae, and most of the mortals. Those who were left swiftly began cleaning up.

Chrysa stepped back into the shadows and out into the shadow of the Washington Monument. She looked over to where she had parked the camp van, and noticed it was gone. She focused on the backseat of the van, where she’d slept the morning away, and turned on her heel to Apparate with a sharp crack!

She appeared in the back row, causing the other four people in the car to jump.

“Chrysa!” Percy said, startled.

“So, how’d you kill off the lion?” Chrysa asked, poking Percy’s new gold-colored feather duster.

“They don’t like space food,” Thalia said. “Percy threw a ton of it into its mouth, then Rhanis and
Zoë shot enough arrows in it to make it dissolve.”

“Huh,” was all Chrysa could think to say in reply. “Good job.”

They were crossing the Potomac when they spotted the helicopter. It was a sleek, black military model just like the one they’d seen at Westover Hall. And it was coming straight towards them.

“They know the van,” Percy said. “We have to ditch it.”

Zoë swerved into the fast lane. The helicopter was gaining.

“Maybe the military will shoot it down,” Thalia said hopefully.

“The military probably thinks it’s one of theirs,” Percy said. “how can the General use mortals, anyway?”

“Mercenaries,” Zoë said bitterly. “It is distasteful, but many mortals will fight for any cause as long as they are paid.”

“But don’t these mortals see who they’re working for?” Percy asked. “Don’t they notice all the monsters around them?”

Zoë shook her head.

“I do not know how much they see through the Mist. I doubt it would matter to them if they knew the truth. Sometimes mortals can be more horrible than monsters.”

The helicopter kept coming, making a lot better time than they were through D.C. traffic.

Thalia closed her eyes and prayed hard.

“Hey, Dad. A lightning bolt would be nice about now. Please?”

The sky stayed gray and snowy. No sign of a helpful thunderstorm.

“If it was struck by lightning, it would fall and kill innocents,” Chrysa pointed out, before noticing something out of the corner of her eye. “There! That parking lot!”

“We’ll be trapped,” Zoë said.

“Trust me,” Chrysa said.

Zoë shot across two lanes of traffic and into a mall parking lot on the southern bank of the river. They left the van and followed Chrysa down the to the escalators.

“The Rosslyn Metro Station,” Chrysa said. “It’s the busiest station in the Metro system, and there are two different lines that stop here, meaning there are four directions we could be going. Come on. It’s a long escalator ride.”

It took more than a minute to get down the escalators and buy their tickets.

“Blue line towards Arlington,” Chrysa instructed as she paid for all five tickets. “Let’s just hope they haven’t figured out how to track credit cards.”

They got through the turnstiles without seeing any signs of pursuit. A few minutes later, they were safely aboard a southbound train, riding away from D.C. As their train came above ground, they
could see the helicopter circling the parking lot, but it didn’t come after them.

“Good job, thinking of the subway,” Percy said with a sigh.

“Metro,” Chrysa corrected. “It’s only the subway in New York. It didn’t exist when I last lived in D.C., but I’ve been down here a few times since. Metro is really the only way to get around in the city unless you want to deal with a long list of absurd traffic laws. Apparently, the city uses revenue from traffic tickets to fund their budget. I did a lot of research on it.”

“When were you…” Thalia began, but her voice faltered. The sound of the helicopter was getting louder again.

“We need to change trains,” Percy said. “Next station.”

Chrysa shook her head.

“There isn’t another line there. It’s just Arlington Cemetery. But the station after that is the Pentagon station, and you can’t get to that one without a security clearance except through the Metro. We can switch to the Yellow Line there.”

Over the next half hour, Chrysa led them through switching trains twice: first to the Yellow Line at the Pentagon, then back to the Blue Line at Ronald Reagan airport. It took them a bit of time, but they lost the helicopter. Unfortunately, when they finally got off the train, they were in an industrial area that was currently serving as the end of the line while the official end of the line underwent renovations. There was nothing there but warehouses and railway tracks. And snow. Lots of snow. It was much colder now.

They wandered through the railway yard, thinking there might be a passenger train somewhere, but there were just rows and rows of freight cars, most of which were covered in snow, like they hadn’t been moved in years.

A homeless man was standing at a trash-can fire. They must have looked pretty pathetic, because he gave them a toothless grin and said, “Y’all need to get warmed up? Come on over!”

They huddled around his fire. Thalia’s teeth were chattering. She said, “Well, this is great.”

“My feet are frozen,” Rhanis complained.

“Maybe we should contact camp,” Percy said. “Chiron…”

“No,” Zoë said. “They cannot help us anymore. We must finish this quest ourselves.”

“You know,” the homeless man said, “you’re never completely without friends.” His face was grimy and his beard tangled, but his expression seemed kindly. There was something familiar about him. Chrysa squinted, activating her divine sight, and she noted the faint aura of godliness about him, an aura Chrysa had felt recently.

She suddenly recognized him, and a small smile came to her face. She bowed her head slightly in recognition, though none of the others noticed.

Apollo’s smile became a little wider.

“You kids need a train going west?” he asked.

“Yes, sir,” Percy said. It was strange that he could be respectful to supposed homeless men, and then
The god-in-disguise pointed one greasy hand to a freight train that had not been there before. It was gleaming and free of snow, one of those automobile-carrier trains, with steel mesh curtains and a triple-deck of cars inside. The side of the freight train said Sun West Lines.

The sun god failed at subtlety.

“That’s…convenient,” Thalia said. “Thanks, uh…”

She turned to the homeless guy, but he was gone. The trash can in front of them was cold and empty, as if he’d taken the flames with them.

An hour later, they were rumbling west. There was no problem about who would drive now, because everyone had their own luxury car. Zoë and Rhanis were crashed out in a Lexus on the top deck. Thalia had hotwired the radio in a sleek, black Mercedes SLK to pick up the altrock stations in DC. Percy was with her. Chrysa was attempting to sleep in the backseat of a Range Rover. It wasn’t going well.

She finally sat up and turned the lights on in the car before checking her watch. It would already be eleven o’clock at night in England, so she couldn’t call her family there. She didn’t really want to talk to Hades yet either. There was one person she did want to talk to though—the one person still living who remembered everything they’d gone through under Kronos’ reign, especially at the end.

Chrysa pulled out her wand and magically created a rainbow before fishing out a golden drachma from her purse.

“O Iris, Goddess of the Rainbow, accept my offering,” Chrysa said, tossing the coin in. It didn’t fall out on the other side of the rainbow, so she assumed that magically created rainbows still counted. “Show me Amphitrite, in Atlantis,” Chrysa requested.

The rainbow shimmered, and an image of Amphitrite appeared. She wasn’t alone; Triton was with her, and several Nereids.

“Sister,” Chrysa called.

Amphitrite looked up, and smiled at her call.

“Sister! It’s good to see you again.” She studied Chrysa’s face intently, then turned to her companions. “Leave us. I would speak to my eldest sister alone.”

As soon as everyone was gone, the smile on Amphitrite’s face fell and she asked, “What’s wrong?”

“What do you mean?” Chrysa tried to deflect.

“The last time you called me with that look on your face, you had determined that your lover was planning to propose to you and you were trying to figure out how to tell him that you didn’t want to get married,” Amphitrite said. “Don’t hide. Not from me.”

Chrysa sighed, and let her head flop back onto the seat of the car.

“Artemis has been captured. Atlas is out from under the sky. He’s threatening our sisters again, Trite. I warned Pleione, and she’s promised to stay away, but…I’m on the quest to find Artemis, along with Zeus’ daughter Thalia, and Poseidon’s son Percy, and two Hunters: our sister Rhanis and Pleione’s daughter, Zoë. I was spying on Atlas, and he threatened to take Rhanis as his new wife, if
she survived that long. After Philyra – Trite, I just can’t.”

“Philyra wasn’t your fault,” Amphitrite tried to soothe.

“He took her because she looks like me!” Chrysa argued. “Because Philyra has black curls and green eyes and didn’t threaten castration if he tried to sleep with her while he was married!”

“I thought you actually went through with that?” Amphitrite asked.

“I was going to,” Chrysa grumbled. “But I never managed to do it before Zeus got a job at the palace. After that, I figured it would be better not to draw too much attention. I still stalked Kronos around a bit, just so he didn’t realize something was up.”

“Something else is bothering you,” Amphitrite noted.

“My kids are at Camp Half-Blood,” Chrysa said, burying her face in her hands. “Sixty-three years in the Lotus Hotel, and the Fates decide that now is when they need to come out. I wanted to wait until this war was over. That way, if everything went wrong, no one would ever need to know whose children they were. Kronos definitely has a grudge, and I don’t doubt he’ll take it out on my children.”

“Tell me about them?” Amphitrite asked, making herself more comfortable in her chair. “They were born in your last life, yes?”

“That’s right,” Chrysa nodded. “Their names are Nico and Bianca di Angelo. Bianca is twelve, and Nico is ten, almost eleven. His birthday is at the end of January. Atlas – he managed to get his hands on Bianca, but I saved her. Probably exposed the fact that Leuke is alive again as well, but I couldn’t let him keep my daughter.”

“I’d do the same if Atlas had Triton, or Kym, or Ben,” Amphitrite said. “It’s part of being a mother. A bit new for you, isn’t it?”

“Technically, I’ve had a child since I died,” Chrysa pointed out. “Hades made Melinoe out of our combined essences. But since she was made from a ghost, and she herself is the goddess of ghosts… she’s a bit odd. She’s not quite whole.”

“It’s been a very long time since I’ve met her,” Amphitrite admitted. “I stay under the sea most of the time, and she’s usually in the Underworld.”

“She’s not very social,” Chrysa agreed. “She didn’t come out to meet Nico and Bianca when I brought them down there yesterday. Makaria and Zagreus were happy to meet them, and they’re only half-siblings.”

“Triton hasn’t liked meeting Poseidon’s other children,” Amphitrite pointed out.

“I don’t mean to be rude, but Poseidon never attempted to control his urges before,” Chrysa replied. “Poseidon had hundreds of children. Mortal and immortal, Greek and Roman, my beloved has only had twenty-five. And Melinoe is Nico and Bianca’s full sister. But Melinoe hasn’t been very open to my attempts to get to know her either.”

Chrysa let out a sigh. Then it hit her what Amphitrite had done. She glared at her younger sister.

“You distracted me.”

“You needed it, Lulu,” the goddess replied unrepentantly. “But you also need to realize that this
isn’t your fault, and you can’t protect everyone.”

“I was the first one to rise, Trite,” Chrysa argued. “I started this, back in 1913, when the tree holding the last vestiges of my spirit in the Underworld died, and I was born again as Maria di Angelo. After that, Grandmother started stirring, the brothers’ fighting nearly destroyed the world, Alcyoneus almost rose, and Kronos started reforming. I was reborn again as a shouldn’t-exist daughter of Zeus, managed to become the Champion of Thanatos and gain quasi-immortality, and then regained my domain and previous memories just before Kronos really got started on his ascent. Tell me how this isn’t my fault.”

“Kronos would have eventually managed to piece himself back together with or without you. You might have spurred it along a bit, but I’d rather have you at our sides when we face him. We couldn’t have done it without you last time. And besides, you’re fighting for someone this time. Last time, you were just doing it for revenge.”

Chrysa winced.

“You figured that out?”

Amphitrite shrugged.

“We all have our hobbies. Mine happens to be psychology. Lulu, you were very close to being a psychopath back then. You were possessive over anything you considered ‘yours’ – our sisters, your foster family – but you didn’t actually put much stock in right and wrong. You went along with helping the Queen hide Zeus from Kronos, and plotting to overthrow Kronos, because it was a secret and you liked secrets. You liked playing the spy. What really committed you to our cause was when Kronos raped Philyra since he couldn’t have you. She was yours, and the fact that Kronos touched her was what made you fight. It was revenge for you. But now, you have something to fight for. You have your kids. You have Hades. And you know, you’ve had two lifetimes of properly experiencing the full array of emotions, so there’s the whole right-and-wrong aspect of it too.”

Chrysa snorted.

“Before I regained my memories, when I still went by Amaranth Potter, a friend of mine told me that I had a hero complex. I could never just sit by when someone was hurt.”

Amphitrite smiled.

“That’s a good thing, Lulu. It means you’re human. Relatively speaking, anyway.”

Chrysa shook her head, she could feel her lips curving upwards. “When did you get so smart, Trite?”

“‘Well,’” Amphitrite said, tossing her hair, “Not to brag, but I have been the Queen of the Seas for over eight thousand years. And my subjects have always been more entertaining than yours are. Comes with being alive, I suppose.”

“Thank you, Trite,” Chrysa said heartfully. “I needed this.”

“It’s what sisters are for,” Amphitrite replied with a smile. “But remember, you are allowed to call when there isn’t a crisis!”

“With the way the next few years are looking, I’m not sure I’ll have the time,” Chrysa replied. “But I’ll do my best. Maybe I’ll host another dinner party. Will I see you at the solstice?”
“I’ll come this year,” Amphitrite nodded. “We should – we should go to the garden together.”

“I’d like that,” Chrysa replied quietly. “See you then.”

She waved her hand through the rainbow, causing it to dissolve. She’d just settled down in the backseat again, a blanket from her bottomless purse wrapped around her, when there was a knock on the window. She startled.

Outside was Percy, looking sheepish.

“Can I come in?” he mouthed.

Chrysa unlocked the doors of the car, and her cousin climbed into the front passenger seat.

“Thalia kicked me out,” he said guiltily.

“Any reason why?” Chrysa asked lightly, even as she dug through her bag for another blanket. The second one ended up being patterned with tiny cauldrons, but she gave it to him anyway.

“We were talking about Luke,” Percy admitted. “About who he is now, and how that’s not how Thalia knew him.”

“It’s hard, when a friend betrays you,” Chrysa said. “It’s worse when you weren’t there, and you have to reconcile the friend you knew with what everyone is telling you.”

“Did that happen to you?” Percy asked.

“No, but it did to my adoptive father. He was told that his boyfriend had betrayed them, and resulted in the death of his best friends before murdering a dozen people. He spent twelve years trying to reconcile the image he had of his boyfriend with the laughing mass murderer that everyone told him he was,” Chrysa explained. “It worked out for them. My godfather was innocent, and they eventually got back together. But for Thalia, it’s harder. Luke has definitely betrayed the gods. But Thalia isn’t really going to be able to comprehend that until she sees it right in front of her eyes. It’s got to be hard for her. Luke was her only companion, the only person she could trust, for two years. Now, she’s got a bunch of people she’s known for six months with her while she goes to confront him.”

“I didn’t think of it that way,” Percy said quietly. “She said that…that Luke never let her down.”

“He didn’t,” Chrysa pointed out. “Even when he poisoned Thalia’s tree, it was so the Golden Fleece would be found that eventually saved her. Luke and Thalia were everything to each other back then. They kept each other alive time and time again.”

“Yeah, well, Thalia doesn’t seem too happy about this. Maybe you should talk to her,” Percy grumbled.

“I’ll give it a try,” Chrysa said, sitting up properly and throwing her blanket off. “Don’t touch my blanket. I’ll be back in a bit.”

It only took her a minute to make her way to the black Mercedes Thalia had taken refuge in. Chrysa knocked on one of the windows.

Thalia glared at her, but lowered one window anyway, allowing the blaring music to filter out into the rest of the car.
“Mind if I come in?” Chrysa asked.

Thalia grudgingly unlocked the doors. Chrysa climbed into the passenger seat and turned the music down to an acceptable level of hearing loss.

“Want to talk about it?” Chrysa asked idly.

“No.”

“Do you want me to take your mind off of it?”

Thalia looked at her dubiously.

“How exactly are you planning to do that?”

“Sing you a lullaby? Tell you a story?”

“I’m not three.”

“You’re never too old for a good bedtime story,” Chrysa said optimistically.

Thalia still looked dubious, but waved her hand.

“Tell away.”

“I’ll have to think of a good one then. Any preferences? Princesses? Mythology? Nonfiction?”

“No princesses,” Thalia said, wrinkling her nose. “And nothing I’ve heard before. I don’t care if it’s true or not.”

The perfect story came to Chrysa’s mind. Somewhat true, no princesses involved, and it definitely wouldn’t be something she’d heard before.

“This is an old wizarding story,” Chrysa began. “I first heard it when I was seventeen, but most of Hecate’s Blessed hear it as children, assuming they’re born with at least one magical parent.”

“Well, I probably haven’t heard it before,” Thalia noted, settling down further into her seat. “Go ahead.”

“There were once three brothers who were travelling along a lonely, winding road at twilight. In time, the brothers reached a river, too deep to wade through, and too dangerous to swim across. However, these brothers were learned in the magical arts, and so they simply waved their wands, and made a bridge appear across the treacherous water. They were halfway across it, when they found their path blocked by a hooded figure, and it was Death.”

“Death?” Thalia asked. “Seriously?”

“He is real, you know,” Chrysa pointed out. “Thanatos. God of Death, son of Nyx and Erebus, twin of Hypnos. He’s the lieutenant of Hades.”

“Sounds like a good reason not to like him,” Thalia grumbled.

“You know it had nothing to do with you, and everything to do with your father,” Chrysa gently reminded.

“Yeah, well, it doesn’t really matter. As it was, he’s still the reason I spent six years as a tree.
There’s a reason nobody likes him,” Thalia muttered under her breath, though Chrysa could still hear it.

Much as she wanted to defend her lover, there was nothing she could do to change Thalia’s mind at the moment, and it would likely only make her angrier anyway. She instead chose to continue the story.

“He was angry that he had been cheated out of three new victims, for travelers usually drowned in the river. But Death was cunning. He pretended to congratulate the three brothers upon their magic, and said that each had earned a prize for being clever enough to evade him.”

“And they accepted?” Thalia snorted. “Idiots. You should never accept a gift from a god, not without knowing the price. That’s why Percy and Annabeth got in trouble with the lightning bolt.”

“But it’s also difficult to turn down a gift from a god,” Chrysa reminded.

“Then you accept it and lock it in a closet,” Thalia said stubbornly.

Chrysa chuckled.

“Probably wise. So, the oldest brother, who was a combative man, asked for a wand more powerful than any in existence. A wand that must always win battles for its owner. A wand worthy of a wizard who had conquered Death. So, Death had crossed to an Elder Tree on the banks of the river, fashioned a wand from a branch that had hung there, and gave it to the oldest brother.”

Chrysa flicked her wrist, ejecting her wand from its holster, and held up the Elder Wand for Thalia’s perusal. “Elder wood, fifteen-and-a-half inches, thestral tail core. More than eight hundred years old.”

She held it out to Thalia, who took it with careful hands, before continuing the story.

“Then the second brother, who was an arrogant man, decided that he wanted to humiliate Death still further, and asked for the power to recall others from Death. So, Death picked up a stone from the riverbank and gave it to the second brother, and told him that the stone would have the power to bring back the dead.”

Chrysa dissolved the Disillusionment charm on her necklace with a wave of her hand, and pulled the smooth black stone on its silver chain from underneath her shirt. The symbol of the Deathly Hallows was carved into the rock in silver. What was unknown to most was that the stone was actually taken from the riverbed of the River Styx. It could provide a temporary anchor for shades to return to the world of the living, but was only good for a short period of time before the connection would start to fade away, causing the shade misery. She had been very careful, after using the Stone to summon her parents as she walked to her death, not to use it again.

Regaining her memories had helped. As Leuke, Lady of the Underworld, it was so much easier to recognize that there is no point in disturbing the rest of spirits, especially ones such as James and Lily Potter, who were happy in Elysium.

She visited them occasionally, just as she visited Adelaide di Savoia and Michele di Angelo, her mother and stepfather as Maria di Angelo. She had once visited Louis, her biological father, but had no real interest in doing so again. He had died when Maria was five. She had no real familial obligation towards him.

Chrysa continued the story.
“Finally, Death turned to the third brother. A humble man, he asked for something that would enable him to go forth from that place without being followed by Death. And so it was that Death reluctantly handed over his own Cloak of Invisibility.”

Chrysa allowed the Invisibility Cloak – never truly away from her, though it usually remained insubstantial until she called for it – to materialize around her shoulders.

Thalia looked skeptical of the three items she was being shown, but didn’t comment.

"In due course, the brothers separated, each for his own destination. The first brother travelled for a week or more, and, reaching a distant village, sought out a fellow wizard, with whom he had a quarrel. Naturally with the Elder Wand as his weapon, he could not fail to win the duel that followed. Leaving his enemy dead upon the floor, the oldest brother proceeded to an inn, where he boasted of the powerful wand which he had snatched from Death himself and of how it made him invincible. That very night, another wizard crept upon the oldest brother as he lay wine-sodden upon his bed. The thief took the wand, and, for good measure, slit the oldest brother's throat. And so, Death took the first brother for his own.”

Chrysa returned the Elder Wand to its holster, right beside her more familiar holly-and-phoenix-feather wand. She could no longer use it, as the wand was unable to handle her increased, semi-divine power, but she kept it with her for sentimental reasons, just as she’d carried it in the mokeskin pouch around her neck for months after it had been broken.

“Meanwhile, the second brother journeyed to his own home, where he lived alone. Here, he took out the stone which had the power to recall the dead, and turned it thrice in his hand. To his amazement and delight, the figure of the girl he had once hoped to marry, before her untimely death, appeared at once before him. Yet she was sad and cold, separated from him as though by a veil. Though she had returned to the mortal world, she did not truly belong there, and suffered. Finally, the second brother, driven mad by hopeless longing, killed himself, so as to truly join her. And so, Death took the second brother for his own.”

Chrysa reactivated the Disillusionment charm on the Resurrection Stone and returned it to its place under her shirt.

“But though Death searched for the third brother for many years, he was never able to find him. It was only when he had attained a great age that the youngest brother finally took off the Cloak of Invisibility, and gave it to his son. And then, he greeted Death as an old friend, went with him gladly, and, as equals, they departed this life. The end.”

“That’s kind of depressing,” Thalia pointed out.

Chrysa shrugged, even as she sent the Invisibility Cloak away once more.

“Most true stories are. As you said, it’s more of a lesson on why not to blindly accept gifts from gods, especially when the god isn’t happy to give them in the first place. The three brothers were named Antioch, Cadmus, and Ignotus Peverell. As the story goes, Ignotus passed the Cloak on to his son, who then passed it on to his daughter, as she was an only child. Iolanthe Peverell then married Hardwin Potter, and the Cloak was passed down from generation to generation of the Potter family for the next eight hundred year. My blood-adopted father, James Potter, used it to play pranks while he was at Hogwarts. Thankfully, it wasn’t in the house when my family was attacked and my parents were killed, so the Headmaster gave it to me for Christmas my first year at Hogwarts. I put it to good use.”

“And the stone and the wand? They’re actually real?” Thalia asked.
“And made by Thanatos,” Chrysa confirmed. “Though according to his version of the story, there was no ‘cheating Death’ involved. The three brothers were necromancers who managed to summon Death and bind him, so Thanatos gave them the items in exchange for his freedom, though he wanted the items out in the mortal world anyway. Wizarding legend mixed up the story, as according to them, whoever had all three of the items – the Deathly Hallows, they’re called – would become the ‘Master of Death’. In truth, the master of all three items becomes the Champion of Thanatos, as I did when I was seventeen, and gains quasi-immortality in exchange for working for the gods.”

“How did you get the other two items?” Thalia questioned.

“The Resurrection Stone was left to me in a will,” Chrysa said. “The Elder Wand – well, that’s a more complicated story. Suffice to say that I won it from its previous owner – without murdering him – and it has been in my possession ever since. And, as master of the Deathly Hallows, the curse upon the wand is broken and it no longer tempts people to kill me for it. Plus, I’m not an idiot, and I haven’t spread it around that I have the damned thing.”

“If you don’t like it, why don’t you just get rid of it?” Thalia asked.

“It’s an annoyance, as is the Stone, but you can’t just get rid of things like that. They’re magical items. Much like Percy’s sword, they return to me. I can’t truly get rid of them, though I can leave them locked in a box, though they still come at my call. They’re well and truly bound to me now.”

Any more questions that Thalia had were interrupted by a yawn.

Chrysa chuckled.

“I suppose storytime worked after all.”

Thalia tried to glare at her, but the effect was lessened by another yawn in the middle.

Chrysa leaned over and kissed her sister’s brow.

“Good night, Thalia. Sweet dreams. I’ll see you in the morning.”

Chrysa climbed out of the car, shutting the door softly, and returned to her Range Rover. Percy was already conked out in the passenger seat. She climbed back inside and shut the door, casting a quick silencing charm on it so it wouldn’t wake her cousin.

“Sweet dreams, Percy,” she whispered quietly. “Sweet dreams to us all. The gods know we’ll need them.”
The Southwest

In the morning, they arrived on the outskirts of a little ski town nestled in the mountains. The sign said Welcome to Cloudcroft, New Mexico. The air was cold and thin. The roofs of the cabins were heaped with snow, and dirty mounds of it were piled up on the sides of the streets. Tall pine trees loomed over the valley, casting pitch-black shadows, helping to offset the negative effects Chrysa was feeling from the sunny morning.

Chrysa ended up casting warming charms on all of them. Everyone was freezing by the time they made it to Main Street, which was about half a mile from the train tracks. Percy sidled up next to her as they walked.

“Apollo came by last night,” he said quietly.

“I wondered if he might,” Chrysa replied. “Did he come as himself, or as the homeless guy?”

“You knew?” Percy asked, surprised.

“I can tell,” Chrysa stated. “He wasn’t actually trying that hard to hide. Zeus wants Artemis found too, so as long as no one is blatantly breaking the rules, he’s willing to overlook things. Did Apollo give you any advice?”

“He said he didn’t know where Artemis was or what she was hunting, but he said to go seek out Nereus in San Francisco.”

“Ah yes, the Old Man of the Sea. He can answer questions…if you can catch him. But we have to get there first.”

They stopped in the middle of town. You could pretty see everything from there: A school, a bunch of tourist stores and cafes, some ski cabins, and a grocery store.

“Great,” Thalia said, looking around. “No bus station. No taxis. No car rental. No way out.”

“There’s a coffee shop,” Rhanis said.

“Yes,” Zoë said. “Coffee is good.”

“And pastries,” Rhanis said dreamily.

Thalia sighed.

“Fine. How about you two go get us some food. Percy, Chrysa, and I will check in the grocery store. Maybe they can give us directions.”

“Meet in front of the grocery in fifteen minutes,” Chrysa said firmly. “If you need to use the bathroom, do so at whatever location you’re at.”

Inside the grocery store, they found out a few valuable things about Cloudcroft: there wasn’t enough snow for skiing, the grocery store sold rubber rats for a dollar each, and there was no easy way in or out of town unless you had your own car.

“You could call for a taxi from Alamogordo,” the clerk said doubtfully. “That’s down at the bottom of the mountains, but it would take at least an hour to get here. Cost several hundred dollars.”
“Assuming Alamogordo taxis take credit cards, that won’t be a problem,” Chrysa said. “Thank you for the information.”

The clerk looked lonely, so Percy bought a rubber rat and Chrysa grabbed a loaf of bread, peanut butter, and jelly so that they could make sandwiches later. She added two packages of Double-Stuf Oreos, argued for two minutes with Thalia and Percy over whether they should get puffy Cheetos or crunchy Cheetos before settling on Doritos, and a bottle of Nesquik chocolate milk. After paying with her AmEx, the color of which made the clerk’s eyes widen, they headed back outside and stood on the porch.

“Wonderful,” Thalia grumped. “I’m going to walk down the street, see if anybody in the other shops has a suggestion.”

“But the clerk said –” Percy argued, but Thalia cut him off.

“I know,” she said. “I’m checking anyway.”

Chrysa and Percy watched her go.

“ADHD’s hard on all of you,” Chrysa said.

“I think she’s still upset about what we talked about last night,” Percy added glumly as he set his rubber rat on the railing of the porch.

“Hey,” Chrysa said, nudging his shoulder with hers. Well, his arm. At twelve, Percy had been almost her height. At fourteen, he was several inches taller than her, just as Annabeth was. Thalia was also taller than her, though not as much as the other two due to four years of living on the streets.

“It’ll be alright,” she continued. “Thalia’s upset. You are too. How would you feel if you’d been away for a while and you came back to find out that Tyson betrayed us and you had to go fight him?”

Percy jerked away, looking angry.

“Tyson would never –”

“I know,” Chrysa interrupted. “But that’s what Thalia thought about Luke. They didn’t have a mom that did everything to protect them like you did. They ran away from home because they couldn’t stay any longer. And now, the person Thalia trusted with everything is her enemy. It’s hard for her. Give her some time, and give her space.”

A couple hundred yards away, Rhanis and Zoë came out of the coffee shop loaded down with pastry bags and drinks.

“How much time?” Percy asked despondently.

Chrysa laughed.

“More than you’ll want to. Just don’t bring it up, and try not to snap back at her.”

Further conversation was interrupted when Zoë and Rhanis arrived with the drinks and pastries. There was hot chocolate for Percy and Thalia, coffee for the Hunters, and hot tea for Chrysa. They also distributed pastries.

“We should do the tracking spell again,” Zoë said. “Chrysa?”
“After we eat,” Chrysa said. “Then we’ll see about calling a taxi.”

Suddenly, a warm breeze rustled past, like a gust of springtime had gotten lost in the middle of winter. Fresh air seasoned with wildflowers and sunshine. And something else – almost like a voice, trying to say something. A warning.

Zoë gasped. “Percy, thy cup.”

Percy dropped his hot chocolate cup, which was decorated with pictures of birds. Suddenly, the birds peeled off the cup and flew away – a flock of tiny doves. The rubber rat squeaked and scampered off the railing and into the trees – real fur, real whiskers.

Percy collapsed next to his hot chocolate, which steamed against the snow. They gathered around him and attempted to wake him up. He groaned, his eyes fluttering.

“Hey!” Thalia said, running up from the street. “I just…What’s wrong with Percy?”

“We felt a god’s power,” Chrysa said briskly. “It was aimed towards Percy. I don’t think it was malevolent though.”


“Well, get him up!” Thalia said. She had her spear in her hand. She looked behind her as if she were being followed. “We have to get out of here.”

They made it to the edge of the town before the first two skeletons appeared. They stepped from the trees on either side of the road, wearing blue New Mexico State Police uniforms over their transparent grey skin and yellow eyes. They drew their handguns and aimed them at Percy.

Thalia tapped her bracelet, and Aegis spiraled to life on her arm. The skeletons didn’t flinch. Their yellow eyes were focused on Percy.

Percy drunkenly pulled out Riptide, and Zoë and Rhanis drew their bows, but Rhanis was having trouble because Percy kept swooning and leaning against her.

“Back up,” Chrysa said, pulling two knives – one celestial bronze, the other her favorite one of Stygian iron – from their hidden sheaths.

They started to – but then the branches began to rustle. Two more skeletons appeared on the road behind them. They were surrounded.

One of the skeletons raised a cell phone to his mouth and spoke into it, but there were no words. He made a clattering, clicking sound, like dry teeth on bone. They had split up to find them. Now, they were calling their brethren.

“It’s near,” Percy moaned.

“It’s here,” Thalia pointed out.


“We’ll have to go one-on-one,” Thalia said. “Four of them. Four of us. Maybe they’ll ignore Percy that way.”

“Agreed,” said Zoë.
“The Wild!” Percy moaned.

“No,” Chrysa said. “Percy is their goal. You three guard him. I’ll take care of this.”

A warm wind blew through the canyon, rustling the trees, Chrysa kept her eyes on the skeletons pointing guns at them, then charged.

The first skeleton fired. Chrysa deflected the bullet off the edge of her blade and kept charging. The skeleton drew a baton, so Chrysa cut his arms off at the elbows before slicing the celestial bronze knife through his spine, cutting him in half.

His bones unknit and clattered to the asphalt in a heap. Almost immediately, they began to move, reassembling themselves.

“Damn it,” Chrysa muttered as she returned the celestial bronze knife to its sheath and pulled out another Stygian iron one. If normal weapons wouldn’t work on these things, Stygian iron would.

After all, nothing took down the undead better than a metal forged in the realm of the dead.

The second skeleton clattered his teeth at her and tried to fire, but she knocked his gun into the snow before stabbing him through the breastbone with her knife. The whole skeleton burst into flames, leaving a little pile of ashes and a police badge. Before the first skeleton could get away, Chrysa stabbed it through the chest as well, with the same results.

She was doing well, until the other two skeletons fired at her back.

“Chrysa!” Thalia screamed.

Chrysa twisted impossibly fast, dodging at the same time as she deflected one of the bullets off her blade. The other missed her heart, but embedded itself in her shoulder instead. She grunted softly before calling, “I’m fine!” to reassure her companions.

She’d suffered worse than a single bullet hole.

Zoë and Rhanis started firing arrows at the third and fourth skeletons, while Thalia blocked the retaliating bullets with Aegis. Percy had turned towards the trees with his arms outstretched, looking like he wanted to hug them.

There was a crashing sound in the forest to their left, almost like a bulldozer. Unfortunately, the skeletons were wary of Chrysa now, and kept them all at baton’s length, pressing them backwards.

“Plan?” Rhanis asked as they retreated.

Nobody answered. The trees behind the skeletons were shivering. Branches were cracking.


And then, with a mighty roar, a massive wild boar came crashing into the road. It was thirty feet high, with a snotty pink snout and tusks the size of canoes. Its back bristled with brown hair, and its eyes were wild and angry.

“REEEEEEEEEEET!” it squealed as it raked the three skeletons aside with its tusks. The force was so great that they went flying over the trees and into the side of the mountain, where they smashed to pieces, thigh bones and arm bones twirling everywhere.

Then the boar turned on them.
Thalia raised her spear, but Percy yelled, “Don’t kill it!”

“That’s the Erymantheian Boar,” Zoë said, trying to stay calm. “I don’t think we can kill it.”

“It’s a gift,” Percy said. “A blessing from the Wild.”

The boar said, “REEEEEET!” and swung its tusk. Zoë and Rhanis dived out of the way. Chrysa had to push Percy so he wouldn’t get launched into the mountain as the skeletons had.

“Yeah, I feel blessed,” Thalia said. “Scatter!”

They ran in different directions, and for a moment the boar was confused.

“It wants to kill us!” Chrysa said.

“Of course,” Percy said. “It’s wild!”

“So how is that a blessing?” Thalia asked.

The boar seemed offended and charged her. She rolled out of the way of its hooves and came up behind the beast. It lashed out with its tusks and pulverized the Welcome to Cloudcroft sign.

“Do we have to face all of Heracles’ Labors on this quest?” Chrysa demanded.

“Keep moving!” Zoë yelled. She and Rhanis ran in opposite directions. Chrysa danced around the boar, weaving in and out while the boar snorted and tried to gouge her. If she was gored, she’d live. The others wouldn’t. Thalia and Percy managed to attract the boar’s attention when it turned towards them and Thalia raised Aegis. The boar charged them.

They only managed to keep ahead of it because they were running uphill and they could dodge in and out of trees while the boar plowed through them.

Chrysa was left alone with the two Hunters.

“Catch your breaths,” she ordered, trying not to wince as the bullet in her shoulder shifted slightly. At least her clothes were black, so the bloodstain wouldn’t be too visible. She shifted her coat so that it would cover the hole in her sweater. “I’m going after them.”

She stepped into the shadow of one of the pine trees and out again on the side of the mountain, just in time to see Percy and Thalia sliding down the mountain on Aegis like a snowboard, even as the Erymanthian Boar charged out onto a train trestle that buckled under its weight. The boar free-fell into the gorge with a mighty squeal and landed in a snowdrift with a huge POOOOOF!

Chrysa looked down to see that Thalia and Percy had skidded to a stop beside the boar.

“You guys okay?” she called down.

“Down here!” Percy yelled back.

A few minutes later, all five of them were watching the boar struggling in the snow.

“A blessing of the Wild,” Rhanis said thoughtfully.

“I agree,” Zoë said. “We must use it.”

“Hold up,” Thalia said irritably. She looked like she’d lost a fight with a Christmas tree, with pine
needles all through her hair and clothes. “Explain this to me why you’re so sure this pig is a blessing.”

“It’s our ride west,” Chrysa said, the pieces clicking in her brain along with the aura of the god that she’d felt earlier. “Do you have any idea how fast this boar can travel?”

“Fun,” Percy said. “Like…pig cowboys. What happened to me?”

“The god used you to channel its power,” Chrysa said. “The message wasn’t meant for you. It was meant for your satyr.”

“What message?” Percy asked, but Chrysa had already moved on. She walked over to the boar and jumped onto its back. The boar was already starting to make some headway through the drift. Once it broke free, there’d be no stopping it. She reached into her magically reinforced messenger bag and stuck her hand, going nearly up to her shoulder before she found what she was looking for. She pulled out the apple and tossed it in front of the boar, even as she waved her wand and enchanted it. The apple floated and spun right above the boar’s nose, and the boar went nuts, straining to get it.

“Automatic steering,” Thalia muttered. “Great.”

She trudged over and jumped on behind Chrysa.

Zoë and Rhanis walked toward the boar as well.

“Wait a second,” Percy said. “Do you two know what Chrysa is talking about – this wild blessing?”

“Of course,” Zoë said. “Did you not feel it in the wind? It was so strong…I never thought I would sense that presence again.”

“What presence?” Percy asked, even as all three climbed onto the boar.

“The Lord of the Wild, of course,” Rhanis said. “Just for a moment, in the arrival of the boar, we felt the presence of Pan.”

There wasn’t much chance for conversation after that. Boar-riding was an uncomfortable situation, and Chrysa had to keep her focus on the apple she was using to guide it. Occasionally, she’d dig another apple out and allow the boar to eat the previous one. It wouldn’t do to taunt the creature too much.

Over time, the mountains faded into the distance and were replaced by miles of flat, dry land. The grass and scrub brush grew sparser until they were galloping across the desert.

As night fell, the boar came to a stop at a creek bed and snorted. He started drinking the muddy water, then ripped a saguaro cactus out of the ground and chewed it, needles and all.

“This is as far as he’ll go,” Chrysa said. “We need to get off while he’s eating.”

No one needed convincing. They slipped off the boar’s back while he was busy ripping up cacti. Then they waddled away as best as they could with their saddle sores. After its third saguaro and another drink of muddy water, the boar squealed and belched, before whirling around and galloping back toward the east.

“It likes the mountains better,” Percy said.

“I can’t blame it,” Thalia said. “Look.”
Before them was a two-lane road half covered with sand. On the other side of the road was a cluster of buildings too small to be a town: a boarded-up house, a taco shop that looked like it hadn’t been open since the second time Chrysa had died, and a white stucco post office with a sign that said Gila Claw, Arizona hanging crooked above the door. Beyond that was arrange of hills…but they were no ordinary hills. The hills were enormous mounds of old cars, appliances, and other scrap metal. It was a junkyard that seemed to go on forever.

“Whoa,” Percy said.

“Something tells me we’re not going to find a car rental here,” Thalia said. She looked over at Chrysa. “I don’t suppose you have another wild boar up your sleeve?”

“Something’s not right here,” Chrysa said. There was something prickling at the edge of her senses. “Our next challenge…”

She pointed towards the junkyard. With the sunlight almost gone now, the hills of metal looked like something on an alien planet.

“We should camp for the night,” Zoë suggested.

Chrysa reached into her bag again and pulled out the handkerchief-sized tent and placed it on the ground.

“Is that the same one we used before?” Percy asked, perking up.

“It is indeed,” Chrysa said, tapping it with her wand. The others were startled when the full tent sprung up, the Hunters less so than Thalia. “In we go. Zoë and Rhanis, you’ll have to share. You and Thalia will be on the left-hand side. Percy, you’re with me on the right.”

All five entered, and the three who hadn’t experienced Chrysa’s magical tent before looked shocked.

“There are four bedrooms and two bathrooms, along with the kitchen,” Chrysa explained in response to their wide eyes. “No dining room though, so I suggest we eat outside. I tend to forget to clean in here, so crumbs end up staying around for a while. It is warded against bugs though. If you need to use the bathrooms, do it now while I start dinner. Then head outside. Try to start a campfire or something. I think I have marshmallows around here somewhere…”

A short while later, they were lounging around the campfire on foam mattresses that Zoë and Rhanis had produced from their packs. Chrysa served up hot bowls of stew and fresh bread with butter, and gave everyone either milk or water to drink. It was perfect to keep them warm in the chilly night air.

“The stars are out,” Zoë said.

There were millions of them, with no city lights to turn the sky orange. Chrysa had missed this sight.


“This is nothing,” Zoë said. “In the old days, there were more. Whole constellations have disappeared because of human light pollution.”

“You talk like you’re not human,” Percy said.

Zoë raised an eyebrow.
“I am a Hunter. I care what happens to the wild places of the world. Can the same be said for thee?”

“For you,” Thalia corrected. “Not thee.”

“But you use you for the beginning of a sentence.”

“And for the end,” Thalia said. “No thou. No thee. Just you.”

Zoë threw her hands up in exasperation.

“I hate this language! It changes too often!”

“If only Pan were here,” Rhanis sighed. “He would set things right.”

Zoë nodded sadly.

“Do you really think it was Pan?” Percy asked.

“He sent us help,” Chrysa said. “I think he was trying to use your empathy link to get in touch with Grover. We’ll find out if Grover felt anything once we get back to camp. Pan has waited for two thousand years. He can wait a few days more.”

“What I want to know,” Thalia said, looking at Chrysa, “is how you destroyed two of the zombies when none of us could touch them. There are a lot more out there somewhere. We need to figure out how to fight them.”

Chrysa sighed and pulled out her favorite knife. The black metal seemed to suck in the light given off by the fire.

“The first time I tried, it didn’t work,” she said. “Celestial bronze does nothing against those things. You can’t kill what’s already dead.”

“But that knife worked. What is it made of?” Thalia asked.

“Stygian iron,” Zoë said softly. “It’s very rare, rarer than celestial bronze, or Olympian silver. I haven’t seen any in centuries.”

“It can only be forged in the Underworld, and it’s usually only Underworld denizens who use it. I have Thanatos as my patron, and he gave me a Stygian iron knife. It can kill mortals and monsters alike, and even affects the shades of the dead. That is why I was able to kill two of the skeletons.”

Chrysa rubbed her shoulder absently. She really should remove the bullet and treat the wound, but she had to wait until the others went to be or they would worry. Still, though the bullet was mostly plugging whatever blood vessels it had hit, the bouncing ride on the boar had shifted it repeatedly. She’d lost a lot of blood, and she really needed to hurry up and heal the wound and take a Blood-Replenishing potion. Thankfully, it was one of the ones she kept in her emergency kit.

Before she could make any suggestions towards retiring, they were hit with a blazing light from down the road. The headlights of a car appeared out of nowhere.

Chrysa was blinded for several moments, so Zoë had to pull her away as they pulled their mattresses out of the way as a deathly white limousine slid to a stop in front of them.

The back door of the limo opened right next to Percy. Before he could step away, the point of a sword touched his throat.
Zoë and Rhanis drew their bows, Thalia her spear and shield, and Chrysa her knives. As the owner of the sword got out of the car, Percy moved back slowly, as the owner of the sword was pushing the point under his chin.

Chrysa glared as she recognized smirking man.

“Not so fast now, are you, punk?” Ares asked Percy.


The war god glanced around at them.

“At ease, people,” he said. He snapped his fingers, and everyone’s weapons – except for Chrysa’s – fell to the ground.

“This is a friendly meeting,” Ares said, digging the point of his blade a little further under Percy’s chin. “Of course I’d like to take your head as a trophy, but someone wants to see you. And I never behead my enemies in front of a lady.”

“What lady?” Thalia asked.

Ares looked over at her. “Well, well, I heard you were back.”

He lowered his sword and pushed Percy away.

Chrysa quickly moved between her brother and cousin before sheathing her knives.

“Thalia, daughter of Zeus,” Ares mused. “And little Chrysocomê too! You’re not hanging out with very good company.”

“What’s your business, Ares?” Thalia asked. “Who’s in the car?”

Ares smiled, enjoying the attention.

“Oh, I doubt she wants to meet the rest of you. Particularly not them.” He jutted his chin toward Zoë and Rhanis. “Why don’t you all go get some tacos while you wait. Only take Percy a few minutes.”

“We will not leave him alone with thee, Lord Ares,” Zoë said.

“Besides,” Rhanis mentioned, “the taco place is closed.”

Ares snapped his fingers again. The lights inside the taqueria suddenly blazed to life. The boards flew off the door and the closed sign flipped to open. “You were saying, Oceanid?”

“Go on,” Percy said, faking confidence. “I’ll handle this.”

“You heard the boy,” Ares said. “He’s big and strong. He’s got things under control.”

“We just ate,” Chrysa said flatly. “But the others will wait inside the tent. You and I can wait out here. I’m sure we can find something to talk about.”

The others looked reluctant, but they headed back inside the tent. Ares regarded Percy with loathing, though he opened the limousine door like a chauffeur.

“Get inside, punk,” he said. “And mind your manners. She’s not as forgiving of rudeness as I am.”
Ares shut the door behind Percy after he climbed in, but not before Chrysa got a glimpse of who was inside, confirming her suspicions.

“So, you’re still following around at Aphrodite’s heels?” she said casually, leaning against the limousine.

Ares’ face tightened. He was easy to wind up.

“Just because you’re Dad’s favorite doesn’t mean I won’t gut you,” he growled.

“Ah yes, but you’re not going to touch me so long as you don’t want all three brothers after you,” Chrysa replied, casually checking her nails. She’d lost a good portion of the nail polish she’d applied before heading to Maine, which really spoke to how much she’d been doing, since it was a magical, long-lasting, water-chip-fade-and everything else-resistant polish.

Thankfully, Percy’s conference with Aphrodite finished before Chrysa could rile Ares up too much. He opened the car door and pulled Percy out.

“You’re lucky, punk,” Ares said, pushing Percy away from the window. “Be grateful.”

“For what?”

“That we’re being so nice. If it was up to me…”

“So why haven’t you killed me?” Percy asked belligerently.

Ares nodded, like Percy had finally said something intelligent.

“I’d love to kill you, seriously,” he said. “But see, I got a situation. Word on Olympus is that you might start the biggest war in history. I can’t risk messing that up. Besides, Aphrodite thinks you’re some kind of soap-opera star or something. I kill you, that makes me look bad with her. But don’t worry. I haven’t forgotten my promise. Some day soon, kid – real soon – you’re going to raise your sword to fight, and you’re going to remember the wrath of Ares.”

Percy balled his fists.

“Why wait? I beat you once. How’s that ankle healing up?”

Ares grinned crookedly.

“Not bad, punk. But you got nothing on the master of taunts. I’ll start the fight when I’m good and ready. Until then…get lost.”

He snapped his fingers, and the world did a three-sixty, spinning in a cloud of red dust. Percy and Chrysa both fell to the ground.

When they stood up again, the limousine was gone. The road, the taco restaurant, the whole town of Gila Claw was gone. Even Chrysa’s tent was gone. They were standing in the middle of the junkyard, mountains of scrap metal stretched out in every direction.

Chrysa immediately dug into her messenger bag.

“Oh, thank the gods he just put the tent away,” she said with a relieved sigh. “That thing was expensive. I would have hated to have had to buy another. So, what did Aphrodite want, Percy?”

“Oh, uh, not sure,” Percy said. He really was a terrible liar. But then again, to the goddess of secrets
and lies, everyone was a terrible liar. “She said to be careful in her husband’s junkyard. She said not to pick anything up.”

Zoë narrowed her eyes.

“The goddess of love would not make a special trip to tell thee that. Be careful, Percy. Aphrodite has led many heroes astray.”

“For once, I agree with Zoë,” Thalia said. “You can’t trust Aphrodite.”


“That way,” Zoë said. “That is west.”

“How can you tell?”

The light of the moon easily revealed the Hunter rolling her eyes.

“Ursa Major is in the north,” she said, “Which means that must be west.”

She pointed west again, then at the northern constellation.


Zoë and Rhanis both looked offended. Chrysa supposed they would be. They’d both known Callisto.

“Show some respect,” Rhanis reprimanded. “She was a fine bear. A worthy opponent.”

“You act like it was real,” Percy said.

“She was.”

Before the argument could continue, Thalia broke in.

“Guys, look!”

They’d reached the crest of a junk mountain. Piles of metal objects glinted in the moonlight: broken heads of bronze horses, metal legs from human statues, smashed chariots, tons of shields and swords and other weapons, along with modern items, like cars that gleamed gold and silver, refrigerators, washing machines, and computer monitors.

“Whoa,” Thalia said. “That stuff…some of it looks like real gold.”

“It is,” Rhanis said grimly. “Like Percy said, don’t touch anything. This is the junkyard of the gods.”

“Junk?” Percy asked, picking up a beautiful crown made of gold, silver, and jewels. It was broken on one side, as if it had been split by an axe. “You call this junk?”

Rhanis swatted the crown out of his hands. “I’m serious!”

“Everything is here for a reason,” Chrysa said grimly. “Anything thrown away in this junkyard must stay in this yard. It is defective. Or cursed.”

“I don’t like this place,” Thalia said. She gripped the shaft of her spear.
“You think we’re going to get attacked by killer refrigerators?” Percy asked.


They started picking their way through the hills and valleys of junk. The stuff seemed to go on forever, and without the stars to guide them, they would have been lost. All the hills pretty much looked the same.

Despite the warnings, they didn’t leave everything alone. Percy picked up an electric guitar shaped like Apollo’s lyre. Rhanis found a broken tree made out of metal. It had been chopped to pieces, but some of the branches still had golden birds in them, and they whirred around when Rhanis picked them up, trying to flap their wings. One of the tree branches got caught in Rhanis’ white hair, and she had to be carefully untangled.

Finally, they saw the edge of the junkyard about a half-mile ahead of them, the lights of a highway stretching through the desert. But between them and the road…

“What is that?” Thalia gasped.

Ahead of them was a hill much bigger and longer than the others. It was like a metal mesa, the length of a football field and as tall as goalposts. At one end of the mesa was a row of ten thick metal columns, wedged tightly together.

Zoë frowned. “Those look like –”

“Toes,” Chrysa said.

Percy nodded. “Really, really large toes.”

Chrysa and Rhanis exchanged nervous glances.

“Let’s go around,” Thalia suggested. “Far around.”

“But the road is right over there,” Percy protested. “Quicker to climb over.”

Ping.

Chrysa had knives in her hands in an instant. Thalia hefted her spear and Zoë drew her bow, until they realized it was only Rhanis. She had thrown a piece of scrap metal at the toes and hit one, making a deep echo, as if the column was hollow.

“Why did you do that?” Zoë demanded.

“I wanted to see if it was asleep,” Rhanis shrugged.

Zoë looked furious.

“Now is not the time, Rhanis!”

“Come on,” Thalia said, looking at Chrysa. “Around.”

Chrysa nodded. Ten-foot-tall metal toes were not something she wanted to go near.

After all, if there were toes, why wouldn’t there be the rest of a body as well?
After several minutes of walking, they finally stepped out onto the highway, an abandoned but well-lit stretch of black asphalt.

“We made it out,” Zoë said. “Thank the gods.”

At that exact moment, they heard a sound like a thousand trash compactors crushing metal.

Chrysa whirled around. Behind them, the scrap mountain was boiling, rising up. The body attached to the ten toes rose up – it was a bronze giant in full Greek armor, around two hundred feet tall. He gleamed wickedly in the moonlight. He looked down at them, and it was easy to see that his face was deformed. The left side was partially melted off. His joints creaked with rust, and across his armored chest, written in thick dust by some giant finger, were the words WASH ME.

“Talos!” Zoë gasped.


“One of Hephaestus’ creations,” Rhanis explained. “But that cannot be the original. It is too small, and that was destroyed in Crete besides. A prototype, maybe. A defective model.”

The metal giant didn’t like the word defective.

He moved one hand to his sword belt and drew his weapon. The sound of it coming out of its sheath was horrible, metal screeching against metal. The blade was easily a hundred feet long. It looked rusty and dull, but that did not matter. Getting hit with something that size would be like getting hit by a battleship.

“Someone took something,” Zoë said. “Who took something?”

She glared accusingly at Percy, who shook his head.

“I’m a lot of things, but I’m not a thief.”

They all looked around at each other. Chrysa caught a glimpse of something in Rhanis’ white braid. She reached out and pulled a metal twig out of her hair. They all stared at each other in horror, but didn’t have much time, as the giant defective Talos took one step toward them, closing half the distance and making the ground shake.

“Run!” Zoë yelled.

They split up. Thalia drew her shield and held it up as she ran down the highway. The giant swung his sword and took out a row of power lines, which exploded in sparks and scattered across Thalia’s path.

Zoë’s arrows whistled toward the creature’s face, but shattered harmlessly against the metal. Percy was clambering up a mountain of metal.

Chrysa and Rhanis ended up next to each other, hiding behind a broken chariot. Chrysa frantically tried to untangle the other metal twigs from Rhanis’ hair.

“It’s too late!” Rhanis said. “Leave it!”

Before Chrysa could reply, they heard a massive creaking noise, and a shadow blotted out the sky.

“Move!” Chrysa cried. She ran down the hill, Rhanis beside her, as the giant’s foot smashed a crater in the ground where they had been hiding.
“Hey, Talos!” Percy yelled from his position atop a metal hill. The monster raised his sword, looking down at Chrysa and Rhanis.

Percy threw something at the monster, which hit him in the shoulder. He turned around, even as Thalia raised her spear. Over at the highway, the downed power lines began to rise. They flew toward Talos’ back leg and wrapped around his calf, sparking and sending a jolt of electricity up the giant’s backside.

Talos whirled around, creaking and sparking.

“Come on!” Chrysa told Rhanis, pulling her further out of the way before yanking the twigs out of her hair.

“Ow!” Rhanis cried, even as Chrysa threw them to the ground in hopes that the monster would leave them alone. Nothing happened.

The giant continued going after Percy, who it seemed to think had sent the power lines. It stabbed its sword into a junk hill, missing Percy by a few feet, but scrap metal made an avalanche over him. Chrysa couldn’t see him anymore.

“No!” Thalia yelled. She pointed her spear, and a blue arc of lightning shot out, hitting the monster in his rusty knee, which buckled. The giant collapsed, but immediately started to rise again. With its half-melted face, it was hard to tell if the giant felt anything.

He raised his foot to stomp, and Chrysa caught sight of a hole in his heel, like a large manhole. There were red words painted around it in Ancient Greek: For Maintenance Only.

“Crazy idea time,” Chrysa said.

Rhanis looked at her nervously.

“I’ve heard of some of your ideas. But at this point, anything.”

“There’s a maintenance hatch on the bottom of the heel. There may be away to control the thing. Switches or something. I’m going to get inside.”

“How?” Rhanis demanded. “You’ll have to stand under his feet! You’ll be crushed!”

“I’ll live!” Chrysa argued. “Thanatos won’t take me. Yeah, it’ll hurt, but I’ll live. I can’t say the same for the rest of you.”

Rhanis’ jaw tightened.

“No. I’ll go.”

“You could die!” Chrysa protested.

“It is my fault the monster came after us,” she said. “I am forty-six centuries old. I should know better. It is my responsibility.”

Before Chrysa could protest again, her younger sister charged at the monster’s left foot.

Thalia had its attention for the moment. Talos was big, but slow. If you could stay close to it and not get smashed, you could stay alive. At least, it was working so far.

Rhanis got right next to the giant’s foot, trying to balance herself on the metal scraps that swayed and
shifted under its weight.

“What are you doing?” Zoë yelled.

“Get it to raise its foot!” Rhanis yelled back.

Zoë shot an arrow towards the monster’s face and it flew straight into one nostril. The giant straightened and shook its head.

“Hey!” Chrysa yelled. “Down here!”

She ran toward it and stabbed straight into its big toe. The Stygian iron caused the bronze to hiss as it peeled away from the wound. Unfortunately, the plan worked a little too well. Talos looked at her and raised his foot to squash her like a bug. Chrysa couldn’t wait to see what Rhanis was doing. She turned and ran. The foot came down about two inches behind her and knocked her into the air. She landed on a sharp piece of metal that dug into her right shoulder, dislodging the bullet. She heard the clink as it came out.

Chrysa reached up, dazed. Her entire hand came away sticky. There was a lot more blood now.

The monster was about to finish her off when Percy, who had somehow dug himself out of the junk pile, threw his sword into Talos’ thigh, cutting large gash into it.

The monster turned. Percy should have run, but his foot still seemed caught in the junk pile.

“Percy!” Chrysa shouted. She and Thalia both ran toward him – well, Thalia ran, Chrysa’s pace was closer to a slow walk, despite her best attempts – but she knew they’d be too late.

The monster raised his sword to smash Percy, then he froze.

Talos cocked his head to one side, like he was hearing strange new music. He started moving his arms and legs in weird ways, doing the Funky Chicken. Then he made a fist and punched himself in the face.

“Rhanis!” Chrysa cried.

Zoë looked horrified.

“She is inside?”

The monster staggered around. They were still in danger. Thalia grabbed Percy and ran with him toward the highway, followed by Chrysa, who was still moving slowly, the fist of her hand pressed against her bleeding shoulder, attempting to slow the blood loss that was already making her dizzy. Zoë was already ahead of them.

“How will Rhanis get out?” she yelled.

The giant hit himself in the head again and dropped his sword. A shudder ran through his whole body and he staggered toward the power lines. Chrysa gasped as she realized the danger, and immediately stepped into the shadows.

She came out beside Rhanis just as blue electricity began to flicker around them. Rhanis screamed.

Chrysa grabbed her sister and pulled her through the shadows, falling out into the snow together. Chrysa barely managed to recognize that they’d made it before the blood loss caught up to her and she fell into darkness.
I groaned as Thalia grabbed me and ran with me toward the highway. Zoë was already ahead of us. She yelled, “How will Rhanis get out?”

I glanced back over my shoulder.

The giant hit himself in the head again and dropped his sword. A shudder ran through his whole body and he staggered toward the power lines.

“Look out!” I yelled, but it was too late.

The giant’s ankle snared the lines, and blue flickers of electricity shot up his body. I hoped the inside was insulated. I had no idea what was going on in there. The giant careened back into the junkyard, and his right hand fell off, landing in the scrap metal with a horrible CLANG!

His left arm came loose, too. He was falling apart at the joints.

Talos began to run.

“Wait!” Zoë yelled. We ran after him, but there was no way we could keep up. Pieces of the robot kept falling off, getting in our way.

The giant crumbled down from the top down: his head, his chest, and finally, his legs collapsed. When we reached the wreckage, we searched frantically, yelling Rhanis’ name.

“Wait!” Thalia cried out. “Where’s Chrysa?”

Zoë looked grim, the moonlight turning her face pale.

“She can travel magically,” she said. “She would have tried to save Rhanis.”

We doubled our search. We crawled around in the vast hollow pieces and the legs and the head. We searched until the sun started to rise, but no luck.

Zoë sat down and wept. I was stunned to see her cry, but honestly? I wanted to cry too.

Thalia yelled in rage and impaled her sword in the giant’s smashed face.

“We can keep searching,” I said. “It’s light now. We’ll find them.”

“No, we won’t,” Zoë said miserably. “It happened just as it was supposed to.”

“What are you talking about?” I demanded.

She looked up at me with watery eyes. “The prophecy. One shall be lost in the land without rain.”

Why hadn’t I seen it? Here we were in the desert, and Rhanis Oceanis was gone.

“What about Chrysa?” I asked. “She’s immortal! She can’t die!”

“No, but she can be hurt,” Thalia said. “She can be hurt badly enough that it takes her a while to regenerate. She’s not gone forever, but she’s gone for now. Could Thanatos count as a Titan? Could this be the Titan’s curse one has to withstand?” she asked Zoë.
“Possibly,” Zoë said, but she sounded doubtful.

We managed to pull ourselves together eventually. At the edge of the dump, we found a tow truck so old it might’ve been thrown away itself. But the engine started, and it had a tank full of gas, so we decided to borrow it.

Thalia drove. She didn’t seem as stunned as Zoë or me. She’d know Rhanis and Chrysa the least amount of time though.

“The skeletons are still out there,” she reminded us. “We need to keep moving. Without Chrysa, we can’t kill them.”

She navigated us through the desert, under clear blue skies, the sand so bright it hurt to look at. Zoë sat up front with Thalia, and I sat in the pickup bed, leaning against the tow wench. The air was cool and dry, but the nice weather just seemed like an insult after losing Rhanis and Chrysa.

I wanted to believe that they were alive somewhere, but I had a horrible feeling that they were gone for good.

I realized I couldn’t stay depressed. I had to set aside thinking about Rhanis and Chrysa and keep us going forward, the way Thalia was doing. I wondered what she and Zoë were talking about in the front of the truck.

The tow truck ran out of gas at the edge of a river canyon. That was just as well, because the road dead-ended.

Thalia got out and slammed the door. Immediately, one of the tires blew.

“Great. What now?” she asked.

I scanned the horizon. There wasn’t much to see. Desert in all directions, occasional clumps of barren mountains plopped here and there. The canyon was the only thing interesting. The river itself wasn’t very big, maybe fifty yards across, green water with a few rapids, but it carved a huge scar out of the desert. The rock cliffs dropped away below us.

“There’s a path,” Zoë said. “We could get to the river.”

It was the first time I’d heard her speak since the junkyard, and I was worried about how bad she sounded, like someone with the flu. I tried to see what she was talking about, and finally noticed a tiny ledge winding down the cliff face.

“That’s a goat path,” I said.

“So?” she asked.

“So, we’re not goats.”

“We can make it,” Zoë said. “I think.”

I thought about that. I’d done cliffs before, but I didn’t like them. Then I looked over at Thalia and saw how pale she’d gotten. Her problem with heights…she’d never be able to do it.

“No,” I said. “I, uh, think we should go farther upstream.”

Zoë said, “But –”
“Come on,” I said. “A walk won’t hurt us.”

I glanced at Thalia. Her eyes said a quick thank you.

We followed the river about half a mile before coming to an easier slope that led down to the water. On the shore was a canoe rental operation that was closed for the season, but I left a stack of golden drachmas on the counter and a note saying IOU a canoe.

“We need to go upstream,” Zoë said. “The rapids are too swift.”

“Leave that to me,” I said.

Thalia pulled me aside as we were getting the oars.

“Thanks for back there.”

“Don’t mention it.”

“Can you really…” she nodded to the rapids. “You know.”

“I think so. Usually I’m good with water.”

“Will you sit between Zoë and me?” she asked. “I think, ah, maybe you can talk to her.”

“She’s not going to like that.”

“Please? I don’t know if I can stand being next to her. She’s…she’s starting to worry me.”

That was the last thing I wanted to do, but I nodded.

Thalia’s shoulders relaxed. “I owe you one.”

“Two.”

“One and a half,” Thalia said.

She smiled, and for a second, I remembered that I actually liked her when she wasn’t yelling at me. She turned and turned and helped Zoë get the canoe into the water.

As it turned out, I didn’t even need to control the currents. As soon as we got in the river, I looked over the edge of the boat and found a couple of naiads staring at me.

They looked like regular teenage girls, the kind you’d see at any mall, except for the fact that they were underwater.

Hey, I said.

They made a bubbling sound that may have been giggling. I wasn’t sure. I had a hard time understanding naiads.

We’re heading upstream, I told them. Do you think you could…

Before I could finish, the naiads grabbed the back of the canoe and began pushing us upriver. I nearly fell over.

“I hate naiads,” Zoë grumbled.
A stream of water squirted up from the back of the boat and hit Zoë in the face.

“She-devils!” Zoë went for her bow.

“Whoa,” I said. “They’re just playing.”

“Cursed water spirits. They’ve never forgiven me.”

“Forgiven you for what?”

She slung her bow back over her shoulder. “It was a long time ago. Never mind.”

We spend up the river, the cliffs looming on either side of us.

“What happened to Rhanis wasn’t your fault,” I told her.

“No, Percy. I pushed her into going on this quest. She is skilled and knowledgeable, my elder in everything but age and maturity. Rhanis has never grown past nine, you see. It is hard to grow up when you stopped growing so young. I…I thought she would be the next lieutenant.”

“But you’re the lieutenant.”

She gripped the strap of her quiver. She looked more tired than I’d ever seen her.

“Nothing can last forever, Percy. Over two thousand years I have led the Hunt, and my wisdom has not improved. Now Artemis herself is in danger, and I lost one of her oldest remaining companions.”

“Look, you can’t blame yourself for that.”

“If I had insisted on going with her…”

“You think you could’ve fought something powerful enough to kidnap Artemis? There’s nothing you could’ve done.”

Zoë didn’t answer.

The cliffs along the river were getting taller. Long shadows fell across the water, making it a lot colder, even though the day was bright.

Without thinking about it, I took Riptide out of my pocket. Zoë looked at the pen, and her expression was pained.

“You made this,” I said.

“Who told thee?”

“You,” Thalia called from behind me. We both ignored her.

“I had a dream about it.”

She studied me. I was sure she was going to call me crazy, but she just sighed.

“It was a gift. And a mistake.”

“Who was the hero?” I asked.
Zoë shook her head. “Do not make me say his name. I swore never to speak it again.”

“You act like I should know him.”

“I am sure you do, hero. Don’t all you boys want to be just like him?”

Her voice was so bitter, I decided not to ask what she meant. I looked down at Riptide, and for the first time, I wondered if it was cursed.

“Your mother was a water goddess?” I asked.

“Yes, Pleione, daughter of Oceanus and Tethys. Rhanis…Rhanis was her much-younger sister. She had several set of daughters – the Hyades, the Pleiades. Then the five of us, my sisters and I. The Hesperides.”

“Those were the girls who lived in a garden at the edge of the West. With the golden apple tree and a dragon guarding it.”

“Yes,” Zoë said wistfully. “Ladon.”

“But weren’t there only four sisters?”

“There are now. I was exiled. Forgotten. Blotted out as if I never existed.”

“Why?”

Zoë pointed to the pen. “Because I betrayed my family and helped a hero. You won’t find that in the legend either. He never spoke of me. After his direct assault on Ladon failed, I gave him the idea of how to steal the apples, how to trick my father, but he took all the credit.”

“But –”

Gurgle, gurgle, the naiad spoke in my mind. The canoe was slowing down. I looked ahead, and I saw why.

This was as far as they could take us. The river was blocked. A dam the size of a football stadium stood in our path.

“Hoover Dam,” Thalia said. “It’s huge.”

We stood at the river’s edge, looking up at a curve of concrete that loomed between the cliffs. People were walking along the top of the dam. They were so tiny, they looked like fleas.

The naiads had left with a lot of grumbling – not in words I could understand, but it was obvious that they hated this dam blocking up their nice river. Our canoe floated back downstream, swirling in the wake from the dam’s discharge vents.

“Seven hundred feet tall,” I said. “Built in the 1930s.”

“Five hundred million cubic acres of water,” Thalia said with a sigh. “Largest construction project in the United States.”

Zoë stared at us. “How do you know all that?”

“Annabeth,” I said. “She liked architecture.”
“She was nuts about monuments,” Thalia said.

“Spouted facts all the time,” I agreed. “So annoying.”

“I wish she were here,” Thalia said.

I nodded. Zoë was still looking at us strangely, but I didn’t care. It seemed like cruel fate that we’d come to Hoover Dam, one of Annabeth’s personal favorites, and she wasn’t here to see it.

“We should go up there,” I said. “For her sake. Just to say we’ve been.”

“You are mad,” Zoë decided. “But that’s where the road is.” She pointed to a huge parking garage next to the top of the dam. “And so, sightseeing it is.”

We had to walk for almost an hour before we found a path that led up to the road. It came up on the east side of the river. Then we straggled back toward the dam. It was cold and windy on top. On one side, a big lake spread out, ringed by barren desert mountains. On the other side, the dam dropped away like the world’s most dangerous skateboard ramp, down to the river seven hundred feet below, and water that churned from the dam’s vents.

Thalia walked in the middle of the road, far away from the edges. Zoë looked nervous, and she kept her hand on her bow.

“Do you sense something?” I asked her.

She shook her head.

“Perhaps, perhaps not. The energy around here, with the water flow...it clouds my senses. It is hard to determine. But whatever it is, I don’t like it.”

I didn’t either. It was already Wednesday, only two days until winter solstice, and we still had a long way to go. We didn’t need any more monsters.

“There’s a snack bar in the visitor center,” Thalia said.

“You’ve been here before?” I asked.

“Once. To see the guardians.”

She pointed to the far side of the dam. Carved into the side of the cliff was a little plaza with two big, bronze statues. They looked kind of like Oscar statues with wings.

“They were dedicated to Zeus when the dam was built,” Thalia said. “A gift from Athena.”

Tourists were clustered all around them. They seemed to be looking at the statues’ feet.

“What are they doing?” I asked.

“Rubbing the toes,” Thalia said. “They think it’s good luck.”

“Why?”

She shook her head.

“Mortals get crazy ideas. They don’t know the statues are sacred to Zeus, but they know something’s special about them.”
“When you were here last, did they talk to you or anything?”

Thalia’s expressions darkened. I could tell that she’d come here before hoping for exactly that – some kind of sign from her dad.

“No. They don’t do anything. They’re just big metal statues.”

I thought about the last big metal statue we’d run into. That hadn’t gone so well. But I decided not to bring it up.

“Let us find the dam snack bar,” Zoë said. “We should eat while we can.”

I cracked a smile. “The dam snack bar?”

Zoë blinked. “Yes. What is so funny?”

“Nothing,” I said, trying to keep a straight face. From the look Zoë was giving me, I was failing. “I could use some dam French fries.”

Thalia smiled at that. “And I need to use the dam restroom.”

Maybe it was the fact that we were so tired and strung out emotionally, but I started cracking up, and Thalia joined in, while Zoë just looked at us.

“I do not understand.”

“I want to use the dam water fountain,” I said.

“And…” Thalia tried to catch her breath. “I want to buy a dam t-shirt.”

I busted up, and I probably would have kept laughing all day, but then I heard a noise:

“Moooo.”

The smile melted off my face. I wondered if the noise was just in my head, but Thalia had stopped laughing too. She looked around, confused.

“Did I just hear a cow?”

Zoë listened.

“I hear nothing.”

Thalia was looking at me.

“Percy, are you okay?”

“Yeah,” I said. “You guys go ahead. I’ll be right in.”

“What’s wrong?” Thalia pressed.

“Nothing,” I said. “I… I just need a minute. To think.”

They hesitated, but I guess I must’ve looked upset, because they finally went into the visitor center without me. As soon as they were gone, I jogged to the north edge of the dam and looked over.

“Moo.”
She was about thirty feet below in the lake, but I could see her clearly: my friend from the Long Island Sound, Bessie the cow serpent.

I looked around. There were groups of kids running along the dam. A lot of senior citizens. Some families. But nobody seemed to be paying Bessie any attention.

“What are you doing here?” I asked her.

“Moo!”

Her voice was urgent, like she was trying to warn me of something.

“How did you get here?” I asked. We were thousands of miles from Long Island, hundreds of miles inland. There was no way she could’ve swum all the way here. And yet, here she was.

Bessie swam in a circle and butted her head against the side of the dam.

“Moo!”

She wanted me to come with her. She was telling me to hurry.

“I can’t,” I told her. “My friends are inside.”

She looked at me with her sad brown eyes. Then she gave one more urgent, “Moo!” did a flip, and disappeared into the water.

I hesitated. Something was wrong. She was trying to tell me that. I considered jumping over the side and following her, but then I tensed. The hairs on my arms bristled. I looked down the dam road to the east and I saw two men walking slowly toward me. They wore grey camouflage uniforms that flickered over skeletal bodies.

They passed through a group of kids and pushed them aside. A kid yelled, “Hey!” One of the warriors turned, his face changing momentarily into a skull.

“Oh!” the kid yelled, and his whole group backed away.

I ran for the visitor center.

I was almost to the stairs when I heard tires squeal. On the west side of the dam, a black van swerved to a stop in the middle of the road, nearly plowing into some old people.

The van doors opened and more skeleton warriors piled out. I was surrounded.

I bolted down the stairs and through the museum entrance. The security guard at the metal detector yelled, “Hey, kid!” But I didn’t stop.

I ran through the exhibits and ducked behind a tour group. I looked for my friends, but I couldn’t see them anywhere. Where was the dam snack bar?

“Stop!” the metal-detector guy yelled.

There was no place to go but in an elevator with a tour group. I ducked inside just as the door closed.

“We’ll be going down seven hundred feet,” our tour guide said cheerfully. She was a park ranger, with long black hair pulled back in a ponytail and tinted glasses. I guess she hadn’t noticed that I
was being chased. “Don’t worry, ladies and gentlemen, the elevator hardly ever breaks.”

“Does this go to the snack bar?” I asked her.

A few people behind me chuckled. The tour guide looked at me. Something about her gaze made my skin tingle.

“To the turbines, young man,” the lady said. “Weren’t you listening to my fascinating presentation upstairs?”

“Oh, uh, sure. Is there another way out of the dam?”

“It’s a dead end,” a tourist behind me said. “For heaven’s sake. The only way out is the other elevator.”

The doors opened.

“Go right ahead, folks,” the tour guide told us. “Another ranger is waiting for you at the end of the corridor.”

I didn’t have much choice but to go with the group.

“And young man,” the tour guide called. I looked back. She’d taken off her glasses. Her eyes were startlingly gray, like storm clouds. “There is always a way out for those clever enough to find it.”

The doors closed with the tour guide still inside, leaving me alone. Before I could think too much about the woman in the elevator, a ding came from around the corner. The second elevator was opening, and I heard an unmistakable sound – the clattering of skeleton teeth.

I ran after the tour group, through a tunnel carved out of solid rock. It seemed to run forever. The walls were moist, and the air hummed with electricity and the roar of water. I came out on a U-shaped balcony that overlooked this huge warehouse area. Fifty feet below, enormous turbines were running. It was a big room, but I didn’t see any other exit, unless I wanted to jump into the turbines and get churned up to make electricity. I didn’t.

Another tour guide was talking over a microphone, telling the tourists about water supplies in Nevada. I prayed that Thalia and Zoë were okay. They might already be captured, or eating at the snack bar, completely unaware that we were being surrounded. I stupid me: I had trapped myself in a hole hundreds of feet below the surface.

I worked my way around the crowd, trying not to be too obvious about it. There was a hallway at the other side of the balcony – maybe some place I could hide. I kept my hand on Riptide, ready to strike.

By the time I got to the opposite side of the balcony, my nerves were shot. I backed into the little hallway and watched the tunnel I’d come from.

Then right behind me I heard a sharp Chhh! like the voice of a skeleton.

Without thinking, I uncapped Riptide and spun, slashing with my sword.

The girl I’d just tried to slice in half yelped and dropped her Kleenex.

“Oh my god!” she shouted. “Do you always kill people when they blow their nose?”

The first thing that went through my head was that the sword hadn’t hurt her. It had passed clean
through her body, harmlessly.

“You’re mortal!”

She looked at me in disbelief.

“What’s that supposed to mean? Of course I’m mortal! How did you get that sword past security?”

“I didn’t – wait, you can see it’s a sword?”

The girl rolled her eyes, which were green like mine. She had frizzy, reddish-brown hair. Her nose was also red, like she had a cold. She wore a big, maroon Harvard sweatshirt and jeans that were covered with marker stains and little holes, like she spent her free time poking them with a fork.

“Well, it’s either a sword or the biggest toothpick in the world,” she said. “And why didn’t it hurt me? Not that I’m complaining. Who are you? And whoa, what is that you’re wearing? Is that made of lion fur?”

She asked so many questions so fast, it was like she was throwing rocks at me. I couldn’t think of what to say. I looked at my sleeves to see if the Nemean Lion pelt had somehow changed back to fur, but it still looked like a brown winter coat to me.

I knew the skeleton warriors were still chasing me. I had no time to waste. But I just stared at the redhead girl. Then I remembered what Thalia had done at Westover Hall to fool the teachers. Maybe I could manipulate the Mist.

I concentrated hard and snapped my fingers.

“You don’t see I sword,” I told the girl. “It’s just a ballpoint pen.”

She blinked. “Um…no. It’s a sword, weirdo.”

“Who are you?” I demanded.

She huffed indignantly.

“Rachel Elizabeth Dare. Now are you going to answer my questions or should I scream for security?”

“No!” I said. “I mean, I’m kind of in a hurry. I’m in trouble.”

“In a hurry or in trouble?”

“Um, sort of both.”

She looked over my shoulder and her eyes widened.

“Bathroom!”

“What?”

“Bathroom! Behind me! Now!”

I don’t know why, but I listened to her. I slipped inside the bathroom – which I only later realized was the girls’ bathroom – and left Rachel Elizabeth Dare standing outside. Later, that seemed pretty cowardly to me. I’m also pretty sure it saved my life.
I heard the clattering, hissing sounds of skeletons as they came closer.

My grip tightened on Riptide. What was I thinking? I’d left a mortal girl out there to die. I was preparing to burst out and fight when Rachel Elizabeth Dare started talking in that rapid-fire machine gun way of hers.

“Oh my god! Did you see that kid? It’s about time you got here. He tried to kill me! He had a sword, for god’s sake. You security guys let a sword-swinging lunatic inside national landmark? I mean, jeez! He ran that way toward those turbine thingies. I think he went over the side or something. Maybe he fell.”

The skeletons clattered excitedly. I heard them moving off.

Rachel opened the door. “All clear. But you’d better hurry.”

She looked shaken. Her face was gray and sweaty.

I peeked around the corner. Three skeleton warriors were running toward the other end of the balcony. The way to the elevator was clear for a few seconds.

“I owe you one, Rachel Elizabeth Dare.”

“What are those things?” she asked. “They looked like…”

“Skeletons?”

She nodded uneasily.

“Do yourself a favor,” I said. “Forget it. Forget you ever saw me.”

“Forget you tried to kill me?”

“Yeah. That too.”

“But who are you?”

“Percy –” I started to say. Then the skeletons turned around. “Gotta go!”

“What kind of name is Percy Gotta-go?”

I made it up to the café in just a few minutes. It was packed with kids enjoying the best part of the tour – the dam lunch. Thalia and Zoë were just sitting down with their food.

“We need to leave,” I gasped. “Now!”

“But we just got our burritos!” Thalia said.

Zoë stood up, muttering an Ancient Greek curse. “He’s right. Look!”

The café windows wrapped all around the observation floor, which gave us a beautiful panoramic view of the skeletal army that had come to kill us.

I counted two on the east side of the dam ride, blocking the way to Arizona. Three more on the west side, guarding Nevada. All of them were armed with batons and pistols.

But our immediate problem was a lot closer. The three skeletal warriors who’d been chasing me in
the turbine room now appeared on the stairs. They saw me from across the cafeteria and clattered their teeth.

“Elevator!” Thalia said. We bolted in that direction, but the doors opened with a pleasant ding, and two more warriors stepped out. Every warrior was accounted for, minus the two Chrysa had blasted to flames in New Mexico. We were completely surrounded.

Then Thalia had a completely insane idea.

“Burrito fight!” she yelled, and flung her Guacamole Grande at the nearest skeleton.

Now, if you have never been hit by a flying burrito, count yourself lucky. In terms of deadly projectiles, it’s right up there with grenades and cannonballs. Thalia’s lunch hit the skeleton and knocked his skull clean off his shoulders. I’m not sure what the other kids in the café saw, but they went crazy and started throwing their burritos and baskets of chips and sodas at each other, shrieking and screaming.

The skeletons tried to aim their guns, but it was hopeless. Bodies and food and drinks were flying everywhere.

In the chaos, I tackled the other skeleton on the stairs and sent him flying into the condiment table. Then we all raced downstairs, Guacamole Grandes whizzing past our heads.

“What now?” Zoë asked as we burst outside.

I didn’t have an answer. The warriors on the road were closing in from either direction. We ran across the street to the pavilion with the winged bronze statues, but that just put our backs to the mountain.

The skeletons moved forward, forming a crescent around us. Their brethren from the café were running to join up. One was still putting its skull on its shoulders. Another was covered in ketchup and mustard. Two more had burritos lodged in their rib cages. They didn’t look happy about it. They drew batons and advanced.

“Three against eleven,” Zoë muttered. “And they cannot die.”

Something shiny caught my eye. I glanced behind me at the statues’ feet.

“Percy!” Thalia said. “This isn’t the time!”

But I couldn’t help staring at the two giant bronze guys with tall bladed wings like letter openers. They were weathered brown except for their toes, which shone like new pennies from all the times people had rubbed them for good luck.

Good luck. The blessing of Zeus.

I thought about the tour guide in the elevator. Her gray eyes and her smile. What had she said? There is always a way for those clever enough to find it.

“Thalia,” I said. “Pray to your dad.”

She glared at me. “He never answers.”

“Just this once,” I pleaded. “Ask for help. I think…I think the statues can give us some luck.”
Five skeletons raised their guns. The other five came forward with batons. Fifty feet away. Forty feet.

“Do it!” I yelled.

“No!” Thalia said. “He won’t answer me.”

“This time is different!”

“Who says?”

I hesitated. “Athena, I think.”

Thalia scowled like she was sure I’d gone crazy.

“Try it,” I pleaded.

Thalia closed her eyes. Her lips moved in a silent prayer. I put in my own prayer to Annabeth’s mom, hoping I was right that it had been her in the elevator – that she was trying to help us save her daughter.

And nothing happened.

The skeletons closed in. I raised Riptide to defend myself. Thalia held up her shield. Zoë aimed an arrow at a skeleton’s head.

A shadow fell over me. I thought maybe it was the shadow of death. Then I realized it was the shadow of an enormous wing. The skeletons looked up too late. A flash of bronze, and all five of the baton-wielders were swept away.

The other skeletons opened fire. I raised my lion coat for protection, but I didn’t need it. The bronze angels stepped in front of us and folded their wings like shields. Bullets pinged off them like rain off a corrugated roof. Both angels slashed outward, and the skeletons went flying across the road.

“Man, it feels good to stand up!” the first angel said. His voice sounded tinny and rusty, like he hadn’t had a drink since he’d been built.

“Will ya look at my toes?” the other said. “Holy Zeus, what were those tourists thinking?”

As stunned as I was by the angels, I was more concerned with the skeletons. A few of them were getting up again, reassembling, bony hands groping for their weapons.

“Trouble!” I said.

“Get us out of here!” Thalia yelled.

Both angels looked down at her. “Zeus’ kid?”

“Yes!”

“Can I get a please, Miss Zeus’ Kid?” an angel asked.

“Please!”

The angels looked at each other and shrugged.
“Could use a stretch,” one decided.

The next thing I knew, one of them had grabbed Thalia and me, the other grabbed Zoë, and we flew straight up, over the dam and the river, the skeleton warriors shrinking to tiny specks below us and the sound of gunfire echoing off the sides of the mountains.

“Tell me when it’s over,” Thalia said.

Her eyes were shut tight. The statue was holding us so we couldn’t fall, but still Thalia clutched his arm like it was the most important thing in the world.

“Everything’s fine,” I promised.

“Are…are we very high?”

I looked down. Below us, a range of snowy mountains zipped by. I stretched out my foot and kicked snow off one of the peaks.

“Nah,” I said. “Not that high.”

“We are in the Sierras!” Zoë yelled. She was hanging from the arms of the other statue. “I have hunted here before. At this speed, we should reach San Francisco in a few hours.”

“Hey, hey, Frisco!” our angel said. “Yo, Chuck! We could visit those guys at the Mechanics Monument again! They know how to party!”

“Oh, man,” the other angel said. “I am so there.”

“You guys have visited San Francisco?” I asked.

“We automatons gotta have some fun once in a while, right?” our statue said. “Those mechanics took us over to the de Young Museum and introduced us to these marble lady statues, see. And…”

“Hank!” the other statue Chuck cut in. “They’re kids, man.”

“Oh, right.” If bronze statues could blush, I swear Hank did. “Back to flying.”

We sped up, so I could tell the angels were excited. The mountains fell away into hills, and then we were zipping along over farmland and towns and highways.

Zoë got bored and started shooting arrows at random billboards as we flew by. Every time she saw a Target department store – and there were dozens of them – she would peg the store’s sign with a few bulls-eyes at a hundred miles an hour.

Thalia kept her eyes closed the hole way. She muttered to herself a lot, like she was praying.

“You did good back there,” I told her. “Zeus listened.”

It was hard to tell what she was thinking with her eyes closed.

“Maybe,” she said. “How did you get away from the skeletons in the generator room, anyway? You said they cornered you.”

I told her about the weird mortal girl, Rachel Elizabeth Dare, who seemed to be able to see right through the Mist. I thought Thalia was going to call me crazy, but she just nodded.
“Some mortals are like that,” she said. “No one knows why.”

Suddenly, I flashed on something I’d never considered.

My mom was like that. She had seen the Minotaur on Half-Blood Hill and known exactly what it was. She hadn’t been surprised at all last year when I’d told her my new friend Tyson was a Cyclops. Maybe she’d know all along. No wonder she was scared for me as I was growing up. She saw through the Mist even better than I did.

“Well, the girl was annoying. But I’m glad I didn’t vaporize her. That would’ve been bad.”

Thalia nodded. “Must be nice to be a regular mortal.”

She said that as if she given it a lot of thought.

I fell asleep shortly afterwards. I woke up from my nap when Hank asked, “Where you guys want to land?”

I looked down and said, “Whoa.”

I’d seen San Francisco in pictures before, but never in real life. It was probably the most beautiful city I’d ever seen: kind of like a smaller, cleaner Manhattan, if Manhattan had been surrounded by green hills and fog. There was a huge bay and ships, islands and sailboats, and the Golden Gate Bridge sticking out of the fog. I felt like I should take a picture or something. Greetings from Frisco. Haven’t Died Yet. Wish You Were Here.

“There,” Zoë suggested. “By the Embarcadero Building.”

“Good thinking,” Chuck said. “Me and Hank can blend in with the pigeons.”

We all looked at him.

“Kidding,” he said. “Sheesh, can’t statues have a sense of humor?”

As it turned out, there wasn’t much need to blend in. It was early morning and not many people were around. We freaked out a homeless guy on the ferry dock when we landed. He screamed when he saw Hank and Chuck and ran off yelling something about metal angels from Mars.

We said our good-byes to the angels, who flew off to party with their statue friend. That’s when I realized I had no idea what we were going to do next.

We’d made it to the West Coast. Artemis was here somewhere. Annabeth too, I hoped. But I had no idea how to find them, and tomorrow was the winter solstice. Nor did I have any clue what monster Artemis had been hunting. It was supposed to find us on the quest. It was supposed to “show us the trail,” but it never had. No we were stuck on the ferry dock with not much money, no friends, and no luck.

After a brief discussion, we agreed that we needed to figure out just what this mystery monster was.

“But how?” I asked.

“Nereus,” Thalia said.

I looked at her. “What?”

“Isn’t that what Apollo told you to do? Find Nereus?”
I nodded. I’d completely forgotten my conversation with the sun god.

“The old man of the sea,” I remembered. “I’m supposed to find him and force him to tell us what he knows. But how do I find him?”

Zoë made a face. “Old Nereus, eh?”

“You know him?” Thalia asked.

“My mother was a sea goddess. Yes, I know him. Unfortunately, he is never very hard to find. Just follow the smell.”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“Come. I will show thee.”

I knew I was in trouble when we stopped at the Goodwill drop box. Five minutes later, Zoë had me outfitted in a ragged flannel shirt and jeans three sizes too big, bright red sneakers, and a floppy rainbow hat.

“Oh yeah,” Thalia said, trying not to burst out laughing. “You look completely inconspicuous now.”

Zoë nodded with satisfaction. “A typical male vagrant.”

“Thanks a lot,” I grumbled. “Why am I doing this again?”

“I told thee. To blend in.”

She led the way back down to the waterfront. We came out next to a nearly deserted beach. There was a dark-haired woman in a lawn chair, sunglasses over her eyes and a book in her hands. My eyes were drawn to her for some reason.

She glanced back at us when we approached, and stood up, stashing her book in a black messenger bag. She turned around and pushed her sunglasses on top of her head, revealing her familiar green eyes.

I took off running for her, followed closely by Thalia. We threw ourselves into her arms.
San Francisco

As always, Thanatos was there in her dreams.

“You died again,” he said calmly. “A combination of blood loss and hypothermia, this time. Why did you decide to shadow travel with an open wound? You know it’s dangerous.”

“My sister was there,” Chrysa replied calmly. “I had to try to save her. How is she?”

“Which sister? Which lifetime?” the god asked, scrolling through a list on his iPhone.

“First lifetime. Rhanis.”

“I haven’t collected her,” Thanatos said with a shrug. “She’s a Hunter, right?”

“One of the first,” Chrysa confirmed.

“She’s not dead. I can’t tell you how alive she is though.”

Chrysa nodded.

“How long will I be out?”

“You know that dreamtime is different than real time. You’re about to wake up, actually. Please try not to die again anytime soon.”

Thanatos disappeared as Chrysa blinked awake.

“Please don’t get up,” Chiron said conversationally from where was sitting in wheelchair form at her bedside. “You might upset your stitches, and I wouldn’t want you to lose more blood than you already did.”

“Rhanis?” Chrysa asked immediately.

“Stable, but unconscious. With Artemis captured, the link that keeps her immortal is damaged. She might slip into a coma without Artemis’ intervention. As it is, Artemis may need to call her brother in to heal her Hunter,” Chiron reported. “But since you got her here, I was able to stabilize her. You saved her life, though nearly at the cost of your own. How did you end up with a hole in your shoulder?”

“Bullet wound,” Chrysa admitted. “Tuesday morning, in New Mexico. I didn’t have time to take it out before we had to mount the Erymanthian Boar for a ride to Arizona.”

Chiron blinked at that.

“Nearly a decade and you still manage to surprise me, Ms. Potter,” he said with a shake of his head. “Especially since, in regards to your revelations Sunday night, I believe I recognize your first identity. It has been a while, hasn’t it, Leuke?”

Chrysa sighed inwardly.

“I was wondering if you’d figure it out. How did you figure it out, for future reference?”

“I might not have if Rhanis wasn’t here,” Chiron said, gesturing across the room to where the white-
haired Hunter lay on the opposite bed. “Black-haired, green-eyed women, while not common, are still not horribly unusual. But you and Rhanis have similar features, and eyes the exact same shade of green. Even among the immortals, there have been very few with those brilliant green eyes. But the true confirmation was that you and Rhanis have identical birthmarks on your left hips.”

Chrysa’s hand instantly moved to the spot in question. Like her scars, the birthmark had reappeared after she had regained her memories. The mark was only a birthmark in the sense that she had been born with it – it looked more like a tattoo with its glittering green and blue colors. The mark was an ouroboros, the symbol of Oceanus – a serpent biting its tail as it wrapped around the world. Every daughter of Oceanus bore the same mark. None of the sisters had every quite figured out why their father thought they needed such marks – Leuke had been of the opinion that he did it to her so that he would be able to recognize her later, since she was given up as a baby, and then simply continued it with the rest of her sisters.

“And you remembered your mother’s,” Chrysa sighed.

“Not particularly,” Chiron shrugged. “I was actually thinking of Chariclo’s. But my wife said that only the Elder Oceanides carried serpents with gold-edged scales. And of the Elder Oceanides, only Leuke Katachthonia was beloved enough by a god to claim his attention thousands of years after her death.”

Chrysa tilted her head in acknowledgement of that statement.

“How long have I been out?” she asked.

“It’s been a little more than fourteen hours since we found you,” Chiron reported. “It is currently three o’clock in the afternoon on December nineteenth.”

“When can I get up?” Chrysa pressed.

“That depends on how long it takes for your wounds to heal, and what potions you have in stock,” Chiron replied pleasantly. “Unfortunately, none of the Apollo campers are here at the moment. I got you to swallow some ambrosia, but the extent of your injuries means it will take some time to work, and I wasn’t willing to give you any more due to your unique physiology.”

Chrysa made a face. “Probably wise.” She then snapped her fingers, calling out, “Mipsy!”

The house-elf appeared next to the bed, dressed in a smart uniform with the Potter family crest on it.

“Mistress Amaranth is calling Mipsy?” the house-elf asked.

“Yes, Mipsy. Please go to Malfoy Manor and ask if either Narcissa or Draco is free and willing to make a house-call for a bit of healing. Nothing life-threatening, and nothing that would need more than basic wound potions and related restoratives.”

“Mipsy will go right away!” the house-elf exclaimed before popping away.

Chiron raised his eyebrows. “May I ask who you’ve just invited into camp?”

“Narcissa is my adoptive father’s cousin, and Draco is her son. He was in my year at Hogwarts, though we didn’t get along until we were adults. They’re both licensed Healers, though only Draco actively practices,” Chrysa explained. “I also was responsible for none of their family being thrown into Azkaban after the war, despite the fact that they were all marked Death Eaters. Lucius – Narcissa’s husband – still dislikes me, and the feeling is mutual, but Narcissa and Draco are pleasant enough now.”
“Do you believe they’ll be busy?” Chiron asked.

“Draco won’t admit to it, but he’s a bit of a worry-wart, and Narcissa’s a mother-hen, so if one of them is even potentially available, they’ll be here.”

Mipsy popped back in at that moment, holding onto the green robes of a Healer.

“What have you done now, Potter?” Draco Malfoy drawled in his usual manner, even as he scanned her prone form worriedly.

“I have a small hole in my chest and quite a bit of blood loss,” Chrysa replied. “It’s not serious, but I do need to get back to what I was doing as quickly as possible.”

Draco was already pulling potions out of the extended pouch at his waist.

“Where were you and what exactly happened?” Draco demanded.

Chrysa rolled her eyes. More than ten years after graduation, and he was still as demanding as ever.

“I got shot. Muggle weaponry. And then I let the bullet bounce around in my chest while I rode a giant boar from New Mexico to Arizona. And then I overexerted myself magically while fighting a giant metal golem.”

Draco simply rolled his eyes as he pulled back the blankets and the edge of her hospital gown.

“Will you ever learn?” he asked, neatly slicing through the bandages with his wand.

“Probably not,” Chrysa admitted.

Draco grimaced in disgust at the sight of the wound, even as he began casting diagnostic charms.

“Did you honestly sew it back together?” he asked incredulously.

“We may be slightly magical, but all those good at healing are at home for the holidays,” Chrysa replied. “So yes, stitches. It’s the easiest Muggle way to stop bleeding. Just cut them and pull them out.”

Draco wrinkled his nose, then ignored Chrysa’s advice and simply Vanished the thread before dumping a potion into the wound.

Chrysa hissed in pain.


Chrysa downed the potion. Draco had already begun casting spells to heal the wound. It was only a few minutes before Chrysa was good as new – aside from a new scar.

“Stay in bed for a bit longer – I’d prefer until morning. Regular scar-removal cream should be fine to get rid of that scar, but you need to wait at least a week before using it,” Draco said briskly, in full healer mode. “I’d recommend you double-check your gown for the Ministry Yule Ball. You know you shouldn’t use glamour charms on a recent injury, and you don’t want to be fielding awkward questions the whole night – you are coming, aren’t you?”

“I plan to,” Chrysa said. “I might even bring a date, if I can convince him to stop working for a few minutes. How are Astoria and Scorpius?”
“Scorpius is well,” Draco said. “Astoria…well, the curse is getting worse.”

She grimaced. Astoria Greengrass-Malfoy’s blood-borne curse was the reason Draco had become a Healer in the first place. He’d always had an interest, because of his mother, but he’d planned to emulate his father in being independently wealthy until learning of his beloved’s fate.

Chrysa hesitated, then said quietly, “You can find the god Asclepius at his temple in Epidaurus. You might want to try, after the holidays are over. I’m sure Sirius and Remus would be willing to watch Scorpius, if you don’t want to leave him with your parents for an extended period. Their Albus is the same age, after all.”

Draco tried to hide the look of hope on his face, but he didn’t do a very good job. It was unsurprising. This was probably the first good lead he’d had in years.

“That would be nice,” he finally admitted. “Scorpius needs more friends his own age.”

“During the Ministry Yule Ball, Albus and his siblings will be staying with the Weasley-Thomas cousins. Ron and Hermione’s Rose, Bill and Fleur’s Dominique, and George and Angelina’s Fred are around the same age as well,” Chrysa added helpfully. “If I’m at the ball, my two children will be there as well.”

Draco looked intrigued.

“You found Nico and Bianca?”

“Does everyone know about your children?” Chiron complained good-naturedly.

“Just family,” Chrysa said. “I let Draco and Narcissa in on everything after the second time they had to heal me from something that should have killed me.”

“We would have figured out something was up,” Draco drawled. “You haven’t aged a day since the Battle of Hogwarts over a decade ago – though you have gained some weight so you no longer look half-starved. Even by wizarding standards, it’s odd. Everyone noticed something’s up. Amaranth released a press statement giving the general gist of things – including the Champion-of-Death thing, not including the reincarnation thing – several years ago. It quelled a lot of the rumors, though we still have to deal with some conspiracy theorists.”

Draco shoved the empty potions vials back into his pouch.

“If you’ll excuse me, I have to get back to the Manor. We were just finishing dinner when your elf visited, so Mother and Tori are rather anxious to hear what trouble you’ve gotten yourself into this time.”

Chrysa raised an eyebrow.

“They do realize that they could combine their ages and multiply it by a hundred and I would still be older than them, correct?”

Draco lifted a shoulder in an elegant shrug.

“Perhaps. But you look younger, so they feel justified in their worry. See you at Yule, Amaranth.”

“Good-bye, Draco,” Chrysa replied, before nodding to Mipsy.

The house-elf grabbed Draco’s robes and popped him away again.
“Will you be staying in bed until morning?” Chiron asked her.

Chrysa sighed. “We’ll probably be meeting Atlas soon enough. If I’m going to face him, I need to be at my best. It will probably be interesting to see.”

“Who will win?” Chiron asked quietly. “The Left Hand or the Right? The Hammer or the Knife?”

“A ten-thousand-year-old question will finally be answered,” Chrysa agreed. “I’ll stay in bed until morning. Morning here will be earlier than morning on the West Coast, so I can probably even get breakfast before heading over to San Francisco.”

“What makes you think the rest of your party will be there?” Chiron asked.

“Apollo told Percy to meet Nereus. Nereus hangs out on the San Francisco piers. If I wait in the general area long enough, Percy, Thalia, and Zoë will show up. Which reminds me…”

She snapped her fingers and called out, “Topsy!”

A different house-elf, also dressed in a neat uniform with the Potter crest on it, appeared.

“Mistress called for Topsy?”

“Topsy, please take the cheapest car I have in my Los Angeles garage that will seat four people and park it at the public train station closest to the piers. Then bring me the keys.”

“Yes, Mistress,” the house-elf agreed.

“Cheapest car?” Chiron asked.

“My cars don’t tend to survive these trips very long,” Chrysa admitted. “My Maserati got destroyed by the Furies the summer before last. My Porsche got a manticore spike through the windshield last week. It tore up the leather interior. That car was brand new. I don’t doubt that whatever care I use to drive the questers to a mountain filled with people who hate me will face the same fate.”

Chiron glanced at the clock on the wall.

“I’d stay and keep you company, but I’m supposed to have an archery class in ten minutes, and the Hunters like to show up to commentate…it can get ugly if I’m not there early. Would you like me to send someone in to keep you company?” he asked.

“Does anyone else know I’m here?” Chrysa asked drily.

“Just Mr. D.”

“Then no. I’m not really up to games at the moment, and you shouldn’t tell anyone else. As much as I’d like to see my children again, no one needs to know about the hiccups in our quest. I’ll get Mipsy to bring me some books.”

“Very well, then. I will be back later, probably after dinner. Would you like me to ensure you get some?”

“Please.”

Chiron nodded and left the room.

The rest of the afternoon and night was rather boring. No one but Chiron and Dionysus knew she
was there, and neither could disappear for too long without being noticed. While Dionysus did
manage to come by for a rousing game of Exploding Snap, most of her time was spent reading or
watching Rhani’s slow breaths.

In the morning, Chiron checked her over twice before allowing her to get up.

“Be careful, Chrysa,” he warned. “You are more powerful than any demigod could ever hope to be,
but you’re not a goddess anymore.”

“I know,” Chrysa nodded seriously. “But full goddess or not, I may be the only one able to defeat
the General. I have to go.”

Chiron nodded soberly. “Go.”

Instead of Apparating away as she usually would, Chrysa simply called the shadows up around her
and stepped into them. She came out in the shadow cast by a building near the San Francisco piers.
She sighed when she realized that she had forgotten to account for the time difference in her
departure times.

Chrysa walked lazily to the shore, conjured a lawn chair, pulled a book from her bottomless bag, and
plopped down, settling in to read until the rest of the questing party got there.

She was drawn from the well-read pages of *Quidditch through the Ages* by the feel of approaching
demigods. She looked up from her book to see a group of three people. Chrysa let a small smile
come to her face as she pushed her sunglasses to the top of her head.

Thalia and Percy were crashing into her a moment later.

“It’s good to see you too,” she said with a small laugh. “I’m fine now, don’t worry.”

“Rhani?” Zoë asked quietly from behind them.

“Critical, but stable,” Chrysa said soberly. “She needs Artemis back, maybe Apollo’s help as well,
but Chiron has her stabilized. She’ll be okay for a few more days.”

“What happened?” Percy asked.

“I stupidly ignored a wound incurred earlier, then overexerted myself. It was a mixture of magical
exhaustion and blood loss,” Chrysa shrugged. There was no need to mention the hypothermia.
What they didn’t know wouldn’t hurt them.

“But you’re okay now?” Thalia pressed.

“Chiron did a lot, and I called in my cousin who’s a magical Healer to finish up,” Chrysa stated. “I
even stayed in bed for all my required hours of bed rest. I haven’t done that since I was twelve.”

“What wound did you ignore?” Zoë asked curiously.

“I got shot fighting the spartoi,” Chrysa shrugged. “It’s fine now.”

“You got shot!” the others demanded.

“It’s fine now!” Chrysa repeated. “We can talk while we walk! Have you found Nereus yet?”

“No. But I have dressed Percy to blend in so he can catch him,” Zoë said, gesturing to the sole male
in the group, who blushed at the attention called to his current get-up.
“I was wondering,” Chrysa said thoughtfully. “I didn’t think ‘vagrant’ was your usual style, Percy. Oh! I think I have a camera in here, I’m sure Sally would love to see…”

“No!” Percy cried out. “No pictures! Wearing it is bad enough!”

“Fine,” Chrysa said with a put-upon sigh. “Go find Nereus. I can’t get too close. Zoë can’t either. He’ll recognize us.”

“Just grab him and don’t let go,” Zoë advised. “You’ll know him when you smell him.”

Percy looked doubtful.

“Trust me, you will,” Chrysa nodded. “Let’s go.”

They spent a long time searching the docks. Finally, Chrysa and Zoë stopped as one. Chrysa pointed down a pier where a bunch of homeless men were huddled together in blankets, waiting for the soup kitchens to open for lunch.

“He’s that way,” Chrysa instructed. “I can sense him.”

“He never travels very far from the water,” Zoë added. “He likes to sun himself during the day.”

“How do I know which one is him?” Percy asked.

“Sneak up,” Zoë said. “Act homeless. You will know him. He will smell…different.”

“Great,” Percy said. “And once I find him?”

“Grab him,” Chrysa said. “And hold on. He will try anything and everything to get rid of you. Whatever he does, do not let go. Force him to answer your question.”

“We’ve got your back,” Thalia said. She picked a big clump of fuzz that came from who-knows-where off the back of Percy’s shirt. “Ew. On second thought…I don’t want your back. But we’ll be rooting for you.”

As Percy headed toward the dock, Chrysa could hear him grumbling about how nice it was to have super-powerful friends.

They watched as he traveled slowly down the dock, drifting back and forth in order to get close enough to smell everyone. Finally, he approached the end of the pier, where an ancient-looking man was sleeping in a patch of sunlight. He wore pajamas and a fuzzy bathrobe that probably used to be white. He was overweight, with a white beard that turned yellow, like Dumbledore’s when one of Fred and George’s pranks had flipped a soup bowl all down his front, except this was dried and crusty.

“That’s Nereus,” Chrysa muttered to Zoë. She nodded in agreement.

Percy sat down near him. The guy moved his head to look at him, but Percy didn’t look back, simply staring out at the water. Nereus turned away.

Percy jumped him.

“Ahhhh!” Nereus screamed. “Help me!”

Percy seemed to be hanging on for dear life.
“Maybe now would be a good time to find the video camera,” Chrysa said thoughtfully. “I could play this at his birthday party one year.”

“Or his wedding,” Thalia offered. “If he lives that long.”

“That’s a crime!” a homeless man yelled. “Kid rolling an old man like that!”

Percy rolled down the pier, Nereus attached to him, until his head smacked into a post. Nereus tried to make a break for it, but Percy tackled him from behind.

“I don’t have any money!” Nereus yelled.

“I don’t want money!” Percy replied as Nereus struggled. “I’m a half-blood! I want information!”

Nereus seemed to struggle harder.

“Heroes!” Why do you always pick on me!”

Nereus thrashed around, but Percy held on. They staggered toward the end of the pier.

“Oh, no!” Percy yelled. “Not the water!”

Nereus yelled in triumph and jumped off the edge. Together, they plunged into the San Francisco Bay.

“We might as well head down that way,” Chrysa said.

Thalia and Zoë nodded, and they began to walk towards the shore, just in time to see an orca leap out of the water, Percy attached to his dorsal fin. A bunch of tourists went, “Whoa!” Percy had the gall to wave.

Nereus collapsed on the edge of the boat dock a few minutes later, heaving and gasping. Chrysa, Zoë, and Thalia ran down the steps from the pier.

“You got him!” Zoë said.

“You don’t have to sound so amazed,” Percy replied.

Nereus moaned. “Oh, wonderful. An audience for my humiliation! The normal deal, I suppose? You’ll let me go if I answer your question?”

“I’ve got more than one question,” Percy said.

“Only one question per capture! That’s the rule!” Nereus argued.

Percy glanced at them, looking lost.

“I’ve seen you in worse positions, Nereus,” Chrysa said, looking him up and down. “Though if that’s how you choose to look now, I see why you haven’t had children since the Elder Days.”

Nereus squinted at her, before recognition filled his eyes.

“Oh. It’s you. Doris mentioned you were back. Why didn’t he just ask you his questions? He obviously knows you. I’m not the only omniscient person running around.”

Chrysa shrugged. “I’m not an immortal now. I still know things, but it takes a while. We don’t
have that kind of time.”

Percy sighed and asked, “All right, Nereus. Tell me where to find this terrible monster that could bring an end to the gods. The one Artemis was hunting.”

The Old Man of the Sea smiled, showing off his mossy green teeth.

“Oh, that’s too easy,” he said evilly. “He’s right there.”

Nereus pointed to the water at Percy’s feet.

“Where?” Percy asked.

“The deal is complete!” Nereus gloated. With a pop, he turned into a goldfish and did a backflip into the sea.

“You tricked me!” Percy yelled.

“Wait,” Thalia said, eyes widening. “What is that?”

“MOOOOOO!”

They all looked down. There in the water, right where Nereus had pointed, was a creature swimming next to the dock. It had the front half of a bull, and the back half of a serpent.

Chrysa felt a sinking sensation in her chest. She did know this creature. It was exactly as she feared.

“Ah, Bessie,” Percy said. “Now now.”

“Mooo!”

“Percy, that is not a Bessie,” Chrysa said firmly, stepping forward. “That would be the creature known as the Ophiotaurus, who was born directly from Chaos.”

She stepped toward the creature, which obviously recognized her. It fearfully scooted closer toward Percy.

Chrysa sighed. “Percy, do you know this creature?”

“Yeah, she – he got caught in one of those underwater fishing nets near Camp Half-Blood. The hippocampi sent Blackjack to bring me to help him out,” Percy said. “It was pretty hard, he wouldn’t let me cut him out, so I had to untangle the whole thing. She – he – was cute. I thought he was a girl, which is why I called him Bessie. And then I saw him at the Hoover Dam when we were there.”

Thalia shook her head in disbelief.

“And you just forgot to mention this before?”

“Well...yeah,” Percy said sheepishly.

“I am a fool,” Zoë said suddenly. “I know this story!”

“What story?” Percy asked.

“From the War of the Titans,” she said. “My...my father told me about this, thousands of years ago.
This is the beast we are looking for.

“Bessie?” Percy asked, looking down at the bull serpent. “But…he’s too cute. He couldn’t destroy the world.”

“That is how we were wrong,” Zoë said. “We’ve been anticipating a huge, dangerous monster, but the Ophiotaurus does not bring down the gods that way. He must be sacrificed.”

“MMMMM!” Bessie lowed.

“I don’t think he likes the S-word,” Percy said as he patted the Ophiotaurus on the head. He scratched the creature’s ears, but the creature was still trembling. Chrysa took a step away from him, and he seemed to calm down a bit.

“How could anyone hurt him?” Percy asked. “He’s harmless.”

Zoë nodded.

“There is power in killing innocence,” Chrysa said quietly, keeping her eyes fixed on the creature, whose eyes were fixed on her in return. “Terrible power. The Fates ordained a prophecy eons ago. They said that whoever killed the Ophiotaurus and cast its entrails into the fire would have the power to destroy the gods.”

“MMMMMMM!”

“Um,” Percy said. “Maybe we should avoid the E-word as well.”

Thalia stared at the Ophiotaurus with wonder.

“The power to destroy the gods…ow? I mean, what would happen?”

“No one knows,” Zoë said. “The first time, during the Titan War, the Ophiotaurus was in fact slain by an ally of the Titans….” Her eyes widened and she looked over at Chrysa.

Chrysa sighed.

“My first incarnation,” she said. “I was the one who, ah,” – she glanced at the still-trembling cow serpent – “illed-kay the creature and was preparing to acrifise-say it to ire-fay. It was so long ago… I’d almost forgotten.”

“You…you worked with Kronos?” Percy demanded.

“Before the gods,” Chrysa said. “He wasn’t always a piece of filth. After the whole eating-his-children debacle, I switched my allegiance to Rhea and the gods, but I remained with the Titans as a spy. I was the one who told Zeus about the prophecy, and he managed to send an eagle to snatch the entrails away before I could cast them into the fire. It was a close call. Now, after more than eight thousand years, the Ophiotaurus has been reborn.”

Thalia sat down on the dock. She stretched out her hand. The Ophiotaurus went directly to her. Thalia placed her hand on his head. The creature shivered.

Thalia’s expression was concerning. She almost looked…hungry.

“We have to protect him,” Percy declared. “If Luke gets a hold of him—”

“Luke wouldn’t hesitate,” Thalia muttered. “The power to overthrow Olympus. That’s…that’s
“Yes, it is, my dear,” said a man’s voice with a heavy accent. “And it is a power you shall unleash.”

The Ophiotaurus made a whimpering sound and submerged.

They all looked up. They’d been so busy talking, they’d allowed themselves to be ambushed.

Chrysa cursed inwardly. She should have been more on guard. Standing behind them, his two-color eyes gleaming wickedly, was Dr. Thorn, the manticore himself.

“This is just pairrr-fect,” the manticore gloated.

Chrysa glared at him. This was the creature who had taken her daughter from her. This was the creature who ensured that her ward was still in enemy hands. What he had done was unforgivable. He needed to die.

He was wearing a ratty black trench coat over his Westover Hall uniform, which was torn and stained. His military haircut had grown out spiky and greasy. He hadn’t shaved recently, so his face was covered in silver stubble. Basically, he didn’t look much better than the guys down at the soup kitchen. He didn’t smell any better either.

“Long ago, the gods banished me to Persia,” the manticore said. ‘I was forced to scrounge for food on the edges of the worlds, hiding in forests, devouring insignificant human farmers for my meals. I never got to fight any great heroes. I was not feared and admired in the old stories! But now that will change. The Titans shall honor me, and I shall feast on the flesh of half-bloods!’

On either side of him stood two armed security guards, some of the mortal mercenaries Chrysa had caught sight of in D.C. Two more stood on the next boat dock over, just in case they tried to escape that way. There were tourists all around – walking down the waterfront, shopping at the pier above them – but that wouldn’t stop the manticore from acting. It wouldn’t stop Chrysa either.

She subtly moved her hand behind her back and snapped her wrist so that her wand fell into it. She cast a wide-range Notice-Me-Not spell around the area, then added a Muggle-Repelling ward. She noticed the guards twitch when she cast it, but that was their only reaction. They must have been warded against magic.

“Where…where are the skeletons?” Percy asked the manticore.

He sneered in response.

“I do not need those foolish undead! The General thinks I am worthless? He will change his mind when I defeat you myself!”

“We beat you once before,” Percy said bravely.

“Ha! You could barely fight me with a goddess on your side. And alas…that goddess is preoccupied at the moment. There will be no help for you now.”

Zoë notched an arrow and aimed it straight at the manticore’s head. The guards on either side of them raised their guns.

“Wait!” Percy said. “Zoë, don’t!”

The manticore smiled. “The boy is right, Zoë Nightshade. Put away your bow. It would be a
shame to kill you before you witnessed Thalia’s great victory.”

“What are you talking about?” Thalia growled. She had her shield and spear ready.

“Surely it is clear,” the manticore purred. “This is your moment. This is why Lord Kronos brought you back to life. You will sacrifice the Ophiotaurus. You will bring its entrails to the sacred fire on the mountain. You will gain unlimited power. And for your sixteenth birthday, you will overthrow Olympus.”

No one spoke. It made terrible sense. Thalia was only two days away from turning sixteen. She was a child of the Big Three. And here was a choice, a terrible choice that could mean the end of the gods. It was just like the prophecy said. Thalia herself looked completely stunned.

Chrysa waited patiently. As much as she wanted to end the manticore’s life for taking her daughter from her – even if she’d gotten her daughter back mere hours later – she needed to wait. She needed to know Thalia’s choice. If she chose to destroy the gods…Chrysa loved her sister, but Leuke was a pragmatist. Nico and Bianca would not survive if Olympus did not survive. If ensuring Olympus’ survival meant she had to kill her own sister…she would do it. She didn’t want to, but she would do it.

It wouldn’t be the first time.

“You know it is the right choice,” the manticore told her. “Your friend Luke recognized it. You shall be reunited with him. You shall rule this world together under the auspices of the Titans. Your father abandoned you, Thalia. He cares nothing for you. And now you shall gain power over him. Crush the Olympians underfoot, as they deserve. Call the beast! It will come to you. Use your spear.”

“Thalia,” Percy said. “Snap out of it!”

She looked at him, dazed and uncertain.

“I…I don’t –”

“Your father helped you,” Percy said. “He sent the metal angels.”

Chrysa really needed to find out what happened in the twenty-four hours she was gone.

“He turned you into a tree to preserve you,” Percy continued. He looked over at Chrysa desperately.

It probably wasn’t what he expected her to do, but Chrysa reached up and slapped Thalia’s cheek. The fog cleared from her eyes immediately.

“Ow!” she said. “What was that for?”

Chrysa ignored her, stepping forward towards the manticore instead.

“I don’t like it when people try to manipulate my friends into things,” she said, a deadly edge to her voice. She took another step forward. One of the mortal guards moved his gun sight from Zoë to her. “I don’t like you much at all.”

The area around them had grown darker. It was a cloudy day anyway, but now the shadows on their little pier grew thick and heavy about them. One of the mortal guards shivered.

“Do you know who I am, manticore?” Chrysa asked idly, tilting her head slightly.
The manticore sneered, though Chrysa could see the underlying fear starting to creep into him. Every shadow in the world was hers, after all. Even the shadows of the mind.

“The little demigod witch,” he sneered. “Zeus’ little whore.”

Chrysa laughed, but there was no warmth in it. It was the way Leuke had laughed before the gods…the way Bellatrix had laughed, the way Voldemort had laughed.

“How? I am no whore, thought I’ve been called worse. But I am more than a ‘little demigod witch’.”

The shadows were still rising around her. She could feel their familiar coolness brushing the backs of her hands and the sides of her neck, the only skin she had exposed in the cool weather. They had already overtaken the more distant mercenaries, who were out of view of the manticore and his closer minions.

Her voice was quiet, but the whisper echoed through the area. Everything within her wards was silent.


The manticore’s eyes widened, and he tried to move, to attack, but it was too late. The shadows overcame him. He was…and then he wasn’t. The shadows ripped him to shreds.

Chrysa didn’t flinch as the blood splattered across her face and clothes. It would be annoying to get out of her hair later. Congealed blood always was.

There was no blood from their mortal enemies. The shadows had simply consumed them. They would be instantly taken to the Fields of Punishment.

She turned back around to see the shocked looks on her companions’ faces. Zoë’s eyes were wide, but she looked otherwise composed. Thalia and Percy were gaping in shock. Zoë at least knew about this side of her. Thalia and Percy had no idea.

Chrysa sighed as she dug a handkerchief out of her messenger bag to clean her face off. She only managed to smear it further across her face before remembering she was a witch and there was a spell for that. She pulled out her wand and waved it over herself.

“Tergeo!” she ordered. The blood was siphoned off her face and clothing and into the ocean below, much to the displeasure of the Ophiotaurus, if the resulting “MOOOO!” was any indication.

“How could you…how did you?” Percy stuttered. “That wasn’t your normal magic.”

Chrysa looked away.

“I told you, I’m much older than I seem. I told you I was an immortal – a nymph. But I was more than that. I was a goddess in my own right. When I regained my memories, I regained my powers as well. Just not my immortality.”

“But you’re immortal,” Percy said, looking confused.

“But not by my own power,” Chrysa sighed. “I’m immortal because Thanatos – Death – will not take me. My soul is tied to the living world.” She chuckled. “I suppose you could say the world is my
“What is this Horcrux you speak of?” Zoë asked.

“It is of no importance,” Chrysa sighed. She looked over at Thalia. “I hope you learned your lesson. It isn’t easy to resist power, is it?”

Thalia blushed as if she was ashamed.

“We’ve all considered it,” Chrysa said quietly, laying a hand on her sister’s shoulder. “The power to act on our darkest desires…it is tempting. Even I have thought about it. When I died in my last life, with Nico and Bianca…it was because Zeus was attempting to kill them. Their father saved them. I died. But that doesn’t discount the fact that he targeted what is most precious to me. When I first came back to my memories, I considered it. He didn’t know what I had once again become. I had only known him as my father for a few months. I could have struck against him and he would never have seen me coming. I could avenge the wrongs against me, but that wouldn’t help anyone. And revenge…revenge carries no satisfaction. It might feel good in the moment, but once that moment is over, what you lost is still gone. And then you have to deal with the consequences of your actions. Would it really be worth it to overthrow the gods?”

“They haven’t done the best job,” Thalia said slowly.

“But they protect the mortals,” Zoë said. “When Kronos reigned, the mortals were nothing more than cheap entertainment, or occasionally appetizers. It is why the gods will not eat the flesh of mortals – they will not do the same as Kronos did.”

“You were there?” Percy asked.

Zoë nodded shortly.

“I was very young. I was only four when the war ended.”

“We need to go,” Chrysa said, looking at Zoë soberly. “You know where.”

“Where?” Percy asked.

Zoë’s face was the color of the fog. She pointed across the bay, past the Golden Gate Bridge. In the distance, a single mountain rose up above the cloud layer.

“The garden of my sisters,” she identified. “I must go home.”

“Well, we can’t enter until sunset anyway, so I think we have time for lunch,” Chrysa nodded firmly.

“But if we have to get to that mountain, shouldn’t we leave now?” Thalia asked. “It looks pretty far away.”

“I had one of my house-elves bring up a car to San Francisco,” Chrysa shrugged. “I’m parked, like, four blocks from here.”

“What about Bessie?” Percy asked.

Chrysa looked down at the Ophiotaurus.

“I kind of forgot about him. Oops. I guess we can’t just leave him here. Percy, he seems to think you’re his protector. You and I will stay here while Zoë and Thalia go pick up lunch.”
“But he doesn’t like you,” Thalia pointed out.

“But I’m the most dangerous person here,” Chrysa countered. “You go get lunch. I’ll look up directions to the mountain.”

She pulled her wallet out of her bag and handed it to Thalia.

“You remember my pin code, right?”

“1933?”

“The year Bianca was born,” Chrysa confirmed with a nod. “Don’t forget drinks! We all need water.”

The two girls walked hesitantly away. Percy plopped down on the pier, trailing on hand into the water to pet the cow-serpent’s nose while Chrysa dug through her messenger bag.

“Book, potions, tent, bandages, nectar, ambrosia…ah! Here it is!” She pulled out her iPhone.

“I thought we weren’t supposed you use cell phones?” Percy asked. “Doesn’t it attract monsters?”

“Between my magic and my quasi-immortality, I don’t give off the same signals that a demigod does,” Chrysa replied as she typed on the device. “Hmm…According to this, sunset is at 4:54 in San Francisco today. It is currently one o’clock. We have three hours to do something about the Ophiotaurus and get to the top of that mountain…which Safari says is called Mount Tamalpais. And my maps app says it will take me…one hour and three minutes to drive there. Add in an extra half hour for traffic, and another hour to climb the mountain, and we have an hour and a half to do something about the Ophiotaurus and get to my car.”

Zoë and Thalia returned at that point, carrying bags full of fast food from In-N-Out Burger.

“Any ideas about the Ophiotaurus?”

“You could call one of your sisters?” Zoë offered.

“There’s an idea,” Chrysa said with a nod. She glanced up at the sky. The sun was finally coming out of the clouds. “Percy, can you lift the water up into the sun?”

Thalia and Percy’s eyes widened as they realized her plan, though Percy soon closed his in concentration as he raised his hand, lifting the water from the ocean into the sun.

“Will you be okay to hold it there?” Chrysa asked.

“I think so,” Percy replied. His eyes were still closed, but his voice was calm. “Just don’t take too long.”

“O Iris, Goddess of the Rainbow, accept my offering,” Chrysa said, pulling a drachma from her messenger bag and tossing it through the rainbow that formed in the mist. “Show me Amphitrite, in the palace of Atlantis.”

As soon as the sea queen appeared, Chrysa asked, “How fast can you get to San Francisco? It’s somewhat urgent.”

Amphitrite blinked at her. From behind her, Poseidon and Triton stared at her surprise appearance, as did the rest of what Chrysa supposed to be the under-the-sea Council.
“Does this have to do with the problem you called me about a few days ago?” Amphitrite asked.

“Tangentially,” Chrysa replied. “We’re about to head towards the Garden of the Hesperides, but I need someone to transport a sea creature to Olympus. As the goddess of sea creatures, I figured you were the best bet – especially since this creature isn’t going anywhere without someone I trust with my life.”

“This meeting will be over shortly. Can it wait that long?” Amphitrite asked.

“No more than an hour,” Chrysa replied gravely.

Amphitrite nodded, just as serious.

“I’ll be there.” The sea-goddess waved her hand through the rainbow, cutting the connection.

“That was Amphitrite?” Thalia asked interestingly. “Won’t she less likely to help us if she sees Percy?”

“Why wouldn’t she like me?” Percy asked, confused.

“Lady Amphitrite is wed to Lord Poseidon,” Zoë explained. “She is thy stepmother, Percy.”

“Amphitrite doesn’t hate Poseidon’s demigods,” Chrysa said. “She knew going into it that Poseidon wouldn’t be faithful. Her only demand was that she be given the respect due her position and that Poseidon not limit her freedom. Poseidon agreed. Amphitrite hasn’t met many of Poseidon’s children, but she’s always kind to them.”

“What do we do now?” Thalia asked.

“Eat our lunch,” Chrysa shrugged. “Wait for Amphitrite. Then we can go pick up my car and head to the mountain.”

They’d each managed two burgers and a pack of French fries before a glimmer in the water heralded Amphitrite’s approach. The sea rose beside Chrysa and melted into Amphitrite.

“What is it you need, sister?” she asked.

Chrysa merely pointed downwards. Amphitrite looked down, then cursed in Ancient Greek.

“Is that the Ophiotaurus?”

“MOOOOOOO!” the cow-serpent said.

“It’s nothing against you,” Chrysa told him. “You’re just a little problematic at the moment.” She looked up at her sister. “Can you transport him to Olympus? While I don’t doubt yours and Poseidon’s loyalty, I worry for traitors. With Aigaios and Thamas have been causing difficulties….”

“I will take him directly to the throne room,” Amphitrite promised. “Go take care of the rest of the problem.”

The sea goddess looked at the rest of the group, her eyes coming to rest on Percy.

“Hello, Perseus Jackson, son of my husband,” she greeted in a neutral voice. “I am Amphitrite, Queen of the Seas, goddess of saltwater and sea creatures.”
Percy, Zoë, and Thalia all bowed lowly, though Percy had to be nudged into it by Zoë.

“It’s an honor,” Percy said, shifting slightly at her focus on him.

“We have been watching you with great interest,” Amphitrite stated. “You are a son of the sea. Your actions speak for us all. Do not disappoint us.”

“I…I’ll try not to,” Percy said.

Amphitrite nodded regally, before turning to Zoë.

“You are Pleione’s youngest, are you not?”

“Yes, Queen Amphitrite,” Zoë replied.

“Shall I pass your greetings on to your mother?”

Zoë looked uncomfortable.

“If it does not trouble you, Queen Amphitrite.”

Amphitrite nodded again. She reached out and hugged Chrysa.

“I expect to see you on the morrow at the Council,” she said firmly. “Do not make me lose you again.”

“I won’t,” Chrysa promised. Her voice went cold. “The sharpest blade can easily defeat the might of a hammer.”

“I pray that is true,” Amphitrite said. “I will take the creature to Olympus now, and remain with it until the Council. Be safe, sister.”

She disappeared back into the water, and the Ophiotaurus with her.
It only took them ten minutes to find Chrysa’s Mercedes-Benz SUV in the parking lot of Embarcadero Station. Chrysa unlocked the vehicle with magic and opened the glovebox in order to start the car properly. Zoë took the passenger seat while Thalia and Percy were relegated to the back. It only took two minutes for Zoë to become frustrated enough with the GPS that she passed it back for Percy to set up.

“We must arrive at sunset,” Zoë said anxiously. Percy was plugging things into the GPS while Chrysa navigated the San Francisco streets on the way to the Golden Gate Bridge.

“I don’t get it,” Percy said. “Why do we have to get there at sunset?”

“The Hesperides are the nymphs of the sunset,” Zoë said. “We can only enter their garden as day changes to night.”

“What happens if we miss it?”

“Tomorrow is the winter solstice. If we miss sunset tonight, we would have to wait until tomorrow evening. And by then, the Olympian Council will be over. We must free Lady Artemis tonight,” Zoë said firmly.

By the time Percy managed to get the GPS set up, they were stuck in afternoon traffic on the Golden Gate Bridge.

“Can’t this thing go any faster?” Thalia asked.

“I cannot control traffic,” Chrysa said irritably.

“You both sound like my mother,” Percy commented.

“Shut up!” Thalia shot back.

Chrysa wove in and out of traffic on the bridge with her usual flair of treating traffic laws as suggestions. Unfortunately, a four-car pileup greatly impacted their travel time. The sun was sinking on the horizon when they finally got into Marin County and exited the highway.

The roads were insanely narrow, winding through forests and up the sides of hills and around the edges of steep ravines. Chrysa didn’t slow down at all. In fact, with the lack of people nearby, she activated the car’s built-in Notice-Me-Not charm and sped up.

“Why does everything smell like cough drops?” Percy asked.

“Eucalyptus,” Zoë said, pointing to the huge trees all around them.

“The stuff koala bears eat?” Percy asked.

“And monsters,” she said. “They love chewing the leaves. Especially dragons.”

“Dragons chew eucalyptus leaves?”

“Believe me,” Zoë said, “if you had dragon breath, you would chew eucalyptus too.”

Mount Tamalpais loomed before them. In terms of mountains, it was a relatively small one, less than
a quarter of Mount Othrys’ original height, before Zeus had destroyed the peak with his thunderbolts.

“So that’s the Mountain of Despair?” Percy asked.

“Yes,” Zoë said tightly.

“Why do they call it that?”

She was silent for almost a mile before answering.

“After the war between the Titans and the gods, many of the Titans were punished and imprisoned. Kronos’ right-hand man, the general of his armies, was imprisoned up there, on the summit, just beyond the Garden of the Hesperides.”


Zoë ignored the question. Clouds seemed to swirl around the peak, as though the mountain was drawing them in, spinning them like a top. Seeing the place where the sky kissed the earth…it was breathtaking, if you ignored the danger aspect of it.

“We have to concentrate,” Thalia said. “The Mist is really strong here.”

“The magical kind or the natural kind?” Percy asked.

“Both,” Chrysa replied grimly.

The grey clouds swirled even thicker over the mountain, and they kept driving straight toward them. They were out of the forest now into wide open spaces of cliffs and grass and rocks and fog.

“Look!” Percy cried as they passed a scenic curve. They turned the corner, the ocean disappearing behind the hills.

“What?” Thalia asked.

“A big white ship,” Percy said. “Docked near the beach. It looked like a cruise ship.”

“Luke’s ship?” Thalia asked. Chrysa glanced up at her rearview mirror and saw her eyes widen.

“Tyson told me that the Princess Andromeda was down at the Panama Canal,” Percy said grimly. “That’s the only way to sail it from the East Coast to California.”

“We will have company then,” Zoë said grimly. “Kronos’ army.”

Suddenly, the hairs on the back of Chrysa’s neck stood up. Thalia shouted, “Stop the car! NOW!”

Chrysa slammed on the brakes without question. The red Mercedes spun twice before coming to a stop at the edge of the cliff.

“Out!” Thalia said, opening her door and pushing Percy out. Zoë and Chrysa evacuated through their own doors. Chrysa shadowed over to Zoë and deployed her Olympian silver shield just in time to hear a loud BOOOM!

Lightning flashed, and her SUV erupted like a Gryffindor-colored grenade. Her shield was the only thing that protected her, along with Zoë as she held it over their heads. On the other side of the car, Chrysa could see Thalia doing the same with Percy. The shrapnel pounded on their shields like
metal rain. When it was over, they were surrounded by wreckage. Part of the VW’s fender had
impaled itself in the street. The smoking hood was spinning in circles. Pieces of scarlet metal were
strewn across the road.

Distantly, she heard Percy tell Thalia, “You saved my life.”

“*One shall fall by a father’s hand,*” Thalia said. “Curse him. He would destroy me. *Me?*”

“No, Thalia,” Chrysa said as she closed her shield. She vaguely noticed Zoë darting off to the left,
probably to check how close they were to the garden. “You may be better at sensing lightning than I
am, but I am better at sensing signatures. This was not our father. And trust me, having been *blown
up* by him previously, I know what his power feels like.”

“Whose, then?” Thalia demanded.

“Zoë said Kronos’ name,” Percy offered. “Maybe he–”

Thalia shook her head, looking angry and stunned.

“No. That wasn’t it,” she said.


They both got up and ran around the blasted SUV. Percy even looked down the cliff.

“Zoë!” he shouted.

Then she was standing right next to him, pulling at his arm.

“Silence, fool! Do you want to wake Ladon!”

“You mean we’re close?” Percy asked.

“Very close,” she replied. “Follow me.”

Sheets of fog were drifting right across the road. Zoë stepped into one of them, and when the fog
passed, she was no longer there. Thalia and Percy both looked to Chrysa.

“Concentrate on Zoë,” Chrysa advised. “We are following her. Go straight into the fog and keep
that in mind.”

She stepped into the fog immediately, just as she heard Percy say, “Wait, Thalia.”

When the fog cleared, she was still on the side of the mountain, but the road was dirt. The grass was
thicker. The sunset made a blood-red slash across the sea. The summit of the mountain seemed
closer now, swirling with storm clouds and raw power. There was only one path to the top, directly
in front of them. It led through a lush meadow of shadows and flowers: the garden of twilight, just
the same now as it had been thousands of years before.

The grass shimmered with silvery evening light, and the flowers were such beautiful colors that they
almost glowed in the dark. Stepping stones of polished black marble led around either side of the
five-story-tall apple tree, every bough glittering with golden apples. The only man to the picture was
the giant dragon encircling the tree. Its body was as thick as a booster rocket, glinting with coppery
scales. He had more heads than could easily be counted, as if a hundred deadly pythons had been
fused together. He appeared to be asleep, as the heads lay curled in a big spaghetti-like mounds on
the grass, all of his eyes closed.
Thalia and Percy stepped out beside her.

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“The apples of immortality,” Thalia said. “Hera’s wedding gift from Zeus.”

Then the shadows in front began to move. Chrysa could sense the four approaching figures, and it was only the advent of their beautiful, eerie singing that allowed her to identify them and prevented her from drawing her knife. Percy reached for Riptide, but Zoë stopped his hand.

Four figures shimmered into existence, four young women who looked very much like Zoë. They all wore white Greek chitons. Their skin was like caramel. Silky black hair tumbled loose around their shoulders. They looked just like Zoë – beautiful and dangerous.

“Sisters,” Zoë greeted coolly.

“We do not see any sister,” one of the girls – Chrysa thought it was Aigle – said coldly. “We see three half-bloods and a Hunter. All of whom shall soon die.”

“You've got it wrong,” Percy said, stepping forward. “Nobody is going to die.”

The girls studied him curiously with their eyes, as black as volcanic glass.


“Yes,” mused another – possibly Hesperie. “I do not see why he is a threat.”

“Who said I was a threat?” Percy asked.

Aigle glanced behind her, toward the top of the mountain. “They fear thee. They are unhappy that this one has not yet killed thee.”

She pointed to Thalia.


“There are no friends here, daughter of Zeus,” Aigle said. “Only enemies. Go back.”

“Not without Annabeth,” Thalia said.

“And Artemis,” Zoë said. “We must approach the mountain.”

“You know he will kill thee,” Aigle said. Chrysa could detect a slight hint of concern in her voice. Even three thousand years after disowning her youngest sister, she still did not want to see her dead. “You are no match for him.”

“Artemis must be freed,” Zoë said. “Let us pass.”

Aigle shook her head.

“You have no rights here anymore. We have only to raise our voices and Ladon will wake.”

“He will not hurt me,” Zoë said.

“No?” Aigle asked. “And what about thy so-called friends?”

The Zoë did the last thing Chrysa expected. She shouted, “Ladon! Wake!”

The dragon stirred, glittering like a mountain of pennies. The Hesperides yelped and scattered.
Aigle asked Zoë, “Are you mad?”

“You never had any courage, sister,” Zoë said. “That is thy problem.”

The dragon Ladon was writhing now, a hundred heads whipping around, tongues flickering and tasting the air. Zoë took a step forward, her arms raised.

“Zoë, don’t,” Thalia said. “You’re not a Hesperid anymore. He’ll kill you.”

“Ladon is trained to protect the tree,” Zoë said. “Skirt around the edges of the garden. Go up the mountain. As long as I am the bigger threat, he should ignore thee.”


“It is the only way,” Zoë said. “Even the four of us together cannot fight him. Unless…” she looked over at Chrysa, who shook her head.

“Ladon is too sensitive to shadow magic. Anywhere else I could easily take us past him, but here…I can’t leave from here. He would be on us in an instant.”

Zoë nodded, though she seemed resigned. Chrysa knew why. The Hunter had resigned herself to death since she learned of Atlas’ freedom.

“Go,” she repeated.

“Do as she says,” Chrysa said. “Thalia and Percy, go left. I will go to the right. Try to keep slightly more to my side, Zoë.”

Just then, Ladon opened his mouths, and the sound of a hundred heads hissing at once echoed through the garden. It sounded almost like Parseltongue, but this was not the time to attempt to speak to dangerous magical creatures. If she was on her own, she might – she’d done so after encountering a Chinese Fireball while accompanying Luna on one of her magizoology expeditions to the Far East.

Thalia and Percy did as she said, going left while Chrysa went right. Zoë walked straight toward the monster, though she was slightly more on Chrysa’s side than the younger demigods’.

“It’s me, my little dragon,” Zoë said. “Zoë has come back.”

Ladon shifted forward, then back. Some of the mouths closed. Some kept hissing. Draconic confusion. Meanwhile, the Hesperides shimmered and turned into shadows. Aigle whispered, “Fool.”

“I used to feed thee by hand,” Zoë continued, speaking in a soothing voice as she stepped toward the golden tree. “Do you still like lamb’s meat?”

Thalia and Percy were about halfway around the garden. Chrysa had already made it to the end, augmenting her steps with the shadows that swirled through the garden. She stood at the mouth of the rocky trail leading up to the black peak of the mountain. The storm swirled above it, spinning on the summit like it was the summit for the whole world – or rather, the whole sky.

Percy and Thalia had almost made it to her when something went wrong. Chrysa felt the dragon’s mood shift. Maybe Zoë got too close. Maybe the dragon realized he was hungry. Whatever the reason, he lunged at Zoë.
Two thousand years of training kept her alive. She dodged one set of slashing fangs and tumbled under another, weaving through the dragon’s heads as she ran in their direction, gagging from the monster’s horrible breath.

Percy drew Riptide to help.

“No!” Zoë panted. “Run!”

The dragon snapped at her side, and Zoë cried out. Thalia uncovered Aegis while Chrysa ran forward and grabbed Zoë. The dragon hissed, and Chrysa used his moment of indecision to sprint past Percy and Thalia up the mountain, dragging Zoë along with her. Percy and Thalia followed.

The dragon didn’t try to pursue them. He hissed and stomped the ground, but he was well trained to guard the tree. He wouldn’t be lured off by the prospect of tasty heroes.

They ran up the mountain as the Hesperides resumed their song behind them. It was more dirge-like now – obviously, they had seen what Chrysa had seen. Zoë had been bitten by Ladon. Chrysa leaned over to whisper into Zoë’s ear.

“I can’t stop the poison,” she said quietly, “but I can stop the bleeding. That will save your strength somewhat.”

“Do it,” Zoë said, voice equally quiet.

Chrysa silently cast Episkey on Zoë’s side. Thalia and Percy never noticed she’d drawn her wand.

At the top of the mountain were the same black ruins that Chrysa had crept through only days before. Blocks of black granite and marble as large as houses. Broken columns. Statues of bronze that looked as though they’d been half-melted. Chrysa could still remember when they been new.

While the palace above ground was in ruins, the lower levels were perfectly intact. She could sense the demigods and monsters below them.

“The ruins of Mount Othrys,” Thalia whispered in awe.

“Yes,” Zoë said. “It was not here before. This is bad.”

“What’s Mount Othrys?” Percy asked.

“The mountain fortress of the Titans,” Chrysa said grimly. “In the first war, Olympus and Othrys were the two rival capitals of the world. Othrys was blasted to pieces by Zeus.”

“But…how is it here?” Percy asked.

Thalia looked around cautiously as they picked their way through the rubble, past blocks of marble and broken archways.

“It moves in the same way that Olympus moves. It always exists on the edges of civilization. But the fact that it is here, on this mountain, is not good,” she said.

“Why?” Percy asked.

“This is Atlas’ mountain,” Zoë said. “Where he holds—” She froze. Her voice was ragged with despair. “Where he used to hold up the sky.”

They had reached the summit. A few yards ahead of them, grey clouds swirled in a heavy vortex,
making a funnel cloud that almost touched the mountaintop, but instead rested on the shoulders of a twelve-year-old girl with auburn hair and a tattered silvery dress: Artemis, her legs bound to the rock with celestial bronze chains.

“My lady!” Zoë said, rushing forward, but Artemis said, “Stop! It is a trap. You must leave now.”

Her voice was strained. She was drenched in sweat. The weight of the sky was clearly too much for her.

Zoë was crying. She ran forward despite Artemis’ protests and tugged at the chains.

“Ah, how touching,” said a booming voice from behind them.

They turned. There, standing in a brown silk suit, was Atlas. He was flanked by Luke and half a dozen dracaenae bearing the golden sarcophagus of Kronos. Annabeth stood at Luke’s side, her hands cuffed behind her back, a gag in her mouth, and Luke’s sword point at her throat.


Luke’s smile was pale and weak. He looked even worse than he had three days previous in D.C.

“That is the General’s decision, Thalia. But it’s good to see you again.”

Thalia spat at him.

Atlas chuckled.

“So much for old friends. And you, Zoë. It’s been a long time. How is my little traitor? I will enjoy killing you.”


The Titan glanced at him, though he had still not noticed Chrysa. Unsurprising, considering the shadows that coated the mountaintop. It was always hard to see her in the shadows, if you didn’t know she was there.

“So, even the stupidest of heroes can finally figure something out. Yes, I am Atlas, the general of the Titans and terror of the gods. Congratulations. I will kill you presently, as soon as I deal with this girl.”

“You’re not going to hurt Zoë,” Percy said, stepping forward to stand slightly in front of the Hunter. “I won’t let you.”

Atlas sneered.

“You have no right to interfere, little hero. This is a family matter.”

“A family matter?” Percy frowned.

“Yes,” Zoë said bleakly. “Atlas is my father.”

Despite the dim lighting, the family resemblance was easy to see. Atlas and Zoë shared the same regal expression, the same cold, proud look in their eyes that Zoë had when she was angry.
“Let Artemis go,” Zoë demanded.

Atlas walked closer to the chained goddess.

“Perhaps you’d like to take the sky for her, then? Be my guest.”

Zoë opened her mouth to speak, but Artemis said, “No! Do not offer, Zoë! I forbid you!”

Atlas smirked. He knelt next to Artemis and tried to touch her face, but the goddess bit at him, almost taking off his fingers.

“Hoo-hoo,” Atlas chuckled. “You see, daughter? Lady Artemis likes her new job. I think I will have all the Olympians take turns carrying my burden, once Lord Kronos rules again, and this is the center of our palace. It will teach those weaklings some humility.”

Annabeth was desperately trying to tell them something. She motioned her head toward Luke, but Chrysa’s eyes were drawn to the grey streak in her blonde hair.

“From holding the sky,” Thalia muttered. “The weight should’ve killed her.”

“I don’t understand,” Percy said. “Why can’t Artemis just let go of the sky?”

Atlas laughed.

“How little you understand, young one. This is the point where the sky and the earth first met, where Ouranos and Gaia first brought forth their mighty children, the Titans. The sky still yearns to embrace the earth. Someone must hold it at bay, or else it would crush down upon this place, instantly flattening the mountain and everything within a hundred leagues. Once you have taken the burden, there is no escape.” Atlas smiled. “Unless someone else takes it from you.”

He approached them, eyes fixed on Thalia and Percy.

“So these are the best heroes of the age, eh? Not much of a challenge.”

“Fight us,” Percy challenged. “And let’s see.”

“Have the gods taught you nothing?” Atlas laughed. “An immortal does not fight a mere mortal directly. It is beneath our dignity. I will have Luke crush you instead.”

“So you’re another coward,” Percy concluded.

Atlas’ eyes glowed with hatred. With difficulty, he turned his attention to Thalia.

“As for you, daughter of Zeus, it seems Luke was wrong about you.”

“I wasn’t wrong,” Luke managed. He looked terribly weak, and he spoke every word as if it were painful.

“Thalia, you can still join us. Call the Ophiotaurus. It will come to you. Look!”

He waved his hand, and next to them, a pool of water appeared: a pond ringed in black marble, big enough for the Ophiotaurus.

“Thalia, call the Ophiotaurus,” Luke persisted. “And you will be more powerful than the gods.”

“Don’t you remember all those times we talked? All those times we cursed the gods? Our fathers have done nothing for us. They have no right to rule the world!”

Thalia shook her head.

“Free Annabeth. Let her go.”

“If you join me,” Luke promised, “it can be like old times. The three of us together. Fighting for a better world. Please, Thalia, if you don’t agree…” His voice faltered. “It’s my last chance. He will use the other way if you don’t agree. Please.”

Luke’s life depended on Thalia joining Kronos. Chrysa could hear it in his voice. And from what she could see, Thalia heard it too.

“Do not, Thalia,” Zoë warned. “We must fight them.”

Luke waved his hand again, and a bronze brazier appeared. Chrysa recognized it well. It was a sacrificial flame.

“Thalia,” Percy said. “No.”

Behind Luke, the golden sarcophagus began to glow. Images appeared in the mists around them: black marble walls rising, the ruins becoming whole, a terrible and beautiful palace rising around them, made of fear and shadow. Part of Leuke ached to see it. Othrys had been her home for millennia. She had thrived there. Shadows and secrets came part and parcel with Othrys. Olympus had never carried the same feelings. But there were two things Othrys didn’t have: Hades and her children. She would not stand for Kronos to rise again, if only to protect her children from that life.

“We will raise Mount Othrys right here,” Luke promised, in a voice so strained it was hardly his. “Once more, it will be stronger and greater than Olympus. Look, Thalia. We are not weak.”

He pointed toward the ocean. Marching up the side of the mountain, from the beach where the Princess Andromeda was docked, was a great army. Dracaenae and Laistrygonians, monsters and half-bloods, hell hounds, harpies, and many more. The whole ship must have emptied. There were hundreds, many more than Percy and Annabeth had described seeing the previous summer. They would be there in a few minutes.

“This is only a taste of what is to come,” Luke said. “Soon we will be ready to storm Camp Half-Blood. And after that, Olympus itself. All we need is your help.”

For a terrible moment, Thalia hesitated. She gazed at Luke, her eyes full of pain, as if the only thing she wanted in the world was to believe him. Then she leveled her spear.

“You aren’t Luke. I don’t know you anymore,” Thalia said.


“He won’t get anywhere near her,” Chrysa promised silkily as she stepped from the shadows so that she was half in front of her companions.

They didn’t have much time. Not only was that army coming, but Zoë’s life force was draining at a rapid rate. Ladon’s poison was strong.

“Chrysa,” he snarled.

“Zeus’ witch-daughter?” Atlas asked, looking intrigued. “The one he sacrificed to Hades after he turned Thalia into a tree?”

Thalia looked over at Chrysa in shock.


“I don’t think we’ve met, little witch,” the Titan replied amusedly. He didn’t look worried in the least bit. Why should he be? Chrysa wore no armor, and the only visible weapon she had was a celestial bronze knife – Annabeth’s knife, which she had stolen off the manticore – held point-down at her side.

Chrysa turned and handed the knife to Zoë. “Hold onto this for a minute, will you?” She tilted her head faintly in Annabeth’s direction. Zoë nodded solemnly.

Chrysa turned back to Atlas and held her arms out.

“Perhaps you’ll recognize me better like this?” she asked with a smile, calling the shadows to her and allowing her infamous armor to form around her, though she left the cowl off.

Atlas’ cold smile disappeared into a look of utter rage. “Leuke,” he snarled.

Luke started at the name. He’d apparently been filled in on the happenings of the previous war… probably in regards to why it was taking Kronos so long to reform, since he didn’t have his heart.

“Honey, I’m ho~ome,” she taunted. Her favorite knife was in her hand now, and the shadows whipped around her in tightly-controlled fury.

A massive javelin appeared in Atlas’ hands, and his silk suit melted into full Greek battle armor.


Thalia went straight for Luke. The power of her shield was so great that his dragon-women bodyguards fled in a panic, dropping the golden coffin and leaving him alone. But despite his sickly appearance, Luke was still quick with his sword. He snarled like a wild animal and counterattacked. When his sword, Backbiter, met Thalia’s shield, a ball of lightning erupted between them, frying the air with yellow tendrils of power.

Zoë took the opportunity to run to Annabeth, cutting her free of her bonds and gag before returning her knife, which the demigod accepted with a nod of thanks. They then charged the dracaenae.

Chrysa couldn’t spare much energy for that however, because she had followed Percy when he attacked the Titan Atlas, who knocked him aside with the shaft of his javelin. Percy flew through the air and slammed into the black wall of Othrys as it rose. It was no illusion anymore.

“Fool!” Atlas yelled gleefully. “Did you think, simply because you could challenge that petty war god, that you could stand up to me?”

“But I can,” Chrysa purred, stepping between Atlas and Percy. “There are many who would wish to see this battle, I suspect. We never truly did, before. The right hand versus the left. The general versus the assassin. The hammer versus the knife.”
She twirled her Stygian iron knife dramatically.

“Are you ready to determine who the best really is?”

Atlas snarled and charged her.

Chrysa somersaulted through shadow and slashed at the back of his ankle. He managed to turn enough that it didn’t sever his Achilles, though golden ichor still spilled from the wound.

Percy took that opportunity to charge again. Atlas’ javelin caught him in the chest and sent him flying like a rag doll. He slammed into the ground at the feet of Artemis.

“No!” Zoë yelled. A volley of silver arrows sprouted from the armpit chink in Atlas’ armor.

“ARGH!” Atlas bellowed, turning towards Zoë. But Chrysa was before him first.

Later, she wouldn’t be able to tell you much about the fight. It was too much of an adrenaline rush. She dodged and leapt with inhuman grace, always half in shadow, sometimes there, sometimes not. She never called on the underhanded tricks she used in war – there was a time and place for such thing, and this duel was not one of them. It was to the death, but she wouldn’t start the underhanded tricks until Atlas did.

She was a master of underhanded tricks, after all.

Besides, this was a fight he had desired too long to call for aid. Leuke was the reason Kronos fell, the reason Atlas ended up under the sky.

Zoë fired arrows at her father, aiming for the chinks in his armor. He roared in pain each time one found its mark, but they affected him like bee stings. He just got madder and kept fighting.

Though not all of Chrysa’s blows struck their mark, those that did were meant to bleed him. It wouldn’t do if Atlas died too soon. It would be preferable if he ended up back under the sky, after all.

Meanwhile, Luke and Thalia were fighting like demons. They went spear on sword, lightning still flashing around them in response to Thalia’s anger. Thalia pressed Luke back with the aura of her shield. Even he was not immune to it. He retreated, wincing and growling in frustration.


He bared his teeth. “We’ll see, my old friend.”

Atlas’ strength was unstoppable, but Chrysa’s tricks were a match for him. She was almost never where she was supposed to be, and she was faster than he knew. He’d been trapped under the sky for millennia after all, while she had been free. Granted, she had been dead for thirty-four hundred years of that, but that was still millennia of training that she had on Atlas. Besides, he was still using the same tactics they had used during the age of the Titans. Leuke’s fighting style had greatly evolved since they last sparred.

The surprised look on his face when she first used her eastern martial arts training to kick him in the face was hilarious.

Atlas advanced, pressing Chrysa. His javelin slammed into the earth where she had been a split second before, and a fissure opened in the rocks. He leapt over it to pursue her, but she was behind him and nearly tripped him into it. He stumbled, and Chrysa managed another hit on back of Atlas’
Slowly but surely, she was pushing him back toward where Artemis held the sky. *Used to hold the sky,* she corrected as she glanced that direction. The young goddess was slowly dragging herself away. From the trail of ichor she was leaving, it looked like the ligaments in the backs of her knees had been severed. Now, it was Percy holding the sky.

*The Titan’s Curse must one withstand* echoed through her mind. Percy couldn’t hold the sky for long. Chrysa shadowed so that her back was to Percy and Artemis. And then, she let herself falter slightly, just enough that Atlas thought he saw an advantage. He began to push her back. Slowly but surely, they traveled toward the place where the sky met the earth.

“You fight well for a girl,” Atlas laughed as Chrysa faux-stumbled again. They were very close now. “But you are no match for me.”

He feinted with the tip of his javelin. Chrysa saw it coming, but she dodged anyway. Atlas’ javelin swept around and knocked her legs off the ground. She fell, and Atlas brought up his javelin tip for the kill.

“For everything you did, traitor, it is your time to die!”

“No!” Zoë screamed. She leapt between her father and Chrysa and shot an arrow straight into the Titan’s forehead, where it lodged itself like a unicorn horn. Chrysa tried to keep from laughing. It would ruin the wounded-and-about-to-die image she was going for. Atlas bellowed in rage. He swept aside his daughter with the back of his hand, sending her flying into the black rocks.

“No!” Chrysa yelled. Atlas turned to her with a look of triumph on his face. Chrysa pretended to try and fail to get up.

“The first blood in a new war,” Atlas gloated. “Fitting that it should be the traitress who ended the last.” He stabbed downward.

With her speed magically enhanced so that she was as fast as she was when she was truly immortal, Chrysa grabbed his javelin shaft. It hit the earth right next to her and she pulled backward, using the javelin like a lever. She kicked the Titan and sent him flying over into Percy. Percy obviously realized her plan and allowed himself to be pushed out of the way, rolling out from under the sky.

The weight of the sky dropped onto Atlas’ back, almost smashing him flat until he managed to get to his knees, struggling to get out from under the crushing weight of the sky. But it was too late.

“Nooooo!” He bellowed so hard it shook the mountain. “Not again!”

Atlas was trapped under his old burden once more.

Chrysa stood up and brushed the dirt off before glancing over to the other fight on the mountaintop. Thalia backed Luke to the edge of a cliff, but still they fought on, next to the golden coffin. Thalia had tears in her eyes. Luke had a bloody slash across his chest and his pale face glistened with sweat.

He lunged at Thalia and she slammed him with her shield. Luke’s sword spun out of his hands and clattered to the rocks. Thalia put her spear point to his throat. For a moment, there was silence.

“Well?” Luke asked. He tried to hide it, but Chrysa could hear fear in his voice.

Thalia trembled with fury.
“Don’t kill him!” Annabeth called from where she had helped Artemis away from the battle and over to the limp form of Zoë.

“He’s a traitor,” Thalia said. “A traitor!”

“We’ll bring Luke back,” Annabeth pleaded. “To Olympus. He…he’ll be useful.”

“Is that what you want, Thalia?” Luke sneered. “To go back to Olympus in triumph? To please your dad?”

Thalia hesitated, and Luke made a desperate grab for her spear.

“No!” Annabeth shouted. But it was too late. Without thinking, Thalia kicked Luke away. He lost his balance, terror on his face, and then he fell.


Chrysa, Thalia, Annabeth and Percy all rushed to the cliff’s edge. Below them, the army from the Princess Andromeda had stopped in amazement. They were staring at Luke’s broken form on the rocks.

One of the giants looked up and growled, “Kill them!”

Thalia and Annabeth were stiff with grief. Percy grabbed Thalia and Chrysa grabbed Annabeth, pulling them back as a wave of javelins sailed over their heads. They ran for the rocks, ignoring the curses and threats of Atlas as they passed.

“Artemis!” Percy yelled.

The goddess looked up, her face almost as grief-stricken as Thalia’s. Zoë lay in the goddess’ arms. She was breathing. Her eyes were open. But she was very, very still. The poison had taken its toll.

“The wound is poisoned,” Artemis said tiredly.

“Atlas poisoned her?” Percy asked.

“No,” Chrysa said quietly. “Ladon did. I closed the wound, but there was nothing I could do for his poison…not with so little time. She asked me to allow her to fight as long as she was able.”

“The stars,” Zoë murmured. “I cannot see them.”

“Nectar and ambrosia,” Percy said. “Come on! We have to get her some.”

No one moved. Grief hung in the air. The army of Kronos was just below the rise. Even Artemis was too shocked to stir. Chrysa forced her grief behind Occlumency barriers and allowed the parts of her that were Leuke to rise to the surface. She gathered shadows into her cupped hands and spoke into them, clearly and firmly.


The shadows dissipated. It took only seconds for two figures in full Greek armor to appear before her.

“You summoned us, my lady?” Phonos asked, swinging his spear idly. Both carried swords and knives. Phonos had a javelin. Androktasia had a bow. Both were dressed in full Greek armor. The metal was Stygian iron, and the cloth was black as well. Their attire was near-identical, except for
the allowances made for their differing genders. Each had the symbol of their mother, Eris, carved into their armor. Each had their black cloaks clasped with a pin in the shape of Leuke’s mark.

“There’s an army of monsters trying to kill me, if you’d like to do your best at killing as many as you can,” Chrysa offered. “Though not the hellhounds, if you please. I’d like to try to pit them against their allies first.”

Her words were met with two bloodthirsty grins.

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“With pleasure,” Androktasia purred. Then they were gone, and the sounds of battle soon reached them.

Chrysa turned to Artemis.

“We must get Zoë away from here,” she said. It seemed to snap Artemis out of her grief.

“Indeed,” the goddess said. She raised her hunting horn to her lips, and its clear sound echoed down the valleys of Marin. Zoë’s eyelids were fluttering.

“Hang in there,” Percy told her. “It’ll be alright!”

Chrysa moved back to the edge of the cliff so she could see her faithful attendants living up to their names and decimating the enemy. She reached out with her Underworld power toward the contingent of hellhounds and ordered, “Destroy the monsters.”

The hounds struggled, but they were creatures of the Underworld and bound to their lord and lady. They obeyed her will, and the destruction increased.

Just then, the moonlight brightened, and a silver chariot appeared from the sky, drawn by Artemis’ deer.

“Get in,” Artemis said.

Annabeth and Percy got Thalia on board while Chrysa helped Artemis with Zoë. They wrapped Zoë in a blanket as Artemis pulled the reins and the chariot sped away from the mountain, straight into the air.


Artemis took the time to look back at him.

“Indeed, young half-blood. And where do you think that legend came from?”

“Apollo must have given you hell over that one,” Chrysa said, too quietly for anyone but the goddess to hear her. The brief wince she saw was answer enough.

Behind them, the army of Kronos roared in anger as they saw their flight, though that was quickly overtaken by the sound of screams as Androktasia and Phonos destroyed them. Still, the loudest sound was the voice of Atlas, bellowing curses against the gods and Chrysa – Leuke – specifically as he struggled under the weight of the sky.

They landed in Oakland after nightfall. If Chrysa wasn’t mistaken, they were actually atop the hill the Caldecott Tunnel ran through, right next to the Roman Camp Jupiter. Well, she thought amusedly, at least it’s safe from monsters.

Chrysa was still quick to cast a Notice-Me-Not ward as soon as they landed. She knelt alongside the
others at Zoë’s side. They bound the Hunter’s wounds, which had reopened sometime during her fight with Atlas.

Chrysa dispelled her armor into the shadows. Her clothing appeared just as it had before, messenger bag in all. She dug into the expanded bag and pulled out a vial of nectar. She passed it to Artemis.

“It won’t heal her,” she said quietly. She could already see the Hunter’s life fading. “But it may ease her passing.”

Zoë didn’t look good at all. She was shivering, and the faint glow that usually hung around her was fainting. Chrysa’s connection to the Underworld could see her life force slipping away.

“Can’t you heal her with magic?” Percy asked Artemis desperately. “I mean…you’re a goddess.”

Artemis looked troubled. Chrysa was suddenly struck by the reminder of how young Artemis truly was, at least compared to Leuke. Even with her time dead and her missing two-hundred-and-fifty-odd years of memories, she was still more than twice the goddess’ age.

“Life is a fragile thing, Percy,” Artemis state. “If the Fates will the string to be cut, there is little I can do. But I can try.”

She tried to set her hand on Zoë’s side, but Zoë gripped her wrist. She looked into the goddess’ eyes, and some kind of understanding seemed to pass between them.

“Have I…served thee well?” Zoë whispered.

“With great honor,” Artemis said softly. “The finest of my attendants.”

Zoë’s face relaxed. “Rest. At last.”

“I can try to heal the poison, my brave one,” Artemis offered.

It was useless. Atlas’ final blow had ensured Zoë’s death. She had known – they had all known – that the prophecy was about her, yet she had chosen anyway to save her goddess. Her loyalty was great.

Zoë saw Thalia, and shakily reached out to take her hand. Thalia was quick to aid her.

“I am sorry we argued,” Zoë said. “We could have been sisters.”

“It’s my fault,” Thalia said, blinking hard. “You were right about Luke, about heroes, men – everything.”

“Perhaps not all men,” Zoë murmured. She smiled weakly at Percy. “Do you still have the sword, Percy?”

Percy looked like he was about to cry, but he brought out Riptide and put the pen in her hand.

“You spoke the truth, Percy Jackson. You are nothing like…like Hercules. I am honored that you carry this sword.”

Her eyes met Chrysa’s then.

“Take care of Rhanis?” she asked, her tone hopeful.

Chrysa leaned down and pressed a kiss to the Hunter’s brow. With that small gesture, she marked
the Hunter's soul with her sigil. While the inverse was mark for Punishment, a soul marked by Hades or Leuke's sigil was meant for Elysium. Zoë Nightshade was a hero, and would be sent straight to Elysium by the Lady’s command.

“Always, little niece.”

“Tell my mother I love her?”

“She loves you as well,” Chrysa promised softly. “She wanted me to make sure you knew.”

Zoë smiled gently, until a shudder ran through her body.

“Zoë–” Percy tried to say.

“Stars,” Zoë whispered. “I can see the stars again, my lady.”

A tear trickled down Artemis’ cheek.

“Yes, my brave one. They are beautiful tonight.”

“Stars,” Zoë repeated. Her eyes fixed on the night sky. And she did not move again.

Thalia lowered her head. Annabeth gulped down a sob. Artemis cupped her head above Zoë’s mouth and spoke a few words in Ancient Greek. A silvery wisp of smoke exhaled from Zoë’s lips and was caught in the hand of the goddess. Zoë’s body shimmered and disappeared.

Artemis stood, said a blessing, breathed into her cupped hand, and released the silver dust to the sky. It flew up, sparkling, and vanished. The stars were brighter now, forming a pattern that had never been there before – a girl with a bow, running across the sky.

“Let the world honor you, my Huntress,” Artemis said. “Live forever in the stars.”

Saying goodbyes was difficult. Thunder and lightning were still boiling over Mount Tamalpais in the west. Artemis was so upset that she flickered with silver light.

“I must go to Olympus immediately,” Artemis said. She looked directly at Chrysa. “Will you be able to take them?”

“Not tonight,” Chrysa admitted. “Fighting Atlas…it tired me out more than I’d like to admit. As I am constantly reminded, I have the memories and powers of a goddess, but I am not a goddess myself. Have your legs healed up?”

“I can walk,” Artemis said stubbornly, before sighing. “I am sure that Apollo will fix them for me once I get to Olympus. Would you like me to arrange transport?”

“I think we’ll be okay,” Chrysa said with a nod. “I can take us back in the morning.”

Artemis nodded, then laid a hand on Annabeth’s shoulder. “You are brave beyond measure, my girl,” she said. “You will do what is right.”

Then she looked quizzically at Thalia, as if she weren’t sure what to make of this youngest daughter of Zeus. Thalia seemed reluctant to look up, but something made her, and she held the goddess’ eyes. Chrysa wasn’t entirely certain what passed between them, but Artemis’ gaze softened with sympathy. Then she turned to Percy.

“You did well,” she said. “For a man.”
Percy looked like he wanted to protest, before he seemed to realize it was the first time the goddess hadn’t called him a boy.

Artemis mounted her chariot, which began to glow. They averted their eyes. There was a flash of silver, and the goddess was gone.
“Well,” Chrysa said, looking over at the exhausted children. “Annabeth, do you think your dad would be willing to come pick us up?”

Annabeth looked startled.

“I…maybe?”

Chrysa moved over to embrace the girl.

“I’m sure he’d want to see you,” she said into her ear. “Especially after being kidnapped. And I think you might need it a bit too.”

Annabeth finally nodded. “I can call.”

Chrysa passed over her iPhone. Annabeth slowly punched in the numbers, while Chrysa dragged Percy and Thalia so that they were far enough away that the conversation was private. The *Muffliato* charm Chrysa cast didn’t do any harm either.

Annabeth wandered over a minute later. “Um…where are we?” she asked, looking slightly sheepish.

“Caldecott Tunnel,” Chrysa said. “I think at least.” She moved so she could look down at the highway going through the hill. “Yep,” she called. “Caldecott Tunnel.”

Annabeth repeated the information into the phone. The conversation didn’t last much longer before she hung up and passed the phone back to Chrysa.

“He’s on his way,” Annabeth said, sounding slightly disbelieving. “When I told him that he could just drop us off at a hotel, my stepmom cut in and said that we were staying with them and she would start making more dinner for us.”

She looked over at Percy apologetically.

“We only have one guest room though, so you’re probably stuck on the couch.”

Percy let out a tired yawn.

“At this point, I could probably sleep anywhere,” he admitted.

“Food, shower, *then* sleep,” Chrysa ordered. “You’re not messing up the Chase’s upholstery when you haven’t bathed since Monday…or before.”

She looked at Percy suspiciously. He somehow managed to keep a straight face.

“We’ll be safe here,” she offered as she sank down to the ground, finally giving in to the exhaustion that had been pressing her since the adrenaline rush from fighting Atlas had worn off. The others followed suit.

“What was that, Chrysa? That armor, that fighting…Atlas knew you,” Annabeth said, looking troubled.

“He did,” Chrysa said quietly. “You’re a bit behind on news, Annabeth. To put it shortly, I’ve been
reincarnated twice now. I’m living my third life. In my previous life, I was known as Maria di Angelo, the mother of Bianca and Nico di Angelo, who have spent the past sixty-three years in the Lotus Hotel and Casino.”

Annabeth’s jaw dropped. Chrysa simply continued talking.

“In my first life, I was a goddess – Titaness, really. I was the eldest daughter of Oceanus and Tethys, first of the three thousand Oceanides. Atlas was my first cousin…and also my nephew, through my sister/his mother. We knew each other quite well. In the days before the gods, we were the right and left hands of Kronos.”

All three demigods were staring at her in shock.

“You…you worked for Kronos?” Percy finally managed to bite out.

“Originally,” Chrysa said with a shrug. “I wasn’t around to assist with the killing of Ouranos – I was being fostered in the House of Nyx at the time – but I did come back just afterward. Kronos and I were close, growing up. I’m actually about a year older than he is. We were playmates. Gaea raised me until I was sent to Erebos and Nyx.”

“Who were you?” Annabeth asked.

“My name was Leuke,” Chrysa said, her voice very quiet. “I was the goddess of shadows and secrets, patroness of spies, assassins, and eventually, traitors.”

“Traitors?” Thalia asked, her voice rising.

“I betrayed Kronos,” Chrysa said, a cold smile creeping onto her face. “He thought that I was on his side, but I’d been plotting against him since he raped my sister. I know how to hold a grudge. He forced himself on my sister, so I carved his heart out of his chest and hid it where he’ll never find it. It’s why it’s taken him so long to reform.”

“You told me that only Hades knew where the heart was,” Percy said accusingly.

“I just said Hades knew,” Chrysa corrected. “And he doesn’t, anymore. I moved it since the last time we spoke. I’m the only person in the world who knows where it is. That’s why Kronos is willing to do just about everything to get leverage against me. And capture me as well, he definitely wants revenge.”

Chrysa held out her hand, calling the shadows to curl around it.

“I still have my domain. There isn’t a shadow I can’t control, and there isn’t a secret I can’t discover.” She grimaced. “Unfortunately, without the body of a goddess, I’m limited in what secrets I can access. Mortal bodies aren’t capable of holding omniscience.”

“I can’t believe that you sided with Kronos!” Percy burst out.

“It was a different time, Percy. Life was different. I was different. More vicious. More ruthless. I was raised by Gaea and Nyx, neither of whom was known for being compassionate. They used to call me ‘Zeus’ attack dog’, because all Zeus needed to do – and Kronos before him – was to give me my target, and I would eliminate them. Even now, my name is almost never spoken aloud. Names have power, and to speak my name is to draw my attention. I had a whole host of titles that were used instead.”

“Those things you said to Thorn?” Thalia asked.
"‘Deceiver, Contriver, Whisperer,’” Chrysa said. “All titles given based on my role as goddess of secrets and lies. “‘Terrifying, Night-wanderer, Knowing One’…I was the boogeyman to many of the gods. I usually operate at night, though I am capable of functioning in the day, and I know all secrets. I am the First-born of Oceanus and Tethys, the first grandchild of Ouranos and Gaea. You all saw my armor, ‘Darkly-cloaked’ is relatively obvious. They called me the ‘exacter of justice’ because I acted as Zeus’ left hand. If there were problems, I made them go away.”

“There were two more,” Thalia said. “You called yourself the ‘queen of those below’ and the ‘lady of the first throne’.”

“As I said, I have been around since before the gods,” Chrysa said slowly, trying to figure out how to phrase this. “Before my first death, I sat on the Olympian Council through several of its incarnations. I led it after Rhea left. King of the gods or not, Zeus did not take over as head of the Council until I died. I held the first throne.”

Before Chrysa could answer the other question, her phone began to ring. She pushed it over to Annabeth, who answered it.

“Hi, Dad….no, we’re actually on top of the hill…. Okay, we’ll head right down.”

She pulled the phone away from her ear.

“Dad’s here. He says he drives a yellow Volkswagen and will meet us at the end of the tunnel going east. He’s already pulled off to the side of the road.”

The four of them got up wearily and began their march down the giant hill – though it was less of a march and more of a slow slog. Thankfully, there were plenty of streetlights in the area around the tunnel, so it was easy enough to find the yellow Volkswagen. Just before they got there, Chrysa glanced behind her into the tunnel and spotted two teenagers, holding spears and wearing purple t-shirts, standing on either side of a ‘maintenance hatch’.

Dr. Frederick Chase climbed out of his vehicle when he saw them.

“Annabeth!” he called frantically, hurrying to embrace his daughter. “What happened to you? Are you alright?”

“She was kidnapped,” Chrysa cut in before Annabeth could prevaricate. “Last Friday. We only just got her back.”

Professor Chase’s face paled and he pulled his daughter even closer to him. He nodded to Chrysa over Annabeth’s shoulder.

“Miss Potter-Black.”

“Dr. Chase. This is Thalia, who originally took care of Annabeth after she ran away, and Percy Jackson, whom I assume you’ve heard about.”

“You’re quite right,” Dr. Chase said, nodding to both teenagers.

The professor ushered all of them into his yellow Volkswagen. Chrysa took the passenger seat while Annabeth was squished between Percy and Thalia in the back. After the week they’d all had, they probably needed it. Amaranth, Ron, and Hermione had often done the same after one of their adventures.

The ride back to the Chase home was mostly silent. All three of the demigods in the backseat had
passed out from exhaustion.

“Is she hurt?” Dr. Chase asked Chrysa quietly.

“I don’t think so,” Chrysa replied, equally quiet. “The person in charge of her captivity was Luke, and he swore to protect her once. He would have done his best to keep her from harm.”

There were several more minutes of quiet in the car as Dr. Chase got them back into San Francisco and navigated the path to his house.

“She’ll be okay?”

“She’s strong. And she has her friends and family supporting her. She’ll be okay, eventually.”

Dr. Chase nodded, satisfied with her answer.

They arrived at the Chase home not long afterwards. Annabeth woke up groggily when they pulled into the driveway, but Percy and Thalia were still conked out on her shoulders.

“We’re here,” Chrysa said in a sing-song voice. “Percy, Thalia, time to wake u~up.”

Both teenagers groaned in unison. Dr. Chase raised an eyebrow.

“They’re always like this,” Chrysa confirmed with a sigh. She leaned over the seat towards the pair. “Don’t make me pull out the water gun.”

“We’re up!” Percy and Thalia nearly yelled, jerking awake with surprising speed. Dr. Chase looked impressed.

They all clambered out of the car. Mrs. Chase met them at the door, greeting Annabeth with a hug.

“It’s good to see you,” she said with a smile. Her smile faded slightly when she saw Chrysa. “Miss Potter-Black.”

“Chrysa’s fine,” she offered politely.

The Asian woman smiled back tightly. “Sophie, then.”

“Frederick,” Dr. Chase added in.

Sophie Chase ushered them into the house.

“Dinner will be ready in about twenty minutes,” she said. “I made your favorites, Annabeth.”

“Could we possible shove the three of them into showers?” Chrysa asked. “None of them have nearly showered in a week. Annabeth’s been in a dungeon of dubious cleanliness during that time, and Percy and Thalia have been in several battles, gone through the desert, and ridden a giant pig during that time. Oh, and Percy wrestled a guy who smelled like hot seaweed, dead fish, and brine.”

Thalia and Annabeth both took a step away from Percy.

“I’m sure we can do something about that,” Sophie said with a smile. “Annabeth, why don’t you use your father’s and my bathroom? Thalia can take the guest bathroom, and Percy can use yours and the twins’. Bobby! Matthew!” she called.

Identical twin boys came running from the living room.
“Annabeth!” they cried out in unison as they hugged her. Annabeth looked slightly surprised as she returned the embrace.

“Boys, these are Annabeth’s friends, Percy, Thalia, and Chrysa,” Susan said, pointing each of them out.

One of the twins – Chrysa thought it was Bobby, but even their own parents mixed them up – looked directly at her and asked despondently, “Are you here to take Annabeth away again?”

Annabeth reeled back in shock.

“No, I’m just here keeping an eye on my little sister and my cousin,” Chrysa said, gesturing to Thalia and Percy. “I do have to borrow Annabeth for a few days, but I’ll try to convince her to come back in time for Christmas.”

“Where are you going?” the other twin asked.

“We have a meeting in New York to go to tomorrow,” Chrysa replied.

“But that’s so far away!” the first twin protested. “How are you going to get there so fast?”

Chrysa waved her hand through the air, allowing green sparks to leave her fingertips.

“Magic,” she said.

Both boys gaped.

“Bobby, could you take Annabeth to her room and then to my bathroom?” Sophie Chase said.

“Matthew, please take Percy to the guest bathroom, and Thalia to yours and your siblings’ bathroom.”

The children – they must have been seven or so by now, Annabeth had run away when they were infants – led the tired teenagers up the stairs.

“I showered this morning,” Chrysa replied to Sophie’s questioning look. “I was away for a day for medical reasons.”

“You left them alone?” Sophie asked, aghast.

“I used magic to transport a Hunter of Artemis away from sudden death to medical attention, but in the process furthered injured myself. I was on bedrest for a day,” Chrysa said coolly. “And Percy and Thalia – while more than capable of taking care of themselves, considering Thalia spent four years on her own without adult supervision, I did not leave them alone. There was another Hunter of Artemis there, and she was several thousand years old.”

Sophie tentatively seemed to accept that.

Chrysa knew that neither Chase parent really liked her – after all, when their daughter had left them, it had been for her custody the second two times. Annabeth had called her specifically to come take her away from her father and stepfather.

There was a reason Bobby and Matthew Chase saw her as a villain.

Small-talk in the living room was…awkward, to say the least. Sophie quickly escaped back into the kitchen, leaving Frederick to attempt to make conversation. They quickly settled on military history – while Frederick Chase preferred WWI, he was still knowledgeable about WWII, and Maria di
Angelo had *lived* through WWII (and WWI, but she had been a toddler at the time) and was able to keep up. Once Bobby and Matthew returned to the living room to play with their Legos, Chrysa joined them on the floor to build. Sophie frowned when she looked into the living room and saw her there, but she didn’t stop her before she headed up the stairs.

Unsurprisingly, Percy finished first, and came downstairs in much-too-large t-shirt and sweatpants.

“Mrs. Chase offered to wash our clothes for us tonight,” he said. “These are Mr. Chase’s.”

“Dr. Chase,” Chrysa corrected absently.

“Dr. Chase’s,” Percy repeated.

Annabeth showed up next, followed closely by Thalia, both with wet hair, wearing t-shirts and pajama pants that Chrysa had seen Annabeth wear previously.

“Oh good,” Sophie said. “Now that everyone’s here, we can have dinner. Annabeth, Thalia, would you like to dry your hair after dinner? I keep my hair dryer under the sink in my bathroom.”

Thalia shrugged.

“Percy can dry it,” she said. “Percy?”

Percy reached out and touched the top of Thalia’s head. Her choppy black hair dried instantly.

“Annabeth?” Percy asked.

She shook her head.

“My hair always ends up really frizzy when you dry it.” She turned to her stepmother, took a deep breath, then said, “I would love the hair dryer later, thank you.”

“Of course,” Sophie said.

The Asian woman ushered them all into the dining room and settled all of them around the table; Frederick was at the head, with Sophie standing by the foot. Annabeth was between on the twins on one side, while Percy sat between Thalia and Chrysa on the other.

Sophie bustled back and forth between the kitchen and the dining room, bringing steaming plates full of fried chicken, mashed potatoes, macaroni and cheese, and green beans to everyone. Chrysa could hear Percy’s stomach growl.

“Eat up!” Sophie announced.

The younger three demigods, along with the twins, dug into their food with gusto. Chrysa was a bit more careful with her eating, but she was somewhat better fed than the younger set.

The conversation flowed between most of the people at the table, though Percy and Thalia were obviously tired. Annabeth looked better off; imprisonment or not, she had gotten more sleep than the rest of them had over the past few days. Chrysa kept quiet. The Chases didn’t particularly want to talk to her, and she didn’t want to interfere with one of the few times that they got to interact with their daughter.

Sophie sent all of the children – demigods included – to bed directly after dinner. The demigods were too tired to protest. Bobby and Matthew tried, but Sophie countered by saying that Annabeth needed sleep.
Finally, it was just Frederick, Sophie, and Chrysa in the living room.

“Thank you,” Frederick finally said. “For looking after Annabeth.”

“You don’t have to thank me,” Chrysa replied. “I know you wish she was still with you.”

“You gave her somewhere to turn to when we couldn’t,” Sophie said. “After the twins were born, with everything that happened, when she ran away…”

“Thalia saved her then,” Chrysa said firmly. “I took Annabeth under my wing because I couldn’t save Thalia.”

“That doesn’t changed the fact that you looked after her for years,” Sophie pointed out. “You’re still looking after her, even after Thalia came back.”

“I do my best,” Chrysa said, shifting uncomfortably. “If you don’t mind, I will retire.” She winced as her British accent made its reappearance. Nowadays, if she wasn’t in Britain, it only did that when she was uncomfortable.

“I’ll show you to the guest room,” Sophie said.

Thankfully, there was no more conversation on the way. Chrysa and Sophie parted ways with a simple, “Have a good night,” before Chrysa was safely behind the closed door of the guest room.

The next morning, Chrysa did her best to avoid even more awkward conversation by getting up absurdly early (by West Coast standards) and dragging the trio of more-than-half-asleep demigods down to the living room so they could Portkey back to New York.

Just before she said the activation word, a small voice from the doorway said, “Annabeth?”

They all turned to see Sophie Chase padding into the room on slipper-clad feet, a bathrobe over her pajamas.

“Yes?” Annabeth asked warily.

“You’re always welcome here,” Sophie said firmly.

Annabeth stared in shock for a moment, before quietly saying, “Thank you, Sophie.”

Chrysa chose that moment to tap the Portkey – a large, yellow rubber duck – with her wand and order, “Penthouse!”

With a rush of color and sound, they landed in the middle of Chrysa’s penthouse, all of them toppling to the ground. Chrysa had one of Thalia’s feet in her face, and someone else’s head on her thighs. Thalia’s knee was under Annabeth’s elbow. Annabeth was almost entirely on top of Percy, who was the head on Chrysa’s thighs.

Unsurprisingly, Annabeth made it up first, a blush painting her cheeks red. Thalia made it up next, then Percy, and lastly Chrysa.

“We have about an hour and a half before we need to be on Olympus,” Chrysa instructed. “I want you all in the garage in half an hour. Change, shower, whatever you feel the need to do. Just remember, we are going to a council of all the gods, so you might want to look nice.”

She then promptly abandoned all of them while she went to get ready. The Grand Council only happened once a year after all, and this would be Leuke’s first in more than three thousand years.
The world would be watching, so she was ready to stun them all.

Getting ready was something that could not be accomplished in thirty minutes. Chrysa promptly went to the potions lab/ritual room that was on an undetectably extended floor above hers, used the Time-Turner that she most-definitely-did-not-have-thank-you-Hermione, and went back in time for three hours.

Once it was ridiculously early in the morning again, she returned to her bedroom and summoned her attendants.

“More enemies to kill, my lady?” Androktasia asked.

“Not this time, I’m afraid,” she said with a sigh. “No, my shadows. This time we have something perhaps even more dangerous.”


Chrysa inclined her head, before smiling wickedly.

“It’s been thirty-four hundred years, after all. I think I should like to make a dramatic entrance.”

Her attendants’ grins were just as devious, as should be expected from Stories, Lies, Murder, and Manslaughter.

Three hours later, she was ready for her grand entrance.

“Are you sure you do not wish for one of us to drive you, my lady?” the goddess of lies asked.

“Yes, Pseudea,” Chrysa said. “I have a chauffeur for these sorts of things. Though I usually drive, I’m not sure I want to in this dress.”

“Please don’t ruin all our hard work,” Androktasia pouted. “We want all of Olympus to see you are just as dark and beautiful as you have always been.”

“You’ve certainly succeeded at that,” Chrysa said, looking herself over in the mirror once more.

Her unruly black curls had somehow been tamed, thanks to her attendants’ expertise. Her tresses were braided around the imperial gold circlet on her brow. Her gown was a mix of emerald green and the darkest blacks, all trimmed and dusted with pure imperial gold.

As always, there were several Stygian iron knives on her person. Her favorite one was the most prominent, hanging from the imperial gold chain that served as her belt.

There was a knock at the door. Her attendants all disappeared into the shadows.

“Chrysa?” Annabeth asked. “Are you ready?”

“I think so,” Chrysa called back. “One moment.”

It took her a minute to find the black silk clutch in her closet. She stuffed her wallet, keys, and iPhone into it, before opening the door to find Annabeth, Thalia, and Percy waiting for her. Their jaws dropped when they saw her.

It was obvious that they had put some sort of effort into their appearances – Thalia’s clothes, while still all black, weren’t ripped for once. Percy was wearing slacks and a dress shirt. Annabeth had put on a dress. But they had nothing on Chrysa.
“Are we supposed to be that dressed up?” Percy asked.

“No, just me,” Chrysa said with a smile. “It’s my first official Council since coming back. I wanted to make an entrance. Come on. The chauffeur is waiting.”

“You have a chauffeur?” Thalia hissed as they made their way downstairs.

“I’m borrowing one,” Chrysa admitted, leading them toward the limousine waiting in front of the elevator. Once they had all slid inside the elevator, Chrysa knocked on the divider separating them from the driver. It slowly lowered, and the demigods reared back at the sight of the desiccated face of no-longer-living chauffeur.

“Everyone, this is Jules-Albert,” Chrysa introduced, not reacting to their looks of shock. “He used to be a French race car driver. Now he acts as my chauffeur when I need one that isn’t a house-elf.”

“You have a zombie for a chauffeur?” Percy demanded. “That’s so cool! He’s not going to try to eat our brains, is he?”

“No, Jules-Albert does not eat…anything, actually. He likes McDonald’s though. And Coke. His kind love Coke.”

“Drink-Coke or drug-coke?” Thalia asked.

“Drink-Coke,” Chrysa clarified. “I’ve never tried drug-coke on one of them. It might be interesting.”

“What happened to ‘drugs-are-bad’?” Percy asked.

“Drugs are bad,” Chrysa clarified. “Don’t take them. They tend to be really weird with demigod physiology. So don’t do drugs. Plus, monsters. You can’t stay alive if you’re impaired by drugs.”

They pulled up at the Empire State Building just before dawn. Chrysa led them out of the vehicle and up to the front desk.

“Hello, Martin,” she greeted. “I’m here to see my father.”

“Of course, Miss Potter-Black,” the man said. He passed over a card to her. “You know the way.”

“I do. Thank you, Martin.”

There was practically no one there as they made their way to the elevator.

“What’s with that guy anyway?” Percy asked. “Is he human?”

“No, he’s a godling,” Chrysa said. “The American child of two gods. Martin is the son of two minor gods, I don’t remember who. He’s been manning the front desk since the Empire State Building was built.”

The rest of the ride was quiet, though it wasn’t long. This was the world’s ninth-fastest elevator, after all.

The doors opened on Olympus. There was a large chariot waiting there, with Nike standing at the reins.
“My lady Chrysocomê,” she greeted with a bow.

“Nike,” Chrysa replied. “You are to take us to the Council?”

“Indeed, my lady. Lord Zeus sent me to escort you.”

They all clambered on to the chariot. Chrysa, with her heavy skirts, stood next to Nike.

The denizens of Olympus stopped and stared as they rode by. Olympus was beautiful in the early morning darkness. The torches and fires made the mountainside palaces glow twenty different colors, from blood-red to indigo. No one ever slept for long on Olympus. The twisting streets were full of demigods and nature spirits and minor godlings bustling around, but everyone parted as Nike drove through the city in Zeus’ chariot. The silver gates opened on their own as they approached.

When they arrived, Chrysa checked her appearance in a swiftly-conjured mirror and was pleased to discover she had not a hair out of place.

“Thank you for your assistance, Nike,” she said appreciatively.

Nike bowed her head to Chrysa. “It was no trouble, my lady.”

Chrysa stared up at the palace, Thalia, Annabeth, and Percy flanking her. They regarded the palace in much the same manner as they’d regarded Westover Hall a week ago. Then, Chrysa first and the other three arrayed behind her, they walked into the throne room.

There were twelve enormous thrones in a U-shape around the central hearth, just like the placement of the cabins at camp. The ceiling above glittered with constellations – even the newest one, Zoe the Huntress, making her way across the heavens with her bow drawn.

All the seats were occupied. Additionally, Chrysa could sense Hades lurking in the shadows of the room, and Hestia occupying the central hearth fire. Amphitrite stood near the center of the room, next to the Ophiotaurus, which was happily swimming in a hovering sphere of water.

“Welcome, heroes,” Artemis greeted.

“Now that everyone has arrived, the Grand Council may begin,” Zeus said. He was speaking to the whole room, but his eyes were fixed on Thalia.

Zeus called out, “Hestia, Goddess of the Hearth and Home, Firstborn of Kronos and Rhea, will you take your seat at this Council?”

A flame exited the central hearth, forming into the shape of a human being. Suddenly, as if blown out by a candle, the fire disappeared, leaving behind a young woman with a shawl over her black hair.

“I accept my seat at this Council,” Hestia declared.

The room shifted, and everything changed. The thrones were now in a circle, with Chrysa and the demigods on the inside of it. The order had completely changed as well: Zeus was still at the head, but to his right were Poseidon, Apollo, Ares, Hephaestus, and Hermes, with Dionysus at the foot of the room. To Zeus’ left were Demeter, Hera, Aphrodite, Artemis, and then Athena.

A throne of fire appeared between Zeus’ throne and Demeter’s. Hestia took her seat.

Zeus called out, “Hades, Lord of the Underworld, God of Riches and of the Dead, son of Kronos
and Rhea, will you take your seat at this Council?”

Hades moved from the shadows to the center of the room, much to the surprise of Percy, Thalia, and Annabeth, if their shocked gasps were any indication.

“I accept my seat at this Council,” Hades stated.

The room shifted again, and a black onyx throne decorated with skulls appeared between Zeus’ throne and Poseidon’s. Just as Hestia had, Hades grew to fifteen feet tall as he walked to his throne and took his seat.

Zeus called out, “Amphitrite, Queen of the Seas, Goddess of Saltwater and Sea Creatures, daughter of Oceanus and Tethys, will you take your seat at this Council?”

“I accept my seat at this Council,” Amphitrite replied easily.

Once again, the room shifted as Amphitrite’s blue silk and mother-of-pearl throne appeared between Hera’s and Aphrodite’s, at the midway point on the right side of the room. The goddess grew as she walked to her throne and took her seat.

Zeus’ eyes finally came to rest on Chrysa. She nodded stoically.

“Leuke Chrysocomê, Goddess of Shadows and Secrets, Firstborn of Oceanus and Tethys, Champion of Thanatos, Lady of the First Throne, will you take your seat at this Council?”

Chrysa took a deep breath, then allowed the shadows to come up around her feet.

“I accept my seat at this Council,” Chrysa said firmly.

The room shifted for a final time. Leuke’s shadow-black throne, made from onyx and decorated with Stygian iron, appeared between Zeus’ throne and Hestia’s at the head of the room.

Chrysa felt Zeus and Hades both contribute their godly power to her so that she too could grow to a godly height – well, nearly a godly height, Leuke had always been short – and take her seat among the gods of the Olympian Council.

Once she was seated, she nodded to Zeus, who said, “I cede my place as leader of the Grand Council to Leuke Chrysocomê.”

Chrysa nodded once more, even as the demigods – still in the center of the room – gasped.

“Let the Grand Council begin,” she called out, her voice echoing through the throne room. She turned and looked over toward Artemis, who stood.

“The Council has been informed of my capture and the quest to release me,” the auburn-haired goddess said. “We know that Mount Othrys is rising in the West. We know of Atlas’ attempt for freedom, and the gathering armies of Kronos. But now the time has come to vote on our knowledge. We were only awaiting your company, Lady Leuke.”

“All in favor of acting against the amassing forces of Kronos?” Chrysa asked.

Everyone in the room raised their hands, though Hestia, Aphrodite, and Hephaestus looked reluctant.

“We vote to act then,” Chrysa declared, before nodding to Zeus.

“ Apollo, Artemis, I want you to hunt the most powerful monsters and strike them down before they
can join the Titans’ cause. Poseidon, you have my permission to unleash your full fury on the cruise ship _Princess Andromeda_ and send it to the bottom of the sea. Athena, I want you to personally check on the other Titans to make sure they do not escape their various prisons. Leuke, if they do…”

Leuke smiled darkly.

“I will discover all information related to the Titans’ plans that I am able. And if there are escapees, I will take care of the threat just as I always have.”

A cold chill fell in the room at her words. She noticed Annabeth shiver.

“And what of my heroes?” Artemis asked, rising from her throne and walking over to the trio of demigods. She turned to human size as she went, a young auburn-haired girl, perfectly at ease in the midst of the giant Olympians. Her silver robes made it seem as if she was walking in a column of moonlight. Once she reached the heroes, she turned to face the other Olympians.

“These half-bloods have done Olympus a great service,” Artemis said. “Would any her deny that?”

She looked around at the assembled gods, meeting their faces individually.

“I gotta say” – Apollo broke the silence – “these kids did okay.” He cleared his throat and began to recite: _Heroes win laurels…_”

“Um, yes, first class,” Hermes interrupted, like he was anxious to avoid Apollo’s poetry. “All in favor of not disintegrating them?”

A few tentative hands went up – Demeter, Aphrodite.

“Wait just a minute,” Ares growled. He pointed at Thalia and Percy. “These two are dangerous. Same with Death Face’s brats. Get them in here too. It’d be much safer, while we’ve got them here…”

“Ares,” Poseidon interrupted, “they are worthy heroes. We will not blast my son to bits.”

“Nor my daughter,” Zeus grumbled. “She has done well.”

Thalia blushed and studied the floor.

“If my children are harmed,” Hades said silkily, “I wouldn’t bother going after you. I’d just hand you to Leuke.”

All eyes in the room darted to Chrysa, whose hands were tightly gripping the armrests of her chair at the mention of hurting her children. The shadows swirled tightly around her. She smiled darkly at Ares, who winced.

Athena cleared her throat and sat forward.

“I am proud of my daughter as well. But there is a security risk here with the other two, as well as Hades’ and Leuke’s children.”

“Mother!” Annabeth said. “How can you –”

Athena cut her off with a calm but firm look.

“It is unfortunate that my father, Zeus, and my uncle, Poseidon, chose to break their oath not to have
more children. Only Hades kept his word, a fact that I find ironic. Even so, his children from before the Oath was made are no longer in the Lotus Hotel and Casino and are therefore a threat once more. As we know from the Great Prophecy, children of the elder three gods...such as Thalia and Percy, and the di Angelo children...are dangerous. As thickheaded as he is, Ares has a point.”

“Right!” Ares said. “Hey, wait a minute. Who you callin’—”

He started to get up, but a grape vine grew around his waist like a seat belt and pulled him back down.

“Oh, please, Ares,” Dionysus sighed. “Save the fighting for later.”

Ares cursed and ripped away the vine.

“You’re one to talk, you old drunk. You seriously want to protect these brats?”

Dionysus gazed down at the trio wearily.

“I have no love for them. Athena do you truly think it safest to destroy them?”

“I do not pass judgment,” Athena said. “I only point out the risk. What we do, the Council must decide.”

“I will not have them punished,” Artemis said. “I will have them rewarded. If we destroy heroes who do us a great favor, then we are no better than the Titans. If this is Olympian justice, I will have none of it.”

“Calm down, sis,” Apollo said. “Jeez, you need to lighten up.”

“Don’t call me sis! I will reward them.”

“Well,” Zeus grumbled. “Perhaps. But the monster at least must be destroyed. We have agreement on that?”

Most of the room began to nod. Chrysa considered it, then said, “I’m not killing it again. It’s still giving me dirty looks.”

That comment seemed to clue Percy in on what they were talking about.

“Bessie?” he asked incredulously. “You want to destroy Bessie?”

Poseidon frowned.

“You have named the Ophiotaurus Bessie?”

“Dad,” Percy said, a pleading tone in his voice, “he’s just a sea creature. A really nice sea creature. You can’t destroy him.”

Poseidon shifted uncomfortably.

“Percy, the monster’s power is considerable. If the Titans were to steal it, or…”

“You can’t,” Percy insisted. He looked straight at Zeus, staring him right in the eye. Chrysa wasn’t sure whether to be proud at his bravery or groan at his recklessness.

“Controlling the prophecies never works. Isn’t that true? Besides, Bess – the Ophiotaurus is
innocent. Killing something like that is wrong. It’s just as wrong as…as Kronos eating his children, just because of something they might do. It’s wrong!”

Zeus seemed to consider that. His eyes drifted to Thalia.

“And what of the risk?” he asked. “Kronos knows full well, if one of you were to sacrifice the beast’s entrails, you would have the power to destroy us. Do you think we can let that possibility remain? You, my daughter, will turn sixteen on the morrow, just as the prophecy says.”

“You have to trust them,” Annabeth spoke up. “Sir, you have to trust them.”

Zeus scowled.

“Trust a hero?”

“Annabeth is right,” Artemis said. “Which is why I must first make a reward. My faithful companion, Zoe Nightshade, has passed into the stars. I must have a new lieutenant. And I intend to choose one. But first, Father Zeus, I must speak to you privately.”

Zeus beckoned Artemis forward. He leaned down and listened as she spoke into his ear.

Chrysa couldn’t resist eavesdropping. There was just enough of a shadow for her to tilt her head and listen in. Unfortunately, she only heard Artemis say, “Thalia,” before Hades through a pebble at her forehead. Her eyes refocused as she glared at him.

‘No eavesdropping,’ he mouthed from across the room.

Chrysa picked up the pebble – which was actually made from solid turquoise – and threw it back at him. He managed to catch it, and then smirked back in response to her increased glare.

Artemis turned around to face the trio once again.

“I shall have a new lieutenant,” she announced. “If she will accept it. Thalia, daughter of Zeus, will you join the Hunt?”

Stunned silence filled the room. Percy stared at Thalia in shock. Annabeth smiled and squeezed Thalia’s hand before letting it go, as if she’d been expecting this all along.

Thinking back on it, she might have. Chrysa knew Annabeth had seen how uncomfortable Thalia was in her new normal. The Hunt would give her a chance to start over, without any reminders of her earlier sacrifice or Luke’s betrayal.

“I will,” Thalia said firmly.

Zeus rose, his eyes full of concern.

“My daughter, consider well…” he began, but Thalia cut him off.

“Father,” she said. “I will not turn sixteen tomorrow. I will never turn sixteen. I won’t let this prophecy be mine. I stand with my sister Artemis. Kronos will never tempt me again.”

She knelt before the goddess and began her oath, though how she knew it, Chrysa couldn’t say.

“I pledge myself to the goddess Artemis. I turn my back on the company of men, accept eternal maidenhood, and join the Hunt.”
“I accept your Oath,” Artemis said.

Thalia began to glow with a familiar silvery light as she was blessed with immortality and the powers of the Hunters.

Afterward, Thalia did something surprising. She walked over to Percy, smiled, and in front of the whole assembly, gave him a big hug.

Percy blushed.

Once she pulled away and gripped his shoulders, he said, “Um…aren’t you supposed to not do that anymore? Hug boys, I mean?”

“I’m honoring a friend,” she corrected. “I must join the Hunt, Percy. I haven’t known peace since…since Half-Blood Hill. I finally feel like I have a home. But you’re a hero. You will be the one of the prophecy.”

“Great,” Percy muttered. Chrysa only heard it because of the shadows.

“I’m proud to be your friend,” Thalia declared.

She hugged Annabeth, who was trying hard not to cry, before going to stand at Artemis’ side. She paused in front of Chrysa.

“I’m sorry, Chrysa,” she said with a sad smile. “You were an amazing sister, and you did everything you could to help me. But…I just…”

“I understand,” Chrysa said quietly, smiling sadly at her younger sister. “You need to move on. You can’t stay in the same place after everything that happened. I was the same way after Britain. I can go back and visit, but I can’t stay for long. Too many things changed in my life. I understand, more than anyone, the need to start over. I love you, Thalia.”

Thalia smiled again, and a single tear fell down her face.

“I love you too, Chrysa.”

Chrysa looked over at Artemis as Thalia went to stand at her goddess’ side.

“I have a single request.”

“You did save me,” Artemis nodded agreeably.

“I’d like her back for Christmas Eve and Day. I’ll bring her back on Boxing Day.”

Artemis considered it, then nodded.

“You can find us no matter where we are, through your shadows?”

“Yes, but I was just going to give her a Portkey tied to you,” Chrysa shrugged. “It’s…dangerous, at the moment, for me to travel through the shadows with passengers. I’m not the only one who can do so, and I don’t know how many Kronos has already seduced to his side. No one can defeat me in the shadow realm, but I’m not certain I could protect others.”

“Very well,” Artemis said. “I will agree to it. Now for the Ophiotaurus,” she said, addressing the entire room once more.
“This boy is still dangerous,” Dionysus warned. “Along with the di Angelo children. The beast is a temptation to great power. Even if we spare the children –”

“No,” Percy said, looking around at all the gods. “Please. Keep the Ophiotaurus safe. My dad can hide him under the sea somewhere, or keep him in an aquarium here in Olympus. But you have to protect him.”

“And why should we trust you?” rumbled Hephaestus.

“I’m only fourteen,” Percy pointed out. “If this prophecy is about me, that’s two more years.”

“One year, seven months, and four weeks,” Chrysa pointed out.

Percy looked at her incredulously.

“What?” she asked. “I know when your birthday is.”

“That is two years for Kronos to deceive you,” Athena said. “Much can change in two years, my young hero. Or even,” she said, looking over at Chrysa, “One year, seven months, and four weeks.”

“Mother!” Annabeth said, exasperated.

“It is only the truth, child. It is bad strategy to keep the animal alive. Or the boy.”

“I would like to reiterate that I am not killing him again,” Chrysa stated firmly.

Poseidon stood.

“I will not have a sea creature destroyed, if I can help it. And I can help it.”

He held out his hand, and a trident appeared in it: a twenty-foot-long bronze shaft with three spear tips that shimmered with blue, watery light.

“I will vouch for the boy and the safety of the Ophiotaurus.”

“You won’t take it under the sea!” Zeus argued, standing suddenly. “I won’t have that kind of bargaining chip in your possession.”

“Brother, please,” Poseidon sighed.

Zeus’ lightning bolt appeared in his hand, a shaft of electricity that filled the whole room with the smell of ozone.

Enough was enough, Chrysa decided. She reached out with her shadows and used them to yank the bickering gods’ ankles. They both fell to the ground and conveniently lost their grip on their weapons at the same time. Chrysa grabbed them with their shadows and sent them to the laps of their more even-minded wives.

She stood from her throne.

“Both of you, behave!” she scolded. “Don’t make me bring out my blackmail folder.”

Both gods grimaced.

“Fine,” Poseidon said. “I will build an aquarium for the creature here. Hephaestus can help me. The creature will be safe. We shall protect it with all our powers. The boy will not betray us. I will
“As will I,” Chrysa said firmly. “And I will vouch for mine and Hades’ children.”

“As will I,” Hades confirmed.

Zeus thought about this before nodding to Chrysa.

“All in favor?” she called out.

Most of the hands in the room went up. Dionysus abstained, as did Ares and Athena. But everyone else voted in favor.

“We have a majority,” Chrysa decreed, trying not to let the glee in her voice be too obvious.

“Since we will not be destroying these heroes, I imagine we should honor them,” Zeus said. “Let the triumph celebration begin!”

It had been a while since Chrysa had been to an Olympian party. Zeus had offered her one on her return as Leuke, but she had refused, as she didn’t want her identity to be publicly known yet. Now, it seemed that her homecoming had been combined with the triumph.

The Nine Muses began to play, and they seemed to have learned some new tricks. The gods could listen to classical music, the younger demigods could listen to hip-hop, and it was all the same sound track. There were no arguments, no fights to change the radio station, just requests to crank it up.

Dionysus went around growing refreshment stands out of the ground, and a beautiful woman walked with him arm-in-arm – his wife, Ariadne. Dionysus looked happy for the first time Chrysa had seen – truly happy, not just gleeful over winning a game. Nectar and ambrosia overflowed from golden fountains, and platters of mortal snack food crowded the banquet tables. Golden goblets filled with whatever drink you wanted were freely available.

Gods kept moving over to Percy to congratulate him. Thankfully, the reduced themselves to human size first, so they didn’t accidentally trample partygoers under their feet.

Nico and Bianca were reunited with Chrysa very shortly into the party, as soon as Chiron and the group of demigods from Camp Half-Blood made their way in.

“Mamma!” Nico called out as soon as he saw her. She had already shrunk by that point, from thirteen feet down to five-and-change, but he still managed to find her instantly. Both of her children ran to her side. “You’re okay!”

“Of course I’m okay, tesoro,” Chrysa said. “I promised to come back to you. And I did. I will always do my best to come back to you.”

“She is very good at that,” Hades said, coming up behind Chrysa and wrapping his arms around her waist as he rested his head on her shoulder.

“Hello, Papà!” Bianca greeted brightly.

“Hello, little ones,” Hades greeted with a small smile.

Chrysa nearly laughed at the shocked looks they were getting from the spectators. Very few people had ever seen Hades like this, and no one had seen him quiet as openly affectionate since before Leuke had died.
The party continued long into the night. Nico and Bianca had already fallen asleep on garden benches. Hades was watching over them, his capacity for socialization filled for the year. It was late evening when Amphitrite found Chrysa.

“Will you come with me to the garden?” she asked quietly.

“Of course,” Chrysa replied.

They walked to the Kepos Triadelphia in companionable silence, only stopping to each grab a new goblet of ambrosial wine.

“He is a good boy?” Amphitrite finally asked.

Chrysa immediately knew she was speaking of Percy.

“He is,” she said freely. “He cares, perhaps too much. If anything, his fatal flaw is personal loyalty. He will go to the ends of the earth for those he cares for, and at least half as far for innocents. But I think he might still manage to make the right choice, should Kronos threaten all he loves for Olympus.”

“What of you?” Amphitrite asked as the entered the open pavilion that detailed their lives. “Could you make that choice?”

Chrysa remained quiet for a long moment as they finished their walk and sat down in front of the mosaics of Metis’ life.

“I would depend,” she finally said. “Were it Hades, or Persephone, or even you or one of our other sisters, I could choose the world. But for Bianca and Nico? They are my children. I can’t imagine sacrificing them to save the world. But I also can’t imagine not doing my duty. Traitors may be mine, but my loyalty doesn’t waver once given. I know that if anyone was threatened, I would sacrifice myself instead in a heartbeat.”

“I wish you wouldn’t,” Amphitrite said. “I don’t want that for you. Metis wouldn’t want that for you either.”

“Metis is gone, Trite. She has been for a very long time,” Chrysa said tiredly. “Athena has much of her personality, but she is…harder, than our lost sister.”

“Metis grew up raising her sisters,” Amphitrite pointed out. “Athena grew up alone, with only her mother’s death at her father’s hands. Or mouth,” Amphitrite said with a grimace.

Chrysa stared at the mosaic of their sister for another long moment.

“I think she would have liked what Olympus has grown into. And I think she would have approved of Percy for her granddaughter.”

“Athena’s child? The one the boy wanted to rescue?” Amphitrite asked with a raised eyebrow. “They are romantically involved?”

“Her name is Annabeth, and she has been my ward on-and-off over the past several years,” Chrysa said. “They aren’t romantically involved…yet. But it will happen. I’m not sure whether it will remain, but I think it will. Demigods’ lives don’t tend to be particularly long. If they make it to the point of getting together, they’ll probably stay together until one or the other dies.”

“If he survives his sixteenth birthday, I’m sure he can make it to middle-aged,” Amphitrite offered.
“There were plenty of other less capable heroes who did.”

Chrysa let out a small laugh.

“I hope you’re right. For his sake.”

They sat there for a while longer, sometimes speaking, sometimes not. It was enough to just spend time together again, a small piece of calm before the storm they knew was coming.

An idea struck Chrysa. She looked slyly over at her sister.

“How would you feel about going on a short adventure with me?”

Amphitrite looked back, and Chrysa could see hints of her younger sister before she went respectable peeking out again.

“What kind of adventure?” the goddess asked, a faux-casualness in her voice.

“Breaking into Mount Othrys and liberating as many demigods as we can from their dungeons,” Chrysa said innocently.

“This is such a bad idea,” Amphitrite said with a shake of her head, though she was smiling broadly. “Count me in.” She snapped her fingers, and her regalia was replaced by armor.

The shadows came up around Chrysa, and her own finery melted into her shadow armor.

“You should probably let someone know if we’re going to be sending random demigods back to Olympus,” Amphitrite pointed out.

Chrysa called the shadows to her cupped hands and lifted them to her mouth.

“Hades,” she said, “Trite and I are going to go break into Mount Othrys and free people from the dungeons. If you could send someone to the throne room to greet whoever we send, that would be great.”

The message left through the shadows as Chrysa dropped her hands.

“What’s the plan?” Amphitrite asked.

“We sneak in, break into jail cells, and throw portkeys at people so they end up in the Olympus throne room. You start on the top level, I start on the bottom. When Kronos’ forces start trying to stop us, you fight them off while I continue letting people out. If it gets too hard for you, we’ll switch. When we’re done, I’ll shadow us out.”

“I thought shadow travel was dangerous at the moment?” Amphitrite asked.

Chrysa shrugged.

“Not for me. A little bit for my companions, but you’re a goddess, so you ought to be fine.”

“I hope I don’t get nauseous,” Amphitrite groaned as Chrysa grabbed her arm and dragged her through the shadows to the dungeons of Mount Othrys.

It went better than expected. It took three minutes and six high-security cells before the alarms went off at the extra security measures went up. It took ten more minutes before Chrysa made it through the other six high-security cells. When she made it up to the second floor of the dungeons, she heard
Amphitrite call down, “Switch!”

Chrysa quickly shadowed upstairs and immediately drove knives into the backs of two of the attackers. She looked over at Amphitrite as she became visible, even as she dodged the strikes of more attackers.

“Bottom floor’s clear,” she stated. “The other two are on you.”

Amphitrite nodded and disappeared down the hall. It took another fifteen minutes for Amphitrite to yell she was finished. Chrysa immediately disappeared into the shadows, only pausing long enough to grab Amphitrite and tug her through as well. A few steps later, they were back in the throne room on Mount Olympus, along with nearly fifty confused demigods and three very unamused Elder Gods, all of whom immediately noticed as Amphitrite and Chrysa left the protection of the shadows.

Most of that was probably because they started giggling and high-fiving over the miniature coup they’d just pulled off against Kronos’ forces, all while less-than-sober.

“That was stupid!” Zeus yelled. “You two could have been killed, or worse, captured, and then where would we be?”

“It worked though,” Chrysa said. “So I suppose we were brave. Bravery is stupidity that works. I am a Gryffindor, after all.”

Zeus buried his face in his hands. Hera smothered a giggle from beside him.

“You are both far too drunk for this,” he muttered. “Each of you can take your particular inebriated lady home and then scold them in the morning. Loudly, since they’ll be hungover,” he recommended.

Poseidon snorted.

“It would be a bit hypocritical, but they do deserve it. I fear the next time I get drunk.”

He snapped his fingers, and then he and Amphitrite both disappeared.

Hades rolled his eyes fondly as Chrysa stumbled over to him. He had to catch her as she nearly fell into his arms.

“You’re getting blood on my robes,” he said mildly. “How did you manage to fight like this?”

“I need to be a lot more ineb – ineberi – drunk than this to fight badly,” Chrysa said, slurring slightly. “Sides, it was a bottleneck. Easy pickings.”

Hades rolled his eyes once more as he half-turned to face his remaining brother and sister.

“Zeus, Hera, I presume I will see you when the next crisis pops up. Good night.”

“Good night,” the king and queen chorused.

Hades snapped his fingers, and he and Chrysa were in her chambers in the Underworld.

“B’bies?” Chrysa asked.

“Nico and Bianca are already in the rooms I prepared for them here,” Hades assured. “Right next door to yours, actually. I’m going back to my own chambers. I shall see you in the morning.”
“Late morning,” Chrysa suggested.

“We’ll see,” Hades chuckled. He pressed a kiss to Chrysa’s temple.

“Good night, my love.”

“G’night.”
Chapter Summary

A jaunt into Nico's perspective...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Nico’s life had changed quite a bit over the past few months. He and his sister had finally left the Lotus Hotel, they’d spent six months at military school, and then they’d almost been kidnapped, though Mamma had come to rescue them. Bianca had been kidnapped, though only for a day. They’d gone to Camp Half-Blood, learned that Papà was a god, and gotten to go to the Underworld, where they learned that Papà was Hades, Nico’s absolute favorite god in Mythomagic! And Papà had given Nico his figurine! It was the only one he didn’t have!

Then they went back to the camp, and played Capture-the-Flag with real swords and managed to win, because Mamma was in charge, and Mamma was perfect, even more so than all the Hunters who seemed to think that boys were awful, even though the one with the crown and the one with the white hair were keeping an eye on him and Bianca because Mamma asked them too. But Mamma had to leave with both of them on a quest with Thalia, the girl who had helped rescue them at Westover Hall. Percy, their other rescuer (he was so handsome!) had caught Nico outside the dining pavilion, listening in on the Hunters’ conversation.

“Wait,” Percy said from behind him.

Nico spun around, almost slipping on the icy steps.

“Where did you come from?” he asked.

“I’ve been here the whole time. Invisible,” Percy said.

Nico mouthed the word invisible. “Wow,” he said. “Cool.”

“How did you know Zoe and Rhanis were here?” Percy asked.

Nico felt his cheeks darken.

“I heard them walk by the Hermes cabin. I don’t…I don’t sleep too well at camp. So I heard footsteps, and them whispering. And so I kind of followed,” he admitted.

“And now you’re thinking about following them on the quest,” Percy said.

“How did you know that?” Nico asked sharply.

“Because if it was my mother, I’d probably be thinking the same thing. But you can’t,” Percy said.

Nico felt his fists clench up.

“Because I’m too young?” he demanded.
“Because they won’t let you,” Percy replied. “They’ll catch you and send you back here. And... yeah, because you’re too young. You remember the manticore? There will be lots more like that. More dangerous. Some of the heroes will die.”

Nico felt his shoulders sag. He shifted from foot to foot. “Maybe you’re right. But, but you can go for me.”

“Say what?” Percy asked.

“You can turn invisible. You can go!”

“The Hunters don’t like boys,” Percy said. “If they find out...”

“Don’t let them find out. Follow them invisibly. Keep an eye on my mom! You have to. Please?”

“Nico...” Percy sighed.

“You’re planning to go anyway, aren’t you?” Nico asked. He stared into Percy’s (pretty) green eyes.

“Yeah,” Percy sighed. “I have to find Annabeth. I have to help, even if they don’t want me to.”

“I won’t tell on you,” Nico said, “but you have to promise to keep my mother safe.”

“I...that’s a big thing to promise, Nico, on a trip like this. And your mom’s one of the most powerful people around. Besides, she’s got Zoe, Rhanis, and Thalia—”

“Promise,” Nico insisted.

“I’ll do my best,” Percy finally said. “I promise that.”

“Get going, then!” Nico said. “Good luck!”

“Tell Chiron—” Percy began, but Nico interrupted.

“I’ll make something up. I’m good at that,” he said with a smile. “Go on!”

Percy had run then, putting on a baseball cap and disappearing halfway down the hill.

The next few days had been spent worrying about Mamma and attempting to adjust to Camp with Bianca. Bianca wasn’t sleeping well, waking up with nightmares from her kidnapping, so Nico ended up sharing her bed, even though it wasn’t technically allowed.

Then, Chiron got them all up long before dawn, bundled them into the camp van, and took them to the Empire State Building, because apparently Mount Olympus was on the sixth hundred floor, and the year-rounders always took a field trip on the winter solstice.

They made their way to the palace of the gods at the peak of Olympus. There was already a party going on. Nico spotted his mother almost immediately.

“Mamma!” he called out as he ran to her, Bianca right behind him. “You’re okay!”

His mother wrapped them both in an embrace.

“Of course I’m okay, tesoro,” Mamma said. “I promised to come back to you. And I did. I will always do my best to come back to you.”
“She’s good at that,” a man said as he came forward and wrapped his arms around Mamma’s waist. It took Nico a second longer than Bianca to recognize him. He looked very different in his ancient Greek attire.

“Hello, Papà!” Bianca said brightly.

“Hello, little ones,” Papà greeted with a small smile.

They spent most of the rest of the party with Mamma, though they did veer off to talk to Percy, Thalia, and Annabeth at different times. Nico ended up falling asleep on a garden bench, Papà sitting nearby and Bianca on the bench across the pathway.

He woke up to a hand gently shaking him.

“Nico, tesoro, time to wake up,” a voice said.

“Mamma?” Nico mumbled into his pillow. He slowly blinked awake. The room wasn’t one he’d ever seen before, but from the black stone walls, he’d guess he was in the Underworld again.

“Good morning, my treasure,” his mother said warmly. “It’s time to wake up. There’s going to be a meeting at Camp Half-Blood concerning the larger meeting last night, and I wanted to know if you wanted to come.”

Nico’s eyes opened and he shot up in bed.

“Yes, please!” he exclaimed. “Is Bianca coming too?”

“She wanted to stay here and explore a bit,” Mamma said. “Your half-sister Makaria agreed to show her around. You can stay here or come with me.”

“With you, Mamma,” Nico said.

His mother smiled at him.

“Your bathroom is through that door over there,” she said, pointing toward the opposite side of the room. “Your papà ensured that the dresser is filled with clothes that will fit you. Remember that although it’s warm down here, it won’t be at camp.”

“Yes, Mamma,” Nico said with a yawn, dragging himself out of bed and into the bathroom. It only took a few minutes before he was wandering out into the hallway. There was a skeleton in a suit waiting for him.

Nico tilted his head to get a better look at the guy.

“Are you a zombie?”

The skeleton nodded, then pointed down the hall.

Nico looked that way, then back at the zombie.

“That way to breakfast?” he asked hesitantly.

The zombie nodded again.

“Cool! Thanks!”
The only person at the table in the cavernous dining hall was Nico’s blonde stepmother – Persephone. She was drinking out of a coffee mug while reading out of a magazine. Nico stepped hesitantly into the room.

He must have made some sort of noise, because Persephone immediately looked up.

“Nico!” she greeted. “Come in! Sit down! Do you have any preferences for breakfast?”

“I thought you weren’t supposed to eat underworld food,” Nico said as he slid into a chair a few down from Persephone. “Didn’t you get stuck here that way?”

“That only applies to those not of the Underworld,” Persephone said, waving dismissively. “I’m its Queen now, and you’re born of its Lord and Lady. We automatically have back-and-forth rights. Well, until you’re actually dead.”

Nico didn’t know how to respond to that, so he just asked, “A *cornetto* and hot chocolate, please.”

Persephone snapped her fingers, and the food was on the table before him.

“I’ll warn you, if my mother visits you’ll be having cereal. She’s very insistent on cereal.”

That seemed to end Persephone’s desire for conversation, as she went back to her magazine. Nico quietly began to eat.

Mamma appeared at the entrance just as Nico was finishing his hot chocolate.

“Are you ready, *cucciolo*? I apologize for leaving you, but I was having a quick chat with Makaria.”

“Sí, Mamma,” Nico said, rising from his chair.

“Leave your dishes, one of the skeletons will take care of them,” Mamma said. She reached out her hand. “Ready for another round of terrible travel?”

Nico made a face, causing his mother to laugh. She grabbed his hand, and there was that rush of cold and pressure, and then they were in the same living room that Mamma had left him and Bianca in during the meeting after Capture-the-Flag.

Chiron rolled into the room in wheelchair form a moment later.

“Good, you’re here,” he said in greeting. “I believe it’s time for another meeting. We’re just waiting on you and Percy, who was telling Grover and the other satyrs something about coffee and Pan, last I checked.”

“It’s an interesting story,” Mamma admitted. “I suppose it’s time for my last confession?”

“More your last revelation,” Chiron snorted. “As many secrets as you keep, I’m sure there will be more confession you must make.”

Chiron waved for them to proceed into the rec room. The Stoll brothers, the buff guy from Hephaestus cabin, the pretty girl from Aphrodite cabin, and a girl with raggedy dirty-blondie hair and a scar on her chin were all there, along with Annabeth, who waved at them. Percy walked in a moment later. His eyes went first to the girl Nico hadn’t seen before.

“I got news,” the girl said uneasily. “*Bad news*.”

“I’ll fill you in later,” Chiron said with forced cheerfulness. “The important thing is that you have
prevailed. And you saved Annabeth!"

“Luke is alive,” Percy reported. “Annabeth was right.”

Annabeth sat up straighter.

“How do you know?”

“I talked to my dad last night,” Percy said. “He says that Luke and Kronos’ coffin are back on the
Princess Andromeda.”

“Well,” Annabeth said, shifting uncomfortably in her chair, “if the final battle does come when Percy
is sixteen, at least we have two more years to figure something out.”

Chiron looked gloomy from his position in his wheelchair by the fire. Nico didn’t know him well
yet, but he could tell as well.

“Two years may seem like a long time,” Chiron said, “but it is the blink of an eye. I still hope you
are not the child of prophecy, Percy. But if you are, then the second Titan war is almost upon us.
Kronos’ first strike will be here.”

“How do you know?” Nico asked, piping up for the first time.

“Why would he care about camp?” Percy asked, almost at the same time.

“Because the gods use heroes as their tools,” Chiron said simply. “Destroy the tools, and the gods
will be crippled. Luke’s forces will come here. Mortal, demigod, monstrous…We must be
prepared. Clarisse’s news may give us a clue as to how they will attack, but the only guarantee is
that they will come. It will not be until summer, at least. This winter will be hard…the hardest for
many centuries. It’s best that you go home to the city, Percy; try to keep your mind on school. And
rest. You will need rest.”

“And train,” Mamma said, bringing attention in the room to her. “Percy, you’re welcome to use the
training room in my apartment. If you’d be willing to help Nico and Bianca as well, I’ll be taking
them home with me, but I will not be around as often. Annabeth?”

The blonde’s cheeks flushed.

“I’m going to try San Francisco after all,” she said. “Maybe I can keep an eye on Mount Tam, make
sure the Titans don’t try anything else.”

“You’ll send an Iris-message if anything goes wrong?” Percy asked worriedly.

She nodded. “But I think Chiron’s right. It won’t be until the summer. Luke will need time to
regain his strength.”

“Excuse me,” one of the Stoll brothers said – despite sharing a cabin with them for a few days, Nico
couldn’t tell them apart yet – “but can we talk about the elephant in the room? And by that I mean
the fact that Chrysa is apparently a goddess? And Nico and Bianca are Hades’ kids?”

All eyes turned to Nico and Mamma.

Mamma sighed.

“I told you all that I was a nymph in my first life. I downplayed myself a bit. I was an Oceanid, a
daughter of Oceanus and Tethys – the first child of Oceanus and Tethys, in fact. The Elder
Oceanides – the original fifty of us, who were born before Ouranos fell – among our number were many who held our own domains as Titanesses, and were eventually counted as goddesses. Tyche is the goddess of luck. Styx is the goddess of oaths. Amphitrite is the goddess of saltwater and sea creatures, and she became the wife of Poseidon. Metis was the goddess of wisdom and good counsel, and she was the first wife of Zeus. I was the goddess of shadows and secrets,” Mamma held up her hand, and a dark shadow formed there, twining through her fingers, “and I was the first lover of Hades. He asked me to marry him,” she said with a sad smile, “but I always said no. After I was murdered, as Leuke, my body was transformed into a white poplar tree in the center of Elysium. That tree finally died about a century ago, and I was reborn as Maria Olimpia Amaranta Corona Buonoparte di Savoia in 1913. I already told you how I met Hades in that life, and had Bianca and Nico, and then came to America and died.”

“I can’t imagine Hades being a god to stick around with his lover and kids for twelve years,” the Aphrodite girl said doubtfully.

“Papà loves Mamma,” Nico said indignantly. “He always has!”

“Hades has had fewer demigod children than any of the other gods,” Mamma said quietly. “In thousands of years, there have only been twenty-one demigods. Bianca is the twentieth, and Nico the twenty-first. Hades has never been one to give in to lust. He only took lovers because of loneliness, and most of the time those lovers looked like me.” She smiled softly. “I think even your mother would agree that there’s always something about your first love.”

Any further conversation was interrupted by Grover, who stumbled into the room, tripping over tin cans. His face was haggard and pale, like he’d seen a specter.

“He spoke!” Grover cried.

“Calm down, my young satyr,” Chiron said, frowning. “What is the matter?”

“I…I was playing music in the parlor,” he stammered, “and drinking coffee. Lots and lots of coffee! And he spoke in my mind!”

“Who?” Annabeth demanded.

“Pan!” Grover wailed. “The Lord of the Wild himself. I heard him! I have to…I have to find a suitcase.”


Grover stared at him.

“Just three words. He said, ‘I await you.’”

That threw the council into an uproar. Nico winced at all the noise. They were only silenced when Mamma pulled out a whistle and blew it shrilly.

“Everyone settle down!” she shouted in the stillness. “Satyr, sit down. You’re not going anywhere until you’ve calmed down.”

Nico watched in awe as his mother easily took control of the room. Orders were handed out, several yelling matches were ended with just a sharp look, and Percy and Annabeth were ordered to go pack so that Mamma could send them home for Christmas.

It took less than an hour before Mamma used magic to transport the four of them to her New York
City apartment. Bianca, Thalia, and Rhanis were sitting in the living room, Rhanis lounging on the couch with a blanket over her.

Mamma looked relieved.

“You’re okay?” she asked the white-haired Hunter.

“Basically,” Rhanis said. “Lady Artemis and Lord Apollo came by last night and healed me up, but after Thalia got introduced to everyone this morning, I got told that I was going on vacation with her until after Christmas.”

“Lady Artemis said that I should spend my birthday with you,” Thalia said quietly. “Have a family party again.”

Mamma brightened.

“Well, I suppose it’s time to plan for a party then. Percy, you go see if your mom’s free. Thalia, take Rhanis out to McDonald’s or a diner or something; go have all that ridiculously greasy food that you won’t be having in the wild somewhere hunting monsters. Bianca, Nico, you’re going to help me decorate.”

If Nico had thought Maria di Angelo was a hurricane in human form (and he had as a child on multiple occasions), she had nothing on Amaranth Chrysocome Potter-Black, who still had all the previous hurricane-ness combined with control over shadows, wind, and magic. Somehow, they managed to have a full-blown birthday party for Thalia that evening, complete with a fancy dinner, cake and ice cream, streamers, balloons, and presents.

It was also Nico and his sister’s introduction to Percy’s mother, Sally Jackson.

“It’s great to meet you,” she greeted warmly. “Percy spent the elevator ride here telling me about you.”

Nico instantly liked her. She reminded him of Signora Morandi, their next door neighbor when they’d lived in Italy. She’d babysat them on occasion when Mamma and Papà went out on dates.

Bianca seemed to like her as well, but she still spent most of the party with Rhanis and Thalia, whom she’d instantly taken a liking too. They both looked a bit like Mamma, but Thalia was a lot louder. And she felt different. Thalia gave off the feeling of electricity. Mamma was less scary.

Nico followed Mamma around, helping her with whatever she needed. He helped collect the dirty dishes and put them in the sink, and then passed out the slices of cake after Mamma had cut it. When the night was over, he helped collect all the streamers and balloons and wrapping paper together so that Mamma could Vanish them.

Magic was so cool.

The next morning, Mamma gave Annabeth a pencil that she’d put a magic spell on. She called it a Portkey.

Mamma tapped the pencil with her wand and said, “San Francisco.”

Annabeth disappeared.

“Where’d she go?” Bianca asked, sounding shocked.
“I sent her to her family’s house in San Francisco,” Mamma explained. “She wanted to spend Christmas with her family. Also, I thought that you’d want to see a Portkey in action, because we’re about to take another one. We’re going to stay with Sirius and Remus for Christmas.”

“In England?” Nico asked.

“Yes, tesoro. In England. There’s a ball at the Ministry for Magic tonight that I’ll be going to, along with Sirius and Remus and some of our friends. You four will be staying with some of my good friends and their children, along with Sirius and Remus’ children. Tomorrow, we’ll have an Italian Christmas Eve, then a British Christmas Day, and then we’ll combine the traditions for Boxing Day – St. Stefano’s Day. That way we can celebrate both Christmas and Natale,” Mamma explained.

“Will Papà be there?” Bianca asked.

“He said he’ll try to come for part of it,” Mamma said. “But trust me, we’ll have plenty of people around. Let’s see, there’s five of us; six Lupin-Blacks; four Thomases; two, seven, eight, twelve, sixteen, twenty Weasleys. That’s…thirty-five people in all.”

“That’s a big dinner,” Thalia said.

“Mr. and Mrs. Weasley had seven children,” Mamma said. “Six boys and a girl. Fred died several years ago, and Charlie’s never married, but the others are all married with two kids, except Bill and Fleur, who have three. Sirius never told me, but the Malfoys might also be coming, so that’s five more people. Narcissa Malfoy is Sirius’ only living cousin, so sometimes at the holidays they decide to ignore the fact that everyone dislikes Lucius Malfoy and Lucius dislikes everyone.”

Mamma conjured a length of rope.

“Does everyone have their bags?” she asked.

They’d all packed lightly. Mamma assured them that they didn’t need to have fancy clothes anything, so they’d mostly just packed jeans and sweaters.

Everyone nodded.

“Grab onto the rope,” Mamma instructed, “and whatever you do, don’t let go.”

Everyone grabbed the rope, and Mamma showed them how to wrap it around their wrists so that they couldn’t drop it.

“I’ll warn you in advance, you’ll probably fall over when we land,” she said. “I almost always do.”

She tapped the rope with her wand and said, “Grimmauld Place.”

The world whirled around them in a rush of wind and color, and then they were all collapsing into a heap.

“Dad!” a boy’s voice yelled. “Papa! They’re here!”

Nico managed to pull himself up in time to see a boy about his age leaping onto Mamma, who somehow managed to twist around in time to catch him with magic. He was left hovering above her, turquoise hair falling into his face. The boy laughed as he stared down at her with golden eyes.

“Wotcher, Amaranth,” he greeted.

As soon as Mamma put the boy on the ground, he reached out and pulled Mamma to her feet. Nico was impressed. He didn’t think he could do that.

“Wotcher, Bianca!” Teddy greeted. He pulled Bianca to her feet next.

Mamma helped Rhanis and Thalia up, while the boy reached his hand out to Nico.

“I’m Teddy,” he said. “Amaranth – Chrysa – is my godmum. I’m glad you’re here. All the others close to my age are girls.”

“Nice to meet you!” Nico said, trying to be excited. This was Mamma’s godson. That meant he was important.

“Wanna go play?” Teddy asked.

“Whoa, hold up, Teddy-bear,” a man’s voice said.

Nico looked over to the door to see a man with dark hair like Mamma’s and grey eyes come in. He was carrying a little girl with light brown hair and golden eyes like Teddy’s.

“Sirius, these are my children, Nico and Bianca di Angelo,” Mamma said, pointing to each of them in turn. “And these are my sisters: Thalia, daughter of Zeus, and Rhanis, daughter of Oceanus and Tethys. They’re both Hunters of Artemis. Everyone this is my godfather and adopted father, Sirius Black, and his youngest child, Lily. Teddy is his eldest.”

“My husband, Remus, has our middle two, James and Albus, in the bath,” Sirius said with a large grin. “But it’s a pleasure to meet you all. Except you, Bianca, since we met the other day. I’ve heard so much about all of you. Oh, and Anthie, Cissy and Draco told me to pass on that they’ll murder you if you try to use a glamour on your recent injury. Which injury would this be, by the way?”

“It’s nothing important,” Mamma said.


“Later, Dad,” Mamma said in the same tone. “Teddy-bear, why don’t you take Nico and Bianca on a tour of the house? Thalia, Rhanis, you two can go along or stay here. Just remember, whatever you end up doing, we’re leaving in – three hours?” she said, looking at Sirius.

“Two hours,” Sirius said. “All the women were planning to get ready together – the younger ones at least. Fleur and Angelina have offered their makeup and hair services to help those of you who are going.”

Teddy made a face.

“That’s boring.”

“You’ll be with Bill, Charlie, and George,” Sirius said. “I’m sure you’ll be fine.”

“Do I have to take them for a tour?” Teddy asked. “I wanna go play in the pool.”

Nico blinked.

“Isn’t it a little cold for that?” he asked.

“Nah,” Teddy said. “We’ve got an indoor pool.”
“Cool!” Nico exclaimed. “Mamma, can we?”

“Only for a couple of hours,” Mamma said. “We don’t want to be late. Girls, do you want to go?”

Thalia shook her head.

“Not really smart for me to go swimming, Chrysa.”

“You’re a Hunter of Artemis now, Thalia,” Mamma said. “Poseidon won’t touch you while you have Artemis’ protection.”

“I don’t know how to swim,” Thalia confessed.

Rhanis perked up.

“I can teach you. I am a water nymph, after all.”

They looked over at Mamma. She waved her hand at them.

“Go ahead. Have fun. The changing rooms next to the pool will provide you with swimsuits in your size. And there are charms to prevent drowning, so don’t worry about that,” Mamma instructed.

“Wait, Nico and Bianca know how to swim?” Thalia asked. “Isn’t that dangerous?”

“Poseidon is usually less vindictive,” Mamma said drily. “And we lived in Venice for most of their lives. It would have been more dangerous if they didn’t know how to swim.”

“We haven’t gone swimming since the hotel,” Bianca piped up. “There was a pool there, and a waterpark, but we didn’t go very often.”

“Probably wise,” Mamma said with a nod. “But you’ll be safe here. Zeus has sworn not to harm my children, and Poseidon won’t do anything to make his wife mad at him.”

“What are we waiting for?” Teddy asked. “Come on! Let’s go!”

Teddy grabbed Nico’s hand and pulled him out of the room. Nico could hear the girls following behind them.

The pool was amazing. The room it was in looked like a greenhouse, and had trees and plants growing over rocks that stuck out of the water. There were multiple slides coming from the rock cliffs, caves within the rocks, and the roof looked like the sky.

“It’s charmed to show the sky,” Teddy explained after Thalia commented on it. “But not the sky here, ‘cause London’s always grey and rainy. This is the sky in the Majorca.”

All too soon, a man came to get them out of the pool and into normal clothes. He introduced himself as Remus Lupin-Black, Sirius’ husband and Mamma’s other papa. He told Nico and his sister that they could either call him Remus, grandpa, or ‘grandpapà’. They could call Sirius Sirius, granddad, or ‘nonno’.

They ended up walking through green fire in order to get to the place they were going. Teddy went through with Nico, and yelled, “The Burrow!” which was apparently the name of the people’s house.

Once at the house, Nico, Bianca, Thalia, and Rhanis were treated to a dizzying number of redheads
and their names. The oldest couple were simply Mr. and Mrs. Weasley. Everyone else was a Weasley somehow….

They’d just made it through the introductions when the blonde woman grabbed Mamma and dragged her upstairs with some other women.

“They’ll be getting ready for the ball for the next couple hours,” someone said from right behind him.

Nico jumped as he whirled around, fists clenched and a dagger he’d gotten from Camp in hand.

“Whoa there, little man,” the redheaded man said, raising his hands. “You’re definitely Ama’s kid. Same hair trigger. Sorry for scaring you. I’m Ron, since it probably got lost in all the names you just heard. Your mom and I were friends in school.”

“She told us a bit about you,” Nico said slowly. “You and your friend…Hermia?”

“Hermione,” Ron corrected with a smile. “She’s my wife now. One of the women who dragged your mom upstairs. I’d introduce you to our kids, but they’re upstairs in the nursery. Rosie’s two, same as Al – you’ve met Al, right?”

“Briefly,” Nico admitted. “He was taking a bath when we got here, so I only just met Al and James. Mamma was happy to see them.”

“She was even happier to see you and your sister, kid,” Ron said, patting Nico’s shoulder. “After the first time that she saw you and your sister, she came back to London and started ranting about how amazing it was to see you again and how unfair it was that she couldn’t get you out of the hotel. And Sirius called after she and your sister came to London last week, and he was telling us all about how excited your mom was. Your mom’s got enough love in her for you and your sister and all her godchildren, and the rest of the world beside. She saved us all with her love once, you know?”

“Really?” Nico asked.

Ron nodded and launched into a story of an evil wizard and the final battle against him at a castle, a battle Mamma had won. Mamma had mentioned something about it when she told her story to him and Bianca when she took them to see Papà, but when Ron told it, it was like something out of a fairytale.

The story ended up collecting a lot of other listeners. All the kids ended up sitting on the floor in front of Ron as he talked. He ended up having to restart the story three times when new people joined. The other adults ended up chiming in every now and then if Ron got something wrong or forgot something.

When it was finished, Nico was in even more in awe of Mamma than he had been before.

One of the other redheads tapped Ron’s shoulder.

“Best head upstairs. You’ve only got half an hour until you leave, and your wife will murder you if you’re late.”

Ron said a word that Nico was pretty sure he wasn’t supposed to know before running up the stairs.

“Hey, Nico,” the man said. He had scars across his face that would have made him look scary if he wasn’t smiling. He was another redhead, but his hair was long and he had a large tooth hanging from one ear. “I’m Bill. I’ll be one of the ones here all night. Ron and his wife are supposed to go
to the ball with your mom.”

“Okay,” Nico said. He pointed at the earring. “What’s that from?”

“Oh, that’s a dragon tooth,” Bill said casually.

Nico’s jaw dropped.

“Dragons are real?” he demanded.

“Sure are,” Bill said. “My brother Charlie is actually a dragon handler at the reserve in Romania. Hey, Charlie!” he called.

A tanned man on the other side of the room looked up from his conversation with another redhead. He had large, muscled arms bigger than Beckendorf’s at Camp.

“Come’re a second!” Bill called.

The man – Charlie – wandered over.

“What’s up, Bill?” he asked.

“Nico here’d like to hear some more about dragons, wouldn’t you, Nico?” he said with a smile.

Nico nodded his head enthusiastically.

Charlie’s stories about the dragons he worked with were interrupted when the blonde woman who had dragged Mamma upstairs came back down.

“They’re ready!” she announced.

Everyone gathered round the bottom of the stairs, making sure that the shorter children were in the front and the tallest adults in the back.

The first person down was a woman with the color hair Mamma always called strawberry blonde. Nico still thought that it was a weird name for a hair color, but her hair did look pretty with her muted green dress. Her redheaded husband was one of the taller ones, but it wasn’t Bill or Charlie or Ron, so Nico still had no idea who she was.

Following her was a redheaded woman whose hair was starting to grey – Nico was relatively certain this was Mrs. Weasley. Her dress was dark grey – almost black – and covered with small, black sparkles. All of the redheads in the room applauded when she came down the stairs. She then moved over to the oldest man in the room, whose red hair looked a lot greyer than her own.

Another redhead followed Mrs. Weasley, though this one’s dress was blue. Nico guessed this was the Weasley sister, though she was married and her name wasn’t Weasley anymore. He couldn’t remember what Mamma had said her name was now though. Once down the stairs, she moved over to a dark-skinned man whose name also escaped Nico’s mind.

Next was a woman whose light brown curls were piled on top of her head in a way that looked like gravity didn’t exist. Her dress was red and reminded Nico of the picture of Mamma that Papà had kept in a locket. It had been Mamma on the day that she met Papà, at her birthday party. She instantly went over to Ron when she was done, so Nico assumed this was Hermione, Mamma’s other best friend in England.

Mamma was the last one to come down, and she looked absolutely beautiful, though Mamma was
always beautiful. She’d been stunning on Olympus two days before, but she was a different kind of beautiful now. She wasn’t as scary, though Nico was sure she could still fight just as well in her dress as she could in her armor.

(He hadn’t seen her armor, but Bianca had, and she’d told him about it. It sounded amazing. Scary, but amazing.)

Her dress was even more old-fashioned than the other women’s, with long sleeves, a high collar, and a full skirt, mostly green like their identical eyes, but also decorated with gold.

Sirius – Nonno – met her at the bottom of the stairs. He took her hand and spun her around, her skirt making an even larger circle as she twirled.

“You’re more beautiful every time I see you, Anthie,” he said.

Mamma laughed.

“You say that every time, Dad,” she told him, though she was smiling.

“He’s right,” Nico spoke up. Everyone turned to look at him, and he resisted the urge to duck his head. Instead, he told Mamma, “you look…più bella di quanto le parole possano descrivere, Mamma.”

Mamma smiled warmly at him.

“Grazie, tesoro,” she said.

“What did he say?” Nico heard someone ask a bit too loudly.

“He said Mamma was more beautiful than words could describe,” Bianca translated loudly.

“He’s not wrong,” Sirius said, leaning in to kiss Mamma’s cheek.

Further conversation was interrupted by the doorbell ringing.

“That’s probably the Malfoys,” Mrs. Weasley said. She left the room, then returned a few minutes later with a trio of blonds, two adults and a toddler.

“This is my cousin, Draco Malfoy, his wife Astoria, and their son, Scorpius,” Mamma introduced. “Draco, Tori, these are my children, Nico and Bianca, and my sisters: Thalia, daughter of Zeus, and Rhanis, daughter of Oceanus. Both are Hunters of Artemis.”

“An honor to meet you,” Draco said with a small bow. “And a pleasure, Nico, Bianca. Is everyone ready to leave?” he asked Mamma.

“We are,” Mamma said. “We’d best hurry, or we’ll be late.”

After that, everything became a flurry of movement. Mamma hugged and kissed them both goodbye, and promised to be back in a few hours. She told them to tell one of their watchers if they needed anything, and to have fun.

They certainly had fun while Mamma and the others were gone. There were still five adults left with all twenty of the under-twenties, even though Rhanis was a hundred times their combined ages and Thalia could take care of herself. Most of the other children were under the age of five, so it was mostly just Nico, Bianca, Teddy, and Bill’s daughter, Victoire, who was eight.
Teddy and Victoire taught them several different wizarding games, such as Exploding Snap and Gobstones. By midnight, they were all tired enough that they were sent to bed – boys in one room, girls in another. The rooms were absolutely filled with sleeping bags and cribs, though there were more girls than boys. Teddy and Nico still stayed up whispering long into the night.

Christmas was both crazy and wonderful. For Nico’s entire life, it had just been him, Bianca, Mamma, and sometimes Papà, so it was extremely strange to be at Black Manor with forty other people to celebrate the holidays. Like Mamma had promised, Christmas Eve was done the Italian way, Christmas Day the English one, and St. Stefano’s Day (or Boxing Day, as the British people called it) in a mix of both.

Thalia and Rhanis had to leave on St. Stefano’s Day, now that Rhanis was healthy enough to go back to the Hunt. Mamma spent a long time hugging them both before finally handing them the Portkey that would take them back to Artemis.

The other three didn’t end up going back to America until New Year’s Day, so they got to celebrate the New Year in both London and New York. Mamma bundled them up in coats, hats, and warming charms and took them to Times Square.

After the holidays, they started school at the same school that Percy went to in Manhattan. It was much nicer than Westover Hall, though history and English still gave both Nico and his sister trouble. Mamma enchanted pencils for them so that they’d be able to read and write in ancient Greek and have it automatically translate, so that they didn’t have to worry about their dyslexia. Mamma had them constantly training when they weren’t in school, sometimes with each other, sometimes with Percy, and sometimes with herself. Their skills with weapons were increasing rapidly under her training.

Nothing truly interesting happened again until Nico’s birthday at the end of January.

Nonno, Grandpapà, Teddy, James, Albus, and Lily had all come to New York to celebrate. It was a Wednesday, so they weren’t going out to do anything, but Mamma had made a special Italian dinner and invited the Blacks and Percy and his mother to come. Over the weekend, Nico, Teddy, and his friends from school would be going to an amusement park with Mamma and Papà. Papà had even made it to Nico’s eleventh birthday dinner.

He’d just blown out the candles on his cake when there was a tapping at the window. Teddy scrambled out of his chair and opened the window to allow in a light brown owl. It wasn’t Hansel, Mamma’s Sooty Owl that usually hung out on the roof but only carried messages when Mamma needed to talk to someone in MACUSA. No, this looked like a normal barn owl.

The owl flew straight to Nico and dropped a letter in his lap before flying out again.

Nico looked down at the parchment envelope.

“Nico di Angelo,” he read. “It even has my bedroom on it, Mamma!”

Mamma was smiling widely at him, as were Nonno and Grandpapà. Teddy was practically bouncing in his chair.

“Open it, tesoro,” Mamma said.

Nico opened the envelope and pulled out the pieces of parchment inside.

“Ilvermorny School of Witchcraft and Wizardry,” he read out loud in amazement. “Mr. di Angelo, we are pleased to inform you that you have been accepted at Ilvermorny School of Witchcraft and
Wizardry. Please find enclosed a list of all necessary books and equipment. Term begins on September 1. We await your owl no later than July 31. I’m…I’m a wizard?” he asked, looking up at Mamma.

Nonno and Teddy had both started cheering.

“It seems so, tesoro,” Mamma said with a smile. “Now I suppose your decision must be if you want to go to magic school or stay here and be homeschooled, and whether or not you want to go here in the US or if you want me to transfer you to Hogwarts, where I went to school.”

“Come to Hogwarts!” Teddy exclaimed. “You’ll be in my year! It’ll be so much fun! Pleeeeeease!”


“You have a while to decide, tesoro,” Mamma told him. “Let me know by spring break, so I can contact Headmistress McGonagall at Hogwarts if you want to transfer.”

“I’ll…I’ll think about it,” Nico said, dazed though there was a smile on his face.

He had Mamma, Papà, Bianca, Nonno, Grandpapà, Teddy and the other cousins. They weren’t hiding from anyone anymore. And he had his acceptance letter to magic school, so he could be just like Mamma.

Best birthday ever.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter gave me so. many. issues. It just did not want to be written. I also took a massive sidetrip into the Arrowverse, and then managed to get another chapter written for A Mother's Choice, so there was that at least. But this chapter is finally done...even if it took being awake at three-thirty in the morning because my roommate likes to play rock music while doing math homework to do it.

I love you all, thank you for your continued support of this, and hopefully the next chapter will not take four months. The next chapter is going to be back to Chrysa for her perspective of Christmas and then everything she's busy doing between Titan's Curse and The Battle of the Labyrinth...and possibly delving into the beginning of Battle of the Labyrinth. I don't really know, I haven't written it yet.

Sorry if there's any mistakes, I literally finished this at 3:30 a.m. and uploaded it. I figured you all had waited long enough.
Days Merry and Bright

Chapter Summary

Chrysa's POV of the last chapter

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Her hangover the morning after the solstice was honestly terrible. As soon as the light struck her closed eyelids, she groaned, rolled over, and attempted to bury her face in a pillow.

There was a low laugh from beside her, and a hand began stroking the back of her head.

“‘M not getting up,” she mumbled.

“I have Dionysus’ hangover cure waiting for you, and Bianca and Nico are sleeping just down the hall,” Hades informed her.

Without looking up, Chrysa reached out a hand towards him. He placed the bottle in her hand. Chrysa sat up just enough to knock back the potion before collapsing back into her pillow.

It only took a few minutes for the brew to kick in enough for thinking not to be painful. It took another moment for light to stop hurting.

She rolled over to look up at Hades.

“I’m surprised you didn’t send the children in with pots and pans,” she said.

“I did consider it,” Hades admitted, “but you’re vindictive and know where I sleep.”

“You know me so well,” Chrysa said fondly. She reached up and patted his cheek.

Hades caught her hand and held it to his face.

“I love you,” he said. “No matter what happens.”

Five thousand years of a relationship – no matter the break in it – meant that she knew what he was getting at despite being half-asleep and hungover.

“Everything’s going to change,” she agreed. “But I will always love you.”

“Until the end of time?” Hades asked with a smile.

Chrysa leaned up and kissed him gently.

“It lasted beyond the end of Time already, and we can last beyond it once again. Everything changes, but who we are, and what we have, is immortal.”

Hades leaned in to kiss her again, harder, wrapping an arm around her waist to pull her closer. Chrysa pressed closer, resting her hands on his shoulders as their lips moved together in an
impromptu dance.

An hour later, Chrysa was showered, dressed, and ready to see her children again.

She went into Bianca’s room first. The girl was sprawled out upside-down on her bed in a position Chrysa couldn’t understand how it was comfortable, but Bianca had always slept like that, even as a baby. Nico hated sharing a bed with her in hotels because she contorted so oddly in her sleep.

“Bianca, passerotta,” Chrysa said in a sing-song voice. “It’s time to wake up.”

She woke up instantly. Most people Chrysa knew who woke up as quickly as Bianca did were either soldiers or others who’d been in situations where they had to be able to wake up quickly. Bianca just did it. Chrysa wished she had that ability. It took her ages to get out of bed at times.

“Good morning, Mamma!” Bianca said. “Is this the Underworld again?”

“Indeed it is, my darling,” Chrysa said. “I’m going to be headed to Camp Half-Blood in an hour or so for a meeting with the counsellors. Would you like to come?”

Bianca wrinkled her nose.

“Do I have to? I’d rather explore down here instead.”

“You’re welcome to,” Chrysa assured. “I can ask if someone would be willing to escort you. The Underworld is rather large, and I wouldn’t want you to get lost. You can’t shadow-travel on your own yet, after all.”

“Will I be able to?” Bianca asked.

“At some point,” Chrysa said. “Other children of Hades have been able to do so, and with my power backing you as well, you’ll probably get it much sooner. Besides, with me around, you’ll have a proper teacher, assuming I have the time.”

“Why wouldn’t you?” Bianca asked, looking confused.

“There’s a war starting, passerotta,” Chrysa said. “My talents are most useful outside of battle; information gathering, counterintelligence, sabotage – that’s what I’m good at. It’s what I’m made for. I’m the goddess of shadows and secrets, and I’m a most effective weapon behind-the-scenes… which means that I am going to be extraordinarily busy. I’m the spymistress and most effective agent on our side of the war.”

“I don’t want you to get hurt,” Bianca said quietly. “You’re…you’re Mamma,” she said, as if all that she was was encompassed in that one word. Chrysa supposed that, to an extent, it did. Her children might know that she was more than their mother, that she was a goddess and a witch and an assassin (though she hoped that she’d succeeded in glossing over that last bit), but they didn’t know. Not yet. And if she could preserve their innocence for just a little while longer, she would.

“I’m very good at what I do,” she assured her daughter, running a hand over her silky black hair. While Nico had inherited her curls, Bianca’s hair held their father’s straightness. “I’ll do my best to always come home to you, figlietta. You and your brother are the most important thing in the world to me. Why don’t you get ready while I try to find someone to escort you around today?”

“I’ll do it, I’ll do it!” a voice came from behind them.

Matching emerald eyes turned to the woman standing in the doorway. She looked to be in her early
twenties, but Chrysa knew that she was a few thousand years old – even if the goddess was nowhere near her own age.

“Good morning, Makaria,” she greeted her stepchild with a smile. “Are you sure you’re not busy?”

The goddess shrugged.

“Elysium’s just a bunch of parties. I can show Bianca all the cool stuff though!”

“No parties,” Chrysa said firmly. “No alcohol until she’s legal in the United States.”

“Technically, you’re still biologically seventeen,” Makaria pointed out. “That means you’re not allowed to drink.”

“I’m her mother,” Chrysa said drily. “It’s within my parental rights to be hypocritical.”

Makaria made an over-exaggerated pouty face.

“You’re no fun,” she said.

“I’m exactly as fun as I need to be,” Chrysa replied. “And don’t cross me. I’ll know.”

“Because it’s a secret?” Bianca asked.

“Because it’s a secret,” Chrysa said with a smile for her daughter. She bopped her on the nose. “And because I’m your mother, and mothers always know.”

Bianca smiled back.

“I’ll be good.”

Chrysa laughed and kissed the top of her head.

“I believe you. Don’t let your sister drag you into anything too crazy. I’d better go wake up your brother.”

Nico was much easier, even if he wasn’t as much of a morning person as Bianca was. She entered his room and gently shook his shoulder.

“Nico, tesoro, time to wake up,” she said.

“Mamma?” she barely heard Nico mutter, face half-smushed into his pillow. He slowly blinked himself awake.

“Good morning, my treasure,” Chrysa said warmly. “It’s time to wake up. There’s a meeting at Camp Half-Blood concerning the larger meeting last night, and I wanted to know if you wanted to come.”

Nico’s eyes fully opened and he shot up in bed.

“Yes, please!” he exclaimed. “Is Bianca coming too?”

“She wanted to stay here and explore a bit,” Chrysa explained. “Your half-sister Makaria agreed to show her around. You can stay here or come with me.”

“With you, Mamma,” Nico said.
Chrysa smiled at him. He was such a mama’s boy. He always had been.

“Your bathroom is through that door over there,” she said, pointing to the bathroom. “Your papà ensured that the dresser is filled with clothes that will fit you. Remember that although it’s warm down here, it won’t be at camp.”

“Yes, Mamma,” Nico said with a yawn. He began to drag himself out of bed. Chrysa waited until he made it into the bathroom to leave the room. She needed to have another chat with Makaria while Bianca wasn’t around, to make sure the goddess didn’t show her child anything too scarring.

By the time she was done going over the Underworld-tour checklist with Makaria, Nico had already finished his breakfast in the dining room.

“Are you ready, cucciolo?” she asked. “I apologize for leaving you, but I was having a quick chat with Makaria.”

“Sí, Mamma,” Nico said. He stood up from his chair and reached for his plate.

“Leave your dishes,” Chrysa instructed. “One of the skeletons will take care of them.” She reached out her hand towards him. “Ready for another round of terrible travel?”

Chrysa laughed at the face Nico made as he walked over to her. She grabbed his hand and pulled him through the shadows to Camp Half-Blood. They arrived in the living room, and were greeted a moment later by Chiron.

"Good, you're here," he said in greeting. "I believe it's time for another meeting. We're just waiting on you and Percy, who was telling Grover and the other satyrs something about coffee and Pan, last I checked."

"It's an interesting story," Chrysa admitted. "I suppose it's time for my last confession?"

"More your last revelation," Chiron snorted. "As many secrets as you keep, I'm sure there will be more confession you must make."

Chiron waved for them to proceed into the rec room. The Stoll brothers, Charles Beckendorf, Silena Beauregard, and surprisingly Clarisse were all there, along with Annabeth, who waved at them. Percy walked in a moment later. His eyes immediately to Clarisse.

"I got news," the daughter of Ares said uneasily. "Bad news."

"I'll fill you in later," Chiron told her with forced cheerfulness. "The important thing is that you have prevailed. And you saved Annabeth!"

"Luke is alive," Percy reported. "Annabeth was right."

Annabeth sat up straighter.

"How do you know?" she demanded.

"I talked to my dad last night," Percy said. "He says that Luke and Kronos' coffin are back on the Princess Andromeda."

"Well," Annabeth said, shifting uncomfortably in her chair, "if the final battle does come when Percy is sixteen, at least we have two more years to figure something out."

Chiron looked gloomy from his position in his wheelchair by the fire. Chrysa felt her own mouth
tighten at the reminder of the oncoming war.

"Two years may seem like a long time," Chiron said, "but it is the blink of an eye. I still hope you are not the child of prophecy, Percy. But if you are, then the second Titan war is almost upon us. Kronos' first strike will be here."

"How do you know?" her son asked from beside her.

"Why would he care about camp?" Percy asked, almost at the same time.

"Because the gods use heroes as their tools," Chiron said simply. "Destroy the tools, and the gods will be crippled. Luke's forces will come here. Mortal, demigod, monstrous…We must be prepared. Clarisse's news may give us a clue as to how they will attack, but the only guarantee is that they will come. It will not be until summer, at least. This winter will be hard…the hardest for many centuries. It's best that you go home to the city, Percy; try to keep your mind on school. And rest. You will need rest."

"And train," Chrysa said. All eyes in the room went to her. "Percy, you're welcome to use the training room in my apartment. If you'd be willing to help Nico and Bianca as well, I'll be taking them home with me, but I will not be around as often. Annabeth?"

The blonde's cheeks flushed.

"I'm going to try San Francisco after all," she said. "Maybe I can keep an eye on Mount Tam, make sure the Titans don't try anything else."

"You'll send an Iris-message if anything goes wrong?" Percy asked worriedly.

She nodded. "But I think Chiron's right. It won't be until the summer. Luke will need time to regain his strength."

"Excuse me," Conner Stoll said, "but can we talk about the elephant in the room? And by that I mean the fact that Chrysa is apparently a goddess? And Nico and Bianca are Hades' kids?"

All eyes turned to Chrysa and Nico.

She sighed. Confession time.

"I told you all that I was a nymph in my first life. I downplayed myself a bit. I was an Oceanid, a daughter of Oceanus and Tethys – the first child of Oceanus and Tethys, in fact. The Elder Oceanides – the original fifty of us, who were born before Ouranos fell – among our number were many who held our own domains as Titanesses, and were eventually counted as goddesses. Tyche is the goddess of luck. Styx is the goddess of oaths. Amphitrite is the goddess of saltwater and sea creatures, and she became the wife of Poseidon. Metis was the goddess of wisdom and good counsel, and she was the first wife of Zeus. I was the goddess of shadows and secrets," Chrysa held up her hand, and a dark shadow formed there, twining through her fingers, "and I was the first lover of Hades. He asked me to marry him," she said with a sad smile, "but I always said no. After I was murdered, as Leuke, my body was transformed into a white poplar tree in the center of Elysium. That tree finally died about a century ago, and I was reborn as Maria Olimpia Amaranta Corona Buonoparte di Savoia in 1913. I already told you how I met Hades in that life, and had Bianca and Nico, and then came to America and died."

"I can't imagine Hades being a god to stick around with his lover and kids for twelve years," Silena said doubtfully.
"Papà loves Mamma," Nico said indignantly. "He always has!"

"Hades has had fewer demigod children than any of the other gods," Chrysa said quietly, eyes fixed on Silena. "In thousands of years, there have only been twenty-one demigods. Bianca is the twentieth, and Nico the twenty-first. Hades has never been one to give in to lust. He only took lovers because of loneliness, and most of the time those lovers looked like me." She smiled softly. "I think even your mother would agree that there's always something about your first love."

Any further conversation was interrupted by the satyr, who stumbled into the room, tripping over tin cans. His face was haggard and pale, like he'd seen a specter.

"He spoke!" the satyr cried.

"Calm down, my young satyr," Chiron said, frowning. "What is the matter?"

"I…I was playing music in the parlor," he stammered, "and drinking coffee. Lots and lots of coffee! And he spoke in my mind!"

"Who?" Annabeth demanded.

"Pan!" Grover wailed. "The Lord of the Wild himself. I heard him! I have to…I have to find a suitcase."

"Whoa, whoa, whoa," Percy said. "What did he say?"

Grover stared at him.

"Just three words. He said, 'I await you.'"

That threw the council into an uproar. Chrysa noticed Nico wincing at the noise. She conjured a whistle and blew it loudly, silencing everyone with its shriek.

"Everyone, settle down!" she shouted in the stillness. "Satyr, sit down. You're not going anywhere until you've calmed down."

Alright. She could do this. She'd led a Wizarding War. She'd helped lead a divine war. She could organize a bunch of teenagers to go do something productive, or at least get them to stop worrying about being productive for a little bit.

"Beckendorf, you and your siblings need to start stockpiling weapons," she instructed. "Swords, spears, knives, arrowheads…everything you can think of. Make sure you have the materials for Greek fire laid out as well, but I wouldn't fully assemble it yet. Clarisse, you're in charge of making sure that everyone present at camp has an increased training schedule, though they still need to have time for others things. Silena, Stolls, every single camper we know needs to be contacted with this new information and warned to start preparing. Monster attacks will pick up, so let everyone know that they might need to come back to camp earlier than usual."

The Stoll brothers looked like they were going to protest being sent to letter-writing duty (horrible for all half-bloods due to their dyslexia and ADHD, even if camp letters were written in Ancient Greek) but she managed to quell any arguments with a sharp look.

"Percy, Annabeth, both of you need to pack everything you have with you so I can take you back to Manhattan tonight. I promised you home to your families by Christmas," she reminded them.

While the campers dispersed, Chrysa left Nico in the game room with the satyr while she and Chiron
went to the centaur’s office.

“This is going to be bad,” he said in a low voice was the door was sealed.

“I assume so,” Chrysa said grimly. “I’m not starting anything until after the holidays, but I’ll probably be near-always in shadow after that. This…this isn’t something recent. This has been building for almost a century now. Since my tree died. And they’ve had thousands of years of hatred to fester in. This is going to be so much worse than the first time.”

“You will be hunted,” Chiron said.

“I will,” Chrysa said.

“Your children?” he asked.

“I will do everything I can to prepare them,” Chrysa said firmly. “They…they have their own roles to play. I don’t know what yet, but they are there.”

“I assume you’re taking them home with you, instead of remaining? They would be safest here,” Chiron warned.

“I would not risk my children lightly,” Chrysa snapped. “I know how to keep them safe.”

“Even if Kronos targets them directly?” Chiron challenged. “Percy and Thalia reported that Atlas was working with mortal mercenaries. What if Kronos simply sends mercenaries to their school to take them, or while they’re playing outside, or when they go for a walk? You cannot simply keep them indoors for the rest of their lives.”

“I can train them so that they can defeat any monsters that come after them, and train them to escape any mortals. There’s not a prison in the world that can hold me, Chiron, and I mean to make my children the same way.”

“You couldn’t be held before, but you’re not simply shadow now,” Chiron said.

“No, but my…substantiality, I suppose would be the best word, means that I can better train my children, who were also born substantial, how to make the transfer into insubstantial,” Chrysa said.

“Children of Hades have died before, from shadow-traveling until they were nothing but shadow themselves,” Chiron stated. “You could kill them.”

“Those were children of Hades,” Chrysa replied. “Nico and Bianca are my children. *Leuke’s* children. I am shadow at my purest. Those born from shadow cannot die from becoming it. Even if they dissipated, I would be able to piece them back together.”

Chiron simply shook his head.

“I do not think this is wise.”

“My decisions are my own, and I shall make them as I please,” Chrysa said flippantly. She stood from her chair. “I’m heading home, and taking my children, Percy, and Annabeth with me. As always, you can contact me if you need me.”

“Be careful, Leuke Chrysochomin,” Chiron called after her.

The smile she flashed back at him was anything but innocent.
“Aren’t I always?”

Percy and Annabeth were waiting with Nico in the living room.

“Are you both ready?” Chrysa asked them.

Both nodded.

Chrysa took off her jacket, pulled out her wand, and cast the spell to turn the former into a Portkey to her apartment.

“Grab hold,” she instructed.

The three children did so, and she tapped the jacket with her wand, ordering, “New York.”

With a whirl of color and sound, they landed in her living room. Bianca was sitting cross-legged on the floor next to the couch where Rhanis was stretched out. Thalia sat on the other end.

“You’re okay?” Chrysa asked her sister.

“Basically,” the white-haired Hunter said. “Lady Artemis and Lord Apollo came by last night and healed me up, but after Thalia got introduced to everyone this morning, I got told that I was going on vacation with her until after Christmas.”

“Lady Artemis said I should spend my birthday with you,” Thalia said quietly. “Have a family party again.”

Chrysa immediately smiled.

“Well, I supposed it’s time to plan a party then,” she said. “Percy, you go see if your mom's free. Thalia, take Rhanis out to McDonald’s or a diner or something; go have all that ridiculously greasy food that you won’t be having in the wild somewhere hunting monsters. Bianca, Nico, you’re going to help me decorate.”

It didn’t take long to throw a birthday party suitable for Thalia’s one-and-only since before she’d run away from home. Chrysa was relatively sure she went a bit overboard, but there was little she wouldn’t do for her sister – any of her sisters. They were hers, after all.

It wasn’t until after Sally and Percy had gone back their apartment and Bianca and Nico were tucked into bed that Chrysa had the chance to talk to her youngest sister. Rhanis obviously noted her intentions and excused herself to the bedroom she and Thalia were sharing, claiming exhaustion due to her recovery.

“It really wasn’t about you,” Thalia insisted once they were alone. “You’re amazing, Chrysa, and you’ve been a great older sister, even if you have terrible taste in men.”

“You can’t talk,” Chrysa snorted. “You have no taste in guys anymore.”

Thalia shrugged. “I never had the best taste anyway, apparently,” she said, ducking her head.

Chrysa reached out to cup her cheek.

“Don’t think like that,” she scolded. “Luke…what happened to Luke isn’t your fault. He’s the one who made the decision to fight against the gods, to aid Kronos.”

“But he was right,” Thalia said quietly, a single tear rolling down her cheek. “We used to curse the
gods together. We hated that we were doomed to a terrible existence just for being born. We hated that they didn’t take care of us better, that they sired us and then left us. And then Grover found us, and we made it to camp, only for me to try to die and end up a pine tree instead. Dad couldn’t save me, but he could turn me into a pine tree? When I woke up, it was just, I was just…lost. I’ve been lost since Half-Blood Hill. You tried so hard to help me, Chrysa, and you did an amazing job – I’m sure you’re an amazing mother – but a mother isn’t what I need. Not in the way your kids do. I don’t need to be protected. I’ve been doing that for myself since I was eight. But as a Hunter, I’m not alone, and I’m not – I don’t have any expectations to live up to.”

“Thalia, I never meant to,” Chrysa began, but Thalia cut her off.

“I know,” she said with a small smile. “You didn’t. But everyone else did. They expected me to be like, like Hercules or Perseus or Alexander the Great. But that’s not me. Everyone had expectations of me, since all they knew about me was that I died on Half-Blood Hill. Everyone just expected this super-amazing daughter of Zeus, and nothing else mattered to them. With the Hunt…I have the chance to start over. To be Thalia. Not Luke’s partner, or the daughter of Zeus, just Thalia.”

Chrysa reached over and hugged her sister tightly.

“I wish you all the best,” she whispered into her ear, “but I’m glad I get to keep you for a few days more. I love you, little sister.”

“I love you too, Chrysa,” Thalia replied, returning the embrace.

The next morning started off with Chrysa giving Annabeth a Portkey in the shape of a pencil.

“San Francisco,” she stated, tapping the pencil with her wand. Annabeth disappeared. Chrysa was so glad that the girl had gotten used to magical means of travel over the course of every vacation she’d taken her on when she was younger.

“Where’d she go?” Bianca asked, sounding shocked.

“I sent her to her family's house in San Francisco,” Chrysa explained. “She wanted to spend Christmas with her family. Also, I thought that you’d want to see a Portkey in action, because we’re about to take another one. We're going to stay with Sirius and Remus for Christmas.”

“In England?” Nico asked.

“Yes, tesoro. In England. There's a ball at the Ministry for Magic tonight that I'll be going to, along with Sirius and Remus and some of our friends. You four will be staying with some of my good friends and their children, along with Sirius and Remus' children. Tomorrow, we'll have an Italian Christmas Eve, then a British Christmas Day, and then we’ll combine the traditions for Boxing Day – St. Stefano's Day. That way we can celebrate both Christmas and Natale,” she told her children. She knew that they’d missed the Italian celebrations during their years in Washington, D.C. Due to the war, they hadn’t dared to show signs of their Italian ancestry, besides the obvious.

“Will Papà be there?” Bianca asked.

“He said he'll try to come for part of it,” Chrysa said. She doubted he’d make it. This time of year was busy for him, even without the approaching war. “But trust me, we'll have plenty of people around. Let's see, there's five of us; six Lupin-Blacks; four Thomases; two, seven, eight, twelve, sixteen, twenty Weasleys. That's…thirty-five people in all.”

“That's a big dinner,” Thalia said, sounding shocked.
Chrysa doubted that Thalia had ever been so involved in a family dinner. Dinners at camp might have more people, but they were separated by tables. All of the children – well, Rhanis would be fine, she’d had worse – were used to small families.

“Mr. and Mrs. Weasley had seven children,” Chrysa said. "Six boys and a girl. Fred died several years ago, and Charlie's never married, but the others are all married with two kids, except Bill and Fleur, who have three. Sirius never told me, but the Malfoys might also be coming, so that's five more people. Narcissa Malfoy is Sirius' only living cousin, so sometimes at the holidays they decide to ignore the fact that everyone dislikes Lucius Malfoy and Lucius dislikes everyone."

She conjured a length of rope.

“Does everyone have their bags?” she asked. She hadn’t bothered packing anything herself. All of her things were already at the Black House, except for her gown, which Fleur and Ginny had teamed up to take care of. They’d cursed her out heavily when she’d contacted them about not being able to wear something showing her shoulders a few days before, but had promised to make sure her gown would be ready for the ball.

Everyone nodded.

“Grab onto the rope,” Chrysa instructed, remembering the first time she’d taken a Portkey, when Mr. Weasley had given the exact same instructions, “and whatever you do, don't let go.”

Everyone grabbed the rope, and she showed them how to wrap it around their wrists so that they couldn't drop it.

“I'll warn you in advance, you'll probably fall over when we land,” Chrysa said. “I almost always do.”

Portkeys really were awful ways to travel. It was why, if she was on her own, she much preferred Apparition or shadow-travel. But with a group this size, neither of those were feasible.

She tapped the rope with her wand and said, ‘Grimmauld Place.”

The world whirled around them in a rush of wind and color, and then they were all collapsing into a heap.

“Dad!” she heard Teddy yell. "Papa! They're here!"

Chrysa barely managed to twist in time to magically catch the teal-haired ten-year-old as he tried to leap on top of her. He let out a laugh as he hovered above her, golden eyes sparkling with mischief.

“Wotcher, Amaranth,” he greeted.


She allowed her magic to put him back onto his feet. He reached out to grab her hands, then pulled her to her feet and into a hug before moving over to pull Bianca to her feet.

“Wotcher, Bianca!” he greeted cheerfully.

Chrysa pulled her sisters to their feet while Teddy went over and introduced himself to Nico. His request to go play was halted when Sirius entered the room with Lily.

“Sirius, these are my children, Nico and Bianca di Angelo,” Chrysa said, pointing to each of them in
"And these are my sisters: Thalia, daughter of Zeus, and Rhanis, daughter of Oceanus and Tethys. They're both Hunters of Artemis. Everyone, this is my godfather and adopted father, Sirius Black, and his youngest child, Lily. Teddy is his eldest."

“My husband, Remus, has our middle two, James and Albus, in the bath,” Sirius said with a large grin. “But it’s a pleasure to meet you all. Except you, Bianca, since we met the other day. I’ve heard so much about all of you. Oh, and Anthie, Cissy and Draco told me to pass on that they’ll murder you if you try to use a glamour on your recent injury. Which injury would this be, by the way?”

“It’s nothing important,” Chrysa attempted to deflect.

“Amaranth,” Sirius said in his parent-voice. It had gotten so much better since he’d actually had children of his own.

“Later, Dad,” Chrysa replied in the same tone. This was not something she wanted to get into with her children in the room. “Teddy-bear, why don’t you take Nico and Bianca on a tour of the house? Thalia, Rhanis, you two can go along or stay here. Just remember, whatever you end up doing, we’re leaving in – three hours?” she questioned, looking at Sirius.

“Two hours,” Sirius said. “All the women were planning to get ready together – the younger ones at least. Fleur and Angelina have offered their makeup and hair services to help those of you who are going.”

Teddy made a face.

“That's boring.”

“You'll be with Bill, Charlie, and George,” Sirius said. “I'm sure you'll be fine.”

“Do I have to take them for a tour?” Teddy asked. “I wanna go play in the pool.”

“Isn't it a little cold for that?” Nico asked.

“Nah,” Teddy said. “We've got an indoor pool.”

“Cool!” Nico exclaimed. “Mamma, can we?”

“Only for a couple of hours,” Chrysa said after a considering thought. “We don't want to be late. Girls, do you want to go?”

Thalia shook her head.

“Not really smart for me to go swimming, Chrysa.”

“You're a Hunter of Artemis now, Thalia,” Chrysa reminded. “Poseidon won't touch you while you have Artemis' protection.”

“I don't know how to swim,” Thalia confessed.

Rhanis perked up.

“I can teach you. I am a water nymph, after all.”

They looked over at Chrysa. She waved her hand at them.

“Go ahead. Have fun. The changing rooms next to the pool will provide you with swimsuits in your
size. And there are charms to prevent drowning, so don't worry about that,” she instructed.

“Wait, Nico and Bianca know how to swim?” Thalia asked. “Isn't that dangerous?”

“Poseidon is usually less vindictive,” Chrysa said drily. “And we lived in Venice for most of their lives. It would have been more dangerous if they didn't know how to swim.”

“We haven't gone swimming since the hotel,” Bianca piped up. “There was a pool there, and a waterpark, but we didn't go very often.”

“Probably wise,” Mamma said with a nod. “But you'll be safe here. Zeus has sworn not to harm my children, and Poseidon won't do anything to make his wife mad at him.”

“What are we waiting for?” Teddy asked. “Come on! Let's go!”

Teddy dragged Nico out of the room, followed by Bianca. Thalia and Rhanis followed as well after glancing to Chrysa for affirmation.

“Let me go put Lily down,” Sirius said, giving Chrysa a hard look. “Then we’ll talk.”

Chrysa dragged her feet on the way to the back parlor. It was difficult to find if you didn’t know exactly where it was, and there was no way for the children to come across their conversation by accident.

The extensive silencing wards on the room helped with that.

Sirius arrived a few minutes later, sans Lily and plus Remus.

“Al and Jamie done with their bath?” Chrysa asked casually.

“All three of the younger set are playing in the nursery,” Remus said. “Kreacher’s watching them. But no deflecting. You were injured?”

Chrysa sighed and pulled down the neckline on her shirt, revealing the still-red and healing bullet wound below her collarbone.

“What the hell happened?” Sirius demanded, immediately moving closer to examine the wound.

“Bullet wound,” Chrysa reported. “Nothing major. I wouldn’t have called Draco in if I didn’t need to get back to the field as soon as possible.”

“Amaranth,” Remus sighed, “just because you can heal any wound doesn’t mean that we’re not going to be upset if you get hurt. It is important, even if you don’t seem to see it that way.”


“It is,” Sirius said. “You heal, but you also feel pain. Do you need to see your therapist again?”

Chrysa winced.

“I… I don’t think so,” she said. “There’s so much going on that I can’t talk about with a therapist…”

“Then talk to us,” Remus said, almost begging. “Talk to us, Amaranth.”

“Please, Anthie,” Sirius said.
Chrysa took a deep breath.

“Okay,” she said. “Okay. I will. Before we leave. But…not today. We don’t really have time to get through everything today, and we can’t be late.”

“Promise you’ll talk?” Remus asked seriously.

“I swear on my magic,” Chrysa said solemnly. “Before this holiday is out, I’ll talk about it.”

“I think we have at least enough time to talk about how you got shot,” Sirius said firmly.

Chrysa sighed and sagged down onto a couch.

“We were in…Arizona. No, New Mexico. It was me, Thalia, Rhanis, Percy, and…and Zoë Nightshade. Thalia wasn’t a Hunter yet. Zoë was the lieutenant of Artemis then. She was leading the quest to find Artemis. We’d left New York and driven to DC, and then took a train to New Mexico. In New Mexico, we encountered spartoi.”

“The skeleton warriors summoned by Cadmus from the teeth of the Ismenian dragon?” Remus asked excitedly.

“The very same,” Chrysa said. “These were summoned for the purpose of hunting down the Hunters, Zoë and Rhanis, but they instead ended up hunting Percy instead, since he was attempting to protect the Hunters. They were armed with guns. Due to who I am, I was the only person in our party capable of stopping them. I was in the midst of fighting off the group that had cornered us when I…uh…forgot to dodge.”

“You forgot to dodge,” Sirius said drily.

“That’s my story and I’m sticking to it,” Chrysa said stubbornly. “And right after that, we had to jump onto the Erymanthian Boar, because that was our ride to Arizona, so I didn’t have time to patch up the wound while we were riding, and as soon as we got off we pretty much got shoved into the gods’ junkyard and had to fight a prototype of Talos. Rhanis managed to get inside it to take it down, but I had to shadow-travel inside to get her out and then shadow-traveled to Camp, because we were both a mess after that and needed healing. That’s when I called for Draco. You’re not supposed to shadow-travel with open wounds. It’s too cold. Rhanis and I made it to Camp, and I called Draco when I woke up the next morning.”

“That’s bizarre,” Sirius said bluntly. “Anthie, you need to take better care of yourself. It’s not just you anymore. It’s never been just you. But now you have your kids relying on you. You can’t risk yourself so often.”

“I have to,” Chrysa replied. “Dad, Papa, there’s a war starting. And like it or not, I’m going to be on the front lines once again…sort of. I’m a bit more on the behind-the-scenes part of the front lines than I was during the Wizarding War. But the very nature of my domain…the very nature of me, means that I have to participate. Like I told you Dad, I’ve been part of this for ten thousand years. It’s far too late to back out.”

Her adopted parents sat on either side of her on the couch and sandwiched her in a hug.

“We love you, Anthie,” Sirius said into her ear. “We loved you before you had all these extra memories, and we love you now.”

“And we’ll love you forever, until beyond the gates of the Underworld,” Remus added.
“I love you both too,” Chrysa said quietly.

They sat there for a while longer, simply basking in the warmth of family. Eventually, Chrysa excused herself to go play with James, Al, and Lily for the last hour before it was time to leave for the Burrow.

She was dragged upstairs almost as soon as she stepped out of the Floo, which was merely the beginning of a few hours of preparations for the ball.

True to their word, Fleur and Ginny had successfully modified her dress to cover up her shoulder area. There would be no awkward questions about injuries and what exactly she actually got up to over in the US.

Sirius met her at the bottom of the stairs when she was done. He grabbed her hand and twirled her around, making her already full skirt even larger.

“You’re more beautiful every time I see you, Anthie,” he told her.

She laughed.

“You say that every time, Dad,” she chided, though she couldn’t keep the smile off her face.

“He’s right,” Nico said from across the room. Everyone turned to look at him, and he ducked his head slightly. “You look…più bella di quanto le parole possano descrivere, Mamma.”

Chrysa smiled warmly at him.

“Grazie, tesoro,” she said.

“What did he say?” George asked.

“He said Mamma was more beautiful than words could describe,” Bianca translated loudly.

“He’s not wrong,” Sirius said, leaning in to kiss Chrysa's cheek.

Further conversation was interrupted by the doorbell ringing.

“That's probably the Malfoys,” Mrs. Weasley said. She left the room, then returned a few minutes later with Draco and his wife and son.

“This is my cousin, Draco Malfoy, his wife Astoria, and their son, Scorpius,” Chrysa told her children and her sisters. “Draco, Tori, these are my children, Nico and Bianca, and my sisters: Thalia, daughter of Zeus, and Rhanis, daughter of Oceanus. Both are Hunters of Artemis.”

“An honor to meet you,” Draco said with a small bow. “And a pleasure, Nico, Bianca. Is everyone ready to leave?” he asked Chrysa.

“We are,” Mamma said. “We'd best hurry, or we'll be late.”

After that, everything became a flurry of movement. Chrysa hugged and kissed her children goodbye, and promised to be back in a few hours. She told them to tell one of their watchers if they needed anything, and to have fun.

They all Apparated to the Ministry. None of them wanted to risk ruining their outfits with the Floo or a Portkey.
Chrysa’s skirts swished to the side as she landed, before settling back down at her feet. Someone tapped her shoulder.

“May I have the honor of escorting you this evening, my lady?” Neville Longbottom asked with a friendly smile.

Chrysa smiled back at her yearmate.

“Where’s your wife this evening?” she asked, even as she accepted the arm he offered her. His dress robes were black with gold accent, which meant that he matched nicely with Chrysa’s green and gold.

“Bedrest. She’s due any day now, but she insisted that I come tonight,” Neville said. “I’m sure she wouldn’t mind me escorting an old friend to the ball.”

“Well, I certainly don’t mind,” Chrysa said, teasing lightly. “You’ll give me an excuse not to dance with every pandering toady that decides they want to dance with me. Besides, I know you’re a good dancer. Ginny had fun when you danced with her.”

Neville let out a laugh.

“My dancing skills as a fourth year should not be a staple of my skills as an adult.”

“You’re the Lord of a Most Ancient and Most Noble House,” Chrysa said drily. “You’ve been dancing since you could walk.”

“True enough,” Neville admitted.

They swept into the large ballroom, which was entirely done in gold and white marble, the flooring a warm wood parquet. The ballroom had been modeled after the one in Catherine Palace in St. Petersburg, though very few actually remembered that. Chrysa only knew because Maria di Angelo’s mother, though she’d been better known as Adelina di Angelo, had been of high enough rank to reminisce fondly about balls thrown at Catherine Palace. Chrysa had always been curious about the Russian palace – it had been too dangerous for her to visit the USSR as Maria di Angelo, as she would have had to travel under her own name, and her mother had been known as a friend of Tsaritsa Alexandra before her death. By the time Maria had legally been Maria di Angelo, Italy was at war with Russia, so it simply wasn’t worth it.

Thankfully, this particular ball had so many people that there wasn’t an announcer, so it took people awhile to notice that Amaranth Potter-Black was there. By the point that everyone had realized it, Neville and Amaranth had made the rounds through a good half of the room.

After they finished rounding the room, they ended up finding some of their other yearmates and chatting until Kingsley Shacklebolt, who had held the position of Minister since the end of the war, announced that it was time for dinner.

The seating arrangement was magically updated, so it recognized everyone when they came in and their titles in order to properly seat everyone at the table.

There were no foreign heads of state this year, so Chrysa ended up the lady of honor and was seated to the right of the Minister. Neville escorted her to her chair and seated her before heading off to find his own seat.

“Been staying out of trouble, Lady Potter?” Kingsley greeted with a small smile.
“Me?” Chrysa asked with a mischievous grin. “Never.”

“I’d expect nothing less,” Kingsley said with a laugh.

Dinner was thankfully not too painful. There was the usual small talk, but Chrysa hadn’t made it to a ball since the previous spring, so most of the small talk was actually informative for her. When Kingsley stood to open the dancing, he offered his hand to Chrysa.

“May I have this dance?” he asked.

Chrysa accepted it with a bow of her head.

“Of course, Minister.”

The dancing was one of the more fun parts of the evening. Her dance with the Minister was filled with more small talk. Her dance with Draco consisted of him interrogating her over her injury. Old classmates, DA members, and Order members all spun her around the floor, which provided plenty of friendly faces so that she could avoid the more politically-inclined power-mongers who would have ruined the party for her.

Neville ended up rejoining her as her escort once she’d been dancing for over an hour with various associates. He offered her a glass of champagne. She drained half of it in one gulp.

“Still as popular as ever,” he said with a smile.

“Unfortunately,” she sighed. “But at least all the people I know means that I can actually just catch up with people while dancing instead of making small talk with random politicians.”

“You know most of the random politicians,” Neville pointed out.

“Not the foreign ones,” Chrysa pointed out. “They just want to gawk over the ‘Woman-Who-Conquered’.”

“So, more of the people you sue for calling you ‘Amy Potter,’” Neville surmised.

“Exactly,” Chrysa agreed.

“Care for another dance?” Neville asked.

Chrysa drained the rest of her champagne and left the empty glass on a passing waiter’s tray before accepting Neville’s hand.

“Lead on,” she said.

They all ended up back at the Burrow around three in the morning.

“The kids’re all sleeping,” Bill reported. “Go home, Amaranth. We’ll send them back through the Floo in the morning, though probably not until after Mum feeds them up a bit.”

“That’s unfair to you, Molly,” Amaranth told the woman. “All the other adults are going back to their homes. Why don’t you and Arthur come stay at Grimmauld tonight so you can sleep in?”

“That sounds lovely, Amaranth dear,” Molly Weasley. “Sirius, Remus? Would you be all right with that?”

“Of course,” Remus said. “You offered your house up to help watch our children. The least we can
do is offer you a room to sleep off the party before you attempt to reclaim your house.”

“Scorpius is sleeping soundly,” Charlie told Draco, who was hovering awkwardly by the door. Astoria had gone straight home; the exertion of the ball was too much for her in her illness.

“He’ll be fine sleeping here tonight,” Charlie continued. “He and Albus were fast friends, and they’re curled up as snug as two bugs in a rug. We can either send him home to yours tomorrow, or we can send him to Grimmauld with Albus until you and Astoria are awake.”

“Are you sure?” Draco asked. As many years as it had been since the war, and despite the family connection to Sirius that his mother tried so hard to maintain, Draco was still uncomfortable with Weasleys.

“Course,” Charlie said with a shrug. “We’ve already got twenty kids. One extra’s not going to hurt anything. And getting him up would wake Albus up, and Albus would wake all the others up, and then we’d have a hell of a time getting everyone back to sleep.”

“If you’re sure,” Draco said hesitantly.

“Draco,” Chrysa said bluntly. “We’re all exhausted. Go home. Cuddle your wife. Tell the house elves not to wake you up. Scorpius will be fine here until he wakes up and has breakfast, and then he’ll be fine playing with James and Albus and Lily at Grimmauld until you and Tori are ready for him to come home. Go sleep.”

Draco hesitated, then nodded.

“Good night, everyone,” he said, before turning and leaving the room.

Chrysa, Sirius, and Remus made their goodbyes as well before returning to Grimmauld Place, Chrysa instructing those remaining at the Burrow that they could send their children over whenever, but they should inform the children not to wake them up and that Rhanis was in charge.

Once back at Grimmauld Place, she barely spent enough energy to say goodnight to Sirius and Remus before heading up to room, removing her dress, and collapsing onto her bed. Figuring out how to undo her magical makeup and hairdo could wait until morning.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was supposed to go further, and then it got too long, so I chopped it. I'm already into the next chapter, but I'm not sure when it'll be done. It's midterm season. :(  

Chapter Summary

Continuation of Chrysa's POV from "Days Merry and Bright" and beyond.

Christmas provided the chance for Chrysa to push away her cares and worries for a little while longer, but Boxing Day meant that it was time for Thalia and Rhanis to return to the Hunt, and time for Chrysa to start immersing herself in her job.

Thalia and Rhanis were sent off by Portkey to Artemis with promises to be safe. From there, Chrysa changed into Muggle garb and made her way to the Dorchester. She had a meeting to get to.

The Table Lumière at Alain Ducasse had been reserved for them for this meeting. It seated six, and was completely private from the other diners, though they were able to see them.

Chrysa was the last to arrive. Rhea, Zeus, Poseidon, Amphitrite, and Hades were already there. Hades rose from his chair to seat her. They all ordered their food and waited for the waiters to leave before getting down to business.

“What are the preliminary reports?” Zeus opened with, not bothering with any pleasantries.

Chrysa stuck her hand under the table and used the shadows cast by the tablecloth to summon the files from her office in the Underworld. She’d set Pseudea and Logos on all the papers she’d stolen from the Titan base she’d raided. They’d compiled everything for her over the past few days, though that was by no means the entirety of the information she had.

“As of eighteen months ago, Kronos had escaped Tartarus by unknown means, though the other Titans imprisoned there were still there. Kioios, Krios, Hyperion, and Iapetus are all imprisoned in different parts of Tartarus, with different mechanisms in order to best prevent their various abilities. I’m planning another expedition within the month to ascertain whether or not they have broken their bonds. This will also give me the opportunity to set up alarms so we are aware of when they do break their bonds,” she said grimly.

“It isn’t safe for you to go that deep alone,” Hades said worriedly. “The pit…”

“I know,” Chrysa said. “Which is why I’m not going alone. My trophós agreed to go with me.”

The others at the table collectively shuddered.

Chrysa rolled her eyes. “Nyx isn’t that bad.”

“She is that bad,” Zeus grumbled. “You’re just immune to how terrifying she actually is.”

“She’s willing to help?” Rhea asked. “I didn’t think she’d be interested in this.”

“She’s a Protogenos,” Chrysa shrugged. “She doesn’t particularly care about this sort of thing. But she also never really cared for Kronos, and she likes me, even if I’m now half-mortal and fragile.”

The others looked like they wanted to object to that, but Chrysa plowed on with her report.
“Before that happens, we’ll be holding a meeting of the Dark Council in order to discuss allegiances with those there. That could…honestly go either way. Again, the Protogenoi don’t actually care, but some of the younger set are also counted as gods – minor gods – and might be offended enough by their lack of respect. However, for some of the younger set, they could also simply not care,” she continued.

“Is that even safe for you to go to this meeting, if there are people loyal to Kronos there?” Amphitrite asked worriedly.

“I’m the goddess of shadows, Trite,” Chrysa said with a small smile and a shake of her head. “I’m the only one the Dark Council might listen to.”

Everyone looked at Hades, who nodded grimly.

“They only tolerate me, and they only do it because she chose me as her consort, and she accepted me as the ruler of the Underworld,” he said. “Leuke is the recognized leader of the Dark Council, especially if the Protogenoi aren’t there. And even when they showed up, they left her in charge.”

“They don’t show up very often,” Chrysa said. “Which is good, because the last time Tartarus and I were in the same room, bets were flying about whether or not I’d finally be given the chance to take down a Protogenos.”

“You were so disappointed that you missed the chance to take out Father,” Rhea said with a shake of her head. “But if you had, Kronos would have married you, and you would have murdered him if your child got swallowed.”

“Happily,” Chrysa said. “But he isn’t my type.”

“He was,” Amphitrite muttered, but it was loud enough that the rest of the table could hear it. Rhea snickered, but the brothers all grimaced.

“I mean, the sex was okay, but it was always a battle of dominance, which made it a bit…messy.”

“You made a big enough hole in the ground that you created the Black Sea,” Rhea pointed out. “You’re the reason it was named the ‘Black Sea.’ That’s more than a ‘bit’ messy.”

“That only happened once!” Chrysa protested, though she could feel her cheeks darkening.

“Twice,” Amphitrite said. “Don’t forget about the Caspian Sea.”

“Oh, and how many blue holes have you and your husband created?” Chrysa challenged.

“Maybe we shouldn’t talk about this right now,” Poseidon said hurriedly. “Or ever.”

Rhea was outright laughing by that point.

“I’m just saying,” Amphitrite continued, completely ignoring her husband.

“Back to the matter at hand, yes, I will be safe at the Dark Council. Everyone there is old enough. None of them would dare to attempt to kill me in the Underworld, especially with my trophós present,” Chrysa said.

It was one thing to talk about her past exploits with her sister and Rhea. It was another thing to talk about them with her consort and her father present. Especially when the subject of those exploits had been their father…reincarnation was really confusing sometimes.
Zeus looked relieved at the change of subject.

“What will you do if the meeting doesn’t go your way?” he asked. “If the younger set declare for Kronos?”

“I’ll remind them what will happen if they dare to bring conflict into the Underworld,” Chrysa shrugged, “and I’ll remind them why it’s a bad idea to go against me in the upper world. I won’t kill them. Most of them are…fed up with how things are run up here. I would be as well, if I were one of them. They are not given the respect they deserve based on the power that they hold. I will remind them to keep the war out of the Underworld, and they will listen.”

“What makes you so sure?” Poseidon asked. “You were killed in the Underworld before. In Elysium.”

“By giants,” Chrysa said. “Sons of Gaea and Tartarus, close enough to their father’s power that they felt protected. And only one of them survived the attack, and he suffered greatly for it. The war won’t go that far. There is no one else who has the right to rule the Underworld.”

“Hades drew a lot for the Underworld,” Poseidon pointed out.

“She wasn’t talking about me,” Hades said. “Leuke is the one the Dark Council recognizes as the ruler of the Underworld. I’m only tolerated because she chose me as her consort and accepted me as ruler of the Underworld. Leuke holds the right to rule as the heir of Nyx and Erebos. The only other person with a possible claim would be Melinoe, as she is our only immortal child.”

“I never had any interest in ruling the Underworld,” Chrysa said. “I’m the shadow, not the figurehead. I gladly passed the mantle over to Hades after the first war.”

“Heirs are important,” Amphitrite said. “The mermaids recognized me as the foster daughter of Nereus, the eldest son of Pontus and Thalassa, and therefore I was recognized as the Heir, which brought the merfolk under my husband’s command without a fight.”

“I forget that you’re just babies sometimes,” Chrysa – Leuke – said, shaking her head at the shocked look on the brothers’ faces. Not Hades – Leuke had made damn sure that he knew exactly what he was getting into with her, back at the beginning, and exactly how tenuous his hold on her heirdom was.

“I’m nearly as old as you are now,” Zeus said drily.

When Chrysa replied, her words weren’t in English or Italian or even Ancient Greek. No, this language was much older. This was the language that her grandmother had crooned lullabies in, that her trophós still spoke to her in, that her name – her true name, was given in.

“Ego mímnāskō atones dlŋhmês antí tū prāmos pneuśîs, torsmp-phutlom. Nom nē šptēēsī tewe wldhēēs moghe eimi proti ghod-ke,” she reprimanded. I remember long years before you first drew breath, thunder-child. Do not think your kingship can counter this.

“I have no idea what you just said,” Zeus said bluntly.

“She just reminded you that we’re much, much older than you,” Rhea said. “We remember what things were like before it was so…crowded.”

“Though, I must say,” Chrysa said as waiter entered their illumined alcove with their first course, “I much prefer the cuisine now.”
They were quiet as the waiters distributed their appetizers and refilled their wine.

“I’m going into hiding,” Rhea said once the staff was gone. “I’ll say goodbye to the girls first, but it’s not safe for me to be around after what happened last time. I’m not like Leuke or Amphitrite – I’m not a warrior.”

“You don’t need to fight,” Chrysa agreed. “As long as Kronos has a more tempting target, he won’t bother going after you.”

“You’re the one in the most danger,” Rhea warned.

“You can’t catch a shadow,” Chrysa said dismissively. “I know how to keep myself safe. We need to worry about the rest of the war. I’ll check on the Titans in Tartarus. Athena will check those outside of it. Apollo and Artemis will hunt the greater monsters, the ones that would give the demigods trouble. The minor gods…they will need to be checked individually.”

“I’ll send Dionysus,” Zeus said with a nod. “He’ll relish the chance to leave the camp.”

“What’s the condition of the under-sea battle?” Chrysa asked.

“It hasn’t quite broken out yet,” Poseidon admitted. “We’re expecting it to by summer, maybe a bit later.”

“It was a blow to their plans when Oceanus decided on neutrality once more,” Rhea said.

“Father was considering joining Kronos, but my sister was quite persuasive in her arguments against it,” Amphitrite said with a smile towards Chrysa.

“I am not sure if it was my arguments or his fear of me that was the true clincher,” Chrysa said. “But either way, Oceanus and Tethys will remain out of this war.”

“Mnemosyne and Themis are remaining neutral, as is Phoebe,” Rhea reported. “But Theia…Theia lost her husband and two of her children. I don’t know what she will do.”

Poseidon frowned.

“Helios and Selene faded.”

“No,” Chrysa said softly. “They didn’t.”

Poseidon’s brow furrowed. Amphitrite also looked confused, though she focused on Chrysa and her eyes widened.

“They planned a rebellion against the rule of the gods, between the Titanomachy and the Gigantomachy,” Zeus said bluntly. “They were the leaders, so I sent Leuke to cut off the head of the snake.”

“I never even realized…” Poseidon said.

“You weren’t meant to,” Chrysa said bluntly. “That’s the point of sending me as opposed to Ares or one of the others.” She began passing out the folders that her attendants had compiled.

“This is all the information I’ve acquired so far, by means of duplication charms when I took out a Titanic base. Some of it is…disturbing, to say the least. It at least gives us information that Kronos has been preparing for this much longer than we knew,” Chrysa said.
They were all quiet for several minutes as they flipped through their pages, interspersed with bites of their appetizers.

“This is…concerning,” Amphitrite finally said.

“Indeed,” Rhea nodded.  “They have a greater knowledge of living demigods than we do.”

“The current methods of leaving satyrs or in-the-know mortal parents to bring demigods to camp clearly aren’t working,” Chrysa said.  “When our enemies know more about our children than we do, there is definitely a problem.”

Zeus sighed.

“I see that now.  Overhauling the system will have to wait until after the war.  We don’t have time to do it now.  We cannot afford the uproar that it would cause.”

“We can’t ignore this,” Poseidon pointed out.

“We’re not,” Zeus snapped.  “We’re postponing it.  Let’s get back to the rest of this.  We have a lot to go through, and we only have this table for a few hours.”

The rest of the meeting was overtaken with minutiae and arguing.  Unfortunately, Zeus kept overruling them and changing the subject whenever they pointed out something that he didn’t like.

Chrysa wasn’t happy about it.  This was a war council, not a party planning committee.  Ignoring them did no one any good.  This was an enemy Leuke had known for *millennia*.  She kept quiet though.  Zeus would figure out soon enough that he should listen to her.

And if he didn’t?

Well, the Titans weren’t the only ones who found Leuke terrifying.

The meeting ended with only broad plans made.  Some of the missions they’d determined would be passed on to Chiron for Camp Half-Blood to complete; others would be handed out among the Olympians.

The next day, Chrysa and Zeus met again, though this time they were alone and no one knew where they were.  As a god, Zeus could be in multiple places at once.  Chrysa had utilized the Time-Turner she’d acquired several years before to go back in time a few hours so that her children, godchildren, and parents wouldn’t know they were missing.

“How do you have names for me?” Chrysa asked as she sat down on the bench next to him.

They were in Vingis park in Vilnius, Lithuania, also known as a place no one would think to look for them in.  Neither of them looked like their usual selves.  Chrysa currently had dark blonde hair and her green eyes were darkened to brown.  The bulky coat, pants, scarf, and gloves she wore for the cold weather disguised her further, especially as they were scruffy enough to make her look like she was a struggling college student.  The Vilnius University knit cap on her head completed the look.  Her father had a similar hair color.  His eyes were still blue, but had darkened enough that they weren’t as piercing and obvious as usual.  He wore similarly bulky clothing, though his was all of better make than hers, though not enough to make him seem extremely wealthy.  To better fit in with there surroundings, they were speaking Lithuanian, which Chrysa only knew for situations like this.

“Several,” Zeus said.
He passed her a thick black binder. She flipped it open to find several dozen papers, all covered in page protectors. Each respective ‘file’ was separated by dividers. There were at least thirty of them.

She briefly thumbed through it.

“Are any more urgent than the others?” she asked.

“I am unsure. All that we are aware is that they are all working with the enemy in one form or another. We cannot risk anything less than definitive action. In addition to taking care of that, I also need you to investigate each of them for information on their activities and their associates that are also involved or may become involved,” Zeus told her.

“How do you want them investigated?” Chrysa asked.

Zeus looked at her firmly, and she knew that it wasn’t his daughter he was talking to. No, he was talking to his Hound.

That was who Leuke was. Zeus’ Hound, his Brachet. Sometimes, when they thought she couldn’t hear them, they would call her his Bitch. Before she was Zeus’, she was Kronos’ with the same names.

“By any means necessary,” Zeus said.

Leuke smiled coldly. That was the carte blanche to do whatever she wished so long as she accomplished her mission – not that she wouldn’t anyway, but it was nice to have permission. It meant she had to spend less time either asking forgiveness (unlikely) or tiptoeing around since she was in Zeus’ bad books later.

“Timeframe?” she asked.

“I want a priority ranking as soon as possible. If you can take care of who you see as the highest-value targets at the time, do so. From there a more definitive timeframe can be given. It must be done before summer begins, preferably before you relocate at the equinox.”

They both paused the conversation as a woman jogged by with her dog. Amusingly enough, it looked to be a female basset hound.

“It has to be done without evidence,” Zeus cautioned.

“Of course,” Leuke said. “But I assume you still want…them…to know it’s me?”

“That’s up to you,” Zeus said. “Just don’t let anything be traced back to you.”

Leuke resisted the urge to roll her eyes.

“I’m not an amateur.”

“I know,” Zeus said, “but you are my daughter, so it had to be said.”

Chrysa blinked at him.

“Thank you for your concern, but I assure you I am more than capable of making sure this goes off perfectly. Do you want this done before or after my trip?”

“Priority list and priority ones before,” Zeus said. “The rest can wait.”
“Yes, sir,” Chrysa said. She stood up, and a wave of her hand had a shadow stealing the black binder away to the hidden safe in her Underworld office. She gestured towards the exit to the park. “I have two hours before I can return. Lunch?”

“I can’t,” Zeus said apologetically. “My wife is supposed to be meeting me shortly, and she will notice if my main essence is not present.”

Chrysa nodded.

“Very well. I’ll go read my new book then. I might even be able to rank a few persons from it before I head home.”

She’d need the time to let her instincts as Leuke resettle. She didn’t want her children to accidentally meet the cold-blooded killer she knew she could be.

Chrysa turned and walked away from the bench, not going toward the entrance to the park, but further in, until she was surrounded by enough trees that it was easy to step into shadow without anyone seeing her.

She reappeared in her office, the green-flamed torches lighting as soon as they detected her presence in the room. She wandered around her desk, reached out towards the back wall and slid her hand through solid stone until she could grab the binder her father had just given her. A hint of power, and it was just as intangible as her hand, so she grabbed it and pulled it through the wall. Her flesh and the binder rematerialized once they were out in the open of her office.

She sat down at her desk, thankful once more for the mortals that had discovered how to make desk chairs so comfortable and ergonomic. She really needed to make sure that whoever it was went to Elysium simply for saving her from back pain. She opened the binder and began reading through it.

On the outside, very few of the men and women included seemed suspicious. Some were businessmen, some were politicians, some were legal ‘fixers.’ It didn’t matter much in the grand scheme of things. It would affect her planning, but not their deaths, nor their afterlives. Anyone killed by her blade (or bullet or bare hands or anything else) would automatically be branded with the traitor’s mark, so long as she did not actively try to avoid it.

That had only happened a few times. Usually she was good enough at what she did to avoid collateral damage, but the few times she’d had to end innocents who had interfered with her assignments, she had made sure they weren’t condemned for their relative/employer/random acquaintance’s actions. Assuming they were true innocents, she would then ensure that they went to Elysium, not simply the grayness of Asphodel.

Once she had finished reading through the binder – fifty-seven names, Kronos’ reach was long – she closed her eyes and connected with her shadows. It was time to find out what they knew.

When she came back to herself, fifty-seven names’ worth of secrets and routines embedded in her head, she found Hades there staring at her.

“The children are worried,” he told her. “You left Grimmauld Place hours ago.”

“I had something that needed taking care of,” Chrysa replied. “It was safer to do it here. You, Seph, and Hecate are the only ones who can get through the wards on my door.”

“Was the information you needed really so urgent that you couldn’t tell your children goodbye?” Hades asked with a raised eyebrow. “They said you went to the bathroom and didn’t come back.”
“It was,” Chrysa said. She didn’t elaborate.

Hades nodded to the binder still on her lap.

“Does it have to do with that?”

“It does.”

Hades studied her closed-off expression for a moment. She hated it when he did that. He could read her better than anyone, even when she relied on Leuke’s coldness to mask her emotions.

“A new job from your father?” he asked.

“Several,” Chrysa said shortly. She flicked her wrist to summon the Elder Wand to her hand, then tapped it on the binder, mentally transferring the information she’d learned on each of her targets into the binder. Then she stood, walked back over to the back wall, and shoved the binder through to the safe once more.

She withdrew her hand, closed her eyes, and took a deep breath. She felt Hades wrap his arms around her.

“You do not walk alone, my love,” he said into her ear.

Chrysa looked over her shoulder to look into his eyes.

“But I do, my love,” she said. “When it comes to these things, I always walk alone. It’s the only way to protect you all.”

“I am a god, love,” Hades reminded. “I do not need your protection.”

“Your body may not, but your mind does,” Chrysa said softly, pressing a fleeting kiss to his lips. “I am made for this. You are not. You are accustomed to much of it, but you are not so cold as I, my beloved, no matter how others may see you. You rule death, but I bring it.”

“You are shadow, Leuke Chrysocomê,” Hades said firmly. “The secret-holder. A spy can easily become an assassin, but it is not who you are. You are not what you do.”

“I am a goddess, am I not?” Chrysa said. “I am what I do, and I do what I am. It is our nature.”

Hades sighed.

“You say that I am more than the dead that I rule, am I not?”

“Of course,” she said, offended that he would think otherwise.

“Then likewise are you more than the shadows and shadows that you rule,” Hades said firmly.

Chrysa smiled tiredly at him.

“Thank you, love,” she said. “I…I needed that. Once I embrace the coldness, it’s hard to let it go again. I didn’t want our children to see that part of me, so I came here.”

“They’ll have to know someday,” Hades pointed out.

“Not yet,” Chrysa said. “Not now. They’re still children. They can find out that most of the immortal world – our pantheon or not – is rightfully terrified by me. Word has probably spread
amongst everyone that I’m alive again now. I should probably drop by India and visit Chaya, or Mexico for Tezcatlipoca.”

“Don’t forget Nótt and Hodr,” Hades reminded. “They’re in Boston now, I think. At least that’s where the Valhalla entrance is currently.”

Chrysa perked up.

“Do you think Odin would try to murder me again if I, ah, visited?” she asked, intrigued.

Hades patted her shoulder.

“Let’s not potentially start an inter-pantheon war until after we’ve dealt with the current one,” he suggested.

“Fine,” Chrysa said with a mock pout.

Hades smiled at her.

“Go back to the children, love. The work can at least wait until you’re back in the US.”

“I’ll try,” Chrysa said with a sigh. She kissed Hades once more, then shadowed back to Grimmauld Place.

“Sorry about that,” she announced as she moved into the family room where her family was. “There was some business I had to take care of.”

“What kind of business?” Nico asked.

She tapped his nose.

“Godly business. But I’m back for now, though it’s always possible for me to get called away again. I only managed to get the 22nd through the 25th completely off.”

“We were just about to introduce Nico and Bianca to Wizarding Monopoly,” Sirius said with a large grin. “Do you want to play?”

Wizarding Monopoly was an invention of George Weasley, though Chrysa had inspired it. It was similar to Muggle Monopoly, but they were playing for properties like Hogwarts and Hogsmeade as opposed to Broadway and Park Place; the bank was Gringotts and losing too miserably could result in enslavement by the goblins; and the board and other players could start shooting spells at you depending on the card they drew. The pieces had been changed to a pointy hat, a cauldron, an owl, a train engine, a cat, a toad, a wand, and a broomstick.

“I call the broomstick,” Chrysa said, plopping down on the floor next to the board. “And I’m going to cream all of you.”

“Bring it on,” Sirius challenged.

In the end, Nico and Bianca ended up teaming up and bankrupting all of them within the first hour, and then spent the next five furiously driving each other towards bankruptcy. Chrysa declared it a draw when they were down to ten Galleons each and still fighting furiously.

They went back to New York on New Year’s, timing it just right so that they rang in the New Year in London before Portkeying to New York, bundling up in several layers with warming charms on
top, and then heading out to Times Square. Chrysa had reservations at an exclusive Wizarding platform above Times Square – invisible to the No-Maj citizens, but with a perfect view of the ball drop. Spells ensured that they could hear the entirety of the Rockin’ New Year’s Eve concert. Bianca and Nico started to droop not long after they got there, but half-doses of Pepper-Up Potion for each of them ensured that they were able to last the rest of the night and still went to sleep afterwards.

After the New Year, Chrysa had to dive straight into registering both children for school. She made sure that they were set up to go to the same school Percy was at – though they were in lower grades. Nico was in fifth while Bianca was in seventh.

It took a bit of trial and error, but she was eventually able to figure out how to set up timers to go off when she was in the shadow world so that she’d know that it was time to leave and return home to greet her children when they came home from school.

A week after school began, she left them in Sally’s care and traveled to the Underworld.

Nyx was waiting for her at the entrance to Tartarus.

“Are you ready for this, thrémma?” Nyx asked. There was no worry in her voice. Night did not worry. But there was the faintest hint of…concern?…for Chrysa’s well-being.

“Even the Pit cannot touch a shadow, especially when the shadow is accompanied by Night herself,” Chrysa said, hoping her voice held all the confidence that she didn’t entirely feel.

Nyx nodded, and they headed down into the depths.

Unlike mortals who were attempting to survive Tartarus, neither of them needed to drink from the Phlegethon to heal from the hardships of Tartarus. Nyx was a primordial, and while Chrysa’s body was mortal, she held the power of a goddess, and that protected her from Tartarus, even though the Primordial himself didn’t like her that much.

Leuke might have been willing to fight Tartarus when he ventured from his pit to the Dark Council meetings, but not even she would dare to attempt to fight a protogenos within his domain. That was the height of foolishness. No, it was much better if she and Tartarus stayed far, far away from each other.

Thankfully, Nyx was enough of a safeguard to keep Tartarus away from her during this little adventure.

Their first stop was the cage that Kronos had escaped eighteen months before. It no longer existed. Tartarus had consumed it.

Iapetus was still firmly in his cage, and started screaming obscenities at them when they came by. He’d always been hot-tempered, though Leuke had preferred him to all of his brothers but her father. His temper cooled faster than the others, and he was more forgiving than all the rest.

Krios and Hyperion’s chains were both weaker than they should be, so Chrysa made sure to strengthen them before moving on. It wouldn’t hold them forever, but the longer they stayed in Tartarus, the better.

Koios was gone.

Chrysa cursed the entire way out of Tartarus, pausing only to bid her tróphos farewell. She stepped into the shadows and appeared in Hades’ dining room a moment later.
Her sense of timing was apparently off – no surprise, time was always weird in Tartarus – so he and Persephone weren’t present. She checked the bedroom on her way to his office – no one was there either. Her third guess was correct: Hades was doing paperwork in his office.

“I’m back,” she announced before collapsing into a chair.

He put his paperwork aside.

“It’s been two and a half weeks,” he told her. “Nico’s birthday is tomorrow. Report?”

“Iapetus, Krios, and Hyperion are still chained,” she told him. “Krios’ and Hyperion’s were weaker than they should be. I attempted to strengthen them, but I don’t know how long they’ll hold. Koios was gone.”

Hades cursed as well.

“That will make things more difficult for us.”

“Indeed,” Chrysa nodded.

“Are you heading to Olympus next?”

“Briefly,” Chrysa sighed. “Father needs to know. But then I’m going home. I need to rest, and I refuse to sleep through Nico’s birthday. It’s the first birthday since I was Maria di Angelo. Everyone’s coming for it. Assuming you can make it.”

“No promises,” Hades said, “but I’ll try. Will you be leaving them again soon?”

“I’m going to try to take care of everything during the school day, but I’ll talk to Sally about watching them if I need to be gone longer,” Chrysa said.

She leaned over his desk and kissed him briefly.

“See you tomorrow.”

“See you tomorrow,” Hades said.

Chrysa stepped into another shadow and out on Olympus. She stumbled as she exited.

Hera raised an eyebrow at her.

“If you’re tired enough to stumble, you shouldn’t shadow-travel again,” she told her.

“I know,” Chrysa said with a sigh. “I’ll call a cab to take me home. Or I’ll put on a Disillusionment charm and just fly.”

“I’ll arrange something,” Hera said. “My husband is in Ganymede’s rooms, so you should probably just yell loudly if you don’t want to see something you can’t unsee.”

The woman swept away, gold robes flying out behind her. Chrysa watched her go before turning the other direction and heading for the rooms allotted to Zeus’ cupbearer. She banged on the door loudly and yelled, “Father! It’s Chrysa! I need to talk to you!”

She heard muffled cursing from behind the door. She suppressed a smirk.

Her father opened the door a moment later. He hadn’t bothered getting dressed properly; he’d
merely put on a bathrobe. Over his shoulder, she could see Ganymede on the bed, covered by a sheet.

“What?” her father said.

“I just got back from Tartarus,” Chrysa reminded. “Kronos’ cage is completely gone. Iapetus is still chained. Krios’ and Hyperion’s bonds were weakening. Koios is gone.”

Zeus cursed again.

“Are you going to track him down?”

“Yes,” Chrysa said. “No matter how long it takes.”

Zeus nodded shortly.

“Let me know if you need anything. And let me know when you’re done.”

“I will,” Chrysa said. “Go back to…that. I’m going home to sleep. Tomorrow’s my son’s birthday, so please don’t have any emergencies I’m needed for.”

“I will attempt not to,” Zeus said drily before closing the door in her face.

Chrysa found a pegasus waiting at the foot of the steps to the palace.

“Are you here for me?” she asked.

The pegasus bobbed its head up and down.

“Did Queen Hera tell you where I live?”

She bobbed her head again.

“May I mount?” Chrysa asked.

The pegasus nodded a third time.

Chrysa mounted with the ease of many hours of practice – mostly done on her breaks from Hogwarts when she’d been living with Sirius and Remus. The Blacks owned a castle that had a pegasus stable. She’d gone riding there many times. She’d also ridden as Maria, growing up as she did.

She’d never been fond of riding when she was Leuke. It was always too slow for her.

She was back home only minutes later, thanks to the pegasus’ speed.

“Thank you for your assistance,” Chrysa said as she dismounted.

The pegasus whinnied before wheeling about and flying back toward Olympus.

Chrysa made her way downstairs and into her bedroom. She didn’t even bother to change before collapsing into bed.

She was woken up a few hours later by her children coming home. They obviously caught sight of her jacket thrown over the couch, as Nico yelled, “Mamma!” and sprinted into her room, followed closely by Bianca.

The next day, Sirius, Remus, Teddy, James, Albus, and Lily all arrived by Portkey for Nico’s
birthday. It was a Wednesday, so it was only a small party, but they were planning on going to an amusement park over the weekend with Nico and some of his friends from school. For Nico’s birthday itself, it was just a family party, with dinner, cake, presents, balloons – the works.

For dinner, Chrysa made all of Nico’s favorite foods in proper Italian style.

“Buon compleanno, tesoro,” she told him when his face lit up at seeing the food.

“Grazie, Mamma,” he replied happily.

They’d made it through dinner and Nico had just blown out the candles on his cake when there was a tapping at the window. Teddy scrambled out of his chair and opened the window to allow in a barn owl, who had a letter grasped in its talons. The owl flew straight to Nico and dropped the letter in his lap.

Chrysa’s eyes widened. It couldn’t be…

Her son looked down at the parchment envelope.

“Nico di Angelo,” he read. “It even has my bedroom on it, Mamma!”

Chrysa smiled widely at him. Sirius and Remus were doing the same. Teddy was practically bouncing in his chair.

“Open it, tesoro,” Chrysa encouraged.

Nico opened the envelope and pulled out the pieces of parchment inside.

“Ilvermorny School of Witchcraft and Wizardry,” he read out. “Mr. di Angelo, we are pleased to inform you that you have been accepted at Ilvermorny School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Please find enclosed a list of necessary books and equipment. Term begins on September 1. We expect your owl no later than July 31. I’m…I’m a wizard?” he asked, looking up at Chrysa.

Sirius and Teddy both started cheering.

“It seems so, tesoro,” Chrysa said with a smile. “Now I suppose your decision must be whether you want to go to magic school or stay here and be homeschooled, and whether or not you want to go to school here in the US or whether you want me to transfer you to Hogwarts, where I went to school.”

“Come to Hogwarts!” Teddy exclaimed. “You’ll be in my year! It’ll be so much fun! Pleeeeease!”


“I’ll…I’ll think about it,” Nico said, though there was a dazed smile on his face.

The rest of the party went by quickly. Despite Remus’ best efforts, Chrysa was relatively sure that Teddy had managed to pester Nico about coming to Hogwarts again. The rest of Nico’s presents didn’t compare to the fact that he had the opportunity to go to magic school.

The rest of the week went by similarly. On Saturday, Chrysa and Hades escorted Nico, Bianca, and four of Nico’s friends to a year-round amusement park nearby. It was mostly eight hours of chasing after six hyperactive children pumped up on sugar as they ran around the park. Chrysa laughed at how exhausted her consort became. Persephone called her once he’d returned to the Underworld, cackling about he’d collapsed on a couch and stayed there.

As soon as her children left on Monday, Chrysa armed herself and started on her high-priority list.
She’d identified fifteen of the fifty-seven names that needed near-immediate attention. The difficult part wasn’t killing them – the difficult part was making it look like an accident. Well, it would be difficult if she wasn’t experienced. She was very experienced at being creative.

Of the fifteen, one got E. coli, one drove his luxury car off a cliff, a third was shot by his mistress after she found out about the other mistress. Number four had a freak accident with a chain saw, number five drowned in the hot tub, number six fell down concrete stairs due to her six-inch heels and broke her neck, and number seven went skydiving and had a parachute failure. The next one discovered he had an allergy to caviar after he ate it. Number nine died of a previously-undiscovered brain tumor. Number ten, eleven, and twelve died in drunk driving accidents nearly simultaneously. Thankfully, they all lived on different continents, so it was unlikely anyone but their mutual employers would notice. Number thirteen’s husband caught her having an affair with number fourteen, and then proceeded to stab them both several times. Number fifteen had the unfortunate luck to have his death planned while Chrysa was watching Saturday morning cartoons with Nico, and therefore had a grand piano fall on his head Looney Tunes-style.

They all died within the first week of February. By Valentine’s Day, Chrysa was down to twenty-four targets. By the end of the month, the original fifty-seven were dead, and Zeus provided her with thirty more. These were simultaneously easier and more difficult: these were godlings. Their defenses were stronger than the mortals, and they were harder to find, but they were easier to kill. She didn’t have to bother with accidents. She simply used her favorite knife – or sometimes one of her other weapons, if she was bored – to end them.

Occasionally she’d use her darker talents to retrieve information from them before their deaths. No one knew everything, but each of them knew something. Leuke knew how to put those pieces together, and she knew how to use them to search for more pieces. Slowly, but surely, she figured out the enemy’s plans.

Of course, Kronos had realized that she was hunting, so he started changing things up on her. However, he wasn’t used to having to hide things from Leuke, his Left Hand, his assassin, and so didn’t do nearly as good a job as he thought.

By the time she headed back to her summer home – the Underworld – she was feeling much better about the coming war. She even planned to take a week off to get her children used to Underworld living. They weren’t quite capable of shadow-traveling on their own yet, but Makaria and Zagreus had been more than willing to take their baby brother and sister to school if need be.

Melinoe still hadn’t met them. She seemed to be avoiding them just as much as she avoided Chrysa. However, not that her children were safely in the Underworld, Chrysa knew that she’d soon have to start taking the longer information-gathering jobs Zeus was pushing for. They were necessary, and she was the best-poised to do them. She couldn’t put it off for much longer.
Nico and the Underworld

Chapter Summary

This covers all the important bits that happen between Titan's Curse and Battle of the Labyrinth proper.

Chapter Notes

This chapter did not want to be written, but it's finally done. I'm hoping the next one goes faster since I'm properly into Battle of Labyrinth. Happy Independence Day, my fellow Americans! As for everyone else, Happy Alice in Wonderland Day!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Nico made his decision two weeks before the spring equinox, a week before when he, Bianca, and Mamma would move down to Papà’s palace in the Underworld.

“I want to go to Hogwarts,” he told Mamma.

She nodded from behind the desk in her office, looking unsurprised at his presence despite the fact that it was five o’clock in the morning and he usually wasn’t awake for another hour. “Alright then. I’ll contact Headmistress McGonagall, and then send your rejection to Ilvermorny. I doubt there’s going to be any problems, especially considering who I am and my position in Wizarding society over there. And the fact that Minerva likes me.”

“Minerva?” Nico asked.

“Headmistress Minerva McGonagall,” Mamma said. She opened a drawer in her desk and pulled out a piece of thick paper – not paper, parchment, she said the Wizarding World used parchment – a silver inkpot, and a black quill. She dipped the quill in the inkpot and began to write in a more elaborate fashion than her normal handwriting. Since it was cursive, upside-down, and English, Nico had no idea what she was writing. “She’s seventy-three years old, fought in the First and Second Wizarding Wars, and taught every witch or wizard in Britain who’s between the ages of twenty-three and seventy. And she’s been Headmistress for everyone between the ages of twelve and twenty-three. She’s very well known, very well respected, and one of the strongest witches I know. But she likes me. She liked my parents too, even if James and Sirius did their very best to drive her grey early.”

Nico felt his forehead wrinkle.

“But James is five,” he objected.

Mamma smiled sadly at him.

“But your cousin James. My father James. Little James is named after him, just like Lily is named after my mother. James was your Nonno’s best friend. All of your cousins were named after people
who were lost. Teddy was named after cousin Andromeda’s husband, who died shortly before he was born. Al was named after Albus Dumbledore, the former Headmaster of Hogwarts who died in the war, and Severus Snape, who did the same.”

“Why dead people?” Nico asked.

“So that they’d always be remembered,” Mamma said. “It can be hard, naming your children after someone who’s gone, but it’s a way of remembering them as well. Before I talk to Minerva, I have a question for you: do you want to go to Hogwarts as Nico di Angelo or as Nico Potter-Black?”

“Does it matter?” Nico asked.

“Both have upsides and downsides,” Mamma said. “As Nico di Angelo, there wouldn’t be as many expectations on you. But everyone would assume you’re a Muggleborn, which you technically are, since Maria di Angelo was a Muggle. There’s less prejudice than there used to be, but there is still some prejudice against Muggleborns. As Nico Potter-Black, you’d have the protection of two different Pureblood Houses, as well as my name in general, but you’d also have the expectations of being Amaranth Potter-Black’s son on you. There would also be questions about where you came from, since you’re eleven and I’m twenty-eight, though I suppose we could pretend you were born during my year on the run. But you’d be under scrutiny, and expectations, and possibly threats as well. The wards of Hogwarts will keep you safe from any – well, most – monsters that might try to harm you, but as ardently as most of the Wizarding World adores me, the other percentage hates me with equal fervor.”

“But everyone would know that you’re my Mamma?” Nico asked.

“Everyone would know,” Mamma confirmed.

“I want people to know,” Nico said stubbornly. “Even if it’s harder for me. You’re my mother, and I don’t want to pretend you’re not. And Teddy’s my cousin and I don’t want to pretend that I don’t know him.”

“Very well then,” Mamma said, leaning in to kiss his forehead. “Minerva should be in her office at the moment.”

“But it’s so early!” Nico protested.

“Time difference, tesoro,” his mother laughed. “Classes should already be in session in Britain. Why don’t you go get dressed so I can introduce you to the Headmistress?”

He hurried back to his room and threw clothes on before returning, only to be sent back to his room and told to dress nicer, since this meeting would be important.

Once his mother judged his outfit appropriate, she grabbed a pinch of green powder from the jar atop the mantle of the fireplace, flicked her fingers towards the fireplace – causing it to suddenly ignite – and threw the green powder into the fire. The flames turned emerald green, nearly the same shade of green as his mother’s eyes.

“Hogwarts, Headmistress’ Office!” Mamma called out, before nearly giving Nico a heart attack by dropping to her knees and sticking her head into the flames. The only thing that stopped him from pulling her away was that she didn’t seem hurt…and he could hear her talking, though he couldn’t make out the words.

A minute later, Mamma pulled her head from the fire, brushed the soot out of her hair, and stood to her feet. The fire remained green.
“Minerva’s free at the moment,” Mamma said. “She’s invited us to come through.”

“Come through?” Nico asked warily.

Mamma looked surprised.

“I’m sorry, _tesoro_! I forgot how jarring it can be to see someone talking through the Floo. Wizards use fireplaces connected to the Floo network as both a communication device and means of transportation. If you just stick your head in, you’ll simply talk to the person on the other side, but if you step into the fire and call out your destination, you’ll be transported to their fireplace.”

“Is that how we’re getting there?” Nico asked apprehensively.

His mother smiled grimly.

“Unfortunately, yes. It’s less nauseating that Apparition, but a bit messier. I tend to trip out of fireplaces, however. We’ll go through together, to be sure you don’t get lost. My first Floo trip, I ended up in the bad part of the Wizarding shopping district.”

She offered him her hand.

Nico took it unhesitatingly, and didn’t protest as she pulled him close to her and then into the emerald fire. A moment later, she was pulling him out of the fire and into a large, well-lit stone room. There was a desk atop a dais where an elderly woman in long green robes and a pointed hat sat, though she rose at their entrance.

“Darling, this is Professor Minerva McGonagall, Headmistress of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry,” Mamma said. “Minerva, this is my son, Nico.”

“How do you do?” the woman said, smiling at Nico before looking up at his mother.

“So, do you care to explain, Amaranth?”

“I’ve been reincarnated,” Mamma said bluntly. “I remember my past lives. Nico was my son in my past life, but he ended up trapped in a place where time does not pass. He was freed last summer and celebrated his eleventh birthday in January. We were surprised when he received an invitation to Ilvermory. However, Nico has expressed an interest in attending Hogwarts, since it is my alma mater, and his cousin will be attending as well.”

The elderly witch raised her eyebrows.

“You want to make me deal with a Potter-Black and a Black-Lupin in the same year? After already surviving the Marauders and your series of adventures?”

His mother smiled winningly.

“I’m sure it will be nothing you can’t handle,” she replied.

The Headmistress let out a laugh.

“Who am I to refuse Hogwarts’ Champion?” she said. She moved over to her desk and pulled out a few pieces of parchment, then pulled out a quill and began writing on one.

Mamma grimaced.

“Please don’t call me that.”
Minerva McGonagall paused and looked up at her, eyebrows raised again.

“I could call you ‘the Savior of the Wizarding World,’ or ‘the Woman-Who-Conquered,’ if you’d prefer.”

“How about Amaranth Potter-Black?” Mamma asked, looking pained.

“I suppose that will have to do, Lady Potter. Will your son be using your last name, or the one he was born with? Since I doubt that was the same as yours is now.”

“Potter-Black,” Nico said firmly. “I want people to know that I’m Mamma’s.”

Mamma kissed the top of his head.

The Headmistress simply watched the exchange.

“Potter-Black it is,” she said. “Is ‘Nico’ your full first name?”

“It’s Niccolò,” Mamma said. “Do you need his full name for the rolls?”

“Please. I’ll list Nico Potter-Black as his use-name, but I need his full name to magically enroll him in the school.”

“Niccolò Salvatore di Angelo,” Mamma said immediately.

The Headmistress wrote it down, then frowned.

“The roll isn’t recognizing the name. Is that his full name, in magical terms, not just legal ones?”

Mamma frowned, then froze before her face twisted and she muttered something that Nico was sure he wasn’t supposed to repeat…not that he knew what it meant, since it wasn’t in English, Italian, or Ancient Greek.

“It’s his full legal name, but I think I know why magic won’t recognize it,” his mother said with a sigh. “When Nico and his sister were born, I was…well, I was in hiding. My family was important, and it would have been too much of a scandal if one of the daughters of the family – even the only daughter of the known wild-child – showed up pregnant, out of wedlock, at only nineteen, and I couldn’t simply say that I’d been sleeping with a god and be done with it.”

The Headmistress started. Nico did as well, but for different reasons than the witch.

“A god?” she questioned.

“One of the Greek ones,” Mamma agreed. “That is information I would prefer to keep quiet, if you please.”

“Of course,” the Headmistress said immediately.

Nic wasn’t sure if it was because his mother was amazing, terrifying, or the fear of angering a god. He was leaning towards it being all on his mother.

“di Angelo isn’t our last name?” he asked.

“Not really,” Mamma admitted. “It was the name I went by for a good portion of my life, but it was my mother’s husband’s name, not my own. And it was never my mother’s name either; her second
marriage was morganatic – which means that since *Mamma* was of a higher rank than *Papà*, they were married in a way that meant that *Papà* couldn’t claim *Mamma’s* titles or inheritance – so she never took his last name.”

Nico knew the explanation was for him.

“What is our last name?” he asked.

“Buonoparte di Savoia,” his mother said quietly.

The Headmistress choked. Nico wasn’t sure why. His mother continued quickly.

“Nico’s full name is Niccolò Salvatore Vittorio Michele Buonoparte di Savoia. I want him to be referred to as Nico Potter-Black. Niccolò if it is truly necessary. I do not want his full name in any other documentation, and I would prefer to have the di Angelo name hidden as well. The harder it is to find my son outside of Hogwarts, the better.”

Headmistress McGonagall recovered her composure and said, “Of course. However, we will be discussing this later, Amaranth.”

Mamma sighed.

“As you wish. But not now. Now is for enrolling Nico in Hogwarts.”

“Birthdate?” the Headmistress asked, quill poised over the parchment.

“January 28, 1935,” Mamma said. “He didn’t actually turn eleven until a few months ago, due to the magical stasis.”

“Graduated a decade ago and you’re still causing problems,” the elderly witch sighed.

“I never technically graduated, since I was on the run for my entire seventh year,” Mamma pointed out. She looked over at Nico. “You are required to graduate, unless you have a Dark Lord specifically targeting you who has already taken over Hogwarts.”

“Don’t tempt fate,” the Headmistress said. “Knowing your family’s luck, I wouldn’t doubt it could happen again.”

“I hope not,” his mother said. “We have enough problems in our world without problems in this one.”

The Headmistress paused in her writing to look at his mother searchingly. Finally, she sighed and went back to her parchment. “At least the problems you’re causing me now are more paperwork and fewer Dark wizard attacks,” Headmistress McGonagall sighed. “I’ll make sure that the accessible roll has his birthdate listed as 1998, just as it will avoid his full name and *either* of his actual surnames. I’ll also do my best to divert any questions, though I may have to tell Filius.”

“I’m fine with Professor Flitwick and Neville knowing,” Mamma said. “I know they can be trusted. Everyone else I would prefer not know, for secrecy’s sake. The more people who know…”

“…the more likely it is to get out, yes, I do remember how secret-keeping works, Amaranth,” the witch behind the desk said. She signed the bottom of the parchment, flicked her wand at it, and then folded it and sealed it with candle wax and a large seal with Hogwarts’ crest on it.

“The roll is complete,” the Headmistress said. “Now there’s just one more thing…”
She dug around in her desk for a moment before pulling out another piece of parchment, which she handed to Nico. The top of the page read, “Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry: Supply List.” Below, it listed everything that first year students would require.

“Thank you, Minerva,” his mother said with a smile.

“Of course, Amaranth,” the elder witch smiled back. “I couldn’t imagine your son attending school anywhere but Hogwarts, even if he was born to your previous incarnation.”


The Headmistress smiled back at him.

“You’re very welcome, Mr. di Angelo – or should I say, Mr. Potter-Black. I hope to see you on September 1st…though I dearly hope I won’t be seeing you in this office as often as your mother managed to visit.”

“I wasn’t that bad,” his mother protested as Nico laughed.

The Headmistress ended up inviting them to stay for lunch, but Mamma declined, since Nico had to get ready to go to school, which hadn’t started yet in New York due to the time difference. Nico honestly wished he could skip – he’d love to see the castle that he’d be attending school in next fall – but didn’t protest too much. Bianca would worry if she woke up and neither of them were home.

One week later, Nico, Bianca, and Mamma moved down to Papà’s palace in the Underworld. Mamma ran over their new daily schedule with them as they walked through the halls.

“We’ll shadow-travel to the apartment every morning, and from there you’ll go to school as normal, and come home as normal. Until you two can shadow yourselves, someone trusted – me, your father, Zagreus or Makaria – will take you home and pick you up in the evenings. After school, you’ll either have your extracurricular activities or you’ll go back to the apartment and train with Percy until five, at which point someone will pick you up and bring you back here for dinner, unless there’s something going on that night, in which case Sally has agreed to feed you and keep an eye on you overnight,” his mother explained. “On weekends, you’ll either train with me or you’ll train in Elysium.”

“Why are we training so much?” Bianca asked.

Mamma stopped short.

“There’s a war coming, my darlings,” she said quietly, reaching out to place a hand on each of their faces. “I will do whatever it takes to make sure you survive it, even if that means training you into the ground. I would rather you never have to fight at all, but I’m not so naïve to think that will happen. I’ve never been that lucky.”

Training was hard. While Nico focused on a sword and Bianca focused on her bow and arrows, Mamma made sure that they were capable of fighting with all weapons. Papà recruited the greatest heroes of their ages to train them: Perseus, Theseus, Achilles. Mamma expanded on the recruitment by adding in swordsmen and bowmen from more modern times, as well as recently-deceased soldiers who could teach them how to use guns. Neither of them particularly liked guns, though they were both decent shots, and Bianca turned out terrifying with a sniper rifle. Mamma said that it was important to know how to shoot, even if very few people in their world used guns.

The only interesting thing that happened before summer was a monster attack while they were at the
mall. Bianca was in the middle of a growth spurt and needed new clothes, and she’d dragged both Nico and Percy along to carry things. She’d also occasionally turned them into dress-up dolls, and promptly informed Percy that Mamma’s AmEx was buying, so he could shut up and try on what she told him to.

They had just exited Macy’s, Percy and Nico loaded down with bags while Bianca walked ahead of them, intent on their next destination. They were hoping to purchase Mamma’s birthday present early, since they knew the summer would be busy. Nico was also hoping to find something else for Bianca, since her birthday was in less than a week. He and Mamma had already gone shopping, but he wanted to get his sister something that he’d found on his own as well.

They had no warning. It was only Percy’s battle-honed instincts that had him pulling Nico to the floor and yelling a warning to Bianca, who dropped to the ground in time to avoid the ball of fire that went through where her head had just been.

Nico fumbled for the Stygian Iron sword glamoured at his hip. Mamma had insisted that he and Bianca be armed wherever they went, even school, but Stygian Iron apparently didn’t hide as other objects like celestial bronze and Olympian silver could, so their weapons weren’t hidden like Percy’s sword/pen. Instead, Mamma had enlisted Hecate for semi-permanent Mist/magic glamours to hide the weapons in most situations and to hide their true appearance in other situations. He was glad she’d insisted on it now.

Percy already had his sword out and had charged one of the…some sort of giants? They certainly weren’t normal-person-sized. And they were throwing flaming bowling balls. Nico rolled out of the way of another one, before finally managing to unsheathe his sword and charge at one of the giants.

There had been over a dozen originally, but Percy had made short work of four of them, while Bianca was firing arrows at the rest. They didn’t always hit their mark, due to the flaming bowling balls, but she was doing a great job of finding the holes in their armor.

Nico kicked at the unarmored part of the back of his giant’s knee, causing him to yell out and rage and crumble. He thrust his sword into the now-reachable chest of the giant, watching in fascination as the monster’s essence was absorbed into the black blade.

He yanked his sword out of the remnants of the giant’s armor, which was quickly fading to dust, and moved on to another giant. This one noticed him before he could attack, so Nico spent most of his time dodging flaming bowling balls before being able to slash at the monster’s hand, which caused it to dissipate.

He took on his third giant head-on again. Percy was across the center aisle on the other side of the mall, engaged in a yelling match with the giant. Percy was calling him…Joe Bob? Bianca was occupied with a giant of her own, who had gotten close enough that she’d shoulder her bow and instead pulled out the long knives (or were they short swords?) that Mamma had trained her to use.

The third giant Nico faced was smarter than the others. He was more obviously afraid of his black blade, and he did his best not to let Nico get close enough to use it.

It was a frustrating fight.

It finally ended with an arrow protruding from the center of the giant’s forehead. Nico turned to see his sister lowering her bow.

“Do you think it’s time to call Mamma?” she asked.
Percy trotted over, sword already turned back into a pen.

"If she’s available," he said. "Chrysa’s always good to have around when you need to clean up a mess. Nico and I’ll grab the bags, you call her."

Bianca nodded and pulled out her cell phone – well, it wasn’t technically a cell phone. It didn’t run on the cellular network, after all. It was on the same sort of network that Thanatos used to run his lists of the deceased, and that the Furies used to track down their prey. While the others on the network could connect to normal cell signal, Mamma had made sure that his and Bianca’s phones could not. She didn’t want them to be even more of a target then they already were.

Mamma didn’t show up, but she sent one of her attendants instead.


"Um, hi," Percy said. "Who are you?"

"This is Logos," Bianca introduced. "God of stories. He’s one of Mamma’s attendants."

"My siblings and I determined that I would be the best to weave a story around what happened here," Logos said mildly.

He always said everything mildly, unless he was telling a story. Then he’d wrap you in with his words that it was hard to get out. Mamma had scolded him loudly the first time she’d found Nico sitting with him. Nico was embarrassed to admit that he probably wouldn’t have gotten out of the story-trance without her. Logos had been very careful with his stories since then.

"Thank you, Logos," Bianca said. "We’ll take our stuff and go back to the apartment."

"Mom’s not supposed to pick us up for another hour," Percy pointed out.

Nico and Bianca exchanged glances.

"We can do something about that," Nico said.

Mamma had mentioned that she’d already introduced them, but Percy still looked a bit freaked out when Nico summoned Jules-Albert, their zombie chauffeur. He shifted uncomfortably the entire ride back to the apartment building.

Mamma was waiting with Sally in their apartment.

"Oh," Percy said as soon as they walked in. "Tonight’s the dinner with Paul, isn’t it?"

"Indeed it is," Mamma said, rising from her seat in the living room and coming over to hug them. She looked Nico over once she pulled away. "None of you are hurt?"

"Not a scratch," Nico said proudly.

"I need to practice with my knives more," Bianca grumbled.

"Well, lucky for you, passerotta, I’ve made plans for that," Mamma said. "I’ve spoken with my sister Phiale. She serves as one of Artemis’ Hunters and leads one of their semi-permanent bases in Montana. She agreed to let you visit for a few weeks during the summer, if you’re willing."

Bianca lit up.
“That sounds great! I’ll get to train with the Hunters? Living Hunters?”

“Living Hunters, not just dead ones,” Mamma said. She smiled sadly at Nico. “Unfortunately, I have to leave as well right after school gets out, so it’ll just be you and your Papà for a while.”

“Where are you going, Chrysa?” Percy asked, plopping down on the loveseat beside his mother. Nico and Bianca took the couch while Mamma sat back down in her chair.

“I can’t say,” she said apologetically. “I’ll be back in the Underworld on the summer solstice,” she said, looking over at Nico, “but I can’t say how long I’ll stay.”

“What’s happening on the solstice?” Nico asked.

“The Dark Council will be meeting,” Mamma said. “Formally, instead of just meet-and-greets, for the first time in nearly thirty-four hundred years.”

“What’s the Dark Council?” Sally asked.

“The Council for the darker deities,” Mamma explained. “It’s older than the Olympian Council, since most of our members are far older than the Olympians. We’re also not limited to twelve. From what I’ve heard, the Protogenoi will not be attending, so instead it will simply be thirty-six ancient, Dark deities in one room to discuss a war that they all may or may not be participating in.”

“That sounds dangerous,” Percy said with a frown. “Will you be safe?”

Mamma smiled at him.

“Perfectly. They know better than to attempt to touch me in the Underworld. Not only are my powers strongest there, but I also have an innate connection to the Underworld. No one would be so foolish as to harm me in the middle of it. Besides,” she shrugged, “we knew from the start that our meetings could be more…ah…volatile than other Council meetings. Our Council chamber is etched with so many spells of peace and protection that it’s hard to raise your voice in there, much less a weapon.”

“Didn’t you die in the Underworld the first time?” Percy pointed out.

Mamma waved his concern aside.

“Unrelated. My murderers were young and stupid, barely even born before they went after me. The older deities know better. Besides, they live in the Underworld. Regicide is very much discouraged when the monarch is innately connected to the place where you live. I’m told that the Underworld was wracked by earthquakes – which then affected the surface – for years. It took Hades, Nyx, and Erebos all they had just to keep the Underworld from collapsing and merging the Earth and Tartarus. The entirety of the Underworld infrastructure was destroyed. At the very least, by virtue of not wanting the roof to fall on their heads, they’re not going to touch me.”

Nico felt himself pale.

“Could that still happen?” he asked.

“Everything’s been reinforced since then,” Mamma said. “Very earthquake resistant. And it’s updated whenever new technology is introduced.”

“I meant could they still hurt you?”
Mamma smiled, but it wasn’t warm like her usual smiles.

“They could try,” she said simply.

A timer went off in the kitchen.

“That’s the meatloaf,” Sally said, rising from her chair.

Then the doorbell rang.

“And that’s Paul,” Sally said. “Percy, could you get that? Everyone remembers the how-we’re-related story?”

They all nodded. Percy got up and headed for the door.

“Paul!” he greeted. “Glad you could make it!”

Mamma rose from her chair as they walked into the living room. Nico and Bianca copied her.

“Paul Blofis?” she greeted with a smile, stepping forward and offering her hand for the man to shake. Or possibly to kiss, Nico was never sure with Mamma, but the man went with the former option.

“That’s me,” he said, smiling pleasantly. “I’m guessing you’re Percy’s cousin?”

“Chrysa Potter,” Mamma offered in return. She gestured towards Nico and Bianca. “And these are my children, Nico and Bianca.”

His eyebrows went up.

“I must say, you look very good for your age.”

Mamma laughed.

“I’m older than I look, but younger than you’re probably thinking. I was rather young when Bianca was born, and Nico as well.”

That was the truth. Maria di Angelo had only been nineteen when Bianca was born and twenty-one when Nico was. That was a bit different from Chrysa Potter being fifteen when Bianca would have been born and seventeen for Nico, but it was still young.

“That must have been hard,” Paul said.

Mamma shrugged it off.

“I wouldn’t change it for anything.”

“Paul!” Sally greeted warmly, coming in from the kitchen and greeting her boyfriend – did it count as a boyfriend when they were old? – with a peck on the cheek. “I’m glad you could make it!”

“So am I,” Paul said with a laugh. “Your cooking’s always better than anything I can come up with. What’s for dinner?”

“Meatloaf, red potatoes, mixed vegetables, and biscuits. Chrysa was kind enough to make the biscuits and vegetables, as well as dessert.”
Mamma laughed.

“All the vegetables required was boiling water and a bit of slicing and dicing, and I’m a deft enough hand at that. It was no trouble. As for the biscuits…well, I saw a recipe online and wanted to try it.”

It didn’t take Mamma long to convince Sally to sit down with her boyfriend while she sent Percy, Bianca, and Nico to set the table. After several months of occasionally eating at the Jackson house, they were both more than aware of where the silverware and dishes were kept.

Dinner went well, at least from Nico’s point of view. Sally relaxed more and more as the night went on. Mamma later told them that she’d been nervous about having Paul meet what she considered the ‘extended family.’

Nico was pleased at the description.

Bianca’s birthday was only a few days later. She and several of her friends from school (and Nico and Percy) went to Coney Island with Mamma and Papà. Sally was brought along as well for extra parental supervision, and she brought Paul with her. Nico was pretty sure that they spent more time with each other than supervising the teenage girls.

Mamma put Percy in charge of Nico, handed them a wad of cash, and told them not to die and that mortals were just as dangerous as monsters sometimes. With an additional warning that while Nico’s sword would not set off metal detectors, it would kill mortals, she left to track down the huddle of teenage girls that Bianca was ensconced with.

Bianca had always been better at making friends than Nico was.

Percy smiled out him roguishly. Nico felt his heart flutter.

“Wanna go ride the Cyclone?” Percy offered.

Nico smiled at him.

“Let’s go!”

School got out a week later. Much to Nico’s dismay, Bianca left immediately for the Hunter base in Montana, and Mamma left for her secret mission.

Which left Nico alone in the Underworld with Papà, who was always busy without Mamma or Persephone around to help.

Mamma hadn’t even let him go to Camp Half-Blood, since it would probably be attacked this somewhere.

It wasn’t fair. Nico wanted to help!

He took to wandering around the Underworld, exploring all the places he could. On more than one occasion, he ran into the ghosts that acted as the judges of the dead. Minos was the most attentive.

Two days after Mamma left, Nico ended up complaining to Minos while sitting on a cliff overlooking the Styx. Occasionally Styx herself would join him here, or one of the other river gods if he chose to overlook their rivers, but no one tended to bother him when Minos visited.

“I just wish I could do something!” Nico exclaimed, frustrated. “Mamma’s always off doing things to help, and even Bianca’s off training with the Hunters! I didn’t even go to camp like all the other
demigods. I’m just here. Training. With a bunch of dead people.” He glanced at his companion.
“No offense.”

“None taken, master,” the ghost reassured. “I’ve been dead for millennia. I’m not offended if someone points it out.”

Nico sighed again.

“I just wish that I could do something.”

“What if you could?” Minos offered.

Nico gave him a sidelong look.

“What do you mean?” he asked suspiciously.

“As you said, I’m dead. And I’ve been dead a very long time. While I might not be able to get back to life, I do know the ways that the living can sneak out of the Underworld. I could guide you along those paths, help you find a way to help. I’ve actually thought of something about that.”

“What are you talking about?” Nico demanded.

Minos looked around, then lowered his voice.

“From what I’ve overheard in discussions between your lady mother and your lord father, the Crooked One’s army is searching for a way to travel through the Labyrinth.”

Nico frowned.

“What’s the Labyrinth?”

“It was built by my…ah, court scientist, you could say. Daedalus.” He nearly sneered the last name. “The Labyrinth is where I kept my wife’s Minotaur. It was also where Theseus” (another name the ghost spat) “slayed the Minotaur, and used the string given to him by daughter Ariadne to make her way out of the Labyrinth.”

“Are you saying that the Labyrinth still exists?” Nico asked.

“Of course, master,” Minos said. “It moved with the rest of Western Civilization. But the Labyrinth was Daedalus’ greatest creation. It didn’t only move, it grew. The Labyrinth is alive, in a sense. But it recognizes its master. I can make it through safely, and furthermore, I can guide you through safely.”

“But what help would that be?” Nico questioned.

“The Labyrinth is tied to Daedalus’ life force,” Minos explained. “Daedalus shouldn’t be alive anyway – he’s cheated death for thousands of years, because he knows what awaits him when he dies. He betrayed me, after all. I wasn’t planning on being lenient with him when he came to the judgment pavilion. And treason was not his only crime, nor even the worst of them. But somehow, Daedalus still lives. And he lives at the center of the maze. If Luke’s forces find Daedalus and get him on their side, they will be able to make their way through the Labyrinth without issue. And if they can make their way through the Labyrinth, the magical boundaries of Camp Half-Blood will not deter them from striking. If we stop Daedalus, we can save Camp Half-Blood.”

Nico took a deep breath and steeled himself.
“Let’s do it.”

Minos nodded. “Are you ready to leave now?”

“Not yet,” Nico said. “I need to pack, and get stuff ready. And I can’t leave until after dinner, or Papà will notice. Tonight.”

“Tonight,” Minos nodded. “You’ll need to get outside of the boundaries of the Underworld. Not even the Labyrinth can allow escape from here.”

Nico thought of the black key necklace that both he and Bianca had one of, that his mother had given them clandestinely and taught them how to use, that they’d been sworn to secrecy over. The keys were on chains without clasps that couldn’t be removed by anyone but Mamma or Papà. Even Papà didn’t know they had them. Mamma had made them promise to only use them in emergencies. Nico wasn’t sure this counted, but he was going to use it anyway.

“I can get out,” he said. “You’ll be able to find me on the outside, and find the nearest Labyrinth entrance?”

“Of course, master,” Minos nodded. “I will see you tonight then?”

“Tonight,” Nico confirmed with a nod.

Dinner was…awkward. Without Mamma, Papà seemed to lose all of his social skills. He also had a pile of paperwork that was constantly being added to by zombie attendants, so he wasn’t paying much attention to Nico during dinner.

“I think I’m going to go to Elysium for a week,” Nico finally said. “Some of the heroes offered to make me my own Camp experience. So I won’t be by for dinner for a while.”

Hades hummed.

“Alright, Nico. Have fun. Don’t get stabbed. Your mother would kill me if I let you get hurt.”

“Don’t worry, Papà,” Nico said. “I’ll be perfectly safe.”

He hoped his father was distracted enough not to notice the blatant lie in his words. That seemed to be the case.

“I’m glad, *patatino*. I know you were disappointed not to be going back to Camp. But it’s safer for you here.”

Nico tried to offer up a smile at that. He was pretty sure he failed from the sympathetic look Papà gave him.

“I’ll be fine,” he said. “Just a week or two with some of the best heroes to ever alive. Minus Percy, of course.”

Papà made a face at that. He didn’t really like Percy. Or Thalia. It had something to do with his brothers breaking the Oath they’d made him swear, despite the fact that he rarely had children *anyway*.

“There’s other heroes down here,” he pointed out. “Have you met your brother Roland?”

Papà nodded.

Nico nodded. “He helped a lot with my swordwork.”

Papà nodded absently. “He was one of the best of my children at it. One of the least crazy too. Though you seem to be giving him a run for his money on both fronts. Bianca too, for the least crazy.”

“Papà,” Nico felt the need to point out. “He’s a ghost. He doesn’t have money.”


They finished the rest of their dinner in companionable silence.

“I’m going to go pack, and then head over to Elysium,” Nico told his father.

Papà came over and kissed his brow.

“Have fun, patatino. Be safe.”

“Always, Papà,” Nico said, mimicking what his mother always said.

Hades rolled his eyes at that.

“I mean it, Niccolò.”


Papà smiled at him.

“Thank you, my son. I’ll see you in a week.”

“Maybe two,” Nico said.

Papà nodded.

“I’ll let your mother know if she asks.”

Nico really, really hoped she didn’t ask. Mamma would know. She always did, even before she had her goddess-of-lies powers back. She said it was a mother thing.

An hour later, Nico left the palace with his space-expanded bag and headed toward Elysium. Once he was hidden in a copse of trees in the fields of Asphodel, he looked around to make sure he was alone before pulling the blacker-than-black key from under his shirt.

He took a deep breath, reached out as if inserting the key into a lock, and turned it. A door of shadows even darker than the dark of the Underworld appeared in front of him, the edges and the keyhole the key was sticking out of glowing with eerie purple light. Nico pulled the key out of the lock with one hand and reached out the other to push the door open so he could step through.

“What are you doing?” a voice said from behind him.

Nico jumped and turned around, hand going towards the hilt of his sword.

Standing behind him was a girl – a ghost, really – just a few years older than he was. She was faded grey around the edges, but not all the way through like most ghosts were. There was an awareness
in her eyes as well. He knew what that meant. But…her aura wasn’t quite right. It wasn’t like his half-brother Roland. More like his half-sister Alice. Though Alice wasn’t a child of Hades, she was a child of…oh. That explained it.

“You’re a child of Pluto,” he said in realization. You remember your past.”

“Yes,” the girl said with a nod. Her cinnamon brown curls bounced when she did. “And you’re alive. And…hiding in the Fields of Asphodel?”

“Promise not to tell our father?” Nico questioned.

The girl shrugged.

“I haven’t seen him since I was alive. But if I do, I won’t say anything.”

Nico glanced around, and extended his shadow power, looking for anyone hiding in the shadows. There was nothing. They were alone.

“I’m sneaking out,” he admitted in a low voice. “I want to help with the war that’s coming, but Mamma wouldn’t let me. So I’m going to go help anyway. I just have to get out of the Underworld first.”

The girl frowned.

“I didn’t think children of Pluto could just leave.”

“We can’t,” Nico admitted. “But I have a key. I can get in and out when I need to. It’s supposed to just be for emergencies though.”

The girl’s golden eyes had widened.

“I won’t tell anyone. Just…do you think you could come back and visit me sometimes? It gets kind of lonely, being the only one who remembers anything.”


“I’ll be here,” the girl said. “Good luck!”

“Thank you!” Nico said.

He waited until she’d backed away several steps before pushing the door open and stepping through. Using the Key was a strange sensation, though not as terrible a feeling as shadow travel. Or Apparition. Or Portkeys. Or the Floo. It was honestly mostly normal. Just the feeling of pressure, as if wind was blowing at a hundred miles per hour for a split second, then gone.

Nico made sure to shut the door behind him, before tucking the key back into his shirt and looking around at his surroundings. He was in some sort of city, though he had no idea which one. He was relatively certain he was still in the United States, but city alleyways all looked alike to him. He had two choices: stay in this alleyway and wait for Minos to find him, or leave the alleyway and try to figure out where he was.

He chose option two.

He hadn’t made it very far – he’d made it onto a main street, but he still hadn’t figured out where he was – when Minos appeared beside him.
“Why are you in Wichita?” the ghost demanded.

“Is that where I am?” Nico asked curiously. “I just got out of the Underworld. I didn’t actually aim for anywhere in particular.”

The ghost rolled his eyes.

“Well, lucky for you, master, there’s an entrance to the Labyrinth in every major city, including this one. Come on. It’s only two blocks away.”

Twenty minutes and one minor bit of breaking-and-entering later, they were standing in front of a wall with a faint Δ carved into it.

“What do I do?” Nico asked.

“Just press it, master,” Minos said. “It will open for you.”

Nico reached out, hesitated, but finally placed his hand on the Δ. It began to glow blue, before fading away along with the rest of the wall. A long tunnel stretched out in front of Nico, with no end in sight.

“You’re sure we won’t get lost?” Nico questioned.

“I was the Labyrinth’s lord,” Minos scoffed. “I cannot get lost here. Come, master. We will be perfectly safe. We will find Daedalus and stop him, ending the threat the Labyrinth poses to your friends. Then you will prove your worth to your mother, and be allowed to further participate in the war.”

The ghost stepped into the tunnel. Nico took a deep breath and followed him into the dark.

Chapter End Notes

I’ve started posting a short three-shot from Kronos’ point-of-view on his relationship with Leuke, which is why Third Life is now part of a series! The story is called Betrayal. Check it out, and I hope you enjoy!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!