Repercussions

by justsmileandwaveboys

Summary

A characters read the book fic. I know... Overdone and overused. But this is my take on how it would unfold. Set after the Giant War, before ToA. The gods have to take a decision about their children and the fates decide to give them a little push. Rated T - just in case. I do not own PJo, Rick Riordan does. Ch34-SoM. Ch58 - TTC.

Notes

Hey guys,
First of all, disclaimer for the whole fanfic - I do not own Percy Jackson series or the Heroes of Olympus series. All characters and words in bold are owned by Rick Riordan and Hyperion Books for Children and Disney Hyperion. I do not intend to use the text from the books for any other purpose other than for this fanfiction and nor do I intend to make any sort of profit from the story. All rights go to the actual owner and not me. This is only a work of love for the series.

Ok, with that done, a couple of things about the fic.
1. This is set after Giant War but before ToA, so no characters from ToA will make an appearance. But Leo and Calypso, for the purpose of the fic, have arrived earlier than in canon.
2. I will try to complete all the books including the side stories.
3. Just enjoy the reading and I appreciate constructive criticism but absolutely do not
approve of trolling or ridiculing the work (Any work) for no apparent reason. So, if you do have a problem with the fic, just drop in a reason as to the problem and if any suggestions for improvement.

Thanks :)}
The Dilemma

Repercussions

Ch1 – The Dilemma

The citizens of Olympus cast wary glances at the majestic palace that stood on top of the mountain as they went around attending to their daily chores. It was three weeks after the Giant War and they had just gotten used to the emergency lock down being lifted. The normally beautiful town had an aura of unhappiness and fear. Fear, not of titans or giants or anyone else, but that of the Olympians taking out the anger and frustration on each other and by extension, their subjects. But so far none of that had happened and that's what the people were afraid of. They had expected the usual bickering and fighting and general chaos that followed two wars being fought within one year, not that such a thing had ever happened before, but the Council had been silent for so long that some questioned whether the gods were still in shock or recovering from the after effects of being torn between their Greek and Roman persona.

Normally, the sky above the palace, particularly the throne room, would be covered in clouds with random thundering and lightning depending on the gods' moods. Now it was peaceful. Too peaceful. There would be occasional flashing of lights or the faint blue glow of the magical boundary of the palace indicating the gods coming and going, but apart from that there was an eerie silence.

Inside the throne room, sat the gods, each lost in their thoughts or work. For the past two days, fourteen gods had sat and watched over their children, both Greeks and Romans. Some of the Romans had stayed behind at Camp Half Blood to help with the aftermath of the war, from healing the wounded to clearing up the camp of the debris of the fallen buildings. The gods had witnessed the skeptical friendship evolving between both the camps, the unavoidable fights that broke out due to tensions running high and the effects of PTSD on the children. That, they all agreed, was the worst thing they had ever seen and that was what had rendered them speechless. Now as the gods sat in silence with the one way IMs opened to both the camps running in the background, they thought about their respective children.

Apollo looked up from his IPad, which was basically showing him his children, as Hestia appeared next to the hearth. She had gone to check up on both camps, since she would usually alternate between Olympus and the camps' hearths. A few moments later Hades appeared in his godly form before settling on his throne, next to Poseidon.

"The doors are finally stable and Thanatos has regained control on them. So we won't have any more problems from that side."

"The remaining giants roaming around?" Artemis asked her uncle.

"They are back in Tartarus." Hades replied, flinching as he remembered getting a glimpse of Nico when the boy had been dragged out of the pit.

Taking a ragged breath in, Poseidon looked up from the report he was reading on one of his province, and asked the Council, "Are we going to take a decision?"
Earlier in the day, the gods had been deciding whether they should break their silence and speak to their children or not. Most of the Council had agreed that they should, but Zeus and Hera did not want to break the ancient rules. Somehow they had stopped their arguments before it could escalate into a full out fight, but as soon as the topic was spoken of, the tension snapped back into place.

"I, for one want to check in with my children. They deserve that much at the least." Hermes spoke up.

"Me too. My children are barely able to heal themselves, let alone all of your children. If I could just go there, all of them could be healed in matter of hours." Apollo exclaimed.

"No. I said before and I will say it now. We cannot break the rules. They are in place for a reason." Zeus snapped. "Plus Apollo, you do not get a vote. It was your prophesy that caused us these problems…"

"Father! This was anyway going to happen. You cannot simply blame Apollo." Athena said.

"Exactly. He does not control the future. He only sees it." Artemis continued. They had been on this topic for almost months now.

Seething, the god of light banged his weapon on the floor and stood up. "What do you mean, I do not get a vote? These are my children," he said, pointing to the IM where the image changed to show the infirmary. "…they have been working nonstop, running on fumes and coffee for the past three weeks. Three weeks. They are barely getting any rest but are still healing the others and taking care of them. If anyone should have a say, it's me. And I vote that we go and interfere."

All the gods, except the king and queen, muttered their consent.

"I understand that the demigods are tired, but we cannot simply break the ancient rules every time they want attention." Hera said haughtily.

"Hera! You forget that they are children." Hestia reprimanded her sister.

Before the other gods could shout at his wife, Zeus spoke, "We cannot break those rules because we don't know what the consequences of doing that would be – "

Zeus was interrupted as the doors to throne room were opened and the Council's undivided attention fell on the three elderly, wrinkled figures that entered the room.

There was an eerie silence as the Fates walked to the centre of the room and the IMs floating in midair vanished.

_Gods. The Fates greeted the Olympians through telepathy. Without waiting for an acknowledgement, they continued as one. *None of you understand the metaphorical double edged blade that you wield. On one hand you can improve your relations with your children, without whom you all would eventually fade and on the other hand you might face consequences of getting attached to them. So what would it be?*_

The gods glanced at each other in confusion and apprehension. Why would the Moirai be interested in such a topic?

*Because it affects the whole of Olympus. Said Clotho. If you are able to cement the relations with your children without breaking the rules and upsetting the very foundation of our existence, it will bring great benefits.* Atropos continued, *But with every positive there is a negative. Would you be*
Zeus looked triumphantly at his family as if to say that he had been correct, that there would be consequences. The others ignored him.

Hestia asked, "What would the benefits be? Can you tell us that?" She hoped it might bring together the whole family, hopefully including the minor gods.

We cannot tell you that. It is up to the Council to decide whether they deem the benefits worth the trouble it comes with. We are at what you would call crossroads for your future and for the first time we are giving you an opportunity to decide your fate. Before anyone could ask further questions, Lachesis said, for any informed decision to be taken, you need the viewpoint of all the sides. So, we have decided to let you hear what your children think about what has happened over the years.

"So, we can go to our children?" Hermes asked with hope.

Not yet. Not now. That can be done once you all take a decision. However, the three ancient beings looked at each other, we have opt for bringing the children to you. But not the current you. No, that cannot be done. The Council and minor gods of the past.

"How far back are we talking about?" Poseidon asked, sounding like he was about to make a business deal.

Ancient Greece, came the reply.

"Isn't that a little too far back? We would not even know anything in that time period of the current situation." Aphrodite mused. Normally, she would not participate in these discussions, but this particular one affected her and her children and she did not like to be an absentee mother. Not anymore, anyway.

Athena asked, "Doesn't the current council need to take decision and not the previous one? Will we be able to change our past?"

Yes, but let us explain ourselves before jumping to conclusions. We will take up the quests and adventures of our young hero, Perseus Jackson and his friends, in his viewpoint, mainly because he has been on the front line for the majority of both the wars. We would send the demigods to that period so that you can discuss about the situation with them and see their reactions to the wars. It would be something to give you all a little push to take a decision. Once the reading is complete, none of you would remember about it. Atropos raised a hand to stop the questions of the council. You will know it subconsciously until now. You cannot change the past as it is already woven in your fate. But knowing the thoughts of your children subconsciously will allow you to understand the reasons for all the steps your children have taken so far.

"Hasn't my son done enough for our kind? He does not deserve his privacy to be taken away from him."

We understand. But Perseus is a unique person. He would give up his privacy if it means to help the others. Anyway, only moments that are important to us shall be revealed. We will explain it to him.

Still not happy or comfortable, Poseidon reluctantly nodded along with his family for the Fates to continue with their plan.
It was a cloudless, sunny day on Mount Olympus. In the throne room, Dionysus and Apollo were discussing to throw a party for the upcoming summer solstice, while Zeus and Hera were having another discussion (read fight) about his children. Hermes appeared all of a sudden in front of his half-brothers and threw a package onto Dionysus' lap.

"Why can you not handle your own wine deliveries, D?" He questioned.

"And here I thought you were the gods' messenger." Came the reply.

"Messenger. Not delivery boy." Hermes said tiredly as he sat down on his throne next to Apollo.

Before either of the brothers could get into further discussion, a brief flash of light delivered three old ladies, a group of confused children dressed in absurd clothes, two satyrs, a cyclops, Chiron and a grinning Hermes.

"Uh… what…" Zeus said looking around in confusion before settling on looking at the Hermes sitting on his throne next to Apollo.

"Call the other Olympians, Zeus, including Hades and his wife and Amphitrite and Triton and Ariadne. Also, the minor gods, and Hercules, Theseus and Perseus and the Hunters of Artemis need to be present, instructed the Fates. They included the heroes in the hopes of bringing down their egos, for the time being, anyway. The Hunters were included so they could see that not all men are like the vile creatures they had to face before pledging to become hunters and maybe could tone down their hatred towards men to only a select few.

"Um… of course. Hermes?"

Hermes nodded and went to gather others, while the other Hermes looked around the room before taking a deep breath. The only reason the Fates had let him tag along was so that he could see his son, Pan, for one last time.

Soon the throne room was filled with the requested gods and goddesses, hunters and heroes. At last Hermes appeared with his son Pan and his half-brother Ares, seemingly dragging them both from their respective beds. Once everyone had settled down, the Fates asked Hermes from the future to explain the situation to everyone, while they took a tall boy with raven black hair, holding a packet of sorts in his hands and occasionally eating from it, to a corner to explain the situation to him. He dejectedly agreed to whatever the Fates had told him and went to stand next to a tall girl with blond hair, who was holding some papers and pencils in her hands.

The demigods had obviously been teleported while being in between activities since most of them were holding some or the objects or in the middle of conversation or even naps when Hermes started explaining about there being two major wars in the future and the reason why the Fates had
decided to take such an action.

"So, let me get this straight." Said Athena. "We will have to read about a demigod, who was a part of these wars that you talk about. And these wars were caused somewhat due to our ignorance? But we still cannot change the outcomes of these wars?"

"Yes. That's pretty much it."

"Okay…" Zeus said, letting out shaky breath. He couldn't believe that they would have two wars within a span of a year and the gods would not participate much in it. The Hermes from the future had not told them against whom the wars would be, nor had he told much about the outcome other than that they managed to barely win in the end.

For the next ten minutes, everyone discussed about the wars as Percy told his friends that the books would be in his point of view. While some looked excited about hearing Percy's thoughts, others were apprehensive that his thoughts would only get him into more trouble with the gods and these gods did not know him or tolerate such disobedience. But they all agreed that it was invasion of privacy and decided not to speak of whatever they hear once they go back to their timeline.

Hermes went to talk to Pan, who was leaning against his father's throne, while Chiron went to greet his former pupils.

Hermes drew his son into a hug that probably lasted minutes and made Pan extremely uncomfortable. Smiling a bitter-sweet smile, Hermes looked at his son before whispering that he loved him. He looked up to see his past self and Apollo looking at him weirdly, before both their eyes widened in understanding and they both leaned back in their thrones with a worried expression.

"Father?" Pan asked, looking between both the versions of his father.

"Oh. Nothing child. It's just that I have not seen you for quite some time now in my time period."

"Uh-huh."

"Anyway, do me a favor. Whenever you all take a break, go talk to those two satyrs." Hermes said, nodding towards the two hyperventilating satyrs standing with the group of demigods, looking at Pan.

"Okay Father."

Smiling, Hermes raised his voice over the buzz of talking in the throne room. "Alright then. We shall take leave now. Children, please introduce yourselves." He said looking at the demigods. He walked towards the Fates, who had just given a bundle of books to Lady Hestia. "Oh, and one more thing. These demigods, especially this one," he said pointing towards Percy, "speak their minds. So, if you get offended by whatsoever they say, do not hurt them. And Percy, try not to piss anyone off over here."

With that the Fates and Hermes disappeared, leaving the demigods staring at each other in an awkward silence.

Chiron spoke up, "I suppose we all should introduce ourselves. We are from the year 2010 as was explained by Lord Hermes and as you all know, I am Chiron. And all of these children are Heroes of Olympus."

Chiron motioned his students to speak. They all as one, looked at Percy, silently ask him to lead. As Percy turned towards the gods, it became obvious to them that he was a child of Poseidon, after
all, he did look like a miniature version of the sea god.

"Percy Jackson, son of Poseidon." The black haired boy said, waving his fingers at the gods before remembering that they were in the past. Hurriedly, he put his hand down and looked at the girl next to him. Both Amphitrite and Triton glared at the said god and then at the hero.

Stifling a laugh, the blond girl spoke up. "Annabeth Chase, daughter of Athena and official architect of Olympus." Athena smiled a little at her daughter, wondering how at such a young age she became an architect for Olympus.

On the other side of Percy, stood a young boy, probably the youngest of them all, clad in all black clothes and dishevelled black hair. "Nico Di Angelo, son of Hades and ghost king." He said, nodding towards his father, who nodded back.

"Thalia, daughter of Zeus and Lieutenant of Hunters of Artemis." She bowed to her father and sister. Artemis looked at her current lieutenant, Adrianna, wondering what happened to her. Zoe, at this time, was the latest recruit.

"Jason Grace, son of Jupiter, the Roman counterpart of Zeus and Pontifex Maximus, which is kind of like head priest." The blond haired and blue eyed boy explained. Hermes had already explained the gods about their Roman counterparts. Now, Hera glared at both the children.

A dark skinned girl looked at Nico, before speaking up, "Hazel Levesque, daughter of Pluto – Roman counterpart of Hades."

"Katie Gardner, daughter of Demeter."

"Clarisse La Rue, daughter of Ares and drakon slayer." This raised a lot of eyebrows, as Ares usually only had sons.

"Will Solace, son of Apollo"

"Leo Valdez, son of Hephaestus and fire user."

"Piper McLean, daughter of Aphrodite."

"Travis and Conner Stoll, sons of Hermes." The brothers spoke their individual names.

"Chris Rodriguez, son of Hermes."

"Pollux, son of Dionysus."

"Lou Ellen Blackstone, daughter of Hecate." The Olympians wondered what a child of minor goddess is doing with their children, while the minor gods were pleased that their children had been included.

"Butch Walker, son of Iris."

"Clovis, son of Hypnos."

"Damien White, son of Nemesis."

"Laurel and Holly Victor, daughters of Nike."

"Paolo Montes, son of Hebe."
"Chiara Benvenuti, daughter of Tyche."

At this all the gods were baffled that the children of minor gods were even being recognized. Seeing this, Percy smirked and looked at his friends, who were trying not to smile.

"Reyna Ramirez-Arellano, daughter of Bellona – Roman counterpart of Enyo and Praetor of the Twelfth Legion."

"Frank Zhang, son of Mars – Roman counterpart of Ares, legacy of Poseidon and Praetor of the Twelfth Legion." Ares smirked at his son and beamed proudly.

"Dakota, son of Bacchus – Roman counterpart of Dionysus and senior centurion of the Fifth Cohort."

"Gwendolyn, legacy of Venus – Roman counterpart of Aphrodite and former centurion of the Fifth Cohort."

"Rachel Dare, Oracle of Delphi."

"Tyson, Cyclops, son of Poseidon and General in Cyclops army of daddy… umm… Poseidon."

"Gleeson Hedge, Satyr, Protector."

"Grover Underwood, Lord of the Wild, Leader of the Council of Cloven Elders and Chosen One of Pan." He finished as he looked at Pan and bowed.

The three heroes of past came forward and introduced themselves to the other demigods.

"Hercules, son of Zeus."

"Perseus, son of Zeus and king of Argos."

"Theseus, son of Poseidon and king of Athens." Dionysus looked like he wanted to strangle the demigod with his bare hands.

"Well, sit down children." Said Hestia as she waved her hand and created comfortable couches to sit on. Once everyone had settled down, she said, "We should begin now."
Hey,
So, the text from the books is not going to be there in full since I don't know whether the site allows that. So if anyone could tell me if it is okay to put the whole text from the books or not, that'll be great.

(A/N - I do not own Percy Jackson series or the Heroes of Olympus series. All characters and words in bold are owned by Rick Riordan and Hyperion Books for Children and Disney Hyperion. I do not intend to use the text from the books for any other purpose other than for this fanfiction and nor do I intend to make any sort of profit from the story. All rights go to the actual owner and not me. This is only a work of love for the series.)

Ch3 – TLT – The first monster

"I would read first." demanded Zeus, while his brothers shook their heads exasperatedly. He thought how a nephew of his could be a leader when his own children were present.

"Uncle. Before you start, I apologize to anyone who will get offended by my thoughts and knowing myself, that is highly probable. So… sorry in advance." Percy said sheepishly as the other demigods nodded.

"Hmm. Alright."

"I ACCIDENTALLY VAPORIZATE MY PRE-ALGEBRA TEACHER…?" Zeus looked up from the book with a questioning gaze at his nephew, who looked lost in memories.

Blinking, he went back to reading, "Look, I didn't ... nasty ways."

"So true." Said one of the demigods while the others muttered their consent, remembering all the friends and siblings they lost over the years.

"Did the Fates get this written as a fiction book?" Annabeth asked no one in particular. When no one answered, Zeus went back to reading.

"If you're ... ever happened."

"I guess that answers your question." Said Thalia.

"But if ... come for you."

"Dramatic much?" Nico asked laughing, while Will looked at him from his couch, thinking that he should laugh as often as possible. Hades felt pleased that a child of his could laugh and befriend others and not be treated as an outcast.

"Can we not have interruptions every line?" Zeus said, only it sounded more like an order.
"Don't say I didn't warn you."

The king god silenced the few demigods who were about to interrupt, with a glare.

"My name... say that."

A few people laughed and all the demigods nodded vigorously in all seriousness. Poseidon looked at his son, who sat smiling, completely at ease with the group. Usually, the children of big three were placed at a higher pedestal than the others and as a result, did not get to interact with the other demigods as much as the sea god would have liked. But looking at them, he thought that all that had probably changed.

"I could ... Roman stuff."

"Dude, your life has been pretty long for a child of big three. Not short, but miserable? Yup."

Travis exclaimed.

Theseus asked, "You do not look more than 16 or 17. How old are you?"

"Just turned 17 three days ago."

"That is considered a long life?" Poseidon asked, worried about his children of the future.

Percy shrugged and a few other gods wondered what would be so horrible about being a child of big three that they did not live for more than a few years. As the gods looked at the other children, they realized that no one actually looked older than 20. This worried them even more.

"I know—it sounds like torture. Most Yancy field trips were."

"Only to you seaweed brain." Annabeth said lovingly to her boyfriend.

"I think anyone will find it torturous." A few demigods replied, while Athena shook her head thinking that they should not give up a learning opportunity, after all, not everyone was allowed to study.

"But Mr. Brunner ... me to sleep."

"Thank you child." Chiron chuckled.

"You slept while being taught? That is disrespectful." Athena said, barely containing her anger. Being the goddess of wisdom, education was her domain and to see it being disrespected annoyed her, to say the least.

"Umm… sorry. I didn't sleep in class, it was more of feeling sleepy?" Percy said, hoping the goddess would calm down.

Before anyone else could say anything, Zeus continued, "I hoped ... I wrong."

The heroes of old raised their eyebrows as they looked at Percy, while Thalia said, "Aren't you always?"

"Didn't I say no interruptions?" Zeus said.

"See, bad… the idea."
Laughter could be heard around the throne room.

"What is a war cannon?" Ares asked, interested.

"It's this huge gun that can fire projectile over a long distance. Very useful." Clarisse replied.

"Wait! What were you aiming for?" Leo asked as he off-handedly made a miniature version of war cannon to show Ares.

"I was probably trying to see the inside of the cannon. Don't remember much actually."

For the next few minutes, the tiny cannon was passed around the room as everyone looked at it.

"This trip… ketchup sandwich."

"Lord of the Wild Grover?" Pan asked, looking at Grover, still thinking about how his father from the future had acted and why would there be a need for a Lord of the Wild.

"Yes, Lord. But back then I was a protector."

Ignoring this, Athena asked, "Girls go to school freely, in your time period?" All the goddesses looked interested. Not that many girls could or even wanted to study in the current times.

"Yes, mother. Equal educational opportunities for both boys and girls are given and it is mandatory for all to study."

Satisfied with this, all the goddesses smiled.

"Grover was… the cafeteria."

Grover mock-punched Percy's shoulder. "This is why I apologized before." Percy replied, sticking out his tongue at his best friend, while the others chuckled.

"Anyway, Nancy… this trip."

"I am liking this girl lesser every second." Artemis mumbled and Apollo looked at her in shock, which she obviously ignored.

"'I'm going to kill her,' I mumbled."

"Yes, cupcake, do it!" Coach Hedge shouted, startling almost everyone in the room.

"Grover tried… anything happens.""

"What if it is not your fault?" Perseus asked his cousin.

"Still I would be blamed."

"Demigods are easy targets, Perseus. They are different from other mortal children and are treated badly for that." Chiron explained.

"Our kind is not treated well?" Hercules gasped.

"The mortals do not believe in our gods and we exist behind a magic veil called mist. No one in the mortal world knows of our existence." Chiron said.
Needless to say, everyone was upset because of this revelation and looked at the future children in a different light.

"Looking back… myself into."

"So, the usual then?" Rachel asked to which Percy nodded.

"Mr. Brunner… evil eye."

"Isn't that what you called…?" Nico trailed off, looking at his cousin.

"Yup." Percy chuckled.

"Mrs. Dodds… absolutely right."

"Hey Grover, while you're at it, why don't you tell him everything about us!" Annabeth said, giving her friend a teasing smile.

"So your teacher is a monster? Which one?" Triton asked his half-brother. As much as he hated his father's actions of cheating on his mother, he was used to it by now and was also getting interested in his brother's life. He wanted to know what exactly had this boy done that the Fates took such a huge step of mixing up the timelines.

Ares grumbled, "Who cares? I thought we were going to read about the wars and not this boy's life."

Surprisingly, it was Dionysus who replied, "We all know that the mental situation of the people involved in a war is as important as the war itself. That's why we have to read all this."

As others nodded, Zeus continued.

"Mr. Brunner… his story."

"Damn!" someone muttered.

"'Mr. Jackson… kids, right?'"

Zeus looked up. "It had to be that one, didn't it?"

"You are one to talk! You didn't even have to go through that." Hades grumbled.

"'Yes… Brunner asked.' Zeus trailed off as everyone turned to stare at Percy.

"I forgot?" Percy said sheepishly, wanting everyone to stop looking at him.

"'Titan'… gods won.'"

"There was this big fight and the gods won?" Hermes asked disbelievingly. "Wow. I have honestly never heard the war being summarized like that."

"It's a talent." Percy grinned at the god.

"I have a question. How do you mistake a rock for a baby?" Connor asked with a thoughtful expression.

"Same as Jason mistook a stapler for food." Thalia said as she laughed and soon the others joined.
Shaking his head, Zeus read, "**Some snickers… real life?**"

"Ha! In your face!" Dakota said, taking a swing from his flask.

"**'Busted.'… Know, sir.**"

"I do now."

"We all do now." Katie said glumly.

"**'I see.'… Outside?**"

"Thank you for the wonderful trip down the memory lane!" Demeter said sarcastically.

"Another question." Connor said. "How huge was the stomach to allow five gods to grow in it?"

The eldest gods looked at Connor like something was wrong with him, while Zeus tried to stifle a laugh and failed miserably.

"Bro, you have got to stop asking questions." Chris whispered to Connor.

"It's a genuine doubt!" Travis said.

"Moving on…" Hades said, looking warily at the Stolls.

"**The class… so hard.**"

"For your own good, son." Poseidon said and Percy nodded.

"**I mean… them correctly.**"

"Well, all of you know most of that by now." Chiron smiled and said.

"**I mumbled… blowing in.**"

"Why are you both fighting?" Hera asked looking between her husband and brother.

"It's in the future, dear." Zeus replied.

"What's Christmas?" asked Hebe.

"It's a festival for another religion. In our times, it is one of the most celebrated and important festivals." Paolo told his mother.

"**Nobody else… your apple?**"

Almost everyone turned to look at the red faced satyr, before laughing out loud. Once the laughter had died down, Zeus continued.

"**I didn't have much of an appetite, so I let him take it.**"

"You didn't have an appetite?" Hazel asked incredulously. "You eat at least two people worth food in one meal!"

Percy just shrugged and motioned Zeus to continue reading.
"I watched... Grover's lap."

"Cupcake! Why didn't you fight back? Show her who you are!" Hedge shouted at Grover.

"What's with this cupcake?" Hermes whispered to Apollo.

"More importantly, what is a cupcake?" Apollo whispered back.

"'Oops... liquid Cheetos.'"

"Ugh. Thanks for that image!" Gwen said, rubbing her eyes as if trying to get the mental image out.

"What is a Cheetos?" Apollo asked.

Piper took out the cornucopia from her jacket pocket and asked it to give her a packet of Cheetos, which she passed onto Apollo.

"You have a horn of plenty?" Hercules asked, looking at the horn hungrily.

"Why do you have it with you?" Theseus asked.

"You never know when there might be a need for food fight." Piper said looking at Hercules, as the seven tried not to laugh.

"I tried... grabbed her - ""

"Nice."

"I didn't... to death."

"For a very good reason." Nico muttered.

"She glared...for trying.""

"You are a good friend, Grover." Hestia said, nodding at the satyr.

"'Honey... Mrs. Dodds.'"

By now everyone other than Percy, Grover, Annabeth and Chiron, were itching to find out who the monster was and how the demigod would survive it.

"Halfway up... was empty."

"Of course it was." Reyna said.

"Mrs. Dodds... she said."

"What problems? It's connected to why your uncle and I are fighting, isn't it?" Poseidon asked his son.

"You will find out soon enough."

"I did... hurt me."

"That's what we all think. I mean who knew my vice principal would attack me, huh?!" Nico asked his cousin.
"I said… the book."

At this, the tension built up disappeared faster than air being let out of a balloon and few demigods and gods chuckled.

"Well... to ribbons."

"I sent a Fury after you?" Hades asked his nephew.

"You sent Alecto after him, dad." Nico replied.

"You sent a Fury after my son?!" Poseidon screeched at his brother. Before he could do anything else, his wife put a hand on his arm. "The child is alive, my lord." She reminded him.

Everyone wondered how Percy managed to get away from a Fury.

"Then things got even stranger."

"Huh?"

"Mr. Brunner… the air."

The gods wondered what would a writing instrument do against a Fury, but seeing all the demigods now relaxed, they figured it might be more than just a pen.

"Mrs. Dodds lunged at me."

Poseidon gritted his teeth in worry and clutched his wife's hand. Even though he did not know the child at all, he had an instinctive need to protect him. Both Triton and Theseus looked at Percy to check whether he was really there with them. Unaware of this, Percy sat, relaxed with his arm around that daughter of Athena, which was really getting on the said goddesses' nerves.

"With a… watching me." Zeus read this with disbelief.

There was a silence for a minute as everyone stared at Percy, including his friends, in disbelief, relief or pure awe.

Finally the silence was broken by Nico's whistle. "No wonder she hates you so much."

"How… how… did you kill a Fury on your first try?" Hercules sputtered.

"Luck?" Percy said, shrugging, which was kind of hard to do with one arm around Annabeth.

"That was no luck, boy." Tyche said. "That was pure talent. Even with my blessing you would not have been able to kill her in the first try."

"Well, Prissy just happens to be the best swordsman in around 300 years." Clarisse told the gods and her father nodded his approval.

With an uneasy smile, Percy asked his uncle to continue reading.

"I was… your butt."

"Huh?"

"Who?"
"I said, "Who?... serious.""

"The mist should not affect you anymore." Athena scoffed.

"I had strengthened it to protect him." Chiron replied.

"Thunder boomed... all right?"

"Well. That was the end of the chapter. Anyone else? I cannot read with so many interruptions."
I will read." Hera said, taking the book from her husband.

Zeus was lost in thoughts. He pondered over what he read, that this child, without training defeated one of the most terrifying monster. The other Hermes had also said that he had fought in two wars. He must have lead the wars for him to be important enough for the Fates to have books on him.

The minor gods were having their own telepathic discussions.

Tyche – The boy seems powerful, does he not? Defeating a Fury!

Janus – Yes. If you look at him from the corner of your eyes, you might think he is Poseidon himself.

Hecate – He does seem to radiate a lot of power.

Hebe – He looks extremely sad. As if he has seen sorrow beyond anything. So do the others. But him, the daughter of Athena and Hades' son look aged beyond their years.

They were pulled out of their conversation as their queen started to read.

"THREE OLD LADIES KNIT THE SOCKS OF DEATH"

"I was... was psycho."

"I hate to break it to you, but you are psycho." Thalia teased.

Percy, the mature 17 year old that he was, stuck out his tongue at her. He did start to wonder if he was slowly becoming a psycho, after all he had been having hallucinations for the past few days. Chiron had said it was PTSD of two wars and Tartarus, but it was getting harder to keep that in mind when he would curl up and try to recover from whatever latest episode he had.

"It got... Almost."

"Grover huh?" Annabeth whispered to her boyfriend, to which he smiled.

"But Grover... the museum."

"Grover! You really need to learn how to lie man!" Travis exclaimed.

"Actually, he can't. There is only so much satyrs can lie." Hermes told his son. Looking at Pan, he said, "Believe me. I tried!"

"I didn't... cold sweat."
"Ugh, demigod dreams are the worst."

"They don't get any better?" Perseus asked.

"Nope."

"The freak… that year."

"It seems to a serious fight." Hephaestus observed as he put out a small fire that erupted on his beard.

"I hope neither of you drag me into this." Hades said.

"Oh! Come on. Where's the fun in that?" Ares exclaimed before Hera, Demeter and Hestia turned to glare at him.

"I started… every class."

"You seem to be connected to nature." Athena observed.

"He is, if he can control the weather in any way." Poseidon said. He decided to talk to Percy later about his powers.

"Finally… poker parties."

"Momma's boy." Ares scoffed.

"Paul?" Hazel asked. The seven had met Percy's mom and Paul just a few days back.

"Nope. Before that." Percy left it that. His tone indicating the matter closed.

"And yet… without me."

"Bla-ah-ah. I would not have survived the next year at all, if it wasn't for you, Perce."

"G-man, I wasn't thinking about that."

"Still…"

"I'd miss… believe him."

"Finally. Now get the Hades out of there and get your ass to camp." Clarisse said.

"You care…?" Piper asked, confused.

"No. Once he comes to camp, there will be action."

"Oh. That makes more sense."

"The evening… Forget it."

"I hope you know the difference now." Chiron chuckled as he asked Percy, who turned light pink and nodded.

"You are pretty good in Latin." Frank pointed out.
"Now, I am. Back then, I could barely complete a question." Percy admitted.

No one would admit a failing, let alone a boy, Artemis thought.

"I paced… hadn't tried."

"You know Chiron would never think that way, right?" Annabeth looked up from the comfortable nook between his neck and shoulder. Percy nodded and looked at Chiron, who smiled at his star student.

"I walked… an adult."

"Fair point." Jason agreed. Both Chiron and Grover shook their heads fondly.

"I inched closer."

"Good. Be stealthy." Hermes encouraged.

"You are talking to a book. Are you sure you haven't lost your mind yet?" Dionysus said, taking a sip from his wine chalice.

"... alone… deadline - ...

"What is this summer solstice deadline?" Ares asked.

"Whatever started the fights between father and Poseidon must have occurred during the Winter Solstice. Council usually has summer solstice deadlines for disputes of winter solstice." Athena mused.

"Not that any of them ever get solved." Hera mumbled.

"Everything should be in the book." Percy said.

"'Will have… would mean.'

"What do you mean again?" Leo asked Grover.

"You didn't fail Grover. How many times should you be told that?" Thalia said angrily. Grover put up hands in defense and asked Hera to continue.

"'You haven't… next fall –'"

"Alive till next fall?" Poseidon asked, his voice higher by an octave.

"Dad, everything gets sorted."

"The mythology… a thud."

"You gave away your position!" all the sons of Hermes exclaimed as one, making everyone look at them weirdly. Hermes smiled and nodded at them.

"Mr. Brunner… slipped inside."

"Good job. Stay hidden." Chris muttered. Clarisse punched his arm. Most of the time Chris acted so serious, that people would forget that he was a son of Hermes at the end of the day.
"A few… moved on."

Very observant boy. Maybe he is better than the other sea spawns, Athena thought. Now, if only he wasn't close to my daughter, then I could have tolerated him.

"Good eye for detail, Percy." Apollo said.

"A bead… winter solstice."

"I was right." Athena smirked.

"Nobody argued." Poseidon rebutted.

Hera continued reading before it could turn into an all-out fight.

"Mine neither… like forever."

"It was probably only a few minutes." Leo said with feeling.

"Good retreat Perce. Would you like to join us for a loot sometime?" Travis asked in all seriousness.

"Ugh. I'm good."

"Finally… of danger."

"Turning your back won't work, satyrs can read emotions." Hermes and Dionysus said at the same time, mock-glared at each other and then turned away.

"The next… back inside."

"Three hours! Chiron! That's torture." Leo exclaimed and the others nodded.

"For a… the best."

"Chiron! You are amazing and all, but please never ever give us pep talks." Thalia said.

"So, he doesn't get any better, does he?" Hercules smiled fondly at his former teacher and asked.

"His tone… stung."

"I am sorry. I did not mean it in that way. What I meant was… ugh…"

"It's ok Chiron. I know."

"Here was… already gone."

"Chiron!" Poseidon admonished the centaur. Chiron blushed.

"On the… of nobodies."

"Nobodies? Well, maybe your father will fit in that category." Zeus mocked.

"You are his uncle. You are included in family. So…" Poseidon deadpanned.

"They asked… never existed."
"That's just mean." Hestia said, shaking her head in disappointment.

"The only… the city."

"You are a really good friend to the satyr." Aphrodite said.

Grover and Percy fist bumped.

"During the… Kindly Ones?"

"Wow! Must have given the faun a heart attack." Dakota said.

"Satyr! And yeah he gave me a heart attack. Scared the Hades out of me."

"Sorry!" Percy looked sheepish.

Hades and Nico mumbled something about people using him as a swear.

"Grover nearly… turned pink."

"I can lie better than Grover and my dad is the god of truth!" Will snickered.

"From his shirt pocket, he fished out…"

"Fished out? Do you compare everything to water and stuff?" Paolo asked.

"I guess. Maybe."

"Do you compare everything to air or you to death?" he asked the other big three children, who slowly shook their heads. "Just checking."

"…a grubby…fancy script."

"I hate that stupid cursive script! It hurts the eyes." Will complained and the demigods as one, turned to glare at Dionysus.

"Why are you glaring at D?" Hermes asked.

"You'll come to know later. Otherwise, we will tell." Pollux said.

"…which was… summer address."

"Oh no. He is not gonna like that." Rachel mumbled.

"Why?" Frank asked.

"Percy doesn't like rich people. They usually turn out to be snobs to him. Plus all his bullies in the school were rich delinquents."

"My heart… at Yancy."

"Nope. Not rich." Pollux said.

"Okay… it to."

"Yeah good. For a minute I thought something was wrong with you." Annabeth said, sitting up
"Grover blushed… defended me."

"That… that would be confusing." Lou Ellen said.

"You protected a satyr?" Hermes and Pan asked simultaneously. Pan continued, "The demigods mostly don't care for my people unless they require something." He continued to look quizzically at Percy, who gave him a small smile and tried to duck behind Annabeth. The demigods of the past had the decency to look embarrassed.

"Lord, Percy is like that. He will protect you even if he doesn't know you." Grover smiled at his best friend.

"Umm… can we continue reading?" Percy's face was almost completely red as he said this. He really did not like being the center of attention. He wouldn't have minded it, had it been on his terms, most likely, while shouting at the gods about something or the other. But he hated the Fates for this reading. He only agreed because the Fates were mostly sure that this would help the demigods in his timeline.

"'Grover,' I said, 'What exactly are you protecting me from?'"

"You want a chronological or alphabetical list, bro?" Thalia asked chuckling.

"Why? How many monsters are after Percy?" Theseus asked, a bit worried about his brother.

"The whole population of Tartarus and a couple of Olympians." She replied off-handedly. Only a few seconds later did she realize her mistake as Percy, Annabeth and Nico stiffened all of a sudden, which did not go unnoticed by the gods, but something stopped them from questioning.

The first time someone had mentioned Tartarus in front of them after the war, Annabeth had hyperventilated and then both, Percy and Annabeth had stormed off. Nico, on the other hand, had stopped talking completely to anyone. After that, everyone had made a conscious effort to not say anything of the sorts, to reduce the triggers for their flashbacks.

Poseidon paled considerably and looked almost like his older brother when he heard Thalia's reply and Triton patted his father's arm, weakly. He had started to like his future brother.

"Guys…" Thalia whispered to her cousins and best friend.

"Maybe we should continue? And take a 10 minutes break after this chapter?" Jason said, his eyes flitting between his sister and his cousins, who still sat stiffly but nodded all the same.

Hoping to get a reaction from the kids, Ares asked, "Why do you want a break so early?"

"The children have ADD, so they have trouble sitting in one place for a long amount of time. I believe 10 minutes would be good for them." Chiron replied, shaking his head at the war god.

"There was… the highway."

"That's not suspicious at all. Nope."

"After a… of ice."

"Ok. Now I'm hungry." Leo said and Butch and Chiara nodded, while Katie and Demeter looked
lost in thoughts, probably thinking about fruits and fresh harvest.

"There were… ever seen."

'Socks?' Athena wondered. 'The fact that the vehicle stopped all of a sudden, that too in front of a fruit stand was suspicious enough. And if three women were knitting… oh, no!' Looking at Percy, she wondered how the child was still alive. A few of the other gods who had caught up also looked at their future hero in worry.

"I mean… blue yarn."

Hera stopped reading as she looked from the book in her hands to young son of Poseidon and then back to the book. Nobody met the Fates and lived to tell the tale. Maybe they didn't cut the thread. Almost all the demigods' eyes were wide open in fear for their friend and leader. Those of them who didn't catch on that the old ladies were the Moirai, were told so by their friends.

"Percy?" Annabeth let out a shaky breath. He had never told her that he met the Fates before the day they came to take away Luke's body.

He put an arm around her to calm her down and then looked around to see everyone staring at him. "Please read on."

"All three… at me."

At this the demigods stiffened or whimpered. Hercules looked over and thought if the fate of this boy was about to come to an end. He had mixed feelings about that. On one hand, he was slightly pleased, after all his cousin had defeated a Fury with no training and was seemingly stronger than most, maybe even Hercules himself. But on the other hand, the boy seemed like someone one should befriend.

Amphitrite looked over at her husband, who was sitting as still as possible. She could feel the nearest ocean also still at the same time. If what was said earlier, that this boy had many enemies, then this would be a very long reading.

"I looked… his breath."

So did everyone in the throne room, even those who didn't like the hero or were indifferent.

"'We're… stayed back."

"Why?"

"Please go in the bus."

"That won't help. He won't be able to leave till the Fates show him what they want to show him." Said Artemis. She sounded distracted. After all even she had warmed up to the seemingly different-than-others hero.

"Across… Godzilla."

"They cut the thread. They cut the thread..." Poseidon chanted under his breath, staring at his son as if he had dropped out of outer space.

Amphitrite rubbed his arm, trying to calm him. Even if she hated all of her husband's demigod
children, she couldn't help but want the boy to survive. He just had that charm that would attract you to him no matter what (not romantically, but in a friendly-drop-your-guard kind of way), just like her husband. That's when she realized how similar Percy was to his father, not only in looks, but also in aura – a godly aura. It so closely resembled each other that if you weren't paying attention, you would mistake the son for his father.

Dionysus, more or less didn't care. He hated all the sons of Poseidon after what Theseus had done to his now wife.

Annabeth looked like she was on the verge of tears, as Percy rubbed his hand up and down her arm. Then he whispered something to her and she calmed down and sagged against Percy.

Thalia on the other hand sounded almost like her father when she shouted, "Percy! Grover! I can't believe you both. Why didn't you tell us? You stupid, stupid, annoying idiot." As she said this, she tried to hit whatever body part she could reach on her cousin from over Annabeth. She calmed down only when Annabeth told her whatever she had been told by Percy. But she still looked like she would sheesh-kebab him.

"At the… cheered."

"Now it works." Jason mumbled under his breath.

"'Darn… telling me?'"

"Everything. Just about everything." This time it was Triton who mumbled, shocking his mother. He usually never took a liking to any of his half-blood siblings.

"He dabbed… almost older."

"You are smarter than you seem, aren't you?" Hephaestus asked.

"It's a good strategy – pretend to be dumber than you are. To get your enemies to underestimate you. Hmm…" Ares thought out loud, possibly thinking about the uses of being underestimated. Everyone looked at Percy in a new light, trying to see him as a smart person rather than relying on the impression they had gotten so far.

'It is.' Chiron thought. 'Most of the camp had underestimated Percy when he had first arrived and the gods still did. So had Kronos and look where that got him.'

"He said… past sixth."

"What do you mean, never past sixth?" Hestia asked as she adjusted the coals in the hearth.

Grover replied, "More often than not, demigods get killed by monsters before they can reach camp. In sixth grade, they are usually 12 years of age and that's when their scent gets strong and attracts monsters. After that it's pretty hard to get them to camp safely. Especially if they are a child of big three. Before the oath, we protectors usually found demigods once they had crossed the age of 13. Now it's so much better."

"What oath?" Hermes asked.

"You'll probably find out once we reach the first war." Travis told his father.

"'Grover'… my coffin."
"Way to scare someone, goat boy!" Nico said. "Anyway. What kind of flowers would you like, Percy? I kind of have unlimited access to them."

"How about dandelion?"

That shut Nico up pretty fast as Percy laughed at his cousin.

"That was the end of the chapter." Hera said.

"Then we can take a break. Everyone come back in 10 minutes." Zeus announced.

All the demigods got up with a sigh and walked out of the throne room.
The gods and Chiron watched the children walk out. Once they were out of hearing range, the gods looked to Chiron with a questioning gaze.

"What is going on with the children, Chiron? They seem too upset." Zeus asked his half-brother.

"They fought in two wars, with hardly any break for some of them. They saw a lot of their siblings and friends die. It's finally taking its toll on them."

"Yes, we get that. But what happened to my son?" Poseidon and Hades asked together.

"And my daughter? Those three seem more distraught than some others." Athena wondered.

Chiron's tail flicked nervously as he said in an uncharacteristically steely voice, "That's for them to tell you, if they want to. Do not push them. Now, if you don't mind, I would like to visit this particular Olympus." With that he turned and walked out, leaving the gods to wonder what had happened in the future that affected the most seasoned teacher in such a way. Some gods wondered if they lost any children in the wars. They decided to go talk to their children.

The first ones out of the throne room were Percy and Annabeth. Percy made a beeline for the nearest river that he could feel and Annabeth followed him, not wanting to leave him alone for even a minute. They sat down on a big rock at the river bank, dipping their feet in the water, after rolling up their jeans.

"They suspect something." Annabeth said quietly, looking at the scenery in front of them, trying to commit it to memory so she could re-create it in the new Olympus.

"Hmm. I noticed. Won't be long before they come to question us."

"I don't want to tell. They knew. In our timeline, our parents know. Still none of them did anything." She said bitterly.

Percy turned to face his girlfriend and cupped her face with his hands. "Hey, don't think this way. That's why we are doing this, remember? Plus, didn't your mom bless you with dreamless sleep? They care. They just suck at showing it."

Looking down and sighing, Annabeth admitted, "I know. It just gets hard after a point of time. I mean, I am not the only one who has been having problems. My siblings are going through the same things, different memories, but essentially the same thing."

Nodding, he kissed her forehead and pulled her into his side. They sat in the peaceful silence for a few minutes before they heard someone clearing their throat behind them.
"Hello, son." Poseidon said, failing to hide his smirk. "Not disturbing, am I?"

"Not at all, Lord Poseidon." Annabeth said, quickly moving out of Percy's embrace and getting up in a hurry. "I… uh… I'll just uh…" she stuttered. Spotting Rachel and Reyna in the distance, she bowed to Poseidon and ran off.

"So, a daughter of Athena?" Poseidon asked as he sat down next to Percy.

"Please don't judge, father. I know you both have the rivalry, but Annabeth and I are not like that. Well, not anymore."

"Obviously. And Percy? I don't judge based on parentage."

They sat in awkward silence for a few moments, before Poseidon voiced his thoughts, "You are uncomfortable with me?"

Taking a breath, his son replied, "This you. Not the one in my time. I don't know this you?" Percy looked and felt confused.

"Are we close – in your time, I mean?"

"Well, you attended my 15th birthday, have hugged me and even bought me a milkshake once. It's safe to say we are closer than what the other Olympians are with their children."

"You don't mince your words, huh?"

"Why bother when you can speak your mind?"

Poseidon chuckled. "True." After a few minutes of silence, "The Fates…" the father asked worriedly.

"Don't worry. It wasn't my string that they cut. It was a friend's, whose fate was connected with mine."

The father and son duo then sat in silence, looking at the fishes swimming around their legs.

Grover and Hedge were standing under a grove of trees, talking about Chuck's upcoming one month birthday celebrations (it was insisted by the demigods), when Pan found them.

"Lord Pan." The satyrs bowed their Lord. "It's an honor to meet you."

Pan nodded to them, before getting straight to the point.

"You are a Lord of the Wild?" He asked Grover, to which he nodded. "Why? I mean, what happened that I would require a Lord of the Wild?"

Both the satyrs looked at each in apprehension.

"I… There… there are some problems with the wild from where come. So…" Hedge trailed off.

"But you both cannot tell me because it will be mentioned in the books?"

Grover nodded vehemently. "Yes Lord. It will be."
Sensing their apprehension, the god dropped the topic and talked with them about the protector duties and what all satyrs did in their time.

Thalia, Jason, Hazel, Nico and Frank were standing in a circle, exchanging embarrassing stories of each other. Well, the four of them were talking and Nico was sulking and occasionally rolling his eyes. He had started talking more to people other than Hazel or the dead, but it was still a work in progress. He usually talked to Jason, who had won the ghost king's confidence when he didn't judge him because of his sexuality or Percy, who he had bonded with over their experience in the pit or Will, but only when the son of Apollo started a conversation.

The group broke apart as Lady Artemis and her Lieutenant, Adrianna, approached them and took Thalia away. They walked till they reached the courtyard of the palace, which wasn't really that far.

"You talk to boys?" Adrianna asked quizzically.

Thalia replied, "I don't hate boys. And these boys," she jerked her head towards her demigod friends, "are my family. They were my family before I joined the hunt. And barring a few vlacas, most of them respect the hunt and the hunters. They just like to irritate us."

Lady Artemis spoke, "All of them are like that. Irritating. Just like my brother." She looked towards Apollo who was with Hermes, talking to their children.

"Tell me Thalia, how did you become my hunter, that too a Lieutenant?"

"It would most probably come up in the books. But all I will say for now is that I needed to escape my fate and you helped." Thalia said cryptically.

"Annabeth!"

Annabeth stopped walking towards Rachel and Reyna, who were petting a white Pegasus, when her mother called her. She slowed down and walked towards Athena who was sitting at a bench in the garden, dressed in a light green chiton. The young architect sat next to her mother when Athena motioned with her hand.

"Yes mother?"

Cutting to the chase, the goddess asked with contempt, "You are with that child of Poseidon?"

Annabeth sighed and took a deep breath, "Mother, Percy… he… Why do you hate Poseidon and his children? I mean I get the whole Medusa thing and maybe even Athens, but even then why do you hate his children?"

Athena bristled at the mention of Medusa, but said in a tight voice, "It's an old rivalry. You might not understand. All of his children, except Triton and Theseus, are exactly like him. Enough said."

"Whatever your reasons mom, Percy is not like that. You will see. And in the future, in my time, you do tolerate him, mostly. Please, I do not want to talk about this, seeing as we have a similar discussion in my time period."

Reluctantly, the goddess changed the topic. "Well, in that case, I was wondering, how did you
become an architect?"

"Ah. During the first war that we fought, most of Olympus had been destroyed. You could have used magic to restore it, but decided to let me build it as a reward for protecting Olympus."

Athena studied her daughter. She looked proud of her achievements, as she should, but there was a latent wariness to her posture, as if she was expecting an attack at any time. She was guarded and Athena needed to know the reason. She hated not knowing.

She looked up as Chiron trotted towards them stating that Zeus was calling everyone back.

As she walked back with Annabeth making small talk, she realized that there was some sort of a commotion in the throne room.

In the middle of the throne room, stood a girl in a white top and dark blue jeans, her caramel hair in a fish braid over her left shoulder, her dark intelligent eyes drinking in the room. They heard a shout of 'Sunshine', before the son of Hephaestus embraced the girl in a hug. Meanwhile, all the gods stood, some with their mouths open as they had one thought in their heads, "What is Calypso doing here?"
Meet the Parent

Once the gods got over their shock at seeing the Titaness who was supposed to be confined to Ogygia, they all walked to their thrones in confusion and watched the demigods greet Calypso as if they all were friends. Finally the demigods sensed their parents' confusion and Percy Jackson informed them that after the second war, Leo had found Calypso for a second time and released her from her island prison, which in turn made her a mortal. None of the gods understood how could they be okay with such a thing in the future, but they figured that they would probably understand everything in the books, so they swallowed their pride and nodded and the children settled down and explained the happenings to the former Queen of Ogygia.

"I suppose I could read the next chapter." The goddess of hearth said picking up the book.

"GROVER UNEXPECTEDLY LOSES HIS PANTS…" puzzled, she looked up at Percy whose face was violently red. All around the room, snorts and laughter could be heard and some immature people were gagging. Grover looked like he wanted the ground to swallow him as his friends looked from Percy to him and then back.

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

"Of course you did!" Rachel exclaimed.

"That was rude, you know. Scared me too." Grover said.

"I know… sixth grade?!"

"Okay. I'm with kelp head. That would freak anyone out." Thalia said and Jason agreed with his sister.

"Whenever he… meet her."

Poseidon perked up but tried not to show it. He wanted to know what kind of person he would fall for at one point. Amphitrite on the other hand was just about controlling herself to not destroy something. She noticed the slight shift in her husband's demeanor and pinched his forearm.

Percy had a goofy smile on his face and so did a few of the other demigods, so Hestia assumed the mother would be a good person.

"Her name…luck."

"Why? What happened to Sally?" Thalia asked in concern.

"You know this boy's mother?" Artemis asked her half-sister.
"Yes, milady. Sally is amazing. She is clear sighted and one of the few mortal parents who know the truth about us. She once even let all the hunters stay in her house because it was too late in the night and we didn't have transport to reach camp." Thalia replied with a wistful smile on her face.

"Her own... no diploma."

"Oh my gods. That's horrible." Piper exclaimed. She had met Sally almost a week ago and had taken an instant liking to her. All of them had.

"What is a novelist?" asked Hestia.

"A person who writes stories for others to read. Sally is currently writing a book." Annabeth replied.

Athena nodded her approval. She liked people who showed ambition especially in anything related to education.

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

'Mortals!' Hera thought with slight distaste, 'they easily fell for gods and that destroyed their lives, not to mention the god's family life.' She looked over at her brother who had a faraway look in his eyes, as if trying to picture this mortal he would have an affair with.

The Queen of Seas looked at her husband with narrowed eyes. She knew it was no use feeling jealous because 1. It hadn't happened yet and 2. She was kind of used to it. But she could be angry at him. 'Stop daydreaming.' She told him telepathically. He had the decency to look embarrassed.

"I don't... no pictures."

"Warm glow? Trace of smile?" Zeus repeated angrily. "You visited him? You broke our rules to visit him?"

"I do not know what I will do in the future, brother." The sea god replied exasperatedly. "But it does seem like I did. And anyway, if it's so important to you then, yes, I usually try to visit my children or at least keep an eye on them."

Zeus huffed but didn't say anything. After all, he too tried to look after his children. Now, if only Hera would give him more time to be alone, he could do it properly.

Percy felt pleased. His father did visit him! But, the other demigods, other than Nico – who usually lived with his father and knew that Hades had hidden him to keep him safe, felt jealous. How come they don't get parents who tried to take care of them!

"See, they... at sea."

"His mother practically told him everything she could without putting him in danger. Impressive." Adrianna remarked to her fellow hunters, who nodded.

"She worked... easy kid."

"None of us are..." Laurel said.

"None of us will be." Holly concluded.

"She sounds like an amazing person. No wonder you never stopped talking about her." Calypso...
Percy smiled at her. Even though he had been elated to see her when Leo returned with her two weeks ago, Percy couldn't help but think of the curse the Arai had given Annabeth, every time he looked at the former Titaness. He guessed he would never forgive himself for leaving Calypso like that. He was ultimately the reason for the curse, and Calypso would always remind him of that.

"Finally… gym shorts."

"Oh! That's vile." Aphrodite said scrunching up her nose as if she could smell him.

"Brother, you have a vivid imagination." Theseus said in an amused tone.

"Why, thank you!" Percy acknowledged with a mock bow.

"Between… carpet."

"That's a pig sty!"

"Hey, that's an insult to pigs!"

"Poker?" Ares asked.

"Television?" Hermes and Hephaestus asked.

"Beer cans?" Dionysus asked.

"Ok. Poker is a betting game played with cards. Horrible game really, I don't like it. Television is a machine that shows moving pictures? And beer is a type of alcoholic beverage, like wine. I don't like that either." Percy said quickly to avoid a full-fledged explanation that Annabeth was about to launch into.

"Hey! Beer is nothing like wine. Wine is way better." Pollux and Dakota said as one. "Beer can be like barley wine though." Dakota said, sounding lost in thoughts.

"Bro? You suck at explanations!" Leo said, making a tiny model of a television.

"You can say that again!" Rachel said reminiscing about how Percy introduced her to his world.

"Hardly… cash?!"

"He asked you for cash?!"

"How dare he? You were a child."

"Um, what is cash?" Perseus asked.

"Mortal drachma, but made out of paper."

"He asked a child for drachma?" Amphitrite and Hera asked as one.

"And this is why men are horrible." Artemis pointed out to which all the male population protested along with some females.

"That was… or something."
"I reiterate, vivid imagination!"

"He managed… lights out."

There was a deafening silence in the room. The gods did not understand the phrase, but looking at various murderous expressions on their children's faces, Hestia had stopped reading. She felt as though this phrase held a lot of meaning for the children.

"Percy?" Grover asked, worried that he missed something important in his best friend's life.

Percy's intake of sharp breath was all the answer needed as the silence was broken with shouts varying from disbelief to anger to sympathy (from those who had gone through the same thing).

Fearing the reply, Poseidon asked about what the words had meant to the demigods of future.

"It means to hit till the person is unconscious." Chiron replied at a low volume which the gods could hear, never taking his eyes off Percy's hunched figure as he tried to calm his friends.

"That mortal did not." The stormbringer said in a steely calm voice.

Looking at his father, Percy tried to assure him, "It was a long time ago and it wasn't that bad."

Apparently, that was the wrong thing to say because the next second he felt himself being lifted off his couch in a bear hug by Tyson, who was crying softly. "Hey, big guy! It's ok. Don't cry. I am fine." Percy wheezed out as he tried to breathe in through the tight embrace.

Finally, after almost a minute of calming the gentle cyclops, Percy was allowed to return to his couch. "I'm sorry." Thalia whispered, touching her cousin's arm. On his other side Annabeth clutched on to his hand and kissed him on the cheek.

Percy asked Hestia to continue, jarring everyone out of their thoughts.

"'I don't… in harmony.'"

"Not a decent soul amongst them." Nemesis said in disgust.

"'Fine… sweet home.'"

"Why didn't your mother do anything boy?" Hera asked.

"Don't say a thing against my mother. She did it all to protect me."

"Gabe's smell… fears melted."

By now most of them had a smile on their face.

"My mother… or Gabe."

"She is strong willed." Artemis admired.

Poseidon had a small smile on his face as he tried to picture Sally, but was brought out of it as his wife nudged him, particularly hard, in the ribs.

"'Oh… came home.'"

"Candy!" Connor, Travis, Butch and Leo drooled.
"We sat... see her."

Ares didn't bother voicing that he thought Percy was a momma's boy, not after hearing that his mortal step-father abused him. The child deserved one good parent, even if he seemed to be extremely attached to his mother.

"From the... like Gabe."

"That is true. Tell me is she still with this Gabe person?" Aphrodite asked.

"No, no she is not. She is happily married to Paul. He is a really great person and he knows about our world." Percy replied with a smile as he thought about how Paul had killed a monster during the Second Titan War.

"Good." Poseidon muttered.

"For her... so bad."

"Seriously?" Grover asked incredulously.

"Until that... sound stupid."

"No. You should tell her." Triton muttered, but Percy heard him. He didn't understand. Triton in the future hated his guts, well from the two times that he had met his elder half-brother. Once, during the war and another time, shortly after the war when Percy was returning a 'mer-baby' who had swam off and gotten tangled in a fishing net.

"I didn't know that it was all real or that she was clear sighted."

"She pursed... the beach.""

"Montauk?" Annabeth asked with a wide smile.

Hestia chuckled as she read, "My eyes widened. "Montauk?""

Everyone chuckled while Thalia asked how she knew.

"'Three... enough money."

"Oh. I'm gonna kill that stultus." Hazel said through gritted teeth. (A/N – hope the use of Latin is correct.)

"Gabe appeared... us go."

Nico decided to go to and find Gabe's soul in the Underworld (Percy had said something to him about his first step-father being dead) and dole out some punishments. Over the past few days, Percy had slowly become somewhat of a big brother to Nico, after he had calmed Nico down from the aftermath of particularly violent nightmare, and the son of Hades couldn't believe he ever had a crush on Percy.

"'Of course... The works."

"She is really good. Bribery always works." Hermes smirked. "Say Percy, have you inherited that talent from your mother?"
"Ugh..." Hermes' smile unnerved Percy. "We should continue reading."

"Gabe... right?"

"That... that creature is trying to control her by giving her a budget! This is clearly not to save money." The love goddess looked positively murderous, making Athena shift a bit further away from her.

"'Yes... a week.'"

A few gods and demigods nodded vehemently.

"But my... his game."

"You can feel the sarcasm from outer space." Will mumbled under his breath.

Nico looked at the son of Apollo sitting next to him. When they had returned from their little break, Nico and Will had ended up sitting next to each other. Nico had a little suspicion that Will had purposely sat next to him rather than with the Stolls and Katie as he had been earlier. But for the love of Hades, he couldn't figure out why, so he let it be. He turned away just as the healer turned to look at him. Apollo and Aphrodite saw this non-verbal exchange and smirked.

"'Thank... whole weekend.'"

"He has his priorities right, doesn't he?" someone mumbled.

"'Not a... scratch.'"

"Sure! Cuz Percy would be driving!" Jason said sarcastically.

"Like I'd be the one driving."

Jason and Percy looked at each other, then high-fived.

"I was... find out."

"What? How did you do that?" Grover asked.

Pan spoke up, "It's a warding used by satyrs and minor gods. How did you?"

Percy shrugged and the gods wondered once again about how powerful the son of Poseidon was.

"I got... the place."

"Of course you did. It brought you to the sea." Theseus and Triton said.

"We'd been going there since I was a baby."

"Hey Annabeth! Have you gone there?" Thalia teased her best friend to which she turned pink in reply.

"Woah! You have gone to Percy's special childhood place?!" Piper exclaimed with a sparkle in her eyes and for a moment Jason swore he could see the family resemblance between his girlfriend and her mother.

"To the beach, not the cabin!" Percy blushed.
"Yeah. Percy swam all the way to Montauk and Rainbow the hippocampi took me and followed." Annabeth told Piper, who was grinning from ear to ear.

"You swam from Long Island Sound to Montauk?" Jason asked surprised.

"Yup. Once I swam halfway to Antarctica before remembering that I had to come back in time for dinner. I get bored."

"Huh!"

"My mom… my dad."

Poseidon looked pleased.

"As we… blue food."

"Yes please! Since day one this weirdo has been eating blue food." Travis said.

"See… like me."

Most of the gods groaned inwardly. They all had, over the years, witnessed the famous Poseidon rebellious streak in his children. If this child had inherited it from both his parents, well, things would not be easy for any god who had to deal with him.

"When it… hearing them."

"We never do. Even if half the things they say are false because they don't know our parent's real identity." Katie said wistfully and the others nodded.

Poseidon and Amphitrite leaned forward to hear about the god through a mortal's eyes.

"'He was… green eyes.'"

At this everyone looked from the son to the father and back to the son.

"You both could be twins if not for uncle's beard and age." Apollo remarked.

From all his children, Poseidon thought, Percy resembled him the most.

"Mom fished… six years."

Poseidon gave his son a small smile. He didn't know whether he would be proud of his child or not. Regardless, he decided, he would always love his boy.

"You know he is proud of you, right?" Annabeth whispered to Percy.

Percy nodded. The hug after the Second Titan War had been proof enough, not only to him but to everyone in the throne room.

"'How… Smelly Gabe.'"

Percy thought of reassuring his father that he did not resent him anymore when he saw the hurt flicker on his face for a second before he regained composure, but then voted against it. It would go against the whole purpose of sitting through this torture of his thoughts being broadcasted like some show on the radio, which was to improve the relations between the gods and their children.
"Are... me around?!"

"Perseus Jackson!" Thalia and Annabeth shouted into his ears as Percy tried to sink into the couch and the older Perseus looked at them in confusion.

"Your name is Perseus?" Poseidon and Triton asked together.

"Yeah. Named after him." Percy jerked his thumb towards the king of Argos.

"You are named after me? Why?"

"Well, us children of big three don't live for long so my mother thought if she named me after you, I might get some good luck, as you are the one of the few demigods who have good luck." Percy didn't mention that the original Perseus also got to live a full life as he didn't want to alarm the other two demigods of the past.

"I regretted the words as soon as they were out."

"Good." Thalia huffed and Annabeth punched him on the arm, and not playfully, mind you.

"My mom's... his head."

"You met a cyclops when you were that young? Man, you are lucky he didn't kill you."

"He must have been a good cyclops – maybe one of daddy's cyclops. The bad ones would kill brother dead." Tyson said and nodded with vigor.

"That is probable. Father does send out his people to watch over his demigod children." Triton speculated.

"Before that... toddler hands."

"Oh. Just like me." Hercules said, looking at Hera in distaste.

"Do not compare." Percy gritted out. He hated being compared the so called best-hero-of-all-times.

Zoe Nightshade seethed with anger and snapped her head up from where she was sitting in the middle of the hunters to look at Percy. She hoped, for the hero's sake obviously, that he was not anything like Hercules. So far he had shown himself to be caring and loving, but then so had Hercules in the beginning.

Artemis caught on to the anger and dislike in the boy's tone and wondered whether the boy knew about the true nature of her father's most celebrated demigod child.

"In every... summer camp."

"Finally" someone breathed out.

"My head... before?"

"Well when you say it that way..." Leo trailed off as whatever he was working on, caught on fire.

"I'm sorry... vivid dream."

Cue groans from all the demigods. Even Chiron made a face. He was the one who would have to wake up a camper if they got caught in a nightmare, and that was enough to give him nightmares.
"It was... the surf."

All eyes turned towards Zeus and Poseidon.

"So not much has changed over the years then." Dionysus mumbled.

"The eagle... harder."

Now everyone except the demigods who knew the real story, turned towards Hades, who was busy whispering to his wife. Feeling everyone's gazes on him, he looked up and rolled his eyes. "I don't care if they fight. As long as they don't kill each other." He said, looking pointedly at his brothers, who looked away, feigning innocence. A couple decades ago, one of their fights had gotten a bit out of hand and it ended when Hades stepped in to stop his brothers from permanently damaging each other.

"I ran... No!"

Zeus smirked, but stopped when all his siblings turned to glare at him. It sucked being the youngest.

"I woke... on end."

Poseidon bit the inside of his cheek in worry.

"Then a... cloven hooves."

"You really were shocked huh!" Grover chuckled.

"I remember when I first saw a satyr..." Will started.

"You fainted from shock." Grover concluded.

"I did not!"

"You did. Ted told me you did."

"That stupid goat! He promised he won't say a word."

Nico chuckled silently at the exchange and Will blushed, but smiled seeing his friend (read crush) laugh, even if it was at his expense.

Jason and Percy saw this and turned to each other. 'Adorable' Jason mouthed over his girlfriend's head at Percy, who replied with an over exaggerated 'I know'.

"Who would like to read next? I suppose this could be the last chapter for the day. Then the demigods should eat and go to sleep. All of you look extremely tired." Hestia said, noticing the bags under the heroes' eyes.

"The second war that we fought just got over three weeks ago and we have had a lot of work since." Annabeth explained.

Demeter took the book from her eldest sister saying, "In that case, let's finish this chapter soon so you all can get some rest."
The First Fight

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Ch7 – TLT – The first fight

Clearing her throat Demeter read, "MY MOTHER TEACHES ME BULLFIGHTING"

"Sweet." Ares exclaimed.

"We tore… barnyard animal."

"Tread lightly cupcake!"

"All I… your friend."

"Best friend, G-man."

"'Urn… donkey-''"

"Uh-oh."

"I will destroy you! Get me a bazooka. I will blast you out of the sky!" Hedge lunged towards Percy only to be held back by Clarisse and Chris.

Pan looked like he was one step away from turning Percy into a plant and then burning him.

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry."

"Insolent child! Why I should…" Pan looked downright terrifying.

To avoid possible bloodshed, Demeter continued, "Grover let… didn't matter."


"It already happened dude."

"Whatever."

"'Blaa-ha-ha… insult!'"

"True. And then you need to stay in the infirmary for two whole days." Travis shuddered.

"Why? Why would you do something like that?" Katie asked, worried for her boyfriend's sanity or the lack thereof.

"It was a dare!" Connor replied.

"'Whoa. Wait… Mrs. Dodds!'"
"That's what you focus on?" Frank questioned. Though, honestly speaking, he would have been far more surprised if Percy hadn't said that.

"'Of course…after me??'

"Yes please. What is after you?" Theseus asked anxiously.

"'Oh… minions.'"

Poseidon glared at his older brother, to which the said brother simply shrugged but wondered why would he send his monsters after this child?

"You missed a couple more gods, goat boy!" Thalia said

"Why? How many gods are after him?" Hermes asked.

"Mm… Well there is father, occasionally Hades…” Thalia replied.

"Dad's mood depends on how much Percy has irritated him recently, which is usually somewhere between moderate to a lot!" Nico interrupted.

"Hera, Ares, Dionysus and even you, but that was because he went out of his way to annoy you that one time." Annabeth concluded, earning a glare (which got softened by the accompanying pout, but don't tell him that) from her boyfriend.

"I think we are missing out a couple more!" Thalia said.

"No. No. That's… that's good… we're good." Poseidon stammered, hoping his son wouldn't irritate anyone during the reading.

Everyone else was seriously worried about Percy's sanity and health.

"'Grover... cut yarn.'"

"Ok. That does sound weird."

"Do not insult the Fates, child." Hestia admonished Percy.

"'Those weren't... you, you.'"

"Wow! Are you kidding me?" Rachel exclaimed.

"'Boys... car exploded.'"

Both Poseidon and Triton held on to Amphitrite's hands and squeezed. All the demigods were interested in hearing how Percy had fought the Minotaur. Nobody had seen the fight and Grover had been unconscious so he was of no help.

"I remember… only explanation."

"FATHER!" surprisingly, a lot of gods shouted along with Thalia, Jason and Perseus. Hera just glared at her husband, not because he tried to kill the demigod but because the little outburst suddenly reminded her of how many children her husband had actually fathered.

"Brother, if anything happens to my son because of you…” Poseidon left the threat hanging as Zeus gulped nervously. Angering Poseidon was never a smart move, irritating him on the other
hand…

"We'd been… to die!"

"Aww! That's so sweet!" Aphrodite shrieked.

"Thanks man." Grover said with gratitude.

"Then he… hope."

Everyone burst into laughter as the Lord of the Wild blushed the color of cherries.

"'Percy… had horns.'"

Poseidon crinkled his brow in concentration. This beast sounded familiar.

"I swallowed… nearest hill."

"Thanks for the flattering description, kelp head."

"Always."

"I thought this car thing was like a chariot. What do you mean roof and door?" Theseus asked, ever eager to learn about new things.

"It's kind of a covered chariot, covered on all sides. And you don't need horses to pull it. It's a machine." Lou Ellen replied.

"Here. It looks something like this." Leo said passing on a model to Theseus. He anticipated this question. It was fun to make all these things, even though he didn't have equipment to make a working model.

"'That's the… the ocean.'"

Percy took a deep breath. Even though he knew his mom was fine, it was still hard to hear this part, especially when he knew what was coming.

"'No!' I shouted. "You are coming with me. Help me carry Grover.'"

Chiron shook his head fondly. That was Percy's biggest flaw and his strongest point – his need to help others at his expense.

"Seriously?" Hercules cried out. "She is a mortal, the monster won't attack her. Leave her and run to safety. You are in danger!"

Percy turned to glare at Hercules. "Do you really think I am going to leave my mother out there?" Poseidon, Amphitrite, Triton and Theseus looked proud at this. They all would also do anything for the people they loved. It was a family trait. Hera, for a moment wanted to hug the child. Don't get her wrong, she still hated all demigods, but this one so openly declared his love towards his mother.

'Loyalty. That's his fatal flaw. It must be.' Athena thought and decided to ask her daughter later, maybe she knew.

"'Food… like horns…'"
"NO!" Theseus exclaimed. "It's not… It is, isn't it?" Percy just nodded.

By now everyone had caught on to the identity of the monster and were looking at the future son of Poseidon in a range of emotions, from worry to excitement (for a fight was to take place). The Queen of Seas patted her husband's hand, who looked as if he had just seen his father (hey, it was a recurring nightmare).

"'He doesn't… with Grover.'"

"You really are adamant, aren't you?" Demeter asked to which Percy just shrugged.

"I think it runs in the family." Hades said, looking at his brother. He remembered all the times he had to deal with the middle brother's stubbornness.

"I didn't… waist-high grass."

Grover thanked his friend for not leaving him for dead using their empathy link. It had finally started working again when Percy had returned to Camp Half Blood and they both had been using it even more than usual. Both of them had been used to feeling each other's feelings in the background and the months without it felt weird, to say the least, although Grover was pleased that he couldn't feel what Percy had felt during his time in Tartarus. He didn't think he would have been able to survive it.

"Children, please tell me you have cut the grass." Demeter asked, horrified.

"Most of it has been burned down or trampled on during the wars and other fights." Katie told her mother, who looked as white as the chiton Hera was wearing.

"Glancing back… electric sharpener."

All of them were so engrossed in the story, that no one bothered asking what an electric sharpener or Fruit of the Looms was.

'Electric sharpener? Seriously?' Thalia mouthed to her cousin.

'My mind works in mysterious ways.' Percy mouthed back.

'You are crazy.'

'We all know. Now pay attention. I wanna know what happened.' Annabeth joined in.

"I recognized… have power.""

"I'm impressed. She is smart, for a mortal anyways." Artemis appreciated.

"That. Or someone told her everything about us. Or enough so that she knew what is going on." Athena replied glaring at the god of seas.

"The pine… soon enough.""

Now all the gods were staring at Poseidon, wondering how much had he revealed to this mortal. Poseidon shrugged. He didn't know what he would do in the future. But he didn't understand why he would reveal so much. Were the circumstances of his child being born special or was this mortal? Or both?
"As if… Oops."

Some smiled, some snorted, some chuckled and some laughed their hearts out, but the tension built up was gone. Ares wondered if this kid was crazy and maybe his brother, Dionysus should take a look at him. Most people would run for this hills, in this case maybe literally, and this boy just stood there thinking about a vehicle. He had no training, no weapons, no knowledge of the situation and an insane need to protect others. The god of war was thoroughly intrigued.

"'Percy… you understand?""

Theseus nodded violently, as if he had been asked the question.

"'How… smelled us."

Amphitrite was sure she would need to heal her hands after this chapter, as her husband and son clutched her hands tightly.

"The pine tree was only a few more yards, but the hill was getting steeper and slicker, and Grover wasn't getting any lighter."

"Leave them and run. You will not survive otherwise." Hercules said, annoyed that this child didn't even know that much. How did he fight in two wars?

'Just like you did with me!' Zoe thought bitterly.

Nobody paid any attention to the son of Zeus, although some agreed with him silently.

"The bull-man… my chest."

Sharp intakes of breaths could be heard around the room. Annabeth held on to Percy tightly, even though she had seen her boyfriend fight and defeat the Minotaur since then.

"The fear in my stomach made me want to bolt, but that wouldn't work. I could never outrun this thing. So I held my ground, and at the last moment, I jumped to the side."

Everyone sighed and Percy tensed up. He knew what was coming.

"The bull-man… simply gone."

Throughout all this, everyone's breathing kept increasing, till they held their breaths as one. After a moment of silence, everyone started shouting.

"What?"

"That shouldn't have happened."

"Monsters can't hurt mortals."

"Oh my gods!"

"Wait!" Poseidon bellowed. "Didn't you say she was alive? Married to someone?" He asked his son in confusion.

"Just read on. You'll find out by the end of the book."
Leo looked at Percy in sympathy. He knew what it was like to lose your mother.

"'No… grew talons."

"Good. Kick his ass!"

"Language, Nico."

"I'm old enough to say ass."

"You are 13!"

"14!"

"Same difference."

"Boys!" Chiron exclaimed, effectively stopping the verbal tennis match between Nico and Jason.

Hades looked at this affectionately, which for Hades was less glaring and more staring. He was pleased that his son could so easily be accepted, that too by a son of Zeus! A tiny hope sparked within him – if his son could be accepted, then was there hope for him? No! No use thinking such things, he thought. His brothers couldn't care less, could they? He damped the hope that was starting to spread itself within him and tuned back to the story.

"The bull-man… Ground beef!"

"Your insults suck, Prissy."

"'Raaaarr!... Like that."

"Duh!"

"The bull-man…his neck."

"Whoa!"

"That was… AWESOME!"

"Bro… that… I'm speechless." Jason said, as he looked at Percy.

"You rode the Minotaur?!" Hermes looked shocked and impressed at the same time.

"You must be good at rodeo." The Stolls said together, a mischievous gleam in their eyes that made Percy fear for his life.

"Whatever you both are thinking. NO!" Percy said with an air of finality.

"Oh, come on! You are no fun!" Connor said.

"Maybe we should involve the party ponies into this!" Travis suggested.

"NO! I forbid you both or any one from your cabin to seek out my brethren!" Chiron shouted, nervous about what could happen if the Hermes cabin exchanged ideas with the Party Ponies. Now, that was a nightmare worthy topic!

"I'm just going to continue reading." Demeter said, not entirely sure of what was going on.
"How did... Grover moaned."

"Goat boy!"

"Sorry."

"The bull-man... then-snap!"

All eyes turned towards Percy, filled with awe, respect and disbelief.

"Remind me to never arm wrestle with him." Leo told Calypso, while Ares thought of doing just that.

"The bull-man... was gone."

Everyone let out a sigh of relief.

"Worrying about this kid is going to age me prematurely." Poseidon mumbled to his wife.

"You are already in your late 4000's."

"Semantics."

"The rain...let him go."

Artemis and her hunters were beyond impressed. This boy was slowly breaking their impressions of men. They couldn't help but be astonished by him.

"The last... him inside.""

"Princess?!" Thalia laughed at her best friends' blushing faces.

"Sure! She gets to be a princess and I get to be a cripple!" Grover huffed in mock irritation.

"You forgot the unhealthy obsession with cheese enchiladas." Percy said.

"Cheese enchiladas are heaven!" Grover retorted.

"Now I'm hungry!"

"Me too."

"Me three."

"Me fo-"

"We get it! Let's go eat." Zeus shouted and everyone agreed.

"And then sleep?" Will said, stifling a yawn.

"Yes. Then sleep for all the demigods." Hestia nodded, getting up and ushering everyone towards the dining hall.
Dinner was a grand affair, to say the least. After years, the entire godly family had come together, which obviously called for a celebration. And let it never be said that the Olympians did anything by halves. Within minutes the dining hall was filled with every type of food imaginable (not the 21st century food, to the disappointment of few of the demigods – who really wanted some pizza and McDonalds – but that's what the horn of plenty was for), the Muses played some sort of classical music in the background, which kept changing to the liking of the person hearing it and the hall had been converted into some sort of ballroom, where some danced while the others caught up with each other.

As far as Annabeth could figure out, from the corner she sat in, the 'hall' was at least three times the Central Park. The gods roamed around, randomly talking to each other or their demigod children. The demigods had claimed one corner of the gigantic hall for themselves, where they all sat in one big group and chatted, relaxing for the first time since the war ended.

Annabeth was sitting on a low rise couch when Percy came back, triumphantly holding two cans of Blue Cherry Cokes (Piper had refused to get him another one after his third can for the day), a box of pizza which had a plate on top of it, of what looked like chicken wings to her, but you never know, and a bowl of ambrosia and nectar pudding, made especially for demigods. Somehow he managed to sit next to her without dropping any of the items.

"Happy belated one year anniversary." He said as he handed her a can of coke. "Since we couldn't celebrate it on my birthday, because mom wouldn't let me out of her sight, I thought we could do now. I mean what better way to celebrate than a larger-than-life Olympian…"

Annabeth put her can down and moved towards her rambling idiot. Putting her hands around his neck, she pulled him in for a kiss. After a few minutes, they came up for air and sighed contently.

"Why do I feel like I'm getting an evil glare?"

"That's probably because mom is glaring at you."

"No fair. You initiated it."

"Are you complaining?"

"Never."

"You guys are cute and all. But get a room" Rachel said, appearing behind their couch holding a glass of wine.

"That. Or we found this perfect lake for them to cool off in." Clarisse said from the next couch over, where she was sitting with Chris.

Ignoring Clarisse, Annabeth turned to Rachel, "Why are you drinking? You are underage."

"So? No rules in the ancient lands, so might as well enjoy."

"Where's the fun in that?" With that Rachel walked off.

"You know this doesn't count. I mean, you still have to plan something better than food on Olympus." She said, sitting back and picking up a slice of pizza.

"I know. I know."

They talked about everything under the sun, from repair works at camp to Annabeth's plans for Olympus to Percy's return to school for Junior Year. Occasionally, they talked to other demigods and sometimes minor gods who came by their couch.

Nico watched as Frank led Hazel to the dance floor, where Piper and Jason were already dancing to a slow tune. He gave the son of Mars a customary older brother glare when he turned towards Nico.

"You'll scare the Hades out of the poor boy, you know." Nico whipped his head around to see a smiling son of Apollo standing next to his chair and just like that his stomach turned into the stomping grounds for butterflies.

Trying to keep his face neutral, Nico said in a monotone, "Good. Seeing that I'm not allowed to shadow travel and scare him, might as well glare at him. Plus I'm the older brother. It's my job."

Will took a brave step and sat down in the chair next to Nico's around the round table that he was sitting on and said, "You do realize that Frank is older than you?"

"So? I'm scarier."

'Scary cute.' Will thought but didn't voice it out, instead he said, "Whatever. How are you feeling? Your powers starting to come back?"

"Yeah. Bit by bit. Still can't shadow travel or summon the dead."

"Good. Otherwise you'll over exert yourself and then end up in the infirmary again."

Nico rolled his eyes and maintained an impassive look while his insides were doing backflips and tap dances. He didn't mind going to the infirmary again. Those three days had been the most exciting and confusing days ever. Will had fussed over him a lot, maybe more than what was necessary, but Nico didn't mind. It's not every day that he got such a treatment, so he let himself enjoy it.

"Anyway, how are things in the infirmary?"

Nico listened to the blonde rant on about his siblings, his patients and other stuff that Nico had absolutely no idea about, but he liked listening to the healer. He was so engrossed in hearing Will's voice that he almost didn't catch Will from falling off his chair, when the healer's exhaustion finally won over his stubbornness to stay awake. Not knowing what to do, he looked around for help and finally motioned Percy to come over.

Soon after, the demigods stumbled to their respective parent's mansions on Mount Olympus, where most of them slept as soon as they hit the beds, which in Percy's case, was underwater.

Annabeth woke up, gasping for air, somewhat in the middle of a king sized bed. She sat there in daze, trying to figure out where she was before the events of the previous day came rushing back.
Touching her face, she realized she had been crying in her sleep. But as much as she tried she couldn't remember the nightmare. She only knew she needed to see Percy. As she crawled out of bed, she looked around the room. The previous night, she had been too exhausted to admire it, but now in the soft glow of the moon, the room looked absolutely stunning.

It was a simple room, with off-white colored walls and intricate designs on the ceiling. One wall had book shelves, which on further inspection she found, were filled with parchments and books on all her favorite topics, from architecture to cultural studies. So, she decided the shelves must be magic. There wasn't much furniture in the room, just the bed, a small table, a study table and a couch. On the couch was a blue and white travel bag. HER blue and white travel bag. It hadn't been there the previous night. There was a note attached to the bag, which read:

'Completely forgot about this. Enjoy your stay in the old Olympus.
Compliments – Hermes – Your friendly, godly travel agent
P. S. As a request of the Olympian Council, do not irritate any of the Gods and do not enter any other gods' (other than your parent's) shrine/temple/house without explicit permission.'

Ignoring the bag for her need to see Percy, she walked out, picking up a few papers and pencils for designing, on the way from the table.

Almost ten minutes later, she sat at the edge of a large lake that made small waterfalls over steps and such. Dipping her hand in the too cold water, she said "Percy." He would hear it or feel it or whatever. He never explained to her how it worked, or rather couldn't explain in proper terms other than that it was a feeling, but he could feel it whenever Annabeth called for him in a water body. With that she leaned against the boulder behind her and picked up her paper and pencil to sketch the scenery. She got so lost in her work that she didn't notice the person behind her. So she definitely jumped a mile when she heard a 'you called?'

"Di immortales! You scared me."

"Sorry." Percy sat down next to his girlfriend and kissed her cheek. "Good morning."

Smiling, she gave him a brief kiss. "Good morning. You look better than last night."

"I feel better. Probably because I'm sleeping underwater. Nightmare?"

"Yeah, but I don't remember it."

He put his arm over her shoulders and brought her closer. "We're together. We'll get over it, together."

Nodding, she tucked her head under his chin and they settled to watch the sunrise.

A few minutes later they heard the muffled sounds of someone's footsteps.

"Rachel?"

"Aah! Dammit guys. You gave me a heart attack." Rachel was dressed in her usual paint splattered jeans and one of her tie-die t-shirts. She held a digital camera, a sketch book and a white box in her hands.

"What are you doing here? And is that a camera?" Percy asked.
"Yup. Found it in Hermes travel bag. And also this unending sketch book/canvas and" she lifted the white box, "colors – whatever I need – paint, crayons, pencils; courtesy of Apollo. Our Apollo, not the one who just woke up and told me that this is one of the best spots for seeing a sunrise."

"Ok. Sit. Join the party."

So they sat there and waited. A few minutes later, the sun rose and created one of the most breathtaking scene ever. The sky and the lake water were drenched in a myriad of colors – blue, yellow, orange, purple and slight pink. There were birds chirping around them and the cold of the night was getting chased away by the rising sun. The three stayed there for almost two hours, the girls sketching (for different reasons) and Percy swimming in the lake, occasionally talking to a fish. Finally, they were found by Theseus, who had been sent by Poseidon to find his half-brother for breakfast.

Breakfast was a repeat of the dinner, without the music and a lot more talking. All the demigods looked better than they had done when they first arrived. After everyone was fed and ready, they all assembled in the throne room to read.
Ch9 – TLT – Slice of Heaven (CHB)

After spending the previous day together, the gods and demigods were feeling a bit more comfortable around each other, so the gods decided to sit on couches amongst their children instead of their thrones. They all arranged the couches around the hearth, where Lady Hestia sat.

"I'll read next." Poseidon said, eager to know more about his son.

"I PLAY PINOCHLE WITH A HORSE"

"What's pinochle?" Dionysus asked.

"An annoying game."

"One of your favorite games." Pollux informed his father.

"I had weird dreams full of barnyard animals. Most of them wanted to kill me. The rest wanted food."

Poseidon burst out laughing by the time he read the sentence and soon everyone joined him. Once they all had calmed down, which took longer than what it should have, the god continued reading.

"I must… the spoon."

"Aww. So cute." Piper mocked as she rested her head against Jason's chest.

"Oh, shut it!" Annabeth said as she blushed pink.

"When she… few weeks!"

"Something is stolen?" Hera asked.

"What's going on?" Clovis suddenly asked, waking up from his usual nap.

"We're reading. Percy just reached camp." Holly told him.

"Ok." And with that the son of Hypnos went back to his sleep.

"I'm sorry… with pudding."

"All this talk of pudding makes me want pudding."

"We literally just had breakfast."

"But no pudding."
"Anyway… The next… his hands."

"Argus is at the camp?" Hera asked, shocked as to what he was doing there.

"Yes, Lady Hera. Argus is in charge of security at camp." Chiron replied.

"When I… a nightmare."

"I'm so sorry" Leo said.

"'The Minotaur,' I said."

"Percy! You shouldn't take names. They have power." The god scolded his son.

"'Urn, Percy… look beautiful.'

All of them could understand the boy's pain in some or the other degree. They too had lost a lot of loved ones over the years. Athena wondered who had taken the mother. The shower of golden light as was described meant that she was alive but had been taken by one of the gods. Which one?

"'I'm sorry,' Grover sniffled. 'I'm a failure. I'm-I'm the worst satyr in the world.'"

"No, goat boy is the best." Tyson said with feeling as he hugged Grover, who looked ready to pass out.

"He moaned… his head."

"Whoa! No one is shaving my head!"

"We don't need to anymore. We can see the horns." Jason said.

"But it'll be fun." Travis and Connor whined, but kept quite when Grover, Hedge and Pan glared at them.

"But I… do something."

"Yeah. You would go save the world." Annabeth whispered in Percy's ear, making him smile.

"Grover was… be okay."

"Great. Go ahead and describe more food, why don't you!"

Poseidon felt really happy that Percy had such a good mother, which meant it would not bode well for whichever god who had taken away the one source of happiness in his son's life.

"Before I knew… you taste."

"NO!"

"His eyes… you mean?"

"He means that the mortal half of you cannot handle the nectar", informed Apollo, ever the doctor.

"I know now."

"He took… my breath."
All the gods and the demigods of the past were excited. They wanted to know how much the camp had changed. The minor gods were especially interested as they wanted to see how their children were being recognized in the camp. If they had claimed their children, it meant that the children had some place to stay.

"We must've... had wings."

The demigods sighed in happiness and both Perseus and Theseus were daydreaming about pegasi. Their camp was wonderful. No matter how many battles the camp went through, it remained beautiful and strong, just like its people.

"Sounds beautiful." Hestia smiled and said. The campers nodded.

"Down at... almost purple."

"D?" Hermes asked. He knew the description by heart because he would be the one who would go around searching for his brother, when the said brother managed to get lost while being drunk after a party.

The gods turned to look at a confused Dionysus. Sure enough, he looked exactly like how the book had described the man. But if it was him, what was a god doing amidst demigods?

"Please read on dad. You all will find out soon enough."

"He looked... stepfather."

"Of course I can!" Dionysus sounded offended. He still didn't understand the remaining part of his description, but both Dakota and Pollux had and were now glaring daggers at Percy. No one insulted their dad, no matter how annoying he was.

"We don't even know if it's you." Apollo said, but didn't sound very convinced. After all, the description was spot on, including the whole 'cherub turned middle aged'. But what was a trailer park?

"Once he comes to know, he will kill you." Thalia whispered to her cousin.

"It's not like I can control my thoughts! Plus, I never said it out loud. At least I don't think I did." Percy whispered back.

"'That's Mr. D... know Chiron...'"

'Mr. D? Yes, it had to be Dionysus. But camp director?' most gods thought and then decided to just listen to the book. They would get more answers that way.

"He pointed... answers B."

"Only you, Chiron! Only you." Annabeth said, laughing. Chiron smiled back.

"'Ah, good... see you.'"

"Real friendly, isn't he?" Poseidon asked, glaring at the god of wine. He was now convinced that the camp director was him.

"'Uh, thanks... a satyr.'"
"Hmm…" The Hermes kids said as one, looking at Percy as if trying to imagine him as a satyr. Then they turned to Lou Ellen, which terrified Percy. If there was one thing that they had learned, it was that no child of Hermes should be given access to magic. Their pranks and practical jokes only get worse.

"Annabeth…the image."

Almost everyone raised their eyebrows at Percy, including Poseidon and Athena. It was no secret that the son of Poseidon was dating the daughter of Athena. Aphrodite looked exited. She wanted to know how much had she interfered in this love story.

Poseidon read on, to save his son from Annabeth's glare.

"They were… a fight."

"Better." Annabeth said to him.

"She glanced at the minotaur horn in my hands, then back at me. I imagined she was going to say, you killed a Minotaur! Or Wow, you're so awesome! Or something like that."

"Seriously?! Do you even know her?" Thalia asked, as everyone laughed. The gods thought that, if the girl was anything like her mother, which she was, then that was the last thing she would ever say. To anyone.

Percy blushed and replied, "Back then I didn't."

"Instead she said, "You drool when you sleep.""

"Now, that sounds like Annabeth!"

"Then she sprinted off down the lawn, her blond hair flying behind her."

"Already checking her out, huh?" Jason asked and got glared at and punched by Annabeth.

"So… no reason.""

Now everyone was convinced that it was the wine god, otherwise why would he not want the boy to say the name?

"It is me, isn't it? Why am I there?"

"You'll find out if we continue reading. It should be explained." Percy said exasperatedly.

"Oh. Right… first test."

All the demigods, past and future, remembered the stories they were told of those who never made it. They heard it through satyrs and nymphs. All those who knew Thalia's story turned to look at her, who said, "I made it. Eventually. Even though I was 6 years late, I still made it, so stop looking at me."

This confused Jason and Zeus, who wondered what happened to the now hunter. Jason was never told about Thalia being turned into a pine tree to preserve her life force.

"Grover…Hawaiian shirt."
"You disrespectful…"

"Why are you scaring the satyr, D?" Hermes interrupted.

"Actually, the bigger question is, why is he even there?" Athena asked.

"Let me read! Now where was I? Aah, yes. "You do… the rules.""

Some campers snorted.

""I'm sure… his pile."

Pan glared at his friend for scaring the satyr.

"Chiron smiled… or not?"

"You are so rude! Have you no compassion?" Aphrodite asked, getting annoyed with the god's behavior. And so were a few other gods, with Poseidon in the first position.

""What… be sufficient.""

"You didn't show him the orientation film?" Annabeth asked incredulously. She remembered how she had treated Percy when he first came to camp. She thought he was dumb for not understanding whatever she told him, even after watching the orientation film. They showed it to every camper. She groaned into Percy's shoulder as he rubbed her arm.

"I honestly don't remember why I didn't." Chiron said, sounding confused.

""Orientation film… much alive.""

There was hum of affirmation around the room.

"I stared… it mournfully."

"How do you eat some mournfully?"

""Wait… smaller matter.""

Most of the gods raised their eyebrows at Chiron. "I was just trying to explain it to Percy without overwhelming him?" Chiron said, but it ended up sounding like a question. Chiron heaved a sigh of relief as the gods accepted this explanation. One crisis averted.

""Smaller… was science.""

"What's science? And why do mortals not believe in us anymore?" Zeus asked. He was offended that the mortals would dare forget his family.

"Science is the mortals' way of explaining the nature. And as for why the mortals don't believe in gods anymore, well, after the flame of civilization shifted to Rome, as I'm sure I would be explaining to Percy in the book, the mortals formed new religions, some based on you all and some completely new." Chiron explained.

""Science… mouth shut."

"That, my boy, is your survival instinct kicking in. Listen to it and don't offend D." Hermes said.
Although, he had a feeling that would be easier said than done.

"Somehow, I have a feeling you are not going to do just that." Poseidon said as he rubbed his forehead. He remembered the conversation he had with his son the previous day, about not mincing his words.

"'Percy… their mothers?'"

"Chiron!" half the gods in the room shouted at the centaur, who looked apologetic.

"My heart…in gods."

All the gods looked at Percy, as if daring him to say that again.

"I obviously believe now!" Percy all but shouted and then mumbled under his breath, "Temperamental idiots." And for his troubles, he got a particularly hard jab in his side, courtesy of his glaring girlfriend.

"'Oh, you'd… even believe.'"

"Confined? Why am I confined?" Dionysus shouted, getting worried and angry at the same time.

"He waved his hand and a goblet appeared on the table, as if the sunlight had bent, momentarily, and woven the air into glass. The goblet filled itself with red wine."

Like he did now.

"My jaw… your restrictions."

"RESTRICTIONS? Who dares to restrict me from my power?" Dionysus shouted as the gods winced. They had never been separated from their powers, but to do that do another. It was beyond torturous. And there was only one god who had such a power – their king. All of the gods were discreetly looking at Zeus, trying to fathom the reason for such a harsh punishment.

The demigods sank lower in their seats, trying to disappear completely. It would so not be good when the gods would find out what had happened.

The longer the silence went on, the stronger the smell of fresh grapes got in the air. The wine god was projecting his power, which in turn gave all the demigods some severe headache.

"Dionysus, stop! Let me read." Poseidon said in a firm but gentle voice, leaving no room for any more discussions. He waited till the god had gotten himself under control before continuing.

"Mr. D looked… More thunder."

By now Dionysus was positively seething. It was obvious that Zeus had restricted him, but why? Hestia and Poseidon looked at each other and had a non-verbal conversation. They would have to protect the demigods, hunters and Chiron, from the imminent fight, when the truth was revealed.

"Mr. D waved his hand again, and the wineglass changed into a fresh can of Diet Coke."

The seven looked at Percy, remembering the crazy and ingenious way he had saved them from Chrysaor and his crew of crazy half-dolphins. Percy turned to look at them with mirth shining in his eyes and they all struggled to keep their laughter in, in favor of the oppressing atmosphere surrounding them.
"He sighed… off-limits."

"You restricted me because of a NYMPH!" Dionysus was now standing in all his 20 feet glory, radiating power like only a god could. The campers had never seen their director truly angry. Sure he was irritated all the time but not usually angry. This scared them, as most of them now were trying to hide in their couches. The wine god was unknowingly hurting the demigods' minds.

"Father." Pollux squeaked in pain. He was getting a horrible migraine and that was after being immune to some of his dad's powers. He couldn't imagine what the others were going through.

Somehow in his angered stage, Dionysus heard his son's plea and controlled himself and his powers receded. Soon the children sat up straighter, rubbing their foreheads.

Zeus looked like he wanted to disappear as his siblings turned to look at him, not in anger but in disappointment. What had happened to their younger brother?

"How would you feel if somebody takes away your lightening? That is your main power, isn't it father?" Dionysus sneered.

All those who knew what this particular book was about, looked at each other, before Percy whispered, "He throws a hissy fit and declares war." But most of the gods heard him and looked at him in confusion, except for the god of madness who muttered, "Of course he would."

"'A wood… little kid."

"Twice?" Ariadne glared at her husband, who looked away from her.

"You declared a wood nymph off limits? You…" Hera trailed off, barely keeping her temper in check.

"'And… of wine.'"

"Finally."

"Mr. D rolled… A god. You.'"

"Percy!" Poseidon said with a pained expression as Dionysus turned to fix his glare at Percy.

"I wasn't insulting! It was hard to believe that there was a god there, especially when I just learned that this world existed, that's all. Honest." Percy tried to pacify the angry god.

"He's telling the truth, D. I'm the god of truth. I know." Apollo told his brother, who then went back to glaring at the king god.

"He turned… No, sir.'"

Dionysus smirked and Poseidon felt relieved. Good, his son didn't antagonize the god any further.

"The fire… your manners.'"

"And that was probably one of the last times he ever said my name properly."

"What do you mean?" Poseidon asked his son.

"Mr. D has the habit of getting our names wrong. As long as the initials match our actual names, he
will make up names for us. So, half the time he calls me Perry, Peter or Pedro. He does that for all the campers."

Chiron grimaced. He knew the real reason behind the god's adamant behavior. When he had first come to camp, he was always irritated, but used to call the campers by their real name. Then, one such camper had died on a quest. A son of Aphrodite. Since then Mr. D made sure to keep distance from the campers. It was very easy to get attached to them.

"He swept… to Olympus."

"One whole century! Absolutely unfair." Dionysus grumbled and a few gods discreetly nodded.

"'Mount Olympus… The what?''"

The gods listened keenly. They wanted to understand more about their future.

"'Come now… are here.'"

The gods were silent for a few minutes, digesting this load of information that they just received.

"It was… adore chocolate."

"Understatement." Someone coughed.

"And then… velvet underwear,"

Chiron raised one eyebrow at Percy. Well, at least the child hadn't told him that on his face. A few of the demigods had, in the past.

"…but as… legs attached."

"Ah! The first time I saw him do that, I was terrified." Chiara mumbled and Paolo nodded, it had been freaky.

"I stared… other campers."

"Alright, this chapter is done. Who wants to read next?"

"I might as well." Amphitrite said, taking the book from her husband. He tilted his head, wondering why she would want to. His queen just shrugged and turned the page.
The First Clue

Ch10 – TLT – The first clue

"I BECOME SUPREME LORD OF THE BATHROOM" Amphitrite read in a mixture of confusion and amusement.

"Oh gods! The titles are too hilarious." Hazel said in between laughter.

Clarisse's and Annabeth's eyes widened in understanding. "Oh, Hades no!" Clarisse said and slumped against her couch. Chris patted her shoulder in sympathy. He had figured out what this chapter would be about, and at one point, the incident was a hot topic of gossip for the campers, so every one of the campers would know about it.

"Sorry girls." Percy said, grinning sheepishly.

"Once I… his front."

Needless to say, each and every one in the hall was trying to control themselves out of respect for the centaur, as Percy and Chiron blushed furiously. Chiron decided to put Percy on camp cleaning duty as soon as they went back.

"We passed… or something."

"No. Not a flip." Travis said.

"Although that would have been cool." Connor continued.

"Not to mention completely random and weird." Katie said, shaking her head at the twins.

"But all of us were talking about the fight. I'm pretty sure some campers went and gossiped about it with the monsters in the forest too, before killing them obviously." Travis told.

"Wouldn't be the first time." Chris said, while the others looked at the older campers as if they had finally lost it. Especially the Romans.

"I looked… being watched."

"It moved?" Annabeth asked.

"Styx. That's twice now."

"Why? What's there?" Athena asked.

"It will come up later."

""What's up… that curtain."
"Ok. That's creepy." Frank shuddered.

"The attic has all the old spoils of war, doesn't it?" Leo asked. He had gone up there one afternoon when he was bored.

"Among other things. At least back then." Percy said mysteriously.

"Come along… strawberries instead."

"Oh, come on! Seriously?" Dionysus asked, sipping his wine angrily.

"I watched… Really.""

"Thanks man."

"It's the truth."

Few gods smiled at this exchange. Aphrodite could feel the love of friendship coming off those two. Actually, truth be told, all of them had strong friendship bonds that she could feel. Just because she advertised more about romantic love, it didn't mean that the other kinds of love were less important. In fact, those ties between friends and families were sometimes more important than two romantically involved people.

"Chiron sighed… Grover's part.""

"Hey!" Pan protested. "It's not fair. It's not his fault that Lord Zeus blasted them off the road!"

"No offence, Lord Pan. But the Council of Clover Elders aren't exactly known for their intelligence." Percy said.

"I wanted… in trouble."

"Not your fault. I freaked you out."

"Still, I shouldn't have left you."

"No, you shouldn't have."

Percy stuck out his tongue at his best friend, who replied in kind.

"He'll get… other career…!"

"Not gonna happen. He will go and find…" The rest of Thalia's words were muffled by Percy's hand, who discreetly pointed towards Pan.

"That's not…real, too?!"

"Are you serious?" Triton asked his brother.

"Do not dare enter my realm, child." Hades sneered. Normally, he didn't go out of his way to kill demigods, but if they dared enter his home, then he would not hesitate. He hoped for his younger brother's sake that his nephew didn't try anything stupid.

"Chiron's expression… the woods."

"Chiron! You cannot just plant an idea, albeit unwillingly, into my child's head and expect him to
forget about it." Poseidon had a feeling that his son would go to the Underworld. He just hoped that he intervened in some manner so as to prevent his son from suffering.

"As we... twelve of them,"

"Twelve?" Jason and Reyna asked together.

"Whoa! Aren't there like 20 of them or something?" Gwen asked and Dakota nodded his confirmation as he took a swing of his Kool-Aid.

"23 actually," Annabeth replied, "We are still working on the honorary Hestia cabin, Morpheus' cabin and Asclepius' cabin." The said gods looked confused. They were getting a cabin in a camp designed only for half-bloods of the Olympian Council?

Percy explained to all, "Back when I came to camp, there were only 12 cabins, one for each Olympian." The gods and the demigods of the past nodded, this was how things were in their times too. "But later, after the first war that the camp fought, the Council decided to recognize all the children of all the gods, including Hades and the minor gods. So, we built cabins for their children."

Thalia and Annabeth snorted. "You are saying this as if the Council came up with the idea." Thalia said, annoyed that her cousin couldn't even take credit where it was due.

"Who else could, daughter? The Council does not let others dictate what it does." Zeus said.

Percy slightly shook his head at Thalia. He didn't want the gods to know about the oath yet, for two reasons. One, he didn't want the minor gods to look at him differently, as he knew would happen. It happened in his time. He was just happy that finally all the children were being accepted. Two, he wanted the gods to read about the war beforehand. That way maybe they could appreciate the step they took.

"So," Hypnos asked, his voice putting the demigods in a sleepy state, "All of our children get a cabin for themselves?"

"Yes, father." Clovis said in his sleep, as he fell against Damien, who pushed him onto the ground.

Hades who had been silent till now, turned to look at his son, who was already looking at him as if he expected a question, and asked, "Do I... I mean you, get a cabin?"

"Cabin 13. The first cabin to be added after the war." Nico said proudly. It was one of the happiest moments when they had completed the construction of Cabin 13. After centuries, Hades and his children had been honored.

Smiling slightly, Hades leaned back into his obsidian couch, as his wife smiled brightly at him. A few other Olympians, like, Hestia, Hermes, Aphrodite, Poseidon (to a certain degree) were happy about this development. Zeus was a bit skeptical. On one hand, he did like the fact that the others were being acknowledged, but his paranoia flared up. He wondered if any of them would try to take advantage of such acknowledgement.

"...nestled in... nothing alike."

The gods nodded. Each cabin reflected the nature of the god it was built for. Obviously, they would be nothing alike, just like the gods, always contradicting and contrasting with each other, individually but together, created the most beautiful symphony.
"Number nine… my speed)."

The gods and their children smiled when their respective cabins were being described and the heroes nodded in affirmation when mentioned about the basketball hoops. Percy did like them, even though he wasn't that good at the game. When asked about basketball, Jason and Will took turns explaining the game to whoever listened. The other campers were lost in thoughts, thinking about their home and feeling homesick.

"In the center of the field was a huge stone-lined fire pit. Even though it was a warm afternoon, the hearth smoldered. A girl about nine years old was tending the flames, poking the coals with a stick."

All the gods smiled at Hestia, their favorite goddess. The goddess of hearth in turn smiled at Percy. Not many would acknowledge the goddess.

"The pair… of peacocks."

The said couple smiled proudly, while both Thalia and Jason grimaced. They were the only ones who had to sleep with a giant statue of their father staring down at them. Most of the time, they just threw a blanket or bedsheet on to the statue before turning in for the night.

""Zeus and… or two."

"That's correct." Hera said smugly.

"Why is no one in my cabin?"

"You'll find out soon enough father." Jason said.

"Okay. So… cabin three."

Poseidon smiled, while his wife scowled at him. He had loved creating that cabin, well the present one anyway. He didn't know if he did the same for the future cabin, but he hoped he did.

"It wasn't… along, Percy."

"Now, wait a minute. Why is there no one in my cabin? You should be having siblings." Poseidon looked at Chiron and Percy, as Amphitrite rolled her eyes.

"Obviously neither you nor father have stopped having demigod children," Athena said, looking towards the said children, "There must be something else going on."

Chiron asked the reading to be continued as the gods sat, puzzled.

"Most of… any here."

"Aah! Gotta love the party ponies, man." Connor said with a faraway look in his eyes. Tyson perked up at the mention of ponies. He really liked ponies. It wasn't his fault that most of them didn't like him back!

""You said… of Hercules…"

The said hero sat up straighter when his name was mentioned. He felt smug that his trainer, a person who had trained hundreds before him and thousands after him, mentioned only him. Hercules wondered if he became that prominent. He was already widely celebrated as one of the, if
not the best hero to be ever born.

"… and all…still needed."

"Very much so." Annabeth said, looking fondly at her second father figure, and everyone nodded. Chiron smiled. He loved these children more than anything in the world.

"I thought about being a teacher for three thousand years. It wouldn't have made my Top Ten Things to wish for list."

"But you are a good teacher." Laurel said.

"You teach?" Hestia asked.

"Yes, Lady Hestia. Sword fighting and canoeing." Poseidon smiled proudly at his son, who smiled back.

"'Doesn't it… depressing?''"

Percy turned to look at Chiron and from the look in the hero's eyes, Chiron knew he understood why it would be depressing.

"Chiron seemed… I drooled."

A few campers laughed, looking at the slightly blushing couple.

"I tried… evacuation center."

Hermes and his children winced at the description of their cabin.

"Chiron, we need to get the cabin redone!" The Stolls twins said.

"Yes, I agree. We shall do that once all the other repair work is completed."

"Can we get a fireman's pole?" Connor asked excitedly.

"Can we discuss this when we get home?" Piper charm spoke.

"Why is the Mer- sorry, Hermes cabin so crowded?" Reyna asked.

"Back then, all the unclaimed demigods were put in our cabin. And there were a lot of unclaimed demigods. Travis and Connor shared one bed for almost three years before we got some space because some of the others ran away." Chris spat out. He was miffed about his dad not claiming him for years, especially when he was already staying at the Hermes cabin. Most of the gods with half-blood children looked away in guilt.

"Why would anyone run away? Camp is an amazing place and you Greeks don't have any other safe place to stay." Hazel asked, but instantly regretted it when a few of the older campers including Percy looked like they were on the verge of tears.

Taking a deep breath, Clarisse explained in an uncharacteristically soft voice, "Most of the demigods who ran away were unclaimed. They thought that their parent would claim them if they went out and did something heroic. So, they would go out in the mortal world, searching for monsters and quests. Till date, no one has ever returned."
A few of the demigods were crying softly as they remembered all the friends they had lost because the gods couldn't be bothered to claim their children. The gods, on the other hand, looked like someone had just slapped them. They never thought their children would do something like this just to get claimed. Percy was feeling a bit satisfied upon seeing the gods' reaction, 'Maybe the reading would show them exactly how one small overlooking on their part affected their very existence'.

Hera was pleased, but for another reason. According to her, these demigod children should have never been born and so they were destined to die. But she dared not voice out her thoughts. She was very well aware of the fact that the other gods, including her husband and brothers, were attached to their abominations, and would not hesitate to tear her a new one if she said anything.

"Dear, please continue reading." Poseidon said to his wife in a small voice.

"Chiron didn't... of myself."

Nobody felt like laughing, but ended up giving a few chuckles, effectively breaking the oppressive atmosphere in the room.

"There were... over there.""

The dense mood returned like a rubber band being snapped.

Feeling annoyed on his children's behalf, Hermes asked, "And how big was this spot exactly, Percy?"

"Just enough to sleep on my side." Percy said, pulling no punches. At this Hermes looked at all the other gods pointedly, but didn't say anything.

"The guy... knife slash."

All the older campers flinched as they heard about Luke. The counselor had been a friend/brother to everyone in the camp.

"'This is Luke," Annabeth said, and her voice sounded different somehow. I glanced over and could've sworn she was blushing."

"Ugh, Seaweed Brain! Why do you have to notice minute details?" Annabeth's whisper was muffled from where she hid her face in Percy's side.

"She saw... of thieves."

"Why did you have to remember?!" Travis whined and Katie punched his arm.

"I looked... behind me."

The gods looked guilt stricken again, while Poseidon wondered why he didn't claim his son as soon as he had arrived in the camp. He usually did that with almost all his children. Even Amphitrite, Triton and Theseus wondered the same.

"When we... the one."

Cue whistles from the campers, which stopped when the couple mock glared at them. Hey, even their mock glare was scary!
"Why did you think he was 'the one'?' Athena asked her daughter.

"It had something to do with a prophecy… it will probably come up later."

"'What's your… your chance?'"

"To be hunted down and killed?" Thalia asked. She couldn't believe that Annabeth would say something like that. They had been on the run for months together. She should know better.

"'To get… train for?'"

"Annabeth!' the wisdom goddess admonished her daughter. Surely, this had nothing to do with the revelation that took place some time back, Athena thought. Did her daughter want to go out and prove herself to the goddess? She banished these thoughts from her head and listened when Lady Amphitrite continued reading.

"I shook… the labyrinth. So…"

Theseus looked at his half-brother and smiled. So, people remembered him for killing the Minotaur. Good.

"'Monsters don't die, Percy. They can be killed. But they don't die.'"

"Geez, thanks! That clears up everything." The Grace siblings said together and smiled at each other.

Amphitrite smiled when she read, "'Oh, thanks. That clears it up.'"

"See. I told you that you guys are too similar." Annabeth said, poking Percy in the ribs.

"Hey! I'm nothing like kelp head. I'm better."

"I agree." Jason teased.

Before Percy could say anything and turn it into a repeat show of a big three fight, the Queen of Seas continued reading, "'They don't… very mad.'"

"You are not wrong." Nico said nonchalantly. "She hates you more than anything, especially after what you did the last time." He said, referring to the fight between Percy and Hades' army.

"'How did… at all.'"

"I still don't understand why we call them that. They are so not kindly."

"Yeah. It's not like they like that name. If anything, it annoys them."

"'Look, is… get it."

"Should have just explained everything to you. It would have been faster."

"'My mom… knew him.'"

Amphitrite shook her head. Percy seemed adamant to not acknowledge his father.

"Annabeth sighed… where to start."
"We all get overwhelmed in the beginning, bro." Leo said.

"Why didn't I just show you the film?" Chiron groaned.

"Then a… camo jackets."

Clarisse growled, "Who you calling ugly, Prissy?"

"'Clarisse… bad smell.'"

"HEY!" Ares shouted, only to shut up when Poseidon glared at him.

"Clarisse growled. "We got an initiation ceremony for newbies, Prissy.'"

"Why didn't anyone stop me?" Clarisse moaned into Chris's shirt, who stroked her head, trying to comfort her.

"'Percy… classier johns.'"

Everyone started laughing. "Oh man, that's so true!" Damien said.

"Clarisse's friends… her fingers."

"Was not!"

"Was too."

"Was…"

"Clarisse bent… my stomach."

Ares groaned. "You couldn't have taken him some other place?"

Poseidon and his family looked excited. This would be the first time they would hear about Percy using his powers. They wanted to see how much power he held.

"I heard… clothes. Nothing."

Poseidon was all out grinning by now and winked at his son when he caught his eye. That was a good amount of power being used, for the first time anyway. A couple of gods were attempting to control their laughter, but weren't being very successful in it.

"I stood up, my legs shaky. Annabeth said, "How did you ...""

"Did you not realize his parentage?" Athena asked.

"No. But, there is a good reason for that mother."

"'I don't… your mouth.'"

All the campers, save Clarisse and Chris (out of love and respect and maybe a bit of fear for his girlfriend), were laughing.

"Only you would ever say such a thing to an angry Clarisse."

"I've probably done worse."
"You have definitely done worse." Annabeth confirmed.

"Her friends… the flag."

Athena grinned. She understood what her daughter was going to do – divide and conquer – a good strategy.

"And that was the end of the chapter. Who wants to read next?"
Offerings

(A/N - Disclaimer- I do not own Percy Jackson series or the Heroes of Olympus series. All characters and words in bold are owned by Rick Riordan and Hyperion Books for Children and Disney Hyperion. I do not intend to use the text from the books for any other purpose other than for this fanfiction and nor do I intend to make any sort of profit from the story. All rights go to the actual owner and not me. This is only a work of love for the series.)

Ch11 – TLT – Offerings

"Here, give me the book. I will read next." Hades said. This nephew of his was turning out to be quite the entertainer.

"MY DINNER GOES UP IN SMOKE… sacrifices to the gods, I presume?"

"Yes, uncle."

"Word of… dripping wet."

"Both, I guess. You wouldn't believe how fast the gossip mill works in camp." Katie said.

"I think we would. We lived in the camp too. One time, a sister of mine brought a couple of dolphins into our cabin and within the next five minutes, half the camp wanted to play with them." Theseus said, shaking his head. Those dolphins were good friends, he thought, he should probably go visit them soon.

"You," Annabeth turned to face her boyfriend, "are not bringing any dolphins in the cabin. The small fishes are more than enough. And so are the horses and pegasi."

"But –"

"No."

"Fine."

The gods watched this in amusement. Meanwhile, Chiron was thanking his lucky stars for Annabeth. If it wasn't for her, cabin 3 would turn into an aquarium for lost/stray sea creatures till they could be returned home. That had happened once before.

"She showed… fast enough."

"Sounds interesting. Why didn't we have anything like that?" Hercules said. It would be another thing that he could excel in, in front of his peers.

"I think, brother, that the fire breathing hellhound is enough." Perseus said.

"Finally we… my fault."

"Sure." Someone said sarcastically.

"She looked… Not who. What…"

"My Oracle is a 'who' not a 'what'." Apollo told Annabeth and the other gods agreed.
"Um… of course." The grey eyed girl replied. It would be really bad when Apollo found out about what had happened to his Oracle. He was very protective of her.

"The Oracle… long-lost friend."

"More like relative or lord." Triton told his younger half-brother.

"I didn't… home now."

"Really?" Clarisse asked, "After all that you saw, naiads made you want to return?"

"Annabeth frowned…disturbed kids?"

"Yes, yes. That's what we are." Connor said solemnly.

"It makes sense. I mean, with Mr. D running the camp and all." Travis added.

The gods just shook their heads at the children's silliness.

"'I mean… you know.'"

"Oh gods! It must have been so confusing for you, especially when you didn't watch the orientation film."

"It was."

"I didn't…few millennia?"

"Doesn't look like it." Hera gritted out.

"It's not the most common thing we did." Hermes said to the demigods, who just stared at the god. They all sat in uncomfortable silence till Hades cleared his throat and started reading.

"'But those… a myth.'"

"Percy, you are a legend. A living, breathing –"

"Annoying."

"– legend."

"Guys! Come on. I'm not." Percy said, blushing furiously.

"Yes, you are."

"No – "

The gods were puzzled as they watched all the demigods arguing with Percy, who in the end declared the matter closed. But the others didn't look like they would be giving up anytime soon. Poseidon was proud of his son, even though he didn't know what all his son had done. If all the campers could agree on Percy being a legend, then it must be true. But why didn't he want any recognition for it? Any other half-blood would kill for such a reputation. None of the gods could believe that someone could be this modest.

"'But if… your dad?"
"Percy! You really don't know when to shut up, do you?" Thalia asked.

"Hey, I honestly thought it would be a god and not goddess."

"Why not?" asked Athena, looking slightly offended.

"Um… till then I hadn't met any child of a goddess, so I didn't know. On top of that, we were always taught about children of male gods in school."

The goddesses were offended. Why were the mortals not told about their children?

"Her hands… American history.'"

'Sounds like a good, intelligent man.' Athena thought.

"'He's human… Why not?"

"What do you mean by that?"

"Wise girl, I was just um… just that…” Percy stopped talking when he saw his father shaking his head and indicating him to stop. "Sorry?"

"Hmmph." But Annabeth was trying not to laugh. She loved making things difficult for her Seaweed Brain.

Hades started to read. "'And my dad?''

"Right there." Apollo said, grinning widely, his teeth momentarily blinding anyone who looked at him.

"'Undetermined… loved her.'"

Amphitrite turned sharply to face her husband and scowled at him. 'You did WHAT?' she shouted at him telepathically. Wincing, he replied in the same manner, 'It's in the future dear. If in any case I do love her, I would never fall in love with anyone who is not you.' She turned away. Her husband did know how to use his words and it helped that she knew that he spoke the truth. Regardless, she was angry.

Some of the other demigods who used to think the same or had a sibling who thought that way, looked down. They always thought that their godly parent, however absent, did love their mortal parent. But they were always heart-broken when they would learn that it was nothing but an affair or sometimes even a one night stand.

Hera scoffed, 'as if a god, one of the most powerful for that matter of fact, would or could even love a mortal.' The idea was foreign and absurd to her.

"Did you ever find out if he did?" Annabeth whispered into Percy's ear.

"Yeah. He did. I think he did. He called her a 'queen among women' you know." Percy whispered back.

"Annabeth gave… ignore us.'"

"That's not true. We do care about our children and we do not ignore you." Hermes said. He always made it a point to keep tabs on his children and sometimes his siblings' children on their request.
Being the god of travel did have its perks.

Percy got angry and so did a few other children. "Maybe. Maybe some of you do care. Maybe some of you even claim most of your children. But not all of you and not all the time. You all are immortal, you have a lot of time in life, but we don't. So in our short lives, if we want just some sort of acknowledgement from our parent, what's wrong with that? I understand that you all have a lot of work and all of that, but I don't think it takes up your entire day to claim one child! I have known friends who never got claimed even when they knew who their parent was. I have known friends who died not knowing who their parent was. And I have known friends who died thinking that their parent didn't care…”

Thalia was also angry. Angry for how she and her brother had been treated, angry for how so many of her half-blood friends and family had been treated and she was angry on behalf of Luke, her oldest friend. She interrupted, "Maybe this system of selective claiming works for you all now. But later, in the future, it doesn't." The Second Titan War could have been avoided, the rise of Kronos could have been delayed, maybe forever, if only the gods had claimed and accepted their children. "We come from a time where we are the outcasts of the mortal world. Mortals, they don't deal with 'different people' very well and so they reject them. And all of us here and all of our friends back home, we all have been treated badly by the mortals in one way or another, all because we are 'different'. And that's because we are only half-human. The few demigods that do actually make to camp, hardly ever get claimed. So, for them it's like coming from one world where you are unwanted to another."

"I was at camp for almost four years, before I was claimed. And the only reason I was even claimed, was because we were in middle of a war." Chris said in a small but unwavering voice, looking straight at his father, who flinched.

Percy took in a deep breath before saying in calm voice, "You claim that you care and maybe all of you do in your way. But how are we to know that? How do we explain that to a nine year old demigod, whose father dropped her off at camp, because she was too much of a trouble for him?" He thought about Amanda, a daughter of Demeter who had been dropped off in the camp a week ago (A/N – OC).

All the gods with children pondered over this. Some were ashamed, some were annoyed that a demigod dare speak to them in such a manner and some out right wanted to blast Percy, but were forbidden to do so. Poseidon suddenly was worried about the circumstances of Percy's claiming. Hestia smiled encouragingly at both Percy and Thalia, who sat there trying to calm themselves down with the help of their equally angry friends. She hoped now that the children had spoken the truth, her hot-headed family might correct their mistakes.

The past heroes, Jason, Piper and Leo, and the Romans looked at Percy and Thalia in respect. No one had ever dared to stand up to the gods. Most of the other campers had already witnessed Percy talking to the gods after the first war, so they weren't shocked.

Once Percy felt better, he told his uncle to continue.

"I thought… behave better."

The silence that enveloped all of them was so deafening and oppressing that Hades thought it would be better to just finish reading as soon as possible. He was itching to talk to both of his children and so were the other gods.

""So, I'm… powerful force…"
"What do you mean by that?" Demeter asked as she and Aphrodite glared at Annabeth.

"Out of all the Olympians, you both are the most peaceful and so are your kids. It's easier for their scent to be hidden." It was Grover who replied.

"...The monsters...Practical jokes?"

"Never again." The Stoll brothers said, remembering the hellhound attack on Percy. After that day no one ever summoned a monster for any reason whatsoever.

"'The point... in college.'"

All the Greek campers with the camp necklace were unknowingly playing with the beads. Athena looked at her daughter and wondered why she would go to camp at such a young age? Was she one of the unwanted children Percy and Thalia had mentioned? It couldn't be, could it? The wisdom goddess didn't know what to think, she just hoped all her questions would be answered soon.

"Why did... gone well."

"Why, what happened the last time?" Jason asked. He hadn't heard of any failed quests whenever the campers told him stories about life at camp before he came there.

"It'll come up later." Percy said dejectedly as he thought about Luke. The guy had been a really good friend right until he tried to kill him, but still...

"'Back in... know something?''"

All the gods sat up straighter, wanting to know more about what was going on that required a solstice deadline.

"'Well...so normal.'"

"You get to go to Olympus?" Perseus asked with a hint of jealousy in his voice. None of the heroes in their time had ever been to Olympus except a few who achieved a lot, like Hercules.

"Yes, we do go to Olympus during the Winter Solstice. Not all of us, only a few year round campers." Annabeth explained.

"You've been... that out."

"I would have probably given up on you if you had." Annabeth laughed and Percy made a face at her. Just like that, any lingering tension was gone.

The gods were in awe. Just one small gesture from the hero and everyone else relaxed. They had never seen something like that. It was like the demigods were so tightly knit that one's emotions affected others.

"Um... what is this Empire State Building." Hercules asked. Shouldn't Olympus be on a mountain?

"It's this really tall building." Jason told his brother.

"Excuse me! 'Really tall building'? Empire State Building is one of the tallest buildings in America. I'll have you know that – "

Annabeth stopped Percy's ramblings as she interrupted, "Percy really loves New York." She
explained to Jason and a few others who were staring at Percy with an amused expression.

"Stupid Californian." Percy grumbled.

"Anyway," Annabeth dragged the word, "Olympus is on top of the building. It might be described later, when Percy goes to Olympus."

"'Right after… know something.'"

"What could be stolen? And from us?" Artemis asked. Who would steal from a god?

"I shook… the problem…!"

Athena shook her head. Why was her daughter so fixated on getting a quest?

"I could… was intact."

The demigods who knew Luke, looked down. It was already hard to hear about Luke. It would be even worse when they would have to hear about his betrayal.

"'Found you… stealing part.'"

"As if anyone of us would ever kid about stealing." Connor scoffed.

"I said… any easier.'"

The gods looked at their children and wondered why it wouldn't get easier. Sure, they understood the anger of unclaimed children. Percy and Thalia's words had really shaken some of them up. But shouldn't a claimed camper like Luke have a better understanding?

"The bitterness… gut me,"

Annabeth flinched as if Luke was about to gut her. Thalia, on the other hand whispered bitterly, "Not yet cuz, not yet."

"…but he… messenger guy.'"

"What?" Hermes squeaked. "Ok. No one has ever called me that. Ever."

"First time for everything, brother." Apollo laughed and patted his half-brother's shoulder.

"'That's him… his scar."

"It's not!" all of the Hermes kids and Percy, Annabeth and Thalia shouted at Hermes, who looked like he was about to throw up. He would never hurt a child of his.

"Luke looked up and managed a smile. "Don't worry about it, Percy. The campers here, they're mostly good people. After all, we're extended family, right? We take care of each other.'"

"Damn hypocrite!"

"What happened?" Hermes asked the demigods but got no answer.

"He seemed… all day."
"He was your friend?" Thalia whispered, shocked.

"Yeah. What did you think? We were at each other's neck from the first day?"

"No. I just… Sorry." Thalia said. She didn't realize that even Percy lost a friend. She always thought that they both didn't know each other at all before Luke betrayed the camp.

"I decided… hate prophecies."

"Don't we all?"

"’What do… the camp.’"

"Oh! So that's why you said he was 'the one'." Leo said.

"Duh!"

"’Somebody special… one before.’"

"It's a son of Poseidon thing." Theseus explained. "It's the same way you can tell every species of aquatic life.

"Luke yelled… hanging off."

"Man, I so do not miss those days." Travis said and both of his brothers nodded.

"I saw… Cherry Coke."

"You don't change at all, do you?"

"The soda… then someday…"

Hades stopped reading to look up at his nephew. "You come down to the Underworld, don't you?" Percy nodded and Hades sighed in annoyance. Another hero foolish enough to come to his realm and demand things. Just what he needs.

"You went to the Underworld and survived?" Hercules asked in disbelief.

"Yes."

"’Here you… grapes. ’Hermes.’"

Both Percy and Annabeth, for just a moment, thought about Tartarus and how they took rest at a Hermes shrine. They decided to go and thank the god for helping them out even in Tartarus, once they went back to their time.

"I was… me. Please."

Poseidon nodded and hoped he claimed his son soon enough. He didn't want Percy to resent him, even though he remembered his talk with his son and Percy had clearly said they were close. The god hoped he made up with his son for any mistake he may have committed.

"I scraped… that smoke."

"I do love that smell. Although, we cannot exactly live off just that." Apollo said, sounding a bit disappointed.
Ares smiled proudly at his children. The other gods were wondering why this capture the flag was being mentioned so many times. Something important must have happened during the game.

"Personally… Go on."

A few gods glared at Dionysus, who grumbled, "Don't look at me like that. If your power was forcefully taken and you were put in a camp, you would be like that too."

Poseidon and Apollo nodded. After all, Zeus had once turned them mortal as punishment.

"Everybody cheered… was home."

All the campers smiled. The camp was the only proper home most of them had known.

"Later in… new home."

"That was ominous."

"That was the end of the chapter."

"How about we take a break and come back in say, 15 minutes?" Hermes suggested. He really wanted to talk to his children and apologize to Chris for not claiming him earlier and making him wait for four years. The other gods were also thinking along the same tracks and quickly everyone agreed to take a break.
Clearing up the air

(A/N - I do not own PJo, RR does.

This one is a small chapter. Like really, really small.)

Ch12 – TLT – Clearing up the air

All of the demigods were roaming around in the courtyard when the gods finally came out of the throne room. Hermes searched around the huge courtyard only to find his boys trying to sneak in to the dining area undetected, undoubtedly wanting to go to the pantry. Chuckling, Hermes appeared behind them and ushered them inside. Once they were all seated inside and armed with the food of their choice, Hermes spoke to Chris, "Son, I do not understand why I didn't claim you or why I did what I did in the future. But I am truly sorry for hurting you. I…I hope that I haven't changed in the future, because I do make it a point to claim all my children. If what the Fates said is true, that I would remember all these memories at the exact time you all are sent back, then rest assured that I will contact you and all your siblings. I will find a loophole if I have to, after all that is what I do."

He smiled at his three children, who just looked at him in shock. This was more than any of them could even dream of – an apology and a promise of contact? This really was heaven. All three of them thanked the god.

"Father, I suppose I owe you an apology as well." Chris said, while his brothers smiled encouragingly at him.

"For what?"

"I cannot tell you why, as it might be mentioned later on. It should be. It may not be in this particular book, but please know that I'm sorry for my actions in the future."

Hermes was not satisfied with this answer but he let it go and the four continued talking about their loot and pranks and life at camp.

Hades and Poseidon were standing under an archway leading to the courtyard, as they saw their children talking to one another. Nico and Percy seemed in some sort of a tense discussion, though neither of the fathers could understand the topic. Nico's hands were moving around a lot and everyone else just gave them a wide berth so as to avoid the flailing hands. As they waited for the boys to finish their conversation, or at least take a break in talking, they saw their youngest brother standing in one corner looking at his children, who were talking to some of the other demigods.

Zeus' face was impassive, as if nothing could touch him, but both the brothers knew that beneath that tough exterior was a father struggling to understand why his child didn't like him all too much. It had been quite obvious to the gods that there was some kind of tension between the hunter and her father. Hades thought that for all the negative characteristics that his youngest brother had, he had quite a few good ones too. But he would benefit from it only if he wasn't so stoic.

Poseidon nudged his brother and nodded towards their children who had just finished their conversation. Taking his leave, the sea god went to talk to his son who had just settled down next to the fountain. Hades caught his son's eye and signaled him to get his sister.

The god of underworld and his children sat down on two benches facing each other, just far enough from the other gods and demigods, so as to have some privacy.
"Father? Is there a reason you have called us?" Hazel asked her father timidly. This was the second time she was meeting him and frankly speaking, she was a bit afraid of him.

"You want to talk to about what our cousins said inside." Nico said. It wasn't a question, just a statement and Hades couldn't help but wonder whether his son knew him well enough to understand his motives. The god also didn't miss the way his son said 'cousins' and not their names. So, he asked the one question that had been on his mind since the reading had started.

"You are close to them? Your cousins?"

"Yes, we both are. Though, I became close to them only recently. Previously, I used to just help them if they needed it." Nico answered. He knew and understood his dad's need to be accepted in the family. "Dad, in my time, you were accepted in Olympus by the whole family, after the first war and in a way, Percy had helped. I don't always understand his motives for doing anything, but he got all of us recognition from the gods. And you now can visit Olympus whenever you want. Although, you don't much." Nico scrunched up his brow.

Hades was impressed and wanted to know more about how his nephew had helped him get acknowledged by his family, but that could wait. "About what they said earlier, do you both feel the same way?" He decided to get to the point directly. No use beating around the bush.

The demigods looked at one another and had a silent conversation. Finally, Hazel spoke, "We don't. Not anymore, anyway. You would come to know more about us later on in reading. But, there was a time when we both had…um…"

"Resented?"

"Ugh… you can say that. But that was when we didn't understand that you were actually helping us and protecting us. Now we understand and are grateful that you did what you did."

Hades thought about what Hazel told him and then nodded and smiled at them, which they returned.

"So, you both have a cabin at camp? What is that like?" Hades asked curiously and they sat there for the remaining time talking about life at camp – both of the camps.

"May I?"

The question startled the black haired boy out of his thoughts and he looked up to see a pair of sea green eyes staring intently at him. He nodded and the god sat down beside him on the rim of the fountain in the middle of the courtyard. The father and son duo were facing the fountain, their legs in the water and they watched in silence as Percy continued to make sea creatures using the water.

"A hippocampus and a Pegasus?"

"Rainbow and Blackjack. Rainbow is Tyson's favorite hippocampus and Blackjack is my Pegasus." Percy looked up to watch Tyson talking with Chiron, Grover and Annabeth.

"There is a hippocampus named Rainbow?"

Percy gave a snort of laughter. "Tyson named him when you sent him to help us out on a quest. You know, you have said something like this before too." Percy thought about Bessie and his father's reaction to the name.

"Tyson has gone on quests with you? He looks about seven or eight years old."
"He is. But once I had snuck out of camp on a quest and didn't want to leave Ty behind. And there was another quest that we went on where he was visiting me in the summer and I had to go on a quest, so we asked him to come along."

"You both are close. That's good. Usually, my half-blood children don't get along very well with the others."

"It could be because the others try to kill us. Every other half-sibling that I have met, other than Tyson and Triton – although with Triton, I don't know what to expect – has tried to kill me."

Poseidon looked at his son in worry. How many of his other children had tried to kill him? "I'm sorry about that. It might be because most of my children take after my more destructive and possessive side, especially my immortal children."

"I know. I was like that for a bit after you claimed Ty." Percy thought about those days when he had resented his younger brother. Claiming. "That's why you are here, aren't you? To talk about what I said inside? Well, I don't regret it. It needed to be said –"

"And I think it needed to be heard. But I am – well – confused. Yesterday, you told me we were close. But, back when you were talking inside, I got the feeling that you might have been talking from experience…"

Percy sighed and looked up at his dad, who was looking at him with worry and maybe some unease. He didn't know how to talk about this. He had never even told his dad – well, the one in his time – about how he had felt about him. But here, maybe in a couple of chapters, all his thoughts would be revealed. Percy turned his attention towards the fountain and brought up a bit of water to his level and started playing with it. Just when the god thought that he won't get an answer from his son, the boy spoke, "I wasn't lying when I said we are close. We do have a better relationship than the others and I have even met you, maybe like five times." Percy said the last part so fast that the god didn't almost catch the words.

Poseidon uncomfortably patted his son's shoulder and they both sat in silence, lost in thoughts till Hera announced that they should get back to the reading.

Once inside, Hermes took the book and declared that he would read next.
"WE CAPTURE A FLAG"

"Oh, finally!" Hecate said. "It feels like we have been hearing about this for ages."

"The next… his tail."

Chiron winced at the memory and the others laughed. "It's ok. None of us are ever any good at archery," Theseus said. "I don't know why. But personally I think it's because we need to stand still and focus. I am not good at either of them."

"Yeah. Neither am I." Percy said and then both the heroes turned to their father for confirmation. Poseidon just shrugged. He honestly had no idea why his children could never perform well in archery. Well, archery wasn't his style anyway.

"Foot racing… a tree."

"You aren't the only one." Both Grover and Hedge said. None of the satyrs could ever beat the nymphs.

"And wrestling… my ear."

"True. But it's much more fun now. At least you can fight back." Clarisse said.

"Then what are you good at?" Ares asked. Till now this child had shown no talent other than doing rash things while being angry. Not that the war god was against impulsive acts – he was always doing them just that they were no good in a battle unless used as a last straw.

"Oh, you'll see." Percy said with a manic gleam in his eyes, while Annabeth and Grover stifled a laugh. The demigods who knew about Percy's duel with Ares were eagerly waiting for the fight to come up.

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

"True. It was frustrating." Katie said. Back then she had not been the councilor, but her older sister would always come and complain about trying to figure out Percy's parent.

"How did none of you guess his parent?" Triton asked. "He could use water as a weapon and was good at canoeing. That is proof enough."

"It will come up later." Chiron said and asked Lord Hermes to continue reading.
"I knew… me either."

Poseidon suddenly had a bad feeling about this. If Chiron didn't want to guess his son's parentage, then something was seriously wrong.

"What does he mean by 'master of none'?'" Hermes asked. "Tell me another god of travel or of thieves or of messengers!"

"Excuse me!" Iris said indignantly. "I, too, am the goddess of messaging."

"Personal messaging dear – like I deliver the messages in umm… person." Hermes quickly backpedaled. He did not need to be cut off from Iris Messaging again!

"Dad," Travis said, "I think he meant that you have a lot of different areas and not just one. Because of that, we – "he pointed towards himself and then his brothers, "- do not have one special power, but have quite a few things that we can do."

"Despite all that, I liked camp. I got used to the morning fog over the beach, the smell of hot strawberry fields in the afternoon, even the weird noises of monsters in the woods at night."

All of the children had a wide smile on their faces, including Nico, whose wide smile was more of a small lopsided smile, but that was the most he had smiled in years. He had also started feeling the same way about camp. It was home. Even amidst recovering from a war and the occasional fights between cabins and the slight awkwardness between him and Percy, he felt calm and happy there.

"I would… her back…"

"Please don't." The sea god said in a small voice. He knew it was hopeless. You can't change the direction of a tide that had already started.

"Actually, I don't find Underworld all that bad. Sure, there are a few monsters and such who always want to kill me, but it's not bad." Percy said. He could live in Underworld forever, not that he wanted to or that he would be welcome, but he could. After Tartarus, even the monotone of underworld seemed wonderful.

Hades blinked in disbelief, while the other gods really wanted Dionysus to check Percy for some kind of mental illness. How could he not find the Underworld bad? It was where all things went after death.

Torn between wanting to ask his cousin questions and staying as far away from his craziness as possible, Hermes opted to continue reading, "I started… phone appear?"

Poseidon took a deep breath. So this was what his son had talked to him about. Even though he knew that he was on good terms with his son, it still hurt to hear all these thoughts.

"It's against the ancient laws." Zeus said, while Hermes at the same time asked, "What is a phone?"

"Phone is a communication device. It uses radio frequency to communicate – which has not been discovered yet, so there is no point in going into that. It's kind of like IM, except that both the people need to have a phone to talk. And you can talk even talk without a visual of the other person," Chris explained. He had an obsession with any kind of communicative device. He was also helping cabin 9 and cabin 6 come up with demigod-friendly devices, since many of the demigods were starting to leave for their mortal home or school/college and wanted a more mortal-friendly way of communication.
Annabeth took out her phone, which was showing 'No Signal' of course and threw it at Chris, who then gave it to his dad.

"Fascinating." Hephaestus said as he admired the phone. "Say, did mortals develop this?"

"Partially. A demigod working with mortals made it." Annabeth said.

"So, this is how you communicate?" Iris asked. She had shifted to sit next to Hermes to see this device. The goddess was also worried whether the demigods would even require her services. After all, demigods couldn't call Hermes for anything, as he was an Olympian, but a minor goddess was of more help to them.

"Actually, demigods cannot use any mortal communication device. It somehow alerts all the monsters in the area of our location." Annabeth said, pocketing her phone. "Only a very few of us even keep a phone with ourselves. I have one because I'm one of the oldest campers and I help run the camp. So, usually mortal parents contact me. But we prefer to use IM."

'Good.' Iris thought.

"You all can discuss this later. Let's continue reading." Zeus said, miffed about being ignored by both gods and demigods.

"\textbf{Thursday afternoon... our instructor.}" The Hermes kids had a huge grin on their faces. That had been one of the most interesting sword fighting class.

"\textbf{We started... were good.}" "Scary good." Jason mumbled, but most heard him and Percy just smirked at him.

"So, you admit I'm good." Percy said with a teasing smile.

"Not better than me." Jason said, keeping up the usual routine they had before having a mock fight.

"I told you then and I'll tell you now. I don't need a sea in the middle of Kansas City to beat you."

"That's what you – "

"OK! We get it. You both are good. Now shut up." Piper said. Ever since the fight in Kansas, both the boys would start one of these mock fights. Normally, they both would control themselves before things got out of hand, but no one wanted to take chances. So, usually Piper or Annabeth would put a stop to this.

Jason and Percy pouted. "Oh, come on Pipes. We were just having fun." Jason said.

"Ugh, guys? I'm with Piper. We have seen how bad things can get when Thalia and Percy fight." Lou Ellen said. She was an undetermined camper during that fight.

"OK! That was like one time. Can't you all just let it go?" Thalia said.

"I don't think they can. Pretty sure you both scared all the campers out of their minds." Annabeth said.

"So, what happened during this fight?" Ares asked, hoping to get some action filled story. He was
getting bored with all the mundane things the boy did.

"It will come up in some other books." Percy said.

"You know," Hestia said, scaring some who had forgotten that she was there, "this is exactly how the fight between your fathers start. The only difference is that you both actually stopped it from happening."

Percy sheepishly rubbed his neck and said, "Ugh... Can we continue reading?"

Hermes chuckled and read, "The problem... for me."

"Then what do you fight with?" Poseidon asked.

"A sword that has oceanic origin."

Poseidon nodded. That would work. His children always required a weapon forged by the cyclops in the depths of the ocean or any other weapon blessed by the god or one of the Nereids. The camp was supposed to have a collection of such weapons specifically for Poseidon's and sometimes Triton's children.

"We moved... the same."

The three sons of Hermes started laughing at this. Luke's face at the end of the practice had been priceless.

Poseidon and his family smirked. Being in water would work as a temporary blessing on the weapon and obviously energize Percy. Now they would be able to see what kind of a fighter the demigod was.

Hermes sighed. He knew what would happen next.

"Instantly, I... his weapon."

"Oh. That's a good one, but a bit tricky. You would need a lot of practice." Ares said off-handedly. All of his attention was on the upcoming fight, albeit only a demonstration and practice fight. But that was the most action he had heard in the last few chapters, he was going to revel in it.

"'This is... undefended chest.""

Those who had already known about this sat in their places with a proud smile, as if they had achieved it themselves. But knowing Percy, he would never take the credit, so they decided to do it for him. The others however, sat in shocked silence. Agreed that the water would give him an energy boost, but it couldn't improve his sword fighting for him. The demigod is certainly talented. Slowly, smiles started forming on most of the listeners' faces until Poseidon broke out into chuckles and winked at Percy, who was starting to get concerned with the silence in the room.

Sensing the boy's discomfort, Hestia asked her nephew, who was still in shock, to continue.

"The other... sorry."

Annabeth rolled her eyes. "Stop apologizing for anything and everything, Seaweed Brain."

"For a... balanced sword..."
"Well that is the question, isn't it?" Ares asked, looking at Percy as if he was a new toy and Ares wanted to play. Poseidon glared at Ares till the later put his hands up in surrender.

"Friday afternoon… of yellow."

"You better not have scared my satyr." Pan said in a menacing tone.

"'Fine… searcher's license?'"

"What are you searching for?" Pan asked Grover. When no reply came, Hermes continued.

"'Well… me along?'"

"Grover!" Thalia shouted at the satyr, who instinctively moved away from her.

"'Of course… useful skill.'"

"It's actually not that useful for us, unless you have been punished to help out the naiads." Chiara said. Her mortal grandmother used to make homemade items like baskets and decorative items and Chiara had been forced to help.

"I tried… be mad."

"You forgot that the hunters also stay there when in town for more than one night, goat boy." Thalia pointed out.

"My hunters stay at that camp?" Artemis asked. Her hunters never even visited the camp till now.

"Yes. It's usually when you have to stay at Olympus for more than a day or you are busy with some other work and don't want us to hunt without you."

The hunters were surprised. Lady Artemis let them stay in a camp filled with boys? They decided to talk to Thalia about this later.

"'Yeah, okay…with mortals…'"

"True. Now, only if everyone else followed my footsteps."

All the other gods decided to ignore the queen. She could and had gone on for hours just lecturing the other gods about affairs with mortals.

"That's her husband's job."

Hera looked absolutely livid while Zeus was trying to put as much distance between himself and his wife, as possible. He had had enough lecture and fights the previous night to last him another few decades.

"'When we… the Underworld.'"

The three brothers, being the mature 4000 something old gods, mouthed out their domains as they came up. The few people who saw this, just shook their heads. For all their talks and actions of being responsible gods, those three still acted like children sometimes.

"'Uh-huh… at that.'"
"What do you mean by that?" Hazel and Nico asked.

"Hey, don't blame me. Your dad is *scary.*" Grover half whispered.

"But I do have a cabin now, don't I?" Hades asked with a smirk. He liked it when people thought he was scary – less people to talk to. Although, he wouldn't mind his family talking to him, even if half the talks end up in a fight.

"Yeah and it's not scary." Percy said.

"That's because you still haven't tried waking Nico up at 8 in the morning for breakfast." Jason said with a shudder. The last time he had tried waking Nico up, the boy had punched him in the face and then kicked him out of the cabin, with a promise to send an army of undead after him, if he tried to wake Nico up before 11.

"I'm not a morning person." Nico said. "And the scariest to wake up is probably Percy. Once I tried waking him up and ended up getting choked and a sword to my neck. And he wasn't even completely awake then."

"I was in enemy territory. What did you expect?"

"When did this happen?" Hazel asked.

"When were you in enemy territory without me?" Annabeth asked.

"It will come up." Percy replied and motioned Hermes to read.

"'But Zeus… cabins empty?'"

"That's what I would like to know." Zeus said, while Hera just glared at him.

"Grover shifted his hooves uncomfortably. 'About sixty years ago, after World War II,'"

"World War?" Hades asked uncomfortably. War meant too many deaths and that meant more work for him.

"Yes, the second that too. Basically, in both the wars, several countries fought against each other, and somehow it ended up with most of the world taking sides and fighting. Both the wars lasted for years – four and six years respectively." Clarisse informed.

Ares licked his lips in anticipation. Two huge wars meant more power to him and also entertainment. Most of the gods paled – no one needed more wars and suffering.

Hazel and Nico shivered. They knew all about the second war, it had been their life since they were born.

"That's horrible." Hestia said, "Why did these wars start?"

"The first one was because the heir of one of the countries was assassinated by a person from another country. After that it just escalated when other countries started taking sides and soon most of the world was at war. It only stopped when a peace treaty was signed." Clarisse told the gods, who were now listening closely.

"And the second war," Annabeth said, "was even more horrible. It was actually a demigods' fight that ended up with millions of mortals and demigods being killed. That was actually the worst fight
between the children of big three." The said gods looked even more horrified that their children
would do something like this. "It started because of an invasion by the losing country of the first
war, and two countries declared war against this country. This invasion was actually led by a child
of Hades, Adolf Hitler, who promised the mortals greatness and power for their country, but
actually wanted to dominate our world by strengthening Hades' domain."

"But I don't need more deaths to strengthen my domain." Hades gritted out. How could his own son
think that?

"We know that, but everyone always thought that if more people die, your kingdom will expand
and be stronger." Percy said.

"In any case, Hitler went around killing millions and then the children of Zeus and Poseidon allied
up to stop him. This ended up with involving almost the whole world. It stopped when the Allied
Powers, that is, Zeus and Poseidon's side defeated the opposing countries." Annabeth concluded.

The gods looked at the children of big three present in the room with unease. They didn't know
what to think. Sure, they have seen wars. Horrible wars. But mortals were hardly ever included and
to hear that a war among demigods turned into a war involving the deaths of millions of mortals
was shocking and horrifying. They all sat in silence, pondering over what they had heard.

After almost ten minutes, Percy said, "I think we should continue reading."

Hermes let out a breath and read, "…the big three… River Styx."

"That doesn't sound right." Athena said. "I mean, yes the war was horrible, but we have had many
wars until now and I'm sure there would be many more till this World War. That somehow doesn't
seem to be the reason for taking an oath."

"But an oath would make sense. That would explain why nobody guessed Percy's parentage." Poseidon said.

"There has to be something else." Athena insisted.

"Whatever the reason, at least they took an oath to not have any more children," Hera said
sounding pleased. Then her eyes fell on the demigods in front of her and she scowled. "But it seems
that they didn't keep the oath anyway." She glared at her husband and brothers.

Hermes hastily continued before his father and step mother could have another one of their marital
disputes. "Thunder boomed… his daughter."

Thalia and Annabeth were lost in memories of their time on the run. Zeus couldn't help but wonder
if that was the reason his daughter hated him and maybe became a hunter, which would a way to
escape the consequences of breaking the oath. Artemis was also thinking along the same lines.

"But that isn't fair.' It wasn't the little girl's fault.'"

"It never is." Hestia said sadly. She had seen way too many demigods being hunted down by
enemies of their parents.

"Grover hesitated… torment Thalia.""

"What?" Zeus shouted at his brother.
"It hasn't happened yet." Hades said nonchalantly. But he wondered why he would do that. He would obviously be angry that his brother broke the oath, but somehow he didn't think he would have sent everything he had, after the girl. There had to be some other reason, he thought. No way would he become that cruel.

"... A satyr... the monsters."

"No. No." Zeus mumbled. "All three kindly ones and hellhounds?" He had a really bad feeling about this.

Apollo suddenly gasped but waved it off when the others turned to look at him. He had gotten a glimpse of three demigods and a satyr fighting against the monsters. There had been a powerful lightning, which could only mean that Zeus was interfering, but after that Apollo hadn't been able to see what had happened.

"She was... Half-Blood Hill."

Everyone stared at Thalia, who looked very pale and was squeezing Percy's hand. Just because she had lived it, didn't mean she wanted to hear about it again. When she saw everyone staring at her, she snapped, "What?"

"You were the giant pine tree that Peleus protects?" Jason asked the first thing that came to his mind.

"Yes."

"How did you turn back?" Zeus asked.

"It will be told later." Thalia said in a tight voice. It was her father's fault that she was hunted down and then he wouldn't let her die peacefully. No, he had to go ahead and preserve her life force. She didn't mind being alive again and being reunited with her brother and her best friend and even make some awesome new friends, but then again she would have liked to die and not face any other monsters and wars ever.

"I am going to continue... I stared... my mother?"

Thalia cuffed Percy on his head. "Kelp head! You couldn't have done anything else. I had been fighting for some time before I was cornered. But you had no idea what was going on. If I hear something like this again, I'll kill you." She scolded her younger cousin.

"You hit too hard." Percy said as he rubbed his head, only to receive another hit. "Ouch."

"Grover... the dead?"

Everyone groaned. "Just drop the idea before you get killed." Hercules said.

"Still alive and kicking." Percy replied.

"How did you even get inside? And how did you get out alive?" Hades and Persephone asked. This happened during summer time, which meant Persephone would be with Demeter. So how did his nephew convince him to let the boy be? Hades thought.

"We can continue reading to find out." Percy said.

"No. Never. Orpheus came close... Percy, you're not seriously thinking-"
"Exactly! So how is your mother alive?" Hades asked.

"Because she wasn't killed but was taken." Athena replied.

"But why?" Hades asked, truly perplexed.

"Hermes read." Zeus said, getting annoyed.

"

"No… Underworld idea."

"Not even a bit." Grover said.

"Not always… worry, okay?"

"I am a goddess!" Nemesis glared at Grover.

"Sorry." Grover squeaked. "I was just trying to get his mind off things."

"I got… boar's head."

Both Athena and Ares smiled at the mention of their children and flags.

"I turned… the flag?"

"Seriously?"

"Hey, genuine doubt ok!"

"So, what happens if someone else wins?" Reyna asked.

"Magic." Lou Ellen grinned and replied.

"He grinned… to help."

"Yeah right!" Percy scoffed and Annabeth stuck her tongue out at her boyfriend.

"The teams… of them."

Pollux took in a sharp breath as all of the campers who fought in the Battle of Labyrinth, looked down, remembering Castor.

"Demeter's kids… and gossiped."

Piper made a face. How much ever she tried, none of her siblings wanted to participate much, in any outdoor activity, which was basically everything.

"Of course they wouldn't be involved in anything." One of the hunters said.

Aphrodite glared at the hunters but before she could say anything, both Piper and Clarisse spoke, "What do you mean by that?"

"Take that back!" Piper said. Just because her half-siblings didn't participate, didn't mean they couldn't do some serious damage when handed a weapon.

"You don't get to say anything about someone you don't know anything about." Clarisse shouted as she thought of Silena and how she had given up her life for the war. They would have not won if
not for her sacrifice, along with tens of others.

The hunters were taken aback that a child of Ares would support the Aphrodite children, but then again the hunters never backed out of a challenge. "All the Aphrodite children care about is looks and love and it doesn't seem like that has changed over the years." Adrianna taunted.

"That's not true. You ever try fighting one of us?" Piper said. She was starting to get really annoyed with the hunters. No wonder no one wanted the hunters to ever come to camp.

"We hunters, actually like a challenge. We don't go around fighting with someone who can't hold their own in a battle."

"Enough!" Thalia shouted as she got up from her place. As much as she liked picking up fights with the Aphrodite cabin every time she came to camp after becoming a hunter, she had also helped carry the bodies of the fallen back to the camp, some of whom were sons and daughters of Aphrodite. "The Aphrodite children are actually pretty good fighters, when given a reason to fight. But it is also true that they don't usually like to fight if they have a choice. And that is not because they are weak or something like that. It's just not in their nature to fight unprovoked. I have fought alongside many of these demigods in the war and they were good fighters. We hunters always make fun of them because they are not aggressive like us and also because our Lady Artemis always is at odds with Lady Aphrodite. But let it never be said that those demigods cannot put up a fight."

All the gods, hunters and demigods were shocked. Did a hunter just defend a child of Aphrodite? This was even weirder than a child of Ares standing up for a child of Aphrodite. The hunters did not know what to say against one of their own. Piper mouthed 'Thanks' to Thalia, who nodded and sat down and asked Hermes to continue.

"Hephaestus's kids… in metal."

Everyone's focus was back on the game, especially the Romans. They wanted to know if this game was anything like their war games.

"'Whoa… kept marching.'"

"So, nothing new then." Thalia joked and Percy shook his head.

"'So what's… a plan.'"

The gods rolled their eyes. They had heard that phrase way too many times – mostly from the goddess herself.

"I hate border patrol." Percy said with feeling.

"Well, I hate Annabeth's plans." Clarisse grumbled.

"She pushed ahead, leaving me in the dust. "Okay," I mumbled. "Glad you wanted me on your team.""

"Sorry." Annabeth whispered to Percy, who just shrugged and kissed her forehead. It was all in the past and truth be told, he was used to people ignoring him back then.

"It was… an idiot."

"Looked like one, too." Clarisse said and Percy chucked a paper ball at her. He and Jason had been
"The bronze sword, like all the swords I'd tried so far, seemed balanced wrong. The leather grip pulled on my hand like a bowling ball."

Poseidon grimaced even though he didn't know what a bowling ball was. But it didn't sound anything light. Ares on the other hand was thinking that if the boy had to put up a fight at any point, an unbalanced weapon would be even worse than being weaponless.

"There was no way anybody would actually attack me, would they? I mean, Olympus had to have liability issues, right?"

"Of course." Connor drawled sarcastically.

"Far away… close by."

"It was there all along?" Annabeth asked.

"I guess. I completely forgot about it." Percy replied.

"I raised… Clarisse screamed."

Ares groaned. Of course he should have seen it coming. They would obviously use Percy and Clarisse's run in in the washroom as a trick.

"Her ugly… the Minotaur."

"No, really?" Clarisse said as she threw the paper ball at the back of Percy's head and smiled when it hit her target perfectly.

"They surrounded… fell back."

"Uh-oh." Theseus said, wondering how his brother got out of this problem. He does seem to have a lot of problems.

"Another Ares… felt numb."

Annabeth winced and looked apologetically at Percy.

"'Oh wow… look stupid."

"You told her where the flag was?" Annabeth shouted at Percy.

"On the brighter side, they didn't care about the flag." Percy said sheepishly.

Annabeth glared at Percy through squinted eyes.

"'You do that without my help,' I told them. It probably wasn't the smartest thing to say."

"You don't say!" Leo said.

"Ha! Only Percy can say such stupid things during a fight."

"Oh. This is only the beginning. You just wait and see." Annabeth said, remembering all the stupid taunts her boyfriend said during various fights.
"Two of… dessert privilege."

"That's it? That's the punishment?" Poseidon asked Chiron.

"We should probably change that." Chiron replied.

"Yes, you should."

"He pushed… jelly beans."

Theseus laughed as Triton rubbed his hands together. This was getting interesting.

"Clarisse and… a twig."

Leo whistled. "Wow. That was amazing!

"Big mistake." Theseus said as he turned to face Clarisse. "You should not have gone into the creek. Actually, you should not have attacked him near a creek."

Clarisse made a face. If she had known about Percy's parentage, she would have done just that.

"'Ah!' she screamed. 'You idiot! You corpse-breath worm!'

"Wrong brother." Travis chuckled but wisely kept quite when the daughter of Ares glared at him.

"She probably… a trick."

"Of course it was." Annabeth said smugly as Athena beamed proudly at her daughter and Ares glared at her.

"Shut up, Princess."

"They staggered… her head."

"You have an item that can make you invisible?" Hercules asked. Now that would be something worth having.

"Yes. It's a gift from mom."

"The last time we tried to steal it…" Travis started.

"It didn't end so well for us." Connor continued.

"Nope. Not at all."

"I felt… me pulverized."

"Wow. You really didn't like him back then at all, did you?" Katie asked.

"No. They fought like cats and dogs all the time." Grover grumbled. He had to sit through every single one of their fights.

"So, just like their parents then?" Hestia asked, looking at Poseidon and Athena.

"'I came… and disappeared."

"And that is unfair." Perseus whined. "You don't need to run to get a healer every time you get hurt. All of you have to do is just touch water and you heal."

"Yeah, why does no other demigod have that ability?" Hercules asked.

"Because my children are mostly water and are a source of water. So, if they touch an external water source, they can heal using that water to replenish their own water source." Poseidon explained.

"Father, I'm pretty sure that you just confused them all." Triton told his father as he took in the confused faces of the demigods.

"Nope. It makes perfect sense to me." Percy said and Tyson and Theseus nodded.

The others still looked confused, so Poseidon continued trying to explain. The keyword being trying. After a while, Amphitrite told him that he was only confusing everyone even more and the god dropped his explanation.

"And I thought you were bad at explaining things." Rachel told Percy.

"I-I don't... water, Percy."

"Finally." Triton said.

"What... steadied me."

"And that's the down side of water powers." Theseus said to his cousins.

"Yeah. But once you get used to it, you can control it better." Percy countered and his brother just nodded.

"Oh, Styx," she cursed. "This is not good. I didn't want ... I assumed it would be Zeus..."

"Why?" Zeus asked.

"Well, you already broke the oath once." Percy said, pointing at a scowling Thalia.

"Before I... like daggers."

"What is a hellhound doing at the camp?" Poseidon asked, worried for his son.

"It will be explained later dad."

"It was... my feet."

Everyone let out a breath they didn't know they were holding.

"By some... summoned it!"

"Are you kidding me?" Frank asked his Greek half-sister.

"I was pissed."

"Be quiet... I'm okay.""

"How is being almost ripped to shreds by a hellhound, qualified as 'okay'?"
"No, you're... I'm sorry..."

"You apologize too much, cousin." Hermes said, pausing his reading.

"But they... a trident."

Poseidon and his family were now grinning. At last, Percy was claimed. It seemed like ages that they had been waiting for it to happen.

"Your father," Annabeth murmured. "This is really not good."

"Why?" Dakota asked.

"Because of the oath, dummy." Gwen replied.

"It is... Sea God."

"And... that was that. Who wants to read next?" Hermes said, waving the book around till Apollo snatched it from him.
Apollo turned the page to the next chapter and grinned. "Oh! This is the perfect chapter for me."

"Why?" His twin asked.

Apollo read with a smile, "I AM OFFERED A QUEST"

"This chapter better explain what's going on at Olympus, what was stolen and why father and Poseidon are fighting." Athena said. Not knowing what was going on was getting on her nerves.

"The next… anybody else."

"Sounds like a dream come true." Chris said wistfully. As much as he loved his half-siblings, the daily squabbles, the random "borrowing" of items from each other and half broken beds (because somebody decided that it would be a good idea to jump on all the beds – for scientific purpose of course like testing the mattress), could get annoying sometimes.

"Not really." Percy said and Jason nodded.

"Why not?" Will asked.

"You are all alone, so no one to talk to after curfew." Jason said.

"You have to sit at the table alone for meals." Percy pointed out.

"Huh, never thought about it that way."

"And I… rare disease."

Everyone looked at Percy, who was intently playing with Annabeth's curls and avoiding looking at anyone. All the older campers felt bad, especially the cabin 11 boys. They prided themselves on being able to relate to any lonely camper because they had experience in looking after unclaimed children. But they never thought Percy would be miserable for being removed from the Hermes cabin. Most were usually overjoyed. But then again, they had another family of siblings to go to and not an empty cabin that had been out of commission for decades.

"Nobody mentioned the hellhound, but I got the feeling they were all talking about it behind my back."

"Yeah, we were."

"I know."

"The attack… the process."
Hermes frowned at his kids. That was no reason to avoid Percy in his classes. Now, the boys were feeling extremely guilty. They shouldn't have abandoned Percy just like that – he had been their brother, even if for only a week. Travis whispered his apologies to Percy, who just waved him off. 

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

"Foreshadowing much?" Annabeth murmured.

"Good." Poseidon said. "At least someone is making sure you are getting enough practice."

"Yeah. Luke taught me a lot of tricks that I know today." Percy said.

"Annabeth still… a plan…"

"I still can't believe that you guys used to hate each other." Piper said. She had always seen the couple madly in love with each other.

"I never hated Annabeth!" Percy said, putting his hands up.

Annabeth turned to face Percy. "I didn't hate you!"

"Could have fooled me."

"You – "

"You guys know that you have had this same conversation, like a million times, right?" Grover interrupted. He could not survive another one of their fights.

The couple turned towards Grover and stuck out their tongues.

The gods watched this in amusement. Whenever anyone of the demigods started bickering, they all looked like the teenagers they were and not the hardened soldiers they had been forced to become. The gods wished they could see their children enjoying for some time and not worry about everything that was going on.

"Even Clarisse… be ignored."

"Oh, I would have loved to pick a fight with you, Prissy. But Chiron had forbidden me from doing that." She said regretfully.

"Oh, yeah. Your whole cabin had their dessert privilege taken away and put on KP for a week!" Travis remembered with a smile. Had it not been for the Ares kids attacking and injuring Percy, the Hermes kids would have probably been put on KP for an almost dangerous prank they had pulled during the game.

"What is KP?" Apollo asked.

"Kitchen Patrol. All of us hate it because the cleaning harpies use lava to wash the dishes. So, even we have to wash the dishes with lava and if we lose concentration while doing it, well, it just takes a lot of time to heal." Will explained to his dad.

"You have harpies cleaning up after you?" Theseus asked. The future camp was even stranger than he thought possible.
"Yeah. They also double as drivers, which mind you, they are terrible at." Katie replied.

Travis added, "Also, they are allowed to eat you if you are found roaming around after curfew."

"Or have stayed back at camp after the summer is over, without informing Mr. D or Chiron." Connor said.

"Harpies are allowed to eat you?" Perseus asked. He was glad that he wasn't in this future camp. He had the habit of roaming around after curfew anyway.

"I have actually never heard of the harpies eating someone. You guys?" Percy said.

"Nah. Hey, Chiron? Do the harpies actually eat you or is it just a threat?" Butch asked.

"Of course they eat you." Chiron said. When the demigods turned away from him, he mouthed 'No' to the gods, who were looking at him in worry for their kids' safety.

"Anyway… I knew… EILEEN SMYTHER"

"What?"

"Who would do that?"

"You know who."

"Um… newspaper?" Hermes asked.

"The mortals' way of spreading information and the daily happenings in their society. They print it on paper and circulate it." Rachel said.

"You are actually in charge of regulating the news that mortals print with regard to anything related to our world." Chris told his father.

"Sally Jackson… black marker."

All the demigods of the future were now annoyed. How could Luke do something like that – that too to a new camper?

"Why didn't you say anything?" Grover and Annabeth asked.

"You should have reported it, Percy." Chiron said.

Percy just shrugged and asked Apollo to continue.

"I wadded… dream yet."

"Oh, goody. Demigod dreams!" Thalia said in fake cheerfulness.

"Yet?" Triton asked.

Percy nodded and said, "I don't remember what this one was about, but I know for a fact that I have had worse dreams after that."

"I was… the sand."

"Oh, I hate the ones in which you can't move or are paralyzed." Jason said.
"Or are naked in a public place." Connor said.

"Those are not demigod dreams. They are your usual nightmares." Clovis said, stretching his arms.

"I know. I just hate them."

"**Over the roar of the storm, I could hear the blue-robed one yelling at the green-robed one, Give it back! Give it back! Like a kindergartner fighting over a toy.**"

"Ok." Athena said. "So, the fight is initiated by father… because Poseidon took something from him?"

"They had been talking about something being stolen." Artemis added helpfully.

"Uncle stole something from father?" Hermes asked. That didn't sound like either Poseidon or Hades.

"I don't steal. I would much rather prefer to punch him in the face." Poseidon said. He was offended that they would think that. His brother on the other hand, wasn't known for thinking things through before making an accusation.

"Completely off the topic here, but what is a kindergarten?" Perseus asked.

"A child of around 5 years in age." Percy replied. "Um… can we continue? Everything will be explained soon."

Apollo read after recovering from his laughter over Percy's description of his father and uncle fighting like small children. **"The waves… swallowed me."**

"What was that?" Hades asked. It didn't seem like him. He would never encourage a hero to come to his realm. Actually, he would show them the horrors of the Underworld to discourage them.

When no one replied, Apollo continued, **"I woke… their verdict."**

"Like I would ever let that happen." Poseidon said. He would fight against the whole council to protect his child.

"**Over Long… the storm.**"

"That was a huge storm!" Pollux said.

"**Grover and… your father.**"

"Excuse me? Who do you think you are calling 'Barnacle Beard'?" Poseidon asked, his posture stiff in anger over the blatant disrespect shown by his nephew.

The demigods from the future were suddenly reminded of the fact that this was the 'temperamental Poseidon' and not the easy going god they had happened to witness during Council meetings.

To protect his younger brother, Apollo read on, **"A net of lightning flashed across the clouds. Thunder shook the windows of the house."**

Okay, so maybe not that easy going.

""Blah, blah, blah," Dionysus said."
"Dionysus!" Poseidon growled as the room filled with the scent of sea on a stormy day.

"Darling, please." Amphitrite said as she covered her husband's hand with her own to calm him down.

The other gods wondered whether the god of wine had a death wish. Everyone knew that one should not disrespect or annoy Poseidon.

Once the atmosphere got back to normal, Apollo kept on reading. "Chiron feigned... of trouble."

"Oh. I would love to see you try that." Poseidon bit out and Dionysus hoped he didn't say any other stupid things against his uncle or his cousin. But he also wondered as to what had changed. He would never disrespect Poseidon so openly. No one in their sane mind would.

"... But Chiron... your father."

The seven looked at each other and burst out laughing as they once again were reminded of their fight against Chrysaor. All the others looked at them in confusion.

"Sorry. It's an inside joke. Please continue reading." Frank said in between laughter.

"Mr. D.... must do."

"Being turned into a dolphin is better than a quest?" Hercules asked.

"Well, dolphins do have a higher survival rate than demigods. But I rather prefer to be a demigod." Percy replied.

"So would we." Leo said.

"Dionysus picked... to use."

"Again?" Dionysus asked.

"You never win against Chiron, dad."

"Tell me... for breakfast."

"Would they taste good?" Leo asked.

"LEO! Do not eat hellhounds!" Percy said.

"Why do you care so much?" Theseus asked, not that he wanted anyone eating hellhounds.

"I have a pet hellhound, Mrs. O'Leary. She is the only friendly hellhound in the world." Percy told his brother.

"You... you have a pet hellhound?" Poseidon asked incredulously.

"Yeah. She is fun."

Something is really wrong with the boy, many gods thought. Who keeps a hellhound for a pet? For that matter, who names a hellhound, Mrs. O'Leary?

"Could you check this one? He seems a bit... you know?" Apollo whispered to Dionysus, before
clearing his throat and continue reading.

"But I… the details.'"

"They always are."

"Thunder rumbled… lightning bolt.'"

"WHAT? WHO DARES STEAL MY BOLT?" Zeus boomed, his voice resonating in the quiet hall. Thunder rumbled and lightning flashed, both inside and outside the throne room.

"Brother, please calm down. I am sure everything will be revealed and sorted out." Hestia said and looked at the children for confirmation.

"Yes, Uncle Zeus. You get back your bolt." Percy said and Zeus nodded, but his eyes still resembled lightning strikes.

"I laughed… like firecrackers.'"

Zeus nodded and puffed out his chest in pride over such a description of his weapon – his symbol of power.

"'And it's… By you.'"

"You!" Zeus said angrily, looking at Percy. "You better return the bolt, boy."

"ZEUS!" Poseidon said sharply. "You are reading from his point of view. Does it look like he took the bolt? Read Apollo."

"My mouth… et cetera…"

"So, truly nothing has changed?" Hestia and Demeter asked in disappointment, while Hera was trying to calm her husband down.

"'Afterward, Zeus… take it.'"

"See, even Chiron is saying that." Zeus said to his older brother, who looked like he was one moment away from strangling Zeus.

"It would do us well, if we actually read what happened rather than come to conclusions." Hades said, trying to pacify his brothers. He had a feeling that he would be dragged into this mess soon enough.

"'But I… his throne…"

"That makes complete sense." Zeus said.

At the same time, Poseidon said, "That makes no sense at all."

Not waiting for either of them to continue, Apollo read quickly, "'…The only… is crazy!'"

"Watch your mouth, boy!" Zeus gritted out.

"He speaks the truth." Poseidon countered.

The throne room was filled with the smell of ozone and a stormy sea as both the brothers had a
silent standoff.

"Zeus! Poseidon! That's enough." Hestia commanded. "Apollo please continue."

"Chiron and… golden net?"

"Oh, come on!" Poseidon said, breaking off the glaring contest he was having with Zeus. "That wasn't even my idea. But obviously Zeus wouldn't believe me."

"Why should I? You want to take over."

"No. I want you to do a better job. I have no interest in taking over. I like my current domain, thank you very much."

"You keep saying that, but how am I supposed to believe you?"

"Ugh! You are as paranoid as father was. Fine! Believe whatever you want, but you better not dare to make false accuses against me, brother, or else the outcome would not be good."

"Alright. That's enough for today. Now, if either of you fight again for the rest of the time we are stuck in this reading, it will not be good – for either of you." Hera said, glaring at both the brothers.

Apollo took it as a cue to continue.

"…I guessed… your toga?"

Zeus was about to comment on it but Hera's glare stopped him.

"But I… see sense…"

"That keeps on getting harder and harder as each year passes by." Demeter commented.

"…But your arrival… I repeated."

"I like how you can summarize the worst possible war ever as 'bad'." Hermes chuckled.

"And you… was furious."

"Uh-oh."

A couple of gods raised their eyebrows at the smirking demigods. "It's a well-known fact that you don't make Percy angry." Thalia said. She had heard that saying way too many times on Olympus, mostly in connection to Percy's fight with Ares. It was a well-known topic of gossip.

"Why not?" Ares asked.

The demigods grinned evilly, making the god of war nervous. Percy rolled his eyes and asked Apollo to keep on reading. His friends made him seem like some kind of hero. He just did whatever he thought would be best for the situation. He didn't see himself as a hero. He had seen true heroes like Bob, Damansen, Zoe, Bianca, Silena, Beckendorf, Thalia and so many others. They were true heroes. He only did what anyone else would have done.

"So I… the challenge."

"That's always the case, isn't it?"
"I swallowed… to kill."

"Real positive thoughts, Perce. Real positive." Rachel said, barely looking up from the sketch she was making of her friends.

"I was too eager to go on a quest." Grover said.

"Yeah, but you had good reason. Your whole career depended on this quest." Percy replied.

"'All right… talk more.'"

"What do you 'still sane'? My Oracle doesn't drive anyone to madness." Apollo asked.

"You will see, Lord Apollo." Chiron said, his tail flicking nervously as he waited for the inevitable outburst from Apollo when he would find out about his Oracle.


"This is before I became the Oracle." Rachel commented.

"Four flights… long time."

As Apollo read this, the panic inside him kept increasing till it became difficult for him to breath. The book described the vision he kept getting since he started this chapter, perfectly. That couldn't be, could it? No. No, it couldn't be.

"Please tell me that's not what I think it is." Apollo said in a calm voice, but his eyes showed the truth. The panic he felt, that feeling of impending doom and the anger – the anger made his eyes shine as bright as the sun. If something had happened to his Oracle, there would be hell to pay.

Artemis sensed her brother's distraught condition before anyone else and quickly moved to sit with him. As much as they fought and irritated each other, he was still her brother, her twin and she wanted to help him. "What is it?" she asked him quietly. He looked at her and for one moment there was panic in his eyes. Then he shook his head and continued reading in a toneless manner.

"Looking at… and ask."

There was absolute silence in the room as everyone thought about what they had just heard. The spirit of Oracle was a mummy and not a maiden? Apollo was the first one to break the silence. He looked straight at Chiron and ordered, "Explain."

Chiron took a deep breath and licked his lips before saying, "As far as we knew, the previous maiden who hosted the Spirit of Delphi was cursed along with the Oracle. The curse was that she would not be able to change bodies until a particular condition had been fulfilled. And so, for years the spirit stayed inside the maiden until her death and then even after her death. We thought the curse would break once the maiden passed away, but that did not happen. Anyone who tried to take on the spirit would lose their minds. It wasn't until the condition of the curse was fulfilled a year ago, that the Oracle changed bodies." Percy had explained to Chiron about Zeus killing Maria Di Angelo and Hades cursing the Oracle as a result.

The god of sun deflated and sagged against his couch as he digested this information. He could take little comfort from the fact that the curse was broken and the Oracle had a new maiden as its host. "Who would do such a thing? Who would curse my Oracle? What did she ever do to this person?" Apollo asked, completely baffled.
Percy and Nico looked at each other. Then Percy said, "Lord Apollo, it will be explained later. Much later."

"Apollo, here give me the book. I'll read." Artemis offered.

"No. It's alright. I'll continue… I wanted… me, either." Apollo looked up at Percy. "Of course she wouldn't. The Spirit of Delphi is a peaceful entity. It would never harm anyone." Then without waiting for any reply, he read, "I got… his buddies."

Percy stiffened at the mention of Smelly Gabe and Annabeth rubbed his arm in a soothing manner.

"My fists… the end.""

"Hold on. What was the prophesy again?" Athena asked, wanting to unravel the mystery of the stolen bolt as soon as possible.

"You shall go west, and face the god who has turned. You shall find what was stolen, and see it safely returned. You shall be betrayed by one who calls you a friend. And you shall fail to save what matters most, in the end." Percy recited.

"So," Athena said, "The god who has the bolt is in the west."

Hades groaned. "It's not me. I know it has not happened yet. But it is not me."

"And you obviously find the bolt and return it to Zeus." Athena continued as if Hades had not spoken at all. "But what do the other lines mean?"

"Let me read and we can find out." Apollo snapped at his half-sister. He was still angry about his Oracle and the curse she had received.

"The figures… anything else."

"True. The Oracle never explains anything. It can get a little frustrating at times, though." Apollo said fondly.

"My audience… is important.""

"Yes. The wording is always important as more often than naught they have double meanings." Perseus said.

"My ears… tell him."

"I would say please tell him, but it doesn't look like you are going to use the safe road." Poseidon said to his son, who just shrugged. Sometimes, he really hated the fact that he and by extension, his children, were completely untamable, especially in the face of danger. They always liked to do things their own way and if anyone tried to stop them, well, then he could use his favorite saying – the sea does not like to be constrained.

"What friend… you'll fail."

"That is disheartening." Aphrodite said.

"How could… to gain?""
"You are going to blame me, aren't you Chiron?" Hades said, rolling his eyes.

"Uh. Sorry about that Lord Hades."

"'Somebody else... now broken.'"

"Ok. Hold it." Hades said, lifting his hand in a stop motion. "First of all, I do harbor a grudge, but it's not because I got Underworld as my domain. I actually like the Underworld. It's because I have been unfairly exiled from my own home. Secondly, my kingdom does not grow stronger... actually it does grow stronger with deaths, but that does not mean that I want deaths. Because with the growth comes more work and that I definitely do not want. And thirdly, obviously I would be angry with these two for breaking the oath that mind you, they initiated. But, tell me, in all of this, where does the point of me taking a weapon I have absolutely no use for, stand?"

Everyone stared at Hades as he finished his rant. They had never heard him say so much, not in one sitting anyway. Both of his brothers were at a loss for words. What Hades said made sense, but they could not think of anyone else who would gain from taking the bolt from Zeus.

Hestia, Demeter and Hera smiled as they saw the two younger brothers looking at their oldest brother in a newfound light. Or well, the old light – the way they saw him before Zeus had become paranoid and voted to exile Hades.

"Uncle Hades is right." Percy said, enjoying the fact that finally everyone will see Hades for the person, or god – whatever, he is rather than the representation of everything evil and wrong in the world.

"He is?" Poseidon asked.

"I am?" Hades asked, confused that his nephew would stand up for him. But then again, his son had told him that Percy had helped him gain back his place in Olympus. "I mean, of course I am." He corrected himself.

"He didn't steal the bolt." Then Percy turned to address Hades. "But I don't find that out until almost at the end of the quest. So, please bear with us when we keep accusing you wrongly and have preconceived notions about you."

Hades nodded. As long as the truth was revealed, he could handle a little insult and accusation.

"I thought... Wh-what?"

"That took an unexpected turn for our goat boy, didn't it?" Thalia laughed as she imagined Grover's face during the conversation.

"'A Fury... the quest.'"

"Why would I have a spy?" Hades asked. "On second thoughts, don't answer that."

"Correct understanding of the plan but wrong orchestrator." Annabeth said.

"'Great... of year.'"

"Next year, G-man. We will go to Maine next year." Percy said.

"I would have preferred if we didn't have to." Grover said. "No offence, Nico."
Nico shrugged. He wasn't looking forward to hearing about that particular quest.

"'Hades sent… the truth.'"

"Yes, reveal the truth boy." Zeus mumbled, still wondering about who, if neither of his brothers, would be foolish enough to take his master bolt.

"A strange… a god."

Hades smirked and nodded, while Poseidon hoped his son wouldn't annoy his older brother in the Underworld. He had given up any hope of Percy staying far away from the Underworld.

"Does this sane part of your brain still exist?" Jason joked.

Percy replied in all seriousness, "I honestly have no clue."

"Grover was trembling. He'd started eating pinochle cards like potato chips."

"Ooh. Chips. I'm hungry." Said Leo and soon almost everyone agreed.

"We should have lunch after this chapter." Hestia announced. It was already time for lunch.

"The poor guy needed to complete a quest with me so he could get his searcher's license, whatever that was, but how could I ask him to do this quest, especially when the Oracle said I was destined to fail? This was suicide."

"So true. It was." Grover said. "But I'm glad you took me along for the ride."

"Duh! Like I would have gone without you, unless of course you didn't want to."

"'Look, if we know it's Hades,' I told Chiron, 'why can't we just tell the other gods? Zeus or Poseidon could go down to the Underworld and bust some heads.'"

"That would mostly include taunting and verbal fighting rather than an actual fight." Ares said, having witnessed way too many verbal fights between the three brothers.

"'Suspecting and… through humans?''"

"That makes it sound like we use our children." Hermes said.

"You do use your children." Hestia and Amphitrite said.

"'You're saying… needed me."

Apollo winced as he read that. They all knew that their children resented them from time to time, but to actually hear it from one such demigod's point of view – that was brutal.

Percy looked at his worried father and shook his head, silently telling him not to worry about it.

"I looked… information too."

"I cannot believe you caught that, Percy." Chiron said. He was surprised that Percy had observed a lot more than he had let on. Although, he shouldn't be surprised. Percy could absorb information as fast as a sponge could absorb water. It was just that he refused to digest the information.
"So let… about right."

"So, all in all, a normal day in the life of Percy Jackson?" Leo teased.

All the demigods except Percy, who was busy mock-glaring at Leo replied, "Check!"

"I looked… you down."

Pan smiled as he heard this. This satyr was braver than most. The god of wild couldn't think of any satyr, including himself, who would willingly go to the Underworld with a barely trained demigod to retrieve a lightning bolt that most probably isn't there to begin with, all because the said demigod was a friend. That's when Pan was confident that whatever Grover wants a searcher's license for, will be found. Maybe this is the reason he was the Chosen One of Pan – whatever that meant. In every break that they took from the reading, Pan had tried to coax information out of the two satyrs, but neither would say a word. They were probably already used to dodging questions of prying demigods.

"I felt so… with me."

"If my first quest was what you had, I would have cried, regardless of Grover coming along or not." Frank said.

"How is rescuing death any better?" Percy asked, his head tilted in confusion.

"At least we didn't have to go to the Underworld."

"What do you mean by 'rescuing death'?" Hades asked. This day was getting weirder and weirder. First a daughter of Ares and a hunter stands up for the children of Aphrodite. Then his nephew stands up for him and proving his innocence and then the Oracle gets cursed and becomes a mummy. And now death needs rescuing. What is happening in the future?

"Umm. Dad, what Percy means is that Thanatos managed to get kidnapped and we had to rescue him." Hazel said. There was no need to panic her father by saying that death itself had completely stopped.

"All the… Los Angeles."

"How is that obvious, Chiron?" asked Holly.

"I didn't know that Underworld is in L.A." Damien said.

Ignoring Damien, Laurel said, "Well, if the parameters are that it is in the West, couldn't that be any of the western cities? I mean the most western city would be… ugh…” She had never been good at geography.

"Alaska." Annabeth said.

"Yeah, but Alaska is a 'land beyond the gods', so Hades settled down in L.A." Percy said.

"Yeah. That's why there are so many earthquakes in California." Annabeth added.

"That's because of Pluto, sorry, Hades?" Reyna asked. "I always thought it was Nept – Poseidon."

"It's probably both, but the ones in and around L.A are mostly thanks to Uncle Hades." Percy said.
"Wow. You guys went to LA on your first quest!" Travis said gleefully.

"Yeah. You guys already knew that when we came back and told what had happened on the quest." Annabeth replied. She was worried as to what the twins were thinking. It was hardly ever good for anyone.

"Yeah, but at that time we were worried about a war. Now, we are not. So, tell me, did you guys go to Las Vegas?" Connor asked.

"And maybe rip off a casino?" Travis asked with a twinkle in his eyes.

"No, we didn't have – wait, how do you rip off a casino? I thought casinos rip off people." Percy said, genuinely curious.

"Oh. We have a full-fledged plan for that. Ok, first of all, you need to look innocent – rich and innocent – "

Chiron interrupted Travis by clearing his throat. "Neither of you are going to Las Vegas. Ever."

Chiron said in his strict teacher voice that had prevented the Stolls from carrying out half of their pranks.

"But, what if need to go to San Fran – you know, to the Roman camp?" Connor asked. The Romans and Greeks had made plans to send few people to each other's camp every few months, so that everyone could understand the other one's culture and other important stuff – their main goal was to enjoy the other camp.

"If I have to, I will personally drop you both there." Chiron said in his no-nonsense voice that immediately stopped all the conversations that any demigod was having.

"Fine." The twins said, deciding to come up with another plan to get to Vegas.

"Now, we should probably continue reading. Lord Apollo?" Chiron said, keeping an eye on the children – who knows what they might come up with? They were very resourceful that way.

"'Oh,' I said. 'Naturally. So we just get on a plane-''"

"Naturally." Thalia drawled. "And then die!"

"What is a plane?" Poseidon asked, wondering why his son would die on a 'plane'.

"It's a mortal vessel which travels in air."

"Ok. Don't get on that." Poseidon said the minute he heard 'air'. His brother was known to kill his nephews and nieces, who took to air for even a few minutes.

"Oh. I am never getting on a plane. Never again." Percy said. The first time had been a nightmare! He rather walk cross country than use an airplane ever again.

"'No… again alive.'"

"Father, why do you have to kill anyone who goes into your domain?" Thalia asked.

"It's my domain and their children," Zeus pointed to his brothers, "are not welcome."

"But, Lord Poseidon doesn't kill us when we go in the sea." Thalia countered. The first time she had gone into the sea with Percy, she had been terrified. But after that she had gotten used to it and
could even enjoy wading in the water – only up to her knees, but that was an improvement.

"See." Poseidon said proudly. "I'm the only one who doesn't kill either of your children when they come into my domain."

"No living person is supposed to come to my domain! If they come, they should have the basic etiquette to be dead." Hades said.

Zeus snorted in indignation, but having nothing to say for himself, wisely kept quiet.

"*Overhead, lightning crackled. Thunder boomed.*"

"Can we please vote on the domain of theatre to be shifted from Dionysus to Zeus?" Poseidon said.

"'Okay,' I said, determined not to look at the storm. 'So, I'll travel overland.'"

"You are afraid of storms?" Jason asked, wondering whether he could create a fake storm to scare his cousin once they went back.

"Aren't you afraid of sea storms, hurricanes and tsunamis?" Percy said with sweet smile, which actually made him look like he was up to nothing good.

Jason huffed and went back to playing with Piper's hands, muttering something about annoying cousins who wouldn't let him have fun.

"Can we not have interruptions every line?" Apollo said. "I am actually hungry and want to go for lunch and there isn't much left in this chapter, anyway."

"That's right… back pocket."

Athena groaned. "You just had to volunteer for a dangerous quest, didn't you?"

"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."

"True. The world would have been destroyed a hundred times over if Percy went alone."

"Actually, the world would have been destroyed a hundred times over if any one of us went alone on a quest." Thalia said.

Apollo mumbled about children not listening to him and continued reading before anyone else could say something.

"If you… get packing."

"Phew! This chapter is over. No thanks to any of you." Apollo said pointing at the children, who just grinned at him.

"In that case, let us have lunch." Zeus said, as if announcing the close of a meeting.
A Little Silliness

(A/N - I do not own PJo. RR does)

This one is like a filler chapter.)

Ch15 – TLT – A little silliness

The palatial gardens, for there were more than one – four to be precise, each covering the four sides of the Olympian palace, were beyond beautiful. Calypso couldn't decide on just a single word in any language, and she knew a lot of languages, that would describe the southern garden that she was walking in. She had been thinking about it for almost ten minutes now, as she waited for her boyfriend – she still couldn't believe that she actually found someone who loved her back. Leo, her annoying boyfriend, and she were going to explore Olympus as they had around two hours to get back to the reading. But just as they had finally managed to escape all their friends for some alone time, Lord Hephaestus called Leo aside to talk to him.

'Surreal', she decided. The garden was surreal. She could never imagine such beauty in even her wildest dreams. It was filled with every type of flower known to the gods, which made sense since the flowers were grown by Persephone herself. Right in the middle of the garden was a huge fountain, rising up to almost two stories in height. Calypso sat herself down on a bench near the fountain, close enough so that spray of water would fall on her if the wind was in the right direction. She closed her eyes, raising her face to the sun. The heat of the sun was just perfect, not too hot and not too bright. There was a slight wind which carried slight spray of water from the fountain on to her. The former Titaness took a deep breath, filling her lungs with the smell of freshly cut grass and blooming flowers. They were in such stark contrast to the smell of the salty sea that she had breathed in for more than a thousand years, that she couldn't help but smile.

"Your smile is like sunshine, Sunshine."

"That was absolutely horrible." Calypso replied as she opened her eyes to see her boyfriend smiling down at her. Leo sat down next to her and kissed her on the cheek.

"So, what did your father want to talk to you about?"

"Oh, this and that. He asked about my half-siblings, how we all are after the wars, what all we have invented – he wants full details of that, how I managed to score you!"

Calypso punched his arm, "He never said that!"

"But, he did ask how come I'm dating you. And when I told him of my awesomeness, I swear he teared up." Leo said, patting his back.

Laughing, the brunette replied, "You are impossible. Come on. I want to see Olympus."

Leo got up and pulled his girlfriend to her feet and started walking towards the exit that led to the main town. "That reminds me. While I was inside, I swear," He mouthed 'Queen Bitch', "was having a stroke."

"Lady Hera? Why?"

"Something about demigods and mortals being allowed to roam unchaperoned around the city. Dad just took me to the other side of the room to escape all that drama."
Just then they heard a shout of "Move out of the way. Move! Move!" Leo, without turning to check, sidestepped and pulled Calypso with him. Just in time too, as Travis ran past them at top speed, just out of reach of Clarisse's grabbing hands. Half a minute later, Chris passed them, asking Clarisse to wait up for him. The couple looked around just as a panting Connor stopped next to them.

"Run, Travis, run!" Connor shouted at his brother, before grinning at the couple.

"What did Trav do now?" Leo asked the still panting Stoll brother.

"Oh, nothing." He replied as he opened his palm to reveal what looked suspiciously like Clarisse's watch.

"If you have Clarisse's watch, then why is she chasing Travis?" Calypso asked.

"Oh. He's just the distraction. Anyway, see ya both later. I gotta go hide this and then help T out. Bye!" With that, the younger Stoll took off towards the gods' residential area, presumably to hide his loot at his father's place.

"Are they always like this?"

"Most of the time, yeah. You should see some of their pranks back at camp."

"It's nice to have so many people to talk to and enjoy with." Calypso sighed. "The first few days at camp, I was so overwhelmed, you know?"

"Yeah. It didn't help that everyone else was busy with repairs and stuff and you had to help in the infirmary."

"I like the infirmary. I like healing others."

"You like helping others." Leo corrected. "But in all seriousness, how do you like camp? Because if it's too much, we could go to the Roman camp. I mean they are stricter and all that, but they have a community of demigods living separately. And they are also cut off from all the major technological advances unlike Camp Half Blood."

"No. Gods no. I don't think so I can live with the Romans. I like your camp. There are nice dryads and nymphs and satyrs, not to mention the people and Chiron. It will just take me some time to adjust."

"Take all the time you need sunshine." Leo said. Then he pointed towards the market place that was bustling with activity. "For now, let's check out the plaza."

Reyna was sitting with Gwen, Dakota, Nico and Rachel on the low lying boundary wall that over looked the lawn, just outside the Olympian palace. The lawn stretched till the end of the cliff that the palace was built on. The five had been talking about their parent's/sponsor's (in case of Rachel) palaces and comparing them. In the distance, the other demigods were playing some or the other game or just strolling in the lawn. A couple of minutes later they saw Jason jogging towards them.

"Hey guys." Jason greeted as he neared them. "You guys want to play freeze tag? We were getting bored so decided to play some game."

"What's that?" Nico asked and the Romans nodded, signaling to say that they too wanted to know.

"Are you guys kidding me? You guys don't know basic games?" Rachel gasped.
"Born in the 1930s here and then was locked in a hotel that slowed down time." Nico said, raising his hand.

"We don't have any type of games, other than war games back at Camp Jupiter." Gwen explained, staring at Nico. None of them knew Nico's back story, but recently Nico had been opening up more and more, enough to be comfortable dropping a few sentences about his past.

"Fine." The Oracle huffed. "Basically, one person is 'it' and then has to run around trying to get the others. Whosoever he/she touches has to freeze at their position and any of others can unfreeze him/her. And then it continues till everyone is frozen and a new person is chosen as 'it'."

"Yeah. Percy said it's something like that. He said he used to play it in his school like years ago." Jason added.

"Why can't we play something else?" Dakota asked.

"We don't have any proper equipment to play capture the flag or war games or even dodgeball, unless you are OK with us throwing rocks at you, because that's the lightest item we can find, short of our clothes." Percy said, coming up from behind Jason along with Annabeth and Piper. "Although I did suggest Marco-Polo or slip and slide, but no one wants to play that."

"That's because you will cheat."

"Will not."

"Will too."

"Ok. What about blindfold tag?" Rachel asked, putting a stop to Percy and Annabeth's conversation. "It's much more fun than freeze tag."

"No." Annabeth said, her eyes shining with something close to fear.

Percy put his arm around Annabeth and pulled her away from the group, saying that they were going to Thalia and see if she or the hunters wanted to join.

"Did I say something?" Rachel asked, confused about her friends' reactions.

Jason and Piper looked at each other and then at Nico.

"It has something to do with Tartarus?" Reyna asked, sensing their apprehension.

Nico nodded. "It is." Jason said. "But it's not my place to say what happened."

The others nodded, then decided to split up and gather up all the other demigods and see if anyone else wanted to play.

Around twenty minutes later – because half of the demigods kept getting distracted by the sights (blame the ADHD), most of the demigods, including the ones roaming around in the town, Thalia and a few hunters (those who didn't hate boys as much as the others), Rachel, Calypso, Tyson and the satyrs and a couple of nymphs present in the area had gathered in the lawn, as Percy and Rachel explained the game.

"I know it's a silly game, but after what we all have gone through, we deserve a little silliness." Percy said and the others smiled and nodded.

Thalia was decided to be the first 'it', mostly to ease the hunters into playing the game without
killing someone. And so the games and the silliness began. It was almost impossible to catch the wood nymphs and some of the hunters, but the highlight of the round was when Laurel and Holly, daughters of Nike, refused to get tagged and climbed trees, ran the length of the cliff and kept on unfreezing the others to make things difficult for the daughter of Zeus.

And that's how Chiron and Lord Hermes found the children around 45 minutes later, when they came to call them for the reading. Thalia was chasing Holly, shouting profanities, while Laurel went around unfreezing the others, who were chanting a mix of "Run! Run! Run!" or "Me! Unfreeze me!"

Just as Thalia managed to tackle Holly to the ground, Laurel had released around ten of them, who went around distracting Thalia. "Gah! Kelp head! I'm going to kill you for suggesting this annoying game."

"Then give up! All you have to do is wear a chiton tomorrow." Percy replied as he unfroze Leo and Adrianna. They had suggested this alternative to Thalia almost 15 minutes ago, but Thalia being the proud hunter she is, refused to accept defeat.

Percy skidded to a stop in front of Chiron and was just able to stop Paolo and Dakota from crashing into him. Then he turned to Chiron and Hermes and asked, "We have to go back now?"

"Yes. You know Zeus's…" Chiron said.

"Ack!" Paolo almost spat out Dakota's Kool-Aid, that he was drinking instead of water. "What is in this?"

"Kool-Aid." Dakota frowned and replied.

"With three times the normal sugar." Percy added.

"Great. Now I need jalapeño." Paolo said and walked away asking for anything spicy.

"Alright. So we gotta go back, huh?" Percy said before letting out a loud whistle that caught everyone's attention.

"We should head back to the reading." Hermes said and shepherded all the children back into the throne room.

"This is not over." Thalia said menacingly to Percy as she sat down next to him.

"We'll see."

"I'll read next." Aphrodite said and the hall fell silent – all exited for the quest to begin.
And So It Begins

(A/N - Disclaimer- I do not own Percy Jackson series or the Heroes of Olympus series. All characters and words in bold are owned by Rick Riordan and Hyperion Books for Children and Disney Hyperion. I do not intend to use the text from the books for any other purpose other than for this fanfiction and nor do I intend to make any sort of profit from the story. All rights go to the actual owner and not me. This is only a work of love for the series.

Ch16 – TLT – And so it begins

Aphrodite waited patiently as some of the demigods shifted their places. Once everyone had finally settled down, she read, “I RUIN A PERFECTLY GOOD BUS”

“What’s a bus?” Theseus asked.

“Remember when we told you what a car is? Bus is just a long car.” Percy said as Annabeth rolled her eyes at him and launched into a complete explanation of exactly what a bus is.

“It didn't take … whatever that meant.”

“Didn’t anyone explain IM to you?”

“Nope.”

‘How did he even survive?’ Hercules thought.

“He gave Annabeth … us up, literally.”

“Fat load of good that did us.” Annabeth mumbled.

“Annabeth was bringing her magic Yankees cap, which she told me had been a twelfth-birthday present from her mom.”

Athena smiled, feeling relieved that she gave her daughter a useful gift. Annabeth on the other hand, frowned thinking about her Yankees cap and how it had stopped working when she needed it the most. Even though the cap had started working once she returned to camp, she hadn’t used it even once after finding out that it was working. She had mixed feelings towards her mother due to the last encounter she had with Minerva. The teen didn’t know whether she wanted an apology (which would never happen) for sending her on the pathway to doom or she wanted her mother to just for once be a mother and not the goddess of wisdom and battle strategy – the one who always used her head instead of her heart. Or maybe, just maybe, her mother had already apologized to her by blessing her with dreamless sleep, which had really helped her out. So it could be that Annabeth needed to find it in herself to actually forgive her mother. She patted the folded Yankee cap in her pocket – she didn’t have the heart to part with it, and decided that she would figure out exactly what she wanted. She always did.

“She carried … a metal detector.”

“You thought you would get bored on a quest?” Frank asked. Then again, it was the most Annabeth thing to do.

“I had never been on a quest before, so I didn’t know what would happen. There could have been
some down time when I could read.” Annabeth said, her cheeks slightly colored. Oh, how naïve she had been.

“No one had really explained anything to you, huh?” Leo asked Percy, who just shrugged.

“Grover wore … on reed pipes.”

“Daddy goat.” Clovis snickered in his sleep, earning a few weirded out looks from his neighbors.

“It wasn’t that bad!” Grover protested.

“It really was G-man. It really was.”

“But you are better now.” Annabeth assured the pouting satyr.

“We waved … daughter of Zeus.”

Zeus frowned. He still didn’t understand how his daughter turned back into demigod from a pine tree. What would be powerful enough to reverse Zeus’ magic?

“Chiron was … face and neck.”

“Peepers? Really? I’m going and telling that to Argus when we go back. His face would be hilarious.” Connor said, chuckling at his imagination of Argus’ face.

“"This is Argus," Chiron told me. “He will drive you into the city, and, er, well, keep an eye on things.”"

All of the demigods turned to look at Chiron in disbelief.

“Are you kidding me?” Thalia said shaking her head.

“Oh, gods! This is so embarrassing.” Travis moaned, putting his face in his hands. Looking at Chiron, he said, “This physically hurts me.”

“Reyna can make a better joke than you, Chiron. Reyna!” Leo said. “No offence Reyna.” He added to Reyna, who threw one of Rachel’s pencils at Leo.

“Ok. Children. That’s… that’s enough.” Chiron said, his face pink in color.

Hermes and Apollo were still staring at the centaur. Then Hermes whispered to his brother, “He lives for thousands of years and still can’t crack a decent joke. I’ll never understand him.”

“I’m sure father or Uncle Hades can make a better joke.” Apollo whispered back, only to have the said gods look at him and roll their eyes. They had never looked more like brothers than they did in that moment.

“I heard … Luke was around.”

“Stop mentioning it Seaweed Brain.” Annabeth groaned. Ugh. Why did she have to act like that wherever Percy could notice her reaction?

Aphrodite was on cloud nine. She just knew that she would have her fun with this particular couple. And from the looks of it, it would have been worth messing around. After all, if any couple could survive her messing around with their love lives, then they deserved happiness. But first they
had to go through her.

“\"Just wanted … kind of normal.\"”

“Why would you smell the sneakers?” Frank asked.

“Yes brother, why would smell the shoes?” Theseus asked.


“Yeah. Back at Yancy, some of the guys used to prank us by putting things in our shoes.” Grover explained.

“And, why wouldn’t you smell the shoes somebody else gave you?” Percy asked to which no one replied.

“\"Luke said, … and disappeared.\"”

“Ah! Looks like I gave him a gift.” Hermes thought out loud.

Grover mumbled to Percy and Annabeth, “I hate those shoes. As much as they helped us in the beginning, I still hate them.”

“Same here.” Annabeth replied.

“\"Awesome!\" … much as Annabeth.\"”

Everyone started snickering. “Oh, man! I can so imagine these two just standing on the hill, blushing like crazy and Luke thinking like what the Hades is wrong with them.” Travis said and he and his brother burst out laughing.

“These two have a vivid imagination.” Katie explained to the others, shaking her head. “But only they understand what they are talking about.”

“\"Hey, man," … me, okay?\"”

“Yeah, no pressure man.”

“We shook hands… these, will I?\"”

“No. No, you can’t.” Poseidon said shaking his head.

“Huh, why didn’t I think of that?” Annabeth wondered.

“You were busy hyperventilating.” Percy pointed out helpfully. He hadn’t felt jealously towards Luke in a long time and now he knew that Annabeth loved him more than anything else. It also helped that she kept reminding him of that fact.

Annabeth jabbed her elbow into his side and turned to grin at him.

“OUCH!” Percy shrieked, rubbing his side.

“He shook his … lit up. "Me?\"”

“Sorry for that G-Man.” Percy said, still rubbing his sore side.
“Nah. I wanted it, remember?”

“You both sound like you didn’t like the shoes.” Hermes noted.

“Ugh… They got us into some trouble.” Percy said and then asked Aphrodite to read.

“Pretty soon we'd laced the sneakers over his fake feet, and the world's first flying goat boy was ready for launch.”

“Oh no.” Pan said. “There is a reason satyrs don’t fly. We can’t handle it.”

“That is true. Once I had asked Pan to drive my flying chariot. Well… we crashed into a grove of trees and then he drove us into a lake. The dryads and the nymphs were really, really annoyed.” Hermes said, wincing as he remembered that event.

“"Maia!" he … toward the van.”

By now, most of the people were laughing, except for Pan, Grover and Hedge, who were shaking their heads. Even Zeus, Hades and Artemis and her hunters were chuckling.

“Percy. Your imagination keeps getting better and better.” Rachel said, wiping fake tears. Then she tried to sketch the scene as per the description.

“Possessed lawn mower?”

Once the laughter had died down to a few snickers here and there, the goddess of love continued to read.

“Before I could … more training.”"

“You had what, like, one week of training?” Nemesis asked.

“Something like that.” Percy replied.

“I really hoped I blessed you.” Tyche said. “Because you are really going to need it.”

“Percy has the worst luck, Lady Tyche.” Annabeth said. “I don’t think anyone can help him.”

“Thanks for the vote of confidence, Wise Girl.” Percy pouted.

“'That's okay. ...Annabeth's invisible cap.’”

Poseidon hoped he had given something to his son.

“'What am ... Could this be...?'”

Percy took out the pen from his pocket and started playing with it. It was a habit now. Anytime he felt anxious or afraid or just plain bored or even if someone mentioned weapons, he would start playing with Riptide. It was no longer just a weapon, it was a part of him. He didn’t how Annabeth was surviving without her knife, but he knew he would be lost without his sword.

No one knew what weapon Percy used except those from the future. He had said before that he used a weapon of oceanic origin. Now, they all, especially Poseidon wanted to see exactly what sword he used. Was it a famous one? As many weapons were handed down from a hero to their younger half-siblings. Or was it a new one, designed specifically for Percy?
“I took off … name is Anaklusmos.”

Percy was now grinning widely as he spun the pen around his fingers.

“Y-y-you use Anaklusmos?” Hercules said, as if in a daze. Then he felt anger. That was his weapon. “That’s my weapon!”

“It was your weapon.” Percy corrected, the grin now replaced by a hard face.

Hercules knew that was correct. He had used the sword to defeat Ladon and shortly after that, the weapon had become unbalanced for him, as if it didn’t want to work for him. So he had thrown it into the sea once he got a new weapon. Was it unbalanced because he was not a child of Poseidon? That must be it. Why else would the sword suddenly become unbalanced?

Zoe was glaring at both Hercules and Percy. She hated Hercules for abandoning her and having her bear the wrath of her family on her own. But Percy? Him she was warming up to. Now he proved by wielding that cursed weapon that he was no better than Hercules. He sure had the strength and determination of the older hero. What if he turns out to become exactly like him? Artemis and the other hunters were also thinking along the same lines. Was Percy like Hercules after all?

As if sensing their inner dilemma, Percy turned to look at Artemis and her hunters. His eyes kept searching till he found Zoe glaring at him. The moment he saw her, his eyes turned sad and apologetic and he shook his head as if to answer their silent question that he wasn’t like the other hero. Artemis wondered whether she and her hunters had met him in the future and perhaps he knew about the fate that befell her latest recruit.

“I have heard a lot about this particular weapon.” Theseus said, bringing Percy out of his memories of Zoe. “Hercules, didn’t you once use this same weapon?” The king of Athens asked, not sensing the tension between the hunters and his brother and cousin.

“Yes. I did. A few years ago, actually.”

“And then you lost it, didn’t you?” Perseus asked his brother. He had a feeling that something was wrong. He had never bought the story of a weapon getting lost. No hero would ever part with his weapon even in the direst of situations.

“Um… yes I did.”

“If you don’t mind, can I see the sword?” Theseus asked Percy, with excitement in his eyes.

“Ugh… ok.” With that Percy uncapped the pen and it morphed into the sword, bringing a smile on Percy’s face. He handed the sword to his half-brother, who admired it. He handed back the weapon to Percy and the latter capped the sword, turning it into a pen again.

The god of seas watched his sons and hoped that the weapon would not bring trouble for Percy.

“Riptide,” … in any case.”

“Looks like you forgot that lesson.” Rachel teased.

“That was an accident!” Percy said.

“What happened?” Jason asked.

“It should come up later.” Percy said.
“I’m really hating that sentence.” Athena mumbled.

“I looked at … blade to kill…”

“Excuse me!” Rachel exclaimed as she looked at Chiron.

“…And I … to know.”

“Ah. The good old Percy Jackson sarcasm.” Leo and Frank said.

“'Now recap … your pocket. Try it.'”

“That’s really useful.” Gwen said. She too, was famous for losing any small item.

“That ability should have been available to Hercules. Perhaps then he wouldn’t have lost the sword.” Perseus commented.

“I was wary… version of reality.’”

“You forgot to mention that it’s really annoying and loves working against me.” Percy said to Chiron, remembering all the times he was in trouble just because the mortals couldn’t see through the mist.

“I put … Land of the Dead.”

“That’s a really depressing thought.” Calypso said.

“Optimism isn’t really Percy’s thing.” Thalia commented.

“Hey. I can be optimistic.”

“Sure.” Thalia dragged the word. “Till now I haven’t heard one positive thing from your thoughts in the book.”

“'Chiron …' I said. ... before the gods?’”

“Why do you ask?” Zeus asked Percy.

“It was a really horrible time.” Hades said and his siblings nodded.

“Chiron pursed … civilization was born.’”

“More like warmed their beds with humans.” Hera muttered under her breath.

“'But the gods can't die now, right? I mean, as long as Western civilization is alive, they’re alive. So … even if I failed, nothing could happen so bad it would mess up everything, right?’”

“Oh no. Nothing would be messed up. Except that the biggest war would break out between the gods and Olympus would be in chaos. But nothing bad.”

“Gee, thanks Hermes.”

“You are welcome.”

“Chiron gave me … in human history.’”
“Chiron! That’s not how you get someone to relax.” Thalia said exasperatedly.

“I can see that now.” Chiron replied. He really should think before trying to calm down the heroes.

Poseidon was worried. Just at the age of twelve, his son had a lot riding on his shoulders. One small mistake or misjudgment could destroy any chance of peace between him and his brother.

“"Relax," I said. … and shopping mall.”

“That always happens. It’s like the outside world is some magical place.” Katie said.

“"So far so good," I told Annabeth. “Ten miles and not a single monster."”

“Great! The one time you try for optimism, you just jinx yourself.” Thalia muttered.

“She gave me … "Could've fooled me."”

“Wow. Grover was right. You guys have had that conversation before.”

“She folded her cap of invisibility. “Look ... we're just not supposed to get along, okay? Our parents are rivals."”

Athena nodded. Hestia reprimanded Annabeth, “That is no reason to hate someone. Just because your parents are rivals, it does not mean that you should be too.”

“Hestia, it is obvious that they are no longer rivals.” Aphrodite said with a smile as she looked at the couple who seemed to be lost in thought.

Percy and Annabeth were thinking about the time Percy had said that the rivalry ended and then kissed her. Oh, how far they had come!

“"Why?"”

“There are way too many reasons. The first and foremost being that he is an imbecile.” Athena remarked.

“Oh, and you are any better? You pompous – “

“Enough! I cannot sit through another one of your arguments.” Zeus said, feeling a headache approaching.

Amphitrite asked the children, “Do they fight like this even in the future?”

“Pretty much or so we have heard. We haven’t witnessed one of their fights.” Percy replied.

All the gods sighed in resignation. Somethings truly never change.

“She sighed. … city after her."”

“See.” Athena said smugly.

“I still don’t understand…” Poseidon started.

“That’s because you have no capacity to understand anything.” Athena taunted.

Poseidon ignored her and continued, “…how foolish do you have to be to reject water for olives?
I’m sure you can survive without olives, but have you tried surviving without water?”

“Father, please.” Theseus said, sounding as if he had had this conversation a million times before. “Please do not threaten to stop the water flow in Athens again.”

While this conversation continued, both Percy and Annabeth were using their self-constraint to not say a word and add fuel to the already accelerating fire.


“*They must … forget it!*”

Those who knew what a pizza was and how much Percy was attached to that particular food, snickered. Only Percy could say something like that.

“What is this pizza?” Apollo asked.

“It’s a food item. It’s Percy’s favorite food actually.” Frank told the god.

Athena gritted her teeth. Only a child of Poseidon could not understand the importance of her gift. She voiced her opinion. “Boy, do not underestimate my gift. The olive tree is much better than a saltwater spring. The saltwater will destroy all the plants that it comes across.”

Unable to restrain himself any longer, thanks to the inherent enmity against the goddess, Percy replied, “Maybe. But if the people figure out how to remove the salt from the water, they can actually use both the salt and the pure water.”

All the gods stared at Percy, while the demigods were trying to control their laughter. Even Annabeth had a smile on her face. She and Percy had had a long discussion over this once, when they had been unable to sleep. That had also turned into a steamy make out session, but that was not the point.

The gods were in shock. As far as they knew, no mortal or even a demigod child of Poseidon could remove the salt from the water, only Poseidon could.

“In your time, do the mortals know how to remove the salt?” Poseidon asked skeptically.

“Yes. And they also know how to purify the salt and the water to be used daily.” Annabeth supplied.

Poseidon sat back with a smug smile on his face and turned to a glaring Athena, “Now which one is better, O Goddess of Wisdom?”

Athena growled at him, while the other gods turned their faces to hide their smirks and laughter.

“Not a word, Athena. And you too, Poseidon.” Hestia commanded and both the gods nodded. No one wanted to disobey Hestia. “Aphrodite, please read.”

“In the front … could notice.”

“You both had noticed, didn’t you?” Percy asked, watching his friends’ faces.

“Yeah.”

“Argus unloaded … even missing her.”
Percy gritted his teeth and Annabeth rubbed circles in his palm to calm him.

“Grover shouldered his backpack. He gazed down the street in the direction I was looking. "You want to know why she married him, Percy?""

“Yes.” Poseidon mumbled. A few of the other gods were also curious.

“I stared at … to tell me.”

“Hey! I had genuinely forgotten that!” Grover cried out.

“I didn’t mean it in a bad way.” Percy told his friend. ‘I think’, he added to himself.

"'Your mom married … feel any better."

Everyone was in shock. That mortal was really smart to actually do something like that.

“Wow.” Piper broke the silence. “Your mom is… just brilliant!”

“And strong, to live with someone like Gabe.” Thalia added. She knew all about abusive homes.

“To be able to mask a demigod’s scent, a child of big three, that too. That man must have smelled really repulsive.” Pan said, crinkling his nose.

“It didn't, … this crazy quest.”

“It was pretty obvious, seaweed brain.” Annabeth said, snuggling into Percy.

“The truth was … give her back.”

Zeus was annoyed. How could this boy not care? Did he not know the importance of a god’s symbol of power, especially his master bolt? How could he not care about stopping a war? He had better not do anything to jeopardize his bolt.

Poseidon had this unprecedented urge to comfort his son. He didn’t want Percy to resent him. He wanted to comfort Percy and tell him that he didn’t abandon him and that he must have watched over him whenever he could. The sea god wanted to tell his son that he didn’t claim him only because he wanted a job done, but he himself didn’t know whether that was the case or not. Did his future self actually only claim the child because he wanted Percy to clear his name?

The god just wished they didn’t have the annoying rule of not visiting their children. He supposed that a lot of demigods would resent their godly parent for the same reasons. All the other gods who had children, looked at them and wondered whether their children resented them in the same manner.

Hades on the other hand, was admiring the boy’s bravery… or was it foolishness?

“You will … I told it.”

A few snickered. Percy’s thoughts were both entertaining and thought provoking, the gods thought.

“The rain kept … stem, and all.”

The throne room was filled with sounds of giggles, chuckles and roaring laughter. Grover was blushing furiously, but even he was chuckling.
“I would have paid to see that happen.” Connor said in between peals of laughter.

“Grover blushed… it?” I asked.”


“"I don't … my shoulder, too.”

“Good. Listen to your gut.” Reyna murmured.

“I was relieved … against her thigh.”

“Back of the bus is not strategically good, in case of a swift exit.” Reyna commented.

“But it is good if you want to stay hidden.” Annabeth countered. “Which is what we were going for.”

“Also, there were no other seats available together.” Grover added.

“As the … the same evil face.”

“Mrs. Dodds? That was the kindly one, correct?” Triton asked.

“Yeah.”

“I scrunched down … Triplet demon grandmothers.”

“All three of them! HADES!” Poseidon screamed at his brother, who moved back a bit to put as much as distance between himself and his brother as possible.

“And my daughter just had to go on this quest!” Athena groaned.

“How did you three manage to escape?” Hercules asked, truly intrigued.

All of the gods and the demigods were fearing for the three, even though they were sitting with them. Ares rubbed his hands in excitement. He would finally get to see or rather hear about the boy fighting without the help of water.

“They sat in … obviously not.”

“Understatement of the century.” Somebody said.

""All three … open," Grover moaned.”

“Then why in the name of Hades are they even there!” Chiara yelled.

“Can everyone stop using my name as a swear word?” Hades grumbled.

""A back exit?" she suggested.

There wasn't one.”

“That’s a serious safety violation.” Chris said.

“Even if … "Will they?"
“They will not care about mortals if I have asked them to kill you.” Hades said helpfully.

“Dear, I don’t think you are helping your brother get any calmer.” Persephone pointed out, nodding towards Poseidon, who looked ready to launch at Hades.

“But… I probably didn’t ask them to kill the children, because then the children would be … well, dead.” The lord of the dead added, trying to placate his younger brother. Only it didn’t work and now he had Poseidon, Athena, Pan and a very angry Gleeson Hedge glaring at him. Hedge was hitting his fist against his palm, which confused Hades. He didn’t know whether to laugh or to back off.

“I don’t think that was the right thing to say, brother.” Zeus told Hades.

“Yeah, me neither. Aphrodite, please continue and tell them that the children didn’t die.” Hades said.

"'Mortals don't have ... in the roof ...?'"

“But, how will you get to the roof?” Gwen asked, sitting forward.

“We hit the … the third sister.”

“That is creepy.” Frank said.

“And so suspicious.” Nico muttered.

“They all started coming down the aisle.”

The tension was so think in the room that you could cut with a butter knife.

"'I've got it...just leave you.'"

“Exactly.” Athena said.

“Percy would never leave you.” Thalia said.

"'Don't worry … and put it on.”

Thalia raised her eyebrow at Percy. “Wait for it.” Annabeth said.

“When I looked …sisters kept going.”

Many released a sigh of relief. But the danger was not over yet.

“I was free… into fiery whips.”

Nico rolled his eyes. Subtlety wasn’t their strongest suit anyway.

“The Furies surrounded Grover and Annabeth, lashing their whips, hissing: "Where is it? Where?""

“It?” Athena asked. “They are looking for an object?”

“My bolt!” Zeus exclaimed. “You are searching for my bolt.”

“Didn’t I already explain that I have absolutely no use for your bolt? Didn’t the children also
confirm that I didn’t have the bolt?” Hades said, pinching the bridge of his nose. His brother was impossible.

“Then what else would you be looking for?”

“How am I to know?”

“If we read, you all will understand exactly what is going on.” Percy said.

“The other people … against the windows.”

“That was unexpected.” Travis said as he laughed.

“It was actually hilarious. Well now it is. Back then it was terrifying. But, you should have seen their faces.” Grover said as he cracked up and soon everyone was chuckling, imagining the worst monsters of Hades being smashed against the bus window.

“’Hey!’ … like bowling pins.”

Ares grinned. It was getting interesting.

“Somehow the driver … toward the river.”

Despite the tension for the children’s safety, everyone from the past listened closely to the description of the place from the future.

“Another great … invisible cap. ’Hey!’”

A few of the gods and hunters smiled and nodded. Percy had put himself in danger to protect his friends. That much they all could appreciate. The hunters were confused. The hero sometimes showed some qualities of Hercules and sometimes was the polar opposite. Zoe thought bitterly that had it been Hercules instead of Percy, he might have just left his friends to fend for themselves.

“The Furies turned… huge nasty lizards.”

Nico scrunched up his face. “Thanks for that image. Now I can’t look at them without thinking of them as giant lizards.”

“’Perseus Jackson,’ Mrs. Dodds said, in an accent that was definitely from somewhere farther south than Georgia. “You have offended the gods. You shall die.””

“Whoa, whoa, whoa… What?” Connor exclaimed. “That has got to be the most unoriginal villain line ever.”

“I have probably heard worse.” Percy said.

“But, can you guys imagine what it would be like if some monster comes to Percy every single time he offends one of the gods and says ‘You have offended the gods. You shall die.’?” Thalia said, chuckling.

“That would be every second day then.” Clarisse said drily.

“I’m not that bad.” Percy protested, while the gods were wondering once again, as to how he survived if he insulted them so much.
“That’s what you think.” Hazel said. She had heard him cursing the gods every second day on Argo II and at the camp.

Even Chiron had to agree that Percy offended the gods on a weekly or sometimes even daily basis. But the gods owed him too much to actually kill him, not to mention he was a source of entertainment for most of them and that Poseidon would declare war if any of the gods even touched a hair on his only demigod son’s body.

“‘I liked you better as a math teacher,’” I told her.”

Everyone started laughing again, some going as far as wiping tears from their eyes. Poseidon’s face was caught between laughter and fear for his son and Hades was shaking his head disbelief.

“You have some nerve, kid.” Ares laughed out.

“She growled. ...suffer eternal torment.”

“She doesn’t know how to bargain, now does she?” Travis commented.

“‘Nice try,’” … of her hands.”

“Ok. How do you not drop the sword? And then kill one of the Furies?” Theseus wondered.

Ares eyebrows had reached his hairline. The boy had excellent determination if he could hit one Fury and kill the other with his hand wrapped with another Fury’s whip. The god smirked. This boy must be a great fighter by now.

“‘Ow!’ he yelled. … like a piñata.”

All of them were impressed.

“No wonder all three of them hate you. You killed them without any training even if they weren’t being as aggressive as they could have been.” Nico commented.

“Mrs. Dodds was … kept falling down.”

“Good job.” Someone said.

Hades couldn’t understand why his Furies didn’t kill the children already. They could have easily done that by now. And what were they searching for? What would the god care about so much that he would send all three of them at once to retrieve it? Definitely not Zeus bolt. He would only care that much about Persephone and his helm, sword and staff. No. Was it possible… that one of them were missing? Not Persephone... but his items. And... and if Zeus’ symbol of power was stolen then what if his symbol of power….? No! But that would explain the Furies’ behavior. If his helm was actually st-stolen, then he would have to take matters into his own hands. And Chiron had not mentioned any other item being taken, which could only mean that he hadn’t informed his brothers.

He was brought out his thoughts when his wife tapped his hand. He looked up to see Persephone giving him a questioning look. He shook his head. Only time will tell if he actually had lost his helm.

“‘Zeus will destroy you!’ she promised. “Hades will have your soul!”

"Braccas meas vescimini!” I yelled.”
The Romans and a few Greek campers who knew Latin burst out laughing.

“Only you would say that to a Kindly One.” Jason said, his shoulders shaking with silent laughter.

“I wasn't sure where the Latin came from. I think it meant "Eat my pants!"”

“Don’t antagonize them more!” Triton said, worried about how his brother got out of this mess.

“It wouldn’t be Percy if he didn’t.” Annabeth replied.

“Thunder shook … recap my sword.”

“Mortals” said Hercules, shaking his head, while the others tried to imagine what the scene would have looked like.

“What is a…”

“Camera?”

“Uh-huh.”

“It’s a machine that can capture images when you click a button. So you don’t have to sit and paint somebody, you can get a picture immediately.” Annabeth explained.

“Life sounds much easier in the future.” Perseus commented. He had to sit for getting a portrait made of his wife and him, and it had been the worst thing ever because he hated sitting in one place and not moving.

“It is. There are so many machines that have so many different functions, that we don’t have to do mundane things on our own.” Leo said.

“And this,” Annabeth passed a photograph to Perseus that Percy had taken out of his wallet, “is a photograph.”

The photo was taken during a councilors meeting a few hours after the war. Some of them had blood on their clothes, some had bandages around their head or hands and some held a cup of nectar, but all of them had the brightest of smiles possible, albeit a little tired.

“You carry this in your wallet?” Clarisse asked. Somehow Chris had gotten hold of the photo, which meant that now it was being circulated around the room.

“Yeah. This one is a second copy. The first one is in my cabin, same as all you guys.” Percy replied, trying to see where the photograph had reached.

Around fifteen minutes later, everyone had settled down and Aphrodite continued reading.

“’Our bags!’ … but darkness ahead.”

“I cannot believe that you tried to kill them even when you would have known that they are on a quest to get your bolt!” Poseidon glared at Zeus.

“You just lost all of your supplies.” Reyna said, ignoring the hundredth glaring contest between Zeus and Poseidon.

“And that is why I don’t like packing supplies before going on a quest.” Percy whined. “I always lose them. Every single time!”
“But don’t you need supplies? What if you are hurt or something?” Dakota asked.

“I usually keep an emergency packet of ambrosia squares and drachmae with me. And obviously my sword and shield.”

“Where do you keep your shield? Is that also some magical item?” Theseus asked.

“Yeah. My watch is my shield. Tyson made it for me.” Percy said proudly, as he showed the others how his shield worked and Tyson beamed at his brother.

“Alright then. That was the end of the chapter and I am not going to read again till the next book.” Aphrodite said. “So who wants it?”
Another One?

(A/N - Disclaimer- I do not own Percy Jackson series or the Heroes of Olympus series. All characters and words in bold are owned by Rick Riordan and Hyperion Books for Children and Disney Hyperion. I do not intend to use the text from the books for any other purpose other than for this fanfiction and nor do I intend to make any sort of profit from the story. All rights go to the actual owner and not me. This is only a work of love for the series.)

Ch17 – TLT – Another one?

Artemis volunteered to read the next chapter. She was intrigued about the hero and wanted to see how the trio would survive without any supplies.

"WE VISIT THE GARDEN GNOME EMPORIUM"

"That doesn't sound too bad." Hazel commented. She missed the grimaces on the trio's face.

"In a way, ... things go wrong."

"What exactly do you mean by that?" Ares growled.

"It's explained here. So let me read." Artemis said. "For instance, ... up your day."

"True." Hermes said, nodding his head.

"So there we... in our noses."

"Why is the night sky yellow? Should it not be black despite the 'glow of the city'?" Artemis asked.

"Well, in our times, people use a lot of artificial lighting like tube lights and bulbs, which are equivalent to lamps or torches, except that they use electricity and not fire. And they are really bright. In New York, there are too many people and too many buildings where they keep the lights on throughout the night." Annabeth explained, trying not to alarm anyone of the vast difference between the times.

"And that makes the sky yellow? You mean to say that there are so many of these lights that they overpower the dark sky?" Artemis asked.

"Yes milady." Thalia answered.

"That does not sound good. How can you see the stars if the sky is not dark?"

"We don't get to see much stars in the city sky. But, if we go to small towns or even outskirts of the city, we can see a lot more."

"And what do you mean by the bad smell? I gather that you are on a riverbank?" Triton asked, cutting in the conversation. He loved the rivers. A lot of his childhood friends and cousins were river spirits.

"Yes, the Hudson river." Percy replied. He was afraid of the reaction to the pollution spread by the mortals. "Um, the rivers aren't... they aren't... exactly clean. Over the years, mortals started
throwing garbage in the rivers to the point where you cannot tell the color of the water. And the animals and plants and the river spirits, they have been affected too much. And it smells too much and the water is now mostly toxic." Percy rushed out. He hated the dirty rivers and had gone a couple of times to the Hudson River and East River to help the naiads clean their waters.

By now most of the gods were furious. They all loved the nature – the wild. How could the mortals do something like this?

"Why have I not done anything?" Pan asked. All of the nature came under his domain. Why didn't he preserve it? Did...did something happen to him? Maybe he is unable to control the entire wild... and that's why needed a Lord of the Wild? Pan didn't know what else to think.

'Perce, remember, after Medusa's attack, we talked about my searcher's license and Pan? They will come to know soon enough.' Grover told Percy through their empathy link. Percy could only hear parts of Grover's message, because they still didn't have complete control on the link, but he understood not to say a word.

"You'll understand soon, Lord." Grover replied to Pan, who looked worried.

Artemis read in a disappointed tone, "Grover was shivering ... into the fight-"

"He saved your life, Princess." Clarisse said, rolling her eyes.

"What did you ... been fine.

Everyone looked at Annabeth like she was crazy. "What?" Annabeth snapped and everyone turned away. Gods, she was scary when angry.

Athena knew it was the pride – hubris, her fatal flaw that made her daughter act in such a manner. Couple that with the fact that Annabeth had literally thrown herself into the quest, made Athena wonder why her daughter wanted to go on a quest in the first place.

"Sliced like ... like sour laundry.

The gods grimaced and wondered, not for the first time, about why the wild was in such a bad shape.

"After a few ... a team, right?"

"Just so you know, that's a clichéd line." Rachel pointed out and Percy made a face at her.

"She was silent ... see the real world."

Travis chuckled. "Yeah, Annabeth. Being dead would really suck for Percy... Really... Ow!" Travis was interrupted as Katie hit him on his arm.

Athena was worried. Why was her daughter being so... for a lack of better term, unwise?

Poseidon on the other hand, was fuming. How could this child not accept that she needed help? She is exactly like Athena, the sea god thought.

"The thunderstorm had ... 'The history professor."

"I still can't believe that you remembered that. I was overloading you with information when I told you about dad." Annabeth whispered to Percy, who just smiled at her.
"Yeah. It didn't ... any good or not."

"Why did you not stay at your home with your father?" Athena asked and hoped that the father did not reject her daughter. Was that why she was adamant to prove her abilities? To show that she could survive on her own?

"We had some differences." Annabeth replied cryptically, neither confirming nor denying her mother's thoughts.

Knowing that she wouldn't get any more answers, the wisdom goddess asked her half-sister to continue with the book.

"If I didn't... okay by me."

"So true." Piper nodded. She didn't know that Annabeth used to be insecure about her abilities. Then again, they had only met recently. Going on quests and saving the world didn't exactly leave time for slumber parties.

Nico groaned internally and cursed Percy for giving him another ridiculous image of Annabeth piggyback-riding Alecto. Just because he didn't speak much didn't mean that his imagination wasn't all over the place. Over the years, that's all he had – his imagination. And now it had gotten scary good.

"I couldn't really ... of these woods!"

"It did not sound that bad." Grover cried out.

"Uh ok." Percy shrugged. He knew there was no lying to his friend, the satyr would read his feelings anyway and sure enough, a few seconds later Grover punched Percy's shoulder.

"He puffed out ... on my head."

A few of them were chuckling at Percy's bad luck.

"Add to the ... a double cheeseburger."

"Food should neither be fried nor greasy." Demeter huffed. Did the people change so much that they no longer cared for good and natural food?

"What is a double cheeseburger?" Hercules asked. Would he like this food? He normally didn't like the natural food that Demeter loved to advertise about.

"It is a disgusting meat product." Grover and Hedge said in distaste and Pan glared at Percy for wanting to eat meat, even though everyone around him ate it.

"Great. Now I want burger." Connor mumbled as Percy was explaining what a cheeseburger was.

"We kept walking ... good smell."

"Weren't you able to smell it even before you were anywhere close to this place?" Athena asked.

"Maybe." Percy and Annabeth replied.

"How were you able to smell it from so far away?" Athena wondered. Then after a pause she said, "It's a monster's lair, isn't it? And the monster is luring you closer through food."
"Yes." Annabeth confirmed her mother's theory.

"Do you not get a break?" Theseus asked.

"Almost never." Percy replied.

"It wasn't a...Garden Gnome Emporium.""

"Is it really that hard to read for all demigods?" Athena asked, wondering how the children studied if they couldn't read. All the demigods in her time could read properly.

"Yes it is. Mainly because it is English and not Greek. Had it been Greek, we wouldn't have any problem." Annabeth replied.

"And not all demigods have dyslexia – the problem where we can't make out the words enough to read." Percy said. "Frank doesn't have that problem and there are some other demigods who can read perfectly. But they will have some or the other inherent problem."

"On a side note, what is statuary?"

"A lot of sculptures." '

"Flanking the entrance..."Snack bar," she agreed."

"You both seem to be in some kind of trance." Hestia said.

"Yeah. There is no way you both would agree on the same thing. At least not without fighting." Jason said. He may not have spent that much time with the two demigods, but he knew that they always had some or the other argument.

"'Are you ... We ignored him."

"Never ignore the satyr."

"The front lot was a forest of statues: cement animals, cement children, even a cement satyr playing the pipes, which gave Grover the creeps."

"That should be your clue to get out. Which mortal would have a statue of a satyr?" Triton said, worried for his brother.

"'Bla-ha-ha!'... looking at me.'"

"That is extremely creepy." Frank said.

"The statues are looking at you?" Perseus asked, his eyes squinting in confusion.

"It felt like that." Grover replied.

Perseus closed his eyes. He had a feeling he had had that experience somewhere. Then it clicked. It was a recurring nightmare... from his time in...her lair. His eyes shot open and he looked at his cousin and his friends in panic and hoped that Medusa was asleep when they met her, because they were going to meet her. He was sure of that.

"Then the door ... a beautiful lady."

Perseus groaned. No, that evil monster was not asleep, not even a little bit. He caught his cousin's
eye, who nodded as if to confirm the identity of the monster and signaled him to not say anything.

"Her accent sounded ... food I smell?"

"That is a horrible lie." Hermes exclaimed. "And I don't even know the meaning of half the things you said in your lie."

"At least he went straight to the point: food." Apollo snickered and others joined him.

"'Oh, my dears,' the woman 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."

"No! Turn around and run." Perseus said. But he knew it was futile. Not only had it already happened – for those demigods anyway, but they also seemed to be in a trance as Lady Hestia had pointed out.

"We thanked her ... thinking about food."

"Of course you were." Thalia groaned. Annabeth had told her this story.

"Go ahead, call me an idiot for walking into a strange lady's shop like that just because I was hungry, but I do impulsive stuff sometimes."

"Percy, sorry to break it to you, but your whole life is filled with doing impulsive things." Grover said.

"Like what?" Poseidon asked, both intrigued and worried about his son's impulsive nature.

"Ugh... we will probably be reading about most of it, Lord Poseidon. But, Percy sneaked out of camp twice to go on quests that he wasn't part of." Grover said hesitantly. Even after becoming the Lord of the Wild and talking to a lot of minor gods, Grover wasn't all that confident in talking to most of the gods.

"Plus, you've ... door behind us."

"This monster is using some sort of magic to pull you all deeper into her lair." Hecate said.

"Wow. You noticed all that stuff? And still did nothing?" Clarisse snorted and mumbled something close to 'Prissy'.

"Give me a break. I was hungry and in a trance." Percy pouted.

"All I cared ... never introduced ourselves."

"Do you guys think monsters have a school or something where they learn about demigods and our names?" Connor asked, stuffing his mouth with caramel popcorn.

"I once interrupted a monster class learning about monster puberty, so everything is possible." Percy said as he remembered the class full of telekhines and everyone was looking at Percy weirdly, thinking how he managed to come across such a thing. "Where did you get popcorn from?" Percy asked Connor, who lifted the Piper's horn of plenty as an answer.

The goddess of hunt continued reading after watching Piper kick Connor for taking the cornucopia from her.
"Our hostess disappeared...too nervous to eat."

"Well, at least one person is not under the spell. But you all should leave immediately." Perseus said, hoping that they wouldn't have to fight this particular monster. But he knew it was impossible. She would not let them leave.

"'What's that hissing noise?' he asked."

Athena was thinking hard. Which monster could this be? She knew almost all the monsters, well she had heard about so many and she had even made a few. But she had never met any, other than the ones she created. So which one was this? Let's see. The monster used some kind of magic to lure the children. She is in a deserted place, surrounded by... statues! She is completely covered and did not like it when Annabeth talked to her. And the satyr heard some hissing noise, which could only mean the snakes on the head of Medusa. And the fact that Perseus had been acting nervous ever since the children reached this lair, only confirmed Athena's suspicion that the monster was Medusa herself. For the first time in her immortal life, Athena felt remorse for creating a monster.

"I listened, ...with our hostess."

"Sleepy? The monster is trying to dull your survival instinct." Artemis said, interrupting herself and then continued.

"'So, you sell gnomes,' I said, trying to sound interested."

"Keyword being 'trying'." Annabeth teased her boyfriend.

"'Oh, yes,'... on this road??"

"Stop making conversation!" Perseus all but screamed at his namesake.

"'Not so ...or even terrified."

"Not her." Poseidon's voice was muffled by his hands that were covering his face.

"Huh?" Zeus looked at his brother in confusion.

"Medusa." Poseidon looked at his brother as he explained. "The monster is Medusa."

"And she is awake!" Perseus exclaimed. He was feeling panic bubbling inside him. Both Hercules and Theseus patted the agitated hero sitting between them. Theseus knew how his cousin felt. He too had been panicking when he had heard about the Minotaur.

"'Ah," Aunty Em ... feeling sorry for her."

"That woman does not deserve pity." Athena scoffed. "She got what she deserved for disrespecting me."

"Ah, but perhaps you should not have turned her into a cruel and cold hearted monster. After all, she is now attacking your daughter." Hestia told her niece, already aware that such an attempt was useless. The family was filled with stubborn and hot headed gods, who hardly listened to reason when in one of their temper tantrums.

Artemis read on before her sister could get into an argument. "Annabeth had ... when I was young."
"Jealous?!” Athena shrieked, causing those near her to cover their ears. "That gorgon thinks I was jealous of her? HER?"

"Athena, calm down. Please." Aphrodite charm spoke and everyone in the room was suddenly extremely calm. The love goddess signaled Artemis to read, but continued thinking about the possibility of Athena being jealous of Medusa.

"'I had a... somebody so nice?'"

Poseidon shook his head. His son was not trained enough to fight Medusa, even when completely conscious, so what chance did he have against her when in a trance? The god hoped that the daughter of Athena would protect his son.

"'Percy?' Annabeth ... should go.'"

"Listen to her."

"'Yes!' Grover ...Everyone loves children.'"

"That is so creepy. It reminds me of this Pedophile Awareness Lecture that I had to attend in school." Rachel said.

"Annabeth shifted... the harm?'"

"Honestly, kelp head?" Thalia shook her head.

"'Yes, Annabeth,' ... camera?' Grover asked."

"The goat is asking the right questions." Ares remarked, only to be glared at by Pan, Hermes and Dionysus.

"Aunty Em stepped... lady's voice."

"Finally!" Half the occupants of the throne room shouted, waking up Clovis, Hypnos and Morpheus.

"'I will just be ...Ferdinand!' Grover gasped."

A few people patted Grover in condolence, as the satyr looked down remembering his uncle.

"'Look away ... dazed to move."

"That's a powerful spell." Lou Ellen muttered.

"Then I heard ... screamed, "No! Don't!'"

Poseidon sighed in relief and loosened his grip on his wife's arm, which was definitely bruised by now.

"More rasping...writhing like serpents."

Perseus shivered involuntarily as he heard the description.

"Aunty Em.... so stupid?"
"It is not under your control, its genetics." Athena said, but her heart wasn't in the insult. She needed to know if her daughter made it out unscathed.

"Think, I ... open my face."

"And that's the brand of Percy-Positivity that we all know and love." Travis said in mock seriousness.

"'The Gray-Eyed ... make my legs move."

"What does she mean by that? What will happen in the Underworld?" Poseidon asked his son. Percy just shook his head to say that he won't reveal anything.

"'Percy!' Behind me, ...to one side."

"Oh. Don't praise me too much now." Grover said, glaring at his friend.

"This is going to be a disaster!" Hermes mumbled in a sing-song tone.

"Thwack!...to my collection!"

"Go Grover!" The Stolls cheered and a couple of gods smiled, while Pan and Hedge beamed proudly at their fellow satyr.

"'That was ... and spitting."

Pan was laughing uncontrollably and was joined by some more gods. They had never seen or rather heard about a satyr flying and fighting a monster. This was too good. Hermes was just glad that his gift was of use to the trio.

"Right next to m... you've got a chance."

"True." Jason said. He was excited. He had heard many rumors about Percy when he had first come to camp. Now, he would be able to see how many were true and how Percy became the hero he was.

"'What? I can't-" ... by the monster."

"Ooh! That was below the belt, Annabeth." Thalia said.

Poseidon and his family nodded. Annabeth had just pointed out to the helpless in front of Percy. There was no way he would ever leave without killing Medusa.

"Annabeth grabbed ... by a factor of-"

"Seriously?"

"'Would you ... eventually crash."

"Oh, that's amazing. Good to know that you both have sooo much faith in me." Grover said, rolling his eyes.

"Sorry Grover." Annabeth said sheepishly and Grover winked at her to let her know that he was just kidding.
"I took out ... a painful "Ummphh!""

Most of the demigods flinched and said some version of 'oomph'.

"Medusa was a... feet, ten feet."

"What? Why?" Perseus asked.

"I could see... arms go weak."

"Oh. That's why," Perseus answered his previous question.

"What?" Jason asked his older brother.

"The closer Percy gets to her, the stronger her magic will work. And she also needs him to be close enough so that she can make him weak when he looks at her eyes in the glass." Annabeth explained.

"From the cement ... her talons."

Everyone inhaled sharply at once.

"I slashed ... monster disintegrating."

Some looked at Percy in shock while some were trying to process what just happened.

"Good reflexes, kid." Ares broke the silence. He was impressed and that was saying something. Perseus laughed out in relief and shook his head in amazement.

"Something fell to the ground next to my foot. It took all my willpower not to look. I could feel warm ooze soaking into my sock, little dying snake heads tugging at my shoelaces."

"Why are you so descriptive?" Gwen asked, looking a bit green, and so was every other demigod.

"'Oh, yuck,' ... the head evaporate?"

"Spoil of war."

"'Once you sever it, it becomes a spoil of war," she said. "Same as your Minotaur horn. But don't unwrap the head. It can still petrify you.'"

"Very useful." Perseus said, remembering how he had saved the princess. Percy smiled and nodded. Very useful indeed.

"Grover moaned ... Not fun."

"Duh!"

"Shush, Dakota."

"He snatched ... Medusa's head."

Hermes nodded. Always double-pack. He hated it when people didn't pack liquids properly.

"We plopped it ...for this monster?"
"You imbecile!" Athena shouted at Percy.

Artemis continued before Athena could harm Percy and Poseidon could retaliate. That would turn into a war. Again.

"Annabeth flashed ...her of him.""

"That's disturbing."

"Not to mention, disgusting."

"My face was ... insufferable."

"You're-"

"You're both exactly like your parents." Apollo said and all the gods except Poseidon and Athena laughed, while Annabeth and Percy blushed.

"'Hey!' Grover interrupted. ... the summer solstice."

"I understand how you feel." Hercules said and soon all the demigods who had ever gone on a quest agreed. When everything went wrong on a quest and the half-bloods would feel hopeless, they almost always got angry with the gods, Chiron thought.

Poseidon stiffened, just a tiny bit, that one wouldn't catch it unless used to it and that's why Amphitrite caught the change. "My lord?" she whispered. She thought her husband was upset because the boy was angry with the gods and Poseidon couldn't interfere and help. But then Poseidon turned to face and spoke with worry, "He is going to do something stupid and impulsive. I can just feel it." The queen patted his hand and hoped that the boy didn't get on the wrong side of the gods.

"What had Medusa said?

Do not be a pawn of the Olympians, my dear. You would be better off as a statue."

"What are you going to do?" Triton asked, his eyes wide in anticipation and fear.

Some of the other gods who knew about Poseidon's crazy side were also listening in anticipation.

"I got up. 'I'll be back.'"

"Percy," Annabeth called after me. "What are you-"

Percy's eyes widened. "Um… just one moment, Lady Artemis." Percy interrupted the goddess, who flashed him an irritated look. Ignoring her, Percy said, "About the next part… ugh… sorry in advance. Please don't kill me." Then he settled down, putting his head on top of Annabeth's.

Poseidon groaned. Great! His son was going to do something stupid which would enrage the gods.

"I searched the ... it in my pocket."

All the gods turned to look at the mentioned couple. Hades shrugged. "We haven't purchased anything yet."

"In the cash ...out a delivery slip:"
Artemis read ahead, then looked up at Percy who had closed his eyes, waiting for this part to be done with. She then reread and looked up to see Grover, Annabeth and Percy stifling a laugh. Letting out a sigh, she read, "The Gods

Mount Olympus

600th Floor,

Empire State Building

New York, NY

With best wishes,

PERCY JACKSON"

The silence that followed was deafening. Except Chiron, no one else had known of this part and the demigods were staring at Percy, not knowing whether to laugh at his antics or whether to run and hide from the wrath of the gods. The gods were staring at Percy with a range of emotions – disbelief (Hestia, Demeter, Hades, Poseidon and the minor gods), amusement (all the male Olympians except Zeus) and anger (all the other Olympians).

Percy looked at the gods and wondered whether they were going to blast him or start applauding. Percy cleared his throat. "So, umm…we should…umm…continue reading?"

Hera stopped her husband from hurting the demigod. She told him telepathically that if his future self didn't blast the boy for his blatant disrespect, then there must be some good reason for that. She also reminded him that the Fates and the future Council had told them not to harm the children.

Zeus turned to Poseidon and said with gritted teeth, "Your son is going to be a headache for us." Then he motioned Artemis to read, who was shocked that her father didn't blast that disrespectful demigod. "We cannot kill him." Zeus answered the unasked question. It was taking all of his self-constraint, which he didn't have much to begin with, to not kill Percy.

"'They're not ... impertinent,' I said."

"That you are." Hephaestus said.

"I looked at... 'We need a new plan.'"

Artemis sighed and said, "That was it for this chapter. Who wants the next one?"

Persephone agreed to read next, after Zeus declared a five minute break, mostly because he needed to walk off the anger.
Revelations

(A/N - Disclaimer- I do not own Percy Jackson series or the Heroes of Olympus series. All characters and words in bold are owned by Rick Riordan and Hyperion Books for Children and Disney Hyperion. I do not intend to use the text from the books for any other purpose other than for this fanfiction and nor do I intend to make any sort of profit from the story. All rights go to the actual owner and not me. This is only a work of love for the series.)

Ch18 – TLT – Revelations

Once Zeus was back from his stroll around the palace (which definitely took more than five minutes, not that anyone was complaining), gave a warning glare to Percy and had a mini shouting match with his brothers about… well… very, yes, very important things, then Persephone started the chapter.

"WE GET ADVICE FROM A POODLE"


"Don't insult the poodle." Grover said and Percy and Annabeth nodded at Clarisse, silently asking her not to get into a fight over poodles with the satyr.

"Poodle is a…?" Theseus asked.

"Dog… a fluffy dog." Rachel replied.

"Oh. I don't think I have seen one yet." Theseus didn't know how a dog could give good advice, but with the amount of crazy things happening in the future, well, anything was possible.

"We were pretty miserable that night."

"Obviously. You just fought Medusa and before that you fought the Furies and lost all your supplies."

"We camped out...food wrappers."

"WHAT? THOSE MORTALS…” Pan yelled.

"What has happened to the world in the future?" Demeter asked with barely contained anger.

"Please." Grover bleated. "It should be explained. Please continue reading."

"We'd taken some ...take first watch."

"Of course you did." Hazel said fondly. She had seen the self-sacrificing, over-protective side of Percy.

"Annabeth curled ... be a satyr."

Hedge and Grover solemnly nodded. Pan was shaking with anger. How could his wild be so contaminated? Did the mortals not care? Why hasn't he done anything? Then a terrible thought came to his mind… what if he is not able to do anything? Have his powers been so taxed that he cannot protect his own domain? Why have the other gods not helped? Surely, they too love the
"Oh, yeah. I... wouldn't be..."

"Hey!" Rachel exclaimed. "I'm an environmentalist!"

"I know. I know. But there aren't many, right? We need a lot more," Grover said.

All the demigods from the future nodded. They all knew the story about Pan and how he had faded and so, many tried to help the satyrs preserve the wild as much as they could – well as long as the satyrs didn't try to turn the cabin area into a forest. That had almost happened once.

"...Your species is clogging up the world so fast ... ah, never mind. It's useless to lecture a human. At the rate things are going, I'll never find Pan."

There was silence in the hall as all the gods turned to look at Grover in confusion.

"Wh-what...what do you mean by that?" Pan gave a nervous bleat/laugh. "I mean...why would you need to find me? I would be at Olympus or... or any place which is rich in wild... or-or..."

The god of wild trailed off, his thoughts going a hundred miles per hour. He suddenly remembered how his father from the future had been with him – how he had hugged him... What had happened? Was the wild depleting because he... he was not there to protect it? Pan's face kept becoming whiter and his aura more nervous, till Hermes went to sit with him and calmed him a bit.

Hermes himself was in shock. What did the satyr mean by find Pan? Pan was missing? How come Hermes hadn't searched for his son? Surely, a god like Hermes who knew every good hiding spot in the world would have been able to find his son. Unless...unless Pan didn't... no... why would his son not want to be found? He too remembered how he had behaved (well, the one from the future, anyway). Back then he had thought that something had happened to his son... maybe he even...fa-. No! He shouldn't think such things. But he knew it was possible. If Pan's domain was getting destroyed, his son would not be able to hold on for long. Hermes held his shaking son and hoped that Pan would be found and everything would be back to normal.

All the other gods were also thinking the same thing, that if anything had happened to Pan, then the wild would be completely destroyed. Or it could have happened the other way round. Why did the satyr need to find the god? Everyone cast worried glances towards the nervous father-son duo.

"I...I will continue reading. We should get more answers that way." Persephone said nervously.

Pan was a good friend and not only that, but her domain overlapped with Pan's. If anything happened to Pan or his domain, she would be affected too. Hades pulled his wife closer as she started reading.

"'Pam? Like the cooking spray?'"

Both Annabeth and Thalia cuffed Percy on his head.

"'Pan!' he cried indignantly. 'P-A-N. The great god Pan! What do you think I want a searcher's license for?'"

Pan looked at the Lord of the Wild. He had been hearing about searcher's license for so long and now he knew that it was for him. He felt grateful that a satyr would put all his energy and his welfare on the line just to get a searcher's license to find him. He hoped that the satyr would find him.
"A strange ... I'd never known."

"Oh. I had completely forgotten about that." Grover said.

"I must have been listening to you both." Pan decided that this satyr must have found him, especially if Pan was paying special attention to him.

"Tell me ... thousand years ago,"

"I disappeared?" Pan asked nervously.

Grover didn't know what to do, so he just nodded. He was dreading reading about Pan fading. He still had nightmares about that.

Hermes was now clutching Pan as if his life depended on it. Pan disappeared. His son disappeared. Why hasn't he done anything?!

"...he told me. 'A sailor off the coast of Ephesos heard a mysterious voice crying out from the shore, 'Tell them that the great god Pan has died!'"

"No." Someone sobbed. No one knew who as they all were lost in thoughts. If Pan was actually dead – faded… then the depletion of wild would make sense. But it couldn't be. Of course the gods knew that fading was very much possible. But, to actually hear about one of them fading… they were immortal… it wasn't supposed to happen, even if it was possible, it just wasn't supposed to happen.

Dionysus looked at his friend to make sure that Pan was actually there. Pan had been one of his first friends in the godly family, when Dionysus had been made a god. Pan couldn't have just gone… no, he couldn't have. But that would explain why the satyrs were with him and not the god of wild. Pan must have asked him to take care of his people. But why? Did Pan already know what was about to happen to his domain? Why did he disappear? There were too many questions and not enough answers.

Everyone was brought out of their thoughts when Pan said confidently, "I cannot be dead. If I were, I would not have been able to send the feeling of wild to you. So I cannot be dead." He was clutching at straws. He knew that. But how else does one respond when they are told that they were going to die. A few thousand years were nothing for immortal beings.

Grover didn't say anything, but asked the goddess of springtime to continue.

"...When humans ... from his sleep."

Artemis inhaled sharply. She understood what had happened. "You satyrs, without knowing it, are keeping Pan alive." She said softly, but in the silence, everyone heard her.

"What?" Hermes asked, although he was beginning to catch on.

"If the mortals are destroying the wild, it would adversely affect Pan, but the satyrs' faith in him is what is keeping him alive. Otherwise, from the descriptions of the nature, Pan wouldn't… he wouldn't have been able to..." Artemis let the remaining sentence hang in the air. It was too much. After all, she and Pan also shared domains. All the wild animals that she hunted were under Pan's control.

Understanding dawned on everyone and many wondered that if anything happened to their domain, who would continue to have their faith in them, enough to keep them going. Some gods understood.
They looked at the demigods and remembered that the mortals did not believe in them and even though their domains might possibly be intact, if they didn't have enough people believing in them, they too would fade. Was it possible that the demigods were one of the few who kept their faith in gods and helped them to continue surviving?

Pan suddenly had a feeling that he didn't make it… that he actually faded. What had been one of Grover's titles? Chosen one of Pan? What if Pan had passed on his responsibilities to this young satyr? Did that make him the de facto God of the Wild? Pan had too many questions and too much worry. But, when he looked at Grover, he felt peace. He had a feeling that the satyr would protect the wild and he would eventually be successful in doing that. It would be a slow and daunting process, but he had to return the faith that the satyr had in him. If anyone could protect his domain, it would be Grover – the satyr who willingly accepted a quest for going into the Underworld, the satyr who put on flying shoes and hit Medusa, the satyr who threw tin cans at the Furies, the satyr who was braver than any other satyr Pan had ever met.

The future didn't seem all that bleak now to the god. He caught Persephone's eyes and asked her to continue reading.

"'And you ... to return alive.'"

"The first?" Most of the gods shouted.

The worry was back. Pan wondered how many satyrs had died just to search for him. He voiced his question.

"Too many. Lord. Too many." Hedge said, his voice filled with sadness as he remembered his friends and family members going on the search and never returning.

"Why? Why did no one ever return?" Pan asked, worried for his people.

Gleeson looked at Grover and waited for him to say something. After all he had found Pan.

Then Pan looked at Grover and said, "You found me, didn't you? So, tell me why has no one ever returned alive?"

Grover was confused. How did his lord know that he was the one who found Pan? Sensing Grover's apprehension and confusion, Pan nodded and smiled at him to encourage him to answer. Everyone was looking at Grover, waiting for him to say something.

"Lord, you were... you were hidden in a place that no one knew of, nor could they guess." Grover said, choosing his words carefully. "There was something that was confusing the satyrs who went to search for you. Actually, even I had gotten confused and had almost died but Percy had come to my rescue." Grover said gratefully and looked at Percy, who smiled at him. "Beyond this I do not wish to say more. We would anyway be reading about it."

"Very well. I am truly sorry for all those who lost their lives just because of me," Pan said, trying to put all that he felt into the sentence, even though both the satyrs would be able to read his emotions.

"'Hang on... one to find Pan?'

"Ooh! That sounds bad." Percy said. "I didn't mean it that way, G-man."

"I know. I know. I was reading your emotions, remember?"
"I have to ...still be awakened."

The gods now thought of satyrs in a different light. They had always seen Pan's people as someone who would be entertainment in a party or good to help out in the gardens or fields. They never considered them as brave, selfless creatures, who would give their lives to find their god.

The Romans were shocked. They knew that satyrs and fauns were completely opposite of each other, but this was too much for them to digest. Not only did the satyrs help out in the daily activities of camp, but they also went around the world looking for demigods and now many of them had even gone on a quest to find Pan, even when they knew that they had no chance of survival. Reyna and Frank decided to get a couple of satyrs to come with them to Camp Jupiter and talk to their fauns and see if they could be changed.

"I stared at ... against a god?"

"None." Zeus said. He had decided that this boy was foolish, even with all the bravery he had shown until now.

The demigods who knew about Ares smirked, while Nico was smiling, thinking about how Percy had defeated his dad and his army of undead. True, Hades had been too shocked to actually do anything other than stare at Percy during the fight, but that still had been way too awesome. Almost worth being grounded after the war. Almost.

Poseidon really hoped that his son didn't go and do anything to annoy Hades, although that might be impossible. Hades had very low tolerance level. Anything and everything annoyed him and Percy had proved that he had knack of knowing how to annoy the gods.

"I don't know," ... all figured out."

Percy grinned sheepishly at his girlfriend, who kicked him in the shin.

"Don't be so hard on her, Percy. She's had a tough life, but she's a good person. After all, she forgave me..." His voice faltered.


"What do ... what it seems."

"Of course it is not! My annoying brother is blaming me for something I didn't do." Poseidon said.

"Hey. Even I have been dragged into this mess." Hades added.

Persephone chuckled as she read the next line, "Well, duh. I'm getting blamed for stealing a thunderbolt that Hades took."

"You both think alike." Apollo said, pointing at Poseidon and Percy.

Hades ignored the part about him taking the bolt. The boy had already apologized for this earlier.

"That's not ... about an object."

Hades nodded. He had been thinking about the same thing when he first read about the Furies attacking the children. Had one of his items been stolen along with the bolt? Was that why he had sent them with the intention of questioning and not killing? The more he thought about it, the more
it seemed possible that something of his was missing too. Apparently even the other gods thought so.

Athena said, "That was exactly what I had been thinking about. If Hades does not want the bolt, as he had said earlier, then why did the Furies ask about an object?" She looked at Hades as if he knew the answer.

Surprisingly, Ares answered, "What if the person who stole the bolt, also stole something of Hades? If he is truly not interested in any other symbol of power, then he might have been searching for something of his own."

Everyone stared at him in confusion. Ares was the violent god, who never thought even for a second before doing something. He was impulsive and irrational. Then, why did his words seem intelligent?

"God of War!" Ares bellowed. "Athena is not the only one who knows battle strategies, even I do. And this one looks like a good strategy, if Poseidon is the only one who is not missing something."

Athena caught on. "Then both Zeus and Hades can blame Poseidon for a thievery he didn't commit and there would be a three way war. But that is only possible if Hades is actually missing something and Chiron had not mentioned anything like that when he had explained the situation to Percy. So, the question is whether Hades is actually missing something and if so, then why has the Council not been informed?"

"They do realize that we are sitting right here, right?" Poseidon whispered to his brothers.

Zeus ignored Poseidon, like he usually did and turned to Hades. "If something of yours is missing, then you should inform the Council. Why can you not follow the procedure?"

"And why exactly should I inform the Council? What has the Council ever done to me, except exile me? That too unfairly, might I add? You think I would trust you, you, to find something of mine? Tell me brother, what would you do if I told you that my symbol of power is missing, huh? Would you search everywhere like you are doing for your beloved bolt or would you just pretend to care while being glad that I no longer hold a power?"

"I…"

"Would do nothing. You would not care. You never do unless it affects you directly. So, I would not inform you had I lost something. As of now, I do not know. And we will not find out if we continue fighting. So, I suggest we continue to read this book and see what has actually transpired. Hmm?" Then Hades turned to his wife and said in a softer tone, "Dear, please continue reading."

The elder gods were worried. Did their brother think like that? That they would not come to his aid had he required it? Zeus was upset. His brother's exile was warranted, was it not? Of course it was. Everyone had been scared of the immense power Hades held. Zeus still decided to talk to his siblings. He had a feeling they had their own opinion on the matter. He knew he would not do anything to reverse the exile but he would listen to his siblings. At least to show them that he had listened.

"'That doesn't ... care about him.'""
Poseidon was once again cursing the ancient laws that prevented him from visiting his child – his
only demigod child at that. He hoped his son now knew that he was cared for and loved.

The demigods of the future and Chiron had the scariest thoughts running through their heads. This
resentment and feeling of abandonment was what had turned many demigods against the gods and
made them side with Kronos. And now it seemed that their leader at one point had the same
thoughts. It made them wonder that had it not been for the fact that Percy was completely
incapable of turning his back on his family, he too might have sided with Kronos. And if that had
actually happened, then… They were just glad that Percy hadn't turned against the gods.

"Grover gazed ... what you'd done."

Percy groaned internally. Why? Why did this book have to reveal everything he felt? Why did
Grover point that out? Then a scary thought struck him. The other books… They would have his
feelings about Annabeth and… and Rachel and Calypso. Oh Gods! He was definitely going to die
of embarrassment.

The sea god smiled. So, maybe his son had not actually resented him. Maybe he had been trying to
convince himself that he did. The god looked at his son and gave him a proud smile.

"Yeah, mailing the head would definitely get people to notice." Apollo said. "I wonder what it
would be like to receive the head of Medusa as a delivery."

"It would be the weirdest and the funniest delivery I would ever have to make." Hermes said.

"That it would be." Apollo said.

"'Yeah? Well ... Percy. Whatever.'"

"Yeah, Percy. You aren't convincing anyone." Thalia said, only to get a punch on her shoulder.

"'Besides, I haven't ... and no way west.'"

Almost everyone groaned. How modest could this child get?

"Nothing worth bragging about? You killed the Furies and Medusa and sent the head of Medusa to
Olympus, but yeah, you didn't do anything worth bragging about." Jason said sarcastically.

"Yeah." Percy replied and no one knew whether he was being serious or not.

"Seriously?" Reyna asked. No Roman would ever let go of such a praise. Hades! No demigod
would ever let go of such a praise.

"Uh-huh. I had help. We wouldn't have escaped the Furies had it not been for Annabeth's hat and
Medusa would have turned me to stone and delivered me to be a decorative piece in Hades and
Persephone's garden, if not for Annabeth warning me and Grover flying and hitting and distracting
Medusa." Percy answered in all seriousness. "Now can we continue? The sooner we finish this
chapter, the sooner we can take a break. Because I need a break. I cannot sit here for any longer."
All the other demigods nodded. They hadn't left the hall when Zeus had gone for his stroll and now
they all were getting restless and restless demigods were never up to any good.

"Grover looked at ... a gaping pit."
"What are you doing there?" Hades asked. It was dangerous for anyone, even in their dreams to go near that pit.

Poseidon nodded and looked at his son in worry and that's when his worry increased tenfold. Percy was sitting stiff, his face white and his breathing shallow. What was even more disturbing was the agitated aura he was projecting, which only Poseidon could feel. The god looked at Annabeth and saw that she was clutching Percy's left hand and his right hand was being held by Thalia. Both the girls were murmuring something in his ear and whatever they said was calming him, but it was not enough.

"It is not… is it?" Perseus asked.

"Tartarus." Persephone confirmed.

Percy took in a sharp breath. He could feel the panic rising slowly in his chest, making it difficult for him to breathe. He could feel everything getting darker and colder and could almost see himself hanging on that small ledge, holding on to Annabeth, with Nico's frail hand too far from his reach. Then he heard Annabeth's soothing voice saying 'We are not there. We are on Olympus. Feel the gods' power around you. We are safe.' So that's what Percy did. He tried to focus on the raw power around him. His dad's calming ocean scent just diagonal from him, the warmth of sun from Apollo coming from somewhere behind him, next to the smell of grapes (Dionysus) and the feeling of open road and freedom (Hermes). The longer Percy concentrated on the powers surrounding him, the weaker the grip of panic got, till he could breathe a bit better. It wasn't gone, but it was controllable. He gripped Annabeth's hand and forced himself to remember that it was only his mind playing tricks on him.

Percy looked at Annabeth and nodded to say that he was a bit better. He noticed that thankfully neither she nor Nico had had any reaction to this part of the reading, although Nico was shaking just a bit, but Hazel, Frank and surprisingly (or rather not so surprisingly) Will were keeping an eye on him. Percy felt a few people staring at him, but he ignored them all and continued looking at the ground and playing with Annabeth's hands.

"Gray mist creatures ... huge and evil."

"Rise from there?" Zeus asked. "What could possibly rise from there?"

"This is a few thousand years in the future, brother. Whatever is trying to get out might still be dormant now." Hestia suggested.

"No. Nothing can get out of there." Zeus declared.

"The little hero... what you want."

The gods could feel some panic amongst them. They didn't know why, but just the description of the voice was scary for them. Poseidon looked at Percy in worry, who was again losing color from his face. Was Percy getting nightmares of seeing the pit in his dreams? It could be possible. He had heard the prayers of his children after a nightmare and so he knew that demigod nightmares were horrible.

Chiron moved towards Percy so he could be close by in case of a panic attack or a flashback. As of now, only he was showing signs of one. The other two were looking better than Percy was.

"A shimmering image ... at me, pleading: Go!"
"That's just cruel." Katie gasped.

"He is cruel." Chris said, remembering how the titan had convinced him to join his forces.

"Who?" Zeus asked.

"You'll find out." Thalia replied.

"I tried to ... unless I stood firm."

Percy started chanting under his breath, "I'm on Olympus. I am safe.' But that word was slowly losing its meaning to him.

By now everyone was getting nervous. What is down there? What is trying to get out?

"Help me rise, boy. The voice became hungrier. Bring me the bolt. Strike a blow against the treacherous gods!"

"Hades?" Zeus said in an accusing tone.

"It is not me. Get that in your thick skull, brother. Why would I want to destroy the gods? I am a god."

"You yourself admitted to holding a grudge against the Council for exiling you."

"True. But then you hold a grudge against Poseidon for capturing you in that net and yet I don't see you trying to kill him every chance you get. That's the same way I won't do anything to Olympus, because it is my first home, whether you want it to be or not. We used to rule together before your paranoia started and you became like father."

"Father…" Demeter said and looked at her sisters, who were starting to come to the same conclusion as her.

"I am nothing like father!" Zeus roared.

"You despise power in the hands of others, Zeus. Just like father did. That was why he ate us in the first place. Because he knew that collectively, we had more power than him." Poseidon told his younger brother.

Before Zeus could retaliate, Hestia shouted, "Father!"

All the gods looked at her in confusion. "The voice, the description, the hunger for power – that all sounds like father to me." She explained and Hera and Demeter nodded in agreement.

"But he cannot be rising. We took care of it. I took care of it." Zeus said.

"Not now he is not, father. But a few thousand years from now? What if he has regained enough power to reform and enter the minds of people and corrupt them?" Athena reasoned. It sounded very plausible.

"It cannot be. Stop speculating. We do not have enough proof for anything yet." Zeus said in a clipped tone, putting a stop to any counter argument from his family. Then the god turned to a white faced Percy and said, "Whoever it is, you better not listen to him." Then he ordered Persephone to read.
"The spirits of the dead whispered around me, No! Wake!"

"See! My subjects are trying to stop the boy." Hades told Zeus, who was ignoring his brothers.

"The image of my mother began to fade. The thing in the pit tightened its unseen grip around me.

I realized it wasn't interested in pulling me in. It was using me to pull itself out."

Percy was shaking so much that the whole couch started shaking and both Annabeth and Thalia tightened their grip on him. Grover tried to calm Percy down through their empathy link, but the fear was so heightened that Grover could not control the emotions flowing through and had to retreat from trying to contact his best friend. By now all the demigods were aware of Percy's condition. They had seen it before too, but in no way were getting used to it. So they did, what they had learned to do – ignore it. Percy didn't need an audience for what he was going through and damn if they couldn't give him that much respite.

A few of the gods also noticed the change in atmosphere near the demigods and were wondering what had happened. Poseidon looked at his son in worry. Now, even Amphitrite and Triton were aware of the turbulent feelings that Percy was projecting and the nearest water source, which happened to be a stream just near the throne room, was beginning to get choppy. Poseidon caught Chiron's eyes and silently asked him what was happening. But Chiron just shook his head and motioned that they will talk later.

"Good, it ... was daylight."

"There was collective sigh of relief in the throne room. Now that the gods had the possibility of the voice in the pit belonging to the Titan of Time, they were even more concerned than before.

Poseidon was thankful that the dream was over, but whatever was going on with his son was still continuing, because now Percy's face was covered in a fine layer of sweat as if he was trying to physically control whatever was troubling him. It was only getting worse.

"'Well,' Annabeth ... pink poodle."

Rachel and Piper grimaced, while Artemis and Pan were curious. Why was a dog pink in color? As of now there were no pink dogs. Did the mortals do something to the poor animal?

"The poodle yapped... to the poodle."

A few gods laughed and turned to see why their children had not interrupted yet. Usually, they would be interrupting every two seconds with something or the other. The demigods were unusually quiet and were worryingly glancing towards a shivering Percy. Percy had his eyes tightly shut and his fists were clenched so tightly that his knuckles were white. His head was bowed down and his breaths were increasing with every passing second.

Chiron knew Percy was trying to hold on till the chapter got over so he could get out of the room without drawing too much attention. He now knew it was a panic attack and Percy was barely holding on before the panic would get to him and break him. Percy needed to be alone for that. The only person who could go near Percy without alarming him was Annabeth and sometimes Jason.

Chiron looked at the queen of the Underworld and asked her to finish to chapter without any interruptions. He had to tell the gods now about what Percy, Annabeth and Nico had gone through. There was no way they could hide it anymore.
Not a single person or god interrupted the reading for Percy's sake.

"That was the end of the chapter." Persephone said in a soft voice and looked at Zeus to grant them a break. But Hestia beat the king of gods to that as she announced a half an hour break.

The demigods stood up as one, as if it was already planned and left in groups as Annabeth pulled Percy up and they both briskly walked out of the room, leaving Chiron and the gods along with the curious hunters and demigods of the past, who had taken quite a liking to Percy, in the room.

"Chiron? What was that about?" Hestia asked softly, looking at Chiron with such intensity that even the old centaur wanted to spill all his secrets out.

"It was something about the pit, wasn’t it?" Poseidon asked, worry for his son evident in his voice. "I noticed that all this started when we read about the dream."

"Yes, this is about the pit. But, what I am about to tell you should not be discussed with any of those demigods, not until they tell you." Chiron took a deep breath which did nothing to calm his nerves. He did not want to break the kids’ confidence but he also knew that the gods would try a more blunt and untactful approach to get to the bottom of the matters, which would only do more harm than good. He looked straight at Poseidon and said, "Just before the most recent war was won…"

"The one that ended three weeks ago in your time?" Ares interrupted.

"Yes, that one." Chiron said with irritation. "As I was saying, before that war was won, Nico, separately and Percy and Annabeth, together had to travel through… Tartarus." He said with difficulty and closed his eyes.
The Reaction

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I have included parts about panic attacks in this chapter. I personally do not go through them and whatever little information that I got was through google, so I just hope that I didn't get anything wrong and if I then I am sorry. I have tried to use only general descriptions and not anything specific, so as to not hurt anyone who might be suffering through such attacks.

Other than that, happy reading!)

Ch19 – TLT – The Reaction

'Tartarus'. The word echoed around the room and in each one's head. They all sat in shock and no one uttered a single word. Chiron opened his eyes to see the remnants of shock on everyone's face before the disbelief set in. None could believe that anyone, let alone three children, could go through a place like Tartarus. The only known ones to have ever gone there and returned were the elder gods, when they had gone to free the elder Cyclopes and Hekatonkheires and they still had nightmares about it. They would never willingly go back there ever again. So, how could have three demigods – three teenagers – survived? Chiron must be mistaken. Yes, that must be the case, because the alternative... the alternative was too scary to be imagined even by the gods.

The first to break the heavy silence was Athena. "Chiron, what exactly do you mean? No one can survive Tartarus. What do you mean about Annabeth being there?" Athena took a pause, unable to continue. She could not imagine the horrors her child must have to go through down there. If she even had been there.

Zeus said, "They are children, they could not have gone down there and survived. It must be something else. Maybe they went to the edge of the pit. Because even if the children did go in the pit, they could not have left Tartarus. The only ones who can leave Tartarus are the monsters in there. And the only reason we could leave was because we were close enough to an entrance to teleport out. So explain yourself." Even as he said this, Zeus had a feeling that Chiron was telling the truth. What would the old centaur gain by misleading the gods?

Chiron nodded and clutched his hands together. Even though he had not gone there, hearing the watered-down version (because there was no way either Percy or Annabeth told him the complete truth) had been enough to put a permanent fear in his heart. "Alright. What I am about to tell you pertains to the happenings of the second war that we fought. While the Fates had informed me that they did not want us to reveal anything before it had been read, this is important to how the children ended up going to the pit." Chiron looked at the gods and saw that they all were paying complete attention. No one was doing miscellaneous things like going through their delivery lists (Hermes) or sharpening their weapons (Ares and Enyo) or checking cloth materials (Aphrodite).

"Remember when Hazel had said earlier that Thanatos had been kidnapped and she, Frank and Percy went to rescue him?" After the gods nodded, Chiron continued, "Well, the main reason he had been taken was so that the monsters and giants – yes, they were back – could steal the doors of
"What?" Hades said, his eyes wide open. "That would mean that all of death had stopped. No one would die, because they could just go back with no Thanatos and no doors."

"Yes. But that is another issue that we would read about. Anyway, the doors had been taken and hidden by the giants. So, when young Nico found out about this, he travelled the whole of Underworld looking for the doors. And he almost found them too. But he got pulled into Tartarus and was only able to leave when he got kidnapped by Otis and Ephialtes and was taken to the mortal world." Chiron took a deep breath again and did not wait for the gods to bombard him with questions. "Later, Annabeth went on a solo quest for Lady Athena and had to fight Arachne herself. The lair was on top of an entrance to the pit and Annabeth's weapons and supplies had fallen in. So, she defeated Arachne with her wits and then Percy and their friends blasted Arachne into Tartarus. But the monster had managed to get a web around our Annabeth's leg. And..." Chiron gasped. It was much more difficult to talk about this than he thought possible. "...and when the spider went down, she dragged Annabeth in with her. But Percy would not let her go alone, so he held on to her... and... and they both went down. They fought their way out of Tartarus, but how they did that would have to be read as I have not been told of the entire ordeal they went through." The centaur let out a shaky breath. Now, he had to wait for the gods to digest this information.

The room was completely still as everyone tried to process this overload of information that they had just received. Hades was paler than usual as he clasped his hands together. His son was barely fourteen and had already not only gone through two wars but had also been in Tartarus! Hades wasn't someone who showed affection at all but now all he wanted to do was hold his son and protect him from everything. There were no words to describe how he felt – the utter despair, the protectiveness, the cold fear in his heart – it was all too much. He needed to find his son. But, before that he needed to know what Nico was going through now.

Athena was trying to compartmentalize her feelings so she could think properly, but how does one deal with the fact that their child was in the worst place in all of creation? Now she knew why Annabeth always seemed to be on alert, why she had a wariness and weariness in her eyes. She had seen far too much than anyone should ever have to. The goddess also felt remorse. Chiron had said that Annabeth was on a quest given by Athena, so in a way it had been her fault that her daughter had gotten into this mess in the first place. But she also felt grateful – grateful to that son of Poseidon for not leaving her daughter alone to face the horrors of the pit. The wisdom goddess had never learnt about Tartarus and its horrors and her daughter had to witness it first-hand... Athena never showed any emotion and some would say that even a god like Hades showed more emotion and feelings than she did. But now Athena had this desperate urge to see her daughter.

Poseidon remembered the day very vividly, when he and his siblings had gone to Tartarus. That had been the worst experience in his life and made him want to go back to his father's belly. It wasn't something that anyone should have to experience, especially not children. Not his son. His son who seemed to have problems from when he was twelve. His son who... who willingly went into Tartarus so that his love wouldn't have to go through it alone. The god didn't know how anyone could be so selfless, so pure of heart to actually go through something like that. The sea god wanted to be angry – angry at Athena for sending her daughter on a quest that ended up dragging the two children into the pit – but he couldn't find it in himself to be angry. All he felt was fear, because the children may have left the pit but it obviously didn't leave them. That had been obvious from Percy's reaction and Poseidon needed to know more about that. And then he needed to go find his son, for only then would the icy cold fear in his veins would recede.

"Chiron, how are the children now?" Amphitrite asked. She liked Percy despite him being a result of her husband cheating on her yet again. "What did Percy just go through right now?" Most of the
"Ever since the war was done with and the children started attending to their duties and responsibilities, they all started suffering from the after effects of fighting two wars with only a break of ten months between them. But these three had a much more severe reaction and suffer through nightmares, flashbacks or panic attacks on an almost regular basis. We try not to mention Tartarus in front of them, but that is not the only thing that can trigger them. It could be anything or nothing at all. It happens. And we all have been trying to deal with it."

"And we have not done anything at all to aid them?" Poseidon asked. If he knew himself, he definitely would have done something to help his son.

"Lord Poseidon, for almost eight months, we have not had any sort of communication with Olympus. The IMs have started working properly only a few days ago and there has been no response from the gods. Few of the children met their respective parent while battling the giants, but after that there has been radio silence." Chiron said this bitterly. "However, Annabeth had informed me that Lady Athena blessed her with dreamless sleep. Nico is usually able to sleep if he has taken some sort of Underworld sedative provided by Lord Hades or Clovis puts him to sleep and the few times that Percy actually falls asleep, Lord Poseidon keeps him company in his dreams or shifts his dreams to the visual of an ocean."

Zeus didn't even have the heart to tell his daughter or his brothers that they were breaking the rules by interfering with their children. But he was curious about one thing. "Why has there been no communication from Olympus?" he asked Chiron.

"We do not know. Eight months ago, Olympus had gone on lockdown and all of you Olympians were locked inside and everyone else who wasn't in the city during the time of lockdown had been denied access, including the minor gods. Now, obviously the lockdown has been lifted." Chiron explained, then added as an afterthought, "If any of you want to know about your children, please talk to them or ask me in private." The immortal teacher's main job (the one he had given himself) was to protect all those under his charge from everything including their Olympian parents. He did not want to reveal any more than he already had about any one particular child.

As the gods stood up to leave, Chiron said, "One more thing. Do not give any special attention to either of Percy, Annabeth or Nico." He remembered that when they tried doing the same back at camp, Percy had withdrawn and didn't talk unless talked to, Annabeth had become too aggressive and Nico had locked himself in his cabin, only coming out at meal times and sometimes not even then. It was only when everyone had started treating them how they usually did, that the three had started to make some progress.

Chiron watched everyone leave till he was alone in the room with Hades, Poseidon and Athena. He had anticipated this. "I will try my best to answer your questions, but I recommend that you talk to your children and accept how much ever they want to reveal." He said.

Annabeth could feel the heat of the evening sun on the back of her neck and as she moved her head, she winced as one more strand of hair got pulled by the bark of tree that she was leaning against. As a tremor shook her whole body, she looked down at the mop of black hair, the source of the tremor and stroked the hair. Somehow during the past fifteen minutes, Percy's head had shifted from her shoulder to her chest to her lap. Percy lay curled up next to her, only keeping his head on her lap. He was taking deep breaths to calm down, but a random sob sometimes broke through and shook both him and his girlfriend.

Once they had walked out of the throne room, Annabeth and Jason had taken a gasping Percy to a secluded area in the courtyard, where Annabeth had helped Percy control his panic attack. The
others had stayed nearby, far enough to give the couple some privacy but close enough so that they were able to keep an eye on them. They had found out early on that the closeness of other campers helped anyone suffering from an episode, so everyone always made it a point to be near each other.

Percy took another deep breath as he concentrated on the greenery of the grass beneath them and the feeling of Annabeth's fingers in his hair, sometimes massaging his head, sometimes playing with his hair. He started to feel calm and the anxiousness and panic was soon replaced by fatigue and drowsiness, which could also be because of the warm climate, but he didn't care. In another few minutes, the son of Poseidon had slept and his tightly wound body relaxed and his breathing went back to normal.

Annabeth looked down at him and wondered how different their reactions were to their attacks. While Annabeth would usually feel restless and want to walk around the whole camp, Percy would normally just curl up and take a power nap. She was thankful that this one was over just as quickly as it had started, otherwise Percy would have felt disassociated the whole day. Those days were never good. But the worst days in her opinion would be when they both had had some type of episode and were not able to comfort the other. Those were the only times anyone else would be allowed to fuss over them. That had happened only twice, thankfully.

Out of the corner of her eye, Annabeth saw some movement and turned to see Nico and Hades walking to another secluded area of the courtyard and Athena and Poseidon looking at her and Percy. The teen sighed. She gathered from their faces that Chiron had told them about her and Percy's trip through literal hell. Well, the parents would just have to wait. She turned to look at their worried faces and shook her head, hoping that they would understand to leave her and her boyfriend alone for now. Thankfully, they did and walked away.

Nico looked at his dad for what felt like the hundredth time within the past five minutes. After the god of dead had kidnapped his son from having a generally good conversation with his crush… umm, friend, Will, the really cute and distracting son of Apollo (not that Nico thought like that or anything), they had walked to a secluded area, scared off the resident nymphs and now his dad looked like he was mentally preparing himself for a visit from Demeter. Nico remembered that Hades had looked just like he looked now, a day before Demeter was supposed to visit the Underworld for a month. But the ghost king knew it was something much more serious. He had a feeling that Chiron had to have told their parents about the pit. The gods would not have let the centaur be after witnessing the beginning of Percy's panic attack.

Nico sat down on the grass. Might as well be sitting for a daunting conversation, he thought. Hades turned to look at him in worry, as if he too might have been suffering from something and when he saw nothing to worry about, he too sat down with his son.

"Nico…"

"Chiron told you about Tar-tar-the pit." Nico said bluntly, ignoring his stutter. In his experience, people didn't ask much questions if you were blunt with them. But he had learnt that from his dad, so it probably would not work, but it was still worth a shot.

"Yes." Hades said. Looking at his son, he asked, "Are you… I mean how are you? And don't say you are OK."

"I am… I am not." Nico said. He decided to just tell the truth and get it over with. He and Percy had been debating about talking to their parents for days now. Percy had wanted Nico to talk to his dad about both Tartarus and almost fading, while Nico had been apprehensive. "But I am getting there. Not immediately. But someday."
Unexpectedly, but then everything between them had been unexpected, Hades pulled Nico into a hug and whispered, "I am so sorry that you had go through all that."

Nico was uncomfortable with the show of affection, but at the same time relieved too. He realized that the most Hades had ever done was pat him and the hug made him feel like he was wanted and accepted. When he was released, Nico felt better, lighter, like some weight had been lifted and he smiled, like he used to when Bianca was still alive.

"Umm… you don't have to answer if you don't want to, but do you also go through what Percy was going through?"

"Sometimes. That was a panic attack. I usually have those and nightmares." Nico answered in a small voice. None of them had ever voiced out what they were going through. At camp, PTSD was a given and everyone excluding the young campers who had not fought in the war, suffered from it to some extent. "The other campers help, though."

"Ah, yes, Chiron did mention something about a Clovis putting you to sleep."

"That will be Clovis, son of Hypnos. He goes around putting campers to sleep who have difficulty in sleeping. He sometimes helps me if the magical underworld sleeping pills don't work."

"Then how did you sleep last night?"

"I don't always need them. Just sometimes."

"Ok." Hades nodded. He could feel his son's reluctance coming back, so he said, "I do not wish to pry and make you uncomfortable." He sighed and continued, "I do not know you as well as me-from-the-future does, but if you do want to talk about anything, I would be available." He breathed out. This had been the most emotional conversation he had ever had with anyone who wasn't Persephone. But he did feel better after seeing his son. The fear that had gripped him was gone and his son looked healthy, given the circumstances.

Nico nodded and thought that the day could not get any weirder. His dad actually had a proper conversation with him that just bested another conversation (in terms of weirdness) he had with him about Nico having a crush on Percy.

The father and son got up from the ground, feeling that the conversation was closed, for now at least. "So, I should probably let you go back to your yellow haired 'friend'." Hades smirked at Nico, who started blushing, and then ruffled his hair and walked off.

Nico, still blushing furiously, turned around in a daze, thinking about how his father knew and walked in the general direction of where the other campers were.

Percy woke up to sounds of whispering and bleating.

"– Nat would not agree to that." Whispered a voice that Percy identified as Grover. He assumed Grover was talking about the problems he was facing from a wood nymph called Natalie at Central Park.

"Can't you just order her to follow instructions?" Annabeth whispered.

Percy decided it would a great time to cut in the conversation and scare them both, "G-man doesn't want to order the nymphs around." His voice sounded hoarse to him. He sat up, rubbing the sleep from his eyes and turned to face his friends. The air was colder and the sun was about to set, making the whole sky light up in shades of red and orange.
"Gah!" the satyr exclaimed. "You scared me."

"That was the point." Percy gave a small grin. His head still felt a bit heavy from… his umm reaction earlier, but the sleep had helped and he was feeling a bit like his usual self.

Annabeth handed him a bottle of water, clearly gotten from Piper's cornucopia and a chocolate bar. She herself was munching on one of those fig bars that he loathed and Grover was eating the wrapper. He looked around and saw that all of the demigods including Tyson, Calypso and Hedge, now joined by hunters and tree nymphs were playing their previous game of freeze tag.

"Thalia managed to win." Annabeth informed Percy. "How are you feeling?"

"Better now." Percy replied, pouring half the bottle on himself and then drinking the remaining half. "Shouldn't we be going back to the reading?"

"Nope. The break time got extended." Grover replied. "Turns out Hermes forgot to make some deliveries for Demeter and Zeus and is now on one of his delivery runs. And then there is the whole matter of Apollo setting the sun and Artemis driving the moon."

"Hmm… ok… G-man, Pan is calling you." Percy said as Pan caught Percy's eye and signaled to send Grover.

"I hope he doesn't ask more about what happened to him. I don't know for how long I can distract him." Grover said as he got up and walked off.

"That's one conversation I will not be looking forward to." Percy commented.

"Yeah…uh… Percy? Chiron had to tell the gods." Annabeth said hesitantly.

Percy sighed as he tore open the chocolate wrapper and said, "That's another conversation I am not looking forward to."

"Yeah, well, your dad came by twice when you were sleeping. So did my mom. And Hades took Nico away, but he came back some minutes ago."

"And… here they are again." Percy said as he saw his dad and Athena looking at them. "Ready for this, wise girl? Cuz here they come."

"Together." Annabeth replied, squeezing Percy's hand.

Percy and Annabeth stood up to meet their respective parent as they neared the couple. Looking at their joined hands, Athena asked, "Is there any way we could do this separately?"

Annabeth shook her head and Percy replied, "Not right now." The couple didn't like to be apart during the aftermath.

"How are you feeling, son?" Poseidon asked, his eyes shining with worry and fear for his son.

"Much better, thank you." Percy said and nibbled on the chocolate bar. He always preferred having sugar. It had always calmed him down and made him feel better.

"So, Chiron told us about what happened." Athena said.

Percy nodded and said, "I can speak for myself when I say that I am fine and honestly do not want to talk about this now. I know you," he looked at Poseidon and continued, "want to talk to me about being down there and all that, but I am in no mood to have that conversation right now."
Percy said a bit forcefully, feeling a bit of anxiousness returning and wanting to put a stop to it.

The god of seas felt his son's hesitance and put a hand on Percy's shoulder and said, "Very well. I am glad that you are feeling better. We can talk whenever you are feeling up to it." Then he looked at Annabeth gratefully and said, "Thank you, child, for taking care of my son." With a pat on Percy's shoulder and a reassuring smile, he turned and walked to where Amphitrite was standing.

Athena sighed and started, "Annabeth…"

"Mother, honestly, there is nothing to talk about. As much as neither of us like the fact that we had to go through what we did, it was an essential part of the quest and it had to be done." Annabeth said, interrupting the goddess.

"Better us than someone else." Percy said solemnly.

"And it has already happened. That we cannot do anything about. But, we both are trying to move on from that and this is only the beginning. We are sure it will get better as time passes." Annabeth had heard that phrase so many times that she could recite it with a straight face and believable tone. But recently, she too had started to believe that she and Percy would be fine. It would take months, but they would eventually reach a stage where they could talk about Tartarus and be ok with it.

Athena sighed dejectedly. "Alright then. I get it that you do not wish to talk right now, but if you do want to…whenever you want to…you can – you can talk to me." She told her daughter. Turning to look at Percy, she said, "I suppose you are not all that bad." Then after a brief pause she added, "Thank you for not letting my daughter go through it alone."

Percy smiled and looked at Annabeth, "Wouldn't dream about it." By the time they turned back to face the goddess, she was already gone.

"Well, that was easy." Annabeth said. "Maybe, too easy."

"They are gonna come back later and talk to us." Percy said and pulled her along to walk around the courtyard.

"True. But think about it this way, we won't have to go back to our time and have the same conversation again." Annabeth replied.

They walked around for another ten minutes, talking to some of their friends, who had been frozen while playing tag. Then there were three distinct flashes, indicating that the gods had returned from their chores. They were talking with Chiron, assuring him that Percy was fine, when Hestia announced that they would continue with the reading. She looked at Percy and silently asked him if it was ok to continue and he just nodded.

While they walked back, Percy could feel the occasional stares, but he opt to ignore them. It felt like the first week back at camp, when everyone had been walking on eggshells around them. But it seemed like Chiron might have also told them not to pay the three any special attention, because when they settled down on their couches, everyone pretended that nothing had happened and that it had been just a normal break.

"Thank the gods for Chiron." Annabeth whispered to Percy, who smiled and nodded and continued to nibble on his chocolate.
The Fall

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Ch20 – TLT – The Fall

Everyone from the past kept glancing with worry and awe towards Percy, Annabeth and Nico, until Chiron caught them and glared at them, making them look away. He hoped that telling everyone had not been a mistake and that it wouldn't impact the children negatively. The parents of the three however looked better than when Chiron had seen them last, so he assumed that they went and talked to their children.

"So, who wants to read the next chapter?" Hestia asked. Somehow the book had made it to her in all the commotion of settling down.

"I might as well." Hephaestus grunted and motioned Hestia to pass the book around to him.

"I PLUNGE TO MY DEATH"

Everyone turned to look at Percy who was whispering something to Jason. Jason had finally managed to convince Thalia and Tyson to trade places with him and Piper, so they could sit with Percy and Annabeth. The cousins ignored all the looks they were getting and continued their conversation.

Shrugging, the god of forges continued to read, "We spent two days on the Amtrak train, heading west through hills, over rivers, past amber waves of grain."

Demeter smiled thinking about at least how her domain hadn't been destroyed in the future unlike Pan's.

"We weren't attacked ... the right opportunity."

"You probably were being watched. If the quest is for any one specific god, usually that one would watch over the quest." Athena said.

"I tried to ... his capture."

"I am really hating this Gabe person." Rachel said.

"Welcome to the club." Percy told her.

No one realized that until Percy spoke, they all had been holding their breaths, worried about whether he was feeling up to continuing with the reading. But now that he spoke, they realized that he may not be ok but he was better. That itself deflated the tension in the room.

"'Don't worry,' ... eye and waved."

"I thought all centaurs were party ponies." Connor said as he turned to Chiron.
"Party ponies?" Dionysus asked, perking up at the word 'party' while his wife just shook her head in exasperation.

"Ah, yes." Chiron started to explain. "Most of my kinsmen revel in throwing parties and umm... other things and call themselves 'Party Ponies.'" He said distastefully, while all the demigods who had met the party ponies had a smile on their faces. "But not all of them are like that. Some settle down and have families."

"They throw the best parties ever!" Travis said with a grin.

Hephaestus quickly started reading when he saw Dionysus about to retort. He did not want to sit through another one of his younger half-brother's explanations about parties.

"I looked around the passenger car, but nobody else had noticed. The adult riders all had their faces buried in laptop computers or magazines."

"What are laptop computers?" Hephaestus asked. It sounded like a machine or he hoped it was a machine.

"It is a small machine that mortals use to record things and play games and watch movies and communicate with each other." Leo said. Then he took out his notepad and scribbled some instructions in Greek. He had been trying to make a copy of Daedalus' laptop for Annabeth, mainly for the challenge but also to cheer her up.

The god of forges was pleased. It seemed like in the future the mortals had really expanded his domain by making more and more machines.

"Another time, trees and was gone."

"I do not know what a Hummer is, but that sounded like the Nemean Lion." Hercules said as he remembered fighting with the beast.

"Hummer is a big car and that was the Nemean Lion." Percy confirmed.

"If lions don't live wild then how do they live?" Pan asked, already dreading the answer.

"In zoos." Hedge replied angrily. "They are kept in cages for entertainment of the mortals. Some mortals only go to visit and see what a lion or any other animal looks like but some go and bully and throw things at the animals in zoos."

Pan looked like he was about to be sick, while Artemis looked like she was going to go and hunt these mortals down. The god of the wild was already hating the future. He just hoped Grover would save the wild and restore it to its complete glory. Grover had already told him that he was going around the world trying to get all the nature spirits to save their own pockets of wild and not rely on someone else to do it for them.

When no one uttered another word except Artemis muttering under her breath, Hephaestus started reading.

"Our reward money... sitting right next to me."

A few people snorted and Piper smirked at Percy, who was once again cursing the Fates for putting all his embarrassing thoughts in the book.

"Grover kept snoring... he never laughs."
"Ok! How many times have I appeared in your dreams to know that for sure?" Hades asked and then added, "And I do laugh."

"Demigods discuss dreams and it seemed like the most popular opinion that you don't laugh." Annabeth replied.

"He was trying to get to you too?" Chris asked Percy.

"I think he was trying to get to all the demigods." Percy said.

The gods didn't bother asking whom they were talking about, because they would never get an answer.

""He offered ... he already has it?""

"All very good questions." Hades said, looking pointedly at Zeus.

"Fine! You don't have the bolt. Happy?" Zeus snapped.

"Very." Hades smiled smugly as their sisters just shook their heads at the brothers' childish behavior.

"I shook my ... and turned his head."

A few demigods snorted, "Grover and his food!"

"Annabeth readjusted his cap so it covered his horns. "Percy, you can't barter with Hades. You know that, right? He's deceitful, heartless, and greedy."

"Excuse me?" Hades glared at Annabeth.

"That's what we were always told Lord." Annabeth replied. "But not anymore. We have Nico to tell us the truth and Percy, who has met you a couple of times."

Hades rolled his eyes. Of course the children were taught that he was the bad god. As long as his son and maybe even his nephew were there to tell the truth that he wasn't completely heartless and was only mildly deceitful, he would be okay.

""...I don't care ... him to rot.""

"That was harsh." Thalia said, but understood where her best friend was coming from.

"Annabeth?" Athena said. Why would her daughter not care for her father? What happened to her to make her hate him?

"I don't think like that anymore." Annabeth said as everyone turned to look at her with a confusing look. "And I think it might be explained, seeing that I told Percy about it."

"Very well... Hephaestus?" Athena said, still looking at her daughter in worry. She hoped that Annabeth had another home other than camp to go to.

""You're not ... their mortal parent.""

Athena was furious with this mortal. How could he reject such a gift – that too a child?

Many demigods understood what Annabeth must have gone through. They all had parents who
didn't want them or left them to their own devices. They knew what it felt like to be rejected by the one person who was supposed to love you unconditionally.

Annabeth grimaced. She remembered those days all too well, when she thought that she was unwanted and unloved, that she had been a burden on her father's mortal family. She felt Percy wrap his arm around her and rub her arm. Leaning on his shoulder, Annabeth thought about the day after the war, when Chiron had informed her to call her dad because there had been around thirty calls from him in the time she had gone on the quest. She remembered how both her dad and her step-mom had broken down in relief over the phone call, when she had called. They had promised to visit her in New York before the new school year started, as she wanted to continue her studies in New York to be near Percy, the camp and Olympus and they had also not wanted to put her in more danger by asking her to fly down to San Francisco. She smiled as she thought about how she had two mortal families now – her own and Percy's family.

"But how ... I didn't exist."

"That is not true, not anymore." Annabeth said, seeing her mother's eyes flash in rage. Athena looked at her daughter with a questioning look. "That's what I always thought but that is not true. My father is not the best at explaining things and talking, so he never talked and I never asked him about it. But for the past two years we have had a better relationship."

"In any case, he should not have treated you like he did." Hestia said softly.

Annabeth nodded and asked for the reading to be continued.

"I stared out ... dad was thinking."

"That is so sweet of you." Piper said. Then after a moment she groaned. "These two bring out the Aphrodite side of me." She explained to a puzzled Jason.

Jason muttered, "These two would bring out the 'Aphrodite side' of an Ares kid." Piper just chuckled.

"Annabeth kept ... I ran away."

Most of the gods felt anger towards the father and his family. How could he treat any child like that? Especially a demigod child, if he knew the dangers that would follow her. No wonder she felt resentful towards her father and would let him die. They hoped that what Annabeth said had been true, that she now had a good relation with the mortal family.

"How old ... short time, anyway."

Athena smiled. She was glad that she looked out for her daughter and guided her to friends. She saw Annabeth and Thalia smile at each other and figured out that Thalia must have been the unexpected friend that took care of Annabeth.

"I wanted to ... stuck on the city."

Annabeth menacingly turned to face Percy who was giving her a sheepish grin. "Huge shopping bag handle?"

"Ugh... it did?" Percy insisted and Annabeth squinted her eyes to glare at him. Great! Now he would have to sit through another lecture on architecture.

"Now that I think about it, it does look like a giant shopping bag handle." Leo said, but cowered
under Annabeth's glare. "Or not? I mean, what does Percy know about architecture, right?" Leo said, only to receive a glare from Percy.

"Maybe, you shouldn't open your mouth." Calypso giggled and Leo nodded.

"I want to ... thousand years."

Percy looked at her proudly and said, "And you did it!"

"It's still incomplete you know?" Then a horrible but plausible thought struck her. "Well, it would be if the gods didn't decide to use magic and restore Olympus."

Athena looked at her daughter in pride. She had managed to accomplish her dreams. The goddess hoped that the Olympians hadn't grown impatient and finished the rest of the work on their own.

"I laughed. ... draw all day."

"Wouldn't have thought that if I had seen you sit and design something." Percy said.

"What do you mean?" Reyna asked.

"Just that Annabeth can actually sit quietly and design the whole day. I mean there could be an earthquake or I could have caught fire, but she would still be concentrating on her work."

The seven nodded. They had seen Annabeth in one of those moods when she would sit all day and just research. Nothing short of pouring water on her head, which Leo does not recommend, could get her out of her research mood.

"Hey, that's just like Athena." Hermes said, but did not elaborate because of the glare he was receiving from the said goddess.

"Her cheeks 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."

"Hey!" Poseidon shouted indignantly, while Athena smirked and nodded in agreement with her daughter's statement.

"Wow! You were so rude!" Rachel and Thalia said.

"It is not rude if it is the truth." Athena remarked.

"What do you mean by that?" Poseidon glared at his niece.

"Do not answer that!" Zeus ordered his daughter. "And stop picking fights every two minutes."

"Well, she started it." Poseidon said childishly. He just loved annoying his pompous niece. She always underestimated him and his children, considering them to be of below average intelligence, just because they were all impulsive in nature.

"And you end it." Hestia reprimanded her brother. She just didn't understand why Poseidon couldn't let go of the stupid rivalry. It wasn't like he actually cared about what Athena thought.

"Hephaestus please continue before these two give me a headache."

"I watched the ... ever cooperate?"

"Not if they can help it." Apollo said.
"Annabeth had... make it complete.""

"I wouldn't call that cooperation." Hermes commented. Both Poseidon and Athena had conversed using Hermes as their messenger. Just because he was the messenger of gods didn't mean they could use him like that.

"'Then we can cooperate, too. Right?'"

"I think you guys can more than just cooperate." Rachel said, wiggling her eyebrows suggestively and making the couple blush.

"We rode into ... said. "Sightseeing.""

"You guys went sightseeing on a quest?" Frank asked incredulously.

"We had the time. We had to wait for three hours right? Better to keep moving around than stay in one place and attract monsters." Annabeth defended herself.

"You forgot to mention that you would also get to see a national monument." Grover said. "Plus it's not like the monsters didn't come anyway."

"'Sightseeing?' ... coming or not?'"

"This is a bad idea, isn't it?" Theseus asked.

"Yup." Percy said with a smile.

"Grover and I ... without monsters."

"Like the dam snack bar?" Thalia asked innocently, before her, Percy and Grover dissolved into giggles.

"What did just happen?" Jason asked feeling confused. He wasn't the only one. Almost everyone in the room was looking at the three in concern and confusion.

"This is one joke that I have no idea about." Annabeth said, just as the three calmed down and became sad as they thought about Zoe and her innocence.

"We might end up reading about the joke too." Percy explained when Jason poked him.

"The Arch was... so I was okay."

"Two of Percy's favorite things together – Annabeth and food." Connor chuckled as Percy blushed and rubbed the back of his neck.

"I kept looking ... shouldn't be here."

"You should have said something!" Annabeth groaned. It was essentially her fault that Percy had to go up in the Arch and then stay behind with Echidna and Chimera and then fall into the river.

"Like you would have listened." Percy retorted, then added, "Plus, you really wanted to go see the Arch."

Annabeth huffed, but knew that Percy was right. She would have shot down his suggestion as paranoia.
"Guys," I said. ... our friend downstairs?"

"Are you kidding me?" Nico asked, shaking his head. "Our friend downstairs?"

"What else was I supposed to say?" Grover asked.

"Umm… uncle?" Nico suggested.

"Huh!" Grover shrugged.

"'Um, right,' ... Darkness," Annabeth said.

"The helm is not just an invisibility hat!" Hades said, sounding offended.

"'Yeah, that's ... fear the dark?!'

"That is the Helm of Darkness." Hades smirked and Zeus and Poseidon nodded. They had have firsthand experience of the powers of helm and neither wished their oldest brother to wield it against them.

"'But then ... how do we know he's not here right now, watching us?' I asked."

"Maybe because I don't have time to waste on you children?" Hades said, rolling his eyes. Just because he had a helm that allowed him invisibility and intangibility, did not mean he went around using it in his free time – well not always anyway.

"Percy, you are really paranoid!" Reyna said.

"Annabeth and ... beans left?!"

"You are really obsessed with blue food, brother." Triton said.

"Actually, it's the color blue. His room is completely blue, most of his clothes are blue, most of food he eats is blue, all of…" Thalia was interrupted as Percy walked over her to shut her mouth with his hand.

"I just like the color blue." Percy said and went back to his place in between Annabeth and Jason.

"I'd almost ... me nuts."

"Us too. It's probably because of ADHD, though." Travis and Connor said.

"You are claustrophobic?" Thalia asked Percy, hoping to get to know his fear. It was only fair since he knew of her fear of heights.

"I don't think so. I don't have the fear – I just don't like small spaces." Percy explained.

"The sea does not like to be restrained." Poseidon said. "Small spaces would make you feel like you are being restrained." He told his son, who just nodded.

"We got ... a word about it."

"Ok. There are specific breeds of dogs that are used as seeing-eye dogs and a Chihuahua is not one of them." Rachel explained to Percy.

"What are those? Seeing eye dogs?" Perseus asked.
"People train some dogs to guide blind people around in their daily lives." Rachel told him.

"We started ... a blue-jean blimp."

"I don't like denim dresses." Katie said and half the girls agreed.

"'They're below,' ... cleared everything up."

"Who names a dog sonny, anyway?"

"No one."

"The lady with the dog is a monster." Rachel said in a sing-song voice.

"How would you know?" Clarisse asked.

"Well, the only people who talk to Percy other than his mom or Paul are other demigods, gods or monsters. And this lady doesn't seem to be either a demigod or a god, so I'm gonna go with monster."

"Really loving your confidence in my social life." Percy rolled his eyes.

"At the top of the Arch, the observation deck reminded me of a tin can with carpeting."

"You have absolutely no appreciation for architecture or art!" Annabeth exclaimed.

"Ok, first of all, it really did look like that. Secondly, it was high up in the air and everyone had warned me not to go in the air, so I was freaking out. Plus, I like what you make." Percy said, making Annabeth smile on the last line.

Amphitrite rolled her eyes. Apparently Percy inherited his father's impressive way with words too.

"Rows of tiny ... pretty quick."

"Now that I think about it, yeah it would have freaked you out." Annabeth whispered to Percy, who just smiled.

"Annabeth kept talking about structural supports, and how she would've made the windows bigger, and designed a see-through floor."

Both Percy and Thalia shivered at the mention of see-through floor. "You are never going to take me to a place that is high in the air and has see-through floors." Percy told Annabeth, who reluctantly nodded.

"She probably... room for me."

"Please tell me you guys didn't spilt up." Piper groaned.

"Ugh… nope." Percy replied.

"Don't you guys see horror films? Bad things always happen to people when they split up." Will said. His cabin currently was going through a horror movie marathon phase – before the war anyway.

"The park ranger... at the bottom."
A few campers face-palmed and some gods shook their heads.

"Grover and Annabeth ... between her teeth."

"Forked tongue?"

"I called it. She is a monster."

"You are way too excited for a monster cornering your friend in a small space in the air." Hercules told Rachel, who didn't bother to reply. Percy had told her all about Hercules.

"Wait a ... nice people here."

"A considerate monster? That doesn't sound right." Lou Ellen said.

"'Doggie!' said ... 'If you insist.'"

"That's more like it." Lou Ellen said.

"Did she just call the dog her son?" Gwen asked.

"So, there are two monsters?" Hercules asked, wondering how his cousin would get out of this predicament.

"Ice started ... lady corrected."

"Chimera? You fought a chimera?" Dakota asked.

"If the chimera is the son, then the lady must be..." Triton said.

"Echidna." Athena interrupted Triton.

Poseidon groaned. How was his son supposed to fight Echidna and Chimera together? He had no backup and barely any training and no water source nearby. But, Echidna rarely ever went to fight heroes personally. Which meant that someone had asked her to fight Percy. Who could have done such a thing? Poseidon glanced at his brothers. They seemed to be the most likely option. Did one of them ask Echidna to go after a twelve year old child? That was too low, even for them.

"'Not a Chihuahua... like a reptile's."

"Yes, that is Echidna." Athena said.

"The Chihuahua barked ... gaping at the monster."

"The mortals can see the monster? Didn't you say there is this mist preventing them from doing so?" Hecate asked. She knew she was controlling the mist in the future. Currently, the gods used a form of magic to prevent the mortals to see their true forms, but beyond that the mortals could see what the gods and their children could.

"Many children can see through the mist at a very young age, but as they grow older their mortal brains can only process the mist. But sometimes the monsters themselves will force their true forms to appear through the mist, mostly to create problems for the demigod fighting them." Lou Ellen explained to her mother.

"The Chimera was ... TARTARUS-EXT. 954."
Hephaestus hesitated before reading about the dog tag. He hoped that it would not affect any of the children and by the looks of it, the children seemed fine. Most of the other gods were also thinking the same thing. Last time, Percy's panic attack had been triggered because of the mention of Tartarus and even Chiron had said that the campers avoided using the word in front of the children.

Annabeth sighed. She had heard the hesitation in the god's voice before he said Tartarus. "Ok. We" she pointed to herself and the campers, "are not big on the whole 'don't say the name because it has power' thing. So, there will be mentions of the pit by name and other things too. But, neither of us," she pointed to herself, Percy and Nico, "are going to suffer through something every time it is mentioned. It is completely unpredictable. But, if something happens, we can take a break. But if all of you start treating us differently, then..." Annabeth's voice shook with anger. She hated being treated as if she would break at any minute and she knew for a fact that neither Percy nor Nico liked it. Percy rubbed her shoulder to calm her down and turned to see if Nico was alright.

"We should pro... what is it Leo?" Percy asked, looking at Leo, who was bouncing in his place.

"I have a question." Leo replied, after seeing that the three were actually fine. "There is a phone line in Underworld?"

"Duh!" Nico replied. "How else do you think we keep track of monsters and spirits and other immortal residents of the Underworld?"

"This phone line is the same thing as what Chris had explained about phones earlier, yes?" Hermes asked.

"Yeah." Chris replied and then turned to Nico, "Seriously? Underworld has a phone line?"

"Yes! We have a call center. Once dad had grounded me and told me to help man the calls." Nico said. "It was ok till we started getting prank calls because one of our spirit bounty hunter by mistakenly revealed the helpline number to a couple of mortal kids."

"You guys have a spirit bounty hunter?" Travis asked, his eyes bulging in disbelief.

"Yes. Sometimes spirits manage to escape Thanatos or one of his helpers, so we have bounty hunters for that." Nico explained.

"Huh! Underworld has a call center and a helpline number... it is not what I thought it would be." Connor said.

"Oh no, these are only the modern updates, other than that we still have Cerberus and torture chambers and dungeons and all." Nico said, wanting to get rid of any thoughts that the twins might have of trying to visit the Underworld or something. You never know with them.

Hades and Persephone listened carefully when Nico was describing about the Underworld. Hades could not wait to hear his nephew's view of the Underworld, even though the paper work for a living person coming to his domain and leaving with his life and soul intact would be very grueling.

"Can we continue with the reading now?" Hera demanded. She did not like it a bit that Olympus was open to so many mortals, even though they were heroes of Olympus in the future.

"I realized I ... would lunge."

Any tension that had been relieved by talks of modern updates in the Underworld, was back. Everyone was interested in seeing how Percy managed to get out alive from this situation.
"The snake ... the terrible Echidna!"

"Zeus!" Poseidon looked at his brother, who was discreetly trying to make himself smaller under the glares of many of the gods. "My son is on a quest to retrieve your bolt from wherever it may be and you are sending one monster after another after him."

"In my defense, I think that he has the bolt." Zeus replied.

"Brothers, please do not turn into another pointless argument, seeing that Percy is sitting right here. Let us continue reading and see what happened." Demeter said, playing the peacemaker for the umpteenth time.

"I stared at her. All I could think to say was: 'Isn't that a kind of anteater?'"

The demigods including Chiron started laughing. It was such a Percy thing to do.

"Why do you have to go around antagonizing everyone that you meet?" Triton asked, shaking his head.

"I don't do it on purpose. It just happens." Percy replied.

"That's because you have no brain to mouth filter, kelp head." Thalia said.

"She howled, ... them get hurt."

"Of course you couldn't." Annabeth whispered fondly.

"I uncapped my sword, ran to the other side of the deck, and yelled, 'Hey, Chihuahua!' The Chimera turned faster than I would've thought possible."

"They are impossibly fast when compared to their size." Hercules said.

"Before I could... off my eyebrows."

"Wait a minute! You went through the fire and still only managed to sear off your eyebrows?" Hercules asked.

"I am kind of fire resistant... well, to an extent anyway." Percy replied. Then upon seeing the past heroes' confused looks, he explained, "Water opposes fire, so I can bear heat and fire up to an extent. Have you never tried this power before, Theseus?"

"Uh... no. I don't go near fire as such to test this ability." Theseus answered. "I am almost afraid to ask, but how did you find out about this power?"

"We will read about it, most probably. But it had something to do with telekhines throwing lava at me." Percy said.

"You have lived a weird life, brother." Theseus said, wondering about how Percy ended up in that situation. Triton and Amphitrite were staring at Percy, thinking about the same thing, while Poseidon was shaking his head in worry.

Hephaestus nodded then read, "Where I had ... national monument."

"Not the last monument that you will be destroying." Thalia mumbled just loud enough for Percy to hear.
"Riptide was now ... into my calf."

"Dammit Prissy! Just kill the Chimera already!" Clarisse said.

"This has already happened." Connor pointed out, only to be punched by the daughter of Ares.

"My whole leg ... Mississippi River."

"So, you are basically defenseless while having Chimera poison running in your veins and the Chimera and his mother out to kill you. How did you survive that?" Ares voiced his thoughts.

"He jumped." Athena deadpanned.

"How would you know?"

"The title of this chapter was 'I plunge to my death'. It is kind of obvious that he jumped or fell. The question is – how did he survive that?"

"Which can only be answered if you both let me read." Hephaestus said. He had no patience for human or godly interaction.

"I managed to ... to figure it out."

"You are so pessimistic." Piper told Percy.

"How can you be optimistic in such a situation?" Hazel asked.

"Huh…"

"I backed into the hole in the wall. The Chimera advanced, growling, smoke curling from its lips. The snake lady, Echidna, cackled. "They don't make heroes like they used to, eh, son?"

"Oh, you wish, snake lady. You wish." Leo said menacingly.

"The monster ... protect these people."

Many people and gods smiled. They could appreciate this heroism.

"I couldn't just ... I was scared."

The campers were shocked. It's not that they thought that Percy was above fear, it was just that he never showed it even if he felt it and that gave the others courage to keep fighting even in face of their worst nightmares. To hear an admittance of fear from their leader, made him more… human… like any one of them.

"No one is above fear." Phobos said. "But only a true hero can admit it." Many gods nodded in agreement while many thought that a true hero should never show fear.

"There was no place else to go, so I stepped to the edge of the hole. Far, far below, the river glittered."

"Jump." Poseidon whispered. It was the only way his son could survive Chimera poisoning.

"If I died, would the monsters go away? Would they leave the humans alone?"
'He still cares about the mortals, even on the brink of death.' This thought was running through many minds. The hunters decided that for all his similarities with Hercules, he was nothing like that hero. Percy was a new type of hero – a selfless, sacrificing-his-life-for-mortals type. How many other heroes would care about mortals in such a situation?

"""If you ... your bloodline."""

"I cannot believe that I am saying this, but listen to Echidna, son." Poseidon said. Then a thought crossed his mind. Until now, his son had been skeptical of him, what if he is too afraid to jump into the river? Then how did he survive?

"That has to be the first time any one of us told our children to listen to a monster." Hermes said.

"Yeah, right, I thought. I'd read somewhere that jumping into water from a couple of stories up was like jumping onto solid asphalt. From here, I'd splatter on impact."

"No, you won't. Just jump and heal yourself." Theseus mumbled and felt Perseus pat his back.

"The Chimera's ... your heart.""

"What does she mean that we are faithless?" Zeus said, his eyes flashing with lightning.

"Do you think she knew that the minor gods no longer trusted the Olympians and would turn sides?" Annabeth whispered to Percy.

"Maybe. This whole thing had been going on for longer than we all know." Percy replied in the same manner.

When no one answered Zeus, the crippled god continued to read, "She was right: ... me as his son."

Poseidon smiled. He wished that these small things would help Percy trust him as his father.

"But this wasn't the sea. This was the Mississippi, dead center of the USA. There was no Sea God here."

"But the river spirits are family and friends. They would always help you out, even if they cannot give you enough power as the sea can." Poseidon said. He knew that his son must already know all these things by now, but he had an urge to explain things to his son, like a father would. He realized that because of the oath, Percy would have had no one to teach him how to control his powers and he would not have had any one to practice those powers with. The sea god decided to ask Theseus and maybe even Triton to help Percy with anything that he might need help with. If they were going to be stuck reading about his son's private thoughts, at least Percy could benefit from the time spent with his brothers, even if in the past. And maybe, even Percy could teach them a thing or two.

"""Die, faithless ... toward the river."

"Good." Poseidon breathed out. At least now Percy could heal himself and not feel abandoned by him, in terms of powers at least.

"Who's next?" Hephaestus asked.

Ares, not one to be left behind by his brother, took the book and said that he would read the next
chapter.
"I BECOME A KNOWN FUGITIVE"

"Sweet"

"I'd love ...: Aaaaggghhhhh!"

"That would be any sane person's thought."

"The river ... and out of my vision."

Thalia shivered. Just the description of falling from that high was giving her vertigo.

"And then:... mud and lost forever."

Many looked at Percy with a questioning look on their faces.

Percy sighed. "This was the first time I found out about my powers."

"You never used or at least tried to find out about your powers after father claimed you?" Theseus asked.

"Ugh... no. All I knew was that I could not get wet in water and that it gave me energy and that I could make plumbing explode." Percy replied, running a hand through his hair. He didn't have anyone to show him the ropes except Luke, who only taught him sword fighting.

"Oh. So, how did you find about your powers?" Triton asked, interested in his brother who had self-taught himself, whereas everyone before him had someone to guide them.

"Mostly during fights or if someone made me angry enough to do something impulsive." Percy shrugged. Why were they asking him these questions? Surely, many would find out about their powers that way.

Poseidon shook his head slightly. This was a dangerous way to find out about one's powers, especially powers over water as it would be difficult to control water while concentrating on a fight. The god saw Theseus and Triton looking at him with a questioning look in their eyes. He understood their question and blinked his eyes in approval. Both the brothers decided to talk to Percy later and see what all powers he had discovered and what all they could teach him control over.

Getting annoyed, Ares started reading, "But my impact ... all around me."

"That is a huge fish." Leo said, trying to imagine a huge fish.
Poseidon and his family grimaced at hearing the condition of the river. "Is it usually this dirty?"
Triton asked his brother.

Percy nodded and said, "It is one of the dirtiest rivers in the world."

Amphitrite winced. Many of her family members were river spirits. How would they survive such conditions? They all needed their waters clean and healthy to survive.

"At that point, ... which was good."

"Very good." Tyson said, nodding his head as he tinkered around with his latest project. He was making a magical sheath for Annabeth's drakon bone sword, so that she could conceal and carry it around with her.

"Second realization:... perfectly dry."

Some campers leaned forward in excitement. No one really knew how Percy's powers worked and they were all excited to learn about it. Even many of the gods were interested in listening about the water powers. They all knew Poseidon was one of the most powerful and they wanted to learn how that power worked.

Poseidon smiled as he heard about his son discovering his powers for the first time. It was like watching or rather hearing a baby walk for the first time.

"I looked at ... slimy rag. Weird."

"Nice" Leo smiled. "So, if you are touching me underwater then can I… you know?" he said, lighting his left index finger on fire, like a candle.

"Flame on? Yeah." Percy said. "But you can't breathe underwater so I would need to wrap you in an air bubble and if you light yourself up, all the oxygen in the bubble will be consumed. So, I don't recommend it."

Leo nodded. He remembered when he almost did that when they met the ichthyocentaurs.

"But the strangest thought occurred to me only last: I was breathing. I was underwater, and I was breathing normally."

"Do you like need gills for that?" Connor asked. He had never seen Percy underwater and was genuinely mocking him.

Percy just rolled his eyes and ignored the Stolls who were snickering.

"I stood up,..."Thank you ... Father.""

At least he has manners, Amphitrite thought. All of Poseidon's children took it as their birthright to be able to control water and never thanked him for bestowing such gifts on them. Poseidon nodded in acknowledgement of the gratitude.

"No response. ... saved me?"

The sea god frowned. Did his son not expect him to be saved? Did he really expect his father to do nothing at all? Didn't he realize that the powers he had were a part of him and Poseidon would never take them away?
"The more I ... join the bottom feeders."

Percy looked down at the ground. He had forgotten how insecure he used to be, not that he was any better now. But, no one knew of these insecurities and suddenly they were out in the open. How was he ever supposed to go back from this? The camp did not need a leader who did not even believe in himself. Maybe now his friends would realize that he was not the hero they thought him to be, that he was not fit to be their leader. Till he had come to camp, only his mother used to think of him as some brave child, everyone else he ever came across always told him how useless he was, that he was not worth their time. But at camp, everyone had accepted him for whoever he was. Would they go back on that after seeing that he was not actually a hero?

The campers' thoughts were running in the opposite direction. They couldn't understand how Percy could not see that he was a hero. Back then, it could be understandable. He thought that he had failed the mortals, but they hoped that now Percy didn't have the same thoughts. He was their hero, their leader and more importantly, their friend. He was the person who would sacrifice himself in a heartbeat for any one of them. He was the person who fought with only 40 campers and the hunters and still managed to protect Olympus from Kronos and his army. He was someone who would sit up whole night, just listening to them rant about the most insignificant things – he had already done that many a times.

Annabeth settled her head on Percy's shoulder and whispered, "Never think like that ever again. You are the greatest hero and friend that we all know of. Oh, and Thalia is saying that she will kick your ass if you think like that." That brought a smile to Percy's face and he turned to look at Thalia, who was glaring at him but had a small smile on her face.

Ares shook his head at the lack of confidence and continued reading, "Fump-fump-fump. ... like dolphin sonar."

"Oh, is it a Naiad or a Nereid?" Amphitrite asked. She knew most of them from her childhood. She was excited to hear how Percy would react to them.

"'Where are ... in Santa Monica."

"I must have sent her to watch over you." Poseidon mused.

"You are breaking the rules, brother." Zeus said.

"He is travelling to the Underworld, obviously I am going to help him." Poseidon said, thinking about why he would want Percy to go this Santa Monica beach.

"'What?' ... foul for my presence."

"A Nereid then." The queen of seas thought out loud. Normally Nereids could go into freshwater for limited amount of time, but for this one to leave so quickly… the water must be really toxic, Amphitrite thought with a frown.

"'But ...' I ... trust the gifts..."

"What gifts?" Athena wondered. Till now there had been no mention of any type of gifts.

"Her voice ... lost her again."

Annabeth rubbed circles in Percy's palm as a comforting gesture. Poseidon thought that he must have found a Nereid who closely resembled Percy's mother so that he would listen to her.
"I felt like drowning myself. The only problem: I was immune to drowning."

Jason frowned as he remembered a conversation he had with Percy, what seemed like ages ago. After they had fought Polybotes, Percy had said something about deserving to die. He had forgotten about that conversation completely. So much had happened since then. Had Percy always been like that? Jason decided to talk to his cousin later in private.

"Your father ... to the catfish."

A few people snorted. "I am pretty sure she was talking to you." Triton said with a teasing smile. "Although, the catfish is brave to stay in such disgusting waters."

Ares groaned. Why did he have to get a boring chapter with no action?

"I waded toward... the dark water."

Amphitrite decided that she really liked this demigod. He was polite (well sometimes), brave, grateful, cordial, humble, loyal, spoke his mind and not to mention, his thoughts were hilarious. He was truly like a mini version of Poseidon. She just hoped he didn't inherit his father's anger. That could be disastrous (for the enemy and himself), especially when combined with his loyalty, bravery and impulsiveness.

"Then I ... floating McDonald's."

"McDonald's." A few demigods said in a dreamy voice.

"What is that?" Perseus asked curiously.

"It's a place that sells food." Percy replied as his stomach growled at the mention of food. "When can we take a break for food?" he asked.

"How about after this chapter, we call it a day and resume tomorrow?" Hestia suggested. It had been a long day and they had received a lot of information. It would do everyone some good to take an early break and just relax.

Once everyone agreed, Ares continued to read, "A block ... nice, dear."

"Parents hardly listen to us children." Rachel said. Her own parents did not listen to whatever she had to say unless it was of importance to them like her schooling or her father's business.

"A news lady ... from the Arch."

"Why is the lady talking to the camera? Didn't you say that it took photographs?" Hermes' brow creased in confusion.

"Uh… they also can record a video, like a whole proceeding of events and then that can be watched later." Travis explained, not knowing how to explain without using modern terms. "That lady works for news channel, where they show these recordings to many people at once."

All the gods who were interested in listening to this explanation were somewhat confused and none of the other children knew how to explain without getting into technicalities or modern terms, which would need their own explanations, so they all left it at that and said that it was something made by Hermes and Hephaestus working together. Both the gods smiled, even if they had no idea what was being talked about.
"Survivors. I felt ... no confirmed fatalities ..."

"How are they still managing to blame you?" Reyna asked.

"The mist hates me. Somehow I always come out on top as the attacker and not the victim." Percy replied.

"I backed away, trying to keep my head down. I had to go a long way around the police perimeter. Uniformed officers and news reporters were everywhere."

"What are these police that you keep talking about?" Artemis asked.

"The mortals have laws to be followed in the society and the police are there to ensure that they follow them. Also, they help out the mortals in trouble and are usually helpful to the mortals, but not so much for us demigods. Mostly because we are incapable of functioning within the mortal laws during a quest or while being attacked by some monster." Annabeth explained.

Zeus smirked. Maybe he could get someone to do the same for Olympus and make sure that everyone was following the laws. But before he could continue with that train of thought both his brothers said in unison, "Don't even think about it." Then Zeus saw all the gods looking at him skeptically and knew that no one would ever allow him to do something like that. But, it would make his work so much easier as the king.

"I'd almost... the hard way!"

"That would be the easy way. The hard way means sneaking into the Underworld and having to go through Charon and Cerberus." Hades said nonchalantly.

"Annabeth stood ... of fell."

"Sort of, huh?" Jason asked and chuckled. A few others joined him. Only Percy would say that after falling from six hundred feet in the air.

"'Percy! Six ...That's the boy!"

"It is amazing how the mortals never fail to misinterpret the truth." Chiron muttered.

"I turned quickly ... from your dad."

"True. And not only out of respect. Father will most probably try to help you." Triton said.

"Before Annabeth ... Percy Jackson."

Many shook their heads and wondered how Percy had been able to complete the quest with the mortal police after him and the gods sending one monster after another to him.

"We ducked ... behind us."

"And that was it for this chapter. Next time, I am taking an interesting chapter." Ares said as he tossed the book away from him. Athena caught it with a glare directed towards Ares.

"Alright. Then as decided earlier, we can continue tomorrow and relax tonight." Hestia said and Zeus nodded his assent, snapping his fingers to open the doors and let everyone leave.
Bonding

(A/N - I do not own PJo, RR does.

Anyway, the part about Percy and Jason's talk is actually somewhat inspired by a similar talk I had with my best friend a couple of years ago, when I was in a similar position. So, sorry in advance in case it feels OOC, although I tried to make those two as much in character as I could.

Happy Reading)

Ch22 – TLT – Bonding

The dinner was once again an extravagant affair, with the mood the most relaxed that Olympus had seen in a while. A tall, dark haired god weaved through the crowd of mingling family members, with two wine chalices in hand, making his way towards his wife. After being stopped a dozen times by old relations and new friends, he finally reached his destination. He handed one of the chalices to Amphitrite and made small talk with the other goddesses she was conversing with. He could not get out of there fast enough, having only one goal in mind – to observe his children, especially Percy and Tyson. He was in no way someone who shied from mingling. Out of all the six elder gods, he was the one who could hold the attention of people for any length of time, just by conversing with them. But not this time, not after finding out that his son went through such a terrible ordeal.

Finding a comfortable nook, the sea god leaned against the wall on one shoulder, next to a torch, looking as if he owned the place – which wasn't that far from the truth, considering that at a time he did actually co-rule over the city, before he decided to make a palace for himself in the ocean. Sea-green eyes searched the room and landed on Triton, his oldest son, who was busy in conversation with a beautiful minor goddess. Poseidon just hoped that this would not lead to another controversy or entertainment for Aphrodite – he had had enough of both. Next, he sought out Theseus, who was talking with Perseus, most probably about how both of their kingdoms were doing. Poseidon didn't care, as long as it didn't turn into a fight, which was always a possibility with the children of big three. After searching for some more time he finally saw Percy and Tyson sitting on a couch, engaged in what looked like a lively conversation. Percy's head was thrown back in laughter as Tyson smiled a toothy grin.

The sea god stood up straighter as he felt a presence behind him – a presence that he could identify anywhere and he should be able to, after all, he had known this presence ever since he first opened his eyes inside his father's belly.

"Spying on your children, I see."

"Aren't you?" Poseidon said as he turned to look at his older brother, who was busy looking at his future children.

Hades shrugged and looked at Poseidon. "Are you trying to take over? Standing in the shadows and spying on others is kind of what I do. You" Hades lifted his chalice towards his brother, "should be out there" he nodded towards the crowd of gods, "entertaining everyone with your annoying jokes."

"I don't feel like it. Not today." Poseidon took a sip of wine. "And for the record, my jokes are not
annoying."

"Yes, they are." Said a third voice. The third brother, Zeus slid between the two gods and quickly ran his eyes over the room.

"Have you finally resorted to hiding from your wife?" Poseidon asked in a teasing tone.

"No. She is just in one of her moods to lecture about everything wrong with this reading situation." Zeus said, rolling his eyes. "So, what are you both talking about?" he asked, anxious to change the subject from him and his marital problems.

"Just that the world must truly be ending, if the three of us can stand and have a civil conversation." Poseidon quipped.

Hades sighed and said, "We were about to talk about our children before you so gracefully cut in."

"Oh." Said the god of sky as he snapped his fingers and made wine appear in mid-air. "I don't understand how mere children can traverse such a place." His mind going back to the information relayed by the centaur.

"I think we should give them more credit. They did fight in two wars, after all." Hades said. "And my child is still only fourteen." He looked at Nico, who was listening to Hazel's stories.

"Indeed, they are all too young. But such is the life of a hero." Zeus said. "Did you both get to talk to your children?" he asked awkwardly. The three brothers hardly ever talked about their lives. It was always some or the political discussion or their usual fights.

Poseidon raised an eyebrow but replied, "Percy was not feeling up to talking at that time and I guess I should have expected that considering what he must have been going through."

Zeus nodded. He had been taken by surprise when he had noticed Percy's reaction and then to be told that the boy had fought his way out the one place that no god would ever go willingly to. Well, he would not be getting over that shock for some time. Both the brothers looked at Hades when he told about his conversation with Nico.

After a while, Poseidon sighed contently. "This is a wonderful sight." He told his brothers, who were looking at him in confusion. Directing their gaze towards the children from the future, he explained, "None of my demigod children actually talk to my cyclops children. But, here Percy is talking to Tyson as if there is no difference between them."

"Well, no one actually talks to my children, but here I don't think anyone really cares about parentage." Hades said, looking at Nico, who had now joined Percy, Tyson, Grover and Annabeth in some discussion.

"You know what is bothering me?" Zeus asked rhetorically. "How different the future really is than we imagined it to be. The mortals don't believe in us and our children live in hiding. There were two wars and yet we Olympians did nothing. Three children fell into Tartarus and we still did nothing. And somebody had the audacity to steal my bolt."

"The wild and my domain have been polluted and Pan is missing. Also, you have punished Dionysus to stay with the children. And that something is stirring in the pit." Poseidon pointed out.

"Not to mention that the minor gods and I have been properly recognized by the Council and the camp." Hades said in wonder.
The three stood in silence, each lost in their own thoughts till Hera spotted her husband and came over to talk his ear off about another problem that she had discovered.

On the other side of the room, the demigods decided to go for a walk before turning in for the night. It had been a long day and most of them were still recovering from working long hours after the war. Jason was walking with Piper with his arm draped around her shoulders. They were bringing up the rear of their demigod group.

"Ok. What is bothering you?" Piper suddenly stopped and asked. "You have been lost in thoughts throughout the dinner. Is something wrong?"

"Huh? Nothing. Nothing is bothering me." Jason said unconvincingly.

Raising her eyebrow, Piper said in a sarcastic tone, "Sure. I believe you."

Jason wrapped his arms around her waist and pulled her closer. He pursed his lips and nodded slightly. "There is something. I'm worried… about Percy."

"Is it about his attack earlier? Because he seems fine to me." Piper said as she put her arms around his neck.

"Well, that and umm… something else too."

Piper tilted her head. "Something he told only you, I'm guessing." Jason just nodded his head. Honestly speaking, the more he thought about his conversation with Percy, the more he was freaking out. It was only because of his Roman training that he was able to keep his reaction under control. But Piper somehow always knew what he was thinking and feeling. Piper kissed his cheek and said, "Go talk to him. Whatever has you so bothered will go away only when you talk to him. I'll distract Annabeth. There was this shrine to mom that she would be interested in seeing. I'll take her there and you can talk to Percy." She pulled out of the embrace and took Jason's hand, pulling him in the direction that Percy and Annabeth had gone in earlier.

"But…but I'm not even prepared." Jason stammered. He had absolutely no idea how to approach the topic. He didn't want to agitate Percy. Nor did he want to remind Percy of unpleasant memories. But Piper was right – he needed to get this off his chest, so he didn't try stopping her. Although, he had a feeling that no one could stop her.

"Then go with the flow." Piper said with a twinkle in her eye. She looked absolutely breathtaking. "When in Greece… do as the Greeks do. And we Greeks love to improvise." She said, twisting the old saying, which made him smile.

They walked hand in hand till they spotted the other couple a few steps ahead of them. Piper quickly walked over and linked her arm with Annabeth's. "Hope I'm not intruding."

Percy laughed and shook his head. "Nah. We were just talking."

"Okay. In that case, I'm going to borrow your girlfriend for a while." Turning to Annabeth she said, "There is this shrine to mom which looks spectacular at night that you might want to see. It has all these colorful lights and actually glows in the dark. Mom showed it to me last night when we were walking over to her palace." She pulled Annabeth, who was listening intently to the descriptions, towards Aphrodite's palace.

"Uh… ok then." Percy said, watching Piper and Annabeth walk off into the night. He turned to
face Jason and said, "So, our girls just ditched us for a shrine?"

Jason shrugged and muttered something about girls being weird. The boys walked in silence for some time till Jason asked, "How are you feeling? No... uhh... no side effects from earlier?"

"No. This one was pretty quick. So nothing." Percy said, kicking a pebble on the paved road that they were walking on.

"Good. Actually, I wanted to talk about something now that we are alone."

Percy furrowed his brow and looked at his cousin. "Everything alright?" he asked in worry.

"Yeah, I guess. Stop worrying about everything, man." Jason punched Percy lightly on his shoulder. Percy had the habit of unknowingly reverting to his leader persona the minute anyone mentioned some kind of trouble. "I actually wanted to talk about you." Jason said, then mentally kicked himself for putting his words so eloquently.

"Me? What about me?" Percy put his hands in his pockets, suddenly on the defensive.

"Umm... I had been thinking about something that you told me. I don't know if you remember... but... umm... remember when we met Kym and Polybotes had captured you?" Jason asked tentatively.

At once Percy became quiet. After a while, he hummed in confirmation, wondering where this conversation was going. He remembered being suffocated by all that poison and Jason and Kym somehow saving his life. So, what... The poison! Crap! He had told Jason about not willing the poison away. But Jason hadn't seemed bothered back then, so why now?

They had stopped walking and were somehow facing each other. Jason caught Percy's eyes for a second and then looked away, trying to get his thoughts together. Percy found a small rock to kick around and was doing so, till Jason spoke up. "You remember what you had told me? You had told me that you didn't remove the poison from around you when you knew how to. That... that you thought that you... you... deserved..." Jason couldn't continue anymore. The words were stuck in his throat. In all his years as a leader and as a friend, he had never faced anyone's inner demons. He didn't know how to proceed.

"Deserved to die." Percy finished the sentence, looking straight at Jason. Jason swallowed and nodded and waited for Percy to speak up again. The black haired boy sighed and said dismissively, "Don't worry about that. I was in a bad place, what with just getting out of the literal hell hole and all. Relax."

Percy started kicking the rock around again, walking a bit away. For a moment, Jason wanted to let go of the difficult topic that he had bought up. But, he had already walked away from that once, he wasn't going to again. Not unless he was sure that his cousin and friend was no longer thinking along those lines.

"Percy wait up!" Jason jogged over to catch up with Percy, who had gone considerably far. "You can't just tell me something like that and expect me to drop it."

"And you can't just bring it up out of the blue. Also, you didn't have trouble dropping it the first time." Percy said in anger. He was finding it difficult to control his anger recently. Ever since he came back, he was perpetually angry, barely able to contain it. It reminded him of when he was young, before he came to camp. Back then he was always angry. Angry at Gabe, at the world and at his dad for leaving. Coming to camp and training had helped him calm his anger down. But now
it was back and Percy didn't know how to calm it.

Jason recoiled as if Percy had just hit him. "Sorry…" Percy said, pinching the bridge of his nose, "I didn't mean to say that. I just…" He took in some deep breaths and thought about Annabeth and his mom and anything else that made him happy.

Jason almost snapped back at Percy, thanks to him being the natural rival with his cousin, but stopped himself at the last moment. "Your anger is getting worse." He observed. He had noticed that Percy was much angrier when he had returned. It had been evident from his sparring style and his attacks on the enemy. "But you are right. I dropped it the previous time. I'm sorry. I really am. But with all the fighting going on at that time…" Jason started apologizing, but trailed off when Percy put his hand on Jason's shoulder.

"Dude, you don't have anything to apologize for. I shouldn't have dropped a bombshell like that on you during a war. But, really, I am fine now. I was in a bad place back then…"

"Things like that don't just go away over a couple of weeks, Perce." Jason cut in. "I am not here to judge you or whatever that you think I will do if you tell me how you feel, ok? I just want to make sure that you are doing ok. And even if you do still feel that way, I just want to help."

Percy looked away, blinking back his tears. No one could help him, he thought. He had created a monster inside him when he had controlled Akhlys' tears and there was no going back from that, ever. He had crossed a line. Out of all the monsters in that gods forsaken place, he had been the worst of them all. Percy closed his eyes and tried to get rid of the visuals he was seeing.

"Percy?" Jason asked as he saw a tear slide down Percy's face. He did not want Percy to have a flashback or something. But hearing Jason's voice broke something inside of him and tears fell faster than the son of Poseidon could comprehend. "Oh gods, Percy! I didn't mean to…" Jason said, panic evident in his voice.

Taking a deep breath and wiping his betraying tears, Percy tried to placate his cousin. "I'm fine. I just…just lost it for a minute there. I swear Jason, I'm fine."

"Please talk to me. I can help, man. At least, I will try to."

Percy swallowed. A part of him wanted to tell about his inner demons to someone and another part wanted him to hide and pretend that everything was ok. And both parts were equally compelling. Percy palmed the sword in his pocket. It was one of the few things that always gave him strength, no matter the situation – whether it was an exam scenario or spilling his guts out to his newly found cousin.

Jason watched as Percy internally struggled. He did not understand what Percy was thinking, but all he knew was that he wanted to help. Percy was someone who always went out of his way to help others, despite whatever problems he himself might be having. Jason, just for once wanted to return the favor. He wanted Percy to actually open up to someone other than Annabeth who could help him out. Abruptly, Percy stilled and sighed. So, he had resolved whatever he was struggling with, Jason thought.

"Fine, Grace. But what I tell you, you better not tell anyone." Percy growled uncharacteristically. But underneath the aggressiveness, Jason could hear the fear of baring his soul to someone else.

Jason nodded. He would never break Percy's confidence. He had a feeling that not everyone got to see Percy for who he actually was. People only saw Percy as what he wanted them to see – not that what he showed was fake, but it was not the entire truth either.
After making sure that they were actually alone, Percy told Jason everything that had happened with Akhlys. He had already told this to the Roman earlier, so it was easy to start with that. Then he managed to choke out how he never felt the same after that day, how he felt like a monster—someone that others should be scared of. He told Jason about feeling afraid to use any of his major powers like making a hurricane or controlling large amounts of water, because what if he lost control and hurt someone? He told how he got nightmares that he had actually managed to suffocate the goddess or that Annabeth was too scared to even look at him. He didn't outright say whether he thought about deserving death, but Jason figured that Percy, in his weak moments might think like that. By the time Percy had finished talking, they both were sitting on the pavement and tears were streaming down Percy's face.

The son of Poseidon drew his legs up to his chest and put his head on top of his knees as he waited for Jason to process all that he had told him. Would Jason think of him as a monster? Would he think of Percy as weak? Would he care? All of these thoughts ran through Percy's head as he wiped his tears. Even though he felt that Jason would not think like that, his insecurities kept rearing their ugly head every time Percy tried to squish them, like a hydra.

Jason inhaled sharply and reached out to Percy, to rub in between his shoulder blades. "I have obviously not know you for as long as anyone else over here has, but even I can see that you are no monster. You are a hero—no, let me talk—"Jason stopped Percy from interrupting, "you would give your life for any of us or anyone for that matter of fact, without hesitating. You are our leader—only you know how the handle the other campers when they are in a mood to fight, I was told that you along with only forty campers, protected Olympus. I mean I know you didn't do it single handedly, but you were the leader they want to listen to. Percy you are literally everyone's friend, whether it is an old camper or a new kid who just entered the borders. So, I guess what I'm trying to say is that because of all this I know for sure that you would never do anything—no matter how impulsive or in anger—to hurt any camper. That's how I know you would not lose control over your powers."

Jason paused to get his thoughts in line. "I can't even begin to imagine what you and Annabeth went through down there. But, please stop thinking as if you are a monster. Because you are not. You… you… have been through a lot and in that moment you had no other choice… it was do or die, wasn't it?" Jason waited for Percy to acknowledge the situation. When Percy gave a slight nod, he continued, "See… do or die situation. You said you had almost reached the doors. If you hadn't done what you did, you do realize that you would have never made it to the doors? And the monsters would have kept on using the doors and maybe all of us would have never even made it. It was already difficult to fight the ones that were there in the House of Hades, if you hadn't… we would not have made it. Percy, sometimes our situations force us to do something that we never wanted to… but that doesn't make us a bad person…"

"What if you enjoy it?" Percy asked in a small voice. That had been the most troubling aspect of the whole situation—that he had actually enjoyed torturing the goddess. Had it not been for Annabeth, Percy was sure he would have killed the goddess or whatever that would happen to an immortal being when being choked.

Jason paused. He didn't know that Percy had enjoyed it. Percy took his silence as confirmation, "Then I am a monster."

"NO!" Jason said vehemently. "No, you are not. Do you enjoy playing with your other powers? The controlling of waves and water and hurricanes and storms and all the other stuff that you can do? Because that's what I do. I enjoy using my powers. And so do you. This…controlling of any liquid that contains water… that is another power of yours and obviously you would enjoy it." Jason saw the look of horror on Percy's face and continued, "Let me explain! In that situation you
had to use this power for saving your own life… but you could also use it for good… if you want to control other liquids that is. You could help with people who got poisoned… gods help us, we have way too many poisoning incidents at camp. Hey, for all I know, you could use it control the maple syrup to not drown your pancakes!"

"You are horrible at jokes." Percy said. He did feel better, though. He never thought about any positive side of such a power. Plus, seeing the usually impassive Jason struggle to help him feel better, was kind of funny.

"Yeah, I know. We Romans aren't big on the whole kidding around thing."

"I noticed."

"What I am trying to say is that every power has a good and a bad side. Only you can decide how to use it. And knowing you, you would never hurt anyone, not willingly anyway. And I know that you know that, but you are not admitting it."

Percy thought about it. He had never ever wanted to hurt anyone… not Nico, not Calypso, not Bob, no one… not even Akhlys.

Jason looked at Percy and realized that he looked a bit better than he did a few minutes ago. But, Jason wasn't done yet. "Perce, about the nightmares… you know the Apollo cabin can help you… you can take some kind of sedative like Nico does. Or you can talk to Clovis… he has minor control over dreams right? Or even Pollux… his dad is the expert on any kind of mental strain, not just actual illnesses. And the nightmares are just that… they didn't actually happen. You have to keep remembering that."

Percy shook his head. "The other campers need that kind of help too. I can't ask those people to help me, knowing that it would take their time and powers away from the other campers. I can handle this."

"Maybe you can. But you don't have to. You always help us all, let us please return the favor. No one would mind helping you out, you know."

Percy shrugged. He didn't want to be a burden for the others.

As if reading his mind, Jason said, "You know just because you ask for help, doesn't mean that you will be burden. You help out people at all times. Like the time you stayed up with me half the night, because I couldn't sleep and we stayed up playing board games. Was I a burden?"

"No, of course not."

"Then you too wouldn't be." Jason said, smiling as he saw Percy sit up straighter, his usual fire almost back in his eyes. They sat in silence for some time, before Jason remembered something. "You know the whole camp was going crazy when Juno had taken you away? Even Clarisse was annoyed that you weren't there… Clarisse!"

Percy looked at Jason in confusion, wondering where this topic came up from – was it a product of ADHD or was Jason actually going somewhere with this. "What I am saying is that don't think that no one would… you know… umm… miss you… if you… you…weren't there." Jason finished, looking away.

Percy understood what Jason was trying to say. That he should not feel like no would care (other than Annabeth and his mortal family) if he… died. "I know." Percy said softly, bumping his shoulder against his cousin's. "Thanks… you know… for making me feel better." Percy said. He
felt as if a burden had been lifted off his chest. He felt lighter. It was suddenly easier to breathe, to see the good things around him.

"It was no trouble. Truth be told, it had been bothering me ever since the last chapter that we were reading… you had thought something about drowning and I just remembered this."

"That must have freaked you out…"

"Oh you have no clue how much I had been freaking out."

Percy tried to wipe the dried up tears and sighed. He got up and extended one hand towards Jason to pull him up. "You are good at this. Maybe you should try your hand at guidance counselling or something."

"Yeah right." Jason scoffed as he brushed off the dirt from his jeans.

"Come on. There is a stream somewhere that side." Percy said, pointing behind him. "I need to wash my face and then we need to find the girls."

After walking in circles for almost half an hour, the two cousins finally stumbled upon their friends. They were all standing near the entrance of the godly residential area and joked about sending a search party for Percy and Jason. Percy automatically gravitated towards Annabeth and hugged her from behind, while Jason put his arm around Piper's waist. Together, they all walked to their respective parent's palaces.

Percy smiled as he saw the Stoll brothers annoying Chris and Clarisse. Nico was talking with Reyna. Piper and Jason were smiling and talking about something that Percy couldn't quite catch. Calypso had dragged Leo to a sidewalk to show him some of the flowers that were planted near the sidewalk. Will, Katie, Lou Ellen, Dakota and Gwen were animatedly talking about some movie that they had watched together while helping out in the infirmary during the night shift. All of the others were either still strolling around or had turned in for the night. Percy looked at Annabeth, who looked beautiful as she talked about the carvings on the shrine that she and Piper had gone to see. He realized how lucky he was to have this family of friends. And he knew that all he needed to do was ask and they would help him. He just needed to find the courage to ask for help.

As Percy walked alone towards his dad's palace, after dropping Annabeth off at Athena's, he felt happier. Talking to Jason had done him good. He hoped he could catch some sleep tonight and then tomorrow would be a new and better day.
Meet the Jerk Relative

(A/N - Disclaimer- I do not own Percy Jackson series or the Heroes of Olympus series. All characters and words in bold are owned by Rick Riordan and Hyperion Books for Children and Disney Hyperion. I do not intend to use the text from the books for any other purpose other than for this fanfiction and nor do I intend to make any sort of profit from the story. All rights go to the actual owner and not me. This is only a work of love for the series.)

Ch23 – TLT – Meet the jerk relative

Over the years, Percy had been woken up in a myriad of ways from simple alarm clocks to nightmares to monsters to the sound of conch shell. But, suffice to say he had never ever been woken up a by a giant jelly fish poking him. When Percy first saw the jelly fish, he thought he was still asleep, but after a while, when the creature continued to poke him, he realized that there really was a giant jelly fish in front of him and he used the water in his underwater room to push him to the other side of the room, long before he was completely conscious.

The sound of laughter made Percy look in the direction of the door to his room. There stood Triton, already dressed for the day. He was leaning against the door jamb and shaking with laughter.

"Sorry." He said as he sobered up. "It's just… the look on your face." Triton started to laugh again but waved his hand and stood up straight. Pointing towards the jelly fish, who had settled on the bed made out of green and blue kelp, he said, "That is plokamia – my first pet. He has the habit of roaming off on his own."

Percy shook his head and said the first thing that came to his mind, "You named your jelly fish pet 'tentacles'?

"Hey, don't judge. I was four months old and father asked me what I wanted to name him. I said the first thing that came to my mind. I call him 'mia' most of the time."

"You could talk when you were four months old?"

"Telepathically." Triton said, swimming into the room. "You should get dressed." He told Percy and then turned towards his pet, "and you should return to palace."

Plokamia looked at Percy. He couldn't talk but Percy understood his intentions. The jelly fish wanted to play. "Umm… later." Percy told Mia and the jelly fish mournfully turned away and swam off.

"I guess giving horrible names runs in the family then." Percy said to Triton.

"Huh?"

"You named a jelly fish 'tentacles', Tyson named a Hippocampus 'Rainbow' and I named the Ophiotaurus 'Bessie' – which happens to be a common cow name for some reason, so…"

The minor god raised his eyebrow, "The Ophiotaurus has reborn?"

"You named the Ophiotaurus 'Bessie'?” came from outside the room. Both the boys turned to see their father standing there looking quizzically at Percy.

Percy laughed. "That's exactly what you said during the Council meeting when I called him Bessie."
Until that point, I thought it was female. But, yeah, he has been reborn and now lives on Olympus in the throne room.

Both the gods shook their heads in disbelief. "You come from a very weird time." Triton said. "Come on, get dressed. The breakfast will be open in another fifteen minutes." With that both the gods left Percy to go wake up Tyson and Theseus.

After the breakfast, the gods took a vote on whether to sit in the garden and read, but the demigods refused. As much as they wanted to sit outside, they knew there would be too many things distracting them from listening to the book. Finally the gods reluctantly agreed to sit in the throne room, but opened the roof of the room, so that fresh air and the sunlight and warmth could come in.

Athena picked up the book from next to the hearth, where they all had decided to keep the books, and announced that she would read the next chapter.

Once everyone had settled in, she read, "**A GOD BUYS US CHEESEBURGERS**"

"Does no one in the future care about breaking the ancient laws?" Zeus said, shaking his head.

"**The next afternoon,... that was obvious.**"

"Ooh. That sucks." Gwen said. She had never gone on a quest and from the sounds of it, she didn't want to.

"Yeah. Food, shelter and taking a shower are luxuries on a quest." Annabeth said, remembering all the quests she had gone on. All the other demigods who had gone on a quest nodded. They never had enough resources for anything.

"Don't you plan for these ahead and then go on a quest?" Athena asked. "On this quest, you lost your supplies, but the other quests should be fine, right?"

"Even if we do plan ahead and keep supplies and manage not to lose the supplies – which is kind of hard to do, most quests are pretty unpredictable. You never know where you may meet a monster and it might not even be connected to the quest and you never know where you will end up or in what kind of situation. So, we prepare ourselves to go on without these things in case of emergency." Annabeth explained to her mother.

All the gods thought about this. They didn't know that the children would face such problems on a quest. True, that the monsters were unpredictable, but to be told that food and shelter were luxuries that they did not have on a quest was thought provoking in the least.

Chiron smiled as he saw the gods struggle to digest this information. Maybe now they would take him up on his suggestion of creating a demigod safe house in each state or something close to that, so that the demigods could rest safely, either on a quest or on their way to camp.

"''Let's try to ... crash into the city."

"You do compare everything to the sea." Lou Ellen said and Percy shrugged. The sea made sense to him and most things could be compared to the sea or something related to the sea.

"Finally we found... from Medusa's place."

"Even for a quest, you guys are low on money." Katie noted and the gods agreed, even if they didn't know what a nickel was worth.
It was the first quest for all of us, so none of us were prepared to lose supplies. And before that neither of us had the need to carry money around in our pockets,” Grover explained. Those were the good old, simple days, where they had to worry about stopping a war and not about actually fighting in one.

"Excellent," Grover ... "Instant messaging?"

"That was my first thought too." Frank said, thinking about when they met Iris and Fleecy.

"Iris-messaging," ... with a spray gun?"

"When you put it that way, it's a bit funny." Holly said and Butch glared at her. Iris smiled as she heard about her method of communication. She was excited to hear the reaction of a demigod witnessing it for the first time.

"Grover pointed ... Hill," Annabeth requested.

"You should have requested a particular person or else it will be directed to the most used place in the camp, even if no one is there." Iris told Annabeth.

"For a moment... 'Luke!' I called."

"It had to be him." Someone muttered and Hermes once again thought why the children were being hostile towards a child of his.

"He turned, ... in the rainbow."

"It is so weird when you use it for the first time." Hazel said. She was using IM to stay in touch with her friends at Camp Half Blood.

"I cannot hug Percy when he calls." Tyson said sadly and Percy patted his shoulder. Tyson had opted to sit on the floor in front of Percy's couch for easier access to Percy, Annabeth and Annabeth's drakon bone sword, while he kept on working on the sheath.

"'Percy!' His scarred ... out of her face."

"I'm getting back at you for this. Wait till the part about Rachel or Calypso comes up. You just wait!" Annabeth told Percy, who blushed. He was dreading that part.

Aphrodite smiled. So she had already interfered in this love story to an extent. Good! It should be entertaining.

"We thought-... Grover all right?"

"Oh! This is about the mini fight in the camp, isn't it?" Travis asked.

"We had six injured campers. That was hardly 'mini'." Katie said.

"Nah. That's mini." Clarisse said and the others agreed. The Romans wondered if the Greeks had no punishment for unauthorized fighting. In the Roman camp, if something like this happened, the person starting the fight and anyone who injured another camper, would have been severely punished.

"I'm right here," ... shook the pavement."
'That's loud.' Will commented.

"Not as loud as your whistle." Nico said and Lou Ellen nodded.

"Do you have audiokinesis?" Apollo asked his son, who nodded. Apollo smiled. It wasn't widely known for his children to have this particular ability – well not in his time, anyway.

"'Chiron had ... and followed Annabeth.'"

Almost all the males laughed while the girls just glared at them.

'I readjusted ... is backing Zeus.'"

"You three" Zeus said, looking at Aphrodite, Ares and Apollo, "are siding with Poseidon?" He huffed. Unbelievable! His own children, turned against him.

"What is this Trojan War?" Ares asked, excited to know about yet another war.

Annabeth gasped and clasped her hands. She turned to look at Chiron and asked, "The Trojan War hasn't happened yet, has it? None of the warriors have been born yet."

Chiron nodded and replied, "It will happen in another couple of decades."

"Whatever! What is the war about?" Ares asked impatiently.

"It is the worst war in our history. Actually it started with a competition between gods..." Annabeth said.

"Like they all do." Percy interrupted.

"...and as a result of the competition, there was a 10 year long war that killed a lot of mortals and demigods." Annabeth continued. "But I cannot tell the actual circumstances, because it might cause a war right here."

Ares was excited. He didn't have to wait that long for a war then. Hades, on the other hand, groaned. Did no one care about how much paper work it will entail? He decided to get more employees, otherwise he might have to start using the spirits to do the paperwork for him. Hestia massaged her temples. Once again a discord in the godly family would lead to the death of mortals.

'I shuddered ... volume decreased drastically.'"

"What did you do?" Connor asked.

"I may or may not have threatened to slash his tires." Annabeth replied with a sly smile.

"'So what's ... to be invisible.'"

"He did not just say that." Thalia said. "Tell me he didn't just say that!"

"What?" Hazel was confused.

Annabeth looked sick. She hadn't known about this. "I have the invisibility cap. It sounds like he is insinuating that I did it because the gods cannot take each other's symbol of power directly." She shook her head. How much hold had Kronos already had on Luke at that time?

"We were ... like that description."
"That's what you concentrate on?" Annabeth asked Percy and then rolled her eyes. She was going to tease him for every line he thought about Calypso or Rachel. She was no longer jealous of either of the girls. Not only because Calypso was with Leo and Rachel was the Oracle, but she knew Percy would never be unfaithful to her, not after everything they had been through.

"In the stall ... of the car wash."

"Now what did you do?"

"She showed him her dagger because he wasn't believing that a 12 year old girl could be scary." Grover said, chuckling as he remembered the mortal's face. He had been completely terrified.

"'You'd better go... in handy.'"

"Yes, they had." Grover mumbled but his expression turned dark as he remembered what happened in the Underworld.

"'Really?' He ... if he just-'"

"That jerk!" Thalia was shaking with anger. How could her friend have stooped so low?

Other than the Greek campers and Chiron, no one knew why they were so hostile towards a seemingly nice person and they all were staring at an angry Thalia.

"It will come up later." Percy said.

"But the mist ... some dinner.'"

"But you guys don't have any money." Jason pointed out.

"A few minutes ... pass out from hunger."

Athena grimaced as she read about her daughter starving on a quest. Hestia shook her head in worry. "You children hadn't eaten anything for a whole day, correct?" When the three nodded, she and a few other gods looked worried. Poseidon didn't care as to who broke the rules to go visit the children but he was glad that they did. At least they would get to eat food.

"I was trying ... Caucasian human skin."

"I do not understand anything about the vehicle." Hephaestus said. "But, the flames design and human skin reminds me of Ares' chariot." The god had fixed the chariot so many times after a nasty fight that Ares would get into, that he knew it better than he knew some of his own inventions.

Ares mumbled something about Athena getting the interesting chapter. He wondered if it was really him and why was he breaking the ancient laws? But, he was more interested in the kid's reaction to him, if it was even him.

"The guy on ... somewhere before."

"That's Ares." Hermes and Apollo said together as Ares smirked at his description.

"You are breaking the ancient laws, Ares." Zeus said. "There better be a good explanation for that."

"As he walked ... to pay for it?'"
"Ares!" Hera shouted. "We talked about this. You cannot go around manipulating mortal minds!"

Ares shrugged. Everyone should stand up to greet him, especially those insignificant mortals.

Frank was disgusted with how his father was behaving. It reminded him of the time he met Mars at his home and had a riveting talk about war (note the sarcasm). Times like these made him want Apollo to be his father. But, if there was something he had learned on his quest and spending time with the Greek campers, it was that every god had a good and a bad side. But, sometimes Frank could not see the good side of his father, if there was any, he thought bitterly.

"The biker said, "It's on me." He slid into our booth, which was way too small for him, and crowded Annabeth against the window."

Athena looked up at Ares and glared at him.

"He looked ... toward the kitchen."

"You are so rude." Aphrodite said, but then again, she already knew about this.

"The biker looked ... guy think he was?"

"You want to know who I am." Ares smirked, looking at Percy, who just rolled his eyes. Ares once again wished he had read this chapter. It was so much better. After all, he was in it.

"Stop it, Ares." Poseidon said. "And why are you even projecting your aura?" He didn't know if his son inherited his uncontrollable anger or not. But, if he was provoked, it wouldn't matter what he inherited, Percy would definitely fight.

"He gave me a wicked grin. "So you're old Seaweed's kid, huh?""

"First D and now you?" Hermes said in surprise. "Why is everyone being so reckless and insulting Poseidon?" No one in their right mind would ever do that.

"Old Seaweed'? Really?" Poseidon looked furious. Had he lost his respect in the future? What were his nephews thinking?

"Yes. Why is everyone being like this?" Triton asked and turned to Percy, hoping he could give some answer.

"Uh… what's wrong? Wise girl?" Percy asked Annabeth. He had forgotten about his dad being the most temperamental of the gods.

"According to the legends, your dad is supposed to be temperamental." Annabeth whispered.

"Oh. Oh! You guys are wondering why everyone is calling dad names, huh?" Percy said, in his usual tactful manner. "In the future, dad is pretty relaxed. He doesn't care about all this name calling stuff unless its Uncle Zeus or Uncle Hades or maybe Lady Athena."

All of the gods' eyes flew wide open in surprise, including Poseidon's. "This has got to be the weirdest thing I have heard ever since the reading started." Apollo said, sounding a bit disoriented.

Blinking her eyes, Athena continued reading, "I should've ... god of war."

Clarisse face-palmed and shook her head at Percy's recognition of her dad.
"No one has ever introduced me as 'Clarisse's dad'. At least you figured it out before I killed you."
Ares said drily.

Percy smiled as he remembered meeting Hermes and calling him Luke's dad. Hermes had said something similar, minus the whole killing thing, anyway.

"Ares grinned and took off his shades. Where his eyes should've been, there was only fire, empty sockets glowing with miniature nuclear explosions."

"Do you mean the mushroom cloud thingy of a nuclear explosion?" Travis wondered.

"Yeah."

"Ok."

"'That's right, ... proposition for you.'"

"Ares." Zeus squinted his eyes and said in a warning tone. "You better not distract them. They are on a quest to find my bolt."

"The waitress came ... "Problem, sweetheart?"

"Ares!" Hera, Hestia and Aphrodite shouted at the war god, who was suddenly interested in the patterns on his toga.

"How many times do I have to tell you, you cannot go around threatening mortals?" Hera said through gritted teeth. When would her son learn?

"The waitress swallowed, ... do me a favor."

"A quest directly from a god?" Hercules mumbled. Gods always sent messengers to tell about quests to heroes. Rarely did a god visit in person.

"'What favor ... fetch it for me.'"

'Easy quest', Hercules thought.

Hephaestus rolled his eyes. Of course his wife and brother are still dating in the future. Why did she even marry him?

Aphrodite and Ares were thinking about what kind of date they had gone on.

"'Why don't you ... can protect you.'"

"What is it with everyone threatening to turn my son into an animal?" Poseidon asked, throwing his hands in the air.

"Why aren't you accepting the quest?" Hercules asked. So many of the demigods that he knew would jump at the opportunity of getting a quest, that too directly from a god.

"I was already on a quest. Plus, he was annoying me." Percy said nonchalantly, while Ares eyes burned brighter in anger.

"I wanted to ... the satisfaction."
Poseidon and Amphitrite felt proud at Percy's self-control. Especially, if he could resist Ares' aura and control his anger.

"'We're not interested,' I said. 'We've already got a quest.'"

"That was not a request nor was it a negotiation, boy. It is an order. You better do my quest." Ares said, baring his teeth and clenching his fists. This son of Poseidon was getting on his nerves. How dare the child question Ares?

Percy rolled his eyes but said nothing. He wasn't interested in getting into a fight with Ares first thing in the morning. He was in a pretty good mood – mostly thanks to his heart to heart with Jason the previous night.

"Ares's fiery eyes ... made him hungry."

Zeus narrowed his eyes at Ares, but thought that if none of his children – his best trackers, could find where the bolt was, then how well was it hidden and who could have the power to hide it so well?

"'Well ... old Corpse Breath.'"

"You brought me into this?" Hades ran his hand through his hair. "What is wrong with you?"

"It made sense, didn't it? I mean, you having the bolt?" Ares said, shrugging.

"No. No, it doesn't. We have already discussed this." Hades said shaking his head. Then he mumbled to himself, "Honestly, I help bring these annoying children up and they blame me for everything."

"'You told him ... your little quest.'"

"I'm a genius." Ares said with a satisfied smile.

"What?" Dionysus asked.

"I just created a three way war. I mean, yes, a two way war was already going to happen between father and uncle, but by bringing Hades into this, I just created a three way war."

"We don't need a war!" The big three said in unison.

Athena shook her head at her half-brother's stupidity and read, "'Thanks,' I ... about your mom.'"

"That's a good way to get someone to work for you." Athena said reluctantly, "Even if it is a bit low."

"A bit?" Poseidon asked, rubbing his forehead. "Percy will do whatever Ares wants to get that information." He mumbled and his wife patted his thigh. He was taking too much stress over something that had already happened, she thought.

Leo and Frank grimaced. They too would do anything if it meant getting information on their mothers.

"'My mom?'"
"Hook, line and sinker!" Clarisse said gleefully. When everyone turned to glare at her, she put up her hands defensively and said, "Sorry, couldn't resist."

"He grinned. 'That got ... he was nervous.'"

"You have a lot of nerves thinking that, boy. Nothing makes me nervous." Ares growled.

"Whatever helps you sleep at night" Percy mumbled and a few of the demigods who heard him, chuckled. The story of Percy fighting Ares was a big news both at camp and in Olympus.

"'You're lucky you ...This is not good.'"

A couple of gods nodded. Ares always had some sort of ulterior motives. He had way too many shields too, so why would he care about one particular shield? It's not like he would carry his special battle shield everywhere he went. And who even carries a shield on their date?

"I stared out ... your ability to think."

"You are quick to catch on, aren't you?" Ares said and no one could tell whether he was mocking or being serious.

"'It's probably some kind of trick,' I said. 'Forget Ares. Let's just go.'"

"You better not." Ares said menacingly.

"They are already on a very important quest. They can afford to let go of yours." Zeus said. He needed these children to find his bolt as soon as possible.

"'We can't,' ... to wisdom sometimes.'"

Athena beamed proudly at her daughter and turned to smirk at Ares, who looked like he was choking.

"Hey, you insolent girl..." Ares said.

"Ares." Athena warned.

Ignoring the goddess of wisdom, Ares continued lamely, "I have wisdom, ok?"

"Ares, please. We all know wisdom is not your forte." Athena said with a smug smile, then continued to read, not giving the fuming god any chance to speak.

"'But this water park ... he acted almost scared. What would make a war god run away like that?''"

'Scared', Ares thought. What could make him scared? That too on a date? Ares looked at Aphrodite, who was talking to Demeter. What would make him scared even in front of his girlfriend? Hephaestus! It had to be. They must have discovered some trick that his crippled brother might have put there to trap them. That seemed to be the only plausible reason why he wouldn't get his shield back on his own.

"Annabeth and ... it read WAT R A D."

"What kind of a place is that?" Aphrodite mused as she braided her hair.
"The main gate ... sad and creepy."

"Sounds lovely." Eros said drily.

"You took me to such a sad place?" Aphrodite glared at Ares, who moved back in his couch.

"'If Ares brings his girlfriend here for a date,' I said, staring up at the barbed wire, 'I'd hate to see what she looks like.'"

Aphrodite turned to glare at Percy and Poseidon covered his face in his hands. His son was going to insult every Olympian and give the god a heart attack. Most of the gods were trying to cover their smiles and chuckles. This child was pure entertainment. They had never had this much fun while reading something.

"I…uh…didn't know about…" Percy said, moving his index finger from Ares to Aphrodite and back to Ares.

"It's kind of hard to miss." The god of forges grumbled.

"'Percy,' Annabeth ... looks," Grover added."

"No, you don't." Poseidon said to his son.

"'Who is she? Echidna?'

"Before any one says anything. I had no clue about Olympian gossip!" Percy rushed out as he saw Aphrodite gear up for a lecture.

Stifling her laugh, Athena read, "'No, Aphrodite," ... "Hephaestus.'"

"Still is." The said god grumbled.

"'What's your ... guys coming?'

A few campers laughed as they thought about Grover doing a midair somersault. "Goat boy: 1, demigods: 0" Rachel laughed.

"Annabeth and I ... My Swimsuit?"

"What kind of names are those?" Hermes asked.

"No monsters ... 'Watch me.'"

"You didn't!" The Stolls said in unison, their eyes wide in shock.

"Oh, no, she did!" Chris said, slapping his thigh. He had never thought Annabeth would ever steal anything.

"She snatched ... with more goodies."

"That is a lot of waterland in one sentence." Athena said before continuing, "'What the ... holding its breath.'"

"Definitely a trap." Will said. He had had enough experience with the Hermes kids pulling pranks and traps on his cabin to know what walking into a trap feels like.
""So Ares and ... Aphrodite's husband?""

Aphrodite shrugged and Hera frowned at her in disappointment. Hephaestus was getting annoyed with all this talk of his brother and his wife dating each other.

""Well, you ... "She likes bikers.""

The campers snorted and some clapped their hands as they laughed. Even Chiron could not keep the smile of amusement off his face. Percy had a certain way of saying things that made everyone laugh.

"Thrown off by Hera, not Zeus." The crippled god said as he fiddled with some scrap pieces of celestial bronze.

Hera rolled her eyes. One small mistake and her son drags it out for eternity.

""Whatever." ... laugh at them..."

Hephaestus laughed. That had been a good day.

""...Hephaestus is ... for skateboarding."

"You really love skateboarding, don't you?" Frank asked Percy.

"Yeah. The rush you get from it is amazing. Although the best would be shadow travelling. Now that's awesome." Percy said and smiled at Nico.

Nico shook his head, "I knew it was a bad idea to make you shadow travel."

"You have shadow travelled? And you liked it?" Hades asked, disbelief evident in his voice.

"Yes. We were short on time, so we shadow travelled. I loved it. The speed and the adrenaline... amazing." Percy said dreamily.

"It was at ... TUNNEL OF LOVE!"

Rachel crinkled her nose. "Who the hell keeps such a name?"

"What's a cupid?" Aphrodite asked. She too didn't like the description of the place that Ares would take her to one day.

"Cupid is Eros' roman counterpart." Jason said.

"Grover crept ...circle of bronze."

"That's too easy. It has to be a trap." Theseus said.

"This is too ... "Eta. I wonder ..."

Hephaestus perked up. He wondered what kind of trap he made this time.

"Get out of there. That's the symbol of dad. He must have put a trap or something there." Leo said.

"Grover," I said, ... or really nothing?"

"Percy!"
"Sorry."

"Grover looked... goes wrong."

"Good plan." Athena said reluctantly. She had a feeling they would need that backup.

"Grover puffed ... come with me-"

"Did I mention that you have good instincts?" Annabeth whispered to Percy.

"'Are you kidding?' ... saw me?"

"Awkward." Piper sang and laughed.

"Who will see you except Percy and Grover?" Hazel asked and Annabeth blushed. That had been one embarrassing quest she had gone on.

"'Who's going to see you?' But my face was burning now, too. Leave it to a girl to make everything complicated."

"I don't make things complicated." Annabeth told Percy, lightly hitting his thigh.

"You don't make them easy either." Percy replied, pulling her closer.

"True." Annabeth nodded.

"'Fine,' I told her. ... and Aphrodite here..."

"Ugh. Don't imagine them doing anything." Hermes groaned, hitting his head on the back of the couch and covering his eyes with his hand. He had once walked in on them... and well, that image will forever be burned into his head.

All the demigods tried to mask their smiles and grins and disgust, as Athena continued to read, "... a couple of ... favorite people: themselves."

"Your deduction skills are spot on." Apollo said and many other gods nodded. The infamous couple were nothing if not self-obsessed.

"I picked up ... invisible. A trip wire."

Hephaestus was giddy with excitement. His favorite past time was devising new traps for the couple. Poseidon and Athena groaned. Great! Now their children would be stuck in some type of trap.

"'Wait,' Annabeth said. ... This is a trap."

"A bit too late in realization." The god of forges said, his eyes twinkling.

"Noise erupted ... making a net."

"Again with the net? Can you be a bit original?" Ares scoffed. He was glad he was not in there. One time trapped in the net had been enough for him.

Poseidon leaned forward. That net was fit for gods and not even they could get out of it. How did the children?
"We have ... around his hands."

"You should not touch the net." Hephaestus said and left it at that.

When they realized that he wasn't going to explain, the wisdom goddess continued, "The Cupids', ..., fifty-eight ..."

All the demigods burst out in laughter. "You guys never told that you had your own show on Hephaestus-TV!" Connor said in between laughter. He had to somehow get his hands on that episode.

"So, instead of getting all of us to go to them, you are bringing entertainment to us. Good one, brother." Dionysus said, slapping Hephaestus on the back.

Ares and Aphrodite were happy that they were not part of that humiliation again. Poseidon and Athena, on the other hand, were annoyed that their children had to spend valuable time on a stupid quest for Ares.

"Hephaestus! ... things poured out."

"Now what?" Poseidon asked. Athena nodded in agreement and read, "Annabeth screamed. ... Sp-sp-aaaah!"

Athena shuddered as she read that. She hated those little things. They always went after her children and now Hephaestus made mechanical versions of them. Great, just great!

Annabeth shivered and leaned into Percy a bit more. The son of Poseidon tightened his hold around his girlfriend and asked quietly, "You ok?"

"Yeah." She replied. "It's just that... just hearing about them..." Annabeth sought out warmth in the embrace. Just because she had fought the original spider did not mean she wasn't still scared of those creepy, little things.

"I'd never seen ... we weren't gods."

"True. I could have programmed them to bite. But a bite for a god and for a demigod... they are two different levels of pain." Hephaestus said, earning a glare from both Poseidon and Athena.

"Annabeth and...than scream."

"Sorry." Annabeth whispered.

"Not your fault. I would have frozen if we were up in the air." Percy replied.

"Thirty, twenty... new surf shoe."

"Whoa!" Leo exclaimed.

"That... that is a different level altogether." Hephaestus said, wondering what all programming he might have needed to do.

"Grover hovered ... water come from?"

"Yes!" Theseus exclaimed. Finally there was some hope of them getting out unharmed.
"Then I saw ... us out of there."

"Forget the mechanics. Just summon the sea." Triton said. Then he remembered that Percy still didn't know how to do that. The minor god hoped that his brother would discover that power soon enough.

"Grover was in ... the way to Denver."

"YES!" Triton exclaimed as he slapped his thigh. "Yes." It was exciting to read about a brother using his powers for the first time. Poseidon, Theseus and Amphitrite were grinning.

For the first time in her life, Athena felt grateful for those annoying water powers.

"'Two, one, zero!'... around the whirlpool."

"Good. Now control the boat. Or the water." Theseus said.

"Or both." Triton added.

Percy looked at both of his half-brothers. They had gotten a bit carried away by the story. Percy thought with a bitter-sweet smile if this was how it would have been for him, had he had someone to teach him his powers. Annabeth caught Percy's wishful look and realized with a pang that he didn't know what it was like to be a sibling. Sure, he had Tyson. But, for all of their love for each other, they were still pretty different. Neither could guide the other in anything. They had nothing in common other than their father and a few basic powers of children of Poseidon. Annabeth felt thankful that she had siblings whom she could talk to and bicker with and guide and be guided by.

"The water ... to respond."

"No, it is not your imagination. Any sea vessel becomes a part of the sea and therefore a part of you. Controlling a boat is as easy as..." Triton explained.

"Controlling a limb." Percy finished and grinned.

"Exactly." Triton grinned at his younger brother, once again thinking about what all powers Percy possessed and how many he could control.

"So that's how you controlled that half broken boat?" Frank asked referring to the so called Roman Navy.

"Yeah. All I had to do was tell it to stay together till we reached our destination." Percy replied.

"At least, ... Valentine's Day stuff."

"That makes a hilarious image in my head." Travis said, chuckling.

"That was hilarious." Thalia said.

"How do you know?" Jason asked.

"Oh. Once, the hunters were waiting in Olympus for Lady Artemis to finish with a meeting and a rerun of that video was being played. They looked so funny." Thalia laughed as she remembered the video.

"Then we were ... cracked in half."
"Uh-oh."

"'Unfasten your ... simple and insane.'"

"Just the usual then." Nico snickered. Percy looked at Nico and saw that the younger boy looked healthier and happier than he had the previous day. He was happy the Nico was opening up – although that might have something to do with a particular son of Apollo who had been keeping Nico company ever since the war ended.

"Simple and insane works." Theseus said, thinking about all the times he had to improvise on the spot.

"'As the boat ... land in the pool.'"

Athena nodded. This could work, but only if they jumped at the correct time.

"'With your luck...I am not so sure.'" Clarisse said.

"'Annabeth seemed ... trajectory angle.'"

"Are you kidding me? You are explaining physics while you are about to crash?" Leo asked, shaking his head.

"Can't help it." Annabeth shrugged.

"Well, keep it simple." Frank smiled and Annabeth grinned at him.

"'Fine.'" I ... solid asphalt."

"You need Jason." Leo mumbled.

"Or a flying goat boy." Thalia said, remembering what had happened next on the video.

"Something ... banged up but alive."

"And once again, the day is saved by... the flying goat boy!" The Stolls pretended to be commenting in some super hero show.

"Who names a whale 'Noo-Noo'?" Triton asked.

"And I thought you children were bad at naming." Poseidon said with a slight smile.

"Ares's shield was still on my arm."

"Good." Ares said. At least the boy managed to keep his shield safe.

"You wasted their valuable time that they would use to find my bolt." Zeus huffed. His son did not have his priorities straight at all. He should be helping in preventing the war... ok, maybe not... after all, Ares was the god of war and he would be interested in the war rather than stopping it. Zeus pondered on this thought. Could it be... no... no, his son would not do something like this... would he? Zeus shook his head as if physically flinging the thought out of his head. His son would not be stupid enough to encourage war between Zeus, Poseidon and Hades... or would he? It was all too confusing for the king god.

"Once we caught ... Good night!'"
"That part was pretty good too and completely unexpected." Thalia commented.

"The Cupids... had been any good."

"Only you would think that." Jason said, chuckling.

"Thalia, what were the ratings?" Piper asked.

"Off the charts. Especially after the war – everyone had wanted to see that episode." Thalia said.

"I hated being ... talk with Ares.""

"Ares is not like your school bullies or whatever you were comparing him with." Hermes told Percy.

Percy shrugged. "He has godly powers. That's all. But the essence is the same."

Many gods' and goddess' eyebrows shot up. No one ever so openly voiced their feelings about a god, especially an Olympian at that.

"You!" Ares' face was red with anger and the fire in his eyes was burning bright. "You better watch out, boy."

"Why don't you take some calming breaths like I told you? Control your anger." Dionysus said, patting his brother's shoulder. He had been assigned the unpleasant task of helping Ares keep his anger under control.

"We should keep Percy under some godly protection when the fight with Ares is read out." Grover whispered to Annabeth and she nodded. Who knows how Ares would react to being beaten by a 12 year old, barely trained boy.

Poseidon shook his head in worry. Percy would definitely need to be protected from the gods if he continued in this manner.

"That was it for this chapter." Athena said.

"Then I guess I would read next." Dionysus said. He was the only Olympian who had yet to read a chapter.
Dionysus gulped a whole chalice of wine before the book even reached around to him. He would definitely need the wine to actually read something. Turning the page to the next chapter, the god of wine read in monotone, "WE TAKE A ZEBRA TO VEGAS"

"So you guys have been to Vegas!" Connor said but kept quiet under Chiron's glare.

"The war god... good on TV."

Hephaestus growled at Ares. He would get him next time, for sure.

"I shoved his shield at him. "You're a jerk."

"How are you still alive?" Dakota asked in surprise. No one in Camp Jupiter would ever insult a god and never on their face. Especially, not the war god. He was second only to Jupiter and Juno themselves.

"This is why you didn't bow to him when he came to camp?" Reyna asked remembering the scene that Percy had created when Mars had come to camp after the War Games and Percy refused to kneel in front of him.

"Kind of." Percy replied. "But the actual reason should come up later."

"And Percy doesn't kowtow to the gods who rub him the wrong way." Annabeth said. She had witnessed his reluctance or obvious disregard for some gods way too many times.

Poseidon sighed. Keeping Percy away from gods' wrath would be a full time job for him. He hoped he had declared Percy under his protection in the future. That would be the only way that the other gods would not hurt his demigod son.

Ares was furious. How dare this demigod not respect him? He didn't bow to him? Him? The god of war? He couldn't hurt the child, but… he could curse him! With a creepy smile, Ares started to place a curse on the boy when he felt something restricting him. It felt like… Hestia? He looked up in surprise and annoyance at the goddess of hearth, who was glaring at him. Her glare almost made him back down. Almost. But he was adamant and stubborn. He would not let such disrespect be allowed.

Do not hurt or curse the child, Ares. Hestia spoke in his mind. If you curse him to lose in battle, just remember that he is a Hero of Olympus and any battle that he fights is on behalf of Olympus. He fights for the gods. By cursing him in battle, you are cursing all of us to lose. For the fate of Olympus, I forbid you to touch this or any other child in this room.

Ares crossed his arms and resigned himself to sulking. Even if he could not place a curse on him
now, he was sure the future him would never let this child walk away unscathed after an insult.

"Annabeth and ... stop in Vegas."

Ares eyes bulged. He was letting the boy walk away? Just like that? Why would he do that? Unless… unless he needed the boy to do something. Maybe he needed the boy to actually find the bolt and stop this war between his father and uncles. As much as he loved war – he only loved those ones which were necessary, meaning the mortal wars. A war amongst the Olympians would only weaken the Council. No one – not even the god of war – would let the Council be weakened because of the master bolt.

"The eighteen-wheeler ... WILD ANIMALS."

"Zoo?" Pan asked. "This is where they keep animals in cages, correct?"

Grover nodded. "Some of the zoos are actually nice and humane, where they create a small, wild area in which the animals can survive and live and grow in their natural habitat. But many zoos only keep them in cages." Grover thought about many of the retired satyrs who worked in zoos to keep the animals safe. He should go and talk to those satyrs soon.

Pan was worried. What had the world come to? His poor animals were being kept in cages and the wild was being destroyed? He decided to talk to Grover and Hedge and give them some ideas to keep the wild safe. Just because he could not do the same in the future, he should take this opportunity of helping them out.

"I said, ... tossed it to me."

"That's suspicious." Enyo said, looking at her twin. "Ares would never help a demigod."

All of the other gods nodded. Ares rarely ever gave something to any demigod unless it was one of his children. And here he gave the demigod, who had shown nothing but disrespect towards him, two gifts… a ride west and a backpack – whatever that was. The god of war did indeed have some ulterior motive. But what?

"Inside were fresh clothes for all of us, twenty bucks in cash, a pouch full of golden drachmas, and a bag of Double Stuf Oreos."

Ares eyebrows shot up. Why was he helping these children out? A free ride would have been enough in exchange for his shield. So why the supplies? Did one of the other gods, perhaps Athena or Poseidon ask him to help the children along the way? Thanks to the ancient laws, neither of them could directly interfere, but they could always send someone else to interfere. Was this the reason Ares had sought them out in the first place? Just to give this bag of supplies to them? It could be the reason. After all, many a times, gods would send items through a third party to their children to help them along in their quests.

The trio of the quest grimaced as they remembered almost getting killed by Hades because of that stupid backpack.

"I said, "I ... when I'd gotten expelled."

Poseidon gritted his teeth. How dare the teachers laugh and call a child stupid? They were there to help out the children not demoralize them.

The demigods could relate. Despite them all being strong warriors, they all got teased in school all
the time, either by children or by the teachers and the support staff. This was one of the main reason many of them didn't want to go to school and preferred to be taught by Chiron and satyrs and Annabeth.

The Romans were happy that they didn't have to go to mortal school. Most of the Romans were brought to camp at a very young age and learned everything at Camp Jupiter and New Rome. They never had to go through mortals teasing them and making them feel inadequate.

"I looked ... UP DEFENSELESS BIKER."

Poseidon laughed at the mental image of a twelve year old Percy beating up Ares. The god of war frowned. He was anything but defenseless.

"'You owe me one more thing,' I told Ares, trying to keep my voice level. 'You promised me information about my mother.'"

"Oh. I completely forgot about that." Apollo said. "Are you sure the future Ares is feeling alright? He is helping the demigods out way too much." The god of healing asked no one in particular.

But, everyone was thinking along the same lines – why was Ares being so generous?

"'You sure ... being kept.'"

"True. But why?" Hades said. He knew he would have taken away the mother. But what did he want in return?

"'Kept. Why?' ... from Cupid statues.'"

"Are you trying to get yourself killed?" Perseus asked in disbelief.

Hephaestus grinned and decided that he liked Percy, just on the principle that Percy hated Ares.

"Behind his sunglasses, fire glowed. I felt a hot wind in my hair. 'We'll meet again, Percy Jackson. Next time you're in a fight, watch your back.'"

Ares nodded in satisfaction. Even though it wasn't a curse and Ares for the life of him could not understand why he didn't curse the boy yet, it was still better than nothing. A warning to be careful in a fight could very well be converted into a curse.

"He revved ... not that god.'"

"True." Ares said. He was happy that at least somebody recognized his importance and saw him as a threat.

All the demigods smiled as if they had some secret. "Too late" somebody coughed out.

"'Hey, guys," ... pan of kitty litter."

Almost everyone covered their nose as if they could actually smell it.

"The trailer was ... the name for."

"Do they not clean the cages?" Pan asked in both disgust and anger.

"Not in this case." Grover bleated. He looked downright scary as he thought about the three poor
"Someone had gone through his white fur."

Pan, Grover and Hedge looked like they were going to go and kill the owners of such a pathetic business. How could they treat animals like that?

"Those horrible men!" Artemis said coolly. Her fists were clenched and it was obvious that she and her hunters were taking a lot effort in staying calm.

"You three better protect those poor animals." Pan said. He was projecting his power and all around him, even on the couch, wild plants started to grow and birds flew in through the open rooftop. Soon, the whole couch was made out of wild plants and flowers and the other occupants of the couch made their own couches to sit on. Pan was surrounded by all types of exotic birds and the other gods were thankful that no other animal came in to the room. Both satyrs gravitated towards the wild nature magic and sat with Pan and the birds.

"This is kindness? ... and the antelope."

"Thank you." Pan said with feeling. At least now the animals could eat and drink.

"Grover calmed the … in for night."

Most gods nodded in approval. No living being deserved to be treated in such a horrible manner. It was a good thing that the demigods were travelling in this vehicle. They could help out the poor malnourished and mistreated animals.

"Grover curled up … plenty of time."

"And…” Thalia dragged out the word, "you jinxed it."

The Olympians hoped that the children would actually complete the quest on time and find and return the bolt before either of the brothers started fighting.

"Hey." Annabeth said quietly to Percy, with a smile. "Remember when we sat in the stables in Argo II and talked about this very moment." She said referring to the book.

"Yeah. It feels like ages ago, now." Percy replied.

Jason, who had heard this as he was sitting next to Percy, asked, "This is what you both were doing in the stables? You guys were actually talking? We thought that was just a… you know."

"Holy Poseidon, Grace. Shut up!" Percy whispered to Jason. Both Percy and Annabeth were blushing furiously as they remembered how they had fallen asleep, only for Frank to find them in the morning.

"On the other … for the gods."

"As always." Percy muttered dismally. The other demigods nodded. They always were a source of entertainment for their immortal parents.

"Hey," Annabeth … weaving contest, right?"

Annabeth clutched Percy's hand as she thought about meeting the giant spider and having to sit and talk with her in the gloomy cavern.
Dionysus remembered what Chiron had said about Percy and Annabeth falling into Tartarus. They had been pulled in because of Arachne. The god, under the pretense of pausing to take a sip of wine, quickly checked up on both of children. When he was sure that they felt nothing more than slight fear, he continued reading.

"Annabeth nodded. ... amazing, wasn't I?"

"Yes, you were." Half of the demigods said to a blushing Grover.

"Annabeth and I ... a pine tree."

Thalia mumbled some choice words about Luke while Annabeth sighed. They could not understand how Luke could use Thalia's sacrifice as if it was nothing.

"In the dim ... want me along."

"Not a failure, goat boy." Thalia told Grover.

Pan agreed, "You are a very brave satyr, Grover. I hope you do not think that way anymore."

Grover was hyperventilating. Never in his wildest dreams had he thought that he would be sitting next to Pan and getting such a high praise from the god. He quickly mumbled a 'No, Lord'.

""You were ... before Grover found us."

Everyone listened to the backstory intently. They were all interested in knowing what had happened to the daughter of Zeus. Jason looked at his sister in awe. He hadn't known about any of this. He didn't know how his sister survived fighting monsters on the run with two other demigods. Three demigods out in the world would have attracted a lot of monsters.

Annabeth and Thalia looked at each other and smiled as they thought about the days when they always on the run, not knowing if they would survive and trying to find food and shelter and safety. But, despite all that, they had been happy. For the first time, the three demigods had found a family for themselves. A family that actually wanted them and not just tolerated them.

Both Zeus and Hermes frowned. Why had their children run away from their homes? Were they being mistreated like the daughter of Athena or even the son of Poseidon (from Gabe)? But both of the gods were glad that their children found one another and could help each other out. Zeus knew that with Hermes' ability to steal, the kids would not go hungry for long. He just wished that his daughter had actually made it to safety and didn't have to be turned into a tree.

Artemis and her hunters looked at the future lieutenant and felt proud that she had taken in a lost seven year old half blood and kept her and the boy safe.

""I was supposed ... a little quicker ..."

"Had I known there would be other half bloods, I would have sent another protector to help you out." Chiron said. He felt guilty for not sending someone else to help Grover. Not only was it Grover's first assignment, but they also knew that the worst of the monsters would be after Thalia and having two other demigods there would only increase the problem for Grover.

"It's not your fault Chiron." Thalia said and Annabeth nodded. "Nor is it yours, Grover. There were way too many monsters after us."

Hades furrowed his brows. He could not understand why he would send so many monsters after
just one girl. His anger over a broken oath would not warrant such a step. It felt more personal to the god. Maybe Zeus had threatened his son, Nico. Was that the reason he sent so many monsters after Thalia? No. That couldn't be it. If Zeus threatened his child, then he would have shown Thalia leniency to get Zeus' favor when his son's time came. There seemed to be something else going on.

"'Stop it,' ... Cloven Elders said so.'"

"Well, the previous council was stupid." Thalia said. Ever since Grover became the leader of the council, there had been a lot of changes. The Council was no longer run by ignorant satyrs, but was run by intellectuals of the satyr community.

"Grover kept ... who finds Pan.'" 

"That was a really nice thing to say." Hestia said and others nodded. Pan was pleased that Grover had such good and supportive friends.

"And the truth too." Annabeth said, looking at Grover in pride. He was the only satyr who could boast of finding four children of big three and finding Pan.

"I heard a ... 'I meant it.'"

"I did." Percy mouthed to Grover, who just grinned. He didn't know what he had done to deserve such great friends, but he was glad he had them. They believed in him whenever he could not.

"We rode ... a weird summer...''

"What? A centaur in a dress? I would pay to see that." Hermes said as he laughed.

"What had happened that summer?" Apollo asked Chiron and everyone either turned to face Chiron or any of the older campers, who had been there that year.

"Ooh! I wanna tell this story." Travis said excitedly. He rubbed the particular bead, his first bead, on his necklace as everyone looked at him in anticipation. Rubbing his hands together, he said, "Alright. So, that was mostly a pretty boring summer till the Texas Chapter, who were on a cross country celebration rampage, ended up at the camp for a week. In that week they had a prank war with Mr. D. It was wild. Anything and everything was fair play. Actually, half of the pranks the Hermes cabin plays, came from them. Anyway in the end, the loser of the prank war had to wear dress for a whole day. And the party ponies lost in the end... so for one whole day, they paraded around the camp in a dress."

"It was weird."

"And hilarious. Gotta love the party ponies, man."

"And that's why none of them are ever allowed to stay at camp." Chiron said in his no nonsense voice. "They destroyed half the camp with their obnoxious parties." Then Chiron thought sadly about the party ponies who lost their lives in the war. Their funeral service had been one of the most painful ones he had ever attended.

"So, each bead is for something special that happened that summer?" Athena asked. "What do all of the other beads mean?"

Everyone was interested in knowing about this, especially the past demigods. They did not get any recognition for surviving a summer at the camp. But, then again the camp was only a training place and many mostly returned to their mortal homes and didn't stay at camp for longer than what
was necessary.

All of them turned to Annabeth, as she had the most beads on her necklace, nine in total. "So, the first year was Thalia's pine tree – in honor of Thalia, the second year was a Greek trireme on fire – which was actually buried in a secluded part of our beach and was found by some Hermes and Hephaestus kids. Then the third year was centaur in a prom dress as Travis explained. Fourth year was the Golden Apple from the Garden of Hesperides – for the quest Luke went on. Fifth year was the symbols of Ares and Athena because that was the first and the last time the two cabins called a truce to let the eldest campers go on a raid to get some celestial bronze for the Hephaestus cabin to make weapons." Annabeth remembered begging Chiron to let her go on that raid. Little had she known that in one year her life would be changed forever. Taking a breath, she continued, "Then the sixth year was trident on black background – for this particular quest that we are reading. After that, for the seventh year it was...well...I will not reveal what has not already been told, but it symbolizes Thalia coming to life. After that, we have one symbolizing a battle that we fought. Then there is one for the first war that we fought, along with names of those who fell in battle. And the last one that we got a couple of days ago, symbolizes the Greeks and Romans coming together to fight the second war and the names of those who fell in battle on both the Roman and Greek side."

All the campers were playing with their beads. The Romans had too been given a bead (for the second war) to symbolize the friendship between the two camps. This last bead was the most colorful. It had a mix of orange and purple swirls – for both the camps – and the names of those who died in the war were written in both Greek and Latin and kept alternating between the languages. It also had the carving of the Athena Parthenos, around which the names were written. But, there was one area of the bead that was completely black. Inside this were the symbols of Hades, Poseidon and Athena, symbolizing the three children going into Tartarus and coming back alive.

"What is with the red coral?" Athena asked her daughter, who blushed and stammered something about Percy giving it to her as a gift.

"Can we get back to reading?" The wine god asked in a bored tone. He was currently sipping on his seventh glass of wine since the morning. He was not even drunk enough to actually sit through a conversation.

"'And the college... live with him.'"

'At least he is trying to make amends.' Athena thought. She hoped it worked out between her daughter and the father, but since Annabeth was still resentful towards her father, the goddess had very little hope.

"'That doesn't... Camp Half-Blood.'"

Athena shook her head in disappointment. Why would the father not support Annabeth?

All the demigods who had to leave their mortal homes for similar reasons, looked down in sympathy. They knew what it felt like to be separated from the family and being called names and treated as a freak.

"'You think... letter or something.'"

"Thanks for that, by the way." Annabeth whispered to Percy.

"Always, wise girl."
"'Thanks for ... next to you.'"

Aphrodite smiled. This was going to be a great love story to meddle with.

Athena raised her eyebrow. Her daughter would fight against her, if push came to shove? If her daughter said it now, she could understand why – after all the two were together. But, back then... why would her daughter fight alongside their natural enemy?

"'Why?'"

"Because you're my friend, Seaweed Brain. Any more stupid questions?"

Athena rolled her eyes. Her daughter would fight against her mother for a friend? That too, a friend she met a couple weeks ago? The goddess couldn't see the wisdom in that.

Poseidon smiled at the statement – not because a daughter of Athena was siding with his son, but because the girl held friendship in high regard just like his son. That was good enough for the sea god.

"I couldn't think... up your pencil."

"That is actually horrifying... being unable to move when you need to."

"Then the dream ... her nose."

"What?!" Thalia shouted. She recognized herself from the description.

Jason looked at Thalia, then turned to Percy, "The description is spot on, other than eye color."

"How did you know what I looked like? We hadn't met and you had not seen a picture of me."

Thalia was freaking out. How was it possible for Percy to dream of her down to every last detail?

Percy shrugged and asked Dionysus to carry on.

"Somehow, I knew ... melted off me."

"It could be..." Morpheus said, deep in thought. "But, it doesn't make sense. The boy thinks that there has to a choice between him and the daughter of Zeus and he chose himself to do whatever the choice was originally for."

"What?" Most of the people asked.

"As I said it is confusing. Maybe, we need more information, but this is the only explanation to the dream that I have." The god of dreams said.

The others decided to move on with the reading. They knew better than to question Morpheus in regards to his domain.

"I fell through the classroom floor. The teacher's voice changed until it was cold and evil, echoing from the depths of a great chasm."

"Oh..."

"Now what?" Dionysus snapped at Morpheus. He was getting annoyed with the interruptions.
"I think the choice is to face whatever is in the pit." Morpheus said and then promptly fell asleep before anyone could ask him any questions.

The demigods from the future were surprised. It was somewhat accurate. Up till that point, there always had been a choice between Percy and Thalia as to who would be the prophesy child. With Thalia as a pine tree, the burden fell on Percy and he would have to face Kronos. The campers were impressed with Morpheus.

"Percy Jackson, ... somewhere else."

"There is someone else in your dreams?" Poseidon asked Percy.

"No." came the mumbled reply from Morpheus, who was still asleep. "Percy is in someone else's dream. This is unheard of…" he trailed off.

"And he ... aloud. Excellent."

"What exchange? What deception?" Zeus was getting anxious. He had a feeling that the voice in the pit was talking about his master bolt.

"Truly, my lord, said the voice next to me, you are well-named the Crooked One." Dionysus faltered as he read the name.

Within seconds all the gods were paying their complete attention to the book. Even Hypnos and Morpheus had woken up. Nike, Tyche and Nemesis stopped playing the betting board game they had been playing. Everyone could feel the tension and fear in the room.

"The Crooked One?" Zeus said shakily. He could not believe it. It could not be… not him… not again. The first time had been bad enough.

"If only I could have remembered the name, we could have convinced Zeus about the threat earlier." Percy mumbled.

"Father?" Poseidon asked. "He is the one who is stirring?"

"It cannot be. He is sliced into pieces. It would take him thousands of years to reform enough to come into dreams." Zeus was still in denial.

"But, father." Athena protested. "By the time this book takes place, he would have had the thousands of years that he needs to rise."

"If he is orchestrating something, then no one is safe from him." Hades said.

"Do you think he orchestrated the whole stealing of bolt and pitting Zeus and Poseidon against each other?" Athena asked no one in particular.

"A fight like that would weaken the Council…" Ares said.

"…and make it easier for him to strike." Enyo concluded.

The three gods of war looked at Zeus as he spoke, "We should read more to find out exactly what is happening." He did not want to believe that his father could be rising. He and his family had barely won the first war against him. If he was truly rising, what chance did they have this time?

"But was it ... use it against him."
"He is the master mind behind this whole fiasco!" Hera gasped. She could not face him again. Zeus held her hand to calm her down.

Poseidon was worried about Percy. What did Kronos mean that they would use Percy against him? There was something else that was going on that had not yet been revealed in the books.

"Shortly you shall have the reward you wish, and your revenge. As soon as both items are delivered into my hands ... but wait. He is here."

Poseidon paled. What would Kronos do to Percy in the dreams, now that he had discovered him?

"What? The invisible ... himself hither."

Hypnos and Morpheus looked at each other in surprise. For a half-blood to travel within dreams... that was something they had never heard of, nor had they thought it possible. The boy must be really powerful to be able to change dreams.

"Impossible! ... fused together."

"That's my throne." Hades said. What did that father of his want to show Percy?

"Standing at the ... with a start."

"That was a horrible dream." Clovis said and shivered.

Dionysus gulped down his entire chalice. He needed the liquid courage after such a revelation.

"Grover was ... the lion's face."

Pan growled. "That man is not fit to even live. How dare he treat a lion like that?"

All of the gods were getting annoyed with the mortals who kept the animals in such a dire condition and then mistreated them.

"The lion ... downright murderous."

"Nobody hurts the wild or the animals." Grover said and Rachel nodded.

"The trucker ... saw you in half!"

"What?" Pan cried out. "This does not sound like a zoo."

"No. It sounds like illegal trade of animals." Rachel growled out. She had helped out so many times to stop such things from happening that she could recognize it immediately.

"Illegal trade?" Pan paled.

"Yes Lord. Some mortals buy and sell rare or wild animals for entertainment or any other purpose to the highest bidder. It is not allowed by the authorities but it is still being done. There are many mortals who are trying to stop this from happening." Hedge explained. He had a satyr friend who would help out in such things.

Pan was visibly shaking with anger and the exotic birds in the room were starting to get agitated. Once Hedge and Grover promised to protect the animals in the future as much as possible and Pan calmed down a bit, Dionysus continued.
"The zebra, ... to react."

"You did not know that you could talk to horses and the like, did you?" Theseus asked.

"No. It was weird." Percy replied.

"There was ... out of the trailer."

"Good. Now free the animals." Pan said and Artemis nodded.

"She said, "This... could understand it?"

"Yes!" Hedge said. "Why were you even thinking about that, cupcake?"

Percy shrugged. His mind worked in mysterious ways.

"The zebra ... in Las Vegas."

"Good job!" Connor said, thinking about how a zebra would look galloping around Vegas.

"Maurice and Eddie ran after it, with a few policemen running after them, shouting, "Hey! You need a permit for that!""

"Oh good. At least the police saw them." Rachel said, satisfied with the truckers being chased by the police and the animals being released.

"'Now would ... into the streets."

Pan and Artemis relaxed. The animals would be safe. It seemed like Grover had put a satyr's blessing on them.

"Some tourists ... that on us?" I asked."

"It would be useful if there was something like that for us, especially on a quest." Katie said.

"Well...if a quest ever brings you to San Francisco or the nearby areas, you can always come to Camp Jupiter." Frank offered and looked at Reyna for confirmation. He was not used to being able to take decisions on behalf of the camp.

Reyna smiled and nodded. "All of you are welcome to Camp Jupiter. Or you can contact us to come and get you if you are stuck somewhere and in trouble."

Percy and Jason smiled at each other. How much ever Hera/Juno's plan sucked, it still brought both the camps together and they were happy that their sacrifice of their time had something good come out of it.

Chiron was also thinking the same thing. He had witnessed Greeks and Romans kill each other for years and to finally see them get along was surreal. He decided that once they went back to their time, he would request audience with the Council and try and persuade them to allow safe houses to be built for the demigods – both Greek and Roman.

"'It only ... Annabeth reasoned."

Many gods and demigods smiled. The gods were once again reminded of Poseidon and Athena insulting one another.
"'Hey!' I ... us much attention."

"It's not every day that you get to see a zebra, and antelope and an albino lion on the roads of Vegas."

"We passed... Hotel and Casino."

"Oh no!" Nico groaned. Now that he knew the truth, he hated that place for taking away years from his life, even though it had protected him and his sister from Zeus. "You were in there too?" he asked Percy. He didn't know that Percy had been in the hotel. Nico always thought that Bianca had told him about the hotel. How did Percy manage to get out?

"Yeah, for some time I was." Percy said.

"The entrance ... and sit down?"

"No... no... walk away." Nico mumbled. When Will looked at him and asked what was wrong, he just told him to wait and hear.

"I'd learned ... you can imagine."

"Oh my gods!" Connor said dreamily.

"It sounds amazing. We should go there." Travis said and Dakota and a few other nodded.

"No!" Annabeth shouted. "It is a trap. No one goes there. No matter how awesome it sounds." She hoped the Stolls would not try anything.

Zeus groaned. Another trap to distract the children from the quest. Why was everyone against them actually finding his bolt?

"'Hey!' a bellhop ... games and rides."

"Yeah, okay. That is a trap." The Stolls said.

"He handed us ... Enjoy your stay."

"It doesn't run out of cash?!" Travis screeched.

"If that's the case, then forget the trap, we have to get the cards." Connor said. "Wait. Does it work outside of the hotel?"

Chiron shook his head. The two brothers would be the death of him. "Do you both remember The Odyssey? There was something mentioned in there that I want you both to remember."

Both the Stolls looked at Chiron in confusion but still started discussing about Odyssey.

"We took the ... room like this."

"I don't understand most of the things in that, but it does sound like a trap. You are getting way too many amenities without having to pay anything. What are the entrappers getting out of this?" Hermes pondered.

"'Oh, goodness,' ... a little strange."
"That is strange." Perseus said, trying to think what kind of a trap this could be.

"I threw Ares's backpack in the trash can."

Ares mumbled something about disrespectful sons of Poseidon who deserved to be destroyed, but no one paid him any attention.

"Wouldn't need ... week of grimy travel."

"You guys hadn't showered for a week? You so deserve a break." Chiara said. She had heard a lot of stories about Percy and Annabeth and their insane quests when she had first come to camp. She still couldn't believe that she actually got to hear about them in detail.

"I changed clothes, ... it could wait."

"Oh no. Whatever magic this place is using is interfering with their minds and possibly memories." Hecate said.

Zeus groaned and hoped that three would figure out that they are trapped and would leave at once.

"I came out ... Geographic Channel."

"You have got to be kidding me. National Geographic Channel? Seriously?" Rachel whined. But what else could you expect from Annabeth. If she could, she would probably study while sleeping too.

"Hey, it's interesting."

"'All those ... 'It's interesting.'"

"See." Annabeth said, dragging out the word and Rachel rolled her eyes.

"'I feel good," ... then back down again."

"That should be an indication of a magical trap." Hermes said, getting worried about what kind of trap the children had walked into. "The magic of the place is interfering with the magic in the shoes."

"'So what ... time," I said."

"Are you serious?" Zeus shouted. "You are on a time bound quest to find my bolt and you are playing?" Unbelievable!

"I couldn't ... Annabeth loved it."

"It sounds amazing." Dakota said, taking a sip of wine that he had managed his father to give him, but only for a sip.

"It does. But it is not worth the risk." Annabeth said but didn't elaborate.

"I'm not sure when I first realized something was wrong."

"Lotus…" Travis said, deep in thought. He had and his brother were still thinking about The Odyssey. Hey, you just don't ignore a direct order/request from Chiron.
"There was something about Lotuses in The Odyssey." Katie said, having joined the brothers in their brainstorming session.

After a while, when the reading did not continue, everyone stared at Dionysus. The god of wine was busy taking lazy sips out of his chalice. When he saw everyone looking at him, he just waved his hand lazily and said, "I was getting thirsty. This chapter is too long… Ok. Fine! I will continue."

"Probably, it was ... on homecoming night."

"Not a good fashion sense." Gwen said and Piper had to agree. She did not like the Elvis style at all.

"We played... and better."

Groovy?"

"Groovy? Who says groovy anymore?" Will asked.

"LOTUS EATERS!" came a shout from the Stoll brothers, Katie and Lou Ellen.

"Uh… what?" Rachel asked.

"In The Odyssey, they mention something about Lotus-Eaters. They are this tribe that have narcotic lotus plants." Katie explained.

"These plants have a kind of magic that makes anyone who smells them want to stay there forever." Lou Ellen said. "And once you are trapped there, you cannot leave. You hardly age, if at all and time moves on around you. A couple of Odysseus' men were trapped there and had to be dragged away. It is speculated that they receive power from the people whom they trap." It was one of her sibling's favorite topics – how the Lotus Eaters worked.

"Percy said something about smelling lotus flowers when they went near the hotel." Travis said.

"So, it must be the Lotus-Eaters. They even named the place Lotus Hotel and Casino." Connor finished.

"Ok. So, they are trapped in a place famous for trapping people, where time slows down while the time around them goes on and they cannot leave?" Apollo asked, ignoring the fact that he had no clue who or what this Odyssey was.

"Yes." Annabeth answered.

"How did you get out and complete the quest on time?" Zeus asked, worried for his bolt, while both Poseidon and Athena were worrying about their children.

"Poseidon's son figured out something was wrong." Dionysus said lazily.

"What?" Ares asked. He hadn't been paying attention for some time now.

"Well." The god of theatre was certainly living up to his name as he dragged out the word. "If you let me read… maybe… just maybe, we can understand what happened." He snapped the last few words at Ares. He could certainly understand how grating it would be for him to live with the children. They kept interrupting every few lines!
"Later, while we were talking, I said something was "sick," and he looked at me kind of startled, as if he'd never heard the word used that way before."

"Doesn't sick mean being ill?" Apollo asked, not understanding why Percy would say that something was 'sick'. Dionysus almost hurled the book at his half-brother for interrupting.

"Yes." Percy replied. "But it also is a slang or local word for something being good."

"He said ... about it. "1977."

"Whoa! That's a long time to stay in one place." Leo said.

"Try living there since the 1930s." Nico mumbled glumly. Will heard him and mouthed in shock, '1930s?' Nico sighed and promised to explain it later during a break.

"'No," I said, ... they didn't care."

"Oh. This is bad. This is really bad." Theseus muttered.

"How long have you children been in there? You have a quest to be on." Athena said.

"Then it occurred ... World War III."

"It makes you forget?" Zeus asked. Will the children even find his bolt on time? These Lotus-Eaters were a menace, he thought.

"I found Annabeth ... is a trap."

"Yes. Listen to the boy." Athena mumbled. She hoped Percy's persistence was enough to get them out of the hotel.

"She didn't ... stay forever."

"How did you figure it out anyway?" Hazel asked.

"Yeah, from the minute you stepped inside that hotel, you had been feeling that something was wrong. How come?" Piper asked.

Percy shrugged. "Instincts?"

"You need more than just good instincts to see through such a powerful magic spell." Hecate said, thinking about how much power the place would have generated over the years.

"'So?' she ... hairy spiders."

"That will work." Hecate said, nodding her head. "The fear of spiders is instilled in her, just like the fear of losing your mother is instilled in you." She told Percy. "Your fears helped you break the hold of the magic. It's fascinating."

"That jarred ... the screen."

A few demigods chuckled.

"I looked at ... Disco Darrin forever."
"And the world outside will crash and burn." Connor said dramatically.

"Grover reached ... the sidewalk."

"That takes a considerable amount of willpower to leave the magic behind." Apollo said. He had had enough run-ins with magic wielding creatures to know just how much willpower is required to break a spell.

"It felt like... in the desert."

"Oh no! How much time has passed since you went inside?" Hercules asked. Lightning meant that they were pretty close to the deadline, because if the deadline had passed… then everything would had already been destroyed.

"Ares's backpack ... to worry about."

"That's odd, alright. Why would the backpack come back?" Hermes asked.

"It might be enchanted." Athena replied. "But, why would Ares give them an enchanted bag?"

There were too many questions and not enough information to figure out the answers.

"I ran to ... complete our quest."

"What? Only one more day?" Zeus asked. How did the children find his bolt and return it in one day?

"How are you going to go to the Underworld, figure out that Hades doesn’t have the bolt, then find the bolt and return it to Zeus in just one day?" Poseidon asked.

"By a lot of planning… and a lot more improvising." Percy smiled. It had been a good quest – at least no one had died on it – nor did he think that anyone had.

"Finally!" Dionysus shut the book. "I am never reading again."
Ch25 – TLT – Death by Hospitality

Ariadne took the book from her husband and decided to read. "WE SHOP FOR WATER BEDS"

When he heard Ariadne's voice, Percy turned to look at her and saw that even Theseus had turned to look at his former lover. Dionysus, who had been glaring at Theseus till now, now was glaring at both the sons of Poseidon. He hated heroes, despite having being one years ago, but of all the heroes, he hated any child of Poseidon more than anyone else.

Percy looked down at his lap as he remembered the story Mr. D had told him once. The story of Theseus and Ariadne and how the demigod had left the girl, who had given up her whole life to help him, on an island all alone. Back then, Percy had been confident enough to think that he would not be like that… but Tartarus had opened his eyes – was he any better?

The demigod thought about all the people he had 'used and left' over the years, starting with Nico. Percy thought about how he had taken the trust Nico had in him and still didn't manage to protect Bianca. He had left Nico alone when the younger boy had needed help and the poor kid was left to fend for himself against Minos' ghost. Percy had never even noticed that Nico might have liked him and he kept on making the boy's life difficult. And yet, Nico always helped Percy, even unknowingly, like with Bob. He thought about Calypso…beautiful Calypso, who nursed him back from the brink of death, who had been a good friend and caretaker and yet he never checked up with the gods whether they had released her or not. And Bob and Damasen…

Jason felt the shift in Percy's demeanor before he even saw Percy. Percy was staring at the ground and was still. Percy was never still, just like the ocean he kept moving around, even if it was a simple tapping of fingers or shaking of his leg. The son of Jupiter nudged his cousin in the hopes of getting him out of whatever funk he was in. 'You ok?' he mouthed when the son of Poseidon turned to look at him. 'Yeah.' Percy replied but still seemed out of focus.

"Seriously, man. What's wrong?" Jason whispered.

"Nothing. Just remembered something." Came the melancholic reply.

Jason was about to insist that Percy talk to him but the dark haired boy shook his head slightly and put his arm around Annabeth and smiled at her. Deciding to talk to his friend and cousin later, Jason tuned into the reading.

"It was ... LotusCash card."

"How do you know if it will work?" Rachel asked.

Annabeth shrugged. "I was hoping it would. That was the only thing we had with us."

"He looked ... to the dollar sign."
"Whoa! It's unlimited?" Chris asked, his eyes twinkling.

"Do you guys still have them?" Travis asked hopefully.

"I think I might have eaten mine." Grover replied.

"You... you ate unlimited money? How could you?" Connor said, looking appalled.

"Hey Percy, Annabeth. What about you guys?" Chris asked.

"Annabeth gave hers to the cabbie and I lost mine." Percy replied. It wasn't far from the truth. He actually didn't know where he had kept his. He had completely forgotten about the card.

"You guys break my heart." Connor said, sounding genuinely upset. "You should have guarded it with your life."

"Just ignore these annoying children and read." Dionysus whispered to his wife.

"The cigar fell..."Your Highness" thing."

"Duh! Who wouldn't?" Gwen asked. Percy, Rachel and Piper raised their hands. The three were used to being treated like royalty because of their parents and hated it.

"Brother?" Triton asked in confusion. He knew that all of his father's children would be treated like a prince/princess by his subjects and he knew for a fact that they all loved it.

"It gets annoying and I don't like it." Percy replied. "I keep telling them not to call me 'Lord' or whatever they call me, but they just don't listen."

"Who calls you 'Lord'?" Dakota asked.

"The horses except Arion, the Pegasi and all aquatic life forms." Percy replied.

Poseidon frowned. Why would his son not like being treated like royalty? This son of his was truly unique.

Dionysus watched the exchange with detached interest. He was skeptical of this new demigod, who was like a puzzle. He showed the usual traits of all demigods – being proud, heroism, strength and courage, having self-importance by protecting others, but then there were some mannerisms that strayed from the usual – his insane need to protect everyone, no matter who, being grateful for his gifts, speaking up to gods, his modesty and now not liking being treated like royalty. The god decided to watch this demigod closely and then come to a conclusion. Was he really a new type of demigod or was he in reality just like his brother, Theseus?

"'Get us there... some special name or title..."

The elder gods shuddered as they remembered the dream. If their father was truly rising, they needed to prepare for war. What if he had actually risen, then was one of the wars that the children fought, against him? No. That could not be. The Hermes from the future had said that the Olympians did not fight much in the wars and it was mostly fought by the children. No child could defeat the Titan of Time. It must be something else. It had to be.

"'The Silent One?' Annabeth suggested. "The Rich One? Both of those are nicknames for Hades."
"
"How about 'The Daughter Stealing One'?” Demeter said.

"Mother, please!” Persephone whined and Hades rolled his eyes. His sister/mother-in-law would never let it go.

"Maybe ... usually described.'”

Hades wondered how many children actually dreamt of him to know how his throne room looked like. It's not that they could just walk in, see his throne room and walk out.

"I shook my... feel like a god's voice.'”

The gods shivered as they remembered Kronos' voice. It was like the embodiment of evil in a voice.

"Annabeth's eyes ... to be Hades…”

"Normally, I would disagree. But in this case, I wish it was me.” Hades said.

"'...Maybe he ... retrieved the bolt.'”

"And were doing what? Going to the Underworld to give it to Hades?” Nemesis asked.

"Hades has the boy's mother. The bolt would make a good bargaining chip.” Enyo said.

"I wasn't sure what was wrong with her. She looked pale."

"You figured it out, didn't you?” Athena looked at her daughter in pride.

"'But if I'd ... your mom back.'”

"See. Even the goat thinks so.” Enyo said.

"I whistled. ... thank you.'”

"You really do.” Pan said, laughing.

"Grover's mind and Coach's eagerness should never be combined.” Piper whispered to Jason.

"'But the thing... it isn't Hades?'”

"When you knew that she didn't want you to ask the question, why did you ask it?” Rachel asked, shaking her head.

"It wouldn't be Percy if he hadn't asked.” Annabeth said fondly.

"'Percy ... more dangerous.”

"Yes, there is something else. Just figure it out.” Apollo said, clearly caught up in the story. He had been getting glimpses of the Underworld for some time now and really needed to know what had happened or will happen.

"The problem ... war would begin.”

"Exactly. How did you manage do stop these two in just one day?” Hera asked. This hero might just be useful for some future personal work like Hercules, she thought.
Percy and Jason made a face at Hera when she wasn't looking. They weren't going to forgive her so easily, even if her gamble paid off.

"'The answer is ... that enough times.'"

"Same here." Came the reply from a quite a few demigods.

"Oh. If you are doubting yourself when you reach the Underworld, you are going to be in trouble." Triton said. He had once visited his uncle for some work and had seen Hades manipulate a soul that was in doubt. He hoped his brother would figure out what was going on before he met Hades.

"The cab sped...only it smelled worse."

Poseidon frowned and hoped that the mortals didn't destroy his beaches too.

"There were ...someone that powerful?"

Poseidon and his family smiled proudly. His domain covered almost the entirety of the world and the other parts that the sea didn't cover were covered by freshwater, which were kind of an extension of the sea god's domain. And even earlier on, all of the land was under the sea.

The other gods looked at Poseidon. They always forgot just how vast his domain was and how powerful he truly was. He never really showed it unless he was throwing a temper tantrum, but they weren't what they used to be anymore. The gods remembered Percy telling them that Poseidon had mellowed down over the years and if the behavior of Dionysus and Ares were any indicators, then it seemed that they had forgotten just how powerful he really was. His children were just as powerful, they thought. The children of the sea would also have control over the entirety of the sea, just not as much as their father. The gods looked at Theseus and Percy and realized that underneath their easy going personalities, they both held immense power.

Zeus scoffed. "The sky covers the entire world, boy. That is more powerful than only two-thirds of the world."

Hades added, "And the Underworld... well... even I don't know the entirety of the Underworld."

"And this is exactly how Kronos was almost able to take over the world." Percy whispered to Annabeth and Jason.

"What do you mean?" Jason asked. He still did not know the Greek side of the Second Titan War.

"Kronos had tried to divide and rule. He knew Zeus would protect Olympus and dad would help him – so he sent Oceanus to fight dad, and he knew that Hades would not do anything except protect his domain because of him holding grudges against the Council. In the end, Nico managed to get Hades to come and protect Olympus and I convinced dad to leave his kingdom and help Zeus. That's how we won." Percy explained as fast as he could.

The three brothers were engaged in a glaring contest and their sisters sighed. "Ariadne dear, please continue. These three will go on for eternity if we let them." Demeter said.

"I stepped into... head went under."

"The toxic water will only irritate him and not hurt him." Triton said. He was upset that even the sea was polluted.

"Solid plan, Perce." Leo said. "Anytime any one wants to avoid a lecture, they can just go
underwater."

"Not when the wife can follow you there too." Poseidon mumbled and Amphitrite jabbed him with her elbow.

"I held my breath at first. It's difficult to intentionally inhale water."

"Even I had trouble the first time. We all do." Theseus said.

"Finally I couldn't ... where everything was."

Everyone listened closely to know what exactly was under the sea. It was one of the most puzzling domains since no one except Poseidon and his family could actually travel under water.

"I could sense ... swirling together."

"How can you see the currents?" Piper asked. She loved the sea. It was calming to see the waves rolling in.

"It's more of a feeling that actually seeing it. But, the waters feel different." Percy replied.

Poseidon was pleased that at least underwater had not been polluted by the nasty mortals.

"I felt something... was right there."

"Sharks are like dogs?" Leo asked.

"To me, yes. They love to play and eat and gossip." Percy said and Triton and Theseus nodded.

"Sharks gossip?" Jason asked.

"All the underwater animals do. Sometimes, they are worse than cabin 10." Percy replied. He remembered how the gossip of him and Annabeth being at Siren Bay had spread like wildfire. The next time he had gone for a swim after the quest, he had been surrounded by all kinds of fishes and interrogated for what seemed like hours.

"The surface shimmered ... bottom of the Pacific."

"You can go to the bottom of any ocean. The only thing that might be affected is your sense of sight at that level." Poseidon said. He was wondering about why he had called his son over there.

"Then I saw ... so I bowed."

Amphitrite smiled and nodded. Even though Poseidon's children did not need to bow to the Nereids, it was in good behavior and courtesy to do so. Not to mention that the Nereids would adore him for that.

"'You're the woman ... Poseidon's court?'"

"Many of them do." Amphitrite said.

"She nodded. 'It ... thought before."

Amphitrite raised an eyebrow. Poseidon seemed to be really interested in this child. Then again, it could be because Percy was his first demigod child in decades. Anyway, the Nereids loved to
pamper any child of her husband's.

"If my father is so interested in me," I said, "why isn't he here? Why doesn't he speak to me?"

Poseidon almost said that he must have wanted to, but stopped himself when Percy just smiled at him, reassuring him that he knew why Poseidon couldn't be with him.

Many demigods cringed. They had spent their whole lives wondering the same thing. It hurt them to know that they had a parent and didn't know whether that parent cared for them or not. And the not knowing had driven so many to rebel against the gods.

"A cold current rose out of the depths."

"You seem to be listening to them." The Queen of Seas told her husband, who nodded.

Percy looked down and smiled. At least his father had been paying attention to him.

Zeus frowned. His brother was bending the ancient laws to his whim just to be with his child. Then again, Zeus himself might have done something like that if it had been his child. Although, he would have a lot more subtle about it, so that it could not be traced back to him. Hmm. Maybe that's why his children never seemed to like him much – because they didn't know that he cared. Could that be a reason?

"Do not judge ... their own children?"

"Especially to our own children." Many gods said bitterly. They hated the stupid divine laws for putting such a clause.

Some of the demigods heard the bitterness in the gods' voices and were surprised. Did they really care for their children? All of them? For all their children?

"Especially to... in her palm."

Hades groaned. So that's how the children managed to get away. But only three pearls? Did he not have the mother with him?

Poseidon smiled. That was a good plan on his part. But why did he give only three of them?

"I know you... these talents?"

"I have been to the Underworld?" Hercules asked. (At this point he still hasn't gotten the 12th labor)

Hades rolled his eyes. Why did the mortals think that they could come to his realm and get away with it?

Percy scoffed and muttered darkly, "No one can escape the pit." He and Annabeth had only made it out because they had the help of a Titan, a Giant and a skeleton saber-toothed tiger.

"Who is Houdini?" Perseus asked.

"A son of Hermes. He could get out of anything and was famous for it." Chris replied. Growing up, Houdini had been one of his heroes.
Hermes looked surprised. His son had gone to the Underworld and survived? The god beamed proudly.

"'Urn ... survive to manhood…'"

"What?" Poseidon asked worriedly. "There is a prophesy for you? What did she mean by 'great and terrible future'?" Was it prophesied that Percy would end up in Tartarus?

"It should come up later… like much later. No one would tell me anything about it." Percy said.

"'…Poseidon would … Good luck, Percy Jackson.'"

"True." Triton said and Hades nodded. There would never come a day that he would willingly let a living mortal soul leave his realm, especially if they doubted themselves.

"She summoned … the gifts. What gifts?!"

"Exactly. What gifts?" Theseus asked. "You have only just received the gifts from father…"

"And Ares." Hermes said. "Ares gave him a ride and a bag. So which gift is not to be trusted?"

"Well, the ride got them west…” Athena said.

"But they got stuck at the trap. If Percy had not figured it out, they would not be able to stop the war. So… it could be that gift." Apollo said.

Athena pursed her lips. "Maybe. And assuming that Poseidon would not willingly give his son some defected gifts and nothing in the bag seemed threatening… it could be the ride he gave them."

"We should continue reading. It should be revealed soon." Annabeth told her mother.

"'Good-bye, … court of Poseidon.'"

Theseus smiled wistfully. Every one of his siblings and him had wanted to see their father's palace, but none could actually go and visit him. This reading was a blessing to him. He could actually meet his father and talk to him for a few minutes. But he had a feeling that Percy had a better relationship with their father – the one from the future anyway.

Poseidon was lost in thoughts. He had seen Theseus' wistfulness and he knew that Percy wanted to visit the palace. Hmm…maybe he could convince Amphitrite to let the two demigods come with them to the palace for maybe a night. His palace on Olympus was connected with his actual palace under the sea, so sneaking away from Zeus would not be a problem. A plan started to formulate in his mind.

"But I looked … You wait."

Percy nodded his head. There had been a sacrifice. His mother had to be left behind.

Both Hades and Poseidon understood at once what had happened. He had given only three pearls because there needed to be a sacrifice to Hades for letting go of living souls from his realm. The children would need to leave someone behind. Poseidon knew whom Percy would leave behind.

"On that happy … DOA Recording Studios."
"You didn't actually think it would be that easy, now did you?" Nico rolled his eyes. "DOA is covered in mist. Only the dead and anyone from our world can see it."

"'You remind me ... Smelly Gabe.'"

"I forgot that he still existed." Rachel said.

"He was talking ... trouble talking about it."

"He mentioned his car?" Jason asked incredulously.

"Gabe was special that way." Percy shrugged.

"What kind of a name is Sugar?" Aphrodite asked.

"Not of a 'grief counselor's'." Percy murmured.

"'There you have... Stay tuned, America.'"

"They really love to exaggerate, don't they?" Rachel said.

"The mist causes you a lot of problems." Lou Ellen said.

"'C'mon," Grover ... to navigate, too.""

"That is a surprisingly accurate description of Ares' personality." Apollo said, catching the dagger that the said god threw at him.

Hephaestus laughed and nodded. "You meet him only twice and that too for a couple of minutes, but have understood his character well."

"I didn't know ... idiot, I stopped."

"Stupid Prissy." Clarisse said.

"Before I ... I uncapped Riptide."

"That won't harm them." Hercules said.

"When the ... through his chest."

"So, I am not the first mortal you tried to kill with the sword, huh?" Rachel teased.

"Yeah. That's how I introduce myself to mortals." Percy stuck his tongue out at the Oracle.

"He looked ... Grover translated."

Both Annabeth and Grover groaned and said in unison, "I hate that place."

"Another monster?" Reyna asked.

"Isn't it always?" Annabeth replied.

"This had got to be some kind of record." Travis said.

"It didn't sound like a place I'd ever go except in an emergency, but this definitely qualified."
"How about not even then?" Grover bleated. He really hated being stretched.

"We burst ... fast if he needed to."

"Definitely a monster." Leo confirmed.

Poseidon looked worried. Now which monster did his son have to fight?

"His suit ... Yes, you are."

"Would have been hilarious if you had, though." Connor said, chuckling.

"Hasn't he heard of oral hygiene?" Gwen asked.

"I don't think monsters have the time to brush their teeth. They are too busy chasing us and then getting killed by us," Clarisse said.

"Is something wrong in the future? What kind of a name is 'Crusty'?" the love goddess asked.

"Sorry to ... -universe-size."

"That is a lot of water beds." Chris commented.

"Beds..." Theseus said. "Oh no. Tell me it's not him."

"Another monster that you fought?" Perseus asked his cousin.

"Uh-huh." Percy said noncommittally.

"This is my ...This is cool."

"No!" Theseus shouted.

"Hmm," Crusty said, ... Crusty pushed her.

Tyson growled, scaring those near him except for Percy and Annabeth. "Nobody hurts Annabeth." He said.

"What kind of a monster cares for beds?" Pollux asked.

"The one who is obsessed with them – Procrustes." Athena said.

"Hey!" she ... her to the mattress.

"Why aren't you doing anything?" Reyna asked Percy.

"Procrustes moves faster than you can comprehend. You have got to be patient with him." Theseus explained.

"That... and I was in shock." Percy admitted.

"Grover tried ... them fit, first."

"His obsession really gets annoying after a point of time." Triton said.

"It was never not annoying." Theseus replied.
"What is his obsession?" Leo asked. He had not heard of this Procrustes.

"He once made an iron bed of 6 feet exact and ever since then he had been trying to find someone who can fit it properly – someone six feet in height." Hephaestus explained to his son.

"Oh… That's… a very weird obsession to have."

"What do ... muttered. "Ergo!"

"That's one extreme case of OCD." Pollux muttered.

"A new set ... bed you like, huh?"

"Ooh… sounds painful." Butch said.

"Was painful." Grover and Annabeth said together, mock glaring at Percy.

"Percy!" Grover ... is it?" I asked."

"You are going to entertain him, aren't you? Like you did with Medusa." Perseus asked.

"Yeah… but different reasons." Percy told his namesake.

"Legally, it's ... on his way to Athens."

"Imagine that on your headstone: Death by excessive hospitality" Connor snickered.

"Yeah," the ... beds? Fabulous!"

"You can really talk under pressure, can't you?" Frank asked.

"Yup. It's my super power – talking under pressure."

"He grinned hugely, ... 'She's impossible.'"

By now, most of the people were smiling as they caught on to what Percy was doing.

"The giant ... intelligent customer!"

A couple of demigods and gods started chuckling. "Either this guy is extremely gullible or overconfident." Jason said with a smile.

"The ropes were really stretching my friends now. Annabeth was turning pale. Grover made gurgling sounds, like a strangled goose."

"You would too, if you were in that position." Grover huffed.

Annabeth grimaced and rubbed her neck as she remembered being stretched.

"So, Crusty ... "Show me."

Theseus clapped as he laughed, understanding how Percy defeated Procrustes. As the others caught on, they too started laughing or chuckling.

"He sat down ... simple adjustments ..."
"Yes!" A few demigods said, others just laughed and a few clapped.

"I had no ... stopped making offers."

"You defeated him the same way I did." Theseus said. "The only difference is you used your wits and I used strength."

'That's one difference.' A lot of gods and hunters thought as they compared Percy to the heroes of the old. Percy was a lot like them. He was proud, powerful, strong, capable and charming, but till now he had not used any of these qualities. They were just there in the background, helping him out. But he depended on other things that the heroes of old failed to notice – his friends, his intelligence, his improvising skills and his instincts. That was what made him different from the others. He could appreciate what the others didn't. In their eyes, the things that made him a hero were his loyalty, gratitude, empathy and modesty, not anything else.

"I cut the ... look taller," I said."

"Really?" Rachel asked.

"Uh-huh. She was taller than me for the next two summers. It was annoying." Percy said, remembering how much it used to irritate him that she was taller than him. Annabeth leaned into Percy's side and smiled as she thought about the millions of times she teased him about their height difference."

"'Very funny," ... you'll ever need!'"

"There is a Monster's Yellow Pages?" Travis asked, already making plans to get his hands on that.

"What is yellow pages?" Hermes asked.

"It is a book filled with names and numbers of all the people or businesses in one area." Chris replied.

"Monsters have a reference book about themselves?" Athena asked. Things in the future were really bizarre.

"Under that,... block from here."

"Great! I have always wanted to know how you went past Charon and Cerberus." Nico said. "He always talks about three living souls that he helped."

"And I really want to know where to increase security." Hades said.

Hecate took the book from Ariadne to read next, but Hestia interrupted, "How about we take a small break, say 10-15 minutes and then continue?" The demigods eagerly nodded. They had been getting restless for some time now.
The demigods were half way across the room before Zeus could even give his unnecessary permission to take a break. Seeing them walk out so eagerly, one could confuse the children with students allowed to leave for summer break. Pretty soon the courtyard and the surrounding hallways were overflowing with hyperactive demigods, chattering hunters and gods.

The blond haired demigod looked all around him, searching for his friend, whom he could have sworn, was next to him just a few moments ago. Finally, the son of Apollo spotted the familiar Aviator jacket somewhere ahead of him – seriously, who even wears Aviator jackets in summer? Will navigated through the crowd of demigods and hunters and finally fell in step with the son of Hades. Nico looked up in surprise as Will appeared out of nowhere next to him and Will was pretty sure that he saw a light blush on Nico's cheeks before the boy composed himself. The healer said a quick prayer to his dad and Aphrodite for good measure, hoping that Nico was like him because he was really starting to like Nico.

"Hey." Will said confidently. He was anything but.

"Hi." Nico replied, trying to ignore the stupid skeletal butterflies in his stomach. There was no way Will would be like him, he thought. Nico had been trying really hard not to get his hopes high like he had done with Percy. But the more time Will spent with Nico, the more difficult it was to keep his guard up.

"So…" Come on, Solace. Think of something…aha! "Back in there, you said something about 1930s?"

"Oh that." Nico said nonchalantly. He was skeptical of revealing this information. What if Will thought that he was a weirdo? Would he treat Nico differently?

They walked in silence in a somewhat secluded corridor around the courtyard, occasionally passing hunters or minor gods. Will waited patiently for his friend to say something. He realized that getting Nico to open up about his childhood or for that matter of fact, anything at all, was like pulling teeth. And Will had pulled teeth before, albeit from a horse's mouth. Honestly, he didn't understand what the camp expected of him – to be a healer, a vet or help out in a satyr baby delivery… Will was brought out of his musings as Nico started to speak.

"So, you know about the old big three pact? Not to have any children?"

"Uh-huh." That pact was common knowledge with what it being broken by all the three brothers.

"My dad didn't break the pact." Nico said, hoping Will would get it and he wouldn't have to explain anything.

"What?" the son of Apollo was shocked. "But you and your sister…"

Nico sighed. "When the pact was made, only Hades had children under the age of sixteen. The other two didn't. Zeus wanted to kill the children and ordered Hades to do that."

Will frowned. How could someone ask anyone to kill their own children? Then it clicked. "You
"Yes." Nico stopped walking and glared at the floor in front of him. Better to pull the Band-Aid, he thought. "When he realized that Zeus would stop at nothing, dad asked a kindly one to erase our memories and put us in Lotus Hotel and Casino. The time over there goes really slowly. So, we both aged slowly, but we were in there for almost 70 years. When Thalia came back to life, dad thought it was time to get the two of us out too. So… anyway, yeah." Nico said in a rush. He closed his eyes and waited for Will to tell him how much of a freak he really was. That it was not worth being friends with someone like him – someone who is not only a child of Hades, but isn't even from the same time as Will.

Will blinked his eyes as the truth of what Nico just told him hit him with full force. No wonder Nico felt so lost. The poor kid wasn't even from the same time as everyone else. That would leave anyone disoriented. Was that why he thought that he wasn't welcome in the camp? Because he wouldn't be able to mingle with the campers? He had his sister with him for seventy years and then suddenly she was taken away from him (the story of Bianca and Zoe's deaths were widely known at camp amongst the older campers). That would leave anyone bitter and feeling lonely.

Then a tiny hope lit up inside Will. If Nico was like him, meaning if he liked boys, then that would explain why he wouldn't be open about it. From when Nico was, liking someone of the same gender was a huge crime – a social stigma. The healer gathered up courage that he knew he should have inherited from his dad. After all, his dad was well known for his… umm…variety of lovers. Will turned to face Nico, only to find a crestfallen face before the son of Hades turned around and started to walk away.

Nico wasn't a patient person, not by a long shot. So, when he waited for almost a minute for Will to say something, he surprised himself with his level of endurance. But, when even after that the other boy was lost staring into nothingness, Nico realized that he must have scared him with the truth. Because, who would want to be friends with someone who didn't belong? Sure, when he had met Will during the war, the healer had assured him that he had friends at camp, but the other boy hadn't known the truth and now that he did, it didn't seem like he wanted to be friends anymore. Just his luck, Nico thought bitterly. The only persons that would accept him were the dead and his ex-crush and his ex-crush's girlfriend and a Roman Praetor known for her unfriendly attitude and his Roman half-sister whom he dragged back to life and… Ok. So maybe he had some friends, who accepted him for who he was. But, it still hurt him to see that Will didn't want to be friends. A part of his brain told him to wait and give the boy a chance, but the bigger part, the part that had made him run and hide before, told him to leave before the son of Apollo could break his heart, because yes, he admitted to himself… he had a massive crush on the blond haired boy.

Composing himself, Nico turned to walk away but was stopped by a hand on his arm. Will's hand, his brain rejoiced.

"Where are you going?" Will asked.

"I…uh… away?" Nico replied. His brain was short-circuiting thanks to Will's hand still being on his arm.

"Why?" Will was genuinely confused. Why would Nico walk… oh! "You didn't think that I would…you know…ignore you or something after this, did you?"

When his question was met with silence and Nico's turned away face, Will groaned, wanting to smack the younger boy for being so stupid. "You χαζό αγόρι (stupid boy)! I was getting my thoughts together, not being weirded out or whatever you thought I was doing."
Nico's eyes flew wide open in surprise and Will hissed in annoyance. "Honestly, di Angelo! For someone who can summon armies of dead and kill monsters without breaking a sweat, you are really stupid sometimes. Guess it's a child of big three thing, what with Percy and Jason being occasional dimwits." Taking a breath, he continued his rant, "Don't you get it? I am your friend. There is nothing, I mean literally nothing that you can tell me that will make me want to not be your friend. I was thinking about you…" Will trailed off as a couple of gods walked by. He pulled Nico into a more secluded corridor and continued, "I was thinking about how lost you must have felt when you were suddenly dropped into modern times. I was thinking about how you must have felt when your sister… No. I am not pitying you, I am empathizing with you. Because I know what it's like to lose siblings. But this is not about me." Will spoke in a softer tone. "Nico, I… I can't imagine what it must feel like being alone for all this time, having to go through so many things on your own. But, you don't have to from now on. We are your friends, you know. Me, Lou Ellen, Cecil, Katie, Butch, Kayla, the Stolls when they are not annoying the crap out of us. And you have your own friends – Percy, Annabeth, Jason, Hazel – them. There are so many of us who want to be your friend. Why is it so hard for you to accept that?"

"It's weird. I am weird." Nico spoke in a small voice. He had never so openly spoke about his feelings, except when he came out to Jason, Reyna, Percy and Annabeth. But that had been different. Being gay is him, just like being a son of Hades, but this… this was his insecurity. Will shook his head. "No. You want weird, Nico? Weird is Thalia dying and getting turned into a tree and coming back to life 6 years later. Weird is helping deliver a satyr baby named Chuck just before going into battle. Weird is having a mummy take a stroll in the forest to deliver prophesy. Weird is everything else that keeps happening in the camp, but you are not weird. You are someone who had to be hidden because your psychotic uncle wanted to kill you. You are just another person, like anyone else, trying to get by with what you have been given. You are a hero to so many of us at camp, especially when you came to war with an entire army of the dead." Will said with a smile. "Di Angelo, you are strong and brave, for all that you have gone through. The campers, they look up to you. They like you. I like…" Will trailed off as he realized what he was saying.

Nico narrowed his eyes, trying to detect any mocking in Will's rant, but he found none. Will was being genuine. Nico relaxed. He hadn't caught Will's slip. Nico smiled as he processed what Will had told him – he wasn't weird, at least Will didn't feel so and that was enough for him. He had other friends who didn't think he was abnormal. Will said that the other campers looked up to him, that they liked him. That Will liked… Oh Gods! Will liked him? Like a friend? Or… Nico was almost panicking now.

"Did you just say that you like me?" Nico asked, trying to squash his growing hope.

"Uh… yeah. You know… you are my… friend?" Will stammered. Crap! He was hoping Nico hadn't caught that. He was so not ready for this. No one except Kayla knew about this, in the demigod world at least.

"You don't sound so convinced." Nico replied. He was taking a chance… a big chance, but he didn't want this feeling of uncertainty inside him anymore. He had taken an indirect rejection from Percy before, he could handle a direct one from Will. Better to get it over with than to keep a hope in his heart.

"I…uh… yes?" Will stuttered, his heart rate having passed normal range some time ago.

"Hey, there you guys are!" Lou Ellen said. She and Butch were standing at the entrance of the corridor. "We have been searching for you both everywhere. Come on, there is nectar lemonade
and then we are going back to reading."

Will frowned. Just when he thought he could finally get to tell Nico, they had to be interrupted. Nico, on the other hand, was frozen with his mouth slightly open. Did Will just say that he liked him? Nico looked up at Will with a questioning look. Will smiled at Nico before telling their friends to go ahead and that they will be right behind.

The two started walking towards where the crowd was. Looking at Nico, Will asked, "Do you? You know like me? Like… like Percy likes Annabeth or… or Jason likes Piper or…"

"Yes." Nico blushed and whispered, then repeated it a little louder so that Will could actually hear him.

Will grinned. Oh thank the gods! He was about to say something when Travis crashed into him and said, "Will. Nico. Thank the gods! Come with me. Some nymph kidnapped Connor and won't let him go. Well, actually we might have pissed her off. But, come on…" With that he and Paolo pulled the two boys into the courtyard.

Meanwhile…

Percy and Annabeth were walking hand in hand when Athena appeared out of nowhere, literally nowhere and whisked away Annabeth, leaving behind a very confused Percy. Sighing, Percy walked to their original destination, a bench under the shade of a nymph-less tree. Percy smiled contently as he sat on the bench. After Tartarus, the smallest of things made him happy, things that he had never appreciated before. Like the warmth of the day, the shade under the tree, the light breeze, the chirping of birds and his favorite, the multitude of people walking and talking around him. People watching had recently become his new favorite pastime. He assumed it was because it kept reminding him that he wasn't down there and that he had made it out. It calmed him almost as much as the sea.

Percy looked around. He saw Katie talking with her mother, Will and Nico walking deeper into the palace, Clarisse and Reyna engaged in a hand to hand combat with Chris, Dakota, Butch and a couple of minor gods cheering them on. He saw Hecate show some kind of magic to Lou Ellen, which definitely scared the nearby tree nymphs. The hunters were talking among themselves as usual. Frank and Hazel were walking around, with Hades glaring at Frank for some time before he resigned himself to talking to Zeus and Hera.

Percy was abruptly brought out his thoughts as a nervous looking Jason sat down next to him.

"Whoa! You ok?" Percy asked him.

"Yeah… No…" Jason replied, looking all around them. "Thalia came and took Pipes away. Said that she wanted to talk sister to girlfriend or something like that."

"So? What's got you all worked up?"

"Knowing Thalia, she is going to tell every embarrassing baby story of me that she can remember."

"Actually, knowing Thalia, she is probably going to make up some stories."

"Not helping."

Percy put up his hands. "Ok. Ok. But seriously, don't worry. It won't be as bad as my mom telling every single detail of what I did as a baby to both Annabeth and Thalia."
Jason's eyebrows shot up. His own anxiousness forgotten. "Ooh! This I need to hear. Next time I see your mom I am definitely gonna ask her."

"No! That is not why I told you that."

"I am kidding. Maybe." Jason teased and Percy rolled his eyes. "Anyway, why are you sitting here alone?"

"Athena kidnapped Annabeth." Percy explained, trying to find his girlfriend in the crowd milling around them.

"That makes me feel better." Jason smiled, making Percy give him a side eye. "By the way," Jason said, changing topics, "why were Triton and Theseus laughing at you earlier when we were walking out of the throne room?"

"Ah!" Percy exclaimed, burying his face in his hands. "Triton told Theseus about how freaked out I was when his pet jelly fish, who is named 'tentacles' for some reason, woke me up."

"What?"

"Weird things happen under the sea."

"Huh!" Jason huffed. "Well, I woke up to Hera screaming at dad for having so many kids. I think it was because there are four of us living in the palace. Thalia was almost ready to electrocute her."

"That'll definitely wake anyone up."

The two boys sat in silence for some time till Jason remembered something that had happened earlier.

"Hey, are you… okay?" Jason asked.

"Yeah." Came the nonchalant reply. "Why do you ask?"

"Well, just something… you were kind of weirding me out earlier. Uh… when you went completely still but told me it's nothing."

"Oh." Percy said, leaning back on the bench. "I told you I just remembered something." After a while, Percy said, "A couple of years ago I sneaked out of camp to go on a quest that I wasn't supposed to go on. But, Mr. D caught me sneaking out." Seeing Jason's confused expression, Percy explained further. "He told me about why he hates demigods so much. You know the story of Ariadne's string?"

"Uh-huh. Theseus was going into the Labyrinth and Ariadne's string guided him, right?"

"Yeah. But it was more than that. You see, she could see through the mist, like my mom or Rachel. So, it was because of that she could guide Theseus in the Labyrinth. She gave up her whole life just to help him out and he promised her that he would take her back to Athens and make her his queen."

"I am guessing it didn't happen like that because Mr. D married her?"

"Yeah. Turns out he left her alone on Naxos, which happens to be sacred to Mr. D. He found her there, they fell in love and got married." Percy finished.

"Okay…" Jason didn't understand where this was going or why he was upset.
"Mr. D told me that… all heroes, every single one of them, are like that. They use and throw people. Hercules did that, Theseus did that and I am pretty sure Perseus must have done that sometime too."

"What are you getting at?" Jason was confused.

"Nothing. I was just thinking about it. That's all." Percy said. "I mean, all these heroes that we look up to, they all are just bad people. You don't just use others like that. People who give up everything for you, you don't just go around making their life difficult. You don't just forget them and leave them to fend for themselves. You don't just promise them and then go ahead and break that promise."

Jason was shocked at the amount of pain in Percy's voice. Looking at Percy, no one would have been able to tell that he was having such a serious discussion. His face was calm, or at least looked calm. The more Jason tried to decipher his cousin's expression, the more difficult it became, until he realized that the calm was just a façade and his real expression was unreadable. Even his eyes, which would always show others what he felt, were unreadable.

Why was Percy so affected by this? Jason thought. Did someone treat Percy like that? Did someone treat someone close to Percy like that? No, Percy would not care if he was treated like that… he would always help others… but if it was someone close to Percy, then he would have been angry or upset, not this… this… whatever he was currently.

"You are making me blush, Grace." Percy deadpanned and Jason realized that he had been staring at his cousin for quite some time.

"What's wrong with you?" As soon as the words left Jason's mouth, he swore he could see Percy's walls go up. "I mean I can't tell what's going on with you. In the morning you were fine and happy and now all of a sudden… I can't even tell."

"You ever sit on the beach and just stare at the sea?"

"Well, I am kind of scared of the sea. You know that."

"Dad won't hurt you unless you insult him." Percy said, then continued. "You should do that. Just stare at the sea, not insult dad. One minute it will be calm and the next it will stormy, but most of the time…"

"You can't decide what it is?" Jason asked. Just because he was scared of actually sitting near the sea, didn't mean he hadn't observed it from far.

"Hmm…"

Percy's walls were definitely up, Jason thought. But why? Then a crazy and impossible idea struck him. He had a feeling that when Percy was talking earlier, he was talking from a personal viewpoint. Was Percy feeling down because… he thought that he… no it cannot be. Percy would never willingly hurt a friend. But what if he had unknowingly hurt someone and now thought he was responsible? Jason felt like punching his pensive cousin, but resigned himself to just talking.

"Please tell me that you are not feeling like you are one of these heroes you were talking about." Jason said, pinching the bridge of his nose.

Percy raised his eyebrow, surprised that Jason had caught on, but stayed silent.

"Percy?"
"Jason." Percy sighed. It was easy opening up to his cousin. Even if they hadn't known each other for longer than two months, they had some kind of unknown kinship and understanding. They somehow had more similarities than differences. "I have done things that I am not proud of, ok? And I am not talking about what happened down there. Ever since that particular quest that I had gone on, I have hurt people."

"Unknowingly, I am sure." Jason said immediately. "Whatever you are thinking about, I am more than confident that you are just over thinking."

Percy was quiet for some time and Jason didn't know whether he would open up like he did the previous night. Then Percy spoke so quietly that Jason had to lean in to hear the words. "You don't unknowingly let someone die, or break a promise or leave someone all alone. You have too much faith in me, Grace. Don't keep it up. I'll let you down too."

The blond haired demigod could hear and feel the anguish in his cousin's words. "What do you mean? You have never let anyone of us down. Percy, for many of us, you have set standards…"

"No." Percy was appalled. "Don't say that. You don't want to be like me. Just don't."

"Why do you think like that? Talk to me, man."

"You should ask Nico. Or maybe Calypso." Percy said with finality. "The others are not even alive." Percy added bitterly, his voice catching on 'alive'.

Jason was silent. He had a feeling that their talk yesterday had only scratched the surface of how Percy felt. There was so much pain and suffering that his cousin had been carrying around. Jason realized that they were reading his cousin's adventures and quests from the time he was twelve. At the small age of twelve, when he had just been introduced to the world of gods and monsters, he had to stop a war from breaking out and deal with Kronos haunting his dreams. Who knows how much he had seen over the years? How many friends he had witnessed dying? And how many of them he thought that he was responsible for? If there was one thing Jason understood, it was feeling responsible for people under his command, especially if something happens to them while under his command. And Percy was the leader of the camp. Jason had heard stories of fallen heroes. Did Percy think that he was responsible for them? Jason knew just how easy it was to blame yourself and just how difficult it was to let go and accept that there was nothing that could have been done. He, himself was struggling with that. But Piper and Leo helped him let go. Did Percy even tell anyone, even Annabeth?

Think of the devil, the son of Jupiter thought. Annabeth, Thalia and Piper were walking towards them, holding some kind of glass. He knew he would not get to complete this conversation now. He decided to talk to Annabeth, Nico and maybe even Calypso later on.

Percy had schooled his features and had a huge grin on his face as he saw Annabeth. Both boys stood up to greet the girls and took the nectar lemonade that they had gotten for them.

"We have another five minutes before the reading starts again." Thalia informed them, then left the couples, to watch the still on-going combat between Reyna and Clarisse, which had gotten a lot more violent than the boys last noticed.

"Come on, walk with me." Annabeth said, taking Percy's hand and pulling him towards the shaded hallways of the palace.

"So, how was your talk with Jason?" Annabeth asked once they reached halfway across the courtyard.
Percy almost choked on his drink. "I… how do you know about that?"

"I am not stupid, seaweed brain. Piper suddenly comes and takes me to see her mom's shrine? She is not interested in shrines, I know that. And then you and Jason disappear for almost an hour and when you do come back, both of you look better. And now, don't think I didn't see you school your face."

Percy sighed. "There is no hiding from you is there, wise girl?"

They had reached an archway and sat down on the steps. "Nope. Now tell." Annabeth ordered, putting her head on Percy's shoulder and holding his hand.

"He is just… he is… we are just talking." Percy took a sip of the drink. "…about some troubles that I am having." He hadn't told Annabeth about the whole deserving to die thing, because he didn't want to scare her.

"Anything I can help with?" Annabeth asked, looking up at Percy from her position on his shoulder. She knew he needed to talk to someone else, someone other than her. Just like she talked to Piper, she knew he would talk to Jason. Not because they didn't want to talk to each other, but they didn't want to burden one another with more problems than they were already facing. They needed someone else… a fresh perspective into their problems. And Chiron had specifically asked them a number of times to talk to someone other than each other about their troubles, their nightmares and their feelings.

"I…" Percy ran a hand through his hair and then put the hand around Annabeth's shoulder, pulling her closer to him. "Just being close to you helps a lot, wise girl." Percy said truthfully. "But… I uh… I kind of have been having problems with… forgiveness." Percy concluded.

"Forgiving yourself?"

"Huh… yeah."

"Percy…" Annabeth said, elongating his name and saying it in a warning tone.

"Fine… about Nico and Calypso and Bob."

Annabeth understood what he meant. They had talked about this a couple of times. She realized that he couldn't forgive himself because he didn't know whether the others had forgiven him for being left alone and behind by him. She knew it wasn't Percy's fault. He hadn't even been aware of what he was doing. With Nico, the grudge that the son of Hades had held against Percy had convinced the older demigod that Nico would never forgive him. Hades! He even felt guilty for Nico's crush on him and not realizing it sooner that his presence was only making it tougher for Nico to move on.

Percy had told her that he felt guilty for leaving Calypso alone on her island even when he had promised her that he would get the gods to release her. Annabeth had a feeling that there was something more there, but every time she approached that topic, Percy would clam up and would be so close to breaking down that she didn't think it was the right time to ask about it when he was clearly suffering through so much more. But she hoped that Jason might be able to help Percy out.

Breathing out heavily through her nose, Annabeth said, "Can I suggest something? You should talk to them. Talk to Nico and Calypso. And then you will see that they don't have any grudges or bad feelings towards you."

"I…I don't think I can face them."
"You are already helping Nico out with his nightmares, why can't you let him help with yours?"

"Because I am supposed to be helping him out. I am supposed to take care of him. He is like my younger brother." Percy breathed out. He had promised Bianca that he would take care of Nico and by the gods he would follow up on that promise. No. Matter. What.

Annabeth pulled away from Percy and turned to face him and forced him to face her. "You know Sarah, my younger sister?"

"The fourteen year old who keeps on picking fights with cabin 10?"

"Yeah. That Sarah." Annabeth smiled. "She is younger than me, but she helps me out. With nightmares and when I am feeling down, she helps me smile. She and everyone else in my cabin. The thing is Percy, as much as I help her out with her studies and her own nightmares and whatever problems she may be facing, she helps me just as much." Taking a deep breath, she smiled. "Siblings and friends help each other. It doesn't matter who is supposed to take care of whom or who is older and who is younger. We all take care of each other. And for you, Jason and Nico and Thalia are those siblings/cousins who take care of each other. You are letting Jason help you, aren't you? Just let Nico help out too. You will feel better and so will they. Just like you feel better when you help them out."

Percy looked down and sighed. "Fine. I'll think about it."

"That's all I am asking, seaweed brain."

"You really are a wise girl."

"That was terrible." Annabeth made a face but pulled Percy forward to kiss him.

"Uh... umm... guys? Are you done sucking each other's faces off?" Connor rudely interrupted the happy couple after a few minutes. "Because we need to get back to reading."

Pulling back, Percy glared at Connor and then asked, "Why are you covered in leaves and bruises?"

"Wood nymphs." Connor growled and left. A few seconds later a chuckling Travis, Nico, Will and Paolo followed.

"Come on, seaweed brain. Let's go and see how the gods react to actual proof of Kronos rising." Annabeth got up and pulled Percy behind her.
(A/N - Disclaimer- I do not own Percy Jackson series or the Heroes of Olympus series. All characters and words in bold are owned by Rick Riordan and Hyperion Books for Children and Disney Hyperion. I do not intend to use the text from the books for any other purpose other than for this fanfiction and nor do I intend to make any sort of profit from the story. All rights go to the actual owner and not me. This is only a work of love for the series.)

Ch27 – TLT – Bribery and Friendship

Hecate waited for the demigods to settle down, before she started reading, "ANNABETH DOES OBEDIENCE SCHOOL"

"Huh?"

"Oh. This must be about Cerberus." Annabeth whispered to Percy.

"What is obedience school?" Athena asked, wondering what her daughter was doing in the middle of a quest.

"It's a training school for pets to get them to behave so that they can live with mortals. Like not to eat furniture or when to listen to instructions." Reyna explained as she put some nectar on a couple of wounds she had received during the combat. That daughter of Ares really knew how to fight. It didn't help that towards the end, both Ares and Enyo were cheering for their daughters and almost ended up fighting with each other.

"Pets?" Pan asked.

Grover spoke up. "Some mortals keep dogs, cats and a few other friendly animals as house pets, either for company or so that the animals don't have to stay out on the roads or both. Some mortals actually end up caring for their pets more than they care for their own children."

A lot of eyebrows went up at that. Mortals were undoubtedly crazy.

"But why is the girl doing this school thing on the quest?" Zeus asked.

"Oh, I think I know why." Hades said. When he saw his youngest brother look at him to explain, he added, "You should read to find out."

"We stood in ... NO LIVING."

"Not really into subtlety, are you brother?" Poseidon asked with a chuckle. He was getting nervous now that his son was about to descend into the Underworld. He didn't care whether for some weird reason his son didn't mind his older brother's realm, he was still going to be anxious till his son made it out.

"It was ... and an earpiece."

"If that is Charon, then he is not a guard. He is my ferryman and I am really interested as to why he let living souls inside." Hades growled out the last part, scaring one of Pan's exotic birds who was flying around near Hades' couch.
"I turned to my friends. "Okay. You remember the plan.'"

"It was a horrible plan, really." Grover said.

"Hey, we made it, didn't we? Don't be so cynical." Percy replied.

"'The plan,' ... think negative.'"

"Is that your mantra for every plan you ever make?" Thalia teased her cousin. She was back to sitting on the same couch as Percy, Annabeth, Jason and Piper. It was a bit of a squeeze, but none of them cared. She was pretty close with her annoying cousin, what with Percy being her second friend after Annabeth when she returned to life – which still weirded her out.

"I took the ... Grover a nudge."

"You were not supposed to see that!" Annabeth groaned as a few people laughed.

"'Oh, right!' he chimed in. "We got this far. We'll find the master bolt and save your mom. No problem.'"

All of the gods were thinking how much courage it must have taken three naïve children to take up this quest and go through with it till the end. They had no facts with them except that the bolt was missing and that they had to stop a war and descend into the Underworld.

"I looked at ... some Underworld butt.'"

Nico snorted thinking about when Percy had actually 'whupped some Underworld butt'. Hades raised his eyebrow in challenge – who did his nephew think he was? He had a feeling that Percy was going to be a major nuisance for him later on.

"We walked ... through their bodies."

Apollo whistled. "That is a lot of souls."

"Well, a lot of people die." Hades retorted, but he was upset. That seemed like more than the usual number. Do more mortals die in the future?

"The security guard's ... name is Chiron?"

Everyone groaned, while Chiron looked offended. "You should not have messed up his name." Persephone said. She wondered how Charon let the children live after such a blunder.

"He leaned across... "Mr. Charon," I said."

"That's pretty much how our mom taught us how to pronounce words." Travis said and Connor nodded, still picking out leaves from all over his body.

"'Well done.' ... Annabeth for support."

Chiron huffed. As if he liked being confused with that slimy ferryman.

"Why weren't you prepared for that question?" Athena frowned. It did not seem like the children had a good plan if they weren't even prepared for a simple question. Why did her daughter let that sea spawn plan? She should have known better. All the children of Poseidon were anomalies. They did not confirm to any type of category that the goddess had devised for all the gods and their
Poseidon and his children always kept on changing their behavior, making it difficult for her to put them in any particular category. They could be defiant one minute and cooperative the next. Their moods shifted faster than Aphrodite's favorite couple of the week and always left the wisdom goddess reeling. They weren't good strategists, Olympus no! But they were good at improvising – she had seen enough quests undertaken by the children of her arch-enemy to know that. They weren't intelligent but they were smart and she, for the immortal life of her, couldn't figure them out. And she hated not being able to figure something out. Hmm… maybe that's why she did not get along with Poseidon. In any case, Athena thought, her daughter should not have let the boy plan anything.

"I don't think they were really expecting politeness and a 'may I help you' in the Underworld." Hades said in a resigned manner.

Percy gave his uncle a sheepish smile and shrugged. No one really thought of Underworld as a respectful place.

"'We want to go the Underworld," she said."

The rulers of Underworld looked at the children in disbelief. If the children were planning to go undetected, they were doing a miserable job of it.

"Charon's mouth... over. "How did you die, then?'"

"Ah! He is onto you." Hades said gleefully. He loved seeing heroes come and fail at his doorstep.

"You guys better have a good answer to that." Nico said. He was really excited to see how the three made it into the Underworld.

"I nudged Grover."

"Uh-oh." Pan and Hermes said together. Satyrs could not lie. The demigods should have known that by now. Hades was grinning maniacally.

Hecate read the next line in her mind and started laughing, scaring everyone in the room. She put one hand up while she tried to control herself. When she was red in face from holding back the laughter, the read, ""Oh," he said. "Um ... drowned ... in the bathtub.""

There was an uproar of laughter and disbelief in the throne room. Everyone, including Zeus and Hera were laughing.

"Ok. I can tell a better lie than that and I am the god of truth…I can't lie!" Apollo said, trying to control his laughter.

"Grover! How did you even come up with that?" Thalia asked a blushing Grover.

Poseidon was nervously laughing. How did his son manage to get entry into the Underworld? Nothing seemed to be going as what they must have planned.

"We weren't exactly expecting a 'how did you die'." Percy said, still chuckling.

When everyone calmed down, the goddess of magic started reading, "'All three of you?' Charon asked. We nodded."
"Big bathtub." Charon looked mildly impressed.

"Has Charon really gotten that stupid or is he just stringing them along?" Persephone asked.

"For his sake, he better be stringing them along." Hades replied.

"'I don't suppose ... 'I'm dead.'"

A few of the gods and demigods chuckled at Percy's dry and straightforward answer.

Hades was almost giddy with anticipation to see what Charon would do now. The ferryman did not like being messed around with.

"Charon leaned forward and took a sniff. "You're not dead. I should've known. You're a godling."

"Is he just figuring that out?" Persephone asked in disbelief.

"What happened to him? He is definitely brighter than that… I think… I hope." Hades said, deciding to instruct his ferryman to check each soul properly before letting them in.

"'We have to ... deep in his throat."

Hades smirked and Poseidon glowered at him. His child was in trouble and all his brother could think about was his employee getting angry at the said child! Admitted that Percy was trying to sneak into Hades' realm, but still… some compassion might be nice.

"Immediately, all ... their wristwatches."

"Ah, yes. Charon has that effect on any soul that he hasn't delivered yet. You better not be making him angry, lest he sets the souls to attack you." Hades said with barely contained glee. He was never present whenever any hero tried to get into his domain. To hear about it was like a dream come true… a very distant dream, but still.

"'Leave while ... braver than I felt."

"Good job." Hermes said to Percy. "For your sake, I hope you know how to bribe properly. That's one way you can get inside."

Even Poseidon hoped that his son could bribe. As much as he didn't want any of his children to get any negative habits, not that his hoping helped any, but this seemed like the only way Percy could get inside the Underworld.

"Charon growled again—a deep, blood-chilling sound. The spirits of the dead started pounding on the elevator doors."

"Bribe now." Hermes said as if giving a tutorial.

"'It's a shame, ... bought, godling? ...'"

Hades smiled nervously. He hoped that Charon wouldn't fall for the money. But he knew it was hopeless. Taking money for passage was in his nature, regardless of who was giving him the money. As long as he got his adequate amount and then some, he would let them pass.

"'...Eh ... just out of curiosity, how much have you got there?""
Hades groaned and shook his head. His ferryman really needed to be reminded not to let the living pass, no matter the money.

Hypnos smiled at his brother's antics. He did always like his money.

"A lot," I said. "I bet Hades doesn't pay you well enough for such hard work."

"Hey!" Hades said indignantly. "I do pay him enough. He gets to keep one-fifth of whatever he earns."

"Umm… one-fourth now." Nico told his father. "You had to increase his pay when he kept annoying you."

"One-fourth!" Hades almost shouted. "And he still wants more!"

"Oh, you … this come cheap?"

Hades growled and Hypnos feared for his brother. "What does he want a pay raise for?" Hades scowled. Charon was always complaining about his job. Humph!

Nico smirked. When Hades would remember all this in their time, Charon was going to get an earful. Nico didn't care for the ferryman much. He always treated the demigod with disdain, even though he had to be polite.

"You deserve … coin on the counter."

The Stoll brothers whistled. "He is better than us in bribery." Chris said, looking at Percy in awe. The three sons of Hermes were just staring at Percy, unnerving the son of Poseidon. Hermes himself was mildly impressed. The boy had skills… now only if he could hone them.

"You will be good at making deals." Hermes told Percy. Percy and Annabeth smiled as they reminisced about the deal Percy made with Hermes to send them to Paris in exchange for finding the Caduceus.

"Charon glanced down at his silk Italian jacket, as if imagining himself in something even better."

"Oh gods! You are the reason he keeps talking about getting a pay raise to buy more suits." Nico groaned. He had heard enough about the different types of suits to be able to recite in his sleep.

Percy looked at Nico in confusion. The younger boy had spoken more in the past few minutes than he had spoken all day. Sure, they were talking about underworld, one of his favorite topics, but still. Then he noticed how close Nico and Will were sitting. He hoped that they had talked to each other. It was kind of obvious to him that they both liked each other. If anyone deserved to happy, it was Nico, Percy thought and smiled.

"He wants a raise to buy clothes?" Hades looked puzzled. What had happened to his employee?

"He is obsessed with clothes." Nico informed his dad.

"I must say, … talking to Hades."

"You better not!" Hades said. As it is Charon protested too much, he did not need a demigod talking on the ferryman's behalf.
"He sighed. ... "Come along."

Poseidon sighed. One hurdle down, who knows how many more to go. Amphitrite patted her husband's arm. He was too tensed for something that had already happened. She didn't understand why he would be like this when he knew that his son had gone through so much worse than Underworld. She liked Percy, but she also knew that the demigod was sitting in front of her, so there was no need to worry. But, she supposed, it was a father's worry for his son and that did not need a valid reason to be present.

"We pushed ... thousand years. Understand?"

"That does not seem fair." Rachel said.

"Well, nothing is fair, not life and certainly not death." Hades said solemnly. "If it was, no one would die young and no one would be mistreated in life and there would be no need for many of us here."

"He shut the ... where you're going."

Athena frowned. She did not like Charon talking to her daughter that way.

"'We'll get out alive," I said."

"That's the spirit." Someone said.

"'Ha." ...death and despair."

"Just out of curiosity," Will whispered to Nico, the sudden closeness increasing his heart rate, "do you change appearance when you go the Underworld?"

"No! That's only for the dead and the residents." Nico whispered back, looking at Will weirdly, till he realized that Will was laughing at him and scowled.

"That's scary." Gwen shivered, remembering when she had met Charon. At least he had been in his normal form and not the scary-ferryman-slash-skeleton form.

"He saw me ... through to his skull."

"Stop being so descriptive." Someone murmured.

Hades smiled. That was his ferryman, he thought proudly. He wondered if his nephew was scared yet or not. He better be!

"The floor kept ... a wooden barge."

Everyone was listening carefully. Much like under the sea, they did not know what was there in the Underworld and though none would actually like to go there, they were still curious. Hades and Persephone and any minor god who served in the Underworld wanted to know what it looked like in the future.

"Charon was ... with gilt edges."

"What?" Hades shouted. "Is that River Styx?"

"Yes." Nico told his father.
All the gods were worried. Even Styx had not been spared from pollution? Why was it so polluted? A river of the Underworld should not be so dirty.

Percy shuddered as he remembered taking a dip in the river.

""The River Styx," ... if you ask me.""

"That's horrible." Tyche said. Why would the mortals give up on their dreams and wishes? Shouldn't they be working towards it rather than throwing them away? Did they need more luck in their lives?

"Mist curled off ... they were dead."

"Obviously." Hades drawled. He was glad that his nephew finally felt the fear that was apt for stepping into the Underworld. His happiness almost cancelled out the glare he was receiving from his younger brother, who looked calm on the surface but Hades knew – as he always did with Poseidon – that he was torn between ensuring that his son was ok and hitting Hades.

Hercules listened to all the details with rapt attention. If he was going to go there for some reason, he should know as many details as possible, the hero thought. He forgot that the Fates had said that all of the memories of the reading would be lost till their deaths or till the heroes reached back to their time – whichever applicable to them.

"Annabeth grabbed... alive on this boat."

"Could have held goat boy's hand." Thalia teased her best friend.

"Shut up." Annabeth playfully punched Thalia's arm.

"I found myself muttering a prayer, though I wasn't quite sure who I was praying to. Down here, only one god mattered, and he was the one I had come to confront."

Hades was now grinning like a madman, his eyes glinting with an almost maniacal gleam. Persephone saw this and nudged her husband to behave properly. Reluctantly, Hades composed himself to show indifference.

"The shoreline ... you, godlings."

"How did you get past Cerberus? Charon was easy..." Hades mumbled. His pet was no ordinary guard dog and would not or rather should not listen to anyone else other than him and the royal family.

"The bottom of ... in his gray robe."

"It's terrible when the young die." Hebe remarked.

"Charon said, 'I'd wish you luck, mate, but there isn't any down here. Mind you, don't forget to mention my pay raise.'"

"Yes. I cannot help you in Lord Hades' domain." Tyche said.

"He is still going on about his pay raise?" Hades asked, annoyed at Charon, for not only letting living souls inside his domain but also having the audacity to ask for pay raise on top of it all.

"He counted ... Jersey Turnpike."
"What?" Hades asked. He did not understand a word of the description.

"That's a surprisingly accurate description." Nico told his cousin. Then addressing his father, Nico explained, "He just means that it's extremely huge and crowded."

Everyone was shocked. The Underworld was crowded?

"There were ... ghouls like Charon."

"There are metal detectors and security cameras in the Underworld?" Connor asked.

"Yup. To make sure that no one carries unauthorized magical items or weapons." Nico replied.

"The howling of ... nowhere to be seen."

"You can only see him if you are dead or close to death." Hades said.

"The dead ... against them."

"Yeah. The 'Attendant on duty' lines are to the judgement pavilion. But, the attendants don't do any work. They just sit and gossip and read magazines." Nico said. It felt good to know something that not many did.

Hades nodded. So, he finally divided them. As of now, there was only one line and all had to go through the judgement. But, it had been getting a bit annoying for the past few years and he had been meaning to open up new lines for some time now.

"'There's a... 'Harsh,' I said."

"Ooh. That is harsh." Butch said.

"I don't really like Kansas." Jason said and he and Percy snickered while Piper rolled her eyes.

"King Minos?" the heroes of old and Dionysus and Ariadne said. They were after all, all related to the king.

"Yeah." Nico said bitterly. Minos had misled him and made him push away all his possible friends. "I hate Minos."

When he offered no explanation, Hecate continued to read, "'Not as harsh as that,' Grover muttered. "Look."

A couple of black-robbed ghouls had pulled aside one spirit and were frisking him at the security desk."

"A special case, I presume." Hades said, looking every bit the king of Underworld that he was. A few gods instinctively moved backwards.

"The face of ... went off a cliff."

"I did not understand most of the things that were said." Hades said in a confused voice before it changed to a sinister tone and he said, "But he definitely deserves my special attention."

"You are scaring everyone again, dear." Persephone whispered to Hades, who noticed that everyone was looking at him warily. He sighed. It's not like he could help it. It would be like
telling Poseidon to not compare everything to the sea or telling Zeus to not make it thunder after every few sentences that he spoke.

"I said, "What're... with anticipation."

"Well, you did only kill her twice." Hades said sarcastically.

"'But if he's ... enormous shadowy monster.'"

"Hmm… You are finally close to death." Hades said. Poseidon clenched his fists and hoped that nothing happened to his son.

"I hadn't ... straight at me."

"He sounds terrifying." Perseus said.

"He is supposed to be terrifying." Hades retorted.

"My jaw hung open. All I could think to say was, 'He's a Rottweiler.'"

"What?!" came a dozen shouts from the demigods.

"I'd always... had three heads."

"Of course..." Travis drawled sarcastically.

"You know, I always wondered why you said that." Annabeth said.

"You were thinking about his breed?" Leo asked.

"The dead ... to being dead."

Hades and Nico nodded as if someone had asked them that.

"The dog's middle ... quite so small. 'A plan.'"

"It was a horrible plan." Grover said. "We would have died because of the plan."

"Ok! I know. I am not allowed to make any more plans if we go to the Underworld again." Percy said.

"Just so that we are sure." Grover teased and Percy stuck out his tongue at his best friend.

"We moved ... translates, exactly."

"It really liked to cuss." Grover said.

"Sounds like Arion to me." Percy said. That horse really needed his mouth to be cleaned with soap water.

"My Arion?" Poseidon asked, thinking about when he last saw his son. That horse was a free spirit more than any of the sea god's children.

"Umm… yes. He likes Hazel, eating gold and insulting people." Percy told his dad.
Poseidon nodded. That definitely sounded like Arion.

"I took the ... about to die."

"Wow! Just... just wow!" Nico said and Hades laughed. This would probably irritate Cerberus more than endear him.

"How are you even alive?" Leo asked.

"'Hey, Big Fella,' I called up. 'I bet they don't play with you much.'"

"Yes, we do. And what do you think the hellhounds are for?" Persephone said. She loved Cerberus.

"GROWWWLLLL!"

"Good boy," I said weakly."

"That's your fatal mistake," Hades said. "You have to be confident in front of him, because he can smell hesitation and fear and then he will kill you."

"My kore had to be kidnapped by a crazy mad god!" Demeter mumbled and her daughter rolled her eyes.

"I waved the... in the River Styx."

Nico was shaking with silent laughter while many were laughing outright at Percy's bad luck. "First of all, Cerberus doesn't play fetch." Nico said, catching his breath. "He cannot leave his position. If you want to play with him you need to stay near the gates."

"Point taken." Percy replied. "How about the next time that I need to go there, I'll take you."

"No. I already got grounded the last time. Never doing that again." Nico replied. Getting grounded always meant helping Hades out with the buckets load of work that came with being the ruler of Underworld. And Nico hated the paperwork – he would rather hang around in the Fields of Punishment.

"Now, why are you helping him sneak in?" Hades asked his son. Did no one care for the rules of the Underworld – No living allowed?

"We needed some help for the war." Nico replied.

Percy scoffed and muttered, "Yeah, because that was the only reason." But he smiled and shook his head at Nico when the younger demigod looked upset. "Not your fault." Percy mouthed to Nico, who finally nodded.

"Cerberus glared at ... he's hungry.""

"Now would be the time that you run?" Theseus asked Percy.

"You cannot outrun Cerberus." Hades said.

"Between Percy's ideas and Hades' comments, I am going to get a heart attack." Poseidon mumbled to his wife.
"You'll be fine." Amphitrite assured her husband, but she herself was getting a bit worried as to how Percy would be able to enter if Cerberus wants to kill them.

"'Wait!' Annabeth ... WATERLAND, DENVER, CO."

"What is that going to do?" Apollo asked.

"That is too small for Cerbie to play with." Persephone said. "And that is only if you manage to get him to listen to you."

"Before I could ... Cerberus? Sit!'"

"And that is how you get Cerberus to listen to you. You have got to be confident." Hermes said. He had played with Cerberus many a times when he had gone to deliver some or the other message to his uncle.

"Cerberus looked ... Milkbone dog biscuit."

"I love your confidence in me, seaweed brain."

"But instead, Cerberus ... let out of tires."

Hades and Persephone raised their eyebrows, while Athena looked pleased with her daughter being able to tame a beast such as Cerberus.

"What happens to the spirits who got crushed?" Will asked his maybe-boyfriend. He still needed to ask him.

"They just appear somewhere else in the line." Nico smiled at Will and hoped that all this talk of Underworld wasn't creeping the son of Apollo out. It was an integral part of Nico's life. But Will only looked somewhat interested rather than creeped out.

"Annabeth said, ... it.'" Annabeth ordered."

Hades looked mildly impressed with Annabeth's tactics. If she got the three headed dog to listen to her a second time, then he would be eating out of her hand for his entire immortal life.

"Cerberus's heads ... spit all over it."

"Ew!" Rachel exclaimed.

"Just like Mrs. O'Leary." Tyson smiled toothily. He loved his brother's pet hellhound.

"She turned toward... on the dog."

"You would need that tone to be used on you, kelp head." Thalia teased her cousin, then ducked when he tried to hit her.

Hestia smiled at the children. At least they were getting along and not letting the differences between their fathers separate them and turn them towards each other. Now, only if her brothers could behave like that. She had noticed that the three had stood together and talked for some time during the previous night's dinner. She hoped that the reading might just bring them closer to one another.

"Grover and I ... I'm pretty sure... ."
"And now you have got Cerbie's undying friendship." Persephone told Annabeth. "If you ever come to the Underworld, he would only have to smell you and he will remember you as a friend."

"Do not encourage them." Hades told his wife.

"But, they are so brave!"

Hecate ignored the argument that the couple were about to get into and read, "Grover and I walked between the monster's legs.

Please, Annabeth, I prayed. Don't tell him to sit again."

"Seriously?" Annabeth rolled her eyes at her boyfriend's antics.

Percy grinned sheepishly and said, "It was a genuine concern, ok?"

"We made it ... the metal detector."

"Oh good." Poseidon and Athena let out their breaths in relief. Another hurdle down. Now they just needed to find Hades' palace and face a very annoyed and angry Lord of the Dead. Easy.

"Now, you will get caught." Nico said.

"But didn't they already pass Cerberus. Now what?" Lou Ellen asked.

"They have to walk through the metal detectors because there is no way around it and then they will get caught because they have magical items with them." Nico explained. Hades grinned. So, he had increased security. Good.

"'How did you ... tears in her eyes.'"

Hades was surprised. The daughter of Athena actually liked to play with Cerberus?

"'When I was ... to look at us.'"

"He sounds cute." Will said.

"He is. Really playful too." Nico replied. He wondered if Will would someday like to go meet Cerberus. Nico was sure he could get his dad to agree for Will to come, although he might have to offer to do some of the paperwork.

"Cerberus panted ... to us. "Let's go.""

"You liked the giant three headed guard dog of the Underworld?" Dakota asked, his eyes wide with disbelief.

"Yeah." Annabeth smiled a sad smile.

Greeks were weird, the Romans decided. Then again they didn't expect Cerberus to behave as a normal pet dog, or Charon to be obsessed with clothes or the gods to be so carefree – well much more than their Roman persona. They realized that the Greeks were a family – a giant, rowdy, dysfunctional family, but a family nonetheless. The Romans had always been a militant people. But, together they would make a formidable enemy – with the Greeks’ passion for their messy family and their independence mixed in with Romans' need for discipline and control.
"Grover and I ... from the Furies."

"I hope you guys don't get caught." Travis said.

"Regardless of whether they get caught or not, they will end up coming to me." Hades said with a smirk.

Poseidon relaxed. Well, not completely. But at least now the children will be going to Hades – the whole reason they had gone through so much. They would be safe. Or, as safe as anyone could be while meeting an angry Hades.

"Grover murmured, "Well, ... attention once in a while.""

Everyone thought about that. No one actually cared much for the monsters, even the friendly ones and especially if they belonged to the Underworld. The gods and demigods looked at Hades. They had never cared much for Hades either, once he had been exiled to Underworld. Was that the reason for his bitterness? That no one, including his own family – the one he grew up with inside his father's belly – cared for him? Just because he ruled over the Underworld? That would make anyone bitter and hold on to a grudge for eternity. Most of the gods decided to change their behavior towards the ruler of the dead and his children.

Hades looked at Percy. He could not figure out the child. How had his nephew figured out that everyone needed attention and love, even in the darkest place? Hmm... the child was unique. Maybe it was because of his different perspective that he had helped Hades get recognition from his family.

Will looked at Nico's faraway expression and realized that maybe this was the reason that he didn't feel welcome in the camp. Because the gods had shunned his father, maybe he too thought that the other campers would not care for him. The son of Apollo decided to prove it to Nico that no one cared who his parent was. He was a demigod and that was all that mattered to the campers.

"I thought about ... his new friend."

"Wow. You really like Cerberus." Nico stated. Maybe he could get his dad to agree to get Annabeth to the Underworld. Cerberus did need someone to play with him time and again. He wondered if Annabeth would like this plan.

"He reminded me of my Doberman." Annabeth said. And it's really hard not to get attached to dogs, even if they are huge and scary and have three heads, she thought. As long as they were not trying to kill her, she could get attached to them.

"Ok. That was it for this chapter." Hecate said, passing the book to Nemesis.

Zeus scowled. There was nothing in this chapter about his bolt. When were they going to find it? The children had less than a day for the summer solstice to begin.
The truth shall set you free

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Ch28 – TLT – The truth shall set you free

Nemesis read out, "WE FIND OUT THE TRUTH, SORT OF"

"Finally." Athena said.

Zeus nodded. It was high time the children found his bolt and returned it to him. Hades on the contrary was relieved that now everyone would understand that he did not take the bolt. Despite everyone having already agreed on the fact that he did not have the bolt, he would feel better if it was properly revealed. He also had a feeling that something of his was missing and he wanted to know what exactly had happened.

"Imagine the largest ... never start."

"Fields of Asphodel." Persephone gasped. The description of a large field filled with whispering people sounded exactly like the Fields of Asphodel. But this description somehow seemed to be bigger than the current size.

"How big is a football field? How big is this place that you are describing?" Zeus asked his nephew. This was a description of his brother's empire and Zeus was interested in knowing just how big it really was. Hades always complained about the work load, but was it really that much? After all, how much trouble could the dead be – they were dead!

"Umm… The Fields of Asphodel would probably be a hundred thousand times this throne room?" Percy looked at Nico for confirmation.

"Almost…maybe a bit more… and it is completely filled with spirits. There is not much space to move around." Nico said, remembering all the times he went to stroll in the Fields, only to find himself suffocating in the swarm of spirits.

Hades looked worried. How many people have died for it to be such a crowded place?

Most gods tried and failed to imagine such a huge place. So many subjects would definitely mean a lot of work. They felt that maybe Hades had been right about complaining about the amount of work he had in his domain.

"If you can ... size of booster rockets."

Everyone listened with interest as the description was read out. It sounded like a depressing place to be. But then again, death was depressing. No wonder the Lord of the Dead was always in a foul mood.

"You don't have to worry about them falling, you know. That only happens when dad gets angry or if the Furies go and loosen one of them up." Nico said nonchalantly.
He looked at Will, trying to see his reaction to Nico's home, but Will only looked interested in knowing what the place looked like. Nico was scared that all these descriptions would show Will that he belonged to such a sad and dark place and maybe the healer would think that Nico wasn't worth being with. Will chose that moment to turn and look at Nico and smile at him, reassuring the younger boy to some extent.

"Annabeth, Grover, ... just sad."

Hades nodded. Most people and gods shied from the dead, thinking that the ghosts and spirits would be frightening. What no one understood was that they were just gloomy. Many of them had been taken before they could reach old age and because everyone craved interaction, all they wanted was someone to talk to. But the only ones who could talk to the dead were the other spirits – who were not good listeners at all – and Hades and his children. The Lord of the Dead realized that his nephew was actually paying attention to his subjects and soaking up the place, as if on a tour, rather than just barge into the palace and demand something. None of the other mortals or even gods who came down to the Underworld stopped to look at anything – they were too scared to, not knowing what they would find.

The other gods thought over this. They knew that each god represented their domain in some aspect. That way, Zeus was always sharp and on the defense, ready to attack at any moment; Poseidon was ever changing in his behavior, much like the sea; Apollo was mostly positive, like the sun and his music; Ares was harsh and rowdy, like the untamed side of wars; Aphrodite looked and seemed innocent and pretty but was in reality unforgiving and all consuming, just like madness of love; and so on. So, what if Hades too, reflected his domain? They all had until now categorized him as a fearsome tyrant, but what if he was sad too and not completely scary?

"We crept along... Newly Deceased!"

"That's oddly cheerful."

"Out the back... don't want to describe."

"How is listening to music torture?" Apollo asked. He was offended that his uncle would use the sun god's domain as a form of torture.

"It is if the music is opera." Will told his father. He hated opera music.

"It is horrible enough to drive away Stymphalian birds." Annabeth said, remembering when they had used Chiron's CD collection to do just that.

"Huh." Apollo was confused. Why was such music then created?

"The line coming... to go when I died."

The demigods sighed in happiness. That was their goal – to reach Elysium and maybe even Isle of the Blest.

"It sounds wonderful." Piper said in a dreamy state. All the troubles they had to go through, everything, it all led to just this one place. Every demigod's ultimate dream – to achieve Elysium and if they are lucky enough – The Isle of the Blest.

While the demigods smiled and dreamed about their afterlife, their immortal parents frowned. They knew that their demigod children did not live long, but to actually see living children dreaming about afterlife was jarring. No parent should have to live without their child and yet the
The demigods nodded. Nico smiled as he thought about all of their friends who were finally happy in Elysium. Even though the half-bloods would prefer their friends and siblings to be alive, they were happy that at least after death, the heroes could find contentment. They definitely deserved it.

"But I thought ... was depressing."

"It really is." Persephone commented.

"We left the ... waiting for us."

"They would have been notified of your arrival, so yes, they were probably waiting for you to come to the palace." Hades said.

"I suppose it's ... back in the grass."

"What?" Hermes blurted. "There is no magic there that should affect the shoes." He was confused. His sandals never misbehaved in the Underworld and the base magic of his sandals and the shoes he gave his son should be same.

Annabeth whispered, "Oh no." Both she and her boyfriend mentally prepared themselves to hear about Tartarus in some time.

Percy reached over the armrest of his couch to tap Nico's hand and quickly told him what would happen so the son of Hades could also be mentally prepared to hear about Tartarus. Percy had a
feeling that it might affect Nico more as he was in Underworld when he got sucked into the pit.

"'Grover,' Annabeth ... him away from us."

Hermes scowled at the book. This was not supposed to happen. The shoes should not be able to fly without the magic word. Something was gravely wrong.

"'Maia!' he yelled, but the magic word seemed to have no effect."

Instantaneously everyone was on alert. If the magic word did not work on the shoes, then...

"Someone or something is messing with the magic of the shoes." Hecate said and Hermes nodded. That seemed to be the most probable answer. The shoes never ever malfunctioned.

"'Maia, already! ... at full speed."

"Yeah, not easy at all." Grover mumbled, keeping an eye on his friends and checking on Percy through the empathy link.

"Grover tried ... the opposite direction."

All of a sudden, Hades and Persephone sat up straighter, a look of panic on their faces. Hades looked at Nico and saw that he was trying to appear calm but his hands were clenched tightly.

"What is it, Hades?" Poseidon asked in worry. His son was supposed to go straight to his uncle, so what was happening now? And why did his brother look so worried?

"Uhh... on the right side of the palace is an entrance to... umm... the pit." Hades explained, still concentrating on his son.

Everyone else quickly caught on and Hestia enveloped the room in a calm and homely energy so that the three demigods could feel safe. She didn't know whether they would be affected by the words of the book but she didn't want to take any chances.

Nemesis read on, "The slope got ... stalactites above."

Nico stiffened. This was the same entrance that he had fallen through. Will felt the son of Hades tense and quickly held one of his clenched fists, which had the desired effect of momentarily flustering the younger boy and making him push back the feelings of despair. Nico looked at their joined hands and blushed but didn't pull back. He knew he needed this support.

"'Grover!' I yelled, ... size of a city block."

Nico gave an involuntary whimper as he recalled going near the cavern in the hopes of reaching the doors of death and then being pulled into... He frantically searched for something to ground him till he spotted Will's hand stroking his. He hadn't even felt the action. Without thinking, he immediately grabbed the other's hand and concentrated on it. Under normal circumstances he would have been embarrassed, but now he just wanted something, anything to calm him down. Will's hand was warm and darker than Nico's and this calmed him. A warm hand meant a person next to him and he did not have that luxury in the pit. He had been all alone and scared and... no... concentrate on the hand Nico, the son of Hades scolded himself. And so he played with Will's hand, focusing on the warmth and the unfamiliarity, tracing the palm lines and a faint birthmark on his wrist. Slowly but surely, he felt himself calming down as he continued to hold Will's hand.

Annabeth closed her eyes tightly but opened them just as soon, as she realized that closing her eyes
only gave her a mental picture of the pit. She felt Percy pull her closer till there was absolutely no space between them. Trying to get her mind off the images flashing in her mind, the wisdom's daughter started tracing patterns on Percy's jean clad thighs. She focused on the patterns as if she could see them and soon began to trace the blueprints of a new cabin at camp and lost herself in her imaginary designs as she heard Nemesis reading in the background, but she didn't listen to it.

Percy was zeroed in on the hearth and feeling of calmness that came from relaxing at home, when he heard Nico whimper in fear and subconsciously pulled Annabeth closer to him. He quickly turned to see whether Nico needed any sort of help but the son of Apollo had beat him to it. Once Percy was sure that Nico would be alright, he checked up on Annabeth, who was busy tracing what suspiciously felt like blueprints on his thigh. He looked up to see similar sea green eyes looking at him in worry. The son slightly shook his head to communicate that he was fine to his father and tuned back to Nemesis reading out his life.

"Grover was ... get to him in time."

"What?" Hermes sounded like he was choking. "Why are the shoes dragging Grover there?"

"It might be explained later on, Lord Hermes." Grover told the god of thieves.

"What saved ... back up the slope."

"Oh, thank the gods." Thalia breathed out and turned to check if her friends were alright. Percy was staring into the hearth again, Annabeth had moved on to tracing lines on Percy's arm and Nico was holding hands with Will. Thalia did a double-take at that. She hadn't known that Nico…well, as long as he was happy and he did seem happy. Thalia wasn't close to the son of Hades, having met him only a couple of times, the longest being when she had first met him and his sister, but she knew that his life hadn't been easy and she was happy that finally most of the demigods were able to find happiness, even in the aftermath of a war.

"The other winged shoe tugged itself off, circled around us angrily and kicked our heads in protest before flying off into the chasm to join its twin."

Percy had a small lopsided smile on his face as he remembered getting kicked by a flying shoe. Ah! His life was most certainly the definition of weird.

"We all ... I said. "Listen."

"No, don't." Hades said. "You should never listen to what it says. If you do, it will drag you down."

"I heard ... from the pit."

All of them were on edge by now. It was clear to most that Kronos or whatever that was in the pit was trying to get the children's attention, maybe to do something for him. But what? If the children had the bolt with them, it was understandable that he would try to convince them to give him the bolt. But something was odd.

"Grover sat ...

"Magic," I said.

"Definitely the Titan Lord or one of the other titans or primordial." Hecate said. They were the only ones who could speak the language of magic. Even amongst the gods, only the older ones could understand it.
Zeus was getting nervous. Where his bolt was and what did his father want from the children?

"'We have ... into the Fields of Asphodel.'"

They all let out a sigh of relief. At least the children were safe. But what just happened only proved that something, if not Kronos (because the gods wanted to be in denial) was stirring in the pit and it had wanted the children or the something from them.

Nico slumped into his couch as he heard that they were out of there. He felt exhausted just by thinking about it. He felt Will nudge him slightly and whisper-ask him 'You ok?' Nico looked up at Will and nodded and turned pink when he realized that they were still holding hands, but neither of the boys tried to pull away. Instead, the son of Hades turned to look at the couple on the next couch and found that they too were ok. Percy turned at that moment to check up on him and gave him a knowing smile. Nico turned away and groaned internally. He had a feeling that he would not hear the end of this, at least in the days to come.

"The wind ... grove. "One of Hades's pets?!"

"I wish."

"Annabeth and I... me that feeling."

Athena raised her eyebrow and thought that the boy was smart. Oh well, as smart as a child of Poseidon could be.

"I was almost relieved to turn my back on that tunnel and head toward the palace of Hades. Almost."

"Compared to that place... you should be." Hades mumbled.

"The Furies circled the parapets, high in the gloom. The outer walls of the fortress glittered black, and the two-story-tall bronze gates stood wide open."

Still shaken up from the unexpected and horrifying turn of events, everyone listened closely to the description of Hades' palace. The palace of the god of riches had to be magnificent, they thought, even if it was in the Underworld – the gloomiest place.

"Up close, I ... that had come true."

"Or would come true." Apollo said. He had helped in the carving... well, not really... he had just informed Hades of any prophesy involving mass death in the future. Once all prophesies carved came true, he would reveal the next batch of prophesies, if any. If they were lucky, the carved prophesies would carry on for centuries or even a millennia and they would not have to deal with more pain and suffering.

"These are new..." Hades said. He and Persephone listened intently as the palace was being described.

"Inside the ... all smiling grotesquely."

Persephone smiled. She loved the garden, although it was a bit different now.

"In the center ... able to leave."
"Exactly!" Demeter cried out. "Why did you have to eat anything he gave you, kore?"

Persephone rolled her eyes as Hades glowered at Demeter. They had had this conversation one too many times.

"I pulled Grover ... down here."

"No. Not really." Hades said sarcastically.

"That is a lot of black in one place." Aphrodite commented.

"Well my palace is not going to be multicolored, now is it?" Hades retorted. He was justly defensive of his palace.

"Every side ... door salesmen."

"The doors are guarded by marines holding grenade launchers?" Clarisse asked. "That's awesome. Cabin 5 is going to take that up."

Hades grinned. At least somebody appreciated a part of his palace... even if it were the guards and even if it was by a daughter of Ares.

"No." Chiron admonished. "Cabin 5 already has hidden land mines and barbed wire and assortments of fatal traps. I am not letting anyone get their hands on a grenade launcher."

The Stolls and Chris exchanged looks. They needed to hide their cabin's stash of dangerous weapons, including a bazooka and a grenade launcher.

"What is a door to door salesman?" Hermes asked.

"People who go from house to house, trying to sell things. They can get really annoying." Travis replied.

"Grover, you think about the weirdest of things at the worst of times." Thalia told her old friend.

"My backpack weighed a ton now. I couldn't figure out why. I wanted to open it, check to see if I had somehow picked up a stray bowling ball, but this wasn't the time."

"Why does he keep mentioning the weight of his bag?" Athena asked. What was wrong with the bag? Wait a minute... the Nereid had told Percy not to trust the gifts... and the bag was a gift. Could it be that she was talking about this particular gift and not the ride west as they all thought earlier? But, what could be in the bag that would suddenly make the bag heavy?

"'Well, guys,' ... me as godlike."

Hades grinned and was pleased that his nephew thought him as a proper god unlike Dionysus and Ares. It could be because he was in his domain and was probably very angry, but Hades didn't care. Now, hopefully the boy wouldn't come and say something stupid like he had the habit to.

Both Ares and Dionysus glared at Percy. How dare he not find them godlike? This child was turning out to be more annoying than Apollo on one of his deliriously happy days.

"He was at ... as a panther."

Hades smirked and Poseidon rolled his eyes. Now he would not hear the end of this.
Many gods looked at Hades and realized that there was absolutely no difference between the description and the Hades in front of them, except that he may have toned down his powers just a little bit.

"I immediately felt like he should be giving the orders. He knew more than I did. He should be my master."

"Hades…” Poseidon said in low voice to his brother. Why was he projecting so much?

Hades shrugged, "The boy is in my home, Poseidon."

Percy shook his head. If his father was like this now, then he didn't want to see his reaction to half the things he thinks about gods… both good and bad.

"Then I told ... simply very foolish."

"Or perhaps both." Artemis said. She could not decide what kind of a person Percy was or would turn out to be.

"I do not have an oily voice." Hades protested.

"You do, when you are trying to be intimidating." Zeus replied off-handedly.

"I do not. And I am intimidating." Hades replied, putting his power into the words, which in turn made his voice kind of oily sounding.

"See…” Poseidon gestured towards Hades as if proving a point.

Glaring at his brother, Hades asked, "What do I mean by 'after what you have done'? What have you done?" He turned to Percy, who just gestured to read on and that he would not reveal anything.

"Numbness crept ... two requests."

Hades raised his eyebrow. At the first meeting, the boy addressed him as uncle? Not many of his family members ever addressed him as their relative… it was always Hades or Lord Hades. Never a familial relation.

"Hades raised ... Hades' underwear?"

There was complete silence for a few moments as everyone comprehended the question. Then the room was filled with sounds of laughter, chuckling or disgust. Percy was blushing furiously and once again cursed the Fates for putting all his thoughts in the book. He hid his face in Annabeth's curls as Hades glared at him, and everyone else stared at him in disbelief.

"If you must know… it's only the robes." Nico said as he chuckled at his father's expense.

Persephone signaled Nemesis to continue reading before her husband could lose his cool.

"'Only two requests?' Hades said. "Arrogant child. As if you have not already taken enough. Speak, then. It amuses me not to strike you dead yet.'""

"Again he mentions that Percy has taken something…” Theseus said.

"I swallowed. ... create the seasons."
"Not that it helped later on." Percy grumbled to himself, thinking about the time when she didn't help out when Hades wanted to imprison Percy.

"I can only calm his moods, not influence his decision… Well, I can if he hasn't made up his mind at that point." Persephone said.

"Annabeth cleared ... you have done?"

"What has he done?" Poseidon said in annoyance. What is going on? What have they missed?

"I would only care if one of my items were missing." Hades thought out loud. "Something is missing, isn't it? Something that I haven't informed the Council about." He asked Percy.

"You will find out everything in some more time. We should read on."

"I glanced back ... blocking the exits."

Poseidon glared at his brother. He better not harm his son in any way.

"Hades bellowed, ... a dangerous answer."

"No, really." Thalia muttered.

"'You are the Lord of the Dead,' I said carefully. 'A war would expand your kingdom, right?'"

"Unbelievable… just…" Hades shook his head and sat glaring at everyone. He was sure that he would explain in no uncertain terms that he didn't want war, to his nephew.

"'A typical thing for my brothers to say! Do you think I need more subjects? Did you not see the sprawl of the Asphodel Fields?'"

"It does seem quite large." Apollo said.

"'Well...'

"Have you any idea how much my kingdom has swollen in this past century alone, how many subdivisions I've had to open?"

"More subdivisions?" Hades rubbed his temples. The future was really going to be a headache.

Every single person was listening intently as they heard Hades explain about his kingdom. This was the first time that they actually heard an explanation. Usually, he would just complain.

"More security ... But my expenses!"

Nico nodded solemnly. Many a times he had helped out in all these problems. Persephone just patted her grumbling husband's arm.

"Charon wants a pay raise," I blurted, just remembering the fact. As soon as I said it, I wished I could sew up my mouth."

Nico face-palmed. "You should not have said that." He whispered to Percy, who nodded in return.

"Well, at least you kept your promise to Charon for speaking up on his behalf." Hestia said, the
corner of her lips turned upwards.

"'Don't get ... ask for this war.'"

The other gods stared at Hades till he growled out, "What?"

"We had no idea..." Zeus started.

"Of course you didn't." Hades shouted. "None of you ever care to ask about how my kingdom is doing. No! All you care about is yourselves. If you have any work from me, you come and visit me, otherwise for the remaining time, I am forgotten." Taking a calming breath, he said, "I believe we have already discussed about all this before. Just continue reading."

His siblings stared at the Lord of Dead, thinking about how hurt he must feel for being ignored and used like that. They decided to make it up to him – whatever it took. The five, sorry, six (cannot leave Zeus out, now can we) of them had gone through enough together to actually leave him alone like that.

Demeter decided to drop the whole 'him kidnapping his daughter'. Even though she wasn't over it and probably would never be, somehow her daughter was happy with Hades. Hestia, the only one who usually talked to Hades without any ulterior motives, resolved to get the other brothers to bring him back to Olympus and treat him properly, like he deserved. Even though it seemed that in the future it had been done, she had a feeling that Hades might not feel comfortable in Olympus after being exiled from it for so long. Hera thought of making an effort to include her brother in the family, even though he didn't fit into her idea of a perfect family, he still was family. The two brothers looked at each other and came to a conclusion. They were the ones who had started the whole exile idea and removing Hades from his original position of an Olympian, Zeus more so guilty than Poseidon. Maybe, it was time that their brother was reinstated. They didn't hate him, no. But they were scared of his powers, so maybe they should push their fears aside and accept him.

"'But you ... I see his plan.'"

"What plan?" Poseidon asked no one in general.

"'His plan?' ... and my helm..."

"My helm..." Hades said.

"So, both the bolt and the helm are missing?" Athena said. "This just proves our previous theory that with Poseidon being the only one not to have something missing, the blame will fall on him from both the sides. And a three way war will weaken us so that the Titan Lord can strike us and there is no way we could protect ourselves."

"True." Artemis said. "Without the three of them together fighting against him, we could not have won the Titan War and if it is truly him this time, then his first order of business would be to pit father and uncles against each other.

The three brothers looked at each other and hoped that it wasn't their father because that poor excuse of a father would know exactly how to make sure that the three didn't get along. The three, despite their difference had always fought together to protect Olympus and hoped that if they had too, they would do that again. Otherwise, Olympus would definitely fall and the era of gods would end.

"'...Had I not ... supporting him?'"
"I know we are being played for fools, but I would never do something like that." Poseidon said coolly. He did not like being blamed wrongly, nor did he like being taken for a fool. Whosoever was creating discord in the family was going to pay.

"'No!' I said. ... to stop you.'"

The Olympians looked away. It was becoming painfully clear to them that they had done grave injustice to Hades over the years. They knew that if he had informed them of his missing helm, they would have rejoiced rather than offer help. But when it came to Zeus or Poseidon, they automatically took sides and helped them.

Percy looked around him at the faces of the gods. It was clear that many were feeling remorse. 'Maybe now they would finally treat Hades with the respect he deserves.' Percy thought.

"'You didn't ... out of Hades.'"

"Hades!' Hera said in a mix of reprimand and fear.

"What?' Hades glared at his sister. "Those two are allowed to throw a tantrum but when I do, you cannot stand it? I see, your affinity towards double standards has not reduced, Hera."

Hera was positively seething, almost glowing with her powers. Hestia said in a calm, steely voice that left no place for any arguments, "That is enough. Both of you. You both very well know that father is involved in all of this. Do not let him get to you. And as for you Hades, that 'counterproposal' better never be used again. You know better than anyone else, what exactly will happen if death is stopped."

Nemesis took that the ensuing silence as a cue to continue, "The skeletal ... experience with that."

Poseidon nodded. He too could not control his anger if he was wrongly accused. His son was more and more like him than he thought previously.

"'You're as bad as Zeus,' I said."

"Do not compare me to Zeus." Hades scowled.

"As if I want to be compared..." Zeus trailed off as he caught Hestia's glare. She was the only one who could get anyone to keep quiet. Ah! The benefits of being the oldest sibling. Composing himself, Zeus said, "Carry on, Nemesis."

"'You think I ... kingdom so easily?"

"The other monsters were probably sent by Zeus." Poseidon said.

"I do not think so." Athena said, her forehead furrowed like it usually got when she was thinking. "Assuming that the monsters knew that the Titan Lord was stirring at that time, and I think they would know, then the monsters were probably sent by him to test the children or bring them to him. But I do not understand the motive behind this. What could he possibly want from the children?"

"As horrifying as it sounds, I am quite certain that he might want the children to rise up against us." Hestia said.

"What?" Zeus yelled.
"Think about it. The titans are unlike us. They do not need anyone to believe in them to exist, they just do. But us gods? We require our domains and people to believe in us, lest we fade. And he might have known about the demigods feeling resentful towards us. He might try to exploit it."

"Knowing father, if he even had inkling of the situation, he certainly would. It would be a sort of poetic justice for him if he were able to get the children to rise against us. After all, we destroyed him, he would deem it right if our children would…” Poseidon was lost in thoughts, just like every other god.

No one noticed the slight look of panic that flitted over the demigods' faces. They could not imagine their parent's reaction when they would learn of Luke's betrayal – the first of many to come. Annabeth asked for the reading to be continued.

"'Easily?' ... Hades shouted."

"What?" Zeus and Poseidon yelled together.

"He had the bolt all along?" Zeus shouted, glaring at Percy.

"We have been reading from his point of view, Zeus. Tell me, did you hear anything about him taking the bolt?" Poseidon rolled his eyes at his brother.

"But then how…” Athena trailed off as she thought about all that they had heard till now. Nothing seemed to point towards Percy having the bolt.

"We should continue reading… everything would be clear in some time." Annabeth said.

"'You came ... your pack, then.'"

"What?" Ares shouted. How can the bag of supplies hold the bolt?

Athena gasped as she finally understood what was going on. "The gifts. The Nereid told Percy not to trust the gifts. We thought she was talking about the ride west, but what if she was talking about both – the ride west and the bag?"

"But didn't the bag only have supplies?" Demeter asked.

"Yes. But any package can be magically enhanced to convert into anything else." Hermes said. "Percy kept mentioning that the bag was getting heavier."

"And that started when they reached the entrance of the pit. So, the pit's magic activated the magic in the bag?" Apollo thought out loud.

Hecate confirmed Apollo's theory, "That could be done."

"The bag could be a sheath for the bolt." Hephaestus said. "If the person knew what they were doing, they could have easily converted the bag into a hidden sheath, like the boy's pen which can turn into a sword."

"But I gave him the bag. Why would I give him the bolt?" Ares yelled.

"For a three way war." Enyo replied. "You yourself had told the boy before that you pulled Hades name into the fight…”

"Yes and that was a good tactic. But I will not allow the Council to be weakened because of a war."
Ares told his sister. She was the more unhinged one out of the two of them.

"What if you weren't aware that the bag was a sheath?" Athena countered. "Someone could have used magic powerful enough to be hidden from a god, correct?

"Maybe…" Hecate said. As per what she knew, she was the only one who could perform magic powerful enough to go undetected through a hall full of gods. But why would she do something like this? No. It didn't make any sense.

During this whole time, the demigods were just staring in awe at the gods. There was no fighting and no insults, only the need to solve a puzzle. "They should have a family night and solve puzzles or riddles together. It would bring them closer faster than any counseling available." Percy said just loud enough to be heard by the demigods, who nodded in agreement.

"Enough." Zeus bellowed to be heard over the hall full of talking gods and gods did not know how to talk softly. "Nemesis continue reading." He was anxious about his bolt and all of his children were busy trying to solve the mystery when it would be revealed soon enough.

"A horrible feeling... humming with energy."

Zeus breathed out in relief. Finally, after all this, his bolt was safe. Now, as for his brother's helm... where could that be?

"'Percy,' Annabeth... my helm. Where is it?"

"What are you going to bargain it for?" Zeus snarled at his oldest brother.

"Seat on Olympus? I don't know..." Hades shrugged, uncaring about his brother's anger. He was worried more about his helm and couldn't care less for his brother's annoying bolt.

Zeus was about to shout at his brother again when Poseidon stopped him and told him to just listen to the story rather than jump to conclusions. He had done enough of that to last another millennia.

"I was speechless... the backpack from..."

"Ares!" the king god glared at his son.

"I don't know why I gave him a bag with your bolt in it." Ares replied. He did not want to face his father's wrath.

"Father, we all heard about the Titan Lord talking about orchestrating the whole thing." Athena said, as the thought struck her. "What if... what if Ares too has been a pawn of his? Unwillingly or unknowingly of course." She added when she saw Ares about to start yelling.

"I... I... it cannot be." Ares sputtered. He looked at Nemesis and told her to read. He needed to get to the bottom of this. How could he – Ares, be anyone's pawn?

"'Lord Hades... flicked her whip."

"You better not hurt my son, Hades." Poseidon growled in a low tone at his brother.

"'There is no... that will change.'"

Hades leaned back on his couch. Now everything was starting to make more sense. Why he took the child's mother, why the Furies did not attack the child and why he didn't send more monsters
after the children to discourage them from coming down to the Underworld. Now, hopefully the helm too would appear magically in the bag, because his nephew seemed to have no idea as to what was happening.

Poseidon hoped that Percy used the pearls soon, otherwise his brother would never let the children leave.

"I thought about ... accept my terms."

"Do not give him bag, boy!" Zeus told Percy as if the exchange was happening in front of him.

Percy rolled his eyes. "This has already happened and I am not stupid enough to give him the bag and start another war."

Athena and Pan were worried. Percy would not give the bag, but he also would not leave his mother behind. He did come all the way, went through so much, obviously he would not leave her behind. Athena hoped that he would not leave her daughter there, while Pan hoped that he wouldn't leave the satyr. Despite all three of them sitting in front of the gods, they knew that he must have left one of them behind because he had mentioned his mother being alive and well before. Many gods, especially Artemis and her hunters were also eagerly waiting for Percy's decision. This decision would show them what kind of a demigod Percy is. Is he the same as all those prior to him or is he different?

"I looked at ... on your mom."

"No." Pan said. "Do not leave Grover behind."

No one bothered to tell him that Grover was sitting right next to him.

""No!" ... go down fighting."

"No." Athena whispered. Why did her daughter have to be so brave?

"You both are really good friends." Hestia smiled at Grover and Annabeth.

Poseidon smiled. At least his son had wonderful, selfless friends. But he knew Percy's answer. He knew his son would chose to save the world first and then his mother. That was when the god knew that he would forever be proud of Percy.

""No way," Grover ... lives for my mom."

Percy looked gratefully at his friends – all of them. At one point or another, they all had saved each other's lives. They all had been through so much over the years. They had grown up together, fought together, ate together, cried together and rejoiced together. Percy knew, that how much ever he hated going on quests and being the gods' pawn, he would do it all if it meant keeping this family of his safe.

""I know what ... most in the end."

The gods and the hunters stared at Percy in disbelief and admiration. Disbelief that he actually gave up his mother to save the world and admiration at the sheer amount of willpower such an action would have required. The hunters now understood why their future Lieutenant was close to this boy. He truly was unlike all the other men they had ever come across.

""I'm sorry," I told her. "I'll be back. I'll find a way."
The smug look on Hades's face faded. He said, "Godling ... ?"

Poseidon grinned and said, "I would love to see that face."

"Well obviously I would be shocked." Hades defended himself. "I would have assumed that he would save his mother and himself and let everything else play out just like any other hero would have."

Chiron smirked and thought how underestimating Percy had been the downfall of so many.

"'I'll find your helm, Uncle,' I told him. 'I'll return it. Remember about Charon's pay raise.'"

"Why are you still talking about Charon's pay raise?" Hades was bewildered at his nephew's actions. He was really confusing.

"I did promise him that I would talk to you about it."

A couple of demigods including Nico laughed. It was such a Percy thing to do – even in the middle of the start of a war, he was keeping his promise of talking about pay raise.

"'Do not defy me.'"

"And it wouldn't hurt to play with Cerberus once in a while. He likes red rubber balls.'"

"Seriously?" Nico was having trouble controlling his laughter, while most of the gods, hunters and demigods had smiles on their faces.

Hades blinked his eyes in puzzlement. Percy was… there were no words that came to the god's mind to describe his nephew.

"I completely forgot about you saying all these things to Hades." Annabeth whispered to Percy.

"So did I. I am blaming it on the adrenaline."

"Sure…"

"Percy Jackson, ... nothing happened."

"Yeah, they take some time to actually work. You know, summoning the power of the sea and all." Poseidon told his son, hoping that he didn't get hurt before the pearls would work.

"Hades yelled, ... off the ground."

Poseidon sighed in relief. Good, nothing happened to the children, he thought.

"Annabeth and Grover ... bubbles and skewer us."

"Oh, no. Nothing can touch them or you till you reach the sea." Triton said.

"How do you ... Were we dead?"

"Unfortunately, no." Hades murmured.

"You are really dramatic, Prissy."
"No, I could ... indignant, "Dude!!"

The demigods laughed and Jason said, "Only in LA."

"I grabbed Grover ... raced away."

"That one would probably go and spread some rumors." Triton said and Percy nodded.

"The surfer ... summer solstice."

"How do you know that?" Dakota asked.

"Son of Poseidon thing." Theseus replied. "We have perfect bearings at sea."

"More importantly, how are you going to go across the whole country and return the bolt on the same day?" Reyna asked.

"I do something stupid."

"Like always."

"In the distance, ... god who'd tricked me."

"Having a conversation with Ares is more important than returning my bolt?" Zeus asked.

"He tricked me and used me and got me angry. Yes, it is more important to find out why. I have your bolt – I'll return it... at some point."

"Your priorities are messed up." Athena told Percy, but realized that this was part of his unpredictable nature.

"Not really." Poseidon said. "If it was me in his place, I would have most probably done the same thing."

"By the way, the chapter is over. So, who wants the book?" Nemesis asked.

"I'll read it." Triton said.

Annabeth whispered to Percy, "You might want to get your dad's protection for the fight with Ares."

"Nah. I'm good... I think."
Triton smiled as he took the book. He was excited to read about his brother. He wanted to see if Percy got the chance to confront Ares and how he made it back to Olympus within one day to return the bolt, when the journey took him minimum three days without distractions.

"I BATTLE MY JERK RELATIVE"

"I hope you don't mean that literally." Triton said to Percy but groaned in fear for him at Percy's answering shrug and smile.

"A Coast ... of us had hooves."

"Good thinking. Although the mist might have covered the satyr's hooves." Hecate said.

"Actually, most of the time, it doesn't or it turns the hooves into something even weirder." Grover replied.

"After reaching ... from seeing my mother."

Many wondered how Percy had gotten his mother back. Did he try to go back to the Underworld after the quest?

"'I don't ... worthy of Athena.'"

"Excuse me!" Athena shouted at Percy, who just put up his hands in defense and signaled Triton to read before Athena blasted him.

"'Hey," she ... like a little kid."

"Anyone would." Leo said softly as he thought about his mother. He couldn't imagine what Percy must have felt like after losing his mother twice. Once was harrowing enough.

"'The prophecy ... I'll have caused it.'"

Many felt bad for Percy. That was a lot of burden to have at the age of twelve – to feel responsible for a three way war that would destroy almost everything the gods stood for.

"Grover shook ... 'Gee, let me think.'"

"If you drag me into this, boy..." Ares left his threat hanging.

"You were the one who gave him the bag. He has every right to be suspicious of you." Hephaestus said.
Ares rolled his eyes and was about to comment but Triton read on.

"There he was,... supposed to die."

Many gods glared at the war god. His behavior was getting guiltier every second. Ares had a bad feeling that he was actually involved in whatever was going on in the future. But why? He didn't think he would have changed so much that he would actually want a war at the expense of the Council's stability.

"'You tricked me," I said. 'You stole the helm and the master bolt.'"

"Impossible." Ares replied as if being talked to. "No god can steal another's symbol of power."

"Shush, Ares." Athena said. She wanted to get to the bottom of the mystery.

"Did you just 'shush' me? ME?" Ares shouted.

Hera glared at her son. "You will keep quiet." The war god nodded meekly. There was no use getting into an argument with his mother. Not even his father, the king of gods, could win an argument against Hera.

"Ares grinned. ... run errands."

"You were the one who got some hero to steal my bolt!" Zeus pointed an accusing finger towards his son. But something didn't feel right to him. Why would his own child do something like this?

"Zeus, enough." Demeter said. "We obviously are going to find out soon enough. There is no use accusing anyone. I hardly think that Ares would come up with such a plan on his own."

"'Who did you use? Clarisse? She was there at the winter solstice.'"

"Prissy!"

"I didn't know anyone else Ares could have known."

"Humph!" Clarisse muttered something about pummeling Percy into the ground till Chris calmed her down.

"The idea seemed ... war helmet."

Ares eyes bulged with shock. Why did he have the helm?

Hades glowered at Ares for taking his helm and the younger god cowered in fear till it got too much for him and he felt like his head would explode. It took Persephone, Hestia and Demeter to calm Hades down enough to let go of his grip on his nephew.

"Something is wrong here." Athena said. "The plan has too many flaws and depends a lot on the child actually even making it to the Underworld. On top of all that, despite Ares being way too invested in the worst types of wars, it leaves the whole of Olympus open to outside attacks. After all, not all of our enemies have been imprisoned or chopped to pieces. Many still roam around, looking for a chance to attack us. Not even with Ares' foolishness and hot-headedness, would he leave us vulnerable."

"There is definitely something else at play here and we will not find it out by hurting each other." Hestia glared pointedly at Hades. "Triton, child, please read."
The messenger of seas was not impressed at being called a child, but decided not to say anything to his aunt and read, "'The helm of ... family!' Annabeth protested."

"Exactly!" Hera pointed out, which no one paid any attention to.

"Ares shrugged. 'Best kind of war. Always the bloodiest. Nothing like watching your relatives fight, I always say.'"

"Hmm…" Ares pondered over this statement. It was the bloodiest kind… too many emotions involved making everyone do the most extreme things possible. But too risky for Olympus, if it was between Olympians. Maybe, between the minor gods… Ares started to look at the minor gods, seeing whom he could start a fight between till he felt all of the six elder gods glaring at him and looked away, feigning innocence. They always stopped him from creating a fight that could escalate into a war, Ares thought and pouted like a five year being denied his favorite toy.

"'You gave me... your pocket, right?'"

"I told you." Hephaestus sang under his breath.

"I wasn't sure how Ares knew about that, but I guess a god of war had to make it his business to know about weapons."

"Sure do." Ares said. He wondered if he was the one who manipulated the sheath, he most certainly knew how to. But it didn't make any sense to him. And why would the bolt return only when in the Underworld and that too near Tartarus?

"'Anyway,' Ares ... had the weapon."

"But why would you send the bolt to Hades? If it were me, I would keep it for myself." Enyo said to her brother. "Not that I would do anything like that, father." She quickly added when Zeus glared at her.

"Hmm…” Athena spoke up. "That would make more sense. These three can keep fighting each other and no one would actually have either the bolt or the helm." When she saw the three brothers glaring at her, she added, "I am only trying to figure out what happened and not planning to start a war amongst the three of you." Finally, Zeus nodded for her to carry on. "Alright, so according to the future Ares, he sent the bolt to the Underworld and it would return to the sheath when near Hades. But the children were nowhere near Hades when the bag became heavy. Meaning that when the bolt appeared when they were close to the pit…"

"Even the magic shoes malfunctioned…” Apollo added.

Hermes gasped. "The shoes took the children to the pit and the bolt also came to the sheath near the pit… what if… what if… the bolt was supposed to go into the pit?"

"But then what I said wouldn't make sense." Ares said in a gruff voice.

"It would if you were made to believe that you had planned the whole thing." Poseidon said in worry. At the confused looks from Athena, Ares and Hermes, he continued, "We are assuming that father is rising, yes? What if he is already powerful enough to have some sort of control over Ares? It wouldn't be the first time he would have tried to control a god. Then, it would make sense that Ares would think the bolt was supposed to go to Hades, but in actuality, the bolt would go to father." Poseidon said in a detached voice, imagining that his son wasn't in the middle of this fiasco. "The war would still happen as per what Ares claimed to have wanted and that would give
enough time for father to make his first strike against us, using the master bolt, no less." Poseidon took a breath. "Obviously, this is all assuming that father is actually rising."

"How...how... did you..." Athena stammered. This was the first time she had ever heard Poseidon say something as intelligent as the plan. She looked at his siblings, but none of them looked surprised at Poseidon.

The sea god raised an eyebrow and said haughtily, "Who do you think made battle plans before you came along?"

"Hey!" Zeus said indignantly. "I used to help you with those. Anyway, half of your plans never worked and we had to improvise."

"But, the other half worked, right?" Poseidon said gleefully. It has been years since he and his brother participated in such meaningless banter.

"That does sound like a plan made by father." Hades said, ignoring his brothers.

"I can read and find out or we could continue discussing." Triton said drily. The demigods smiled and thought that it was something that Percy would have said.

"Yes, continue reading." Poseidon told his son. He tried to suppress his smile at his son's antics.

"'But why not... inside his head."

"You jinxed it!" Zeus told Poseidon, thinking about how powerful their father must be to control Ares.

"It already happened!" Poseidon riposted.

Ignoring his father and his uncle, Triton continued, "'Why didn't I ... idea, was it?''"

"No. no, it wasn't." Ares said. He didn't know whether to be happy that his name was being cleared or to be upset that he was being manipulated by the Crooked One.

"'Of course it... don't have dreams!'"

After realizing that Poseidon used to make battle strategies before she came along, Athena didn't even bother to ask how Percy caught on so quickly. Apparently, it was in his blood. Huh! And here she thought that nothing could surprise her.

"No one asked you about dreams." Apollo said to Ares.

"Father must be controlling Ares through dreams then, just like he was trying with Percy and the other hero." Zeus said.

"Seems like it." Hades said.

"I hesitated. "Who ... Nothing personal.""

Zeus and Poseidon had identical scowls on their faces as they looked at the god of war, but decided not to say anything about the name-calling seeing that he had been under the influence of their father at the time.

"You better not hurt my son, Ares." Poseidon warned his nephew. He would punish his nephew if
that happened. Being controlled or not, no one could hurt one of his children and get away unscathed.

"He snapped his ... yourself, Ares."

"No, Ares don't." Poseidon said to the book. Then he turned to his youngest child and asked, "Why would you say something like that?"

Percy shrugged and answered, "I was getting annoyed with him and wanted a reaction out of him. I guess... I think it was more about getting annoyed. He did try to get me killed and blamed me for stealing the bolt."

Poseidon looked at his son in worry and hoped that Ares had had the intelligence to not get into a fight with a twelve year old. "You should not take such rash actions." He told his son. This was worrying for him. It seemed that his son had inherited his ability to make horrible rash decisions.

"Don't worry dad. It was a one-time thing."

"Yeah. Now you go around challenging Titans and Giants and other monsters and not gods." Thalia snorted. She would never forget the day when Percy charged Atlas and challenged him to a duel. Honestly, what was the kid thinking?

Everyone was staring at Percy as if he had lost his mind, which could be probable, after all how many twelve year old demigods go around challenging the god of war? Ares snickered and thought that if he had actually fought the child then the child would be dead. What did the boy think, challenging a god?

"This is why you wouldn't bow to Mars?" Reyna was gob smacked.

Percy looked at her and nodded and Frank remembered that Percy had told his father that he had fought him. He couldn't have, could he? Yes, yes, of course he could have. He was Percy Jackson – the crazy, impulsive, scary and heroic Graecus and now apparently could fight Ares and live to tell the tale.

Triton looked anxiously at his brother and hoped that Ares would not rise to the challenge and nor should Percy challenge him again. Ares wasn't exactly known for his thinking process.

"He laughed, but I heard a little edge to his laughter ... an uneasiness."

"And why exactly would I – the god of war – be uneasy about fighting a twelve year old child?" Ares snarled. How dare the boy think of him as anything other than fearsome?

The god of seas prayed, he didn't know to whom but he did, and hoped that his son wouldn't antagonize Ares. The war god would have no qualms about killing a boy in cold blood.

"You've only ... what it takes."

"Scared?"

"Are you trying to get him to attack you?" Hermes asked, concerned about his newly found cousin.

"That was kind of the whole point." Percy pointed out.

"In your ... boar charged."
Poseidon gritted his teeth and controlled himself from hurting Ares.

"But I was ... the sea."

Triton read it out with a giant smile on his face and gave an impressed nod to his brother.

The gods were astonished. It was not an easy job to kill one of Ares' boars. The boar was charged by Ares' power and many a heroes had taken small quests to kill such boars who terrorized villages, because Ares had no boundaries. But, here this child of Poseidon didn't even blink as he killed the boar, albeit using his water powers, but it still should have been a difficult job.

Ares glared at Percy and the fire in his eyes was burning brightly. How did the boy manage to kill his beast in one strike, even with his powers? He did not know whether he should be impressed by the boy's skills or be furious for killing his boar.

"I turned back to Ares. "Are you going to fight me now?" I asked. "Or are you going to hide behind another pet?"

"How dare you speak to me like that?" Ares bellowed, his face red in rage.

Apollo and Dionysus took turns calming him down as Hestia told Percy, "Do not try to anger him more, child. It would not do you good to have a god against you."

Poseidon nodded and said, "Don't tell me you tried to fight him." He knew that a demigod was the only one who could go around challenging anyone. No rules applied to them and as long as they were smart enough, they could traverse without any problem through any realm without having to face the consequences.

"Don't be angry with Percy, daddy. He is good with a sword." Tyson assured his father and smiled at Percy and received a warm smile in return.

Hercules rolled his eyes while Theseus and Perseus looked at Percy in concern. How was a twelve year to fight a god? Was he crazy?

Once his father had assured Tyson that he wasn't angry with Percy, Triton read anxiously, "Ares's face was ... whipped, wouldn't it?"

There was a collective inhale around the room as everyone processed what they just heard. Did the boy just… provoke Ares… again?

Triton saw Ares gear up to shout at Percy again and quickly read to avoid anything breaking out.

"Flames danced ... him my sword."

"What did you just do?" Poseidon shouted at his son. Why could his son not see that this was so dangerous? Why was he trying to get killed? Did he... Hold on! His son was fine. Did that mean that someone interfered somehow or... a crazy thought came to him... did his son... defeat Ares? No. That would be impossible for a twelve year to do. But, how else would Percy be fine?

Ares was seething now, flames dancing in his eye sockets and smoke covering his eyebrows. He was going to kill this child regardless of what Poseidon had to say. This wasn't even a fair fight for Ares... he needed someone of his standards to fight... not a child. So, why did he accept it? Why didn't he just leave and maybe leave a curse on the child for insulting him.

Every single demigod (of the past and Romans), god and hunter was staring at Percy. Till now he
had only been provoking Ares but now they were actually going to fight! And the child had just put both the bolt and the helm at stake. Hold on! Didn't the child say that he returned the bolt? Then how… he could not have beaten Ares in his own domain… no, someone must have interfered. Yes, that must be it.

Zeus and Hades gritted their teeth. How could their nephew just gamble their symbols of power? Both the gods hoped that Percy won or that someone interfered. Zeus wouldn't even care if Poseidon appeared out of the sea and fought Ares and broke all their rules. He just wanted his bolt back and his nephew had the audacity to challenge Ares into a duel for the bolt and helm.

"I would point out the lack of wisdom in such a duel, but this seems like the only way to get the items from Ares and consequently, the Titan Lord." Athena said. She never thought that she would back a child of Poseidon and yet she found herself doing the same.

The campers who knew about the fight, except Clarisse, were grinning. They had been waiting to hear about the epic duel, especially Thalia. She had heard so many things on Olympus and from the older hunters. She just wanted to know about it from her cousin's side.

"'That's cool, ... I told her.'"

"YOU!" Ares stood to his full height and pointed his finger at Percy, about to blast him to pieces, but Poseidon put a layer of protection around Percy and glared at Ares.

"Do not try to harm my son. The duel is as much as your fault as it is my son's. Regardless, this is all in the future and has already happened for my son. So, sit down and just hear as to what happened. If I see or feel you trying to do something to Percy, who I am now declaring under my protection, I will not hold back my anger." Poseidon said in a calm voice. He did not raise his voice and yet it carried around the whole room. Ares sat down – even he wasn't hot-headed enough to anger the most temperamental god on Olympus. And he really wanted to see how the boy was still alive.

Percy quickly said a 'thank you' prayer to his father and told him not to worry, reassuring him that everything worked out just fine even though Ares now held a grudge against him and probably would hold it for all of eternity.

"She swallowed. ... and Poseidon together.'''

Despite the heavy atmosphere, Aphrodite grinned and was giddy with anticipation for this love story to unfold. Oh! The tragedies she would place for them, she thought. Maybe not anymore though, seeing that he went to Tartarus for the girl. Now she thought of blessing them with eternal love for as long as they lived. They deserved that much. Not even the goddess of love could imagine the amount of love and dedication to each other that the couple must have had to survive a place such as Tartarus. She shuddered just thinking about it.

Piper grinned as she remembered the kiss that the couple shared to end the rivalry between their parents, as Percy phrased it.

Percy and Annabeth just smiled at each other and Annabeth snuggled into her boyfriend's side.

"My face felt ... stand behind you.'''

Hestia smiled and nodded as she poked the coals in the hearth. The gestures, though might not aid him physically, they would certainly go a long way in boosting his morale.
"'Grover ... have you got?'"

"Exactly! What have you got?" Ares repeated the question and Percy rolled his eyes.

"A smaller ego, I thought, but I said nothing."

Phobos and Deimos abruptly burst into chuckles before composing themselves when their father glared at them. Many gods followed their example, including Aphrodite, who was trying not to giggle too much.

"Ooh, burn!" Leo said and Clarisse glared at him, but she herself was trying to fight a smile out of respect and fear of her father.

Triton calmed down and started reading before Ares could hurt his brother.

"I kept my ... to wisdom sometimes."

"Good. Stay in water." Poseidon said to the book, going into protective father mode. He knew Ares would sooner rather than later try to get Percy out of the surf.

Most of the gods were rooting for Percy to win – not many actually liked Ares. Some of the others, however were indifferent and just waiting it out and see who would be the better fighter. Percy had the advantage of being in his element and source of power but Ares had been fighting since he could walk, if not before that, and Percy had never actually utilized his powers and didn't know the extent of them. Percy was right – he would have to use wisdom to defeat Ares because he lacked the strength.

The throne room was already thrumming with anticipation even though the actual fight hadn't started yet.

"He cleaved ... end of his sword hilt."

Ares grinned and nodded, forgetting in the moment that he was the one fighting the child. He analyzed the fight like any other fighter would and realized that despite the water aiding the boy, he actually had good reflexes, at least for a barely trained demigod. Now, only if they were enough to keep him alive. Ares looked at Percy, who was relaxing with one arm around that girlfriend of his and was whispering something to her. He didn't seem like he was actually even listening to the fight. Although, to be fair, he was the one who fought it and would remember it, but anyone else would definitely listen to a fight that they had.

"He grinned. ... jump onto dry land."

"Oh no." Triton said softly, interrupting himself. Now there was no way Ares would let Percy step into the water and it didn't seem like Percy knew how to summon the water to his aid while fighting on land. How did his brother survive this? Poseidon, Amphitrite and Theseus tensed and wondered, not for the first time, why Percy had challenged and provoked Ares.

Ares smirked and thought how he would now defeat the boy. A part of him wanted to put the boy back in water to give himself a sort of challenge, but what's done is done. Enyo too, smirked, but for entirely different reason. She was excited to see a battle between a child and her brother. There was a reason the child was still alive and not cursed and the war between the big three stopped. She was interested in knowing whether the boy managed to do that on his own or whether someone interfered and stopped her twin from killing Poseidon's son.
"I tried to ... sand of a dune."

Poseidon inhaled sharply and looked over at Percy to confirm that he was still there. How could his son sit so calmly when he was having a mini heart attack and gods didn't even have a heart to get heart attacks!

Apollo shook his head as he analyzed the damage that the boy's body would have gone through. Despite having a soft landing, the kick itself must have done considerable damage to his ribs, especially if it was strong enough to send him flying almost thirty feet.

Ares leaned forward and cracked his knuckles. He was disappointed. He expected the boy to put up an actual fight. Ah! Well not everyone could last for even a few seconds in a fight against Ares. The war god was interested in knowing what he did next. The boy was clearly defeated – he was obviously hurt and weaponless and unless he knew how to summon the water to him, Ares had won. Now, he would only have to draw blood and he would be the official winner. So, how did the child get the bolt to Olympus?

"'Percy!' Annabeth ... to get to my feet."

Apollo looked impressed at the boy's constitution and so did many of the other gods. To recover this fast after such an injury, how much ever infinitesimally, was impressive. Maybe the son of Poseidon was stronger than they gave him credit for.

"I couldn't look ... Car doors were slamming."

"What is happening?" Tyche asked.

"The police had come. We were fighting on mortal property and the mist wasn't exactly concealing us." Percy replied.

"'There, officer!' ... 'Call for backup.'"

"Stupid, annoying mortals." One of the demigods mumbled.

"I rolled to one side as Ares's blade slashed the sand."

Everyone was again fixated on the happenings of the fight. Now that Percy had gotten up, he may have a chance to stall his demise by the hands of Ares, till whichever third party could come and save him. No god or hunter could imagine Percy actually winning against Ares.

"I ran for my ... before I did it."

"Of course, I did." Ares said, sounding offended. "I am the god of war!"

Ignoring his cousin, Triton continued, "I stepped back toward the surf, forcing him to follow."

"Good. Good." Theseus chanted under his breath and hoped that Ares wouldn't notice Percy making him go into the water.

"'Admit it, kid,' Ares said. "You got no hope. I'm just toying with you.'"

The god of war nodded and relaxed into his couch. The son of Poseidon couldn't possibly even hope to win now.

"My senses were ... circling somewhere above."
Ares narrowed his eyes and thought that in a fight, noticing too much of the surroundings could be bad, especially if the boy got fixated on something other than the fight.

The demigods smiled and nodded. The ability of witnessing everything around them during a battle had not only kept them alive by seeing a side attack before it happened, but had also helped them keep their friends alive.

"More sirens.

I stepped farther into the water, but Ares was fast. The tip of his blade ripped my sleeve and grazed my forearm."

"No blood?" Enyo asked.

"No blood." Percy confirmed.

'Hades!' Ares thought. He could have finished the fight now if he had used a bit more force. The fight was quickly getting boring. The demigod was clearly not an experienced fighter for Ares to even feel a bit of challenge. What a waste of his time and talents!

"A police voice ... them like me."

"Don't focus on anything other than your fight." Amphitrite mumbled, barely above a whisper.

"Ares turned to glare at our spectators, which gave me a moment to breathe."

"Good." Poseidon muttered. The fight must have been taxing on his son, if despite being in water he needed some time to breathe.

"There were... scattered, screaming."

"ARES!" Hera shouted at her violent son. "How many times do we need to discuss that you are not to harm any mortals unless provoked!"

Frank grimaced and thought about how his father just blew up the vehicles without a second thought about the lives he might be taking. Why did he have to be the son of such a violent god?

"Mortals are not to witness my fights." Ares replied, sounding like a complaining child, which he was.

"And you are not to hurt them." Zeus said with finality.

The demigods who had never witnessed the gods actually acting like parents towards their godly children, were surprised that the king and queen of Olympus could actually behave like parents.

"Ares roared ... wading in after me."

Athena tilted her head to the side and thought that if the boy could come up with a clever plan, something to do with water, he might just survive the fight.

Poseidon and his family were thinking along the same lines. The god of seas hoped that his son knew how to hold someone in place using the water or any of those sorts of tricks. But he didn't have much hope. His son was new to all this and had only recently found out that he could breathe under water and could withstand the pressure of the sea. Would he realize that the whole sea was waiting for his single command to strike on his behalf?
Annabeth smiled as she recalled what Percy did next. It had stupefied her in that moment. She looked up at Percy and saw that he was staring into the hearth, as if picturing the fight. Well, that or he was thinking about food. Both were pretty good possibilities but she was inclined to go towards the latter.

"I felt the ... seemed to recede."

Triton made a choking sound as he read that. He realized what his brother was up to and smiled at Percy. Even Poseidon and his wife had realized how Percy might use the pressure that must surely have been building up.

"What are the waves going to do?" Ares asked, bewildered at this sudden turn of thoughts.

Athena smirked as she said, "If his plan is any good, he might just be able to defeat you."

"Impossible! I am the god of war."

"We know. You only repeat it like every few minutes." Hephaestus said as he put out a fire that erupted in his beard.

Everyone who hadn't caught on to Percy's plan was wondering how the reducing the waves would help Percy. It would only allow Ares to move faster in water.

"I was holding ... Ares on a wave."

"Whoa!" a few demigods said in excitement.

"So?" Ares snarled. "He only went over me…"

"You are forgetting that he is riding a wave. He went over you, but the water is still there." Artemis said, smirking. The boy was smart even if he was foolish enough to provoke Ares to duel with him in the first place.

Ares groaned. He was despising the boy more and more every passing second.

"A six-foot... the god's heel."

The room was quiet for a few seconds before some started clapping and some were still staring at Percy in shock while others laughed and congratulated Percy, who was blushing and hoping that everyone would go back to reading so that he could go back day dreaming about pizza and blue coke and blue cookies.

Ares was as still as one of Medusa's statues. Then his brain caught up with what had been read out and the various emotions that he was going through were evident on his face. His face morphed from confusion to shock to disbelief to denial and finally settled on anger. How…how could the boy not only win but also hurt him – a god?

"How…how…you..." Ares sputtered in anger. His face was almost purple in rage and everyone surrounding him were just itching to get into a fight.

"Wisdom beats strength." Athena said in happiness, even though she did just compliment a child of Poseidon and a very irritating one at that.

"Oh shut up!" Ares shouted at Athena, who looked like she was about to murder him. "The boy clearly cheated. He used his powers!"
"And you are a god. He was right to use his powers." Poseidon spoke up on behalf of his son. He still couldn't digest the fact that his twelve year old son defeated the god of war! *Twelve year old!* A baby really, in immortal terms and he defeated Ares! This was one of the proudest days for Poseidon.

"You won against Ares." Zeus stated to Percy in shock. How could anyone defeat the god of war? The king god felt disoriented.

"By hurting his heel." Hades said in an awed voice. His mouth was slightly open as he stared at his nephew.

"That was hardly a fair fight. If I would have used my powers…" Ares sneered.

Poseidon rolled his eyes and said, "Just admit it that you got bested by my son. And you are a god. It was a fair fight."

Percy realized a fight was about to break out between Ares and anyone who said anything against him – which seemed to be majority of the room's occupants. He stood up and whistled to be heard over the noise in the room. At once all eyes were on him.

"Did he just whistle to get the gods to shut up?" Dakota whispered to Reyna in disbelief.

"That's Percy for you." Travis whispered to Dakota, having heard him.

Percy mentally slapped himself for getting the gods' undivided attention. He didn't even know what to say. "Umm… please don't start a fight here. And… uh… I may have won that fight but it was because Ares had underestimated me and didn't fight properly, obviously. Also, he was under Kronos' control and I did slam a six feet wave carrying the entire pressure of the area that I was holding back, into him. It was by chance that I won."

Percy sat down once he realized that everyone was so startled by him that they forgot to insult Ares. Even Ares was staring at Percy as if he had grown two heads. What kind of a person didn't take a compliment for something that he actually achieved?

"Son? Your winning was not entirely by chance." Poseidon broke the silence. He didn't understand why Percy would leave his winning on chance when clearly talent and wisdom were involved too.

Percy rubbed the back of his neck before speaking up, "I know that, but a lot depended on chance. It's not that I am not proud of going against Ares and winning, it's just that I know that had I not been in the sea, I would not be alive. I also know that if I go against the full force of Ares, I might not win."

"We can try." Ares said, but thought about Percy was acknowledging that his winning the duel depended on chance as much as it did on talent. He could appreciate that in a fighter even though he now hated Percy with ardor.

"How about no?" Poseidon told Ares. He would not have his son duel with Ares again, even though he did seem like he could fight with a god on equal footing. What had the daughter of Zeus said? Percy had challenged Titans and Giants? If he could fight them and live to tell the tale, then he could very well duel with his cousin as equals. But Poseidon rather not have his son do something like that.

Artemis' memory flashed back to the previous night when Thalia had told her a few things about the hunt in the future including that Percy was the only boy who had won over Artemis' confidence and the only one most of her hunters respected. Back then the goddess could not understand how
she could give her approval to a boy, but now she did understand. In spite of winning against and injuring Ares in a duel, the boy could admit that he got lucky. He wore his modesty and humble attitude as a second skin and she was sure that this characteristic would be one of the reasons that she approved of him and that her hunters respected him for.

Jason thought over what Percy had said and realized how very different his cousin was from everyone else. No one would admit to defeating Ares by chance. He realized that Percy was a well-loved and adored hero because he never went throwing his weight around, never rubbed his achievements in another's face and it was not because he was not deserving of these, it was because he was so modest and humble that he never spent any time thinking about his feats. He was proud of who he was and what he had done, but he was also aware enough to acknowledge all the help that he had received and that made him a leader.

Percy, uncomfortable with the silence in the room asked Triton to read. The minor god blinked his eyes a couple of times and read, jarring everyone out of their musings, "The roar that... fighting was useless."

Zeus breathed heavily and said, "He must be getting his powers back if he is able to influence the nature to this extent." His siblings looked at each other in fear. They had barely been able to defeat him once and now that he seemed to be regaining power and strength and if he did manage to escape Tartarus, then how would they fight him again? They knew that if he returned, with him would return all the monsters that were loyal to him, like Kampe or Olympus forbid, Typhon.

All the campers who fought against Kronos' army and had seen the titan himself, shuddered. They had no idea how they had managed to win that war. It had been such a close call and in the end, had it not been for Nico and Hades coming to protect Olympus, they would have never won the war. They had had so many of these miracles during the entirety of the five day battle that for some time after the war, everything had been surreal and had passed in a blur. Till date, none of them remembered exactly how the events unfolded. They realized that they finally would get to hear and recall some of those horrible memories through the books, even if it was in the view point of Percy and they hadn't seen the same things as him.

"The darkness lifted.

... Perseus Jackson. Beware."

Ares nodded in satisfaction. At least he cursed that miserable son of Poseidon. But the curse did not seem to be a very potent one. Why did he add 'hope for success' in the curse? The curse would now only work whenever Percy consciously hoped to win. If he did no such thing, then the curse would not work and would fade over time. The god checked Percy for the lingering traces of his curse and didn't find any. So, the curse had faded away then. He did not know whether he should be happy that the curse didn't impede the boy in his efforts to protect Olympus or whether he should be annoyed that the boy suffered basically nothing for injuring Ares in battle.

Poseidon too, quickly checked Percy for any types of curses. What he found, shocked him. His son did not have any remainder of curse that Ares had given him, but there were traces of other curses and they somehow had an evil aura, for the lack of better words. They had an ancient feel to them, as if the administrator of the curses were ancient beings. But where would his son come... On a whim, the god checked the daughter of Athena and the son of Hades for any curses. His nephew didn't have any curse on his person, but the daughter of Athena did, though not as many as his son. His suspicions were confirmed. Percy had gotten some curses in the pit and the only ones who could do something like this were the Arai. The god rubbed his face and looked at his son in worry. How much did his son have to suffer in just the five years (he just turned seventeen some
days ago) since he was introduced to their world? As Triton continued reading, Poseidon vowed to get his son to open up about his sufferings. Maybe Poseidon could help him out.

"His body began ... toward my friends."

Hades sighed in relief. At least his helm was safe.

"But before I ... give her indigestion."

A few chuckled and shook their heads. They were getting used to Percy's way of thinking and joking about everything.

"I love your thoughts, man." Connor said as he chuckled.

"'We saw the ... call off the war.'"

Hades raised an eyebrow but honestly wasn't surprised that his nephew just gave up the helm and did not ask for his mother to be released but only for the war to be called off. The god understood that he must have released the mother once his helm came back to him. He had no use for the mother nor would he want to keep another spirit in the Underworld when it was not required.

"She hesitated,... clutches again ...'"

This, however, surprised Hades. Alecto wasn't exactly known for warning or advising heroes. She preferred to devour them instead. For her to actually compliment a hero – for this was complimenting in her own twisted way – then Percy must have truly impressed her. And it was not easy to impress a Fury.

"She cackled, ..."

"Cool!' Grover corrected."

"How about both?" Travis said in awe.

"I didn't feel terrified. I certainly didn't feel cool. I was tired and sore and completely drained of energy."

"Understandable." Apollo said. "You did just fight the god of war and used up energy while controlling the sea for the first time. I am assuming first time would require a lot of energy. And not to mention you were kicked in the chest and also cursed. You will feel a little tired for quite some time."

Percy nodded and decided not to point it out that (a) this had already happened and (b) he already knew this!

"'Did you ... than the Furies."

"Oh much, much, much stronger." Hera mumbled.

"I looked at ... cause World War III."  

"Not that small." Zeus grumbled and let the bolt grow to its full size but put it away when Hestia reprimanded him.

"'We have to ...
"Fly," I agreed.

"What! No!" Theseus said. He did not know how it would be possible to fly without a Pegasus but if his brother flew without a Pegasus then his uncle would definitely kill him.

"I don't think your uncle would harm Percy when he has the master bolt with him." Poseidon said smugly as he reassured Theseus and Zeus reluctantly agreed. He could not kill his nephew if he had the bolt with him.

"She stared at me. ... like that. Come on."

"Yeah, master bolt or not, I am not going to fly unless it's a life or death situation." Percy said.

"You are always in a life or death situation." Jason pointed out.

"And we flew halfway across the world." Leo said.

"That was on a boat! And it was a life or death situation." Percy said. Even on Argo II, he preferred when they were sailing over water rather than flying. He was always nervous that Zeus would blast him out of the sky despite being on a quest to save the world.

Triton released a breath and said, "That was the end of the chapter." This had been a very exciting chapter, to say the least.
Zeus looked around the throne room as Triton passed the book to Pan, who wanted to read next. He saw Hades and Persephone talking about something, probably about the helm that his brother was overly attached to. He tried to eavesdrop on his brother but the elder gods had earlier in their lives decided to always encompass themselves in a protective layer so as to prevent such eavesdropping. The king god then thought of eavesdropping on his children – it always helped him to know if they were planning another protest against him. He was never going to be over that.

Athena and Aphrodite were as usual bickering about wisdom of love, but at least this time it was about that daughter of Athena and not Athena herself. It was something about the greatness and the epic nature of the child's love story. Having no patience for such talks, honestly why did they even make Aphrodite an Olympian – oh yeah, because she is beautiful, Zeus' brain supplied; Zeus moved on to his other children.

Hephaestus was as usual busy with some or the other invention of his, but this time he was actually talking to a couple of minor gods about how Percy defeated Ares in the fight. Wherever Zeus tuned in, that was the one topic – Perseus Jackson – whether be it about his heroics, his abilities, or his humor, whatever.

Ares was fuming and glaring at Percy while Enyo kept on encouraging him to take some violent step to annihilate the boy. Zeus groaned internally. These twins of his would be the reason for his untimely demise, he thought. Separately, they were destructive enough, but together… together they could create a bloodbath even in an empty room. He hoped that they didn't invoke Poseidon's wrath… again. He did not want to pull them out of any more messes that they created. For some unknown reason, his brother was in a good and jovial mood and the king god wasn't interested in morphing that mood into anger anytime soon.

Apollo, Hermes and Dionysus were engaged in yet another talk about Percy. Well, Apollo and Hermes were talking and Dionysus was supplying wine and listening to them. They were talking about Percy's sense of humor and heroics. Honestly, if Zeus heard another word about his nephew it would be too soon.

Yet, when he tuned in to listen to what one of his favorite daughters, Artemis was talking to her hunters about, it was again about that annoying boy. Artemis! Talking about a boy? Zeus had to strain to listen to them. They were talking about how this one might be different from all the other men they had come across and how Thalia had told Artemis that this boy was accepted by her.
Wait! What? The one goddess who absolutely loathed boys, accepted this son of Poseidon?

Everywhere Zeus could only hear one name – Percy Jackson – whether it was spoken in reverence or hate or love or jealousy. Zeus thought about all that he had knew about this child. The child was impulsive, disrespectful towards the gods except his own father, strong, powerful and might have anger issues. It wasn't difficult to see that this child would be a nuisance for the future Olympian Council. So, why hadn't Zeus done something about him? Normally, he would eradicate all such threats, because that's what Percy felt like to him – a threat. Did he not do anything so as to avoid discord in the family? Poseidon was always attached to any child of his, even if it was a monstrous child, like that cyclops sitting with Percy. Unless the child did something against the sea god's morals, which Zeus didn't know that his brother even had, Poseidon loved his children. If any of the gods unjustly even scratched a child of his, Poseidon would throw a temper tantrum surpassing that of Zeus himself – not Zeus' words, Hestia had once told him that, though the god of sky didn't think of his 'justified outbursts' as a childish matter.

Zeus huffed as he looked at Percy. The boy was nothing great, he thought. It was true that he had managed to slay the Furies, Minotaur, Medusa, Procrustes and escape Echidna, but the god was confident that his son, Hercules could have done all that and not fallen prey to the various traps on route to the Underworld and retrieved his bolt without so many troubles. Olympus! Hercules could have fought and won easily without using his powers against Ares. His son had already completed eleven of his labors, only one more remained and then he would be free of his service to that king. Zeus thought about how this Percy had fallen into Tartarus and knew that if Hercules ever had to go through such a thing, not that he wanted his son to but if he had to, he would have been able to complete the journey easily. The god could never understand why the hunters and by extension his daughter, hated Hercules so much. He was obviously the greatest hero to have ever been born.

So, what was so great about this nephew of his that even his own children – Thalia and Jason – seemed to be enamored by the boy? The god decided to keep an eye on Percy and see for himself what the whole fuss was about.

"Brother." Zeus was brought out of his thoughts as Poseidon spoke to him. "I think it would be good if we had a lunch break before continuing with the reading." Poseidon suggested but it sounded more like an order.

Zeus realized that even though Pan had the book, he had not started reading and was chewing on what suspiciously looked like some kind of root. Huh… the satyr god was weird. Zeus announced the break – he anyway wanted to talk to Athena about the dangers of this son of Poseidon. And if the boy was too dangerous for Olympus, he would find a way to destroy the boy, no matter how much of Poseidon's wrath he may have to bear. He did not save and raise Olympus for it to be brought down by a loose cannon of a child.

X-X-X-X-X

Ares stomped out of the dining hall in anger. Throughout lunch, that ugly cripple and many minor gods rubbed the result of the fight with the boy in the war god's face. Who did they think they were to speak to an Olympian in such a manner? Ares paced angrily through the gardens and the various cobblestone roads to reach his temple. On his way over, he burned a couple of shrubs, probably some nymphs and other things that he did not remember but knew that he would get an earful from his mother later on. Well, whatever.

Apparently, Tyche hated him because instead of finding solitude in his temple, he found his crazy twin leaning against a pillar with a smirk on her face. He wanted nothing more than to wipe that annoying smirk off her face, but despite what others thought about him, he loved his sister enough
"What do you want Enyo? I want to be left alone." Ares said as he moved past his sister. He growled at her as she followed him into the temple. Why did they have to be the gods of the same things? Why could they not be like Apollo and Artemis – different enough that one needed permission to enter another's temple? Not that it mattered with the 'golden twins'. No. Those two left a permanently open warding for the other to enter their temple. Ares wished he had that option, but apparently being twins and the god/goddess of the war, made him and his sister almost the same person in the views of temple warding.

Enyo gave a sly smile as she followed her brother deeper into the temple into his sacred place, the one place that he would actually kick her out of. She needed to plant the idea that she and Eris came up with, into her brother's head. He did always need a kick start before he could create complete carnage, unlike her. She could actually plan on her own. But first she needed to rile him up so he could not see through her plan in anger.

"Oh. Is it about the boy beating you in the battle?" Enyo played innocent.

Ares abruptly turned to face her but she had been expecting it and had stopped a split second before he did. "You very well know that it is about that. Now leave me alone."

"Let me guess… that cripple is getting on your case again, is he not? He *is* always looking for ways to insult you, dear brother, and the boy just gave him a golden opportunity."

Ares pinched the bridge of his nose. "What do you want?"

"Just to see how you are doing, of course."

"By reminding me of that cripple brother of ours? And that son of Poseidon?"

"Well, let us be honest. You are not going to just let this insult slide, now are you? I mean, he already insulted you and was rude towards you when your future-self visited the boy and gave him a quest. He questioned your fearlessness and authority. And now… now he hurt your heel in a duel. A simple twelve year old hurting the mighty Ares. It is quite… embarrassing." Enyo twirled her dagger between her fingers while she talked to Ares.

Ares' eyes were now blazing with the intensity of a wildfire, his face was as cruel as anything Enyo had seen and he looked every bit the god of war that he was. Through his anger haze, he could not see the smirk that Enyo had on her face. He could not think straight and only had one goal in mind – to destroy Perseus Jackson. But a small voice in his head reminded that Poseidon had placed the boy under his protection. Hurting the boy would be deemed as a direct attack on Poseidon and that was a losing fight for the god of war.

Ares breathed in and said, "You know that Poseidon has placed his son under his protection. I cannot harm him."

This had been exactly what the goddess of war was waiting for. "Physically." She stated.

"What?"

"You cannot hurt him physically." She said as she walked further inside the temple, making her brother follow her.

"And I assume you have a plan for hurting the child otherwise?"
Enyo smiled cruelly as she reached the base of her brother's giant statue. Turning around to face her brother, she leaned against the statue and said, "Don't I always?"

Ares now had sported the same cruel grin as his twin, which in turn made them look very alike. "And are you going to tell me?"

The goddess moved away from the statue and went to stand in front of it. She pointedly looked towards the base of the statue, which showed the various wars that Ares had fought in.

"What?" Ares asked, also looking at the base of his statue.

"This." Enyo pointed to the center graving which depicted Ares, Enyo, Phobos and Deimos riding a chariot into battle.

Ares furrowed his brows in confusion till realization set in. "You want me to ask Phobos and Deimos to mentally hurt the boy."

"Uh-huh. That way you can get your revenge and would not have broken the rule of no god being able to hurt someone under another's protection (only applicable for physical violence). Additionally, it cannot come back to you. It would be the boy's foolishness to look straight into the twins' eyes. The boy has fought in wars and journeyed through Tartarus. He has to have some fear. My nephews can easily bring those to the boy's fore mind and well, let's see how it unfolds from there."

Ares hesitated for a few moments before calling out, "Phobos! Deimos!"

Both the sons appeared in front of their father. "Yes, father? Why have you summoned us?" Phobos asked.

Ares and Enyo told their plan to the twins who nodded their assent, not like they were given a choice. They decided to gang up on Percy later in the day as they felt Hera summoning everyone to resume the reading.

X-X-X-X-X

Percy was sitting on a low lying stone wall overlooking a garden on the outer side of the palace. Seriously, Zeus and Hera had a lot of gardens and neither were gods of nature, Percy thought. He was supposed to be sitting with Annabeth but Jason and Reyna had decided that it was the perfect time to go look at shrines for ideas for Jason's new project. Apparently, it wasn't considered plagiarism if you took the ideas from your ancestors. 'We just want to recreate all of this.' Jason had said when Percy pointed out that they were just copying it all and not being creative. He had also received a swat from Annabeth for that, so he knew not to bring that up… ever.

So that's how the son of Poseidon ended up sitting alone on the wall. He saw some of the campers walking around, occasionally irritating one another, as was the norm. A few couples had secluded themselves from the group of campers and were just wandering around the garden. Tyson and Leo were sitting under a tree and going through some plans for new inventions and Calypso was going around talking to the tree nymphs. For a minute Percy thought of going and clearing the air with Calypso, but he didn't want to do anything without Annabeth being nearby in the odd case of him losing it.

But he hadn't been paying attention to any of this. No. He was focused on a group of girls, all dressed in silver chitons and practicing archery. In particular, he was looking at a brunette – an old friend, Zoe Nightshade. She seemed happy and not as burdened with life and the hunt as she had
seemed when he had met her.

Every single night, before going to bed, Percy had the habit of looking up at the stars to find Zoe, especially after Tartarus and Bob. It felt odd to him to look up and not find her there in this time period. Many a times he had wanted to go talk to her. But what would he say? 'Hi, I am supposed to be a friend but I can't talk to you in my time period because you gave your life protecting ours?' Nope. Not a good conversation starter. On top of that, this Zoe would hate the guts of any man. Percy sometimes thought that perhaps Zoe would have been a good friend had her fate not been so bleak. He was on friendly terms with some of the older hunters who knew him from Zoe's time – meaning that they at least exchanged pleasantries and jokes with him and if they were in an extremely good mood, they might even sit and chat with him.

"Has no one taught you that it is not polite to stare, boy?" a female voice sneered from behind him.

Quickly jumping off the wall, Percy turned around to face the Lieutenant of Artemis, not Thalia, the other one. Percy tried to remember her name but realized that he hadn't asked Thalia who this one was. He hadn't seen her around in the hunt before so he assumed that she had either left the hunt or had broken her oath or fallen in battle.

Putting his hands up to his chest level in defense, Percy stammered out an apology. "I…uh…I wasn't… staring. Sorry." Not exactly his best, but would have to make do for now.

Her face remained impassive as she scrutinized him. Percy dropped his hands to his side and let her continue the inspection and waited for a verdict. After a few moments passed, Percy realized there was a glint of humor in her eyes. Great! She was just toying with him. The son of Poseidon looked to his left as Thalia approached them and playfully punched his shoulder.

"Please tell me you didn't already annoy Adrianna." Thalia said to Percy.

"I am not annoying." Percy replied.

So this was Adrianna. Percy remembered once asking Artemis about her other Lieutenants – if there had been anyone else before Zoe. Hey, he was a curious guy! Now he remembered what the goddess had told him when he had visited the hunters to help them get over a dispute with a minor river god who was on good terms with Poseidon but did not like Artemis, for she had once killed one of his favorite beasts. The goddess had told him about one Lieutenant of hers who had left the hunt to live a mortal life as a priestess in a temple of Artemis, because she had grown tired of her immortal life. Maybe this was the hunter who did that, Percy thought.

"Yes, you are." Thalia retorted childishly.

"No, I am not. You are."

"I love your originality."

"Oh shut up."

"You first, Seaweed Brain."

"How many times do I have to tell you not to call me that?"

"Seaweed brain, seaweed brain, seaweed brain..." Thalia kept repeating till Adrianna interfered before the two children of big three could start a fight.

"Ok that's enough." Adrianna said. "I forgot that you both are your fathers' children."
Percy looked sheepishly at the hunter and apologized. "Uh… sorry. And about earlier… I just know some of these hunters in the future."

"Ah, yes. Thalia did say something about you being a friend of a few hunters." Adrianna said. "I hope you understand the amount of trust the hunters have put in you, Perseus."

"Percy. And yes I know."

"So, tell me. Whom all do you know from my hunters?"

"Uh…" Percy looked at his cousin who nodded that this hunter wouldn't gut him. "Zoe, Phoebe, Sabrina and Penelope."

Adrianna raised her eyebrow and smiled a genuine smile. "If Zoe and Phoebe can accept you as a friend then I am sure no other hunter would have a problem." Those two girls hated men more than any other hunter in the hunt.

"I don't mind about who wants to accept me as a friend." Percy said as he sat on the wall with Thalia and Adrianna. "As long as they are comfortable. If they are not, I don't try to talk to them. Just want you to know that I mean no harm." Percy knew some of the stories of the girls in the hunt and understood their skepticism of men. He himself would have hated men if he were in their position.

Adrianna nodded her approval of Percy's behavior. It wasn't every day that she came across a man who would acknowledge and respect the oath that she and her hunters had taken.

"That is good. Otherwise, I doubt I would have let you near my hunters." Artemis said as she appeared in front of the trio, who quickly got up and bowed to her. "Adrianna, please go and gather the others. We have to get back to the reading."

"So, Perseus…"

"Percy"

"Percy…" Artemis continued with an amused expression. "There has been something that has been bothering me for some time. You see, I once noticed your dislike towards Hercules. Tell me do you know the reason why the hunters dislike Hercules?" Artemis wanted to know whether Percy knew about the real character of the so called best hero to be ever born.

"Yes I do." Percy said in a tight voice. He did not like Hercules a single bit. Especially when everyone tried to compare him with that son of Zeus. Percy hoped that he would never ever turn out like him.

Artemis slightly nodded and said, "Then you must be close with the hunters, with Zoe, to know such a thing. For your sake, Perseus, I hope you are nothing like that horrible man."

"I do too hope that I don't ever become like him." Percy said sincerely.

"He is not, Lady Artemis." Thalia said proudly and smiled at Percy. "And kelp head, you would be the last person to be like that idiot Hercules."

She smiled at Percy and Thalia and told them to go ahead to the throne room, where the reading would soon be starting.

Once the cousins were out of earshot, Adrianna, who had returned with the hunters, addressed
Artemis, "He seems to be genuine, milady. He doesn't seem to be overly proud of his achievements and it does seem that he has quite a lot of them. He also treats the hunters with respect in the future." The Lieutenant pursed her lips and said, "Maybe not all males are bad. The other male campers that I had interacted with yesterday also seem to be respectful of our oath."

"Yes, they do." Sabrina confirmed. She had never hated men but had joined the hunters for her love for hunting wild animals and beasts. "But they are extremely annoying. They are always up to some or the other prank or joke. But they do not come off as disrespectful."

Adrianna turned to the young hunter and said with humor, "It seems that you and Zoe, Phoebe and Penelope are actually friends with Perseus Jackson in the future."

Both Zoe and Phoebe raised their eyebrows. They hated men more than the other hunters did. They could easily fathom Sabrina and Penelope befriending a male, for those two girls did not hate the males, but Zoe and Phoebe did. So, what was so special about Percy Jackson that they would befriend him?

Artemis, having read the girls' thoughts said, "Why does anything need to be special with him? Maybe there is nothing special with him or rather he does not think there to be anything special with him, which would mean that he would not give himself too much importance. Maybe it is because of his humility and humanity that you felt comfortable enough to be his friend. If befriending you all comes in middle of a quest for the boy, we can learn more about how that happened. Come on, we must not keep the others waiting and I am quite eager to know more about this hero."

The hunters nodded and murmured their assent and they all went towards the throne room.
"I SETTLE MY TAB"

"Tab?" Theseus asked.

"It's like paying the dues, you know λογαριασµός." Percy told his brother.

"It's funny... until much later."

"None of us do." Katie said sending an apologetic glance towards Chiron who was looking at them fondly. At least the children remembered his words later when required.

"According to... the earthquake."

"Whoa! What?" Leo asked.

"What were they smoking?" Travis asked, his face lighting up with amusement.

"And can I get some?" Connor joked. When he saw Chiron glaring at him, he added, "I'm not serious. My mom will kill me if I do that."

"What are you talking about?" Hermes asked wondering what could be so bad that his sons' mother would be unhappy with.

"Uhh... nothing... nothing..." Travis said. He figured that it would not be good for either him or his brother if they launched into a complete lecture about narcotics, not that it was not common in ancient times, but he did not want to take a risk. So far Hermes had come off as a cool but protective father, and Travis didn't want to know how he would react to his sons discussing drugs. He gestured Pan to continue with the reading.

"This crazy ... of terror."

"At least he was of some help to you all." Poseidon said in amusement.

Ares was controlling himself from killing the boy. He looked at his sons, who were already looking at him. They nodded at him to confirm that they will make a plan soon to hurt Percy. They wanted revenge for their father's insult.

"What is this 'odyssey'?'" Athena asked. "You all were discussing it before too."
"It is an epic poem about Odysseus, who was or will be, seeing that he hasn't been born yet, a legacy of Zeus. We had told you about the Trojan War..." Annabeth waited for the gods to acknowledge that and then continued, "Odysseus was one of the reasons the Greeks won the war. But once he won the war, he did something horrible which made all of you curse him, because of which he was to face troubles when returning to his home. But on the way back, he hurt one of Lord Poseidon's children and well... it took him around 10 years to return, during which he lost all of his crewmembers." Annabeth told the story in as simple terms as possible. She did not want to reveal more than necessary even though the gods wouldn't remember any of it till the half-bloods were sent back to their time. But if she revealed more, the gods might start fighting each other again. It was with great difficulty (on the gods' part) that they weren't fighting each other.

"Now, over the years, odyssey has come to mean epic journey and this is probably why it is mentioned here." Chiron told Athena, who looked like she was about to ask a bunch of questions.

"Poor little ... in police custody."

"The mortals seem to have become more foolish than they already are." Artemis said. Who could believe such a story?

"Normally, I would disagree, but seriously who cooked up that story?" Rachel said exasperatedly.

"The reporters ... plane to New York."

"Oh gods! Are you kidding me?" Connor said, bursting into laughter.

"That would have pissed him off so much!" Pollux said as he chuckled.

Percy grinned as he remembered about this. "He was extremely annoyed."

"He deserves it." Leo said.

Poseidon nodded in agreement. He didn't understand some of the things that his son did, but it seemed like he may have gotten back at that poor excuse of a mortal and a step-father in a small manner. He hoped that he remembered this man later on, so he could go and see justice done in his own special way. This mortal would learn firsthand why it was a bad idea to hurt a child of Poseidon.

"I knew there... board the flight."

Hazel agreed, although her fear was boats rather than planes. Annabeth smiled as she remembered how she almost had to push Percy inside the airplane and how he wouldn't let go of the armrest and the bolt throughout the flight.

"Takeoff was ... at La Guardia."

"I can understand." Hazel sympathized.

The other demigods looked at Percy. Except the children of big three, none of the others had any problem with another god's domain. They couldn't imagine how frightening it must have been for Percy to voluntarily go into Zeus' domain – the one god who would not blink before striking him down.

"The local ... Chiron the truth."

"You... were prepared to die?" Perseus asked his namesake. That would have taken incredible
courage to just walk up to Zeus and tell the truth.

"Yes." Percy said in a matter-of-fact manner. "I had the bolt, I wasn't supposed to be alive and I entered his domain without permission. I was sure I would die. I was kind of surprised when I didn't."

Hestia looked disapprovingly at her brothers. It was because of their perverse behavior towards one another, their children had to be terrified all the time.

"I hopped... Empire State Building."

Everyone except the Greek campers who had visited Olympus and Chiron, was excited to know how the new Olympus looked like. Was it anything like the one they were on currently? How much had changed over the years? What were the gods like in that time?

"I must ... twenty-four hours."

The demigods shrugged unconsciously. This was the usual for any quest and most had gone through something like this over the years. Some of the more sympathetic gods felt bad for their children.

"I went up ... heard me."

"I don't think they would just let anyone in like that." Jason said. Ever since he found out that the Greeks had visited the gods (back when he was in Camp Half Blood), he had always wondered what that would be like... visiting the gods, meeting his father, all of that. But now he didn't feel any of that excitement as he sat in the throne room, opposite his father, that too in the ancient times.

The Romans were insanely jealous of the Greeks. How come the Greeks get to meet the gods and why not the Romans? They rarely ever saw the gods and when they did it was most probably because the world was ending. But the Greeks got to have a god as their director (a crazy god who hated demigods, but still...) and they could visit the gods during the Winter Solstice, albeit only a couple of them got to go, but that was still more than Romans. Where was the justice in this?

Dakota was jealous of Pollux because the latter got to meet their dad every day. "Not to sound offending or anything, but why do Romans not get to meet the gods and the Greeks do?" He hoped his question didn't put any strain on the relationship between the two polar opposite and yet similar sides of the gods and their children.

Reyna was glaring at him for asking such a question. It wasn't that she herself wasn't curious about it, but it was that she was worried for the answer. What if the gods didn't care for their Roman children? Is that why they didn't even show affection as they did to the Greeks? It was quite evident that the gods liked the Greeks better. Otherwise, why would they choose to be in the same city as the Greeks? Why would they not choose to be somewhere in the middle of the country so that they would not offend either of the camps? The Greeks had better weaponry and some even had gotten gifts from their parent… why not the Romans?

Chiron sighed in resignation as many children, both Greeks and Romans, and even some of the gods looked confused. The Greeks had never considered that question before, but Chiron had expected it to crop up at some point. It had been one of the major issues between the camps during the civil war.

Taking a deep breath, Chiron cleared his throat and answered the question. "There are many
reasons for that, my dear children, but none of them are that the gods don't care about the Romans, so please put that thought out of your minds as I am sure you all must have already thought of it." The Romans looked and felt somewhat relieved at this while the Greeks who had thought of it, looked away in shame.

"As you know, the Greeks are on the east coast and the Romans on the west coast. This was done not only to separate the camps and stop wars but also because of the geography of the ancient lands. The gods, over the years have preferred their Greek persona over the Roman one because it is their original self and that is why they live in the same city as the Greek demigods, who just so happen to be a part of their power source, just like Camp Jupiter is one of the power sources of the Roman persona. Another reason being that the Greeks gave equal respect to all the twelve Olympians while the Romans had... well, you know what the Romans did."

Chiron did not want to reveal to the gods that the Romans did not respect Athena and Poseidon. He needed to protect the children from the gods' wrath. When the campers nodded, Chiron continued with his explanation. "Because of this reason, the gods needed to stay closer to Camp Half Blood. There is a strategic reason too. I know both the camps have had difficulty with this topic – The Romans have a city of their own where they can live safely and away from the monsters while the Greeks have no such provision. And Camp Jupiter is a military camp but Camp Half Blood is a normal summer camp."

The campers nodded and the Greeks felt that it was unfair that the Romans got to live their lives but the Greeks were forced to be on the run throughout their lives which usually ended before they even reached twenty years of age. "That actually represents the characteristics of the two sides. You know that Ancient Rome was largely developed as a military base because of which Camp Jupiter is a military camp and is stricter and has more campers, since the military needs numerous soldiers. The Greeks on the other hand are more free spirited and individual warriors..."

"So that is why we are less in number but more skilled in one-on-one fighting?" Annabeth asked.

"Yes." Chiron ran his hand over his face. "You see why this was one of the topics for the demigod civil war?"

The demigods nodded and Chiron said, "This is another reason why the Romans are the ones near Mount Othrys. Because we need a military to handle the home base of the titans since all the monster soldiers would go there first to assemble or regroup during an attack. But the Greeks being individual warriors needed to stay near Olympus in case of an attack."

Annabeth's eyes sparkled excitedly. "If we take both the camps in a battle scenario as the circles of defense, then it makes sense as the larger group – The Romans are on the outside defending against the larger (in quantity) threat and the Greeks are on the inside defending against all those that bypassed the outer circle."

"Yes, something like that." Chiron smiled. "But coming back to the original question of why the Greeks have met gods is that it is a recent development. It started out as a need to go buy godly provisions for the camp over the winter, when more and more younger campers started to stay as year round campers, but turned into an annual thing. But in total, a handful of councilors have gone to Olympus around four times."

"It still doesn't explain why we Greeks cannot have a safe city to live in." Pollux said. His brother Castor had always wanted to stay away from the demigod life and in the end he was the one who ended up giving his life to protect the camp.

Chiron smiled sadly. He too had wondered about it many a times. "Because the gods like to follow
the old traditions. In the ancient times, well, in the time that we are in currently, the heroes had to come to where I was staying in order for me to teach them, just like the Romans go to Lupa for training. But over the years, Greeks maintained the tradition of coming to me when they absolutely had to and we recruited the satyrs to gather demigods in order to ensure safety of the demigods. But the Romans made sure that the demigod was given to Lupa as early as possible for military training. Once you demigods came to me, you were to stay with me, but with Lupa, she would train the demigod and then send them to the camp, which is why more of their demigods survived as they were already trained when they left for camp. Since they were more in number, they made a safe city for themselves to live in. But, with Camp Half Blood, not many reached the camp safely, mostly because we are nearer to the gods and so all the monsters know about the camp's location."

Chiron looked at the demigods, who were lost in thoughts and the gods who were mostly confused. He hoped that the children didn't take the explanation in a negative manner. These topics along with the insult of Athena and Poseidon and the age old rivalry of the Greeks first defeating the Romans and the Romans invading Greeks, were the reasons why the camps were separated. He remembered the time when the camps used to be in close proximity to one another and the gods, like a family. But just like in many families, the Greeks and Romans being like step-siblings, could not bear the tension and started fighting, effectively ruining any chance of reconciliation.

Chiron understood the need for Hera's plan. To take away the pillars of both camps and exchange them, in the hopes that the leaders of the opposing camps would give the other camp stability. But it could have horribly backfired, had the leaders been anyone other than Percy and Jason. Percy, who would take up leadership and friendship wherever he was, without prejudice and Jason, who would always step up to whatever role that may be required of him. They were lucky that it had actually worked and now thanks to both the leaders, the camps understood that they were not enemies but friends and family.

Percy thought about what Chiron had said and decided that it did not make sense any longer, not that it would have made any sense in the ancient times, but the gods didn't always make sense anyway. Their traditions needed to change. He spoke up, bringing everyone out of their thoughts. "Well, the traditions do not hold anymore. We need to change them. Both the camps should get the chance to actually live their lives. It is not fair on the Greeks to not be able to live for more than twenty years of age and it is not fair for Romans to not be able to meet the gods, well at least as much as we do."

All the demigods agreed and Chiron suggested Percy to seek out the Council once they reached back to their time. Although, he thought, the Council would definitely remember this, judging by the looks on their faces.

The gods didn't know what to think. They weren't aware of the many differences. Though, to be fair, they weren't aware of the existence of the Romans till a couple of days ago. Obviously, the children felt the need for changing whatever traditions they had in place. The gods wondered whether their future selves would feel the same.

Chiron signaled Pan to continue reading, seeing that Percy had made up his mind to change the existing conditions and he would see to it that it actually happened.

"I was about... unzipped the top."

"Oh that'll get him to agree." Connor said, the previous conversation being already pushed to the back of their minds.

"The guard l... it out and-"
"Do not touch my bolt." Zeus said while Poseidon and Hades chuckled.

"'No! No!' He ... waited, and waited."

"The elevator is pretty slow." Chris commented.

"And plays horrible music." Will added.

"Muzak played. "Raindrops keep falling on my head...""

"Ok. That's not that bad." Will mumbled.

"Finally, ding. The doors slid open. I stepped out and almost had a heart attack."

"Because of the height?" Thalia asked.

"Because of the sight, I assume." Annabeth smiled. She knew heights didn't bother Percy as much as small places did.

"I was ... really there."

A few demigods chuckled while others agreed. That had been their reaction too, even if they had gone to Olympus in the middle of a war.

"From the ... hundred years ago."

Those who had visited the city were lost in thoughts and others were trying to imagine it. The gods thought that it didn't seem much different than what they had now. Maybe the individual palaces would be different.

"Is it like this Olympus?" Piper asked.

"Something like this one, but that was before the first war. Now much of it is in ruins or under development." Percy said.

"That is if the gods haven't rebuilt it while being on lockdown." Annabeth said. She hoped that they hadn't because she had a lot of plans for it, but being the impatient beings that they were, she didn't harbor much hope.

"This place can't ... from their garden."

"That would have been a weird experience." Lou Ellen said. The maximum she had gotten thrown at her by nympha were sticks and a bunch of leaves. It wasn't her fault that one of her spells backfired and hurt a nymph.

"It would have been if I wasn't so shocked that Olympus existed."

"Hawkers in ... Hephaestus-TV."

"Don't need that anymore."

"The nine ... in a festive mood."

"That could either mean that they weren't aware, although that would have been impossible seeing how these two fight." Hestia said, looking at Zeus and Poseidon. "Or it could have been that they
called off the war when you started your journey to Olympus."

"Several of them turned to watch me pass, and whispered to themselves."

"Seems like you are already a topic of gossip." Hermes commented.

Percy grimaced. That was one of the reasons why he didn't like going to Olympus – the gossip and the stares. The other reason was that he never knew when Zeus was in a foul mood and might want to blast him.

"I climbed the ... anybody bitter."

That raised a lot of eyebrows. No one had ever thought of the palatial designs in that manner. But now as many recalled the description of Hades' palace, they realized that it was just like the one they were currently sitting in. The gods felt bad for Hades and also guilty for banishing him just because they were scared of him. Olympus had been his home for years before he had been forced to live in the Underworld full time. Obviously, he would have wanted a piece of home with him. So, he created it.

Hades groaned internally. No one was supposed to know that. Even the gods who had been to both Hades' palace and Olympus, never found out the similarities between them. And yet, this little boy just took one look and knew one of Hades' biggest secrets. How was this boy so observant? He was prejudiced when he met Hades but soon changed that opinion. He realized how lonely it got in the Underworld. He realized Hades' intention of building a similar palace. And according to his son, this boy had helped Hades get back his position on the Council. Hades was surprised and pleased. If his nephew noticed so much and understood the meanings behind the things he saw, then there was no wonder he was such an important hero and leader. He saw what others didn't, and if he could do that for Hades, the god was sure that his nephew could do that with the other demigods. He would have been able to sense and understand what they said between the lines, which would make others trust him. The god of dead realized that regardless of Percy being a source of headache for him in the future, he would be a good ally too.

"Steps led up ... moving constellations."

Many looked around them to see how much had changed and realized that the gods weren't fond of change because the description and their surroundings were the same.

"Twelve thrones, ... to its immediate left."

Poseidon nodded. He would never leave his child alone with Zeus in a room, especially on the first meeting and in such a dangerous circumstance. He would be present to make sure that Zeus didn't try to harm his child.

Zeus wanted to know what his nephew thought of him and the boy better have thought nice things.

"I didn't have ... blue pinstriped suit."

Zeus frowned at this. What is a pinstriped suit?

"If you were feeling that way, it was most probably because you are at our power source and father and uncle must have been fighting." Hermes said. There had been a lot of times when his father and uncle would have a verbal fight but the whole room would fill up with their energy and sometimes even the gods felt threatened to step into the throne room.
"He sat on a... rainy gray."

"So you finally started to maintain to your beard." Hera said. She had been trying to get her husband to tame his beard for years now. It was too bushy!

Zeus pretended not hear his wife and glared at Pan who was snickering.

"As I got ... he smiled a lot, too."

Amphitrite looked at her husband and realized that not much had changed, except something about the description felt to her as if he had matured. But she could not understand whatever he had been wearing when his son saw him.

"Looks like we adopted the dressing sense of the times." Apollo said. All the gods that the boy had described, except Hades, had donned the local clothes, just like the children.

"Nep-Poseidon wears khaki shorts and Hawaiian shirts?" Reyna asked. This did not sound like the terrifying god that they all had in mind. They assumed he would be pretty uptight. But even the god in front of them seemed to be a jovial god other than the few times he had gotten angry with someone during the reading.

"Yeah." Percy replied. "I don't like the shirts though and I made the mistake of telling him that once and ended up getting a half an hour lecture on why Hawaiian shirts are better than anything else, despite what Lady Aphrodite says." Percy had a lopsided smile as he remembered the day he was waiting on Olympus for Annabeth to finish her work so they could finally get to go on a movie date and he had ran into his father. They had somehow ended up drinking milkshakes and talking about Hawaiian shirts among other things. It seemed like ages ago now.

"I am quite curious as to how we look and dress in the future." Aphrodite said and most of the gods agreed. The gods were nothing if not vain, but don't tell them that.

"There is a way to see how we look like from the children's view point. All I have to do is tap into their memory, painless obviously unless used for a long stretch of time, and we can use Iris' power and project it onto an Iris Message." Hecate said, already waving her fingers in preparation. She knew the gods would agree to such a suggestion.

The demigods looked apprehensive as the gods agreed to Hecate's suggestion. They didn't want anyone prodding around in their memories. After explaining the process to the anxious demigods and assuring them that she will only look for gods in their memories and that it would be painless and the spell wouldn't even last longer than a few seconds – just enough time to extract the memories, she cast a blanket spell on the children to get the images of as many gods as possible.

The gods spent the next 45 minutes just ogling as their future selves, their thrones and the fashion choices they made and a few futuristic machines. They didn't know from whose viewpoint they were getting to see the images, so Phobos and Deimos didn't know that Percy had already met and defeated them once as they devised their 'evil plan'.

Once the effect of the spell wore off from the projected images, Zeus asked why they couldn't just watch the events instead of reading. Hecate pointed out that holding a spell on a mortal for more than five minutes would be extremely painful. Percy too protested that they were already reading his thoughts, they better not try to see his memories. The way he said it, scared a couple of gods and made the others wary of him. It was the same tone Poseidon used when giving a final warning (which always was also the first warning) to anyone. Once he was satisfied that no one was going to try something on him, Percy asked Pan to continue reading.
"His throne ... finished an argument."

"That's the usual situation." Demeter mumbled.

"I approached the fisherman's throne and knelt at his feet."

Zeus' raised both his eyebrows and looked at Percy. "You should address me first, boy."

"I am his father. It is only right that he addresses me first." Poseidon said glaring at his brother.

"'Father.' I dared ... me into dust."

"Don't worry. He is not going to do anything stupid while I am there and I would not let anyone else hurt you either." Poseidon told his son. Percy nodded as he remembered the day the god had stopped the council from voting on killing him.

The other demigods were once again jealous of Percy and thought that had it been them and their parent, would the god/goddess have done the same thing for them?

"To my left, ... This is only right."

The gods chuckled as they thought back to almost the same words being said by the brothers. They really hadn't changed over the years.

Poseidon hoped that the first meeting between him and his son had gone well. He usually did not meet his children when they were awake. He preferred to check up on them when they were asleep or not looking. It was easier that way for him when he had to leave.

"'You still ... hear him speak.'"

The demigods and Chiron winced as they thought about what Poseidon had said and how Percy must have felt. Percy looked at the ground as he felt some of his friends looking at him and Annabeth stroking his hand. Even though he now knew what his father had meant, it was still difficult to hear this. He had never forgotten that conversation and on some nights of self-doubt, the conversation and his father's words would come back to haunt him. Those were the nights he would take out the two-worded letter that his father had sent him – a physical proof that he cared.

"Wrongdoing.

A lump welled up in my throat. Was that all I was? A wrongdoing? The result of a god's mistake?"

Percy gritted his teeth and thought about anything other than that conversation. Why was this even required to be in the book? Why couldn't the book just say that he returned the bolt and lived happily till next summer?

The gods realized the mistake Poseidon had made in his wording. They hadn't even thought that the boy would take it in that way. It was clear to them that Poseidon meant wrongdoing for breaking the oath and not the child himself. This was why the gods didn't get along with their mortal children. Their thought process, emotions and a lot of other things were so very different from each other. The children being half human, were more attuned to emotions and morals than the gods were or could ever be.

Poseidon shook his head and looked at his son worriedly. "That is not what I meant." He said
softly to Percy so that only Percy and the few people around them could hear him. 'I hope', he thought to himself. "What I meant was…"

"About breaking the oath." Percy said. "I know that now." His tone was casual as if he was unbothered by his father's words but only the few who knew Percy properly, knew that he was tense.

Poseidon didn't miss the way his son added 'now', meaning that at one point he had thought that Poseidon regretted him being born. The god hoped he had understood how his son must have felt and tried to make him understand what he had actually meant.

"'I have spared... asked calmly."

"He would never risk his own bolt." Hera commented.

"'Let us hear ... from Olympus.'"

Thalia, Jason and Perseus shook their heads in exasperation at their father's pig-headedness.

"'Perseus," Poseidon ... to encourage me."

Poseidon sighed and wished he could show any emotion during an official meeting. But that would show his enemies in the council just how much he cared for his children and then they would try to take out their anger with the god on his children.

"It was like ... him yet, either."

The demigods nodded and thought that it was easier to face their godly parent when they were distant. Their aloofness reminded the children that they were not a normal family and gave them the strength to not blame their parent for not being there for them.

Amphitrite and Triton looked between Poseidon and Percy, who were both lost in thoughts. They thought over to the past days and knew that the demigod was over such feelings towards Poseidon and really hoped that the sea god would set the record straight.

Many of the other gods wondered whether their children thought about them the same way. The gods didn't know how they felt about that. They had enjoyed spending time with their children and one part of them hoped that the children didn't feel the same way Percy had felt towards his father. But another part of them hoped for the very thing as it would make it easier for them to stay away from their children.

"'Address Lord ... my scalp rise."

"Oh." Hazel said.

"Huh?" Percy looked at her in confusion.

"That does not look anything like the master bolt in the statue... That's what you meant when you said that the master bolt didn't look like the one in the statue."

"Oh, yeah. Everyone gets that wrong."

"'I sense the ... in the family.'"

"That it does." Hestia agreed.
"That does not mean I would do something like that." Ares snapped.

"'Lord?' I asked.

... all?" Zeus asked."

"You are incorrigible." Hades said to his brother. "How would any of the dreams even sound like me? And you very well know Ares only listens to you."

Ares looked skeptically at Percy. The boy did not accuse him, but tried to clear his name? Why?

"'No,' I said... than the gods.'""

"I can bet you anything that Zeus will disagree." Poseidon said and most of the gods (the brave ones at least) agreed.

"Poseidon and ... more," Zeus said."

"See." Poseidon said, proving his earlier point.

"Even when you both considered the possibility of father rising, you declared the matter closed?" Demeter stared at her brother.

"And I still say that it cannot be him." Zeus said.

"I am sure even if Kronos stands in front of him, he is still going to be in denial." Thalia whispered to Percy and Annabeth.

"'I must go personally to purify this thunderbolt in the waters of Lemnos, to remove the human taint from its metal.'"

Human taint? The gods looked at Zeus weirdly. No symbol of power could be tainted nor would it need to be purified in any water. The only reason to even go to Lemnos was to get Hephaestus, who liked to live there, to check the weapon for damage. So, why did Zeus make up such a lie that Poseidon would surely catch?

Poseidon looked gratefully at his brother. He knew what Zeus was doing. He was giving him time to talk to Percy. The king god smirked and thought that Poseidon definitely owed him for that.

"He rose and ... Annabeth Chase-"

Annabeth and Grover looked at Percy and shook their heads. Only Percy would interrupt Zeus and tell him that he didn't complete the quest alone. Those who didn't know Percy, were surprised that he would willingly share the recognition that Zeus himself was giving him.

"'To show you... let you live.'"

Hmm… so that's why he hadn't harmed this annoying nephew of his, Zeus thought. Although, truth be told, he was growing fond of the nephew… not that he would ever tell that to anyone. He had a reputation to uphold.

"What does he mean by not knowing what Percy's arrival meant for Olympus?" Hermes asked.

"I think that the World War was not the only reason for the oath… there has to be something else. And now father too hinted that Percy's arrival could be adverse for Olympus." Athena said. She
knew something was missing, but one look at the children clarified that they would not reveal anything.

"'Um ... Zeus was gone.'

"This is why I say that Zeus should be made the god of theatre." Poseidon chuckled as Zeus glared at him.

"I was ... of theater.'" Poseidon, Hades and Hestia laughed and soon almost everyone joined in while Zeus just rolled his eyes.

"I see your so called humor has not improved over the years." Zeus said to Poseidon once the latter had calmed down.

"Neither have you." Poseidon replied just as quick.

Zeus narrowed his eyes at his brother, but having nothing witty to say, just signaled Pan to continue.

"An uncomfortable silence.

"Sir," I said, "what was in that pit?""

The sea god wished that his son had not felt the need to be so formal with him without an audience.

"Poseidon regarded ... warm on my back." Poseidon gripped ...

"He has that effect." Hades said. He wondered why the names were not having their usual effect when anyone spoke them aloud. Maybe it was because they were in a time bubble and everything outside of Olympus had been stopped till the reading was done with. That could be it. The Fates were clever that way.

"Poseidon gripped ... pit is another thing.'" Poseidon gripped ...

"He is able to stir from time to time?" Hera asked. How could it be possible? As of now, they had neither heard nor felt anything of that sort. But, a couple millennia would be enough for their father to regain his strength.

"If he is able to stir from time to time then logically speaking, it is only a matter of time before he can gain enough strength to actually rise from the pit." Athena said.

"And if he rises and we are not prepared then…” Hestia left that thought hanging in everyone's mind.

Zeus hoped against hope that his father was not rising. But if the knowing looks and the looks of terror in the children's eyes were something to go by, then he knew that Kronos was coming back or had already come back – for the children.

"'That's what ... all you need to do.'"

Percy huffed and rolled his eyes. Sometimes he wondered whether they would have been more prepared had Zeus actually listened and paid heed to the signs. Maybe Artemis then would not have to go around finding proof and would not have been kidnapped. And maybe, both Bianca and
Zoe would be alive. Could other lives been saved if the gods had accepted that Kronos was rising? Percy pushed the thought away from his mind. Dwelling on such thoughts would only lead to doubting the gods and well, then hatred wouldn't be far behind. The gods were not perfect and he knew that now. But they were still gods and still the best option for the world and still their parents. He had to stand by them and maybe hope to change their minds when they did something that felt wrong.

"'But-' I stopped ... you, does it?""

"Nope." A couple of demigods said in unison and Poseidon grinned proudly at his son. No child of his should be restrained by having to obey, unless absolutely necessary. This was one of the main reasons that a child of Poseidon could not get along with a child of Zeus. Zeus' children expected everyone to follow them because of who their father was, but Poseidon's children were never one to obey and follow in someone's footsteps – they always needed to pave their own path. And if they were forced to do something… well, that was a recipe for disaster.

By now everyone in the throne room knew that Percy may have many virtues but obedience was not one of them. Like father, like son.

"'No ... sir.'"

"I must take some blame for that, I suppose. The sea does not like to be restrained."

"I think that you need to take all the blame." Amphitrite said. Oh, the number of times she had heard complaints from Hera and even Zeus about Poseidon being a hardheaded fool.

Poseidon shrugged. It wasn't his fault that he did not like to be restrained, it was in his nature – it was who he was.

"He rose ... pays his debts."

"So, that's how..." Leo said. He had been wondering how Percy had managed to get his mom back.

The many gods who had also been thinking about the same thing, looked at Hades in awe and respect. They hadn't expected him to just let go of the mother, but then again, the lord of the dead was breaking all their prejudices. Maybe he wasn't all that bad, after all.

"My heart was ... a little sadness."

'Oh, he would have wanted to.' The Queen of Seas thought.

The demigods understood where Percy was coming from. They too had many times thought about their parents being together, but it was a hopeless dream and to be frank, none of them could actually imagine their biological parents living together – one a god, another a mortal. It would never work.

"'When you ..."

"A package?"

Percy, Annabeth and Grover had identical devilish grins on their faces as they thought about the package.

"'You will ... a thousand years...""
'Mm-hmm', Amphitrite telepathically spoke to her seemingly-calm-but-definitely-flustered husband.

'I do not know, my dear.'

'Oh, you loved her or will love her – this is confusing.'

'I...no...I... You do not seem upset.'

'Truthfully speaking, I do not know whether I should be upset. You do love her but I doubt you are in love with her.' Amphitrite congratulated herself on not getting upset on such a topic. She had a feeling that had it been some other woman, she would not have maintained her calm, but somehow this mortal woman did not feel like a threat to the queen.

Percy was looking at Amphitrite, trying to see if she would go ballistic like a certain Queen of skies would, but when nothing happened except a few looks being shared between her and his father (that Percy could have lived without), he didn't know whether it was really calm or just the calm before a storm.

"...Still ... I'd been born."

"That did sound wrong, father." Triton said and Theseus nodded. What had happened to their father who could speak so eloquently?

The demigods were surprised. They had never thought that the one person to have a good relation with their godly parent actually had such starting troubles. Not everything was as it seemed, they thought.

"But I am talking about giving him the life of a hero and it is always tragic." Poseidon tried to explain to his sons.

"You may have been, but the child is human too and he would have perceived it in a different way." Hestia gently told her brother.

"'I don't mind... on my part.'"

All the children flinched at that. No one wanted their parent to say that their child was ‘an unforgivable mistake’, how much ever true they thought it to be. Percy shook his head as he thought how he and his father had been talking about two different but almost similar things.

Some of the gods were staring at Poseidon, who had covered half of his face with his hand. What had he been thinking? From his point of view, it all made perfect sense, but when he heard it from his son's view point, he could see how very wrong he was. He looked at his son, who just shrugged at him, as if saying that it was all in the past.

"And I thought I was bad at parenting." Zeus said loud enough to be heard by his brothers, but not by anyone else in the room.

Poseidon glared at him while Hades said, "You are bad at parenting. Poseidon just seems to be having an unlucky day."

"'I'll leave you ... the Sea God.'"
A few of the gods and demigods had smiles on their faces. This was the Poseidon they knew or had heard of. The one who would go to any lengths to protect his children from anything.

"As I walked ... kind of hero."

"Not as if, kelp head. You are a hero." Thalia said with pride and an air of finality and the others nodded, with Tyson ending up looking like a bobble head.

Before Percy could respond, Apollo whistled and said, "If my muses paused their concert for you, then you are a hero. They do not stop playing just for anyone."

"Forget the muses. You just stopped a war. I am surprised no one invited you for a feast." Hermes said and Percy couldn't tell whether he was mocking or being genuinely serious.

"Fifteen minutes ... as she saw me."

All the demigods had a wistful look and huge grins on their faces. All those who had met Sally were thinking about her and the others wanted to meet her.

"Percy! Oh, ... of his wits."

"Ha! Would love to see that expression." Leo said.

"She didn't ... better get started."

"What the f..." Travis started but completed in a muffled voice as Katie had clasped her hand on his mouth.

"There are children here." Katie hissed at him, pointedly looking towards an amused Nico and a blushing Hazel, who was fanning herself with her hand.

"That vile creature! We should hunt him down." Said one of the hunters and others agreed.

"Oh, tell me you took care of him, brother." Theseus said to Percy in a somewhat sinister voice, reminding Percy of all those stories about Theseus when the hero had turned bad thanks to keeping bad company.

"You'll see." Percy said.

"I swallowed ... done yet or what?"

Most of the people in the throne room were getting annoyed and angry with Gabe. Who did he think he was? Many of the males wondered whether this was the reason the hunters hated the male population. Not many had ever tried to find out the reasoning behind the hunters being the way they were, thinking that all of them hated men for no reason at all.

"She closed ... free appliances.""

The demigods started snickering. That was the least this Gabe could go through for hurting Percy and making his life miserable, they thought.

"'Oh, yeah ... right? Come on.'"

"Why does she still care about him? Why is she still with him? She doesn't need him anymore." Hera asked angrily.
"It's not easy to leave an abusive relationship." Percy said in a clipped tone. After Gabe, he had found out all he could about such relationships, so he could protect his mother. When Paul had come along, Percy had watched his every move and made sure nothing like that would ever happen again to his mom. He might have scared Paul in the process but Percy had told his new stepdad everything about Gabe when Paul was to marry Sally and he had understood Percy's initial mistrust.

Poseidon narrowed his eyes at his son's words. It sounded like that man hurt the mother. The god was already feeling protective of this woman and he promised himself that if that man had hurt her… well, no one called Poseidon the scariest-when-angered god for no reason.

"In the month ... off the lampshades."

"That sounds dirtier than the Augean stables." Hercules said.

"It was a close competition." Percy replied, making Hercules wonder how this boy knew the amount of filth in the stables.

"Gabe and ... call the cops."

A lot of growls and sounds of annoyance could be heard all over the room. How could anyone treat another person like that?

"'Gabe, ... ruining my Camaro.'"

Amphitrite covered her husband's shaking hands. He was trying his level best to control his anger.

"'But-'

... wasn't around."

Annabeth looked at Percy in shock. She didn't know that Gabe had even hit Sally.

Both father and son had identical looks of anger on their faces, making anyone near them want to scoot away. Through the open roof, everyone could feel the weather changing – it was becoming darker with the storm clouds and the winds were blowing at high speed.

Amphitrite asked her husband to calm down and stop the weather changes, but he replied that he was angry but he wasn't controlling the weather. They turned to look at Percy, who had one fist clenched tightly and was being calmed down by Annabeth. Soon, Percy opened his fist and the storm clouds dissipated. But even after that the mad look in Percy's eyes didn't fade and Poseidon realized that even though Percy had stopped projecting his anger into the nature, he was still very angry. The god had a feeling that it wouldn't be long before Percy lost control on his anger… for good. Such was the turmoil within the demigod.

"A balloon of ... I call the police."

"And where exactly does he expect a twelve year to go?" Frank said angrily, which surprised many because the new praetor was known for keeping his cool.

"'Gabe!' my ... definition, was human."

"It would be so good if we could hurt the mortals. The ones who are deserving of it, anyway." Thalia said, thinking about the many abusive and downright horrible mortals she had come across while on the run.
"My mother took ... will work out."

"No it won't, you silly mortal." Hera sniffed.

Percy glared at Hera with such intensity that a lesser being would have definitely trembled. It took all of Percy's willpower, Annabeth's soothing words and Piper's strongest charm speak to make sure Percy didn't say or do anything stupid.

"You will never speak like that again for my mom." Percy told the queen of gods. He had a lot more words to say to that goddess but Piper's charm speak stopped him.

"'Mom, it'll ... a moment before."

Percy grinned and gave a hollow laugh that would have scared him had he not been so engrossed in thinking about the contents of the package.

"It was a ... RETURN TO SENDER."

Everyone was grinning or chuckling evilly. It would serve the human right to be petrified by Medusa. Jason stared at Percy. He didn't know whether to be glad that Percy would finally get rid of that filth or be afraid that at the age of twelve Percy would have no problem doing something like that. If Percy did follow through, then it would mean that he had a dark side all along and Jason needed time to digest that.

The heroes of old were pleased with what was to come. It was fitting of a hero to remove all the monsters including the mortals. They themselves would have done that. Hades! If they didn't have Medusa's head, they would have killed the mortal with a mortal weapon. The three waited eagerly for Percy to remove Gabe from life.

"Suddenly I ... the Sea God."

Poseidon nodded and knew that whatever actions Percy would ever take, he would still accept his son.

"I looked at ... the living room."

"Yes!" Perseus exclaimed. That was what he had done for the princess and that was what Percy should do for his mother.

While everyone, barring the few who knew the truth, waited for Percy to do something like that, Hestia looked at the son of Poseidon and realized what he must have done. She smiled a small smile. This hero was different… so very different from the others. He understood how to yield. She just knew it. He knew when to step back and let others take care of themselves and only step in to offer some help but never direct interference.

"That's what a Greek hero would do in the stories, I thought. That's what Gabe deserves."

"Exactly." Hercules said.

"You are hesitating." Poseidon said. He had framed it as a question but it ended up as a statement. He knew his son would chose his own path and not go according to the norm of heroes. He really was the true son of sea god.

"But a hero's ... Even Gabe?"
"What?" No one could believe that Percy was even thinking about such a thing. It should be a no-brainer to get rid of Gabe.

"No." Hades said to Percy in reply to the question the boy had asked himself. When everyone turned with a questioning look to look at Hades, he explained. "No one has the right to take another's life, no matter how justified. Well, theoretically anyway. Sometimes you cannot avoid such a thing, but if you do have a choice, then do not do it. The boy is right in thinking that it is not his place to take such a decision. If anyone should get the opportunity to take a decision…it should be the mother. After all, she was the victim. And the victim should have the right to choose. That being said," Hades looked at Percy, "the torture you thought of is pretty good. When that man's spirit ends up in the Underworld, I will personally make sure he gets that treatment." … and then some, the god added to himself as he saw the look on Poseidon's face. He knew that Poseidon would want to have a say in this man's torture.

The gods and demigods of past thought about what Hades had said but decided that it was not the Greek way. The boy should exact his vengeance.

"A month ago... rid of him."

Annabeth grinned and said softly, "She did all of that and then some." She thought about how in a couple of months Percy would have a baby sibling, whom he was looking forward to spoil completely.

"She wiped ... wave of his hand."

Amphitrite raised an eyebrow and looked at her husband and spoke slowly. "You did what?"

"It's in the future?" Poseidon said apologetically. He must have really loved this woman to offer her so much. A palace? He definitely would have loved her.

Amphitrite was thinking the same thing but then thought about why the woman didn't take up Poseidon's offer. No mortal would have been to resist such a proposition from a god. What made this one so special?

"'What's wrong ... me of that.'"

The queen of seas smiled and understood why her husband had fell for this mortal woman. She was free spirited, just like him. She did not want anyone to take care of her. She was her own person. That, the goddess of sea could appreciate.

"That is really inspiring." Hazel said and everyone agreed. It would take incredible courage and will power to not take the easy road out, especially such a tempting one.

The Greek campers were reminded of the time Percy had refused godhood. He may have had a lot of reasons to do that, but they realized that this very characteristic of his mother might have been a contributing factor.

"We listened ... of the summer."

That was Percy alright, thought the campers. Giving others choice to make their own decisions but putting his foot down as to where he stood on the topic.

"She kissed my forehead. "You'll be a hero, Percy. You'll be the greatest of all.'""

"So true." Someone said softly.
"I took one... all. Her own."

There were a lot of grins and smiles in the room as they realized what Sally might have done.

"'The meat ... a garden statue."

"Yes!" a few demigods exclaimed gleefully.

"Oh, she deserves to take her revenge." Nemesis said.

"And then she deserves some good luck." Tyche added, to which Nemesis secretly agreed but did not say out loud to her sister. She had an image to maintain, after all.

"I like this woman." Amphitrite whispered to her husband who looked at her in shock. He tried to find any traces of anger, jealousy or anything else but only found that she was speaking the truth.

'I do too.' The god of seas thought to himself, but dared not say it aloud, lest the good mood of his wife evaporate.

Hestia smiled warmly at Percy and thought about how her observation of him had been correct. The boy knew when to step back. The mother was no damsel in distress, she was the hero who saved herself.

Artemis and her hunters were thinking about the same thing. Percy must have gotten many of his qualities from his mother, they thought. No wonder he was so sensitive towards the hunters and didn't judge them inferior just because of their gender. He knew first hand that women could take care of themselves and didn't try to impose his opinions on them, unlike the men they had ever come across. Zoe could see why she and Phoebe would have befriended him in the future.

"This chapter is done." Pan said. "I think there is only more left and then we will be done with this book."

"Oh good. This quest was dragging on for a long time." Some minor god commented but was ignored by the majority.

"In that case, allow me to read the last chapter." Hebe said.
Treason of the highest order

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Ch32 – TLT – Treason of the highest order

The goddess of youth read, "THE PROPHECY COMES TRUE"

"Didn't it already?" Gwen asked, her brows furrowing in confusion.

"Yeah, I mean you guys went west, got the bolt and helm and returned it. What more is there?" Piper asked.

"You can only understand a prophecy's actual meaning once it has come to pass and not before that." Apollo said sagely.

The older Greek campers exchanged nervous glances. They wondered how the gods would take the betrayal. The campers had years and still some of them weren't over it and the sacrifices that came along with it. This exchange didn't go unnoticed by a few gods.

"Oh no. Something bad happens?" Hazel asked nervously as she saw the campers' nervous looks. She looked at Nico for an answer.

"I don't know. I hadn't come to the camp yet." Nico replied, turning to ask Will, but the blond also replied that he came to camp only a few months before Nico did. Percy leaned over the couch and told the new couple just one word, and they both nodded and became solemn.

"You will find out in this chapter anyway." Annabeth said.

"We were the... in our absence."

"Who made your shroud?" Theseus asked Percy. His future brother had no siblings and no one else would know how to make a proper burial shroud for a child of Poseidon.

Clarisse snorted and Percy smiled as he mock glared at her, which was pretty hard to do and not look like he was suffering from some sort of facial muscular disease, but he managed it just fine. It had been the best shroud he had ever had, but he wouldn't tell that to Annabeth, whose cabin had made his second shroud that the camp had burned when he had disappeared to Calypso's island.

"Annabeth's shroud ... to burn."

All of the older campers chuckled as they remembered Percy burning the shroud. It had been a good day. One of the last proper joyful days they had had before everything went to Tartarus.

"As Apollo's ... seen in the past."

"Of course!" Pan exclaimed proudly. "I have yet to meet a satyr as brave as Grover!"

A few demigods, Tyson and Hedge clapped and laughed, while Grover was blushing furiously.
"The only ones not in a party mood were Clarisse and her cabinmates, whose poisonous looks
told me they'd never forgive me for disgracing their dad."

"Yeah, never." Deimos whispered to his twin. They had decided to corner Percy in the next break.
It shouldn't be that long now.

Clarisse shrugged. She and her cabin were somewhat over that. Having a war dangling on their
heads and losing friends put some things in perspective. They had long ago gotten over any major
issues that they had and most of their fights were just for show or fun. They loved to have a love-
hate sibling relationship. And it was fun to confuse the other campers with their weird friendship.

"That was okay ... races this Saturday...""

"Wow… just wow." Jason whispered, shaking his head.

"That's Mr. D for you." Percy replied with a smile. Camp would not be camp without Mr. D's
annoying comments.

"I moved back... what I'd done."

Poseidon smiled at his son. He would always be proud of his child and he hoped his son knew that
the sea god never regretted him being born.

The other half-bloods had a faraway look on their faces. That was all they had ever wanted for
themselves – for their parent to be proud of them and actually tell them that they were proud.

"As for my ... super-ugly neorealism.""

"Oh, good for her." Hestia smiled warmly.

"At least that Gabe was good for something." Thalia said.

"But don't worry... by cabin nine."

"I love the fireworks! Too bad we had to miss it this year." Percy said.

"You guys have fireworks?" Dakota asked dreamily and looked to Reyna to ask if they could also
get fireworks.


"Being Hephaestus's ... million colors."

"That sounds… awesome." Gwen said and the other Romans agreed.

"Hey, maybe when we go back we can have just random celebratory fireworks show." Travis
suggested, looking at Chiron for permission.

"That would be good, if cabin 9 does not mind working on it." Chiron replied with a smile. He
knew the children – all of them – needed something good to happen to them. Hopefully, the
fireworks would get them back to their usual spirits.

"We can swing it." Leo said, looking up from the miniature Colchis bull that he was making.

"As Annabeth and ... humans and Pan ...""
Grover had a small smile on his face. In the end it was humans, satyr and cyclops together when they had found Pan.

Pan wished for his own sake, that the satyr would find him soon enough and not get hurt in the process.

"'We understand,' ... old mama goat.'"

"Yeah, Annabeth. You are such a mom." Thalia teased her best friend who rolled her eyes at her but had a smile on her face.

Pan thought Grover to be very lucky to have such caring friends. Not everyone was blessed with such companionship.

"But he didn't ... the Nemean lion,"

Zeus looked at Hercules with pride. Hercules wore a similar expression on his face as he thought that he was actually famous in the future.

"Am I well known in the future?" Hercules asked. He wanted to know what the future demigods thought of him.

"Yes." Jason said. He knew that Percy and Thalia did not like Hercules for some reason and Jason himself wasn't fond of his half-brother from the time he met him at the island.

Hearing this, the hero sat up straighter, puffed his chest out and had a proud look on his face that made him look identical to his father.

"Artemis chasing the ... good enchiladas.'"

Percy and Grover grinned at each other. Enchiladas were kind of their inside joke – something that only the two of them shared from their time together at Yancy.

"Grover grinned, ... had to be."

"Are you sure you are not prophetic?" Will asked Percy.

"Nah! He is just overly intuitive." Annabeth replied as she smiled at Percy.

"July passed.

... rather than Hades."

"Not a traitor." Ares muttered under his breath.

"You shall ... betrayed me."

"So that is what is yet to be completed then?" Apollo said. When Hermes nudged him to explain, he said, "Ares never pretended to be the children's friend. Throughout their encounter he was only an ally at best. That means that a friend is yet to betray him."

"But what else is left?" Artemis pondered. "The quest has been completed. A betrayal would make sense in the middle of the quest, but after the quest...?"

Having no answers to their questions, Hebe continued, "That must be ... in the center."
All the campers who had that bead, were playing with it. It was a habit of numerous campers – to play with the beads. It reminded them that they had a home and friends no matter where they were.

"'The choice ... stop a war!'"

"That he started in the first place." Clarisse muttered angrily. She hated Luke for taking away Chris from her and for making him go into that wretched labyrinth all on his own. Chris had almost died because of Luke.

"The entire ... for the year."

The gods noticed that all the demigods had a faraway look and the biggest smiles that they had seen. The children smiled unintentionally as they heard Percy's thoughts. They all always felt the same way on the last day of camp. The camp was the only place they were truly accepted. No one judged them for being loud or quirky or fidgety. They didn't have to hide their personalities because there were others just like them. And to leave that behind at the end of the summer and go into the mortal world where they had to watch their every step and word, it was saddening to say the least.

"The next morning, ... Council #12"

"That's a cheerful letter." Dakota said sarcastically as he took a sip of his 'special Kool-Aid'.

"That's another thing about ADHD. Deadlines just aren't real to me until I'm staring one in the face."

There were murmurs of agreements from all the demigods, except Annabeth, Reyna and Jason, who just rolled their eyes. It wasn't that hard to finish the job before the deadline, was it?

"Summer was ... a classroom-duh."

"You shouldn't even have to think so much. You would need training." Perseus said.

Percy shrugged and responded, "I would get to stay alone with my mom for the first time. Plus, I stay in the same city as the camp. Could just go there if it was needed."

"But there was ... good or not."

"Please tell me you didn't actually take that as a consideration point." Annabeth said to Percy, who just grinned at her. Of all the things he took as advice, this had to be one of them!

"I thought ... the next summer?"

"Would it kill you to be optimistic?" Travis asked his friend.

"Most of the times... yes." Percy replied in all seriousness.

"That was ... my head."

"I usually go to the sea and cleanse." Theseus told Percy.

"Cleanse?" Percy looked quizzically at his brother.

"Uh... that's what our older sister, Alyona calls it. Basically to let go and externalize the emotions onto the sea. It clears the mind."
"Oh. Never tried it. I usually just go sit there and talk to fishes."

"Don't you get more problems to think about if you do that?"

"Yeah." Percy shrugged. He didn't mind the problems of the fishes. They were so much simpler than his problems, it was almost therapeutic to listen and solve them.

"The campgrounds... the same idea."

The campers steeled themselves for what was to come. Most of them had been there at the camp when the wood nymphs had dragged a dying Percy out of the woods. They knew it wouldn't be long before the truth would come out. They had never known exactly what had happened between Luke and Percy. This would be their chance.

"His gym bag... straw and armor."

Hermes felt proud at his son's fighting techniques. He wondered why this son of his wasn't here in the reading. According to the book, he was the senior counselor and yet here Travis and Connor had told him that they were the senior counselors. What had happened to Luke? From Percy's thoughts it was kind of obvious that Luke was important, just by the number of times he was mentioned. Then why wasn't he here? Did something happen to him? Hermes had never even known this child of his and yet he was already feeling protective of him, just by the book's talk of Luke. He hoped that nothing happened to his son.

"They were only... the other steel."

"WHAT?!" a few gods shouted.

"That is not supposed to exist." Hephaestus said. He had given clear instructions at all his forges to ensure that no mortal and godly metal was ever mixed. So, where did this demigod get such a weapon?

"If it is both celestial bronze and steel, then it can be used against both immortals and mortals." Leo said in confusion. No demigod was supposed to hurt mortals. It was one of their biggest rules. They why did this Luke character have this sword? And where did he get it from?

"Exactly. That is the whole reason it is forbidden." Hephaestus told his son.

"Not the only reason..." Zeus said nervously, which in turn made the other gods nervous. Their king was never nervous.

"What do you mean?" Hermes asked. He was getting worried. Why did his son have a forbidden weapon? Something was wrong here.

"I hope you are wrong." Hades told Zeus, having come to the same conclusion as his brother. Looking at Hebe, he said, "Read on."

"Luke noticed me looking at it. "Oh, this? New toy. This is Backbiter."

"So apt." Clarisse said.

"'Backbiter?"

... immortals both."
"That has to be a forbidden weapon." Theseus said.

"It is." Poseidon replied. "There has only ever been one other weapon having the same metals in it."

"Father's scythe." Hera said and the six elder gods looked at each other in nervousness. That weapon was pure evil.

"Why would a demigod be wielding such a dangerous weapon?" Artemis asked.

Hermes was thinking the same thing. Why would his son be having this weapon? Especially if the last known weapon having the same composition was the most dangerous weapon in their entire history. Kronos' scythe was the only weapon known to have killed two immortals. No sane person would want to be within at least a mile of that weapon, if they could help it.

"I may have an idea… but let us hope that I am wrong." Athena said, which made the others anxious because the wisdom goddess was never ever wrong. "Let us continue reading."

"I thought about ... one of a kind."

"It can't be…" Zeus muttered under his breath.

"He gave me ... why I hesitated."

"This is like listening to a horror movie." Will said. "You know something bad will happen and you want to shout at the hero to not do something, but it's useless."

"I have a bad feeling about this Luke person." Triton said. "What does he mean by 'one last time'? It sounds like either or neither of you would come back."

"I should've ... 'Drinks are on me.'"

"Oh, come on! That's like Percy's kryptonite." Connor said. "No wonder you went with him."

"Kryptonite?" Triton asked.

"The one weakness. You know like how you can lure animals with food? It's the same thing with Percy and Coke." Thalia said.

"Ok. You are exaggerating. I am not that bad." Percy protested.

"Umm… Percy? Even we know that you love coke." Gwen said. "And we have known you for only a couple of weeks."

Percy started protesting but none of the campers were believing him, so he just pouted.

"I stared at ... a satyr, maybe."

"Or the right people in cabin 11." Pollux said.

"Dude, no." Travis whispered to Pollux. "Chiron is here."

"I heard that." Chiron said with a smile. "And Mr. D and I are already aware of what all you smuggle in anyway."

"No!" Travis stage whispered with a look of horror.
"Bet you, you can't find our stash." Connor said, giving his brothers a high five.

Chiron playfully narrowed his eyes at the children and let it be. They were always unsuccessful in searching for the cabin 11 stash of... well, everything. The camp didn't even have that many hiding spots. Where did the children hide their stuff?

"Of course, the ... willpower crumbled."

"See, kryptonite!" Grover said and many laughed.

"Hey, man. You are just like me. Except that I like Kool-Aid." Dakota said.

"You don't just like Kool-Aid. You are addicted to it." Frank said.

"Don't tell me that you can get as hyper as Dakota does." Jason said. He had never seen a hyper-active Percy. Well, no more than the usual.

"No, strangely enough, it actually calms me down." Percy replied.

"Hmm..." Will hummed, looking at Percy as if he was a test subject till Lou Ellen snapped him out of his musings.

"Sure," I decided. ... it," I admitted.

"Really?" Triton asked. Why would anyone miss being attacked?

"Not anymore." Percy replied. He had had enough of quests and saving the world. He just wanted to... retire and live a safe life with Annabeth.

"You?"

... Have a nice life."

"Oh, he cannot use me as an excuse!" Thalia said through gritted teeth. Unbelievable.

"He makes it sound like it was a pity quest." Connor said dejectedly. Luke was everyone's hero, everyone's big brother and when he had betrayed the camp, the whole camp felt as if someone had stabbed them in the back.

Hermes leaned forward in his couch and clasped his hands together. Something was about to happen. Something bad and his son was in the middle of it. He just knew it.

"He crumpled ... Big House attic."

"What is he doing?" Gwen whispered anxiously to anyone who would listen, but everyone was too engrossed in the story to pay any attention.

"You make it ... to say good-bye."

"Oh gods! That has double meaning, does it not?" Perseus said.

"He snapped his fingers. A small fire burned a hole in the ground at my feet. Out crawled something glistening black, about the size of my hand. A scorpion."

"A pit scorpion?" Will gasped. The poison from a pit scorpion was almost impossible to cure,
especially if it stayed in the body for longer than half a minute.

"What is he doing?" Hermes breathed out. He looked at his demigod sons sitting near him. Travis' eyes were closed and his girlfriend was rubbing soothing circles on his palm. Connor was fiddling with a piece of scrap metal that he had picked up from Leo. It was a nervous trait, Hermes was sure. And Chris was looking down at his lap. The god of thieves looked at the other children and sure enough, some of them looked nervous and others anxious.

"What is going on, son? Why is that boy attacking you?" Poseidon asked. His son just finished a quest, why was this happening to him?

Percy took a breath and said, "We should read."

"I started to ... in sixty seconds."

"It is true, isn't it? What Lady Hestia had earlier thought of? That he wants the children to rise up against us?" Athena asked. "That is why this boy has a blade made of bronze and steel. That is the reason he is setting a pit scorpion on Percy, isn't it?"

"Why are you saying that?" Hermes asked, his hands clenched so tightly that his knuckles were white.

"Think about it." Athena said in a calm voice. "The boy had been bitter towards us even in the beginning of the book and his failed quest must have only increased these feelings."

"It does make sense. Besides, he is Percy's friend and the prophecy said that he would be betrayed by a friend. This could..." Apollo said.

"We will read to find out more. Do not make assumptions." Hermes interrupted in a clipped tone but he had a feeling that Athena was right. She always was – perks of being the wisdom goddess. But he hoped that she would be wrong this one time.

"'Luke, what-'

... you a friend."

Normally the gods would never leave such a golden opportunity to prove that they were right. But this was no normal situation. A child of the gods was betraying them. He was turning his back on them to go to… Kronos? Why?

"'You," I said.

... to us half-bloods."

"How dare that child speak of us in such a manner?" Zeus bellowed.

Apollo patted an upset Hermes, who was still trying to grasp what his son had just said. All the gods were in an uproar. How could a demigod say such a thing about them?

Poseidon asked Percy to explain what had happened, to which Percy replied, "I don't remember much of this conversation but I'm sure that Luke explained a bit more. We should read and see and after that if you still want, I can explain."

Zeus glared at Percy but asked Hebe to read.
"I couldn't ... love them? ..."

"Yes." many demigods whispered.

"...Their precious '...more honest.'"

"Oh gods! He sounds like a mad man. I can't believe I ever listened to him." Chris whispered into his hands. He thought of all the promises Luke and Kronos had made to him and then had let him rot in the damn Labyrinth. It was only when Chris had woken up in the big house with Mr. D looking at him in concern for a second before his expression morphed into his usual indifference and a worried Clarisse dressed in her usual armor but speckled with dirt and blood, then Chris had realized what a huge mistake he had made. He had left his friends and family, his Clarisse and gone against everything he had known only to find out how disillusioned he had been.

"'You're as crazy as Ares.'"

"YOU..."

"Quiet, Ares."

Ares sat down grumbling about taking revenge on the disrespectful son of Poseidon.

"His eyes ... time to think."

"Yes. Stall him." Theseus muttered. Why did his brother had to be in the middle of whatever that was happening?

"'Kronos,' I ... brainwashing you, Luke.'"

"Exactly! He excels at that." Hades said.

"He is using our own children against us."

"'You're wrong.... could think up.'"

"That is a good quest." Reyna said. "Getting past the dragon is no joke." She remembered when the legion had stormed Mt. Othrys.

Hermes frowned at his son's words. That was not an easy quest. Till date only Hercules had managed to complete the quest. Why did his son not understand that?

"'That's not an ... discovered my theft.'"

"We never pitied him. All of us always looked up to him." Connor said in a hollow voice.

"That traitor should be hunted down and killed." Zeus said angrily.

"Brother, this has already happened. I am sure we would have taken the necessary steps." Hestia, ever the voice of reason, said softly but firmly. Turning to the children, she asked, "How...how much time had passed between the quest and the theft?"

"Around two years." Annabeth replied, wondering where the goddess of hearth was going with this.

Hestia pursed her lips and nodded. "That is a long time to be controlled by father. If the child was being brainwashed the entire time, he cannot break the hold."
"You dare support the child?" Zeus asked his sister.

"No, I am not supporting anyone. I am just stating that I do not think the child was capable of making lucid decisions if he was being brainwashed. Once he was under the control of father, he would have done whatever was asked of him."

"Regardless of all that, the child should not have listened to father in the first place." Poseidon said. It was a very serious matter if Kronos had been able to manipulate a demigod to this degree. Demigods were not easily susceptible to suggestion.

Hermes snapped out his thoughts. Until now he had been sitting in a rigid position, unable to process what Luke had done. But now he said in a low voice, "When Ares could be controlled by him, then how could my son be able to resist?"

"You still claim him as your child? Even when he has so clearly committed treason and is working with father?" Zeus asked his son.

"Yes. He is still my son, is he not? It is clear that he is being controlled by the Titan Lord. Instead of trying to think about killing him, we should try to find out how to break the hold. We should try to save him. He is only a child."

"It takes a great amount of willpower to break his control." Hades said. He had seen powerful allies of the gods fall because of that.

"He will be able to do that. I would not just have given that quest to anyone if they were not strong enough to do it." Hermes took a deep breath and said, "Anyway, we should be discussing the threat that the Titan Lord poses if he is able to control demigods and gods."

The corners of Percy's lips turned upwards as he thought about how even though Hermes knew nothing about Luke, he still defended him. It reminded him of the various times the god had asked Percy to save Luke. He just wished that Luke would have seen it earlier, then maybe the war could have been avoided. Clearing his throat, he said, "We should actually continue with the reading. All of this had already happened and reading would give more answers than discussing, because we cannot say anything about what has not been read."

"The scorpion was ... down to Tartarus.""

"How long has father been planning all of this?" Hera whisper-asked as she covered her mouth with her hand.

Ares scoffed. As if a mere child could beat him in battle. That miserable son of sea god only won because he used his powers while Ares was being controlled by Kronos. No one could beat him in his own domain.

"'You summoned ... confused the curse."

"The plan is pretty well thought out." Athena said. "If it weren't for the enmity between father and Poseidon, Percy would have worn the shoes and the plan would have actually worked."

"In that case, for the first and the last time, I'm glad that these two fight." Demeter said.

"Luke looked ... they will pay for."

"Di immortales!" Thalia cursed. "I gave up my own life. If anything, the gods preserved my life."
"You're being ... who serve him."

"Only a fool would believe that." Zeus scoffed.

"Father would not care about who helped him rise as long as he is able to gain control. Then no one other than the titans would be spared." Poseidon said.

"That was how he was getting people to work for him. He promised them a better future where they would be recognized and respected." Percy said.

"You mean there are more who joined him? Our own children?" Athena asked.

Percy tapped a finger on his lips and said, "Sorry. The Fates asked us not to reveal anything not read out."

"Call off the ... of darkness."

"Oh!" Hades gasped.

"Now what is wrong?" Artemis asked. They had already gotten way too many shocks in a matter of few minutes.

"That is not just an ordinary sword. That is the scythe itself." Hades said.

"Or a manifestation of it. It seems to use the same dark energy that father possessed." Zeus said.

Hermes worried his lower lip as he thought that Luke must be the most important piece of Kronos' plan if he was wielding the scythe itself. But why? Why was his son involved in all of this? Had he been that bad a parent that his son would want to destroy him?

"The scorpion ... me after all."

Poseidon squeezed Amphitrite's hand as he reminded himself that nothing had happened to his son. Why did his child have to suffer so much?

Percy stroked the faint scar on his palm. It had faded a lot over the years, to a point where you needed to look for it to actually see it. But that had been one of his earliest scars and he remembered getting it as clearly as if it happened a few minutes before.

"My ears pounded. My vision went foggy. The water, I thought. It healed me before."

"Water will not work on pit scorpion poison." Triton informed.

Theseus furrowed his brows and asked, "Why not? Water heals everything else for us."

"When you get poisoned and go into water, the water pulls out the poison from the blood stream. But this pit scorpion poison works too fast and there will not be enough time for water to pull it out." Poseidon explained to his sons.

"I stumbled to ... a conch horn."

"Oh good!"

"If you don't mind… how did you get back to camp within sixty seconds? You must have already lost time when you were at the creek. And within sixty seconds the poison would kill you, correct?" Will was genuinely curious. He could not imagine any scenario short of super human
speed that would take Percy back to camp within the time limit.

"Actually the poison would work a bit slowly on Percy than it would on any other demigod." Amphitrite explained. "Percy's constitution is different from other demigods. He has more water in him, which means that his internal water would delay the poison from reaching his heart. It would give him enough time to get help."

"You know, I've never thought about how any of this actually works." Percy whispered to Annabeth.

"In that case, it's good that you are getting answers."

"Hmm... I think you and Will are more interested in this than I am."

"That is true." For some reason Will had assigned himself the doctor for all the seven a few days after the war.

"Then everything ... see me conscious."

The campers laughed. It was such an Annabeth thing to say, especially to Percy.

"You guys do know that infirmary might not be the best place to flirt?" Connor teased the couple and got a crumpled drawing sheet thrown at him in response.

"Dunno. I don't think the infirmary is all that bad. What do you say?" Will cheekily whispered to Nico, who rolled his eyes but was blushing the whole time.

"You were green ... grading Latin papers."

"I think healing you would have been a bit more tiring than grading Latin papers." Travis laughed.

"How are you ... then microwaved."

"Wow. How did you even come up with that?" Jason asked.

"I have great imagination."

"Apt, considering ... go after him."

"No. You need to rest." Poseidon said in his best dad-voice, which had Percy automatically nodding.

"Chiron shook ... the matter closed!"

"I hope he opened it once Chiron reported this to us." Hestia said, but she and the other gods got their answer when they looked at the demigods' faces. Even after all that, how much in denial could Zeus be?

"Percy, I know ... And Annabeth?"

"Which prophesy?" Demeter asked.

"The one that said that Annabeth needed to wait for someone special to come to camp?" Apollo asked. He did not remember any other prophesy being mentioned.

"Yes. But there was another related prophesy. It should come up at some point." Chiron said.
Apollo frowned. Two related prophesies would only mean something huge was about to happen. Prophesies were hardly ever connected unless something was majorly wrong.

"Chiron glanced ... haven't you?"

"We forebode you from talking about this prophesy?" Poseidon asked. This was much more serious than he imagined, especially if this prophesy was about Percy. Was it about his son? Did his son have to go through more troubles?

"His eyes were ... never a good thing."

"That much is true," Apollo said. "The heroes always try to change the outcome. But once you try to do that, the prophesy becomes self-fulfilling. There is no escaping it. It's better to let it play out on its own."

"We can't just ... not to advise me."

"Yes, I did." Chiron sighed. "But, I have had experience with telling other children of Poseidon what to do and then they would go out of their way to not do that. I have learned that it's easier for everyone if we let you decide on your own."

"Ah." Poseidon chuckled.

"But you must ... they're here."

"Who is?" Athena asked her daughter.

"You will see."

"Who's here? ... need anything?"

"That has to be the first and last time she took your advice, kelp head." Thalia said.

"Maybe not the last time. But, one of the few." Annabeth agreed.

"Hey, I give good advice." Percy protested. "Just ask the fishes and the horses."

"We rather not." Jason chuckled.

"It's actually not bad. I have talked to the fishes and the horses." Grover defended his friend.

Ignoring the extreme weirdness of the children's talk, Hebe read, "Yeah. Help me up. I want to go outside."

"Percy, that ... of bed."

"See. Never tell Percy not to do something." The demigods chuckled thinking about all the times Percy had broken any rule that went against what he wanted to do.

"Annabeth caught ... the Western world."

Hermes stroked his beard and hoped that he had tried to interfere and save his son from this horrible fate that he was heading towards.

"I managed a ... don't know."
"I would say – stay at camp and train – but I have a feeling that you are not going to do that." Perseus said.

"Percy doesn't do easy." Travis said waggling his brows at Percy and Annabeth. He stopped once he got a crumpled paper to his face. The paper contained a crossed out design of what looked like an amphitheater.

"I told her ... for company..."

"Excuse me." Clarisse said indignantly.

"Annabeth pursed ... Waterland in Denver."

"You spoke to your father?" Athena smiled as Annabeth nodded. Hopefully, now her daughter and the father could get over their differences and maybe Annabeth could get a home to go to.

"'I wrote him ... Iris-message?!'"

"Never." Percy whispered to Annabeth.

"It doesn't even apply anymore, seeing as I'm going to be staying at your place." Annabeth whispered back and Percy smiled brightly enough to compete with one of Apollo's grins.

"I managed a ... anyway. Agreed?!"

"Looks like you both are good at foreshadowing." Katie said.

"You sneaked off on a quest?" Theseus asked and shook his head when Percy smiled at him.

"'Sounds like a plan worthy of Athena.'"

"No. It sounds like a horrible plan." Athena rolled her eyes. This son of Poseidon was going to get her daughter into all sorts of trouble.

"She held ... truly alone."

"Aww… you already miss her!" Gwen said. When everyone looked at her weirdly, she said, "I am a legacy of Venus, guys. This is allowed."

"I looked out ... of my choice?"

"Of course I would." Poseidon assured his son.

"'I'll be back next summer,' I promised him. "I'll survive until then. After all, I am your son." I asked Argus to take me down to cabin three, so I could pack my bags for home."

"That was the end of the book." Hebe said as she closed the book and passed it along to Hestia to keep it at the hearth.

"A lot happened in this book." Artemis said. "The Titan Lord is rising and using demigods and gods as his pawns."

"I hope we are actually prepared for it." Her twin said.

"Maybe the next book will mention something about that." Hestia said. "As for now, how about
we take some break and come back and start the second book?"

Everyone eagerly nodded. The demigods were getting anxious being cooped up inside for so long and the gods wanted to just walk off the built up tension.
(A/N - I do not own PJo, RR does.

This is the break chapter... largely Percy centric. I swear I didn't intend for it to be this long...I think it is long... anyway, once I started writing, I couldn't stop. Hope you guys like it.

Sea of Monsters will be from next chapter onwards.

Happy Reading :D )

Ch33 – TLT – Fool me twice

Will and Nico were walking in a secluded area, exchanging stories. Will had just finished telling Nico about his mom and her singing career and was pestering Nico to tell him something about his adventures.

"I really don't have anything good to tell."

"I don't care if you tell me about how the paperwork in Underworld works, ok? You have to start talking to people, starting with me."

"You're annoying."

"Thanks. I take great pleasure in it. Now talk to me."

Nico groaned in frustration. Will had been badgering him to speak up since forever now. It wasn't his fault that nothing interesting ever happened in the Underworld and that was where he spent most of his time. Nico wanted to tell something fun and exciting, like all of Will's stories were. He didn't want to come off as boring and …

Will interrupted Nico's thought process, "How about we play 20 questions? But I do all the asking and you do all of the answering and no one word or one sentence answers allowed."

"Uhh… ok?" At least Nico wouldn't have to think of something to talk about. Answering questions – he could do that… maybe. The look on Will's face was frightening at the very least.

"Great." Will smiled brightly and was bouncing on his heels, which was equal parts endearing and scary for Nico. "Let's start with something easy…"

"How long have you been waiting to do this?"

"Way too long… now the question… yeah… Would you like to be my boyfriend?"

"Uhh… duh."

Will couldn't wipe the smile off his face. "I told you no one word answers." He said cheekily.

"What do you want me to do? Write an essay on it?"

"That would be flattering. Anyway, this was a yes/no question, so you are forgiven…"

Nico rolled his eyes. Will looked like a kid left in a store that had all his favorite toys, games, puppies and ice-cream.
Okay… easy question… Who is your favorite god? … Other than your dad.

"Hmmm… Dionysus." Nico said. Will looked at him expectantly and gestured a 'go-on' motion with his hand. "Do I have to explain? … Fine. He has cool powers okay? Like who wouldn't want the ability to make someone go mad? Or…or cure it." Nico smirked and said, "That was more than one sentence. Next question."

"That hardly even qualified." Will pouted. "What do you do in your free time?"

"Visit the Fields of Asphodel, play with Cerberus, and hide from Persephone." Nico replied, ticking off the points on his fingers as he said them.

"You are not really getting the point of no one sentence answers."

"Those were three very distinct points. Moving on, Solace."

Will frowned and asked, "Why do you hide from Persephone? And I want a full answer this time."

"Humph. Fine. She doesn't like me because… well, obvious reasons – proof of infidelity and all that. And if I do anything to annoy her, which is literally everything I do including breathing, she turns me into… a dandelion." Nico muttered the last part.

Will chuckled but stopped himself when he saw Nico glaring at him. "Fine. Fine. Next question. Which camp do you prefer? The 'why' is already included in the question, so don't just answer the name of camp."

Nico made a face. "Camp Half Blood, obviously. People are much friendlier here and don't avoid me like the plague… And uh… you are in Camp Half Blood and so are my other friends." Nico said, turning pink.

"Why did you never stay at camp before if you like it?" Will asked. It seemed like this was something that had been troubling him.

Nico stopped walking and scowled at the ground to get his thoughts in order. When he looked up, he saw Will standing next to him, staring at him in curiosity with an encouraging smile. "Because of who my dad is. He wasn't accepted or allowed on Olympus and it was the same for me. People don't like hanging around with those who control the dead, Will. Don't say that it's not true." Nico said when Will was about to protest. "It is true. That's why there had been no cabin for the Hades' children."

"No. The reason why we didn't have the Hades cabin was the same as why we didn't have cabins for minor gods – the Olympians don't care for anyone other than themselves. And until now, everyone was scared of the power your dad holds. That much is obvious from the reading. Regardless, you also ran off when we had the Hades cabin." Will reached forward to hold Nico's hand, making the shorter demigod blush despite the topic they were discussing. "I hope you know that we want you around. So don't go running away this time."

"Uhh…" Nico blinked, trying to get over the fact that he was holding hands with Will. The previous time he had held the blonde's hand was when he was having a mini panic attack, so that did not count. "I won't." Nico promised. "And I didn't run away from camp after the Titan War. I was visiting dad because he was having problems and then the whole Camp Jupiter thing came up. And the gods made me promise that I wouldn't say anything about either camp, so I couldn't stay. And, I was searching for Thanatos and the doors of death at that time."

"Well, next time someone gets kidnapped, take one of us along, okay? Don't go solving problems
on your own." Will said as he pulled Nico to start walking again.

"Okay." Nico smiled. This was nice, he decided. Being accepted and having friends that cared about him was a new experience.

Will said after a while, "So, that has been what… 6 questions? Ok next one…” he trailed off as he saw Jason coming towards them. "Hey, Jason."

"Hey, guys." Jason greeted the couple before noticing that they were holding hands. "Oh… uh… bad timing, huh?"

"You needed something?" Nico asked Jason. He wasn't really interested in leaving Will now that they were talking and holding hands and enjoying in general. Did he mention that they were holding hands? He had been waiting his whole life to do something as simple as that with someone that he actually liked and not being judged for it.

"Uh… wanted to talk to you. But that can wait." Jason replied and then smirked and added, "You guys enjoy yourselves."

"No. Hey, if it is important, you guys talk. I can go…"

"Or he can talk to both of us." Nico said.

"It's kind of personal." Jason said seriously. "No, I'll talk later. It's ok… you guys…"

"Oh. Enough. It's pretty obvious that whatever you want to talk is important." Will said. Then he turned to Nico and said, "I'll meet up with you later." Making a split second decision, he leaned down and pecked Nico on his cheek before jogging towards the sounds of the campers talking.

Nico blinked slowly a couple of times before a slow, wistful smile appeared on his face as he stared after Will.

"Let me know when you come back to earth." Jason said with a knowing smile.

"Huh?" Nico said in a dazed manner before remembering that Jason was with him. He blushed but scowled at Jason's annoying smile and said grumpily as he started walking, "What did you want?"

"Sorry about interrupting. I didn't know…” Jason said as he fell in step with the son of Hades.

"Whatever. What did you want?"

"Wow. You are grumpy." At Nico's glare, Jason said, "Ok I wanted to talk about … uh Percy."

"What? Why?"

"So, umm… I was talking to him earlier and he said something that troubled me…"

"So, go trouble him."

"He wouldn't say anything."

"So, why did you come to me? I don't know him well. Annabeth or Grover would be better for answering whatever questions you have." Nico said, but stopped walking and looked at Jason. "Is it something about… the pit? Or…?"

"I don't know actually. I was talking to him in the morning about why he seemed a bit off. And we
talked and he said that I should talk to you and then left it at that."

"What was it about?" Nico asked, genuinely concerned for his friend/cousin. He knew Percy would never, for some reason, let Nico help him directly. At first he thought that Percy didn't want anyone's help, but now he wasn't so sure. After all, Percy talked to Jason about whatever was troubling him. Did Percy not want his help specifically? Or did Jason and Percy have a better relationship? Maybe it was a mix of both. Why would the son of Poseidon want Nico's help, when Nico had betrayed him or used him a couple of times? But then again, Nico had thought that he and Percy were getting along just fine.

"I… he said something about Theseus leaving Ariadne after she had helped him and that every hero was like that. That they would let people help them and then leave them behind. That's what Bac-Dionysus told him, anyway." Jason said, not knowing how much he should reveal. But then he decided that they needed to help Percy. This topic seemed to be on his mind for quite some time and seemed to be eating at him. And Percy being Percy, would not ask for help or discuss his problems. He preferred to help others rather than getting help from others.

"And this is bothering him… why?"

"Because he thinks that he is like that." Said a third voice. Seconds later, Annabeth materialized out of thin air, holding her Yankees cap in one hand.

Both Jason and Nico had jumped and immediately taken out their weapons when they heard a voice out of nowhere. Seeing Annabeth, they relaxed and Jason said, "Gods! You scared us."

"Sorry." Annabeth didn't look sorry in the least.

"Where's Percy?" Jason asked, looking around as if expecting his cousin to materialize out of thin air.

"Last I saw him, he was with the Stolls, planning some prank on Chris and Clarisse."

"Why is everyone after those two all of a sudden?" Nico asked.

"Their two year anniversary is coming up. The boys want it to be a 'bang' celebration. Hopefully, they don't mean it literally." Annabeth rolled her eyes and then looked at Jason in such a piercing manner that he almost wanted to cower. "I heard you looking around for Nico and had a feeling that you would talk about this topic. So, I followed you."

"Uh ok." Jason said. "Percy told you about what we had talked about?"

"Yes. I told him to directly talk to Nico and Calypso, but I have a feeling it will be weeks before he actually does that." She sighed and said, "Ever since the pit, he has been having troubles with this topic… and he just keeps it inside. I don't even know what prompted this thought in him."

"Still in the dark here." Nico said. "What did you say before? That Percy feels like he has… what? Used people and left them?" At both Jason and Annabeth's nod, Nico sighed, "Whom does he think he left behind?"

"You. And Calypso." Annabeth said.

"Me? Why me?"

"That's what I want to know. As far as I have seen, Percy is always helping Nico out." Jason frowned.
Annabeth looked at Nico and realized that he actually didn't know what they were talking about. Oh, how she wished Seaweed Brain could see Nico like this. Then he would know that he had nothing to worry about. Annabeth addressed Nico, "After Bianca… you had run away and Percy feels that if he had tried harder to find you, then he could have protected you from Minos' ghost. He feels bad that he didn't try to be a good friend to you and you still kept on saving his life, directly or indirectly. And it turns out that he had promised Bianca that he would take care of you and he says that he broke the promise."

Nico furrowed his brows as he thought about this. Shaking his head, he said, "That's… that's stupid. I mean… I left because of my crush on Percy and I didn't know how to handle it and the fact that my dad is Hades and no one wanted a Hades' kid hanging around the camp. I… none of that was his fault…" Then Nico got angry and said, "Is he stupid? Disillusioned? Having his head so far up…"

"Ok. Ok." Jason calmed Nico down. "It is no one's fault. The thing is Percy thinks that he did something wrong. He is overthinking it." But what prompted it? Why did Percy think that way? Jason didn't have any answers. He thought maybe he should talk to Percy again.

"I think that you should go talk to him. Help him out." Annabeth told Nico.

"He doesn't want my help."

"Did I mention that he is a vlakas?"

"That's a given."

"He thinks that it is his responsibility to take care of you because you are like a younger brother to him."

Both Nico and Jason groaned in frustration. Percy could be so thick headed sometimes. "Where is he?" Nico said. "I'll go and talk to him or beat it into him. I don't care."

"No!" Annabeth said. When the boys looked at her in confusion, she explained, "If you go and talk to Percy just like that, he is going to clam up, ok? The more you push him, the more he will push back."

"I think I felt something like that in the morning when I talked to him." Jason said.

"Hmm. It's a miracle that he actually talked to you last night and then today."

"Wait. You know about last night?"

"What happened last night?" Nico asked. Why was he not in the loop?

"Jason and Percy talked about something. He didn't tell what and I didn't ask. That's between the two of you." Annabeth glared at Jason, "You better keep it that way."

"I will." Jason said sincerely. "But if Percy won't let us help him, then what do we do?"

"Give him some time. Talk to him later. If he starts closing you out, don't push." Annabeth suggested. "Listen, I have to go find Percy. See you guys later. Don't do anything stupid. Oh, and congrats Nico." With that, the daughter of Athena walked towards the main palace, leaving the cousins to discuss what to do next.
Percy turned into another corridor and groaned. It looked just like the one he was in some time ago. He was contemplating leaving bread crumbs or rather sugar cubes, since he actually had some in his pocket, in each corridor that he went into. He had been with the Stolls, discussing pranks and whatnot, when they decided to split up and check the palace for good hiding spots and basically anywhere a couple of teenagers could do something and not be discovered immediately. And that was how he found himself walking in circles on the fourth floor of the palace. He had been trying to get out of this maze of corridors for quite some time. He was definitely going to be late to meet Annabeth. Oh, she was going to kill him.

He wasn't lost, he told himself. It must be that Daedalus fashioned the Labyrinth after the Olympian palace, because he had felt this confused only in that stupid Labyrinth. Unfortunately, the area that he was definitely not lost in, had only one window, but he couldn't find anything on the outside as footholds for him to scale down the wall and he didn't think Zeus and Hera would be impressed if he dug his sword into the wall and used that to slow down his fall. He was that desperate to get out of the palace. It didn't help that the more he walked around, the more he felt like the walls were closing in on him.

Reaching the end of the corridor, he sighed and turned left, only to come face to face with Deimos. Percy jumped back, suddenly on alert. His last meeting with this particular minor god had been less than spectacular.

"Hello. I am Deimos." The god of terror grinned at Percy and the demigod couldn't help but think of him as a shark about to devour a poor unsuspecting fish.

"Uh. Hi. I'm Percy…"

Deimos laughed and said in a sinister voice, "Oh, I know. We are reading a bunch of books about you."

Percy laughed nervously, trying to think of how to get past Deimos without annoying or upsetting the god. Sure, he had fought him in the past. But that was past for Percy, not the god. He did not want any problems in ancient times – he had plenty in his time.

"You look lost. Say, do you need any help?"

Alarms started going off inside Percy's head. This whole scenario reminded him of a 'Stranger-Danger' workshop back at Goode. Suddenly, the fact that he got lost in the palace didn't seem so normal. Percy was usually good with directions and now that he thought of it, he had been in this corridor earlier too. He had a feeling that Deimos was behind it. And if Deimos was here, Phobos would be lurking nearby. As if on cue, a voice behind Percy said, "He does look lost, doesn't he."

Percy turned around to face Phobos, but made sure that he could see Deimos from the corner of his eye. This reminded him of the various times he had got cornered and then beaten up by bullies. And Percy hated bullies – almost as much as he hated Kronos. And he really hated Kronos.

Making sure not to look the god of fears directly in the eye, Percy said, "You must be Phobos."

"Ah. You have heard of us." Phobos exclaimed gleefully.

"Yes. Phobos and Deimos – god of fear and terror, respectively. Twin sons of Ares and Aphrodite and drivers of his chariot. You both really hate it when anyone other than the two of you touch Ares' chariot." And are horrible swordsmen, he thought to himself, but didn't say aloud. "I learned
the family tree for an exam."

"Yes, well, you see you did something to make us really annoyed and angry." Deimos said.

"You made a fool out of father and well, we don't tolerate such an insult." Phobos said.

Percy had a few choice words to say about Ares but he let the moment go and said, "But that happened years ago and the Ares I know doesn't try to kill me every time I see him. Can't we just forget this and move on?" 'Let the enemy underestimate you.' Percy remembered a senior in one of his old schools telling him that. If they think you to be weak, they would let down their guard and you can get the upper hand by element of surprise.

"Not until we get our revenge and why waste this opportunity." Deimos said. Within a few seconds his eyes started glowing and he released waves of terror to wash over Percy. This would give his brother some time to go through the demigod's memories and thoughts and find Percy's fears.

Percy gasped and crashed into the wall behind him as he tried to get a hold of himself. He had expected the attack but he had never actually fought Deimos. He had battled Phobos and Deimos had been defeated by Clarisse. Being terrorized by Deimos' powers felt like a flashback and panic attack rolled into one, tied with a bow that was an external controller of the terror. Percy knew to an extent how to handle his panic attacks and flashbacks. If he could see the warning signs beforehand, he would be able to get himself back to normal quite quickly. But that was when it was all in his head. Now it was being controlled by Deimos – the one true expert on terror.

Nevertheless, Percy tried to take back control of his mind. He was not going to be defeated by two arrogant bullies, who were nothing without their powers.

Percy saw a lot of things – the various battle fields that he had fought on, speckled with bodies of the fallen heroes, Olympus in ruins, facing Kronos in the throne room with only a sword and the curse of Achilles, seeing Annabeth being pulled into Tartarus, fighting the Arai while trying to reach Annabeth, controlling the poison and tears of Akhlys and meeting Tartarus himself and losing Bob and Damasen to the primordial. When his mind reached the scenes of Tartarus, for a minute it felt like the hold of terror had loosened up, before his mind started replaying all of the scenes. Soon, he was lost in those memories. It felt like he was right there, whether it was standing in the middle of a battle field or in Arachne's cavern or wherever in Tartarus. The panic was too much and he felt light headed – like when he couldn't breathe. This sent him into another bout of panic as he remembered almost dying in a muskeg in Alaska.

Somewhere deep inside his brain, a small voice told him that it was all in his head, that he had survived everything and was on Olympus, that he was being bullied by two overgrown children. The son of Poseidon felt compelled to listen to the voice for two reasons. One, he had learned to listen to his instincts and two, the voice sounded oddly like Annabeth's and Percy knew not to ignore Annabeth unless he doesn't feel like kissing or hugging her for a day. So, Percy listened to the voice and started protesting against the images being shown to him. He reminded himself that he was on Olympus, that he was alive and that he didn't have to face any of those things again. One of his hands somehow found its way inside his pocket and he started to play with his pen. He had found earlier on that holding his weapon in its pen form helped him calm down. In the sword form however, he would probably take someone's head off.

Percy took deep breaths and blinked his eyes open that had somehow shut on their own. He looked around and saw that he was still in the corridor but it looked different. He started listing the differences in his mind. There was one window in this corridor that he hadn't seen earlier and there was another exit that looked like it led to the stairs. He looked in front of him and saw Deimos on the floor clutching his head and Phobos looking between his brother and Percy with an alarmed
look. For a minute Percy thought that the god of fears was scared. That was a funny thought, he thought to himself and started laughing a hollow laugh that scared him and he shut up immediately.

Percy looked at his feet and took a few more deep breaths before pushing himself away from the wall and standing to his full height of 6'1". He was nowhere close to being okay but he wasn't going to show that to the sons of Ares. He looked at Deimos, who was being pulled to a standing position by his brother. Looking at his watch, Percy realized that the flashback had lasted only a couple of minutes.

"You…you…that was Tart-the primordial…" Deimos panted in fear. The god of terror had never known fear. But after seeing this demigod's memories, he would never forget what fear and terror were – the feelings anyway.

Percy looked at him quizzically before realizing what must have happened. He recalled when Deimos had been terrorizing Clarisse. He had turned into an angry Ares by looking through her memories. That was what he must have been doing for me, Percy thought. And he must have seen what all Percy had seen during his flashback. Then…when Percy had felt reduction in terror… that must have been Deimos also getting a kickback of Percy's memories. It must have been too much for the minor god who had always been protected by his father.

Percy brushed off the dust from his jeans and glared at Deimos and then at Phobos. When Phobos started to walk towards Percy in a threatening manner, the demigod was reminded of street thugs. Percy snarled and gave Phobos one of Lupa's signature 'wolf stares'. He didn't know whether it would work against a minor god or not. It worked against mortals just fine. But for a moment, Phobos faltered and Percy realized that the god of fears must have also gotten a glimpse of what he had been through.

"Stay away from me. Both of you." Percy ordered in his best menacing voice and turned towards the exit leading to the stairs.

Once he was out of their sight, Percy sagged against the wall and took a couple of calming breaths. He was starting to feel light headed again. He needed to find Annabeth. She would know what to do. With that goal in his mind, he went down the stairs, thanking the gods that this wasn't the spiral staircase that he had used to go up to the fourth floor.

By the time he reached the ground floor, he was almost running and crashed into Triton and Poseidon as he exited the staircase.

"Oh sorry, sorry." Percy mumbled as he tried to catch his breath. Not to self: Do not run when feeling light headed and tired.

"Son?" Poseidon looked at Percy in worry as he steadied his youngest. Percy's eyes were slightly glazed and he was panting. There was a sheen of sweat on his forehead and he looked like he just wrestled half of the cyclops army.

"Here, sit down brother." Triton said as he caught Percy from collapsing to the floor and took him towards the steps that Percy had just come from. Percy's eyes were closing as he felt himself come down from the adrenaline high and the after effects of his flashback.

Once Triton had made sure that Percy wouldn't fall flat on his face, he looked at his father for guidance. What had happened to Percy? He looked like he had seen Oceanus or something like that.

Poseidon sat down next to Percy and put his hand on Percy's forehead, as if he was taking his
temperature. The god felt that Percy was tired and transferred some energy to him, while Triton made a small piece of Ambrosia appear and gave it to Percy to nibble on.

Once the demigod was visually looking better, Poseidon asked, "What happened, son? Was it something like yesterday's…?" Poseidon didn't know what to call it. All he knew that it had given him a scare.

Clearing his throat, Percy said in a tired voice, "Something like that. Flashback this time. Nothing to worry about. I've had worse." His words were getting mixed up by the end of his answer.

"What do you need?" Triton asked. His brother was foolish if he thought that they wouldn't be worried. And if he had had worse than this… then Triton didn't want to see how Percy looked like after those 'flashbacks'. This was worrying enough.

Percy's head rolled back for a second before the demigod jerked his head forward. The energy from his father and the Ambrosia had cleared his head and brought his breathing back to normal and made him less tired than he had been before, but he still needed to sleep to feel a bit better. Percy put his head against the wall and said slowly so as to not jumble up the words, "Annabeth. She knows what to do. And sleep." With that the demigod passed out and Poseidon caught him before he fell down.

Annabeth sat down on a window ledge in the hallway. She had searched a lot of places for Percy and she was tired. The palace was huge and he could be anywhere. Stupid Seaweed Brain! He was going to get the silent treatment, she decided. She shifted to sit sideways on the ledge and closed her eyes to feel the cool breeze on her face. A deep voice pulled her out of her 'ways to punish Percy' thoughts.

"Annabeth?"

The daughter of Athena turned to see Triton standing next to her. She quickly read him, like she had done her entire life. He was standing tall and proud, exuding confidence and power like only a god could. He reminded her of Percy when he was about to go into battle. But the god's eyes gave him away. He seemed nervous, his eyes constantly darting towards the opposite side of the palace, across the courtyard.

"Yes." Annabeth stood up to greet the minor god.

Triton looked at her and without wasting any time, explained the situation to her. Then he put his hand on her shoulder and teleported them to the staircase where Percy was now leaning against Poseidon and resting.

Annabeth sat down next to Percy and he, even in his sleep, gravitated towards her. She put his head on her lap and made him more comfortable with the help of Poseidon.

Looking at the gods, she said, "He should be better when he wakes up. Give him around twenty minutes." Then she looked down at Percy and it was like only those two existed. "Stupid seaweed brain." She said softly as she ran her fingers through his hair.

Both the gods took one last look at Percy and saw that he seemed content and so they left the couple alone, promising to come and get them when the reading started. The gods had extended the break so that Apollo and Artemis could go and do their duties.

Once they were a bit farther away from the couple, Poseidon looked at his son and said, "I went through his recent memories. I couldn't understand what exactly the flashback was, but it seemed
like his old memories were being relived. But before that he had been talking to Phobos and Deimos."

Triton pondered over this, then asked his father, "You think Ares sent them? Percy did defeat Ares in battle, maybe he wanted revenge or something."

"I think so. I am going to have a word with that nephew of mine. Go to your mother and let her know to keep an eye on me in case I lose my temper." Poseidon didn't want to get into any fights with his brother when Percy was nearby. Zeus would not hesitate to harm Percy and Poseidon didn't want to give his brother any chances.

X-X-X-X-X

Ares and Enyo were watching some of the demigods spar with each other when Phobos and Deimos appeared behind them. The four walked to Ares' temple to discuss what had happened.

"So, in what condition is that upstart son of Poseidon?" Ares asked in contempt. He hadn't seen the haunted look in Deimos' eyes, but Enyo had.

"What happened to you?" Enyo asked the god of terror and brought her brother's attention to his children's condition. Deimos looked, for a lack of better term, scared and Phobos was nervously looking around.

The minor gods quickly told the story of their encounter with Percy along with the few images that they had seen in his memories. "That child has seen way too much, father. Deimos lost his control just by getting a few glimpses of his memories." Phobos told Ares.

Deimos gulped down the nectar that his aunt had given him and said, "He... he met the primordial of the pit. I doubt there was anything that we could have done to him that would scar him beyond that."

"And his greatest fear was... himself." Phobos added.

Ares and Enyo looked at each other in confusion. What had the child gone through and seen that made Fear and Terror tremble? Was it a mistake going after him? And what person has themselves as their greatest fear? There is always something else. The pair of twins stood there, lost in their own thoughts, when they heard a deep, icy voice.

"I knew I would find these two here." Poseidon said as he formed out of water vapor.

"Uncle." Ares acknowledged. Out of the four of them, he was the most level headed and diplomatic and that was saying something.

Poseidon stalked forward like a predator would. "It was your plan wasn't it? Going after my son?"

"Which son?" Enyo said, but moved backwards when Poseidon glared at her.

"We don't know what you are talking about uncle. Maybe you are mistaken?" Ares said, wanting to shield his sister from the danger that was Poseidon's infamous anger.

"Wrong answer. Maybe I could talk to your sons alone."

"They were just leaving..." Ares said, hoping his sons would actually leave and maybe take Enyo with them. The god of war wasn't easily scared but then the god of sea was a force to be reckoned with.
"No, they weren't." Poseidon snapped his fingers and both the sons of Ares found themselves stuck in a block of ice engraved with what looked like celestial bronze. "Better, don't you think?" Poseidon smiled broadly, as if he was enjoying himself, which in all honesty he was. No one messed with his family and got away.

"Poseidon, let my sons go." Ares gritted through his teeth. "Or else…"

"Or else? You'll go running to my brother? Complain about me?" the god of sea clasped his hands behind his back. "Maybe you should. Then I can tell my little brother about how your sons were out to terrorize mine. And then we can have some Olympian justice. Am I right?" The god flashed a brilliant smile towards the four younger gods. So much younger than him.

He walked right up to Phobos and Deimos and looked the two in the eye. "Tell me everything." Poseidon said to them and there was no way they could escape him. When he looked them in the eye, it was like he could see through their very existence – plain as day.

Within seconds, the younger twins told the god of seas everything – from the plan to manipulating the magic to make Percy think that he was lost to the images they saw in Percy's memories. Poseidon bit the inside of his cheeks in worry when he heard about Percy's encounters in the pit, but on the outside he remained stoic. Once the minor gods had completed their tale, Poseidon turned towards Ares and Enyo and warned them in his famous first and final warning tone, "If either of you try to bring harm to Percy, physical, mental or otherwise, you will regret it for the rest of your immortal lives. Am I clear?"

When the four nodded their understanding, Poseidon scanned the palace and its surroundings for his wife and went to her.

It was almost half an hour later that Hestia called everyone back to the throne room for resuming the reading. While walking back, the sea god saw Percy and Annabeth talking to Triton. Percy saw Poseidon and Amphitrite approaching them and smiled at them.

"How are you feeling, son?"

"Better. Thank you for helping me out earlier." Percy said. He winced internally as he remembered the condition he was in when he had bumped into Poseidon. He never wanted his dad to see him in such a vulnerable condition. He wasn't that comfortable with him! He wasn't completely alright even now, but it was better than the condition he had been in earlier. Out of the corner of his eyes, he saw Phobos and Deimos enter the throne room and he glared at them.

"Don't worry. They know better than to annoy you again." Poseidon said and winked at Percy as he steered the group towards the couches closest to the hearth, where they had been sitting earlier.

Percy smiled as he realized that Poseidon must have gone and talked to them. He didn't know how his dad knew about the run-in, but he felt protected like he had never felt before as he thought about Poseidon going against the twins for Percy.
(A/N - Disclaimer- I do not own Percy Jackson series or the Heroes of Olympus series. All characters and words in bold are owned by Rick Riordan and Hyperion Books for Children and Disney Hyperion. I do not intend to use the text from the books for any other purpose other than for this fanfiction and nor do I intend to make any sort of profit from the story. All rights go to the actual owner and not me. This is only a work of love for the series.

Sea of Monsters!

Phew... this took all of my creative thinking. The first couple of chapters of SoM are completely useless...but I think I managed it.

Anyway, this has the first two chapters of the book, cuz the first chapter was literally 5 pages.

So... enjoy reading...)

Ch34 – SoM – Sea of Monsters – Of old and new friends

As soon as everyone had settled down, Hestia picked up the book marked 'Book 2' and asked if anyone volunteered to read it. Janus volunteered and the goddess passed the book to him. Many were excited to know what quest the son of Poseidon would go on this time and if he would meet any of the gods. The gods, as usual wanted to know more about themselves and to see themselves from the point of view of a demigod was exciting.

Clearing his throats, the god of doorways read, "MY BEST FRIEND SHOPS FOR A WEDDING DRESS"

"Uh… what?" Leo asked and at the same time Grover groaned and dramatically hit his head against the back of his couch and covered his face with his hands.

"Annabeth?" Piper questioned.

"No. No. Grover!" Clarisse said as she started laughing. Seeing Grover in the wedding dress still counted as one of the best days of her life.

Everyone turned to look at Grover, who was furiously blushing and glaring daggers at Percy. He hoped there was something embarrassing about Percy in the book.

"My nightmare started like this."

"That does not sound good." Clovis muttered in his sleep. No one understood how he could sleep and hear everything at the same time. Maybe it was his default setting, seeing that both Hypnos and Morpheus were asleep too.

"I was standing ... for his life."

Pan looked at Grover in a questioning manner and said, "I remember you telling me that the satyrs never returned because they kept getting lost. Is this…?"

"Yes. This will probably tell why the others never came back." Grover said in a haunted voice as he remembered the cyclops' cave.
Most of the gods and demigods were anxious to know what could mislead so many of the satyrs.

"Yeah, I said ... ever returned from."

"Why is it explaining everything again?"

"It seemed like it was written as a work of fiction. So, maybe because of that..." Annabeth supplied.

"Anyway, in my ... shower of sparks."

Grover shivered from the memory. That had been the worst thing he had ever gone through and he had gone through the Underworld.

"What is after you?" Hedge asked. After all the years of not knowing what happened to his friends and family who went on the search, he would finally find out. Although, he didn't know whether he wanted to know or not.

"Grover stumbled, ... BRIDAL BOUTIQUE."

"Ok. The title makes sense now."

"Grover dashed ... off Mexican food."

"How can you smell the monster in the dream?" Rachel asked.

"I was trying to contact Percy to tell him that I was in trouble. Maybe because of that..." Grover replied.

"Fauns can do that?" Dakota asked. He was impressed. Why could the Roman fauns not do such useful things?

"Satyrs!" Grover said indignantly. "Yes, we can do that. I don't think I had started forming the empathy link... but, if he could smell the monster..." Grover said in a thoughtful voice. He looked to ask Percy what he thought, but the demigod had dozed off on Tyson's arm.

"You have an empathy link?" Pan asked in earnest. "That is not only difficult to form but also very dangerous. Not to mention highly unreliable."

"Dangerous?"

"Yes. An empathy link can link a satyr and anyone else through emotions and they can always feel the other's emotions and sense danger, but if something happens to one of them, then the other will also feel it. And if one dies, then the other one will also die, sooner or later." Pan explained. Grover had to be really desperate if he opened an empathy link. No satyr would want to do that, especially with a demigod – they had unpredictable lives.

"Oh, Don the Faun mentioned something about empathy link when he met Percy." Hazel exclaimed.

"Yeah. We never broke it." Grover said. "You have a satyr called Don the Faun?" 'Romans were weird,' he thought to himself.

"Grover trembled ... bellowed: 'MIIIINE!'"
Many demigods and some gods (who would refuse vehemently to this) jumped when Janus read that part. The god of doorways chuckled as he saw everyone looking around in alarm. That was the whole reason he had read it in a booming voice and using the power of having two faces.

"I sat bolt ... humanlike shape."

"Monster or stalker?" someone asked.

"But then ... window disappeared."

Janus' left head had been reading the narrative part until now, but he read the dialogue in a falsetto voice, using his right head. A few of the gods shook their heads. This was going to be a long chapter if Janus continued with his antics.

"It must've ... Riptide for so long,..."

"You didn't train, brother?" Theseus asked, turning to see a sleeping Percy.

"He stayed at home during the winter." Annabeth answered. "So, he didn't train."

"That was the last time he went without training for a long time." Grover said, remembering listening to Percy complaining about how much more he had to train that summer because he had lost touch with his skills.

"Besides, my mom ... her china cabinet."

A few demigods smiled involuntarily as they imagined Percy doing something like that.

"I put Anaklusmos ... Grover meant?"

"He is not doing a good job of not thinking about nightmares." Dakota said and everyone rolled their eyes. Gwen took away his flask from him. He had had too much sugar... for the whole week.

"I made a ... exploding homework."

"That's innovative." Lou Ellen said drily.

"How come he had no accidents?" Travis asked. Percy was known for attracting trouble wherever he went – even if it was a five minute walk to the grocery store.

"You'll see." Annabeth said.

"Tomorrow, I'd ... wrong I was."

"Obviously. It's Percy. What do you expect?" Thalia said.

Poseidon wondered what could have gone wrong for his son. Monsters? New quest? Olympus forbid, another fight between him and his brothers?

"My mom ... you all right?"

"Percy eating less than five pancakes or waffles is a dead giveaway that something is wrong." Leo said sagely and the rest of the campers nodded.

Janus read ahead and decided to use both of his heads to speak the two dialogues – just to irritate
"Yeah ... the word camp."

"Oh... is this about...?" Thalia asked Annabeth, who nodded and the hunter sighed.

"What is ... shop you like."

"Hey, Tyson is in this!" Leo exclaimed. He liked the cyclops. Tyson had loads of good ideas on how to make any machine better, thanks to his time spent in the underwater forges. And he was also good company to keep, with his endless stories and hero worship of Percy.

Tyson looked up when he heard his name and smiled then went back to working on Annabeth's sheath. He had a surprise for her in it and he wanted to give it to her as soon as possible.

"Oh, man, ... for a skateboard."

"Does he even have a skateboard? He thinks a lot about skateboarding." Reyna asked.

"Uh... yeah he does. He treats it better than he treats half of his possessions." Annabeth said in an exasperated voice. Percy was obsessed with his skateboard that Paul had gotten as a 16th birthday gift. Even she wasn't allowed to touch it if he wasn't in the room.

"But something ... problems?"

"How can camp not be safe for half-bloods?" Hazel asked.

"It will come up in sometime. It should." Annabeth said.

"Percy ... so suddenly."

The gods wondered what was so wrong with the camp that Chiron wouldn't let Percy go there. Were their children safe? There would be only one reason that Chiron would not allow demigods to come to camp – if it was under attack. Was the camp under attack?

"My mind was ... underground alone."

Tyson nodded vehemently. He was terrified of underground. The only thing that made it better was Percy.

Poseidon looked at his sons. He would finally get to know how Percy and Tyson met and how come they had such a good friendship.

"I gathered ... about Grover?"

"It's so weird how both of them were connected." Percy said sleepily as he rubbed his eyes. He had woken up when Tyson had started nodding which made his whole body shake.

"She wouldn't meet ... and vanished."

"Oh, somebody is definitely following you." Piper said.

"Mm-hmm." Percy nodded and put his arm around Annabeth.

"That was unsatisfying." Janus said. "The chapter's over! I'm reading the next one too. This one
was too small for my liking." He then turned the page.

"I PLAY DODGEBALL WITH CANNIBALS"

"What is dodgeball?" Hermes asked.

"Which kanívalos did you meet?" Artemis asked and Poseidon started going through a mental list of all cannibals that he knew of.

"Dodgeball is a game." Connor told his dad. "Basically we have two teams and the teams throw balls at each other and try to eliminate everyone from the other team by hitting them with the ball."

"This is considered fun?" Hercules asked incredulously. Where was the fun in throwing things at… oh he gets it now. It would be fun to throw things at other people.

"Yeah. The whole point of the game is to avoid getting hit while making sure that the other team members get hit." Travis said. "We don't have the balls or we could play it here. The ball has to be lightweight so that it doesn't hurt anyone."

"As for the kanivália, they will come up in some time." Percy said.

"My day started ... T-shirts to work."

"Sounds awesome." Connor said. He would love to go to such a relaxed school.

"Sounds like a school for demigods, except for the fact that there are mortals there." Travis said.

"Do you know how much we can get distracted in such a school? Where there is no discipline? And this school wasn't even good in providing education. They treated child…" Annabeth trailed off when Percy put his hand over her mouth. But he quickly retracted it when she glared at him with such intensity that had he not been used to being on the receiving end of that glare since he was 12, he would have definitely wanted to run and hide.

Janus took that opportunity to read.

"That's all cool ... would happen."

"Wow. Even I can tell that's a horrible idea – for the school, not for the kids." Travis said.

Chiron looked appalled at such a method of teaching. Why would anyone leave children unsupervised? The school was lucky that it wasn't a school for half-bloods, otherwise half of the building would have been destroyed, the children would need medical attention and a search party would have to be launched for the missing children, because half-bloods always managed to go missing, even in the most mundane of situations.

"What happened... of those activities."

"Sounds fun." Connor said.

"Sloan wasn't ... FOR CHILDREN sign."

"That's... ironic."

"Anyway, Sloan was giving everybody wedgies until he made the mistake of trying it on my friend Tyson."
Percy hoped that he didn't think anything bad about his brother. Although, he would have to talk and explain to Tyson about his feelings when Poseidon had claimed the cyclops. Percy was pretty sure those negative feelings would show up in the book. All his other embarrassing feelings and moments did. He looked next to him to watch Tyson wrap up the project he had been working on, so that he could listen to the book properly, now that he was a part of it.

"Tyson was the ... his crooked teeth."

"Wait! So you didn't know that he was a cyclops till you both came to camp?" Clarisse asked.

"Nope."

"He was so shocked when I told him that Tyson is a cyclops. You should have seen his face!" Annabeth chuckled.

"But isn't your mom clear sighted? She would have been able to tell, right?" Frank asked.

"Mom said that as she grows older, it's becoming harder to see clearly through the mist. So, even she didn't know about Tyson." Percy explained.

"His voice was ... off 72nd Street."

Poseidon, Amphitrite and Triton along with the campers listened carefully about Tyson's past. None of them knew much about the gentle cyclops.

"Meriwether Prep ... my only friend."

"Mortals are so rude and judgmental." One of the hunters said and many agreed.

Poseidon was angry that mere mortals would pick on his cyclops child, but he was grateful that at least Percy befriended his brother, even when he didn't know their relation. The god was still amazed that any of his demigod children would even talk to a cyclops. Mostly his immortal children kept each other company and there was a wide chasm between the immortal and mortal children. At least now, thanks to this forced reading, Triton was getting closer to both Percy and Theseus. Although he would not remember being Theseus' friend till they were in the same time as the future kids, Poseidon hoped that Triton and Percy would continue their friendship (he was sure that they would become friends in no time if they actually talked) even when they were in the same timeline.

"My mom had ... I don't know."

"The mist." Connor stage whispered.

"Thank you, brother." Tyson whispered to Percy. He hadn't known that Sally and Percy had tried to help him out before they even knew him properly.

Some of the gods were impressed with Sally's actions. They didn't think that a mortal would care about a homeless child, especially when the said child had no connection to the mortal. But, here Sally Jackson was proving them wrong. Either this mortal was special or not all mortals were selfish.

"Anyway, Matt ... kids' tire swing."

"Serves him right." Hazel said. She hated bullies just like Percy did. She had been bullied way too many times because of how she looked and she wished that she could have retaliated back then.
"'You freak!' ... seen them before."

"And those must be the monsters." Jason said.

"Uh huh."

"'Just wait till ... violent people.'"

"That has to be the worst way to provide an education." Athena said.

"You passed the course because of destruction?" Travis asked. "Man, that's awesome. That would be the only course the Ares' kids could pass."

"Oh. As if you are any better, Stoll." Clarisse sneered. "Everyone knows that cabin 11 causes more destruction than my cabin."

"At least its prod."

"Enough." Chiron ordered. Being cooped up without any outlet for their natural tendencies to fight, was driving the children crazy… more so than usual. Chiron decided to get training done in breaks. Maybe the children could even learn some tricks from Hercules, who despite his moral shortcomings was still the best fighter… ahem, one of the best fighters, Chiron amended himself as he looked at Percy.

Ares rolled his eyes. Why would the centaur stop the fighting? He was getting bored with all this reading stuff… he wanted a fight. If he wasn't terrified of Poseidon and his ability to follow up on his threat, then Ares would have somehow gotten Percy angry enough to spar with. It seemed like the boy could hold his own and if not, then Ares wouldn't mind putting him in his place. But, Poseidon and his threat still lingered in the war god's mind.

"Matt Sloan ... would be fine?"

"You didn't lie. Everything was fine, better than fine!" Tyson sounded content as he smiled at Percy.

Percy smiled back at Tyson and felt guilty about ever being embarrassed by him when he was first claimed. He needed to set things straight before the reading could break Tyson's heart.

"Our next exam ... the trash can."

"Wow!" Rachel laughed. "Tell me you guys passed the test."

"Oh yeah. If they gave us grades, it would have been the only time that I would have gotten an A+." 

"I'm loving this school more and more." Travis said.

"Actually, this would be the perfect school for Cecil." Connor said as he thought about his half-brother who was infamous for messing up everything. That kid could probably mess up making toast.

"After Mrs. Tesla ... thirty seconds."

"Horrible education system..." Athena muttered under her breath.
"I was glad ... was in danger."

Most of them had already forgotten that Grover and the camp had been in danger. The reminder quickly sobered those up who had no idea what had actually happened.

"In social ... Washington, D.C."

Some of the boys wolf-whistled and others laughed as the couple blushed. Annabeth stared at Percy in disbelief. "You carried my photo to school?" She whispered to him. Percy turned an unhealthy shade of red and ducked his head and mumbled, "I'm going to kill the Fates. I don't know how, but I will."

"Oh, these two are just so adorable!" Aphrodite was giddy with excitement, which scared both Poseidon and Athena. An over-excited Aphrodite was never up to any good.

Janus continued reading when the children had stopped making too much noise and Percy's color had come down to a more acceptable shade.

"She was wearing ... been my imagination."

"Oh, puh-lease. You just wanted an excuse to look at her photo." Leo teased Percy.

"These are literally my thoughts. Why would I lie in my thoughts?" Percy retorted, but none of the campers paid him any attention, as they were too busy laughing and commenting.

"I wished ... annoying sometimes."

"Dude, she is smarter than half the camp put together." Will said and Percy smiled proudly at Annabeth.

"I was ... She is not your—"

"Yup."

"Uh-huh."

"Shut up guys." Percy groaned as Annabeth patted his hand in what was supposed to be comfort, but she herself was too busy laughing for the gesture to feel comforting.

"'Give it back!' ... names like that."

"That should have been your first clue." Rachel pointed out.

"Hold on." Connor said, putting his hands up in a stop motion. "What monsters have such names?"

"'These guys are ... who I really was ..."

"Ah! If only we could tell the mortals who we were…” Clarisse said in a dreamy-menacing voice that made everyone around her wary of her.

The demigods of the past wondered how their future siblings could suffer so much in the mortal world. At least in their times, the mortals knew exactly who they were and celebrated them. They didn't have to deal with disrespectful mortals who got in their way during quests or just normal daily life. Maybe that's why these demigods didn't carry that aura of being superior to others, with them – because they were used to subduing themselves to fit amongst the mortals.
"The bell ... calling my name."

"I assumed that you would recognize my voice, you know?" Annabeth whispered to Percy.

"Before I ... to ask him about."

Hestia smiled and adjusted the coals in the hearth. Even when Percy didn't want to do something, he still did it for his friend without considering it twice. That made Hestia proud of the demigod. But this also made it clear that the boy's fatal flaw would be his friendships and loyalties to others. And that was one of the most dangerous fatal flaws because it always seemed innocent but no one ever knew when it would take the demigod's life but protect his friends.

Poseidon was curious as to how Tyson got his scars. He knew that a cyclops who had been abandoned would have a difficult life, but Tyson seemed so young and Poseidon was worried about what troubles he might have had to face before he met Percy.

"Anyway, I'd learned ... that I'd observed."

"How can you move less than a dead person?" Hermes asked.

"How can such a person be your gym coach?" Hedge asked.

"Coach Nunley was a… special person." Percy's face twisted with distaste as he thought about the completely useless gym coach.

"Matt Sloan ... six of them."

"That's just unfair." Calypso said.

"It won't matter. In some time, the monsters will attack Percy." Thalia said confidently.

Percy said dramatically, "Have you no faith…?"

"Oh, I have complete faith… in monsters coming after you."

"Matt Sloan spilled ... "Smell funny.""

"Clue número dos." Leo said.

"The visitors ... like targets."

"You had horrible teammates." Frank pointed out and Percy shrugged. Half the class had been scared of Sloan. Percy was the only non-popular kid who wasn't scared of Sloan and his goons.

"'Tyson,' I said. ... exploded in laughter."

"That is unethical." Nike said.

"My eyesight was ... speed of sound."

Poseidon let out a breath that he didn't know he had been holding. Great, he thought, now two of his children were facing who knows how many monsters of who knew which species.

"Whooom!"
Clarisse grinned and thought that now that Percy knew he was fighting against monsters, there would finally be some action in the book.

"I still cannot believe that someone is named after me." Perseus mumbled.

"The way he ... Valentine hearts."

"The Laistry... something giants?" Hazel asked.

"Yup. The Canadians." Percy answered and chuckled as Frank face palmed.

The god of seas frowned. Tyson could handle the giants easily, but there seemed to be too many of them and he was too young. He hoped that neither of his children got hurt during this.

"Matt Sloan dropped... We want lunch!"

"Why do they always want to eat us?"

"Well, they are cannibals..."

"Who is Babycakes?"

"His girlfriend probably."

"He waved his ... I yelled."

"What is that mortal supposed to do?" Athena asked.

Percy shrugged and said, "Most probably just reflexively called him."

"Nunley looked ... bloodthirsty monsters."

"Who the hell tosses Molotov cocktails around? In school?!" Reyna asked incredulously.

Clarisse and the Stolls started chuckling evilly. The rest of the campers didn't even want to know what they were laughing about. It would most probably scar them for the rest of their lives.

"'Yeah. Mm-hmm," ... smoking shreds."

"Damn! You guys have to fight the monsters and protect the ignorant mortals? Sucks to be you." Dakota said.

"'Run!' I told ... completely defenseless."

"Are you kidding me?!"

"How did you survive this?"

"Another fireball ... threw their balls."

"Ah, that's how you survived."

Poseidon was impressed that Tyson put himself in danger for Percy. He didn't need to. He wasn't even old enough to be in danger and fight monsters, but he still did it. Their friendship kept on
impressing the sea god.

"Tyson!" I screamed, ... miles an hour."

"Oh gods! You don't know that he is a cyclops. Man, you must have been so confused." Travis said.

"Of course I was." Percy said.

"Till I told him that Tyson was a cyclops." Annabeth added.

"He sent them ... after a fight."

"Thank the gods for small miracles. Can you imagine what it would be like if we actually had to clean up decapitated bodies of monsters?" Lou Ellen said, shuddering at the horrible thought.

"My brothers!" ... their destruction!"

"You are awfully fixated on that tattoo." Jason noted.

"Tyson!" I said. ... huge KA-BOOM!"

"And I am assuming he still didn't pay any attention?" Reyna asked.

"You assume correct." Percy said.

"Kids were ... his magazine."

"Ok. He cannot be for real. How can you not see or hear explosions?"

"Surely the whole ... followed his lead."

"Oh man! You should have told him that. It would have been hilarious." Chris said.

"I knew we ... crazy idea."

Everyone including the gods, groaned. By now everyone knew that Percy's ideas were never well thought out or any good. How he managed to survive with just those ideas, no one knew.

"I ran ... the door."

"Umm… what exactly are you planning? How will get your sword? The giants will kill you before that." Jason asked. He had learned to be wary of Percy's plans.

"That's where the plan comes in." Percy said, making everyone roll their eyes.

"Explosions behind ... room door."

"Your plan is damage of property?" Gwen asked.

"Every plan of Percy's involves some sort of damage to either a property or himself or both." Grover said. "Usually both."

"Now, I figured... all over the gym."

"That is… a lot…lot of gas." Rachel scrunched up her nose and many people followed suit,
especially the hunters who were mainly disgusted by the boys.

"So, what was your idea?" Thalia asked.

Annabeth chuckled and replied, "He was counting on his jeans falling somewhere near him so he could get Riptide."

"Ok. That is a horrible idea… even by your standards." Grover said.

"Desperate times." Percy shrugged.

Athena stared at Percy and wondered, not for the first time, what did her daughter see in this boy? This had got to be the worst idea she had ever heard and she had heard some of Hermes' prank ideas.

"I turned just in … you want!"

'Yes. Protect your brother.' Poseidon thought.

"The giant … the giant's feet."

"Are you kidding me? Of all the places your jeans could have fallen… it had to be near the monster!" Pollux said.

"You have absolutely no good luck." Tyche said, wondering why she didn't bless the hero with any luck at all. Or maybe, it took all the good luck in the world to protect him from the broken oath's consequences and keep him alive this long.

"If I could … myself to die."

"Tell me again, how did are you alive?" Will asked.

"The way I always survive." Percy replied and smiled at Annabeth.

"Suddenly the … tip of a blade."

"What?"

"Oh…" Thalia looked at Annabeth. "Obviously it was you who saved his ass… again!"

"I will ask again… What?" Frank said.

"Wait for it." Thalia said.

"The ball dropped … pretty upset."

"No kidding."

"Standing in … miles by ghosts."

There was a collective 'oh' from many of the readers. Obviously, Annabeth saved the day.

"What happened to you? Why are you hurt?" Piper asked.

The wisdom goddess was wondering the same thing. What had happened to her daughter? Wasn't she supposed to be with her father? Oh no… did she run away again? The goddess looked to her
daughter to ask the questions that were troubling her, but Annabeth was telling Piper to wait for the explanation to come in the book. And so the goddess kept silent.

"**Matt Sloan, who'd ... my friend.**"

"Go Annabeth!"

"Hold it. How do you know that that guy was picking on Percy?" Piper asked. Then her eyes widened in understanding. "Were you the one who called his name before?"

"Uh-huh."

"**The gym ...-room window?**"

"Why were you looking through his window?" Athena asked her daughter.

"I needed to talk to him about camp."

"*There's no time ... police officers.*"

"And obviously you got blamed for everything."

"Obviously."

"*Percy Jackson? ... Mm-hmm.*"

"Oh. Now he speaks!"

"**The other adults ... of the building.**"

"Well… at least you left the semester and the school with a bang." Connor said and the campers rolled their eyes at his lame comment.

"Well. Who is reading next?" Janus asked, looking around at his siblings.

Eros sighed and took the book.
Eros read, "WE HAIL THE TAXI OF ETERNAL TORMENT"

"Sounds promising."

"Annabeth was ... wanted to admit."

"If only..." Travis said.

"What?"

"If only you had admitted that to yourself... we wouldn't have to deal with the two of you tiptoeing around each other..." Katie explained.

"For four years!" Connor concluded and the campers chuckled. It seemed to the gods that this was a topic of much discussion with the children.

"Four years?" Gwen asked. "Wow... you guys are... you guys are slow." She said with a laugh.

Aphrodite smiled and thought that if it took four years for the two to get together then she definitely had her fun with the couple. She hoped the books would show their entire love story. Oh, this was going to be so much fun!

Percy made a face at his friends and asked Eros to continue. If the campers had it their way, they would spend the entire night teasing Percy and Annabeth.

"But I'd just ... 'He can talk?''"

"Wow, aren't you rude?" Rachel said and then added in a teasing tone, "Is this your normal reaction to all of Percy's friends that you don't know?"

Annabeth rolled her eyes at Rachel. Ever since they became friends, Rachel had taken it upon herself to tease Annabeth about how she used to behave with the now Oracle.

"Yeah, why are you rude to him? I thought you guys are friends." Piper asked.

"I had a good reason." Annabeth said cryptically and told Eros to continue with the reading.

"'I talk,' Tyson admitted. 'You are pretty.'"

"You are." Tyson exclaimed and nodded.

"'Ah! Gross!'... with him around.'"
"Only because he is young." Poseidon said.

"You should have told me back then that he was a cyclops." Percy whispered to Annabeth.

"I made the mistake of thinking that you already knew it and were being a seaweed brain as usual." Annabeth whispered back.

"Tyson seemed ... out of here."

"So you are the reason he calls them Canadians." Frank said. "Well, I take offence to that."

"Why?" Calypso asked. This topic seemed to be an inside joke as both Hazel and Percy were chuckling.

"Frank's half Canadian. He is the Chinese Canadian baby man. At least according to Arion." Percy said and started chuckling again and was joined by a couple of other boys.

"I hate that horse." Frank mumbled to himself.

"'The police'll be ... lot of attacks?'"

"What is going on with camp?" Jason asked. He loved his new home. Sure, he had some troubles fitting in because the basic nature of Romans and Greeks was completely opposite to one another, but he was getting used to it a bit more as each day passed by.

"If you are dreaming about it, then it is really bad." Clovis said as he woke up thanks to Paolo's and Connor's insistent poking. He had not been there at camp when this incident had happened and wanted to know exactly what happened that warranted demigod dreams.

"I shook my ... Poseidon, Athena—"

"Oh. You don't have to explain any of that to him. He is literally born with that knowledge since both his parents belong to our world. Only half-bloods need to be reminded of it." Triton said.

"Someone should have told me this back then." Percy grumbled.

"'Yes,' Tyson .... Monsters."

"Yes."

"That must have been confusing for you. To have someone accepting all of this so easily." Katie said.

"You have no clue."

"I stared at ... "But then ..."

"Ah. They are born with that knowledge too... about who their parents are." Triton said. After his father's subjects, the most he talked to were the cyclops in the forges. Over the years, he had gained a lot of knowledge about them.

"Oh."

"A siren ...
"Trust me."

"How much did you blow on the taxi?" Chris asked.

"I wasn't talking about a mortal taxi." Annabeth said.

"There are taxis for demigods?"

"Yup. Though I recommend never using them…even in case of emergency." Percy advised.

I hesitated. "What ... like claw marks."

Athena winced and wondered how many monsters her daughter had to fight on her own. The way it had been mentioned 'all the way from Virginia’, the goddess gathered that the place was pretty far from where Percy had been staying. She hoped that she helped her daughter out this time too. But if the situation at the camp was as dire as the children had been making it sound, then why did the father not drop Annabeth off at camp? Did she run away again?

"'What are you ... on the other."

The campers were excited to know what taxi exactly took a drachma as payment and whether they could use that taxi next time when they had to go to camp. The Romans were more interested in this as they didn't think there was any taxi service for the Roman demigods. Lupa would frown upon such things. She would rather that they walked to camp on a broken leg than take help from anyone – apparently it was a sign of weakness.

"'Annabeth," I ... 'Ô hárma diabolês!""

"Oh no!" Perseus said. "Not them. They are highly irritating."

Hercules asked, "Who?" Whom did his brother meet that he had not met?

"The Graeae – Deino, Perso and Pemphredo. I met them to get the location of Medusa. They are her sisters." Perseus explained.

"And they drive a chariot?" Theseus asked.

"Yes. When I met them they were resting, but the chariot was there."

"As usual, the ... her plan was."

"Yeah, me neither." Dakota said.

"That actually sounds fun." Clarisse said.

"She threw her ... decipher what it said."

"What did it say?" Leo asked.

"Gray Sisters." Annabeth informed.

"Oh, I know them." Nico said. "I once accidently shadow-traveled to where they were resting. They actually know a lot of things."

When Nico didn't offer any more information, Eros shrugged and read on, "The passenger ...
drachma on arrival."

"We never paid that, did we?" Percy whispered to Annabeth.

"Yeah, we never did."

"'Done!' the woman ... sackcloth dress."

"That's them." Perseus confirmed.

"Ugh. They haven't changed their appearance at all." Aphrodite scrunched up her nose in disgust.

"The one driving ... always buckle up!"

At the mention of his former lover, Zeus got a faraway look in his eyes, but quickly changed his expression to indifference when he felt Hera glaring at him. How did she always know what he was going to think? It made his life much more difficult than it already was.

"I looked down ... her the eye?"

"What do you mean 'eye'? Don't they have their own eyes?" Jason asked. He had a feeling the answer would be something extremely weird, just like everything else in the Greek world. Honestly, everything was over the top for the Greeks, from lifestyle to their legends.

"They share one eye and one tooth among themselves." Perseus explained. He then turned to his future cousin and asked, "Who is Tempest?"

"Perso." Annabeth answered. "The three changed their names to stay with the times. So, Deino became Anger and Pemphredo became Wasp."

Some of the campers were still reeling from the fact that someone could share an eye and a tooth among three people, when Eros continued reading.

"I didn't have ... the next block."

"That, actually sounds like fun." Travis said and many of the campers nodded. The need for danger and speed was somewhat of a built in feature for many of the demigods.

"No. No, it wasn't fun." Percy said.

"Oh, come on. Don't be such a spoil sport. You like speedy things."

"Yeah I do. But one time is enough with the Gray Sisters. Plus, I hate trio of old women – Furies, Fates, Gorgons and Gray Sisters."

"'Wasp!' the ... Broome Street."

"I am so glad I never travelled in their chariot." Perseus said in relief.

"That's horrible driving." Piper said.

"Ares can drive better than that." Apollo said.

"'Excuse me," ... eye total.""

"That would have been shocking."
''Next to me, ... why-did-you-do-this-to-me look.''

Travis chuckled. "That would be the first and the last time Percy gave that look to Annabeth."

"Yeah, usually Annabeth gives that look to Percy." Grover added.

"No. No. That look is what-in-the-name-of-Hades-is-wrong-with-you look." Thalia said and a few campers chuckled thinking about all the times they had witnessed that look.

Percy rolled his eyes, "You guys done laughing at my expense?" he said in mock annoyance.

"'Hey,' she said, ... surrounding communities.'"'

"That sucks…for anyone who doesn't live in New York."

"'We've had ... thousand years ago!!!''"'

"Who is Jason?" Theseus asked.

"He was… actually will be, the leader of a group of heroes from Iolcus. He was a legacy of Hermes and Prometheus." Annabeth told the past demigods and the gods. Hermes perked up at the mention of his legacy being a leader and important enough to be remembered millennia later.

"Yeah, he and the Argonauts – that is the group of heroes he went with – went on a quest to find the Golden Fleece." Percy said. Annabeth had made him learn the whole Greek history book that she taught from, by heart. "Actually, Hercules will meet them one day."

At the mention of his future meeting with this group of heroes, Hercules started paying more attention. "Why are they called Argonauts?"

"Because of Argo. They got a ship built called Argo and then called themselves Argonauts." Leo explained. Then he turned to the other seven and said, "Does that make us Argonauts II?"

"No." All the remaining seven replied in unison. Ever since the war had ended and Leo had returned, he had been trying to name their group something or the other. Usually it was centered on him like 'Team McShizzle' or 'Leo and the others'.

"Why would you be 'Argonauts II'?" Hephaestus asked his son, although he already had an inkling of the answer.

"For the recent war, our cabin made a flying ship and named it Argo II." Leo said. "It got destroyed." He added sadly. He didn't think anyone would be interested in making an Argo III. The previous one had taken up all of their time and energy. If he even suggested this, his siblings would kill him and then probably make the ship.

Hephaestus smiled proudly at his son. His children made a flying ship! That would be extremely hard to do, especially if it had to be made for participating in a war.

"Give me the ... grab at Tempest's."

The three eldest goddesses looked at the big three. "It sounds like one of your fights." Demeter said and chuckled. The other two sisters also joined in. The big three just pretended to have not heard anything and motioned Eros to continue. Their sisters just loved to poke fun at them. And their fights were perfectly reasonable, no matter what anyone else said. They were brothers after all. It was their birth right to fight each other.
"With their hair ... anything it saw."

"Ugh. That's disgusting."

"Finally Anger, ... really very wise.""

"They don't seem so wise." Piper said.

"They actually are." Athena said. "They have a lot of knowledge and information that they don't easily depart with. They know almost everything."

Eyebrows shot up all around the room. Did the goddess of wisdom just call someone else wise? That did not sound like Athena at all.

"Obviously, they are not as wise as I am." Athena added.

Everyone relaxed. Now that was the Athena they all knew and barely tolerated.

"Phew! For a minute I thought something had happened to her." Apollo whispered to Hermes and Ares, who nodded in understanding. After all, the gods weren't known for giving credit where it was due. They usually punished others for it.

"This coming ... the East River."

"Well, at least there is water nearby." Poseidon mumbled. He did not like the Gray Sisters after their eye had polluted that lake and made the resident naiad and fish ill.

""Yes, wise!" ... seek!" Tempest added."

"They just slipped up. They always do." Perseus said with a smile. That was how he had managed to get the information on Medusa. The sisters had been fighting for their eye and had given him confirmation that they actually knew Medusa's location. After that it had been easy, taking the slimy and disgusting eye and blackmailing them for the location. Throwing the eye in the lake had almost been worth the earful he later got from Triton for polluting the water and making its residents ill.

"Immediately her ... they all screamed."

"Just take their eye. They will tell you everything." Perseus told his namesake.

"Ew." Many campers exclaimed. "Why would you willingly touch their eye?"

"I remember now. That was how you had gotten information on Medusa." Lou Ellen said to Perseus, who nodded in confirmation.

"You touched their eye?" Hercules asked in a disgusted tone and both he and Theseus leaned away from their brother/cousin.

""The last... lake!" Anger agreed."

"And the lake was polluted for years." Triton grumbled. He had been put in charge of cleaning up the lake and it had been the one of the worst duties he had ever taken up.

""Years to ... into my lap."
Many were either shaking with laughter at the scene that must have been created or were disgusted that the eye was in Percy's lap.

"Ah! They themselves gave you the weapon for blackmail." Perseus said in glee. It hadn't been that easy for him. He had to get the eye and fend off three extremely angry old women. "Now, don't give the eye back till they give you the information."

"And don't throw the eye into any water body." Triton warned, giving a dirty look to Perseus.

"I jumped so hard, my head hit the ceiling and the eyeball rolled away."

"Oh gods! You touched the eye, didn't you?" Jason asked in a disgusted tone. He had done a lot of things on quests, but he never had to touch an eyeball. And Percy wasn't even on a quest.

"Well, someone had to return it to them. And Tyson was car sick and Annabeth was too far away." Percy said, grimacing as he remembered holding the eye.

"I can't see!" ... picking that up!"

"You will have to." Hestia said. "Otherwise they would just keep increasing the speed as they cannot see their destination. Eventually, the chariot and the passengers would burst into a million pieces due to the speed."

"It really sucks to be you." Lou Ellen said to Percy.

"The taxi slammed ... Give it back!"

"Oh no. You are going to use it for getting information, aren't you?" Poseidon asked his son, who just shrugged.

His son was definitely following in his namesake's footsteps. First, he had beheaded Medusa, just like Perseus had done, although she had been wide awake and out for vengeance, but it was the act that counted. Now, he was going to use the Graeae's eye to get information. The more Poseidon thought about it, the more he realized that Percy had done a lot of things that Perseus, Hercules and Theseus had done. Maybe he was a greater hero than all three of them combined. The sea god was elated at such a possibility. If this came to be true, then he would be the proudest father ever… not to mention the bragging rights he would get to tease his brothers for all of eternity.

"Not until you ... into oncoming traffic."

"Better than the lake." Triton said.

"Not for the Gray Sisters." Thalia said.

"As long as you actually don't throw the eye like Perseus did, you should be fine." Poseidon said.

"The ... Almost to camp!"

"Huh? That still makes no sense." Perseus said. The sisters never gave useless information. So, what could the numbers mean?

"They gave useless information?" Athena asked. "That does not seem right."

"No. It wasn't useless…" Annabeth trailed off as she realized that ancient times didn't have the concept of longitudes and latitudes – at least not yet. After all, Eratosthenes hadn't been born yet.
"The numbers are actually referring to a location in the world. They are umm… longitudes and latitudes…it's a system of finding locations in the world. And the mortals use it for almost everything." Annabeth explained. She couldn't find a way to explain the coordination system without giving a full history and complete explanation about how it worked. And judging by the looks she was getting from almost every camper, they didn't want her to turn this into a geography class. Humph! Their loss. Being unable to simplify something was a problem for a child of Athena.

"Okay…" Athena said in an uncertain tone. The so called explanation had done nothing to quench her thirst for knowledge. She would need to talk to her daughter later. "So, the numbers somehow relate to a location? Is it something related to Grover's problem that Percy had told about?"

Percy and Annabeth looked at each other and then said in unison, "It will come up later."

Athena was irritated. The whole not understanding things about the future was getting on her nerves. She was the goddess of wisdom for crying out loud. She literally survived on knowledge and now it was being denied to her. She wanted to shout at the Fates for not letting the children speak of what was to happen, but instead she took a calming breath as she realized that a lot of gods, especially that annoying Poseidon, were waiting for her to blow up.

Disappointed that Athena did not throw a tantrum (she hardly did unless it had something to do with Poseidon and occasionally Ares), Eros decided to continue with the reading.

"We were off ... into Wasp's lap."

"Oh good."

"The old lady ... under attack."

"What?"

"Is the camp under attack?"

"What happened?"

The gods and demigods of the past and the Romans were expectantly looking at the Greek campers for an explanation. How could there be an attack on the campers? The only attacks that happened near camp were when a monster would chase a half-blood till the camp boundaries. But, this sounded like an attack on the camp, especially if a group of campers was present.

"You will anyway find out soon enough." Percy said. The older campers were kind of enjoying holding all the answers when everyone else was in the dark. They finally understood why the Athena campers were always so smug. It was nice knowing everything… well, everything that happened anyway.

The gods groaned and Tyche quickly took the book to read about what had happened to the camp and if their children were alright.
Bullfighting

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Ch36 – SoM – Bullfighting

"TYSON PLAYS WITH FIRE"

"Mythologically speaking,... breathe fire, too."

"What kind of a monster is that?" Hercules asked. He had never come across this particular beast, and he had fought almost everything possible.

"Is it a new monster? Because I have not heard of it." Athena said, tilting her head slightly to the right. She had a library just filled with details on every type of monster – old and new.

"Well, if they are bronze bulls, then obviously they are a creation of..." Artemis said.

"Hephaestus!" Apollo concluded rather cheerfully, although that could be attributed to the tenth empty glass of wine in his hand. He and his brothers may or may not be having a discreet drinking game. Although none of them had any rules for the game – they just drank to see who could last longer without being detected by their father.

"In that case, I haven't made anything like that yet. But it does sound interesting." Hephaestus said as he took another chalice of wine from Dionysus.

"They are called Colchis Bulls. You had made them as a gift to a mortal king. Anyway, they are hard to be beaten by demigods because they radiate a lot of heat." Leo explained. "But, I don't know what they are doing outside of the forges. Apparently, you don't let them out of your forges because they are unstoppable and can wreak absolute havoc."

"And what are they doing at camp borders? If they are a creation of Hephaestus, they would not attack demigods unless provoked. And somehow, I don't think the demigods would go and provoke these bulls." Athena said.

"Or they could have gone rogue. It doesn't happen often, but it does happen." The god of forges said thoughtfully.

Zeus had thought up of another possibility, but it was too far-fetched… or was it? He decided to consult his brothers. In spite of having their undying rivalry, in the face of adversity he would trust no one else with important information and thoughts.

Poseidon! Hades! The king god spoke telepathically to his brothers, who barely stopped themselves from jumping in surprise at a conversation started out of the blue and that too by the youngest brother.

Poseidon replied, What?
I had a thought. I do hope it is too far-fetched and completely impossible, but what if these bulls had neither been enraged by children nor had they gone rogue. What if they were set on to the camp by someone?

Who could do something like that? Hades asked. One would need considerable amount of power to override Hephaestus' work.

You don't...you don't think that it is...father's doing? Poseidon asked as he caught onto Zeus' train of thoughts.

Maybe? Because even if the bulls managed to escape the forges, why would they go to camp? Why not anywhere else? Or else, if they were enraged by a child, then they would have probably killed the child and not gone to camp.

As much as this pains me to say – you might be onto something, Zeus. If father was strong enough to control demigods and gods in the previous book, which I presume must be almost a year prior to this one, seeing as it is summer once again in the book, we can only assume how much stronger he must have gotten over the year. Hades mused.

The brothers looked at each other. On the outside, no one would be able to know that they were discussing something serious, but their eyes flashed in concern, before they tuned back to listen to Tyche.

"As soon as ... booties whooped."

"There is something worse going on than two unstoppable bulls?" Theseus asked in worry.

Percy gave a noncommittal reply as he was concentrating on thumb fight with Thalia.

"Ten heroes are unable to fight the bulls?" Hercules asked. What kind of heroes are they if they couldn't even fight two bulls, albeit the bulls were made of bronze and breathed fire, but still the heroes should at least be able to do that much.

"The bulls are hard to defeat." Clarisse said offended by the insinuation underlying Hercules' tone. It had been her duty to protect the camp from the bulls. Only if Jackson hadn't interrupted her… "You cannot get close to the bulls without getting burned to a crisp."

"Unless you have Medea's potion. That is the one of the few things that can protect you from the heat." Annabeth said as she pushed away Thalia and Percy's hands from her lap for the umpteenth time. Why did she have to be sitting in middle of two of the most easily bored people on the planet?!

"What worried me ... doing it anyway."

"That is impossible!" Athena said.

"How were the bulls able to break the magic barrier?" Hecate asked.

"The more troubling thought is that if the bulls could do it, then would the camp really be safe from any type of monster?" Apollo asked, all of his drunkenness forgotten at the mention of the possibility of his children being in danger.

The big three looked at each other. Their previous thoughts had been confirmed. Who other than an all-powerful titan, nursing millennia old wounds, be able to cross into one of the most protected places that belonged to the gods?
"One of the heroes ... a border patrol."

"Border patrol?" Athena mused. "If there is a border patrol then this must not be the first time this had happened."

"If the camp's magic barriers were failing, then that would definitely warrant demigod dreams like Annabeth had been having." Morpheus said. That was a small blessing that the gods had given their children – the dreams would always subconsciously alert the demigods of some impending danger. What the demigods chose to do with that was up to them.

"'It's Clarisse,' ... hated my guts."

"Understatement." Ares muttered under his breath.

Poseidon looked at the pair of twins who had tried to inflict pain on his son and hoped that for their sakes, they would never try something like that again. He could have done more to them – made them regret ever having that terrible idea in the first place, but he had a feeling that his son would not have liked that. Percy did not seem the type of person who needed others to stand up and fight for him. He looked at his son, who was busy doing... something with the daughter of Zeus' hands. It looked like some sort of game to the sea god, judging by the looks on their faces. The god would never understand the children of the future.

"Still, she was ... bull's shoulder."

"You are at camp. You could have gotten a new weapon." Hercules said.

"Where are the other campers? Why are they not involved in the fighting?" Reyna asked. The Romans would have not left only ten warriors to fight against two Colchis Bulls. If the rumors were true, they were a force to be reckoned with.

"The bulls were inside the camp borders." Clarisse said as if that should be enough for the others to understand.

"So? All the more reason for other campers to fight." Perseus said.

Clarisse rolled her eyes and started explaining as if to a small child. "If the bulls are able to get inside the camp borders, it means that the camp borders were failing. And if the camp borders are failing, the campers had a lot of area to protect from attacks. The camp is huge. The only side we were relatively safe from was the sea as sea monsters hardly ever came to camp. And even if they did, they could not get to us on land." She smirked as everyone finally understood the situation the camp was in. Then she turned to Hercules and told him, "As for getting a new weapon – I could have but that would mean leaving my people behind and most of them were new campers that we had gotten over the year. And if I left, there would be no guarantee that the bulls wouldn't follow me into the camp. If I stayed at the border, I could at least distract them from going into the camp."

Everyone pondered over what the daughter of Ares had said and admired her willpower and strength to stay and keep on fighting even with no proper armor or weapon or trained heroes.

"I uncapped my ... more chances.""

"Dude!" Leo said exasperatedly. "Tyson is the one person who can beat the bulls. No sweat."

"But brother want to protect." Tyson said. "Just like daddy."

Percy smiled at Tyson as he remembered Poseidon unwilling to let Tyson into the battlefield as he
was afraid of losing him. "That and I didn't know that he was a cyclops." Percy told Leo.

"'No!' Annabeth ... but he can't—"

"Whoa! You still couldn't see through the mist? You are near camp, it should have been easier to see Tyson properly." Lou Ellen said. "Unless... the mist is too strong..."

"The mist was too strong for me." Percy said. "It was part of dad's plan to get Ty to safety. And the fact that I had been seeing him as a mortal for too long, so I couldn't just see through the mist unless specifically told that he is a cyclops." Chiron had told him this once when Percy had asked about why he hadn't been able to see Tyson for a cyclops but Annabeth had.

Hmm... so he did have some hand in it. Poseidon had been wondering how Percy and Tyson had met in the same school. No cyclops ever went to a school. So, he had planned all of this – their meeting, Percy not being able to see Tyson as a cyclops and maybe even a push towards their friendship. But, why? What purpose did Tyson serve for Percy? If the sea god had just wanted Tyson to be safe, he would have sent one of the other cyclops in the forges to pick him up. But, instead he had sent Tyson towards Percy. Why exactly had he done that?

"'Percy, do ..."

"Medea's what?'"

"That's a real thing?" Will asked. "I always thought someone made that up."

"Nope. Very real. You can get it on Olympus for 4 drachmae." Annabeth replied.

"Annabeth rummaged ... me more confused."

"That's just like talking to Athena." Hermes said. "You come back with more questions than answers. And usually the most prominent question is: Why did I go to her in the first place?" The five drunk gods were laughing and Poseidon joined them. He always enjoyed insulting Athena. He would go as far as to say that it was his favorite pastime.

Athena glared daggers at the gods till they sobered up. "Then don't come to me. I rather not spend an entire day trying to explain the most simplest of things to you lot."

"As if we..." Ares started but was cut off by Zeus.

"Ok. Enough. Tyche continue reading." Zeus ordered. He could not sit through another fight between Athena and all the male Olympians. It always ended with someone or the other having to spend at least a night in Apollo's healing room.

"'Look, I don't ... porcupine quills."

"That is a good plan. But how will that deter Colchis Bulls?" Reyna asked.

"That was the only thing we had. Campers were injured and we didn't have enough time to call for backup." Clarisse replied.

"Unfortunately, Clarisse ... charged Clarisse's line."

"Ok, it might work with one bull." Reyna mumbled, thinking about what strategies could have been used and what she could have done in that situation.
"I was halfway up the hill—not close enough to help. Clarisse hadn't even seen me yet."

"And that should have been your clue to keep your mouth zipped." Clarisse growled at Percy who at least looked apologetic.

"The bull moved ... that bull's charge."

"That has got to be the most you have ever complimented Clarisse." Travis said and ducked out of Clarisse's fist range.

"Unfortunately, at ... "Look out!"

Ares roared at Percy, "You shouldn't have said anything. Now you will startle her and break the formation. Do you not know even that much?"

"Sometimes, I can never tell if he cares or not." Clarisse whispered to Chris.

Percy winced and said, "I know that was a mistake. But, back then I think I was only concerned with warning her."

Ares grumbled about Percy's stupidity as Tyche started reading.

"I shouldn't have ... Clarisse for the kill."

"On second thoughts, it is better that the formation was broken." Athena said. Ares stared at her as if she had grown two heads and she explained, "Had the formation been intact, the children might have been able to stop the first bull, but the second bull would still attack from behind and then they would be stuck between two bulls. They probably wouldn't have survived that. Or they would have to break formation just when the second bull attacked. That might have been tricky since they would already be under attack by the first one." She looked at Percy and added, "But, this is not to say that startling them was the best idea."

"I lunged forward... a frozen burrito."

"I assume that is a lot of heat." Hephaestus said, trying to understand the analogy.

"Yeah. It's like saying that it can instantly turn ice into vapor." Leo said and then smiled as he finally finished the miniature Colchis Bull that he had been making. It was the size of his palm but had the same likeness to the original. Triumphantly, he lifted the bull and showed it to his dad, who immediately started analyzing the parts.

"Is it anything like the original?" Annabeth asked warily.

"Yeah. But I don't think it as hot or can walk on its own."

Just then the bull started creaking and groaning and Hephaestus had enough time to cover it with his hands as it blew up and his hands lit on fire. "I think you need to remove the strain from the heart." The god told his son, who nodded and jotted down some points in his book.

Tyche blinked a few times and wondered how all of this could even be considered normal and continued reading.

"'Let me go!' ... bulls distracted."

Athena and Ares nodded their approval of the plan. The more distracted the enemy, the better
chances they had of survival. Now they just needed to find a way to damage the bulls since they were not actual monsters and would not go up in golden dust.

"Bull Number One ... made things personal."

"The barrier is too weak to be of any use to the camp." Hermes said.

"What could have caused it to fail like that?" Athena asked but no one had the answers and the children were clearly not going to tell anything before it was revealed by the books.

"I couldn't fight ... of practice I was."

"Oh no!"

"You should have stayed at camp and trained."

"I know. That was the only time I went without practice for that long."

"I lunged but ... maybe broken."

Poseidon covered his mouth with his hand and hoped that Tyson would come to Percy's rescue. He was not only strong enough but could also withstand the heat. If the bulls had been able to break the barrier, then so should Tyson.

"Bull Number One ..."Can't—get—through!""

"Why not?" Poseidon asked.

"He was too young. The bulls were older to be able to break through." Percy explained and then yelped as Thalia accidently shocked his hand in frustration for not being able to capture his thumb.

"Sorry." Thalia said, not sounding sorry at all.

"Other hand." Percy said, as he shook his right hand, trying to get some feeling back into it.

"'''I, Annabeth Chase, ... "Percy needs help!'"

"That's all?" Reyna asked, fascinated. As far as she knew, the only protection that Camp Jupiter had was the Little Tiber and if monsters were brave enough or more in numbers, they could enter the camp, without any permission. But, the Greek camp was protected by a magic barrier and a guard dragon and monsters could enter only with permission of a camper. That seemed like a better deal than having Little Tiber and an annoying Terminus guarding them. And Terminus was more of a security guard than anything else.

"Yeah." Annabeth replied. "If the barrier is working properly, then anyone who is not a demigod or satyr would need permission of one of us to enter the boundary."

"Unless you know how to hijack Blackjack." Rachel added. "Nobody says anything to Blackjack. Mostly because they are scared of Percy."

"Do not touch Blackjack." Percy warned. He loved his Pegasus and hated it when anyone other than him or Annabeth touched him unless given permission. He added, "And no one is scared of me." A lot of campers rolled their eyes or coughed something that sounded like 'yeah, right'.

"Who is Blackjack?" Triton asked.
"My Pegasus." Percy replied. Theseus cocked his eyebrow. Percy had a Pegasus for himself? That was amazing.

"Hey, time out." Jason said, making a 'T' with his hands. "Why is Peleus not there?"

"Oh, Peleus comes in at the end of this quest." Annabeth said.

"Who is Peleus?" Perseus asked.

"Our guard dragon. He actually has another guard duty but if any threats come from the main entrance of the camp, he will attack." Percy replied.

"Oh, is this when you guys get the…" Piper said, trailing off as Annabeth motioned her to stay quiet.

"Yeah. The whole quest is for that." Annabeth replied. "We should continue reading." She said when she saw the gods about to ask questions.

"Before I could ... "BAD COW!""

The campers laughed at that. They could imagine Tyson doing something like that.

"His fists made ... pulled inside out."

"Whoa! That's some strength man." Leo said in an awed voice.

Tyson blushed as a lot of campers cheered for him and congratulated him for getting the bull. Poseidon looked proudly at his cyclops son. He seemed to have a lot of strength considering that he was only a child. Then again, not everyone could become the General of the Cyclops Army. Tyson must be really strong and a good leader to get that position.

"'Down!' Tyson ... head in odd places."

Leo and Hephaestus grimaced at the destruction to the poor machine.

"Annabeth ran ... completely singed off."

"That's all?" Jason asked. "Didn't you say that its temperature could microwave a frozen burrito? How weren't you burned?"

"Heat resistance, remember." Percy said.

"That's useful."

"'The other bull?' ... merry-go-round animal."

"That's a good image." Travis said.

"Clarisse pulled ... under control!"

"Sure you did." Connor scoffed and scrambled to get out of Clarisse's hitting range, but still got nicked in the arm by her dagger.

"I was too ... saving me again!"

"It's a good thing that listening to others isn't Percy's thing." Chris said gratefully.
"'Clarisse,' ... her command."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Clarisse growled at Percy.

"Uhh… nothing?" Percy offered a sheepish smile.

Clarisse narrowed her eyes at Percy as Chris tried to pacify his girlfriend and hopefully convince her to not kill their friend.

"'I'll be back,' ... really look at him.'"

"Finally!"

"The Mist makes ... cheeks on either side."

"Why are you crying?" Triton asked.

"Because I disobeyed Percy. He told to stay out but I came inside." Tyson said sadly.

"You saved my life big guy. It's ok." Percy said, reaching up to ruffle his brother's hair at which Tyson gave a huge smile and hugged Percy.

"Can't breathe."

"Oops. Sorry."

"'Tyson,' I ... decide what to do.'"

Poseidon narrowed his eyes and fixed his glare at Annabeth for talking so rudely about his children. "You talk of my son as if he is an animal." The god said in low voice that barely contained his anger. "And they are not unwanted. Much like you half-bloods, they need to find their own paths. And then they can contact me. Some do and some don't." he explained, his anger evident in his stiff posture.

The campers were reminded of how Poseidon had taken revenge for Polyphemus' incident with Odysseus. He had made his journey back home so much more difficult and had deprived him of his crew. This was the one god who openly declared war if any one of his children were ever hurt and Annabeth had just insulted his children.

Percy came to Annabeth's rescue, "Dad, relax. She has a good reason to not trust cyclops. Anyway, she is now friends with Tyson."

"Yes, daddy. Annabeth is my friend." Tyson added helpfully.

Poseidon looked between Percy and Tyson and relaxed when he found that they were truthful. He wondered what had happened to the daughter of Athena to make her talk this way of his son.

Tyche continued once Poseidon had calmed down.

"'But the fire. ... what's happened.'"

"Tantalus?" Jason asked with a raised eyebrow. It couldn't be that infamous guy, could it? And if it was, what was he doing at camp? Wasn't he supposed to be dead?

The gods stiffened at the mention of Tantalus. Why was the girl referring to the most monstrous being ever? The gods hated Tantalus for what he had done to them. And they hated any form
cannibalism thanks to the elder gods' early life being spent in their father's stomach. Demeter particularly looked like she was going to be sick, considering that she was the only one who had eaten that disgusting meal.

"It cannot be…" Hera said in a disgusted tone.

Zeus ordered Tyche to read. He wanted to know whether this was his poor excuse of a son or just a namesake.

"'Tantalus?' I asked.

"The activities director," Clarisse said impatiently."

"Chiron is the activities director, is he not?" Apollo asked, looking at Chiron for clarification.

"I am, Lord Apollo. But I recommend that you wait for everything to be explained in the reading."

"'Chiron is the ... Things are changing!'"

"What?" Hera screeched. "Who fired Argus?"

"Umm…What is 'fired'?" Hermes asked bravely.

"It means that he was asked to leave his job." Chiron supplied which only fueled Hera's anger and Zeus had to calm her down.

"But why are things changing?" Athena asked. "If they haven't changed for years then I am sure that we are not involved in it."

"Unless, there is a threat to Olympus. Then the Council can interfere in demigod matters." Artemis said.

"First, the camp borders are failing and letting the monsters inside, then Argus is asked to leave and Chiron is not the activities director, but Tantalus is?" Apollo said in distaste. "There has to be huge threat if this much has been changed."

Everyone looked at the children who just shook their heads and so the gods turned to Tyche to read and supply them with much needed answers.

"'But Chiron ... had poisoned it."

Silence rang in the throne room and the older Greek campers were lost in their thoughts. Thalia grimaced as she realized that all the attention would now be on her.

As a tree, she hadn't felt anything but when the Golden Fleece had brought her back to life, for the weeks to come, she had felt the after effects of poisoning. She had managed to survive only thanks to Annabeth, Chiron and surprisingly, Percy. Although, now, after knowing Percy for years it wasn't surprising that he had helped her even when he knew that she could be a potential enemy or competition. She had rejected him and put him down at every given chance and yet he had persistently stayed by her side when the others couldn't. She turned to look at Percy, only to find him already looking at her in nostalgia, as if he too was remembering those early days of them meeting each other and locking horns.

"W-w-what do you mean by poisoned?" Jason stammered, looking at his sister as if she was currently poisoned.
"B-but if the tree was poisoned, then how is…she-?" Leo looked confusedly between Thalia and Percy.

Zeus looked like someone had caused him physical pain as he looked at his daughter. Was it not enough for her to give her life and be preserved as a tree, but now she was poisoned? Who would do such a thing? How dare someone perform such a low and disgusting act? And if his daughter was dying for the second time then how did she return to life? Was she healed of the poisoning or was she brought back to life? Zeus wanted to hold his daughter and make sure that nothing happened to her. He knew it was irrational as she was sitting right in front of him, but he couldn't get himself to see reason. All he knew was that his daughter was hurt once again.

"How… who did this?" Zeus said in anger, but even then he had a feeling he knew the answer. When the campers did not reply, he asked, "Was it father?"

"Yes." Thalia replied curtly.

"Chiron, tell me you found a cure." Zeus asked his half-brother in desperation.

Chiron shook his head and said, "That poison had no cure."

"Then how…oh." Athena said. "The Golden Fleece? That would be the only thing that could make sense. The fleece is the only thing that can cure anything."

"And if the girl's spirit had not completely died, then the Fleece might have been able to revive her." Hades said and looked at his youngest brother, who was trying his level best to not show any emotion. He understood how his brother must be feeling – to be king of all, he had to show no emotion, no weakness. He had to maintain this façade of indifference even when, especially when it were his children's lives on the line.

The campers looked at each other. Well, that did not take long for the gods to figure out. Then, it shouldn't have. After all, the Fleece was not lost in this time. Polyphemus had still not stolen it.

"Yes." Annabeth confirmed.

Athena nodded and then asked, "Why would there be a need for quest for Golden Fleece? I am assuming the book is completely about getting the Fleece. But shouldn't you heroes already be having it?"

"That, you will need to read from the book." Annabeth replied.

Zeus nodded and sighed. At least his daughter was safe. But, he wanted to talk to her and get to know her and find out why she didn't like him. Clearing his throat, the king said, "It is getting late and we already know that everything turns out alright, so, I suggest we break for the day and head for dinner." And maybe I can talk to Thalia, he thought to himself.
Sleepless nights Part I

(A/N - I do not own PJo, RR does.

Okay, so this is the break chapter with Zeus and Thalia bonding...hopefully they aren't OOC. I was also wanting to put Percy and Poseidon bonding in this but had no time when I wrote it and decided to keep it this way... so I am dividing the chapter into 2 parts. This is the 1st one. I'll upload the second one tomorrow - with Percy and Poseidon and maybe Triton.

Anyway, hope you guys like the chapter.)

Ch37 – SoM – Sleepless nights Part I

The demigods claimed their corner once again in the huge dining hall. All of them were involved in some or the other sort of game and this time the heroes of the past and a few hunters had joined them. Some were busy arm wrestling while others were playing truth or dare and some were just sitting and talking. Percy and Thalia were still continuing their previous match of thumb war, much to Annabeth's dismay. Their scores were tied and both were not going to stop unless pulled apart forcefully. A roar of cheer rose up from the small crowd of demigods and hunters that had gathered around the pair, as Percy won the latest round.

"Again." Thalia said as she cracked her knuckles.

"Seriously guys! You both are going to go on forever like this. Just forget the game." Annabeth said in a stern voice. But even her stern voice that could stop Percy from doing foolish things and the Stolls from playing pranks, was nothing in front the friendly rivalry that was going on between the cousins. Annabeth cursed the big three rivalry as her boyfriend and best friend started another match, probably their 15th.

"Never." The cousins said in unison as they started the game.

A god watched all of this from not so far away. He stood in a comfortable alcove that didn't have much light and shielded him from prying eyes and an unusually cheerful wife. The electric blue-eyed god concentrated on the game and rooted for his daughter, even though he had absolutely no clue what the children were playing, but it looked fun from the look on their faces. He remembered them playing the game even during the reading.

"Unbelievable!" A voice said from near the king of gods. Zeus turned around to face his eldest brother staring at him in disbelief and exasperation.

"What?" Zeus asked. Why was his brother here?

"What? You are asking me… Ugh!" Hades exclaimed and went to lean against the alcove wall on Zeus' left. "First Poseidon and now you. Are you both trying to take over my position of watching people from shadows?"

Zeus tilted his head to the right, not understanding his brother's frustration.

Hades rolled his eyes. His patience having left him as soon as he had spotted Zeus. "This is my spot." He explained slowly. "Last night Poseidon stood here to spy on his sons and now you are here. Why aren't you out there with the other gods?"
Zeus shrugged. "I didn't feel like it." He didn't have to explain anything to his brother. He turned back to see Thalia win the round of whatever game they were playing. The daughter of Athena quickly intervened before Zeus' nephew could start another round. Instead, the others joined the two and they all started playing some other game.

"Oh… hello." Poseidon said as he stopped short when he saw his brothers standing in the alcove. It was a good spot and he had wanted to check up on Percy without upsetting his son. He had a feeling that Percy hadn't recovered from his earlier episode and wanted to observe. But, it seemed that his plans were cut short.

Hades groaned and Zeus stifled a laugh at his oldest brother's expense. "Let me guess. You too want to spy on your son?" Hades gritted out.

"Uh… yes." The god of seas said as he leaned against the wall opposite to Hades and turned to watch his son. The children were laughing at something that Leo had said.

Hades sighed in resignation and watched his daughter talking to the daughter of Aphrodite. His son was sitting with the son of Apollo and some children of the minor gods, that Hades couldn't remember the names of.

The god of dead turned to look at his brothers. Zeus was lost in thoughts as he watched his daughter ruffle her brother's hair, no doubt telling something embarrassing about him, if the blush on his face was anything to go by. Poseidon on the other hand had this mask of indifference that Hades could see through from a mile away. It was quite obvious that he was struggling with something as he absentmindedly played with the fruits in his fruit bowl. Hades could bet anything that the seas were in turmoil tonight.

"Did you run into Demeter on the way?" Hades asked Poseidon, pointing at the fruit bowl in the latter's hands.

"Uhh… yeah. It was better to accept this than listen to her lecture on healthy eating." Poseidon made a face as he looked at a peach in disgust. "I hope she gets over her phase of eating fresh fruits soon enough."

"Yeah. So do I." Zeus added. "She somehow has managed to rope in Hera into this craze of hers."

Hades was grateful that he only got to see Demeter for a couple of months and the winter solstice. The three lapsed into an unusually peaceful silence as they went back to watching their children. But soon Poseidon, never one to stay silent, broke the quiet and suggested to Zeus, "You should go talk to her."

"What?"

"Your daughter. You should go talk to her. Both Hades and I have talked to our children and you should talk to yours. You will feel better." Poseidon said seriously.

"What makes you think I haven't?" Zeus retorted. He didn't want his brother's advice, no matter how much he needed it.

Hades replied, "If you had, you wouldn't be standing here and looking at your daughter in remorse – which even you have no idea why you are feeling."

Zeus looked from Hades to Poseidon and back to Hades and asked, "Was this preplanned or something?"
"No." Poseidon said, shoving the fruit bowl into Hades' hands as if it had personally offended him. He didn't like fruits. He looked straight into Zeus' eyes, "We are just trying to help you. Once I talked to my son, I did feel better. I understood him. And I know you want to understand your daughter and want to know what has happened in her life that has made her bitter towards you. So, talk to her."

Zeus eyes shone with anger at Poseidon's words. How did his brother know these things? Was it that obvious that his daughter didn't like him? Regardless, he was the king of gods and he didn't want anyone's advice. He was about to tell his brother exactly what he thought of his unwanted advice, when he saw him glaring at something or someone in the distance. Zeus turned to see who had been foolish enough to anger Poseidon and realized that his brother was glaring at Ares and Enyo who were talking to Aphrodite.

Sighing, Zeus asked, "What did they do to annoy you?" He knew those two would do something to anger Poseidon. And if they went after or were planning to go after Percy, then the sea god would not be his usual tolerant self.

Hades head snapped up and he looked around to see what was happening when Poseidon said, "Those two did something to anger me. I have dealt with it."

"And they are still intact?" Hades asked looking at the war twins.

"I gave them a warning."

"They went after your son, didn't they?" Zeus asked.

Poseidon made a noncommittal sound and turned to look at Percy, who seemed to be enjoying, but the god had a feeling that it was all a show.

Hades narrowed his eyes. It wasn't like Poseidon to leave someone with a warning if his children were threatened. Something else must have been on his mind – maybe whatever was on his mind even now.

"What is going on with you?" Hades asked. Despite their fights, he cared about his brother, just like he knew deep down – maybe very deep down, that those two cared too. "You seem to be preoccupied."

"I too had noticed that." Zeus added after a moment.

Poseidon looked at his brothers, who were both staring intently at him, silently asking him to spill whatever was bothering him. There was no sign of mocking or insincerity. It reminded him of those early days when the three were getting acquainted with one another and had only respect and love for each other and not the hatred and jealousy that ruled their minds and relationship currently. He sighed in defeat and felt any semblance of a fight leave. Running his hand over his face, he launched into what had happened earlier that evening with Phobos and Deimos and Percy. He told them about what he had learned about Percy's trip through Tartarus – the few images that the twins had seen in Percy's head. By the time he had finished telling all this, he had aged almost ten years.

"I don't know the full details of the images that the boys saw, because even they were too terrified to tell much." Poseidon added as he closed his eyes and leaned against the wall.

The other two gods were silent for so long that Poseidon didn't even know whether they were standing next to him or not. He looked at his brothers and saw them looking at Percy and his friends. Percy was laughing and telling some story that had captured almost everyone's attention –
something about crazy dolphins. In that moment, the boy looked like his father, when the god would entertain throngs of gods with his stories.

Hades finally broke the silence, "It is hard to believe that he went through all of that and met…met the primordial himself. He seems so carefree…"

"Not when I saw him in the evening." The sea god whispered, wanting to get the image of his son looking so vulnerable and broken, out of his head and yet at the same time wanting to protect him from anything and everything.

"All of these children… they have gone through way too much. What did the Hermes from future say? That the Council wanted to take a decision on whether to contact the children and yet prevent the ancient laws from being broken?" Zeus mused.

"What are you thinking?" Poseidon asked.

"I… I am not sure… yet." Zeus admitted and the brothers once again slipped into a comfortable silence till Hestia found them.

"There the three of you are. Do you really think you three can disappear and no one will notice?" Hestia asked the brothers, who were blinking as if brought out of some deep thoughts. She followed their gazes and saw that they had been watching their children, who were now getting ready to go back to the palaces. She said softly, "It would be better if you actually talked to them rather than watch from far. That's why we are even having this whole reading, right? So, that we can decide what to do with that ancient law?" Motioning the brothers forward, she said, "Come on. The Muses are preparing to have a small concert before we retire to our chambers."

As she watched the three brothers walk back to join the other gods, Hestia smiled and said a quick thank you to the Fates. Maybe, this reading would finally teach them to be a proper family.

X-X-X-X-X

Zeus paced the corridor outside his room in the palace for the umpteenth time. He was considering whether he should go to Thalia and talk to her. He had already talked a little with Jason the previous day and the boy had explained to him about the Romans and the Greeks and a bit about the camps and his involvement in them. It was Thalia that he was skeptical about. She had always found an excuse to leave the room if she was about to be left alone with him. He checked in on her telepathically and found that she was still awake and talking to Jason. As far as Zeus understood, the two had been separated when they were children because they were Greek and Roman and were not allowed to be together.

Just as the god was turning to walk down the hallway again, his wife opened the bedroom door and said, "What are you still doing out here? Get inside."

Sighing, the god realized why he still hadn't gone to meet Thalia. Hera would be furious if he did. She was already angry about having four illegitimate children in her palace and if he would want to go talk to one such child, who knew what she would do. But, Zeus knew that for some odd reason, Hera was in a good mood, so he said in an authoritative voice, "I am actually going to talk to Thalia. I will join you later."

Hera narrowed her eyes at her husband but said nothing. Hestia's words were still ringing in her ear – about the family becoming a proper family if the reading went successfully. But, that extended only to the gods and not their demigod children. These children should never have been born and yet they were here, roaming around the whole city as if they owned it. If she had it her way, she
would kill each child. But, the Fates had spoken to her separately to not harm as much as a hair on any of the children and even Hera would not go against the Fates.

Reigning in her flaring temper, she gritted out, "Ten minutes and then you better be here." With that she slammed the door in her husband's shocked face. She repeatedly told herself that it was all for her family. She understood why the gods needed their demigod children, but that didn't mean that she had to tolerate the children, especially those of her eternally unfaithful husband.

She closed her eyes and forced herself to relive all the good energy she had gotten from the dinner, thanks to her full family being there. Each time a family gathered in good spirits, it pleased her and satisfied her powers. After all, family was her domain. So, she had not been all that surprised when she immediately felt a surge in her powers and mood during the meal. What had surprised her, was the amount of familial love she could feel from the demigods. It was as if they were a family of their own. And that was the only reason she had let her husband go to that wretched daughter of his. Hera couldn't even imagine the swell of power she would experience if she could mix the two separate families, even for a small amount of time.

Zeus walked in a daze to the floor below his, to Thalia. He still couldn't believe that Hera had let him go that easily. What was she planning? Did she need him in her favor for something? The king god tried to think of anything that his wife might gain from letting him talk to his daughter, but nothing came to mind. Somehow he had a feeling that nothing terrible would happen. But, then again, he had a feeling that marrying the goddess of marriage was a good idea. It wasn't that he didn't love his wife, but he it wasn't in his nature to be faithful, just like most of the other gods.

Sooner than he realized, he was standing in front of Thalia's room. He could hear her and Jason talking inside. He had doubts in his mind. He had never talked to any of his children – not for emotional reasons anyway, unless they were his godly children. And then too, it had been eons since that had happened. Taking a breath, he raised his hand to knock, when Jason suddenly opened the door.

"Uh… hello, father." Jason said, the smile on his face falling at seeing his father.

"Father?" Thalia said as she came to the door.

"Jason. Thalia." Zeus gave a small reassuring (he hoped) smile to his children, who were looking at him in surprise. "I was wanting to talk to Thalia, if you both were done talking for the night?"

Jason turned to look at Thalia. He knew that she didn't have the best relationship with their father, not that he had any better relationship. But he had the excuse of never having met him before. When Thalia gave a small nod to him, he took it as his cue to leave.

"Sure father. Goodnight, father. 'Night, Thalia."

"'Night Jason."

Once Jason had gone into the room next door, Thalia looked expectantly at Zeus.

"Would you like to take a walk with me?" Zeus asked. When Thalia nodded, he gestured to follow him.

They walked in silence to a balcony overlooking most of Olympus. Zeus snapped his fingers and the balcony was bathed in a soft yellow light as the torches came to life. It was a huge rectangular area jutting out of the palace, surrounded with white and golden Greek columns. But, Thalia was mesmerized by the view. She could see the whole of Olympus lit up with torches and could make
out the waves breaking in the distance on the seashore. The night sky shone with millions of stars and a crescent moon.

Zeus watched Thalia's face light up in amazement at the scenery. "This is one of my favorite places." He informed his daughter as he leaned against the cold stone railing.

"It's beautiful." Thalia breathed out. They stood in silence for some time before Thalia spoke up, "What did you want to speak to me about, father?"

"Nothing in particular actually." The king admitted. "Tell me about yourself."

Thalia furrowed her brows. This was new, she thought. The few times she had met Zeus while visiting Olympus along with Artemis, they had hardly spoken to each other or it had been about the latest hunt that she had gone on. This – him asking about her – was new.

"Well, you already know about me from the reading. I ran away from home and met friends on the way, but because of the broken oath I had too many monsters after me and died on Half Blood Hill but you turned me into a tree and then the tree got poisoned six years later. Then the campers got the Golden Fleece and I was no longer a tree." Thalia sounded confused by the end of her sentence. Wow, her life was seriously complicated.

Zeus looked at her. She was standing a good distance from him and a bit away from the edge of the balcony. He beckoned her to join him near the railing. She hesitantly came forward and gripped the stone railing so tightly that her knuckles were white. The Lord of the Sky could feel a bit of fear from his daughter and wondered if she was scared of him. Surely, that couldn't be the reason for her fear. He hoped it wasn't.

Smiling a reassuring smile at her, he said, "I know that. Maybe you could tell me why you left your home?"

The hunter frowned at the railing with intensity that only a child of Zeus could muster. She had only recently told Jason why she had ran away. It wasn't something that she shared freely. But, here her father was asking her – such a simple question but a complicated answer, for her at least. Taking a breath to center herself, she said, "I…" Thalia gripped the railing with both her hands as if the railing gave her some sort of strength and then started again, "My mother… she umm… wasn't in the right mind. She…" Thalia bit her tongue and folded her arms across her torso and explained in a rush, "She couldn't bear that you had left and she lost her mind and spiraled. Then seven years later you returned as the Roman version and when you left again she was completely overcome with grief or something. Then later Hera came and mom gave Jason away to please Hera. I couldn't…just couldn't stay there any longer."

Zeus looked at his daughter, who had her eyes fixed on the horizon and was unconsciously rubbing her upper left arm. At first the god thought that she was cold but realized that she was actually stroking her arm like one would an old injury.

Furrowing his brows, he asked, "Did she… ever hurt you?" he pointed to her left arm where Thalia was still rubbing. Once she realized what she was doing, the demigod dropped her arm back to their original position of hugging her torso.

"Thalia?" Zeus pressured. He needed to know if his daughter had been hurt by her mother's hand. An unstable person would definitely not see what they were doing to their own child. His father and wife were perfect examples, what with eating his children and throwing Hephaestus off Olympus, respectively. And it would have been Zeus' fault. Even though he wasn't responsible for his future lover's actions, he still felt responsible for his children. He always did. That's why he
showed favoritism even though he knew that none of the other gods liked that about him.

"Sometimes when she would get too drunk." Thalia mumbled and Zeus had to lean in to hear her.

Lightening flashed through the whole of Olympus as Zeus tried to control his anger. He pinched the bridge of his nose and took a couple of deep breaths, which did absolutely nothing to calm him down. But he did reign in his anger, so he could look at his daughter and apologize. Zeus was a proud god and everyone knew that. He never backed down even if he was in the wrong. And he had never in his entire life, ever apologized. Ok, maybe once to mother Rhea, but that was to his mother so it didn't count.

But, now the proud king turned to face his daughter who was looking at the fading lightening and said, "I'm sorry… that you had to go through all of that."

Gulping, he realized that it hadn't been at all easy to apologize, even when none, ok most, of it wasn't even his fault. He couldn't understand why Hestia said that it should be done more often. It was the hardest thing that he had ever had to do. But when he looked back at Thalia, he understood why Hestia insisted on apologies. His daughter's expression of disbelief and a bit of happiness was worth trampling on his pride for a moment. But that didn't mean he was going to make a habit of it. His daughter deserved that much from her father and she got it. No one else would have that privilege.

Thalia blinked her eyes a couple of times. Did her father just apologize to her? What...what just happened? She pinched herself only to find that she was actually awake. Only then did she realize the enormity of what happened and she broke into a smile and nodded an acceptance at her father.

Zeus gave his daughter a tiny smile and turned back to look at his kingdom. The duo stood there for what felt like hours and settled into a more peaceful silence and atmosphere. But there was something still nagging the god.

Breaking the silence, he asked Thalia, "Why did you become a hunter? You could have lived out your whole life, but you chose immortality. Why? I am just curious."

Thalia huffed in laughter and said, "That will be explained in the reading... most probably."

Zeus rolled his eyes. He hated the whole rule about not revealing anything that hadn't been read out. "Fine." He huffed. "Are you at least happy being a hunter?"

"Yes." Thalia answered simply as if it was the easiest thing to do.

Zeus nodded. He couldn't really complain if his daughter was happy. But, this was the second daughter he lost to the hunter life, seeing as the previous daughter started the whole hunter business in the first place. He looked at Thalia just as she stifled a yawn.

"We should retire for the night." Zeus smiled at Thalia. He suddenly felt like smiling a lot. Putting one hand on her shoulder to steer her back into the palace, he realized that his brothers had been right about the whole feeling better after talking to the children. Not that he would ever tell those two menaces that. He didn't need their ego inflated.
Sleepless nights Part II

(A/N - I do not own PJo, RR does.

Okay, so this is the Part II of the previous chapter with Percy and Poseidon bonding and Triton being friendly. I hope you guys like it. This is a small chapter because well, it was supposed to be a part of the previous chapter.

Anyway, enough yabba yabba from my side. Seriously hope you guys like it.

P.S. Thanks for all the kudos and reviews :D )

Ch38 – SoM – Sleepless nights Part II

"This makes small blade." Tyson said and pushed a tiny button on the handle of the sheath that he had been making for Annabeth. "This makes big blade."

Percy and Tyson were sitting in the latter's room where Tyson had been showing his brother the elaborate sheath he had made for Annabeth's drakon bone sword. It was black in color with silver designs showing Annabeth's adventures much like the ones on Percy's shield. Around the base of the handle were silver and sea-green markings of an owl and a trident.

"I will show tomorrow when I fit blade in this." Tyson said as he wrapped up his project and put it away. He couldn't wait to see Annabeth's reaction. He knew that she loved fighting with dagger so he had made the sheath magical to make sure that she had the option of using a dagger as well as a sword.

"That's so cool." Percy said. "Annabeth is going to love it."

"Really?" Tyson asked hopefully.

"Yup. Really."

Satisfied with his brother's answer, the cyclops sat back to wall next to his brother and said, "I am excited to hear our adventures. We had fun. And there will be Rainbow. And beating the bad cyclops and rescuing goat boy."

Percy chuckled and nodded. He wasn't excited about listening to his thoughts being broadcasted like entertainment. And this quest would have him going to Circe's island and becoming a guinea pig. He was not looking forward to that at all. Till now only Annabeth and Reyna (because she was on the island) knew about this. Oh gods! Now everyone would.

Then he remembered what he had wanted to talk to Tyson about. His negative thoughts towards Tyson would most definitely break his heart. Now that they had reached camp, those chapters might be coming up soon. Percy cleared his throat and started playing with the water around them, trying to muster courage to carry out this conversation.

"Hey big guy, there is something that I wanted to talk to you about." Percy said, stalling for some more time to get his thoughts in order. He would need to break it gently to his younger brother, otherwise Tyson would take it in the wrong sense.

Tyson turned to face his brother and said, "Yes, brother?"
The demigod sat cross legged and played with the hem of his jeans before saying, "Remember when we first went to camp and you got claimed by dad?"

Tyson smiled broadly and nodded. "Yes. It was amazing."

"Well, I…uhh…” Percy felt a lump in his throat. How was he supposed to tell Tyson that he used to be ashamed to have him as a brother? Even if he no longer felt that way, how would Ty take it? "I… in the beginning… when you were claimed…I…” Percy looked into Tyson's eye that was looking at him in concern and confusion. "Do you remember how I used to be angry all the time when dad claimed you?"

Tyson furrowed his brow and nodded. "You were sad and angry."

"Yes, yes I was. I used to think badly of dad when he first claimed you. I used to be… kind of ashamed… the other campers would tease me about you and I couldn't believe that we were… related." Percy said in small voice as he hugged his legs close to his body.

After a few minutes of silence, he looked up at Tyson, who had tears streaming down his face. Pursing his lips, the demigod sat up properly and said, "Tyson. I love you. You are my favorite brother and one of my best friends. I just…I used to be stupid thinking such things and…oomph."

All air rushed out of Percy as Tyson pulled him into one of his bone-breaking hugs. Percy managed to free one of his hands and patted Tyson's back and apologized. "I'm sorry big guy. I was a bad brother to you back then…"

Tyson loosened his hold on Percy and wiped his tears and said, "No. You are not bad brother. You are the best brother. I love you too. It is ok. I forgive you brother."

Percy sighed in happiness and hugged Tyson. When they pulled apart, the demigod said, "Ty, tomorrow when they read my thoughts…"

"Don't worry. I know that you don't think like that."

"Thank you." Percy smiled at Tyson who smiled back and then yawned. "Go to sleep, big guy. I'll wake you up in the morning." Percy said gently, standing up from the bed.

Percy waved his hand and the glowing pearls' light diminished till only one pearl glowed with a faint light, because just like Percy, Tyson too didn't like to sleep in complete darkness.

"Good night Percy. I hope you don't have nightmares." Tyson said before promptly falling asleep and snoring so loudly that the water around him rippled. Smiling, Percy swam to his room.

X-X-X-X-X

Percy tossed on his bed for the hundredth time since he left Tyson's room. Closing his eyes, he tried to think peaceful thoughts, but nothing helped him to actually sleep. He had tried everything from counting down from 100 to trying to stay still and sleep, but nothing worked. He wished he could go to the beach, because even though he was underwater, it didn't have the same calming effect as the beach. He needed to feel the movement of the waves against the sand.

"Argh!" he exclaimed and sat up in the bed. Now that he had thought about watching and feeling the waves, it only made him even more restless.

Percy knew it was too good to be true when he was able to sleep properly for three continuous nights. But, now his insomnia was back. He was tired, so very tired, but every time he closed his
eyes, he felt restless. That was the usual. But, on days like today, when he had had a flashback, sleep never came.

Earlier in the evening he had tried to keep himself occupied with any activity, hence the thumb war with Thalia. He knew that she would not let it go until she won the game and that her competitive attitude would rub off on him in no time. He let anything and everything distract him. Because if he wasn't distracted, he would start thinking about the flashback and if he did that, he would start zoning out...well, Annabeth called it dissociation, but he didn't care for actual terms. All he knew was, if he was left alone, he wouldn't remember what happened next. That was one of the reasons that the campers tried to stay close to one another. On the days Percy had a flashback, Jason would be allowed to sleep in cabin 3. The same went with anyone else who had a cabin to themselves. One of their friends were allowed to share the cabin on particularly harsh nights. Chiron had put this rule up when in the first week after war many campers woke up to screams or were actually roaming around in the night because they couldn't sleep. Now he wished he could go and talk to someone who would understand, but even if managed to go to another god's palace, he still couldn't go inside and wake up his friends.

Tossing the flimsy sheet away, Percy got up from his bed and sank his toes into the cool sandy floor. The flooring in the whole palace was resembling the seabed except that it was all plain unlike the up-down topography of an actual ocean floor. But this was only the residential area of the palace. The palace that could be seen on Olympus had two stories above water and a couple of stories below the water. Percy decided to explore the palace. He had never seen his dad's actual palace apart from the time it was getting destroyed, he could at least see this particular palace, even though he knew it wasn't even close to grandeur of the actual palace. It would be something to occupy his mind or so he hoped.

Deciding to walk instead of swim, Percy quickly left the private sleeping quarters of the palace and explored the rest of the -2 level as he liked to call it as it was the second floor under the water. He came across sleeping starfishes and frilled sharks. He hadn't met one in almost a year. It wasn't until he stepped on a giant squid's tentacle by mistake and the said squid threatened sleepily to wrap him up and kill him that he decided to swim.

Percy didn't know how he even reached the dining area but he guessed he must have zoned out because when he checked his watch, he had been roaming around for almost 45 minutes and he could remember only the first 15 minutes. The only reason he even realized that he had been floating aimlessly for the past half an hour was because he heard voices from somewhere in front of him, which thanks to being underwater, were resonating in his head. That, and he had a feeling that somebody might have been talking to him.

He looked around and found himself in a huge room with a table in the center and the walls made out of abalone shells and some other type of stones that he couldn't make out. Giant glowing pearls were floating above him, lighting up the whole room. Percy didn't know where exactly in the palace he was, seeing that he had never dined over here. He looked in front of him and saw his father looking at him as if waiting for an answer.

Shaking his head, Percy asked very eloquently, "Uh... what?"

Poseidon smiled and said, "I asked you what you were doing awake at this hour?"

"Oh, I couldn't sleep so I was just roaming around."

"Come join us." Poseidon said beckoning Percy to the table, where he saw some sort of magic mosaic that kept moving around and some parchments littered on the table. Just then Triton entered from an adjoining room that had to be the pantry. Percy could just make out a couple of mer-people
"Hello." Triton greeted his brother, who looked like a spirit from their uncle's kingdom. "We were just wrapping up some of the work." He explained as he saw Percy look at the parchments lying around.

Poseidon gestured Percy to sit next to him and opposite to Triton. The god looked in concern at his younger son who looked like he had no clue as to where he was. When Percy had floated in with a dazed look, Poseidon had already been thinking about checking up on him. But, seeing his son so disconnected from the surroundings reminded him of earlier in the evening when Percy had ran into Poseidon and Triton. He was starting to worry about Percy's well-being. The boy had simply said that he wasn't able to sleep that Poseidon thought that it could be a regular thing for him. The god remembered Chiron telling him that many a times Percy didn't sleep at night. Did the boy just roam around like this then? Why didn't he take help from Hypnos' children like the son of Hades did?

"Did you wake up from a nightmare?" Triton asked as he gave a glass of nectar to Percy.

"Thanks. Uh no. I couldn't sleep." Percy replied.

"Does it happen often?" Poseidon asked, hoping that his son would open up and talk to him about what had happened to him in Tartarus and whatever he was going through now.

"Mm-hmm...sometimes it does."

"That cannot be healthy for demigods." Triton said. "You would require more sleep than gods do. What do you do if you cannot sleep? Do you not try to sleep?"

Percy internally scoffed. Nothing about his life was healthy by any standards. "It's...I just can't sleep sometimes." He wasn't going to tell that he was almost afraid to sleep. That was the reason he didn't sleep most of the nights. "Normally I would go to the beach but I don't know where the beach is here so I just swam around. Might have annoyed a giant squid on the way."

"Oh. That must be Greg. Don't worry, he is always annoyed." Triton said nonchalantly.

"I can take you to my beach if you want. This palace is connected to the whole ocean. We can travel anywhere." Poseidon offered. He felt happy as Percy's eyes shone in excitement before the boy blinked and regained his composure.

"No. It's alright."

Poseidon smiled and said, "Come on. We should go. I haven't been there in ages." He had a feeling that Percy didn't want to trouble him. So, without giving either of his sons a chance, he quickly transported them to his private beach. It was the only place that no mortal or god other than Poseidon, Amphitrite or one of their children could come to or even find.

Percy blinked at the sudden change of scenery. The beach looked like any other tropical beach would at night, with tall palm trees and sand dunes. The sea was shining silver with the moon's light and the air was pure. Percy had never felt this sort of power in the air. The salty smell of an untouched ocean lingered in the air and the tide was surprisingly not high.

"What is this place?" Percy asked as he turned around to see a few hills in the distance.

"It's a small island called Doron. Father made this island for mother as a wedding gift. No one can come here without their permission except me and my sisters, nor can it be located by any mortal
or god." Triton explained as he inhaled the smell of ocean. Even though the oceans outside of this small island was not polluted, the sea in front of him could never be harmed. It was a small paradise for their family.

"Wow." Percy said as he turned a complete 360 and took in the beautiful scenery in front of him. Turning to Triton, he asked, "Doesn't Doron mean gift?"

"Yes." Triton said and chuckled. "Now I understand what you meant by horrible naming being a family trait."

"It's not that bad a name," Poseidon said as he walked to the shore.

Triton and Percy followed their father to the shore and Triton asked his brother, "So, what do you do at the beach that makes you sleep?"

"Oh, it doesn't make me sleep. It just calms me down. I usually sit till the sun comes up or if the harpies find me, then I have to run back into the cabin."

"Come here." Poseidon motioned to Percy. "Do you remember what Theseus had said before? About externalizing your feelings onto the sea? It will make you feel better. Give it a try."

Triton smiled. It was exactly what Poseidon used to make him do when he had nightmares and couldn't sleep. Looking at Percy, he realized that Percy didn't really know how to do that, so he explained how to let go. A few moments later the demigod followed his instructions and the sea picked up his emotions.

Percy's eyes were closed and he was knee deep in the sea. The waves had become harsh and violent, hitting him in the chest most of the times. But Percy could only feel relaxed, nothing else. He didn't feel any of his anxiousness from earlier or his restlessness and he even felt his perpetual anger subside a bit. He didn't know for how long he stood there in the water, but when he finally opened his eyes he felt a lot better. The demigod turned around to see his father going around picking shells and he could feel Triton swimming somewhere in the distance.

The sea god looked up as his son returned from the sea. Percy was mostly covered in water but not wet and he looked better and more like his age than he had before. "Feeling better, son?" he asked Percy as the demigod came closer to him.

"Yes. I can't believe I haven't done something like that before."

"You didn't have anyone to teach you." The god said and motioned Percy to help him in finding shells.

They walked in silence for some time before Poseidon spoke up. "You have a lot of anger." He looked at Percy who had stopped walking and was looking at Poseidon in confusion. Pointing towards the sea, the god explained, "The waves were harsh when you let go of your control. That can only mean anger and restlessness. Moreover, I could feel it when you were in there."

"Oh." Percy said before bending to pick up a broken shell and toss it into the sea. He debated whether he should tell his father. He had a feeling that Poseidon had purposely sent Triton away just so they could talk one on one. Taking a deep breath, Percy said, "It has been that way ever since the pit. Can I ask you something? How did you know that Phobos and Deimos had come after me in the evening?"

"You may not like my answer." Poseidon warned. "I looked through your recent memories. I needed to understand what you were going through."
Percy gritted his teeth and felt his anger increase again. He hated that the gods took without asking. All his father had to do was ask and Percy might have even told him. Did the gods have no such thing as consent? And if his father had seen his recent memories, then he must have also seen the images of Tartarus. Was that why he had brought Percy here? To talk about Tartarus?

"I understand that you are angry. But, I assure you that I didn't see anything beyond Phobos and Deimos." The god said.

"Did you see what the flashback was?" Percy asked curtly.

"No. I couldn't make it out because it was reliving of memories." Poseidon said. "But the twins told me whatever they could about the memories." Poseidon stopped walking and turned to face his son. Percy was glaring at the ground and apparently he hadn't broken his connection to the sea completely because the waves were once again picking momentum and would soon turn into high tides. "I want to understand what happened to you. And I understand if you don't want to talk about it with me, but I would appreciate it if you do. I only want to help you, son."

Percy felt exhausted all of a sudden. He had been expecting this conversation to come up ever since Chiron had told the gods about Tartarus. But that didn't make him any more prepared or willing to have this conversation. Percy didn't know whether it would be easy to talk to his father from the future with whom he had some shared past and memories or this particular father who had no idea about Percy except what he knew from the reading.

Sighing, Percy sat down on the sand and his father followed suit. The two sat in silence for almost ten minutes. Percy was waiting to gather his thoughts and to see whether Poseidon would give up and leave. But the god sat patiently. He didn't try to pressurize his son into speaking about anything. He just sat there and stared at the horizon. There was no sort of expectation to talk that Percy could feel. The demigod remembered the old stories about the elder gods going to Tartarus to free the elder cyclops and the hundred-handed ones. His father might just be able to understand somethings about the pit.

Exhaling loudly, Percy asked, "What would you like to know?"

"Hopefully, eventually everything," Poseidon said truthfully. "But as of now… whatever you are comfortable with. Or you don't even have to tell about what happened in the pit. You could just tell me about what you are going through now that things have quieted down for the camps." Poseidon said, giving Percy an out. He didn't want Percy to talk if the boy wasn't ready to.

Percy gave his father a small smile and thanked him for giving an option. He didn't think he was ready to talk about Tartarus yet. He didn't even talk about it with Annabeth and whatever he had told Jason was something they had already discussed before. Even the version that he had told Chiron had been watered down to PG13. But he didn't think he could tell his father about the things he did and saw in there.

"Okay. Um… I think I would talk about what I am going through rather than what had happened." Percy said and Poseidon just nodded and smiled reassuringly at him.

"I…uh…have nightmares about… well, everything that has happened over the past year." Percy said, starting with the easiest thing. His father would definitely know about demigod nightmares. "We had the first war and then two months later Jason and I were put into another war. And ten months after the first war, we had to fight this war. I cannot even decide which enemy was worse. And then a part of prophesy required someone to go into the pit. We didn't realize it till later, but that was the only way to make sure that we didn't have more problems."
The sea god nodded and watched his son mold the sand into something using water. His son was too young to have gone through so much and yet he took everything in stride. Over the past two days, Poseidon had noticed Percy going around and talking to each and every one of the campers. He could easily see how the other demigods respected him and looked up to him. He just hoped there was someone like that who could help Percy out with his problems. The god snapped back into listening to his son when Percy spoke up again.

"I obviously have trouble sleeping." Percy said as he stuck some of the shells he had picked up onto the sand castle he was building. Annabeth would be horrified by his building skills, he thought.

"Why? If it is not due to nightmares that you wake up, then why do you have trouble sleeping?"

Percy worried his lower lip for some time before explaining, "Mostly it is because I am..." he trailed off. How was he supposed to tell his father that he was scared of nightmares? He was supposed to be a hero. He should not be scared of such things. His thoughts however came to a stop as he felt Poseidon rub between his shoulder blades. He hadn't realized that he had been taking a lot of shallow breaths.

"Because you are scared to sleep? Because of the nightmares?" Poseidon guessed and by the look of alarm and disappointment on Percy's face, he guessed correct. "Son, it is normal to feel fear. No one, not even us gods, not even Phobos, is above fear. I would be worried if you did not feel it."

Percy nodded and crushed his sand castle and started building it again. "It's just that they are never just nightmares. They are mostly memories. It's like having a flashback while I'm sleeping. At least if I am awake I might be able to control it, but when I'm sleeping..." Percy took a shaky breath and said, "I guess that's why you help me out if I sleep and have a nightmare. You usually shift the nightmare to a visual of a beach and a couple of times you talked to me in the dreams."

"But it is not always?" Poseidon said. Percy's description of what the god was doing was only possible if he himself was asleep at the same time and had been looking out for Percy having a nightmare.

Percy nodded and said, "No. Not always. But you don't have to. Really. I should probably ask the Hypnos cabin to put me sleep when I can't sleep on my own."

"You should do that. It does not mean that I will not help, but you will feel much more rested. And one day the nightmares will get easier to handle. It will take some time but they will better."

"Thanks dad." Percy said with a smile. He didn't know when or if there would ever come a time when the nightmares would be bearable but to hear it from his dad was soothing. It made him believe that one day he could put all of this behind him and move on.

"No, son. I should be thanking you for sharing this." Poseidon said as he watched Triton in the distance having a swimming competition with some dolphins. He looked at Percy and offered, "Whenever you want to talk about something, you could come to me. I would listen. I can promise you that."

Percy smiled and nodded. Maybe someday he might take his dad up on that offer. They sat there for some more time in silence and then decided to join Triton who was surrounded by dolphins and sharks. Soon after that Percy started to feel his eyes starting to get heavy. Maybe it was because of the emotional exhaustion of talking even a little bit about his problems to his dad or maybe it was because he had been having a swimming contest with Triton for almost half an hour and the minor god was cheating by using his double tails.
In the end they decided to go back to the palace when Poseidon could feel Percy get tired enough to not have any nightmares. His son might not have even scratched the surface of what he had and was going through but it was a beginning. And it wouldn't hurt if Poseidon could keep an eye out for his son and try to help whenever he could.
Unpleasant Changes

( A/N - Disclaimer- I do not own Percy Jackson series or the Heroes of Olympus series. All characters and words in bold are owned by Rick Riordan and Hyperion Books for Children and Disney Hyperion. I do not intend to use the text from the books for any other purpose other than for this fanfiction and nor do I intend to make any sort of profit from the story. All rights go to the actual owner and not me. This is only a work of love for the series. )

Ch39 – SoM – Unpleasant Changes

The next day was a warm sunny day but there was a cool breeze blowing throughout Olympus as if mimicking the jovial nature of most of the gods. Almost everyone was in a good mood, especially the six elder gods. For reasons unknown to everyone else, even the king and queen of Olympus were for the first time in a very long time not grouchy but had actual smiles on their faces, which baffled a few of the younger gods and demigods.

After breakfast and little coaxing from the gods, they all decided to sit and read in the open air amphitheater. It was a huge semi-circular structure made out of limestone, which allowed even the farthest listener to be able to hear everything properly. In the middle was the hearth where Hestia was already tending to the fire when the gods, demigods and hunters filled up the area. It reminded the campers of their campfire and made them feel homesick and most of the campers took up their usual positions as if they were sitting at the campfire for sing along.

Nike decided to read the next chapter.

"I GET A NEW CABIN MATE"

"Ever come ... furniture polish?"

"All the damn time." The Stolls said in unison and a few other demigods and even some of the younger gods nodded.

"That's kind ... like ugly scars."

"Why is the forest getting affected?" Gwen asked.

"Because the camp borders are failing." Katie explained. "The borders aren't just for protection from monsters or hiding us from the mortals. They also create a separate environment inside the camp, which allows us to grow even those plants that shouldn't survive in North America. And Thalia's spirit only strengthened it. So, when the tree started dying, so did the borders and the magic shield around camp."

"So basically everything in the camp was also dying?" Hazel asked in a horrified tone. She couldn't imagine what she would do if something like that ever happened to Camp Jupiter.

"Yeah." Connor replied. "It was like staying in a hospital during an epidemic outbreak. Everything around us was either almost dead or already dead, except obviously the people."

"Somebody had messed ... out of a couple."

"So, like Camp Jupiter then?" Jason asked.
"Yeah, something like that. Except that there was this feeling that something might attack us and we wouldn't be able to protect ourselves anymore." Percy said with a grimace as he remembered how those few days were like.

"None of that ... the toilets."

All the older campers chuckled at Tyson's innocence and inquisitive nature, which thankfully had not been affected over the years of terrible quests and wars.

"'Whasthat!'"

... mom's group.""

"Thank gods we don't have that rule anymore." Chris said and the Stolls nodded. It was too much work for them when they had to take care of their siblings as well as undetermined campers.

"What do you mean? Where do the undetermined children go?" Nike asked.

"Well, most of the campers get claimed the day they arrive or in the next couple of days. Till then, if there is no extra bed in the Hermes cabin, then a few other cabins have volunteered to host the camper till they get claimed." Chiron explained. "So any god/goddess who doesn't mind another camper staying with their children, those cabins can take in the child till he/she gets claimed." The counselors had come up with that before the Giant War had started because it had been getting too difficult for the Hermes cabin to take care of everyone.

"Anyway, before this war had started, we had already talked to Lady Hestia and she had been alright with her honorary cabin being turned into a sort of cabin for undetermined campers, whenever it got completed." Annabeth added and Hestia smiled. She would obviously welcome any child into her cabin.

Satisfied that her children, if unclaimed, would have a proper place to stay, Nike read, "He looked at me in awe. "You ... have a cabin?"

"Number three." ... patch of kelp."

The amphitheater was filled with laughter at Percy's thoughts. Percy just shrugged when his dad and Triton looked at him in confusion. It was a genuine concern for him and he still didn't know what Poseidon might turn him into.

"You say that as if it was my goal to get turned into a pine tree." Thalia joked, lightly kicking him in the back. She was sitting behind Percy with Jason and Piper.

Percy mock glared at her while rubbing his back but turned to look at Poseidon when he quipped, "I would probably turn you into a dolphin or something along those lines."

"Huh. Still better than floating patch of kelp." Percy shrugged.

"When we got ... second father to her."

Chiron looked over and smiled at Annabeth. All of the children who came to him were like his own children. He knew more about them than their parents – godly or mortal – did. He knew what the children liked and disliked, he knew what made them tick and he knew how to calm them down. The centaur knew each child personally and he never forgot about any of them, even long after they were gone. Just like he still remembered that Hercules' favorite color was actually red
and not blue like Zeus thought or that the hero felt cheated by the gods because of what Hera had made him do to his family or that he wouldn't back down if anyone so much as hurt his pride or ego. In the same way he knew things about everyone who came to him.

"Chiron ruffled ... over the year!!""

"Everyone says that." Connor said.

"I think it's an adult's thing." Lou Ellen said.

"I swallowed. ... made me angry."

At once, all the demigods and gods who had children turned to glare at Dionysus, who shrank under the glares he was receiving. Apollo was the most annoyed. He had raised Chiron and taught him everything he could. How dare his brother remove the centaur from the position that Apollo had bestowed upon him?

"'But this is ... circumstances?' I asked."

"Yes. Exactly what circumstances would make some of the Olympians to not trust Chiron?" Apollo seethed. Chiron was like his own child. Sure, if he went by relations, then the centaur would be his uncle, but nevertheless, it was Apollo who had found Chiron and raised him and so Chiron was like a child to him. And he did not appreciate that someday in the future, the Olympians would turn against the one person who took care of their children.

"There were some valid circumstances, Lord Apollo." Chiron said. He knew that Apollo would be the one person who would not tolerate such an action taken towards Chiron.

"Hardly." Percy scoffed. "All they had to do was use their brains and they would see that you would never do something like that."

Chiron offered a weak smile and rubbed his forehead when many of the demigods agreed with Percy. He did not want Percy to annoy any of the gods now that they were in such good moods. But, between Apollo's anger and the shock of Chiron being removed from his position, most of them hadn't even registered Percy's words.

"But, what circumstances are you talking about, Chiron?" Artemis asked.

"Well, if the Titan Lord is rising, then maybe that's why…" Athena mused and Apollo rolled his eyes.

"That's like accusing father or uncles or aunts because of parentage." Apollo said. "That cannot be…” he trailed off when he saw the older camper's faces. So Chiron's parentage was the reason that some Olympians did not trust him. "That's absurd!" he shouted.

"Please, Lord Apollo." Chiron pleaded. "This has already been done and I had been reinstated in a couple of weeks' time anyway." He looked at Nike and asked her to read.

"Chiron's face ... pits of Tartarus.'"

"Did you ever find out what venom it was?" Jason asked.

"No." Annabeth replied.

"'Then we ... do it, that traitor.'"
"He didn't do it, did he?" Hermes asked. He still couldn't understand why his son would turn his back on their family.

When the campers offered no answer, Nike continued, ""Perhaps," Chiron ... lost centuries ago.""

"Lost?" Athena asked. "Surely, you are talking about the Golden Fleece. That is the only source of magic that can heal anything. Why would it be lost?"

"Everything will be explained mother," Annabeth said as she looked at Athena, who looked like she would throttle one Fate at a time for putting up the rule.

"'What is it?' I ... do not leave.'"

"Hmph. You are not going to follow orders, now are you?" Theseus asked his brother.

"Oh, I'm pretty sure the whole of Olympus is waiting for the day Percy follows an order." Thalia said with a laugh.

"'Why?' I asked... took your life."

"It was a trap. Just not the kind we were expecting." Annabeth murmured.

"Was it a trap?" Dakota asked.

"Sort of." Thalia replied. It was more of a battle strategy, she thought to herself.

"It was true, ... wanted him around."

"Yeah, very subtle."

"But no. ... save her friends?"

Everyone unconsciously nodded and a few looked at Thalia in admiration of her fearlessness and willpower.

"Annabeth was ... 'Just checking.'"

The gods once again wondered how horrible this prophesy could be that they had forbidden Chiron to talk about it. Poseidon wondered whether this prophesy had already come to pass or were they still waiting for it happen.

"'Chiron ... rumbled outside."

Poseidon narrowed his eyes. Why was Chiron insisting on Percy being kept safe? And why had Kronos been so adamant to go after Percy? Was the whole poisoning of the tree a ploy to get Percy? There must be some truth to it if Chiron had felt that the poisoning could be a trap.

"Wow." Leo whistled. "You actually swore on Styx to protect Percy." He looked impressed.

"Why would you make her do such a thing?" Athena asked Chiron. Then she turned to her daughter and asked, "Why would you agree and swear on River Styx?" If something happened to the boy on her daughter's watch, the River would not let it go. It would hurt Annabeth.

"I had forgotten about this." Percy whispered to his girlfriend. "If I had known how impossible it is
to protect someone, I would not have let you make that promise." He thought about how he had made a similar promise but not on Styx, to Nico and how he had failed to keep the promise.

"And I still would have made it." Annabeth replied and quickly kissed Percy's cheek. She had a feeling what he would be thinking about.

"'Very well,'... quickly as I fear.'"

"That's optimistic." Frank mumbled.

"Surprisingly, there were no deaths." Travis said and the other older campers nodded. Between Dionysus and Tantalus, the children had been expecting some or the other fatal accident.

"'Who is this ... forgotten you!'"

"Why exactly is father after Percy?" Poseidon asked Chiron. "It is because of this prophesy that keeps getting mentioned, isn't it?"

"Yes, Lord Poseidon. But that will be explained later." Chiron said. He could feel the annoyance and worry rolling off the sea god but he did not want to go against the Fates. Anyway, it was fun for him to hold all of the answers. He was always doing whatever the gods wanted without asking too many questions because they never replied to his queries, so it only felt right to be able to do that to them.

"With that, he ... I didn't believe it."

Jason looked at Percy and thought that from such a small age, his cousin had started taking up responsibilities, even when he too was suffering from the same problems as others. Jason had thought that this leader persona of Percy had come up only because of the Second Titan War, but now it seemed like it was his natural role. It made sense, he supposed, a child of big three was always expected to fill up the role of a leader.

"The sun was ... right to lead the line."

Athena was proud that her daughter was a leader but at the same time wished that it hadn't been at the cost of her childhood.

"Next came ... to tell her about it."

"I am going to kill those disloyal idiots." Clarisse muttered under her breath.

Ares looked at his daughter and hoped that she better prove her worth soon, because if she couldn't even handle a couple of bulls then why was she even the leader. Then the god looked at Frank in pride. Now that was a child fit to be his, Ares thought. The boy was a leader of an entire camp!

"After the Ares ... you wanted."

Hephaestus grinned proudly at the mention of his son. It seemed that his son was pretty talented. The god wondered why he wasn't included in the reading, but he had a bad feeling about his child's fate when he saw the solemn and downcast faces of the campers.

The campers remembered the day Percy had returned with the horrifying news of Beckendorf's sacrifice. He had been a good friend to everyone and always created anything they asked him to – whether it was an armor or shield or even some machines for playing pranks. Percy gripped Annabeth's hand as he stared at the ground. The son of Hephaestus had been one of Percy's closest
friends at camp and he didn't think there would ever come a time when he would move on from his untimely death.

"The other cabins ... I was a demigod."

Grover smiled at his best friend. He was lucky to have someone who cared for him so much, the satyr thought.

Pan, too was thinking along the same lines. He whispered to Hermes and Dionysus, "I like this child. He respects us." Hermes nodded while Dionysus just rolled his eyes. The boy was too perfect to be true, the wine god thought. Soon he would show his true colors as an arrogant people user.

"After the satyrs... and Connor Stoll."

"Ah! Finally!" Connor said.

"We were starting to wonder that maybe you had forgotten us." Travis said.

"You both are way too annoying to be forgotten by anyone." Katie said.

"Whatever. At least people will remember us." Connor said.

"They weren't twins, but they looked so much alike it didn't matter. I could never remember which one was older."

"Hold on! You both are not twins?" Dakota asked.

"Wow. For not being twins, you both are identical." Gwen said.

"Of course we are not twins." Travis said. "I am older and taller."

"By one year." Connor said indignantly. "And I am much better looking. Like much, much."

"Wow. This is like listening to Artemis and Apollo fight." Thalia said and Percy agreed.

"They are still fighting about who is older?" Hermes asked.

"All the time. Like 99% of their conversation is about that." Thalia replied and the gods and hunters groaned. So, they would have to put up with the infamous debate even millennia later. Apollo grinned and looked at his twin, who just rolled her eyes exasperatedly.

"They were ... down your shirt."

"Ooh. Good idea." The brothers said in unison.

"No!" all the campers shouted at them. They knew that the two won't drop a firecracker down somebody's shirt…well, they hoped that the brothers won't. It was hard to know with those two.

"I'd always ... get the joke."

"Oh. We got the joke..." Travis said.

"But it was a horrible joke." Connor finished.

"As soon as... out who'd spoken."
Percy gritted his teeth. Now all the insults from the campers would probably start. He just hoped that not too many were mentioned in the books. As it is Tyson would have to deal with Percy having horrible thoughts about him.

Poseidon winced and hoped that Tyson wasn't insulted at the camp. But, it was a camp of demigods and while they were quite nice to their own people, they weren't exactly the most accommodating people when it came to different species.

"From the head ... these days: Whatever."

"You are so rude, D." Aphrodite told Dionysus who just sipped his wine.

"He was wearing ... one at a time."

Pan glared at his friend. Why was he treating the satyrs as his personal slaves?

"Mr. D's real ... the same time."

"It is him." Athena said.

"What is that disgusting creature doing at the camp?" Aphrodite asked, enraged that someone like Tantalus would be allowed anywhere near children.

"He should not even be allowed near children, let alone our children." Zeus said, glaring at Dionysus. If he was the camp director, then he definitely must have had a hand in getting Tantalus at the camp. What was his son up to?

"'This boy," Dionysus ... me at length."

Poseidon glared at Dionysus and swore that if any harm came to Percy because of that diabolic creature, he would make the wine god's life miserable. Why would he discuss Percy with that Tantalus? Surely, Dionysus hadn't become that irresponsible over the years.

"'I am Tantalus," ... gotten into a civil war?"

Poseidon narrowed his eyes. Why was Percy being ill-treated at the camp? Why was he being singled out? Was it because of the broken oath? Or was it because of the prophesy that kept on getting mentioned?

The campers thought about how during the earlier years, Dionysus used to mistreat Percy more than any other camper. No one ever gave much thought to it because Percy had always taken everything in stride and made jokes on Mr. D's treatment of him. But, they had never considered that he might actually have been suffering because of it. What else had they not known about their friend?

"A satyr inched ... now it will work."

Hermes narrowed his eyes at his brother. "Don't tell me that you brought Tantalus to camp just because you wanted to torture someone." The god of thieves said in a grim voice, which worried some as they had never heard him speak in anything but a jovial tone.

"I don't know. It hasn't happened yet." The wine god said and hoped that he had a good reason for getting that miserable spirit to camp.

"Tantalus grabbed ... Tantalus muttered."
"At least his punishment hasn't been pardoned." Hades said. Even though he hadn't been invited to that dinner, he had been disgusted enough to hate the old king for all of eternity.

"'Ah, well," ... trying to warn me."

"You really don't know when to shut up, do you?" Jason said in disbelief.

"You should know that by now that Percy has no brain to mouth filter." Thalia chuckled.

"How did you not remember? He is one of the most infamous people in our history." Annabeth said, shaking her head.

"I didn't read?" Percy told his girlfriend. "It's easier when people just tell me. And it saves time… for me."

Annabeth fondly shook her head. How did she fall in love with this vlakas?

As entertaining as it was, Poseidon hoped that his son didn't go around aggravating everyone he met. That would earn him a lot of enemies.

"'I'll be watching ... sir.'"

Everyone dissolved into giggles and chuckles. Leo dramatically said, "All hail the Lord of Sass." And the campers started laughing all over again.

"What did that mean?" Perseus asked with a grin when the campers had quieted down a bit.

"Sass?" Travis asked. "It means having an insolent attitude."

"That he has plenty." Theseus said, shaking his head. This younger brother of his was just too hilarious.

"'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.'"

"Seriously, what is wrong with you?" Apollo asked Dionysus.

Thalia narrowed her eyes. Even she was a child of big three – she was the first one for whom the oath was broken. But even then, when she had come to camp, Mr. D hadn't singled her out or mistreated her. Why was he behaving as such with Percy?

Reyna frowned and remembered when Percy had first come to Camp Jupiter. The entire camp had singled him out. They had been wary of him and many had been rude to him in that one week that he had stayed at camp. Back then, she had wondered why he hadn't reacted to any of that. But it seemed that he was already used to being treated that way.

"My face was burning, but I knew better than to talk back. Dionysus was an overgrown brat, but he was an immortal, super powerful overgrown brat."

Dionysus glared at Percy. He didn't know what the boy had just called him, but the demigod was starting to get on his nerves and the fact that he was a son of Poseidon did the boy no favors.

"What is a brat?" Apollo asked inquisitively.

"Uh... a spoiled child – paliópaido." Annabeth explained and hoped that Mr. D wouldn't hurt Percy
Dionysus' face was purple with barely contained rage. That disrespectful child of Poseidon! The wine god looked up when he felt someone glaring at him and saw that Poseidon was indeed glaring at him.

_Don't you dare hurt my son! He speaks the truth. You are behaving as a child._ Poseidon warned his nephew, who sat back but didn't stop glaring daggers at Percy.

"I said, _'Come ..._"

_Dionysus snickered._

Almost everyone glared at Dionysus. How could the wine god be so callous with their children's lives?

"You are forgetting D, that your own children live at that camp." Apollo said in disappointment.

"This is all in future so don't any of you dare look at me like that." The god snapped.

Nike huffed in anger and read, "'_Leave us,' Tantalus ... Not openly, anyway._"


"Only when I have no choice." Percy defended himself. It wasn't like he went out of his way to break the rules, they just stood in the way of doing the right thing.

"Huh. When you're right, you're right." Clarisse said, thinking about how she would have never made it hadn't it been for Percy's annoying ways to flout rules and sneak out of camp.

"'_I'll be right ... are my friend._'"

"And my best brother!" Tyson whispered to Percy. "Don't worry, I remember what you said last night."

Percy smiled gratefully at the cyclops and prayed that there would not be too many insults in the book against Tyson.

"_Which made me ... silently. Please._"

Poseidon looked at Percy and Tyson and realized that Tyson must have been the help that he had sent to Percy. The cyclops' particular skills might have been needed in whatever quest his son would go on. Otherwise, the god would have just called Tyson to his forges.

"_The smoke ... really listening._"

"It does." The sea god told his son.

"_I went back ... for announcements._"

"How worse could things get?" Frank asked.

"With Tantalus involved? A lot." Katie replied.

"'_Yes, well,' Tantalus ... enough to eat._'"
The gods grimaced, knowing that Tantalus could actually follow up on that thinly disguised threat. What had Dionysus been thinking? Was this his way of getting back at the Council for being punished? By putting their children in harm's way?

"Dionysus clapped ... fear, disbelief."

"That sounds like fun. Why would they have to be removed?" Ares asked. Chariot races were his favorite sport, right behind dueling.

"It should come up." Clarisse said.

"'Now I know,' ... Apollo table called."

"Whoa! What the…" Dakota said, his eyes wide open in disbelief and fear.

"How did that happen? Like… how?" Jason asked. He knew that the camp had chariot races even though he hadn't participated in one because the camp wasn't really into hosting games during a war and with Percy missing.

"They get really dangerous. The chariots aren't exactly built for safety. So, if you or the horses get hurt… that's it. A lot of times, the riders would get trampled by horses or get run over by other chariots. And the others cannot stop their chariots at a minute's notice because then they themselves would get badly hurt." Annabeth explained. She had been there when the last chariot race had taken place before Chiron had banned it. They only kept the chariot races in their schedule anymore because the campers had agreed that if anyone got seriously injured, the whole thing would once again be removed.

Seeing the alarmed looks on all those who hadn't participated at a chariot race, Percy said, "Don't worry. The few times that we had the race, no one got seriously injured." That didn't particularly calm anyone's nerves and they decided not to actually take part in it.

"'Yes, yes!' Tantalus ... to object did so."

"Why would anyone object? Sounds like a sweet deal to me." Dakota said.

"It was. But, the camp was unstable remember. We were no longer safe and having to prepare for some stupid races wasn't going to keep us safe." Katie said.

"Oh yeah."

"'But, sir!' Clarisse ... blushed. "Um, I didn't—"

"Are you kidding me?" Reyna said. She turned to Clarisse and said, "No offence, but had it not been for Tyson, the bulls would have killed or severely injured you all."

"Yeah I know." Clarisse said. She internally groaned as she remembered how attention seeking she had been during that time. It wasn't that she didn't deserve the attention, after all she had been protecting camp for a long time, but she had let that pride get in between her goal of protecting the camp and had it almost cost her life and the camp.

"Tantalus had a real sweet spot for Clarisse here." Travis snickered.

"Yeah, she could have probably murdered us in our sleep and gotten away with it." Connor said but shifted away from Clarisse under her murderous glare.
"Tantalus was screwed up." Percy said.

"That he was." Katie agreed.

"'And modest, too.' ... a hand toward Tyson."

Poseidon, Amphitrite and Triton looked positively murderous. How dare Tantalus speak like that? Even the campers looked uneasy as they realized that Tyson had been treated horribly and had he not been so innocent, he would have just left the camp to die. He had saved their lives so many times, especially in the Battle of Labyrinth.

"Uneasy murmuring ... six-foot-three Cyclops."

"That wasn't the only reason." Travis said quietly.

"I know." Percy replied.

Something in Percy's tone made Poseidon feel that Tyson might have to face more humiliation than he already was. But Tyson looked completely at peace as he worked with fitting the drakon bone sword into the sheath. Poseidon hoped that his son was still too naïve to understand what was being said.

"'Come now,' ... above Tyson's head."

Tyson grinned as he remembered being claimed. It had been the best day of his life. He had gotten Percy as his brother! And he knew Percy loved him, no matter how he would behave in the book. He just knew it!

"With a sickening ... family resemblance!'"

Poseidon grimaced as he realized that the campers would not be friendly towards Tyson. They would be bitter towards him because a god claimed a cyclops when so many demigods were yet to be claimed. He realized that the campers might even make Percy's life difficult if Tantalus' statement was anything to go by.

"Everybody laughed ... a half-brother."

The campers had an uneasy silence enveloping them. Most of them had laughed and made fun of Percy and Tyson for days to come and it hadn't been until they had returned from the quest that the campers had started accepting Tyson as a friend. Now that they actually knew the cyclops, they couldn't believe how judgmental they all had been. They quickly apologized to Tyson for mistreating him, but the cyclops, bless him, only stared at them in confusion and told them that they were his friends and shook his head at their apologies and went back to working on his project.

The sea god now knew for sure that the campers would have taunted both his children over this claiming. But he also had a feeling that claiming Tyson had been the right thing to do despite the insults that the children might have to endure.

Nike announced that that was the end of the chapter and passed the book to Iris.
Ch40 – SoM – Angry Birds

"DEMON PIGEONS ATTACK"

"The next few ... I said it."

Poseidon frowned at his son's thoughts. From the time he had spent observing Percy and Tyson, he had gathered that the two were like actual brothers. So, why was Percy ashamed to have Tyson as a brother? Was it because he was a cyclops? Or were the other campers giving him a hard time? Poseidon looked at his sons and saw that Percy was staring at the ground and playing with his sword and Tyson was calmly making whatever he had been working on for the past few days. Either Tyson didn't know what was going on or Percy had already told him about this.

"My father, the ... now a joke."

Percy winced as he heard his thoughts being read out. He remembered the feelings of shame and anger from those days. How could he ever have been ashamed of Tyson? He couldn't believe himself. He felt Tyson nudge him and looked up to see the big guy smile forgivingly at him. He had no choice but to return the contagious smile.

The campers too were chagrinned at their earlier behavior towards Percy and Tyson. They had forgotten just how much they used to tease Percy. It had been borderline bullying. No wonder Percy had thought such way. The campers knew that most of them always tried to impress each other to be accepted in their weird family. So, obviously such an exclusion and bullying would only make Percy's life miserable. Some of the campers were about to apologize to the sons of Poseidon but one glare from Annabeth shut them up. They realized that if they said anything, Percy would get angry because of embarrassment or guilt, so they decided to apologize later.

The sea god sighed internally and thought about what all his sons might have had to hear at the camp. Nevertheless, he knew that he wouldn't have claimed Tyson so soon after Percy's prayer for sending help, if he didn't have an ulterior motive. This just strengthened his earlier thoughts that Tyson was going to be important in some way to whatever was going on.

"Annabeth tried to... own that track."

"Oh, tell me that you guys don't actually team up for chariot races!" Leo said, trying to diffuse the little tension that had built up amongst the campers.

Thankfully, it had the desired effect and Connor said, "They actually do. It should be counted as cheating you know."

"Yeah, it should be." Will piped up, looking at Chiron, who just shook his head at the children.

"It's not cheating, it's pure talent." Annabeth retorted.
"Oh puh-lease. Everyone knows I can kick both your asses any day." Clarisse taunted.

Soon, the children started taunting and throwing around insults, while the Romans just watched the entertainment unfolding in front of them. Even Jason had been roped in by Thalia, who had challenged Percy and Annabeth. Hey, they were Greeks – loud and proud through and through. No one could challenge them or their egos and not expect a fight.

The gods watched in amusement as the children shouted insults at each other. It reminded them of any of the Olympian meetings. They were all the same. Finally, Chiron intervened, much to everyone's disappointment, and stopped the demigods threatening all of them with additional duties for the Counselors once they returned.

When everyone had quieted down, Iris read, "**One morning ... "Oh sorry, eyes."**"

Piper shook her head. Why were her siblings such unkind people? One would expect the children of the love goddess to be loving and kind to everyone, but they were complete opposites barring a few.

"**As they walked ... monster, either!"**

Dionysus frowned into his wine chalice. He couldn't figure out the boy. When he had heard Percy being embarrassed of having the cyclops as his brother, he had thought that finally the boy had shown one character flaw, although the god himself couldn't imagine any of the other demigod children being happy with the same circumstances. But, he didn't care, after all the boy had some flaws and more would only come up during the reading and the other gods would see the true nature of demigods. But now the son of Poseidon was protecting the cyclops from being called a monster even when he himself did not want him as a brother. Why was it so confusing to deduce the boy's nature? Was it because he was half-human? Humans were complicated species even for being such simple beings. The wine god didn't know why, but he terribly wanted to show the other disbelieving gods that the heroes were not all that they were made out to be.

"**Annabeth raised her eyebrows. "Hey, don't get mad at me! And technically, he is a monster."**"

"A good monster?" Tyson asked slowly.

"The best ever." Came the reply from many demigods and the cyclops grinned and went back to putting some final touches on his project.

"'Well you gave ... deceitful, treacherous—'"

"Ahem!" Poseidon said with a raised brow.

"She has good reason to not like most cyclops." Percy told his father.

"'He is not! What ... worse than before.'

"This sounds like a high school based teen movie." Piper said.

"Or UST." Leo piped in and all of the demigods laughed as Percy and Annabeth blushed and glared at them all.

"The next couple ... and greatest."

The campers had a sad smile on their face as they remembered Silena. Piper hoped there was more
information on her sister. She wanted to get to know more about Silena. The romans saw the looks on the other campers' faces and wondered just how many people had they lost in the wars.

Poseidon smiled at the mention of his son. Pegasus was still quite young at this time and had only a handful of children currently, but it was nice for the god to hear that later there would be many pegasi.

"**Being the son ... into a cloud.**"

"Yes, it is neutral territory." Zeus said sourly. "Unfortunately." He added.

"It must be so nice to understand them." Reyna said thinking about her Scipio and wishing she could actually talk to him like Percy could.

"It is." Percy said with a smile. He missed Blackjack, who had insisted on giving him a ride every day since the day he recovered from his injuries completely. "It is also nice having a heads up before the pegasus randomly takes a dive."

"**The problem was... Apollo guys easily.**"

"Yeah, well, we aren't exactly masters at swordplay." Will grumbled.

"Did you go up against the whole cabin? It sounds like you did." Perseus asked.

"Yeah I think so." Percy replied in a thoughtful voice. "I don't remember."

Everyone seemed to be impressed other than the campers. The Greeks had seen Percy defeat Titans and heard about defeating Ares, so one cabin was nothing for them. The Romans would have been impressed had they not seen Percy thrash their best cohorts like it was nothing and defeat a giant as if he had been doing that since he was a baby.

Hercules smiled and thought that if at that young age his cousin could be named better at swordplay than any camper in the hundred years and defeat Ares albeit with the help of his powers, he would most definitely be even better now. He offered, "Would you like to spar later?"

Percy's eyes sparkled. As much as he hated Hercules for what he had done to Zoe, he couldn't help but be excited at the prospect of getting to spar with the most famous hero, who was known for his fighting skills and techniques. "Sure." Percy replied and the campers cheered. They didn't know whom to root for – the most famed hero of all times or the twice named Hero of Olympus.

The gods too were excited for this and decided to watch the practice whenever the heroes would spar. They all had seen Hercules fight and defeat so many terrible beasts and monsters and even though they hadn't seen Percy fight, they assumed it would be an even match considering that the son of Poseidon defeated Ares in a duel.

"**I should’ve been ... so I ditched it.**"

"Dude, there are no similarities. Even I can see that." Leo said, looking at Poseidon and imagining him as Sylvester Stallone.

"I know. Arts and Crafts isn't really my thing." Percy replied.

"**I scaled the ... be part of it.**"

The gods wondered whether the poisoning was Kronos' doing. That seemed to be the only
possibility. But then why hadn't he attacked the camp? Surely, that must have been his aim. The camp was already weak from the sounds of it. It would have been no problem to send a small army of monsters and attack the camp. The gods were thankful that Kronos didn't do that. Even though they didn't show it, most of them, if not all of them, cared for their children and didn't want the children to die in an invasion of the camp.

"At night, I ... He likes sheep."

"That makes no sense."

"I thought about ... would slow us down."

Poseidon smiled and thought that despite being ashamed and taunted by other campers, Percy was making an effort to include Tyson.

"All this talk of chariot racing makes me want to have a chariot race." Holly said.

"Yeah! We will beat you all." Laurel said and everyone sighed. This was the downside of having Nike as their mother – they were always competitive.

"Where will we get chariots and horses from?" Butch asked.

"You are on Olympus, dear. We have both chariots and horses and a race track." Nike said excitedly. It would be amazing for her if the children would have a competition.

The campers looked at Chiron with so much hope that the old centaur had to bend to their wishes. "We can discuss it later, okay?" He said, knowing full well that they all would soon be having a chariot race, if the faces of campers and gods were anything to go by. After all, the gods would not leave such an opportunity to be entertained.

"As we were ... with Thalia's tree."

"That's either too melodramatic or you are really, really pessimistic."

""'It's just... understand why."

Poseidon cocked his head to the side and looked at the ground. He knew that he wasn't trying to compare the two, but Percy might have been made to feel that way because of the other campers and their insistent teasing and mocking.

"I heard a ... a wedding dress."

"What?" Thalia asked, looking confused at the sudden change of topic.

"It didn't ... covered his face."

"Why are you in a wedding dress?" Hedge asked.

"It should probably be explained in the dream." Grover said, shuddering as he remembered that dreadful time with Polyphemus.

"He was standing ... to hear me!"

"Project?" Pan asked. "You have already made the empathy link, then?"
"Yes, Lord."

"I hear you," ... heh-hehheh.""

"That is creepy." Hazel said.

"Like pedophile creepy," Leo agreed. "Where are you?" he asked Grover.

"It will come up," Grover and Percy said in unison.

"Grover turned ... and turned left.""

"Well, that's precise." Dakota said.

"It kind of is." Reyna replied. She realized that Grover was talking about the Sea of Monsters and if that was true, then she would get to understand what actually had happened on Circe's island.

"Huh?"

"It will come up."

"What? How did ... eaten by Polyphemus!"

"Wait. What?" Apollo asked.

"Only the Golden Fleece's magic could be like Pan's." Athena said. "You are saying that this Polyphemus has the fleece and the satyrs get attracted to it?"

"Yes, Lady Athena." Grover replied.

"So, all of our brethren, who went missing, had actually gotten eaten by that cyclops?" Hedge asked, looking sick.

Grover nodded and explained, "We follow the scent of the wild – wherever it is strongest. And the fleece basically oozes nature magic, so every satyr follows that scent thinking that it is Lord Pan. Once we manage to reach Florida, the scent takes us over water and then he captures us."

"And eats satyrs?" Pan asked, looking equal parts livid and sick.

"Polyphemus?" Poseidon said slowly, as if in a daze. "My son Polyphemus?"

"Yes dad." Percy replied.

"He is a bad cyclops." Tyson added. "He tried to kill us."

"How...? But... How does he even have the fleece? Is it not in Ares' grove in Colchis, guarded by that dragon?" Poseidon asked, completely baffled.

"Yes. As of now it is in Colchis in the grove sacred to Lord Ares, but later it is taken by a hero and Polyphemus then steals it from him and uses it lure satyrs." Annabeth explained.

Poseidon looked at a loss for words. Why would his son do something so horrible?

"Everything should get explained and if it doesn't, then we will explain it." Percy said and asked Iris to continue.
"Poly-who?"

... wants to marry me!"

Clarisse burst out laughing. "You looked so hilarious in that dress." She said to Grover, who was blushing. Soon a few others joined in the laughter.

"That actually is a good plan to stall and wait for rescue." Pan said.

"You can lie!" Hermes exclaimed proudly.

"Uh… somebody poked out Polyphemus' eye?" Poseidon asked. What was going on?

"Yeah. Umm… remember when we told about Odysseus? That he had hurt one of your children?" Percy said. "He had actually gotten captured by Polyphemus and then fought with him and poked his eye out to escape being eaten. Then Polyphemus asked you to curse Odysseus as revenge and you did and that's why Odysseus got delayed more than he already had been."

The sea god blinked and said, "Okay…" Cursing someone for hurting his child did sound like him, he thought. But why had his cyclops son stolen the fleece and lured satyrs to him? He took a deep breath and hoped that all questions would get answered by the time this book was completed.

"Under different ... Monsters, of course!"

"Of course he is in the worst place to be in." Perseus said. They all had only heard rumors about the sea, never actually going there themselves.

"That should be easy for you because of your powers over the sea." Hercules said to Percy. He himself had never gone into the sea of monsters. Maybe someday he too shall go into that sea and fight the famed monsters that resided there.

"It is not actually, because that sea is a bit different." Percy said.

"The Sea of Monsters is tainted with the power of the monsters that live over there and Percy might have difficulty with that sea, since it is not directly under father's control." Triton explained.

"The sea of ... out of here."

"Wow. Do none of you know anything about optimism?" Gwen asked.

"Honeypie! the ... heard in my dream."

"Ooh. That would be creepy."

"The morning ... of submarine radar."

Hercules furrowed his brows. He knew that screeching sound even though he had no clue what a submarine radar was.

"How do you know what a submarine radar sounds like?" Leo asked.

"I... don't know. Never heard one. But if I did, it would have sounded like the sounds that the birds were making." Percy said.

"Submarine is a sea vessel and therefore a part of the sea, correct? Maybe that is how you knew."
Annabeth suggested.

Triton nodded and said, "If that is a sea vessel, then you would know everything about it just like you would know everything about the sea. You don't even have to ever see this vessel to know how to operate it or how it sounds like."

"That is so cool." Leo said in a fascinated voice. "Hey, superman. Do you have same things with planes?"

"I don't know. I have never tried flying a plane, Leo."

"You should..."

"The racetrack had ... ten o'clock."

"Still the same, huh, D?" Apollo teased. His brother never got up unless the sun chariot was right on top of wherever he was.

"'Right!' Tantalus ... your chariots!"

"What kind of a punishment is that for killing someone?" Reyna asked, disgusted with this Tantalus.

"That was how Tantalus ran the camp." Travis said. "As I said earlier, we were really surprised that no one had died in the few weeks he was there."

"Well, it wasn't for a lack of trying on his part." Connor said.

All the gods, even Dionysus, were disgusted by the callous nature of Tantalus. They wondered why Dionysus from the future never interfered into these matters. Was it because of the ancient laws or was it because he didn't care for demigods? Even Dionysus thought that for all his hatred towards demigods, he wouldn't let something happen to them because of Tantalus, especially when his own children were there in the camp.

"Beckendorf led ... fully loaded Maserati."

Leo and Hephaestus grinned at the mention of their chariot and mechanical horses. They hoped that the book explained all the mechanisms and traps involved.

"The Ares chariot ... other nasty toys."

Ares, Enyo and his children grinned at the mention of their chariot. Ares hoped that he won the race and that there would be some gory fighting. If he himself had been in the race, then that would have definitely happened.

"Apollo's chariot ... opposing drivers."

"That is more aesthetic than practical." Enyo pointed out.

"Well, you can be both aesthetic and a fighter." Apollo quipped with a dangerous gleam in his eyes. He didn't appreciate when everyone else only saw the surface and not the fact that he and his children could shoot down anything. After all, there was a reason he and Artemis were always covering Zeus' back in a war.

"Hermes's chariot was ... they'd schemed up."
"Be scared of us…" Connor said.

"Be very, very scared." Travis concluded and both the brothers had a maniac shine in their eyes that made everyone around them uneasy. Those two didn't look like much but nobody wanted to find out just exactly what they could do given the circumstances.

"Why are my children getting all of the old things? The old cabin and now the old chariot." Hermes asked.

"Yeah! We always get the old stuff." Chris said. "We should change that."

"Oh yeah. Definitely." Travis said seriously. Now that the war was over and he had to leave for college in some time, he had started making a list of things to be done for the Hermes kids.

"That left two ... your chariot, Percy."

"I cannot believe I am saying this, but listen to the sea spawn." Athena said, looking constipated.

"'I'm not making ... wasn't completely serious."

"No one would." Clarisse said. She was so glad that the Oracle changed bodies because if there ever came a time that she had to consult the Oracle again, she would go crazy if it was the mummy. Although it wasn't any better when the green smoke poured out of Rachel.

"Before she could ... than regular birds."

"You should have said something!" Annabeth said to Percy.

Hercules gasped and said, "Are those... Stymphalian birds? I mean with the screeching noise you mentioned earlier and now that they were shiny... it has to be them." When the older campers smiled at him, he said, "I hope you have something that makes loud sounds, because of they are more in number then you will definitely need it."

"Tyson was having ... mention the apples?"

"Did you just bribe the horses?" Triton laughed.

"Is there something that you don't bribe?" Connor joked.

"Well, I see it more as offering them food in return for favors."

"Well, we call it bribery." Travis said.


"Finally they agreed ... than skate-boarding."

"Oh, you and your obsession with skate-boarding!" Annabeth groaned.

"You have an unhealthy obsession with anything that gives you a rush." Will noted.

"That's the sea in him. We all like speedy things. The faster the waves, the better it is." Triton grinned. "Obviously, we cannot keep the waves at full speed at all times since it will destroy the lands and kill people, but you get the gist."

Seeing that everyone was too stunned at this revelation to speak, Iris continued, "I took the ...
concentrate on driving."

"You are going to run a clean race?" Ares said as if the thought itself disgusted him.

"I always try to." Percy said and smiled at Annabeth. All the times that they had won the chariot race, they had always run a clean race.

"You are so not a Roman." Reyna said with a shake of her head.

"'We will win.' ... and name calling?"

The campers winced and Travis said, "Sorry about that." But Percy just waved it off. The campers felt bad though. They hadn't even thought about how Percy would take all of the teasing they had been doing. The campers wondered why Percy never showed them what he had been feeling. But they guessed that this wasn't the only time he had hidden what he had been feeling or going through.

"As the chariots ... over the noise."

"Of course he didn't. Those flesh eating birds are right up his alley." Artemis murmured.

"'Charioteers!' he ... mistake, maybe not."

"Most definitely not!" The Stolls said in unison and high fived one another and Hermes grinned at his children while Apollo glared at them and their father.

"The riders were ... in the dust."

Everyone laughed as the Stolls scowled and blushed.

"Not even two seconds into the game and already two cabins are out!" Dakota said. "This is awesome! We should totally do something like this." He said to Reyna, who just had to nod. This did sound like a fun game, but then again the Greeks were well known for having fun.

"Two chariots down... at us, shouting: 'See ya!'"

Everyone grinned as the game progressed. They didn't know it could be fun to read about chariot races, but it was.

Athena smiled proudly at her daughter and hoped that her cabin would win. Although if the first few seconds of the game were anything to go by, she was sure that she would win.

"The Hephaestus ... Tyson!" I yelled."

"Yeah, nice save."

"'Birds!' ... toward the track."

"Uh-oh. Damn monsters taking away all the fun we have." Laurel said. She always did like a good competition and did not appreciate the monsters trying to interfere.

"No big deal, I told myself. They're just pigeons."

"No, they are not." Hercules muttered.
"I tried to ... use his pole...."

Poseidon grinned and hoped that his son would win and then the god would be able to rub it in that annoying wisdom goddess's face.

"Annabeth's fighter wasn't smiling now. He pulled a javelin from his collection and took aim at me. He was about to throw when we heard the screaming."

"The dam birds, huh?" Thalia said with a chuckle and both Percy and Grover joined her while everyone just rolled their eyes. No one knew what the joke was and it was getting annoying.

"The pigeons... horses steaming."

"Damn demonic pigeons!" Leo shouted.

"In the Ares ... right on running."

Ares grinned and said, "See, always be prepared. If you get distracted in war, you will die."

All the gods rolled their eyes. They had had heard enough of these random 'words of wisdom' from Ares. It was always about one thing – war.

"The spectators weren't... toward the stands."

"Yes. But for saving them, so don't be disheartened." Hestia said warmly.

"We would have been severely injured or even died if you guys hadn't turned around." Katie said. She didn't remember much from what had happened that day as she had been busy protecting a younger camper, but she knew that Percy and Annabeth had saved the day.

"Annabeth rode ... safe to shoot."

"That's an ambush. Unless you can get them away at a safe distance, you cannot fight them all." Hercules said.

"Thank you, captain obvious." Percy muttered under his breath and Annabeth chuckled.

""Too many!" I yelled to Annabeth. "How do you get rid of them?!"

"Brass bells." Hercules offered.

"Or any annoying noise, really." Athena said.

"So, we can make Apollo sing then." Artemis taunted. She and Apollo had had a little insult throwing match going on the side.

"Come on. I know you can do better than that, little sister." Apollo said.

"I am older to you by nine whole days, Apollo!" Artemis shouted. "I helped in your delivery!"

"Or we could just make these two have a shouting match near the birds." Hermes said with a grin.

"She stabbed ... Chiron's collection!"

"Excuse me!" Chiron said indignantly and both Annabeth and Percy smiled sheepishly at him.
"I understood ... for the stands."

Clarisse groaned and thought how wrong she had been. Without their ingenious idea, the campers would have been in an even worse condition than they had been that day. How easily she used to let pride and ego cloud her judgments!

Ares slumped in his place. That was no worthy victory when there are no competitors. It was only fun if there was someone to beat, physically or otherwise.

Nike sniffed, "That is not proper game ethics. She was unopposed. That is unfair."

Iris quickly read, knowing full well that Nike would go on and on about proper game ethics.

"I urged our ... back outside."

Chiron raised a brow. He wanted to see exactly which one of his favorite music did Percy find repulsive.

"Down at the ... control! Not to worry."

"That is utter chaos!" Enyo said gleefully as she could almost imagine the lovely sight it would have made. Well, lovely for her anyway.

No one ever said that the gods were stable beings.

"We pulled up ... moaning in Italian."

Chiron huffed and said, "I will have you know that that is a very good collection!"

"Whatever you say Chiron." Percy said cheekily causing Chiron to playfully narrow his eyes at the son of Poseidon.

"So, Charon is obsessed with Italian suits and Chiron is obsessed with Italian music! Something is seriously wrong with them." Nico said.

"You are Italian." Will pointed out.

"That's beside the point."

"The demon ... own brains out."

"Can't blame them." Travis chuckled.

"Then they ... on the horizon."

"Humph! We can do better than that." Adrianna said and the hunters agreed.

The campers just rolled their eyes. They had this fight way too many times with the hunters. It was no use getting into it in the past too.

"The camp was ... clothes pooped on."

"That should be the least of their worries."

"'Bravo!' Tantalus ... disrupted this race."
"
"Okay. Wow! That guy is really starting to piss me off." Piper said.

"You and everyone else, Beauty Queen." Leo said.

"You both just saved everyone. How could he not see that?" Theseus asked incredulously.

"Lack of food makes people go unhinged." Percy said. "And that guy was born crazy."

"That and he didn't like you at all." Annabeth added.

"That too."

"So, who will read next?" Iris asked, looking around till Morpheus took the book.
"I ACCEPT GIFTS FROM A STRANGER"

"Percy! Has no one ever told you not to accept anything from strangers? That's how you get kidnapped." Leo chuckled and then burst into full scale laughing and the Stolls joined him. The other campers quickly took away all the Kool-Aid (Dakota style) and cokes that those three had with them (thanks to Piper's cornucopia). A hyperactive Leo and Stolls were worse than Taz the Tasmanian devil.

"Who in their right mind would kidnap Percy?" Thalia said. "He will annoy them so much that they will return him within a few minutes."

"You do realize that somebody had kidnapped Percy for eight whole months, right?" Jason told his sister. At least he had been awake for the entire time, but Percy was asleep for almost six out of the eight months.

"Yeah, well, nobody said that the kidnapper was in her right mind." Annabeth quipped and Percy shook with silent laughter.

Not understanding what the children were talking about, Morpheus decided to get on with the reading, "The way ... his mood."

The campers burst out laughing at that image. "You-you told him to go chase a donut?" Dakota asked between peals of laughter. "Dude, you are awesome!"

"I am assuming this donut is a food?" Apollo asked with a grin. When the campers nodded, the gods started laughing, even Zeus, Hera and Hades.

Once everyone had calmed down to a respectable level, Morpheus read, "He sentenced us ... Stymphalian death-bird."

"You ate the bird?" Hercules asked.

"Yup. Very tasty." Connor said lost in thoughts about the fried bird.

"The only good ...

"Messy?!"

"He is not wrong." Hermes said while a few chuckled.

"She sighed. "A ... Are you serious?!""
"So, you do know about the Golden Fleece then!" Athena said. This boy seemed to be quite ignorant despite all his bravery.

"Annabeth scrapped ... the clay skeletons."

The few campers who had seen the movie started laughing while the others shook their heads exasperatedly.

"How did she not gut you that minute?" Leo asked.

"I was used to him," Annabeth replied rolling her eyes.

"Annabeth rolled ... important to her."

"Yeah, probably."

"'The point is, ... Thalia's tree.'"

"It did more than just cure." Thalia said.

Jason said, "Thank gods for that." For years he only had a feeling about her, not remembering more than a few things. He was glad that she had survived. Finally, he had a family.

"Annabeth nodded. ... same time. It's perfect!"

"It is a bit too perfect. It actually feels orchestrated." Athena said.

"It could be a trap." Artemis said. "Maybe the Titan Lord wants the Fleece for himself."

"Even if he does, he cannot use it to reform himself." Zeus said. "The Fleece cannot reverse the magic of scythe."

"But, what can?" Triton asked.

"Something that directly opposes the nature of the scythe." Poseidon said. "The scythe took many lives..."

"So, to reverse something that the scythe did, you need someone to willingly give their lives to the victim of the scythe and it cannot be an immortal who pledges their life since they live on forever. It needs to be someone who can actually die." Hades finished. The three brothers looked at one another and thought that if their father had actually risen, he must have had a lot of mortal followers who pledged themselves to him – whether it was coerced or not, that would not matter if they willingly said the pledge.

"So, that's how the pledging thing worked." Percy whispered to Annabeth, who nodded.

While the gods were discussing this, a few campers and Dionysus had some other thoughts running in their minds, something that had been overlooked in favor of the fleece and the possibility of the trap. Dionysus wondered whether the boy had an urge to save everyone. He had himself said that he would save his friend and the camp at the same time. If that was the case – if the boy really had an inexplicable need to save others, it may be both a good and bad thing. If taken to extremes, the boy could either save everyone or lose everything. The god of madness wondered whether this was what drove the boy to do whatever he had done to reach this position of getting special attention from the Fates. The boy had even been this way in the previous book and had mentioned wanting to drown when he couldn't save others. So, what was it – the need to save others or the need to save
others at the cost of his life? Dionysus decided to keep his eyes open for further information. Contrary to popular belief, he wasn't all about wine and drinking, although it helped. He was up for understanding the mortals and demigods. The god thought that it was probably because he had been one of them and still hadn't been able to understand them or maybe it was just that madness and all the psychology that came with it was his domain.

"Annabeth hesitated. "A ... Western Civilization."

"That is true." Demeter said. "What if father thinks that he can heal from the fleece? Then he would want the fleece. The only reason we know how to reverse the effects of scythe is because the elder cyclops and Hekatonkheires had told us about the scythes magic."

Zeus nodded and said, "Regardless, it seems like a bit too much of a gamble if father is sending unknown demigods to find a lost fleece that no one knows the location of. Wouldn't he rather send his own people so as to avoid any problems? I would if I were in his place."

"It seems like he would not care either way. If the children get the fleece then he can take it from them and if they don't, then the camp dies..." Poseidon said.

Athena cut in, not wanting to be left behind, "He must have figured out another way to healing and rising if he is taking such a risk. Maybe he had even figured out about the pledging."

"Did I mention that they should solve puzzles together?" Percy whispered to his friends.

"They are figuring out things over here when they should have done it back in our time." Thalia muttered.

"It was the prophecy at works, Thalia. I doubt that figuring out would have able to stop it." Annabeth said solemnly.

"We should read. It would answer our questions faster that way." Hestia said.

""What choice do ... spoons in the lava."

Poseidon sighed sadly. His son was only a child – both of them. And they had to be thrown into saving themselves and avoiding Kronos. They were too young to be doing all that. He wished he could protect them, but he had a feeling that their paths had already been chosen and he couldn't have interfered even if he wanted to.

""Percy," she said... was playing dumb."

"I never know with you." Annabeth said honestly.

"Hey!" Percy protested.

""The Sea of ... but no.""

"That clears it all up. Thanks!" Leo said sarcastically.

"If Olympus and Underworld have moved, then the Sea of Monsters might have also moved." Athena said, narrowing her eyes at the son of Hephaestus.

Morpheus read quickly, before Athena would do something to the boy.

""Another straight ... Bermuda Triangle?""
"Whoa! You mean to say that the Bermuda Triangle is actually the Sea of Monsters?" Dakota asked. None of them had been taught that...maybe because it was a Greek concept and the Romans hated all the seas anyway. But still!

"Yes." came the reply from most of the Greek campers.

"Damn!"

"You do learn something new every day." Gwen said.

"Why is it called the Bermuda Triangle?" Amphitrite asked.

"The area the sea is in, can be fitted in a giant triangular shape." Percy said. "So, the mortals call it the Bermuda Triangle, since one of the places that the sea touches is called Bermuda."

"And the mortals cannot see such a huge area? I heard that the sea is enormous." Hercules asked.

"The mist is pretty heavy on the boundaries of the Sea, so the mortals are only able to see the mortal aspect of the sea, like they can see their people going in, but cannot see what happens after that. But if a mortal goes inside the mist covered area, then they can see the monsters and well, everything that we see." Annabeth explained. "There are even reports of some mortals saying that the water is green and not the usual blue."

"The water is green?" Theseus asked.

"Yes." Triton replied. "As I said earlier, it is tainted with the monsters that reside there, so it is green. Pure, bright green, not sea green like on mortal coasts."

"Yeah. It's disgusting." Percy said. "And you feel lost over there. It's not like you don't know where you are type of lost. It is like you know where you are but are still lost. Like if you ever have dreams where you are in a familiar location but everything is wrong and even though you know where you are going, you feel lost."

Theseus shuddered and said, "I cannot imagine ever getting lost in the sea."

"I know." Percy replied sympathetically and motioned Morpheus to read.

"'Exactly.'

... How hard can it be?"

"So, was it easy to find then?" Perseus asked.

"It could have been but we had too many distractions." Percy replied.

"Annabeth knit ... gun, will you?"

"Sounds like a good plan. Pressuring always works." Jason said.

"Yes. But pressuring Tantalus? It must have backfired." Piper said.

Percy and Annabeth grinned and shrugged. There was a quest issued and they managed to save the camp, so the backfire didn't work anyway.

"That night at ... picked their lyres."
"Yes. That would be disheartening." Demeter said.

"I bet that she says that we need fruits." Hades whispered to Poseidon and Zeus. Somehow, overnight they had gotten a bit closer to each other. It wasn't like the olden days, but t was better than what their relationship had been a week ago.

"You should eat fresh fruits." Demeter continued.

The gods groaned while the big three covered their smiles. Nico whispered, "Wow this is like how she gets with cereals."

"What?" Will asked.

"Nothing… long story. Will tell later." Nico whispered just as Morpheus started reading.

"We did all ... Land is Minos's Land."

"You guys have weird camp songs." Frank said and the romans nodded. The little time that they had spent at the Greek camp, they campers usually sang some or the other uplifting modern songs or even some of the old songs about war. None of this weird numbers had been sung during that time.

Will chuckled and suggested, "Maybe we should have a camp fire and sing all of the camp classics."

The Greeks nodded. Hey, if they were going to be stuck in the past, the least they could do is get into their normal routine. Some of the gods (mainly Apollo and his muses) nodded. They would love to see what the children sang about.

"The bonfire was ... the color of lint."

Hestia smiled sadly and thought that the children could really use some hope in such dire conditions.

"Dionysus left ... the Big House."

"If D also didn't want him there, then why is he there?" Hermes thought out loud.

When no one offered any answers, the god of dreams continued, "When the last ...diving into the flames."

A few campers snickered and Butch said, "Even the marshmallow would rather die than be touched by Tantalus."

"Well, that was a waste of a completely good marshmallow." Leo said.

"Tantalus turned ... me into silence."

A few gods and the campers cracked a smile at Percy's persistence and overcoming something like being embarrassed in front of an audience. Even Dionysus smiled a little without thinking but quickly schooled himself.

"I stood and ... with chariots—""

"Seriously?" Ares said. "He is still going on with the chariots?" As war crazed as he was, he knew
that protecting the camp was the number one priority. Why was this Tantalus even there?

"The Golden... coming from her."

"Um... duh!" Travis grinned as Percy mock glared at him.

"The Fleece... need saving."

"I...I don't even have words to say about this guy!" Damien said.

"How did you guys survive that guy?" Butch asked and got a couple of shrugs and 'no clues'.

"Everybody stared..."

"30, 31, 75, 12," I said."

"Ah! Those numbers correspond to some location, yes?" Perseus asked.

"Yeah."

"Ooo-kay," Tantalus... We need a quest!"

"I honestly didn't expect that, you know?" Annabeth said to Percy.

"Have you no faith?" Percy said in an exaggerated tone.

"Hey, not our fault that you pretend to be dumb." Connor said.

Percy huffed and rolled his eyes. He didn't pretend to be dumb, he just didn't like speaking up.

"Wait just a... WE NEED A QUEST!"

"Ah. Good old pressuring tactic." Hermes said. "No way can he refuse now. I hope."

"Fine!" Tantalus... Or die trying."

"Something tells me he is not going to choose you for the quest." Calypso said.

"My heart filled... would stop me."

"You sound crazy or deluded or both..."

"I do."

Jason thought that his cousin didn't sound crazy at all. If he had been in Percy's shoes, he too would have wanted to save the camp. Maybe, he thought this way because of being a leader for so long or because it was the natural instinct as a child of big three to protect others and be ahead of everyone else.

Dionysus rested his chin on his palm and thought about his previous assessment of the boy. The child was really obsessed with saving everyone. That must be his weakness – being unable to give up when he needed to just because he wanted to save everyone.

"I will allow... Clarisse!"

"What?" a few campers protested.
"Hey! What do you mean by that?" Clarisse growled.

"Nothing. Nothing."

Ares smirked and thought that finally his daughter would prove her worth to him. Although, he wished that a son of his would go on the quest. His daughter didn't seem like much, after all, she was a girl. Not that he would ever mention that to Enyo... she would kill him and wait for him to recover before repeating the process.

"The fire flickered ... another said."

All those who knew Percy thought that he never did anything for being in the spotlight. Sure, he would like getting recognition for what he did but it wasn't in his nature to crave it. He rather just stay in the background if it meant that he could save others.

"Wow. Those children of Ares do not like you at all." Theseus said.

"Nope, they don't." Percy replied.

"Clarisse glared... save the camp!"

"Even then, wouldn't you need a child of Poseidon along with you?" Hercules asked. "You are travelling over sea, it would be only logical to take a child of Poseidon with you." The hero thought that had it been him, he would have chosen a child of Poseidon to accompany him. Not because he needed another hero to aid him, but it was good protection in the sea. No sea creature or god (those who respected Poseidon) would hinder their progress with a child of Poseidon on board.

"Not necessarily." Clarisse replied. "I can navigate on my own."

"And died too." Annabeth muttered.

"Can it, Princess."

"You first."

To avoid a miniature version of Athena-Ares fight, Morpheus read on, "The Ares campers ... a ghost story."

The older campers grimaced as they remembered the story and the gods realized exactly what story he was going to tell.

"I didn't know ... I'd ever faced."

"That's true."

"That's because he is worse than a monster." Demeter gagged thinking about that meal.

"'Once upon a ... Children—just—like—you.'"

"He wasn't allowed to take the ambrosia and nectar to the mortal world." Zeus growled. "Nobody is."

"Then how does the camp have nectar and ambrosia?" Jason asked. Back at Camp Jupiter, they didn't have such provisions. They had to use normal medicines or herbs and potions. But Camp Half-Blood had ambrosia and nectar.
"That's because we give it to them. It is only to be used in case of emergencies and to heal the campers." Apollo replied. "You do not eat it on regular basis, correct? Only when you are injured, you consume it."

"Oh."

"He pointed a crooked finger at several people in the audience, including me."

Poseidon barely contained his growl. Why had Tantalus particularly targeted his son?

"Do you know ... was in the stew?"

Everyone looked sick, especially the Olympians.

"No one dared ... on her quest?"

Chiron looked livid. How could the gods let their children be in the vicinity of that...that...vile creature? The gods themselves could barely look at him or listen about him, but they would willingly let their children share the same breathing space as that monster! Sometimes the old teacher just couldn't understand the gods.

"Silence.

... Tantalus's pet."

"Who would?"

"Sir—"

... punishing me again."

"Good. You never know what he might do."

"Good," Tantalus said. ... Sleep well."

"Why didn't any of you leave? And I don't mean for going on the quest." Rachel asked. She couldn't imagine living in such a time at the camp.

"It wasn't like it didn't cross our minds, but we couldn't just leave the camp unguarded." Travis said.

"And for many campers, camp was the only home they knew. We couldn't leave them behind – not because of a lunatic. He wasn't going to drive us out of our safe haven." Connor said and the other campers nodded. They would never leave the camp, no matter the situation.

"With a wave of ... anyway?" he asked.

"Yes!" some campers exclaimed and chuckled.

"I don't know," ... Too dangerous."

Poseidon smiled at both of his sons. One wanted to help even if he didn't know what was going on and was too young. And the other wanted to protect the younger one. They were already like brothers.
"Tyson looked ... delicate little pieces."

"Cyclopes can handle any machinery, no matter the size." Hephaestus grunted as he patted down another fire in his beard.

"'What are you ... don't want me along?'"

Annabeth looked down. Even though she still didn't like cyclops other than Tyson, she didn't want to hurt his feelings. She didn't realize that he would have understood her hostility towards him.

"'Oh, that's ... of his eye.'"

The campers were saddened by this. They all liked Tyson. He was like a giant hyperactive puppy… who could kill anything and grow like 20 feet… but who cares! He was a good friend to all, even if they didn't reciprocate the feelings.

"I remembered that Grover, like all satyrs, could read human emotions. I wondered if Cyclopes had the same ability."

"To some extent they do. But then too, only a few of them. The others are not bothered to use that ability." Poseidon explained.

"Tyson folded up ... how he'd gotten hurt."

The others too wondered about the scars. Since the beginning of the book, there had been mention of the scars and they all were curious. But they didn't want to upset Tyson by asking. Hopefully, it would be revealed in the book.

"'Daddy always ... have been born.'"

Poseidon and the campers winced at Tyson's thoughts. The demigods realized that they had isolated and made Tyson feel bad about who he was. They had even made life difficult for Percy and made him want to distance himself from Tyson. Isn't that what they all had been suffering their entire lives – isolation and ridicule from the mortals just because they were different? How were they any different from the mortals they hated so much? They did the same thing to Tyson that mortals had been doing to them.

"Don't say that, Tyson." Rachel said, giving the cyclops a side hug, which got turned into a full on bear hug.

"No. No. I am lucky." Tyson said with a smile and the campers smiled with him.

"'Don't talk ... was a monster?""

Poseidon bit the inside of his cheek in worry. He wished he could help any of his children, but with cyclops, they needed to contact him. And honestly, sometimes he just forgot about them. That was one of the main reasons that whenever a cyclops child of his contacted him, he would ask them to come to his underwater forges. He wondered if the reason he hadn't called Tyson yet was because Tyson needed to be on this quest.

Some of the campers who had lived on the streets had always had such thoughts about their parent. How could any parent let that happen to their child? But they realized that being a child of a god wasn't anything glorious. If anything, it was worse than being a child of a mortal, but it did have its benefits and no, they were not thinking about the powers they had. The campers looked at their
friends and knew that this was the upside of being a child of a god. They got a huge family and loads of friends. And yes, the powers were super cool.

"Tyson ... camp will be a good home for you. The others will get used to you. I promise."

"That's true," Annabeth said. "Half the camp looks forward to the time Tyson comes and visits."

"Yeah, but Percy hogs all his time." Travis pouted. Tyson was good for pranks. They never thought that a cyclops could be good for playing pranks, seeing as how clumsy and huge they were, but Tyson loved it, even if the pranks hardly worked, but the Hermes cabin always had a blast (sometimes literal) when Tyson came over.

Percy stuck his tongue out at Travis and shrugged. His brother, his right to hog time.

"Tyson sighed. ... would I ever wake up?"

Grover grimaced and said, "Sorry for putting that pressure on you."

"No problem. I would rather know if you were safe or not." Percy said with a smile.

"The full moon ... award from Tantalus."

Percy ducked just as a rock sailed past his head. "Sorry." He squeaked as Clarisse threw another rock at him and the other campers laughed at him.

"I'll pulverize you Prissy. Just wait for it." Clarisse threatened as Chris moved away all the rocks from her reach.

Knowing about Clarisse's struggle with self-confidence thanks to her annoying dad, Percy said, "I didn't mean that you couldn't. I just… dunno… had this feeling I guess. That I needed to be on the quest."

"Whatever." Clarisse said, understanding what Percy was trying to do. "I'll still pulverize you." She said but it didn't have much heat behind it and Percy knew that he had managed to get his message across.

"I got out of... convenience store."

"Reveal our whole operation, why don't you?" Connor said and Percy just grinned sheepishly at the three glaring sons of Hermes.

"Sneaking out ... for the beach."

Poseidon, Triton and Percy smiled as they remembered their little excursion the previous night. The two gods had also felt better after visiting their domain. Being away for days was really annoying for them.

"I spread my ... advice or something."

"Hey, is this when you meet the gifts giving stranger?" Leo asked.

"Uh-huh. Anytime now." Percy replied.

"The sky was ... Corona Borealis"
"What?" Zeus squeaked, not that he would classify it as that.

"I…There is a constellation after my name?" Hercules asked with a raised eyebrow and a hopeful look.

Artemis and the hunters scowled. Why was there a constellation named after Hercules?

"Uh… yes." Annabeth replied.

Zeus and Hercules grinned in pride. "What does it look like?" Hercules asked wistfully. He wished he could see it.

"It looks like a kneeling person, stepping on the head of another constellation called Draco, named after the dragon that you killed." Annabeth said.

The gods were impressed. It wasn't every day that Artemis would create a constellation for a demigod, especially someone that she loathes. He must have done something so impressive that even Artemis herself was obliged to create a constellation for Hercules.

"There is also a constellation for Perseus and Andromeda." Rachel said as she tried draw as many constellations from memory as she could.

"Huh?" Perseus looked shocked and Zeus grinned even more. Two of his children had constellations for them!

"Yeah. It is supposed to depict you holding a sword and Medusa's head." Rachel said. She had once spent a whole summer learning astronomy to spite her parents but in the end she had ended up loving it. "And Andromeda's depicts her being freed from the chains. And on top of that is the constellation for Pegasus. And…"

"Ok. This is turning into astronomy class, Rachel." Percy said bringing Rachel out of her furious drawing phase to glare at him.

"There are a lot of constellations." Percy said to the gods and asked Morpheus to read as Annabeth shook her head in exasperation.

"—when somebody said, 'Beautiful, aren't they?''"

"Uh, what's happening? Kind of forgot thanks to Astronomy lecture." Dakota asked.

"Percy is on the beach looking at stars and drinking coke and somebody randomly commented on the stars." Thalia said.

"I didn't think there was anybody with him."

"There wasn't."

"That's creepy."

"I almost spewed ... figure out why."

"Hermes!" Apollo said loudly.

"What?" Hermes replied, looking up from the gambling game he was playing with a couple of minor gods.
"No, not you. That description is yours. Only you have a sly smile and grey hair." Apollo explained.

"Oh. Oh, yes. It is. And I do not have grey hair – they are highly fashionable."

"Why are you there?" Zeus asked with a raised brow. "Ancient rules, Hermes. Or have you forgotten?"

"I don't know. Could be delivering a message." Hermes said as he placed a bet on the side.

"My first thought... jogged from?"

"All very good questions. But why are you even sitting and analyzing instead of leaving? Stranger in the middle of the night… not very safe." Leo said.

Percy turned slowly towards Leo and said, "I was in the middle of something. Anyway, he didn't look threatening."

"Murderers never do."

"Please continue reading." Chiron said, knowing full well that the campers were on the verge of discussing murderers and who knew where they would go from there.

"'May I join you?' he asked. 'I haven't sat down in ages.'"

Hermes frowned and thought why he hadn't sat down in ages. Was it a phrase used by the people then or did he mean it literally? He hoped for the first option.

"Now, I know—... hard to be afraid."

"Seriously?" Thalia chuckled.

"See, that's how you get kidnapped."

"I was next to the ocean, guys!" Percy said. "I am as safe as I could be."

"You could be safer in your cabin."

"Shut up, Valdez."

Leo laughed. He loved to get on Percy's nerves. The comebacks were always hilarious and the guy was a good sport, unless you insulted someone he cared about. Then he would kill you, but otherwise Percy was pretty chill.

"I said, 'Uh, ... Coca-Cola! May I?'"

"Why can you not be that polite with us?" Dionysus grumbled.

"You annoy me and use me as a delivery person and not as a messenger that I am." Hermes said drily.

"There is a difference?" Dionysus quipped but looked away at the responding glare.

"He sat at ... in his pocket."

"Oh, hey. I use a cellphone." Hermes said excitedly. He wanted to know more about himself in the
future. The book just got interesting for him.

"The jogger sighed. ... than earthworms."

"That would have been a shock." Jason said. He knew that Hermes' staff had two snakes on it, but he didn't know how he would react if he ever actually saw them and didn't know the context.

"Martha and George." Hermes said with a smile, summoning his caduceus.

*George and Martha.* George corrected Hermes.

"Hey! Martha and George!" Percy said, turning to look at the snakes writhing on the caduceus.

*George and Martha.* George corrected exasperatedly.

All of the gods stared at Percy and Hermes asked skeptically. "Can you hear them?" The way Percy had turned meant that he had heard George.

"Yeah." Percy said. "Why?"

"They don't usually talk to demigods." Hermes explained slowly, still confused that his snakes would talk to Percy.

*That means you are special, dear.* Martha said.

*You are inflating his ego.* George grumbled.

*You are just jealous that I didn't compliment you this morning.* Martha replied.

"Ok. Enough both of you." Hermes said. "I want to know why I am there." It didn't look like he was on a delivery run. He wouldn't have sat down.

"The jogger ... the phone: "Hello?""

"Don't curse in front of a child." Hera reprimanded.

"As if that ever stopped her." Apollo whispered to Hermes and they both chuckled.

"He listened. The ... I gotta go."

"You are delivering for Prometheus?" Athena asked. None of the other gods knew exactly what it was that Hermes did. They all just gave him messages or packages and he would deliver them without complaint. Ever ready to learn new things, Athena wished that the book would explain what Hermes did.

"Another gift to humanity?" Zeus asked rubbing his temples. "The first one was troubling enough."

"Do you mean me?" Eris asked at the same time. "Why am I working for you?"

"I don't know!" Hermes said and motioned Morpheus to read before someone else could ask a question.

"He hung up. ... on your phone."

"That would have been weird." Travis said.
"What? Oh, they don't bite. Say hello, George and Martha."

So, you finally learn! George said and then said, Hello, George and Martha.

The demigods laughed at the snake's antics, with Percy the loudest. Hermes had asked the snakes to make sure that everyone could hear them.

"Hello, George ... all the real work."

"Not again!" Hermes said.

But it is true. George said.

It is not. Martha replied.

It is.

Not.

"Enough!" Hermes shouted and both of them kept quiet.

""Oh, let's not ... constellation, Percy?"

"It gets worse?" Hermes asked.

"That's what you always tell me." Percy replied and Hermes wondered just how many times had he met the demigod for the child to be so comfortable talking to him. Not that he tried to make his life difficult or anything, but no other demigods other than his children were so comfortable with him. Then again, the child was comfortable with Hades, so Hermes really shouldn't be surprised.

"I was still ... I like Hercules."

A few campers laughed and Chris said, "You could have phrased that a little better."

"Hey, I didn't write it!" Percy replied but was himself laughing.

Hercules was proud that this cousin of his liked him whereas Artemis and Adrianna frowned. When they had talked to the boy, he had clearly stated his dislike of Hercules and yet here he said that he liked Hercules. Zoe was also thinking about the same thing. She didn't know how she could be friends with someone who liked Hercules.

"Why?"

"Well ... because he had rotten luck. Even worse than mine. It makes me feel better."

Everyone was stunned and looked at Percy.

"That's a first." Jason said. "Don't people usually like him because he is the best hero of all times?"

"I am the best hero of all times?" Hercules asked, looking at his brother.

"You had a good publicist." Annabeth said and the campers chuckled.

Ignoring Annabeth's comment (because he didn't understand it), Hercules asked, "How is my luck worse than yours?" This boy had gone to Tartarus. How could his luck be considered even worse than that?
"Uh. Back then it was applicable," Percy said and then thought, 'At least I wasn't driven to madness and made to kill my own family.' He could not think of anything worse than that – not even Tartarus. He knew that Hercules had mistreated people and it wasn't excusable, but Percy still felt bad for the older hero and the troubles he had to face because of a jealous Hera.

Artemis and the hunters relaxed. At least this demigod wasn't enamored by Hercules' strength and whatever the other demigods usually were enamored with.

"The jogger ... about the Fleece?"

"Hermes, don't you dare encourage my son to sneak out and find the Fleece." Poseidon warned.

"Dad, it's already done." Percy said and Poseidon looked up and shook his head. Why did his son have to go and find trouble?

"Before I could ... leave a message."

"Excuse me!" Demeter said indignantly. "Why should I leave a message?" She then wondered as to how she would even leave a message, but that wasn't important. Her nephew was ignoring her!

"She's not ... rolled his eyes."

"That is hardly a meeting. You are just sitting and talking." Demeter sniffed.

"Well, isn't that what a meeting is?" Hermes said cheekily. "We all sit and talk. The location or the subject does not matter, now does it?"

Everyone tried to hide their smiles at Hermes' reply.

"'Sorry again, ... you, exactly?'

"Should you not have asked that first?" Amphitrite asked, her eyes glinting with laughter. This was exactly what Poseidon would have done. He would talk and then later remember to ask whom he was talking to.

"I wasn't even worried until the snakes came out." Percy replied with a shrug.

*We are not threatening.* Martha said.

*I am not. Your size would scare anyone.* George said.

*Oh, that's it!* Martha said and starting chasing George around the caduceus. Hermes shook the staff till the snakes apologized and kept quiet.

"'Haven't you ... wants to show off!"

*As usual.* George said and then added, *What does she mean by not been full sized for months?*

Ignoring the snake, Morpheus read, *"The man took ... father," I said. "Hermes.""

The campers face palmed. "Do you have the habit of recognizing gods as someone's parent?" Reyna asked, remembering Percy calling Ares Clarisse's father.

"It's easier that way." Percy said.

Leo was trying his very best to not chuckle and looked like he was having a stroke.
"What?" Piper asked him.

"Star Wars reference. Just ignore me." Leo said with a chuckle. Those who caught on, laughed with him or looked at him as if he was crazy.

"The god pursed ... to be kind.""

"That is true." Hermes said. "That is the first time anyone has ever introduced me like that."

"Ooh! I want to know what the boy calls me when he meets me." Apollo said in glee.

"How are you so sure that you will even meet him one on one?" Hermes asked.

"Everyone else is meeting him. Why should I not?"

Zeus gritted his teeth and mumbled about ancient laws and rule flouting children.

"Actually, you were introduced to me by Lady Artemis." Percy said.

"You spoil all the fun." Apollo said childishly to his twin.

"God of thieves ... Will that stop you?"

"You are a bad influence on my son." Poseidon told Hermes.

"I bet he even told the story about how he stole Apollo's cattle." Ares said in a monotone. They had heard that story every time they talked to Hermes.

"I want to go. I have to save Grover."

"Thanks, man."

"No problem."

"Hermes smiled. "I knew a boy once ... oh, younger than you by far. A mere baby, really.""

The whole amphitheater groaned.

"Seriously?"

"This again? When are you going to get another story?"

*He is always talking about himself.*

"Hey, this is my favorite story!" Hermes said.

"We know!" replied almost everyone.

"Here we go ... tiny pieces?" I asked."

The gods laughed and Annabeth asked, "How do you not know this story?"

"Why didn't I blast you?" Apollo asked, stroking an imaginary beard and looking at Hermes intently.

"Because I was too cute a baby?" Hermes asked.
"Huh. And you gave me the lyre." Apollo said, satisfied with the answer.

"'Hmm ... the moral?''"

The laughter now could be heard all over Olympus.

"I can't believe you asked for a moral for a story on stealing." Travis said, trying to control his laughter.

"Wh-wh-what moral?" Hermes asked, flabbergasted. "No one ever asks for a moral!"

"I want to know the answer for this one." Poseidon said chuckling.

"'The moral?'' ... like that moral.'"

"Unbelievable!" Hermes said, still confused by the turn of events.

"No mother would like such a moral." Hera said, looking disdainfully at Hermes.

"Rats are ... I'm hungry."

Yes, I am. Can we go find rats? George said.

"Olympus does not have rats." Zeus said.

That is because we eat all of them. George quipped.

"Read Morpheus," Hermes said, before his father could get into a fight with a snake. He never knew with his father!

"'I've got it,' ... How's that?"

"I think that is the motto of your existence." Ares said.

"Stop encouraging my son."

"No. My motto is – do whatever you want." Hermes replied.

"And then get caught and clean up your mess." Artemis said.

"I do not get caught."

"I think last year you did."

"Shh."

"'You're saying ... 'But how—'"

"I am everywhere." Hercules said in a confused tone. His name had been mentioned so many times.

"Yeah. Like Starbucks." Percy replied and the few who understood, laughed with him.

Zeus ignored the children and asked, "You are giving him gifts?"

"I am giving him gifts?" Hermes repeated. Huh, I must really want him to go for some reason, the god thought to himself.
Hades was worried about the line that said a hero was lifting Cerberus. Why would anyone do that?

"'Never question ... Busts Heads?'"

"What?" Hercules asked. He was way too confused now.

"It is an H-TV show." Connor said.

"Yeah. We have all the seasons." Chris said.

"And unlimited subscription to H-TV." Travis said.

"That is not unlimited. It has to be renewed monthly." Chiron told the boys. "Also, return the television to the rec room when we go back."

"What is H-TV?" Theseus asked. The future terms were extremely confusing and hardly made any sense.

"Hephaestus Television." Leo replied. "Dad created it for Olympus."

"Great show." ... pick it up.

"Why am I giving you two gifts?" Hermes asked.

'I almost dropped ... the cold side..."

"A compass?" Triton and Theseus said in unison.

"My children do not need compass if they are at sea." Poseidon said. It must be something else too.

'It's a compass!' ... second gift. George?"

"You should have warned me." Annabeth said to Percy.

"I was kind of busy falling from a couple hundred feet."

"It wasn't that much."

"She's touching ... stopped wrestling."

*I hate when that happens.* Martha said.

"George unhinged ... really need it."

"Very potent." Percy said.

"How will I ... feel your-self again."

"That sounds like a potion that I use." Apollo mused.

"He tossed me ... you helping me?"

"That is what I would like to know." Zeus said.

"He gave me ... Luke?"
'Ah' Hermes thought and sat back in his place. So, this was what he wanted… his son.

"You wanted by thirteen year old child to save your son from father?" Poseidon asked. He understood his nephew's emotions but he wanted to shield his own son from that father of his.

"When you put it that way… it does sound… quite desperate." Hermes sighed sadly. What was he thinking – sending a thirteen year old to protect his son? But he must have been clutching at straws to take such an action.

Zeus huffed. "You should not care. He is a traitor. He chose his path."

"He is my son and he was brainwashed to choose this path." Hermes retorted. He knew this would become an issue in the future.

"We… should continue." Percy said as he felt Zeus' anger growing. So much for the happy mood in the morning.

"Hermes didn't ... you especially.""

Everyone grimaced at that. To be told that a child hates his father… the gods didn't know what to do. They sympathized with Hermes and his situation. Here a father wanted to protect his son who hated him to such an extent that he would rather have him dead. The gods wondered what exactly had happened between Luke and Hermes to cause such a reaction.

"Hermes gazed up ... inventing the Internet—""

The gods looked at Hermes, who was staring into nothingness with a small smile. They didn't expect such words from the troublemaker of the family. Hera smiled and thought how Hermes had grasped the meaning of family when no one else could or rather didn't want to.

"You invented ... saying about family?"

A few of the gods and demigods nodded as if being asked the question.

"I—I'm not sure.""

Hermes looked at Percy, who replied, "I know now." Hermes nodded and was glad that he could impart some knowledge to his cousin.

"You will someday. ... discount ambrosia."

Hermes grimaced and said distastefully, "Work!"

"I doubt you sat very long with Percy. How do you have so many messages already?" Athena asked.

"I don't just deliver messages and packages for Olympians, I do it for every god." Hermes said, spreading his hands to show just how many gods there were around them. "Many of the minor gods aren't even here because they have their own nonstop duties to attend to."

"Oh." Athena said. She, or for that matter, any of the other god had never understood the vastness of Hermes' job. They decided to tone down the constant reminders they sent to Hermes for delivery. The only who understood was Triton since he was the messenger of the sea. He gave Hermes a sympathetic look that Hermes returned.
"And you, Percy," ... experience with travel."

"Show off." Apollo teased.

"It is not showing off if it is the truth." Hermes said and winked at his sons. They had told him that the previous night.

"He snapped his ... against the dark water."

"I hate that ship." Percy said and Annabeth and Tyson agreed.

Hermes wondered exactly what was on that ship.

"'Wait,' I said. ... go with you.'"

"There is literally no choice there." Jason said.

"Nah. He knew that I would go, I just needed to accept it." Percy said.

"He opened his ... an impossible decision."

"So, finally the quest will start!" Piper said. She had been excited to know exactly how they got the Golden Fleece.

"And it is a race between Percy and Clarisse." Holly said gleefully.

"Oh. So much fun!" Laurel grinned.

"No. No competition." Percy said.

"Ugh. You guys team up?" Laurel asked distastefully.

"You will just have to wait." Clarisse said.

"So… that was the chapter." Morpheus said. "Who wants to read next?"

"Give it here." Asclepius said.
(A/N - Disclaimer- I do not own Percy Jackson series or the Heroes of Olympus series. All characters and words in bold are owned by Rick Riordan and Hyperion Books for Children and Disney Hyperion. I do not intend to use the text from the books for any other purpose other than for this fanfiction and nor do I intend to make any sort of profit from the story. All rights go to the actual owner and not me. This is only a work of love for the series.)

Ch42 – SoM – The Evil Ship

"WE BOARD THE PRINCESS ANDROMEDA"

"Andromeda?" Perseus asked. Was the ship named after his wife? How famous did he and his wife get?

"Yes. The mortals have the habit of naming boats or ships or anything important really, after famous Greek and Roman persons." Annabeth explained.

"I was staring ... picking up our scent."

"Oh, you guys need to move fast."

"'Percy," Annabeth ... promised Chiron—"

"Unfortunately, it was a promise to keep you safe and not a promise to keep you in camp." Athena huffed. Why did her daughter have to be dragged in the middle of all of this? Normally, she would be alright and even proud when her children would go on quests. They almost always made it back alive. But, here the circumstances were different. This was about the titan lord trying to rise and destroy Olympus and the wisdom goddess didn't want any of her children to get caught up in it. It was already clear that the son of Poseidon was right in the middle of the situation.

"''I promised I'd ... that's impossible."

Thalia could understand where Annabeth was coming from. She too had been terrified when she first met Tyson. Thankfully, Annabeth had already told her about the gentle nature of the cyclops and had actually even vouched for him. That was the only reason Thalia hadn't tried to kill Tyson the second she met him.

"I wondered again why she had such a grudge against Cyclopes. There was something she wasn't telling me.

She and Tyson ... us all killed."

"That is considerate, but being around monsters is natural territory for cyclops. If anything, he might be able to shield you from most monsters because monsters usually fear cyclops." Triton explained and Percy nodded. He had been so naïve thinking that Tyson would start crying in front of monsters. Sure, the kid had been scared, but he had only always helped them and saved their lives.

"On the other ... us being gone."

"That's true. Tantalus would have probably made his life difficult or left him in the woods." Katie
"No. If you had left him at camp, I would have called him to the forges immediately." Poseidon told Percy. There was no way he would ever leave his cyclops son in a hostile place.

"Percy," Annabeth ... "You know what I mean!"

"Would it not be better if you actually took a cyclops to Polyphemus' island? Tyson might be able to talk to him..." Triton asked in a confused tone.

"Uh... Polyphemus would never listen to anyone. Even dad." Percy said.

"Yes. Polyphemus is bad cyclops. He hurt Annabeth and want to eat goat boy and kill brother and me." Tyson said in earnest.

"Tyson can go... have time to argue."

"Probably both." Annabeth said. "Anyway, I think I might have figured out by then that you don't change your mind. Like ever." Percy just offered her his trademark troublemaker grin and shrugged.

"All right," ... "How's it going?"

Everyone looked incredulously at Percy. "Dude, seriously?" Leo asked. "Not the time to chit-chat."

"Had you never prayed before to Lord Poseidon?" Hercules asked. He couldn't believe that Percy had never prayed before. All of the demigods always prayed for something or the other to their parent.

"Uh... no. Not before that."

"Actually that is a refreshing way of starting a prayer." Poseidon said with a smile. None of the demigods ever prayed as if it was a conversation. It was always to the point for them – can you do so and so thing...we are sacrificing this and this... The prayers always went something like that. So, it was nice to have his son attempting to have a conversation, even though it wasn't the best of times to be doing that and the sea god was sure that he would have had a laugh over this.

"Percy!" Annabeth ... eaten and stuff, so..."

"That has got to be the most informal prayer I have ever heard and I get quite a lot of informal prayers." Hermes said. He liked Percy more and more. Despite the obvious gap between gods and demigods, this child was at least trying to maintain a somewhat father-son relationship. He wasn't overly formal either. Like when he didn't bow immediately or fall head over heels trying to impress the god when he had visited the boy. Hermes didn't like all the formal stuff that his father insisted on. He was content with being treated like a friend in unofficial situations and the boy had got to be the first demigod to treat him like that and that was novel.

Percy just smiled and thought that most of his prayers to Poseidon, not that he made that many, but most of them went something along the lines of the one being read out. He assumed it was alright with Poseidon since he hadn't been told off... yet.

"At first, nothing ... through the ocean."

"That is either an awesome image..." Travis said.
"...or a horrifying one, depending on the situation." Connor finished.

"Do you both usually talk like this?" Frank asked.

"Like..."

"...what?"

"Oh gods!" all the campers groaned as the Stolls chuckled.

"As they neared... breath. "Fish ponies!"

"Hippocampi." Theseus said with a smile. He had met a couple of Hippocampi on one of his quests. They were quite sweet if somewhat melodramatic.

"Rainbow." Tyson said wistfully. He missed his friend and hadn't seen him for almost months. Percy promised Tyson that they would go for a swim with the hippocampi when they returned home.

"He was right... rainbow tail fins."

"Oh, they sound beautiful." Piper said and a few others agreed.

"Oh, you should see them." Annabeth said and the few campers who wanted to meet hippocampi turned to look at Percy till he relented and promised to ask Rainbow and his friends to come to the beach so that everyone could play with them.

The gods were once again marveled by how easy the relationships were between the demigods. There was no hesitation to even ask for something like meeting hippocampi. The demigods in the ancient times were much more formal, even with one another. They would not simply ask another demigod, who wasn't a sibling, to do something as simple as this request. There would always be a barter system and the requesting demigod also would have to do something for the other.

"'Hippocampi!' Annabeth... if they caught you."

"I love your descriptions, man." Dakota said with a chuckle. "Cafeteria ladies crossbred with dodo birds. Ha!"

"Ella is not bad harpy." Tyson said.

"No. No, she is not." Percy agreed.

"Who?" Theseus asked, wondering if there could be good harpies.

"Ella the harpy. Tyson's girlfriend." Percy said as Tyson ducked his head and blushed.

"Okay..." Perseus said, looking at the demigods from the future in disbelief. How did they come across so many good monsters?

"'Tyson!' I said... followed right behind."

"I can't believe you actually said giddy-up." Thalia said.

"I thought they only did that in movies." Butch said.

"No. They do that in real life too." Will said. "There is a riding school near my place and they
always say giddy-up."

"The harpies cursed ... had other problems."

"Why do you think so negatively?" Hazel asked.

"Maybe you should spend some time at ROFL with Iris and Fleecy. They will give you positive thoughts." Frank joked.

"Or drive me crazy." Percy replied.

"The cruise ship ... I had no idea."

Perseus' eyebrows shot up and he asked, "Is she supposed to resemble Andromeda?"

"Most probably." Annabeth replied.

"Mortals are strange if they would keep the masthead as a terrified princess." Theseus said and Perseus nodded. He did not appreciate the darkest part of his wife's life being used as a decorative masthead.

"I remembered the ... head of Medusa."

"Yes. And just in time too." Perseus said in relief. Meeting and saving Andromeda had been the best thing he had ever done in his life.

Annabeth hit Percy on the arm and hissed, "Too many F's? Are you kidding me? Please tell me you know the actual story." Percy nodded vigorously. He did not need a lecture on ancient history when they were sitting in ancient Greece.

"That Perseus always ... real optimistic."

The demigods looked everywhere other than at the gods. They remembered all of their friends who had died so young in the wars and wondered how they would go. Would they get a happy ending and old life or was their fate tied to being some monster's meal?

"One of the only?" Hercules asked with trepidation.

"Sorry, we cannot say anything." Percy said. He thought about Hercules and Theseus. They both had horrible deaths and even though Hercules became a minor god, he was still too bitter against the Olympians for making him stay on the island forever. And Theseus… Percy realized it wouldn't be long for his older half-sibling before he fell into bad company and later would grow bitter and kill his own son and be thrown off a cliff.

Perseus didn't know whether he should be glad that he had a happy ending or be upset about his brother and friends, who seemingly would not be getting such a life.

The gods were understandably uncomfortable with this topic. They had the misfortune of seeing their children's deaths, whether it was by hands of a monster or a mortal or even another god. That was the only thing they regretted their demigod child being born, because they knew that in the end, the child would have a horrifying death. The gods hoped that at least their children in the future would have better luck.

Deciding to move on from the morbid topic, Asclepius cleared his throat, bringing everyone out of their thoughts and read, "'How do we ... of the ship."
"Oh. That sounds fun." Leo said. "Except maybe not in the middle of the ocean."

"Don't worry. The hippocampi make sure that you don't fall off. And if you do, they will just pick you up." Percy assured him and Annabeth nodded.

"Perce, do you know how to do the ollie trick?" Thalia asked, trying to mimic the trick with her hands.

"Oh, yeah." Percy smiled.

"You fell down, what, like ten times?" Annabeth teased and Grover laughed and added, "And skinned his knee, for which he complained for two whole hours."

"You both promised not to talk about it."

"What are they talking about?" Jason asked, interested in this skateboarding obsession that his cousin had.

"When we were, I think 14, Percy tried to learn a lot of skateboarding tricks just after the camp ended and Grover and I were in New York for some time, so almost every day we had to witness him skateboarding and failing." Annabeth laughed.

"At least I got the hang of it. You are still stuck on the basics." Percy stuck his tongue out at Annabeth.

The gods were watching the children interact as if they were in their own bubble till Zeus got annoyed and asked for the reading to be continued.

""Tyson, shhh!" ... his new name."

"They named a hippocampi, Rainbow?" Amphitrite asked in amusement and both Poseidon and Triton chuckled.

"Apparently, being unable to give a decent name runs in the family." Poseidon said, his eyes shining with mirth.

""Um, we have ... sworn was crying."

"Ah! They get attached too easily." Poseidon said.

""Maybe we'll see ... in Ancient Greek."

"Yes. That's the method to open locked doors." Connor said sarcastically.

"It's so easy guys." Travis said. "Let us teach you."

Annabeth looked skeptically at the brothers while Percy mouthed a 'later' to them, which satisfied the boys for the time being.

"I figured we'd ... any of them."

"Something is wrong. Why would the ship be empty?" Athena said.

"Is it a trap?" Ares asked, hoping for some fighting to come up soon.

"It shouldn't be, seeing that Hermes sent them to the ship." Artemis said.
"Hermes…” Athena thought out loud, narrowing her eyes at the said god, who was eyeing her warily. "He wanted Percy to save his son… maybe that boy is on the ship."

"But if the boy is on the ship and he is working with the titan lord, then whatever forces he has might also be on the ship." Ares said thoughtfully before his face broke into a grin. Oh, in that case, there would definitely be some fighting.

"Continue with the reading."

"It's a ghost... nodded nervously."

"Ok yeah. That's a monster ship." Rachel said.

"Didn't you already know that?" Percy mouthed to Rachel, who replied with 'Oh, yeah.'

"Did they choose the ship because of the terrifying masthead?" Dakota asked as he mixed sugar in his Kool-Aid.

Chris almost spoke out loud that they chose it because of easy access and large space but caught himself at the last minute. He hoped that Percy, Annabeth and Tyson didn't come across him during their time aboard Princess Andromeda. His dad wasn't taking Luke's betrayal well, for obvious reasons, so how would he take the betrayal of another son. How would the other gods react? He was one of the few who had turned sides but lived and returned to Camp Half Blood. The son of Hermes wondered how the other, newer campers and the romans would take the betrayal. He had already been panicking for the past few days to the point that the Stolls and Clarisse had told him to snap out of it and that they and all the other campers would stand up and vouch for him if need be. He just hoped that the need would not arise soon.

Asclepius started reading once he realized that no one was going to answer the weird red water drinking son of Dionysus. Honestly, that child needed to control his sugar intake. The doctor in Asclepius was twitching to examine the child.

"Now that we ... no sign of life."

"That is seriously creepy. Even in the middle of the night there should be the crew members and a few guests who just cannot sleep." Piper said and Rachel agreed. It seemed like they were talking from experience.

"And yet ... was wrong."

"Even I had gotten that feeling." Annabeth said.

"'We need a ... Enjoy your cruise!'"

"That is some luxury you guys are getting." Leo said.

"Not worth the monsters later." Percy mumbled.

"We opened our ... feel a lot better."

"Of course I thought of everything. I am the god of travel." Hermes said with a grin and the others just shook their heads.
"I'll be next ... be careful."

"Good. Always be careful in new surroundings." Athena muttered under her breath. She was trying to suppress it, but her protective mother side was slowly taking over.

"We locked ... they drifted past."

"Must be the Scythian Dracanae." Chris muttered and Clarisse patted his arm, subtly telling him not to worry.

"Finally my weariness got the best of me. I fell asleep ... and had my worst dream yet."

"Do you get even one dreamless night?" Will asked, already going into doctor mode and wondering whether these many demigod dreams were even healthy.


Poseidon narrowed his eyes slightly and wondered whether the reason Percy couldn't even sleep properly anymore was because he had conditioned himself to not fall asleep unless exhausted. He decided to observe his son for a few more days and see if he could help or get Hypnos or Morpheus to help.

"I was ... great victory."

"Why is father checking your progress?" Hestia asked. Kronos would not pay so much attention to one person unless he wanted something from them... or unless he had recognized Percy as enemy. Then he would try to break Percy. Hestia hoped that Percy would be strong enough to resist Kronos... not many were.

"I wanted to ... appreciation lately?"

Poseidon could feel his anger growing until Amphitrite stroked his arm in an attempt to calm him down. How dare his father try to turn Percy against the gods? What did that titan even know about parenting? But, a small part of Poseidon knew that that must have been the reason any demigod would turn against the gods – the appreciation and recognition – not for their deeds but for simply existing. The gods hardly ever acknowledged their children, even if the children were claimed. Poseidon hoped that Percy would not feel any such anger or resentment towards him.

"His laughter ... threads back together."

"Close call. Better get the threads done properly." Rachel said, knowing how it felt like to be caught red-handed doing something that she wasn't supposed to, like shredding the only copy of Draft Land Deed that her father had for buying a marshland. Ah! She was grounded for two months but it was worth the deal not going through.

"The room shook ... least an inch."

"You are so lucky he is blind." Thalia told Grover who nodded in relief. He had been really lucky with the whole Polyphemus thing. It could have gone wrong so many times before Percy could have even reached the island but somehow he survived till Percy came and rescued him.

"'Too many ... just for you.'"

"Yes. Be consistent with the lies, no matter what they are." Travis said.
"Mmmm!" The ... such a flirt!

"I think I threw up a little in my mouth." Gwen said with a grimace.

"No more ...

"Certainly. Oh yes."

"Wow! Just...wow." Clarisse said with a chuckle. The whole Grover-Polyphemus thing was hilarious. Hopefully, the book would not mention the idiot cyclops wanting to marry her. That was not something she wanted the Stolls or Solace to know. Theirs were the two cabins she was always at odds with. They did not need that kind of ammunition over her.

"The monster ... back into place."

Pan let out a breath of relief. He was happy that at least one satyr did make it out alive out of the monstrous place, but he was still burdened with the deaths of hundreds of satyrs who must have gone out in search for him.

"Grover closed his ... on the Promenade!"

"Kraken Lounge?" Hazel asked.

"Disemboweling practice?" Jason said. "Definitely a monster ship."

"It is way too cheerful for a monster ship." Frank said.

"I sat up in ... "Disemboweling practice?"

"Why did you mention the hair?" Annabeth asked as Thalia snickered behind the couple.

"I didn't write it." Percy defended.

"Once we were ... to the passengers."

"There are mortals on the ship? I thought it was a monster ship." Piper said.

"Nobody asked ... wandered off."

"It seems like they are in some sort of a trance." Athena said and everyone wondered what this would mean for the mortals.

"'Good morning," ... kind of trance."

Athena smirked as her daughter too came to the same conclusion as her. She knew her daughter would be the one keeping the other two safe. The son of Poseidon would only be needed for his power over sea. Athena knew that she would never accept a son of Poseidon other than Triton and Theseus and only because one raised her and the other had an incredible thirst for knowledge. She was only ready to accept this boy because he made her daughter happy and had accompanied her to Tartarus. And she knew that her future self would already be keeping an eye on the couple.

"Then we passed ... of those before."

"And now you have one as a pet." Jason said. He had been shocked out of his mind when he had learned about Mrs. O'Leary and that she was Percy's pet.
Percy smiled as he thought of Mrs. O'Leary. He was away from camp for only three days and he already missed her. He assumed it was because he had been away for half a year before that, that now he just wanted to be with his friends and family and that included his pets.

"The weird ... of the ordinary."

"The trance is to keep the mortals calm and not notice the monsters. Again, such a charm would require a lot of strength. Just who is handling all of this manipulation?" Lou Ellen said. Her eyes widened as Will whispered to her and reminded her that Hecate had supported Kronos during the war and that it could be her doing. Who better than the goddess of magic to control magic?

"The mortals would serve as food for the monsters, won't they?" Butch asked, feeling sorry for the poor mortals who were being dragged into the war for no reason.

Nobody bothered answering because they already knew the answer. The rising of Kronos suddenly seemed a lot more realistic to the gods, who had been doing everything they could to stay in denial. But, now not only the gods and demigods, but also the mortals were being dragged into the middle of the inevitable fight for power. Suddenly, there were too many species involved for the gods' liking.

"'Not hungry ... to be embarrassed.'"

"And yet you subconsciously were embarrassed." Leo commented in a deep voice as if talking on one of the Animal Planet shows.

"What are they talking about? Who joined?" Athena asked.

"Mortals?" Apollo guessed.

"Demigods." Hermes answered, a sickening feeling settling in his abdomen. He wondered just how many demigods would have joined Kronos. "Mortals don't hold power over us in small numbers but demigods do. If someone is trying to destroy Olympus, they would first have to get the demigods on their side."

"That is correct." Athena said, looking at Hermes in amazement. How did he figure it out? The goddess wondered over the many things she had learned about her fellow Olympians in the past few days...more than she had learned in all the years she had spent with them. She thought if she even knew the gods at all or if she knew only a tiny part of who they were and classified them as whatever she could see on the cover.

"There were other demigods who joined father's cause?" Zeus asked angrily.

"We cannot reveal anything." Percy replied making the gods huff in frustration.

"Something—or ... snake laughter."

"Scythian Dracanae?" Pollux asked. He had fought a lot of them during the Battle of Labyrinth and they had talked somewhat like that.

"Yeah."

Hercules made a face as he remembered his encounter with the original dragon woman. Ugh! It was disgusting.

"Annabeth looked ... girls' restroom?"
"Are you kidding me?" Thalia laughed out.

"Why are you worried about the girl's bathroom?" Connor asked.

"You try having a conversation in the girl's bathroom… it's freaky." Percy said with a shudder and all the girls laughed while the guys tried to imagine what that would be like and decided to give up on it. It just felt wrong.

"'I mean the ship, Percy! We have to get off the ship.'"

"I can totally imagine Annabeth's face when she said that." Piper said and laughed and soon a few others joined her.

"'Smells bad,' … any monster's."

Chris stiffened and hoped that it wasn't him. He didn't know how he would even begin to explain any of that to his dad. He didn't care about any of the other gods… they would always judge. But his dad… he just hoped Hermes didn't hate him after it would be revealed that he too had joined the enemy. He decided to tell his dad in the next break, whenever that might be. Hopefully, his dad would not be too disappointed in him.

"'—only a … forget his voice.'"

"So, Luke was on the ship." Athena smirked that she was once again right and Poseidon rolled his eyes. Trust Owl Head to get excited for the wrong things just because she was proven right.

"Agrius? As in Polyphonte's sons?" Artemis asked in distaste.

"Yes." Percy replied but didn't elaborate. He remembered that Luke had told him the twin bears' story, so he didn't feel the need to explain anything. He felt sorry for the bears and their mother. How much ever off track Luke had been, he had been correct about a few things and one of them was that the mortals always got caught in the middle of godly disputes and wars.

Hermes wondered if Percy had been able to talk Luke down from the obvious suicide that he was heading towards. The gods hoped that Percy did.

"'I'm not ... on the casket.'"

"Bait?" Apollo worriedly asked. "The whole poisoning was a trap, wasn't it? To get the fleece for themselves?"

"Something like that, Lord Apollo. It should all be explained later. It is a bit more complicated than that." Annabeth said and the gods worried about how much complicated the things could get.

"Their voices ... to Mount Olympus."

"Wish you guys could do that." Thalia said sadly as she remembered her oldest friend.

The gods and demigods sat in silence, all lost in their own thoughts till Hestia cleared her throat and said, "I know we all are anxious to know what happens next, but may I suggest a break to take out minds off the developments and maybe a respite for the demigods." The goddess looked at the half-bloods who had been getting quite restless for some time now. She wondered whether they even slept in a constant state of fidgeting because somehow none of them could sit still for more than a few minutes and their attention could be captured by the smallest thing.
Reluctantly, the gods agreed and realized that they did need a break before plunging into what could be a chapter that held all the answers to their questions.
(A/N - I do not own PJo, RR does.

I swear it wasn't supposed to be this long. Anyway, I hope the whole fighting scene is good for you guys because I spent like most of the day trying to find out how to write a fight sequence.

Happy reading :D )

Ch43 – SoM – Sparring and Confessions

Loud chatter filled the amphitheater as the occupants started walking out towards the more open spaces in the palace. Percy walked with Annabeth, Tyson and Grover with their other friends walking nearby. Once they reached the lawn spread out just beyond the amphitheater, Tyson pulled out the sheath that he had been making for Annabeth and stopped the little group so he could show it to them.

Annabeth, Percy and Grover and a couple of their other friends looked at the small object in Tyson's huge hands. The object looked like a thick, black bracelet cuff that could be straightened to form a handle. Tyson pressed a small button on the side and a dagger protruded out of the handle.

"Whoa! Is that the drakon bone sword that I gave you in the morning?" Annabeth asked, fascinated by the dagger.

"Yes. I know you like dagger more than sword. So, I made it a dagger and a sword." Tyson said proudly as the demigods looked impressed with his skills. He then pressed the same button again and the blade extended to become the full-fledged drakon bone sword that Annabeth had been using for the past month.

"Oh gods! Tyson, this is amazing! Thank you so much." Annabeth said and hugged Tyson.

"Told you she'll love it." Percy grinned at his brother as Tyson showed Annabeth how to use the magical sheath.

They spent the next few minutes watching Annabeth get a hang of the new handle. It was quite entertaining to watch Annabeth's skills. Even a few hunters had stopped to watch and compliment her moves.

"That is really good." Perseus said as he came to stand next to Percy and watched Annabeth turn the dagger, midway through a move into the sword and still carry out the maneuver with precision.

"Thank you." Annabeth said smugly as she turned it back into a cuff and put it on. Looking at Percy and Hercules, she asked, "Are you both planning to spar anytime soon? Because that is something I need to see." She looked at Percy and added, "Otherwise, I need a sparring partner for practicing with this." She lifted her right hand which had the cuff on it.

"Oh, please spar now." Leo piped up excitedly and no one knew whether he wanted Percy to fight with Hercules or Annabeth. Soon, all the demigods nearby were excited at the prospect of seeing some action.

Hercules shrugged and said, "That is good with me. If it is alright with you, we could spar now." He looked challengingly at Percy, who smirked and shrugged.
This was going to be fun, Percy thought as a ripple of excitement went through their not so little group.

"Child of Zeus versus child of Poseidon." Reyna said. "This could get ugly pretty soon."

"Yeah." Piper said, having seen Jason and Percy's spars. It usually ended with destruction of the already destroyed property and lecture from Chiron about responsible use of powers and whatnot.

"That's why someone needs to find Chiron." Annabeth said. She knew she could get Percy to calm down if things went out of hands but she wasn't so sure about Hercules. All the legends said that in a fight, he was ruthless. She didn't want him pushing Percy to lash out in anger.

Percy and Hercules chatted about their techniques and preferences till Rachel and Grover returned with a skeptical Chiron. Trotting up to the two, Chiron asked, "Are you both sure you want to spar now?" When he got two nods and a couple of 'duh' from the crowd, he asked everyone to go to the arena because Hera would not allow anyone to 'destroy her lovely lawns'.

Soon after Percy and Hercules had reached the arena, the surrounding seats were occupied by demigods, hunters, gods and even some of the other citizens of Olympus. Apparently, news on Olympus spread faster if not as fast as news in Camp Half Blood.

Percy warily eyed the spectators and Hercules asked him, "Do you not like an audience?"

"It depends on the situation. But I don't like being entertainment."

"I understand what you mean." Hercules said solemnly and Percy was reminded once again of how badly the gods treated the famed hero. "But I would like to think of it as an audience rather than being entertainment… I think it would be best if we just ignored the gods."

Percy smiled and said, "Αμήν (amen)."

"Are you not going to use armor?" Hercules asked as he and Percy walked towards Chiron and a couple of other campers who were standing to one side of the arena.

"I don't usually. Anyway, I don't have my armor over here with me." Percy replied and then asked, "What about you?"

"Seeing as you are not going to be using any armor, how can I? In any case, I prefer to fight without it. Shield?"

"I have mine with me." Percy lifted his left arm and showing his new watch. Hercules nodded and went to collect his sword and shield from Perseus and Theseus, who were standing a bit further away from the campers from the future.

"You look excited." Jason said as Percy approached them.

"Hey, it's not every day that I get to fight with Hercules." Percy grinned and repeated giddily, "Hercules!"

"Yeah, well, don't forget that he is a son of Zeus. So, be careful not to fight like how you do with Jason. Otherwise, there will be a natural calamity." Annabeth said.

"Are you both ready?" Chiron asked.

Percy nodded and Annabeth kissed him and explained, "Tradition." Then she added, "Have fun."
She didn't need to wish him luck – he never had it anyway and his skills compensated for all the bad luck thrown his way.

Hercules, too nodded his assent and turned to face Perseus, who deadpanned, "I am not kissing you." He looked towards the couple to their right and turned back to face his brother and wished, "καλή τύχη (good luck)."

Hercules rolled his eyes and said, "ευχαριστώ (thank you)."

When Percy, Hercules and Chiron had reached the center of the arena, a hush fell over the spectators as they impatiently waited for the centaur to announce the beginning of the spar.

"Alright." Chiron said, loud enough to be heard by everyone and causing both Percy and Hercules to take a step back from the loud volume. "Before we begin, a few ground rules." Chiron looked at both of his students and said, "One, no using of powers. We do not need a catastrophe on our hands."

Needless to say, a lot of demigods and gods were disappointed. They had wanted a complete showdown.

Hercules shrugged and said, "I do not use them much, anyway."

"Two, if I feel the fight is about to get out of hand, I will stop it." Chiron said, hoping he didn't have to use this particular rule because he too wanted to see two of his best in a fight. "And three, no maiming or severe injuries allowed. Use the flat of the blade as you usually do in a friendly match."

This again caused groans from a couple of gods who were rooting for blood to be spilled, but they quickly kept quiet under glares from Zeus and Poseidon. As much as the brothers wanted their child to be the winner, they did not want the child to be hurt too badly.

The boys agreed and took their positions. Hercules stuck his shield in the ground since he and Percy had agreed to use the shield only if absolutely necessary, and flexed his hand as he clutched the base of the sword. Percy took out Anaklusmos and looked at Hercules shield. Relieved, he thanked his lucky stars that it was not the shield that had Akhlys' images on it. He didn't know if he would be able to handle that reminder.

Chiron banged his hoof on the ground to signal the start of the match and both Percy and Hercules grinned at one another in challenge.

Hercules went on offense first and struck his first tentative blow. The swords clanged as Percy met the strike midway and pushed back. Then he countered with a strike of his own that was parried by Hercules. The boys threw another couple of harmless strikes to get a feel of each other's fighting styles.

Chess. That was the thought in Percy's head as he sidestepped another one of Hercules' strikes. Offhandedly, Percy thought that sparring with Hercules was like playing chess. They both were studying each other's moves more than actually starting the fight. Till date Percy's fights with any other demigod had either been a series of continuous practice sessions or a do-or-die moment. He hardly ever got the chance to study the opponent in an experienced first time fight.

Hercules saw the slash a split second before it could catch him in the arm. He quickly moved backwards, just out of reach of Riptide. Bringing down his own sword, he pushed Riptide out of the way. It felt different – fighting an opponent who was using his previous weapon. But Hercules
could see the difference in the way Percy held the sword and how he twisted his wrist just slightly and the sword responded as if it was an extension of his arm.

Ares groaned as the boys in the arena moved around, throwing lazy strikes. He was going to lose his mind if they didn't pick up the pace soon enough. But in this slow paced fighting, the god of war could see just how much both the parties were holding back and he knew that in a proper fight, both will be formidable enemies.

As if on cue, Hercules landed his first powerful blow that would have caught Percy's shoulder had he not blocked it in the nick of time. But the gods could see that both the boys were still just playing around.

Percy side stepped and used his blade to push Hercules' blade upwards, causing Hercules to twist his wrist in a painful manner till the older demigod accepted defeat and stepped back out of Percy's range. Grinning, Percy slashed towards Hercules' torso. Hercules deflected the blade.

The older demigod feinted to the left, causing Percy to move Riptide to meet the blow. Instead Hercules twisted the blade just a second before it hit Percy's torso and pushed him backwards.

Percy lunged. Hercules caught the blow and riposted. They continued in the same fashion for some time. Attack. Block. Riposte. Circle-parry. The sounds of metal clanging were heard in the entire arena. The spectators had grins fixed on their faces as the boys picked up speed.

Percy ducked as he felt Hercules' blade cut through the air just above him. Using the flat of the blade, he hit the other demigod just below his knee, causing him move backwards in surprise. Quick as lightning, Percy stood up and slashed towards Hercules' sword hand. Hercules held his hand just out of reach and twisted his blade to meet Percy's. But it wasn't there.

Percy moved his blade and slashed at the other demigod's legs. Hercules managed to jump over the blade and brought down his sword in quick successions on Percy. Each blow was met with a strong defense but Hercules kept pushing Percy to the edge of the arena.

Cheers of 'Hercules!' or 'Percy!' were resounding in the entire stadium as Percy got annoyed with defending and hit Hercules' wrist. Hercules gritted his teeth as he almost dropped his sword thanks to wrist hit. It had been actual years since someone had been able to get their blade close enough to make that hit. Cursing himself, Hercules lunged at Percy only for his sword to meet empty air.

Percy moved away from his opponent and slashed at him from the side. Hercules felt the blade graze his upper arm and he quickly dropped his arm out of the blade's range. That was the one use of Percy using the same blade as Hercules used to. The older demigod knew the blade's range by heart.

Swinging the sword in a wide arc, Hercules brought it down on Percy's head. The swords clanged as Riptide caught the blow and Percy used his sword to push Hercules' in almost a complete circle. Getting the upper hand, Percy tried the disarming technique that Luke had taught him.

Hercules's sword clanged out of his hand. Everyone stared in surprise but Hercules saw Percy's shoulders tense and he sidestepped the oncoming attack. The match would only be over when one of them would be in a sort of check-mate position.

Riptide slashed the ground where Hercules' feet were just a moment ago. Someone in the crowd shouted, "May the force be with you." Percy's educated guess? It was probably one of the Stolls.

They were again almost in the center of the arena. Hercules' sword was still a few feet behind
them. The older demigod kept on sidestepping and blocking the attacks using his hand. Blood trickled out of a couple of wounds in the palm of Hercules' hand but he just grinned like a madman at Percy, which unnerved the latter.

Poseidon was grinning as he saw his son advancing on Hercules. No one had ever beaten Hercules in a sword fight and the god was hoping his son would.

Zeus on the other hand, was controlling himself from throwing a lightning bolt at the annoying son of Poseidon. Could the boy not see that Hercules was unarmed? But he realized that Hercules was edging him on. Surely he had a plan. After all, no one could defeat Hercules.

Hercules jumped backwards once again as Percy's sword slashed at the ground near the older demigod's feet. Hercules grinned and Percy realized what Hercules was going to do. The son of Zeus hit the ground and rolled, picking his shield on the way and came up on one knee. He held the shield above his head just in time to catch Percy's blow.

Pushing with all his might (and Hercules had a lot of strength), he stood up and the force made Percy stagger backwards. Hercules aimed a high kick at Percy's chest and the younger demigod fell a few feet away. The famed hero dashed to pick his sword just as Percy jumped up and opened his own shield.

"I want to bet on Percy too." Dakota said to Travis, who had just returned from collecting all of the bets.

"You can't bet on both of them, vlakas." Travis said as he took his seat next to Connor.

"And you can't change bets either." Connor said to a pouting Hedge.

Hedge proceeded to shout at Percy, "Come on, cupcake. Show him who the boss is!"

Percy chuckled at Hedge's shout and blocked Hercules' strike with his shield. This was fun, he realized. They could have finished the match so many times by now. But, he wanted to see more of Hercules' tricks. Percy had even seen a few new moves that hadn't been taught in camp.

Whop! The sound was too close to Percy's head for his comfort and he tucked and rolled as Hercules brought down another strike on him. The son of Poseidon came up on his knee behind Hercules and quickly twisted and hit Hercules behind his knees with the flat of his blade.

Hercules staggered but maintained his footing. He turned just in time to prevent a blow to his back. It wouldn't have injured him but it would have hurt like Hades. Hercules slashed at Percy's leg. Managing to move only one leg out of the way, Percy's right leg caught the strike and he felt blood starting to flow out.

Damn! He thought as he tried not to put too much pressure on the injured leg. Percy hoped that the blade didn't cut anything important.

Hercules was starting to feel tired and it wasn't because he lacked the stamina. He had fought for hours at a stretch. It was just that he always fought to kill and now he had to be careful not to kill. It had been years since he fought in an actual practice fight against an opponent who could last for more than a few minutes. He could see the strain of not killing starting to show in Percy's stance. The hero realized that maybe even Percy had always fought to kill. Hmm, they were more evenly matched than he thought possible.

"Vlakas! Left." Annabeth said a second before Percy jumped to the left to avoid Hercules' strike. The boys had been fighting for almost forty minutes now. While the crowd was cheering and still
placing bets and encouraging the boys in the arena, Annabeth was starting to get annoyed. Annabeth huffed.

"What?" Jason asked. He was standing next to Annabeth and Chiron just in front of the seats.

"Percy is just playing. He could have finished this ages ago." Annabeth said in annoyance.

"If I didn't know better, I would think that you are getting bored." Thalia said as she got up from her seat behind Annabeth and came to stand with them.

"Not bored. Just annoyed. The fight is not progressing. They are just tiring each other out, when they could have finished it long ago. Percy left so many openings unattended." Annabeth complained. She hated it when people stalled in a practice fight. Sure, in an actual battle, the stalling could result in life or death, but in a spar it was useless. And she hated useless things.

"He is doing what?" Jason asked. He didn't see any such thing.

"Percy is well… how do we say it… toying with his food." Chiron said with a smile. He already had a feeling who would win. He knew that Hercules too was leaving a lot of chances, but it was because Hercules was proud and would not defeat an evenly match opponent so easily. But the centaur knew from experience that Percy was just waiting for something.

"So is Hercules." Perseus spoke up in defense of his brother.

"Why?" Jason asked, ignoring Perseus.

Thalia spoke with a smile, "Brother dear, when you have had as many fights with Percy as I have, you will understand that Percy is just waiting for something to happen."

Jason rolled his eyes at his sister's antics and asked, "What is he waiting for?"

"Dunno." Thalia shrugged. "Last time he did something like this during a fight with me, he waited for me to shoot lightning at him and then he summoned salt water to create a shield in front of him. The water caught the lightning and he shot the water back at me."

"So, you got hit by electrified salt water?" Perseus asked.

"Yes. It didn't affect me much, but Percy used that chance to disarm me and win." Thalia said sourly.

"But they cannot use their powers." Theseus joined in.

"Who knows what Percy is waiting for?" Thalia replied.

Percy did a one eighty and ducked just as Hercules struck from behind. Using his shield as a base, Percy swept his leg and managed to topple Hercules. He needed a moment to breath. In the past five minutes, both he and Hercules had gotten a lot of small cuts. And he knew that any moment Hercules would hopefully perform a good sword trick. That was what Percy was waiting for – for seeing a disarming trick. He knew that Hercules had one that Chiron hadn't taught Percy. Hercules had even used it some time back but Percy had managed to block it halfway through before realizing that it was a new trick. Now he wanted to see it completely and hopefully be able to repeat it.

"Hades!" Ares growled.
"What?" Hades said in irritation. He hated it when even the gods threw his name around in vain.

"They are still playing around." Athena said with narrowed eyes.

"So? My son will win." Zeus said. "No one can defeat Hercules."

Poseidon rolled his eyes and said, "Well, my son did disarm yours."

"If he was strong and skilled enough, he would have already won." Came the reply.

"Considering that he has fought and won wars, I am sure that he is competent enough." Poseidon said in irritation. "Maybe he just likes to play around with his food."

Before Zeus could retort, Hera said, "Keep quiet and just watch."

Percy felt a bead of sweat make its merry way into his shirt as he blocked another attack. The sun was almost on top of them. Was it noon yet?

He contemplated ending the match. Percy knew he needed only around five to six moves before he could win. He already had gotten a hang of Hercules' fighting style and while Hercules' was in no way predictable, he was starting to get more offensive in his fighting. It would only be a matter of time before he slipped and gave Percy the opening he wanted. But, a part of Percy – the part that probably came up with all of his crazy ideas – wanted to see the disarming trick.

Another five minutes of blocking, lunging, sidestepping and overall cursing and sweating, went by before Percy's wish was granted. Hercules used an old (or rather current, seeing as they were in ancient times) disarming trick that Percy had only read and seen the pictures of in one of Annabeth's books. This time Percy didn't stop Hercules from completing the trick and surely, Riptide fell out of his hand.

"Yes!" Zeus shouted and the gods turned to look at him. The king just raised his eyebrow and sat in his place as if he had not uttered a single word.

Poseidon gave his brother a side eye and said, "The match is not yet over."

"It may as well be. My son has got the upper hand and your son is defenseless."

"He has his shield."

"Keep quiet." Ares hissed before his eyes widened as he remembered whom he was talking to. Ignoring the annoyed brothers, Ares just kept his eyes fixed at the scene unfolding before him. He soon realized that Percy was still playing when the boy just kicked his fallen sword out of the way and raised his shield to protect himself from the attack.

Percy imagined his legs to be a springboard as he pushed upwards and managed to push Hercules backwards. That guy was really strong. As Percy ducked once again, he thought of whether to wait for Riptide to return to him or not.

Hercules brought down his sword once again and cursed as Percy sidestepped. He got the feeling that Percy was just stalling, trying to get to his sword. In the next second though, Percy kicked him in the shin from the side and pushed against him with all his strength. Hercules knew that he was strong but so was Percy. Although the boy was not as strong as the son of Zeus, the kick to the shin had momentarily fazed the older demigod and Hercules fell down.

Percy scooped up Riptide and brought it up just as Hercules struck down. Swords and shields...
clanged and the crowd got even more excited. Once again the game was evenly matched.

Getting tired prematurely, thanks to his lack of proper sleep the previous night, Percy decided to end it then and there. After a few more minutes, the son of Poseidon got the opening he was looking for. He had been running the Hercules' trick (as he called it) in his head for some time now.

Percy twisted his wrist and carried out the maneuver that Hercules had performed some time back and somehow it worked. Hercules' sword once again fell down. This time however, Percy did not give the older demigod any chance to fight back. He pushed down against Hercules' shield with his own, effectively stopping Hercules from using the shield. Percy brought his other hand in for the kill and a split second later, Riptide had found its home at the base of Hercules' neck. When Hercules tried to protest, Percy dug in the sword just a bit – not enough to draw blood but enough to warn him not to fight back.

They held the position for a few seconds till Chiron stomped his hoof once again, signaling the end of the match and declaring Percy as the winner.

The crowd erupted into cheers and soon enough everyone was going around collecting their winnings.

Poseidon gave Zeus a smug smile before turning around and going to Ares to collect his own share of winnings.

The two opponents grinned at each other and shook hands and went back to their friends. They both collapsed into the seats once they reached the stands.

Annabeth hit Percy's head and said, "Why were you stalling?"

Percy grinned sheepishly and drank half of the nectar Jason had given him and poured the remaining on his leg wound, which was now swollen and blood still slowly flowed out of it. "Wanted to see the trick." Percy explained to Annabeth who just huffed and rolled her eyes.

"What trick?" Hercules asked as he ate ambrosia.

"Uh…" Percy rubbed the back of his neck and said, "The disarming one…you know the one you did." Percy motioned the trick with his hand.

Hercules furrowed his eyebrows and said, "I thought you knew that."

"No. We do not teach it anymore," Chiron said as he came up to the two and inspected their injuries. He turned to Percy and said in an accusing tone, "I assume you saw Hercules do the maneuver and realized you had not learned it and then proceeded to drag out the match just to learn it."

Percy grinned, showing all his teeth as Nico poured an entire pitcher of water over him. Soon, his smaller cuts and bruises healed themselves and the cut on his leg started closing up.

"But… you did it perfectly… right now." Hercules said as he let Will heal a couple of his cuts that the ambrosia and nectar didn't.

"Uh… yeah. I copied it from you."

The son of Zeus stared at his younger cousin incredulously before throwing his head back and laughing. "You are a really fast learner."
"Thanks." Percy grinned and then groaned as he saw a couple of gods coming their way.

X-X-X-X-X

Hermes grinned to himself as he counted his drachmae that he had won. Thank Olympus, he changed his mind to bet on Percy rather than Hercules. Most of the gods except Poseidon and his family and a couple of other gods had bet on Hercules.

The god heard some sound and looked up. He saw a couple of gods walking towards Percy and Hercules and the hoard of demigods that stood there. His sons – Travis and Connor – were going around distributing the winnings. The god of thieves was halfway out of the arena when he heard, "Dad!" He stopped and looked to his right where Chris was nervously standing, trying to wave the god down.

"Hello." Hermes said cheerfully as he walked up to his son. Why was his son so nervous? "Is something wrong?" he asked gently.

"Erm… I was wondering if I could talk to you. If you are not busy or anything." Chris said, worrying the frayed edges of his camp T-shirt.

Hermes frowned and nodded. "No, not busy. We can talk. Are you alright?"

"I…uh… needed to tell you something."

Hermes mind started going on overdrive as he nodded encouragingly and took his son to a row of empty seats, knowing that no one would disturb them.

Chris swallowed as he sat down next to his father. He could feel Hermes' worried gaze in his direction, but he couldn't bring himself up to tell the god the truth. He didn't even know where or how to start. Off-handedly he thought whether he should go classic and start with, 'Forgive me Father, for I have sinned…'

He internally rolled his eyes at his wayward thoughts and took a deep breath. He could hear his father ask him once again what was wrong but Chris couldn't gather the courage to talk. What would his father think? Would he even want Chris as his son? What if he hates him? What if…

Hermes shook Chris' shoulder lightly to snap his son out of his thoughts. He contemplated for a second to look into his son's thoughts but decided to keep it as a last minute resort. He could see that whatever Chris was thinking about, was eating him alive.

"Chris?"

"I…” Chris dug his fingernails into his palm hard enough to draw blood and once again took a deep breath. "Father, I…” He looked up at Hermes and said in a low voice, "Luke was not the only one to…” he trailed off and looked at the ground, tears prickling his eyes. He gritted his teeth and willed himself not to cry. He would take Hermes' rejection without crying… He had to.

Realization dawned on Hermes and he turned away from his son and looked forward. Placing his elbows on his knees and bowing his head, the god said, "To turn sides?"

The god heard a sniffle and a small "Yes."

"Can you explain?“ Hermes didn't intend for it to come out so harshly, but he couldn't control the emotional turmoil inside of him. Why did another one of his children turn their backs on him? Was he that horrible a father? Why only his children? Did his children in the future hate him? It didn't
seem so from the Stolls and Chris, but now he didn't know what to think.

Chris swallowed as only one thought ran in his head, that his father hated him. And he should, his brain supplied, which father would want a traitor for a son?

Pushing away the thoughts for the time being, Chris spoke, "After Luke left the camp… he tried recruiting a lot of half-bloods. Some listened and others didn't. He…umm…came to me in a dream with the titan and they told me to…" Chris wiped a betraying tear as it fell down his cheek and continued, "At first I resisted, but they were persistent and then I gave in. I…I was at camp for years and I still hadn't been claimed. I was so angry. Luke knew and he told the titan. I left before Thalia's tree got poisoned."

The father and son sat in silence for some time, the only sounds in the background being the sounds of laughter from the other demigods, some of whom were sparring.

Hermes tried to process all that his son had told him. Obviously his son would have been angry for not being claimed. Hermes wondered how Chris slipped his mind in the future. He cursed Kronos for being able to manipulate two of his children.

"And how did you come back to camp?" Hermes asked quietly as he watched his son wipe away tears. He wanted to comfort his son but he also wanted to know what had happened.

Clearing his throat, Chris said in a gruff voice, "They wanted to find an entrance of the Labyrinth. There was supposed to be one that led inside the camp boundaries. So, they sent me to find it…"

"Alone?" Hermes asked, horrified with what his son must have seen and gone through in the Labyrinth. Theseus was the only one who had been able to leave the Labyrinth and that was because of Ariadne.

"Yes." Chris said with a shudder. "I went in alone and got lost. I…I don't remember much of what happened inside… there." Chris rubbed his hands together to get some warmth that suddenly felt like it had disappeared at the mention of the worst maze in the world.

The god put his hand on his son's back and encouraged him to continue.

"I… I don't know how… but somehow I must have found an exit. It was somewhere near Clarisse's home. That's what they all told me. Anyway, she took me to camp and they tried to cure me."

"Cure?"

"I…umm… had kind of lost my mind in the Labyrinth. It had driven me insane." Chris winced as he said that. He had absolutely no recollection of those days. "Mr. D was gone on some official duty and there was no one who could heal me. Later, when he returned, he healed me. I…I am… I realized that I had made a huge mistake." Chris' voice broke as his emotions came pouring out. He managed to somehow not dissolve into a puddle of tears and apologized, "I am so sorry, father. I am so sorry."

Neither knew for how long they sat there, with Hermes rubbing Chris' back and Chris trying to get his emotions under control. Ever since he returned to camp, he had put all his energy into proving to everyone that he was not a traitor…that he could be good. That he would fight for them and for Olympus. He never let himself speak these things out loud, knowing that he would break down and the camp could not afford that… not when they were losing so many. Now, after almost two years of nonstop fighting, he finally let himself feel all of those feelings of shame and inadequacy and doubt and he couldn't control himself anymore.
Seeing his son breaking down, Hermes flashed them away to his private quarters and held his son close till all his tears had dried up. He didn't say anything… didn't say that it was okay, because it clearly wasn't. He just held him and let the boy's emotions run their course.

Hermes kissed his son's head and heard his son croak out, "I am so sorry…" Before Hermes could stop him, Chris had started babbling and the god could not make much sense of his talks. Although, he stopped his son from speaking when Chris said something along the lines of 'disappointment and you don't want me here'.

"Chris." Hermes said, trying to get his son's attention. When that didn't work, he ordered, "Chris, look at me."

Slowly, Chris looked up. Somehow, during all of this, Chris had ended up with his head tucked under Hermes' chin. He was ashamed of how he had behaved. He – a 21 year old – was reduced to hysteria in front of his dad. Wow, his dad must be so annoyed with him. He was a god. He didn't have time for such things.

The demigod was brought out of his negative thoughts when Hermes said, "Son, I forgive you." Seeing no reaction, Hermes repeated himself over and over till Chris' eyes widened in disbelief. Hermes gave a small smile of relief at his son's reaction and sat back against the couch's backrest.

"Now listen to me very carefully, alright?"

Chris nodded.

Hermes said, "I am not blaming you for anything. You were angry and rightfully so. I should have claimed you when you came to camp and I am extremely sorry that I made you feel unwanted for years. That is not the case, my son. I am proud of you, like I am proud of all of your siblings. And I love you." Hermes smiled to accentuate his point and sighed in relief when Chris blinked and gaped at the god. At least there was a reaction!

"But I…" Chris protested.

Hermes shook his head and said, "I am proud that you could break the hold of the titan lord on you. I am proud that you were courageous enough to descend into one of the most deadly places in the world. I am proud and happy that despite all the hardships that you faced, you came back to us and you survived. And that is what is important. That you returned home. Throughout our lives we do some things that we are not proud of. No one is perfect, my dear. No one. The most important thing is that you are able to let go of the not-so-proud-things and still do the right thing. And I am sure that you did. I am just glad that you came back safely."

Chris ducked his head and tried to think through what all his dad had told him. He was proud of him? That…that was something…he didn't expect that. And his dad loved him – a traitor?

"You are not a traitor!" Hermes said forcefully. He had been going through his son's thoughts in order to aid him in getting his confidence back. "You may have taken a wrong turn, but you are not a traitor. If you still don't believe me, then I will spend all of the time that we have over here in trying to make you believe me."

Chris nodded and smiled a watery smile. Damn his emotions! What was he – a pubescent? He sniffed and angrily wiped away his tears.

Hermes smiled and brought his son into a hug. He resolved to make sure that his son would get rid of all the negative thoughts and feelings by the time they were done with this reading. This was the
They sat there on the couch in Hermes' palace for some time, with Hermes telling jokes and the pranks he played on his siblings, to make Chris smile and it worked. Soon enough, Chris himself was telling of a couple of recurring pranks back at camp.

Almost ten minutes, Apollo banged on the palace door demanding entry. Hermes waved his hand and granted his brother entry and with a snap of his fingers, made his son presentable.

"I have been searching everywhere for you." Apollo said to Hermes as he flopped down on another couch. "Hello, Chris."

Over the past few days, Hermes and Apollo had gotten friendly with each other's children.

"Are they starting the reading?" Hermes asked.

"No." Apollo said, sitting up straight. "Lady Hestia suggested… and by suggested I mean ordered, that we have an early lunch because apparently the children worked up an appetite by just watching the sparring."

"Oh, do not pretend that you were not hoping for an early lunch." Hermes quipped and got up from the couch. "Come on, son."

The three then walked to the dining hall, discussing about the match they had seen earlier.

(A/N - Now I know many people have found it disturbing previously that Percy was able to defeat Hercules but just hear me out. From all that I have found out about any of Hercules' stories is that he always fought with only his strength or otherwise used a bow and arrow. There are hardly any stories of Hercules or most of the other old heroes using weapons, only sheer strength. So that is one reason why Hercules could have lost. Another is that I think that Hercules would hardly have had anyone who would be his match among his peers and therefore wouldn't have much practice in practice matches. This is again what I think and based on this, I had Percy as the winner.)
Capture and Escape

(A/N - Disclaimer- I do not own Percy Jackson series or the Heroes of Olympus series. All characters and words in bold are owned by Rick Riordan and Hyperion Books for Children and Disney Hyperion. I do not intend to use the text from the books for any other purpose other than for this fanfiction and nor do I intend to make any sort of profit from the story. All rights go to the actual owner and not me. This is only a work of love for the series.)

Ch44 – SoM – Capture and Escape

After lunch, everyone quickly filled up the amphitheater, wanting to hopefully get some answers about what was happening in the future. When everyone had settled down, Hypnos took the book and offered to read the next chapter.

"I HAVE THE WORST FAMILY REUNION EVER"

"Then you have not seen Olympian family reunions." Apollo chuckled and then shuddered as he remembered their last reunion that had ended up with half of the palace blown up and a couple of gods in his healing room for almost two months.

"Annabeth volunteered ... or nobody went."

"You should not split up in an unknown location." Athena said, silently grateful that the sea spawn would not let Annabeth roam off alone.

"'Nobody!' Tyson ... ahead invisibly."

A few people nodded their approval of their impromptu plan. It didn't take long for everyone to get caught up in the story.

"We hid whenever ... second guy's voice."

"What are they doing with an Aethiopian drakon?" Perseus asked. He gave an involuntary shiver as he remembered rescuing Andromeda from being sacrificed to one such drakon. Ugh! How he hated that drakon!

"They had all sorts of monsters. Even those that were not easily found or had even been forgotten by gods." Percy said and remembered when his dad had told him that Oceanus had been sending monsters that he had forgotten about.

The gods were shocked. There were monsters that old that even they had forgotten them! But then it made sense, for if Kronos was rising, he would make sure that kind of monster rose with him. Some of the older monsters were difficult to kill, even for the gods. They wondered how their children managed to fight all the monsters.

"Was the other person this Luke guy?" Hazel asked.

"Huh?" Leo said.

Hazel explained, "Percy said that he had a feeling that he should recognize the second person's voice. So, was it this Luke person?"
"No. I would have known if it was Luke. This was someone else from camp." Percy said in a solemn voice and then remembered that it had been Chris. He hoped that the gods would not be too harsh on him, if it was revealed that it was indeed Chris.

"Some campers already left?" Reyna asked and got a nod in reply.

Everyone was surprised that Kronos had managed to already get campers to leave the gods and come to him. Exactly how long had he been planning all of this?

"I hear they ... from Cabin Eleven."

Chris stiffened and gritted his teeth. Why? Why did his name have to come up so early on? The second person after Luke to… He kept his eyes fixed on the ground as he felt Clarisse hold his hand and Travis, who was sitting on his other side, bump their shoulders, showing that he was not alone in this.

"Our Chris?" Butch whispered to Will and Nico.

"Hmm." Will confirmed and signaled him to keep quiet. Once Chris had returned to camp, his story had not been told to any of the new campers.

Apollo raised a brow and looked at Hermes to see if the god of thieves knew anything about this. Hermes just continued to look at Chris, ready to defend his son in case any of the gods suddenly remembered his complete name. When he felt Apollo looking at him, he confirmed with a slight nod and didn't take his eyes off his son.

"Your name is Chris Rodriguez, is it not?" Athena said, looking at Chris.

Hermes internally groaned. Of course it has to be the Olympian-know-it-all who would remember such a detail.

Chris squeezed Clarisse' hand to draw some strength and looked up at Athena and nodded. He already knew the next question, so he answered in advance. "Yes, that is me." He said in a small voice. There was no doubt that he was confirming that he had turned sides.

For a second there was absolute silence in the amphitheater when everyone except the older Greek campers stared at Chris. Then came the tidal wave of shouts of disbeliefs and accusations.

"A traitor!"

"How dare you turn your backs on us?"

"He should be punished."

"Fight!" That was undoubtedly Enyo.

There were so much yelling and general discord that Eris was just grinning and edging everyone on with the help of her powers. They continued in the same fashion till the hearth, all of a sudden, shot up almost 30 feet high.

"That is enough." Hestia said in a steely calm voice, still in her usual 9yo body. But her eyes were burning with fire and it did not contain the usual warmth and that scared the gods into silence. She continued when there was complete silence, "I will not hear another word against the boy. It is obvious that the child is with the campers in the future and is unharmed, which can only mean that we have accepted him."
"But that does not excuse the fact that he is a traitor. He betrayed us and joined father to bring us down." Zeus said angrily.

"And then he returned and protected Olympus from Kronos." Percy said in a voice that left no space for argument.

Lightning danced around in Zeus' beard and eyes as he glared at Percy. Then he turned his anger towards Hermes and said, "Two of your children! Two!" He didn't need to say anything else because the insinuation and the accusation was very evident.

"And a couple of Aphrodite's children, a few of Apollo's, Nemesis', Hecate's. The list just goes on." Percy said coolly. "Yours." He waited till realization set in in the king's eyes and then continued, "Immortal and godly, of course."

Silence reigned in the area as Percy's words sank in. Immortal and godly. That could only mean one thing. The gods had turned against Olympus. But why?

"What do you mean?" Poseidon asked, wanting to reconfirm everyone's thoughts. "Did gods…?"

"Yes. Some of them." Percy said. "Who all and why – should be explained in later books. If it is not, then I will tell." Percy then looked at Zeus and said, "Just because the first two people that I met and recognized were Lord Hermes' sons, does not mean they were the only ones. Till date we do not know the names and parentage of some of those children because none of you could be bothered to claim them."

"You mean to say that the children turned against us just because they were not claimed?" Hera asked haughtily.

The campers glared at Hera. How dare she push away their sufferings as something trivial?

"That was a contributing factor." Annabeth said in an irritated voice. She never had any love for Hera and now her hatred for the queen had only worsened.

Percy narrowed his eyes at Zeus and Hera, who were still looking at the campers in a condescending manner and said, "Maybe claiming is not important for you, but it is for us. Can you imagine what it is like to feel unwanted for years? Hmm?" Percy turned to look at Hades, knowing that from all of the gods, no one else knew that feeling better than the god of the dead. When he saw a spark of sympathy in Hades' eyes, he continued, now looking at as many gods as he could, "All of those years of pent up anger, frustration, irritation… it all gets converted into anger and hatred towards all of you. And then comes in Kronos, giving everyone an outlet for that hatred. So, some join because they want to vent, some because they want revenge, some because of peer pressure and some because they have no reason to care for the gods." Percy looked around at the gods and realized that some were lost in thoughts and others were just glaring at the campers. Percy sighed and thought to himself that sometimes people couldn't be changed. He hoped he would be proved wrong by the end of the reading.

After few moments of silence, Hermes spoke up, "Just to be clear, none of you will hurt my son in any which way, lest you want to face me." The god looked at his son, who was looking at him in gratitude and smiled at him, eliciting a smile in return. He quickly thanked Percy telepathically for standing up for Chris and him. Percy just turned around and nodded at him.

"Hypnos, if you would not mind reading?" Hestia said.

"I sort of recalled ... cheered and howled."
Demigods and even hunters gasped as they understood the meaning of such an action.

"They… the other demigods… they are being taught to…" Jason said in a horrified tone.

"To kill us." Annabeth confirmed.

The campers decided to listen intently. They never knew of the happenings inside the enemy camp, so to speak. Now they would finally come to know. All they knew about the ship was that it housed the majority of Kronos' army. But, now it was turning out to be a sort of training ground for them.

"Annabeth stepped ... way to turn.""

"That is creepy." Piper said.

"Is he talking about you guys or Clarisse?" Frank asked.

"Dunno." Percy replied. "Never found out what they were talking about at that time."

"Before I could ... the final straw.""

The gods were stunned. They hoped that the future them knew exactly how much they were being played. If Kronos had already guessed that the gods would remove Chiron for the poisoning of the tree, then what else had he already planned for?

"Annabeth shivered. ... 'Right outside.'"

"Uh-oh."

"Run!" Leo said.

"Yes, thank you for that. We didn't know." Percy said sarcastically.

"You guys got caught, didn't you? Frank asked.

"O ye, of little faith." Percy said dramatically and at the same time Annabeth said, "Yes."

A few campers chuckled.

"Too late, I ... Come right in."

"Technically, isn't Percy his uncle or something?" Rachel asked. "That would make Percy Annabeth's…"

The campers looked at Rachel in horror and said in unison, "We don't talk about familial relations."

"Basically, if your parent isn't the same, it doesn't matter." Lou Ellen said. "Capiche?"

The campers stared at Rachel till she nodded. Then she said, "Anyway, you guys are half Greeks – relations shouldn't matter, right?"

"We don't talk about that either!" came the shout and Rachel nodded and gave two thumbs up, while the romans were busy laughing at the Greeks till Annabeth told them that they were just an extension of Greek.
The gods were busy looking anywhere other than each other or their children. This topic was always weird for them.

"The stateroom was beautiful, and it was horrible."

"That doesn't make sense." Frank said.

Annabeth explained, "Since it is a stateroom of a luxury cruise ship, it was beautiful but because it was the headquarters of Kronos and his people, it was horrible."

"Oh."

"The beautiful part: ... whole room feel cold."

The gods said up straighter at the mention of the sarcophagus. It sounded awfully like something for Kronos because of the engravings and the fact that Percy felt the sarcophagus making the whole room feel cold. That was exactly how it was near the titan.

Poseidon, Athena and Hermes felt something akin to panic rising within them. They didn't want their children even on the same continent as that thing.

"'Well,' Luke said, spreading his arms proudly. 'A little nicer than Cabin Eleven, huh?''"

"Not a chance." The Stolls growled.

"He'd changed ... Harvard this year."

Leo snickered and repeated, "College-age villain was wearing to Harvard this year?" and just like that the campers started chuckling at Percy's thoughts.

"Evil male model?" Thalia asked.

"Stop checking him out, man!" Jason teased as he chuckled.

Percy just buried his head in his hands and cursed his ADHD and the Fates. The gods didn't even bother asking what the children found so amusing but a few of them had smiles as they watched their children laugh. When everyone calmed down, Hypnos continued.

"He still had ... of the room."

"What?" Zeus squeaked, then cleared his throat and repeated, "What?"

"How is the boy able to use telekinesis?" Athena asked.

"Kronos." Percy said and everyone worried about how far gone Luke was.

"None of us ... heard of them."

"Yes." Hermes answered. "Ares' great-grandsons."

Ares groaned and said, "I should have let you dismember them rather than turn them into birds."

"They were birds?" Percy asked.

"Yes." Hermes answered. "That was why they were able to reform. Now, if I had gone with the original plan of dismembering them... they would not have been able to reform."
"I already taught all of this to you!" Annabeth hissed at Percy, who wisely apologized for forgetting.

"I said nothing. Despite the javelins pointed at me, it wasn't the bear twins who scared me."

"Then what did?"


"I'd imagined ... from shaking."

"Well, it is hard to face someone who tried to kill you." Thalia said and everyone nodded. It didn't matter if it was a monster or a person, it was really hard to be bold in front of someone who had attempted to kill you.

The campers smiled a bit as they thought about Percy facing Luke. They weren't happy that he was shaking and terrified, but they were glad that the boy whom they treated as someone who could not be affected by fear, was actually showing fear. It made him more approachable, more relatable and more human. Now they knew that he must have been as terrified as they were during the war but somehow he managed to push it aside and lead them and that's what they loved and admired about him. That was why he was their leader.

""You don't know ... enough, though ...""

"The audacity of that boy!" Aphrodite sneered. "It was all Artemis' fault. She should not have interfered."

"My fault? You should not have ordered her to fall in love in the first place."

"In case you have forgotten, love is my domain. I can order or instruct anyone to do anything related to love and you have absolutely no say in it. You should not have let her become a huntress."

"And you should not have meddled with her after she became a huntress!"

"You were the one who abandoned her."

"Only because you made her break her oath."

"Oh, that oath is rubbish. You need love in your life."

"I do not need anything of that sort. I have been living like for years and I will continue to do so. So, stop messing around with my hunters."

"Your hunters! HA! They do not live proper lives. What sort of life condemns love?"

"A good one."

"You just need a god or a man…"

"ENOUGH!" Zeus bellowed, effectively rendering everyone speechless. "You both are giving me a headache. Now, SIT DOWN! Read Hypnos."

During the verbal fight, both the goddesses had stood up to hurl insults at each other and many watched in amusement. The demigods on the other hand were disgusted. Now they could understand why Luke was against gods. Even when they made mistakes, they showed no signs of
compassion or regret. They destroyed lives like it didn't matter and probably to them it didn't. But to the demigods, it did.

'This is why Luke wanted to destroy Olympus. Well, one of the reasons anyway.' Percy thought.

"'For lunch,' ... How's school?''"

"That ba…" Thalia's voice got muffled as Jason clasped his hand on her mouth. He dropped his hand when she glared at him.

"'You poisoned ... tree. So what?''"

"SO WHAT?!" Thalia shouted, making the people around her jump in surprise. Lightning was surrounding her hands, so Jason held her hands till the lightning disappeared. Taking a deep breath, Thalia gritted out, "He tried to kill me…he poisoned me and then he acts all casual."

Percy turned around and held Thalia's hand, ignoring the little pulses of lightning still flowing through her. "Hey." Percy said softly so that only Thalia could hear him. "Luke was an idiot ok? Just try to remember what he did in the end for us."

Thalia clutched Percy's hand like it was a lifeline and said just as softly, "It's just… he acts like it doesn't matter." The 'I don't matter' was left hanging in the air.

Percy shook his head and smiled and said, "Like I said, an idiot. He knew what would happen in the end. He knew you would come back." Percy had some inkling of Thalia liking Luke back when they were on the run. Though, she had never told him in so many words, it had become obvious over the years. And Percy knew that it must have been a contributing factor for her choosing to become a hunter.

Everyone, even the most shameless of gods felt like they were intruding on a private moment and averted their eyes from the cousins. Zeus motioned Hypnos to continue reading so that there would be no awkwardness for the children.

Artemis smiled as Hypnos started with the reading. She was glad that Thalia had a good brother figure in her life. As much as she hated men for their callous behavior towards women, she knew that having a brother was a very good thing. And that was one of the good things about Apollo. Say what you will about his treatment of women and his hidden, dark nature, if there was one thing he excelled in, it was taking care of Artemis, no matter how much she debated that she didn't need his help. The moon goddess looked at her twin, who was playing some tunes on his beloved lyre and smiled.

"'How could you?' ... be on my side."

"As if I would ever side with them!" Thalia shouted and Percy withdrew his hand just as the lightning came back in her hands.

"We know." Annabeth said with a smile and Thalia muttered under her breath, "I'm going to go to the Underworld and kill him all over again."

"'Liar!'

... intelligence, Annabeth."

Athena growled as she realized that the boy was trying to manipulate Annabeth using her fatal flaw – hubris.
Hermes shook his head at his son's words. How much influence did the titan have on him? Was even any of it influence or was he talking from his own free will? Hermes hoped that it was influence because if Luke really felt that way, then it would be very hard to convince him that the gods did not abandon their children. That Hermes did not abandon Luke.

"Because you have none of your own!"

"Good comeback."

"His eyes ... at Tyson."

The Stolls grimaced as they heard Luke's words. Here he was, their own brother, ready to slaughter them all. What had gone so wrong for him to do something like this? They and anyone else who knew Luke from the Hermes cabin, was never going to get over the pain of betrayal, regardless of how heroic his last moments were.

"Hey!" I said.

... you mean."

"He had spies in the camp?" Ares asked. This was getting way worse than it already was. Although, it did make a good war story. Hmm…

"Yes." Annabeth replied, thinking about Silena.

"Even back then?" Clarisse asked. She didn't have to say any name because the campers knew that she was talking about Silena. She looked sick.

Chris put his arm around her and said, "No. Not back then. Back then it was Greg from Demeter's cabin."

"What?" both Katie and Demeter shouted. "Greg was a spy?" Katie asked. She thought about her brother who had never returned to camp once the Fleece had been brought to camp. She knew he had turned sides but she didn't know that he had been a spy before that. They had found his body in the aftermath of the final battle.

After a few moments of silence, Hypnos continued.

"He shrugged. "How ... for this monster?'"

Poseidon gritted his teeth. Was it not enough that Kronos was taunting Percy in his dreams? Now this upstart too was doing the same thing!

"Tyson clenched ... you the prophecy?'"

"The prophecy that we forbade Chiron to tell?" Zeus asked.

"What happens when you turn 16?" Poseidon asked, worried for his son.

"My Lord, he is already 17." Amphitrite reminded him and the god relaxed before realizing that Percy would have gone through something horrible when he turned sixteen.

"Yes, it is the same prophecy." Percy told Zeus. Then he turned to Poseidon and said, "I can't tell what the prophecy was about but since I'm 17, it is already completed. It was a horrible prophecy though."
Poseidon nodded at his son and hoped that Luke was wrong. That the gods were not using Percy. That he was not using Percy for their own gains. At least he didn't have to worry about Percy being unable to reach even his sixteenth birthday. But he knew that the journey would not have been easy at all.

"I wanted to ... my enemies are.""

Most nodded subconsciously at Percy's words. As long as he knew that the gods were not the enemy, they would all be just fine.

"'Then you're... the deck shook.'"

"Whoa! Those bears are strong!" Clovis exclaimed in his sleep.

"How does he even hear anything?" Laurel asked Butch, who shrugged.

"'Too bad, Cyclops,' ... let them—'""

"Together?" Piper said, catching on to the word. "Meaning, one on one, Tyson can defeat them?"

Percy and Tyson nodded and grinned at each other.

"'Luke,' I cut in. ... gold sarcophagus.""

Hermes frowned and asked, "Percy, do you know what he meant by that?" He hoped that he didn't actually abandon his son. He couldn't have. He never would!

"Yes, I do. But it will come up later. Much later." Percy said and then added, "He was wrong. You didn't abandon him." Percy hoped that this little piece of information would tide Hermes by till the truth about the curse on the Oracle and May Castellan came out.

Hermes wasn't satisfied. He wanted the full information, but decided to not press the matter. After all, if the Fates didn't want anything revealed before it being read out, then they most definitely had a reason for it.

Athena frowned and thought about what Luke had said. He had been right. The more demigods that turned their backs on Olympus, the weaker Olympus would get. Since the demigods were part god and one of the major source of power sustenance for the gods, it would be like someone was chipping away Olympus, when they turned sides. But, the sarcophagus…

"The box creeped ... small piece appears—""

"They figured it out." Demeter gasped. "They figured out how to use the pledges to bring him to life."

"Please tell me that we know of this development." Hestia said.

Chiron nodded and said, "Yes, Lady Hestia. The Olympians were aware of these developments. I, myself had informed you of this when the children had returned from the quest."

Percy snorted and said, "And yet refused to do anything."

"What do you mean?" Poseidon asked.

"Well, I think it should come up during our next quest...I think... but as far as I know, there were
some Olympians who were trying to gather more evidence to convince Uncle Zeus that Kronos was actually rising."

As one, everyone stared at Zeus incredulously. Zeus tried to appear nonchalant about it and said, "I suppose that I needed to be thorough."

That was apparently the wrong thing to say, because the next fifteen minutes constituted of the Olympians shouting at him for being so blind, although, not so bluntly.

Finally, Hestia got everyone to calm down and asked Hypnos to read. She herself was getting irritated with the complete ignorance that Zeus possessed in the future.

"'That's disgusting!' ... the next age!'"'

"He should have known better than to bribe Percy with power and fame." Poseidon huffed. He was glad that it was his son over there, because they didn't care much about either of power or fame. Now, if it had been one of Zeus' children, then it could have been a different story altogether. Thirst for power was their fatal flaw after all.

"'Go to Tartarus," she said."

"Never using that again." Annabeth said.

"Never." Percy and Nico said in unison.

"Luke sighed. ... matters to discuss.'"

"What is he doing?" Athena asked.

"He is letting them go." Poseidon answered in a confused manner. "But why?"

"That was what I meant!" Athena huffed.

Nike asked, "What do you mean?"

"First of all, he is letting Oreius take them, when it is quite obvious that he is not competent enough. Secondly, if he wanted the children to actually stay on board, he would have sent both the brothers and not just one, seeing that the cyclops would be able to defeat one of them easily." Athena answered.

"So, it is all a pretense? To get the children to feel that they are being captured when in reality he is giving them the opportunity to escape?" Hermes asked. Maybe...just maybe, Luke wasn't that far gone. Maybe he was trying to help the demigods. Then a much darker thought came to the god of thieves – what if it was all planned? What if Kronos wanted the children to leave so that they could find the Golden Fleece?

"It appears to be." Zeus said, motioning Hypnos to read. He wanted to know why the children were being allowed to leave. Surely, their father would not overlook such a small detail.

"'But—"

... But maybe separately ...

"Yup. Do it!" Leo said, caught up in the moment. No one bothered to tell him that this had already happened.
"We exited the ... in the pool!"

"Whoo! Go Tyson!" a couple of demigods cheered.

Even the gods cracked a smile, despite knowing that the freedom was only an illusion and there was definitely an ulterior motive behind letting them go.

"One of the ... Sirens wailed."

"Damn!"

"Are you guys gonna jump into the ocean?"

"Somewhat."

"'Lifeboat!' I yelled.

... of piña colada.'

Everyone burst out laughing at that image. "That was Jeff, I think." Chris laughed. "He never went to camp."

"No wonder he slipped." Clarisse snorted.

"Laistrygonian archers ... would be overwhelmed."

"You were able to slash arrows midair?" Apollo was impressed. "Laistrygonian archers are pretty good. How were you able to do that?"

Percy shrugged and Thalia boasted, "That is nothing. Percy had once slashed through the hunters' arrows."

Everyone looked at Percy in disbelief. No one could ever see the hunters' arrows, such was the speed. How did Percy cut through them?

Percy was flustered and ran his hand through his hair and asked Hypnos to read.

"The lifeboat was ... toward the ocean."

"Oh, now you are safe." Triton said with a smile.

"What about Annabeth?" Athena asked.

"She will be safe as long as Percy knows how to handle the pressure and keep the boat upside." Triton said.

Athena rolled her eyes and thought that that didn't give her much comfort. She knew the entire journey had to be over the sea and that meant she and her daughter needed to trust the boy. Argh!

"Alright, this was it." Hypnos said as he passed the book to Nemesis and dozed off.

Phobos said, "I'll read then."

"He can read?" Percy mouthed to Clarisse, who looked pretty surprised herself.
WE HITCH A RIDE WITH DEAD CONFEDERATES"

"What do you mean by that?" Hades asked, wondering where the dead came from.

Percy, Annabeth and Clarisse looked at each other and Annabeth said, "It should come up later, Lord Hades."

"'Thermos!' I screamed ... I'd lost my mind."

"I think anyone would if you scream 'thermos' while falling into water." Thalia said drily. Percy just rolled his eyes at her.

"She was holding... doing the right thing."

"I should have probably taught you how to use it, huh?" Hermes said with a smile.

"It's alright, Lord Hermes. That is how Percy literally does everything – completely unprepared." Annabeth teased Percy.

"Hey. I do not."

"Name one thing that you were prepared for." Thalia challenged.

"I…uh…" Percy looked around him, trying to find inspiration for anything that he may have been prepared for and that worked. Being unable to find anything that went according to plan, he said, "Capture the Flag? … I cannot work with plans!"

The campers just chuckled at Percy.

"'Hang on!'"

... then it was gone."

"Wow! That is really fast." Leo said.

"As we ... was still poor."

"That was a good idea to inform Chiron, but I am afraid that I cannot control the messages properly if there is a lot of speed involved." Iris said. "For one, the wind will keep disrupting the rainbow. And then it is hard to keep up with the speed, especially if I am handling a lot of other messages at the same time."

"When Annabeth ... at a dance club."
"You partied with the party ponies?!" Travis asked Chiron in an excited voice.

Chiron sniffed. "I did no such thing." He said as if the whole idea disgusted him.

"We told him ... Comanche warriors."

"What were you trying to warn us about?" Annabeth asked.

"Ah! The Sorceress, I think." Chiron replied and Percy and Annabeth grimaced thinking about Circe.

"'What?' I yelled.

... Chiron was gone."

"Okay... so, there may be some disadvantages of the party ponies." Connor said.

"But, they are still awesome." Travis said and a few of the campers nodded in agreement while others just shook their heads in exasperation.

"An hour later ... by three kids."

"Yeah, that would be a bit weird." Rachel said.

"'That's Virginia ... miles,' I said."

"Woah! That is a lot of distance." Leo said. "That cruise ship had to be real fast."

"It was." Annabeth replied.

"She stared at ... That is so cool.""

"That is a really good thing." Theseus said. "We do not have to waste time with a compass and map at sea."

"Did you know nothing about your powers?" Athena sneered. How this boy was considered a hero when he didn't know anything about his own abilities and powers, was beyond her.

"No, I didn't."

"I wasn't sure ... many questions.""

"Yeah, that's the problem with mortal authorities. They unknowingly make life so much more difficult for us." Frank said.

"Now, if only there was a sort of hall pass for demigods..." Travis said.

"Then you lot would wreak havoc." Chiron deadpanned and all of the demigods started protesting.

Once they had settled down, Phobos continued, "'Keep going into ... was directing me."

"That is some crash, man." Jason said, happy that he didn't have any such side effects of his powers.

Poseidon furrowed his brows and said, "That should not have happened. Sure, you would be at a lesser advantage in freshwater than in seawater, but not to this degree. Either the river spirit and I
were not on good terms or you were much more tired than you thought."

Triton agreed and said, "You would not have known where you were, but you should have been able to reach safety on your own."

Percy thought about it and realized that that was the only time he had such an adverse reaction to the change from sea to river. Everytime after that he had managed just fine. "Hmm…"

Phobos, getting annoyed with the discussion on weird water powers, started to read. Why did he even opt to read? Oh, that's right – Deimos challenged him to.

"'There,' she said. ... I didn't like it."

"Wow, you are such a city guy!" Rachel said.

"How did you survive on any quest?" Thalia teased.

"Hey, I make do, okay?" Percy defended and pouted when Annabeth laughed at him.

"'Come on,' ... draw attention.'""

Once again, almost everyone subconsciously nodded their approval.

Thalia said, "Oh, you guys are going to safe house! It's still there?"

Annabeth smiled and replied, "Yup. Still intact. Well, I don't know if it is intact anymore. But, when we went there, it was."

"What safe house?" Lou Ellen asked.

"When we were on the run, we made a couple of safe houses on the way. So, they have all the provisions a demigod would need." Thalia explained.

"Nice. I want the locations, so I can give it to the other protectors." Grover said and Annabeth agreed.

"After burying ... for a long time."

"Wow. That is awesome."

"And well thought out."

"That's what you get when you put together an architect, a son of Hermes and Pinecone Face." Percy said and got slightly shocked for his troubles.

"'A half-blood ... I don't know. Uncomfortable?'"

"Ooh. Somebody's jealous."

"Shut up, Valdez." Percy said but his face was flaming red. He avoided looking at Annabeth, who herself was a bit red in the face but was laughing at him.

"No. That's not the word.

The word was jealous."
"See, even you agree."

"Damn it, Jackson! If you knew that, why did you make us all suffer by tiptoeing around each other for four years?"

Percy and Annabeth were blushing furiously. Percy groaned and hid his face in Annabeth's hair as the others chuckled and teased them. "Percy." Annabeth said, but he just mumbled something along the lines of hiding forever in her hair and hating the Fates.

"It's ok. I also liked you back then." Annabeth whispered and that got Percy to look at her. Once he realized that she wasn't kidding, he smiled and relaxed and slid down a little so as to put his head on her shoulder.

All the while, Aphrodite was ranting about how cute and in love the couple were and how much she would enjoy messing with their lives, to Ares. The war god threw a panicked look towards his son, silently asking him to continue reading.

"'So ...' I said. ... seeing Luke.'""

"Oh, wow. You guys are like a married couple. Mom and our stepdad always send us out if they want to talk." Travis said.

"Shut it Travis, or I'll make sure that you never get hot showers at camp." Percy said.

"Shutting up."

"'It's not your... bait? Or Grover?'""

"Definitely the Fleece. I doubt he had anything to do with what happened to Grover." Reyna said.

"It could have been Grover too, actually. Percy was already wanting to leave camp to save Grover and the poisoning could have been an added measure." Jason said.

"Except that the tree was probably poisoned before Grover got captured by Polyphemus." Annabeth said. "And they had no way of knowing what happened with Grover."

"She studied ... poison the tree.'""

"Sounds about right."

"'What did he ... each other.'""

"We have done both." Thalia said and high fived Percy.

"Hey, me too." Jason said, not wanting to be left out. Percy nodded and gave Jason a fist bump.

Then Percy turned to Nico and said, "We both have also probably tried to kill each other…"

"Well, I won't say we are best friends, but yeah it counts." Nico said and smiled wryly.

Leo said, "So, the only kid of big three that you haven't tried to kill is Hazel?"

"Let's keep it that way." Hazel replied, not wanting to know what it would be like to be on the receiving end of Percy's anger.

The big three watched their children in amusement. They sounded exactly like the three gods. Their
similarities often let them to fight each other and yet at moments they would have each other's backs. Although, the chances of the latter happening were diminishing pretty fast, much faster than any of the three brothers wanted. The three gods thought about the previous night when they had been able to talk and advise each other. Maybe they could go back to being brothers, they thought and hoped.

"Let's go with ... into the dirt."

"Exactly." Thalia said.

"I wanted to a... a pastry box."

"What?"

"Oh come on! I wanted to know the reason."

"Where did he get powdered donuts from?"

"Annabeth stared at... the hill!"

"Uh-oh."

"What?"

"Monster Donut shops are a chain of stores actually connected to monsters' life force." Connor explained. When everyone stared at him, he said, "It's a well-known story amongst Hermes kids. Some of our siblings started it!"

"Why would anyone create a shop that is connected to monsters?" Reyna asked.

"It was an experiment gone wrong." Travis defended.

Reyna decided never to let the Mercury children carry out any sort of experiments. Who knows what they would end up creating?

"'This is bad," ... chocolate donuts."

"Great! I want donuts now."

"How did it even appear there?"

"I am pretty sure Annabeth explained it to me." Percy said. "So, it should be in the book." Then he mumbled under his breath, "Seeing that the Fates found it important to include my love life in it."

"'This shouldn't be ... of sinister forces."

"Now they should be."

"I wonder what all chains are connected to monsters." Leo mused.

"Probably Walmart." Chris said and the campers chuckled, except for the Romans, Nico and Calypso who just stared at the others.

"'It could be a ... across the country?"

"I don't think anyone thinks about that." Leo quipped, but hastily added under Annabeth's glare,
"But we probably should. You know to live and all…"

"Um, no. …

She froze."

"Oh no! There is something behind you, isn't it?" Will asked.

"How do you know?" Butch asked.

"That's what happens in a horror movie." Will replied and everyone groaned. The horror movie obsession of the Apollo cabin was extremely annoying. Most were glad that they wouldn't be at camp during Halloween.

"What?" I demanded. … A MONSTER DONUT KID!

"The hydra! Are you kidding me?"

"Is there a monster that you have not fought?" Hercules asked, thinking that this cousin of his had already defeated some of the monsters that he and Perseus and Theseus had defeated.

"Uhh…" Percy scratched the back of his neck. "I wouldn't know the name if I hadn't met it yet. So, dunno?"

"Why is it wearing a bib?" Leo asked.

"Probably because it was a newly formed hydra." Annabeth replied. "Why did you even ask that?"

"It's Leo you are talking to – expect something like that to come up." Piper answered.

"Hmm… it's like talking to Percy." Annabeth said.

"Damn right!" Percy said and reached over to high five Leo, while the girls just shook their heads in exasperation.

"I took out my … following our scent."

"But how did it reach your campsite?" Hazel asked.

"It probably followed Tyson when he left the shop and then kept following the scent." Annabeth said.

"My heart pounded. … two of its heads."

"Wish it was that easy to defeat a hydra. But, nooo. Somebody just had to make a monster that needed to have its head chopped off and then burned." Percy complained while Leo just laughed.

"Typhon and Echidna." Annabeth corrected.

"What?"

"The hydra was born to Typhon and Echidna. You said somebody." Annabeth pointed out and Percy just groaned and nodded his head.

"The Hydra stumbled…"
"It worked."

"That was a horrible idea." Annabeth said.

"Why, thank you." Percy stuck out his tongue at her, making her smile.

"The sight of ... swung my sword."

"That is a bad idea. You do not have anything that can burn the hydra's stumps." Hercules said, reminiscing about when he had killed the hydra.

"I wasn't thinking... and I think I had most probably forgotten that little fact." Percy said.

"Little fact!" Annabeth huffed.

"'No!' Annabeth ... shop somewhere!"

"What?!

"Seriously Princess? That's what you care about?" Clarisse chuckled.

"I don't know what I was thinking." Annabeth said with a chuckle.

Poseidon pursed his lips and wondered how the children had managed to survive this. Did they manage to find a source of fire? Or did they manage to escape the hydra? Although, escaping a hydra was extremely difficult to do. They must have found a source of fire.

"I dodged a ... Hydra followed."

"You could drown the hydra." Jason suggested. "I'm pretty sure it would need to breathe."

"Yeah, like you did with the gorgons." Frank said, remembering the way Percy had saved his life and killed those two gorgons.

"I didn't know how to do that yet." Percy replied.

"Annabeth moved ... at the arcade."

"Whoa! That's awesome." Dakota said.

"Thanks, Tyson." Annabeth said.

"No one hurts my friends." Tyson said with conviction.

"We kept inching ... thing would kill us."

"I know. I know. I'm pessimistic. Happy?!" Percy said, raising his hands in defense, before anyone could say anything and many had actually opened their mouths to comment.

"Then I heard ... on the Hydra."

"Finally!" Clarisse exclaimed. Everyone looked at her weirdly and she said, "You'll find out soon enough."

"'Steam engine,' ... enemies on two fronts."
"Excuse me?" Clarisse said indignantly.

"We weren't exactly friends back then." Percy replied.

"And you guys are now?" almost everyone asked.

"No!" both Percy and Clarisse replied in unison and mock glared at each other while Annabeth and Grover laughed, knowing that those two were just keeping up pretenses.

"A gravelly male ... at will, Captain!"

"So let me get this straight." Piper said. "The girl is obviously you." She looked at Clarisse.

"Obviously." Clarisse replied.

"And you are about fire a cannon of sorts at the hydra but they" Piper pointed at Percy, Annabeth and Tyson, "are too close. And you are still going to fire?"

"Duh!" Clarisse replied. "If they have any brains, they would get out of the way. And anyway, the Captain was experienced in all of this."

"Okay…" Piper said, still not sure about how Percy was friends with Clarisse.

"Annabeth understood ... guts tend to do."

The demigods looked sick. "That is disgusting." Rachel said.

"At least you weren't covered in it." Annabeth grimaced.

"At least it wasn't the green slime. Thank gods monsters vaporize." Percy said.

"'Gross!' screamed ... Hades' palace."

"Huh?" Gwen asked.

"Gift from dad to help out in the quest." Clarisse said.

"Your dad has a ship of dead people?" Rachel asked.

"No." surprisingly, it was Nico who replied. "In every war, the losing side goes to Ares, including the soldiers, or rather the dead soldiers, who fought and lost and their vehicles and weapons. It all goes to Ares. He can call upon them whenever he wants."

"Death boy is correct." Clarisse said.

"Don't call me that."

"Whatever."

Ares smirked and thought that he must have faith in his daughter if he gave her a gift. Or maybe he was waiting for her to prove herself. Ugh! Why couldn't it be a son of his? Since when did he even have daughters? Till date he had only had one daughter and she had been killed before she could even reach Chiron. That was the problem with daughters, the war god thought. He got attached to them even before they were born. He didn't know how the other gods managed when something happened to their daughters.
"The ship was ... Come aboard.""

"I thought I would never say this." Travis said. "But, Clarisse to the rescue!"

"Shut up Stoll. I saved all of your asses from the drakon too. Otherwise all of you would be dead." Clarisse said, talking about the drakon in the war that had killed Silena.

"That you did." Annabeth said.

"By the way, this chapter is done." Phobos said as soon as he found a break in the demigods' conversation. By Olympus, they could talk a lot! The god of fear gave the book to his twin and said, "You read now."

"I do not wish to read." Deimos replied, looking at the book in distaste.

"I read, did I not? It is only fair that you should also read." Phobos retorted.

"Why should I? I do not…" Deimos said.

"Deimos, just take the book and read." Aphrodite ordered.

"Yes, mother."
Violence is not the answer

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Ch46 – SoM – Violence is not the answer

Deimos threw a dirty look at his brother, who was silently chuckling, and read, "CLARISSE BLOWS UP EVERYTHING"

"Finally some action." Ares sighed in relief and Aphrodite hit his arm.

"What do you mean by that, punk?" Clarisse growled at Percy.

"I didn't write the book." Percy replied. "Anyway, if this chapter is about us going to the entrance to the Sea of Monsters, then you know what I mean." Percy grinned at Clarisse as she glared at him.

""You are in ... bronze cannon balls."

"Great weapons." Reyna appreciated and Clarisse agreed with her.

"Everywhere we ... overruled my fear."

"As it usually does." Grover teased.

"Oh come on. Not you too." Percy whined.

""Tantalus expelled ... with his SUV.""

"How come that didn't happen?" Leo asked.

"He has a SUV?" Connor asked.

"Because we saved the camp?" Annabeth said to Leo. Then she turned to Connor and said, "Yes, he has a SUV, but you can't steal it because it is not even at camp. He summons it."

"Dammit." Connor muttered.

""Did they ... Won't you, Captain?"

"You were enjoying that way too much, weren't you?" Will asked.

"Of course. When you have an army at your disposal, then you will understand." Clarisse said.

"I have my entire cabin at my command." Will said.

"Hardly an army. Most of them are medics or musicians." Clarisse sneered.

"And all of us are damn good at archery." Will retorted, getting annoyed with Clarisse. She always
tried to put down Cabin 7. Hades! She tried to put down every cabin and the only cabin who could fight back and win was Cabin 6. Maybe even Percy, but he hardly cared for what Clarisse said.

"That means nothing." Clarisse scoffed.

"I'll show you nothing." Will got up but Nico pulled him down as Chiron interfered and promised to put both the cabins on KP and the worst shower times if they didn't stop fighting.

Ares groaned and muttered something about Chiron always ruining a good fight, just like Hera and Zeus, whenever he started fighting with one of his siblings.

"The captain ... Destroy anyone.""

"Destroy anyone. Nice!" Ares and Enyo said in unison with a grin.

"They do not wish to do it. They are only willing so that they can attain peace." Athena rolled her eyes and wondered not for the first time as to how she was even related to the war twins.

"That does not matter." Ares said, grinning about the prospect of destroying everyone.

As Athena opened her mouth to retort, Hera said, "We are not going to get into this debate again. Deimos, continue reading."

"Clarisse smiled. "Destroy anyone. I like that.""

Athena narrowed her eyes at Clarisse and said, "For your sake, I hope that you are not too much like your father."

"What does that mean?" Ares growled at Athena.

"You know what that means." Athena replied. "Your arrogance and overconfidence will be your downfall and you know it. It has already happened quite a lot of times."

"Is that a challenge?" Ares grinned a cruel smile.

"No. Merely an observation." Athena replied with a smug smile.

"Alright that is enough. I do not wish to sit through another one of your silly fights." Aphrodite said. "Deimos?"

Deimos nodded and read, "Tyson gulped.

... of the water.""

"That is the spirit." Ares bellowed in pride.

"That is utter stupidity." Artemis said. "I doubt it would be easy to even find that ship. It is already obvious that they were moving too fast for a regular ship."

"If they do find the ship then my daughter can blow them up." Ares said.

"Do you really think it would be that easy to blow up a ship that carries the remains of the titan lord? Do you not think there would be defenses for that sort of an attack?" Athena sneered. Why did Zeus give Ares a throne on the Council?

"Well, my dear wisdom goddess, sometimes things are not that complicated. You just like to make
them complicated." Ares sneered

Athena narrowed her eyes and retorted, "And sometimes things are not solved with simple
solutions like blowing something up. Sometimes you need to be smart and not strong. But
obviously, you would not know anything about that, now would you?"

Zeus groaned and ordered Deimos to read, before either of the gods could give him a headache.

"'You don't understand," ... steal my chance.'"

"Exactly!" Ares said while all of the gods just shook their heads. It was quite obvious that the three
needed to join forces. A daughter of Athena, a daughter of Ares, a son of Poseidon and a cyclops
could easily take on anything that came in the way. But, alas, this girl was too much like her father
to accept the help that she needed.

Clarisse groaned and said, "Should have let you both help."

"It doesn't matter. In the end things worked out just fine." Annabeth said.

"'Where are your ... the camp.'"

"You didn't take anyone along with you?" Reyna asked.

"No." Clarisse said.

"Why not?" Ares asked. He didn't know whether to be proud that his daughter undertook a journey
to the Sea of Monsters on her own or be upset that she didn't understand the fact that she would
always need comrades because a war or a battle could never be fought by one single person.

"I think I have a pretty good idea." Apollo said. "The prophecy must have said something about
either something happening to her friends or that she could not trust her friends or something else to
do with her friends. That is the most common reason for a demigod not taking their friends on a
quest. But what you do not understand is that the prophecy is often having double meanings and
any attempt to avoid the prophecy will only lead to the prophecy fulfilling itself. Am I right?"

Clarisse nodded and said, "Yes, it was the prophecy. I think I told Percy the prophecy later on, so it
should probably come up in the book."

Satisfied, Apollo nodded and asked Deimos to continue.

"'You mean even ... with enemy spies.'"

"You are really enjoying being in charge of a whole crew, aren't you?" Reyna asked.

"Wouldn't you?" Clarisse asked, already knowing the answer.

Reyna gave a knowing grin and said, "I already have a whole camp at my command."

"Co-command." Percy reminded her, pointing to Frank, who gave a sheepish grin and waved at
Reyna.

"Yes. Co-command. Happy?" Reyna rolled her eyes. Damn! She had gotten used to calling the
shots for the months without Jason and then later without Percy being there. Although, Octavian
had been a royal pain in the ass and she wouldn't have minded someone else taking care of him.
Bless his soul.
"Ecstatic."

"The dream came as soon as I fell asleep."

A few people groaned and Thalia said, "Of course it did."

"Do you ever sleep normally? Without any dreams?" Jason asked.

"A handful of times but not on quests." Percy said. "Never on quests." He mumbled to himself.

"Grover was sitting ... I—I wasn't—"

"Busted." Leo sang.

"'Come!' Polyphemus... to come off."

"You were wearing high heels?" Travis looked like he was about to burst with laughter.

"Well, I couldn't show him my hooves, now could I?" Grover blushed. He hated this book.

"The Cyclops pulled ... looking for Pan."

"That cyclops is obsessed with sheep." Piper said, making a face.

"You have no clue," Grover replied.

Poseidon felt disgusted as he heard the description. 'Bones of satyrs' was especially disturbing. He liked the satyrs and he liked Pan. They were good entertainment and loved to keep the nature and by extension, the water, clean. Not to mention, they always had a good joke up their sleeves.

Pan and Hedge, too, were feeling sick as they heard the description. How many sheep and satyrs had the cyclops eaten? Pan felt extremely guilty for disappearing just like that. He wondered if he even told anyone that he was going to do such a thing. He didn't have much hope about it seeing that satyrs were going around in search for him.

"What I don't get is, where did the cyclops get a La-Z-Boy recliner and the television set from? That too in his size." Leo asked, obviously fixating on the weirdest item.

"Monster shop." Tyson replied. "There is a shop for monsters and we get everything over there. For all monsters. All sizes."

"Great!" Katie scoffed. "Even monsters have a better life than us."

As the demigods nodded and talked about all the amenities the monsters had access to and the demigods didn't, the gods wondered whether this was true. Did their children really suffer that much? Was the camp not enough? Did they really need more amenities to help them out? Seeing that all of the children were agreeing with the daughter of Demeter, the gods realized that maybe their lives were really horrible, especially if they were forced to fight in wars.

The hunters too, were thinking about the same thing. They had always dismissed demigods as privileged and entitled people who always flaunted that they were a god's child. But over the past few days, the hunters had heard enough from the book and from the comments of the demigods, that they started realizing that maybe that was not the case. Maybe it was true in the times they were living in, after all, a child of god was widely celebrated and admired. But, the demigods from the future seemed to be living in hiding, scared of what the mortals would do them because of their
difference with the rest of the mortal world. And they were also ignored by their parents, both
godly and sometimes mortal. The hunters wondered whether they would need to change their
impression of the demigods in the future. Maybe, just maybe, they weren't all horrible persons.
None of the ones from the future seemed to be. They were more like a family like how the hunters
were family to one another.

Artemis read her hunters' thoughts and realized that they were all thinking along the same lines.
Maybe she was too quick to judge and had passed that onto her hunters. She was glad that the
hunters were trying to change their way of thinking and decided that she too should not judge
everyone as the same, just because of a few people.

"Polyphemus set ... copper and silver coins."

"The magic of the Fleece." Hedge said wistfully.

"You stopped to see all of that?" Clarisse asked.

"You didn't?" Percy said. It was such a beautiful sight. How could he have not wanted to see it?

"It doesn't help with war, so it is useless." Clarisse said. "I already told you this."

"Wouldn't knowing the terrain and surroundings help in a war?" Travis asked.

"Yeah, but not the beauty." Clarisse replied.

"You should appreciate the finer things in life." Katie said.

Clarisse scoffed but secretly agreed. As much as she loved fighting and wars (to an extent), she had
seen enough things get destroyed as a result and now wished she could have seen those things in a
better light. Like the meadows in the camp or the easy going atmosphere the campers had before all
the fighting and the battles began. But she would never say those things out loud. She did have a
reputation to maintain.

"And at the ... good eating! And now—"

"Tell me that you killed this monster." Pan said, his temper rising.

"We didn't kill him." Grover said. "But we did take the Fleece away and no satyr or anyone,
actually, would ever go there. And the island also gradually went back to its usual awful state."

Pan grumbled but didn't say anything. That was hardly a punishment for a monster who lured and
ate so many of his brethren.

"Polyphemus scooped up ... train by tomorrow!"

"Oh gods!" Hazel said in worry. "How did you manage to get to Grover the next day?"

"With extreme difficulty." Percy said and Annabeth nodded. They had yet to get into the Sea of
Monsters and then meet Circe and the Sirens. She didn't understand how they had managed to do
all of that within one day.

"Isn't that ...

"Pets?"
"He had pets?"
"You'll see."

"Grover looked ... the Cyclops's cave."

"Your thoughts are extremely poetic." Apollo said. Then added with a grin that scared Percy, "I like it."

"I woke to ... Where is that girl?"

"What happened?" Phobos asked

"It says what happened. Stop interrupting me." Deimos said.

"Then his ghostly ... Monsters, of course."

"Seriously Prissy? You had to ask that?" Clarisse teased.

"Hey, I was disoriented from the dream." Percy defended.

"Whatever helps you sleep at night, Jackson."

"I stuffed my ... the CSS Birmingham."

"You know that is really creepy." Frank said.

"What is?" Percy asked.

"That somehow you always know that you wouldn't be spending the night over at some place." Jason answered. "Like every time you were leaving some or the other place, there was always this line about how you thought you wouldn't be seeing it again or spending the night there or something along those lines."

"Are you prophetic?" Will asked.

"Nope." Percy replied but Apollo raised his brow and thought that whatever Jason that said was correct. Percy somehow always knew a little about something that would happen – at a very small scale, but just enough. How was that possible? It couldn't be just the demigod survival instinct. Was he blessed by Apollo at some point? But why? Even his dreams seemed to be a bit more prophetic and abnormal than normal demigod dreams. The god decided to keep his ears open for any such other circumstances when the boy had a feeling about the future.

"I was on my ... the boiler deck."

"You didn't!" Clarisse growled at Percy. It was a private moment and even though she knew that Percy had come to know of her fear of Ares when Deimos had terrorized her, she didn't know that he might have seen this moment. No, he couldn't have. No one knew of that. And if he had seen it, then it would be in the book. That meant that everyone would come to… no! He better not have seen that. He couldn't have.

Percy turned to look a Clarisse and offered her an apologetic look. He knew nothing he would do or say would help her. He understood how she felt. How could he not, when his whole life was being read out like entertainment. But, it wasn't fair on Clarisse or anyone else, whose secrets Percy knew. He had agreed for his life moments to be read out, not anyone else's!
Feeling herself being close to tears, Clarisse got up and walked out with as much dignity as she could muster without breaking down. If she was being honest, she didn't mind Percy knowing her secret. He was a good friend. But this! Everyone else coming to know… she couldn't handle it.

Everyone just stared as Clarisse speed-walked out of the amphitheater, followed by Chris and a moment later, Percy. He needed to talk to her and make sure that she was alright.

"Please continue reading." Percy said before he too left after the couple.

Percy exited the amphitheater into the palatial entrance and searched everywhere for the couple. A few moments later he heard a shout of 'Clarisse, wait up.' Following the sound, he caught up with Chris, who had just broken into a run.

"Where is she?" Percy asked as he ran next to Chris.

"Next left." Chris replied and they both ran till they caught up with Clarisse in a dead end corridor. Well, not that much of a dead end, seeing that the end was actually a sort of a window into one of the many gardens.

"Clarisse?" Percy asked tentatively as Chris went up to her and put one arm around her.

"Go away, Percy."

Percy. That's it. She was actually angry, Percy thought. Then he mentally kicked himself. Of course she was angry. At this very moment, they were reading about her deepest secret and fear. He could hear Deimos' voice but couldn't make out the words from the distance.

"I'm sorry." Percy apologized as he wrung his hands together.

Clarisse angrily turned around and Percy could see that it was taking a lot of effort to not cry. "Sorry? Jackson, sorry does not cut it. You just had to, right? Couldn't help yourself? You just had to know what was going on. You just had to watch and listen."

"What's going on?" Chris asked, feeling completely out of loop.

"Jackson couldn't help himself from playing Sherlock Holmes." Clarisse bit out angrily.

"I… shouldn't have done that." Percy said softly.

"No. No, you shouldn't have." Clarisse said and took a deep breath. "What all did you hear?"

Chris looked between his girlfriend and their friend. He knew that they had a weird friendship. But what were they talking about?

"Umm…something about how a brother of yours should have gone on the quest. I…don't remember much. But… he umm…” Percy raised his hand, mimicking what he remembered of Ares' motions.

"He?" Chris asked in confused voice. "Who are you…Ares? You both are talking about Ares?"

Clarisse sniffed as she imagined what all the other campers must be thinking about her. What her father would be thinking about her. He would think her weak and not worthy, like he always did. He would prefer it if she was a boy. All the days that they had spent in Olympus, Ares had not even talked to her once. He ignored her and only talked to Frank, who actually didn't look all that interested in talking to Ares.
Clarisse laughed a hollow laugh. Just her luck. Her father didn't want to talk to her, who had done everything to get his attention. Instead, he went around talking to her half-brother, who wasn't all that interested in their father. She knew Frank was gentler than all of the Ares and Mars kids combined. And yet her father was interested in him, just because he was a boy. Not for the first time, Clarisse wished that she was a boy. Ever since she had come to camp and read up on her father and her popular older siblings, she realized that they were all boys. And she had started acting and pretending to be one. She had never been overly into all the stereotyped girl things, but ever since she came to camp, she gave up all the things that she liked, in the hopes that if she acted more like a boy, her father would notice her. Many of her sisters did the same thing. And yet, she was always a disappointment for him.

Clarisse angrily wiped her tears and punched Percy in the abdomen. She wanted to do more damage, wanted to take her anger out, but Chris held her back and kept telling her that Percy didn't do anything to her. That she shouldn't hurt Percy. Finally, she relented and went to sit on the window ledge overlooking the stupid, beautiful garden.

Percy winced and rubbed his abdomen. Man, Clarisse could hit really hard, especially when she put all of her power (Ares power) into it. He went to stand opposite to where she was sitting and Chris sat in between them. Percy didn't know whether Chris was protecting Percy or Clarisse. They all sat/stood in silence till Percy remembered that he had always wanted to ask one question, but it was too private. But, now that all privacy was gone, he thought of asking it.

"Clarisse?" Percy asked. When she looked at him, her anger seemed to have reduced a bit. Oh gods, this question would probably make her go all she-hulk on him. Swallowing, he bravely asked, "Did Ares ever…? You know?"

Chris' eyes widened as he understood what Percy was asking. Did Ares ever hit Clarisse? Did he ever even threaten her? Chris was usually a pretty chill guy but now he felt anger like never before. If Ares had done something to Clarisse, he would go kill that annoying god of war.

Clarisse looked at Percy for some time and thought about his question. She understood what he wanted to ask. Obviously, Percy would ask that. "No. He never. He's just… scary."

They sat/stood in silence for some time till Clarisse asked Percy, "How are you doing it?"

"Huh?"

"How are you ok with the reading?"

"I'm not." Percy said sincerely. "But the Fates said that it might help us out in the future and maybe the gods might become sensible after hearing a demigod's thoughts. I never thought that everyone else's things that I knew of would also be read. I really didn't."

Clarisse nodded and said, "Not your fault." Stupid Jackson, she thought, of course he would give up privacy for helping others. She hoped that the gods and other demigods had enough sense to not bring it up in the future because they would have to deal with a very pissed off Clarisse.

X-X-X-X-X

Everyone looked at Annabeth for an explanation, but she just shrugged. She didn't know what the matter was, but she was sure that whatever it was, it was supposed to be between Percy and Clarisse and now the whole world (their world) would come to know. She felt bad for Clarisse. She too had been in that position when the truth about her relationship with her father had come out. And she knew that Percy hated every moment of the reading, because all of his deeply preserved
secrets were coming out.

When Deimos didn't continue the reading, Hestia reminded him to. She had a feeling about why the three children had left.

"Clarisse was ... Ares, the god of war."

"Ares, you cannot directly interfere in a quest taken by your child." Zeus said with barely contained anger. Why was no one paying attention to the ancient laws in the future? What was so important that everyone was breaking the laws?

Deimos read the next few lines in his head and knew why his sister had left. He hoped nobody tried to kill his father. Because, unlike in normal circumstances, Deimos would not protect his father this time if someone attacked him. But something felt wrong to him. He could not believe that his father would do something like what was being insinuated.

""I don't want ... take this quest."

"ARES!" Aphrodite shrieked at her lover, who was sure that he lost hearing in his right ear.

"And do tell brother, what is wrong with your daughter taking up a quest?" Artemis asked in a dangerous voice as she fingered her bow. The hunters were glaring at him. Scratch that, everyone was glaring at him, except for a few gods who either were not listening or didn't care.

"N-nothing wrong." Ares replied. But he himself was wondering as to why he was acting that way. Sure, he was strict with his children, but he didn't think he would outright tell a daughter of his that he thought she wasn't good enough. No. He loved his daughters (immortal). Even Harmonia, who was complete opposite of him. Then again he had never had a demigod daughter. But why would he treat them any differently? Had Clarisse done something before this to feel his wrath?

""I'll succeed!" ... other?" Ares growled."

By now everyone was glaring at Ares, even Hera, who didn't care about demigods. He too couldn't understand his behavior. Was it because he wanted his daughter to succeed or because of something else? Ares moved quickly just as an arrow embedded itself in his seat. He looked up to see Artemis fuming, whether it was because he didn't get hurt or because of what the book said, he didn't know.

"Ares." Aphrodite said in a calm voice. But the god of war knew that voice, it was the one she used before she went ballistic and her eyes were glowing, which was always a bad sign. Ares had never been the one to be scared, but Aphrodite was extremely scary when she got properly angry. "Care to explain?"

"I-I don't know." Ares said truthfully. He needed to make sure that Aphrodite understood that he would never do something like that. "You know me. I would never." He looked around and knew that no one was going to believe him. Ah! To Tartarus with reputation. He decided that this was more important than keeping up with his reputation of being ruthless. He gingerly sat down next to Aphrodite and said, "You know I love my daughters, love you, Enyo. I would never threaten...n-not like that." He looked genuinely confused and upset when he said, "I do not know why I am behaving like that." Then he whispered, "Tell me that you trust me. Please."

The goddess of love narrowed her eyes at her lover. She knew that he loved their daughters – Harmonia and Adrestia. But his behavior in the book was just like his usual behavior with his demigod sons, except the whole physically threatening part. Was there some other reason for him
being so violent with his child? But what could drive him to do such a thing?

She said, "Talk to me once you have sort this out." With that she shimmered and appeared next to Artemis and Athena, who were still glaring at Ares.

Hera scoffed and said, "I do not know why I am even surprised. What else can we expect from the god of war?" Some of the gods agreed with the queen while many remained silent, some hoping that there would be a fight and drama and others still not believing that Ares would do something like that.

Ares was livid. That goddess knew nothing about him, how dare she say something about his character. Despite all his flaws, he knew that he would never hit anyone outside of a battlefield or unless they really deserved it, and his daughter would never fall in either category. He angrily bit out, "You do not get to talk about me, seeing that you know nothing about me, *mother.*"

The demigods were positively furious with Ares. How dare he behave like that with Clarisse? First of all he was an absent father just like every other god and then he threatened his daughter to complete a crazy quest all on her own! Was he deranged? Didn't he know the pressure that every demigod had to please their godly parent? They would do anything, take or give life, if it meant that their godly parent was proud of them. They would literally go to the ends of the world to get a little recognition from their parent, and here Ares was abusing that need to please. Even a bully like Clarisse did not deserve such treatment. Then another thought struck them. What if Clarisse was a bully so that she could please Ares? It was well known that Ares was the bully amongst the gods. What if Clarisse felt the need to be like him so that he would accept her? That seemed like a pretty good reason to become a bully… at least to the demigods it seemed like a pretty good reason. They could accept the thought process behind that. After all, they all too tried to be like their parent, thinking that was what they were born to be. Only a few, like Piper or Frank, had ever tried to stray from the usual behavior acceptable from a particular god's child. They all accepted their character flaws as something inherited from their godly parent and never tried to improve it, because if their godly parent had a flaw then they would also, right? The demigods decided to try and steer away from the stereotypes and be their own person rather than what their parent wanted of them. It would be difficult and near impossible, but they were tired of being someone's shadow – someone who didn't even care about their existence.

Unknown to the demigods, a few of the gods were listening to their children's wayward thoughts and were shocked, to say the least, at their thought process. Did the demigods really think like that? Did they only strive to please their parent and nothing else? Were the ancient laws the cause of this? After all, if it hadn't been for the ancient laws then the gods could freely visit and talk to their children. Did the children really think that the gods stayed away because the child was not like them? The gods couldn't understand what to think. They couldn't understand their children's reasoning and psychology. Was there really such a huge gap between them and their children that the children had to resort to changing themselves completely in order to get a bit of attention from the gods? The reading was getting more eye opening than they had thought possible.

Still angry and not wanting to hear any more accusations to be thrown his way, Ares ordered Deimos to read. Deimos hastily started to read. He did not want to be in way of his father's anger.

"*The alarm bells... splotches in the distance.*"

Poseidon had a horrible feeling about this. He knew which entrance the children were going towards and honestly, he thought that the clashing rocks were a better option. Because, despite Percy being a sibling to Charybdis, she was too angered by Zeus for turning her into a monster that she would kill anyone, even her own half-brother. And Scylla was ruthless after what Circe had
done to her.

(A/n – there are way too many options for Scylla's parentage but none of them actually match Charybdis' parentage and yet they are called sisters. Anyway, since I couldn't find anything that relates them, I am just leaving the wording open to interpretation.)

"My nautical ... for deep water."

Sometime during the reading, Percy, Clarisse and Chris had quietly returned. Clarisse made an effort to not look at anyone, knowing that the part about her and Ares had already been read. But she realized that none of the demigods were looking at her differently and she breathed out in relief. She realized that she could trust them to not bring it up. The gods however, were a different matter. She could feel their gazes on her, occasionally turning into staring, especially Ares. She could tell that Ares was looking at her, but she didn't look up to meet his gaze. She continued to look anywhere other than people. Thankfully, Deimos started reading a bit louder to snap everyone's attention back to him.

"I wasn't sure ... want to meet."

"You didn't know about Charybdis and Scylla?" Triton asked Percy.

"No. Till a few days ago in the book, I didn't even know about the Sea of Monsters." Percy said. This was one the few times he wished that he had actually read up on ancient history like Annabeth kept on pestering him to.

"Do you not study about all this, boy?" Athena sneered. What did her daughter even see in this child? He was incompetent to be dating a daughter of Athena. He had no knowledge about anything except stupid, impossible ideas that had a lesser chance of working than Aphrodite's marriage with Hephaestus.

"I prefer to be told about things rather than read about them. It saves time." Percy replied and Poseidon nodded his agreement.

Athena just rolled her eyes and hoped that one day her daughter would realize that she was with a completely irresponsible and impulsive person and would leave him for someone way better and deserving of her.

"'What do you ... the other hand ...'"

"No!" Poseidon said. "You cannot blow up either of Charybdis or Scylla. Scylla is too high up and as for Charybdis... well, you would need an entire army to do any proper damage." 'Considering that I do not blow you up first', Poseidon thought but didn't say out loud. Monster or not, no one hurts his children.

Clarisse nodded and wished that someone had told her that before. She would not have been so foolish to think that blowing up something would be the solution to everything.

The gods thought that Clarisse was so much like Ares – always going towards violence when she could have found a simpler solution if she thought about it.

"'You are crazy, ... for Charybdis!'"

"You will have better chance of survival with Scylla." Athena said, shaking her head. This daughter of Ares was going to get Annabeth killed! Why did she have to be like Ares? "You might even be
able to avoid her without too many problems seeing that most of your crew is dead. You could keep them as bait and get Percy to steer the ship next to the cliffs. That way you should have been to cross into the Sea of Monsters without too many problems."

Percy, Annabeth and Clarisse looked at each other. That was a good plan. Of course it was a good plan – Athena devised it. It may not be perfect but they could have worked with it. Only if Clarisse had decided to think rationally and not use brute force. Now Clarisse understood why Percy had been able to defeat her father in the little duel they had. Her father had gotten overconfident and she was had followed in his footsteps.

"'Aye, m'lady.'"

... her to Tartarus!"

Almost everyone, excluding Ares who still thought it was a good idea to blow up the monsters, shook their heads in disapproval.

"Seeing that you all are going to go ahead with this suicidal plan, I hope Percy controlled the sea for easy passage." Artemis said.

"He cannot." Poseidon said in worry. "Not only is Charybdis much stronger than Percy and has almost absolute control over her area, second only to the three of us," Poseidon pointed to himself and his wife and son, "she also is just too loud for Percy to be able to concentrate on controlling the sea."

"So, you need absolute silence to control sea?" Hercules asked both Theseus and Percy.

"No." Triton replied. "They do not need silence but if there is someone having control of the sea and creating a lot of noise, it would be near impossible to control even a wave near them. It would feel like the sea itself is protesting."

"Oh." Hercules still did not understand Triton's words but decided not to push it, lest they get a complete lecture on water powers.

"She said it ... in the wind."

"Don't tell me that the ship blows up before you even reach the monsters." Thalia said.

"The ship does not blow up before we reach the monsters." Percy said.

"I don't know if I should believe you or not."

"As we got ... toilet being flushed."

"Great! Now I am going to imagine Charybdis as a giant toilet." Clarisse said. "Thanks for that image, punk."

"You are welcome."

"Did I mention that I love your thoughts? Cuz I do," Leo said with a chuckle. Ah! He and Percy thought alike. He could imagine the greatest friendship between the camp's nutcases blooming.

"Every time ... by ten-foot waves."

"That's scary." Jason said and everyone agreed.
"I tried to ... awfully good to me."

"Yeah, me too." Someone said.

"You were actually doing all of that?" Annabeth asked.

"Why are you so surprised?"

"Nothing. I was busy trying not to throw up."

"I would have passed out by now." Hazel said, shuddering as she thought about being in such waters.

"I would have shadow travelled off the ship." Nico said.

"I would have struck her with lightning." Thalia said.

"That would a bad idea." Triton said. "You see, Charybdis hates all children of Zeus. So, if you had hit her with lightning, she would have not only caused a tsunami but also risen out of the water just to kill you."

There was a stunned silence among the demigods. Deimos took this as his cue to read.

"Undead sailors ... full of wind?"

"Do not use it." Amphitrite said. "It would end up creating something even worse, probably a waterspout or a hurricane."

"And knowing Charybdis," Poseidon said, "it would be a spectacular disaster. Obviously only Percy would be able to survive it." The god looked so happy and lost in thoughts of the disaster, that it scared almost everyone and Deimos continued to read before Poseidon could decide to create such a disaster.

"I nodded. "But ... wouldn't respond."

"I cannot imagine what that must feel like for the sea to not respond." Theseus said gravely.

"Horrible." Percy replied, thinking about the time he had gotten captured along with Frank and couldn't get the water to respond to him for some time.

"'I—I can't,'... in the whirlpool."

Everyone leaned forward in anticipation and fear for the children. How did they survive this?

"'Full reverse!'... starboard cannons!"

"You are in Charybdis' whirlpool. You can only hope that you do not get sucked in by her or capsize." Triton said.

"Or blow up, seeing that the ship is heating up to an extent that it is steaming." Hephaestus said.

Clarisse shook her head at her younger self. Back then she had thought that she was doing the right thing but now... hearing her actions through someone else's point of view was eye opening. She could see all the flaws in her plan, if she could even call it that.

"Dead Confederates ... too dangerous!"
It seemed too dangerous, Poseidon thought, even for a cyclops. He looked at his sons to make sure that they were actually there. But from the grim look on Percy's face, the god knew that something must have happened. Of course, something must have happened, he thought angrily. They were in Charybdis' clutches and the ship was about to blow up.

"He patted my ... stuck between them."

"That's disgusting." Gwen said.

"And scary." Dakota added.

"Why are you so descriptive?" Holly asked as she made a disgusted face.

"Charybdis was an orthodontist's ... off its pole."

"It is a good thing that you did not have proper weapons that could do some damage, otherwise she would be really annoyed." Triton said.

"'Again!' Clarisse ordered. ... it!'" Annabeth said."

"Thank gods for Tyson!" Chris breathed out.

"'Wait!' Clarisse ... to move away."

"Listen to the sea spawn." Athena said and everyone ignored her while Poseidon and his family were offended by her words.

"I gripped the ... on a carnival game."

"Oh gods! Are you guys going to sink? Because that would be really ironic." Lou Ellen asked.

"We would have been sucked in faster than we would have sank." Percy said.

"We were thrown ... side of the strait."

"Oh." Clarisse said with a sheepish grin.

"What?"

"I didn't know you were using your powers."

"If I hadn't, we would have capsized and died." Percy said and looked at Annabeth who also had a sheepish look on her face. Sheesh! Did they really think that he wasn't using his powers? Some friends he had!

"Another smoldering ... Clarisse yelled."

"Yes!" almost all of the demigods shouted.

"Even if you abandoned ship, you would be stuck on the mortal side of the sea. Unfortunately, you would have to stay on board and try to get through to the monstrous side of the sea." Athena said.

"'We have no ... his leather boots."

"Between Charybdis and Scylla..." Travis whistled.
"You met Charybdis, now meet Scylla." Connor completed gleefully.

"We are about to die, and you both are…happy?" Annabeth asked.

"Well, you guys didn't die. So…” Travis trailed off as everyone glared at him. Raising his hands in defeat, he said, "Fine. Killjoys." He whispered the last part.

"'Scylla!' a sailor... snapped him up."

"Damn! He jinxed it for himself." Dakota said, taking a sip of his Kool-Aid.

"It happened so... deck is in flames."

"You guys are on a burning ship…" Travis said.

"...in the middle of the ocean…" Connor said.

"...and literally between Charybdis and Scylla." Travis finished.

"You guys just destroyed the whole idiom. You guys took it way too far." Connor said with awe in his voice.

"Umm… thanks?" Percy said in a confused tone. Annabeth hit his arm and he turned to her and whispered, "What else am I supposed to say? They are crazy."

"'Lifeboats!' Annabeth... the thermos. 'I'll get Tyson.'"

"No. Do not split up." Triton said. "Scylla can only pick one person per head. The longer you stay in a tight group, the longer you have the chance of survival."

"Too late…” Percy said with a sheepish grin and everyone groaned and wondered how he managed to escape this time.

"'You can't!' she said. 'The heat will kill you!'

"Or that." Triton muttered and Amphitrite patted his hand in comfort. On her other side, Poseidon had already captured her hand in a death grip.

"I didn't listen... from my face."

"You were eaten by Scylla?" Thalia shouted at Percy.

"Still alive. Not eaten." Percy said rubbing his head where Thalia had hit him.

"Whatever." Thalia said and grumbled about annoying brothers who wouldn't tell her anything.

"How did you escape her?" Jason asked.

"I kinda poked her in the eye. With my sword." Percy said and everyone laughed, mostly to relieve some of the built up tension.

"Dude, you are like Houdini! Are you his reincarnation or something?" Travis asked.

"Houdini didn't opt for Isle of Blest." Nico spoke up. "Percy is just plain lucky in the worst of situations."
"Well, considering that Percy lands up in the worst of situations, it is only fair to give him good luck to escape those situations." Chiara said and Tyche agreed with her daughter.

"Scylla had somehow ... exploded below me."

"WHAT?" the whole amphitheater exploded with questions and exclamations of disbelief and some people, taking advantage of the bombarding of questions and noise, started talking extremely loudly just to annoy everyone.

Percy whistled loudly and the sound echoed in the whole amphitheater and everyone fell silent.

"We should read." Percy said.

"KAROOM!

... across the ocean."

"Oh good."

"So that's how you all are still alive!"

"So, did all of you cross over into the Sea of Monsters? Because it would suck if after all this you didn't." Leo said.

"Yeah we all crossed." Annabeth said.

"And Tyson? Wasn't he in the engine room?" Rachel asked.

"I am a cyclops. I can survive fire and also water because of daddy." Tyson explained.

"Did you all get separated?" Leo asked.

"Listen to the reading!" Annabeth said and motioned Deimos to read.

"I couldn't see ... able to drown."

Jason narrowed his eyes at the mention of wanting to drown. Why was Percy always in such a pessimistic mood? Jason actually wouldn't have even known of this characteristic of his cousin had they not had the reading. Despite having extremely negative thoughts, Percy was always cracking jokes and making everyone smile and have a good time. He didn't mind being the joker for others. Jason was reminded of Leo. His best friend was also like Percy – always making other laugh and cracking jokes at his own expense and then when he thought no one was looking, he would go back to brooding. The son of Jupiter wondered whether it was a characteristic of every negatively thinking person to make others smile so that no one would think that they were actually sad. Or was it just these two?

"You didn't know that Tyson could survive the blast?" Triton asked.

"No. I thought he was gone." Percy said sadly and Tyson gave him one of his signature hugs, that is, his bone crushing hugs, sometimes literally.

Deimos announced the end of the chapter and passed on the book to his sister, Harmonia.
Makeovers and Spiked Drinks

(A/N - Disclaimer- I do not own Percy Jackson series or the Heroes of Olympus series. All characters and words in bold are owned by Rick Riordan and Hyperion Books for Children and Disney Hyperion. I do not intend to use the text from the books for any other purpose other than for this fanfiction and nor do I intend to make any sort of profit from the story. All rights go to the actual owner and not me. This is only a work of love for the series.)

Ch47 – SoM – Makeovers and Spiked Drinks

"WE CHECK IN TO C.C.'S SPA & RESORT"

Percy groaned and hid his head in Annabeth's princess curls, thinking about how he would die from embarrassment when the whole Guinea pig debacle would come up. Reyna observed the couple and felt a mixture of dread and anticipation build up in her. Dread for what if she was mentioned in this chapter? Although as far as she remembered, she had only talked to Annabeth and the whole book was in Percy's point of view, so she might not be mentioned. She was also anticipating to finally come to know what had happened on that horrible day.

"You guys went to a resort?" Piper asked.

"More importantly, there is a resort in the Sea of Monsters?" Gwen asked.

"Yes." Annabeth said.

"What is a C.C. spa and resort?" Perseus asked.

"Spa and resort in general is a place to relax. Like an inn, except that they are very luxurious." Annabeth said. Percy was still hiding in her curls. "C.C. is the name of the owner of the place that we went to."

"I woke up ... way he could’ve lived."

"I am stronger, brother." Tyson smiled and said to Percy, who had finally come out of his hiding spot in favor of listening and Annabeth may or may not have nudged him in the nose with her shoulder.

"He'd given his ... I lost it."

"Oh good. At least you still have the gifts." Hermes said.

"Extremely good." Percy muttered, grimacing as he thought about what would have happened had they lost the multivitamins. He would forever be entertaining children and eating celery.

"We sailed for ... feel any less lost."

Triton nodded. He too always felt a bit overwhelmed whenever he went to that sea. It just felt wrong being there, despite it being his domain. It wasn't under Poseidon's explicit protection and everything was just so very wrong over there.

"No matter which ... marry Grover earlier."
"You guys arrived right on time." Grover sighed in relief. He didn't want to imagine what would have happened if they hadn't.

"'Yeah,' I said ... me to resent her."

"And I love you." Percy whispered to Annabeth, who repeated it back to him. She would never get tired of hearing those three words.

"Get a room" Thalia whispered from behind, having heard the declaration of love. Percy turned around and stuck his tongue out at Thalia.

"I looked down a... the wisdom goddess!!"

"Sometimes there is wisdom in not knowing something." Athena said and a few gods and Chiron agreed.

"'I know! But ... a dangerous weapon.'"

"What?" Zeus yelled and all of the gods leaned forward in the places, momentarily forgetting that this all had already transpired for the children.

Athena nodded to herself. She knew that there had to be some other reason for her father and uncles to not have any children for almost sixty years... and that was a huge feat.

"What is this prophecy?" Hades asked.

"It will come up when I turn sixteen." Percy said. "This all has already happened for us and well, things turned out alright in the end. Kind of..."

Poseidon nodded and asked for the reading to be continued. But he was busy thinking about his son being a powerful weapon. It was obvious that his son was the prophecy child. All the other big three children were younger to him. The god worried about the numerous problems that his son must have faced and was utterly grateful that his son had managed to live through everything that came his way.

"'Why?'

... Gods, or destroys it.'"
children cannot reveal it unless it has been read out." Knowing that her family was in turmoil, unable to decide what the prophecy could mean for them, she said, "The prophecy is not all bad. It also says that he may protect Olympus or destroy it. I am sure that he protected Olympus, seeing that Percy is already seventeen and the fact that Hermes had come from the future."

"Yes. Hestia is correct." Poseidon said, latching on to his sister's words. "I doubt Hermes would have been able to come here had Olympus been destroyed. Not to forget that the children have won both the wars that they fought in. This prophecy must be about the first war."

Soon, all of the gods agreed as Percy also assured them that the prophecy had already come to pass and that they won both the wars. Zeus, finally having calmed down enough, asked Harmonia to read, but decided to keep an eye on Percy. If he was prophesied to have enormous power and be a weapon, then he may still hold that sort of power. Hmm, maybe that was the reason he could defeat Hercules in the spar. There was no other way that anyone could have defeated Hercules, Zeus thought, still annoyed from the fact that Poseidon was taking every opportunity to gloat about the result of the fight and that Hades was enjoying the gloating.

"I let that ... you came along."

"That must have been a terrible burden." Perseus said.

At once, Percy, Thalia and Nico nodded. Percy thought about how many nights he had stayed awake thinking about the prophecy and having nightmares that he took a wrong decision. Thalia thought about the burden she felt for the few months before she pledged to become a hunter. She had been so ecstatic that she could pass on the prophecy to Percy that she had never even stopped to think about the sudden pressure she must have put on Percy. Nico on the other hand was thinking about how close he had come to becoming the prophecy child. That suffocating thought along with Nico's obsession and crush on Percy had been the reason that he had broken Percy out of his father's dungeons. He hadn't been able to breathe till he knew that Percy was safe and was going to be the prophecy child and not Nico.

"On our port ..."

"Thanks a lot."

"You are not wrong. It would have been safer to just kill you." Zeus said. "I wonder why we did not."

"Do not dare to touch my son." Poseidon growled at Zeus.

"That is why, I suppose." Hades said with a smirk. Everyone knew that as long as Poseidon was around, no god could really hurt his child. And if they did, they would definitely come to regret it for the rest of their immortal lives. That was the one reason not many gods meddled with Poseidon's children, immortal or mortal.

The sea god glared at all the gods for added measure before saying, "Continue."

"'Percy, I don't ... give any hints?'"

"Neither my Oracle, nor her prophecies ever give any hints." Apollo said, offended by such a question.

"Annabeth hesitated."
"That is a trick." Reyna said, unable to stop herself. At everyone's puzzled looks, she elaborated, "That bird and a couple others were enchanted to alert passersby to there being land nearby." She then added, "As to how I know of this, you all will find out. Maybe."

"'Land,' she said. ... a tropical paradise."

"It's a trap?" Connor asked.

"Of sorts."

"Welcome!" said ... banged up rowboat."

"That has to be a trap." Athena murmured. She wondered just how many things her daughter would have to go through before they could reach the cyclops' island and get the Fleece.

Reyna's eyes widened and she thought that the girl had to be her sister, Hylla.

"Then again, ... at or something."

"Interesting theory." Reyna said.

"Is this your ... the young gentleman."

"Ok. What?" Will blinked in confusion.

"Please tell me that you guys ran away from there." Jason said.

"We did." Annabeth said.

"Just not… immediately." Percy completed.

"I hate makeovers." Piper commented and Percy agreed, which earned him quite a few weird looks.

"A what?" I ... begged like a dog."

"Are you kidding me?" a lot of demigods shouted at Percy, who had a sheepish look on his face.

"By gods! Half the time you guys walk into a trap, it's because Percy is hungry." Frank said.

"Yeah. You guys should probably carry the horn of plenty around with you. It will save you from almost everything." Leo said.

"I can't help it, ok? I'm almost always hungry." Percy defended. "Like now. I'm not even kidding. Piper, can I have something?"

After what seemed like forever of all the demigods badgering Piper for some food from the horn of plenty and her finally giving in, Harmonia read, "I guess it ... I forgot about them."

"Oh crap! It's that kind of a trap." Connor said.

"Is it like the Lotus hotel?" Nico asked.

"Worse." Percy shuddered and Annabeth and Reyna suppressed a grin.
"The place was ... and galloping horses."

"Of course you noticed all the water and the slides." Annabeth said.

Percy grinned, then asked, "What did you notice?"

"The architecture and the spa." Annabeth replied like it was the most obvious thing.

"Tyson loved ... Tyson was gone."

Even though Tyson was in front of them, the line moved many. Annabeth leaned in to give Percy a quick peck. Some of the people thought what their life would be like if they suddenly lost a sibling. But they soon abandoned the thought. It was just too painful to even imagine.

"'You okay?" ... did their nails."

"How come there are no guys?" Clarisse asked. "Pretty sure a Navy submarine only has guys on it." She figured out that the vessels that had been mentioned earlier were just too bizarre to be models for tourists. They must have been some of the mortal ships that went missing in the Bermuda Triangle.

"You don't want to know." Percy replied.

"As we headed ... carry me toward her."

"Magic?" Hecate asked, suddenly interested in the happenings of the book.

"If it was in some other language, then how could you understand?" Hazel asked.

Percy shrugged but Reyna answered, "She was singing in the language of magic actually, but somehow everyone could understand what she sang."

"How do you know all of this?" Piper asked. "You were there, weren't you?"

"You'll see." Reyna said cryptically and Enyo wondered what her daughter was doing in a trap.

"We came into ... and whoa."

"Whoa?" Annabeth asked sweetly.

Percy licked his lips and moved away unconsciously. "Please don't kill me?" But he relaxed when he saw her eyes shining with laughter.

"She sat at ... "It's beautiful."

Athena raised her brow. She was very much interested in knowing as to who this person was, who had a beautiful tapestry that enchanted her daughter.

"The woman ... a forest at night."

"Circe?" Hecate gasped. The description sounded like her daughter. She had dark hair and green eyes and loved to weave. And if this was truly a trap, then the boy was in danger, for Circe was known for her treacherous ways with men, regardless of their age.

"Yes." Annabeth answered.
"You appreciate ... My name is C.C.""

"The animals ... sound of them."
"I, for some reason, do not think that they are actually guinea pigs." Hecate said, already knowing that those must be men.

"We introduced ... please this lady."
"Yes, I am afraid that is part of her magic. Mortals strive to please her when they are near her." Hermes said.

All those who knew about Circe and her ways wondered how the children managed to break her hold on them and why wasn't the boy some sort of an animal?

"'Oh, dear,' ... this young gentleman.'"
"Hylla?" Hazel asked. "Queen Hylla of the Amazons?"

"As in Reyna's sister?" Frank asked.

Everyone turned to look at Reyna and Enyo wondered why her daughters were working with Circe. And since when did she have two children? She thought that only Reyna was her daughter and now she was coming to know of some Hylla, who was the queen of the Amazons. Oh this was just wonderful. One of her daughters was a commander of an entire army – camp, whatever, and the other was queen of the Amazons!

"Yes." Reyna answered. "Hylla took us to that island when we were kids to protect me from violence. Then Circe took a liking to her and she became C.C's attendant."

"Small world." Leo whistled.

"'But ...' Annabeth's ... your true self!'"

Athena bit her lower lip and wished that her daughter could overcome the spell laid on them. They needed to get out of that place and get the Fleece.

"Annabeth's eyes ... they were hungry."

"Oh. Oh!" Athena said and then let out a small laugh at Percy's upcoming misfortune.

Nobody except the demigods paid any attention to her. Apparently, her laughing out randomly was a common phenomenon.

"'Well ...' Annabeth ... way you are.'"

"No!" Hermes said. "The minute you admit that, you are in her clutches. There would be no way to fight her off till she accomplishes what she wants."

"How do you know so much about Circe and her ways?" Apollo asked. He already knew, but he loved to embarrass the messenger god in front of the family.

"It is my... uhh... job to know things." Hermes said and glared at Apollo. What happened between
him and Circe was supposed to be a secret and Apollo better not tell that to anyone. He was sworn to secrecy, after all. And honestly, it wasn't even Hermes' fault in the first place. He still didn't understand why she used her magic on him, knowing that it would not last more than a day. Still. That minor goddess was someone he would never cross paths with again. Not if he could help it. Ignoring her weird uncles, Harmonia read, "I fidgeted in ... stayed down straight."

"No zit and your teeth are perfectly imperfect and I love your hair." Annabeth whispered to Percy, who had once again taken up residence in her curls.

"C.C.'s voice ... I knew that."

"None of that matters." Leo said, looking down at his uncool appearance. If he could look like how he did and still land Calypso, he thought, then Percy had nothing to worry over.

"I know." Percy said. "It was the magic talking."

"Who cares? ... good in myself."

Annabeth got furious. Nobody was allowed to make her seaweed brain sad except herself. No one. How could Percy not see anything good in him? He literally oozed it. She may be biased but she knew it was the truth. She hoped that it was only the magic's effect on him and not his real thoughts, because in that case, he was in for a lecture. And probably some make out session. But first lecture. She tried to get her wayward thoughts in line and listen to the reading.

"'There, there,' ... without the faults."

"You do realize that that is you right now?" Annabeth whispered to Percy, who blushed. "Except that your teeth are still crooked and you sometimes have the weirdest clothes. I mean neon green T-shirt, seriously?" she teased him.

"Hey, that was a dare from the Stolls and you know it." Percy replied in the same manner.

Piper looked at Percy and gave a small smile. Percy really had grown into that image. Sure, at first when she had met Percy, she could not understand what all the craze was about back in cabin 10. True, Percy looked like a Greek god and Piper had thought that the girls back at camp were just crazy about his looks. But, over the little time she had known him, she realized that most of the older campers also knew of his friendly nature and that was more attractive than anything in his looks. And being the daughter of goddess of love and beauty, Piper knew that it was the imperfections of a person that made him/her really endearing and beautiful and not the actual physical beauty. Although, that was always a plus.

"'Whoa," I managed.  
... of course ... this.""

"She wasn't wrong. I mean that's what guinea pigs do, right? Eat fruits and run on the wheel?" Annabeth teased Percy, who groaned and hid himself in the crook of her neck. No way was he going to survive the embarrassment of turning into a guinea pig.

"She stepped ... strawberry milk shake."

"Don't drink it." Lou Ellen said. She had read all of the old stories of her crazy half-sister and she knew of what the sorceress did to boys.
"Too late." Annabeth said.

"How… is he even…him?" Lou Ellen asked, pointing at Percy.

"Moly." Hermes said.

"Who is that?" Ares asked.

"Moly the herb. That is not a person. That is the only herb that can protect the consumer from Circe's magic." Hermes informed. "Those multivitamins that I gave must be moly."

"Yes, they were." Annabeth replied. She had understood what the tablets were the moment Circe had revealed herself. Hermes had given the same herb to Odysseus to protect him from Circe's magic.

"'One of these, ... guys at this spa?'"

"You were able to think clearly?" Athena asked. Seeing the offended look on her daughter's face, she added, "It is just that it is extremely hard to break through Circe's magic for even a moment and that too by someone who does not have magic in their bloodline."

Percy sat up straight and shrugged. He didn't know how he had done that, it had just happened without any conscious effort. In any case, he didn't want to dwell on that day. Like ever.

"'Oh, but there ... what's happening?'"

"Poison?" Travis asked.

"No, dummy." Katie said. "Haven't you read the stories about Circe? She turns guys into animals because she hates them."

"Ok seriously, what is wrong with everyone?" Connor said exasperatedly. "Why is everyone hating on guys? Like, what did we ever do to you? First the hunters and now Circe!"

All of the male demigods nodded. Why did everyone hate them so much?

"Don't forget the Amazons." Frank said. He then added, "Well, they don't per say hate us. They just like us as slaves or prisoners more than people."

"In that case, the hunters are better. At least they outright hate us." Chris said, making a face thinking about Amazons.

"Well, all of them technically had a good idea of condemning men, seeing as they started in ancient times. And we all know how the guys from that time were." Rachel said. "I mean… with half the stories that I have read at camp. Phew!"

"True. But they should have changed their outlook over the years, right?" Pollux said. The hunters especially didn't like him because his dad was famous/infamous (depending on whom you ask) for his wild parties.

Chiron interfered and said, "As good as this topic is, I am sure you all can discuss it later." The campers always got into these arguments/debates that somehow all ended as a giant bitching session against the hunters, every time the hunters left camp. And Chiron had seen the look of pure anger and hatred on Artemis and her hunters' faces and he did not need this to turn into a war, because that was what happened whenever anyone started a small debate with all of the gods.
present.

""Don't worry, ... I was ..."

All of the campers were too annoyed with the previous discussion still fresh on their minds that they did not even poke fun at Percy for turning into a guinea pig. Although, had they not been so pissed off, they would have definitely laughed.

A few of the hunters were struggling to not laugh out loud. That was what men deserved, they thought as they looked at some of the gods who looked uncomfortable.

Percy stared at the ground as he heard some chuckles and giggles coming from some of the gods and goddesses and hunters. Surprisingly, none of the campers said anything yet. Either they were trying to be polite, which Percy knew they were definitely not, or they were still angry and lost in thoughts because of their previous conversation, which seemed like a more probable reason. Percy bit his lip and tried to push away the recurring thoughts of inadequacy away. He knew that he had low self-esteem. Chiron had told him that once when he had been feeling particularly down and had been helping the centaur in cleaning up his room from all the papers.

Percy swallowed and looked up at Annabeth, who was busy tracing patterns on their joined hands. He carefully put his arm around her and congratulated himself on not letting go of her hand in the process. Pasting his trademark smile on his face he looked around at the few people who were still chuckling or giggling, showing them that they didn't affect him at all. No one needed to know the truth. He could manage it on his own. He knew he would. He had to. For Annabeth. She didn't deserve someone who couldn't even find confidence in himself. As if feeling his inner turmoil, Annabeth squeezed Percy's hand and looked at him in a questioning manner. Percy just shook his head and gave her one of his genuine smiles.

""A guinea pig," ... almost blacked out."

Annabeth glowered at nothing in particular. How dare Circe hurt Percy?

""None of that, ... hold the sword."

"You do not need your weapon. You need the herbs." Athena said. Why would the boy even think about using his sword? Once again, the goddess could not understand why her daughter was so enchanted by this dimwitted boy. True, he had some moments when he came up with something borderline genius, but most of the times he was just too slow for the goddess' liking. She genuinely wanted to know why her daughter liked him so much.

"I squirmed ... "Miss C.C.?"

"Oh good. Annabeth to the rescue!" Thalia said.

"C.C. cursed ... just wasn't Annabeth."

Percy and Annabeth blushed as some of the boys wolf-whistled and teased the couple.

"So without make-up, huh?" Annabeth teased Percy while blushing herself.

Percy scratched the back of his neck and said, "You look beautiful either way."

"Damn you, Jackson. Stop making all the other boyfriends look so bad." Travis chuckled.

"Mind your own business, Stoll." Percy retorted.
Once the demigods had quieted down after a serious discussion on all the camp boyfriends, Harmonia finally started to read again. Honestly, the only even remotely interested in the conversation was Aphrodite, Eros and the parent of whichever demigod being talked about.

"She looked around ... "A sorceress?"

"Tell me that you were finally able to see what was going on." Rachel said.

"Yup." Annabeth said. "She should not have revealed that she was a sorceress."

"'Yes, my dear.'... shadow of men.'"

"But one of us was not conceited." Annabeth said and then added, "Not as much as the other anyway."

"'I—I don't ... their cage cleaned."

"Ok. That is really disgusting. Not to mention the violation of animal rights right over there." Rachel said, scrunching up her face.

"'Stay with me," ... Amelia Earhart——""

"She should have known better than to ask a daughter of Athena such a question." Piper said in pride.

Annabeth just smiled a smug smile and basked in all the attention and praise that she was getting from various people, especially Percy, who kept whispering something or the other in her ear.

"You had a chance to become immortal and gain knowledge and you gave it up?" Athena asked. She was glad that her daughter did not chose to stay with Circe, but the thirst of knowledge that Annabeth would have had to turn down… How did she manage that? Then the answer was right in front of Athena's eyes as Annabeth looked at Percy for a moment before turning to face Athena and say "Yes."

Athena was bewildered. For a boy and not just any boy but a child of Poseidon, Annabeth had given up a chance of gaining knowledge. How…how was that possible? Obviously, that must not have been the only reason, seeing that the camp was dying, but still…Athena could not understand her daughter at all.

"'Bah! Men get ...The greatest of all."

Some of the demigods turned to Calypso and asked, "You are a sorceress?"

"I can do magic, yes." Calypso replied and Lou Ellen smiled. There was so much that she and her siblings could learn from Calypso.

Leo pulled Calypso closer and beamed in pride. Of course his girl was a powerful person. That must have been the whole reason for the gods to punish and banish her to that stupid island.

"'You ... C.C. ... you ever wanted."

"I already have all that I want." Annabeth whispered, snuggling into Percy. It was starting to get a bit colder as dusk approached.

"You are all sappy today." Percy teased and Annabeth turned to glare at him. He hastily added,
"Uh… can you go back to being sappy. Please?" Giving him an evil eye, Annabeth put her head on his chest and smiled. It was nice to just sit and relax. The cold air around them and the heat from the hearth that was slowly spreading around the amphitheater as it gradually became colder. It was nice knowing that they didn't have to immediately run and save the world. Again. It was just nice. Period. And none of them had anything simple and nice in the past months.

"Annabeth was still ... absolutely powerless."

"That was all acting, wasn't it?" Percy asked.

"Mostly." Annabeth replied and Percy was seriously grateful that Annabeth was strong enough to have snapped out of it and give up such a great opportunity.

"'Let me think ... shut behind her."

"Well, that is one way of showing the prison that the place really is." Thalia muttered.

"The dreamy ... business-suited attendants."

"Was the other one, you?" Percy asked Reyna, who nodded.

"'Well," Circe ... Is that wise?'"

"Yes. Yes it is." Hermes said gleefully.

"You are enjoying this way too much." Apollo whispered to his half-brother.

"I hate her for…"

"Turning you into a pig? I know." Apollo smirked and winked at his gaping brother. "I didn't say it loud enough for anyone else to hear." He reminded Hermes, who was still looking shocked.

"Circe looked ... I'd lost Tyson."

"And that is why you are nothing like those other guinea pigs. Or rather anyone else." Annabeth whispered to Percy. She had obviously caught on to his previous turmoil and knew that it would have something to do with his lack of self-confidence. Percy smiled gratefully at her and kissed her head.

"'What will ... at your throat!'"

"YES!" a lot of shouts came from around the amphitheater. Annabeth just grinned and soaked it all in. Unlike Percy, she had no problem with praises. She loved them. Hubris was, after all, her fatal flaw.

"'How!' Circe yelped.

... nothing for you.'"

Hermes grinned and sat back in his place as Athena and Poseidon looked at him gratefully.

"'Turn Percy ... the vitamins inside.'"

Everyone was smiling. Even Hecate couldn't stop the small smile forming on her lips at the girl's bravery. Circe may be her daughter, but Hecate knew that she may be just a little bit unhinged.
And it was good to see someone who was strong enough to beat the magic, albeit with a bit of help from Hermes.

"'No!' Circe ... of their hair."

Poseidon smiled in relief. Now that his son was back to normal, all they had to do was get off the island without getting hurt and go to Polyphemus' island and hopefully not run into the sirens on the way. The god knew that as of now, Siren Bay was pretty close to the Cyclops Island. He wondered if it had changed in the future and hoped that it did. The children did not need any more distractions.

"'No!' Circe screamed. ... them were barefoot."

"Blackbeard and his crew." Reyna said.

"Blackbeard the pirate?" Nico asked excitedly.

"Uh… yeah…?" Reyna answered.

"Cool. I mean nothing." Nico said and went back to his usual brooding face. Will smiled and filed away this information about Nico and pirates.

"'Argggh!' bellowed ... son of Ares?"

"That witch captured my son!" Ares yelled. Then he said a bit more softly, "So, umm, what has he done?"

"He was a pirate." Percy said.

"Still is." Reyna said. "Although now he is more of a bandit, I think. I don't know. We didn't stay in touch."

"Blackbeard is alive." Nico whispered to himself.

"So, you like pirates?" Will whispered.

"No." Nico said. After some time he gave in and said, "They are awesome, ok?"

"As you say, Di Angelo. As you say." Will whispered back with a smile.

"'Aye, lass," ... celery! Arggghh!"

"That has got to be one of the funniest things I have ever heard." Leo laughed and a few joined him.

"Circe screamed. ... red as it felt."

Aphrodite grinned at the young love. She never had the first person information about any of her favorite love stories. But now she finally got something like that. She thanked the Fates for this opportunity. She could already see from the couple in front of her that this was going to be a love story for ages to come. She was already excited to meddle in it.

"She undid the ... for three centuries."

"Still not fair." Reyna mumbled, thinking about all the days she and her sister had spent in fear of
the pirates. Till they learned to fight and use weapons, that is.

"Which ship?" ... Queen Anne's Revenge."

Poseidon and Triton grinned. They loved the trireme and even though they didn't think this ship was anything like the trireme, it would still be amazing to hear about Percy manning a ship all on his own for the first time.

"Wait, you know how to sail? Like properly?" Travis asked.

"Yup." Percy replied. "I guess it's another son of Poseidon thing."

"That it is." Poseidon said. "The older the ship, the better you will be able to control it. But that is not to say that you cannot control other ships. Just that the older ones are better."

Percy nodded and the remaining seven were grateful that Percy had that particular skill. They had definitely used it on their quest.

"Argggh!" Blackbeard ... and sticks of celery."

"They were still obsessed with celery when we left them, in case you wanted to know." Reyna said.

"Okay…" Leo said. Then he turned to Percy and asked, "How did you manage to get the ship moving if the sails needed to be fixed?"

"That is the real son of Poseidon thing." Annabeth said, thinking about how Percy had managed the ship like it was nothing. And he had looked great doing it. For the first time since they had met, Percy had looked completely at peace when he was sailing.

"I closed my … "Percy, how …""

"Whoa! Magic!" Connor said.

"Something like that." Triton said smugly. "Percy would have absolute control, including telekinetic, over sea vessels."

"Ok! How many abilities do you have, man?" Jason asked in awe and Percy just shrugged.

Most of the gods especially the big three were wondering the same thing, but for different reasons. Poseidon was excited to know more about his son's capabilities, while Zeus was looking at it from a paranoia perspective and Hades was more or less indifferent, other than general curiosity.

"I didn't have … into the Sea of Monsters."

"This was an exciting chapter." Hermes said when Harmonia announced the end of the chapter.

"Hopefully, now you can reach in time to save Grover." Pan said.

"And get the Fleece." Athena reminded.

Hestia then declared that they should take a small break and shift indoors because of nightfall. Everyone grumbled as they got up to follow the orders of the goddess of hearth. Hey, it was a pretty good weather, unlike the usual weather that always had lightning and thundering and storm clouds.
There was a cacophony of voices as everyone talked and tried to stay as close to the hearth as possible. The insides of the throne room were lit up with torches that bathed the whole room in a sort of yellowish glow. Once everyone had settled, Adrestia opted to read.

"ANNABETH TRIES TO SWIM HOME"

"Huh?"

Annabeth looked at Percy in confusion. What chapter was this? As far as she remembered there wasn't any swimming involved. After meeting Circe, they had gone to the island… and she had insisted on hearing the sirens… great! If she was correct, then Percy had seen what the sirens had shown her. And if he had seen it, it would be in the book. She groaned and Percy mouthed 'Sorry' to her. She waved him off. It wasn't his fault that the Fates had chosen his viewpoint to be read out.

"I'd finally ... over the prow."

Percy had a small smile on his face as he remembered how peaceful sailing really was for him. It was one of the few times he could just forget everything and feel the wind, the waves, the serenity that came with being over an open ocean with no destination in mind. It was just him and the sea – just how he liked it. Unfortunately, he had only once sailed in such a peaceful manner. Usually it was all quests and whatnot.

The other seven thought about how peaceful and at ease Percy used to look whenever they sailed over ocean. Many a times they would find him on the deck, simply leaning against the side with eyes closed and a small smile on his face, just like the one he sported right now.

"But now that ... on Circe's Island."

Annabeth frowned. Why was Percy beating himself up over something that wasn't in his control? They had been under a spell of sorts. There would have been no way that he could have gotten control over it. But it was such a Percy thing to do – to take responsibility even when he could possibly have no control over things. He had always been hard on himself. Sometimes she wondered if it was because he needed to please others – not to gain attention or be a people pleaser but to be accepted. He needed to be in the right, just like Jason. But the more Annabeth thought about it, the more she realized that with Jason, being right was a part of leadership. He needed to be right because he needed others to see that he was a good leader. But with Percy, it was like he needed to be right because he had low self-esteem, maybe from the years of being bullied, and he needed others to see that he was strong. That he could rise above everything that the world put in his way. Maybe this was the reason he refused to take help willingly unless there was no other way. He had often pushed himself to the limit before he would accept that he needed help.
Snuggling into his side, Annabeth tried to think about how to help him.

"If it hadn't ... really worried me."

Percy dug his nails into his palm and glared at the floor. Why did his insecurities need to be broadcasted to his friends and the gods? No one needed to see this side of him. Annabeth reached over and opened his palm just before he could dig his nails more into his palm and possibly draw blood. Silently, she just stroked his hand and that was all the support he needed. He still didn't know how everyone would treat him after all of this but he knew that he would manage just fine with her by his side.

"We sailed through ... in a hammock."

"I can understand that." Hazel murmured. She herself wasn't a big fan of sailing and hated the times they had sailed over water during the quest.

"You didn't have problem on this quest." Piper said.

Annabeth shrugged and answered, "I was mostly preoccupied and when you are with Percy, you get used to being in water."

"I watched the ... me or not."

"Oh. The ones in that sea are mostly those who have been punished or they do not belong to our family and are usually supporters of Oceanus." Triton explained. "They would not hurt you but they would not help you either."

"Sometime after ... Far around."

"Good thinking." Hephaestus said absent mindedly. "My security measures would not discriminate between demigods and other nuisances."

"I didn't need ... What happened?"

"That is something that I want to know." Poseidon muttered under his breath as he and Zeus sat up straighter to pay more attention to the story.

Jason glanced at Thalia and didn't know whether he actually wanted to know about this or not. Listening to her story of giving her life for her friends had been harrowing enough. They had sat the previous night and talked more about her life on the run. Even after being siblings, there was an air of uncertainty amongst the two, maybe because they had been separated for so long. But slowly they were heading towards being the siblings that they were.

"It was hard ... find the exit."

Athena clasped her hands together. Why did her daughter have to go through so much? All eyes were on Annabeth and Thalia. And all were wondering about how they managed to fight off a cyclops who was tricking them. Killing a cyclops was a bit harder than other monsters because of their size. The bigger the cyclops, the bigger the injury that would be required to kill him. On top of that, they usually had immense strength and could easily manipulate others if they wanted to. Especially the ones that were Poseidon's spawns. In that aspect, they were exactly like the god, as strength and manipulation were some of his strong points.

"She brushed the ... him in the foot."
"What?!" Leo laughed in amazement. "That is so you." He said to a smirking Annabeth.

Athena had a small proud smile on her face. It wasn't every day that she heard about a demigod child of hers, who at the age of seven, stabbed a grown and manipulating cyclops in the foot. Her smile grew even more as she heard whoops of laughter and praises around the room.

"I stared at ... pretty brave, Annabeth."

"That is true." Thalia said. "It was awesome seeing you do that."

"It really was." Grover said.

"She shook her ... still be alive today."

"Maybe. Maybe not." Thalia said with a shrug. "That was one of the prominent things that happened. There could have been so many other things that we could have done better to reach camp faster."

Annabeth gave a small nod to Thalia and knew that they could have blamed so many things but maybe it was just fated for Thalia to get turned into a tree. Otherwise, the daughter of Zeus would have turned sixteen even before Percy came to camp. The Fates must have already decided the future when that had happened. Back then, she would have blamed anything and everything for Thalia's death, but now… now she understood little bit about the Fates and knew that no matter what they did, the Fates had everything decided. The Fates always won in the end and she didn't have to like it, but she was wise enough to acknowledge that they always had a plan. And somehow that didn't make her feel helpless. It made her feel as if she was working on something larger than her, larger than even the gods and that was enough to keep her moving on.

"We sat on ... another Cyclops?"

"Yes, you would." Annabeth whispered to Percy and he heard her despite the various voices of his friends saying the same thing.

"Maybe now. But back then?" Percy whispered back.

"Yes." Annabeth said. "If it meant saving someone, you would do it in a blink of an eye." An understanding passed between the two as they thought about how Percy fell in Tartarus for her, how he had gone on one quest after another, not knowing what was in store, just because someone needed his help.

Adrestia started reading when the demigods had quieted down.

"I didn't dream ... Traps. Trickery."

"The dead are really adamant on keeping you alive." Hestia noted.

"They would be." Hades said. "If father is coming back, it would wreak havoc in the underworld because of all the monsters. Additionally, the dead can sense such things faster than anyone else."

"Then you would know about father's return." Zeus said in an accusing tone.

Hades narrowed his eyes and addressed his brother. "Yes, I would. But considering all that has already transpired up until now, so would you."

Having no comeback for that, Zeus motioned his granddaughter to read, while Hades rolled his
eyes in exasperation.

"Kronos's golden ... open that coffin."

"No!" Poseidon said and leaned forward. "The one thing he is great at is manipulation. You would think you are doing the right thing but at the end you would be doing whatever he wants you to. Especially in dreams."

Percy and a few other demigods who had been haunted by Kronos nodded their affirmation. Till the very end, the campers had actually played their roles pretty well in Kronos' grand scheme and had it not been for Luke gaining control for a couple of minutes, they all would have been dead.

"I uncapped Riptide. ... I wasn't sure why."

"Still dreaming about me?" Thalia was weirded out. "You got the eye color wrong again."

"At least it was blue that time." Percy replied.

"I think" Morpheus said slowly, "that you already had a feeling or that someone was warning you about what was going to happen."

"What do you mean?" Zeus asked.

"I am not sure yet. I would need to know more about the dream."

""Well?" she asked. ... me and Aegis."

"You have Aegis?" Zeus asked.

"A copy. Yes." Thalia replied, fingerling the silver chains on her wrist.

"You are not in control." Morpheus said. When everyone threw him puzzled looks, he explained, "This is the second time it is mentioned that he is unable to move, which means that he is not in control of whatever is happening or is about to happen."

"Meaning that he might be playing into father's plan all along." Demeter said.

"That makes sense," Hera said and motioned for the reading to be continued. They needed more information on what was happening and apparently the dreams told more than the actual quest.

"She tapped her ... turn and run."

"That is true." Athena said smugly. That shield was as good as having Phobos next to them on the battle field. "But it cannot petrify you."

"I know that now." Percy said.

"The girl ... to warn her."

"Listen to him." Zeus said. He was panicking because even if it was just a dream, the idea of his daughter being near his father was terrifying.

"That is not really me." Thalia said.

"I am not so sure." Morpheus said. Looking at Adrestia, he said, "Please continue reading. I think I know what is happening or rather what the dream is trying to communicate."
"But she didn't... my hammock."

"Morpheus?" Zeus half ordered and half asked.

Morpheus nodded and explained, "I think that the titan lord already knows that the Golden Fleece would bring the girl back."

"The prophecy had said something about the next child of the big three to reach sixteen, correct?" Athena mused. When she got confirmation, she continued, ignoring the annoyed looks Morpheus was throwing her way. "I assume that Thalia is older than Percy. In that case, if she is brought back to life, she would reach sixteen before he would."

"That would give father another person to manipulate." Hades said.

The god of dreams cut in before anyone could say anything else. "Yes. Yes. As I was saying before I was rudely interrupted." He gave a side eye to Athena. "He knows what would happen and I think that it was his plan all along to bring the girl back to life. And from the looks of it, she would do whatever the titan wanted her to, considering that the opening of the sarcophagus revealed a light that surrounded her. This could either mean that she would die or that she would release him. In either case, he would get what he wanted and Percy has no control over it."

Percy, Annabeth and Thalia looked at each other with an impressed look on their faces. That had been so close to what had happened or would have happened. Thalia knew that she would have had a hard time saying no to Luke and Kronos had used that very thing against them. Had she not become a hunter, who knows what would have happened?

Artemis smiled and thought about what Thalia had told her, that she had needed to escape her fate and Artemis had helped her. If what the others were discussing was true, then her half-sister would have needed to become immortal to stop from being manipulated. The goddess said, "That is why you became a hunter, is it not? How old are you?"

Thalia nodded and replied, "A few hours from turning sixteen."

Dakota whistled and said, "That is cutting it close."

Still shook up from this revelation and the interpretation of the dream, Zeus motioned to continue reading.

"Annabeth was shaking... of the Sirens.""

"Go around that one too." Athena said, but then groaned at the sheepish looks on her daughter's and Percy's faces.

"I could barely... singing soon.""

"Don't... don't do what I think you are about to do." Chiron said. The children had not said anything about Sirens to him when they had explained what all had happened on the quest.

"Sorry?" Annabeth said sheepishly.

"I remembered stories... get that chance?""

"No!" Athena said. "It is not always wise to know about everything. Knowledge is not power in itself, but rather how you apply that knowledge. You should know that." But even as she said that, the goddess knew that had there been an option for her to find out what she really wanted, she
herself would not have been able to give up such an opportunity despite the cost. Then how could she expect her daughter to? But like every other parent, she wanted her child to be better than her.

"I know that now." Annabeth told her mother.

Athena nodded in relief. Better late than never. But she was intrigued about what the Sirens had told her daughter and a selfish part of her hoped that it would be mentioned in the book.

"Coming from most ... appeal to her, too."

"You just compared Sirens to documentaries?" Annabeth asked Percy in an amused tone.

"She told me ... and drown myself."

"You are doing something extremely dangerous. It is almost impossible to escape the lure of Sirens once you hear them." Athena said, getting worried about her daughter.

"'Are you trying ... ropes right now.'"

"Do not under any circumstance let my daughter out of your sight." Athena gritted her teeth.

"Not your fault." Annabeth whispered to Percy and held his hand in comfort. It had been a stupid idea on her part to listen to the Sirens. She still didn't know if she had gotten any wiser or not.

"She seemed ... to go faster."

"Yes. Faster and further away from the island." Poseidon said. "Because even if you cannot hear them, you will definitely get curious to do so. That is a part of their magic."

"I still couldn't ... in my ears."

"Do not unplug your ears." Theseus said. He had heard stories about the Sirens and he did not want his brother to face them. Even though he hadn't talked much with his brother, he did like him and didn't want anything horrible to happen to him.

"This is the best example for 'Curiosity killed the cat', isn't it?" Leo said and the demigods around him groaned.

"But satisfaction brought it back." Annabeth pointed out.

"Only a child of Min-Athena would say that. Others would be pleased to not be curious enough to put themselves in danger." Reyna said.

"Nah!" Thalia said. "You wanna know the number of times Percy had been in danger just because he was curious?"

"A lot." Grover butted in and Percy just shrugged when some of the people who had heard this exchange looked at him.

"Annabeth was ... fight a song?"

"I don't even remember any of this." Annabeth said.

"I tried hard... to disarm her."

"How could you let her out of your sight? How could you even forget to disarm her?" Athena
shouted at Percy.

"Enough, Athena. It was your daughter who wanted to hear the Sirens. Do not blame my boy." Poseidon glared at Athena and motioned Adrestia to continue.

"I rushed ... the jagged rocks."

"How did you guys escape this?" Piper asked.

"This one was all Percy." Annabeth said in relief. She hadn't even known the danger she had been heading towards. At that point, all she had cared about was reaching the island to her parents and Luke. Nothing else had mattered.

"I screamed her ... and yelled, "Stay!!"

"That would work on the ship? That sounds like you are ordering a dog." Chris said.

"Yup." Percy said. "As long as I think about where I want the ship to be, it will be there."

"That is so cool." Jason said and Percy grinned at him.

"Then I jumped ... fangs of rock."

There were a couple of sharp intakes of breath around the room as everyone started catching up with the amount of danger the children were in. Athena looked at her daughter and Percy and was internally grateful that they had been together. This was one of the few times that being a child of Poseidon might be a good thing in her books.

"I had no ... black volcanic sand."

"If you get any closer to the island, the Sirens would descend on you." Demeter said and Athena glared at the goddess. She was the reason that the Sirens even existed in the first place. Obviously, the original intent of turning the sea nymphs into half-birds had been less sinister, but Athena didn't care about whom she blamed. Her daughter was in danger.

"I looked around ... heads keep changing."

"Did not need to know that." Travis said.

"What do you mean that the heads keep changing?" Rachel asked.

"The Sirens can turn into whomsoever you desire to see at that time. Anyone who can make you feel safe." Chiron explained. "That is how they hunt. They lure you with a false sense of security and once you are close enough, they eat you."

"Umm… okay…" Rachel said hesitantly.

"I couldn't hear ... on Monster Donuts."

Despite the danger that they were reading about, Chiron couldn't help but smile as he thought about how Percy had considered him as one of the people who could make the boy feel safe. Back then, they had not been as close as they were now, seeing that most of Percy's time at camp was spent on the quest. It felt nice to get confirmation that the children viewed him as more than a teacher.
"Annabeth swam toward ... been seeing them."

Annabeth stiffened, knowing what was to come next and Percy drew reassuring circles on her hand, signaling that he was there for her.

"Three people ... goddess Athena."

Athena sighed softly and understood where her daughter was coming from. Obviously, the child would want her parents to be together and looking at all the other children and the wistful look on their faces, all of them too wished of the same thing. The goddess knew little of family, seeing that she belonged to the most messed up family in all of eternity. She had been brought up by her cousin, for crying out loud. But she too had found herself wishing that her parents were together, when she was younger anyway. Now she knew that things were best the way they were, even if hardly anyone was happy with the state of their humongous family.

"Next to them sat a young man ... Luke."

"You still liked Luke?" Piper whispered over Jason and Thalia to Annabeth, who shrugged.

"The whole scene ... she'd ever wanted."

"Wistful thinking." Annabeth whispered to Percy. "That's what it was."

"Well, at least you did become an architect for Olympus. That part wasn't so much wistful after all." Percy reassured her.

"That I did." Annabeth whispered.

"That description!" Leo whistled. "I wanna see the new Olympus that you designed."

"That's only like 5% done or something before they went on lockdown." Annabeth said. "And I doubt the gods would have waited for almost a year for me to start the work again."

"Their loss." Percy said proudly and with finality. He raised a brow in challenge to a couple of gods who were staring at him, till they all looked away.

"I blinked hard. ... but I held on."

Annabeth shook with silent laughter. "I kicked you in the face?" she laughed, her tone somewhere between amusement and apologetic.

"Not for the last time." Percy said, rubbing his jaw, where Annabeth had accidently kicked him when they had been climbing the Climbing Wall a couple of days ago.

"Sorry." She didn't sound sorry in the least.

"I willed the ... to fight again."

"Sound does not travel well in water, so the song would not be heard underwater. You should stay underwater." Athena said and hoped that the boy had had enough knowledge to understand such simple things.

"The water! Sound didn't travel well underwater."

Athena rolled her eyes at Poseidon, who was looking at her as if to say that his son was not stupid.
But the goddess was slowly realizing that on her own. The boy only pretended to be stupid or rather was feigning ignorance despite knowing many things. His observation skills were superior to most and even though he was slow in processing things, he somehow always came out on top, with or without help from others. So, maybe he was not up to her standards, not many were, but he was better than what she had expected and it seemed like she would have to put up with that.

"If I could... minor problem."

"I love how you think that being unable to breathe is a minor problem." Hermes said sarcastically.

"Thanks." Percy replied with mock seriousness.

"He can keep her alive if he figures out how to create a film of air around her." Amphitrite said.

"I grabbed her ... pulled toward me."

"A bubble of air would also work." Triton said.

"So, that's how you create a bubble? You just imagine them coming to you?" Annabeth asked.

"Yup. There are a lot of bubbles in the ocean." Percy replied.

"The sea obeyed. ... the water."

"I love your powers." Leo said.

"I did not know that we could do that – keep someone else alive in the sea." Theseus said. Maybe he could learn a few tricks from his brother. It didn't seem like Percy needed any learning in the powers department. He had only known about being a demigod for about a year and still had discovered a good number of powers. Theseus was sure that he hadn't discovered as much as Percy had. But then again, he depended on his strength rather than powers, like Hercules, while Percy used mostly his powers and his sword fighting skills.

"She gasped and ... I told them."

"They most probably spread rumors after they left you," Triton said.

"They did." Percy said but did not elaborate.

"Fish sound more fun than I thought possible." Piper said.

"They are." Triton said.

"They swam off, ... of Siren Bay."

"Did that happen?" Annabeth asked incredulously.

"Yup." Percy and Tyson said in unison. Tyson continued, "There were so many stories to hear about you both."

"And all of them false. Well... most of them." Percy said.

"'I'll get us ... just to be sure."

"Better to be safe than sorry." Artemis said.
Athena just sighed in relief that her daughter was out of danger and aboard the ship.

"We sailed until ... temptation would be."

Annabeth shuddered as she remembered that feeling. The feeling was indescribable. In all these years, she had not once had any other experience that she could compare to that. It was like being pulled in by gravity like in a black hole, not that she knew what that felt like. But she knew what it felt like to be pulled in by Tartarus and maybe she could compare the two, except that she hadn't been willing in the whole falling into the pit scenario.

"I didn't want ... your parents."

"I don't think I ever told you, but that dream city was awesome." Percy whispered and Annabeth whispered her thanks.

"She blushed. ... flaw is hubris."

"That is a horrible flaw to have." Nemesis said. "Pride can be the downfall of many."

"It was." Annabeth whispered in a haunted voice.

"What do you mean?" Percy asked.

"Before we fell..." Annabeth said. "If I had not taunted her and had just waited for you all to come or figure out a way to get out of there, then I probably would have noticed that I was trapped in her webs."

Percy rubbed her arm and whispered, "It does not matter now. Ok? Don't think about it anymore." After a pause, he added, "So was mine. Fatal flaw, I mean. Personal loyalty, right? I willingly went in after you."

Annabeth looked up at Percy with a haunted look in her eyes and he kissed her forehead, hoping to push away her fear and demons. "They are fatal for a reason, right? But we still made it. But that was the last time I'm letting you out of my sight on a quest."

"Ditto." She whispered back and leaned into him. Never again would a quest or a god separate them.

"I blinked. 'That brown stuff they spread on veggie sandwiches?""

"Wow!" Piper burst out laughing and was joined by other demigods while the gods just looked at Percy in exasperation.

"Did I just compare hummus and hubris?" Percy was blushing as he asked Annabeth.

"Yes, yes you did, Seaweed Brain." Annabeth replied with a smile. She had completely forgotten about this. He could be such a Seaweed Brain sometimes, she thought fondly.

"She rolled ... than hummus?"

"Nothing. I hate that stuff. It's so... weird." Leo said in disgust and Percy leaned over to give him a high five.

"'Hubris means ..."
"I'm listening."

"The no homework got your attention, didn't it?" Jason asked.

"Who wouldn't want no homework?" Percy replied and a chorus of agreements ran amongst the demigods while Chiron fondly shook his head.

"'I mean, the ... of be a nightmare.'"

"That is true."

"Yup."

"It would be chaos."

"I can just feel the love, guys!" Percy said as other demigods joined in. Percy thought about the one time he had sat on his father's throne to contact him and the exhilarating feeling and the rush of power that came with it. Maybe running the world felt like that for the gods. But it was too much of a responsibility. Now, the only responsibility Percy wanted was of submitting projects and homework and his soon-to-be-born baby sister and his parents and Annabeth and his friends and... yeah, he was never getting away from his other responsibilities and as long it didn't involve the fate of the world in his hands, he was quite alright with it.

"I think it would be too much of a burden. The weight of the world on your shoulders and all that." Jason said. As much as he loved being in charge, the whole idea of running the world seemed so daunting.

"That is not a good feeling." Annabeth and Percy said in unison, knowing how the weight actually felt like.

"It is too much of a responsibility and burden." Hestia said. She and some of the other gods, mainly the Olympians, had been listening in to the children's conversations. "That is the whole reason everything was divided into domains for separate gods."

"I thought it was so that we could keep him in check." Hades said, jabbing his thumb towards Zeus, who started protesting immediately.

"It was to keep all three of you in check." Hera said. Now all of the three brothers started talking over each other about how responsible they were and that they didn't need to be kept an eye on. No one was buying their explanations.

Hestia rolled her eyes at her brothers and said, "It was to make sure that no single one of us gets too much power and tip the balance that we made."

"Still the more responsible and mature one." Zeus grumbled, but his siblings heard him and gave him weirded out looks. The king of gods was nowhere close to being mature. But he did try his best to run the world. Unfortunately, his best could be improved.

Adrestia made sure that the Olympians were done with their conversation of running the world and the contest between the three elder gods about responsibilities, before reading, "'Then you're lucky. ... 'fatal' for nothing.'"

"True." Percy, Annabeth and Nico said.

"Do you know your fatal flaw now?" Piper asked, wondering what hers was.
"Yes." Percy said.

"It is personal loyalty, is it not?" Athena asked, already knowing the answer. She felt compelled to explain, "It is just that your previous quest was all about getting your mother back and now in this quest you are trying to save your friend and the camp. It sounds like personal loyalty." She didn't add that Percy had fallen in Tartarus for her daughter.

"Yes." Percy said hesitantly. Even though the gods from the future knew about it, many of his friends didn't. He didn't know whether they should even know about it or not, but now that Annabeth's fatal flaw was out in the open, he didn't mind giving her company.

"It is for some of my children." Poseidon said. He didn't mention that it was very rare for a demigod to have loyalty as a flaw. Usually, his children were reckless or destructive. He and many other gods were uncomfortable with this conversation because the fatal flaws of their children were usually a reflection of the god's own shortcomings. But, unfortunately for the gods, the demigods were already well into the discussion of fatal flaws.

"What do you think is mine?" Travis asked no one in particular.

"Stupidity?" Clarisse jested.

"Do we have the same?" Connor asked, ignoring Clarisse.

"That cannot be." Athena said, ever ready to explain things. "It does not depend on your parent but on your own nature."

"Which is a part of the parent's nature, anyway." Hestia said.

"Yes, it is. But not all of my children would have hubris. That depends on their own nature and priorities. Like most of Poseidon's children would have recklessness as fatal flaw or that most of Zeus' children would be unable to give up power or..."

"Yes, that is quite enough. It is getting late. We should finish the chapter and break for dinner." Zeus butted in before his daughter would go around revealing every god's failings.

"I thought about ... so far away."

"Do blue waffles smell different than normal waffles?" Leo asked, wanting to take away the awkwardness that had enveloped them at the mention of their parents being together. It was one of the few things that all of the demigods wanted.

"Yes." Percy said, grateful for the little distraction. "They are better! When we go back, I'll make blue waffles and you can see for yourself."

"You cook? Edible stuff?" Thalia teased. She knew that Percy was a decent cook, thanks to all the time he spent with his mother.

"Of course. You liked the pasta I made."

"I never said that."

"You never denied it."

Annabeth laughed at Thalia's lack of comeback. It was always fun to watch the two throw insults at each other. That is until the big guns, aka, lightning and water powers came into play.
"Maybe I didn't want to hurt your feelings." Thalia said, not wanting to back down.

Percy just grinned at her, knowing that he won this round. "I win. Nothing you say can change that."

"This round, kelp head. This round."

Hestia stifled her laugh. This little banter reminded her of a verbal match between Zeus and Poseidon over who had the better hair. Honestly, those two could fight over literally anything and everything. Shaking her head, the goddess asked Adrestia to read.

"So was it ... might join him."

"Way too many." Chris said darkly.

And with that the seriousness of the whole situation came crashing down on the Olympians. How many of their children had left them to join the titan? How many of them had died protecting the wrong side?

"H-how many?" Apollo asked.

"Even we don't know the exact number. Many left from camp and even more never even made it to camp." Annabeth replied.

"Why?" Demeter asked.

The demigods looked at each other and Katie answered her mother, "Abandonment? Brainwashing? Anger? Resentment? Everyone had their own reasons."

Some gods looked sad while some looked furious and some were still processing the information. Many questioned how someone could leave the gods because of any reason. Nothing seemed justified enough for them. The demigods and Chiron didn't have the heart to remind the gods that many of them had also joined Kronos because of the same reason that the demigods did.

"I thought about ... that coffin lid?"


"Could be. Kronos did say that he had to convince Luke for a long time to host him. He might have been doing that even then." Percy replied. So many of the things that had happened now made sense. And he knew that as they would continue reading, they would find out just how well thought out Kronos' plan had been. That guy had been playing a different game all along and none of the demigods or the gods had seen that.

"Suddenly Annabeth's ... of the Cyclops."

"Finally! I was wondering if you guys would ever make it in time." Frank said.

"They cut it pretty close." Grover bleated.

"Alright. Since the chapter is done, let us break for dinner tonight and continue with the reading tomorrow." Zeus announced when Adrestia signaled the end of the chapter.

As soon as the announcement was done, the demigods broke out in excited chatter, happy for the extra time they would get to roam around the place and not be cooped up in one place, listening to
the books.
Building Bridges

(A/N - I do not own PJo. RR does.

So, this is a break chapter and the only reason it took so long to post it is because of damn writer's block. Honestly spent like half a day staring at the document, trying to find some sort of inspiration from somewhere. And...this is the end product. I really hope the characters are not OOC. I really tried to make sure that they aren't.

Anyway, hope you guys like the chapter.)

Ch49 – SoM – Building Bridges

Dinner was a lively but short affair. None of the demigods wanted to spend much time at dinner but rather wanted to play the board games that Theseus had been raving about. And so after the dinner, a couple of minor gods had made the board games appear. Now, the children sat in circles around the various games, some playing an ancient version of chess, checkers or even tic-tac-toe. But the most crowd was gathered around a board game of petteia that Annabeth and Theseus were playing. It was a strategy/war game and it was right up Annabeth's alley.

Percy was sat between the two opponents, not knowing whom to side. Normally, it wouldn't be an issue. Annabeth vs anyone one, pfft, easy answer – always Annabeth. But now, even for a short time, he got to experience having a demigod sibling, even though the sibling had made some questionable life choices, but then almost everyone at some point did something or the other that was against someone else's morals. Percy decided to let it go for the time being and enjoy having a sibling.

Percy and everyone else who had been watching the game, raised a brow when Theseus managed to capture two of Annabeth's pawns, back to back. The only ones who did not seem fazed were Hercules and Perseus, who had dropped their game of checkers to watch this particular game. Percy remembered that Theseus was well known for intelligence and the guy had to be pretty good at strategies if he had become a king and gotten Athena's favor. Still, Percy knew there had to be a reason that Annabeth let two pawns be sacrificed. Concentrating on the board, he tried to find out her game plan. Over the years of planning Capture the Flag strategies and battle plans with her, the son of Poseidon had gotten pretty good with figuring out her motives. So, he wasn't surprised when he saw her subtly trying to block about five of Theseus' pieces in one go. It was one of the earlier Capture the Flag strategies that they had planned out together, only a bit tweaked to fit the game rules.

Apparently, he wasn't the only one who had figured it out because in his next move, Theseus moved one his pawns to block his opponent's oncoming attack. Glancing up, the king saw his younger half-brother's impassive face, but his eyes held mirth at the move. Percy's eyes darted towards Annabeth and Theseus too looked at the girl who seemed unperturbed by this new development. But the king of Athens knew how to read people. He had learned that trick over the years and knew that the girl had been banking on the area he had just captured. She didn't show any signs of frustration but her eyes had hardened just a bit and she was digging one her nails into her thigh, unnoticeable to many but he didn't have any problem picking up the nervous traits.

Feeling Percy's eyes on him, Theseus turned to look at his brother again. The boy had a brooding look on his face, which was his resting face. Theseus would know. They shared the same expressions. It was his eyes that gave him away. They were really expressive and reminded
Theseus of a calm sea, but he knew that it could turn into a tsunami in less than a second under the right circumstances. He had seen the same look upon his siblings when he had been staying at the camp. Right now, those eyes were in silent awe of his move. Quickly darting his eyes between Percy and the empty place next to him, Theseus silently asked his brother to join him. There was a slight hesitation in Percy's eyes and the king knew that the boy didn't want to leave his girl's side, even though he wasn't exactly sitting next to her. He seemed torn between love and blood-relation. Even then, after a moment, Percy leaned a bit towards Theseus and went back to observing the board and the older brother knew that at least for the duration of the reading, he had gotten a sibling. It had been years since he had a younger sibling to talk to. He had been close to two of his younger siblings – a brother and a sister, but both had not survived a fight where they had been ambushed by many of their father's and even some of Theseus' enemies. Pushing the thoughts of grief away, he turned back to the game, just in time to see Annabeth make her move.

It wasn't until after another fifteen minutes that Annabeth had finally been able to capture Theseus' piece and block the others, effectively winning the game. Even then, it had been a close match and had he seen the trap she had laid down for him, a second before making his move, he would have most probably drawn the game. He blamed the superior Athena genes for Annabeth's victory.

"Good game." Percy said to his brother with a grin. Annabeth was explaining her trap to Reyna and Gwen, in hushed tones.

"Yes, it was. I suppose I should have moved right instead of left." Theseus replied, excited to talk to Percy.

"Yup." Came the reply. "You saw the trap?"

"Yes. A moment too late, though."

"At least you saw it. Most of the times I don't even realize that I'm walking into a trap."

"Yes, that is pretty evident from the reading." Theseus grinned, thinking about the number of times they had read about Percy walking into a trap and then realizing that it was a trap.

Percy blushed and rubbed the back of his neck and tried to make some excuses before shrugging his shoulders. They continued talking about the game and Theseus told Percy about how he usually played the game against his advisors or Perseus, to pick their brains about different strategies. They were interrupted when Perseus wanted an opponent for the game and Theseus asked if Percy wanted to play the round.

That was how they found themselves ten minutes later with Percy and Perseus on opposite ends, playing a game of petteia. Not many knew whom to support. On one hand many of the demigods had fought under Percy's guidance, but that was on an actual battle field and they didn't know whether he would be any good in a board game. And no one except the heroes of old knew about the extent of Perseus' strategical prowess.

Theseus now understood Percy's previous hesitation of choosing a side. On one hand was his cousin, a person whom he was extremely close to and on the other hand was his own brother and even though he didn't know him, he felt compelled to support him. Sighing, he continued sitting in between the two, opposite Annabeth, who had been warned not to help out Percy during the game.

The round was played faster than what Annabeth and Theseus had been playing, but it still held the same level of well thought moves and strategies. The older son of Poseidon learned another thing about his newly found brother. Percy just could not sit still and quiet. During the entire game, he kept twitching or shaking his leg and making comments and holding conversations with Jason and...
Nico, who had come to watch the game. Even then, his concentration from the game didn't waver. If anything, it amazed many, who had thought that Percy couldn't play the game or be any good at it. In the end, the game was a draw, because even after losing more pieces than his cousin, Percy had somehow been able to block the remaining pawns of Perseus.

Almost two hours and multiple games and chats later, the demigods decided to leave the hall and Theseus, Percy and Tyson walked back to Poseidon's palace, animatedly talking about the games and sharing stories. Theseus still didn't feel comfortable around the cyclops, but seeing how at ease all the other demigods were and reading about Tyson's bravery in the book, he thought of giving the cyclops a chance.

Sighing, the buff girl tied her hair in a bun and leaned against the balcony railing. She looked down at her wrist watch and sighed again. Only 12.30 am. She should probably try to get some sleep. But sleep was an alien concept. It had been successfully avoiding her for almost a week now and being in a new place was not good for her nerves. Even if the said place was her father's palace and especially if the said father had no reason to like her.

She summoned her spear – the third and the latest, given to her by Ares after she had defeated the drakon during the war and destroyed Maimer in the process. Oh, she knew what the others had called it, knew that not many cared for her unless they needed to win a fight, but she also knew that she couldn't care because caring meant showing weakness and no child of Ares was weak.

Clarisse smiled as the tip sparkled with energy and electricity. It held a bit of Ares' power and could be summoned at will, which meant that she didn't need to worry about carrying it everywhere. Thanks to Ares’ dislike towards Percy, he had wanted Clarisse to have a better weapon or at least of equal standing, so the spear could also never get lost, just like Riptide. She ran her fingers across the middle of the spear handle, where her name had been engraved. A little gift from Ares for being the one of his best fighters – his words, not hers. It had been delivered to her house in Phoenix when she had went back after the war.

She had tried everything to tire herself out so as to get some sleep, including races with the Stoll brothers, who were one of the fastest runners at camp, walking around with Chris and even chatting with Frank for the past hour, before the poor kid had almost dozed off mid-sentence. She realized that he wasn't all that bad except that he wasn't fond of war and fighting and basically everything that Ares stood for. Still, from what she had heard, he was an amazing fighter and an even better shot. He was probably the only child of Ares/Mars who liked archery better than combat, she thought with a smirk.

Clarisse looked around her. Satisfied with the space in the balcony, she took a fighting stance and swung her spear. Within seconds, she picked up pace and to anyone looking at her, it would look like she was fighting for her life. Fighting was the only that cleared her mind and made her feel at peace. It might be weird for other demigods to fight and feel peace, but all children of Ares could relate to her. Demigods were not made for sitting and reading. No, they were made to move around and fight and help others. Being unable to do any of those for the past few days was getting on her nerves. She thought of asking Frank or Annabeth to spar with her the next day. Normally, she preferred to fight with Percy, but Annabeth's new weapon was too tempting to fight against and she needed to see for herself how good Frank really was. Unknown to the demigod, who was lost in her own world as she continued her lethal dance around the balcony, a figure watched her from the shadows in the palace.

Ares had been thinking of retiring for the day thanks to Aphrodite still not talking to him for being
a horrible father to his daughter in the future. He still did not understand why he had behaved in such a manner. He had never ever physically threatened a child of his. Sure, he got angry with them and pushed them and shouted at them, but only because he wanted his children to be better fighters, to be always prepared, to be worthy of something and not to just rely on his name and influence to get ahead in life, like many other demigods did. And he really did not know how to handle a daughter of his, seeing that he hadn't had any demigod daughters up until now.

Hermes had suggested talking to Clarisse to understand what had happened. At that time, Ares had been a second away from punching his annoying, younger half-brother. Who did he think he was, telling Ares how to handle his own child? But Ares had held back, only because Aphrodite had been keeping an eye on him and he didn't want to get into her bad books any more than he already was.

Now, as the god watched his daughter practice in the middle of the night, he thought back to what Hermes had said. Maybe he should talk to her. If anyone knew how to handle children, it was Hermes. That much Ares could appreciate. The messenger had always had the best relationships with his children, both mortal and immortal. And yet, two of his children had betrayed the gods, Ares thought ruefully.

The god ran his hand through his short hair and took a few steps forward, far enough to not startle Clarisse but close enough to see her moves properly. He couldn't help but smile proudly at her precise moves, some of which he recognized and some which had to have been made up later in the future. He could almost imagine her fight with his blessing. She was that good! Even then, he could see some mistakes that she made, whether they were mistakes in her form itself or whether she didn't care to correct them because it was practice, the god didn't know.

Unable to stop himself, when he saw a problem with Clarisse's stance, he suggested, "Keep your left knee bended and then jump forward. You will have a farther reach."

At once, Clarisse turned to her left, her spear crackling with red electricity and her face fierce as if in a real battle. She relaxed her stance once she recognized her father. Standing straight, she politely said, "I do know that, father. Thank you. But, I have an injury in my left leg."

She had hurt her leg while helping around the camp after the war. Normally, the Apollo kids would fix it up, no problem, but ever since the war, they had had their hands full and were perpetually tired. The whole camp knew of how much those children needed their rest, but the injured still needed to be fixed. So, she had asked Kayla to only heal any long lasting damage and the remaining could heal on its own.

Raising an eyebrow, Ares waved his right hand in Clarisse's general direction and she felt a sort of tingling in her body. A few seconds later, all of her soreness and burns and scratches and cuts received during the past couple of weeks were healed. She felt better than she had in weeks.

"Thank you, father." Clarisse said with a genuine smile.

Ares nodded his acknowledgement and asked, "Did it happen during the war? Why were you not healed?"

The god wanted an opening, anything, to be able to talk to his daughter. Talking was not his strongest point. He was no good with words. He felt emotions. But that was the extent of it. He could hardly act on it or even talk about anything other than war, fighting, parties or games with anyone. Only the goddess of love knew how to get him to talk about anything else. Now, to actually try and do something like that on his own, was scary to say the least. He tried to control the anger that he felt from the fear of having to hold a conversation. He would rather take on a
"No. Actually, it happened when I was helping around the camp in clearing up after the war. One of the roofs caved in and I got trapped under it. The medics could have healed me completely but they all were tired and had to heal others too." Clarisse explained, clutching her spear as a lifeline. Her father's presence itself was enough to unnerve her. For the longest time, Ares had been her personal fear, but ever since the encounter with Phobos and Deimos, she had gotten better at controlling this irrational fear. She had to remind herself that this was her father and he would not hurt her. Probably. Hopefully.

Ares nodded and thought that that would have been the case if the conditions of the other demigods was anything to go by. When he had first seen the children and was told that they were from the future, one of his first thoughts had been about the condition of the children. They all had looked so weary and tired and he could recognize their looks, their stances from those he had seen in the aftermath of wars. He hadn't been really surprised when the gods were informed of there being wars in the future. Nothing short of war could have hardened the children to such an extent. Still, two wars and one of them against Kronos himself, was something that no child should have to go through. War was not for children and he would know. He was the god of war, after all. But here, the poor children were dragged into it. He could acknowledge the strength and resolve that each child had, even that upstart son of Poseidon.

Changing the subject, Ares questioned, "So, you prefer spear to other weapons? I thought that son of Poseidon had destroyed your electric spear."

"Yes, I do. Percy had destroyed the first spear that I had. Then you had given me another spear that got destroyed in the first war. This is the third spear that you have gifted to me as a reward for slaying the drakon." Clarisse said.

Three gifts to one child! She was something special in that case, Ares thought to himself. He was shocked that he would keep on gifting spears to his daughter. Normally, if he had gifted something to any child of his, he would not give them something if the original gift was destroyed or lost. This again brought him back to his original thoughts regarding his behavior towards her.

"You must be something really special if I have given you three spears." Ares said with a small smile. "And this one," Ares nodded towards the spear that his daughter was holding, "this one is charged with my own power, is it not?"

Clarisse nodded and wondered whether she should will away the spear or what. She was confused that Ares was even talking with her, especially when this Ares knew nothing about her or her achievements. Her confusion was cleared when a few moments later Ares asked if he could see her practice again. And so she spent the next half an hour showing off (just a teensy bit) to Ares, with him correcting her whenever she made a mistake or showing her a better way of completing the same move. Had it been anyone else correcting her, she would have probably hit them by now, but with her father, it almost felt like he cared. All in all, it was nice.

Ares felt the shift in Clarisse's energy before it started affecting her moves. He had already noticed that she had looked and felt tired when he had been talking with her. Only now, her body was catching up with her mind's fatigue. The god wondered whether his daughter had slept recently or not. It didn't look like she had. Must be the side effects of war. He knew all about the lingering nightmares and visions that stuck with the warriors even years after a war had taken place. He himself had sometimes experienced them. He could only imagine how much worse it would be for a child, who had to fight two wars within a single year. Maybe this was why Clarisse had actually been in the balcony rather than in her room.
"Alright. That is enough for now." Ares ordered and watched as Clarisse completed the strike and stopped and faced him. Sometime during the little session that they had going, it had turned into training from practice. Smiling, Ares said proudly, "You are good, Clarisse. You are really good."

"Thank you father." Clarisse said, feeling a bit out of breath but so much better than she had been feeling ever since that dreaded chapter with her talk with Ares had been read out. It almost felt like talking to her father from her time, who was actually proud of her. After that praise in front of the whole of Olympus, she had started to feel accepted by her father. And later when she had remembered that she had been blessed by him, it had made her day. After all, Ares didn't go around blessing just anyone.

"You should go and rest. You seem very tired." Ares said as he snuffed out the torches with a snap of his fingers, bathing the two of them in moonlight.

Clarisse nodded and bowed to Ares before willing away her spear and walking back into the palace. She stopped when she heard Ares calling her name. Turning around, she realized that the god looked uncomfortable.

Ares pursed his lips and then said, "About earlier… what had been read out?"

Clarisse gritted her teeth. Just when she had thought that she wouldn't have to think about it, her father had to bring the wretched chapter up. Just her luck!

Shaking his head, as if to clear his thoughts, Ares continued, "I do not understand why I did that. Daughter, understand that I do not behave like that." Ares took a deep breath. How was he supposed to explain anything to Clarisse when he himself was at a loss for words? Why was it so hard to say… well, anything?

"It is alright, father." Clarisse said, hoping to get away from the awkwardness and the reminder of not-so-pleasant feelings.

Ares gritted his teeth and swallowed. It felt like something was constricting his throat, making it difficult to swallow and breath. He somehow resisted rubbing his chest where it felt like some sort of weight had been deposited. He knew that he had two options. Either take the exit that his daughter was offering him or complete his thoughts. In either case, he knew that this paralyzing feeling would go away. Ares almost let the conversation come to a stop. It was so tempting to just let go and never bring it up, but something stopped him. He remembered how Aphrodite had told him to sort it out. He doubted anything would be sorted out if he left now.

So, he bit his tongue and choked out, "I just… I wish I knew the circumstances. Maybe…then I could understand…" The god bit the inside of his cheek and knew what he had to say next. He knew that he needed to say it but that didn't make it any easier. He was a god! He didn't owe anyone any explanation for what he did. Well, except Zeus and Hera and sometimes Aphrodite. But not to a demigod! Never to a demigod. But this was his daughter, his child. And he had wronged her and even if he didn't know the actual reasons, the words still needed to be said. Somehow, he knew that it was the right thing to do. So, he bit the proverbial bullet and said in an emotionally constricted voice, "I am sorry for what I had done."

The god of war waited with bated breath for his daughter to say something. He didn't need any acknowledgement. His deed was done. He said what he had needed to and could leave. But now that the words had been said, he could not find it in himself to leave at all. He needed with something fierce, for his daughter to be okay with what he had said. And so he waited.

Off on a tangent, he thought that he must have definitely burned something in his room. All these
emotional things and talking was not his forte. So, all the anxiousness and anger that he had felt, had been directed towards something expendable in his room.

Clarisse was stupefied. Did Ares just apologize to her? What was happening? Was her father alright? She held her breath as the words sunk in her head and she realized the enormity of what had happened. Looking at Ares, the demigod realized that he was waiting for some sort of an answer or acknowledgement. She could not even fathom how hard it must have been to say something like that. She knew she was more like her father and if she had difficulty in saying anything beyond flippant comments, then her father must be having it a hundred times worse. Once this realization sunk in, Clarisse could not stop the hesitant smile that formed on her face.

Nodding nervously, Clarisse said softly, "I… appreciate it. It is alright." Almost as an afterthought, she added in a slight whisper, "Thank you father."

Ares released the breath he didn't know he had been holding. Giving a half smile, partly out of relief and partly out of love for his daughter, the god walked towards Clarisse and said, "You should really go to bed now." Stopping in front of her, Ares touched her forehead and said, "This will ensure dreamless sleep till you are here."

Clarisse didn't feel anything different but at the same time knew in her bones that her father was right. She wondered how he had known that she wasn't sleeping because of the nightmares. Then again, he was a god. He must have his ways of knowing such things. Thanking Ares one last time, the tired demigod dragged herself to her room and promptly fell asleep the second she tucked herself in her bed.

Ares walked back in a daze to his room. Rubbing his eyes, he found himself to be feeling tired as well. He entered his private quarters only to find Aphrodite sitting on his bed. When he entered, she beamed such a vibrant and lovely smile at him that for a minute he forgot everything about being tired.

"Well done, Ares." The goddess said and kissed her lover, surprising him. This was extremely different from her previous distant attitude. Maybe, apologizing to his daughter had been the right step after all.

Ares grinned as Aphrodite put her arms around him. She whispered to him, "You need a new couch."

"Huh?" Ares said and turned towards his couch. Sure enough, it was reduced to ashes, the wall behind it being tainted with the burn marks. So, he had burned something, he thought to himself. Without a second thought, he waved his hand and a new couch suddenly appeared. The evidence of Ares' previous anger and anxiousness, nowhere to be seen.

Ares rested his head against his lover's and exhaled. He was tired all over again. Who knew that one small talk would take so much out of him? But he felt better now that he talked and spent some time with his daughter. Not to mention that it had won him Aphrodite back. He let Aphrodite order him to sleep. He could be his usual self tomorrow but tonight… tonight he needed to just rest.
The next morning, everyone once again gathered in the amphitheater. The gods were using their powers to keep the weather as pleasant as possible and with most of them in a jovial mood, it wasn't all that hard. Most of them were already treating the whole reading business as a retreat. Only the Olympians were a bit tensed because of the whole Kronos-coming-back situation. But even they couldn't keep up the tension for any length of time around their children. The future demigods had almost recovered, physically at least, from the effects of the war and had started behaving like the teenagers they were. That meant that they were much louder than usual and even more hyper. Hestia quietly sat next to the hearth and observed them. She just couldn't get over the amount of life the children brought with them. The amphitheater was ringing with laughter while many of the children chased each other around the place, although mostly it were the children of Hermes being chased around by the others. Once everyone had settled down and some of the older demigods had intervened and prevented the Stoll brothers from getting hurt by the other campers, the goddess of hearth asked for a volunteer to read. Calliope, one of the nine muses, volunteered.

The muse read in a melodious voice, "WE MEET THE SHEEP OF DOOM"

"I do not understand." Adrianna mumbled and the other hunters agreed with her.

"When you ... island of the Sirens."

"Well, looks can be deceiving." Calypso said, thinking about her island. It had been one of the most beautiful places but it still had been a prison for her.

"The Cyclops's ... and white beaches."

"That sounds beautiful." Katie said dreamily.

"Except that it houses one of the most dangerous cyclops ever... yeah." Travis added.

"As we sailed ... whatever that is.""

"It is not that bad." Triton said. He had helped create that island for his cyclops half-brothers.

"I dunno. From what the stories say, Polyphemus had run the island into the ground before he stole the Fleece." Connor said.

"I felt a little ... had no choice."

"You feel guilty for the strangest of things, dude." Jason said in disbelief.

"That place was beautiful. You would feel guilty too for ruining it." Percy said.
"Umm… Percy, they are Romans." Butch said.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Dakota asked, offended by Butch.

"Well, Romans are famous for plundering and all." Clarisse shrugged.

"Hey!" Gwen protested. "As if you guys would care about the island."

"Pfft. We wouldn't." The Stolls said in unison.

"Even I wouldn't." Will said. "Percy is just weird that way."

"Kind of still here." Percy said, waving his hand around. Then he motioned to the Muse to continue reading.

"Camp Half-Blood ... the size of hippos."

"Monster sheep?"

"Yup."

"Just past them ... A dragon or ..."

"It is now." Piper said.

"In every sense of the word." Annabeth said. She explained, "In the current time that we are in, it is guarded by a dragon in a grove sacred to Ares and in our time, it is guarded by Peleus."

"History repeats itself." Reyna muttered under her breath.

"That's when ... clean white bones."

"Oh gods." Piper muttered, looking a bit queasy.

"The title makes sense now." Zoe said to Adrianna.

"Meat eating sheep?" Pan looked like he was about to throw up and then kill someone.

"Annabeth and I ... the CSS Birmingham."

"So, Clarisse is already there at the island?" Reyna asked.

"Yes." Clarisse grumbled. She hoped that the book wouldn't mention her almost getting married, but she didn't have much hope.

"So that's how Tyson was alive? Clarisse must have taken him with her." Frank said.

"Wait for it, buddy." Percy said.

"We decided ... away to help."

"This doesn't happen often, but Annabeth, listen to Percy." Thalia said.

"Unless you have the strength to tear the sheep apart." Hercules suggested.

"Not even then should she go into the sheep's territory." Perseus retorted.
Again, Athena felt grateful for the son of Poseidon being there with her daughter. Although, it was his fault that she was even on the quest in the first place. For some reason, Annabeth had made a couple of bad decisions during the quest and the goddess was glad that her daughter had friends that cared for her on this quest. Especially someone with personal loyalty as a flaw. Even though it would be fatal for the boy, it would be life saving for others and the goddess knew that she was selfish enough to be happy for such a thing.

"Besides, our .... might still be alive."

"Duh!"

"That's not how it happened, Chris." Clarisse told her boyfriend.

"Then how…"

"You'll find it out the same way I did." Percy said.

"We moored the... back at camp."

"At least you would have had practice of climbing the cliff." Theseus said.

"But, back at camp, if we fell, we have healers and some of the older satyrs stay around the lava wall to help any campers who fall. Here, we would just die." Percy said.

"That is true. At least the sea is nearby." Theseus replied.

Percy shrugged and said, "I honestly didn't know how to use it to break the fall."

"Let us just read." Poseidon interrupted before Theseus could reply and increase the anxiousness he was feeling. He was worried about all three of his sons. Where was Tyson? Would Percy be safe? And why was Polyphemus so horrible?

"At least it ... the better climber."

"She is literally better at almost everything at camp." Thalia said proudly and beamed at her sort of adopted sister.

"Except hand-to-hand combat against me." Clarisse pointed out.

"Or archery against the Apollo cabin." Will added.

"You can't compare against something that you are born with." Percy said. "Just admit it – she is the best."

"Yes. Annabeth is the best… after peanut butter." Tyson said and everyone chuckled.

The gods watched in amusement as the demigods argued a bit more about who the best camper was, before they all agreed on Annabeth, who was equal parts blushing and equal parts proud.

"We only came close to dying six or seven times, which I thought was pretty good."

"I do not think that you understand optimism." Perseus said to his namesake.

"There is not much scope for optimism when you are climbing a cliff and have a rocky beach below you and a hungry cyclops above you." Percy replied.
"Huh…"

"Once, I lost … was my face."

The campers chuckled as Leo said, "Another kick to the face!"

""Sorry," she … sneaker tasted like."

"Do I even wanna know?" Frank asked.

"Not really." Percy said and Annabeth shook her head at her boyfriend.

"Finally, when …bellowed another voice."

"What the f-?"

"Language, Valdez." Jason chided.

"*Cambia la lingua. Come questo – Che cazzo.*" Nico sassed and Chiara giggled while Will just stared at Nico. He hadn't known that Nico could speak Italian fluently. The Romans looked at Nico in awe and confusion. This was the first time they were seeing him open up like this.

"Language, Mr. Di Angelo." Chiron admonished the son of Hades. He had already started noticing Nico becoming a bit like his old ten year self for a few moments, in the past week. He didn't know how he would handle this new development along with all the usual mischief makers of the camp, including Percy. He could just see the disaster that the camp would be in when Nico started opening up more and especially if he became friendly with Percy and the Hermes children.

"If I hadn't … and I'll fight you!"

"Polyphemus is hard to defeat." Tyson said solemnly.

"My daughter can do it." Ares said as he remembered the practice/training session he had witnessed the previous night.

"Maybe not back then." Clarisse mumbled.

"The monster … no sign of him."

"I will come soon, brother." Tyson said with a smile and Percy nodded.

"If he wasn't with Clarisse, then how did he survive?" Hazel asked.

"You'll see soon enough." Annabeth replied.

"Hold it." Travis said and looked at Clarisse. "You got captured?" he said incredulously.

Clarisse narrowed her eyes at Travis and said menacingly, "Why don't you try fighting Polyphemus?"

"Ooh. Touchy subject." Connor snickered.

Clarisse growled at them, but was held back by an exasperated Chris, who warned his brothers to stay quiet.

"'Hmm,' Polyphemus … demanded. "Who— Grover?""
"Shut up, Clarisse!" almost all of the campers shouted and Chris winced at his girlfriend's stormy expression.

"This has already happened." Clarisse gritted out.

"Do not blow his cover, girl." Pan said. "Grover is already trying to protect you and himself."

"I didn't know what was happening." Clarisse tried to justify.

"You should have understood it." Athena said and mumbled something about children of less than average intelligence, which thankfully for her, Ares didn't hear.

"Next to me, ... Clarisse yelled."

"CLARISSE!" everyone yelled in annoyance.

"What?" Clarisse shouted back. "I didn't know what was happening. I made a mistake. Happy?"

"The satyr has to pay the price of your mistake." Pan grumbled.

Before Clarisse could push Chris away and start a fight or at least a yelling match, Grover said, "She made a mistake, Lord. But we all are fine now. This was a long time ago."

"You take action without thinking. I hope that you have changed over the years." Athena said, knowing that Clarisse got this particular trait from Ares.

"I have." Clarisse grumbled and many of the older campers agreed, except the Stolls and Will. They hardly ever agreed with Clarisse.

"'Oh!' Grover yelped. ... entire wedding party."

"He actually did do that." Grover shuddered. "Ugh! Don't remind me."

"'What satyr?' ... the wedding dress!"

"Not. A. Single. Word." Clarisse warned the other campers.

"At least it is being revealed when Percy and Annabeth are at the island and not before that." Hermes said.

"I wanted to ... over his head."

Clarisse grimaced and mouthed an apology to Grover, who brushed it off. He had gotten into way more dangerous situations since then. Still, it would have been nice not to be outed to a bloodthirsty cyclops.

"'Stop!' Grover ... just wait here."


"Yes. Keep on stalling till Annabeth comes up with a plan." Athena said.

"Maybe my son comes up with a plan. It does not always have to be a child of yours." Poseidon said to his arch enemy.

"Yes, it does." Athena said and as one, both the gods turned to look at their children.
"Umm…" Percy said hesitantly and then pointed at Annabeth and said, "She came up with the plan and I executed?" At Athena's laugh and Poseidon's annoyed expression, Percy continued, "That's how we usually work. She plans and I execute. Unless it's an emergency. Then I plan and execute and usually almost die."

"Usually?" Thalia scoffed. "Kelp head, every single one of your plans has almost gotten you killed, including that one prank that you planned."

Percy pouted and said, "It wasn't my fault that they were practicing with an axe."

"Do I even want to know? Where was I?" Annabeth asked. She had heard nothing about any prank that Percy planned involving axes.

"Nope. And you were at Olympus." Thalia replied.

Athena had a smug smile on her face as she asked Calliope to continue.

"The monster..." "You a satyr, too?"

"Wow! I-I give up…" Connor said, throwing his hands up.

"'No, you... rip your arms off!''"

Connor leaned ahead and stared at Clarisse. "You aren't in any position to be making threats."

"Yeah, you are hanging upside down..." Travis said.

"... Over boiling water." Will continued.

"Shut up guys." Chris said and at the same time Clarisse said, "And I can still do more damage than you all combined."

"You couldn't even cut the ropes." Percy quipped and moved quickly as Clarisse' knife sailed past his shoulder and fell to the ground. Picking it up, Percy said, "I'll just keep it safe with me."

After making sure that the children weren't about to kill each other, Calliope read, "'Rip my arms... "Who's the bride?''"

"Why are you hurt?"

"Who's the bride?"

Will's mouth hung open in a wide grin as he realized the situation. "You..." he pointed at Clarisse. "Oh gods! This is gold." He guffawed and fell over on Nico, who was confused with the proximity. Soon, the other demigods and gods caught up and many were laughing.

"Why didn't you tell me?" Chris asked Clarisse, while trying to keep her from killing anyone. She glared at him in reply.

"You got married to a cyclops?" Butch asked.

"NO!" Clarisse shouted.

"We talked her out of it." Percy said before succumbing to laughter.

Taking pity on Clarisse, Hestia asked the reading to be continued.
"Polyphemus looked ... she was a ripe apple,"
"Ripe apple? Where you hungry?" Jason asked.
"Probably."
"and tossed her ... Tammany, Lockhart, etc."
"Weird names for sheep." Katie said.
"Not more than Mrs. O'Leary for a hellhound." Lou Ellen said and everyone nodded.
"When the last ... a six-ton boulder."
"How did you guys manage to rescue them?" Piper asked.
"By repeating history." Annabeth replied with a smug smile. The plan had been good until she had been caught.
"Huh?"
"Wait and hear."
"We tried for ... we couldn't tell."
"I could kind of feel your emotions. But that was all."
"Even if by ... with a magic sword."
"Unless it is Excalibur." Dakota said.
"That is a myth." Reyna said.

Ignoring them, Will said to Percy, "What about the Williamsburg Bridge?"
"That was different. I don't know how, though." Percy said sadly as an image of Michael Yew flashed in front of his eyes. They never had found his body. Everyone assumed that it had been carried away by the river current, but Percy had searched after the war and never found any evidence of it.

At the mention of the bridge, all those who had fought in the war from Greek side, fell silent and said a little prayer for Michael, which confused the gods who actually heard the prayer.

"Annabeth and I ... for sheep hooves."
"At least you do not have to worry about the man-eating sheep." Apollo said, trying to break the air of melancholy surrounding the demigods.
"Where are the other cyclops?" Poseidon asked.
"There were no other cyclops." Percy replied.

Annabeth explained, "They supposedly moved out sometime before Polyphemus got the fleece."
"We watched as ... became a vegetarian."
"Yes!" Grover and Piper exclaimed while everyone else protested.

"'Trickery,' Annabeth ... do you like sheep?"

"Oh gods! You are going to repeat what Odysseus did, aren't you?" Katie asked.

"Yup." Annabeth replied with a grin.

Chiron grinned proudly at Annabeth while many of the demigods were still wondering what Katie and Annabeth had been talking about.

"'Just don't ... the belly of a sheep.'

"Oh!" the demigods said as they remembered the story of Odysseus.

"You have done weird things for a quest." Perseus said.

"Yes, I have." Percy replied.

"Now, I'll admit ... and my nose."

"I wish someone took a picture of this." Connor snickered.

"Is it weird that I can imagine Percy as a baby wallaby?" Leo asked.

"Yes!" Calypso replied. Sometimes she didn't understand her boyfriend's wayward imagination.

"You know, we can use this as a dare for D." Hermes excitedly whispered to Apollo, who agreed whole-heartedly. They both knew that Dionysus would be capable of anything when drunk out of his mind.

"In case you're ... like that."

"I do not think anyone ever wonders what the underside of a sheep smells like." Hercules said, trying to control his laughter.

"Thanks for the info, anyway." Leo said, giving Percy a thumbs up.

"You are welcome."

"The sun was ... hold me to it."

"Yes, we will." Athena said.

"You never told me that."

"You were sleeping. I never said that you had to be awake for it." Percy quipped and stuck his tongue out at Annabeth.

"I love loopholes." Travis said.

"My sheep taxi ... you for breakfast!"

"Poor sheep." Pan mumbled.

"You all were discussing that someone had used this tactic before?" Athena asked.
"Yes, mother. Odysseus did this to escape Polyphemus' cave." Annabeth said.

"And you guys used it to get inside." Rachel said. "Genius!"

"Thanks." Annabeth replied.

"Ok. So, you are inside. How will you get out?" Chris asked, worried about Clarisse being stuck inside the cave.

The four who were there, looked at one another and Percy said, "Nobody comes to the rescue." All four of them started laughing and Grover asked to read further to understand Percy's statement.

"And just like ... "I remember you!"

"Huh? That did not make any sense." Artemis said when the demigods started laughing.

"Odysseus used to call himself Nobody in front of Polyphemus, so that the cyclops couldn't complain to anyone about exactly who had blinded him." Annabeth explained. "It was actually genius until Odysseus got overconfident and revealed his real name when he was leaving the island. Because of that, Polyphemus was able to ask Lord Poseidon to curse Odysseus for blinding him."

"That's kind of like Clarisse shouting at Polyphemus in the end, right?" Grover whispered to Percy and Tyson. The two brothers agreed. They almost recreated everything that Odysseus had done, including blinding the cyclops.

"Now it makes sense." Athena said.

"You're too ... there was silence."

Everyone held their breaths as one…

"Then Annabeth shouted, "You haven't learned to throw any better, either!""

…and released it together.

Annabeth shook her head and said, "I'm alive. So, nothing major happened."

Percy, Grover and Clarisse scoffed and Thalia said, "Shh…"

"Polyphemus howled. ... "Come find me!"

"Technically, that is correct." Travis said.

"Yeah. You can't kill nobody. But, you can kill Nobody." Connor said and high fived his older brother.

Travis chuckled and said, "Do you think 'Nobody' can kill nobody or nobody can kill 'Nobody'?"

"Please shut up." Katie told her boyfriend and got thanked by everyone for that.

"Polyphemus barreled ... male/female thing."

"I still don't understand how anyone can mistake a satyr for a female cyclops." Piper said.

"I'm just glad that he was stupid. Otherwise, I'd be dead by now." Grover said.
"I just hoped ... the work of Medusa."

"Why would Medusa turn sheep into stone?" Perseus asked incredulously.

"Money? Her work is actually quite famous." Nico answered. When everyone looked at him weirdly, he defended himself, "I meet a lot of people, okay?"

Will leaned into Nico's side and whispered, "So, you would have a lot of stories to tell, yeah?"

Nico groaned and whispered back, "Not this again." Will's answering grin assured him that the topic was not dropped.

"There were ... be blown up!"

"Wow! Can't you at least be a bit more excited to see the rescue party?" Katie asked.

"Nope." Clarisse deadpanned.

"'Good to see ... and mumbled, 'Thanks.'"

The Stolls and Will stared at Clarisse in astonishment. Clarisse glared back and replied, "I can be grateful. But only when they deserve it."

"We saved your cabin from catching fire... and you punched us." Travis said grumpily.

"Because you were the reason my cabin was almost on fire in the first place!" Clarisse exclaimed. "Just keep your grubby hands away from my landmines."

"I still don't know why they have landmines in front of the cabin." Frank whispered to Hazel.

"Graeci!" Dakota whispered to Frank in explanation. "They are just plain weird."

"'You're welcome," ... just been crushed."

Tyson hugged Percy till Percy tapped him to let him know that he couldn't breathe. Tyson only loosened his hold a bit and refused to let go of Percy. Knowing that protesting was futile, Percy let himself take the comfort that Tyson was giving him. He still remembered how it had felt to believe that he had lost his brother. That had been one of the few times that someone had turned out to be alive when Percy believed them to be dead. He knew that the next quest onwards it would be very hard to keep his emotions in check. They had lost a lot of people over the years and he wasn't looking forward to reliving their deaths all over again. The only reason he had survived hearing about Tyson's 'death' was because his half-brother was with him. As it is, he could feel himself choking up just thinking about Bianca and Zoe's death in the quest.

"'Okay. Come on, ... crying out in fear."

There was pin drop silence in the amphitheater that was broken by Athena's gasp.

"What happened? Why did you stop reading, Calliope?" the wisdom goddess asked. She hoped that nothing horrible had happened to her daughter. Despite Annabeth sitting in front of her eyes, she could not shake off the fear and worry coiling inside of her.

"The chapter is over." Calliope said. "Is anyone going to take up the next one or should I continue?"
"I will read it." Enyo said, motioning for the book to be passed to her. She could feel a fight coming up, especially if the girl was hurt, then the boy would do anything for her. And she hoped to read about her niece's fighting skills. Ares had told her about Clarisse's impressive skills with a spear. Now, she wanted to see it in action. Even if it was in the form of reading. Maybe, she could suggest for another sparring session later on. Something like Percy and Hercules'… with a lot more blood. Yes! That would be good, the goddess thought to herself.
He's Alive!

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Ch51 – SoM – He's Alive!

"NOBODY GETS THE FLEECE"

"Seriously? Wordplay? Now?"

"I didn't write it."

"'I got Nobody!' ... eyes were glassy."

Annabeth leaned against Percy's chest as a few people around them exclaimed in worry. She didn't know much about what happened from this point onwards and she knew that Percy wouldn't have told her everything anyway. At least she was getting to know about everything that had happened.

"That is not the child I remember…” Poseidon muttered to himself.

"Polyphemus has not been a child for the past 50 or so years, dear." Amphitrite reminded her husband.

"'I'll rush him,' ... You and Grover—"

"Percy!" Thalia yelled at her cousin, causing him to turn around to look at her. "You idiot. No one will leave you to fight on your own." Looking at Clarisse and then Grover, she asked forcefully, "Right?"

"Right." They both replied.

Annabeth looked sternly at Percy and said, "You better not go into any fight on your own."

"Yes, ma'am."

The sea god felt himself calm a bit with this conversation. Personal loyalty was a horrible curse but it helped if the friends and family didn't let Percy take half-baked decisions.

"'No way,' they ... ready to attack."

"You are one of the bravest satyrs that I know of." Pan said to Grover.

Hedge agreed and said, "You should always go down fighting."

"'We'll take him ... about something."

"Yeah. Back then, hardly anyone ever agreed with Clarisse about anything." Katie said.

"Only because none of us knew much about her." Annabeth added.
"All right," I said. "Attack plan Macedonia."

"Good choice. But you might need more people. It works better with larger numbers especially against a big enemy like Polyphemus." Chiron said to Percy. The demigod nodded and didn't point out that he, Annabeth and Clarisse were the ones who had been teaching battle plans and strategies to the newer demigods for the past couple of years.

"What is this attack plan?" Reyna asked. She wanted to know more about Greek fighting styles. They were extremely different from the Roman style, mostly because they all focused more on the individual's strength.

"It is explained here." Enyo said and read, "They nodded. ... for the help."

"Yes, that is a good plan." Ares said, forgetting all about his enmity with Percy for the time being.

"But Chiron is correct. It would work better with more numbers against a big threat." Athena pointed out.

"What I don't get is that fa-satyrs are given training courses on how to fight?" Reyna asked in a puzzled tone.

"We satyrs are very different from those fawns of yours, cupcake." Hedge said. "Give me a couple of days with them and I'll set them straight."

All of the seven's and Nico's eyes flew wide open and they pitied the fawns as Reyna agreed to take Hedge with her to talk to the fawns. Hazel stifled a laugh as she imagined Hedge chasing Don the fawn around camp, to 'set him straight'.

"I hefted my ... of nose drool!"

"W-what?" Butch asked. He didn't know whether to laugh at the pitiful insult or be appalled by it.

"Prissy, you need to work on your insults."

"Nose drool..." Leo repeated with a chuckle and was ignored by everyone.

"It didn't sound ... motionless as a rag doll."

Everyone sucked in a breath and looked at Annabeth to make sure that she was actually alright. Athena hoped that her daughter wasn't too hurt but knew that it was a baseless hope. A drop from that height, especially when she was already hurt, could even be fatal. The fact that Annabeth was fine and in front of her eyes was the only comfort that the goddess had.

"The other bad ... advancing on me."

"You would need a lot of cuts and stabs and slashes to beat him." Gwen said.

"Or Percy's awesome powers." Frank suggested.

The said demigod shook his head and said, "Back then I didn't use my powers as much as I use them now."

"Then how did you manage to kill him?" Laurel asked.

"Wait and listen." Clarisse said.
"I moved in ... yelled at Grover."

"Yes, please." Athena mumbled and Aphrodite patted her arm. The love goddess could understand the concern for the child. Both of the quests that the children had gone on were quite unnerving, despite being very good entertainment material.

"He rushed over, ... was too quick."

"That's my Clarisse." Chris said proudly while his brothers pretended to gag. Clarisse blushed at the praise and rested her head on Chris' shoulder.

"And as soon ... or the hand."

Poseidon quietly rooted for Percy to succeed. He wondered whether this made him a bad father to Polyphemus but then convinced himself that his cyclops son, the one that he loved, was long gone and overtaken by the monstrous nature of cyclops. He just hoped that the children would be able to leave the island unharmed, or as unharmed as possible.

"But we couldn't ... it gave me an idea."

"Horrible idea or good idea?" Thalia asked.

"It was actually good…” Clarisse said.

"Let me guess, it didn't work out as it was supposed to?" Thalia completed and everyone groaned at the answering nod.

Athena grinned as she understood what the idea could have been, but wondered whether the chasm was even wide enough for the cyclops to cross or not.

"'Fall back!' ... make him mad."

"His eye must be his weakness." Hercules suggested.

"Or his heart. But a really long and strong weapon would be required for that." Artemis added.

"'Grind you into sheep chow!' he promised. 'A thousand curses on Nobody!'"

Annabeth and Percy suddenly stiffened, which scared their neighbors. So, this was when Annabeth had been cursed. Percy wondered whether he too was cursed in the same manner, seeing that both he and Annabeth had called themselves Nobody. Annabeth grabbed Percy's hand for comfort and he squeezed her hand in return. Ducking her head down, Annabeth quickly dabbed her eyes. She had started tearing up as she thought about Tartarus and how she had felt being blinded all of a sudden.

The coupled flinched at the sudden contact of Thalia's arms on their shoulders from behind. She had moved down from her place to sit where she had been keeping her legs before, so that she could be closer to her friends.

"Are you okay?" she whispered to them. Percy nodded stiffly while Annabeth didn't reply at all and just slumped against Percy.

Nico, who was sitting next to Thalia and diagonal to Percy, prodded his cousin with his toes and gave him a questioning look. Percy turned and shook his head at Nico, signaling that they didn't want to talk about it. Nico nodded and turned away, thinking that this might be his chance to help
both Percy and Annabeth. He remembered his talk with Annabeth and Jason that they had, two
days ago. Getting Percy's attention again, Nico mouthed 'talk later' and added a glare when Percy
looked like he was about to argue. The older demigod rolled his eyes and nodded, thinking that he
would brush Nico off later.

This interaction was unnoticed by most of the demigods and gods as they were all listening to
Enyo.

"'Faster!' I told ... at the ropes."

"That is a good plan." Artemis said. "Just make sure that the cyclops is still on the other side of the
rope bridge when it gets cut. Otherwise, he may be able to leap across."

"The first strand ... right next to us."

"Dammit!"

"Of course it wouldn't be that easy."

"'Failed!' he ... baby-blue tuxedo kilt."

"Now, the cyclops is a goner!" Will exclaimed.

"Why do you say that?" Apollo asked his son.

"Because Percy doesn't hold back when he gets angry." Nico said as he remembered Percy beating
Hades in his furious state.

"Yeah. He is like our Hulk. When he gets angry… that's it for the monsters." Travis said.

"Hulk?" Hermes asked.

"Uh… future stuff." Chris said in an unsure voice.

The fact that Percy didn't argue against anything being said about him, only showed Nico that
something was wrong. Maybe something that had been said a little while back, reminded the
couple of either the pit or something else that was a bad topic for them.

The gods on the other hand were wondering whether Percy was anything like Poseidon, when
angered. Because if that was the case, then they had to be wary of the child.

"Nobody was going to swat down my friends like that! I mean ... nobody, not Nobody. Ah, you
know what I mean."

"Did you actually think all of this?"

"Of course not."

"Strength coursed through ... hovering over his eye."

Enyo read it in disbelief. How was a thirteen year old child able to defeat a fully grown cyclops so
easily? Everyone stared at Percy in shock and finally Ares broke the silence. "H-how were you able
to do that? How long did you fight for?"

"Around a couple of minutes… maybe less." Clarisse answered and Grover agreed. She had been in
awe of Percy when she had seen him fight like that. That was when she really believed that he
could have defeated even her father.

"That is…" Zeus said.

"…impossible." Hades finished his brother's sentence.

Everyone from the past was surprised and were staring at Percy while none of the demigods from
the future even seemed fazed by this. They all had seen Percy do much more than that.

Percy squirmed under the scrutiny and finally cracked and demanded, "What is it?"

"You were just a child. There is no way that you could have defeated a fully grown cyclops with so
much ease and that too in under a few minutes." Artemis explained.

"Percy is much more powerful than he seems, Lady Artemis." Chiron said with pride.


"Your anger is your driving force, in that case." Poseidon said. He remembered the amount of
anger Percy had unleashed into the sea the other night. The god hoped that his son had learnt how
to control his anger in a fight because otherwise it would only get difficult for him to fight
effectively and efficiently.

Percy frowned at his father's words. He didn't want his anger to be his anything. He said to the
gods, "Don't listen to them" he pointed towards the other demigods, "they always exaggerate."

"No, we don't." Nico said. "You haven't seen yourself in battle."

"Give me a moment." Rachel said, furiously sketching on her sketch pad. After a few moments of
everyone staring at her, she finally exclaimed, "Aha! There you go." She handed Percy a sketch of
him fighting Polyphemus. It had been a weird dream long ago, that she remembered about when
they had started reading about this quest. She had been sketching bits and pieces of that dream
since then.

The sketch was hastily drawn and the page was divided into four parts, each depicting a stage of
the fight against the cyclops. It showed a younger Percy, his face carrying the baby fat that a
thirteen year old would have, a zit on his nose and bright eyes. His face was that of a fierce warrior
regardless of the babyish features. He looked like a force to be reckoned with and not like a
teenager.

"See. This is what you looked like." Rachel pointed out to Percy, who made a face at her. He
couldn't believe that it was him. She must be exaggerating. He couldn't even recognize himself.

"Yup. That's about right." Clarisse said as she looked at the sketch. Travis had snatched it from
Percy and was now circulating it.

"Gimme." Leo said, making grabbing motions towards the paper. Once he got it, he whistled and
said, "Man, you were a scary 13 year old."

The next few minutes were spent with the paper being passed around amongst the gods and
hunters and everyone commenting on how terrifying Percy looked. The said demigod, irritated
with the proceedings, had given up arguing and was resting his head on top of Annabeth's. Once all
of the Olympians had seen the sketch and come to a conclusion to look out for any more impossible
feats that Percy had achieved, Zeus asked Enyo to read.
"Uhhhhhhhh," Polyphemus ... you waiting for?"

"Yeah!" Ares yelled.

"Noooo!" Jason moaned. "Please tell me that you didn't feel pity for him."

"Uhh…" Percy ducked his head and rubbed his neck.

"The Cyclops sounded so heartbroken, just like ... like Tyson."

"PERCY!" almost everyone shouted at him.

"Polyphemus is bad cyclops." Tyson said. "Percy is too nice to see that."

"Too naïve." Athena corrected.

"'He's a Cyclops!' ... in cold blood?"

"Not all of my children are good people." Poseidon said in a sad voice. The god didn't know what to think of Percy. The boy was too good of heart and at the same time so powerful. Maybe, just maybe, Percy would turn out to be better than all of his children. But only if he was able to take the correct decisions – a mixture of both head and heart.

"I know that now." Percy said, thinking about Antaeus.

"It's weird to think that some monsters are actually our siblings or at least related to us in some manner." Jason said.

"Yeah. A couple of my half-siblings have tried to kill me." Percy said.

"What did you do? You can't freeze like that…" Reyna asked.

"I killed those who could be killed." Percy said in a monotone. "Polyphemus was the only one I couldn't." Taking a breath, Percy asked Enyo to read.

"'We only want ... I eat you first.'"

The gods shook their heads in disappointment. It was expected of a monster to do something like that. The boy's emotions would be the death of him if he didn't understand that evil always stayed evil.

"He opened his ... head and thump!"

"Whaa…"

"A rock the ... into the chasm."

"Nice!"

"Sweet!"

"Who did that?"

"I turned.

... as we look."
"Thank the gods for Tyson." Chris exhaled and grinned at the cyclops, who was grinning and looking around as everyone praised him.

"Thanks buddy." Percy said to Tyson.

"I will protect you when you cannot protect yourself." Tyson replied in earnest, bringing a huge smile to Percy's face.

"Tyson gave us ... found this island."

"Rainbow is the best!" Tyson exclaimed loudly. "I miss him."

"Don't worry, big guy. We'll go meet him when we go back to camp, okay?" Percy reassured Tyson.

"You have got to love the hippocampi. They are one of the most loyal and playful creatures." Triton said fondly.

"I wanted to ... Annabeth is hurt!"

"You do realize that the sentence can be taken wrongly, right?" Connor asked.

"'You thank ... and clammy."

Athena chewed at her bottom lip in worry and said, "Use the fleece. That can heal her."

"Duh." Percy muttered to himself and Annabeth rolled her eyes at him.

"Grover and I ... "The gold one!"

"Good." Athena nodded her agreement and took a relaxing breath. Now, her daughter would be fine.

"'Oh. Pretty. Yes."

... precious gold wool."

"Oomph. That's heavy." Leo said.

"It's not that heavy." Clarisse retorted.

"For a fleece, it is." Travis argued.

"Children!" Chiron warned and looked sternly at the campers.

"I spread it ..."

Please. Please."

"Thank you." Annabeth whispered to Percy and kissed his cheek.

"Always, wise girl."

"You know, we were there too." Grover said cheekily, having heard the exchange.

"Yes. Thanks to you, Clarisse and Tyson, too." Annabeth gave a small laugh.
"The color ... me out of it."

A few of the demigods smiled and chuckled at that.

"'Annabeth,' I ... injected her with glitter."

"Do you have to check her out all the time?" Travis teased and the demigods laughed at the couple's expense.

Percy blushed and said, "No." Then he mumbled to himself, "Not back then, anyway." Annabeth, having heard that, lightly jabbed his side and raised her brow at him in question. Percy pulled her close and whispered, "You are kind of distracting when you fight. You look really... good."

Annabeth blushed tomato red and said, "Seaweed brain!"

Thalia dropped her head in her hands and let out a groan. "Why did I have to hear that?"

"Stop eavesdropping and go back to your place." Percy told her.

"Meanwhile, Tyson was ... fresh meat nearby."

"Yes. Get off the island." Hedge said.

"So, that's it? This quest is over? You guys obviously go back with the fleece and save the camp and then Thalia comes to life, right?" Reyna asked.

"In a nutshell." Percy said.

"But there are a few more complications." Annabeth informed the others.

"Of course there were." Calypso said. She was quickly catching on that things never went right for Percy. She wondered if she was one of those hindrances on one of his quests.

"'We have to ... sheep in pursuit."

"It is a good thing that Polyphemus had not trained the sheep to respond only to him." Perseus said.

"'Keep the Fleece ... to carry her."

"Duh, Percy!" Leo mocked and grinned at the hero.

"Before I could ... tip of the island."

"I have said this before and I will say it again – You have awesome powers." Jason said and everyone agreed. Most of them had been saved at one or the other point by the said powers. Plus, seeing someone turn into a hurricane in the middle of a battle field could not be easily forgotten by anyone.

"'Incoming!' Tyson ... we're home free."

"Ugh! Don't tell me that you jinxed yourself." Thalia groaned.

"I jinxed myself." Percy replied.

"Your luck is... just unbelievable." Tyche said, wondering how come she didn't give the young hero any sort of good luck.
"We almost made ... boulder in each hand."

"Damn!" Dakota said. "Does that thing even ever die?"

"Dunno." Percy said.

"The important question is – how is he still alive after falling in the chasm?" Clovis asked with a yawn.

"Because he is a cyclops." Triton replied. "They are more durable than mortals and can survive falls up to an extent. And since Polyphemus is millennia old, he would be stronger than any other cyclops too and just that hard to kill."

"I think Ma Gasket was much better." Piper said.

"That bad cyclops lady?" Tyson asked. When Piper nodded, Tyson simply said, "She is gone."

"Good." Leo said.

Enyo spoke up, "The chapter is over. Who is reading next?"

"Allow me." Eris said, reaching for the book.
Rainbow to the Rescue

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Ch52 – SoM – Rainbow to the Rescue

"I GO DOWN WITH THE SHIP"

"The ship sank with you on it?" Frank asked. That didn't seem right. He remembered the condition of the pitiful boat that they had taken on their quest. Percy had held it together with sheer willpower. There was no way that a ship could sink with Percy on it.

"Wait for it." Clarisse told her brother.

"'You'd think he'd run out of rocks," I muttered."

"That's what we always think." Leo said, remembering when Argo II had been attacked by the ourae.

"'Swim for ... to your kind!'"

"He is wrong." Grover said.

"Tyson froze.

... 'Thieving humans!'"

"Wasn't he the one who stole from us first?" Will asked.

"Yup."

"Polyphemus threw ... not my kind!'"

"Exactly." Tyson said. "My friends are my kind."

Poseidon smiled at his son's words. Many gods wondered about the similarities between Tyson's words and actions and Percy's actions. Was putting friends above all, a trait of the sea god's children or was it something unique to just Tyson and Percy?

"'Death or victory!' ... water and growling."

"Nope. It still is funny." Travis chuckled.

"It's not, when you are facing him." Grover bleated.

"'Percy!' Clarisse ... hold Big Ugly.'"

"Percy, you are rubbing off on Tyson! Self-sacrificing is your thing." Nico said and Percy made a face at him.
"You both are similar in some ways." Annabeth told Percy.

"'No! He'll kill ... drew my sword.'"

"If you had been using your powers, you could have easily defeated him." Jason pointed out.

Poseidon frowned and said, "I do not think so. I usually do not favor one child of mine over another if they are fighting and not just because of the ancient laws. No two children of mine would have the same powers, same as everyone else's children, which is why they cannot use their powers to fight one another. Not to mention that Polyphemus would have the basic control over water. It would not be as much as Percy's but water would not hurt him."

"Polyphemus advanced ... the rock to rubble."

"Gotta love cyclops strength."

"I willed the sea... onto the beach."

"You-you kicked him in the eye?" Connor asked in an amused tone.

"What else was I supposed to do?" Percy retorted.

"I thought the water wouldn't hurt him." Jason whispered to himself.

"It didn't. It only pushed him away because he didn't have much control over water." Percy replied.

"'Destroy you!' ... children of the gods!!"

"You tell him, Percy!"

"That is true. The fleece should be used to help others and not lure poor satyrs to their deaths." Pan said.

"'I am a ... curse this thief?!'"

Poseidon raised an eyebrow at that. Did Polyphemus really think that the god would do whatever he would be asked of? Just because he protected his children, did not mean that he did it unjustly. And he especially would not interfere when both sides were his own children.

"He was ... of my voice."

"You nearly blinded him. Nice!" Will said and then muttered, "Never thought I would ever say something like that."

"Are you guys going for repeating the whole thing that Odysseus did?" Thalia asked. "You already used the hanging on the sheep thing, Nobody, Polyphemus asking Poseidon to curse you and now almost blinding him." She ticked off the points on her fingers as she said them.

"Yeah. The only thing that is left is actually shouting at him while sailing off and you guys would have recreated the whole adventure." Chris said and Clarisse grimaced as she remembered doing just that. She hadn't know that he was using hearing to pinpoint them.

"'Poseidon won't ... won't play favorites.'"

"Quite right." The sea god said.
"How did you know that he wouldn't?" Thalia asked. She had always wanted to know how Percy was always so confident and secure in his relationship with Poseidon, whereas she had always been afraid of Zeus, not knowing whether he would prefer to have her dead or not.

"I didn't." Percy replied honestly. "But I hoped that I was right."

"Oh."

"Polyphemus roared. ..."

**Tyson stopped.**

"No." Poseidon whispered. It was getting pretty obvious to him that this wasn't his baby cyclops anymore. Polyphemus was just another monster.

"'You weren't ... spun toward his voice."

Tyson looked down and said in a sad voice, "I made mistake. Should not trust bad cyclops to be good."

Percy patted his half-brother's arm and said soothingly, "It is okay, big guy. We both made the same mistake of hoping that Polyphemus might be good."

"Yes, you did." Amphitrite said. "I hope you understand that evil stays evil and monsters cannot change their nature."

"Not always. Sometimes they can change, like Tyson or Mrs. O'Leary." Percy said.

"Ella too." Tyson blushed and added.

"Yes. Ella too," Percy nodded and softly added, "and Bob and Damasen weren't evil."

"Bob didn't have his memories." Nico pointed out and Thalia agreed with him.

"Who is Bob?" Will asked Nico.

Annabeth shook her head and informed Nico, "He got them back."

The son of Hades was shocked. His eyes were wide open and he gasped and said, "H-he got them back? And still chose us?"

"Yeah, yeah he did." Percy said with a small smile and Nico smiled back.

"Excuse me, do you mean Damasen as in the giant?" Athena asked her daughter. "And who is this Bob?"

"You will find out later, I suppose." Annabeth said, not in a mood to talk about her lost friends. As it was, she was barely able to stop herself from crying and she knew that Percy too was struggling with the same. Taking a breath, the daughter of Athena said, "We should continue reading."

The gods were not satisfied with anything that had just occurred. Why were the two children emotional over the giant farmer? And what kind of a monster was called Bob? Despite that, they knew that the two children would not say anything any further and Zeus signaled Eris to continue.

(A/N – At this time, Damasen is still not punished and is the farmer like he told Annabeth in his story.)
"Tyson!" I shouted.

... with extra olives.

"Dude, I don't even know what to say to that." Leo said and a couple of demigods were staring at Percy as if he had lost his mind.

"Tyson flew ... little bit higher."

"That had been satisfying to watch." Clarisse said, while everyone else was busy imagining where Percy would have hit the monster.

"'Blaaaaah!' Polyphemus ... down my fear."

"And this is why you are nothing like a guinea pig." Annabeth whispered to Percy. The level of confidence and adoration in her voice made Percy feel a lot better than he had felt ever since the whole Circe's island fiasco had been read out.

"Polyphemus swung the ... already damaged eye."

"Percy! That was awesomely done!" Travis exclaimed and many others agreed.

"Don't encourage him." Annabeth glared at Travis and turned to Percy and said, "That was extremely dangerous. What if you hadn't landed on him? You would have been badly hurt from such a high fall."

"I would have been fine." Percy said nonchalantly. He swallowed nervously at Annabeth's glare and said, "I mean... I won't do something like that again?"

The blond girl narrowed her eyes and said menacingly, "You better not." She had had enough of dangerous situations involving Percy and didn't want him to go around doing something stupid like that mentioned in the book.

Percy nodded as Connor said 'whipped', making all of the demigods laugh.

"Polyphemus yowled ... wasn't right."

"For the love of Olympus, just kill the cyclops!" Apollo exclaimed in frustration, making everyone stare at the sun god. Apollo waved them off and said, "No worries. I just got really frustrated."

"I can relate to that." Ares said in a gruff voice and went back to glaring at Percy for not killing the cyclops and dragging out the quest for longer than necessary.

"'Let him go," I told Tyson. 'Run.""

Everyone groaned.

"Yes, yes. I was stupid. Moving on..." Percy said.

"With one last ... your face, Cyclops!"

"Clarisse!" Thalia whined.

Clarisse shrugged and said, "Didn't know that he was using sound to find us."
"Shut up, I ... missing Tyson and me."

Poseidon and Triton glared at the daughter of Ares. This was the second time she had jeopardized the quest by opening her mouth when it wasn't needed.

Clarisse groaned. Now she could understand how wrong she was to let her proud nature overrule everything else. She had assumed that since she was on the ship with the fleece, everything would be sorted out. She had obviously not realized that Percy's luck was as good as his aim with an arrow.

"'Yeah, yeah!' Clarisse ... "Shut up!'"

"Yes, please!" most of the demigods said.

"Too late. ... Queen Anne's Revenge."

"Daughter of Ares, you should learn to keep quiet." Athena growled. Her daughter was still injured and on that ship.

Ares narrowed his eyes at Athena but knew that she was correct. It had been Clarisse's fault that first Grover and she had been locked up and now they were about to sink. The only good thing in the whole scenario was that there was a son of Poseidon to help them out. But Ares didn't know if Percy was powerful enough to take care of three children who weren't children of Poseidon and when one of them was injured.

"You wouldn't ... a playground slide."

"Woah! Seriously?" Gwen asked.

"Yup. The weight of the tons of water that enters it…" Percy trailed off, his voice taking up a tone of awe at the dangers of the sea. Poseidon had a grin on his face as he thought about wonderful water disasters before realizing that they were talking about his son's quest. The sea god sobered up and smirked at Zeus, who was staring at him.

"I cursed, willing the sea to push us faster, but the ship's masts were already going under."

"That is really fast. Barely seconds." Reyna said.

"'Dive!' I told ... everything around it."

"That is true." Poseidon said gleefully and looked at Zeus in challenge, as if showing that his domain was much more dangerous than his brother's.

"Clarisse was a ... head by a beam."

"True. You would not be of any help to anyone if you were unconscious." Triton said. "At least you would be fine at the end. I cannot say the same about your friends."

Athena gritted her teeth and wondered whether Poseidon and his children were all crazy. How could they so nonchalantly talk about ships sinking and dragging the children underwater? She decided that they all had to be insane.

"We need help, ... neck of a hippocampus."

"Oh good!" Athena mumbled to herself in relief. Even Ares looked relieved at the mention of his
daughter being out of danger for the moment.

"What if Rainbow was far away?" Leo asked.

"It would not matter." Poseidon explained. "Hippocampi are one of the fastest swimmers. They could easily be able to come to the rescue within seconds."

"But how would they hear Percy?" Athena sneered at her arch-enemy. Just because she needed answers from him, did not mean that she could not be snobbish to him. On top of that, the fact that she did not know something and had to ask Poseidon for an answer was irksome.

"If they were too far away to hear Percy then someone would have relayed the message." Triton said. After all, all underwater messages were under his control. "Some or the other creature would have heard their call and kept on broadcasting the message till it would reach the hippocampus. It works faster than it seems."

Hermes was impressed with this system and thought to talk to Triton about it. Maybe he could use something like that and reduce his work load.

"Rainbow, the ... was wrong."

"Yeah. Do you think he would get off the island to hunt you down, if he finds it out?" Frank asked.

"Nah. He is too lazy for that." Clarisse answered.

"We skimmed ... instantly fell asleep."

"Yes, she would need rest. The fleece would only heal her and not energize her." Apollo said.

Asclepius nodded and added, "Even the other questers would need the rest. I do not suppose any of them have rested at all."

"I didn't know ... were going."

"Miami." Chiron said. "Everything from the sea of monsters ends up in Miami. That is why it is so dirty."

"Yeah, all of the monsters end up there." Grover said.

"This Miami must be the closest land outside of sea of monsters, for the hippocampi to take you there." Triton noted.

"I just propped ... asleep, too."

"So, that's why you said it." Grover said.

"It would have been better if I had been awake for it, you know." Annabeth teased Percy. The green eyed demigod stuck his tongue out at her.

"That was the end of the chapter." Eris said.

"I suppose I could read next." Clio, one of the nine muses, offered.
Ch53 – SoM – Welcoming Party

"WE GET A SURPRISE ON MIAMI BEACH"

"Lemme guess… it's a bad surprise," Rachel deadpanned.

"How would you know?" Travis asked.

"Have you met Percy?" the host of Oracle asked. "It's like Murphy's Law was made for him."

"It's not that bad." Percy said. Then he added as afterthought, "Never mind."

"'Percy, wake up.'

... and cruise ships."

"When you think like that, it makes a good picture. But it wasn't all that. Too much pollution." Grover said.

"'Miami, I ...they didn't let on.'

"Mortals." Dakota scoffed and then shrank under Rachel's glare.

"Most probably the mist covered you guys up or something." Lou Ellen said.

"Then why can't it cover up all the attacks I have in school and all." Percy whined.

"Dunno. Did you piss mom off at any time?" Lou Ellen asked.

Percy shrugged and said, "I don't think so."

"But you never know…" Annabeth pointed out.

"Now that we ... Omega on the pocket."

"I liked that jacket." Clarisse mumbled to herself.

"Annabeth ran ... camp ten days!'"

"It didn't seem that long, did it?" Holly asked.

"No. I think, for us it was like 3-4 days." Annabeth replied.

"Is the camp alright? I mean, who knows how much damage could have happened in ten days right?" Hazel asked.
"The borders and the tree were almost completely gone by the time I reached with the fleece."
Clarisse said with a grimace.

"What do you mean 'you reached'?" Reyna asked.

"It will come up." Clarisse said.

"'That's impossible!' ... you hadn't interfered—"

"Are you kidding me?" Jason asked incredulously. "If it hadn't been for Percy, you would probably have been dead."

Clarisse waved him off and said, "Whatever. We didn't have the best of relationship back then."

"And you have now?" Piper asked. "Just last week, you almost ran your spear through him."

Clarisse grinned and said, "Almost being the key word. He was fine."

"I have a scar." Percy retorted and showed his right arm that he had used to block Clarisse's spear. There was a faint white line just below his elbow. The scar hadn't completely disappeared because Percy had had a lot of hidden injuries and the water healed the major ones before moving on to smaller ones and he hadn't stayed in the water for a long time to heal all the scars.

"I'll throw you in the lake." Clarisse said.

"Won't work anymore. Old and closed injury."

"Then live with it, Prissy and stop irritating me."

Before Percy could retort, Chiron asked Clio to read.

"'Percy's fault?!' ... foot in frustration."

"I have never seen Annabeth do that." Connor said.

Annabeth squinted her eyes at Connor and said, "You never will."

"The thing was: ... made me look bad?"

Clarisse had a little smile on her face. So, Percy had actually understood her point of view. She had never known why he had actually let her take the fleece home when he could have been recognized as the hero he was. But, for him, it was more important to protect the people rather than get any recognition.

"I thought ... made him look bad ..."

Clarisse glared at the back of Percy's head. That had better not be the reason for letting her go with the fleece. She didn't want any pity from him or anyone else for that matter of fact.

Ares shrugged. It was true that he didn't care for the other heroes except his children and obviously he would be furious if his child made him look bad in front of the other gods, especially because of Percy, who had already humiliated him once before. Ares cocked his head to the side as a realization hit him. Percy. Maybe the son of Poseidion was the reason he had behaved like that with his daughter. The child had already defeated him in his previous quest and being a god, Ares would know about him leaving the camp to get the fleece. The war god wouldn't have wanted to look bad
because of the boy hijacking his daughter's quest. That would have been a valid reason to threaten Clarisse, the god thought to himself.

"'Clarisse,' I said, 'what did the Oracle tell you exactly?'"

"Yes! Finally, I'll get to hear the prophecy." Apollo exclaimed.

"She looked up... fly home alone."

"What is that supposed to mean?" Ares yelled at Apollo.

"I do not know." Apollo said in annoyance. He had had these kind of conversations for way too long. "My Oracles give the prophecy but we do not know their actual meaning unless they come to pass. You know this."

"What is the point of being the god of prophecies, if you yourself do not know what they mean?" Ares mocked.

Apollo rolled his eyes and gritted out, "The point is, brother, that the prophecies warn you of a future. What you do with that knowledge is up to you. As long as you do not try to control them, you would be fine. Athena had said this before and I will remind you that how a knowledge is used is the actual power and not knowledge itself. As the god of knowledge, intellect and truth, I would know that better than any of you."

"But, Apollo, from what all has already transpired, would you be able to guess what the prophecy means?" Athena asked.

"Maybe. What were the lines, again?" Apollo asked and Clarisse recited them from memory.

"Hmm. Alright, so the first line is obviously referring to the ship the children used to travel to the entrance of the sea of monsters. Then, the second line says that they find the fleece, which they did. The third one would be…"

"The cave of the cyclops?" Pan suggested when Apollo paused in thought.

"Right." Athena exclaimed. "The girl was trapped inside the cave, which was made out of stone."

Apollo nodded and said, "The fourth has obviously not yet happened but if I were to guess, I would say that she would require her friends' aid to reach the camp, but might have to make the journey on her own, just like she started the quest on her own." Satisfied with his own interpretation, the god asked Clio to read.

"'Ouch,' Grover... I've got it."

"Have you now?" Apollo said with a raised brow.

"I searched my... three hundred dollars."

"That's enough for a plane ticket back to New York." Clovis said. He usually flew to Miami to meet his mortal aunt.

"Tyson to the rescue. Again." Leo whooped.

"I ran to the... in Clarisse's arms."
"Probably me. I thought you had lost it." Grover said.

"Wait! You let Clarisse go home with the Fleece? It should have been you. You were the one who saved them and got the Fleece." Hercules said.

"It didn't matter." Percy answered. "The tree must have almost been dead and the fleece needed to reach as soon as possible. I couldn't fly because Zeus wouldn't let me and air travel is the fastest way to travel. And anyway, it was her quest. I was always anyways going to get Grover. Clarisse's task was to get the Fleece."

"Clarisse said, ... Fleece back safely."

"So not a Roman." Dakota muttered.

"I could see ... meant what I said."

"I would be suspicious too." Reyna said. "Not many would let another hero get recognition."

Percy rolled his eyes at the comment.

"She jumped ... was on its way."

"Now you guys need to get home right? That's all?" Piper asked hopefully. How many more difficulties could they have?

"Yup. But wait for it." Grover said. "If it gets over now, it is too easy and Percy doesn't do easy."

"'Percy,' Annabeth ... safely back by tonight?"

"What's wrong with that, Princess?" Clarisse sneered.

"A lot of things." Travis muttered and felt the full force of Clarisse's glare on him.

"He means – nothing." Katie said and smacked Travis's head.

"'It's her quest,' ... easy to do."

"Not at all." Grover said.

Annabeth shrugged and said, "It is hard to be surprised when you know everything about each other."

Percy looked at her with pleading and hopeful eyes and said, "But I still manage to do it?"

The grey eyed demigod pretended to think for a while and said, "Hmm… occasionally."

Percy punched the air in victory and had a smug smile on his face. "Mission accomplished!" he exclaimed as the demigods teased him and laughed.

"If you two are done flirting, we could continue?" Clarisse said after a while in a teasing tone.

"'Come on,' ... at my throat."

"Whoa! What?" Rachel blurted out as the previous jovial mood evaporated, leaving behind tense air.
"'Hey, cuz,' said Luke. 'Welcome back to the States.'"

"I'm really starting to hate him." Frank said.

"Starting?" Gwen asked. "The guy betrayed everyone, you should already have been hating him."

"Guys…" Percy said. "Just listen."

"His bear-man ... kicking and screaming."

"Gods, he makes me sick." Adrianna said.

"What I do not understand is how did he know that you were going to be in that place?" Theseus said. "Was he or his men following you?"

"No, they weren't." Annabeth answered. "Miami is the place that everything coming out of sea of monsters ends up in. He just guessed that we too, would end up there."

"'What do you ... hospitality, of course.'"

"Oh gods! For how long has he been just waiting there for you guys?"

"He must have been sailing towards this Miami when you met him." Athena guessed. "Which means that it had always been their plan to let you get the fleece and then take it for themselves."

"They seemed to have everything well planned out." Hestia mused. "It is a good thing that Percy let Clarisse take the Fleece with her. Now they cannot get the Fleece."

"The bear twins ... us get some 'hospitality.'"

"What are they planning? An invasion of the camp?" Hazel muttered to herself.

"Huh?" Piper asked, having heard the comment.

"Why are the monsters prepared and the demigods in battle armor?" Hazel questioned.

"Oh."

"'And so, the ... 'Some old friend!'"

"You are never getting the Fleece!" Dakota growled.

"'Maybe you ... You messed up.'"

"Damn right, he screwed up." Butch said.

"Now he would try to stop Clarisse from reaching the camp." Athena groaned. "You should really not have said anything."

"In that case, he would need to be very fast. How do you suggest he would do that?" Hermes asked.

"He has an assortment of monsters. He could use them to do it for him." Athena replied.

"Luke's eyes ... 'Yeah.'"

"It's a good thing that Percy and Clarisse don't have the best history. Otherwise he would have
prepared himself for that possibility." Will commented.

"Agrius!"

... Miami Airport, fast."

"Of course he has a pegasus." Theseus said.

"'But, boss—"

... I had an idea."

"That was an awesome plan. Best entertainment ever." Travis said and Chiron grinned. He could never forget that Iris message.

"What are you going to do?" Athena asked. "You are planning an Iris message, aren't you?"

"To whom?" Iris asked.

"It was brilliant." Annabeth said to Percy. "You all will find out soon."

"'You've been ... accept my offering."

"Of course, it would be." Iris said gently. "You are not required to say it out loud, actually. As long as you say it respectfully, the prayer will be accepted."

"'You tricked ... HALF-BLOOD!'"

Everyone, even Dionysus, Zeus, Hades and Hera had smiles on their faces as they thought about the plan. At least something would go right for them. They needed it.

"Oh my gods!" Frank said. "That is genius!"

"You will get Luke to talk about his plans and tell Dionysus at the same time. It might even get Chiron pardoned. It is not a bad plan. You better hope that Luke or his people do not actually see the Iris message." Athena said. It wasn't a bad plan at all. If she dare think, it was even a good plan.

"Behind Luke, ... Thalia's tree, Luke?"

"You should not be so blunt lest he think something to be the matter. You should get him to talk about his plans indirectly." Athena reprimanded.

Poseidon rolled his eyes and said, "No need to go about things in a roundabout manner. Being blunt would throw the boy off his plan and confuse him."

"Please read, Clio." Zeus interrupted.

"'I did, of course," ... have the guts.'"

"That is treachery, not guts." Jason snarled. This was the person that was supposed to be Thalia's friend? He was a coward, a traitor, a murderer. Jason rarely felt such anger but now he was just one step away from destroying something.

Hermes hung his head in shame. He had a feeling that his son was so far gone that no one could
help him. Obviously, he hoped that that wasn't the case and that he didn't give up on his son, but he could see that any efforts might be futile.

""You call it ... once I was done with it.""

"Which is something that I do not understand. Why would father want the demigods to have the fleece? Why not keep it with himself? That would undoubtedly be more beneficial." Hades said in frustration.

"He might have wanted Thalia to recover. That way he could get to control her. And it would be easier since she was already friends with Luke." Athena suggested.

"That maybe so, but the fleece would accelerate his healing and he would return faster. Then he would not need the children, would he?" Poseidon said.

"Because of the prophecy." Athena said in irritation. "A child of the big three would be a weapon that could destroy Olympus. If he is unable to get Percy to join him, then he would prefer to bring Thalia back to use her."

Zeus narrowed his eyes and thought about Athena's ideas. They were quite plausible. But he wanted to know more. Now that his nephew was able to get Luke to talk about his plans, they might get more information. With that in mind, he asked to continue with the reading.

"That made me ... us down a little.""

"That is true. Now that they are using pledges to bring him back, nothing short of destroying the still mending body, with the scythe no less, is going to stop father's recovery." Demeter said.

""And so you ... and stumbled back.""

Everyone smiled and some chuckled.

"It was a miracle that one of us didn't say anything. Many of us wanted to kill him." Connor said bitterly.

"Well it is a good thing that none of you did. I would be toast otherwise." Percy said.

"Above the pool, ... with both hands.""

"Can somebody kill him already?" Dakota asked.

"He is already dead." Nico replied.

"You know what I mean." Dakota grumbled.

""I fear not,"... horse's pinochle games.""

"Finally!" Leo exclaimed and the demigods laughed. Even the gods cracked a smile at the statement.

"Tantalus grabbed ... exploded into cheering.""

All of the demigods, especially those who had the misfortune of meeting Tantalus, cheered and clapped at the dismissal. The Olympians looked satisfied as they realized that the punishment that they had rolled out was still intact.
"Luke bellowed ... to be replaced.""

Zeus raised his brow. So, Athena had been right. Kronos was not able to get Percy onto his side, so he was bringing Thalia into the picture. He bit his cheek as he thought about his children's fatal flaw. It was almost always inability to give up power. He wondered how his daughter was able to refuse it. Not many of his children could overcome their fatal flaws. She must be really strong to be able to do so.

"I wasn't sure ... this boat alive.""

"Well, it does seem impossible to get off the boat. How did you manage it?" Perseus asked.

"I had help." Percy said and looked gratefully at Chiron, who was already smiling at him.

Clio announced the end of the chapter and Hestia suggested that they all shift indoors because the tree nymphs were complaining that they had gone too long without rain. The demigods got up in hurry, wanting to walk around a bit.
It took around half an hour for everyone to get settled in the throne room and the delay may or may not have been because the big three decided that they had gone way too long without a shouting match and decided that the middle of a corridor was the perfect place to shout at one another. No one knew what the fight was about, as usual, but the other Olympians did not seem worried and Hermes told everyone that this was the big three's way of talking to each other. At last, the three brothers graced everyone with their presence and Zeus asked someone to read.

"If I may, my Lord?" Ganymede spoke up from where he had been sitting with Eros and creeping Nico and Will out by staring at them and randomly smiling.

"Of course." Zeus said in delight. He hadn't seen Ganymede in quite a while. He heard a little choking noise and looked to his side to see Hera huffing and glaring at both him and his ex-lover. She had some plants holding her hands in place and he realized that Demeter must have interfered.

Thalia and Jason looked at each other and shook their heads in exasperation. They were getting to see more relationship drama by staying with Zeus and Hera than they had seen from Cabin 10.

Clearing his throat to get everyone's undivided attention, Ganymede read, "THE PARTY PONIES INVADE"

"Party Ponies!" The Stolls said in unison and the Greek campers grinned.

"'One on one," I challenged Luke. "What are you afraid of?!"

"Getting beaten and looking like a fool in front of his people?" Dakota asked and shuddered from too much sugar intake.

"Nah." Percy said, looking at Dakota in concern. "Luke's better than me."

"I'm better than you." Thalia pointed out. "Luke could be your equal."

Annabeth said, "Luke would be better as long as Percy is being careful about not lashing out."

Turning to her boyfriend, she said, "And you could defeat Luke if you didn't keep thinking that he was a better swordsman."

Percy shrugged. He would always consider Luke to be a better swordsman. Anytime he lost his concentration in a fight, Percy would always hear Luke's voice instructing him. He didn't know when his internal motivational voice turned into Luke's voice, but as long as he himself didn't follow the son of Hermes' footsteps, he was fine with it.

"Luke curled ... a giant raven."
"Pure black pegasus?" Triton asked in amazement.

"Yeah. Why?" Percy replied.

"Black is not a color on Pegasus." Poseidon said. "His children are only of the colors that are represented on him. So, it is quite weird that there is a pure black pegasus."

"According to Blackjack, he is the only pure black pegasus." Grover said. "He said that he was the only one to have ever existed."

Amphitrite nodded and said, "Well, there is one such newborn foal who stays with Pegasus. This Blackjack could be the same pegasus."

"How?" Thalia asked. "I mean, other than the original Pegasus, none of them are immortal, right?"

"Yes." Amphitrite answered. "But all pegasi have immortal blood, which helps them to reform once they fall. Their personalities change but they retain all of their previous lives' memories."

(A/N – I'm not really sure of how that reforming thing works. It was mentioned that Scipio was reforming because of his Pegasus blood. If it is mentioned or explained in anything other than the PJO or HoO series, then I might not have read it. For any DW fans, think of it as regeneration minus the whole light show and a lot slower. I'm not putting it as reforming like how the monsters reform in Tartarus because the pegasi are too awesome to reform like that.)

Percy smiled at that. He thought of asking Blackjack about all of this when he went back to their time. He missed the pegasus more than he thought possible.

"The pegasus ... with saddle soap."

"What?" Percy half yelled.

"Blackjack is not a mare." Annabeth said in confusion.

"Yeah." Percy said.

Grover chuckled and said, "Your thoughts, buddy. You mistook him for a mare? I'm gonna have to tell him this."

Percy looked at his best friend in horror and said, "You wouldn't! He will want me to get him a cake made out of donuts to make up for that."

Hazel looked at a flustered Percy in amusement and asked, "Does he curse as much as Arion?"

"Oh, nowhere close. Arion is another league in himself. But I rather if they don't meet and talk – in front of me, at least. It would give me a headache." Percy replied.

"'Sir!' Agrius called,... you get whipped??"

"Keep doing it." Athena said.

"Why?" Artemis asked.

"If I am correct, which I always am, then Percy is trying to stall Luke by goading him into a fight. This will give Clarisse some more time to be able to take the fleece back to camp." The wisdom goddess explained.
"Luke glanced at ... at sword-fighting."

"Thanks for the vote of confidence." Annabeth told Percy. "But I wasn't able to come up with any good plan."

"You would have." Percy said in earnest, making Annabeth smile up at him and kiss him on the cheek.

"I'll kill you ... died in the process."

Poseidon nodded sadly and said, "That is how the weapon is made. The two opposing metals need to be bonded with the blood of an innocent. It is an ancient ritual involving a lot of magic and a lot more pain."

"Luke whistled to ... to this party."

"That is unfair." Perseus shouted. "Both sides need to be on equal footing. They should at least have the same weapons."

"Who would stop him?" Nike said in disgust. "They are in his captivity. He can twist the rules in any which way and no one can say anything."

"The shield was ... not listening to him."

"I'm sure you will get the hang of it once you start fighting." Piper said. "You did defeat the cyclops in a few minutes."

"The cyclops just had strength, nothing else. Luke, on the other hand, had intelligence. That is a lot harder to beat." Percy explained. "Plus he had been fighting since he was nine years old and I had only one summer of training and he had been my trainer. He knew all of my moves." Percy muttered to himself, "Not to mention that he was Luke."

Annabeth, having heard the last comment, shook her head and whispered to Percy, "That was the reason you couldn't beat him. You always thought that he was better."

Percy looked at his girlfriend and then looked at his lap. He knew she was correct. Percy did always consider Luke better than him. But how could he not? Luke had taught him a lot. He had been his friend when no one wanted to. And until Luke had betrayed them, Percy had looked up to Luke. So, every single time that he had to fight Luke, Percy would turn into that unsure, inexperienced and scared twelve year old, who was one step away from hero worship.

"Oh, that is bad." Reyna said. "You really should have stayed year round and trained."

"Huh? Yes." Percy said.

"Luke lunged and ... out of practice."

"So true." Thalia said and the fact that Percy had had only one summer's worth training, hit everyone with full force. They were reading about an inexperienced, young and tired Percy, for he had just finished a quest. This child was no match for the leader of Kronos' army.

"He came at me ... at Luke's face."

"Good job." Theseus said while many breathed out in relief.
"The force of ... on his feet again."

"Wow. That guy is fast." Leo said. He hadn't believed it when Percy had earlier said that Luke was better than him. After all, the son of Hephaestus had seen Percy fight. But, now hearing about Luke's skills, Leo could see him be able to match evenly against Percy.

"I attacked and ... take the weight."

"How are you alive?" Hera asked bluntly.

"What do you mean by that?" Poseidon asked.

"Nothing to offend you, brother." The queen rolled her eyes and said. "It is just that we had thought that the sword the traitor was using was a manifestation of father's scythe. If it truly was the same weapon, then your son should not be alive."

"Then, maybe it was not the same weapon." Hermes said venomously, miffed about the 'traitor' comment.

"Maybe it was a weak manifestation. It might still not possess all the powers of the original blade." Hades suggested.

"Whatever it was, I suggest that we continue with the reading." Zeus said and Poseidon was grateful that his son was not hurt by the original blade. He would not have survived it.

Percy internally groaned and thought about what kind of reaction he would get if the books told about him getting cut by the scythe. He knew that Annabeth would kill him for not telling her about it.

"'Perrrrrcy!' Grover ... to black out."

"Did you cut your femoral artery?" Will asked, deep in thought. "There is no other reason that I can come up with that would make you black out so soon after an injury."

(A/N – I don't know anything about medical stuff. All I know is that bleeding out from the femoral artery, which is in the thigh, is one of the fastest ways to bleed out.)

"What?" Percy asked.

"Don't use medical terms." Nico said to the healer.

Rolling his eyes, Will rephrased his question. "Were you bleeding out really fast?"

"No, he wasn't." Annabeth said.

"What are you talking about?" Apollo asked his son.

"The book said that Percy felt like he was about to lose conscious. But it doesn't seem like a fatal wound or anything." Will answered with a puzzled look on his face.

The god furrowed his eyebrows for a split second before realization dawned on his face. "It is not the injury itself, but the blade that cut him." Apollo said solemnly and all of the gods stared at Percy in disbelief.

"You should be dead, boy." Hades said.
"I have heard that before." Percy mumbled. He hadn't even realized that he had injured by the scythe twice. He was glad that the first time wasn't as bad as the second time, otherwise he would not have actually survived.

Poseidon gripped the couch tightly, almost ripping it in worry and said in a slightly shaky voice, "The blade was probably not as strong as it once had been. All that matters is that Percy is alright."

"He is about to lose consciousness in the book, father." Triton reminded the elder god. At the look he got from his parents, the minor god hastily said, "Which is why we should continue reading to find out what happened."

"I'd never make ... and bared his teeth."

"NO!" a few of the demigods bellowed while Athena and Pan looked ready to murder everyone in their paths.

"Please tell me that the Party Ponies come and save you." Travis said.

"They do love coming to our rescue at the last possible minute." Chris said.

"That's when all Hades broke loose."

The god of dead huffed and muttered some choice words about demigods using his name to curse.

"Whish!
... to the deck."

Athena sighed in relief.

"'Brother!' Agrius ... over Miami Bay."

"Good." Amphitrite said. The pegasi were one of her most beloved animals.

"And you got his undying devotion because of that." Grover said to Percy.

"Yeah. Even though I didn't actually save him or anything of that sort." Percy said.

"For a split ... of the main stairwell."

"Party Ponies!" the older Greek campers said to themselves with a smile. Even Chiron had a smile on his face as he thought about his relatives.

"'Ponies!' Tyson ... either side."

"What?" Frank asked in bewildered tone.

"They sound awesome. I wanna meet them." Dakota said and the Stolls involved him in their plans of meeting up with some of the Party Ponies.

"Ah! The wild centaurs." Dionysus said, taking a sip of his wine. "They are not that awful at throwing parties.

Apollo rolled his eyes and said, "They are actually quite good at it. But one has to be careful with them, lest you lose your memories of the parties they throw."
The demigods looked in surprise at the gods as many of the gods and goddesses were lost in thoughts of the parties.

"They exploded ... celebrate or attack."

"Probably both." Katie said.

"Definitely both." Clovis said. He had many times joined the Party Ponies' parties that the centaurs dreamt of.

"Apparently both. ... the swimming pool."

"Oh I love those arrows." Will said in glee. Then he added a bit sadly, "They were Michael's favorite. He always had at least one with him at all times. Even if you woke him up in the middle of the night."

Nico patted the healer's hand awkwardly in an attempt to console him. The son of Hades didn't know if it worked but Will did end up holding on to his hand. All of the other Greek demigods looked away from each other. Every life lost hung between them like an albatross.

The gods and other demigods and hunters looked at the Greek demigods in sadness and pity. They all knew that expression and air of melancholy that surrounded the demigods. It only came from losing a friend, a sibling, a comrade. Apollo, especially, felt horrible. He was sure that this Michael was a son of his. Who else would have such affinity towards arrows? So, even if he didn't know anything about this Michael, he felt downcast.

After a moment, Percy broke the silence and asked Ganymede to continue reading.

"His warriors scattered. ... warrior would retreat."

"Party Ponies are scary?" Reyna asked incredulously.

"Oh yeah!" Thalia said. "You should see them in an actual fight."

"Yeah. Imagine a stampede with bows and arrows and paint ball guns and literally anything that can be used as a weapon." Annabeth said.

Dakota grinned and said, "They are my kind of people. They can party and fight. Maybe, both at the same time. I have to meet them."

Chiron internally groaned and hoped that he could stop the children from meeting his wild relatives but if both Greek and Roman demigods came together, they would be impossible to get through to.

"'Come get some!' ... to slip and fall."

"I have never heard of such a fight." Enyo said incredulously.

"What is the use of fighting if you are not killing or at least maiming the opponent?" Ares scoffed.

"Well, this is obviously more of a rescue than a fight." Athena said, rolling her eyes. "It is more important to get the children out of there than to maim and kill."

Before Ares could retort, Ganymede read, "Chiron galloped ... was on fire."

"That was most definitely a weaker version of the scythe." Zeus mumbled.
"Luke was ... brethren!" Chiron said.

"Why are you withdrawing? Stay and fight." Ares and Enyo shouted in unison.

Chiron rolled his eyes and said, "This was a last minute rescue that I had come up with, Lord Ares, Lady Enyo. We did not have much weapons required to fight an entire army. That is why we retreated. Not to mention that Percy was injured and we needed to get him out of the enemy base."

"'You won't ... deck chair."

"Awesome!" Leo snickered and many joined him at the image that must have created.

"A palomino centaur ... anything to you?"

"No." Tyson said in confusion and some of the campers smiled and chuckled.

"Luke's warriors were ... of downtown Miami."

"Ah! Yes. That would have been confusing for someone travelling with us for the first time." Chiron said with a smile.

"I have no ... miles and miles."

"That is almost accurate." Chiron mused and did not elaborate. The campers, who were used to such things, went back to doing whatever they had been doing while listening to the reading. The gods on the other hand, waited for some kind of an explanation. When none came, Ganymede continued reading.

"In no time, ... on their faces."

Chiron groaned internally at his brethren's behavior while some discussed the fun in head slams.

"Chiron sighed. ... cells to spare."

"Hey! Don't dis the Party Ponies, Chiron!" Travis whined.

Chiron shook his head and said, "You all have a strange affinity towards them."

"They are fun." Connor said.

"'Chiron," I said, ... cleared my name."

"I do not think that enough time had passed for you to be contacted by D, Chiron. And gather your relatives and reach the children" Hermes said. "How did you know about that then?"

"I am sure that I would explain it to the children, Lord Hermes." Chiron said.

"'But how did ... distance for humans."

Iris smiled at that. She was glad that she could aid the centaur and the demigods.

"That makes more sense." Hermes muttered to himself.

"I looked ... were getting into."

"I like paintball. We should play." Tyson said excitedly as Percy and Grover explained what
exactly this paintball was, to everyone from the past.

"'So what now?'... Nobody won.'"

"That is true." Athena said. "Which is why, I think, that the enemy would already be making their next moves. After all, you did get the Fleece."

"'But we got ... shall carry you.'"

"What was the matter?" Apollo asked.

"Let us wait and see if it is revealed." Chiron said cryptically.

"'You're coming, ... I'm curious about the Fleece.'"

"You knew?" Thalia asked Chiron.

"I had a feeling, my dear." The centaur replied kindly.

"About what?" Athena asked.

"About Thalia coming back to life." Chiron said. "I had known that she had only been injured and not dead when turned into the tree. I had a feeling that the fleece might mend her and bring her back. Even then, it had been quite shocking when it actually happened."

"I didn't know ... once I was done with it."

"How would you know anything about that?" Thalia asked, raising her brow at her cousin.

"You connected it to the correct thing." Jason mumbled.

Percy shrugged and said, "Gut feeling, I suppose."

"Uh-huh." Thalia said.

"Had he just ... his true intentions."

"You are not wrong." Hestia said. "He always makes everyone else complete his plans. They would think that they are working on their own, doing what they had always intended to do, but what no one understands is that where father is involved, he will find out what you would do and then incorporate his plans into that."

"Like a parasite. His plans would live on your plans and you would not even know that you were all along supporting him." Demeter said.

Annabeth leaned into Percy's side and whispered to him, "We did always work better when there were hardly any plans involved. This is why he didn't like you at all. You never do anything that is planned."

Percy tilted his head and looked at Annabeth in confusion and said, "I don't know whether what all you said was a good or a bad thing. So, I'm gonna go with good and be happy about it."

Annabeth chuckled and sighed contently as she felt him kiss her hair.

"Over by the ... many bad habits?"
"You are not very good at being discreet." Dionysus noted.

"Annabeth met ... between them."

"I hate it when you do that." Percy whined, looking at Annabeth and Chiron, who shrugged at the same time.

"'Sure, Chiron,' ... 'I made her tell me.'"

"Which is why it is almost impossible to hide anything from you." Connor said.

"Yeah," Chris agreed, "you have an uncanny ability to pester us till we tell you whatever we are hiding."

Percy's arguments died in his throat as almost all of the demigods agreed with Chris and Connor.

"His eyes ... it secret forever."

"Although, I suppose, I was hoping that we could hide it from you a bit longer." Chiron said to Percy.

Percy shrugged and said, "It's all done. Anyway, it was better that I knew." 'I think', he thought to himself.

"'So am I ... when I'm sixteen.'"

"That would explain why you survived meeting the Fates." Athena said. "But if you are already 17, then whose life cord did they cut?"

"That will come up when I turn sixteen in the books." Percy said. He then frowned and thought that wasn't a sentence he would ever have thought to say out loud.

Athena huffed but motioned for the reading to be continued.

"Chiron's tail ... Mount Olympus!"

"Ah! You are getting overwhelmed with the prophecy." Apollo said. "This is one of the reasons, why it is not a good thing to tell someone a prophecy before time."

"He will try," ... I was close to."

"The prophecy is about you. Chiron should have seen that." Apollo said. At everyone's confused looks, he explained, "The Fates came to Percy. That in itself should have been enough proof that the prophecy was his all along. The Fates would not go anyone else."

Chiron nodded and said, "I did think like that but I was also confused since Thalia might be brought back to life. And if that happened, then she would definitely be older than Percy."

"That would be confusing." Apollo said.

"I'm just a ... something like Kronos?"

"With the right decisions? Everything." Apollo said.

"Yes." Athena agreed. "It may not seem possible but just one single hero can put up against anything and everything as long as they believe in themselves and us."
The demigods nodded as they remembered all of their friends, half-bloods, satyrs and even nymphs, who had fought alongside them and in their own ways, stood up to so many monsters. None of them were anything special – all ordinary people, going about their daily lives, but they had stood up to evil and changed everything. There had been so many, some thankfully still alive, who had done one small thing – just one, mind you – and that one little thing had given sometimes saved someone's life or given others some more time to regroup or even given many hope to continue.

"Chiron managed ... Do you understand?"

"Yes."

A small whisper uttered by every single demigod, some still young or new to the immortal world and some older and already veterans of wars. They all felt inspired by Chiron's words. They didn't understand everything that the centaur must have been trying to convey, for he had lived for so much longer than all of them combined, but they had seen enough to start understanding what he had meant.

The immortals in the room looked at the demigods, as if realizing their importance for the first time. They all had lived for so long that they never bothered to remember anything of importance, for it was all too fleeting for them. That was one of the reasons why many would forget to claim their mortal children. But there were a few moments when something would happen that would draw their attention. This little speech from Chiron was one such event. Truth be told, the whole reading was one such event. It was something that they would never forget, they were sure of it, that even after a million years, they would remember every moment of the reading.

So, when they heard the speech, they all finally saw demigods as the bridges connecting the two worlds – the mortal and the immortal – and their importance hit the gods with a force. The demigods were protectors of the mortals and the ambassadors of the immortals. And the gods knew that without demigods, they wouldn't be able to do a lot of things. They needed their children, but were too proud to admit that. And now, in this moment, they finally began to understand that.

Somewhere, far away, the three Fates smiled a bit at the gods' thoughts and changed the course of their weaving by one-tenth of a millimeter and knew that that little change might just create the butterfly effect needed for the existence of Olympus.

"I ... I don't know."

... will destroy you."

"Which begs the question that why did he not kill Percy whenever he realized that he could not use him?" Hera asked and had the decency to look sheepish when Poseidon glared at her for her insensitivity.

"He did but I somehow survived every time because of my friends." Percy said.

"Sometimes the monsters were just plain stupid." Annabeth added.

"That too."

"'You talk like you know him.'"

"You did not know?" Poseidon asked his son.
"No. Either I didn't pay attention or had forgotten about it."

"Well, you should learn all of our history, boy." Athena instructed.

"Yes. But I usually just ask someone if I don't know."

Annabeth nodded and said, "Many a times he has actually waited for the monster itself or me to tell him about something while he is fighting the monster."

Percy grinned and said, "It's easier for me that way."

Annabeth rolled her eyes at him.

"Chiron pursed ... camp for Kronos?"

"Paranoia." one of the campers whispered and they all struggled to keep their chuckles to themselves. Chiron just looked at them in slight exasperation and hoped that they didn't actually go around annoying the gods. There was only a limit up to which the gods would accept being talked back to.

"I do not understand how we could ever take such a decision." Artemis said to herself.

"Chiron's eyes ... He spared your life?"

"Seriously?" Thalia and Clarisse asked at the same time.

"Hey, I get it all mixed up okay?" Percy defended himself.

"Anyway, he won't be doing it any longer." Annabeth assured them. Then she turned to Percy and asked very sweetly, "Will you?"

"Uh, nope?" Percy replied nervously.

Satisfied, Annabeth turned to talk to Thalia and Percy let out a breath in relief and shared a look with Jason, who was silently laughing at his misery.

"'Percy,' Chiron said, his voice impossibly soft. 'The titan Kronos is my father.' "

"And that is the end of the chapter." Ganymede said.

"In that case, I suppose I could read the next chapter." Aeolus said, materializing next to the wind gods. He had been flitting around the whole throne room, usually irritating the other gods.

"We should probably break for lunch first." Hestia suggested. "You can read after that, Aeolus."
Ch55 – SoM – Letters and Racing

Lunch was over soon after it began because Zeus wanted to be done with the book and someone had let it slip that there were only a couple of chapters left to be read. Grumbling, all of the demigods made their way inside the throne room. They had been looking forward to getting to walk in the rain. Although, that might have been because Percy had promised that he would not let them get wet in the rain. And the son of Poseidon had been looking forward to pranking them and letting them all get wet once they had reached a bit further away from the palace, which would have anyway have happened since he couldn't hold the protection over so many of them. But no such luck.

Once everyone had settled in, Hestia passed the book to Aeolus.

"THE CHARIOT RACE ENDS WITH A BANG"

"What importance is a chariot race of?" Zeus grumbled. He was getting impatient for his daughter to be brought back, now that the fleece was at the camp.

"Patience, brother." Hestia said calmly, knowing that Zeus was waiting for the appearance of his daughter.

"We arrived in ... Half-Blood Hill."

"Obviously not." Dionysus rolled his eyes and said. "Especially, considering what all has happened with the Iris message."

The gods understood the wine god. None of them would be in a celebratory mood when it was confirmed that the titan lord was making a comeback and would stop at nothing, including targeting mere children and having to be there at the camp but being unable to help at all because of the ancient laws.

"The camp had ... "really-big-lizard-with-breath-that-blows-stuff-up")."

"It actually means 'Eternal Dragon', but whatever." Jason said.

"It's close enough." Leo said.

"That had been terrifying actually. Before all these attacks had started, not many of us had practice in killing the more dangerous monsters, let alone see a dragon. We were just lucky that these guys came back with the fleece before any more of the monsters could attack." Katie said.

"The Big House's ... around Thalia's tree."

Some of the gods felt bad for their children for being attacked in the only safe place they had.
Some of the more sympathetic gods wondered how shook up they themselves would be if someone attacked them at Olympus. Not that that was possible, they thought, but if something like that happened, they would feel unsafe and violated.

"The moment ... waves on the beach."

The demigods sighed in longing. They wanted to go back to their camp, their home.

"It was like everything was in HD." Travis said and the other older Greeks nodded.

"So," Reyna turned to look at the Greeks and asked, "if you were to take off the fleece, all of that would go away?" She hoped that that was not the case. Just like Camp Jupiter, even with the evidence of a war, Camp Half-Blood looked beautiful.

"No, not at all, child." Chiron said. "The fleece has already healed and strengthened the camp borders. We keep it safe with us."

"Oh. That's good."

"Gradually, the needles ... Weekly right away."

"There is an Olympus Weekly?" Gwen asked in confusion.

"Yeah. It's fun to read." Connor said. "All of the latest fights, news, gossips and fashion advices for cabin 10 and other stuff that we usually skip."

"The other stuff that you skip would be the policy changes and rules and laws, Connor, which is what you should be reading." Chiron said with a small smile.

"Boring." Travis drawled.

"In the meantime, ... campers for once."

"Regardless, you guys should have been recognized for all that you had to go through." Reyna said tentatively. If she had gone through all of that, she would want some recognition, even if she did break the rules to be in that position.

Percy shrugged and said, "It didn't matter. We got the fleece and Grover. That was more than enough."

"And none of us died." Annabeth added and Percy repeated it in agreement.

"Don't forget me." Thalia said. "I came back to life."

"We can't forget you. You won't let us." Percy stuck his tongue out at Thalia, who replied in kind.

"Later that night, ... breakfast pastries,"

"That was a good one." Travis sighed, while at the same time Katie said, "That was the worst I have ever heard."

"Hey!" The Stolls said indignantly.

"I haven't heard this one yet." Butch said.

"Let's tell ghost stories tonight." Connor suggested and the others agreed and Nico groaned. None
of them know the real ghost stories. That was when Lou Ellen said, "And we have Nico. He should have the best ghost stories." Nico groaned and protested loudly as everyone else seemed excited for this.

"Clarisse shoved me ... good to be home.""

"Ahh! So, this is how the weird friendship started." Will said.

"I still don't know if they are actually friends or not." Pollux said in confusion.

"Are not." Clarisse and Percy said in unison as Annabeth and Grover laughed at their lie.

"The next morning, ... camp was safe."

"And this is when these two started using their parent's powers to win the chariot races." Connor grumbled.

"Percy can only talk to horses and not control them and chariot is an inanimate object. I cannot control them. So, it is not cheating." Annabeth pointed out.

"Whatever..." Connor replied.

"Tyson wasn't ... special modifications."

"This should be good." Theseus said, hoping that this race was also described like the previous one.

"We spent the ... wanted to win."

"Yup." Laurel and Holly nodded in agreement. It was all about winning for them.

"The night ... slung over his shoulder."

"Is that me again?" Hermes asked.

Aeolus read, ""Hermes?' I ... jogging clothes?'"

"Why are you breaking the rules again, Hermes?" Zeus asked in exasperation. He was starting to give up on his family following any rules in the future.

"For all we know, father, I could just be delivering some message to him."

"You do not work for demigods. Only gods." Zeus reminded his son, who rolled his eyes when the king god wasn't looking.

"'Uh ...' I wasn't sure whether I was supposed to kneel or buy stamps from him or what."

"Yes, Percy. That's what you are supposed to do when you meet dad." Travis said.

"You buy stamps from him." Connor concluded and they all laughed.

"I didn't know what to do, okay?" Percy said but everyone was busy explaining to the various gods what a stamp was. Once that was done, the throne room was once again filled with laughter from some of the gods while others said that he should obviously kneel, which Hermes waved off saying that it wasn't needed.
"Then it occurred ... the diplomatic approach."

"How is that diplomatic?" Katie wondered.

"Dueling to death is diplomatic." Ares huffed and some of the other gods agreed while Hera wondered where exactly her family went wrong. Why were they like this?

"'I'm really ... you abandoned him.'"

Despite the words and what they meant for him and his son, Hermes couldn't help but smile, just a little, at the words spoken. Throughout the reading, he and many of the other gods, he was sure, had forgotten Percy's age. Maybe it was because of his actions and deeds, but the gods had forgotten how young the boy really was. And yet his words – simple, innocent words – reminded the messenger god that the child was only thirteen in age. He was far too young to face anything that he had faced.

"I waited for ... time as a rodent."

Hermes shook his head and said, "I would not do that. You only happened to tell me the news, unfortunate as it was. How could I harm you for that?"

"Instead, he just sighed. 'Do you ever feel your father abandoned you, Percy?'"

Amphitrite felt Poseidon stiffen, nothing too obvious but she could tell and she was sure that anyone who was close to her husband including his hot-headed brothers, could tell too. None of the gods would ever want an answer to that question, no matter that they already knew it, but to hear it from their children was undoubtedly hard.

All of the demigods immediately wanted to nod their answers as if they were the ones being asked. They wondered whether Percy's answer was the same as theirs. He always had had a way better relationship with his father, whether it had been because he was the only child in decades or because he was the prophecy child, it didn't matter.

"Oh, man.

... call or something."

Clarisse scoffed and said, "Yeah, well Prissy, that's how it is for everyone else. You are the only one who has even seen their parent and got to talk to them. So, quit complaining."

"I know." Percy said but continued to stare at the floor. Till date, except Hermes, no one else had known all this and now suddenly it was broadcasted to all. He didn't even want to see anyone. He knew that was how the gods worked, but he couldn't help how he felt, now could he? And despite knowing that the others had it worse than him at least in parents' department, he still could not help but feel angry or sad whenever he thought about his dad. The demigod controlled the irritation brewing inside of him. These were his feelings and his alone. No one else had a right to comment on them just because they thought that he had it better than them. Maybe he did, but that didn't give the others a right to say anything about that.

"Clarisse." Chiron tutted.

"Fine! I won't say anything." Clarisse rolled her eyes and said. Then she muttered to herself, "Doesn't make it any less true."
Poseidon sighed internally when he heard his son's thoughts. He had expected it. This was one of the downsides of being a god, he thought. They could never express themselves how they wanted to. The god decided to focus on the fact that he had a good relationship with his son, which meant that he did all that he could without outright breaking the laws. That had to be enough. There was nothing else that he could have done, not without angering his brother and possibly the Council. After all, they too stayed away from their children because of the ancient laws.

"The more ... To notice me."

Son. Poseidon's voice echoed in Percy's head, almost making him jump. I would have definitely noticed you. Just because I am not allowed to contact you, does not mean I do not see or care. I do both.

I know dad. All this had been before I understood about the laws. Hermes explained about them. Percy prayed to his dad.

"Hermes readjusted ... You spoke to him.""

"Well said, brother." Apollo whispered to Hermes, who gave him a nod in reply.

"I don't understand... why would there be more problems?" Katie asked.

Before Hera could make a snide remark, Demeter quickly explained, "If we did interfere all the time, we would not be able to pay attention to all of our children. We might end up helping some and others not at all. You see how that could lead to resentment amongst not only the children but also with us?"

When the children slowly nodded, she continued, "Not only that, but if we interfered and made some choices for you or solved some problem, you might like it once, maybe twice, but not all the time. We cannot and do not want to force something on you. That again will only create further problems."

"If we started solving your problems, then after a point of time you would forget how to do it yourself. You would start thinking that you do not need to solve your own issues, that someone else would do it for you. If something is going to be worth it, you have to face your own hardships." Aphrodite said. "Like love. For love to be true and real, you have to face so many problems, give up so much, break some hearts and have your heart broken..."

"I think you are going off the topic now." Artemis interrupted.

Apollo cleared his throat before Aphrodite and Artemis got into another fight over love and asked the demigods, "Do you understand what we are trying to say?"

"Kind of."

"Yes."

"Good." Zeus said and asked Aeolus to read.

""I tried to ... killing to a minimum.""

"That is not a family." Hera said snootily. "Family members do not try to harm one other, nor do they cheat or backstab each other. There would not be any fights or disagreements, only love for one other. What would you know about family, Hermes..."
"Enough." Zeus stopped his wife before she could say something hurtful to Hermes, which would end up creating another fight. For the goddess of family, she wasn't very good at keeping familial relations cordial.

"I have said this before and I will say it again, sister" said Poseidon, "what you talk of is idealistic and hardly achievable, especially by a family like ours."

"What is that supposed to mean? It would not be hard if someone made an effort." Hera said.

"You mean, someone other than yourself of course." Hades rolled his eyes and said, "In case you have forgotten, our father, who had chopped his father up on request of his mother, ate us and then our mother told our brother to chop up our father. That hardly makes the foundation for a healthy and ideal family."

Hera's eyes flared up in annoyance. How dare Hades say anything about her domain, her family? Her family could be and would be perfect had it not had so many unwanted people in it, gods and demigods alike.

Before anything could escalate further, Hestia said, "I am sure we could have this conversation later on. It would be best if we continue reading." Her tone left no space for arguments and even Hera had to listen to her oldest sister.

"It didn't sound like much of a recipe for the perfect family."

"Exactly." Hera exclaimed.

Even Aeolus knew not to entertain Hera's mood and continued as if she had not said anything,

"Then again, ... life this summer?"

Poseidon smiled and nodded at Percy, who had finally looked up when Hera had started ranting about her idea of a family.

"In the distance, ... this summer already."

"That you have." Poseidon said, feigning anger, which was outed by the twinkle in his eyes. Hermes sheepishly grinned at his uncle.

"'I really only came to make this delivery.'"

"I knew I went to make a delivery." Hermes said.

"What delivery would you have to make to a demigod?" Zeus asked.

"Well, obviously a god was either sending a package or a message to Percy." Hermes said, rolling his eyes.

"Which god would do that?" Zeus asked in irritation. Why was no one giving him an answer? And why was it taking so long to finish the book?

"Oh, I do not know." Poseidon drawled sarcastically. "Maybe you decided to write him a letter, brother."

Aeolus schooled his smiling face and read, "A delivery?"

... dropped the pad."
How dare you drop us? George said.

"I thought you both were sleeping." Apollo said.

You thought wrong.

George! Do not talk like that.

Or what?

"Alright. That is it." Hermes said and shook his caduceus till the snakes stopped complaining and promised to not interrupt. The god didn't have much hope of that holding true as not a second later George started talking to him in such a manner that no one else could hear them.

"Ouch, said ... the stylus again."

What do you have against snakes? Martha asked indignantly.

"Uh… they try to kill me?" Percy replied.

Fair enough. Continue. Martha said.

Aeolus rolled his eyes and read, "Martha and George ... didn't find any.""

You could have brought a guinea pig. I would not mind that either. George said and promptly started running around the staff as Martha started chasing him for teasing Percy.

"What about ... sea-blue envelope."

"You are not supposed to interact with the children, including writing them letters!" Zeus said to Poseidon, who motioned for the reading to be continued. It was not worth getting into an argument now. He wanted to know what he had written to his son.

The demigods were shocked as they looked at Percy in jealousy. Poseidon had written him a letter? That was more communication than they all had with their parents in their entire lives.

"My fingers ... of an ocean wave."

"You are not wrong. That is how it would have been made." Triton said and Percy nodded, thinking about the letter.

"'Good luck ... the Hermes cabin.'"

"Duh, dad!" The Stolls said in unison.

"And don't ... you mean?" I asked.

"Yes. What does she mean?" Poseidon mumbled to himself.

"Don't mind her, ... New York 11954"

"What is with that anyway?" Frank asked. "How come the number is a decimal?"

"It is pi." Annabeth said. "3.141 is pi, which is a mathematical constant. It is also a Greek letter."

"Yes. This was suggested by Lady Athena." Chiron said. "Some sort of an inside joke, I think."
"It is." Annabeth insisted and was about to explain when Thalia said, "It's ok. No need to explain. We will just take your word for it."

"An actual ... letter to say."

Poseidon shook his head sadly, knowing that whatever he had written to his son, whatever that had warranted breaking of the rules, would not be an explanation or an apology. It had to be something vital, maybe something related to the prophecy even.

"I opened the ... of the page:"

Zeus' eyes shone in interest, wanting to know what exactly had his brother conveyed to Percy in just two words.

"Brace Yourself"

"Huh?" many said in confusion.

"What does that mean?" Triton asked.

"I think I know." Poseidon said looking at Percy and Thalia. He would have known what the fleece would have been able to do and would have wanted to warn Percy. Having known how it felt to wake up one day and see someone who is supposed to be his brother (Zeus), he would not have wanted Percy to go through the same thing. It would create problems for him and Thalia, like it did for him and Zeus.

"The next morning, ... writes two words?"

"True. When you are going to break the rules, at least do it properly." Hermes said.

The demigods agreed with Percy. He would definitely be disappointed after getting a vague letter from his dad.

"Martha the ... I was prepared."

"Very good." Poseidon praised his son for catching on to what the god had been trying to do.

"Oh!" Zeus said. "You were warning him about Thalia, were you not?"

"I suppose so." The sea god said as everyone understood the meaning of the weird letter.

"It was hard, ... tug of the reins."

"Nice." Leo said and noted down some points for Hephaestus cabin's next chariot.

"Tyson had also ... push it away."

"Thanks buddy, for giving away all of your trade secrets." Travis said, grinning maniacally.

Annabeth turned to face Travis and said, "Do you really think that's all that we have?"

"Just wait for the next race, Trav." Percy said, mirroring Travis' grin, which made him look crazy.

"We'll crush you."

"And then I'll crush you." Thalia said.
"Cabin 1 or cabin 8?" Percy asked as Thalia was the only one who could represent two cabins.
"1."
"It's on."
"Umm… I'm involved in this, right?" Jason asked.
"Yeah, yeah, you can play too." Thalia said. "Double electrocution for Kelp Head."
"We'll see Pinecone Face."

Will volunteered Nico and said, "We can have exclusive big three chariot race."
"Involve the Romans too and get Hazel to pair up with Nico." Laurel said excitedly.
"Then Annabeth can't side with Percy if we are doing only siblings." Connor pointed out.
"I will play. I will ask Daddy to let me stay at camp for some time." Tyson piped up.

The demigods spent the next ten-twenty minutes planning out different games and the gods listened in earnest. Even Zeus wasn't insisting on reading in favor of listening to the children plan out games and competition for big three's children. It would be another way of showing that his children were ultimately superior to his brothers' children.

"I figured we ... up their togas."
"We don't wear togas, dude." Will said.
"I wish we didn't have to." Dakota said.
"You guys wear togas?" Pollux asked.
"Yeah. Tradition and all that. You should have seen Percy. He must have tripped a million times just walking to the Principia." Frank said.
"What?" The Stolls rounded up on Percy. "You wore a toga?" Travis said
"And didn't tell us? Like there are no photos?" Connor asked.
"Gods no! No photos." Percy said in relief.
"As amusing as this is, we should finish the book." Hades said drily.

""Here," he said, ... Tyson was concerned."
"So, this is the shield you wear?" Perseus asked.
"Yeah." Percy answered. "That was the older one. It got lost once during a fight." Raising his arm having the watch, he said, "This is the new one Ty made for me."

"I promised him ... Learn to survive."
"That's brutal." Piper said.
"It sure is." Leo said darkly, remembering his time on the streets.
"But also good in some ways." Tyson said.

"Why would you say that?" Thalia asked. She could not think of anything other than Luke and Annabeth that she was happy for when on the run. She didn't know how she would have survived on her own.

"I think Ty told me the reason, so it should be in the book." Percy said.

"But that's so ... like Polyphemus."

"There must be many other ways to teach that lesson than to let the young cyclops live on the streets on their own." Leo said. No one should have to live like that, not even a cyclops and definitely not a nice cyclops like Tyson.

"Maybe so, but none of them will be as good as experiencing it on your own." Athena said.

"That's easy to say when you don't have to live through it." Leo mumbled to himself.

"But I got ... me a brother.""


Poseidon had a small smile on his face as he realized that he had been correct. He had made his sons meet on purpose, maybe for just this quest or maybe for everything else that was yet to come their way.

"I stared ... one for you.""

"And you did." said all the campers who had been there that day and remembered how Percy had included Tyson when he had won the race.

"I climbed on ... in the Hermes chariot."

"Oh no! Come on!" Ares shouted.

"What else did you expect? My daughter and her skills, mixed with the boy's ability to talk to horses and a cyclops' handiwork. There is no way anyone else can win against that." Athena said.

"Percy is pretty good with chariot racing, mother, and not just because he can talk to horses." Annabeth defended her boyfriend. She wondered how long her mother would continue putting him down before she would have to accept that he wasn't what she thought him to be.

"We've got 'em!" ... somehow kept going."

"Good job." Apollo praised his son.

"That was most probably Flynn." Will guessed, remembering stories of chariot racing that Lee had once told him.

"I urged the ... with Connor Stoll."

The gods were caught up in the chariot race and Apollo and Hephaestus cheered while both Ares and Hermes groaned and glared at each other.

"Clarisse would have pummeled you, dude." Holly said to Connor. She didn't believe that he could
fight with the daughter of Ares and stand his ground, as she had never actually seen him fight. "Yeah. But not before I got in a couple of good hits." Connor said proudly and looked pointedly at Clarisse. "Yeah, whatever punk. Don't think that will happen again."

"If we took ... sure was confident."

"Trent. It has to be him. He is way too overconfident." Will said, thinking about his annoying brother. "It was." Travis confirmed. "He had taken over for Lee because Lee had been injured in the dragon attack."

"'Yeah, right!' ... aim was perfect."

Athena smiled as Apollo grimaced. His children did not seem to be winning the race once again. "The javelin ... chariot behind them."

Apollo cursed under his breath as the other gods whose children were in the race, grinned. "I held our ... well-oiled machine."

"It helps that you can talk to them. You could possibly get them to do some crazy stunts." Connor grumbled, but sounded excited over the prospect of getting to see crazy stunts by horses. Percy grinned and said, "Most of the time I have to tell them not to do some stunt because the chariot would definitely flip."

"The Hephaestus ... pulled himself forward."

Leo and Hephaestus grinned at the progress. This race was so much better than the previous one, the gods thought. "Annabeth cursed ... us underfoot."

"You would need a sharper blade than a knife to cut those cables." Leo said. He had seen the material and some of these ropes and cables that his cabin was so fond of. They were almost impossible to cut through. "'Switch with me!' I told Annabeth. "Take the reins!'"

Athena nodded and muttered, "He does have the better blade." She couldn't help but think that her daughter and the son of Poseidon did make a good team. She had the brains and the knowledge of everything including battle and weapons and he had the power and maybe just a little bit of brains. Very little. "'But—"

... our guard down."

"Oh yeah! He could get downright mean during competitions. Man! He once put me in infirmary for a week during Capture the Flag. He and his contraptions!" Chris said with a smile.
Hephaestus frowned at the usage of past tense. He convinced himself that it could be because this son of his had completed his training and no longer stayed at camp, but something still felt off to him. The god never had the best of relationships with people, preferring to stay with his inventions, but he could understand his children. They were probably the only living beings he could understand and connect with, which was why he had a feeling that something was wrong. Maybe it was the way the oldest of the children looked at nothing in particular whenever Beckendorf's name was said or maybe it was just a father's intuition. He just wanted his son to be alright.

"We were neck and neck now, Clarisse coming up from behind, making up for lost time."

"YES!" Ares bellowed.

"NO!" Hermes whined, wondering what happened to his team.

"We were still in the race dad. Chill." Travis said, making his father smirk at Ares.

"'See ya, Percy!' ... Annabeth yelled."

"That escalated quickly." Piper said, thinking about a few days after the war when a younger camper had accidentally toppled a jar of Greek fire. Fortunately or unfortunately, the camp was used to such accidents and they had quickly contained the fire, but not before everything in the fire's vicinity was destroyed.

"You both need to jump and abandon the game." Hercules said sadly. He had been rooting for his cousin.

Percy and Annabeth looked at each other and grinned. Turning to face Hercules, they said together, "Never!"

"'Get rid of it!' ... It was stuck fast."

"Secret adhesive." Leo said with a crazy grin. "The recipe has been passed down from older campers for ages now. Stick on literally any surface, that thing. You need a lot of force to remove it."

"Oh yeah!" The Stolls said, rubbing their hands. "Years ago, we struck up a deal with Jake to give us the adhesive..." Travis said.

"...and stuck everything in the camp together. So. Much. Fun." Connor continued. "Completely worth the one month of cleaning duty."

Percy grinned and nodded at the brothers. He had also helped them in that prank, mostly to escape being stuck to a wall or bench like the Ares kids. It had been fun.

"Then I remembered ... His blade shattered."

Hephaestus groaned at his children's predicament. He could appreciate the strength of the shield and the sheer brilliance of it, especially when made by an inexperienced and young cyclops, but did it really have to be used against his own children?

"'What?' he shouted... in the dirt."

Percy and Annabeth grinned and high fived.

"I was about ... like a spatula."
"Yeah, that'll work." Leo grumbled at his team losing. He started thinking about who would participate in the next race. Someone who could go against the likes of Percy, Annabeth, Jason, Clarisse and Thalia. Yeah! He might need his best fighters for that.

"The firebomb ... to avoid it."

Both Ares and Hermes let out a breath of relief at the knowledge that their teams were still in the race.

"Annabeth pulled ... crowd roared."

Poseidon and Athena grinned as their children won their first proper chariot race and Ares and Hermes groaned.

"Once the ... made herself heard:"

"You don't just ignore Annabeth and live to tell the tale." Katie teased and the campers agreed.

"'*We couldn't ... baby brother.'"

Tyson gave Percy a huge smile and hugged him and then Annabeth. Grover quickly got out of his range, before the cyclops could gather him too in the group hug.

Poseidon smiled proudly at the public acknowledgement of Tyson. He knew that meant a lot to both of his sons.

"Tyson blushed. The crowd cheered. Annabeth planted a kiss on my cheek."

Aphrodite smiled insanely and Athena rolled her eyes as the demigods teased the couple.

"And it still took years to get them together." Thalia grumbled.

"The roaring ... the laurel wreaths."

"The end." Aeolus said as he completed the reading.

"The end of the chapter or the book?" Nike asked.

"Only the chapter, I am afraid. There is one more chapter to be read out for the book to end." Aeolus said, looking at the handful of blank pages left in the book. The pages would magically fill up when they were being read. The Fates did this to make sure that none of the impatient gods could read ahead.

Zephyrus volunteered to read the last chapter.
Knowing that this chapter would definitely have to contain the details of his daughter coming back to life, unless Percy was not at camp, Zeus impatiently waited for the god of west wind to read the chapter.

"THE FLEECE WORKS ITS MAGIC TOO WELL"

"That afternoon ... rocked to pieces."

"Yeah, you seem to be an expert on these things." Grover said.

"Unfortunately." Percy said, thinking about all the times everything went to hell, sometimes literally, when he started to enjoy himself. He wondered whether it meant that he wasn't supposed to have any off time or do anything that remotely made him happy. He decided to get rid of the thought. Such thoughts always led to him being depressed or moody the whole day.

"Grover announced ... improved much."

"HEY!" Grover said indignantly.


"Anyway," Annabeth said, squinting her eyes at Percy, "they are much better now."

"He played ... blame them."

Both Grover and Percy chuckled as they remembered that. They had to get Pollux and Castor to unwrap the strawberry plants from around them.

"Grover told ... okay with him."

"Why? It is dangerous to keep an empathy link." Pan said.

"Maybe. But it is better if we knew where the other one was and if we were safe." Grover said, remembering Percy's reasoning. "And we have used it at other times to get help whenever we were in danger."

Pan nodded at his successor's words but still considered the link to be unstable and dangerous.

"He put ... You could die!"

"Or the other way round." Pan mumbled. He had become very close with the two strange satyrs from the future. He liked Grover for not only being the next Lord of Wild but also for his bravery and compassion. The other satyr, Hedge, was too much fun to be with. Even if he was a bit too
violent for the god's taste.

"'If you get ... felt about it."

"You are horrible." Grover huffed and pouted and Percy grinned cheekily at the satyr.

"Later on during ... looking for me."

"I forgot that that happened." Hazel said.

"Honestly, so did I." Percy said.

"'How did you ... how it's done.'"

"I guess that you are still not ready." Thalia teased Percy, who glared at her.

"I know how to manipulate mist, okay?" Percy retorted.

"Sure you do."

"I do."

I believe you.

"I –"

"Guys please!" Annabeth interrupted the arguing cousins.

"'You mean, ... you called her."

"After all that, you still hadn't called your mom?" Jason asked incredulously.

"I uh, kinda forgot, I guess." Percy scratched the back of his neck sheepishly.

"The worst ...half-to-death" part."

"That is literally the start of every conversation after a quest." Grover chuckled and Annabeth agreed with him. Even the remaining of the seven and Thalia and Nico chuckled. They too had heard that line a million times when they had gone over to Percy's place to relax.

Percy just hoped that the gods would not require him to go on another quest... like ever. He was done with it. But he also knew that if he absolutely had to, he would go on another dangerous quest. But that didn't mean that he liked it, not anymore.

"But finally ... in her nature."

"That's the same with you." Thalia said and then shuddered as she thought about the one time that Percy had actually gotten angry with her. She added, "Unless you are actually angry with someone."

"Hey, I can stay angry with someone." Percy said, sounding like a five year old.

"Yeah, you can. But only when they have actually pissed you off. Otherwise, you just let it go after sometime." Annabeth said.

"Fine." Percy grumbled but smiled at Annabeth when she rolled her eyes at his antics.
"I'm sorry, Mom," ... only get worse."

"And it did. So much worse." Percy muttered darkly. He was just glad that this little excursion to the past wasn't taking up any time in his time period. He didn't how his mom and Paul would take it. He still didn't know how to tell them about it, knowing that they would once again be upset that he was taken away from them, even if they didn't feel it.

"She tried to ... know us yet."

"Did you?" Piper asked. Even with her dad's resources, they had difficulty in finding a good school which would take her. After all a demigod who went out of their way to create trouble was not welcomed anywhere.

"Yeah. Paul's school." Percy answered. He had been mildly disappointed when Paul had said that the school would not probably take him back. He had been gone way too long. Percy had liked Goode. It was comfortable, which again proved that he wasn't allowed to get comfortable in one place. Things could always go wrong. He just wished that he could survive his next school, whatever that may be, till he was ready to go to New Rome.

"As for Tyson, ... me by surprise."

"I must have contacted him." Poseidon mused. "I usually ask the cyclops to come down to the forges. Some refuse it but most of them think it better to come and work with their brethren."

"Dream came ..."

"Now."

"That's seriously short notice." Frank said.

"Too short." Percy agreed.

"I stared ... need them."

"That's true" Percy said.

"Which part?"

"Both. Leaving and weapons." Percy and Tyson said.

"Unfortunately, I ... life someday."

"It did. Many times." Percy said, thinking about the manticore attack and the Battle of Labyrinth.

"The way he ... see into the future."

"No."

"Cyclops cannot see the future."

"I know. I was just thinking." Percy said. "Jeez!" he muttered under his breath.

"He headed down ... of Monster Donuts."

"Sounds like a nice shield." Leo said, thinking about making something like that depicting his,
Jason and Piper's adventures. Something just for the three of them.

"It was." Percy said.

"Is this one the same? I mean does it have the same pictures?" Jason asked, pointing towards Percy's wristwatch. He had only seen the shield during the spar between Percy and Hercules.

"Nah. More adventures on this one." Percy said fondly, stroking the button on his wristwatch. He pressed the button and the dial started expanding till it turned into a shield. He detached the shield from his wrist and gave it to Jason to see.

On the outer rim of the shield, were some names in ancient Greek, which made it hard for Jason to read. Piper and Leo translated it for him. They were the names of Percy's friends, both alive and otherwise. Leo pointed out one overly crowded place on the rim – the only slightly crude design on the shield. There were the names of few of Percy's Roman's friends, including Jason, Piper and Leo. It seemed that Tyson must have added it after meeting them at the Roman camp. The rest of the shield had different pictures of Percy, Tyson, Annabeth and Grover. In some they all were fighting, while in some they were just together, doing nothing in particular. The one which caught Jason's eye was of Percy in a hurricane. He looked absolutely ferocious there, controlling the nature around him. Another great picture, almost in the center was of some type of honor guard and Percy walking in the aisle that they formed. Jason assumed that it must have been the campers' way of honoring Percy's leadership in the war.

Sighing, Jason passed the shield back to his cousin. There was so much of Percy's life that he had no clue about. A part of him was glad that he was able to hear about Percy's life before the Romans and Greeks got together for battling Gaea but another part of him pitied Percy for having his thoughts read out like this. It was obvious that the son of Poseidon wasn't enjoying the reading like the others were. Then again, Jason couldn't blame him. After all, he too wouldn't be happy if it were his thoughts being read out as entertainment. He didn't know if he would even have the courage to sit and go through such a thing only based on a flimsy chance of things getting better for future demigods.

"I couldn't help ... bunk all night."

"I am sure I would send him to camp every now and then." Poseidon said with a small smile. He was extremely pleased with himself and his plan of getting Percy and Tyson together.

"'Hey, Percy.'"

... blinking a lot."

"Who are you fooling? You were crying." Annabeth said and Grover agreed.

Percy internally groaned and wondered why his friends couldn't just keep quiet.

"'Tyson ... enchiladas at all.'"

"We have peanut butter sandwiches." Tyson said gleefully.

"I don't understand the whole peanut butter thing." Frank said.

"I like peanut butter." Tyson said.

"Understatement." Percy scoffed. "You are obsessed with peanut butter. Your war cry is peanut butter."
Tyson grinned and blushed at Percy's teasing.

"Annabeth held ... like old times."

"I miss those days." Grover said wistfully. Now all three of them had other responsibilities and hardly had time for each other.

"Yeah me too, G-man." Percy said softly.

"A storm ... our magical borders."

"Why is there a storm? I don't think that is the season for a storm." Lou Ellen said.

"Dramatic entrance." Percy said. "Wait for it."

"Still, my dreams... the darkness."

"Well, he is correct, is he not?" said Athena.

"It would seem so." Artemis said. "Though, I cannot fathom how the Council would not be prepared now that we have received confirmation that the titan lord is rising."

Chiron cleared his throat and said, "It would seem that more information and persuasion was required to convince umm the Council."

The elder gods except Zeus, all groaned as they understood the underlying meaning of Chiron's words. It was obvious that Zeus was the one who refused to believe that their father was truly rising. Trust Zeus to want evidence when it was time to take action. They knew that without Zeus' order, the Council would not be allowed to go and start rallying troops – something that was obvious that would be required.

Huffing, Hades asked for the reading to be continued. The quicker they were done with this particular book, the quicker they could find out what was in store for them.

"Then my dream ... Brace yourself."

"Oh!" Zeus exclaimed with barely contained glee as he looked at his daughter. The storm that was mentioned and Poseidon's dream message all pointed to Thalia being revived soon.

"I woke with ... had happened—"

"I didn't know you were worried." Annabeth whispered to Percy.

Rolling his eyes, Percy said, "I'll always be worried."

"Thanks for the vote of confidence." She retorted sarcastically, but the gleam in her eyes said that she was grateful for Percy's concern.

"I ripped off ... just lying there ...""

Thalia bit her lip. She wasn't looking forward to all the attention being on her but at the same time wanted to know exactly what had happened. She had been pretty out of it at that time and not seeing any familiar faces or rather seeing the familiar faces, all grown up, had been too disconcerting for her.
"I ran outside... armor and pajamas."

"It's not every day that someone pops out of a tree." Travis said.

"Yeah. I mean that's a bit too weird... even for us." Connor said.

"I did not 'pop out" Thalia mumbled.

"Well" Annabeth drawled. "The roots kind of parted and you appeared. It was freaky."

"I heard the ... the prophecy."

"That is true. It does make you wonder as to for how long he had been planning it." Apollo said.

"Knowing him, maybe from the beginning or maybe whenever he realized that Percy would not be controllable." Poseidon said.

"We should have known that he would do something to push him two steps ahead of us." Hera said.

"Apparently, we were not ready to even believe that he was back." Hades drawled, accusingly looking at Zeus, who was avoiding eye contact with his siblings.

"What do you ... work too well."

"It makes me think that you aren't pleased to see me." Thalia said dramatically, with one hand on her heart.

"Well..." Percy drawled and stopped only when Thalia punched his arm.

"We galloped ... unconscious girl."

"Glad to see that your one track mind finally caught up." Thalia teased.

"When Annabeth ... 'Percy, wait!'"

"Why?" Jason asked.

Chiron sighed and answered, "We did not know how Thalia was even alive and I didn't think that Percy should be the first person she should see when she woke up. It had been way too long sine a child of Zeus and a child of Poseidon had been at camp at the same time. Usually, they avoided to train together, thanks to enmity between the two gods. It could have resulted in a disaster. Literally."

Thalia shrugged, knowing it to be true and said, "Still, it's a good thing that Percy was the one I saw first. If I had seen Annabeth or Grover, I would have definitely freaked out. At least an unfamiliar face was good to see."

"I knelt by ... seen her before..."

"Yeah, from all of the weird dreams you keep having about me." Thalia said.

"You still look the same." Nico said, recalling the description that had just been read out. After a moment, he seemed surprised that he had even spoken out loud.

"I would." Thalia said to Nico. "Like after six months or something, I became a hunter."
"Oh." Nico said, lost in thoughts. Six months. That meant that the next quest to be read out would be the one involving Bianca. He wondered whether he should tell his dad about her, but he couldn't even think about her without wanting to kill something or bursting into tears or both.

"'It's true,'... were burning."

"That would be your natural instinct to stay away from her and see her as an enemy." Poseidon said. Now that he was hearing it from his son's perspective and seeing how good a friend that daughter of Zeus was to him, the god was feeling upset about how his rivalry with his brother affected their children.

"'She needs ... acting so scared.'"

Zeus' expression remained neutral but he was surprised that the boy was so quick to help even when it went against his natural instincts. The king god was obviously glad for it. It didn't look like anyone else in the camp was of any help if they were so scared of her sudden appearance.

"Thanks dude." Jason said to Percy. "For taking care of her."

Thalia sharply flicked her finger against her brother's head and said, "I can take care of myself, thank you very much."

"Yeah, but still." Jason said sincerely and rubbed his head where she had hit him.

"I took her ... all too stunned."

"Wow! None of you guys are very proactive, are you?" Thalia teased the older campers.

"Well, excuse us if we are too shocked by the reappearance of someone everyone thought to be dead." Annabeth bluntly said. Thalia made a face at the daughter of Athena.

"Then the ... 'You're safe now.'"

"Thanks for that, Kelp Head." Thalia said sincerely. She had been panicking when she had opened her eyes. She had needed someone to say that she was safe because that was the only thing that mattered to a demigod – to be safe. It didn't matter if they were alright or not. As long as they were safe, they could manage everything.

Jason stole a glance at his sister and their cousin. He could see why they were such good friends. Percy was the one who had made her feel safe after who knows what she suffered through. The son of Jupiter was glad that it was Percy who had been the first one to help her out. He was the one person who would not leave anyone unattended, especially if the person was sick or anything of that sort.

"'Strangest dream ...'

What's your name?'"

Thalia shivered as she thought about her time as a tree. Her only clear thoughts were of being injured and dying, soaked in her own blood. There had been only a few times when she had felt someone near her, maybe even talking to her. She had taken comfort in that. But when she could suddenly see, hear and feel everything around her, it was like waking up from a long coma. She had been terrified and Percy's calm nature and attitude had calmed her, even when she had felt that she was in danger near him.
Zeus was grateful for his nephew – not that he would ever say that out loud. It was pretty clear from his daughter's expression and stressed out feelings that it had been a horrible experience for her. He was glad that his nephew was there to help her out.

"That's when I ... my worst enemy."

"So dramatic." Thalia said drily.

"Had to prepare for you." Percy quipped quickly.

"At least she wasn't your worst enemy." Leo said gratefully. He had seen few of Percy's and Jason's fights and knew that Thalia was even more temperamental than Jason. A fight between Percy and Thalia would be disastrous.

"Maybe not enemy but we were definitely on each other's case for a long, long time." Percy said and Thalia agreed.

"Just be happy that you didn't have to witness their annoying bickering and fights." Annabeth grumbled. She hated playing peacemaker between the two cousins. It was even more tiring than being the official architect of Olympus.

"'I am Thalia,' the girl said. 'Daughter of Zeus.'"

"Hi Thalia. We are Travis and Conner." The Stolls said in unison and ducked as Thalia threw some paper balls at them.

Zephyrus closed the book with a slam and announced the end of the book.
Okay... So, this is the break chapter and the next chapter would be The Titan's Curse! YAY! :D

I really hope that this chapter came out nicely. I wanted to show some feelings but not give away the happenings of the next book, at the same time...

Enjoy the reading :D )

CH57 – SoM – ANTICIPATION

Hestia picked up the book marked 'Book 3' and opened it. As expected, it was blank. She was about to ask for a volunteer to read when she looked at Percy and saw him and a few of the other's lost in thought. He especially was looking at the book as if it might just attack him. The goddess of hearth had a feeling that it might be a difficult one to read, especially if Kronos was getting stronger. He would definitely start causing problems for the demigods – even more so than the usual. That coupled with the fact that the Council was not being proactive must have been difficult for the young children to cope with. She sighed and made up her mind.

"Zeus, I was thinking that maybe we could have a small break before we start reading this one." Hestia said and motioned to the book in her hand. She lowered her voice and said, "I think it might be needed."

Seeing the solemn expression on her face, Zeus agreed for having a 15 minute break and watched as the demigods ran out for some fresh air.

As soon as it was only the Olympians in the room and a few of the minor gods, Hades asked impatiently, "Is there still no way to read it in advance?"

Flipping through the pages, Hestia said, "No, brother. They are all still blank. I doubt there is any way to get around this considering it is sent by the Fates."

"Something is wrong with this book." Poseidon said.

"What do you mean?" Athena asked incredulously.

"Percy seemed upset when Hestia picked up the book. Considering he was joking and laughing around a few minutes ago, I think that the quest in this book must be really harsh on him."

"Or maybe he is just as mercurial as you are." Athena snarled but knew that the sea god might be correct. She had seen the son of Hades getting agitated in the last few minutes.

Poseidon shrugged at Athena's comment. It was obvious that the good mood might get evaporated when they started reading the book.

Apollo, being the optimist and the literal ray of sunshine that he was, said, "Well, if everything is going to go to Tartarus, not literally of course, we might as well enjoy this break." With that he shone brightly (show-off) and disappeared.

Shrugging, the remaining gods too went off to either talk to their children or visit their domains and
get some work done in the meantime.

X-X-X-X-X

Will and Nico stood next to each other, leaning against a wall and looking out into the rain. The gods had obviously forgotten to tell them that the showers requested by the nymphs had been increased and the whole air was filled with the distinct smell of rain. Thankfully, Nico thought, that there was no thunder or lightning. He wasn't exactly fond of it. The brooding demigod was brought out of his thoughts as his boyfriend shook his shoulder.

"Earth to Nico!" Will said for the third time. He wanted to talk to Nico before the book was read out. Having guessed the next quest, he could only imagine how hard it must be for Nico to have to sit through the reading of the next book.

"I'm here, I'm here." Nico said and hoped that Will would stop shaking him.

Grinning, Will said, "Well I had to be sure. You always seem to wander off into the depths of your mind."

Nico rolled his eyes and said, "I'm not playing 20 questions again."

"But we never finished it." Will pouted till Nico groaned and gave a small smile. Becoming serious, the son of Apollo said, "Anyway, it is not about the 20 questions, which we will continue. No, don't argue. Good!" He smiled as Nico finally gave up any pretense of being offended by the accursed 20 questions game.

Will shyly took Nico's hand and said, "About the next quest that will be read… it is the one where you and… your sister come in, right?"

"Yeah. I think so." Nico said softly, having half the mind to run away from the whole reading business.

"Hey," Will bumped his shoulder against Nico's and said, "it will be alright, okay? We are here to help you."

"I don't want any help. I don't need any help."

"Well tough, 'cuz I want to help." Will said with determination, knowing that Nico was getting scared once again. Damn the gods! They should not have given the break. It was only giving Nico some time to overthink and worry.

Nico didn't look at Will. Instead, he looked into the courtyard and the rain which he was sure would feel like needles on his skin if he went out there. He knew Will had his best intentions at heart, but the worry and the sense of foreboding that was unfurling in his stomach was making his legs twitch and the familiar feeling of wanting to run away was making itself known. For a brief moment, he tried summoning the shadows around him. They gave a small twitch and started creeping towards him before falling back. The whiplash of exerting himself even this much felt like snapping a rubber band. He knew he could push himself even further but then he felt his hand being squeezed and he looked next to him and his insides turned to lead.

Will looked at Nico as soon as he felt the younger boy's energy fluctuate. Thanks to the physical connection, the healer could feel Nico's energy and basically anything related to his health. Will had felt the temperature drop for a few seconds in which Nico's hand had started to fall lax in his hand. Now, looking at the deer in the headlights look on his boyfriend, the healer realized what he must have been trying to do.
Will gritted his teeth and said in a low voice, "Don't you dare, Di Angelo! I didn't nurse you back to health just so that you could exert yourself and run away."

Feeling ashamed, Nico said in a small voice, "I know. I don't… I don't know what…"

The son of Hades felt tired and it didn't have anything to do with his little power display. He felt an overwhelming desire to rest his head on Will's shoulders and just relax. But he didn't. He couldn't. He didn't know if it would be welcome but the other boy's shoulder felt like they had a gravitational pull and Nico tensed up, not wanting to intrude on Will's personal space.

The son of Apollo looked at Nico's crestfallen face and felt the boy getting tired, more emotionally than physically. He just wanted to wrap his arms around Nico and take over the younger demigod's burdens. He was too young to have gone through so much. A small voice in his head reminded Will that he was only a year older to Nico but the healer paid no attention to it and instead wondered whether Nico would mind hugging in the middle of the corridor, where everyone could see them.

Not knowing that the other one also wanted the same thing, both the boys settled with just holding hands and staring at nothing in particular.

It was a few minutes later that Will broke the silence that enveloped the two boys. "Does he know?"

"What?" Nico asked in a confused tone. He had been enjoying the comfortable silence.

"Your dad." Will said, nodding towards the opposite side of the courtyard, where Hades and Hestia were talking.

"Umm…what?" Nico asked eloquently. What was Will going on about?

Looking at Nico, Will explained, "Does your dad know about Bianca?"

Nico turned away from his boyfriend to look at the god of underworld and said, "No." He didn't have it in himself to talk about his sister. To anyone. He only ever mentioned her name in front of Hazel and sometimes Percy. Will had been a new and welcome addition to that little group.

"Don't you think he should know? I mean it shouldn't be a shock to him, right?" Will asked hesitantly. Bianca was obviously a very sensitive topic (as it should be) but he hoped that Nico didn't take her being mentioned in a wrong sense.

"I…" Nico faltered. He knew Will was right. Hades should know that one of his children…was gone. "I should tell him."

"Yeah." Will smiled. Tugging Nico's hand as he pushed away from the wall, Will said, "Come on then. I'll take you halfway."

The two boys walked hand in hand – a huge achievement for either of them – till they reached a group of the campers, where Will broke off and gave Nico an unnecessary push in the general direction of Hades.

"Go on. I'll be here." The son of Apollo said and watched as Nico walked hesitantly towards his father and aunt.

X-X-X-X-X
"Percy?"

Percy looked behind him and realized that this was probably not the first time that his name had been called out. His green eyes met Thalia's slightly furrowed electric blue. He was standing outside the throne room with Annabeth and it seemed that Thalia had joined them some time ago.

Forcing a smile, he asked, "Yeah?"

"I was asking if you wanted to come with me to talk to the hunters. I thought of telling them that they are going to be in the book soon enough." The Lieutenant said exasperatedly.

"I – uh, ok." Percy shrugged. With that Percy, Thalia and Annabeth, who had been silently watching the cousins, set off towards the horde of girls in silver, standing not too far from them.

Percy walked a bit behind Thalia and Annabeth, not knowing whether his presence would be welcomed or not. He didn't need some of the most skilled fighters in probably the world, to use him as target practice. He had a feeling that his initial reaction to them and in particular to Artemis would land him in the doghouse.

Adrianna stopped talking as she saw the future Lieutenant and her friends approach the hunters. She wondered what they wanted. Before this, only Thalia had sought them out on her own, not the other two. The auburn haired girl wondered about how the other girls would take to Percy.

"Hello." Thalia greeted and made introductions of both Percy and Annabeth. That was obviously not required considering that they were all reading a bunch of books on Percy and by extension Annabeth.

"You have an exciting life." Penelope said to Percy as a few of the more civil hunters greeted the demigods.

"Yeah, not really all that exciting." Percy shrugged. He avoided talking about the books as much as possible. He didn't need other people scrutinizing his life.

"You are modest." Sabrina said. "I can see why we would be friends."

"I still do not understand how Zoe and Phoebe came to be your friends." Penelope said bluntly.

"That's actually why we came here." Annabeth said to the hunters, who were all paying attention to the newcomers. "It would probably be explained in the next book."

"There are hunters in the next book?" Zoe asked skeptically, not liking the idea of being friends with a boy.

"Yes. We had a joint quest of sorts." Thalia said.

"Yeah, but it was mostly us trying not to kill each other." Percy mumbled but most heard him.

"I doubt us hunters can tolerate you demigods enough to go on a quest with you." Phoebe said.

"What is the quest that would warrant such an action?"

"I suppose that revealing such an information would be against the whole purpose of this reading… according to the Fates, in any case." Artemis said as she approached the not so little group. Looking at the demigods, she said, "However, I believe that it has to be something of utmost importance if the Oracle would suggest that hunters and campers work together. After all, it is well known that the groups do not have the best of relationships."
"It was really important, believe me." Percy said, wondering how the gods would take it when they would hear that Artemis had been kidnapped.

Artemis nodded and guessed, "It would have something to do with the fact that the titan lord becomes stronger while the Council does not do anything."

"Something like that." Percy said, his eyes flitting towards Zoe, who had lost her life all because the gods did nothing.

Adrianna's voice broke Percy out of his musings. "I do not suppose that I am the Lieutenant that you meet in your time."

"How…" Percy and Annabeth asked.

"Simple. Neither of you seem to know me." Adrianna shrugged and then asked apprehensively, "So, who is the Lieutenant that you meet?"

Both Percy and Annabeth turned towards Thalia and looked at her in a questioning manner. The daughter of Zeus said, "Told them that they would come to know when the quest came up."

"Then I suppose you would not tell me even now, seeing that we are yet to read the book." The Lieutenant stated. "In that case, can you answer this – do either of you know what happened to me?"

Percy heard the slight fear and hesitation in her voice and sighed. Nodding his head, he replied, "Lady Artemis had once told me that her Lieutenant – I'm guessing it's you – had left the hunt because she was tired of the immortal life."

Artemis and her hunters nodded in satisfaction. It sounded like something Adrianna might do. It was good to know that she had neither been killed nor had she broken their oath. They all wondered who the next Lieutenant would be and if she would be as good as Adrianna.

Taking their leave, the three demigods decided to walk around a bit before they had to subject themselves to sitting and listening to the first quest that had spilled blood.

"Are you alright?" Annabeth asked Percy as she took his hand in hers.

Percy shrugged noncommittally and Thalia said, "This one was a bad quest…"

"Even if we did get our famous dam joke from this." Percy said with a reminiscing smile.

"Yeah." Thalia smiled as she thought about that day on the dam.

"Yeah…” Percy trailed off as he looked at Nico talking to Hades. His thoughts strayed to Bianca – the first death in the war, the first of many to come. Averting his eyes from his uncle and cousin, the son of Poseidon decided to join the Stolls, Chris and Will in whatever discussion they were having, no doubt that it would take his mind off the morbid thoughts.

"We will manage." Thalia whispered in her cousin's ear, placating both him and herself. She knew they would need strength to complete this quest. They had never given themselves time during or after the quest to mourn their newfound friends. Maybe this time they would get the chance they had been deprived of. Maybe now they could finally grieve and come to terms with the happenings of past couple years.

X-X-X-X-X
"Umm… father?" Nico said in a small voice, interrupting the discussion that Hades and Hestia were in. Both gods stopped immediately and turned to look at the teenager.

"Yes?" Hades asked and felt Hestia poking his back, no doubt telling him to be pleasant to his future son.

"I… I was wondering if I could talk to you?" Nico asked and then hastily added, looking at Hestia, "If that is alright with Au-Lady Hestia."

Hestia smiled kindly and said, "Of course, you can talk to your father." As she walked past Nico, she added softly, "And you can call me aunt if that is what you call me in the future. We obviously know each other well, if your attitude is something to go by."

"We are… I think." Nico confirmed and Hestia smiled widely and walked away.

"That is good. Just like with me, not many stop and talk to Hestia." Hades said to his son as they watched Hestia walk away and meet up with Dionysus and Hephaestus on the way.

Nico turned to face his father and said, "I talked to her at camp. She was one of the few who looked my age, so… I didn't even know that she was a goddess till Chiron told me later on."

Smiling, Hades said, "You truly are unique. So, tell me, what is that you wanted to talk to me about?"

With that, Nico's easy going demeanor vanished and he started fidgeting around. "Umm… well… I-I had a sis-sister." Nico said rapidly.

"Not Hazel?" Hades asked in a confused tone. He had a child that wasn't present at this reading? Why?

"Not Hazel." Nico confirmed and bit his lip. He looked away for some time and then when he looked back Hades, the god swore he could see Nico's eyes glistening with tears.

"Son?"

"Bianca." Nico said in a whisper. "Her name was Bianca. We had the same mother. Like Thalia and Jason, except we both are were Greeks. So maybe more like the Stoll brothers." he rambled.

Hades was silent as he saw his son struggle with some unknown thing. He had two children with the same woman? Maybe they were twins. But before he could think anything else, he realized that Nico had said 'was'. So, what happened to her?

"Was?" Hades asked.

Nico nodded and said barely above a whisper, "Yes. We should come up in this next quest. Bianca was a part of it."

Hades inhaled sharply as he understood what must have happened. "Do you know…?" he asked, hoping that Nico might know her fate after her passing on.

"Rebirth." Nico said with a sigh and looked at Hades.
Hades nodded and said, "That is, I suppose, for the best." He did not know how to feel about this daughter of his that he had never met and had already lost her, no doubt to his father's crusade for revenge.

"Maybe." Nico's shoulders slumped. He still could not get over the fact that his sister had once again left him without warning him. Why would she do that? Why?

Hades awkwardly patted Nico's shoulder in an attempt to console his boy. He looked up when he saw Hermes standing a bit away from him and his son, looking like he didn't want to interrupt them.

"Yes, Hermes?" Hades asked politely.

"Father is calling all of us back for the reading?" Hermes said, feeling confused at the little display of emotion from Hades and his son.

"Go ahead. We will be right behind."

Hades watched Nico angrily dab his eyes and sniff. "If you wish to sit out of this reading, you could always go to my palace or something." Hades offered.

The boy shook his head, his hair flopping around his face and said, "No. I want to know what actually happened."

"Alright then. We should go to the throne room." Hades said, holding Nico's shoulder and steering him towards the throne room.

Will had been waiting for Nico at the entrance of the room and took his hand once he came close enough. Together the boys joined Jason and Piper on their couch, which was next to Percy, Annabeth, Thalia and Grover's couch.

Percy offered Nico a weak smile as he sat down and Nico returned a hesitant smile as they waited for everyone to settle down. The son of Hades was not really looking forward to this, but he needed closure and he hoped that finally understanding what had actually happened might just help him.
"Does anyone want to volunteer to read the first chapter?" Hestia asked once everyone had settled down.

"If I may…?" Adrianna piped up, looking at Artemis and the other Olympians for confirmation. No matter how many times she met the gods and talked to them, it was always slightly unnerving to speak up amongst them.

Artemis nodded as Hestia passed the book to the Lieutenant.

"Alright… MY RESCUE OPERATION GOES VERY WRONG"

Rescue operation…Oh! – Nico bit his tongue to keep his composure. He and his sister were being introduced way too soon. He knew it had to be them. That was one mission that actually went horribly wrong. For Percy anyway. Back then, Nico hadn't cared about anything other than his stupid game coming to life and his sister joining the hunt. For Nico, it had been a dream come true. He had wanted something more in life…more than just him and his sister and their annoying school and when all of it came true, he treated it as some game. Nico scolded himself mentally. Oh, only if he had known that his dream was actually a nightmare – one that he could never get out of. The son of Hades felt Will shift next to him and thought that maybe the nightmare could finally go back to being a dream. Maybe.

"Whom were you rescuing?" Dakota asked. He had never heard of demigods going on such missions.

"It will come up." Percy said, not at all looking forward to being reminded of the Di Angelo siblings' innocence.

"The Friday … new boarding school."

"Not to study there, right?" Piper asked with a raised eyebrow.

"Nah. Not studying in a boarding school ever again." Percy said with feeling. He did not want to spend time away from his mom for longer than demigodly required. And boarding schools were not demigodly required.

"We picked up … tell about me."

Thalia chuckled and said, "And there were so many stories."

"Do tell." Clarisse said, wanting to get something to embarrass Percy with.

"Do not tell." Percy cried out. Even then he knew by the look on his cousin's face that she would
not keep quiet.

Thalia grinned and tapped her chin in a thoughtful manner. "Which one should I tell? So many to choose from. Ok. So, this one time Percy was like 2 or 3 and Sally had taken him to the park…” Thalia's voice became muffled as Percy covered her mouth with his hand.

"…and over there he befriended some other kids." Annabeth continued the story as she laughed at Percy's horrified look. "Anyway, one of the girls over there had a pet rabbit and Percy just loved the rabbit."

Thalia stuck out her tongue and Percy dropped his hand in disgust and she continued the story as Percy tried to shut Annabeth up. "He liked the rabb-"

Thalia quickly got off the couch as Percy came towards her and said through peals of laughter, "So, he liked the rabbit so much that he played only with it…"

Annabeth said, "And later insisted on hopping all the way back to his place."

"It was 10 minutes' walk." Grover said, remembering the story that he had begged Sally to tell him.

"But with this one hopping like there is no tomorrow, it was almost half an hour, because he got tired and didn't want to walk or be carried the rest of the way." Thalia said with a chuckle as she looked at a red faced Percy who was being teased by the Stolls.

"Aagrh! I hate you guys so much." Percy groaned, putting his face into his hands. He looked up just as Thalia was gearing up to tell another baby story.

"You've got another one?" Jason asked, still chuckling and imagining a 2-3 year old Percy hopping all over the place.

"Another one? Bro, I have got a whole arsenal of Percy's embarrassing stories." Thalia said with glee.

"Which we don't need to hear." Percy said and looked pleadingly at Adrianna to continue reading.

"Oh but we do." Leo said.

"No. No you don't." Percy exclaimed.

Thalia stuck her tongue out at Percy and started saying, "There was this one time when…”

"I'll tell what happened two years ago." Percy said menacingly and Thalia stopped immediately with a horrified look on her face.

"Don't you dare."

Percy grinned as Thalia pouted and Annabeth and Grover started laughing. The four of them had gone out to celebrate two years ago and Thalia had managed to spectacularly embarrass herself. They had sworn not to say a word of it — mostly because Thalia would kill them in their sleep.

"Ooh. What happened two years ago?" Jason asked, looking at his cousin. He needed some ammo on Thalia.

"Nothing." Thalia said and glared at her brother and he retreated at once. Looking at Adrianna, she asked her continue. There was no need of getting all of their secrets out. In any case, she would tell her cousin's baby stories later on, whenever he wasn't around to blackmail her.
Adrianna stifled a laugh at the two cousins' expense and read, "Thalia wiped ... on the other."

"Sounds like something out of a movie." Butch said.

"A bad movie." Lou Ellen supplied.

"You got that right." Nico muttered under his breath.

"'Are you sure ... to my battles.'"

A few campers snickered and Annabeth asked, "How else were we supposed to get to Maine?"

"'It's okay, ... getting killed.'"

"Your mother is right, you know. By now, even we all know that that is the truth." Theseus teased his younger sibling.

"Yeah I know." Percy replied, gazing lovingly at Annabeth.

"She's right, ... contact camp?"

The campers, all had amused looks on their faces as they thought of their leader being driven to battles by his mother and having to deal with classic motherly questions.

"Uh, why is this in the book?" Percy whisper-groaned to Annabeth, who just chuckled at his misfortune. She missed Sally already. The brown haired woman was the only one who get away with packing extra sweaters while dropping her son off for a rescue mission.

"'Mom, seriously! ... of that car.'"

"I can understand." Will said sympathetically. His mom too would fuss a lot whenever dropping him off at camp.

"If my mom ... to death."

"Oh, but those were the best ones!" Thalia snickered and Percy threw his pen at her.

"Annabeth and ... like ice daggers."

"That is really cold." Jason lamented. Having lived in San Francisco for most of his life, he could not even begin to imagine how cold Maine would have been. He was glad that his quest was in summers. Although, he supposed that he would have to get used to the annoying cold weather if he wanted to live in Camp Half-Blood.

"Once my mother's car was out of sight, Thalia said, "Your mom is so cool, Percy.'"

"She really is." Thalia sighed and all those who had met Sally, agreed.

"Does 'cool' not mean 'cold' anymore?" Adrianna asked, perplexed with the twisting of words in the future.

"It does." Annabeth answered. "But it also means 'awesome'."

"Uh-huh." Adrianna said and then mumbled to Sabrina, "The future seems to be really confusing."

"'She's pretty okay," I admitted. "What about you? You ever get in touch with your
Thalia's face darkened at the mention of her mother and she covertly looked at Jason. She supposed she could be glad that Jason had never had to remember Beryl's bad days. Her good days itself were a nightmare most of the time.

Jason, on the other hand, was thinking about his mother's ghost that he had encountered at Odysseus' Palace. He tried not to think much about his mother. Despite him telling the ghost that he was no child of hers, it still haunted him to think about the family that he had lost because of both Beryl's insanity and Hera's interference. He sometimes wondered what it would have been like to be brought up alongside Thalia and not as some warrior who would ultimately have to lead everyone into battle. For once, he just wanted to be a younger brother. But now that chance was lost. Thalia was eternally 15 and he supposed he had outgrown his years of being a younger brother. He couldn't help but be jealous of the easy-going, sibling relationship that Thalia and Percy had – that was what he had wanted and hoped that he would get to that stage with his sister.

"As soon... perfect evil "ten.""

Thalia grinned evilly and said, "Glad to know that I can scare you, Kelp Head."


"Whatever helps you sleep at night, Kelp Head."

"'If that was ... I guessed."

"I take offence." Nico grumbled.

"I think I was referring to your vice-principal." Percy retorted. He was happy to see that Nico wasn't as tightly wound up as Percy had expected him to be. Then again, it could have something to do with the hand that the younger boy was holding.

"The oak doors ... overkill. Literally."

Ares and Enyo grinned at the description. Now that was the kind of place they wouldn't mind going to.

Athena raised an eyebrow and asked, "What kind of a school is that?"

"A horrible one." Nico replied and Hades wondered how his son's mother could send him to such a school.

"My hand went ... was coming."

"If both of you are feeling that way then whatever the monster is, it must be old and powerful." Demeter said. "Nothing else would agitate two children of my brothers."

"Annabeth started ... like dance music."

"Huh?" Will looked at Nico in confusion.

"School dance." Nico replied. He kept his eyes fixed on the flames in the hearth, trying to draw comfort from there. It wasn't long after the dance had started that Percy had found Bianca and him.
It wouldn't be that long now.

"We stashed our ... would get inside."

"You should always plan ahead. That is the only way you would ever be prepared." Athena said sourly and then mumbled about unprepared children going on missions. "Now something is bound to go wrong."

"Why would you say that?" Poseidon asked.

"Because they are unprepared." Athena said sharply.

Artemis asked her lieutenant to continue with the reading. If they let Poseidon and Athena continue, they might as well sit in the throne room till the particular rescue mission came to pass.

"I said, "Ma'am, ... the eighth grade.""

"Mist manipulation." Lou Ellen commented. "Nice."

"Demigods can manipulate mist?" Hecate asked. She had assumed that only she or her children could do something like that.

"Only if we are trained to do it." Thalia replied.

"They never teach these things at Camp Jupiter." Jason complained. He would love to know how to manipulate mist. He had tried to take lessons from Hazel but nothing made sense to him and he had finally left it alone.

"The male teacher ... had to be kidding."

"Are you kidding me?" Annabeth asked exasperatedly and Percy shrugged.

"I can't help my thoughts." Percy said.

Adrianna shook her head and thought that at the end of the day, despite whatever the boy has done, he was still that – a boy. Trust a boy to get sidetracked like that during a mission.

"The woman blinked,... And they made it!"

"Not bad, Grover. Could have been better, but not bad at all." Connor said seriously.

"After the whole Polyphemus thing, G-man got better at lying." Percy said and the Stolls gave Grover a thumbs up.

"Dr. Thorn glared at us. I decided one of his eyes had to be fake. The brown one? The blue one?"

"Not the time." Thalia muttered to Percy.

"He looked... gymnasium again!"

"That Thorn dude did not seem affected by mist." Dakota said.

"Yeah. He should be going along with whatever you say. The other one is all dreamy and stuff, right? That's the correct response." Lou Ellen said.
"Hmm… wait for it." Thalia said, enjoying holding the answers.

"We didn't wait ... do that yet?"

"That was the wrong thing to say." Perseus said, but didn't elaborate when others turned to him.

"An uncomfortable ... not me?"

"Oh no!" Travis said dramatically.

"Big three kids' rivalry." Connor finished for his brother.

Ignoring the two brothers, Thalia said to Percy, "Because even he knows that I'm the better person out of the two of us."

Percy rolled his eyes and said, "So deluded."

Poseidon looked at Chiron with a raised brow. If controlling the mist was this important, then the centaur should have taught Percy how to do it. So, why didn't he?

Chiron, having guessed what Poseidon's expression was all about, explained, "At that time, it was more important to train Thalia since it seemed that she was the prophecy child."

"But I'm still the better one, right?" Thalia turned to Chiron with a smile.

The centaur chuckled at her and motioned Adrianna to continue. This was one question he would never answer. He loved all the children equally.

"Grover hurried ... the school motto."

"Rank. It was my rank." Grover said.

"How could you think that 'Grunt' was the motto?" Frank asked incredulously.

"Well, it's a military school. And you know the noises…” Leo said and then grunted to put his point forward.

Percy laughed and high fived Leo. "That's exactly what I was thinking."

"Great minds think alike." Leo said and everybody rolled their eyes.

"'So what's the ... demigods out there."

"I disagree. There are way too many of your kind." Hera sneered.

Ignoring her, Adrianna read, "'A brother ... what to do!'"

"One monster should be easy enough." Ares said.

"Satyrs aren't exactly trained to fight monsters. They are trained to avoid monsters and get the demigods to safety." Thalia said.

"Grover looked ... the real world."

Thalia frowned at the floor. She didn't know that Percy used to feel undermined by her. But then again, it was obvious that that was the case now that she thought about it. She herself hadn't liked
Percy solely because she felt that he had taken her position. He had become Annabeth's best friend, camp's leader and taken Luke's place in their lives. She had hated him for it. And if she was being honest, she had had some inkling about how he had felt when she had become the leader and she had rubbed it in his face and put him and his decisions down every single time. Thalia sighed and was glad that she wasn't in that position anymore.

"'Right," she said. ... Dr. Thorn."

"I knew it!" Lou Ellen exclaimed.

"Weird thing ... overcompensate or something."

The Romans all nodded their heads in agreement. Even though they didn't have a uniform other than for senate meetings, they still lived in a military environment. So, whenever they got the chance, they would go all out and celebrate. Unfortunately, they didn't have much of those occasions. This was one of the reasons they liked Camp Half-Blood. It wasn't strict but at the same time the campers were all well trained.

"There were black ... case, it was true..."

"It's so much fun listening from a guy's perspective." Piper said. "Although, I think those girls are demented."

"They have to be." Clarisse said. "Reminds me of Drew and her pack of girls."

Most of the Greek campers shuddered at Drew's mention. She was a menace at camp and the sole reason why most of the campers avoided cabin 10 and its occupants like the plague.

"'There they are." Grover nodded toward a couple of younger kids arguing in the bleachers. "Bianca and Nico di Angelo."

Will squeezed Nico's hand in assurance when he felt the younger demigod tense up.

"That's you, right? You have a sister? Like a real sister?" Dakota asked Nico. "I mean not like Hazel – half-sister and all..."

"Shut up Kota." Jason hissed at his friend. He didn't know how Nico would take this whole reading of the quest. He knew that this was when Bianca had died. If it had been him in Nico's place, he would not have been able to sit through the reading. As it is, he knew how it felt to lose an older sister and even though he got her back, it still wasn't the same.

"Yeah." Nico croaked and then cleared his throat. "Yeah, that's umm me and… my sister."

Both Zeus and Poseidon turned to look at Hades to see if he knew of this daughter of his and it seemed that he did since he did not seem shocked at all. The way some of the older children were behaving, it was clear that the topic of this child was not a good one. The two gods wondered what happened to their niece.

Hades on the other hand, was looking forward to hearing about this child of his. He wondered whether he had ever met her or even knew a bit about her. The only thing he wasn't looking forward to was listening to her death, whenever it came up and in whatever book.

"The girl wore ... something was wrong."

"Trading cards?" Leo asked in confusion. Nico did not seem the type to play with anything let
alone trading cards.

Nico sighed and said in a small voice, "Mythomagic. They were Mythomagic cards." He wasn't looking forward to hearing about how stupid he was as a ten year old kid. Ugh! Why hadn't he behaved like a normal person in front of Percy? He was sure all of his childishness would be in the book.

"You play Mythomagic?" Gwen asked. "You would get along with literally half of our camp. Every second person there has played or plays that game."

"What is this Mythomagic?" Hermes asked.

"It's a stupid card game." Nico deadpanned. "But informative. Half of my knowledge of gods came from that."

Rolling his eyes, Frank explained, "It's basically a card game that has different gods on the cards and each card has some points that can be used to defeat the other person…"

"That was a horrible explanation." Nico said, his lips twisting as if fighting a smile.

"I wasn't even done with the explanation." Frank retorted. "Anyway, it's easier to actually play the game and explain than explain just like that."

"Do you still play Mythomagic?" Will whispered to Nico. A younger half-sister of his was obsessed with the game but didn't have anyone to play with. Maybe Nico would entertain her. That way Nico would at least start interacting with other people.

"No, not anymore." Nico replied. "But I still have the cards that Percy bought for me as 'cabin-warming' gift – his words, not mine."

"He bought you cards?"

Nico shrugged and said, "He knew I burned my previous cards. So, he got me a full collection. Must have been expensive. I still don't know how to repay that."

"Maybe you could actually play with them and not keep them as a decorative piece on your table." Percy suggested in a whisper, scaring the two boys. Looking at their expressions, he said, "You guys were distracting me from listening to Adrianna."

"Annabeth said, ... of here," I said."

"Please tell me that is not your actual plan." Athena groaned when Percy and Thalia shrugged. They didn't like working according to plans. They were better off when thinking on their feet.

"I started forward, ... we were here."

"Monsters can see through the mist so they are not susceptible to mist manipulation." Chiron explained. "Unless the manipulator is an expert in magic like Lou Ellen or Hazel."

""Don't look ... on those kids.'"

"Now that's a better plan than just taking the children and walking out." Athena said with relief.

Percy rolled his eyes and grumbled under his breath. He couldn't understand whether Athena was tolerating him or not. One minute she would accept some idea of his and the next she would treat
him as an idiot, albeit indirectly. It was starting to get on his nerves.

"Can you stop calling me a kid?" Nico asked Thalia, who mouthed 'nope'. It was weird listening about his cousins discussing him and Bianca like that. He didn't know whether he wanted to know Percy's first impression of him or not. For him, from the minute Percy came to his and Bianca's rescue, he was a hero. Now Nico wondered whether Percy ever saw him more than some annoying mission that put Annabeth in danger.

"'Dancing?' Annabeth ... hurt. 'I did.'"

"Dude, seriously? McCartney?" Travis said in disgust.

"Hey! I like McCartney." Katie glared at Travis, who rolled his eyes and mumbled about horrible choice in music.

"'Oh my gods, ..."

"Green who?"

"I'm changing your playlist." Percy said to Grover.

"I'll help." Thalia said and laughed as Grover groaned. He needed to hide his IPod again.

"'Never mind. ... for some reason."

"And here we go again." Thalia teased. "Percy's thoughts on Annabeth."

Percy groaned and closed his eyes. He was not going to look at anyone till some fight scene came up or something. He felt himself getting redder and hotter as some of the other campers teased him and Annabeth.

"'So..." I tried ... heck is natural?"

"Good question. Obviously, the answ-" Travis trailed off as Adrianna glared at him for interrupting.

"'Um, design any ... she was saying."

"At least you listened." Annabeth said to Percy, whose eyes were still closed and head resting against the back of the couch, but he smiled and she knew that he hadn't gone off to sleep. Yet. She continued, "Thalia doesn't even bother. She keeps on interrupting."

"You see, being your boyfriend, he has to listen. I have no such obligations."

Annabeth rolled her eyes fondly and went back to leaning against Percy's chest.

"The truth was ... ever saw them."

Annabeth smiled at that. She didn't know that Percy had wanted to see her more often. Hades! She hadn't even known that he had liked her for so long. But now that she was listening to his thoughts, she realized that he himself had not understood that he had had a crush on her. Ah, Seaweed Brain!

"Yeah, uh, cool." ... for being clumsy."

"Oh, you don't need an excuse. Everyone knows that outside the battle field you are clumsy."
Thalia said.

"Am not." Percy replied. "Only at dancing."

"You got better." Annabeth said and then explained to Thalia. "He had to learn for Sally and Paul's wedding."

"Ah!"

"Dance, you ... "Me, Seaweed Brain.""

"I…" Piper shook her head. "How did you guys even get together? Percy was way too clueless. Even Jason was better."

"Hey!" Jason said indignantly.

Grover chuckled and said, "Give it a couple more years, a hundred dozen life threatening situations, add some godly interference, a war and voila!" He thrust his hands towards the blushing couple as if presenting them to a crowd.

"Please read." Percy requested.

"Oh. Oh, right."

... judo throw me."

"Been there, done that." Annabeth said and the seven and the Romans laughed.

"What?" the Greek campers asked.

"Annabeth judo flipped Percy when they met at Camp Jupiter." Reyna said and laughed.

Clarisse laughed and said, "Only Annabeth would meet her boyfriend after spending months searching for him and then judo flip him."

Percy shrugged and said, "You should have seen the Romans' faces. They almost went to war for that."

"Yeah, we aren't exactly used to random people coming and judo-flipping our Praetor after kissing them." Frank teased.

Annabeth shrugged. She had needed to do it, to get the anger and frustrations of the time spent searching for Percy, off her chest.

"I'm not going ... stepping on her toes."

Aphrodite had a huge smile on her face. Oh, this story was just perfect. The unconfident lovers were so much better than the confident ones. There was just so much potential for heartbreak there. If it weren't for the simple fact that she couldn't find it in herself to separate the two, Aphrodite was sure she would have already planned something for them.

"What were ... stepmom again?"

"Oh, you are so sweet! This is perfect." Aphrodite blurted out.

Both Percy and Annabeth had identical frightened looks on their faces. No one ever gained
anything by having Aphrodite take an interest in their love life, every single demigod knew that.

Adrianna, who was starting to like the couple, didn't want anything to happen to them and continued to read.

"Annabeth sighed. ... Hades's gym shorts."

"Excuse me?" Hades asked with a raised eyebrow.

"What's wrong with San Francisco?" Dakota asked at the same time.

Ignoring Hades, Percy said, "Well, San Francisco is supposed to be bad for us. Greeks that is. Because of Mount Tam."

"Yes." Chiron said. "But more than that, it is because no Greek demigod would ever feel safe being in such close proximity to the Roman camp." He paused and looked thoughtful and then said, "However, considering that most of the enmity has been resolved or rather there is some peace now, perhaps it won't feel like a danger zone to the campers anymore."

"I'll let you know if anything has changed, when I go to visit dad." Annabeth said.

"'So he wants ... I was kidding.'"

"Of course I thought you were kidding. I keep forgetting that you weren't brought up amongst other demigods." Annabeth said.

"Oh, he would still be just as clueless even if he was brought up amongst demigods." Clarisse said.

"Ha-ha." Percy mocked.

"'You know. I... tell you something.'"

Finally opening his eyes, Percy looked at Annabeth and whispered, "Were you going to tell me that you were going to join the hunters?"

Annabeth looked up at him and asked, "How did you...?"

"Grover found the pamphlet."

"I was only considering it. I hadn't decided." Annabeth sighed as Percy nodded once and tightened his hold on her as if telling that he wasn't going to let her go anywhere. She was fine with it. There was no other place that she rather be.

"Suddenly she froze. ... nowhere in sight."

"Damn." Will mumbled.

"'We have to ... necks, like kittens.'"

Hades glared at nothing in particular. He was used to having his children been pursued and hunted by monsters but the only way he had been able to go through that without interfering was by turning a blind eye, regardless of how much it hurt to do so. But this was the first time that he was hearing a firsthand account of such a thing and he didn't want to hear it. Especially when he knew Bianca's fate. Was this the end for his young daughter? Surely it couldn't be so soon. Nico had said something about a quest and this was only a rescue mission. But then the chapter title had said that
the rescue mission had gone wrong. All of these questions were only confusing and agitating him. For the first time, he understood and appreciated the state Poseidon and Athena had been in during the reading. Then again, they knew that their child survived and Hades knew that his didn't. Taking a deep breath, Hades tuned back to listening to the story. He needed to know what happened.

"I still couldn't ... I thought, Wait."

"You will not follow her." Triton stated, already figuring out that Percy would not have liked the changing of power positions with Thalia's introduction.

"How do you know that?" Percy asked.

"It is simple. We are not good at following orders because we are used to giving them. Now that our cousin is giving out orders, your inherent enmity coupled with our basic nature would not let you take her lead."

"Let us just continue with the reading." Hades said. He hoped for his nephew's sake that because of his stupid decisions, nothing should have happened to Bianca.

"I remembered ... after Dr. Thorn."

"Sorry about that." Percy apologized to Annabeth.

"It was always going to be a trap." Nico leaned over and whispered to Percy and Annabeth. "His aim was to get the two of us and one of you. I remember him saying something like that."

Annabeth furrowed her brows and said, "Makes sense. They would have known that it would be difficult to defeat a Manitcore. Even with all of us there. It would have been easy for Thorn to take two untrained demigods and any one of us. Just one sting and the pain could even incapacitate us."

"The door led ... right at me."

"Not at you." Nico said nonchalantly. "Well, I was looking at you. She wasn't."

"Yeah, figured that out pretty late, didn't I?" Percy scoffed.

"I advanced slowly, ... bronze weapons."

"Even though that is correct, monsters do not usually run away from demigods." Artemis said.

"Unless it is a trap." Phoebe said. "But celestial bronze does not scare them into running."

 Adrianna read ahead and sighed. So the boy had once again walked into a trap. Well, she supposed she wasn't really surprised. He had walked into so many traps in the first two books that he should be banned from leading missions. He hardly ever checked the surroundings before doing something. Still, Adrianna, unlike Phoebe and a couple other hunters was ready to give him another chance because the Fates wouldn't get so many books on the adventures of just one person if he was useless.

"'My name's Percy,' I said, trying to keep my voice level. 'I'm going to take you out of here, get you somewhere safe.'"

"You are good with children." Hestia noted.

"He is." Chiron said proudly. "That is one of the reason why he is one of the few who is in charge
of orientation for new campers."

"Bianca's eyes widened. ... 'I know who you are.'"

"Do all of the monsters know who you are or are they given special lessons before they attack you?" Leo asked and Calypso face-palmed.

"If there is a monster who hasn't heard about Percy by now, then I'll be worried about the monster." Connor said.

"Anyway, all supporters of Kronos knew about Percy." Chris said.

"Can we continue with the reading?" Percy asked. "Thank you."

"I tried to ... this before. Poison."

"I do not like the fact that you are so accustomed to poison that you can actually recognize it." Poseidon said in worry. Why was it that his son kept on getting poisoned so much? Or tricked into drinking a potion? Or injured by one of the most dangerous weapons ever created?

"On the brighter side, I can actually recognize it and maybe stop it or do something to stop it."

"Well, I do suppose that is a positive side." Poseidon said thoughtfully, still not liking the familiarity his son had with poison.

"In any case, if I am correct, then the poison would not kill him." Artemis said.

"What do you mean?" Poseidon asked.

"A monster that has mismatched eyes, one of which glows blue? And has 'dagger-like projectiles' that contain poison? I am guessing that the monster is most probably a Manticore. They are ancient and powerful enough to agitate those two even from a distance."

"How…?" Percy muttered.

"She is the goddess of hunt. It is literally her job to know about all monsters." Annabeth whispered to Percy.

"I forced ... throwing knives."

"That has to be Manticore." Adrianna interrupted herself and addressed Artemis. "The tail would move so fast that Percy would not be able to comprehend it and it would certainly look like an invisible person throwing knives from behind the monster."

"Quite correct, Adrianna." Artemis praised.

Pleased with herself, Adrianna continued, "Next to me, ... accurately I can throw."

"Hmm. It does require quite an effort to bring down a Manticore. I wonder how you did it." Artemis said.

"Who would read next?" Adrianna asked the room at large.

Tuning out of the talks going on around him, Hades hoped that he wouldn't lose his daughter so early on. He wanted to know more about her before the inevitable happened. He felt Persephone squeeze his hand and turned to smile grimly at her and pushed the thoughts of his daughter's fate to
the back of his mind. He was eager to know what happened next to his children.
"Allow me." Phoebe said and took the book from her Lieutenant.

"THE VICE PRINCIPAL GETS A MISSILE LAUNCHER"

Before anyone could ask what a missile launcher was, Phoebe read on, "I didn't ... think to get it."

"Scream?" Butch asked.

"No."

"I closed my ... Grover was awake."

"Oh. So, that's what you were doing." Nico said.

"Did it work?" Travis asked.

"Let me read!" Phoebe snarled and turned to look at the book and missed the campers rolling their eyes.

"Hey, Grover! ... summon your ride.""

"Ride?" Zeus asked. "He is not going to kill you?" Now that his child was in no danger or rather no immediate danger, he could not care less about the demigods. Obviously, he was not going to mention it out loud to his brothers, who were glaring at him for his callousness.

"No. He was kidnapping us." Percy said.

"'What ride?' ... say anything at all."

A lot of demigods, especially who had faced an annoyed or angry Nico, smiled. Nico was somewhat known for speaking his mind when angered or irritated and the campers were glad to know that he had always been like that, even in the middle of getting kidnapped by a dangerous monster.

"Dr. Thorn made ... heavily armed friends!"

"Did you even hear anything out of that?" Percy asked.

Grover grinned sheepishly and shrugged and said, "Maybe something about food. But I could most definitely feel your emotions."

"Sure..."
"'Halt,' Thorn said.

... mist and darkness."

"At least you are near the sea." Poseidon mumbled in relief.

"Dr. Thorn pushed ... a mobile phone."

Some of the demigods murmured their assent. It was too disconcerting to see ancient monsters using modern technology. Although, thankfully, it wasn't a usual sight.

"I glanced behind ... a plan, right??"

"Does he ever?" Clarisse snorted.

"Yeah, I do." Percy said indignantly.

Rolling her eyes, Phoebe read, "Grover! I ... might help. Maybe."

"That might work." Triton said in a thoughtful voice and Poseidon made a noncommittal sound which made Hades wonder whether his brother would help out in such a situation, especially when it involves his children.

"It might not." Artemis said. "A manticore moves pretty fast, making it impossible for all three of the children to escape."

"'I would kill ... almost like a tail."

"See, a manticore!" Artemis said happily and Apollo rolled his eyes at his sister.

"'Unfortunately," Thorn ... but each other.'"

Hades raised his brow at that. If the children had no one else then it was quite possible that the mother was dead. In that case, who put the children in school? Was there someone else? Or was he himself involved? A part of him hoped that it was the latter. He hardly ever had the opportunity to get involved with his children and if he had this one little chance of taking care of his children, even indirectly, then that was enough for him.

"'Aww," Dr. Thorn ... work for Luke.'"

"Father – to be more precise." Demeter mumbled.

"'Dr. Thorn's ... who's the General?'"

"That was kind of hilarious when you did that." Nico said with a twist of lips that was a smile. Percy grinned at him.

"'The General?' Ares asked in confusion and then his eyebrows shot up as he realized whom the manticore was talking about. Looking at Athena, he realized that she too had come to the same conclusion and he said, "The General of the Titan army? Atlas?"

"Unless they have changed Generals over the years, I would say yes." Athena snarled but it didn't quite have the bite. If Atlas himself was stirring, then it was an even bigger problem than they all realized. Although, as long as he was trapped under the weight of the sky, they all would be fine.
Zoe and Calypso pursed their lips and hoped that it wasn't Atlas that the monster was talking about, although Calypso remembered Hephaestus once saying that Atlas had briefly been able to escape his punishment.

"Thorn looked toward ... louder and closer."

"What is...?" Hephaestus started asking but Leo interrupted.

"It is a mortal machine that carries people in the air."

""Where are you ... great army and—""

The campers were all trying to stifle their laughter at the image of a ten year old telling a manticore off.

"Man! I would love to meet your ten year old version." Dakota snorted.

Will was shaking with laughter and said, "You were a cool kid."

Nico smirked at him and said, "I suppose I was."

"'Now, now,' ... downfall of Olympus!'"

The jovial mood evaporated instantly and the gods looked at each other. They all had different ideas of what monster this Thorn person was talking about but most of thought of Typhon – the one monster they never wanted to face or think about again. Poseidon and Triton, on the other hand, were thinking about the Ophiotaurus. They remembered Percy telling them a couple of days ago about renaming the Ophiotaurus as Bes or Bessy or something. It could be that monster that the manticore was talking about. If many old monsters were stirring and making an appearance then it would only be natural for the Ophiotaurus to be reborn.

"'Okay,' Bianca ... completely nuts, too.'"

"Everyone knows that." Thalia said.

"I never got ... been truly frightened."

Thalia smirked and looked at Percy.

"I think I'm talking about Aegis and not you." Percy replied to the unasked question.

"She uses a ... the sight of it."

"Hmm... I have not seen it but I suppose it would be terrifying." Hercules mused and Thalia took that as an invitation to bring out Aegis. She tapped her bracelet and murmured 'Aegis' and the shield expanded. Most of the campers were used to seeing it, so they were somewhat prepared and only recoiled a bit and directed their eyes elsewhere, but everyone else was too shocked and scared to do anything. Perseus yelped and scooted back into Hercules, who was frozen as if actually turned into stone.

"That is what she looks like?" Theseus asked, looking at the floor.

"I do not know, now do I?" Perseus said. "You are not supposed to look at her or that will be the last thing you ever see."
"It's almost true to her actual features." Percy said, looking over the shield at his brother and cousins while patting Tyson's shoulder and trying to calm him down.

Pleased with the result, Thalia grinned and closed the shield and everyone sighed in relief.

Taking a deep breath, Phoebe read, "Even Dr. Thorn... "For Zeus!"

Zeus managed a smirk but was worrying about his daughter going against a powerful manticore.

"I thought ... dare look."

"Why is no one helping?" Zeus muttered under his breath, too caught up in the fight being read out to do anything more than that.

Artemis and her hunters were gladly soaking up all information about Thalia. They wanted to know how good she was. She had to be a great fighter and leader to be their Lieutenant. None of them had seen her fight or spar in the past few days that they spent with her and hoped that they could see it before the reading was done with.

"Dr. Thorn launched ... entangling him."

"What is some grass going to do against a powerful monster such as a manticore?" Ares sneered and muttered about useless satyrs.

"A lot, actually." Pan snapped at the war god and flicked his hand, demonstrating the power of nature as grass broke out of nowhere and wrapped up Ares' legs and started moving upwards, towards his thighs, all the while digging into his flesh. Ignoring Ares' yelps as he tried to unsuccessfully cut through the thickening grass, which was now joined by vines, Pan addressed Grover, "You have gotten better at woodland magic. Although, I suppose it would take much more practice to be able to that." The wild god jabbed a thumb towards a seething Ares, who was now hacking off the grass and vines wrapping around him. Sighing, Pan removed the plants and said, "Do not underestimate woodland magic, Ares. It is quite powerful."

Ares glared at Pan but before he could do anything to him, Phoebe started the reading again, not wanting anything to happen to one of her favorite gods.

"Dr. Thorn roared ... 'And what is that?''"

"Oh, the poor children still do not know about our world." Hestia said.

"It was kinda fun." Nico said to himself.

"For you." Percy pointed out. "Bianca was freaking out."

"'A manticore?' ... saving throws!'"'

"What?" Phoebe asked, looking up at the Nico in front of her.

"Mythomagic." Frank said with a smile. "Nico was talking about the attack power in the game."

Rolling her eyes at their stupidity, the hunter read, "I didn't know ... stop a second volley."

"It saved you. That is all that matters." Tyson said with a smile and Percy nodded. The shield had served its purpose pretty well.
"I heard ... monster roared."

"In your dreams." Thalia said.

"And not even then." Percy added and the cousins grinned at each other.

"'Never!' Thalia yelled ... with a monster?"

"Mortals and monsters together?" Hestia asked in worry.

"Yes. It is pretty easy to buy mortals by bribing them." Annabeth said.

"And they wouldn't even know what they are actually doing as they cannot see through the mist." Thalia added.

"See, I have always said, have I not, that mortals are despicable." Hera said, as if an age old point had been proven.

"Just read." Zeus demanded. His daughter was still in the middle of fighting a manticore and no one was even helping her out.

"The searchlights... other direction."

"Instead of watching all of this, why can you not help her out?" Zeus asked testily.

"Only over here it seems like the fight is pretty slow, but it all was happening within minutes, if not seconds." Thalia explained. "You are hearing it from a demigod's perspective, father. During a fight, every single thing slows down for us, but it is still seconds or minutes in reality. And even then, Percy had to protect the two demigods than come and help out. Or at least wait till someone else could protect them."

As Zeus grouchily looked away from her, Thalia thought about how she had been annoyed at Percy for not helping out in any of their fights but now that she thought about it, time had only slowed down for them because they could see, feel and hear everything in a battle field but in reality, there wasn't enough time to help out anyone.

"'No!' I ran ... in the woods."

Phoebe read the last line with a slowly growing smile and looked up at her hunter sisters, who had also reached the same conclusion. The hunters had come!

"What are my hunters doing there?" Artemis asked.

"You will see, my lady." Thalia said with a smile but internally cringed, thinking about how she was at odds with the hunters till she joined them.

Phoebe excitedly read on, wanting to know more about the hunt in the future, even though it was from a boy's perspective.

"The manticore ... 'It cannot be—'"

"Oh, but it is." Sabrina said with a smirk.

"His sentence ... Dr. Thorn's shoulder."
The hunters, all, now sported a huge grin on their face as they thought about hunting beasts. You could even hear the smile as Phoebe read.

"He staggered ... much accuracy."

"You just had to mention that, didn't you?" Will groaned and Nico patted his hand.

"Of course not." Adrianna sneered. "We are by far much superior to demigods."

Will rolled his eyes and retorted, "Only because you are actually trained by a goddess for months or even years."

"Admit defeat, boy. We are much better than you could ever hope to be." Phoebe said.

Will narrowed his eyes, but before he could reply with a biting remark, Percy interfered and said, "Could we just continue with the book? We can all discuss this later."

The hunters glared at Percy but Phoebe went back to reading. She would show those demigods that the hunters were far superior to any demigod, especially those annoying children of Apollo.

"The manticore ... "Oh, wonderful.""

"You do not sound pleased." Artemis stated.

"I was not." Thalia admitted. "Didn't really have the best history with hunters and I always got into a fight with the then Lieutenant."

Artemis nodded as the hunters frowned at Thalia's words. The goddess realized that she might have tried to recruit Thalia before this meeting and Thalia would not have wanted to join them. Some of the girls who actually refuse the hunt, most of the time were bitter with the hunters, as they usually got over-excited or too protective of the hunt and insulted the girls who rejected them.

"I didn't have ... to kill, my lady?"

The hunters frowned at the description as they could not infer who the new Lieutenant was and wished for Percy's too elaborate and detailed description to find out who the hunter was.

"I couldn't tell... the Ancient Laws."

"It is not." Artemis said with half a smile. "I hunt wild beasts and he is a wild beast. Ergo, my hunters and I are allowed to hunt him."

"We know." Aphrodite said with a roll of her eyes.

"Great! Now Artemis gets to meet him." Apollo muttered under his breath and Hermes chuckled at his older brother's antics.

"'Not so," ... "Zoe, permission granted."

Phoebe grinned as she read her friend's name and immediately looked up at a blinking Zoe. Slowly, all of the hunters smiled and some patted Zoe on her back.

"What?" Zoe asked with wide eyes.

Smiling, Artemis said, "It looks like you are my Lieutenant, Zoe."
The hunters, all laughed and cheered. Adrianna said with a smile, "I knew you had great potential when we recruited you. I could not have asked for a better successor."

Looking at a still shocked Zoe, Hercules allowed himself a smile. He did not and would not forget his time with Zoe and how she had provided him with a weapon. He looked away when he saw one of the hunters glaring at him.

It was all a buzz to Zoe – the congratulations from her fellow hunters or the cheering and laughter. When she had joined the hunt a year ago, all she had wanted was a family and somewhere to belong to, after having been disowned by her original family. She never thought that she would one day be in the position and have the honor to lead the hunters. But before she could allow the happiness to sink in, she remembered that the Lieutenant's circlet was now adorned by Thalia. So, what had happened to her? Had she willingly stepped down or had she fallen in battle? There was no way that she would ever break the sacred vow and she didn't think herself to be capable of standing down and watch a new hunter take her place. She was proud that way. That, however, left only one valid option – she had fallen in battle. And if that didn't scare her, then nothing else would.

Apprehensively, she asked over the sound of her fellow hunters' talking and directed the question at Thalia, "What happened to me?"

Both Thalia and Percy, who had been watching the hunters and especially Zoe, had seen the moment that realization dawned on her that she was no longer the Lieutenant. But that did nothing to soften the blow of her question and Thalia visibly flinched at the blunt question.

"You'll see that later." Thalia said with confidence that she definitely did not have.

That was all the confirmation Zoe needed and her bubble of euphoria suddenly popped and she felt sick. She was going to die. She didn't have the strength to even face that possibility and hoped that she did actually step down from her position. The cheering had died down at the bleak future of next Lieutenant and Phoebe cleared her throat and read as if nothing had happened.

"The manticore growled. ... charged at the monster."

"No..." Percy mumbled and tightened his hold on Annabeth. She clasped his hand and snuggled into his side, as if to reassure him that she was sitting next to him and not about to fall off a cliff.

""Get back, ... Zoe ordered."

"No." Athena said vehemently.

"Sorry, sister, but killing the beast is of utmost importance." Artemis said and looked at Annabeth in wonder. How did the girl survive? Unless she managed to get out of the line of fire in the split second that it took for the arrows to reach their mark. Her hunters never missed a shot and if the girl was still well and alive, then she must have managed to at least duck when the arrows went her way or maybe had only gotten nicked by an arrow.

""No!" I screamed.

... into the darkness."

Percy leaned into Annabeth and inhaled her scent. She was right here, next to him and not somewhere out in the dark. But even with that reassurance, he could feel the anxiety creeping up just like it had when he had lost her to the manticore. It only eased a bit when Annabeth kissed his
cheek in order to calm him.

Athena glared at the hunters before turning to look at her daughter, only to find the son of Poseidon clinging to her. The goddess could not even bring herself to glare or scoff at the boy because he looked like he was protecting Annabeth from everything. Athena hoped that they had found her daughter safe somewhere at the bottom of the cliff but she had a feeling that it would not be the case. After all, the manticore would simply not jump off a cliff if he did not have a way to escape.

"'Annabeth!' I yelled.

... the sound of gunfire."

"Mortals." Adrianna muttered darkly.

"Most of the ... into the night."

"At least you did not kill them or order to shoot them down." Apollo said drily. It would be very much in his sister's character to do such a thing.

"The Hunters advanced ... timing, as usual.'"

"Ah! There is enmity over there." Adrianna stated and wondered how Thalia ended up becoming the Lieutenant if she didn't like Zoe or even the hunt.

"Zoe scanned ... is beyond help.'"

Athena sighed. She was correct. The manticore had managed to escape and hopefully took Annabeth along with him. Her daughter had more chance of survival against the enemy than she did against falling off a cliff.

"I tried to ... think you are?'''

The hunters, as one, looked up to glare at Percy. How dare he insult them? How dare a boy talk in such a manner, especially to their goddess?

"Ah-ah-ah!" Apollo tutted, shaking one finger at Percy. "You should not have said that, especially to Artemis. If it were not for the fact that you are injured and in shock, I myself would have been upset with you for such disrespect."

Artemis rolled her eyes at her annoyingly, over-protective, younger brother and addressed her hunters, "My brother is correct. The boy is only in shock and grieving for losing his friend. It does not seem that he meant to be disrespectful."

"Regardless, my lady…” Adrianna said but Artemis interrupted her.

"No, my child, let him be. Can you not understand that he is grieving and hurt?"

"Very well." The hunters stopped their glaring and asked Phoebe to read.

"Zoe stepped forward ..."Goddess of the Hunt.'"

"Now that you know that, you better not be disrespectful, boy." Phoebe said, passing the book to Sabrina, who had wished to read next.

"I doubt any of you would have let him live if he was.” Adrianna calmed her friend.
Smiling at her hunters' protective attitude, Artemis asked Sabrina to read the next chapter.
"BIANCA DI ANGELO MAKES A CHOICE"

"After seeing … you're so… Wow!"

Grover groaned as the older Greek demigods chuckled. They were all too familiar with the creepy-stalker nature of the satyrs when the hunters came to visit the camp. Grover, on the other hand was worrying about the fact that the book might contain his other not-so-eloquent moments involving the hunters, since Percy had witnessed like half of them.

"'Get up, goat boy!' … our school, but…"

Hades frowned at his daughter's explanation. Despite not knowing what a 'bank trust' was, he was pretty sure that there was something weird with that story. Surely, the mother would have told the children about their real identity and on her death, one of the Furies would have gone to ensure the children's safety. It was a precaution he took with all of his children, seeing as they would be unwelcome at the camp. He usually asked one of his servants to go and make sure that his children found shelter and safety. He decided to ask Nico more about him and his sister if it was not revealed by the end of the day.

"She faltered. … athlete?"

"Not quite." Nike said, thinking about the upcoming Olympian Games. It was one of her favorite job, to look over the games.

"Although we do participate in them." Hermes said.

"'No," Zoe … movement points for—"

Will stifled a laugh and choked out, "What?"

"Just ignore…" Nico grumbled. He was already hating the chapter and it only got worse from here onwards.

"There is no way anyone can ignore the hyperactive Nico." Conner said with a chuckle. "I remember how you used to be when you were ten."

"Good old days." Travis said with a sigh.

"Nico used to be hyperactive?" Leo asked incredulously. No way that the brothers were talking about the same Nico – the look-at-me-and-I-will-kill-you Nico. Just, no way!

"Oh, you have no idea just how annoying he could get. I may have planned his murder a couple of
times.” Percy said with a roll of his eyes. As much as that kid had been annoying, he had been at least a happy person and Percy suddenly found himself missing the younger Nico.

Nico huffed and was glad when the hunter started to read again.

"'Nico, shut up!'... search for her—"

The sound of 'aww' suddenly filled up the air – some spoken with genuine feeling while most spoken in teasing.

"—I couldn't ... looked pained."

"A first hand horrible lesson." Leo muttered to himself.

"'Do not ... friend has vanished.'"

Athena breathed a little freely at that. Her daughter had only been taken and not killed. That would always be a good thing.

"I still ... her presence."

"You could have… based on how attuned you were to your powers by then." Poseidon said.

"'Oo!' Nico ... arrows! Is he dead?'"

Nico buried his face in his hands and groaned out, "Somebody kill me now."

"Oh, wait for our one on one talk then." Percy said, patting Nico's shoulder and then added, "I hope that is included."

"'He was a ... faint right there."

Nico chuckled at the memory as Annabeth berated Grover about proper etiquette when introducing a half-blood to their world.

"'Grover, put ... hooves are clean!'"

"I don't think that was the point, man!" Leo said as everyone chuckled.

"'Bianca,' I ... go!' said Nico."

Not for the first time, Will wished that he could meet this younger version of Nico and make sure that the innocence and the sunny attitude didn't erode. It was like mourning for a friend he never had. Sure, he had met that Nico – the ten year old, inquisitive kid – but that felt like lifetimes ago. Both he and Nico had been new to the camp and Will, at that time, had liked to keep to himself and a few select siblings. So, he had never noticed the son of Hades as anything more than another addition to the camp numbers. Now, he wondered that if he had befriended the young Nico, maybe he could have stopped him from leaving and going down the rabbit hole. A logical part of his brain told him that he didn't even know why Nico had left in the first place. All they had heard was that Nico had ran away and after a couple of excursions by some of the older campers, they had given up on Nico being yet another demigod who ran away and hopefully didn't join the enemy. Unfortunately, leaving the camp had been on an all-time high at that time. Unconsciously, Will started rubbing circles on Nico's hand and hoped that he would finally find out why Nico had left the camp, since it was rumored that Percy was the last person to see Nico at camp.
"'Wait,' Bianca ... Thalia said."

Zoe looked at Thalia. She could not understand why the child of Zeus and their future Lieutenant was so adamant about being away from the hunt. Why would she not let the young girl be given the option of being in the hunt? Joining this group of Artemis' most loyal followers and soldiers was the best thing that ever happened to the daughter of Atlas. So, she couldn't understand why anyone else wouldn't let the young girl be given the opportunity to start a new life. It was obviously better to be a hunter than a demigod warrior of the gods. At least the hunters weren't used as slaves of the gods. They were a family and at the same time individuals too. They could decide and influence other hunters and be influenced by them, unlike the demigods, who had to follow whatever orders the gods gave them. And they treated each other with respect and love, unlike the demigods, who only cared for themselves and their quests and nothing else. That had been pretty obvious from Hercules' behaviour towards her. All demigods were the same – selfish and self-important people who would sooner lay down their lives for the gods than treat someone with respect and humility.

And yet, somehow this didn't sit well with Zoe Nightshade. Ever since the last book had been read out, her opinion of the demigods – at least the ones from the future and in front of her – was changing. None of them looked like the type to be anything less than respectful of others. Maybe, except the daughter of Ares, but then she too showed emotions, so Zoe truly felt conflicted. Her views were being contradicted and she felt uncomfortable with the directions of her thoughts. Were the demigods really not so different from hunters? Or was it only one demigod, in whose viewpoint the books were being read in, that was so different than the typical demigod that the hunters had come to recognize. The hunter felt frustrated and knew that some of her hunter-sisters felt the same way. After all, no one liked when their beliefs and views were challenged. It looked like she needed to wait till at least the books ended, to form an opinion of her own. And Zoe, for the first time, did not feel the patience that came with immortality, to be able to wait for such a long time.

"Thalia and Zoe ... from the school.""

"I do hope that we do not let the boys stay at our camp with us." One of the hunters murmured in a scandalized tone. It would be horrendous if the boys were allowed to be near them, not to mention disrespectful.

"'Yes, my lady.'

... speak with you.'"

Nico paled as he realized what was coming and he knew that he would finally get to hear about Bianca choosing random people over him. He was confident that Percy was there when Bianca had taken the oath.

"'What about me?'... they're so... Argh!''"

Unable to hide her curiosity anymore, Sabrina interrupted herself and asked Thalia, "Why do you hate us?"

"I... I think I told Percy about it later on, so it might be explained. But anyway, it's just that Zoe had tried to recruit me when I was on the run and I had refused and ever since then it had been bad blood between hunters and me." Thalia explained with a shrug.

"Why would you refuse to be a hunter?" Adrianna asked incredulously, as if the thought was alien and it might as well have been for the hunters. They could not think of there being anything better than becoming one of them. They got the opportunity of making a new family, hunting monsters,
being immortal and being in servitude of Lady Artemis. What more could a girl want?

"I had reasons." Still do, Thalia thought. If it hadn't been for the fact that Luke had turned evil and she had less than a few hours left to take on a huge responsibility, the daughter of Zeus was sure that she would have preferred to be a demigod. Despite the danger of being a half-blood, she had family and friends amongst them. Now she struggled to maintain ties with both her families – the demigods and the hunters. The two sides had no love for one another and the only reason she was able to keep in touch with the demigods was that most of the hunters didn't mind Percy and Annabeth and didn't give Thalia much grief whenever she wanted to visit the camp.

"'I'm with you," ... think of that?'"

"Oh gods! Don't turn on each other." Annabeth groaned and once again wondered how the two opposites managed to hold off from killing each other, long enough to find her.

"You both are so much like your fathers." Hestia commented with a dry chuckle. "Every time something goes wrong, their first step is to blame each other and that usually continues till they the very last minute until something forces them to work together."

Both Zeus and Poseidon turned away from each other and looked anywhere but at their eldest sibling. It was always shame-inducing when she reprimanded them, but did she really have to do it in front of the children?

"My jaw clenched. ... cap in the snow."

"See… we stopped fighting." Percy said childishly.

"For now. Lemme see for how long this holds." Annabeth said, looking accusingly at both Percy and Thalia, who were grinning sheepishly at her.

"The Hunters ... my fault."

Annabeth rolled her eyes and mock-glared at Thalia. "See what you did."

Percy wanted to argue that it had been his fault but knew better than to do that. He knew that Annabeth would not take to that and would lecture him for who knew how long. But just because she didn't feel that way, didn't mean that he could not blame himself.

As if she knew, Annabeth whispered to Percy, "Stop it. You heard what all happened. There was no way you could have stopped it."

Percy nodded and smiled at her, to please her. But then her words sunk in. He did hear what happened and as much as he would like to believe that he could have stopped it from happening, a small part of him knew that it would have been near impossible. This realization didn't ease the guilt festering inside but it did help him feel just a little bit better.

"What had Annabeth ... she was still a tree."

"Huh..." Travis said and he and his brother got a strange gleam in their eyes as they looked at Thalia.

"I'll kill you both," Thalia deadpanned, looking at the Stolls and the two turned away. The one thing which they had learned within the first month that Thalia was back was that they should never, ever play a prank on Thalia. It was suicide. Although, she loved playing pranks on others.
"Finally, one ... his sun chariot."

The demigods snuck discreet looks at Nico. It was weird for them to listen about a part of Nico's life that didn't involve summoning armies of dead and glaring at everything within a five mile radius. It was unimaginable to picture Nico, their Nico, being a kid who played with figurines and cards, who found everything fascinating and would laugh and smile for utter nonsense. That Nico could have passed for a child of Apollo with his sunny nature. But the Nico of now, the Nico they knew, was like a person who had stopped seeing the positive side of life and spent all of his time gods-knew-where and doing gods-knew-what. They feared and pitied him, unable to understand how a person could be so gloomy and then chalking it down to parentage. But it was now obvious that that had not always been the case. Something had happened and those who knew about Bianca's death, finally understood how horribly it impacted their resident necromancer.

"'Big collection,' ... didn't last long."

Hades glanced at his son, who looked lost in thoughts. Painful thoughts, if the look in eyes was anything to go by. The god tried to understand why his son wouldn't remember something prior to a year. If he didn't know better, he would have thought some powerful force keeping the memories away. Normally, any mortals, including half-bloods with mortal blood, were very persistent on discovering everything – Pandora was a great example of that. So, why did his child not investigate more? Why did he cast aside the fact that he could not remember anything? Hades mentally rolled his eyes at himself. It seemed he was becoming as paranoid as his youngest brother. For all he knew, the loss of memory could be due to weaker mortal minds which were unable to store memories of childhood for long. Yes, that must be it.

"'Hey, can I ... write with it.'"

"And you still haven't." Annabeth said. "I doubt it could run out of ink, though. I mean that would beat the whole purpose of being a magical pen/sword."

"I guess." Percy shrugged. He couldn't even imagine using Riptide for anything other than fighting. But if it never ran out of ink...hmmm... in that case he wouldn't have to worry about actually keeping a normal pen with him for writing exams.

"Wait! It is actually a pen?" Nico asked.

"Yeah." Annabeth replied and took the pen from Percy, who had been playing with it for some time, and demonstrated how it turned into an actual pen.

"I'm pretty sure you found out that it was also a pen and not Percy." Thalia said with a chuckle.

"Duh!"

"'Are you really ... really well, then?''"

"Yes, I can." Percy said to Nico, who just rolled his eyes.

"It would be weird if you couldn't." Leo pointed out.

"I looked at ... asking questions."

Will whispered to Nico, "It looks like you enjoy twenty questions."

Nico groaned and hit his head against the back of the couch. Will would never stop now that he was finding out how Nico was like a couple of years ago. Styx!
"Did I fight a lot with Thalia, since she was a daughter of Zeus? (I didn’t answer that one.)"

"Yep."

"If Annabeth's... for asking that one."

"Insensitive much?"

"Stop replying to all those questions, Stoll!"

"Nah"

"Was Annabeth ... to the wolves."

"Yup."

"We know, Travis!" shouted everyone, including many hunters.

Nico covered his face with his hands and groaned as he thought about how annoying he used to be. No wonder Percy never saw him as more than just a kid.

Will looked at Nico and smiled a sad smile. He wished Nico would have stayed like that – always asking questions and being happy in general. The healer promised himself that he would get Nico out of whatever funk he was in. Nico would smile and laugh again. Will would make sure of that.

"I figured any second he was going to ask me how many hit points I had, and I'd lose my cool completely, but then Zoe Nightshade came up to us."

The son of Hades blushed as he heard that line. He had had half a mind to ask the very same question. Hey, how was he to know that Percy wasn't some crazy old hero who just looked young! After all, he had just met a twelve year old goddess or rather a goddess in the form of a twelve year old. It had all been very confusing and exciting for him.

"Percy Jackson."

... been sent to fetch."

Zoe frowned at that. She didn't know what she was feeling but it felt pretty close to shame. But she knew that she didn't need to be ashamed of her future actions. That was how hunters always behaved with boys and the hunters were not wrong in their actions. The boy might just be too sensitive to everything, the hunter thought to herself. Pleased with her thought, she tuned back into the reading and ignored the nagging feeling in the back of her mind.

"Come with me," ... and waved me inside."

Apollo looked sharply at his twin. She never, ever invited a male to her camp, let alone her tent. The only one allowed anywhere in the vicinity of the hunters was he himself. He often wishfully thought that Artemis trusted him to be around her hunters and not do anything other than harmless flirting (and he only did that with the mentally and emotionally strong hunters and not just anyone) but more often than not, he knew that that was not the case. The god knew that his sister only let him near her hunters because then she could call upon him whenever the hunters needed a ride in his carriage or any other thing that he could easily offer them. But he would do anything for her, even if it meant being used for the rest of their eternal lives.

"Bianca di Angelo ... for a young girl."
The hunters bristled at the boy being in the same tent as Artemis, even if there by invite. It just felt wrong to them. At the same time they were curious to know what a boy thought about Artemis and the hunters. Would he understand the importance of the hunt or would he too dismiss them as many had done in the past?

"'Are you surprised ... Forget themselves.'"

"In other words, grow up, live life and fall in love." Aphrodite said bitterly.

Artemis shrugged and said, "And get their hearts broken and be used by men as nothing more than a pastime."

"Bah! You should live a little."

"Enough! We are not to have this discussion yet again." Hera interrupted.

Taking it as a cue to read, Sabrina read out, "'Oh.'

Zoe sat down ... idea of being a guy."

"Perhaps not, but Zoe does dislike all males, especially demigod males." Artemis said nonchalantly while Zoe looked away from everyone's gazes.

Hercules frowned a little. Why would Zoe hate all male demigods? He had, until now, thought that she had joined the hunters because she wanted to leave her oppressing mountain and bullish father. But what if there was another reason? Was it possible that she joined the hunt so as to stay away from males? Surely not! She had been quite cordial towards him during the… Oh no! He could not be the reason, now could he be, that she had joined the hunters? Hercules had thought that they had parted ways on equal grounds. Was that not the case? Had he hurt her in the process of completing his quest? Did he drive her away from her life of being a Titaness? Did he dare to think that he held such power over her decisions? Maybe… maybe he did. The hero was at a loss of what to do. On one hand, he wished to sort things out with Zoe – he didn't want the blame of yet another life destroyed by his hands on his conscience. On the other hand, he wanted to wait and see if the reason for Zoe's newfound hatred of males stemmed from their time together or from something else entirely. Hercules decided to wait.

"'You must forgive ... them from you.'"

"Ah! So that is why you let a boy into your tent. I was wondering why you did that." Apollo exclaimed.

"And so ... nearly forgotten."

"That does not bode well for anyone." Hermes said.

"No. No, it does not." Demeter muttered.

"She stared at ... school dances."

"Percy!" Annabeth said in exasperation and almost everyone rolled their eyes at Percy's answer.

"'No, no. ... raised her hand."

Zoe's eyes widened and her breath quickened. This had to mean her father. Who else could cause such a reaction from her future self? She hoped that she didn't have to meet him at all. She felt one
of the hunters rub her back and felt herself relax. No matter what happened in the future, at least her sisters, not the biological ones, would help her out.

"'Go on, Percy,' ... downfall of Olympus.'"

Artemis furrowed her brow. What great monster would bring the downfall of Olympus? Sure, there were many monsters that took quite an effort from the gods to be brought down and then there was Typhon, from whom most gods ran away. It had to be Typhon. But it had been a long time since Zeus defeated the father of monsters. Was it possible that he himself was stirring? But if it was him, then Artemis would not go alone to search for him, she would at least take half the Olympian Council with her. It had to be another monster – one that she wouldn't mind tracking all on her own.

"The goddess was ... do this alone.'"

"Take someone with you, please." Apollo muttered to himself, very well knowing that that would not be the case. He was starting to panic slightly, very slightly. But that feeling of oncoming doom was lurking nearby and he needed to know that Artemis at least took one hunter with her – any one of them, but not alone.

"'But, Artemis—'

... go there with me.'"

"No!" Zoe whispered sharply to Artemis.

"It has to be done, my child." Artemis said calmly to her hunter. Now she knew why she didn't take her hunters along. Her own Lieutenant would not be welcome on the mountain and her hunters would be in danger. Yes, it was a task fit for a goddess. Nothing on the mountain could harm her, including the guard dragon.

"You are going to meet the General, are you not?" Athena asked.

The goddess of hunt nodded and said, "It seems like it."

"You must not." Apollo almost yelled at her. Taking a deep breath, he reminded himself that he didn't have enough proof to start panicking. Yet.

"Apollo, I can handle it. You know that." Artemis said with a roll of her eyes.

"But was it not mentioned earlier that the General is stirring?" Pan asked.

"Yes."

"Then would that not mean…"

"...that he is no longer bearing his burden?" Ares concluded, looking at Zeus for confirmation.

"Perhaps." The king god nodded, stroking his beard in thought. "But it is impossible. If he no longer bears his burden, then everything would have been destroyed, unless he found someone to take up on his task."

"Which would be difficult for anyone who is not a titan." Poseidon pointed out. "Nor can the bearer bear the weight for more than a few minutes." The sea god looked at Hercules as he said that.
"We would definitely get answers if we continue reading." Hephaestus said, glancing at a paling Apollo. It was obvious that the sun god was worrying about his twin.

"Yes. Sabrina, please do continue." Hestia said, picking up on Apollo's frantic emotions.

"'As... as you ... danger we are in.'"

"Proof?" Poseidon asked, furrowing his brows. "PROOF? Really, Zeus?" The god turned to look at his younger brother. He could not believe how blind Zeus was being to their predicament in the future. "All that the children went through in the previous two quests... and yet you need more convincing that father is truly rising? This is the time to take action and not find ways to dupe ourselves that nothing is wrong."

"Poseidon," Hades lifted his hand in a 'stop' motion, "why are you so surprised that he is not taking any action?"

"What is that supposed to mean?" Zeus gritted out.

"Just that you hardly take any action unless the threat can no longer be ignored and by that time the world might as well be in chaos." Hades said drily. Honestly, he had seen this coming ever since the first book when they found out that Kronos was rising.

Zeus glared at his brothers and said, "For all we know, it could all have been just a trick from father's side. We know how proficient he is in those. In that case, it could hardly be a matter of concern."

"Of course." Poseidon said with a roll of his eyes. "A couple of demigods turning against us, ancient monsters being reborn, a sarcophagus in which father's pieces keep appearing – hardly a matter of concern. My fault. We should probably ignore all of it."

"Brothers, not now." Hestia interrupted Zeus's retort and motioned the hunter to continue reading before the two could start a verbal fight.

"'You know ... about that.'"

"Nor have I." Apollo said. "Can we?"

"But whom are we praying to? I mean, we are gods ourselves." Hermes said in confusion.

"As exciting as this question is, I am sure that we should read." Athena said drily. She did not need another extensive discussion on non-existential matters.

"A flicker of ... into a jackalope?"

"Why would you ask that?"

"Curiosity."

"You and your curiosity!"

"'Sadly, no. ... you burned down.'"

"You burned cabins?" Jason asked in surprise. The hunters were supposed to be coming to Camp Half-Blood in a week's time. Was it safe for the campers to have hunters in their vicinity?
"I am sure that we had a good reason." Phoebe said flippantly.

"Good…good reason?" Clarisse asked indignantly.

"A stupid prank is not a good reason to burn down cabins with people in them." Travis half yelled at the pompous hunters. Thankfully, both of his siblings had escaped unharmed. However, had the cabin been full, many would not have been so lucky in escaping an over-crowded, burning cabin.

"The hunters didn't know that there were two campers inside the Hermes cabin when they burnt it." Thalia said and raised a finger before anyone could say anything. "I'm not saying what they did was right. I mean, in no situation should anyone burn down the cabins."

"Wh-what was the prank?" Dakota asked, almost fearing the answer. He had seen the myriad of pranks that the Stolls could play. What kind of dangerous prank did they play on the hunters that made the girls burn down cabins?

"Harmless pranks actually. We repainted their cabin to bright orange, green and pink with giant pink plastic flamingos in front of their cabin." Connor said.

"Substituted their toothpaste with hot sauce." Chris added.

"Short-sheeted all of their beds." Travis said, counting off the items on his fingers.

"Changed the cabin alarm to heavy metal." Clarisse said, chuckling in delight.

"Unscrewed their table in the dining pavilion." Chris said. "Little stuff like that for their whole duration of stay."

"Irritating but not harmful." Travis conceded.

"Nothing that would warrant burning down Hermes, Ares, Apollo and Aphrodite cabins." Connor said bitterly.

"It almost turned into a wildfire." Annabeth said, remembering how panicked the younger campers had gotten during that time, including her and how her's and Demeter cabin had almost caught fire. Artemis and Adrianna raised their eyebrows. How much had the hunters changed that they burnt down cabins for what seemed like harmless pranks? Sure, the demigods were extremely annoying people but neither could comprehend that the hunters would do something like that. Maybe they too had played a prank that resulted in fire. No way would the girls purposefully harm the campers. Artemis decided to ask Chiron later about that particular incident.

The campers who had been present during the time of the fire were still bitter as they listened to Sabrina reading.

"Zoe muttered ... join the Hunt."

Artemis and the hunters smiled at the prospect of a new hunter and Hades raised an eyebrow.

Nico worried his bottom lip. So, Percy had been there when she took up the offer. Would she give him a reason for doing so? Was there a valid reason to leave Nico behind in a new environment, hell, a new world!? Nico didn't know whether he wanted to know the reason for Bianca abandoning him, because that was what it felt like, but before he could come to a conclusion, the hunter started reading.
"'What? But ... "immortality."'"

'Not all that it is made out to be.' Percy thought, thinking back to his first conversation with Chiron when the centaur had said that immortality was depressing.

Nico wondered whether that was one of the reasons that Bianca took up the life of a hunter. Immortality. It sounded like a nice deal, living forever and never having to worry about dying and going to the Underworld. But was giving him up worth it?

"I stared at ... mind around it."

"Of course you could not. No boy can ever imagine the honor of living such a life." Adrianna said disdainfully.

'But a son can.' Percy thought to himself and briefly looked at Poseidon, who was whispering something to Amphitrite. Percy had been given that opportunity once, last year, to be immortal. Hades! To be a god! To be with his father and serve in his court. To get the recognition every demigod, he included, had always wanted. Instead he chose Annabeth. Percy looked at his girlfriend, who was busy glaring daggers at Travis for throwing a piece of rolled up paper at her. Percy was satisfied with his life. Sure it was dangerous and he was almost always a moment away from dying but at the end of the day, when the dust settled, he had Annabeth to be with and his parents and those were the relations he could have never kept if he had accepted the offer. That was another big 'what-if' of his life.

"'So you just ... in Zoe's eyes.'"

Like it did now. She glared at Percy and was about to say something harsh when Sabrina tapped her arm and motioned her to stay quiet.

"'That is not ... boys can do.'"

"Damn right! It is the best place anyway." Clarisse exclaimed. She would not let anyone, not even a goddess, insult the camp, even indirectly. The camp was her home for whenever her mother, a now honorably discharged navy navigator, had to leave for months together at a time.

"Hear, hear." Chris said and the other campers agreed and laughed.

"'Hey!' I ... of responsibility.'"

Responsibility. Of course. That was why she left without even thinking. Nico was once again feeling bitter towards his sister. Was he that much of a burden that she wanted to be free of him? Was he not enough a family for her? Had he never been enough for her? Because she had been for him. He would have been forever happy if he had her with him. Just the two of them. He could have been happy. Then why not her? Nico glared at the ground and willed away the tears threatening to form in his eyes. He felt Will squeeze his hand and was aware of Percy's 'discreet' gaze but he didn't want any interaction. He just wanted to feel numb. He needed it. Burden, his brain supplied. Shut up, he thought and continued glaring at the poor floor.

"'Bianca, you ..."

"I accept it," Artemis said.

A roar of cheer erupted from within the hunters as they celebrated getting another sister in their hunt. Every time a new person joined, it was like getting a new sibling and they always celebrated
it in their own way.

Nico bitterly looked at the hunters and wished that they knew that they were celebrating condemning Bianca to her death. He was positive that had she not joined the hunt, she would have never gone on that quest and all would have been fine.

"The flames ... eternal girls' club."

"You make us sound like some child's play. We are anything but that." Phoebe said and Percy noticed that now all of the hunters were once again glaring at him. He resigned himself to the fact that that would continue to happen till at least the quest started.

Nico swallowed the lump in his throat and looked straight at Percy and said, "It is not your fault. She wanted it." 'She wanted to leave me', he thought. He could not help but blame himself for driving away his sister to Artemis' Hunt. If it had not been for him, his sister could have easily gone to camp and lived her life, but no… he had to spoil everything. He always did. Someone at Camp Jupiter had once told him long ago that he had the touch of death and he figured that he did. His mother and sister were both gone because of him. Well, Zeus could share the blame or even take the whole blame for Maria, but Bianca's death was because of him. He was sure of that.

Percy saw some form of self-hate in Nico's eyes and said, "Don't form any opinion yet, okay? She talked to me about her decision later on. It might be in the book. Not your fault, okay?"

Nico shrugged. In the current state of his mind and emotions, he could not think of any other reason for Bianca to join the hunt.

Ever since his daughter uttered the first words of the oath, Hades had a sick feeling unfurl inside of him. His daughter had been immortal. She could have lived forever and he could have been satisfied that at least one of his children got to live for eternity and yet Nico had said that she had died. She had died when she had the whole of eternity in front of her. That somehow made her death even worse than he thought possible. Being the god of Underworld, Hades wasn't someone who feared or mourned the dead. Death was a part of life, a next stage of life and so he never considered it as something horrible. It was obviously horrible for those left behind in the land of living. They were the ones he pitied and mourned for, for they were left with one less person who loved them. But when an immortal died, it was nothing short of something unnatural, for it was not supposed to happen or happen only in theory. There were times when the impartiality and the indiscriminating nature of his own domain hit the god hard and left him reeling. This was one of those times.

Persephone sneaked a look at her husband. On the outside he looked unmoved and quite frankly bored, but she had learned how to read the signs and right now he was anything but unmoved. She had been observing both Hades and Nico ever since it was announced that Nico had a sister. The goddess had hoped that she was reading the signs wrong but now she was sure that was not the case. Sometime back she had started thinking that the girl had died and had felt bad for the child who had to listen to her upcoming death in probably the war. But the fact that Banca or whatever her name was, had been a hunter, made her death much more morose than it would have been. The goddess of springtime was no fan of her husband's demigod children but unlike Hera, she did not wish them cruel and painful deaths. As long as they didn't come near her or try to undermine her, she was mostly alright with them. It was usually the lovers that she was bitter towards. But she tried to be more… civil towards the children as they were important to and loved by her husband and that was the only reason she feared for the time when the girl's death would be read out, if it was witnessed by her nephew/cousin. She laced her fingers with Hades' to show him her undying support and watched in delight as the darkness and weight in his eyes dimmed to some extent.
"Do not despair, ... from my brother."

Apollo grinned as he realized that he would soon make his first entry in the book. He wondered what the boy's first reaction to him would be like. Would he take to him like he took to Hermes and his father or would he despise him like he despised Ares (maybe to a lesser degree), as both reactions were a possibility depending on Apollo's mood at the given time. He wondered what his nature was like. He had so many questions about the future him and couldn't wait till it would be read out.

"Zoe didn't... really do."

"She need not be upset about choosing our way of life. She did not owe the demigods anything." Helen, one of the older hunters pointed out.

"Did she forget the part where we rescued Bianca and Nico from getting kidnapped by a manticore?" Thalia whispered loudly. Even though she was the Lieutenant of Artemis, she disliked it when her fellow hunters dismissed and belittled the demigods. Just because she left that life behind, did not mean that she would not stand up for them. She was first a demigod, always.

The hunters had obviously heard the comment and one of them asked, "Are you sure you are a hunter?"

"Pretty much, yeah." Thalia replied with a smirk. "But I'm also a demigod, Oya. And we always try to look after one another."

Sabrina, wanting to avoid conflict between a senior hunter and Thalia (whom she was starting to really like), continued with the reading, "Then she was ... irresponsible twin, Apollo."

"Excuse me! Whom do you think you are calling annoying and irresponsible?" Apollo asked indignantly. It looked like Artemis still hadn't changed in the future. Always putting him down. And even if her remarks had a bit of sibling love, the bite was still there and it still did hurt sometimes.

Artemis' eyes twinkled with mirth at her brother's expression and she said with a straight face, "Why, you of course. Would you like Sabrina to repeat it again?"

Apollo rolled his eyes as Sabrina repeated the sentence. He knew that some of the older hunters loved to annoy him as revenge for him annoying Artemis. Now if only they carried on this teasing attitude when he flirted with them, it would be much more fun than it already was. But alas, there was seemingly a limit to a hunter's sense of humor. Well, whatever. He had enough humor sense for all of the hunters and his twin. He watched as Sabrina gave the book to Penelope, another one of his favorite hunters, as the chapter was over. He was excited as he was sure that the next chapter would be where he made an entrance. The god hoped that it was as stunning an entrance as he himself was.

(Footnote A/N -

Just wanna explain some things here. The reason I might have pointed out a lot about Nico feeling rejected and a burden is cuz when you get depressed and that thought comes to you, it just sticks and doesn't go away and can get really... I don't have a word for the feeling but it feels like you are being weighed down and drowned and a lot of other things at the same time. I hope none of you have been in such a situation but if you have, I hope you know now that that is not true, no matter how strongly you feel that to be the case.
Another thing, I felt it really, really horrible for Bianca to die when she actually had the whole of eternity in front of her. Like, I dunno how to convey what I feel about it but it is just really, really unjust that that happened and that's why I put the whole Hades' internal monologue thingy.

I don't know if I was too harsh towards the hunters but I honestly don't like the way they treat demigods (I might be a little... okay, a lot biased). That's why I tried to put that they are pretty casual about demigods. Same goes for Artemis...cuz the hunters had to learn from somewhere right!

I hope I covered all the points and I hope you guys liked the chapter! :D )
Ch61 – TTC – THALIA NEEDS DRIVER'S ED

Penelope raised an eyebrow as she read out the chapter title in confusion, "THALIA TORCHES NEW ENGLAND"

At that, both Percy and Nico grinned while Grover looked queasy as the three remembered that particular ride.

"Artemis assured ... manhunt... again."

"That could have happened. Would have been fun if it did." Thalia said.

"But the hunters manipulated the mist. Thankfully." Grover breathed out in relief. It was always stressful for him whenever Percy had a run in with the authorities.

"The Hunters ... her brother like that."

Nico secretly agreed with Percy and was glad that his childhood hero was on his side, even though he hated the fact that they were united in their disapproval of his sister's decisions.

Zoe rolled her eyes and said, "She is allowed to live her own life and not have to worry about him." The way she looked at Nico made it pretty evident that the hunters didn't only dislike him for being a boy but also for being a child of Hades.

"But she was wrong in abandoning him just like that... without any warning or discussion." Surprisingly, it was Travis who had spoken up in defense of Nico. While it was surprising for others, Connor understood where his brother was coming from. They and all of the Hermes' children who had not left camp, had felt abandoned by Luke when he had gone on his revenge crusade and betrayed them all. And sure, it was nothing like the Di Angelo siblings' situation, those two still understood the feeling of being left behind by an older sibling. Obviously, that was before his betrayal sank in.

"The poor girl had every right to live her life without any burden." Helen, a senior hunter said frostily. The boys were getting on her nerves with all their ignorance.

Thalia glared at the hunter and said in a steely cold voice, "That was different. I had no idea that
Jason was alive. As far as I knew, he had died when he was two years old. So, do not assume that you know anything. If I knew that he was alive, the least I would have done was talk to him."

Jason clutched Thalia's hand that was emitting sparks and tried to calm her down. He was pleased that Thalia wouldn't have just joined without informing him about it. He had always been worried that because of the years lost between them, they no longer had a sibling bond, but he could see that that was not the case. Time and distance didn't matter where family was involved.

"Penelope, could you continue reading?" Chiron asked, disappointment towards the hunters lacing his every word. He wanted to do damage control before either of the children could hurt the hunters in any way. They could do substantial damage. The hunters may have forgotten, but he hadn't – they were half gods, after all.

Penelope took one look at the seething demigods and started reading, "Thalia and Grover ... That stuck-up, no good -"

The hunters were about to say some biting remarks once again, but one look from Chiron stopped them. They may not like or respect the demigods but no one in their right mind would ever disrespect Chiron. Looking around them, the hunters noticed that even some of the gods were glaring at them, daring them to say one word towards the demigods. The girls wondered as to when the gods suddenly became so protective of the demigods but having no answer, just shrugged and listened to the reading.

"Who can blame ... Grover swooned."

"That is not love." Aphrodite snarled and still managed to look perfect. She was disgusted that anyone would compare the satyr's obsession with Artemis as love. "That is obsession. The satyrs love nature and since Artemis seems to be the only one left who protects it to some degree, the satyrs seem to be obsessed with her. There is a difference, girl."

Ignoring all the looks of disbelief thrown her way, Aphrodite turned back to checking out her nails.

After some prodding, Penelope looked away from Aphrodite and read, "You're nuts, ... during the winter."

"As you are during summers, dear sister." Apollo teased.

"Oh, you know it is because we have better hunts in the summers." Artemis threw back and rolled her eyes when Apollo said, "If that is what you want others to believe."

"Hold on." Hermes said. "Why are you both still driving the sun and moon in the future? Where are Helios and Selene?"

The demigods uncomfortably looked at each other. They didn't know how to break the news to the gods. How do you tell someone that their friends (if the titans were even that with the gods) were going to fade because the Romans did not want them?

Finally Chiron cleared his throat and said, "Lord, they have umm… faded."

The gods looked at him as if they misheard something.

"What do you mean, faded?" Demeter asked and Chiron looked mournfully at her till she gasped.

"No." Artemis whispered. Selene was a dear friend of hers. How could she have faded? How could that have happened?

"When you all umm… transitioned to Romans, the Romans did not worship Helios and Selene among a few others. But those two, being the oldest and having no other hold other than being worshiped to, slowly faded. And their duties were distributed among other gods." Chiron explained, hoping the blunt answer would act as a Band-Aid being ripped off. Quick and effective.

The gods were shocked and just stared into nothing for some time, as if mourning the future loss of their friends, while the Romans tried to make themselves as small as possible, not wanting to be on the receiving end of the gods' wrath. After some time, Zeus motioned the hunter to continue.

"'You're, um, ... could drive the sun.'"

"Dude, you should know by now not to mix up science and gods. It only leads to more and more confusion." Chris said.

"I miss Helios." One of the minor gods whispered loudly.

"Hey, I heard that." Apollo said indignantly, pointing in the general direction of the voice. Then he turned to face Percy and said, "Who said the sun was a star miles away?"

"It is a star." Artemis said.

"Only because you wanted to show off."

"Selene made the star."

"That does not matter." Apollo waved his hand. "That star is only the physical representation of 'sun'. My chariot, which used to be Helios' before he and Selene decided to take some time off - they should be back in another decade or so – anyway that chariot is what brings the daylight and all that."

"I'm confused." Butch muttered.

"Nope. Understood it perfectly." Will said chirpily.

"Of course you did." Holly said from behind Will.

"'It's not ... pulling up in a—'"

"Pulling up in the sun?" Apollo asked with barely contained glee. He really wanted to know about his future self. Seeing as he could see the future, albeit occasionally and even then it hardly ever made sense, the god was always excited to know more about the future. "It is exactly like that."

"There was a ... until he parks."

Parks?

Apollo grinned brightly, which would have blinded someone momentarily if anyone had been looking at him.

"I averted my ... Maserati Spyder."

"Uh, what?" Apollo asked in confusion and looked around in the hopes of an answer. All of the other gods looked at Percy in confusion.
"That's what I saw." Percy said in defense.

"That's because the chariot is enchanted to look like whatever you desire… in cars or any vehicle." Thalia explained. Apollo had explained it to her once when she had asked as to why his chariot was a bike. "Apollo said it was because the sun always brings what you desire like light, crops, all of that stuff, so he wanted the chariot to do something like that too."

"So, what do I ride?" Apollo asked, once again excited now that the initial confusion was gone.

"Last time I saw it, it was a gold Bugatti Veyron. You had removed the enchantment for some time." Thalia replied. "It is fastest car, I think. With the war going on, didn't really check which the current fastest car is. In any case, it is only a manifestation of the sun chariot."

"Well, whatever that vehicle is, it sounds good." Hermes said and Apollo grinned. Of course it was good, it was his, wasn't it.

"So, you want a 'red convertible Maserati Spyder', huh?" Thalia asked.

"Good choice man." Will said and the Stolls and Leo agreed, while the Romans and Nico looked confused. Turning to Nico, Will asked, "So, what did you see?"

Nico shrugged and said, "I don't know the name of the car but it was something that I had seen once when I was a kid."

"You are still a kid." Thalia pointed out.

"Am not." Nico said and Will grinned as he realized that the previous dark mood had evaporated a bit with all the talk of cars.

"Alright, enough." Zeus said and ordered Penelope to read.

"Party pooper." Connor mumbled and the demigods stifled their laughter.

"It was so ... my old enemy."

The demigods looked at Apollo to confirm Percy's theory. Clarisse whistled and said, "He does look like Luke."

"No." Will said, not wanting his dad to be compared to that demigod even in just looks.

"Yeah, he does. Only a bit – like at the first glance or something." Annabeth said.

"This guy had ... "Apollo is hot."

All of the campers stared at a blushing Thalia as Percy, Grover and Nico silently laughed. The daughter of Zeus glared at Percy who just smirked in response. If there were going to be embarrassing things about him, there might as well be embarrassing things about others.

"I do not understand." Hermes said, looking around for someone to explain the situation to him. What did Apollo's body temperature have to do with anything and why was it so funny for the campers?

"It's alright. You don't need to." Thalia said, glaring at the snickering demigods.

"So did not expect this." Leo guffawed. He found it hilarious that a hunter would find Apollo attractive.
"Oh come on." Rachel said. "You should have seen it coming from a mile." She motioned around her with her hands and said, "Literal Greek gods, guys. You all know the saying."

"Let's not even go there, okay?" Will said uncomfortably.

"Yeah, let's not." Thalia agreed and glared at Penelope till the latter started reading once again.

"'He's the sun god,' I said."

"Wow. Just wow!" Gwen said in exasperation. "No wonder it took you guys so long to get together."

"'That's not ... Apollo called.'"

"I am not your little sister!" Artemis cried.

"Whatever you say, little sister." Apollo chuckled.

"Argh!"

"If his teeth ... getting worried!"

"Sure you were." Artemis said. "You most probably wanted to go for a ride in my chariot."

"Hey, I do get worried. You wouldn't know." Apollo replied and then added, "The chariot part is probably right too."

"Artemis sighed. ... have to argue—"

"I was born nine days before you were. How in Olympus did that translate to you being born first?" Artemis asked incredulously. Her brother would never change!

"Semantics." Apollo waved his hand in the general direction of his twin.

"So what's ... tips on archery?"

"No, they do not." Artemis gritted her teeth. "They are plenty good in archery without your interference."

"Does that mean they would be better with my interference?" Apollo asked cheekily.

"Better at target practice." Adrianna said with a smirk.

"I will love to see you try." Apollo said with a raised brow and Artemis caught the irritation in his voice and said, "No one is doing any target practice. Penelope, continue reading."

As the chuckling hunter went back to reading, Artemis sent an apologetic look towards Apollo, who shrugged it off. It didn't happen often, but it did happen sometimes that the hunters would start getting on Apollo's nerves. While he didn't mind the remarks from Artemis most of the time and enjoyed the witty bantering with her hunters, there were times when they went a bit overboard or he just got plain annoyed with them. Those were the times that Artemis needed to be careful about. She didn't want her hunters finding out first hand as to why Apollo was so feared amongst the people.

"Artemis grit ...
Apollo bit his lower lip in worry. He did not like the sound of his sister going on a hunt all on her own. It was a bit too ominous for him.

"Then he raised his hands in a stop everything gesture. "I feel a haiku coming on."

"A Hai- what?" Apollo asked.

"Haiku." Will replied. "It is a Japanese short poem and you are obsessed with it."

"Okay, alright!" Apollo grinned brightly.

"The Hunters ...

I am so cool."

Will frowned and said, "The last line is only four syllables. It should be five."

"That's what you are concerned about and not the hideous poem he said?" Nico whispered, not wanting Apollo to catch him insulting the god.

"This is not the worst I have heard. Wait till you hear his limericks. Now they were actually horrible." Will replied.

"Wait. How have you even heard his so-called poems?" Annabeth asked.

"Dad sends the cabin a poem at the beginning and end of summer. We have folders filled with his poems from all times." Will said wistfully. "They are fun to read."

Meanwhile, all of the gods were staring at Apollo in shock. They had never heard him recite anything below the best poetry, so this was a shock.

"Um… what was that?" Dionysus asked.

"That was a haiku." Thalia said with a grin as she looked at Apollo's shocked face.

"Honestly, they sound better in Japanese." Will said. "Or maybe that's because I can't understand the language. In any case, Austin says that since it is of Japanese origin, the meaning gets lost in translation."

"Okay…" Apollo said, somewhat unsure of the explanation. "Who is Austin?"

"My half-brother. He is planning to study music and literature, so I usually go along with what he says about those things."

"So… Apollo is horrible in poetry in the future." Ares said. "That is good to know."

"Oh, his original works are amazing. But he doesn't do much of that anymore. No appreciation, he says. So, he recites haikus and limericks to annoy everyone." Thalia said. She had learnt a lot about Apollo on one of his visits to the hunters' camp, where Thalia had a heart to heart with him because she was unable to sleep and somebody had to keep him company otherwise he would annoy Artemis by waking her up every time she slept off.

"He grinned at... so big-headed?"
"Six syllables." Apollo said in a thoughtful voice. He was starting to like these haikus. He decided to ask his son more about them. Maybe he could write some better ones, not to irritate others but to put forth his words and views.

"'No, no, ... goddess from Sparta—'"

"I like Sparta." Ares muttered.

"Limerick?" Apollo asked in excitement. He was glad that there were so many forms of his domain. The future looked pretty good to him.

"How 'bout I explain all this later?" Will asked.

"Sure." Apollo pouted a bit.

"'I've got it!' ... all about you.'"

"I think we all would have. It is not every day that somebody comes alive after being a tree for a couple of years." Athena said drily.

"Now, that would have been an eventful meeting." Dionysus said.

"Thalia blushed. ... I remember one time—'"

"Yes. I definitely do not like it when girls turn into trees." Apollo muttered darkly. Daphne was still a sore topic for him. He wondered if he had moved on in the future because that would be the only way he could even joke about something like that. But he decided that he could and would not ever move on from her and Hyacinth. So, he must have finally come to terms with what had happened with them. He wondered if his heart still ached for them in the future – the only two people he would ever love so brilliantly. He was brought out of his musings when Dionysus passed him a wine chalice, having guessed his mood and thought direction. The god of sun gladly accepted the chalice and the distraction that came with it.

"'Brother,' Artemis... they blew stuff up."

"You have learned well, brother." Hercules joked and then became serious when a few of the immortals looked offended.

"Yes, yes you have." Hermes said. He liked his little cousin and hoped that Apollo too would like him.

"Ah, no need of the formalities with me. I already like you. Although, you could do well to be careful with a few others." Apollo said to Percy.

"Yeah, well, back then I wasn't sure whether you were one of the gods who would rather have me dead or not." Percy replied.

"Oh, well." Apollo shrugged.

"Apollo studied me, but he didn't say anything, which I found a little creepy."  

"I thought you 'already like him'." Ares mocked.

"Right now, I do. But in the future, that would be the first time I meet him." Apollo said but wondered whether he actually liked Percy in the future or not. It would be hard to dislike the boy,
he thought to himself. Maybe he already had an inkling that the prophecy was about Percy and
didn't know what to make of him. Yes, that could be the case. Otherwise, Apollo would have
definitely said something to Percy.

"'Well!' he said ... Let me get that.'"

"Apollo! How many times do I have to tell you not to flirt with my hunters?" Artemis reprimanded.
"You are incorrigible."

"And proud of it." Apollo grinned at his sister.

"Zoe recoiled... call them sweetheart.'"

"Looks like, just like these three," Hestia pointed at her own brothers, "you both have not changed
either."

"Apollo spread ... mess around.'"

"I doubt you could live without messing around." Artemis said to her twin.

"Of course not. Where is the fun otherwise?" Apollo retorted causing Artemis to roll her eyes.

"Artemis rolled ... snow and shadows."

Apollo caught himself before he could gasp in horror. Now that Artemis had taken off on her own,
it was getting clearer that it was a grave mistake. He still could not figure out properly as to what
he was seeing and so he closed his eyes and blocked all disturbances from around him. Finally he
could see somewhat clearly.

He found himself standing in some sort of lawn? Garden? Plains? Somewhere with grass, that's for
sure. He walked a bit forward and wondered if a storm was coming and that's why his vision was a
bit obscured. He kept walking till he reached a cliff end and looked down. He didn't know where
he was but that was surely a long way down.

Looking straight in front of him, the god realized that he was surrounded by clouds but somehow
the feeling was a bit heavier and denser than he was used to. Where was he and why was he seeing
this particular vision? And what did it have to do with Artemis?

Just as he was thinking all of this, he felt a vibration beneath him. Alright, he thought to himself, I
am on a mountain that is shaking. Maybe, earthquake? Except that the next vibration was
accompanied by a sound – a terrifying sound that he had definitely heard before. Before he could
register what the sound was, something compelled him to turn around and he almost lost his
balance and fell off the cliff.

There, right in front of him was a giant funnel cloud and beneath it one lone figure, struggling to
keep the cloud on the shoulders. The god shuddered as he saw the sky almost slip off the shoulders
for a fraction of a second before the bearer adjusted him-no herself. Apollo blinked at the sight in
front of him. This wasn't correct. This was not supposed to happen. But before he could say or do
something, he was jarred out of the vision as Hermes bumped into him and he remembered that he
was in Olympus, listening to reading of a book about his future cousin.

He looked around him and calmed down when his eyes fell on Artemis, who was sharpening one
of her hunting knives. Apollo wanted nothing else than to make sure that she was actually there
and alright. But he had to be content with just sitting there and looking over at where she was
sitting happily amongst her hunters. He suppressed a shiver as he recalled the vision he had and the lone figure in it, holding the sky on her shoulders. He would never forget that terrified look in her eyes, a look that didn't belong there for he had never seen Artemis that terrified in their entire lives, except the one time they went up against Typhon.

How had Artemis been trapped under the sky? Where was Atlas? What was the monster that led his twin to the titan? Where was he, himself? The god of music had way too many questions and no answers. He hoped that the children's quest would start soon and that they would rescue his sister at the earliest.

Pushing away the image of a struggling Artemis, he focused on his sister in front of him and wished that there was a way to bypass and change what would happen in the future. He didn't want his sister to suffer at all, but for now he was helpless to do anything.

"Apollo turned and grinned, jangling the car keys on his finger. "So," he said. "Who wants to drive?"

Apollo squinted his eyes and thought as to why he would let anyone else drive the chariot. He never let anyone do that. Ever. There was only one person he had let drive his chariot and Zeus had knocked them out of the sky. Although that might have been because that particular immortal had once annoyed Zeus a lot. In any case, the person had to be worthy enough to drive the chariot. Ride in it, yes; drive, no. That was his rule.

"The Hunters piled ... the driver's seat."

Will chuckled at that image and most of the others were looking at Nico in shock.

Leo whistled and asked, "What happened to that Nico?"

As soon as the words left his mouth, Leo wished he could take them back. Reyna, Jason and Percy were almost glaring at him while Nico was full on giving him his standard death-stare. Leo gulped and thought that he could hardly handle one pissed off son of the big three but three of them at the same time? He was so dead.

Penelope looked at the demigods and realized that none of them would be getting the answer to that question and cleared her throat to read.

""Is this really ... got this cool car.""

"Oh come on, you love driving the sun around." Artemis pointed out.

Apollo gave a feeble smile, still trying to shake off the horror of his vision and said, "Sure I do. But all the time? I do not think so. It would get annoying."

Artemis raised her brow at her twin and tapped the side of her head to tell him to talk to her telepathically.

What? Apollo asked.

What happened to you? Are you alright?

Of course I am.

Apoolllooo!
Fine. You should not have gone alone. I knew it.

A prophecy?

A vision of sorts. The General got out. He was free.

The sky?

Apollo looked pointedly at Artemis till her eyes got comically huge and she shuddered. Then she said to him, I am sorry that you had to see that. But I suppose that it was bound to happen.

I suppose so. Mind you, I still do not like it. And I am sure that I would do everything I could to get you back.

You cannot, if it is a quest for the children. You would be forbidden.

Does it look like I care?

Father would punish you.

Still do not care. Let him. I would interfere regardless.

Artemis sighed and knew that she could not change her brother's mind. After all, if their positions had been switched, she would have led her hunters to find and free her brother. Thank you, Apollo.

Apollo shrugged and winked at her. He knew that despite all of their fights and his usual insecurity regarding Artemis actually loving him or just using him, they both would still do anything for each other. That was what happened, he supposed when they had to be born on an island with only each other for company. No matter what all happened between them, they would remain siblings and take care of each other in the worst of situations and get on each other's nerves, the rest of the time.

"But how does... Make sense?"

"No." all of the demigods said in unison. There were always somethings that always confused them when they tried to mix the godly world with their mortal upbringing. In the end, they satisfied themselves with the fact that some things would never be clearly understood by them and they had loads of other things to do than to try and keep up with the godly world's weirdness.

"Nico shook ... the sky. Perfect."

"Or not." Grover mumbled as he remembered how terrible the drive had been. Even Percy was a better driver and he had the habit of randomly speeding on an empty road.

Apollo nodded absentmindedly. Thalia would be worthy enough to drive the chariot. She had sacrificed herself for her friends and then turned into a tree and then turned back into demigod. Also, she was the daughter of Zeus. Yes, she was perfect for driving the chariot.

"Oh, no." ... much more slowly.

"That would make sense" Pan said, "since trees do age, but at a slower rate than mortals. So, she also would age like a tree."

Thalia rolled her eyes and muttered, "That makes me feel so much better."

"Apollo tapped his ... about a week."
"So, in a week from this… conversation, you would become a hunter?" Jason asked.

Thalia looked thoughtful for a while and said, "Yeah. Although it felt so much longer. Didn't even realize it had only been a week."

"Too much happened in that week." Percy muttered but Thalia and Grover heard and nodded their agreement.

"'That's my ... the sun chariot.'"

"I doubt she would say something like that. It is so out of character for her." Artemis said.

Penelope laughed and read out, "'That's not ... out of the sky.'"

"This is why you are not allowed to take someone along with you on the chariot." Artemis huffed. "You never ask father's permission."

"That was just the one time!" Apollo exclaimed.

"And it better be the last time something like that happened." Zeus said in a gruff tone and glared at Apollo when he tried to roll his eyes.

"Apollo laughed ... be a natural!'"

"No! Apollo, you do not let anyone drive a chariot without practice beforehand." Artemis yelled.

"Do you think it would have been better if it was in chariot mode?" Nico asked Thalia.

"No. No, it would not have." Thalia said.

"I'll admit I ... different could it be?"

"I'm gonna say, a lot!" Leo said.

"Driving is still driving. Anyway, I'm still a better driver than her." Percy said, jabbing a thumb in Thalia's direction.

"We'll see that once we return home." Thalia challenged but before Percy could accept it, Annabeth told them both to back off.

"'Speed equals heat,' ..."

"Sorry.'"

"At least you had soft landing." Nico said and Grover grumbled.

"'Slower!" Apollo ... kept it floored."

Artemis glared at her brother and he said, "Sooo, maybe I should not have let her drive."

"Maybe?" Hermes asked. "She sounds as bad as Pan when it comes to driving a chariot."

"Hey! I'm good with a chariot." Thalia said indignantly and at the same time Pan said, "I do not like heights, father."

"Then pray tell why you are so bad in the book?" Hermes asked.
Thalia huffed and turned away. She wasn't going to tell anyone that she was scared of heights. What a joke she would be! A daughter of sky, scared of the very thing. Her heart beat increased in panic as she remembered that she had told Percy about it. Or rather, the little annoying idiot had found it out. Regardless, it would probably be in the book. Oh gods! She was going to kill Percy!

"'Loosen up,' I ... to look black."

"Too high!" Apollo said, running a hand through his hair. Yeah, this was a disaster. Next time he should probably think before acting and definitely not give his chariot to anyone to drive.

"'Ah...' Apollo ... freezing over."

"Hey, I had heard about that." Rachel said. "One of my old classmates had moved to Cape Cod. We thought it was freak weather."

"Nope. Just Thalia's terrible driving." Percy said and jumped off the couch as Thalia lunged at him from over Annabeth.

"So, not much of a difference." Grover chuckled and then yelped and ducked as the said girl threw her hunting knife at him.

"Thalia tilted ... it was me."

"It was definitely you" Grover said and added, "and me too. Probably Nico too."

"Not me." Nico said.

Percy shrugged and said to Grover, "Yeah well, not really a fan of falling from heights. Especially, when there is no water below."

"Now we were ... rows of seats."

Penelope paused to catch her breath. By now everyone was laughing as they imagined the situation in the chariot. Apollo on the other hand, looked mildly worried.

"If it is getting hot inside the chariot, then we are probably going to blow up." He said. "Yes, I definitely should not let anyone drive the chariot."

"'Take the wheel!' ... were catching fire."

"Apollo!" Zeus shouted.

"Yes, yes. I know. Do not let anyone else drive the chariot. Lesson learned, father."

"Sure you did." Artemis scoffed and Apollo grinned at her. Maybe he should check whether the person can drive before he let them handle the sun chariot. Next time, he would be more careful.

"'Pull up!' I ... sudden blast of cold."

"And then people say that there is Global Warming." Rachel said.

"Nope." Thalia said. "That's just the gods taking out their anger."

"Or someone's crazy driving."

"Shut up, Kelp Head!"
"There!" Apollo ... woven wicker baskets."

"It was hilarious when you guys crashed." Clarisse chuckled.

"I was just glad that we stopped moving." Grover said.

"The bus bobbed ... important, shall we?"

"I love how casual you are about this." Dionysus said. "You are officially invited to all of my parties."

Athena shook her head in disappointment at her brother. Honestly, when would her family start behaving like the centuries old gods that they were!

Hermes leaned towards Apollo and said, "We are never going to mention about the accidental burning of those two villages, right?"

"Right." Apollo whispered back. "As far as we are concerned, we were never there and you have never been in the chariot."

"Good!" the god of thieves said. "I do not need another punishment from father."

The two brothers started paying attention when Zeus announced a five minute break because the demigods were fidgeting so much that it was getting on his nerves.
CH62 – TTC – OHANA

There were three girls, clad in silvery chitons, waiting outside the throne room. The girl in the middle had a silver circlet on top of her braided, auburn hair. To her left, stood a stern faced girl with curly, blond hair that came to her waist. She seemed to be the most impatient of the three girls. On the other side was a tall girl, her face twisted in annoyance, seemingly at the blond girl, if the looks she threw her way were to be considered. Tying her blond hair up in a bun, Helen searched the crowd coming out of the throne room impatiently.

"Curse these demigods! They are taking so much time to walk out of the room." She said in annoyance.

Originally, it had been the idea of some of the older and senior hunters, led by Helen and they had managed to convince all but a couple, that they needed to talk to Thalia about her unorthodox friendship towards the demigods and mostly boys. In the end, Adrianna, who had been skeptical of this plan, had to agree because of majority of hunters wanting an answer from Thalia. Sabrina had ended up tagging along with Helen and Adrianna to get Thalia, hoping that she might be able to change Helen's thoughts, but till now had no such luck.

The three hunters had been waiting to ambush their future leader for almost one whole minute. But it seemed that they underestimated the amount of time that a group of demigods could take while talking and walking out of the massive throne room. Finally, after an eternity which in reality was only one more minute, the demigods walked out, laughing and talking loudly as they all broke into groups and went their own way.

"...as annoying as Percy." Nico was saying as he, Will and Thalia walked out of the throne room.

"Am not." Thalia exclaimed indignantly.

"Sure." Nico snorted. "The only difference is that he hasn't said anything yet."

"He hasn't?" Thalia questioned and then added, "Don't worry. He won't be far behind then. How are you sure that he even knows about you two? Are you even listening to how oblivious he is to everything?"

"He isn't all that oblivious. Only when it comes to Annabeth. All his descriptions and stuff are pretty spot-on." Will commented, taking the attention away from a blushing but glaring Nico.

"Uh-huh." Thalia said as she spotted the three hunters and told the couple to go on without her. Walking up to the hunters, Thalia noticed that the three moved away a bit when Nico and Will passed by them.

"What's that about?" Thalia asked with a raised eyebrow, already having a feeling of the answer. Helen sneered, "I cannot believe that our future Lieutenant would be friends with a child of Hades."

Thalia had heard that tone of voice before in the mortal world, whenever the mortals talked about something they despised. And she hated it, hated that that particular tone was used even within the demigod community and now even with hunters. The daughter of Zeus, coldly asked, "And what is
Sabrina fidgeted but answered, "Well, he is Lord Hades' son." She said that as if that explained everything. When Thalia didn't look like she understood, the hunter continued, "We all know the stories about him. A deceitful Lord, if there ever was one."

"He abducted his own wife, the one he claims to love. If that is how he treats those he supposedly loves…?" Adrianna said but stopped in annoyance when Thalia rolled her eyes and started walking away, making the three hunters walk behind her.

"Have none of you been listening to a word that is being read out?" Thalia asked. She had no love for Hades but after Percy and a reluctant Nico had once told her about Maria, she understood why Hades had a special grudge towards her. Although the two boys hadn't said much, she had pretty much inferred that Hades had indeed loved Maria and Zeus had killed her while trying to kill Bianca and Nico. Sometimes she felt like she didn't even know her own father and then she read the history books and realized that he had always been like that.

"According to Percy, Annabeth, Grover and Nico, Hades isn't the horrible god he is made out to be. And even if he was, Nico is nothing like that. All of you just heard how he used to be – the innocent and hyper-active kid. Nico only pretends to be grumpy…" Thalia said, coming to a stop when she saw the other hunters, who looked like they had been waiting for her. With a sigh, she realized that the hunters were really crazy in the olden days.

"Okay. What is this? Ambush or intervention?" Thalia asked, looking at each of the huntress.

"Neither." Zoe spoke up. She wasn't too sure of talking about Thalia's friendship with the demigods and didn't want to anger Thalia by questioning it. "We just wanted to talk to you."

Thalia was starting to feel cornered as the hunters stared at her and that annoyed her. She had always loved her fellow hunters ever since she joined the hunt and for the first time she felt suffocated among them. She watched as Sabrina, Penelope and two other hunters came to stand near her in what she assumed was a show of confidence in her. It was the way Sabrina and Penelope always stood with her whenever some other hunters gave her grief.

"Then talk." Thalia said rudely as she crossed her arms and leaned against a pillar, not having the patience for any niceties. Right now, all she wanted was to go and third wheel Annabeth and Percy, her two best friends in the demigod world.

"You are too friendly with the demigods, especially the boys. They cannot be trusted." Phoebe said bluntly.

Thalia looked unfazed with that. She was used to Phoebe being all haughty when it came to Thalia's connection with the demigods. She still didn't understand how Phoebe, who used to be a demigod, could turn a blind eye to other demigods. Thalia could never do something like that. As much as she loved and respected Phoebe, the self-appointed older sister of the hunters, she sometimes couldn't understand her thought process. Thalia felt horrible just thinking these things, considering that Phoebe had recently died in her time and all of the hunters were still in mourning. But, she also didn't want her friendship and loyalty questioned.

"Phoebe," Thalia sighed, "how can you be so sure when you don't even know anything about them?"

"What is there to know?" Oya asked. "They all consider themselves to be above all others…"
"Like when? When have any one of them said or done anything to you to give that impression?" Thalia asked in barely contained anger. ")Cuz if they have, I'm gonna go and set them straight."

"They always have. You are too blinded by them to see it." Helen huffed. "Let me tell you about two months ago when a son of Ares, Alexander, encroached on our hunting grounds…"

"And threw his weight around, dismissed whatever you all told him and in the end got himself and one of the younger hunters killed by the monster he was hunting because he didn't pay attention to you all." Thalia completed in a bored tone. "Have heard this story like a million times from Phoebe."

"In short, yes." Phoebe said, miffed that they didn't get to complete the story with all its gory details. "This is only one example. A mild one at that. We have seen worse from the demigods."

"They are always disrespectful of the hunt…" Zoe said.

"But these demigods are not." Penelope said vehemently. It seemed that they already had had this conversation before. "Not one of them have said or done anything to prove that."

"True." Thalia said. "And they won't do anything like that. If they do, it's most probably a mistake. Every story that I have heard in camp about hunters is that all the fights are started by hunters because apparently we can't take a joke."

"Of course!" Helen threw her hands up in exasperation. "Every story that you hear from the demigods will obviously glorify them and show us in poor light."

"Most of them are accurate." Thalia retorted.

"How would you know that, child?" Artemis asked and the girls turned in surprise to look at her. She and Apollo had crept up on them when they heard argumentative tone from the group.

"Because I verified with the hunters, my lady. And they did say that it started because of the prank wars that are always going on in the camp." Thalia said, standing up straight. "I have lived in the camp before I was a hunter and I know for sure that pranks and practical jokes are a daily part of camp, just like our training. So, the demigods are used to them and they don't think twice before extending the jokes to hunters. And honestly I do not blame them. If we, hunters go to Camp then we should live like them…"

"Like barbarians you mean." Phoebe muttered.

Ignoring her, Thalia continued, "…and not expect them to live like how we do. They had every right to not let hunters into the camp after the cabins were burnt down. After all, it is a camp for demigods and not hunters. Out of respect for our Lady, Chiron had let the hunters in the camp and the campers had agreed to not do anything unless provoked."

Artemis looked thoughtful and nodded while Apollo was smirking at Thalia's little rant. He liked this half-sister of his. She was brave to stand up to her own hunters, for it was always easy to stand up to enemies and difficult to do the same with friends and family.

"Girls, Thalia is right. The camp is for the demigod children of my brothers and sisters and not for my hunters, which I do believe is extremely unfair, but none of you can and should aggravate them over there." Artemis said.

"But my Lady," Adrianna said, "that is something of the future. What we want to know is how can our Lieutenant be so friendly with the demigods, especially the males? How can you let it happen,
Artemis? Those despicable males, always believing themselves to be better than us, forcing their views and themselves on us, they abduct young girls and use us for as long as they need and then leave us behind. Is that not right, Zoe?"

Zoe's expression turned sour at that and she looked away from her Lieutenant and Hercules, who was in hearing distance, glared at Adrianna. He was pretty sure that the jab had been meant for him and his lingering doubts fled when Adrianna smirked in his direction.

"Adrianna, that is quite enough!" Artemis reprimanded, already aware of the not-so-discreet crowd that had started collecting around them. "As for why Thalia is still friends with males, it is something that only she could answer and I am sure that I have a good reason to let that continue so do not doubt me, child."

"You might want to take a deep breath and probably think happy thoughts." Apollo whispered to Thalia. He had moved to stand behind her when he saw storm clouds gathering above them. The air had a distinct electric charge to it that the god had come to recognize as one belonging to his father.

Following Apollo's instructions, Thalia started thinking about camp and Jason and Jason eating a stapler – that did the trick. Soon enough, she was trying not to laugh out loud at that image. She realized that everyone was sort of waiting for her to reply and she barely resisted the urge to glare some of the more annoying hunters to death. They were even more narrow-minded in the ancient times!

The ex-demigod steeled herself and said, "First of all, my Lady, there is a very good reason why you have no qualms with my choice of friends, which should be clear by the end of the quest that we are reading about. That is also the main reason that most of the hunters are at least cordial towards the demigods. As for you all," Thalia turned sharply towards the other hunters, her voice becoming biting and her head held high. She looked every bit the leader of hunters as she was and the hunters and Artemis finally saw what had prompted Artemis to directly make her the Lieutenant. She had the same air of leadership and confidence that Zeus held.

"For someone who have such rigid opinions of the demigods, you know next to nothing about them. Phoebe, you used to be a demigod and so were Agatha, Bernice, Cynthia and Xenia. Tell me, how can you bear to hear these accusations against the demigods? Do you not remember what it was like to be one? Because I do and I will not stand here and do or say nothing and let you all think whatever you want to think about them."

By now, a few of the Olympians were also watching the spectacle, some wishing for more drama and entertainment and others hoping to see if the new Lieutenant would be able to drive some sense into the hunters.

"Maybe none of you have had any decent examples of demigods in your time but from when I come from, we have so many good demigods, who are decent people. Both girls and boys. And you all might see that if you take off the blinders that you have. You have seen a few…okay many horrible males in your time before you became hunters and even now, but you cannot generalize and say that all of them are like that. You cannot say that the same things that you think of the males would apply to your father, brother, cousin or male friend. Tell me, do they?"

"My father is Lord Zeus," Cynthia said timidly, looking around to see if her father was nearby.

"Yes. Let's not get into that." Thalia said with a roll of her eyes. "I get it if you are from the godly family and don't have many great examples of males," Thunder rumbled loudly and a few of the male gods grumbled. "...but don't apply that to other men. Especially those whom you don't
Thalia mentally rolled her eyes when she heard Apollo mumble something along the lines of 'taking offence to that'.

"As for why I am friends with the demigods, it's simple – they are my family. Jason is my brother, Percy is my cousin, Annabeth is like a younger sister, Nico is the grumpy, younger brother and everyone else is family. Just family, not by blood but by choice – same as the hunters. When I joined the Hunt, I only took the oath to 'turn my back on the company of men' and not on my family. Need I remind you that the oath only means that I will not fall in love romantically? It does not mean that I will not love my family. There is a huge difference that seems to have been forgotten. But if any of you stand for separating a hunter from her family, then I'm sorry, but I cannot be a part of that."

"Of course not!" Artemis said in an offended tone. "My hunters do not need to turn their backs on their family when they join the hunt."

"Which is why in the future, many hunters who have family around, go visit them whenever we pass by the area their families live in." Thalia said smugly. It was one of the first things that she had asked Artemis about when she had become the Lieutenant. Facing the other hunters, Thalia was pleased to see that at least a couple of them looked thoughtful. Maybe, they were actually listening to her.

"And what was the last thing that you said?" Thalia asked in a somewhat mocking tone. "All those things you said about males? Well, guess what! Women, too are guilty of the same things. Females do as much damage as males, they are just as manipulative, just as arrogant and just as oppressing. And if you think that it is not the case in your time but something that only happens from where I am, then you are mistaken. Just because it is not advertised or talked about, doesn't mean it doesn't happen. And if you open your eyes and mind, you will see that not all males are bad, as you think them to be."

"Well, if that is true, then pray tell why we have not seen something like that." Helen sneered.

"Get off your high horse and you will see." Thalia snapped. "If any of you have any other questions regarding what I do outside of the hunt, then it is none of your business."

Thalia turned sharply towards Artemis and bowed stiffly. "My Lady." She said curtly and then promptly walked off, not seeing where she was going but wanting to get away from the crowd. She hadn't even noticed how many people had gathered around and she was sure that she saw Zeus somewhere out of the corner of her eye. The nymphs, gods, demigods, they all parted and made way for her. The demigods grinning at her, the gods frowning and the nymphs just plain startled.

"They are in the garden." Chiron whispered to her as she passed him. He had an impassive face but the gleam in his eyes told her that he was proud of her. She was about to question as to whom he was talking about but she realized that she hadn't seen Percy or Annabeth anywhere. If they were nearby, they, especially Percy would not have been able to stop himself from fighting on her behalf. Huffing, she stalked off towards the garden.

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"There we go," Hades commented drily to Hestia as they watched Thalia walk off in anger towards the gardens. "I was beginning to wonder if we would be having a drama free day."

"Brother," Hestia said with a smile, "if that were the case, we would have not been on Olympus."
Looking up at her brother, she added, "In any case, you cannot complain about your niece. She supported you after all."

"Not something that can be said for all of my nieces and nephews." Hades said, looking at Zeus, who was looking as shocked as the day Hades had announced his marriage to Persephone.

"I am going to tell Zeus that we should probably extend the break for everyone to calm down." Hestia said and walked off towards her youngest brother, who still looked shocked.

"Good idea." Hades said mostly to himself as he spotted his son and daughter standing with Zeus' son and Aphrodite's daughter and one of the satyrs.

"Should I go after her?" Hades heard the son of Zeus ask his friends.

"Only if you want to get punched in the face and then electrocuted." The satyr replied. Hades remembered this one to be Pan's successor. "The only who can calm her down is Annabeth."

"Where are they anyway?" Hazel asked.

"Annabeth wanted to see sunset." The daughter of Aphrodite said absentmindedly before pulling the blond boy away to go sit with Calypso and the son of Hephaestus.

Grover yelped as he saw Hades standing not too far behind them and hastily bowed and ran off. Both Hazel and Nico turned around in surprise and greeted him in unison.

"Did you need something, father?" Nico asked, his protective side coming out as soon as he saw Hades. He knew that Hazel was still slightly frightened of their father and Nico wanted to make sure that he protected her from even an imaginary threat of their father. He knew Hades wouldn't hurt her but still had an urge to protect her.

"I wanted to ask about your older sister actually." Hades said with a slight frown. He still didn't understand if he had interfered and indirectly made sure that his children found sanctuary before they were discovered by the demigods or not.

Hazel looked at Nico and said, "I'll be with the others?" She wasn't too sure if she should leave him alone with such a topic or not.

"Go ahead. I'll join you guys later."

Hazel nodded and gave her father a weak smile before walking off towards Reyna, Frank and Will, who were both looking towards Nico and Hades in mild confusion and concern.

"What do you want to know?"

"Come, walk with me." Hades said as he spotted some of the demigods trying to listen in. After a few moments, the god asked, "Did she… she…survive this…?"

"No," Nico said curtly, looking at some weird painting in the distance. Off the topic he wondered whether the painting was the modern art of the ancient times.

Hades nodded, having suspected the same already. "Did I send anyone to look after you both? I do not know whether you would even know if I had sent someone but I usually do send one of my people to make sure that my children find some sort of sanctuary."

Nico looked at Hades in surprise. This was news to him. He had thought that Hades had only sent
Alecto to get him and his sister out of the stupid hotel. He didn't know that the god usually did something like that. The demigod wondered, not for the first time, exactly from where the majority of the world had gotten that notion that his father was a horrible excuse of a god.

"Yes, you did send Alecto disguised as a lawyer…" Nico said, trailing off before he could say something about the Lotus Hotel. He had a feeling that he wasn't supposed to say anything about that yet. "You will come to know more about that most probably in the reading. Percy had also gone on the quest and I'm sure he would have talked to Bianca and gotten to know all of this."

"Huh?" Hades uttered in confusion. He didn't understand what his son was talking about but he was glad that he had sent his Fury to look after the children.

"Nothing…” Nico said and stared at nothing in particular, trying to remember something…he didn't know what, but for a split second he had suddenly remembered some memory from the hotel. It was always infuriating when something like this happened. He would remember something for a second and as soon as he realized that he was remembering something, the memory would be wiped clean. Silently cursing the River Lethe and Zeus for good measure, Nico cleared his head before the accompanying headache would make an appearance.

"Are you alright?" Hades asked, having noticed the momentary spaced out look on Nico's face.

"Yeah…yeah I think…yeah I am." Nico said.

"No, you are not." Hades said with conviction. "Is it something related to your memory? I remember that something relating to this was read out. As if you had forgotten something?"

"No, everything is fine dad." Nico said and Hades dropped the topic but wasn't convinced and hoped that this mystery would be cleared too. It seemed like his son was shrouded in mystery. Feeling, rather than seeing the demigods lurking just round the corner, Hades sighed and said, "Your friends are waiting for you. Go and be with them."

Without further prompting, Nico bowed and left to where Will, Jason, Piper and Reyna were standing, pretending to be busy in some conversation. As the god watched his son walk away, he was glad that at least his child got to be happy. But why the son of Apollo? Why not anyone else? A small voice in the back of his head said that he had the goddess of springtime as wife. He shouldn't be the one to talk. Smiling a little, he wondered whether he and his children were destined to attract stark opposites of themselves. Death with Flowers (Hades), Death with Immortality (Bianca) and now Darkness with Sunlight (Nico). Yes, they were destined to get something completely opposite of them. "Now what was so polar about the son of Ares?", Hades thought as he went on to find Persephone and share this new theory with her.

X-X-X-X-X

"Sunset." Annabeth reminded Percy as soon as they left the throne room and the throng of demigods.

"Yes, sunset. I remember." Percy replied as he saw Thalia talking to Nico and Will at the entrance of the throne room. Pulling his girlfriend towards the gardens, he said, "We might get better view from the gardens."

Annabeth nodded, desperately craving the fresh air. Being cooped up in the throne room had been driving her crazy and she had started to feel a bit suffocated inside. That, along with the fact that she had a nightmare of Tartarus the previous night, nothing too severe and she had been able to wake herself up but it still rattled her, and now she was craving for open air and sunset. The sunset
was to remind her wayward brain that she was not down there but in Olympus with her friends.

When they reached the entrance of the garden, Percy sat down on the lowest step and Annabeth, on the step above him. Putting her arms around him, she pulled him back till he was resting his head on her shoulders and she was resting hers against his head. They watched the sun disappear within a few minutes behind a couple of palaces as it set and colored the sky a bright orange.

After few moments of silence, Percy asked, "Better?"

Annabeth took a deep breath, inhaling the scent of freshly cut grass, flowers, rain (that had finally ended sometime back) and something that was distinctively Percy. "Yeah" she said with a smile.

Percy smiled brightly at her as he tilted his head back to look at her. "Do you want to talk about it? Some say it helps."

Annabeth shrugged, momentarily displacing Percy's head from her shoulder and said, "Not really. It was just, you know, run of the mill nightmare…falling in there and all that. I woke up and walked around in mom's garden and then went back to work on some designs."

Percy caught Annabeth's hand that was on his chest and brought it up to plant a small kiss on her palm. "I still think you should have called me. You don't even have to come inside the palace. Just use any water source… I could have helped."

"For all I know you could have been in deep sleep and I didn't want to risk waking you up." The blond sighed. "You have slept more here in the past few days than you have back at camp."

"It's probably the water."

"Are you going to start sleeping in the lake once we go back?"

"Depends on whether the naiads would let me get my bed with me." Percy joked and smiled as Annabeth made a face at him.

The couple looked up at the sky as loud thunder rang through the whole area. Seeing no storm clouds or such, Percy said, "Someone pissed off the gods."

"It was bound to happen."

"Hmm." Percy moved up to sit next to Annabeth and pulled her in a hug, still not over the fact that he couldn't help Annabeth during her nightmare. Back at camp, Malcolm always sent someone to get Percy whenever Annabeth had had a nightmare. They had asked multiple times if they could sleep in Percy's cabin as it was always empty, but Chiron had refused even when they promised that they would be sleeping on different beds. The centaur had said something about not annoying Lady Athena just when the gods had finally got their heads back to normal. And Coach Hedge had definitely not helped by informing Chiron that the two of them had once slept off in the stables. Now, that had been an awkward conversation.

"We'll be fine, right?" Annabeth asked in a small voice. She had been thinking about all the times either one of them had a nightmare or flashback or panic attack. Sometimes it felt as if everything was only getting worse. When she had shared that little tidbit with Chiron, he had wisely said that sometimes things needed to get worse before they got better like a healing wound or recovering from fever or even a quest. She only hoped that Chiron was right because at times she felt as if it couldn't get any worse and she didn't know how much more either of them could handle before things stopped getting better at all. She didn't know for how long she could keep her mask of indifference and sunny smiles intact when she felt like just curling up and crying her heart out.
Percy was silent for so long that she thought that he hadn't heard her but she felt him take in a shaky breath and say with as much confidence as he could, "Yes."

She knew that he wasn't even sure of that, he had told her that much the night before they were brought into the past. But that one word was enough for her, for now anyway, because she knew he would be with her through it all, just like he was with her in the literal hell that they walked through.

"Good." She said as she looked up at him and pulled him in a kiss.

A short lived one at that as a few moments later Thalia stormed onto the porch like area they were sitting in.

"Unbelievable! The nerve of those hunters. And here I thought that they were narrow minded in our time but they…" Thalia broke of her rant as she looked at the still kissing couple and yelled at them, "ARE YOU BOTH EVEN LISTENING TO ME?"

The two jumped apart as if they had been electrocuted and looked at Thalia in varying degrees of shock and annoyance.

"Uh-huh."

"Thalia!" Annabeth said as if just seeing her. As she took in the angered and distraught state her friend was in, Annabeth patted the place next to her and asked Thalia to sit with them. Once Thalia had calmed down enough to sit in a huff, Annabeth said, "Explain."

And so Thalia told the two all that had happened in the past few minutes and Annabeth's eyes changed from the normal, calm grey to storm cloud grey as her anger grew. As for Percy, his face turned stony as he heard the details.

"You have got to be kidding me!" Percy said in exasperation as he ran his hand through his hair.

"How can they just judge like that? Without proof or reason or…or anything!" Annabeth exclaimed.

"Yeah, well I handled it." Thalia said grumpily. "As much as I love those girls as my sisters, they can be really, really annoying sometimes."

"They have been taught that way." Annabeth said, always the one with the cool head. "They have seen that and learnt it and now they behave the same way."

"Not a good enough reason." Percy bit out.

Thalia stared at the orange sky for a bit and said, "Don't wanna talk about it now. So, what were you guys upto?"

"Kissing?" Percy shrugged and Annabeth groaned at his answer.

"Before that, dumbass."

"Talking about nightmares…" Annabeth replied.

"Oh." Thalia said. She knew that the two wouldn't want to talk about that topic. No matter how much ever she tried to get them to open up about it, she would only manage to get little details before they closed up and she knew for a fact that they hadn't even started to tell her anything
about Tartarus. It annoyed her to just sit with them and not be able to help them at all but she knew that it would be difficult for them to open up about something as horrible as Tartarus.

"Anyway!" Percy said loudly and clapped his hands together, "I'm hungry."

Thalia snorted. The previous somber mood now completely gone thanks to Percy. "Of course you are. You are always hungry."

"Not always." Percy said as he got up and pulled both of the girls up. "I haven't figured out how to eat and sleep at the same time."

"Yet." Thalia said.

"Yet." Percy nodded and smiled as he saw that neither Thalia nor Annabeth were upset anymore. The trio walked through the crowd that had still not dispersed and Percy and Annabeth glared at anyone that stared at Thalia.

"You ok?" Jason asked Thalia as the three neared the little group of demigods.

"Yeah. Don't feel like killing anyone, so I'm good." She replied with an easy smile.

"So," Percy said, spotting Will and Nico, "when did this happen?"

"Not you too!" Nico groaned and Will blushed.

"We all already took turns asking the same question." Frank informed an amused Percy.

"Yeah, you are the last one bro." Travis said as he appeared out of nowhere with arms full of food.

"No! I can't be." Percy said as he snatched a few items off Travis.

"You are." Connor said, appearing literally out of thin air. Extending his hand towards Annabeth, he said nonchalantly, "Here you go. Thanks for your nonexistent co-operation."

"Connor!" Annabeth yelled as she looked at her cap that the son of Hermes had just handed her. "I'll kill you."

"Catch me first." He replied and sped off with Annabeth at his heels as they went around the courtyard. The others laughed as they watched Annabeth finally catching up with the younger Stoll and punching him in the gut.

"So, Nico…" Percy started.

"No." Nico said and walked off, dragging Will behind him as Hestia appeared around the corner and announced that they would be starting the reading in some time.

"Oh come on! Don't be like that!" Percy said, walking behind the couple. "Nico, come on man."

Thalia laughed as she watched Percy hurrying up to catch up with Nico. Looking around her she knew that she was correct in her argument with the hunters – this was her family. Her first family.
The hunters weren't interested in drawing attention to themselves so shortly after such a huge spectacle in the courtyard and readily gave the book to Perseus when he wished to read.

"I PLACE AN UNDERWATER PHONE CALL"

"I'd never seen ... balls of real fire."

"Sounds pretty." Gwen said dreamily.

"It is." Katie said. "You should really come this winter. We can celebrate Christmas together."

"More lights ... there or something."

"I… I don't get your thought process man." Connor said with a shake of his head.

"'Whoa,' Nico ... know the way.'""

"Typical." Katie snorted.

"'Oh, really, ... and turned away."

"Wha…" Will whispered.

"Don't remember. Probably something about staying at camp or something." Nico replied.

"'Take care, ... 'And, uh, be good!'"

"Being good is the worst advice you can give to a half-blood." Dionysus mumbled to Apollo.

"He gave her a wicked smile, as if he knew something she didn't."

"Of course I knew something that she did not." Apollo said. "I always know something that the others do not. That is the whole point of being the God of Prophecy."

"Really?" Athena said. "I thought it was so that you could warn us beforehand whenever something was to go wrong."

"Yes. That is what I meant." Apollo grumbled and went back to playing with his lyre.

"Then he closed... have his figurine.""

"Yeah, why isn't there a Chiron figurine?" Dakota asked. "He has taught almost every hero ever."
"It is better that way. I am not one for publicity." Chiron informed.

"But just imagine how many attack points Chiron would have." Damien mumbled to Paolo, who just shrugged.

"'Our activities ... me. Let's go.'"

"Boy, your sister is a hunter. You should show more respect." Oya said and Nico glared at her with such intensity that she moved back, trying to get away from him.

"The second thing ... of them, either."

"Where is everyone then?" Perseus asked, interrupting himself.

"Raids, missions, getting half-bloods and all that type of stuff. Anytime we got information about such things, whoever was available would go. We needed as many weapons and people as possible." Clarisse explained and looked at Chris. This was the time she had found Chris.

"I spotted Charles ... seem to be around."

"When the camp is empty, that is when you know something bad is happening." Theseus said.

"That is true. The camp is hardly ever empty, even now when we do not have to stay year round." Hercules said.

"The Big House ... another one lost."

"Dionysus!" Athena said in a shrill voice. "How can you be so casual about my missing daughter?"

"Well, obviously this is a regular occurrence. Or so it seems." Dionysus said, taking a sip of his wine.

"It actually was. From that winter onwards, we had lost so many demigods to either the enemy or fear which made them run and hide. Most of those who went into hiding, have not been found till date. We can only presume the worst." Chiron said solemnly.

"That still does not explain as to why Dionysus, who is supposed to be looking after the children, does not care about my missing child."

Chiron shook his head and thought grimly that despite everything, the gods had never understood Mr. D. and his coping mechanisms. "Because he was used to it. He had been at the camp for decades. He is used to children dying or going missing on quests and missions. But that does not mean that he does not send satyrs or nature spirits on secret missions to find the demigod. He usually does that."

All the Greek campers were shocked at that news. Mr. D cared? That did not seem right. He always said that everyone would be better off without the demigods. They all turned to look at Grover and Hedge to see whether those two satyrs would confirm to this absurd revelation.

Hedge nodded and said, "We are sent on missions every time a half blood goes missing. Most of the time that is how we end up finding other demigods."

Grover too confirmed this. This was one of the reasons the satyrs and all nature spirits respected Dionysus. Because despite whatever he wanted the world to see, they knew that he wasn't all that heartless. He too had demigod children. He just couldn't afford everyone else to know about this
side of him.

As if guessing the meaning behind his future self’s actions, Dionysus downed his whole chalice in a gulp. How much ever he hated the nature of demigods currently, he didn't think he could turn a blind eye towards them if they were in danger because there was no one to protect a demigod other than they themselves. He knew that from experience.

"I'd been trying ... hand of cards."

"He actually won?" Chris asked in surprise.

"Apparently." Percy replied.

"'What do you ... out of the room."

"Wow. You were a really happy person." Clarisse said, looking weirdly at Nico. "Most of us would just be confused about what is happening but you… weird."

"Whatever." Nico said with a roll of his eyes. Yeah, he was never going to hear the end of this.

"'Now," Chiron ... "Certainly not!'"

"Excuse me!" Athena said in anger. "How dare you not…"

"Oh enough." Dionysus said in a bored voice but his eyes were starting to burn a bright purple. "First of all, what I do in the future regarding the demigods is none of your business seeing that father gave me the autonomy over the camp. And as for not searching for your daughter, I think I know why I did not let the other children go."

"And what valid reason would there be?" Athena asked in a controlled voice.

"He did not want other demigods to die on a search mission. We had already lost so many during that winter. We needed as many able bodied people as possible for the upcoming war." Grover said in a meek voice. He had overheard that conversation once.

"That would be a valid reason." Ares said. "I would rather not have my children dying while trying to find someone else. Where is the glory in that?"

"Glory?" Athena seethed. "You worry about glory when a child would be in danger?"

"Athena, you are clouded by emotions." Ares commented. "Had it been someone else's child, you would have done the logical thing and chosen not to lose warriors over one person."

Athena gritted her teeth but knew that Ares was right. Had it been anyone other than Annabeth, she would have weighed the consequences of a rescue mission that might do more harm than good and then decided on what to do.

"Read, son." Zeus said.

"Thalia and I ... girl is dead."

"See." Dionysus said, lifting his chalice towards an annoyed Athena.

"They are so annoying." Percy muttered to himself and Annabeth patted his hand.

"I wanted to ... for all of us."
Dionysus glowered at Percy and said, "Watch your words, boy!"

"They are my thoughts. I can't exactly control them and it's not like I knew that they would be read out for you all." Percy snapped. He was feeling pretty annoyed with the fact that the gods seemed almost undisturbed over the fact that one of theirs child was missing. He remembered how unsettling and panic inducing it was to not have Annabeth next to him and how he had itched to just run to wherever she was and not return until he found her. All of this was making him quite irate.

Perseus gulped as he saw the purplish fire in Dionysus' eyes increase tenfold and promptly started reading. He did not want anything to happen to his namesake.

"'Annabeth may ... on her own.'"

"You are truly inconsiderate and horrible." Artemis said angrily. How dare he treat a maiden like that? Regardless of her intelligence, the daughter of Athena would require help to escape. How could Dionysus not see that?

"Think what you want." Dionysus said between sips.

Clarisse growled and said, "You do not leave someone to fend for themselves in some unknown area especially during war. That was what Luke did …" Clarisse broke off and looked at Chris. "I can't believe we almost did that."

"It's ok. This is Mr. D we are talking about. I'm sure the campers would have done something if the quest hadn't come along."

"I would have." Both Thalia and Percy said in unison and grinned at each other. Annabeth was the reason they had even started working together, although Percy had a feeling that she was also the reason the two had started fighting.

Perseus smiled at his sister and cousin. He adored and was slightly jealous of their closeness and wished the same could be said about him and his cousins. Despite being a part of a huge family, none of the family members acted beyond friendly towards one other. It was good to know that sometime in the future, the relations would be good enough to be a family, at least for the demigods.

With a smile on his face, the older hero started to read once again.

"I got up ... I didn't care."

"Percy!" Annabeth scolded him. "How many times do I have to tell you to not do something like that?!"

"Sorry. Lost my temper." Percy replied sheepishly. "Anyway, it was his fault, not mine. He gets on my nerves." Percy whispered the last part, to avoid getting into a conflict now. The Mr. D in his time was a bit more tolerating of him and his actions, but the one over here wouldn't think twice before blasting him to pieces and Percy wasn't in a mood to get into that.

"HE gets on everyone's nerves. You are the one who has to keep calm." Annabeth whispered to him. Noticing that Perseus was reading slowly and trying to listen to them, she hissed at him, "Read!"

"'You're glad ... helping out a little!'"
"PERCY!" Annabeth yelled at him as all of the other demigods groaned.

"I wonder as to how you are still alive, brother." Theseus said and looked at Percy in shock and a bit of admiration.

"So, it's not just Mars you are disrespectful towards." Dakota noted.

Dionysus on the other hand, was glowing, literally glowing with anger. This was another reason he hated the demigods. They were disrespectful. They assumed that being a child of the gods, especially one of the big three, they could do anything and get away with it.

Poseidon ran a hand over his face and wondered what exactly prompted Dionysus to not kill Percy. Such disrespect would never be tolerated by any of the gods and he would be a hypocrite to tell Dionysus to let this pass when he himself would have blasted anyone who even dared to utter those words to him. Despite all that, he felt that there was at least an ounce of truth in what Percy had said. It still didn't mean his method or words were correct.

"Dionysus! Do not…" Hestia warned the wine god, who had purple fire in his eye sockets. Adrianna was trying to calm him down but in vain.

"HOW DARE…"

"Dionysus!" Hestia said calmly, not raising her voice and yet being heard by everyone. "Do not harm the child." She waited till Dionysus had a little bit more control over himself before sharply turning towards Percy. "As for you, you need to learn to control yourself, Perseus."

"I…"

"Listen!" the goddess said. "For whatsoever reason, none of the gods have taken any action against you for your blatant disrespect and disregard for us. That does not mean that you start taking us lightly. If you cannot respect our ways or our stature, at least respect our experience. You may not like Dionysus' methods or his nature or his behavior, which honestly Dionysus, you could improve on. But, Perseus that does not mean that you are allowed to be rude to him. καταλαβαίνεις? (Do you understand?)"

"Ναι, λυπάµαι. (Yes, I'm sorry.)" Percy replied sheepishly. "When I get angry, I just can't control what I do or say…"

Hestia sighed and looked at Poseidon but addressed Percy, "Yes. That you get from your father."

Once Dionysus had stopped glaring at Percy enough to angrily drink his wine, Hestia asked the reading to be continued.

"For a second, ... No way!"

"Wine dude?" Dionysus asked Nico in shock, almost forgetting the past few minutes.

Hestia and Poseidon chuckled at this. So this was how Percy got out of being punished.

"I can't believe you called Mr. D 'wine dude'. Damn!" Travis chuckled. Why didn't he think of that? It would irritate Mr. D so much.

"Yeah, I can't believe it either." Nico muttered to himself. How had he been like that? Oh, this was too embarrassing!
"Mr. D turned ... powers are sweet!"

Nico groaned and buried his face in his hands and Will whispered, "So, this is why you said Mr. D was your favorite."

Frank looked at Nico and asked, "Really? How?"

"Power and control over mental illness and stability." Nico said. "How would you work if your brain didn't?"

"Yeah, pretty handy stuff. Cool too. And a bit unsettling." Percy agreed, thinking about how Mr. D had saved their lives on the quest. He wasn't as horrible as he wanted the demigods to think. When he saw a few people looking at him, he said, "You'll see later."

"'Ah.' Mr. D ... the Hunters visit."

"Really?" Adrianna asked in fascination. She couldn't imagine playing a game with the campers. It was true that in the past few days she and a few other hunters had played with the demigods but that was only to keep peace and they did end up liking a few of the demigods. But even then she couldn't see the hunters wanting to take part in games with campers.

"Yeah. We hate it." Connor said. "Especially the Aphrodite cabin."

"Because we can easily defeat you. No need to be sore losers." Helen taunted.

"Not because of that." Katie grumbled. "Because you guys don't belong to camp and visit only for a couple of days, camp rules can't be applied to you and so you all can maim us during the game when we can't do the same to you. A bit underhanded, don't you think?"

"Hey, we don't or rather won't do it anymore." Thalia said.

"If you say so." Lou Ellen said.

"But we can easily defeat you!" Oya said, picking up on the fact that none of the campers had denied it.

"Trust me, the day we have a goddess training us for centuries and have the advantage of immortality and all the enhanced senses and speed, we would crush you." Annabeth threw back. She hated the fact that the hunters always defeated them in the so called friendly match.

"Or if we were allowed to use powers in the match." Clarisse added, not that the rule stopped her cabin or some of the Hermes kids but it did stop all the other punks.

"That might just blow up the camp." Thalia pointed out. "But yeah, if even the maiming rule was lifted for the campers, hunters would be in trouble." She conceded, looking at Chiron for confirmation.

Chiron smiled and nodded and said, "And that is why we have a rule."

"But that is not fair, Chiron. The hunters would have undue advantage." Nike said.

"Why is the rule of no maiming not applicable to the hunters?" Artemis asked, wondering why the hunters were given more power in the camp.

"Because they don't follow it." Clarisse replied. She had heard stories of some of the older matches
where the hunters broke the rules and did not face consequences because they only stayed for a few days.

"And we cannot punish them for it as they do not stay for longer than a couple of days. So, the rule still exists but it is known that it would not be followed by the hunters." Chiron said. He had always wanted to point out the problem with the matches but there was never a time that he could discuss such trivial matters with Lady Artemis and he didn't want to relax the rule for the demigods, because he knew they would go directly into war with the hunters. The flimsy rule and their respect towards him was all that was keeping them from doing something like that.

"Girls!" Artemis addressed her hunters. "I expect all of you to follow the camp rules if and when you visit them."

"Of course, My Lady." Adrianna said and the others mumbled the same.

"'Yeah,' Thalia ... wanted to kill me."

"Good distraction. Even I had forgotten that." Travis said.

"'You've already ... immortal enemy?'"

"Too late for that now." Clarisse snickered and Percy stuck out his tongue at her.

"She was right. ... white landscape."

"Hey!" Percy screeched as Thalia hit him on the head.

"What do you mean by 'raven'? Do I look like a raven to you?"

Percy tried, really tried to not laugh but it was of no use. He looked at his annoyed cousin with her silver and black attire, flapping her hands and trying to get to him as he dodged her and instantly imagined a raven flapping its wings and started laughing hard enough to fall to the floor. His rambunctious laugh was infectious enough and soon many were laughing or giggling not because of the hilarity of the situation but because it was contagious.

"Oh that's it. Kelp head, you are so dead." Thalia said as got off the couch to hit Percy, who scrambled to get up and run. Thalia gave chase and soon they were out of the throne room, running in the corridors.

"They are not going to go from joviality to murderous within a second, right?" Demeter asked in masked worry.

Chiron shrugged and seemed undisturbed, "Maybe not. I think they have grown up from that. Maybe… hopefully… I'm not so sure."

With that doubtful image in everyone's head, Perseus started to read.

"'We'll get ... arrow any second."

"What was the argument about?" Annabeth asked, suddenly feeling lonely without Percy and Thalia on either side.

"The guys wanted to shoot hoops and the hunters wouldn't let them because of the no guy rule." Will said. His cabin also hadn't been able to play at that time. "My cabin was there too. It started off with shouting, then insults and Thalia interrupted before it escalated further."
"The usual then." Chris said and Will shrugged while most of the hunters had haughty looks on their faces.

"'I'll break that... but she nodded.'"

"Ok. That is going to be a disaster." Jason said, remembering how he and Percy had been sort of at odds till Annabeth took the reins.

"Oh, you have no idea!" Katie said.

"Why did I have to miss this?" Clarisse lamented and then grinned at the prospect of getting to hear it all.

"What happened?" Leo asked. He had seen the few times Percy and Jason combined powers against the enemies and he knew Thalia was supposed to be powerful. If she was even half as powerful as Jason, he would never like to see her and Percy having a go at each other.

" Exactly what would happen if you want a child of one of the big three to follow another child of the big three." Chiron said with a grimace. That had been quite terrifying, even for him. He knew from experience that there was hardly any stopping children of big three when they were fighting one another.

"A miniature version of Zeus-Poseidon conflicts?" Hades asked in a nonchalant manner.

"With powers." Nico replied, a maniac gleam in his eyes. That had been such an exciting thing to watch and the raw power surrounding him had called out to him even when Travis and Connor had made sure to push him and another new camper to the back. That was the first time he had the urge to use his powers but thanks to not knowing what they even were, he had not done anything.

"That is really bad." Annabeth mumbled. Neither of the cousins had told her much about it and most of her siblings had gone home for the winters and the ones who were left behind and had witnessed it had been too young and were protected by the older campers and hadn't been able to see much.

"What's really bad?" Percy asked, still panting as he and Thalia ran inside. He had a couple of bruises and Thalia's hair was all messed up and she was rubbing her shoulder.

"Yours and Thalia's fight during capture the flag."

"Hades!" Thalia swore and sat down. "Yeah, that's bad." She sent an apologetic look towards Percy. It had been as much her fault as it had been his. Now at least she would get to know why he did what he did. Back then she had only wanted to show him that he was and would always be second best. But now she knew better. Now she knew that they were both best in their own fields. Percy couldn't do many of the things that she could and vice versa. Their similarities were the reason for their fight and their love for Annabeth had brought them together and kept them that way. Now they no longer needed Annabeth as a mediator between them… most of the time.

"So not looking forward to that." Percy said.

"I am." Clarisse said in glee.

"Shut up!" Percy moaned as the daughter of Ares cackled.

"As she headed ... the same thing!"
"Definitely would have." Annabeth said with conviction.

"She shifted from ... Thalia blinked hard."

"Los Angeles!" Jason breathed out. It was so close for him. Well, closer than Thalia at least. He would have been around maybe 10-11. He didn't know if it was possible to mourn someone he had never met but he still mourned for his mother, who had to be something more than just a drunk, who would have cared for him and his sister whenever lucid. He mourned that mother.

Thalia leaned over the side of the couch and held Jason's arm and whispered, "I'll tell you more about her better days later." She gave him a small smile which he returned and thought about some of the better days.

"I'm sorry."

"... must've been it."

"Then why does it feel like that isn't it?" Leo asked and yelped as Thalia glared at him and he could see what Percy meant about shooting lightning from the eyes. Man, Jason's sister was scary!

Zeus frowned as he looked at Thalia. The scrawny boy was correct. It did feel like there was more than just not wanting to drive the car. But what else could it be? She had met Apollo for the first time, so it could not be that she had been afraid of the sun god and it wasn't like she was surrounded by darkness or water that she needed to be afraid of her uncles. If anything, she was in the one place where no harm could come to her – in the sun chariot, high up in the sky – her own domain. What could terrify her over there, other than not wanting to drive the chariot? Nothing came to the Lord of Sky's mind and he left the mystery be. There was nothing that could scare his daughter other than driving the chariot. That must be it.

"She trudged off... Top secret!"

"What is this mission that you are on?" Enyo asked her niece. This girl seemed strong and powerful enough to gain Enyo's special attention.

Clarisse grimaced and said, "It actually leads to the next quest they go on so I can't say anything about it."

"Is she okay?"

"... get outta here!"

"Aww, you care!" Connor said in falsetto.

"Dangerous times dude. Had to care." Percy grinned at Clarisse, who rolled her eyes at him.

"Why were you missing in action?" Ares asked. "Chiron, did you send anyone to look for her?"

Athena rolled her eyes and said, "Now, who is the hypocrite? When it was my daughter in danger, it was alright to not send anyone else and put them in danger but now that it is your daughter, it is alright to put others in danger?"

Ares glared at Athena but before he could reply, Zeus asked his son to read.

"I decided to ... And I would find her."
Piper sighed and looked at the couple in question. When she had seen Annabeth utterly distraught over Percy's disappearance, many a times she had wondered whether the poor girl was in too deep and had wondered if Percy would be the same way if something like that had ever happened to Annabeth. Her question had obviously been answered when Percy had come running in panic and saying something about Annabeth being kidnapped when she had gone on her solo quest. It had then again been answered in the most painful manner when Percy had voluntarily fallen into Tartarus for her. And now it was being answered once again. And each time the answer had been the same – yes, he would do anything to get her back, just like she did for him.

As she saw Annabeth snuggle into Percy's side, Piper thought about how these stories of perfect love had never seemed to exist for her and how she had always thought that they existed only in fairytales and movies. That wasn't true, not anymore. Percy and Annabeth's story wasn't perfect, not always and had way too many difficulties and hurdles to be overcome, but that was what made it real to her. That was what had brought her faith in love, back and made her believe that maybe she and Jason too might get that chance.

"I took off my... new in the room."

"How do you not notice a huge fountain in your room?" Annabeth asked in exasperation.

"Talent?" Percy replied cheekily and grinned at his girlfriend.

"Some talent." Annabeth muttered under her breath.

"At the back ... gift from Poseidon."

The sea god grinned as he realized what the fountain and water was for.

"I looked into ... with my family."

Hestia smiled brightly at her brother and said, "That is such a wonderful gift, Poseidon."

"I think so too." The god replied.

"I opened the ... weeks at a time."

"Seriously, Seaweed Brain?" Annabeth said. "That is not a valid reason to not call your mom! Do you have any idea how worried she is till you call her? Honestly…” she continued to mutter under her breath as Percy threw her a sheepish grin and looked at his namesake to continue the reading.

"My father?... or something?"

Poseidon smiled and said, "One, yes you can send Iris Message to just about anyone and two, no it would not anger me. It would actually be quite nice to get an IM from a child of mine. I have never gotten one before."

"I Iris-messaged you last year, father." Triton pointed out.

"Fine. A demigod child of mine then."

"Uh… will keep that in mind?" Percy said in an unsure tone and Poseidon nodded at him.

"I hesitated. ... of the Cyclopes."

"Yay!" Tyson clapped his hands and looked up from where he was sitting with Leo, working on
some dangerous looking machine.

"The mist shimmered, ... give me a hug."

"Unfortunately, that is only an image." Iris said with a little smile.

"The vision ... to Dad much?"

"You wanted to talk to me about what the maticore had said?" Poseidon asked.

"Um, yeah and to know if Annabeth had fallen into the ocean." Percy answered.

The god sighed. "If that had been the case, I would have already informed Chiron about it and Athena would have badgered me till I gave safe passage and help to her daughter."

"Oh."

"Tyson's smile faded. "Not much. Daddy is busy. He is worried about the war."

"What war?" Amphitrite said sharply. "Do we not have to wait another two-three years till Percy turns 16 for a war to happen?"

"Yeah, Olympus does." Percy replied.

"But not Atlantis." Poseidon said in understanding.

"Yeah." The Olympians paled at that. If one of their strongest, if not the strongest warriors, was stuck in a war of his own, then the major war would be difficult to win.

"Hold it." Jason said and turned to Percy. "I thought you said that Atlantis didn't exist."

"The mortal myth doesn't, this one is different." Percy replied and then continued when Jason looked confused. "The island that is mentioned in the myths – the one that was submerged? Yeah, that doesn't exist. But this is dad's realm. The island's name in the myths was taken from his city. It is sort of a different dimension under the sea. Kind of hard to explain. Like you have to visit it to understand what I'm talking about."

"It's just like how when you descend into the underworld, you are actually going to a different dimension and not like to the center of the earth or something like that." Annabeth explained. "Or when you go to Olympus, you are not actually hovering above the city but in a different dimension that is connected to the mortal world by the gods' powers. That's why Olympus can exist above New York or Underworld under Los Angeles or the Labyrinth under most of the world. In a weird way, the mortal world is superimposed on top of the Greek world and both manage to thrive side by side. And the only connection between the two worlds, is us – demigods."

"And that is why you demigods are so important. You all connect the two worlds and act as a bridge." Chiron said. "The only one other than demigods who can move freely between the worlds is Lord Hermes because he is the messenger of the gods. No other god can travel between the dimensions without permission."

"And that's why we have to do all the dirty work." Percy said grumpily.

"In a way, yes." Chiron said and waited for some time for the demigods to digest this new information before asking Perseus to read.
"What do you ... the metal was cool."

"Well, that's an easier way of cooling metals." Leo muttered.

"Old sea spirits ... was not good."

"Yes, that is not good at all." Triton said in worry.

"Especially if Oceanus is creating trouble. He had stayed out of the war before. If he is participating, then..." Amphitrite looked at Poseidon anxiously.

"Then the titans are sure of winning." Poseidon said with unease but calmed a bit after looking at his son. "But, he would be wrong. We won, did we not?"

Percy nodded and mentally added that they won at a great price. Both the times. Zeus was anxious over the fact that if Poseidon was busy fighting with Oceanus, then how would he and Hades defeat their father? The last time, it had taken all three of them to do something like that and even though their father would now not be as powerful as before, it would still take a lot to defeat someone like him. The god was now more eager than ever to directly hear about the war. But he knew that needed to know what happened before it, to even understand the war properly.

"Is there anything I can do?" I asked.

"I doubt you can." Triton said with a shake of his head. "You seem to have a lot of your own battles to fight. It would be unfair for father to ask you to fight underwater too."

Percy smirked as he heard that. Oh, how he wished the Triton from future, who had taunted him during the war, could hear this. He wondered whether that Triton and Amphitrite really hated him or they had been tense only because of the year long war that they had been fighting in. He hoped it was the second option because he was really starting to like the Triton and Amphitrite who treated him nicely. He didn't want it to turn into hatred later on.

"Tyson shook ... here right now."

"You should have told me brother. I would have helped you find Annabeth." Tyson said sadly.

"I know but you needed to make weapons for the war." Percy explained and Tyson nodded, now thinking about how he had not been allowed to fight in the war.

"Tell her hello!" ... his monstrous army."

"Why? How far is this place from where you last saw them?" Athena asked in confusion, while Reyna asked at the same time, "They were going to South America?"

"Around actually." Percy replied and Reyna frowned in confusion. Then he answered Athena, "They were cruising in the Eastern Coast when I had seen them and now they were going to the south."

"So they could go around the land." Poseidon said in understanding.

"But what's on the west coast?" Dakota asked.

"We are, Kota." Jason said.
"Right. And so is Mount Tam." Gwen replied. "They are going to Mount Tam."

"Obviously they would. That is their base." Reyna said.

"What is this Mount Tam now?" Enyo asked.

"Mount Othrys." Annabeth replied.

"So, they are going to their General." Artemis said, looking at Apollo. There seemed to be a lot going on in the future. How did the Olympians manage to stop it all if Zeus had forbidden them to take any action?

"'All right,' ... lonelier than before."

"I'm sorry, Percy. I didn't know…" Tyson said.

"It's ok, Ty." Percy said with a wave of his hand.

"I was pretty miserable at dinner that night."

"You still didn't call your mom?" Annabeth asked in an accusing tone.

"I called her the next day… I think." Percy replied.

"I mean, the ... any money to lose."

"They could never have convinced me of that." Nico said.

"Yeah." Travis scowled.

"It does not seem fair for those children who do not have any siblings to not have anyone else sit with them." Hestia said thoughtfully.

"Yes, but those are the camp rules." Chiron said and then added under his breath, "Not like the children like to follow it."

It was true though. Annabeth was more often than not at Percy's table and Nico had started sitting with either Jason or Percy or sometimes the Apollo cabin and even Pollux had started sitting at least at the edge of his table so he could talk to the other campers over at Demeter's table. It was nice in the way that none of the children were alone anymore and Chiron didn't mind that particular rule being broken but he was never sure when one of the gods were in a bad mood and might do something against one of the other children. Many rules in the camp were out of fear of the gods' tempers and unpredictable nature.

"The only table ... seem to mind."

The hunters smiled at their description. Despite wherever they might be, they were always a big and happy family. Some of them thought about how the demigods behaved with one another during the meal times in the past few days and they realized that even the demigods were like them, a family. They weren't so sure about the happy part though.

"When we'd ... it was a whopper."

"Again?"

"Hey, this is the first time I'm having a nightmare in this book."
"That's because you haven't slept yet in the book." Thalia said and Percy shrugged.

"Annabeth was ... in a cave."

"Oh!" Apollo inhaled sharply. So, Annabeth had also been there. But why?

"What is it?" Hermes asked his older brother.

"You will see, I am sure of that." Apollo replied. "Perseus, continue."

"Annabeth struggled ... to ruins."

"You did not tell me that." Artemis said to Apollo.

"What?" Athena asked.

"I had a vision earlier about that place. Mount Othrys. It seems like the palace is returning or else they are rebuilding it." Apollo replied and motioned Perseus to continue once again. He needed to know what was going on and how come Artemis had been forced to take the burden. Because only a Titan could be forced to take on the weight but others had to want to take it on. So what exactly could have prompted his sister to do something like that?

"Thorn!" Annabeth... was in pain.

"None of this makes sense. Did you not say that Luke was going around the land and now he is on Mount Othrys?" Aphrodite asked in frustration.

"I said that the ship was going around the land. Not Luke. He had been on land the whole time or so it seems." Percy said, clutching on to Annabeth as he remembered what he had seen next.

"He was ... drenched with sweat."

"No! It cannot be." Hermes gasped. "If that is Mount Othrys as Apollo said, then the blackness and the fog must be..."

"The sky. Yes. It does seem that your son is holding the weight of the sky." Zeus said. "If that is the case, then where has Atlas gone? And how come we have not heard anything about this?"

"Forget Atlas for a minute father!" Athena said frantically, a tone that didn't match with her usual calm nature. "The son of Hermes is going to manipulate my daughter to take the sky from him. I'm sure of it. That has to be the reason they brought her there."

Hermes rolled his eyes and said, "Even if that was the case, for what reason would they want her to hold the sky? She would not survive the weight of it for more than an hour and that is speaking optimistically. So what purpose would it solve?"

"Getting my son there?" Poseidon asked in confusion but somehow didn't feel that to be the answer. If they had wanted his son, they could have gotten to him at any time during the year when he wasn't staying at the camp.

"No." Apollo said and looked at his twin and she nodded at him. Saving a maiden would be the one thing that would make her take up the burden. Now he needed to see if that was how things had panned out. Not bothering to explain to his family exactly what he meant, he told his half-brother to read. The sooner they got to the bottom of this mystery, the better it would be for his mental health.
"Annabeth!" he called. ... Don't trust him!

"Yes, please do not trust him." Athena said.

Morpheus shook his head and said, "You would not be able to change anything that is going to happen, Percy. In the dreams, you are only a spectator. You do not hold any sort of power there and would only be able to communicate with anyone who was also dreaming of the same thing."

"But my voice ... she asked."

"Good. Question him and stay away." Athena muttered. Why was her daughter being dragged into all of this?

"They left me ... from Annabeth."

"Percy!" Annabeth said.

"It's not like I wasn't right. Should not have trusted him at that moment."

"If I hadn't, I would have died for sure. I wouldn't have been able to take on the manticore on my own. In a twisted way, he did save me."

"Right." Percy scowled, not at all happy with the way things had been back then, but knowing that Annabeth was probably right. She always was.

"Then the darkness above Luke began to crumble, like a cavern roof in an earthquake. Huge chunks of black rock began falling."

"Please help him." Hermes pleaded, his eyes brimming with worry for his son.

"Annabeth rushed ... able to do that."

"No! Now you are stuck under it." Athena lamented.

"What I am interested in is how did you manage to hold up the weight?" Zeus asked with a frown. How powerful was this girl? Till date only Hercules had managed to hold up the weight for some time.

"She is a powerful maiden, father." Artemis said with pride. "Her strength lies not in her physical attributes but in her heart and mind. That was how she could hold the sky for even those few seconds."

Percy beamed proudly at Annabeth, his eyes going to the fading grey hairs on her head. They were almost completely gone, only a few strands were now remotely grey and only he and Annabeth knew about those few hairs. They were the last remaining mark of that horrible winter and soon even that would be gone. That somehow gave him hope that one day even the marks of Tartarus would fade. They would never leave him but they would definitely fade into the background and merge with who he was.

"Luke rolled free, ... to crush Annabeth."

Athena and Hermes groaned at the inevitable betrayal. It was expected but both had hoped that maybe in such a situation, the boy would remember his real family. Apparently, he was too far gone for that to happen.
"'HELP ME!' ... try not to die.'"

"What does he mean by that?" Athena asked. "Even if they expected Percy to see this, how do they expect Annabeth to hold up the sky till he manages to reach the other side of the country?"

"That is where you are wrong, sister." Artemis said. She looked determined and knew that she would help this poor girl out. "They did not need Annabeth for Percy, they needed her for me. I am tracking a monster on my own, am I not? They could have easily been laying the trap for months knowing that I would do something like that. And their original plan had not been to take Annabeth specifically…"

"It was to take one of the campers and the children of Hades. They would have used the other girl if they had to, in order to lure Artemis to them." Apollo concluded in a hollow voice.


"Because she was searching for proof to get the council to take some action." Poseidon said in a thoughtful tone. "If they stall her long enough, they would have time to finish whatever they started without having the Council interfering."

"They really had planned everything." Hermes muttered.

"Then it is a good thing that the children went on a quest." Artemis said and motioned Perseus to read. It would do the Council no good to think about what was already done or rather would later be done.

"The ceiling of ... Luke was responsible."

"He always was." Clarisse growled.

"That was the end of the chapter." Perseus declared and handed over the book to Hercules as Zeus asked them not to stop the reading for now.
A FIGHT AND A QUEST

(A/N - Disclaimer- I do not own Percy Jackson series or the Heroes of Olympus series. All characters and words in bold are owned by Rick Riordan and Hyperion Books for Children and Disney Hyperion. I do not intend to use the text from the books for any other purpose other than for this fanfiction and nor do I intend to make any sort of profit from the story. All rights go to the actual owner and not me. This is only a work of love for the series.

Enjoy the chapter :D )

CH64 – TTC – A FIGHT AND A QUEST

Hercules frowned at the chapter title and read in confusion, "AN OLD DEAD FRIEND COMES TO VISIT"

"That was freaky." Connor said.

"And disturbing." Lou Ellen added.

"At least you weren't the ones who had to keep it…her… back." Percy said in revulsion and Grover shuddered.

"Oh yeah! That happened." Travis said with a chuckle.

"The next morning … dumped on him."

A few people chuckled and Pan muttered something about evil wood nymphs.

"When I told … Zoe dreamed—""

Everyone looked at Grover in confusion or amusement. The hunters glared at him and Adrianna asked, "And exactly how would you know what Zoe dreamt of?"

Grover stuttered, "Uh… I… dreams…I…"

"Stalker with hooves." Percy muttered in his breath and motioned Hercules to read.

"'Whoa. What … the Artemis cabin.'"

"How dare you? Disrespectful satyr!" Zoe shouted at Grover while the satyr looked apologetic and ashamed.

"Mind your tongue, cupcake!" Hedge growled and glowered at the infuriated hunters.

"Right. Enough!" Zeus commanded and glared at anyone who tried to say something. He was in no mood to see what would most definitely be an entertaining fight. Right now he was only worried about the revelations of the previous chapter and needed to know what exactly happened to Atlas and what he was up to.

"(...) "You're a stalker … and Zoe Nightshade."
"I would!" Travis said, raising his hand as if he was in a classroom.

"Me too!" Connor said. "I'll bet on Argus."

"Same." Chris and Travis said while a few others nodded their agreement.

"'What did ... Artemis being in trouble...'

"I knew it! I knew you should not have gone alone." Apollo said to Artemis, who just rolled her eyes at him and motioned Hercules to continue. She knew that her brother would not calm down till she was actually found in the book.

"...and needing the ... Artemis is lost?"

"If Artemis is truly lost, then the hunters should be allowed to leave at once to find her." Adrianna said in irritation. How could Chiron not let them go if Artemis was in trouble?

"No. You must not take actions in haste." Artemis said calmly. "There must have been a reason as to why I wanted to go alone and it must have been to protect you all."

"But, if something has happened to you then we would have to make haste to find you." Adrianna countered.

"No. As I said, I must have had a very good reason to make sure that you stayed away from whatever I was hunting. You all must follow those orders." Artemis said with an air of finality.

"'What do you ... Is that even possible?'

"Yes, unfortunately it is." Demeter said in a sour voice while both Persephone and Hades rolled their eyes. They were never going to hear the end of it.

Hercules read ahead and grimaced as he realized that his cousin might be in for it again. And this time from the goddess of springtime. Although she was known to be a mild tempered goddess and usually in a good mood, Hercules didn't think that Persephone would take kindly to an insult, even an indirect one.

"Well, yeah. ... 'Springtime.'"

"Exactly!" Persephone sniffed. "I still do not understand who spread the rumor that I am the goddess of flowers! Springtime is much more different than just flowers. It is the rebirth of everything!"

"And still you somehow managed to marry the god of death." Demeter scoffed.

"Underworld." Hades corrected. "Thanatos is the god of Death. There is a difference there."

"Yes, we all know that." Zeus interrupted. "You three can have this discussion later on and in private." He added when the three turned to glare at him.

"'Whatever. Artemis is a lot more powerful than that. Who could kidnap her? And why?'

"Do not dismiss me like that, child. I can make your life miserable." Persephone said in anger and Percy nodded meekly. After the dressing down from Hestia, he wasn't in a mood to get into another fight with a god/goddess.
"Grover shook ... evil bark mulch."

"He may not be powerful or strong enough to do anything on his own but then again he never
would have had to lift his finger. His words are enough." Poseidon said in a grave voice.

"The fact that he is even strong enough to be summoned from the pit is reason enough for his entire
army to start coming together. One little hint from him and every last one of them would fall over
to try and please him." Hestia said in disgust.

""I don't know," ... connected," I said."

"Very good." Apollo said. "Now just get a quest and go get Artemis…"

"And my daughter." Athena added while Artemis shook her head at her brother. Why was he so
upset? She would be fine. He should know that.

"(...) I thought ... to Zoe," I said."

"Yeah. That might not go so well." Thalia said. "Zoe would have rather killed you than talk to
you."

"Who else was I supposed to talk to?" Percy asked incredulously.

"ME!" Thalia said in exasperation.

"You would have killed him too." Annabeth said drily.

Thalia shrugged and said, "Not if he started the sentence by 'It's about Annabeth…'."

""Um, before ...thinking about joining.'"

"You wanted to join us?" Phoebe asked.

"I was thinking about it." Annabeth said honestly and squeezed Percy's hand in assurance that she
wouldn't be leaving him.

"You should have. A hunter's life would have been way better than what you are living now." Zoe
said.

"No, it wouldn't have been." Annabeth said wistfully, smiling at Percy.

"Exactly!" Aphrodite said in excitement. "This beautiful love story would have never happened
then." She said, pointing towards Percy and Annabeth.

Percy furrowed his brow and whispered to Annabeth, "Do you think it is possible that she put in
the thought of the hunters in your head just to mess with us?"

Annabeth thought over it. The idea had been all her but if there had been interference by the
goddess then she wouldn't have known the difference. This was what she hated about the godly
world. If anyone had interfered in their lives, no one would know what the original plan of action
would have been. Biting her lip, she whispered back, "It could be possible. She is definitely
capable of it. But we will never know."

"Well, whatever or whoever's idea it had been, I'm glad it didn't work out."

"Me too."
"I'd like to ... maiden at a time."

"Excuse me?" Phoebe asked while Percy shrugged and Annabeth tried to hold in her giggles.

Hercules smirked and tried to imagine how that would have looked like but looking at the slightly annoyed hunters, he decided to read. There was no need to start a fight between the hunters and Percy. But if did happen, he would love to be a part of it.

"The rest of ... still sent me packing."

"Who was that?" Clarisse asked in amusement.

"Mark." Travis snickered. It had been hilarious to see one of the biggest camp bullies walking around the camp with a hole in his pants. That had been the only time that he hadn't bullied anyone.

"I visited the ... everything he knew."

"That may be true but you should still have come to me." Chiron said gently.

"You wouldn't have let me gone." Percy said.

"It is not like you paid attention to that little thing." Chiron said with a huff and Percy grinned cheekily.

"You sneaked out of the camp to go on a quest again?" Amphitrite asked.

"Yes." Percy answered.

"Even in the previous quest, you had left to rescue your friend and yet again you are doing the same thing." Hestia said thoughtfully. "Maybe you became predictable for father. After all, all he would have to do was take someone you love and you would have been out of his way while he could do whatever he wanted."

Percy nodded and said, "But both the times, the two things had been interconnected."

"Luckily, I suppose."

"(...) My blood was ... into the attic."

Apollo shook his head and said, "If it was not your quest to begin with, then the Oracle would not tell you anything."

"Yeah, figured it after that." Percy replied.

"(...) I made ... 'Uh, what's up?'''

"I'm going to pretend that you didn't actually say that." Annabeth said in amusement.

"Yeah, that would be better."

"It's still better than that one time some junior camper asked me if I felt like telling him a prophecy." Rachel said with a shake of her head.

"(...) 'I have a question, ... I'll figure it out myself.'"

"Should the Oracle have not given him an answer if he was to become one of the questers later
"on?" Artemis asked.

"Maybe. But I suppose it was the wrong question." Apollo said thoughtfully.

"What do you mean?" Poseidon asked.

"Well, I am only deducing this. But if Zoe has already had a nightmare about Artemis' condition then it is safe to assume that Artemis has been captured and taken Annabeth's position of holding the sky." the god said tonelessly. "Which would mean that Annabeth is no longer in danger. Then the correct question would have been 'how he could save Artemis'."

"How can you say that my daughter was no longer in danger? As long as she is with Atlas' people, she would always be in danger." Athena said indignantly.

Apollo hummed and said, "Yes, she would have been in danger, but the Oracle does not care. My Oracle's task is to look out for dangers to the world and not just one person. Since Artemis is holding the sky, saving Artemis would mean to save the world at that point since even she could not have held the sky for longer than a few days. Even if it feels like the Oracle is giving a prophecy relating to only one person, it is always about a bigger picture with the spirit. The first prophecy that we had heard had been about stopping a war between father and uncles, even if it felt like it had been about getting back the bolt. The second one had been about getting the fleece but more importantly it was about protecting the children and indirectly, us. I am assuming that the one that we would hear now would sound like a prophecy to save Artemis but it would be about making sure that the sky does not actually fall."

Everyone was quiet as they processed that information and finally Hercules read, "I turned and ...

AND PERCY JACKSON"

"You kept the scarf!" Thalia said in amusement.

"Shut up." Annabeth said as she blushed. Till date she had no idea as to what had compelled her to keep it, but she had.

"I stared at ... smiling gruesomely."

"That's creepy. Just... creepy." Leo shuddered. Even though he had never seen this mummy, he had heard enough ghost stories to know about scary things. And a weird mummy, housing an ancient spirit that could see into the future, was pretty high on the list of creepy and scary stuff.

"I dropped the ... number of campers."

The hunters smiled as they realized how easy the game would be for them. The campers would need all of their campers to actually think about winning against the hunters. But they would have still liked to be able to go and search for Artemis. Right now they were not that worried but in the future, during the game, they would have been wanting to be anywhere but trapped in the camp, forced to play a game that they assumed neither side wanted to play.

The campers on the other hand, groaned as they remembered that terrible game. They were sure that even if Thalia and Percy hadn't ended up fighting, they would have lost the game, but the fight had been a sort of a valid excuse for losing the game.

"Zoe Nightshade ... about her nightmare."

"Of course she would have told us." Phoebe said. "What I do not understand is why we cannot
leave the camp? Why do we have to be stuck in that place? I doubt any of us wanted to be there."

"Because that is how things are done in the future." Thalia replied. "If Artemis asks us to go to
camp, we go, no questions asked. Simple as that."

"On our team, ... were raring to go."

"Of course they will play in a game against the hunters." Clarisse said. "They hate the hunters cuz
the hunters insult them more than what they do to the other campers."

"You know what, Drew should have been there." Connor said.

"I never thought I would ever hear anyone say that for Drew." Katie said.

"Yeah, normally we wouldn't." Travis said to his girlfriend. "But just imagine… Drew vs the
hunters. She would drive them up the wall and that would be without using her charmspeak."

"That would be fun." Clarisse said menacingly.

"Also troublesome for all of us if we give her such power." Piper said. As it was, Drew was
difficult to handle but if she caught wind of the campers wanting her to go against the hunters, her
already inflated ego would be even more unbearable.

"'I'll show them 'love is worthless,'" Silena Beauregard grumbled as she strapped on her
armor. "I'll pulverize them!'""

The hunters scoffed and Oya said, "I would love to see her even try."

"Trust me," Clarisse said with a twisted smile, "if S-Silena was to go against you all, she would be
terrifying. She is worth more than you all. She…"

Chris wrapped his arm around Clarisse and whispered, "It's ok, we know the real Silena. You don't
need to tell them."

Clarisse gritted her teeth but kept quiet. She wanted to defend Silena's memory against the hunters'
inconsiderate thoughts but she knew Silena had been the type of person who wouldn't want others
to fight her battles and even though she was no longer with them, Clarisse didn't want to go against
something that her friend wouldn't have wanted.

"That left ... better defense?"

"Actually…" Annabeth started and looked at the two. She knew their strengths and weaknesses
and knew that they both would excel in both offence and defense but only if they actually wanted
that position. Now she knew how the fight had started.

"You both would be good at either position. With the shield, if Thalia was in offence, then the
opponents will scatter from around her and her path to getting the flag would be easier. However in
defense, the opponents would try to avoid her and if they did get past her, her ability to summon
lightning could be helpful by creating a cage of lightning around the flag."

"Don't give her ideas!" Percy whined, thinking about the obligatory game they would have to play
when the hunters came to visit the camp the next time.

"Too late." Thalia said with a grin, already thinking about game plans she could use.
"Like you didn't know that." Annabeth said to Percy. "And as for you, Percy, in defense you could almost easily defeat anyone who came near the flag and control the stream at the same time, although back then you didn't have as much control over your powers as you do now." Annabeth added thoughtfully. "But in offence, you could easily go and get the flag by both using your powers over storms and using a hurricane like you do in fights or just your sword fighting skills."

"So, wait, who was correct? Me or him?" Thalia asked. She had sometimes wondered about if the positions had been reversed then would they have won the game?

"Honestly, it's hard to say," Annabeth said. "That is something only you both can agree on. But if I had to choose, I would probably put Percy on…"

"Guard duty?" Percy teased and Annabeth stuck her tongue out at him.

"Nope. Offence and Thalia on defense. There are more benefits that way."

"I agree with that opinion." Athena said. "If your powers are anything like your fathers, then Poseidon's son would be in offence while Thalia would be on a higher ground as defense. That way, she would be able to spot the enemy and use the lightning to blast them, while on the battle field, Percy would have more use." Everyone got the feeling that she was talking about this from any of the recent battles that the gods have had.

Percy smirked and said, "So… I was correct. See, you should have listened to me."

"Percy!" Annabeth rolled her eyes and hit his arm.

"Obviously," Athena continued, ignoring the children, "if you want to annihilate your enemies completely, it would be advisable to put all the children of big three together in the battle field and make sure that no one from your own side is too close to them. Unfortunately, that would only work if the children want to work together."

"Yeah." The seven except Percy, Jason and Annabeth said in unison, while the others tried to imagine what that would be like.

"And that is yet another reason as to why no powers are allowed to be used in the game. We do not need complete destruction of property." Chiron pointed out.

"Thalia already... was teasing me."

"What'd you think?" Thalia asked with a smirk.

"I think that you were purposely getting on his nerves." Annabeth said in an unamused tone.

"Hey, it was fun." Thalia shrugged.

"Till it almost turned into war." Pollux pointed out.

"I'd had... problem," I lied."

"See, he should have just said the truth." Thalia said.

"Yeah and then your fight would have started before the game." Annabeth said to which both Thalia and Percy shrugged.

"'Cool.' Thalia turned... on his face."
"Great! I'm back." Nico said with a scowl while others laughed.

"’’Percy, this is ... the other team?’’"

"And that's how you know that he is a son of Hades." Travis snorted and Nico rolled his eyes.

"For a ten year old, you are really interested in killing someone or the other." Reyna said.

"It sounded fun, I guess." Nico said. "The whole idea of killing you know… not actually killing someone. Like, you hear in stories about people getting killed and… I'm not making much sense, am I?"

"None whatsoever." Percy grinned and Nico's face twisted into something weird as he tried to stop himself from smiling at the sheer stupidity of his words.

"’’Well… no.’’

... keep fighting, and—’’"

"Never saying that again." Nico groaned at his younger self's naivety.

"Yeah, resurrection is not all that fun. It's pretty confusing actually." Gwen said, remembering when that had happened to her.

"It's definitely overrated." Leo added with a nod. "But on the upside, you get to live again."

"Yeah… that's the whole point of resurrection." Calypso said.

"’’Nico, this is … We'll have a blast.’’"

"Wow! You sound like an older brother." Chris said and added, "Luke used to say that before games to us, especially those two." He pointed to the Stolls at that, who smiled sadly at him. They missed those brotherly moments with Luke and the insane number of pranks Luke could come up with, even in his sleep.

Nico thought over it. Now that he was somewhat of an older brother, he could see how the way Percy had acted with him over the years, except for the times when Nico had betrayed Percy, was similar to how siblings would act with one other. How Bianca had been with him. Maybe, that was another reason, Nico thought, that he had pushed Percy away. Maybe somehow, in some way, the son of Poseidon had reminded him of Bianca.

"Chiron's hoof thundered ... More like an idiot."

"The usual then." Thalia chuckled and the others laughed along with her. When Percy wasn't being his serious, brooding self, he made for an excellent comic relief.

"We set our ... of a sense of humor."

"So accurate." Connor chuckled and a few others laughed while others just looked at Zeus, hoping he wasn't going to get angry. But he looked like he wasn't even paying attention.

"Anyway, it was ... out of the way."

"That was not fair." Nico grumbled.
"Dude, you couldn't even lift your sword. Forget about actually fighting with it." Percy retorted and Nico scowled at him.

"(...) "Um, yeah. ... everybody clear?""

"Yeah, that's not gonna sit well with Percy," Jason said, already having guessed what the fight would have been about. Having to follow someone else's orders would have been difficult for him too, especially if they were different from what his ideas were.

"You left your position." Annabeth said to Percy.

"Golden opportunity. You'll see." Percy defended himself.

"Whatever. I was counting on you to not leave your position but you couldn't even follow that little order," Thalia said. "We could have won."

"I still stand with what I did, okay?" Percy said and backed down when Annabeth put her hand on his chest and pushed him a little back. Before Thalia could counter Annabeth motioned her to keep quiet and the two cousins turned away from each other.

"Right." Annabeth said, looking at the two cousins, "continue reading."

"Everybody nodded. ... But nothing happened."

"Of course we would not do something stupid like that." Sabrina said. "During the hunt, the manticore had been distracted with your group and so we could storm out like that but during a tactical game, we would be stealthy. Like how one has to be during hunting."

"I think we could have stormed them and still won. There would have been no need for surprise attacks and elaborate plans." Helen scoffed.

"I caught a glimpse ... If I moved fast..."

"That would have worked." Annabeth said and added when Percy opened his mouth to say something, "Only if you both had been in on the plan from the very beginning." With that, Thalia smirked and Percy frowned as Annabeth asked Hercules to read.

"(...) "I'm going in."

... I had it made."

"And... you jinxed it!" Clarisse groaned.

"I had made it!" Percy replied.

"Mhmm."

"The guard turned ... and took off."

"Why would you say sorry?" Clarisse asked.

"It was Bianca. That's why. Otherwise I probably wouldn't have."

"I was ten yards... are unsportsmanlike!"

"Yes, they are!" Nike huffed. She absolutely abhorred unsportsmanlike behavior. It was
disrespectful!

"I got up and ... in her hands."

The hunters smirked as they heard that.

"'No!' I yelled, ... helmet like antennae."

"Oomph!" Butch winced. "What happened to you two?"

"Phoebe." Travis grumbled and Connor nodded.

"'The Hunters win!' Chiron announced without pleasure. Then he muttered, 'For the fifty-sixth time in a row.'"

The hunters laughed at that. "Fifty Six?" one of them exclaimed.

"And you demigods play this game all the time, do you not?" Phoebe laughed.

"It was winters and most of the campers weren't even there." Katie huffed. "Next time play against all of us."

"Hey," Travis whispered to her, "I don't really think that's a good idea."

"They bring out the worst in me." Katie whispered back. "In any case, we can win against them. If either they play along with the rules or we play without any rules."

"Yes!" Nike said, excited to have a game to monitor. "How about you children play the game here?"

"Wait, what?" Thalia asked and many looked at Nike in disbelief while others looked eagerly at the prospect at having to play capture the flag.

"I thought we had already thought of having a chariot race." Ares said.

"We can have both." Nike answered while the demigods just looked on in confusion, which soon gave way to eagerness. None of them had any time to play around during the past one year and while a game against hunters wasn't exactly a pleasant idea, they didn't mind actually playing against the girls.

"Wonderful!" Ares grinned at the prospect of getting to see fights and races amongst the children.

"Well, we should probably ask the children." Hestia said, having caught a few uneasy looks amongst the children and Chiron's worried face.

All of the campers looked at each other and the hunters and shrugged in response. "That... might be... fun?" Percy said hesitantly and Nike nodded enthusiastically.

"Hunters?" Hestia asked and the hunters looked to Artemis for permission and she smiled back at them. The hunters were in too.

"Alright!" Nike said, standing up at her place. "It is decided that the children would play this game of capture... the flag? And chariot race!"

Most cheered and some groaned at that.
"How much time would you all require to prepare for the games?" Nike asked.

"Capture the flag wouldn't take any preparation for us." Annabeth answered and looked at Reyna, who shrugged and said, "We have our war games, so it wouldn't take long to understand capture the flag."

"Ok. So no time needed for capture the flag for us. And as for chariot racing… we usually make our own chariots and that's why we require more time for that…" Annabeth said.

"No worries, my child. There are plenty of chariots and horses here." Nike assured her.

"Then… maybe a day to work out teams and plans?" Annabeth said, looking around at the campers for confirmation. The campers all shrugged or nodded at her.

The hunters agreed with the same and Nike announced, looking at Zeus for confirmation, "Then we can have capture the flag tomorrow and the chariot race, the day after?"

"That would be fine." The king replied gruffly. As much as he wanted to continue the reading of the books and be done with the mystery that the future held, he was also excited at getting to see the entertainment that the children would surely provide.

"Very well." Hestia said a bit loudly to be heard over the excited noise that filled the room. Hearing her, there was silence at once. "Now that we have decided that, can we continue with the remaining of the chapter?"

"Yes, Lady Hestia." Hercules said with a smile and read, ""**Perseus Jackson!** Thalia yelled, storming toward me."

"Uh-oh." Percy and Thalia said and looked everywhere but at each other while Clarisse grinned at the upcoming fight.

"(...) "**What in the ...**"

"**I didn't say that.**"

"Oh! You both should have worked together." Annabeth whispered to the two of them.

"**'Argh!' Thalia pushed me, and a shock went through my body that blew me backward ten feet into the water.**"

"Uh-oh." Leo said. "You just pushed him into water. The last time someone did that…" Leo looked at Clarisse, remembering the earlier capture the flag match they had heard about.

"Yeah, I had been warned against that or just simply even shocking him." Thalia said, looking at Chiron and Percy nodded. He too had been given a similar warning when Thalia had come back to life or rather demigod life. Chiron knew that keeping the two nearby would only cause problems unless they learned to control themselves. Unfortunately, that had not been enough.

"**Some of the ... 'I didn't mean to—'**"

"Oh this is going to be fun!" Clarisse said, rubbing her hands together in glee, while Leo and the remaining seven were looking forward to know who would win a battle of powers between Percy and Thalia.

"**Anger roared ... breathing heavily.**"
"You two sound like your fathers." Hestia said.

"This is how all of their fights start." Hera said in annoyance, having witnessed one too many fights and rant of Zeus. "One of them will do something to annoy the other, who would have something else on his mind and the next thing you know, both are taking out their anger and frustrations on each other."

"And then I get pulled into it." Hades said drily, looking at this brothers, who once again pretended not to hear anything. "For. Absolutely. No. Reason."

Both Thalia and Percy grinned sheepishly and asked Hercules to continue.

"'Enough!' Chiron ordered."

"That, unfortunately, would be of no use." Demeter said. "If they are determined to fight, then there is usually no stopping them and I speak from experience."

Chiron nodded and said, "I learnt that."

"But Thalia held … Thalia was not cool."

"Percy," Annabeth dragged out his name, "please tell me you didn't fight because of that."

"And other stuff too." Percy pouted and Annabeth threw her hands up in annoyance.

"So, if I call you Seawe…" Thalia said.

"Don't even think about it." Percy said with narrowed eyes. Looking at the other campers, he said, "Any of you."

"Just checking." Thalia replied with a cheeky grin.

"'Bring it on, ... it was my clothes.'"

"And your armor." Thalia pointed out.

Zeus grinned thinking about his daughter winning in the fight and Poseidon glared at him and said, "It is not yet over."

"Now, you both better not start your own fight." Hera warned the brothers, who looked at their older sister with an innocent face.

"'Thalia!' Chiron said. ... icy funnel cloud."

"You controlled ice?" Theseus asked in amazement and Poseidon smirked.

Percy shrugged and replied, "It was more of a slush. It wasn't completely frozen."

"I should try that next time." Theseus said to himself as Hercules read on.

"'Percy!' Chiron pleaded.

... I was looking at."

"It has to be something shocking for such a reaction." Demeter said.
"It was." Katie said with a shudder. "Shocking and disgusting."

"Someone… something was approaching. It was shrouded in a murky green mist, but as it got closer, the campers and Hunters gasped."

"My Oracle?" Apollo asked in amazement and hope.

"Yeah." Connor said in disgust.

"'This is impossible,' ... shade of green."

Apollo grinned at first but it soon turned into a frown and he said, "If the Oracle herself moved when she was not supposed to then something horrible has or will happen. Something that cannot be avoided any more."

Percy thought about it and found himself nodding. The next day he had found Bessie and it had been his weird luck that had made sure that he had been the one who found her and not someone from the enemies' side. That would have been disastrous. Maybe the Oracle had come to warn them to not fight each other but to unite against the enemy. Then again, the Oracle was plain weird and even Apollo had admitted to not understanding her, so no one would ever know what prompted her to move.

"(...) The Oracle ... mist poured out."

Apollo nodded and said, "That seems to be the correct question and it also looks like that Zoe is the leader of the quest."

Zoe's eyes widened at that. She would lead a quest? She didn't know how to do something like that. Something that held the fate of her goddess.

Adrianna, having guessed Zoe's thoughts, whispered to the young hunter, "You will learn how to lead over the years. Do not fret over it."

Zoe nodded and tuned back to the reading.

"I saw the ... she was in pain."

The gods winced at that. The pain must have been unbearable if Artemis was willing to show it on her features. They hoped that the children reached her before something horrible and drastic happened.

"The Oracle spoke:...
And one shall perish by a parent's hand."

"That is the end." Hercules said and Theseus took the book from him to read the next chapter.

Everyone was silent as they thought about the chilling prophecy that they had just heard. It sounded too ominous and they realized that not every one of the questers would survive this quest.
THE FIVE QUESTERS

Chapter Notes

Now I'm all caught up with the chapters that I have posted on the other site, which means I'll be uploading here only when I upload there too - which is once a week. But till the first week of September, the updating might be slower because I have exams coming up.

(A/N - Disclaimer- I do not own Percy Jackson series or the Heroes of Olympus series. All characters and words in bold are owned by Rick Riordan and Hyperion Books for Children and Disney Hyperion. I do not intend to use the text from the books for any other purpose other than for this fanfiction and nor do I intend to make any sort of profit from the story. All rights go to the actual owner and not me. This is only a work of love for the series.

I think till like the first week of September, the updates might be a bit slower cuz I have exams in September, so I'll only be writing when I take a break from studying.

Anyway, moving on with the chapter.

Enjoy :D )

CH65 – TTC – THE FIVE QUESTERS

Theseus was not sure if he should break the heavy silence that reigned in the room. Just as he was about to read, Artemis asked in barely a whisper, "What do you think the prophecy means?"

The demigods and Chiron wisely kept quiet as the gods and hunters looked around them, hoping that someone would answer the dreaded question. Finally, the god of prophecies cleared his throat and recited the prophecy once again, in order to clear his head.

"Well, um, well…" Apollo cleared his throat. "The questers would obviously have to go west to Mount Othrys. We knew that. The next line probably means that they would have to traverse through a desert to get there and…"

"One of them would be lost." Dionysus said. "As in dead? Or kidnapped? Or just plain lost?"

"We do not know." Apollo answered but had a sinking feeling that it would be the first option.

"Dead." Athena said thoughtfully. "That is the option that makes most sense. No quest can ever survive on five questers. It always has to be three. That is the sacred number. Three rulers of Olympus – father, Poseidon and Hades, three Fates, three Furies, three judges in the Underworld, three Graces of Aphrodite, Apollo’s Scared Tripod, three faces of Hecate, three heads of Cerberus. Everything is always in three or multiples of three. Five questers does not make sense. Meaning that in the end, only three of them survive."

"Yes. Thank you for that." Artemis said bitingly and Athena remembered that the quest required
hunters too and that meant that there was a chance of hunters not making it out of the quest.

"Hmm." Apollo said and continued, "The next one indicates that something or someone that can cause our downfall, shows the questers the way to Artemis?" Apollo was confused. What enemy of Olympus would want to help the children in getting to his sister? Unless, of course, this quest was a trap for the children.

Zeus looked at his daughter and his nephew. Since they were reading about this quest, it meant that Percy had been on the quest and had obviously survived. He wondered if his daughter too, had been one of the questers. Did the 'bane' refer to those two? After all, according to the Great Prophecy or the bits that they had understood until now, had said that a child of his or his brothers could cause the downfall of Olympus. So, did it mean that one of them led the quest and ... and what? If that line in this prophecy was true, then it would mean that one of them would ultimately lead to their destruction, but the time for the Great Prophecy had passed and apparently Olympus was still standing. So, what could the line in the prophecy mean? Who or what was it referring to?

"It seems that way." Demeter said, answering to Apollo's confusion.

"Alright." Apollo muttered.

"'Campers and Hunters combined prevail'" Artemis recited from memory. "That means that only on working together, can the quest be completed."

The hunters made disgusted faces at that and looked at the demigods in distrust. Those children of gods should not be allowed to go on a quest that was meant to save Artemis but alas, the prophecy made it clear that they had to work together. They wondered as to which insufferable child they would have to work with to free Artemis.

"Yes." Apollo said. "But I worry about the next line – who would have to bear the titan's curse? It must mean Atlas' burden, for there is no other Titan that we had cursed."

"If it means to hold the sky," Zoe said timidly, "I might be able to do that. I am a half-Titaness by birth."

"But it is too dangerous to assume that your previous powers still hold good." Artemis countered, hoping that her latest recruit would not have to go through such an ordeal.

"And what of the last line?" Hades said abruptly. Ever since they had heard the prophecy that line had been troubling him. Nico had said that Bianca did not survive this particular quest, which would mean that she was one of the two who were prophesied to be killed during it. Had he been responsible for her untimely death? He could not imagine doing such a horrible thing to his daughter but what if it were true? No! He could not have done something like that. He could not have hurt his own child. He would never hurt his own child.

"Let me see, what parent would actually kill their own child?" Hephaestus said sarcastically, glaring at Hera. If he had been mortal, her act of throwing him from the top of this very mountain, would have killed him. As it is, it had left him more deformed than he had been before the incident.

"Atlas." Zoe choked as she said her father's name. She had cut all ties with her family, but it still ached to think of them. "My fa-father would not think twice before killing me. It could be that."

"Or something completely different." Adrianna said vehemently. She liked the new hunter and could not imagine such a horrible betrayal of a parent towards the girl. Although, it did seem more
than likely that a Titan would kill their own child. Ultimately, hadn't Kronos eaten five of his children without remorse? Atlas could be no different than that treacherous monster.

"Whatever the prophecy means, it has already come to pass and I do not think that we can change it." Hestia said. "We should probably read. More answers will be gotten that way. Theseus if you would."

"Yes, Lady Hestia." Theseus said and read, "EVERYBODY HATES ME BUT THE HORSE"

The title brought smiles to some faces but most were still worrying about the quest to come.

"The least the ... the most popular."

"Nah!" Travis said. "We were just pissed that we lost and you were a better target than the shock-happy Thalia."

"Figured." Percy grumbled to himself.

"'Watch her head!' ...'Did I break anything?'"

"What would have happened if the head would have just rolled off?" Leo asked curiously.

Grover said, "Not gonna touch that."

At the same time Percy said, "Would have just walked away and pretended nothing happened."

"'I can't tell," Grover ... about Annabeth."

"Well, technically..." Apollo said.

"We know." Athena said and motioned Theseus to continue, while Apollo grumbled about not getting to expand everyone's knowledge on the workings of the Oracle.

"'What will... That too. Of course."

"Sorry 'bout that." Grover said to Annabeth.

She waved him off and said, "Searching for Pan was important too, especially in the times we were in. We would have needed every single person we could get on our side. In any case, it was your lifelong dream."

"'Why?' I asked. ... driving him nuts."

"It was driving each and every satyr crazy." Hedge grumbled. "We never had had no one looking for Lord Pan before that."

"Hmm… the satyr maybe correct." Hermes said hopefully. "With such ancient powers surfacing after so long, it is quite possible that they would have momentarily affected Pan and he would be able to rise again."

"But even then," Pan argued, "I doubt with the condition of the wild that we have heard about and the satyrs have informed me of, that I would be able to do anything more than bring the satyr to me."

"But that would be enough. Then the satyr can get you to Olympus." Hermes argued back, not
wanting to accept the inevitable future.

"Father please." The lord of wild pleaded, "If I had wanted that, I would have gone to Olympus in the first place and not hide somewhere where even you have not found me or have not told anyone about where I was hiding."

As Hermes was about to argue again, Apollo nudged him not to and reminded the younger god that anything that they had, were or would read about was already done and could not be changed. Pan's fate was already made and nothing could undo whatever was to happen. Grumbling, Hermes gave a stiff nod and motioned Theseus to read. He would need to find a way to save his son. He had to.

"I've let ... I can just feel it."

"I think" Hestia said softly, more to herself than to anyone in particular, "Pan has already been trying to get in touch with Grover."

Both Pan and Hermes smiled at that. While Hermes thought that his son was still trying to fight to get back his strength and powers, the God of Wild knew that the future him would have felt his end nearing and would have wanted to pass on his powers to someone who really deserved it.

"I didn't know ... includes Percy."

The three daughters of Kronos chuckled and Demeter said, "I have seen these three," she pointed towards her three brothers, "use the same tactic with each other after every fight."

"Oh yes." Hestia said with mirth, a teasing tone present in her voice. "The last time, I think Zeus and Poseidon managed to go on through three whole months without talking to each other."

"Peaceful times." Hades grumbled and the demigods tried to wipe the smiles and smirks off their faces that had appeared at the thought of the gods behaving as childishly as a thirteen or fourteen year old would.

"Indeed." Hera said with a smirk and the Olympians secretly agreed.

"The council was held around a Ping-Pong table in the rec room."

"Which is something that I never understood." Jason said and the other Romans nodded.

They had been so shocked the first time they had seen the council being held. It had been just after the war and the critically injured had been taken care of when Chiron had called for a council meeting and invited the Roman Praetors and officials to join them. The rec room had been jam-packed, with the cabin leaders around the ping-pong table and the Romans scattered all over the room, wherever they could find a decent place to sit. With the high tension between the two sides, Chiron had gladly let Percy and Jason lead the meeting, seeing that both sides trusted the two boys. Back then, while Hazel, Frank, Dakota and a couple other Romans had been amused at the vast difference between the Roman and Green way of doing things, Reyna had wondered how the Greeks had managed to survive for so long if they were so disorganized. But as the meeting had progressed, all doubts, barring the one regarding the location of such a serious meeting had fled every Roman's mind. That had been the beginning of mending the bridges between the two sides of the same coin.

"Umm… cuz it's fun and there's food?" Travis said, unable to understand how a meeting would otherwise take place. Food and fun were very essential!
"Yes, but shouldn't such a meeting take in, well, a more official location?" Reyna asked, still unsure of the rec room being a proper place to conduct any official meet.

Thalia shrugged and said, "It doesn't matter. We have to discuss something, then who cares whether we talk about it in a conference room or the rec room. The decision would remain the same."

"That…" Reyna started to say, but then stopped and thought about it. It was weird and unorthodox but then so were the Greeks. Somehow, this method suited them. The daughter of Bellona could not imagine the Greeks ever doing something serious. She was sure that even during the battle, most of them had been laughing and hacking through the enemy like they were born doing it. Nodding, she said, "Okay."

Theseus waited and looked at the campers, wondering if anyone else would interrupt but caught Thalia's look and turned back to the book.

"Dionysus waved … "This is pointless.""

"It truly is." Phoebe said. "We should be out in the world, searching for Lady Artemis now that we have a prophecy and instead what do we do? Sit and watch demigods, who would surely end up fighting each other."

Chiron shook his head and said, "That is how things are done at camp, Phoebe. Every time there is a prophecy and a quest, all cabins leaders are required to discuss it and then vote on who would be suitable to go on the quest. Obviously, subject to the quest leader's discretion."

"'Cheez Whiz!' Grover … must leave immediately."

The hunters nodded their agreement and huffed at the disappointed look that Chiron gave them. Apollo sighed and said, "You must listen to the prophecy. You girls need the demigods on this quest."

"The demigods will only be a hindrance. We, hunters are more than capable of finding and rescuing Lady Artemis on our own. We do not need any demigods with us." Helen said in anger.

"While that may be true, having demigods with you will…" Apollo countered.

"Do nothing." Adrianna said and looked at Artemis for confirmation, missing Apollo's annoyance at being interrupted. When Artemis looked on expressionlessly, the Lieutenant continued, "We are stronger, faster, more focused than they ever will be. We…" Adrianna faltered as Artemis' expression did not change. Picking up her courage, she said with conviction, "We do not need them."

"And yet, you will find that you do." Chiron said calmly. He had a feeling as to what the hunters must have been feeling. He didn't know it personally, but he could only imagine how shaken they would have been after seeing that most of their convictions about anyone who was not a hunter were untrue. To have someone's foundation rocked like that would only want them to hold on to what they knew and he knew that they were going to fight tooth and nail to cling to what remained of their biased opinions.

"Why?" Sabrina asked in an unsure voice. "Why do you say that? Why do we need them?"

"Because they have something that you do not." Chiron said.

"Their parent's power, only in smaller quantities." Dionysus said smugly. He had always despised
the hunters when he had been a demigod and had always wanted to show them the true reality of the situation. For as much as he now disliked demigods, he knew that many of them could evenly match any hunter on a good day and on a bad day… well, the hunters needed to watch their backs. The only reason no one ever dared do anything against the hunters was because they were protected by Artemis and no one wanted an angry Artemis near them.

As the hunters looked away, Theseus caught his father's eye and continued the reading.

"'And go where?' ... get five hunters and go.'"

Nico smiled a little at the ground as he realized that even after becoming a hunter, his sister didn't lose her stubborn streak. She was like a dog with a bone when she got some idea into her head. The only problem was getting the idea into her and that was what Nico's job used to be – to convince her that something was the way to do things and if that something happened to involve a little too much fun, then hey, Bianca had agreed to it, hadn't she?

Nico knew that now Bianca had gotten the idea of going, she wouldn't drop it. Was this the reason she had gone on the quest? Because of her stubbornness? He hadn't been told anything except that she was going on the quest and would come and meet him before leaving with the hunters on their next adventure.

"It sounds like she joined a cult." Damien said and some of the boys snickered.

"'Yes,' Zoe agreed. ... need thy help.'"

"Here we go again." Clarisse mumbled and a few demigods near her snickered at her annoyed tone.

"'Your' Thalia grumbled ... need yerrr help.'"

"There is a difference in how we speak?" Adrianna asked slowly and in confusion.

"Yup." Thalia said and then frowned. "Because Zoe is from olden days, her language and mannerisms are of that age, but ours are different." Turning to face Annabeth, Thalia asked, "How are they speaking normal English now?"

"I…" Annabeth's eyebrows scrunched up as she thought about this. "I don't think they are. What language are you speaking?"

"Ελληνικά (Greek)" came the reply.

"Then why do we hear English?" Percy asked.

"I hear Brazilian Portuguese and am speaking in that." Paolo said.

"I think the Fates made sure that we all can understand each other and so we speak in the language we are comfortable in and hear what the others say in the same language." Chiron said and Annabeth nodded, having thought of the same thing. It was very fascinating to her.

"But what if I'm deliberately speaking in some other language? Like Spanish or Greek?" Leo asked. "Ahora? (Now?)"

"I heard Spanish." Annabeth said and looked around to see the others nodding, while the ones from the past looked at Leo in a mixture of fascination and trepidation. "Hmm… so maybe when we want the others to hear some other language, then they can?"
"Seems like it." Chiron replied. He had never heard nor seen such type of enchantment, that too, over such a large group.

"Cool!" Leo exclaimed excitedly. "Does this remind anyone else of 'Doctor Who'?"

"Doctor what?" Reyna asked in confusion.

"Not 'what', 'who'." Leo said and looked around in disappointment as only the Stolls and Lou Ellen nodded. "You guys are a disappointment. How am I the one who has watched it?" Leo exaggeratedly rolled his eyes and mumbled, "This is a tragedy!"

Ignoring him, Annabeth asked Theseus to continue.

"Thalia rolled ... try to cooperate?"

"Do you even care?" Apollo asked in annoyance.

"Probably not." Dionysus said in a dismissive tone and Apollo shook his head at his youngest brother on the council.

"'Mr. D,' Chiron ... of war preparations."

"That is true. Unfortunately, someone refuses to see the trouble we are in." Poseidon said pointedly, looking at Zeus, who huffed and refused to look at his brother.

"'Are you suggesting that the gods have trouble acting together, young lady?' Dionysus asked."

"YES!" almost everyone said, while Zeus glared at them and the other Olympians chuckled. It was true, then why deny it.

"'Yes, Lord ... goes on this quest."

"How would you decide that?" Harmonia asked. "Were it an even number, it would have been easy, but now with uneven numbers on either side, there would be unnecessary trouble."

"'Three and two,' I said."

"Would that be wise?" Harmonia asked.

Percy nodded and said, "Three hunters and two campers seemed good enough. The quest was to find Artemis and the hunters wouldn't back down unless you gave them majority and we would lose more time over arguing rather than actually getting on with the quest."

Athena nodded and said, "That would be wise, to give hunters the majority."

Artemis, on the other hand was upset. Having three hunters on the team would increase the chances of her hunters losing their lives. If two out of five were not to survive the quest, then she would have preferred for all five to be demigods. She did not want to lose her hunters. But now that did not seem possible.

"Everybody looked at me. Thalia even forgot to ignore me."

"Umm. Duh!" Thalia said. "You said something mildly intelligent. Of course it shocked everyone."
Percy ignored her.

""'We're supposed ... strength of numbers.'""

"No, that would not be wise. You have only a few days to complete the quest. You would need to move quickly. With so many of you tracking me, you would be bound to get confused and distracted." Artemis explained to Zoe.

"'(...) "This monster—... terrible party conversation.'"

"You may be the younger than all of us but even you would know what possible monsters Artemis could have been tracking." Hermes said and Dionysus grunted and went back to sipping his wine.

""'Chiron," I said, ... Perhaps even more powerful.'"

"More powerful than Typhon or Keto?" Zeus asked and Chiron nodded grimly. He was grateful that the Ophiotaurus had taken a liking towards Percy and had stuck with him wherever he went, because otherwise, they would all have been in trouble.

"But what can be more powerful and still be a monster?" Ares asked.

"Ophiotaurus." Aphrodite said absent mindedly and then gasped. "It is the most powerful monster out there and very elusive. I had seen it once when I was still in the ocean. I have never seen it after that."

"That would make sense." Artemis and Athena said.

"In that case, let us hope that it is not the Ophiotaurus because if it is this monster, then we have a serious problem." Zeus said but the raised eyebrow of Percy was enough to make him doubt his false convictions.

""'That's some ... are going to die.'"

Connor shrugged and said, "I wasn't going on the quest, so it's not my problem till the monster comes knocking at my door."

"I like your attitude." Leo said.

"I don't." Clarisse grumbled.

"Well, it's the surest way to stay alive." Connor said with a grin and Travis nodded.

""'One shall be ...muttering of agreement.'"

"That would not help." Apollo said. "Prophecies come true regardless of what you do to prevent it."

""'And the ... parent would kill them?'"

"No parent would want to kill their child." Hera said.

Everyone stared at her.

"In case you have forgotten, our father ate us." Demeter said in distaste.

"You threw me off this very mountain, mother." Hephaestus sneered.
Hera paused and pursed her lips, looking at the crowd staring at her in disbelief. "Right! … I stand corrected. No parent should want to kill their child. How is that?"

"Better?" Hestia said, her face contorted in disbelief at her youngest sister. Shaking her head, she asked Theseus to continue. There was no need to think about Hera's ever changing mood – they would get nowhere with that topic.

"There was heavy ... who turned sixteen."

"Oh. Oh no, no, no." Poseidon said. "I would never hurt you, Percy. They might." He pointed towards his brothers. "But not me."

"I do not think any one of us would hurt our own child." Hades said.

The demigods looked at their parents in disbelief.

Seeing the looks on the children's faces, Ares said flippantly, "We would not hurt our child. Sure, we may kill each other's children, but not our own… I think."

"Should we be worried about how casual they are over this topic?" Frank whispered to Jason.

"I think we are past that stage by now." he replied.

Theseus looked warily at the gods and took a deep breath before reading, "Supposedly, that kid ... Father's Day after all."

No one had any answer to the disturbing questions. The gods wondered that if it was between their existence and their child, whom would they chose. They all knew the answer but didn't want to admit it. They would save themselves. Of course, killing their child wouldn't be the first course of action, but if push came to shove, they would do it. They'd be upset, yes, but most probably not regret it and that, terrified some of the gods.

"'There will be ... Don't mind me.'"

"Would it kill you to at least pay attention and not create more trouble?" Athena asked in annoyance. She never did understand why Dionysus was made an Olympian.

"Do I look like I care?" Dionysus replied.

"'Percy is right, ... would thy mother say?'"

"I think I would have liked Silena." Piper whispered wistfully to Jason, who nodded in return.

"I would say that beauty is not made for going on quests. Do not drag my daughter into your problems." Aphrodite told Zoe.

"They are your problems too. If the quest is not completed, we would all be in grave danger." Artemis said.

"Whatever." The goddess of love replied. "Let me know when the next part about their love story comes up." With that she went back to talking to Ares.

"(...) Zoe stood. "... to give it to her?""

"I think that you should not take it. The two boys are sons of Hermes. There would be some sort of
trick involved. There always is.” Adrianna said, thinking about the last time they had come across a child of Hermes. That insufferable demigod had made even the calmest hunters lose their cool.

The Stolls snickered as they remembered the t-shirt. That had been fun! And for all the time that Phoebe had been in the infirmary, the whole camp had gotten together to play pranks on her.

"I knew the ... wish Bianca to go."

"What?” Hades said abruptly and Nico clenched his teeth in anger. So it had been Zoe who had dragged Bianca to her death. A part of Nico’s brain reminded him to drop the grudge before it consumed him, but he was finding it hard to do. The only thing that helped him was the fact that Zoe hadn’t survived the quest either.

"Why would you take an inexperienced person with you on such an important quest? My daughter did not even know of our world until two days ago as per the book. Why would you take her along?”

"I…” Zoe wasn't sure why exactly she wanted to bring along a new comer when there were so many other experienced hunters.

"It may not seem like a good idea,” Artemis said, "but it is an excellent way to prove her worth to the hunters. Although, I would have preferred if such an important task would not have to be taken up by such an inexperienced hunter."

Zoe nodded, pleased that at least some part of her future self’s decision had Artemis' approval.

"Bianca looked ... Bianca's head right now."

"That is exactly how, I suppose, the first quest feels like.” Perseus said, thinking back to his first quest.

"I still feel that way on every quest.” Grover mumbled and Tyson patted his shoulder, making Grover wince at the sudden impact.

"'And for campers?’ ... even a half-blood.’"

"But a satyr would be helpful. Their tracking is actually pretty good.” Artemis said.

"Of course it is.” Pan replied from the other side of the room.

"'But he is a ... to question her."

"Wait a minute! It is already five questers if Thalia goes.” Hercules said. "Then how did you manage to be on the quest?’"

"He snuck out of the camp.” Amphitrite reminded Hercules. "He was not part of the original quest but only joined it later, I think.”

"Yes.” Percy replied.

"Now, okay, ... his eyes sad.”

"Why are you not supporting him, Chiron?” Poseidon asked, wondering if Chiron knew something that they didn't, but then that was a usual scenario. The centaur usually remembered things that even the gods had forgotten.
"I was not sure that it was a good idea to send Percy out on the quest." Chiron sighed. "As far as I knew, the Great Prophecy was now Thalia's, which meant that she had to be the one who took the decisions that would lead up to the unfolding of the prophecy. Moreover, at that point, Thalia's sixteenth birthday fell on the day of the winter solstice, which made me wonder whether this particular prophecy would overlap with the other one. Throwing two children of the big three into the quest did not seem sensible to be."

Poseidon nodded and kept quiet, not knowing how to argue with that logic.

""Oh," Grover said, ... company of a boy."

"So, you would rather put everything in jeopardy than fight alongside a boy?" Aphrodite asked slowly, dragging out the words. On receiving no reply, but a haughty look from the hunters, the goddess scoffed and said, "And you call my children airheaded. Unbelievable."

"What did you think he would do?" Hercules scoffed. "Come on to you rather than fight monsters? I thought you had better logic than that."

Zoe seethed and glared at Hercules. "No. I would expect him to do exactly what boys like yourself do. Use us to get what you want. No such boy will ever accompany me on a quest and definitely not one which would lead to Mount Othrys."

Hercules would have replied had he not been so stunned. He had a feeling that they were no longer talking about Percy's involvement in the quest. No. They had moved on to his own labors.

No one spoke as they waited for Hercules to say something, but seeing that the demigod was confused by the words, Chiron broke the tension and asked Theseus to read. He knew that this was a matter that was best solved amongst the two and everyone was not required to witness it.

""What about ... supposed to go!"

"You said that in the last quest too. That you felt like you were supposed to go." Hermes noted.

"His instincts are usually good." Annabeth replied and Percy shrugged.

"Nobody rose to ... their companions."

"As it should be." The hunters said.

At the same time, some of the demigods said, "Unfortunately."

"My ears were ... be with you."

"How awesome would it had been if he had said 'May the Force be with you'?" Leo asked excitedly and the Stoll brothers gave him a high-five.

Percy chuckled at their antics and whispered to Annabeth, "This was the one quest where so many gods actually helped."

Artemis ignored the joviality amongst the demigods as the last line read out was ringing in her ears. 'Zoe, Bianca, Phoebe, Thalia and Grover' and of course Percy had gone too. Now, she knew that not everyone from the future was present but the ones that were present included three of the names in her head, which meant two of the hunters were no longer with them. Fearfully, the goddess looked towards her hunters and realized that Zoe must have been one of the two to die, for that would be the only way Thalia could have become the next Lieutenant.
Athena, having come to the same conclusion, looked sadly at Artemis and offered her condolences silently, when she caught her half-sister looking at her.

"I didn't show ... opening in my chest."

Percy pulled Annabeth towards him and tightened his hold on her.

"'Grover,' Chiron said, ... sure of herself.'"

"Gee thanks." Thalia grumbled. "Good to see you think so highly of me, Chiron."

"Thalia, you know it is true." Chiron replied and chuckled at Thalia's indignant expression. He knew that she had gotten better at controlling herself ever since she joined the hunters, but it would still do her good to be reminded of her innate nature.

"'Would you ... could handle it.'"

"No we couldn't have." Percy and Thalia said in unison.

"Now we can though." Percy said and Thalia nodded. "And we weren't that bad back then."

"That's because you couldn't feel the annoyance rolling off each other." Grover pointed out. "Always ask the satyr! We know best."

The cousins gave their friend a sheepish grin.

"'The way you ... you, we can call.'"

"Chiron that would never happen." Annabeth said with a chuckle and Chiron smiled at her. Getting Percy to back down when something huge was happening was not something that could be achieved. They had learned that much in all these years.

"'Yeah,' I said. ... that particular weapon.'"

Hercules sighed. So this was about him. But why? Why was Zoe so affected and that too centuries into the future?

"(...) "Chiron," I said. ... scared to ask."

"You are really good at scaring the children." Hades said offhandedly and the campers chuckled at Chiron's look of disbelief.

"I stood at ... cop on television."

Annabeth chuckled and said, "He really does look like that."

"Who does?" Reyna asked.

"My stepdad."

"I was too ..."

"Mom!'" I said."

Annabeth sighed and said, "And now you scared her."
"Yeah, but back then I didn't care." Percy said, thinking about his initial mixed feelings regarding Paul.

"She jumped so ... my writing seminar."

"Blowfish?" Poseidon asked in confusion.

Percy laughed and corrected him. "Blobis. I made the same mistake myself and I think you called him Blowfish to his face."

"I've met him?"

"Yeah, you uhh... came to visit on my birthday."

The other demigods and especially Theseus looked on in jealousy at the easy relationship between the father and son. They had never heard of a god visiting his demigod child on their birthday. They wondered how their lives would be had their parent cared enough or at least half of what Poseidon seemed to care for Percy.

"'Mr. Blowfish?'

... down to Annabeth."

"With you, it always does." Thalia said and Percy poked his tongue out at her.

"My mother's ... think you have to."

"Great! Now you have permission. You can actually leave." Travis said and muttered about his mom never giving him permission to sneak out of camp. Instead, the last time he tried something like that, he got grounded!

"I stared at her. ... the same for you."

"And then some." Piper said and the campers nodded. They all had seen how distraught Annabeth had been when Percy had been taken away.

Percy smiled softly and rested his on top of hers and she interlaced their hands together.

"And with that, ... remember the dream."

"Again?"

"Get used to it. I have way too many dreams."

"I was back in ... the ground vibrate."

"Atlas." Calypso said wearily.

"Luke emerged ... 'She's fading. We must hurry.'"

"How-how long had you held the sky?" Athena asked her daughter.

Annabeth got a faraway look in her eyes and said, "I don't remember. It could have been minutes or days, I couldn't tell."

"Probably minutes, but even those feel like days. You would have died had it been actual days."
Hercules said with a grimace as he remembered having to hold the sky.

"The hypocrite. ... blood of the gods."

Apollo tried to get his anger under control. How dare anyone hurt his sister? He would destroy them. He would burn them to the ground. The god's eyes burned bright yellow and the sun outside grew hotter and the citizens of Olympus wisely ran for shelter.

Apollo. You must control yourself. Artemis' voice sounded in his head. Nothing has happened to me and I will be fine. But right now you need to control your anger before you burn something.

Let them burn. Let it all burn. Apollo replied hotly but tried to calm down. He closed his eyes, trying to contain his power inside his body. The couch dipped next to him and he felt Artemis holding his arm and slowly he reigned in his anger. It still burned hot but now controlled. The god let out his breath and opened his eyes only to recoil in surprise as his lyre was shoved in front of face, courtesy of Hermes. The initial shock was enough to confuse his anger and Hermes smirked as Apollo took the lyre and started strumming a sad tune.

""You heard the ... dark, horrible place."

"A special type of celestial bronze can effectively capture even us, gods." Hephaestus offered as explanation as he watched his son and Tyson make a miniature flying machine, with excitement.

"The goddess l... but I couldn't move."

Aphrodite made a whimper like sound at that and received weirded out looks from everyone around her.

"So beautiful!" Eros whispered to himself.

""Free my hands," ... to beat, Artemis.""

"He could have only won because of some or the other trickery." Apollo said angrily, still concentrating on the sad tune that was slowly turning into something darker.

""You surprised me," ... kill the girl now."

"Do not dare touch my daughter, you worthless titan!" Athena seethed.

Zeus groaned internally as he watched Athena calm herself down and Apollo's furious look. He had a feeling that those two would interfere and break the laws to help out their loved ones. Could they not tell that the laws were made for a reason? Humph!

""No!"" Artemis ... will be meaningless.""

"Sacrifice!" Hades exclaimed. "So, they are looking for the Ophiotaurus."

Zeus bit his lip and said, "Then hope that we find the beast before they do."

"Luke gathered up ... quest is... challenging."

"Is this yet another trap?" Poseidon asked in worry.

"Kind of." Percy said, thinking about the little army of skeletons that were to kill the hunters and probably take Thalia to Atlas so she could summon the Ophiotaurus for them to kill. He thought
smugly that the plan would have been successful had he not interfered and taken away the hunters’ cloth before the skeletons could smell it. Obviously, they had gotten his scent instead and they all did end up going to Atlas and he did almost summon the Ophiotaurus. He mentally shrugged and thought that at least they had managed to get out of that one alive.

"Kind of?" Artemis repeated. "If it was a trap, do tell how you got out of it."

"Well, I'm really bad with plans, be it ours or the enemy's." Percy said and shared a smile with Thalia.

The campers couldn't help laughing at that.

"The man's ... BANG BANG."

"Now what? What could disturb you at camp?" Theseus asked, interrupting himself.

"You'll see." Percy grinned, thinking about his friend. Damn! He missed Blackjack.

"Someone, or ... with a black Pegasus."

"A black pegasus?" Amphitrite questioned. "It is the same one from the previous quest, right?"

"Yes."

Reyna grinned at the prospect of getting to know more about Blackjack. She had really liked him and made sure to visit him every day that she had been in the Greek camp.

"Whoa, boss! ... horse-ke-bob!"

"I like him!" Leo announced, taking a break from his machine, which for some reason was flying in a zig-zag manner around his head.

"Yeah, if you could talk to him, you guys would hit it off just fine." Percy said.

"Be my horse translator?" Leo asked.

"Nope." Percy replied. "I don't want to sit in between two crazy people. Or one crazy pegasus and Leo."

"Come on! I'll make you cool stuff." Leo pleaded and Percy paused to consider.

Annabeth rolled her eyes and said, "How about you both decide Percy's bribe later on? Theseus, can you just read. These two will take forever."

"Its black ... still sleeping for?"

"Who wakes up at five in the morning?" Butch asked.

"Blackjack apparently." Will replied.

"Who would ever want to wake up?" Clovis asked and slept off on Butch's shoulder.

"'How many times ... of adopt me."

"Blackjack adopted you?" Jason asked. "Shouldn't it work the other way round?"
"When does anything with me?" Percy asked with a sigh. "But yeah, he did. One day he just randomly appeared next to my bedroom window, scared the Hades out of mom. Never left me alone since that day."

"Like a lost puppy." Thalia chuckled.

"He'll trample you if he hears that. He hates being compared to dogs. Says that they bark a lot. Too much noise." Percy said.

"Hey Annabeth." Thalia said, ignoring Percy. "Do you remember that dog who followed you around for like 3 whole weeks?"

"Yeah." Annabeth said with a sad smile.

"What happened to him?" Hazel asked.

"Got eaten by a hellhound." Thalia said casually.

"I…I don't even…" Percy said. "Isn't that like cannibalism?"

Annabeth stared at him and Percy backtracked. "I mean… sorry for your loss."

"Better." Thalia whispered before breaking down into chuckles.

"See, Blackjack ... needs your help."

"What does he mean by 'another'?" Triton asked.

"Well, when the sea creatures, nice monsters or otherwise are in trouble, with usually mortals, the hippocampi call for Blackjack, who comes and gets me and I go and help them out." Percy explained.

"No. You will spoil them." Poseidon whined. "They will get used to it and go to you whenever they want something."

"What he means" Amphitrite said, "is that you are doing good work."

Percy smiled and shared a mirth filled look with Theseus and Triton.

"'Again?'

... underwater and help."

"Hippocampi do really have a lot of issues. Mostly because they love to help out other creatures but even then they have way too many problems." Triton said.

"Quick question." Connor said and Percy groaned, knowing it would be a question just to annoy him. "How do mermaids get hangnails? And how do you exactly help them?"

"I… you don't want to know. And in any case, that was an exaggeration." Percy grumbled and told Theseus to read.

"'All right," I said. ... for a long, long time."

"Was that the end of the chapter? That felt like an end of the chapter." Clovis asked, suddenly waking up.
"Yes it was." Theseus replied, closing the book after marking the page.

"Good cuz I'm hungry." Clovis said and many agreed.

"We should break for the day now." Hestia declared.

With that, everyone excitedly made their way out of the throne room.
YES! Finally! I am back and have actually finished this chapter :D
Thanks a lot to all of you guys for wishing me luck for my exams (it was alright... still waiting for the results) and thanks for being so patient with me.
I know I said that I would update in second week of Sept but then I was travelling to my home and didn't have much time to write anything over there.

Now, this chapter, following the previous trend, is a break chapter, and is basically different head-canons put together so I hope you guys enjoy the chapter.

Also, a quick and huge thanks to Mikaza for the Spanish idea (I really like it) and thanks Sparks for helping me out every single time I get stuck in a chapter. :D

Read on!

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CH66 – TTC – A DINNER AND A SONG

“A hover board!” Leo said proudly as Tyson gingerly held a rectangular piece of celestial bronze.

“What now?” Piper asked curiously and Butch muttered something about Star Wars.

“Well not technically a hover board cuz it can’t hold more than a few pounds and we still need to work out some stuff but yeah…” Leo said proudly and gave a disappointed sigh at the blank faces of Piper, Reyna and Dakota around him. “Seriously guys? Not even a ‘congrats’ or ‘you are a genius, Leo’?”

“I don’t think they understand.” Tyson said softly. “I’ll show you how it works.”

Tyson ran his hand over the board and it began to vibrate for a few seconds before making its way around their little group. The two, or rather Leo, had decided to showcase their latest invention, in this case, a telekinetic hover-board, to the campers while they all waited for dinner to be served.

“It works on telekinesis.” Leo said as the board moved along with Tyson’s hand movements. “This one is tuned in to both mine and Tyson’s mind… Pretty cool, huh?” Leo said smugly as he watched more people crowd around them.

“Super cool.” Thalia said with a grin as she watched the board do a somersault before landing in Tyson’s giant hands.

“Finally!” Leo exclaimed. “Someone who understands how awesome this is. Don’t you guys get it? You don’t have to walk anywhere!”

“I’m interested.” Clovis said sleepily, blinking his eyes to chase away the sleep.
“Ding-ding-ding! Congratulations! You are my first customer.”

“Woah, woah, woah! You can’t do any business without our permission.” Travis said with a raised eyebrow as he and his brothers shook their heads at Leo.

“Yeah man! It’s an unwritten rule of the camp.” Chris said solemnly. “Cabin 11 is in charge of all illegal business in the camp.”

“And all business is illegal in camp.” Connor said and put his arm around Leo.

“Oh really?” Leo replied with a roll of his eyes.

“Yeah.” Travis said, running a finger across the hover board and barely suppressing a yelp as he got shocked by the equipment. He straightened up and said, “We could have an agreement. You could pay us and then do your little side business.”

“Exactly!” Connor said, steering Leo away from the group and from Travis and Chris, who were stealing the hover-board from an unsuspecting Tyson.

Leo gave a smug grin as he caught the reflection of the two boys walking away from the crowd and said, “By the way, I always have a self-destruct instruction… even in prototypes.”

“What…” Connor scrunched up his face and turned around as he heard shouts behind him. Both Travis and Chris were on the floor and Travis was clutching his hands gingerly while Chris was staring at the broken hover-board.

“Don’t steal from me.” Leo smirked and walked away, leaving Connor watching an exasperated Will berate his brothers.

“Did it look cool? Please tell me it looked cool.” Leo asked Jason and Percy as he walked over to them.

“Meh.”

“Kinda.”

Leo fist bumped Percy and glared at Jason. “What do you mean by ‘meh’?”

“Use an explosion next time and then walk away.” Nico suggested as he looked at the commotion surrounding the broken hover-board.

“Nico!” Hazel exclaimed while Annabeth told Leo not to use an explosion and Percy gave him a thumbs up over Annabeth’s shoulder.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

“So, what are the rules exactly?” Reyna asked Annabeth while the other Romans stopped eating to pay attention. The demigods were huddled in one corner of the dining hall and Annabeth had taken it upon herself to explain the Capture the Flag to the others.

“No killing, no maiming, you can injure the other person though.” Annabeth said between bites as Percy looked on in a bored manner. He was already half asleep and they hadn’t even gotten to the planning part, while the hunters looked like they were already planning the demigods’ funerals.

“Hey.” Hazel whispered to Percy. “Is this anything like the war games?”
“Somewhat like that, but not so organized.”

“So, what you did would be an accurate representation of the game?” Reyna asked, having heard Percy.

“Mnhmm.”

“What did you do?” Jason asked in amusement.

“You’ll probably hear about it.” Percy replied and turned to Annabeth. “What’s the game plan?”

“I still do not understand the game.” Theseus interrupted and Thalia and Annabeth took turns explaining the game to the ancient heroes. Thalia had decided to play with the demigods, seeing that this would be the last time she would be able to do so.

Sighing, Percy tuned out of the conversation once again and smiled at Leo and Calypso, who looked like they were in the middle of an argument. He was about to look away and leave the couple to their argument when Leo waved him over in a somewhat urgent manner.

“What?” Percy asked as he scooted over to the son of Hephaestus.

“Tell her that it’s not a bad idea.”

“What’s not a bad idea?”

“The hover board. Duh!”

Percy grinned sheepishly at Calypso and said, “It’s not a bad idea?”

“You could be a little more convincing, you know?” Leo deadpanned and stared at Percy.

“Well… I mean hover board is an amazing idea…”

“But?” Calypso asked in glee.

“But, well… it’s hovering…”

“Yup! The name kinda makes it clear.” Will mumbled from where he, Nico and Lou Ellen were sitting.

“He means that it’s not touching the ground, meaning it’s in the air, meaning…” Nico pointed out.

“It’s in your uncle’s domain.” Lou Ellen completed.

“Yeah. So not a big fan of things not touching the ground.” Percy said and Nico nodded. Turning to Calypso, he asked, “What’s your issue with the board?”

“It exploded twice before I made the working prototype… that I blew up anyway.” Leo muttered.

“In your face. It exploded twice in your face, Leo!” Calypso said in exasperation.

“Hey! A little more faith would be nice.” Leo pointed his spoon in Calypso’s general direction. “If I can make a talking dragon…”

“Only you could understand the dragon.” Percy added.

“… and Buford the table and use Archimedes’ sphere, I can make a hover board. I just won’t put
explosives in the initial ones.”

“You put explosives?!” Calypso yelled.

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“You put explosives?!” Calypso yelled. “Yeah. It’s safe. Really.” Leo said and started tinkering with the half made hover board at his side.

“Yeah. It’s safe. Really.” Leo said and started tinkering with the half made hover board at his side. “Explosives are safe?” Nico asked skeptically.

“Explosives are safe?” Nico asked skeptically. “Well… most of the times. Like if you are standing really, really far away or you know, know how to use them…”

“Well… most of the times. Like if you are standing really, really far away or you know, know how to use them…”

“This is why the infirmary is always full.” Will said with a roll of his eyes.

“This is why the infirmary is always full.” Will said with a roll of his eyes. As all of them scooted away from Leo, Percy asked, “On a scale of 1 to 10, how sure are you that that’s not gonna blow up?”

“As all of them scooted away from Leo, Percy asked, “On a scale of 1 to 10, how sure are you that that’s not gonna blow up?”

“1 being…?”

“1 being…?”

“1 being a 100 percent sure and 10 being not confident at all.”

“1 being a 100 percent sure and 10 being not confident at all.”

“11.”

“11.”

“Uh-huh”

“Uh-huh”

“Leo, you really need to stop messing around with it.” Lou Ellen said, eyeing the object in Leo’s hand with distrust. Both Will and Nico repeated her words.

“Leo, you really need to stop messing around with it.” Lou Ellen said, eyeing the object in Leo’s hand with distrust. Both Will and Nico repeated her words. “I’m not messing around. I know what I’m doing.” Leo said distractedly.

“I’m not messing around. I know what I’m doing.” Leo said distractedly. “Leo, listen to them.” Calypso said, her voice going high pitched as sparks started coming out of the contraption.

“Leon, listen to them.” Calypso said, her voice going high pitched as sparks started coming out of the contraption. “¡Ay-ay-ay! Ellos están loco en de cabeza, Calypso. Ellos no saben lo qué están deciendo.” Leo said, squinting at the device as his hands created fire.

“¡Ay-ay-ay! Ellos están loco en de cabeza, Calypso. Ellos no saben lo qué están deciendo.” Leo said, squinting at the device as his hands created fire. “I hate it when they can speak another language other than English and Greek.” Will mumbled, trying to remember some of the Spanish that he had learnt from one of his old neighbors.

“I hate it when they can speak another language other than English and Greek.” Will mumbled, trying to remember some of the Spanish that he had learnt from one of his old neighbors. “I speak Italian.” Nico pointed out.

“I speak Italian.” Nico pointed out. “Other than that.”

“Other than that.”

“What did he say?” Calypso asked in confusion.

“What did he say?” Calypso asked in confusion. “He called us crazy and that you shouldn’t listen to us ‘cuz we don’t know what we are seeing.” Percy explained as he picked his way through Leo’s abandoned plate.

“He called us crazy and that you shouldn’t listen to us ‘cuz we don’t know what we are seeing.” Percy explained as he picked his way through Leo’s abandoned plate. “Saying, not seeing.” Leo corrected absently and then looked up in shock. “You know Spanish?”

“Saying, not seeing.” Leo corrected absently and then looked up in shock. “You know Spanish?”

“A bit, I guess.” Percy shrugged. “I can understand bits and pieces if you speak slowly.”

“A bit, I guess.” Percy shrugged. “I thought you took Latin and not Spanish in school.” Nico said and added at Percy’s confused look, “The reading? The first book mentioned that you were in Latin class with Chiron.”

“The reading? The first book mentioned that you were in Latin class with Chiron.”

“Oh, yeah.” Percy nodded. “Didn’t take Spanish but when we used to live with Gabe, we lived near a Hispanic Community, so I learnt it a little from the other kids.”
“I didn’t know that.” Annabeth said, sitting down next to Percy.

“Yes, well, I can’t speak it properly except a few words here and there and the guys used to say that I always murdered the grammar…”

“But you can understand it?” Leo asked, his invention forgotten for the time being.

“Yes.” Percy sheepishly rubbed the back of his neck at the attention he was getting from their little group.

“Damn!” Leo exclaimed. “I can’t insult you in Spanish!”

“Nope. Those were the first things I learnt.”

“They always are.”

“I know Greek swear words.” Jason said with a grin.

“Good for you.” Percy replied with a thumbs up.

“What are you all talking about?” Thalia asked, looking over from where she was sitting next to Perseus.

“Jason knows swear words.”

“Duh! Who do you think taught him those, Kelp Head?”

“Atta girl.” Percy grinned and ducked as Thalia threw a carrot at him.

“No food fight, guys!” Annabeth said, putting her hand on Percy’s to stop him from throwing celery.

“Should we not discuss the game plan for tomorrow? I do not like to lose and especially not to those girls.” Hercules said, side-eyeing the hunters. He added under his breath, “Not after a day like today.”

“Yeah, nobody likes losing to them.” Travis said, joining the group and avoiding Leo’s smug look.

“Okay. Is everyone here?” Annabeth asked, doing a mental headcount. Satisfied, she looked to Lou Ellen and nodded. Soon, the demigods were surrounded by some invisible force.

“It’s a spell I have been working on. No one can hear us now.” Lou Ellen explained with a smirk.

“X-X-X-X-X

The golden haired boy shifted around a bit to get comfortable and went back to reading the thick book placed on his lap. Will made a note on the side margin and turned the page, once again looking up to check if the moon had changed its position. Apparently not.

The son of Apollo was sitting in one of the enormous, golden rooms (maybe this was the famously infamous sun room) in his father’s palace. Unable to sleep, he had made his way to the nearest room with his favorite medical science book in his hands and a pencil tucked behind his ear. The
The hall was huge and covered on three sides with ceiling to floor windows that gave the room a feel of hanging in midair. The room was painted an obscene shade of gold and Will was sure that come morning, it would shine brighter than probably the sun.

His thin finger traced the lines as he read them while the other hand tapped the pencil to a rhythm playing in his mind. He groaned in irritation when he read the same sentence for the millionth time. This had been happening for quite some time. He would start reading a line and re-read it a hundred times before realizing what he was doing. It took him a whole hour to just finish reading two paragraphs. Malcolm, his good friend and Annabeth’s brother would have been so disappointed in him.

Thinking about his other friends made him think about the camp and especially the patients that he had left behind. He couldn’t just stop worrying about them and no matter what he did, he would end up thinking about all the things that could go wrong in his absence. Lou Ellen and Nico had been explaining to him that time would not be passing back at home and they would only be gone for a second or two, but his stupid brain was not ready to accept that.

It was a baseless fear and he had voiced as much to Nico while they had walked back to the palaces to rest but Nico had been understanding and assured him that no fear was baseless or stupid just because it sounded so. If it was real to him, then it had to be tackled. And even though this assurance had made Will grin all the way back to the palace, it did nothing to calm his thoughts down when he had finally gone to bed.

_Nope. Not thinking about that. Lalalalalalala. Think about Nico… puppies… Nico…_ Will kept repeating it in his head as his nightmare reared its ugly head once again.

“Will?” came a whisper from behind him.

“Gah!”

Will leapt up from the couch, his book falling to the floor with a ‘thud’ and his hands coming up in a defensive position with his pencil held in his left hand like a dagger ready to be thrown. His first thought was that Nico had managed to find a way to bypass the whole rule of not entering other’s palaces and had shadow-travelled into the room but the figure standing in front of him was taller and healthier looking than the son of Hades.

“Oh. I did not mean to scare you.” The figure said in a whisper and Will relaxed himself at the familiar voice.

“Dad?” the boy asked in a whisper, bending down to right the lamp that had fallen over and pick up his book. As he straightened up, he asked, “What are you doing here?”

Apollo grinned at his son, his face lighting up under the moonlight and said in a whisper, “Well, this is my palace, so…”

“No. I mean, what are you doing awake at this time and over here.”

“I could ask you the same question.”

“I was studying.”

“At this nonsensical hour?”

“Yes… why are you still whispering?”
Apollo shrugged and came around the couch to stand in front of his son. Plucking the pencil out of Will’s hand, he asked, “Why are you still holding this… stick as a weapon?”

“It’s a pencil and you sneaked up on me.” Will said.

His lack of sleep and the jump scare had upset his already anxious mood and it made him cranky and on the defensive. As it was, he could feel a headache build up near his temples. The healer was hardly ever impolite and was trying his best to rein in his sour tone while talking to his dad, so it came as a relief when Apollo put his hand on Will’s shoulder and gently pushed the boy to sit down. Will instantly relaxed under Apollo’s touch, either because the god was using his power to calm him down or he was glad that Apollo didn’t take offence to Will’s somewhat rude attitude. Whatever be the case, it had Will relaxing into the couch.

Picking up the book, the god followed his son’s example and sat down on the couch. Fingering the foreign text on the book and watching it change to Greek, he asked, “So what is this book about?”

“Biology and medicine.”

“Ah! A healer’s guide then.”

“Yeah, something like that.”

“You are more interested in that, aren’t you? Healing rather than music or poetry or archery.”

“Yeah. I’m alright at archery and downright horrible at poetry. I like music, well cuz my mom is a singer, but other than that, healing or medicine is what I’m good at.” Will said tentatively and hoped that Apollo wasn’t in the habit of folding pages as the god leafed through the book.

“This is a mortal book!” Apollo beamed at his son and added, “They are not wrong about a lot of things although there are way too many diseases listed in the book.”

“Yeah well, you got angry a lot or so they say.” Will said with a grin.

Now that they were on a favored topic, he was feeling far more comfortable than before. He tried to remember the last time he had met his dad. It had been after the end of the first war when he had helping around the streets of Manhattan, picking up the injured and the fallen alike and shielding them from the mortals’ prying eyes. It was at one such street corner that Apollo had helped him carry a horribly injured son of Ares to the camp van. They had talked for only a few minutes with the god giving him an enhanced version of one of the healing potions and asking about the conditions of all of his kids. Then he had promptly disappeared. There was a vast contrast between that Apollo and the one sitting on the couch next to Will. For one, this one looked far too young and carefree than in even any of the pictures or statues of the god and for two, his hair was standing up in all directions, as if he had ran his hand through his hair in frustration and stopped just short of pulling them out, a far cry from his usual look.

“That would do it.” Apollo muttered under his breath. He gently closed the book and asked, “So tell me son, what draws you towards healing?”

Apollo smiled as he saw Will taking in a deep breath and launching into a detailed explanation of everything he loved about healing and helping others, his favorite parts and with little encouragement, about the various different things he had to do as the ‘best healer of the camp’. The more he talked, the more he relaxed and the more Apollo relaxed. The fate of his sister had been eating at him throughout the night and his little distraction of attempting to write an epic had only left him frustrated. It had been by chance that he had happened upon his distressed son sitting
alone in the sun room with only the moonlight and lamp as company.

“…right before the war! It was a boy by the way. A healthy one, so that’s good, but still!” Will was saying with an exasperated smile that was beginning to look fond.

Apollo chuckled and said, “That must have been interesting.” He had only been half listening to Will’s rant but had still managed to get the highlights.

“That’s one word for it. I couldn’t stop shaking even when I joined the war.”

“Ah! The excitement of helping bring someone into the world.”

“More like the nerves.”

“That too.” Both father and son chuckled and Apollo asked, “Why are you actually awake?” He didn’t know what prompted the question as he wasn’t too inclined to talk about any sort of ‘heavy feelings’ with anyone. Maybe other than Artemis. But something innate made him want to know about his son from the future and he couldn’t think of anything selfish that would make him want to do that other than the prospect of helping Will out in whatever was troubling him.

Should I? Should I not? Will kept thinking it over in his head. Did his father really want to know or was just making small talk? Even a couple of days of living in the camp, hearing the heartbreak of hundreds of children waiting for a speck of attention from their distant parents was enough to warn off any camper from attempting to get their parents’ attentions and that made them all the more suspicious of anything the gods did. After all, there was no such thing as free lunch – a lesson that every demigod was well aware of.

Finally, the part that did crave his father’s attention said, “Nightmares.” Will shrugged nonchalantly as if it was normal (which it was but no one, especially Apollo needed to know just how much it affected him).

“Hmm. The war I presume.” Apollo said with a nod. He was well aware of the nightmares and jumpiness that followed a war and his child had already lived through two of them in a small amount of time. Looking at Will’s half-hearted nod, Apollo changed his observation to, “Or the aftermath?”

The boy’s tightening of jaw was enough answer and the god said sagely, “The aftermath is usually even worse than the actual war. We, and I mean even you demigods by that, are trained in what to do in a war, how to fight, how to respond, we are born for that, are we not? But once that is over, once the enemy is defeated and the silence reigns once again, that is when it all comes crashing down. When you have to see your friends and possibly family injured or even worse. No one trains you for that. There is no training for that.” Apollo trailed off, thinking of his own experiences after a war, when he was called upon to heal others, to deliver both good and bad news to family and friends alike. That was the only part of healing that he absolutely hated and maybe his son was discovering the same sadness that accompanied such news.

The two sat in silence, each pondering over the wise words delivered by the sun god and re-living their own experiences. It was after a few minutes that Will found himself saying, “We didn’t have that many casualties in the Gia – the second war. The first one was worse… in terms of the people we lost.”

Apollo hummed and asked, “And how was the second one worse?”

Will shrugged, his tone changing back to the nonchalant voice and said, “I dunno. I got involved
only in the end. The seven and for some part, Nico were the ones who were involved on the front line, so to say.” After a pause he added somewhat bitterly, “They were the ones who went around finding and fighting the danger when all of us were just chilling in the camps.”

“Sometimes waiting and anticipating for the worst to happen can be worse than actually doing something about it. Especially when you are not aware of the happenings out there on the ‘front line’.”

Will mumbled to himself, “I thought Mr. D was the psychiatrist of the family.”

“It is true that D is well versed in how the mind works but I do know it too.” Apollo said with a smirk and added, “Superior hearing, child. You cannot really not expect me to hear that.”

The demigod blushed and stammered, “I-uh-yeah. Sorry.”

“So what ails you? I could help or just listen. Apparently that in itself is sufficient in helping someone out.”

Will raised a brow at his cocky father and said, “It’s stupid, really.”

“So was giving the pithos to Pandora to open it, knowing that she would not be able to help herself, only in the hopes of tormenting Prometheus, but that did not stop it from happening, now did it?”

“What?”

“Nothing. Do carry on.”

“Uh…I worry about the injured campers back at home?” Will said skeptically, gauging Apollo’s reaction and his sincerity. When Apollo nodded in encouragement, Will continued, “I’m afraid that something would go wrong when I’m here.”

“You do have other healers, do you not?”

“Yes and they are really good and I swear I’m not a control freak but I still keep freaking out over if something would go wrong cuz I’m not there to stop it. And everyone is just so over worked over there like what if they are low on power and need my help and I’m not there? There are just so many people who need help and are not fully healed because Olympus was closed and we couldn’t get any supplies from there and we were only using our powers and rationing the healing potions and ambrosia to the people. And I know that no time is gonna pass while we are here but I can’t just get rid of this and the nightmares! Gosh! The nightmares are just so bad. Like I’m having this particular one where my patients don’t make it and then come back to life and kill me.” Will panted in relief as he got his troubles out in the open and added, “See, it is just so stupid.”

“I would not say that it is stupid. It is something that every healer goes through and has to get used to. Your brother, Asclepius had the same doubt and so did I. I used be worried all the time when I first showcased my superior healing abilities and started keeping a healing room. It took me some time but I got used to the fact that I cannot be around my patients all of the time. I had other responsibilities and I had trust in the other healers.”

“But they already have so much work, dad!”

“Mmm… that would be something that you would have to work out within yourselves. What I am saying is that you are young and just starting out in the work of healing. It would be better that you would conquer this fear now, otherwise it would drive you into a frenzy. It certainly drove your brother mad.”
So, no help whatsoever, Will thought to himself.

“You said you think of all that could go wrong in your absence? Maybe, then you could possibly think of the solutions to those problems and see which of the other healers would be able to handle such problems. It would assure you that despite your absence, the patient would be in good care. It would be important for you to get over this, especially if you are serious about healing.” Apollo advised and smiled at Will’s thoughtful look. That was how he had managed to get rid of his anxiousness of leaving the healing rooms to his apprentices.

Will hummed and nodded. “I can try that.”

“Do that. It might just help you.” Apollo said. “Now how about you go and get some rest. I would have to get the sun up in another two hours.”

“Nah. I’ll just study till morning or something.” Will said, picking up his book from where Apollo had left it between them.

The god eyed his son and knew that the boy still had his doubts. Well, it would not do him any good to think more about them, thought the sun god. “What else troubles you?”

Will tapped his pencil against the book and said, “What if something goes horribly wrong when I’m not there?”

“You mean if you lose the patient?”

“Mhmm.”

Apollo turned completely to face Will and asked, “And what guarantee is there that the same would not happen were you present? What is it that you have that could save a patient where your siblings cannot?”

“I – nothi-“

“Because if there is anything different or special about you that could save a patient, then by all means you have the right to be anxious. But…” Apollo held up a finger to stop Will from interrupting. “But if there is no such thing that differentiates you and your siblings’ abilities, then what exactly are you worried about?”

“I – I don’t know. It’s just a stupid fear.” Will said in a disheartened tone.

“I do not mean to undermine your fear or distress you in any way. All I am saying is that if there is something that you can do then your siblings must too be able to do it to save the patient and if such a thing is unique to you…”

“It’s not.” Will chewed on his bottom lip.

“There you go.” Apollo said with a smile. “As long as you trust and believe that your siblings would treat your patient the same way you would, you would feel much better. And Will?” Apollo waited till his son looked at him and then added, “There is one thing you must keep in mind, especially when you know the things that we know.”

The god paused for dramatic effect and then said, “There is a difference between the deaths that can occur. One, the very worst one, is due to our neglect and two, the kind that cannot be stopped no matter what we do because it is decided by the Fates and once they cut a life string, no amount of power can stop that life from dying. It can be delayed but never ever stopped. And as long as
you work towards making sure that the first type does not happen, it will be alright. It would still be hard to face such a situation but it would do you good to remember that sometimes, somethings just cannot be stopped or changed.”

Will pressed his palm into the side of his book and asked, “And then what do I do? Someone comes to me for help and if I cannot help them then what good am I?”

Apollo pressed his lips together and said, “I am not saying that you would never lose a patient. That is an impossible scenario even if you are my son and are gifted in the power of healing. Asclepius and I are gods of healing and medicine and yet we have lost patients over the centuries. It would be horrifying and paralyzing and it would shake your very core and you might even want to give up.”

Will inhaled sharply as he remembered some of the campers dying in the infirmary after the first war. None of them had been his patients and yet he had wanted to just run away.

Apollo looked sadly at his son and rested his head against the backrest. “I know wars and that not everyone survives it and so it is not an off base deduction that some of my chil – your siblings did not make it. Tell me, what did you do then?”

A snap resounded in the room as the pencil in Will’s hand broke into two under the pressure that the demigod applied. Willing himself to not tear up at the mention of his now gone siblings, the boy muttered, “We mourned and helped each other.”

“Then you do the same when such a thing happens.” Apollo said simply and patted his son. The two sat in silence for some time till Apollo blurted, “Did you lose many?”

Will at first thought that his father asked about patients but the look in the god’s eyes made him change this thought. “A few. Lee was a healer and a musician and Michael was more into archery and generally just fighting with everyone.” Will gave a watery chuckle and continued, “There were two that ran away and…” He trailed off, gazing into nothingness as Apollo wrapped his arm around Will’s shoulders.

Tightening his hold on his son, the sun god wondered how he coped with such happenings in the future. Did the passing of a child begin to feel normal for him or was everything as over sensitized as it was now? Did he still break down every time it happened? He hoped that he did because the opposite would be to become like his father – no reaction whatsoever – and that was something that he could not bear. Realizing that it was pretty late and his son should really go and get some rest, he cleared his throat and asked, “Would you still like to stay here or go to bed?”

“I think I’ll stay here, if you don’t mind.” Will replied hoarsely, tracing the picture on the cover page of the book.

“Oh alright. In that case, how would you like to help me out in writing an epic?”

A small smile graced Will’s lips and he said, “I am just pathetic at poetry. I can’t even get anything to rhyme.”

Apollo tapped his chin with his forefinger. “That would be a huge problem. Hmm. Aha! What about writing a song? You did say you liked music.”

“I like it. I just can’t write or compose anything. I used to try it with my mom.”

“Do you still not try it with your mother?” the god asked as he summoned his lyre, already having
decided to either write or compose a song. The epic could wait. It was anyway going to be about yet another tragedy and he wasn’t in the mood for tragedy tonight.

“Oh no! We both decided that I didn’t have that talent.” Will said with a fond smile as he thought about the one summer he and his mother had sat down and brainstormed and at the end of the vacation had finally understood that Will should just not try to write anything.

“Hmm…” Apollo said absentmindedly as he strummed his lyre and soon a joyous melody enveloped them. “Do you know our celebratory songs?”

Nodding along to the tune, Will said softly, “Yeah, I know this one but I’m pretty sure the lyrics have changed over the years cuz most of the songs that we sing have some or the other recent events in it.”

“The campfire, yes?” Apollo asked as he increased the pace of the music. “I would definitely want to witness that. What is the music of the future like, I wonder?”

“Do you want to…” Will asked hesitantly. “Do you want to hear some of the music that we have? I even have a few of mom’s songs. I record her when she sings.”

“Record?” Apollo asked, abruptly stopping the music. Was there a way to record his voice and hear later on without having to sing? That would be very useful indeed.

“Uh. Yeah. I have a music player.” He said, pulling out an iPod from his pocket. “You… uh… you gave it to me.” Fiddling with the device, he said, “Actually, you kinda give it to all of your kids when we are claimed.”

“I do that?” Apollo asked, still staring at the device in fascination.

“Yeah…you… do you want to hear some songs?”

Apollo grinned and said, “Obviously. I just need to know how well music has progressed in the years. What heartfelt love story or tragedy would sound like in the future?”

Will smirked and said, “Remind me not to introduce you to EDM just yet.”

“What is EDM?”

“Not important. Now listen to this.”
Hey! So, early update, I know. But I just had a lot of free time and no net connection. What else was I supposed to do? :P

Anyway, the first half of the chapter is something that just came to me and I put it down in words and liked it. Hope you guys like it too!

Oh and I have deleted the chapter that was only A/N (ch.66) so the fic is gonna show only 67 chapters like before.

Disclaimer- I do not own Percy Jackson series or the Heroes of Olympus series. All characters and words in bold are owned by Rick Riordan and Hyperion Books for Children and Disney Hyperion. I do not intend to use the text from the books for any other purpose other than for this fanfiction and nor do I intend to make any sort of profit from the story. All rights go to the actual owner and not me. This is only a work of love for the series.

CH67 – TTC – The Innocent Monster

The lake was serene and the water cool to touch, just like the atmosphere surrounding the little water body. It was silent, not the oppressing type or the even the type of silence before a storm. No. This was the calm silence of nature as dawn approached at a lazy crawl, stirring a few birds and animals.

The god inhaled the smell of morning dew as he leaned over the side of lake to look at his reflection. Bright sea green eyes looked up at him, devoid of emotion, staring as if they held all the answers in the world. Poseidon leaned back and ran his hand over the water, just shy of touching and disturbing the tranquil surface. The water did not respond to his proximity and the god sighed in understanding.

Some days he felt old, inexplicably so and on those days he had no clue what he felt. Everything felt like a blur, time passing too slowly and too rapidly at the same time, memories merging with one another and he would be restless and peaceful, all at once. Such days, though still far apart, were slowly starting to come too soon for his liking. This was when he needed to know what he was and so he would come searching for answers in the depths of his old home.

Set in the most impenetrable part of Mount Olympus was a lake, mediocre in size and nothing to behold, especially for those who didn’t know its history. It was, like most of the important things, lackluster, but of immense value to the elder gods. It had been a point of reconciliation for far too long. The six elder gods never dared to fight one another in the vicinity of the lake, for it reminded them of their mother, as it was her who had created the lake for them. She had called it a ‘family space’ and requested them to not bring any strife to the area and who were the gods to refuse such a request of their mother. Over the years, it had become a safe haven for them and the gods came there to relax or to honor their mother, who was most probably still travelling the world. Poseidon usually came here when he was in a ‘neutral’ mood. If the water didn’t respond to his closeness then he would know that it would be a ‘weird mood’ day, or as Triton liked to call it ‘the splitting
headaches day’, for the non-responsive nature of the sea always gave the younger god a headache.

The ‘crunch’ of a twig breaking was the first thing that alerted the sea god of someone else’s presence and then came the smell. The smell of ozone and the feel of static. He quickly ran a hand through his hair to make sure that his hair had not responded to the static of his approaching brother. Poseidon’s eyes flicked to meet Zeus’ as the younger brother entered the clearing around the lake. The two nodded once and went back to their own musings, with Zeus preferring to sit as far from Poseidon as possible without having to go to the other side of the lake. Just because they had yet to fight in this area, didn’t mean that either of them wanted to tempt the other to do it.

Zeus looked at the water and then at Poseidon. The water was not gravitating towards the god, which was weird because this water always gravitated towards him, which could only mean that it would be one of those days when Poseidon would more or less be lost in his own thoughts. That was good. That way there was a lesser chance of a fight involving the sea god during the day. But then again, Poseidon was infamous for his changing moods. He could be smiling and jesting one minute and declaring war in the next.

Already knowing the answer and never one for much quiet, Zeus asked, “So what are you here for?”

Without looking away from the horizon, the god shrugged and replied, “Nothing in particular. And you?”

Zeus sighed, happy for the opening and said, “Worrying, I suppose. For the future. There is far too much happening and too little of precautions being taken. I wonder…”

“What made us so insouciant?” Poseidon completed.

“I… yes, something like that.” Zeus said with a nod. This had been eating at him ever since this whole bizarre situation appeared out of nowhere.

“Probably the years of inactivity.” Came the reply. “It has not been long since we defeated the Titans. It would make sense that in none of the years leading up to this particular future, we would have faced any attack from them.”

“So you are saying that we got lulled into a sense of false security.”

“Yes.”

“You… might not be wrong.”

Poseidon smirked and teased, “Sorry, what was that again? I said something that the great Zeus agreed with? Oh, brother dear, you have just made my day.”

Zeus rolled his eyes and threw a pebble at his insufferable brother. To be honest, he felt better that Poseidon agreed with the conclusion that he himself had come up with. Breaking the unusually comfortable silence once again, he asked, “Is it not odd that we do not always remain Greek?”

“Not really.” Poseidon replied, now juggling some pebbles. “Change is the only way to move forward, and sometimes that means changing who we are.”

Ah! So Poseidon was in an introspective frame of mind. That meant that Zeus would only get sensible answers from him. Well, he wasn’t exactly feeling sensible and wanted some sort of response from his brother. Out of all of them, Poseidon was the one who could change a hundred moods within a span of minute. That always made it fun to provoke him and Zeus did not like this
“I walked past Hades feeding a lion.” Zeus said. That got a response from Poseidon in the form of a raised eyebrow. At least there was some reaction rather than the indifference that usually accompanied such days.

“He could be trying to connect with mother. You know how much she loves those lions.” The sea god said as a white colored lioness and her cub appeared on the other side of the lake to drink water.

“Well that is a foolish way to go about it. It is not like mother is responding to any messages that we sent her. Even Hermes is having trouble getting to her.” Zeus said bitterly, the age old fear of not being the favorite of his mother rearing its ugly head.

“Foolish, you say?” came a smug reply from the god of Underworld as he neared the clearing. Behind him was a beautiful woman, her black hair braided along with flowers and her green eyes shining. Her skin glowed unearthly in the early morning sun.

“Mother?” Zeus asked skeptically as he and Poseidon got up in unison.

“Oh, my boys!” Rhea sang delightfully and crossed the clearing faster than what should have been possible to hug her youngest children.

“You really are here!” Poseidon said with a huge smile as he released his mother from their hug.

“And why did he know this?” Zeus said in an accusatory tone, pointing at Hades, who had now joined them.

“Zeus, be nice.” Rhea admonished and then broke into a smile and said, “Honestly, this was supposed to be a surprise for all of you. It is, however, unfortunate that one of the companions I was taking this trip with, passed on.”

“And ended up gossiping with Thanatos, who in turn, told me about mother’s return.” Hades answered. “Do not worry, brother,” Hades continued as he saw Zeus’ glare, “I only came to know of it last night when Thanatos appeared in my dreams to update about the daily affairs of Underworld.”

The Titaness smiled and said, “I was supposed to be here a few days ago but there was this… feel… some sort of protective layer surrounding you all. It just took me some time to get past it.”

“Ah, yes. That must be the Fates’ work. You see we are having this little… thing going on over here.” Poseidon said. “This reading of the future, including some people from the future. Because of this, we have to lose touch with the outside world for the duration of the reading. That really hinders with our work. But on the upside, the whole family is here. Well, most of them, anyway.”

Rhea nodded in understanding, not really understanding the necessity of such drastic measures and voiced her opinion to her boys, who took turns explaining what all they had gathered by now.

“Are you going to stay for long?” Zeus asked, knowing his mother’s tendencies to leave after a day’s visit.

“Well, I had thought of doing just that. I have been travelling for so long, I have met so many new people, species even, on other planets. I do wish to stay here for some time.”

“That is fantastic news!” Poseidon said, putting his arm around Rhea and steering her towards the
town, as his brothers scowled at him for taking their mother’s time.

“There you are!” Hestia said, coming into the clearing. “I knew you… Mother!”

And just like that, Rhea had ran over to her eldest child, leaving the three gods to trail behind her. The five chatted happily as they walked back towards the palace. At their request, the Titaness had agreed to sit in on the reading, seeing that her children would be busy in that.

As they neared the dining hall for breakfast, Rhea shouted in joy, “Hera! Demeter! Calypso! Zoe!”

Amidst bewildered gazes, she went and hugged her daughters and her grand-nieces, while the elder gods went to their families and started the long process of introducing everyone to Rhea.

“Oh gods!” Percy whispered to Annabeth as they stood and watched the commotion and happiness amongst the gods. “It’s going to be so weird when we get to the part of meeting Kronos and all of that.”

“Not at all.” Sounded a whisper near Percy’s ear, making both him and Annabeth jump in surprise. Rhea stood next to them with Poseidon, wearing a smug expression at catching the two unawares.

“Holy Poseidon! You scared us.” Percy said in a rush before blushing at both using his father’s name as an expression in front of the god himself and speaking freely with Rhea.

Struggling to not laugh outright at Percy’s slip, Poseidon gestured to the boy and introduced him to Rhea. The Titaness smiled and said, “It is very obvious that he is your son. And child, as for your earlier comment, do not forget that I was the one who encouraged the children to kill my tyrant of a husband the first time around. If he does manage to rise up again, I would love to hear about how he was defeated once again.”

With that, the mother-son duo went on to meet others and Annabeth said with a shake of her head, “This family…”

“Yeah.”

X-X-X-X-X

It took an hour and a half, but the gods had managed to calm their excitement down to a manageable level and they all had finally settled down in the throne room to continue with the reading.

“Right!” Hestia said, her voice carrying over everyone else’s and soon the room was quiet enough for her to continue without raising her voice. “Who would like to read next?”

Timidly raising her hand, Zoe asked if she could read the next chapter.

“I MAKE A DANGEROUS PROMISE”

Nico groaned and mouthed ‘sorry’ to Percy as Hercules mumbled, “Of course you do.”

Tapping Nico’s shoulder, Will raised a questioning eyebrow and Nico whispered, “I did something stupid. You’ll hear about it.”

“Blackjack gave me… waterskiing any day.”

“Surfing is still the best.” Piper said.
“Remind me to ask Blackjack to give you a ride when we go back.” Percy said with a smile.

“Here. Blackjack slowed… where everything was.”

“That’s never not going to be cool.” Travis mumbled,

“As I got… trapped animals die.”

“That’s horrible.” Grover said mournfully.

“This is the problem with the mortals not knowing about us. If any such creatures got captured over here, the fishermen would release them, lest they face our wrath.” Triton grumbled.

Agreeing with Triton, Zoe wondered if she should be glad that Percy was at least willing to help out the poor creatures who were left for dead by the fishermen. Hoping that the animal survived, she read, “Apparently this poor… all that smart.”

While Theseus and Triton suppressed a smile, Connor said, “How mean of you! What did the poor… oof!”

“Shut up, Connor.” Clarisse said with satisfaction as Connor glared at her over the cushion she had thrown at his face.

“Free it Lord! … an enormous eel.”

Almost all of the gods groaned at the mention of the Ophiotaurus. Sure, they had figured out that the Titans were searching for this particular monster but that didn’t mean that they were glad in being correct.

“Of course it is the Ophiotaurus!” said Hera.

“At least it seems that we have found the creature first. Now, all the boy has to do, is bring it to us.” Zeus said.

“It does not sound like Percy knows what the creature is or even represents.” Amphitrite observed, looking at Percy for confirmation. Percy nodded at her.

“Whoa, little one … only speak horse.”

“What a disability!” Clarisse said sarcastically.

“It is.” Percy replied solemnly and the daughter of Ares rolled her eyes.

“We don’t know what it is, lord, one of the hippocampi said. Many strange things are stirring.”

“Even the hippocampi do not recognize the beast?” Poseidon asked in surprise.

“It has been far too long since the Ophiotaurus was seen and even the hippocampi could not remember such old stories and creatures.” Chiron answered.

Rhea’s face brightened at seeing Chiron and she quickly moved to embrace him. “Oh Chiron! I have not seen you in ages. How are you? You look so old! And what is wrong with your hair?”

Zeus rolled his eyes and asked Zoe to read as Chiron consciously touched his hair. If left to his mother, half of their time would go in her catching up with everyone. This was exactly the reason
he didn’t like her staying away for so long.

“"Yeah," I murmured … in the dark.”

“That was a bad move, child. The Ophiotaurus, even in such a young form would instinctively know not to go near anything sharp.” Hestia said and Percy nodded.

“The cow serpent… Mama cows. Vegetarianism.”

“That was… horrible.” Grover said with a roll of his eyes.

“Vegetarianism? Seriously?” Rachel asked skeptically. “You are so weird.”

“I had to calm them down.” Percy replied with a shrug. As embarrassing as it was for the whole world, his world, to find out his thoughts and actions, it was at least nice to remember some of the nicer, peaceful moments, even if these moments included near stampede situations.

“I doubted the… of a blade?”

“Ophiotaurus is always a ‘he’.” Rhea said from where she was now seated next to Ares and Enyo, who looked really uncomfortable being mothered over by her.

“It was like she’d seen swords before and knew how dangerous they were.”

“Only an idiot would think that swords are friendly things.” Clarisse mumbled.

“What’s annoying her?” Percy asked under his breath.

“She has a few problems with the game plan.” Annabeth replied in a whisper. She had spent almost half the night fighting with Clarisse over the plan and they were still nowhere close to a negotiation. They had to figure something out before evening fell.

“"All right." … "Good cow. Nice cow."”

There were a few chuckles at that and Pan said, “I like him. He is nice to the animals.”

“Except Gladiola.” Grover said and he and Annabeth chuckled.

“Hey! I said hello to her. What more do you expect?” Percy replied with a huff. Grover always brought up Gladiola every time they saw a poodle.

“Finally, the net… big brown eyes.”

“He already likes you.” Rhea said, braiding an annoyed Enyo’s hair. “That is good for Olympus.”

“"Yeah," I said… toward the shore.”

“Does he seriously wait around for you to return whenever you are doing these things?” Jason asked.

“Yeah. He usually gets someone or the other to play with.” Percy replied.

“Tempest never waits for me.” Jason grumbled.

“You should ask him nicely.” Percy replied and stuck his tongue out at his cousin.
“Success, boss? ... save my friend.”

Annabeth patted his thigh and said, “You got there... eventually.”

“As Blackjack flew... doing up there?”

Nico slid down a bit in his couch, trying to be inconspicuous. After having actually gone on quests, he had understood how difficult it was to make a promise even on your own life, let alone on another person’s. He now wished he had never met Percy that day, never made the older demigod make that promise. If that had not happened, he wouldn’t have spent so much time wrongly hating Percy for ‘killing his sister’. He would have only hated him for making Nico realize that he was different than everyone else he knew. Feeling Percy’s eyes on him, Nico cringed and faced the son of Poseidon, who only slightly shook his head at Nico, not in a condescending manner but in a let-bygones-be-bygones manner. That relaxed the younger demigod just a tiny bit.

“I hesitated. The last thing I wanted was more time for Nico to tell me about his Mythomagic game. But something was wrong. I could tell by the way he was crouching.”

“Hey! I wasn’t that bad.” Nico said indignantly, all regrets forgotten for time being.

“You really were.” Will said apologetically, remembering once being in the same training session with Nico and having to listen to two hours of nonstop information on the card game.

“Et tu, Brute?” Nico whispered loudly, trying to relax the atmosphere for the stupidly, dangerous promise that was coming up. It had the desired effect, for lowering his tension anyway since the others didn’t know what was coming, as the demigods laughed at this new and more open Nico and the gods looked at them in confusion.

“Blackjack,” I said... on the Hunters.

“Did you seriously just use my name as a verb?” Grover asked exasperatedly.

“Why are you spying on us?” Zoe asked in anger. What was wrong with the demigods? Why were they all spying on the hunters for absolutely no reason?

“I was looking out for my sister.” Nico gritted out and mumbled to himself, “Nothing that you were bothered with.”

Rolling her eyes at the boy, Zoe continued, “There were voices... T-shirt with it.”

“You foolish demigods!” Adrianna admonished. “Why would you play such a horrible prank?”

“How dare you...” Phoebe said, ready to attack the Stolls as she realized that they had sent the t-shirt for her. Sabrina and Penelope held her back from harming the boys, consoling her by saying that they could get back at them during the game that evening.

“But...” Zoe said, her voice tinged with confusion. “Wasn’t Phoebe the third person to go on the quest with us? If she cannot recover then she cannot go on the quest.”

“Trust the demigods to ruin the quest for a childish prank.” Helen seethed.

“Not to worry, Zoe. You could choose another quester to go with you. There is no compulsion that only Phoebe could go with you.” Adrianna consoled the younger hunter.

“Hmm... alright.” Zoe said with a nod, still not convinced that that was how the quest would
"That's terrible… without rain."

"You should choose another to go with you. I somehow do not think that that was what the Oracle had meant." Artemis said thoughtfully.

"You are still at camp, so I do not think the prophecy is in effect yet." Apollo mused. "With one of the questers out of commission, I think the prophecy would start once the fifth person has been selected."

"But—... risk another Hunter."

Artemis nodded and sighed in relief. At least Zoe was unwilling to select another hunter. But that also confirmed the goddess’ suspicions that Zoe and Bianca did not make it out of the quest, seeing that Percy, Thalia and Grover were all here. Moreover, the son of Hades had been tense since the minute this book had been announced.

"Bianca was silent… Dawn is breaking."

Morpheus tutted and said, “There is a reason you must have been getting those dreams. They act as a warning and you should heed them. That would involve warning your team about them. Obviously, if you wish them ill by keeping what might have been important information, away from them, then it is all the same to me.”

“No!” Zoe said vehemently. “Why would I wish such things on them? I do not even know them.”

“Zoe, let it be. He does not know what he says. You should continue reading. I am sure you had a good reason not to tell Thalia about the dream just yet.” Artemis said in a calm tone, all the while glaring daggers at Morpheus.

"Nico scooted … are on. Hurry!"

“Even invisible, you get into trouble!” Annabeth muttered with a sigh, like she had been putting up with Percy’s tendencies to find trouble even in an empty room, for far too long. And she definitely had been.

“It’s a talent.”

“One I’d prefer that you didn’t have.”

"And Zoe followed … to find me."

“Thanks for that, by the way.” Nico said. “It so would not have gone well if I had actually followed her.”

“You probably would have been lost even before you reached the city.” Percy replied jovially. “You were distracted by almost everything back then.”

Nico scowled at him and mouthed ‘I don’t like you’. Percy shrugged in reply.

Ignoring the boys, Zoe read on, finally excited and terrified for the actual quest to start.

"'Where did… 'Wow. Cool.'"
“Case in point.” Percy said to Nico.

“'How did you... But you can't.'”

“Technically, you did kinda follow your sisters… Thalia and Bianca.” Frank pointed out.

“He looked defiant… heroes will die.”

Will said, “Thank goodness for Percy. You would have definitely died on that quest.”

“The confidence with which you say that amazes me.” Nico said in disbelief.

“You were being an idiot.” Will deadpanned.

“I’m so happy this whole thing is about Percy and not me.” Nico mumbled to himself, thinking about the number of stupid and half-baked decisions that he had taken. Then again, for a couple of them, Percy had been involved, so the son of Hades wasn’t feeling very optimistic about the whole reading.

“He shoulders sagged… they find out—”

“Oh yeah! ‘Cuz that’s gonna stop you.” Thalia said sarcastically.

“How would he know that?” Percy asked, jabbing a thumb in Nico’s direction.

“But… I did.” Nico said with a smirk.

“'Don’t let them … couldn’t lie to him.”

Reyna chuckled and said, “Oh, you got sucked in by the innocent eyes.”

“Hey! My eyes are far from innocent.” Nico said indignantly. Throwing his hand up, he said, “What are we even talking about?”

The demigods chuckled as Zoe continued, “'Yeah," I said ... my sister safe.‘”

Will drew closer to a thoughtful Nico and whispered, “This is the stupid thing you were talking about earlier?”

“Yeah.” Nico said with a sigh, all signs of his previous happiness now gone.

“I… that's a … he insisted.”

“That is indeed a dangerous promise. On quests it is hard to guarantee your own safety, let alone someone else’s.” Perseus said gravely.

“Yeah I know. I was being stupid.” Nico said sullenly.

Travis shrugged and said, “Whatever. I would want guarantee that Connor would return safely, if he ever went on a quest.”

“Yeah, so would I.” Connor said. “… That I would return safely.”

“Vlacas!” Travis chuckled and shoved Connor off the couch.

Shaking her head at their antics, the hunter continued, “'I'll do my ... them. Run?”
“Sometimes you just miss the obvious, don’t you?” Hazel asked, smothering her giggle.

“Sometimes? Try every single time.” Thalia said with an eye roll.

**Then I heard … "Yeah. Let's fly."**

“Blackjack to the rescue.” Piper said.

“He usually is.” Percy replied with a fond smile.

“Wait!” Frank said. “Weren’t you, like, invisible? How did he know where you were?”

“I can talk to horses and pegasi, and they can hear me… well my thoughts actually. It starts getting annoying when they answer any question I ask myself.” Percy answered.

“Huh! Useful.” Frank commented.

“Not if the horse belongs to the enemy.” Dakota pointed out.

“And that was the end of this chapter.” Zoe said, mumbling ‘thankfully’ under her breath.

“Well, in that case,” Rhea said from next to Athena and Artemis. “I would love to read next.”

“Okay.” Zoe said and passed on the book.
Hey guys! The story is back. YAY! So enjoy this chapter.

Also, if anyone of you like reading Avengers fics, like Post IW fix it stuff, I have one that I'm currently writing. It's called Assimilation (on both AO3 and FF.net). So, give it a go and lemme know how it is.

Disclaimer- I do not own Percy Jackson series or the Heroes of Olympus series. All characters and words in bold are owned by Rick Riordan and Hyperion Books for Children and Disney Hyperion. I do not intend to use the text from the books for any other purpose other than for this fanfiction and nor do I intend to make any sort of profit from the story. All rights go to the actual owner and not me. This is only a work of love for the series.

Ch68 – TTC – Percy Ruins Some Plans

Rhea had an amused smile on her face as she read the title, “I LEARN HOW TO GROW ZOMBIES”

“Percy?” Hazel asked in amusement.

“You’ll see.”

“The thing about… their products anymore.”

“Nah. That was just a one-time thing.” Connor replied and shared a look with Travis.

“No, it wasn’t.” Katie replied. “I work at the camp store. I know how many things we have thrown away over the years because of you two.”

“I didn’t know she worked at the store.” Travis whispered to Connor. “What else don’t I know?”

“A lot.” Katie whispered loudly.

“We lost the … That's the one.”

Zoe looked impressed at the fact that she could commandeer mortal vehicles that sounded so different than the usual chariot.

“Hey, look! There's a donut shop. Can we get something to go?”

“Ah! The famous obsession with donuts.” Hazel chuckled and thought about how Arion always wanted gold nuggets. The affinity for weird and unconventional horse food probably had something to with being descendants of Poseidon. She looked at Frank and tried not to laugh out loud as she wondered what weird food he might like if he turned into a horse.

“Half of my pocket money goes on buying donuts for him.”
“I tried explaining… birth date said.”

“That she was sixteen.” Thalia replied with a shrug. “Anyone who looks like they are old enough to drive get a fake license made.”

“Woah! You have a fake license?” Leo asked in fascination.

“Yup.”

“Dude! Your sister is way cooler than you are.” Leo said to Jason, who rolled his eyes at his best friend. He would get a driver’s license in the next year. It was fine. He wasn’t jealous at all.

“‘Well,’ I said … we couldn’t move.”

“Why are you stopping them, D?” Hermes asked his younger brother. The child was going on an important quest that would not only protect Olympus but also throw some light on Luke’s condition. Till now the wine god had not shown any interest in the books with regards to the children and now all of a sudden, he is hindering Percy? Why? He didn’t seem to take any action in the previous book when Percy had done almost the same thing.

Before anyone else could answer, Percy spoke up, “Because I was breaking the rules and there is another reason which would probably come up any time now.”

The son of Poseidon knew what was coming up and wasn’t exactly looking forward to it. He looked at Theseus, Mr. D and Ariadne. This was going to affect them the most and Mr. D’s apparently baseless hatred of the demigods would finally be explained. Percy wondered what the other demigods would think about it. Would they be as confident as he had been back then in their innocence and goodness or would they have doubts like he now did?

“‘Going somewhere?’ … wine dude!”

Dakota chuckled and said to Nico, “Looks like that caught on.”

“Yeah,” replied Nico, “caught on by a horse!”

“Mr. D sighed in… do you want?”

Annabeth rubbed her forehead and said, “It wouldn’t kill you to be a bit more respectful, you know?”

“Yeah, it’ll actually save you.” Thalia piped in as Percy nodded, hoping that Dionysus wouldn’t go ballistic this time round. The look on the god’s face wasn’t all that encouraging.

“Is there anyone you have not disrespected?” Triton asked in disbelief.

“Are we counting thoughts?”

“If we do?”

“Lady Hestia. She is super nice.”

“Okay then.” Triton sighed as Hestia chuckled at the exchange and especially the look on Poseidon’s face at hearing that his boy probably disrespected him at some point.

“‘Oh, what do … the way down.’”
“Dionysus!” exclaimed Rhea, interrupting herself, “we do not threaten to throw someone off a tall structure the first time.”

“This is not the first time.” Dionysus responded.

“Oh, okay.”

“I balled my … do to you?”

“Valid question.” Thalia said. “Mr. D never liked Percy since the beginning. He wasn’t that hostile towards anyone else.”

“He has a reason.”

“It isn’t really a valid reason.” Jason whispered to Percy, remembering their talk from some days ago. He and Piper were sharing the couch with Percy and Annabeth. “He didn’t even know what kind of person you are.”

“It was valid enough for him.” Percy whispered back. “Plus, he has been harboring that hatred from even this time. It’s not gonna be easy to let it go.”

Jason groaned softly and said, “Why are you so understanding and forgiving?”

Percy shrugged. “Just because you see some good side of me, doesn’t mean I don’t have a bad one.”

The other boy nodded and whispered in understanding, “And if you are forgiving to someone for their faults, maybe they can forgive you for yours.”

“You finally got it!”

“What are you both whispering about?” Piper asked and the two shook their heads in unison and concentrated on the reading.

“Purple flames flickered in his eyes. "You're a hero, boy. I need no other reason.""

Ariadne looked at her husband and whispered, “Dionysus, this better not be about what I think it is about.”

“I think I might disappoint you in that, my dear.” The god replied, knowing where exactly the conversation was going. He glared at the back of Theseus’ head. That pompous demigod was sitting over there as if he had no troubles in the world. Dionysus really wanted to see whether the demigod even felt a bit of remorse for what he had done or not. Maybe he’ll finally get his chance to see just that.

“"I have to … wouldn't understand!!""

“Do not forget child, that Dionysus was a demigod before he became a god.” Rhea said. “If there is anyone on the council who could even understand you demigods, it would be him.”

The wine god angrily sipped his wine. He absolutely loathed to be reminded of his demigod days. The only good thing that had come out of those days was that he had created wine and his father had miraculously offered him to become a god and that too an Olympian.

“Um, boss … to talk nice.”
“You should really listen to the pegasus.” Theseus said, worried for what new trouble his brother would get into. It was obvious that Dionysus didn't like demigods even now so it couldn't have been anything that happened recently in terms of the events in the book. So, what had happened that had made the god hate demigods? After all, a god who used to be a demigod should be more supportive of them rather than hating them so completely.

“The grape vines … out of sight.”

“You should let him go, D.”

“Do not tell me what to do!”

“'Did I ever tell you about Ariadne?’ Mr. D asked.”

Ariadne sighed and looked sadly at her husband. She didn’t want him to hold a grudge against all demigods because of her. She had moved on from Theseus not long after Dionysus had mended her heart. Where she had all but forgiven the demigod for his deeds, her husband had taken it up as a reason to hate the demigods.

“What does Ariadne have to do with this?” Theseus asked incredulously, but at Percy’s warning look and the heated glare that he could feel emanating from the wine god, the King of Athens decided to not say another word till he found out what the issue was.

“'Beautiful young … I don't care!’”

“Typical demigod.” Dionysus muttered under his breath. He could feel every last bit of hatred that he buried deep inside, come out all at once.

“How is this about me?” Theseus asked but once again kept quiet when Percy gave him a ‘don’t make this worse’ look.

“But I didn't … The end.’’”

“Oh.” Theseus sucked in a breath as he finally realized what Dionysus was talking about. But to hate all of the demigods because of that? Was it not too extreme for the god? It wasn’t that bad, was it? If anything, he too deserved to be angry at the god, but he wasn’t, was he?

“Mr. D sneered… a broken sandal.’’”

The Greek demigods shifted uneasily as they realized why Mr. D was always snapping at them for no reason. He was probably taking out all his frustrations over this one demigod on them.

“That is not true!” Theseus said indignantly. “I did not leave her behind.”

“Dionysus, do not make this worse.” Ariadne warned her husband but he didn’t listen to her.

“Did you or did you not leave her alone on Naxos?” Dionysus asked, purple fire burning in his eyes and his voice carrying every bit of power that he kept hidden.

“I had a…”

“Did you or did you not?”

“I did, but…”
“Then you left her alone after taking her half way across the sea, after taking her away from her family. She gave up her life to accompany you on the voyage. She went against her entire family to help you out in the labyrinth and this is how you repaid her.”

“There was a reason!” Theseus raised his voice in anger. He could tolerate a lot of things but not false accusations.

“Hmm. Love triangle and that too involving a god, a demigod king and former mortal. I love this.” Aphrodite said with a giggle.

“Not now, Aphrodite!” Athena and Artemis hissed at the goddess of love.

“A REASON?” Now, even Ariadne did not stop her husband from losing his cool and creating a scene. She too wanted to know what reason could have prompted Theseus to leave her behind on an unknown island.

“She was unwell,” said Theseus, his eyes unfocused as if he saw the very day this had occurred. “She had been unwell ever since we started our journey. Travel on sea did not suit her.”

“That much is true, my Lord.” Ariadne said to Dionysus.

Theseus continued as if he had not heard his former lover. “Every passing day made it even worse and I knew we had to stop at land to ease her situation. So I stopped the ship at the first land that I spotted. That was Naxos but back then I did not know that. There were rumors of a special herb that could be found at some distance that could ease this sickness. So I went to retrieve this herb. I would have stayed back with her on the island and sent my crew ahead but I was the only child of Poseidon aboard and no one would undertake the journey without me. A few days later, whence I was returning to Naxos, I found myself amongst sea monsters. So I sent a few of my crew members ahead while I dealt with the monster. The crew never made it as they too were attacked on the way. Another few days passed before I made it to the island. But by then Ariadne was gone and I had to return.”

Theseus was quiet for a while and then spoke with much grief, “In my grief stricken state, I forgot to change the sails and lost my step-father.” He looked at the god with sadness and asked quietly, “So, tell me who was wronged here?”

No one answered the demigod except Hestia, “Both of you were.”

“What do you mean by that, Lady Hestia?” Ariadne asked the solemn goddess.

“Naxos is an island sacred to Dionysus which means it is essentially part of our world. Most of the areas covered by our world do not have the same concept of time as the mortal world does.”

By now most were confused as realization dawned on Dionysus’ face.

“Time on Naxos is faster than time in the mortal world. We, as gods, would not feel the change in time as we do not age and are ultimately unaffected by it. Days, months, years, they all feel the same to us. But for you, Ariadne, it would have felt like months what in reality were only a few days for Theseus.”

“No,” gasped Theseus as he stared at the ground.

“Dionysus?” Ariadne asked her husband for confirmation of this. Had he known this and deliberately sabotaged her relationship with Theseus? No! He could not have. He was not that sort of a god.
The wine god shook his head and said, “I do not know. I cannot feel any change in time while travelling from mortal world to our world or vice versa. Being on Naxos would have made it seem like months for me too considering I had not been in the mortal world for years back then. It could have been only a few days in the mortal world and I would not have known of it.”

The god was lost in his own thoughts about how wrong he had been. In the end, it turned out that it was none of their fault for what had happened. It was the confusing nature of the interaction of mortal and immortal world that had left both Ariadne and Theseus heartbroken. He wondered that had he not interfered and taken her away, would she have gone with Theseus upon his return?

As everyone was pondering on this new information, Ariadne saw her husband’s inner turmoil and clutched his hand to show that she was here with him and not Theseus.

Leaning closer to him, she whispered, “My Lord, I do not want to think about what may have been. It was quite some time ago and I do not wish things to be any different than they are today. But you know what you have to do now.”

“I am not going to apologize to a demigod, if that is what you mean.”

“Those are your words, Dionysus, not mine. I never said that you have to apologize. But now that you mention it, you do have to.”

The wine god turned to look at the smug look on his wife’s face and whispered adamantly, “No.”

“Yes, you have to. You have been fueling your anger against the demigods based on this incident. Now that the truth is out, you do owe him an apology.”

“This is only one incident. The demigods are far from innocent or have you not seen that from Hercules’ thoughtless actions? I may have been wrong on this particular incident but I am not wrong about the general nature of the demigods.”

“From what I can see, the general nature of the demigods is trying to barely survive in a world that cares not for them. You have wronged Theseus and you should make amends for that.”

“That is not going to happen. We are not discussing this anymore.”

Ariadne huffed at her husband’s bullheadedness. This was one of the biggest drawbacks of the gods – their ego. They always believed themselves to be right and even when they were wrong, they would project an air of righteousness at all times. She knew she would have to keep at it till he relented. She couldn’t believe that even after centuries, Dionysus was still holding on to this one incident.

Rhea looked around at the introspecting gods and demigods and suggested that she continue the reading. She had come home to spend some time with her children. She wasn’t going to let the whole time be gone in reading about the future, no matter how important.

"That's wrong." … wood nymph—"

“The boy is not wrong, Dionysus.” Ariadne raised her brow at her husband.

“Humph!” the wine god casually sipped his wine, ignoring his wife’s not so subtle looks.

"My point … everyone around you.”

Hestia and Artemis shook their heads at that and Hestia said, “While you are correct in saying that
Dionysus, that both gods and demigods are vain, you should also take into consideration the source of their actions. Where exactly would demigods learn this from?”

“Gods.” Thalia muttered under her breath.

The gods shifted uncomfortably and avoided looking at either Hestia or their children as Hestia continued, “From the gods, obviously. They have seen or heard all about how each god behaves with the mortals or anyone else for that matter. It would not be too hard to guess their thought process that if it is alright for gods to behave in such a manner, then it would be alright for them too. And if that is true for the demigods, then we also have to consider where the gods would have picked this up from. The Titans, obviously…”

“That is exactly why it is better to not get involved in all this relationship nonsense.” Artemis inputted.

Rhea sighed and said, “It is no secret that this family has absolute lack of good father figures. My father threw his children into Tartarus before his other children killed him, my husband ate his children before I got Zeus to safety and then the children killed Kronos too. I suggest that none of you take up the bad habits from each other. And with that said, let us continue.”

Without waiting for anything else to be said, Rhea continued to read, while the demigods tried to digest all that.

“So you'll excuse … ask Zoe?”

Zoe groaned and hoped that the boy would do no such things. She would definitely kill him if he did something like that, but the way things were going, she was sure that all would be eventually revealed.

Having seen Zoe’s reaction, Percy said, “Don’t worry, I didn’t actually ask you. I prefer to live.”

“Good.”

“He waved his … the other heroes.”

“That’s not true.” Jason said and whispered to Percy, “It’s not, okay?”

“Mhmm.” Percy said dismissively and thought about how he had left Calypso or Bob behind. He had used them both, Calypso to heal and recover from his ordeal and Bob to help him out and even use him to kill the Titan’s own brother, and then he had left them. Just because he hadn’t meant to do it, didn’t mean he hadn’t done it. Theseus too hadn’t meant for Ariadne to be left all alone and heartbroken, but he had done it, albeit unknowingly. Hercules may not have even understood what he was doing when he had left Zoe behind, but that didn’t mean that he hadn’t destroyed her old life when he did it.

Unknowingly, Percy had glanced at Calypso while he had been thinking about all this. The sorceress, having caught the look, groaned internally. She knew that was the reason why Percy had been avoiding talking to her all this while. Although, she had been initially angry at the demigod, she no longer felt that way. She was quite happy in her life and she didn’t want Percy unnecessarily drowning himself in misplaced guilt because of something that had been out of their control. She now saw that Percy had always been in love with Annabeth, whether he knew it or not. There was no way he would have ever stayed back with Calypso for any reason whatsoever. If this demigod could jump into Tartarus for that girl, then giving up immortality and a private island would be nothing for him.
Annabeth brought their intertwined hands up and kissed Percy’s hand. “It is not true, Percy, no matter what you are thinking. I know you. Trust me, okay?”

“Okay.” Percy sighed in defeat and leaned against the backrest. He would trust Annabeth. That he could do very easily.

“With that, Dionysus … on this quest.”

“You had way more chance of messing up your previous quests than this one.” Reyna said. “At least you have experience now.”

“I don’t think it made that much of a difference.” Thalia said and Percy nodded in agreement.

“'Come on, Blackjack … was so tired.”

“Poor Blackjack.” Reyna and Hazel said sympathetically.

Thalia chuckled and said, “Benefits of immortality, we don’t need breaks often. Zoe had only stopped because Grover and I were driving her crazy.” At the confused look from the hunters, Thalia explained, “I couldn’t sit still for that long and Grover needed the washroom. He was really nervous.”

“Hey!” Grover bleated in indignation while the demigods chuckled.

“I’ll be okay … can do that.”

“You should send him back,” said Reyna, now worried for the second pegasus she had befriended in her life.

“I did, but he was too tired to move at that time so I told him to stay there otherwise there was no way he was going to let me go alone.”

“I put on my cap of invisibility…”

“Yours?” Annabeth asked, one brow raised in question.

“Mine? What? No, that’s yours. Yours.” Percy answered with a nervous smile. Annabeth was way possessive about her things, including him.

“Good.”

“…and walked over … hot chocolate problem…”

“It’ll turn invisible but that’ll only work for inanimate objects.” Annabeth confirmed.

“Yeah, figured that out later.”

“Why are you even thinking about food at this time?” Adrianna asked.

“I didn’t have time for breakfast between all the rescuing the Ophiotaurus and running away to go on the quest.”

“Fair enough. This time ‘round.” Gwen said with a shrug.

“…when my whole … did it right.’”
“What are you talking about?” Sabrina asked in confusion.

“An old satyr tracking spell.” Hedge answered. “We use acorns and nature magic to track something. The nature magic would rearrange the acorns and we can read them to find out the next step.”

“Yeah, every satyr is taught this in school.” Grover added.

“Does it work?”

“Of course it does, cupcake! Don’t question our methods.”

“Coach, relax.” Piper said calmly and Hedge calmed down.

“’D.C. is about … I’d forgotten.’”

“You lived in D.C.?” asked Will.

“Yeah.” Nico scrunched up his face as he tried to remember those days. “Long, long… ago. I don’t remember much.” The boy sighed as he stopped trying to remember his life before Lotus Hotel. There were days when he could remember bits and pieces but those didn’t come around so often and usually came with a giant dose of headache and nausea.

“’I dislike this … said west.’”

“We are not heading west? Why are we not heading west?” Zoe asked in confusion.

“There is a reason… sort of. You’ll see.”

“’Oh, like … a scullion?’”

Annabeth chuckled and shook her head at Thalia when the hunter looked at her friend.

“They should at least use modern cusses to insult us. At the least, we’ll be able to understand them.” Connor said.

“Yeah, I’ll inform them of that.” Thalia told him.

“’Whoa, you … Let us go.’”

“Huh! You can’t argue with that.” Lou Ellen said.

“Don’t challenge her!” Percy said in a mock panicked voice and Thalia rolled her eyes at her cousin’s antics.

“As Blackjack … hunted dinosaurs.”

“That was exaggeration!” Percy said before Annabeth could say something to him about messed up history timelines.

“I give up!” Annabeth shook her head.

“How old … didn’t want that.”

“Nobody would.”
“Fortunately, the van started to slow down.”

“Finally!”

“It crossed the … of the sky.”

“That’s not how it happens.” Chiron said. “Pegasi can’t show up on military radars. They can’t even be spotted by regular mortals. None of our creatures can, except demigods.”

“Good to know.”

“He… he just called us creatures. Is nobody going to argue with that?”

“Nope.”

“**Set me down … handsome like me.**”

“I like Blackjack.”

“He’s like a pegasus version of Leo.”

“Hey!” Leo shouted and then added, “That’s…not a bad comparison. Carry on.”

“I promised to … then I froze.”

“Monsters? So soon?” Perseus asked.

“Not just yet, but you are close enough.”

“A block away … Westover Hall.”

“I can’t believe we missed that and Kelp Head didn’t.”

“I’m amazing.”

“Shut up.”

“Invisibility cap on … bigger then.”

“Maybe because you were smaller.” Thalia suggested.

“Guys, come on, it’s not even noon yet. Don’t start now.” Grover interrupted before Percy could respond.

“Thalia checked the … and followed him.”

“Thank gods for that.” Grover said in relief.


“You’ll see.”

“Thorn crossed the … be PRIVATE.”

“Must be…” Frank said with a smile. It was entertaining whenever the others made a mistake while reading things. It made him feel better about his lactose intolerance and being unable to eat
“I followed … gotten me killed.”

“It’s a good thing that you didn’t screw this up then.” Thalia said and then looked skeptically at Percy’s sheepish expression, “What did you do?”

“Meh… you’ll see. It wasn’t that bad. I think.”

Reyna hummed and said, “The monsters are organized.” At everyone’s looks, she said, “What? You gotta appreciate that.”

“Not really.”

“Yeah, we don’t appreciate the bad guys. They are bad guys for a reason.”

“Travis, you like the Joker.”

“Oh come on! He’s the Joker. How can you not like him?”

“Yeah, he’s got style.” Connor agreed with his brother.

“That he does.” Nico agreed and then added, “What? I know modern stuff!”

“Sure you do.” Percy scoffed. “It took you half an hour to figure out how to use the oven.”

“That’s hard, okay? It is.”

“Is not.”

“Is too.”

“Is…”

“Why are you not reading?” Hermes asked Rhea, who was now next to him and Apollo.

“They remind me of their fathers. It is so much fun to watch this.”

“This will not stop unless you start reading.” Apollo said, already having witnessed other such squabbles amongst the children.

“Fine. Children! That is enough for now.”

“I was in … old enemy Luke.”

Hermes sat up straighter at that. Finally, some news about his wayward son!

“He looked terrible… recently been reopened.”

“The scar was given by Ladon, correct?” Zoe asked. When the others nodded, she continued, “And if they went back to the mountain, Ladon would have recognized him and attacked him again. Ladon does not forgive nor does he forget trespassers.”

The god of thieves grimaced at that. What had prompted his son to think that going through all of that would be better than staying safely at camp?
“Next to him ... he wasn't yelling.”

“He is there?” Calypso and Zoe gasped. This was even worse than Atlas just being out from under his burden.

“Dr. Thorn took ... call him sir.”

“Monsters would not like to give respect to any demigod.”

“'How many?’ ... General growled.”

“He is not going to let me live through this quest.” Zoe muttered under her breath.

“Everyone in the ... keep them occupied.’’”

“Great! A monster in a museum filled with mortals. This is gonna be fun.” Clarisse grinned in anticipation.

“'But—’

"We cannot risk you, my boy.'’”

“What is so important about the boy that they would not risk him?” asked Ares.

“Nothing good, that is for sure.” Athena replied, trying to come up with a reason for the monsters to want to keep the boy close to them. He had not fought with any of them, other than the one time Percy had forced him to duel. As the demigod instigator of the whole fight against the gods, the boy should have been on the forefront of everything and yet he only worked from shadows, protected by someone or the other. What purpose did the boy serve for the titans?

“'Yes, boy,' ... could even move.”

“Now that I think of it,” Apollo said thoughtfully, “Atlas does look like a sculpture.”

“A horribly crafted one, if that is the case.” Hermes added.

“'You have ... born commander.’”

“Unfortunately, his whole purpose was to command the titan army.” Artemis said.

“'I should ... daughter of Athena.'’’

“It’s really freaky that they had thought and planned so much in advance. I mean, just think of all the ways they could have succeeded.” Dakota said with a shake of his head.

“Which begs the question: why didn’t they?” Enyo asked.

“Luck?” Demeter asked.

“This has nothing to do with me.” Tyche answered. “For one, I would not give anyone so much good luck that they would survive all of what could have happened. That would just tip the balance that Nemesis and I try to maintain. And for another, this is an open war on all of Olympus and I would not be allowed to interfere at such a large scale when demigods are involved in this.”

Everyone pondered over that as Rhea continued, “'But you promised ... come to her.'’”
“Thankfully, that didn’t happen.” Thalia whispered and Percy and Annabeth nodded. “But he did follow Percy around a lot.”

“Apparently that because I saved him, he started to think of me as his protector, or so dad told me once.”

“*The Hunters will … her name!*”

Zoe grimaced. She was sure her father would kill her, no matter what it took.

“What did that idiot think? That I wouldn’t be that difficult to kill?” Thalia scowled at the ground.

“Luke swallowed… them,” he said.”

“Teeth?” Will asked in confusion. “What are they going to do with teeth?”

“Plant them. Didn’t you hear?” Travis asked cheekily and Will rolled his eyes at the boy.

“You’ll see soon enough.” Percy said.

“In the center … Hawaiian Punch.”

“Please tell me that’s not blood.” Chiara said faintly.

“That’s not blood…?” Butch replied. “But it kinda is.”

“This is like a fantasy sci-fi or something,” Damien said.

“At least you didn’t see it happen.” Percy replied.

“The soil began … the best—”

“Of course they are trying to outdo each other. They wouldn’t be villains if they didn’t.” Leo said.

“*Ha.*” … General said that.”

“The boy’s role in the whole plan is sounding a bit suspicious. It is like he does not want to do something but is still going ahead with it.” Athena said in frustration. She hated not having all the answers at all the time.

“He was really confused the whole time,” Annabeth said sadly, yet again wondering had she gone with Luke or tried to stop him, would it have made a difference.

“—but under my … "Mew?"”

“What?”

“That was anti-climactic.”

“Yeah, I was expecting something really scary.”

“It was a kitten … in the dirt.”

“Cute.”

“They were.”
“Everyone stared … your face again.””

“I miss Small Bob.” Annabeth said sadly and Percy nodded.

“Who’s Small Bob?” Hazel asked.

“A friend. He was one of those homegrown kittens.”

Hazel nodded in confusion and decided to pay attention to the reading.

“The terrified guard … "I love them."”

“Humph!” Rachel glared at the book.

“That they are.” Ares said with a satisfied smile that made the other gods wonder what exactly he had done now.

“A minute later … "More Tylenol?"”

“Tylenol works on titans?” Lou Ellen asked.

“Anything is possible. You just learn not to question the weirdness.” Will answered.

“"No! It will … shall do nicely."”

“Aah!” Hades said in understanding and explained, “This will be a bit troublesome for the children. Worry not, as long as my daughter fights them, the other children will be fine.”

“Now I am worried.” Zeus muttered under his breath and Hades glared at him.

“He planted … have the scent?””

“What is going on?” Adrianna asked in confusion.

“Zombies.” Nico replied. “These are special ones. Once they catch your scent, they will follow you till they kill you. Nothing can defeat them. Well, almost nothing. Only a child of Hades can. Power over the undead and all that.”

“I thought it was because of Stygian Iron.” Percy said.

“That would help too, but it’s mostly because of child of Hades stuff. I didn’t have any weapon when I dismissed them.” Nico told Percy.

“Well, at least you have Bianca with you.” Adrianna said in relief to Zoe, who still looked tense.

“"Yesssss, lord … Hunters wore."”

Zoe gasped at her father’s actions. Of course he would do something like that.

“That horrible, good for nothing…” Helen seethed.

“"Excellent," … X-ray images.”

“I don’t know if I should be afraid or fascinated.” Leo said.

“Both.”
“One of them ... would fool it.”

“They are creatures of old. There is not much that can bypass them.” Hades said with a hint of pride in his voice.

“The snake lady ... of the air.”

“Aaand you have exposed yourself.”

“You saved me.” Zoe said skeptically, looking at Percy in confusion.

“It didn’t make much of a difference anyway.” The son of Poseidon replied.

“’What’s this?’ ... has to be.’”

“At least the guy knows the one person who always screws up his plans.” Dakota said, sipping at his Kool-Aid.

Travis snorted and said in a high pitched voice, “And I would have gotten away with it too, if it weren’t for you meddling Percy Jackson.”

The few of the other demigods laughed as they recognized the slightly modified Scooby Doo villains’ catchphrase.

“I sprinted ... then I ran.”

“Damn! You got yourself in trouble.” Leo said. “Again!”

“Oh no! And then you joined us on the quest, correct?” Zoe asked exasperatedly. No wonder Percy had not been all that enthusiastic when she had earlier said that he had saved her.

“Correct.” Percy confirmed with a sheepish smile.
Chiron took the book from Rhea to read the next chapter. He was both excited and apprehensive about what he would now find out about one of the best students he had ever had. Although, he knew most of the things about every quest Percy had gone on, there were so many things the boy had just glossed over or even omitted to tell and the centaur was finding it interesting to know about all those little things.

“I BREAK A FEW ROCKET SHIPS”

“Considering the previous chapter names, that’s not all that bad.” Calypso said.

“Says you.” Grover grumbled. “You didn’t have to witness his stupidity in this one.”

“Hey! It worked.”

“But it was stupid and it shouldn’t have.” Thalia pointed out.

“But it did.” Percy replied smugly.

“I tore across … Apollo space capsule.”

“They named something after me.” Apollo said with a smile.

“They named a lot of things after you.” Will said and Apollo grinned brightly while the other gods mentally prepared themselves for the show-off session that was surely coming up.

“Grover yelped … out of nowhere.”

“Literally? Or are they that fast?” Frank asked curiously.

“Both.” Thalia replied. “We don’t carry the bows with us. We can just summon it.” With that she held out her hand in front of her and all of a sudden a bow shimmered into existence, with the accompanying quivers on her back.

“So cool.” Frank and Leo said in unison as Thalia sent away the weapon.

“When Zoe realized … lower her bow.”
“None of us would be.” Penelope said with a shrug.

“'You! How … to be here!'”

“Man, you are so convincing.” Connor chuckled.

“'Luke,' I said … A monster.'”

“Now you guys should really run. You already wasted so much time in talking about it.” Gwen said.

Annabeth whispered to Percy, “This is with the lion?”

“Yeah.”

“Can’t wait to hear about this one!”

“Thalia and Grover … anything yet.’”

“Or they could have gotten an old and powerful monster to confuse the trails.” Artemis said thoughtfully.

“That would work.” Pan said. “The acorns would lead you to the nearest powerful being if you only search for a powerful scent, which you were probably doing seeing that you were tracking Artemis. You would not have considered that beings older than Artemis or just as old can very well tamper with the magic.”

“That would explain the detours.” Grover mumbled to himself.

“'Zoe,' Bianca … leave now.'”

“Finally.”

“'Good idea,' … of this quest.'”

“Oh come on!” Annabeth growled. “He is only there to help.”

“And anyway, you don’t leave someone behind like that.” Dakota said. “Not when there is a monster nearby.”

“'Hey, I’m … to the van.'”

“I am the leader of the quest. You cannot decide on who gets to accompany us.” Zoe grumbled, to which Thalia just shrugged.

She had already fought on the same topics the last time she had met her predecessor. She wasn’t in the mood to do it again and anyway, she had been a different person back then. Immortality had not only altered her physical appearance but also tempered her anger and impulsive nature a bit. Now, the only person she usually picked fights with for no apparent reason was Percy and that too because the two of them now knew each other’s limits and wouldn’t anger the other too much.

“'That is not … leave them behind!'”

“Oooohhh, shots fired!” Travis said and gulped as Thalia glared at him.

“So not the time for this.” Piper groaned. No wonder the hunters and demigods were always at
odds, if this was the attitude of their leader. She wondered whether much had changed under Thalia’s leadership.

Adrianna sighed and thought about how much Zoe’s hatred for men had grown over the years. “There is a difference between leaving boys behind to join the Hunters and leaving them alone while on a quest and with a monster nearby. We do not only hunt the monsters for fun, we also do it to protect others, irrespective of their gender. We do not, under any circumstances, leave someone behind like how you are suggesting, based on just their gender.”

Zoe meekly nodded at the gentle scolding.

“Thalia looked like … even bigger.”

“The Nemean Lion?” Hercules asked in surprise. The description suited that magnificent beast completely.

“Yeah.”

“Is there a monster you have not come across?” Theseus asked in disbelief.

“I wouldn’t know that. I’ll only come to know of them if I come across them.” Percy replied.

Annabeth shook her head and said, “Percy here, believes that he should only get to know about a monster if he meets it and not otherwise.”

“What’s the use otherwise?”

“Knowledge? Not being caught by surprise when you actually meet the monster?”

Percy shrugged and replied, “Even if I know about a monster, I’m always caught by surprise. It wouldn’t make a difference.”

“Never mind.” Annabeth sighed. She knew the two of them could argue a lot on this topic, like almost any other topic.

Chiron took the opening before either of them could continue on the topic.

“'The Nemean Lion … stainless steel.'”

“Nope. They are stronger.” Thalia said.

“'Separate on my … Go!'”

“Strangle it.” Hercules suggested, thinking about his first labor and sighed. How far he had come! Now he had only one more left before he could be purified of his sins.

“How?” Percy asked. “None of us had the super strength that you do.”

“So, how did you manage to kill it? There is no other way the lion would just let you go.”

Thalia chuckled and said, “We did something stupid. Well, Percy did. We just watched.”

“I uncapped Riptide … 'ROOOAAAR!'”

“Good to know that Medusa’s face is scary even for the Nemean Lion.” Perseus said. He had never seen the monster’s face when he had beheaded her, even though she had been sleeping at that time.
He did not need to have that nightmare added to his usual list of nightmares.

“Her face is scary to even her own sisters.” Percy said. Looking at the looks he was getting, he said, “Don’t ask.”

“'Hi-yah!' … going to pounce.”

“Damn! I missed that.” Thalia grumbled.

“Why do I have a feeling that you are about to do something stupid?” Hazel asked in concern.

“When isn’t he?” Grover asked.

“'Hey!' … burst of sparks.”

“Impenetrable skin. It is plain annoying.” Hercules complained. “And now you have gotten his undivided attention. He does not care much for arrows, but he does not like a direct attack on him. I tried both before strangling him.”

Poseidon closed his eyes and ran his hand through his hair. Why did his son insist on being the target of every monster? Why couldn’t he just let someone else deal with it? Just for once. Now he not only had the Nemean Lion after his life but also those skeletons that were originally meant for the hunter.

“The lion raked … tongue and throat.”

“Finally!” Annabeth breathed out.

“Please tell me you are about to do what I think you are about to do.” Theseus said with a grin. He had a fairly good idea where Percy was going with that thought.

“What are yo … Oh.” Hercules said as he realized what might happen. “Why did I not think of that?”

“Do you really want an answer?” Perseus asked cheekily.

“No.”

“Its mouth … Target the mouth!”

“That is a good plan, but there is a flaw in it.” Artemis commented. “When you know that a part of you is vulnerable, you do not flaunt it and you do not let it be an easy target. The same goes with the monster. He knows that he is vulnerable in his mouth, so he will make sure that he does not leave himself prone to attacks.”

“We managed it.” Thalia said.

“Barely.” Grover added with a shudder.

“The monster lunged… Clear the area!”

Poseidon beamed at his son in pride. He was a natural leader even at a young age. It was astounding. On top of all that, he was also making sure that the mortals were safe from the monster. That was not something that most demigods were worried about. In such a situation, most would try to get rid of the monster while trying not to die, but from the very beginning Percy had
been making sure that no one, including the mortals would get hurt. The sea god still didn’t know much about his son except from what was being read out, but he was proud of the boy, not only for his heroics in a fight but also of his personality. It was a rare combination.

“Groups of kids … to kill first.”

“Surround it, confuse it and then kill it.” Ares mumbled.

“Just get the lion to roar at one of you and then the hunters will have a clear shot.” Apollo suggested.

“That’s an even worse idea than Percy’s usual ones.” Annabeth commented with a groan.

“I take offence to that.”

“You should.”

“Zoe and Bianca … mouth more!”

“The roar idea would work.”

“Shh, Apollo.”

“Do not ‘shh’ me.”

“The lion snarled … sold that stuff…”

“Hold on.” Chiara said, holding up a finger. “The Smithsonian, right? Gift shop…”

“What are you talking about?” Chris asked.

“There’s only one thing anyone would regret buying in that whole gift shop.” Chiara said with a mix of a grimace and a smirk. Looking at Percy, she help up her hands to show a rectangle and asked, “The packets…”

“Yeah.”

“Nice.”

“Thanks.”

“What are…”

Chiron cleared his throat and looked pointedly at Chris, who immediately shut his mouth.

“I have got to learn that from him.” Hermes whispered to Apollo, thinking about the previous night and how he had been unable to sleep thanks to his sons being up to no good in the palace.

“'Thalia,' I said … the gift shop.”

“What is in the gift shop?”

“You know if you let Chiron read, Travis, you would find out faster.” Annabeth said with a sigh. The Hermes’ kids were extremely hyper this morning. She hoped that wouldn’t change during the game with the hunters.
Chiron nodded gratefully in Annabeth’s direction and read, “This is no … with an armful.”

“Glittery silver…? Oh, yuck! Those are disgusting.” Clarisse made a face as she remembered the first and last time she had ever insisted on eating space food. Her mom still teased her about it.

“Zoe and Bianca … to tiny slits.”

“Smart monster. I hate it when we have to fight smart monsters.” Leo said with a groan.

“Thalia jabbed at … monster's attention.”

Percy remembered the last time he had thrown Riptide at someone invincible to get their attention. Kronos had neither been impressed nor amused. Thinking about that time led the hero to remember his kind hearted friend, who had sacrificed himself for the plan to work and while Percy had somewhat made peace with what had happened, he would never forget Beckendorf’s look of determination as he had made to detonate the charges. Percy hoped that his friend was happy with Silena in Elysium. That was the least he had deserved.

“It turned … strawberry parfait.”

“You did what?” Nico chuckled as he tried to imagine that.

“You should have seen the lion’s face!” Grover laughed.

“Space food!” The Stolls said in unison, an idea already forming in their devious minds.

“No!” Katie scolded the two brothers.

“But we didn’t even say anything.”

“I know you two and I know you are planning something.” Katie narrowed her eyes at the brothers.

“That … has never been heard of before or even done before I think.” Hercules said and wondered why he had bothered to strangle the lion. He should have just fed it.

“The lion's eyes … plain nasty.”

“You do know that many of that stuff has to be rehydrated before you eat them?” Annabeth asked skeptically, already knowing the answer.

“Hehe.” Percy grinned at his girlfriend. He may have forgotten that little piece of information.

“Tell that to my younger self.”

“It doesn’t really make much of a difference.” Chiara said and Clarisse agreed.

“Zoe, get … his pipes.”

“That makes it just sound like the people are screaming because Grover was playing a song.” Rachel noted.

“That’s also a possibility.” Thalia deadpanned.

“Hey!” Grover shouted and then murmured, “Rude.”

“I scrambled away … spaghetti dinner.”
“Nice.”

“I would have listed this as animal cruelty, if it wasn’t a monster.” Hedge mumbled.

“The lion’s eyes … away from me.”

“And that’s how you scare the Nemean Lion.” Leo said with a flourish.

“’Now!’ I yelled … it was still.”

“That was… smart.” Hercules said begrudgingly.

“It was innovative.” Athena corrected but was secretly slightly impressed. No one would have thought to defeat an almost invincible monster in such a fashion.

“Death by space food.” Will chuckled.

“Alarms wailed … interesting strategy.”

“It really was.” Zoe said with a slight smile. Even though she didn’t like males, especially if they were demigods, she could appreciate someone who could think on the spot and use any available resources to kill a monster and save lives.

Percy dipped his head in acknowledgement and was happy that Zoe was starting to somewhat warm up to him. He hoped that they could be friends for little time, this time around.

“’Hey, it … normal lion's pelt.’

Hercules smirked as he patted the golden-brownish himation he was currently wearing. It was actually the Nemean Lion’s pelt but had turned into a himation when Hercules had picked it up. He wondered where Percy’s spoil of war was. He would never part with the pelt and looked at Percy to see if he was wearing something that could be the spoil of war. He didn’t find anything in Percy’s simple clothes that could actually be the fur of the Nemean Lion and was interested in knowing what happened to the fur.

“’Take it," … or something?’”

“Normally, yes.” Hedge and Rachel said in unison.

“Just take it. It is very useful.” Hercules said and a few other people nodded.

“Yeah it is.” Percy mumbled and then said to himself, “for a sacrifice.”

“’It is a … it," I said.”

“No, I did not. I may have fired the fatal shot, but it was your idea that could make it possible. You were the orchestrator of that plan and thus the fur rightly belongs to you.” Zoe explained with a visible smile. She couldn’t believe that the hero was actually willing to give up the fur to her.

“She shook her … golden-brown duster.”

“I can’t imagine you in a duster.” Annabeth said, looking at Percy.

“You don’t want to either.” Thalia commented. “Not a good look.”
““Not exactly my style,” I murmured.”

“It isn’t.” Percy agreed with himself.

““We have … or each other.”

“Nice.” Pollux said. “Confusion song, right?”

“Yeah.” Grover replied.

“How do you know that?” Katie asked.

“I babysit young satyrs for extra money.” Pollux answered. “I get to learn a lot about their song
magic and all that.”

“You babysit?” Will asked.

“It’s good money.” Pollux replied with a shrug.

Chiron continued to read as soon as he saw the Stolls about to say something. The two boys could
come up with anything when money was involved.

““You did … straight at me.”

“One monster down and a dozen more to go.” Reyna said with a shake of her head. She had learnt
in the past one month that when Percy was involved, the monsters were almost never ending.

“Story of my life.”

“"Go," … distract them.""

“That will not happen.” Artemis mumbled to herself. The one thing she knew about her latest
recruit was that Zoe would not leave someone behind who fought beside her.

“"No," Zoe said … leaving anyone behind.""

“Now the real quest would start.” Apollo commented. “Now that the fifth member is here, they can
finally go on and search for Artemis.”

“And save the world from the General.” Artemis reminded her brother.

“And that too.”

“Would any of you children like to read the next chapter?” Chiron asked the demigods.

“Obviously!”

Percy groaned as Travis took the book from the centaur. He was so not going to survive this.
The Incognito God

Chapter Notes

I know, I know. I took more time to update this chapter but TBH, I just found a really interesting fanfic and got caught up in that. I hope this chapter is good cuz I had some trouble writing it but then stuck to this version of it rather than the other one I had written. Anyway, enjoy reading and thanks for all your continued support :D

A/N - Disclaimer- I do not own Percy Jackson series or the Heroes of Olympus series. All characters and words in bold are owned by Rick Riordan and Hyperion Books for Children and Disney Hyperion. I do not intend to use the text from the books for any other purpose other than for this fanfiction and nor do I intend to make any sort of profit from the story. All rights go to the actual owner and not me. This is only a work of love for the series.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ch70 – TTC – The Incognito God

Travis grinned maniacally at Percy as he slowly and in great show, turned the page for the next chapter.

“Just get on with it, Stoll.” Clarisse growled.

“Spoilsport.” Travis mumbled.

“GROVER GETS A LAMBORGHINI”

Connor whistled and said, “Wow.”

“It was like for a night. You’ll see.” Grover replied.

“Lamborghini is a car.” Leo said as he saw many of the gods look at them in confusion. “A really, really awesome car. How did you guys come across that?”

“Read, Trav.”

“We were crossing…”

“Can you use your normal voice?” Katie asked in exasperation. Travis was mimicking Percy’s voice to read.

“But these are his thoughts!”

Katie raised an eyebrow and said, “Read normally or I’m going to take away the book from you.”

Travis pouted as Percy said, “Please do.”

“Fine.” The older Stoll brother said with a sigh.
“We were crossing … toward us.”

“How come you get a helicopter chase? So not fair.” Connor whined. “I’ve always wanted to be in a chase.”

“Me too.” Chris sighed and Travis agreed with them.

“Me too.” Leo said with a smile. “Preferably in one of the sports car and on the highway. That’ll be so cool.”

“Yeah.”

“Travis! Read!”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“'They know … they are paid.'”

“That’s unfortunately true.” Rachel with a shake of her head.

“You,” Zoe said, pointing at Travis, “Stop making that sound when you read my parts.”

Travis had reverted to mimicking the voice of the person whose part he was reading and ended up talking in falsetto while reading Zoe’s parts. He wasn’t all that good at imitating others. That was Connor’s expertise.

“Everyone’s a critic.” Travis muttered under his breath.

“'But don’t … around them?'”

“Mist.” Reyna said with a shrug.

“But wouldn’t they be exposed for a lot of time to the monsters? They should be able to see through the mist then, right?” Butch asked.

“Even prolonged exposure to monsters can’t change human stubbornness.” Lou Ellen said. “Look at all the people in San Francisco. Every single one of them would have come across a monster at some point or another. They literally live under the shadow of the monster’s base of operations, but no one ever reports anything over there.”

“Mortals are just weird.” Calypso said thoughtfully.

“Can’t fight you on that.” Rachel conceded.

“Zoe shook her … than monsters.'”

“That much is true.” Nico said, thinking about all the mortals that he had witnessed being punished for their crimes. He couldn’t believe that people could actually do such horrendous things in life.

“The helicopter … now. Please?'''

“Direct interference is not allowed.” Hera sniffed in disdain. How dare the girl think that she could order her father around like that?

“It was not required at that moment. When it is required…” Zeus trailed off as his wife glared at him.
Travis smirked and read, “But the sky … Alexandria.”

“Thank gods you guys have someone who knows the area.” Annabeth said, knowing how hard it was to go on quests and be stuck in some unknown place.

“Anything … come after us.”

“Oh good. Now stay away from the windows and act normally.” Leo said and explained, “I have some experience of hiding from authorities.”

“I think, by now, we all do.” Percy said.

“I don’t.” Gwen piped up.

“That’s because you are too good.” Dakota said.

“When did you have to hide from authorities, ‘Kota?” Jason asked in confusion.

“I may or may not have stolen a couple of things during a quest.” Dakota said with a shrug and Jason chuckled. He was sure that the son of Bacchus would have stolen either some sugary food or Kool-Aid or maybe even both.

“Grover let … pretty confused.”

“Not twelve years, more like seventy.” Nico mumbled. Even though he didn’t remember much of his days prior to the Lotus Hotel, he still would be confused with all the changes that had taken place over the years. Every time he thought that he had gotten the hang of things, a new item would pop up out of nowhere and leave him as confused as before.

“Bianca,” Zoe “… Next station.”

“Good thinking. Like one of those adventure or crime movies.” Chris said.

“Over the next … moved in years.”

“And now you are stuck in some unknown location.” Piper lamented.

“Not yet…” Travis said, raising a finger and continued reading.

“A homeless guy … Come on over!”

“At least there is someone good enough to offer some warmth.” Hestia said.

Thalia mumbled, “Offering warmth is kind of his job description.”

“We huddled … homeless guy.”

“You gotta be more careful, cupcake.” Hedge said to Grover.

“Isn’t he like your leader or something now?” Will asked.

“Fine.” Hedge grumbled and said mockingly, “Lord Cupcake.”

Percy snorted as Grover chuckled and rolled his eyes.

“Maybe we should … homeless person’s fire.”
“I do not think you should be discussing things about quest around a mortal. What would he think?” Perseus said.

“Probably that they are bat shit crazy.” Leo supplied. “Which is kind of a normal occurrence on the streets, so…”

"You know … seemed kindly."

“That’s such a good line.” Rachel thought out loud.

“Yeah, but you see how it is in reply to Zoe’s comment about finishing the quest on their own? Like how is the guy able to make sense of all of that?” Will asked.

“So, what are you thinking? Monster?” Paolo asked.

“Nah. Monster would have already attacked by now.” Connor said confidently.

“So, it’s either a really, really nice homeless dude who has seen a lot of crazy or someone is maybe helping them.” Will said thoughtfully.

“Oh just read.” Percy said when they turned to look at him.

"You kids need a train going west?"

“How would the guy know that?” Chris asked.

“Definitely a helper,” said Katie.

“Yes, sir,” … SUN WEST LINE.

“Sun West Line?” Artemis quirked an eyebrow and looked at her grinning twin. “ Seriously, Apollo?”

“It is a good name!”

“How do you know…” Zoe asked with a frown.

“Because the vehicle is free of snow whereas everything around is described as covered in snow and the name is a dead giveaway.” Artemis explained to Zoe.

“Why are you interfering?” Zeus grumbled.

Apollo shrugged nonchalantly and replied, “They have Artemis.”

“Let it be, brother. It has already been done.” Hestia said calmly.

“There is a reason we do not interfere in the quests. You know that.” Zeus said sourly but stopped glaring at Apollo.

“That's… convenient"

“It really was.” Thalia shrugged.

“I am such a wonderful god.” Apollo said with an exaggerated sigh that made everyone roll their eyes.
“Thalia said … with him.”

“Considering who you were talking to, it is quite possible that he did just that.” Artemis said.

“How are none of you even suspicious of this?” Reyna asked exasperatedly.

Percy shrugged and replied, “After a point you just stop questioning anything good that happens on a quest.”

“And prepare for whatever price you have to pay for that good thing.” Annabeth said solemnly.

“An hour later … stations from D.C.”

“We didn’t know you knew how to hotwire a car.” Travis and Connor said in unison.

“You pick these kind of things up.” Thalia said.

“I agree wholeheartedly.” Percy said with a nod. “And no, she is not joining you guys on one of your raids.”

“Oh come on!” Connor groaned as Thalia agreed with Percy.

“Raids are fun.” Travis grumbled and continued to read.

“‘Join you … live that long.’

“That took a dark turn.”

“‘Nice coat … one-on-one.’”

“I think the Ophiotaurus might be the only monster that does not engage in any battle, at all.” Triton said thoughtfully.

“‘He said … as bait.’”

“I hate when that happens.” Theseus murmured.

“That’s literally every quest we go on.” Percy said and Annabeth nodded.

“‘No idea … San Francisco?’”

“Dakota’s Kool-Aid.” Gwen grumbled making everyone except Dakota chuckle.

“‘The Mist … Mountain of Despair?’”

“I think the name makes it pretty obvious.” Connor said. “It’s a mountain…”

“Of Despair!” Travis finished with a chuckle and everyone rolled their eyes at the brothers.

“For the love of gods, can you both stop being idiots for some time?” Katie said exasperatedly. As the boys opened their mouth to talk, Katie said, “That was rhetorical!”

“Just read, man!” Chris said to Travis.

“None of you are any fun,” Connor pouted.
Travis sighed and read, “**Thalia raised … She's the expert.**”

“Didn’t do that either.” Percy told to Zoe before she could tell him not to do something like that. Zoe nodded at Percy. At least he was smart enough not to do something as stupid as that.

“**She glared ... mouth shut.**”

“I always know more than you do.”

“Sure you do.”

“**The afternoon ... of the Hunters.**”

“You do look like a hunter.” Travis said, looking at Thalia.

“I am a hunter, you moron!” Thalia said in exasperation.

“I mean even without your hunter uniform.”

“Still a hunter.” Thalia rolled her eyes and then glared at Travis to continue reading.

“**Then suddenly ... I guessed.**”

“Bullseye.”

“**Her eyes got ... leave Luke.**”

“Wow.” Travis whispered to himself. Suddenly he felt grateful that his brother had had good friends in his life and it also made a lot of sense as to why Luke had taken Thalia’s death harder than Annabeth had, why he had gone all crazy. Travis was sure if something happened to either Connor or Katie, he too would go off the deep end.

Thalia looked nonchalantly at the ground, like she had been doing for some time. She didn’t want anyone to know how much hearing all these past talks affected her. Grover, who was sitting next to her, discreetly squeezed her hand and she was grateful that he didn’t need words to know what was going on. Silently accepting his support, Thalia went back to listening to Travis read.

“**'Oh.' ... down someday.**”

“And she was right, was she not?” Helen asked rhetorically.

“No.” Thalia replied harshly.

“He betrayed all of you…”

“Do me a favor and shut up.” Thalia bit out, glaring at Helen.

Before Helen could reply and turn it all into a warzone, Travis continued to read.

“**I watched ... Never.**”

“How can you say that? All that we have been reading goes to…” Penelope asked, not unkindly.

“You didn’t know him and you didn’t know what all had happened before all this happened.” Thalia said in a tired voice.
“People just don’t turn bad and work with Titans all of a sudden.” Annabeth said. “There were things that happened before this and I think Percy found them… out later?”

“I did.” Percy said with a nod.

The hunters looked skeptical at that and Zoe wondered whether Thalia was wrongly protecting Luke’s actions like she herself had done for Hercules for quite some time. She liked the new Lieutenant and hoped for her sake that Luke had actually been a better person before whatever had happened to make him change like that.

Seeing that none of the hunters were going to say anything, Travis read, “"We'll have … killing him?"”

“Valid question but you could have had a bit more tact, Jackson.” Rachel said with a sigh. Sometimes Percy could be the sweetest and most thoughtful person but sometimes he had the sensitivity of a table.

“Yeah…” Percy said, rubbing the back of his neck and smiling sheepishly at Thalia.

“"Do me … shut me out.”

“Tit for tat.” Leo said.

“And now Percy would be feeling miserable for some time.” Piper said with a sigh. By now she had figured out that Percy was far more sensitive than he showed others, especially when Annabeth was involved.

“Good.” Thalia said, poking her tongue out at Percy, who was listening to whatever Annabeth was whispering to him.

“I sat in … air conditioner.”

“Classic,” Connor snorted.

“As I watched … shotgun seat.”

“You seriously have the opposite reactions to such things.” Frank said with a shake of his head.

“Yeah, in the last book when dad had come to you in the middle of the night, you were all chilled out and now Apollo turns up out of nowhere, right next to you and you are still chilled out.” Chris said. “I would have freaked out.”

Percy just shrugged and said, “I didn’t feel like I was in danger, so…”

“ Weird.” Travis said and rolled his eyes.

“His jeans … by a truck.”

“That, for some reason, makes me think of Octavian.” Hazel said with a grimace. Even though the Augur had died in the war, somehow none of them had felt anything about it. They of course conducted his funeral with all the proper rites and all, but it didn’t affect anyone in the entire Roman camp. They all had been bullied and blackmailed so much by the guy that now they just didn’t care and thought ‘good riddance’.

“Ugh! Don’t remind me of him.” Dakota groaned.
“Yeah, he killed my pillow pet.” Percy whined and Annabeth mockingly patted his shoulder. “It was a cute pillow pet, okay? It was my only companion.”

“No one’s arguing.” Annabeth replied.

“What’s the story here?” Thalia asked in interest.

“Don’t ask.” Hazel rolled her eyes just as Percy explained how Octavian had brutally murdered his panda pillow pet.

Thalia raised her eyebrows skeptically and said, “Dude! That’s what you are upset about?” At Percy’s frown, she shrugged and thought that she finally figured out what to get Percy for his birthday. In their timeline, she was going to meet Percy the next week. She thought about how to convince the hunters to make a pit stop at Costco.

Ignoring the weirdness around him, Travis continued, “’If it weren't ... Olympus tabloids.'”

“That is true.” Apollo said and wondered what these ‘tabloids’ were.

“Olympus has tabloids?” Gwen asked in disbelief.

“Duh!” Butch replied. “Cabin 10 has each and every published article there is. So much gossip.”

“Way too much gossip.” Piper said with a groan. She knew all about the hidden wall that contained clippings of everyone’s favorite gossip of the week and the hidden cupboard that had all the publications that were ever published.

“They recently started the Demigods section. Anyone read that? It’s so funny.” Travis asked.

“You have subscription to Olympus Weekly?” Clarisse asked.

“Nah, but Cabin 10 has.” Chris replied.

“You too?” Clarisse looked skeptically at her boyfriend.

“What? It’s fun to read it. It also has the show timings for H-TV, so…” Chris said with a shrug.

“I’m dating a weirdo!” Clarisse groaned.

Travis chuckled and continued, “He cleared … cool stuff’”

“That was horrible.” Artemis said and scrunched up her nose.

“That wasn’t so bad.” Will said at the same time and shrugged at the weirded out looks he was getting. “I’ve read worse. Trust me.”

“We do.”

“Apollo?” I guessed … named Fred?”

“Wow! I cannot imagine a god named Fred.”

“Fred… hmm…” Apollo said and shook his head in disappointment. “It does not have the regal ring to it like Apollo does.”

“Do you want to change your name? I can come up with a few names that would suit you.” Artemis
offered in mock seriousness.

“I would have but nothing can surpass Apollo.” The sun god said with a sigh.

“Continue with the reading.” Zeus ordered before Apollo actually could come up with a better name for himself.

“‘Eh, well… Zeus insists on certain rules.’”

“And you are supposed to follow them,” said the god in question to his family. Everyone was going out of their way to break the ancient rules. Why?

“Hands off … Nobody.’”

“Nobody.” Apollo said with a determined nod. Anyone who wanted to hurt his sister, had to go through him.

“I am not your baby sister!” Artemis growled at her twin. “We are twins! And even then, I am the older one.”

“Whatsoever you say!” Apollo said dismissively, grinning at Artemis.

_Eh, well… Zeus insists on certain rules._

“Thank you, Artemis said in Apollo’s head, but you are going to get yourself in trouble with father if you help the demigods.

_I do not care_, Apollo replied with a mental shrug. _I meant it, nobody gets to hurt you._

_You will get yourself in trouble!_ Artemis lamented but thanked her brother again. It was so like Apollo to do something like this to protect her. Well, she didn’t need protecting, but he insisted like the annoying baby brother that he was.

“‘Can you … don’t like it.’”

“So, we still do not know that Atlas is no longer under his burden?” Hermes thought out loud.

“What I want to know is, how they are working without us having even an inkling of what they are doing.” Athena said in frustration.

“Unfortunately, Atlas is pretty smart.” Calypso answered. “He would have found a way to carry out his plans without alerting anyone and the barrier between gods and demigods would have made it easier for him to do so.”

“That does seem to be the case.” Perseus said with a nod.

“‘And Annabeth … to the gods.’”

“That is true.” Hera said, glaring at the insignificant mortals in the room.

“But it should not be.” Hestia told her sister and looked at the gods for good measure.

“Hmm, yes. If they are family, you should treat them as such,” said Rhea.

Poseidon said, “In this family, that means betrayal, murder, treachery, to name a few.”

Rhea scowled at her second youngest and said, “Why is that trend still following? Be better than your father and uncles.”
“Yes, Poseidon, be better.” Zeus said cheekily.

“You too, Zeus.”

“As you say, mother.”

“Psst! Trav, read!” Percy whispered to the amused demigod.

“'What about … of the Sea.'”

“Ugh! Nereus!” Triton said in distaste.

“He smells a lot.” Percy scrunched up his nose as if he could smell the foul smell.

“He has … you don't know.'”

“You have to be the first demigod who figured it out so fast.” Artemis said.

“Hey!” Apollo protested. “I do know what my Oracle means.” He whispered to himself, “After the quest is over anyway.”

“Sure you do.” Ares said with a chuckle and Apollo made a mocking face at him.

“Apollo checked … gripping my hand.”

Hercules sat up straight and was on alert. The only one he knew till now who had gotten the lion’s skin was himself and Percy and unless someone else had also bested the lion in between, there was a good chance that the person in the dream was him. But why was he in somebody’s dream in the future?

“'Hurry!' … find us!'”

Zoe barely stopped herself from gasping out loud. It sounded a lot like that particularly horrible night when she had lost her birth family all because of a hero. Even though years had passed since that day, she still remembered everything vividly. That was the curse of being immortal, she could not forget anything, try as much as she could.

“Percy?” Annabeth whispered. He hadn’t told her about this dream. Obviously, he wouldn’t tell her all his dreams. That would be just plain weird. But something like having a dream which seemed like it was in the past should have made headlines.

“Hercules and Zoe.” He whispered back, cursing the Fates once more. He was sure Zoe would hate him after this.

“Oh crap.”

“I know.”

“It was nighttime … in the starlight.”

“How…” Hercules gasped. He was now sure that the people in the dream was him and Zoe. The garden with thousand flowers as described in the dream only reminded him of the Garden of the Hesperides. “How are you seeing this?”

“I… don't know?” Percy shrugged. “I sometimes dream of the past.”
“That should not be possible.” Hypnos said. “Is that not right, Morpheus?”

“You are right. This should not be possible. You should not be able to see something of the past. Demigod dreams are only meant to show the future or the present.”

“Unless… what if the past is important for the future? Like, maybe it gives hints of what would happen in the future.”

Athena nodded and said, “History always repeats itself. Maybe the past would give hints for the future and that way Percy can probably stop it from repeating?”

“That seems plausible.” Artemis said. “Although, I do not understand what this particular past would hint towards.” She had already figured out what Percy was probably dreaming of.

“We will understand that if we continue reading, don’t you think?” Dionysus said lazily.

“We raced up … cared about me.”

“Which is something that always puzzled me.” Hercules muttered to himself. He still could not understand why Zoe would care about him. They had met each other only a few days before this particular thing had happened. How could anyone care for someone in that small a time? The hero wondered whether he should talk to Zoe about that but he was skeptical of even approaching her based on the dangerous and downright murderous looks that the other girls were giving him.

Zoe on the other hand gritted her teeth in barely restrained anger. She cursed herself for being such a fool as to fall for the ‘greatest hero ever’. She should have known that he would have had a bigger head than any other hero just for his status alone. She should have known that he would have ultimately left and she should have definitely known all this because of who his father was. She wondered if he had even cared a bit for her, but flung the thought out of her mind. This same question had kept her awake and restless for far too long. It was high time she stopped thinking such things, especially about someone who probably didn’t even remember her or the help she had provided to him.

“"I don't trust your father," I said.”

“Nobody does.” Apollo said. “Titans are not exactly the most trustworthy people.”

“Not all Titans.” Percy whispered and Annabeth whispered back, “Or all Giants.”

"'You should not … You will die.'"

“I still do not understand how you managed to trick Atlas of all the Titans!” Perseus said to Hercules. He too tried to get the golden apples by talking to Atlas but the Titan had not even paid him the tiniest speck of attention.

“Charms and flattery, brother. They will get you everywhere.” Hercules replied smugly and didn’t miss the way the glares from the hunters increased tenfold on that. He wondered what that was about.

“I chuckled … immortal power.”

A few of the hunters growled at Hercules for that.

“What?” Hercules demanded, annoyed with all the looks he was getting.
“If you do not know it yet, then it is worthless to tell you. Typical demigod!” Adrianna bit out and Zoe sternly glared at a few other hunters who were going to say something on her behalf. She didn’t want her life to be displayed out in the open as entertainment, even more than it was being.

Travis took the silence as cue to continue reading. Damn! This was supposed to be a fun chapter. Why was Percy getting dragged into a thousand year old love squabble?

“The girl breathed … being stubborn.”

“You should not have offered him any help whatsoever, let alone your power.” Phoebe said. “He does not deserve it.”

“What do you mean by ‘her power’?” Hercules asked, having heard the comment.

“Anaklusmos contains oceanic powers as it was created for Pleione.” Triton explained. “It was also what gave Zoe her power over the ocean and by giving it to you, she gave up her oceanic powers.”

“What?” Hercules asked in shock. Why would anyone give him their own powers? Sure, that was what had helped him out a lot, but why would an almost stranger give him such a gift?

He turned to Zoe and asked, “Why? Why would you give me that?”

Zoe glared at him but gritted out, “You would have died otherwise. I see now that that would have been a better option.”

Hercules physically recoiled at such venomous words, but what shocked him the most was the look in her eyes. As if she really wished that had happened. The only other person who ever gave him that look was Hera, as she was doing even now. What had prompted Zoe to look at him like that? Was he expected to give her back the sword? They were her powers after all. Maybe she wanted them back. That was the only thing that made sense to him. But back then he hadn’t known that the sword contained her actual powers, if he had known such a thing, he would have returned it. Maybe that was why the sword had become unbalanced for him. Maybe taking it away from its actual owner made the powers become too much for him. He wished he still had the sword, so he could return it to its rightful owner. That way maybe the hatred towards him would reduce. But alas, he had thrown the sword away, it having no more use for him. It didn’t seem to be the right choice, now that he thought about it.

“The girl's voice … out to sea.”

“Apt name.” Frank said, thinking about the times he had seen Percy using the blade. Hardly anyone had seen it coming most of the times, either because of the name of the blade or because of Percy’s own talent, he didn’t know, but it fit the sword.

“Before I could … He is here!”

“Thank?” Zoe muttered to herself. Hercules was going to thank her? Or was it the Percy in the dream that wanted to thank her? Hercules hadn’t bothered to at least thank her for her assistance even after he had managed to trick Atlas and obtained the apple. He had just left without saying a word to anyone.

“I sat bolt … two peaks.”

“Were you not supposed to be dropped off at sunset?” Hermes asked.

“We slept in the train the whole night.” Grover replied. That had been the maximum rest they had
gotten on the whole quest. The next time they rested was after Bianca’s…

“I fished my … Zoe Nightshade.”

The few who had still not figured out what the dream had been about, gasped, while the others rolled their eyes.

“Okay. I’m done. Con? You want to read next?” Travis asked, glad that the awkward dream was finally done with. He could not handle awkward situations, especially the ones including girls, at all.

“Sure.” Connor said and took the book with a grin. The next one better be good.

Chapter End Notes

P.S. Lemme know if you guys want a Hercules-Zoe confrontation cuz I do have an idea for that but am not sure if I should put it up or not. Mainly cuz Zoe does not strike me as the type to engage in drama.
Ask and you shall receive!
Yay! I finally wrote the Hercules confrontation scene. And that was the reason why I took so long to write this chapter. I got stuck... like for 3 whole days and then somehow the writer's block just disappeared today and well, this is the result. I hope you guys like it, cuz I liked writing it.
Ooh and 230 kudos! That's crazy! Wow! Thanks a lot guys!

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Ch71 – TTC – Taking a Breather

Grover nudged Thalia while Travis was passing the book to Connor. He remembered what had happened not too long after the train ride and by the look on Thalia’s face, she too remembered. There had been something that he, Annabeth and Thalia had been discussing for some time and while it was only speculative in nature, he wanted to give it a try if it had a chance of working.

“I know.” Thalia whispered as she leaned towards Grover.

“Tell him.”

Thalia nodded and whispered loudly, “Percy! Psst! Percy!”

But Percy was busy in discouraging Connor from reading the chapter and dismissed Thalia. Thalia leaned over her own couch and over Annabeth’s lap to tug Percy’s shirt. Once she got his attention, she whispered, “After the train ride, we went to the junkyard. Right?”

“Yeah. I think so.” Percy said and then his eyes went as big as dinner plates as realization hit him.

“We need to warn Nico.”

“We don’t even know if it is in the next chapter or not.” Thalia whispered as she tried to keep her balance across Annabeth’s lap.

“Then? What do we do? None of us can read what would happen next.”

“That might not be true.” Annabeth chipped in, finally able to get Thalia off her lap. “See, the Fates knew that the gods would try to read in advance and see what all is important enough for them to read and all of that stuff.”

“Which would have made my life a lot easier.” Percy grumbled.

Ignoring him, Annabeth said, “But the thing is, this whole thing,” she waved her hands around, which got the attention of many others who were not already staring at them, “is about your life.”

“I’m aware. Painfully aware of that fact.”
“Yeah. So, maybe, just maybe, you might be able to read the book ahead of everyone else. Cuz you know, this is your life, your thoughts. Who would know that better than you? Some parts, if not all of the book, would be a surprise to everyone. Except you.”

“So, maybe I can read it and find out when… got it.” Percy nodded and turned to face Connor, only now realizing that almost everyone was looking at him. “Con, give me the book.”

“Nope. Not happening. I’m reading this chapter whether you like it or not.”

“You can read it all you want, I just wanna check something.”

“You wanna read the chapter?” Clarisse asked.

“That’s never going to happen. I’m not reading it. Not this book, not any other book.” Percy said vehemently and impatiently shook his hand when Connor had not handed over the book.

“You won’t be able to read it anyway.” Connor said as he handed over the book.

While Annabeth explained the logic of Percy might being able to read anything in the book as it was his life and thoughts, Percy went through the next and the few chapters after that. At the bottom of one page, he just stared at the text and bit his lip.

He softly closed the book and said, “We should probably have a break before the next few chapters.” If their previous few days’ timetable was anything to go by, they would reach the chapter that told Bianca’s fate just in time for their lunch break.

Hestia nodded and declared a break, saying that they all had achieved quite much for the morning session as it was. She was sure something horrible was going to happen, just by the look in Percy’s eyes. That and the fact that this quest openly declared that two of the questers would die. It didn’t take long to realize exactly who would not survive. Now, only the matter of who was first, was remaining to be seen.

Glad to stretch their legs, the demigods were the first ones out, followed by the hunters. Percy, Thalia, Grover and Annabeth had made their way to the edge of the courtyard in search of Nico. It was after some time that Nico and Will walked over to them in search of some answers. The son of Hades looked uncomfortably at the others and getting the hint, Annabeth left to try and make a compromise with Clarisse regarding the game, Thalia went to search for the hunters and Grover ended up walking into Tyson’s back.

“Nico,” Percy started to say but was interrupted by Nico.

“I figured.” Nico said, maintaining an air of nonchalance. “So soon? Like it’s not even halfway through the quest, right?”

Percy shook his head slightly and informed the younger demigod, “It’s the next to next chapter. See, if you don’t want to listen…”

“No!” Nico said vehemently. “I want to… I need to. Sh-she told me that I was wrong to blame you and I want to know what had actually happened.” Nico tightened his hold on Will’s hand as he tried not to cry. “This is the only way I’ll ever be able to let it go.”

Percy nodded grimly. He too would have wanted to know about something like this.
Thalia!

Thalia turned around at that and looked around to see who had called her. Spotting the hunters some paces away to her left, she made her way to them and internally groaned at the look on Zoe’s face. Of course they would have figured out by now exactly who all were going to not see the end of the quest. She was so not looking forward to this conversation.

“Hey!”

Zoe nodded at the greeting and got to the point, “I know that Bianca and I do not… make it. I want to know who is next.”

Thalia nodded. She knew that she would want to know when she was going to die, if only to reduce the blow that came with it and she knew this from personal experience.

“First Bianca.”

Zoe took a shaky breath in and whispered to herself, “I did this to her. I should not have let her come on this quest.”

Adrianna and Sabrina put their arms around the distraught hunter and Adrianna consoled her, “No, do not do this to yourself. You made a decision for your quest and Bianca agreed with you even when she knew that there were predictions of deaths. Let the child have the dignity of choosing her own path. Do not take that away from her. Do not blame yourself for this.”

“She’s right.” Thalia said. “Bianca made a choice and it was fated to carry out in a particular way. It was no one’s fault. Not yours, not Percy’s. No one.”

“Percy’s?”

“Nico blamed Percy for it for a long time.”

“Because of the promise that the boy made to the child.” Penelope said in understanding and Thalia nodded.

Zoe bit her lip and asked, “I am the one who dies by parent’s hand, is it not? You do not even need to answer. I know Atlas and I know what he is like. That is why I have never even tried to return to the mountain since the day I left.”

“This was one horrible quest.” Thalia told them.

“It does not matter.” Zoe said confidently, straightening herself. “As long as Lady Artemis is safe, it does not matter.”

Thalia nodded even though she knew that Artemis would disagree with that, but it was something that the hunters held dear to them. It was an unspoken rule amongst them that no harm should ever come to Artemis, goddess or not.

“Percy!” Hercules called out as he spotted the younger demigod walking past him. “Could we perhaps talk?”

“Uh…sure.” Percy said uncomfortably.

He wasn’t sure how to feel about Hercules. On one hand, he was the greatest and the most
celebrated hero of all times and one didn’t need to be a demigod to even know his name and on the other hand, Percy had seen how Hercules had used Zoe, not to mention the number of times Percy had been compared to Hercules was enough to irritate him for eternity. That being said, the more time he spent in Hercules’ vicinity, the more he started looking up to the older demigod, not for his personality (although he could be quite funny when he wasn’t trying to uphold some image) or such but for his skills in a fight, although those tended to lean towards brute strength rather than weapons or powers like Percy preferred. But Hercules had been Percy’s favorite story character when he was younger. He had admired the way Hercules could literally take up anything thrown his way and still come out on top and that was how Percy used to comfort himself on really shitty days with Gabe – that Hercules had had a worse life and could make through that all, then what was stopping Percy from doing the same?

Hercules came to stand still in front of Percy and wondered how to approach the topic. He didn’t know whether Percy would even know the answer to his question or not, but since he had had the dream, he may know more things than what was in the book.

After watching Hercules struggle for a while, Percy broke the awkward silence. “If you wanna ask as to how I saw the past, I have absolutely no idea. That was not the last time it happened either. On the next quest too, I saw some things from the past. It just happens.”

“No, not that. Although that is quite disturbing. Um…” Hercules said with a small smile and blurted out, “Do you have any idea why Zoe hates me? Apart from her being a hunter, I mean.”

Percy cocked an eyebrow and cross questioned, “Do you have any idea why Zoe became a hunter?”

“No.” Hercules replied. “Should I? I have not seen her since that day you have dreamed of. This reading is the first time I am seeing her after that day.”

“Maybe you should talk to her about this.”

“And risk being flayed alive by the hunters? I think not. Please, if you do know what the matter is, let me know so I can at least explain myself, if that is required.”

Percy put his hands in his pockets and shifted around a bit, trying to come up with a way to get rid of Hercules. He so did not want to have this conversation. He wasn’t even involved in any of this! But Hercules did have a point. If he approached Zoe, he wouldn’t be able to get a word out before the other hunters would descend upon him like vultures.

“Why do you think she is pissed with you?” Percy asked in the hopes of getting some decent reply from the hero.

Hercules looked confused and replied, “Because she gave me her sword and I didn’t return it?”

Percy was taken aback at that and looked to the left, trying not to laugh and at the same time trying to digest what was just said.

“By your expression, I presume that I am incorrect?”

“Oh yeah.” Percy replied with an exaggerated nod. “Way off topic! Um…” Percy tried to get his thoughts in line and phrase something that wasn’t too rude. “Zoe helped you on that quest, right?”

“Yes, she showed me the path to the top of the mountain and her father’s weakness.”

“And gave you her sword and powers.”
“Yes.” Hercules agreed with a frown and then asked, “Why would anyone do that? Why give your powers to someone whom you have known only for a handful of days?”

“Did you ever thank her for her help or acknowledge her in any way?”

“I was busy fighting Ladon and then tricking Atlas.”

“And what about after you got the apple? After you finished the labor?”

“I…” Hercules frowned, “do not remember. Maybe I was busy trying to get out of there or maybe I had to rush back for the next labor. You do not understand.” There was a desperate touch to his voice. “These labors… they-they will cure me of this madness. I cannot let anything distract me from them.”

Percy watched silently as Hercules visibly covered up his little slip. He had of course heard from Jason about whatever Hercules had told the son of Zeus on the island, but he could now appreciate just how much everything had affected Hercules. His hatred for Hera grew even more and he wondered for a dark moment what it would be like for her if she ever met the Arai and could be affected by them. She had caused enough grief for everyone in his time and now he could see that she had driven Hercules to madness, made him kill his family and now he was the one doing time for it, in the hopes that his madness could be cured, while she escaped unscathed. Percy knew that by now Hercules had already lost himself and was too far gone and by the end of his twelve labors, he may end up feeling a bit better, but he would never ever be cured. Instead he would continue going down in the downward spiral that was his life, till one day his own arrogance, his inconsiderate nature and his own wife would take his life. Because that was what Hera wanted – if she could not have a happy married life, then no one else could too, especially if they were her husband’s illegitimate children.

Percy had a sudden urge to hide Jason from Hera. She had already destroyed his life by taking him away from his family and later from his camp, Percy didn’t want her doing any more damage. At least in that regard, Thalia was safe. She had Artemis looking after her and no god was foolish enough to go after Artemis’ hunters.

But none of this excused Hercules’ behavior and Percy sighed as he thought about how he would have to literally spell everything out for Hercules to understand where he went wrong.

“You met the Hesperides and what? Charmed your way into their inner circle?”

“Something like that. I needed information about the Garden and that was the easiest way. They are very susceptible when it comes to men.” Hercules said with a slight smirk but still did not understand what that had to do with everything else.

“And you knew that and you used it in the worst way possible. When you know of someone’s weakness like that, you shouldn’t have taken advantage of it.”

“Percy’s right, you know.” Thalia said, leaning against the pillar behind Hercules. She had overheard somethings and wanted to give Hercules her piece of mind. “You flirt with them and you think that they won’t be affected? Why do you think Zoe gave you her weapon and powers? Why do you think she went against everything she knew just to help you out? And then after all of that, you end up not even thanking her, let alone acknowledging her. You left her all alone to face her angered family. She was thrown out of the family and was forbidden to enter the mountain ever again. Why did you think she became a hunter? For the heck of it? No, she needed to escape the mess that YOU left behind.”
By now Percy had moved in front of Thalia and was almost restraining her from punching Hercules in the face. She had already created a scene the previous day while trying to school the hunters, there was no need for her to do something like that today too. Not to mention, if she got into a fight with Hercules, the hunters would definitely want a part of the action and that could get ugly pretty fast.

Hercules was a vivid shade of red and it was pretty obvious he was restraining himself as he said, “And it is my fault? Maybe they should have had a better sense than to be infatuated by someone they met only a handful of times over a span of three days. I did what I had to do. I was on a mission and I did my job. It is not my fault if Zoe let herself get drawn in too much. So do not blame me for something that I had no intimation of beforehand. If I knew that something like that would happen to her, I would not have involved her into my quest.”

“You sure about that?” Percy asked skeptically and raised a brow. Ever since he had come to camp and realized that Hercules had actually existed, he had tried to find more information about the hero. He didn’t know why, but he had felt that he could relate to someone else having a horrible life, but he had learned over the course of time, from Chiron himself, that Hercules’ nature had been an exact copy of Zeus and Percy had already heard and read a lot about Zeus’ nature.

“Yes.” Hercules said vehemently and watched the other two look at him skeptically. He now realized that this had been a bad idea. What else should he have expected anyway? No one would ever understand what he went through, what he was going through. And who exactly was Percy to blame him for anything? He had overheard Zeus saying once that Percy reminded him of Poseidon in their younger days and Poseidon wasn’t any better than Zeus. He may not be as bad as him but he wasn’t exactly a saint either.

Hercules leveled a glare at Percy and bit out, “And who are you to blame me for anything? From the reading it is pretty obvious that you are cunning and resourceful. I am sure if put in a similar situation, you would not hesitate to do whatever it is that you both think I did wrong. Such is the nature of demigods.”

Thalia opened her mouth to insult Hercules for even trying to say something about Percy. Sure the guy wasn’t perfect, it would be suspicious if he was, but he wasn’t any Hercules either and he sure as Hades wouldn’t do something as low as using and throwing others.

Before Thalia could get a word out, Percy said, “No, you are right. When I have to, I do use others, I have done it before and I don’t think I’ll be stopping that if I take up a quest later on. And I am not on some higher moral ground to tell you this or am not all that different from others. But the difference is that it’s not my default reaction. I try to take it as a last resort, when I am backed up in a corner and have no way out.” Percy thought about how he had talked Bob into killing his own brother. He had known exactly what he was doing. He never told that to anyone although he had a feeling that Annabeth knew that. He wouldn’t be surprised if she did. She did know him best, after all.

Percy continued, “And I know what I am doing so I make sure that I don’t leave someone in a far worse condition than they were originally in. But the biggest difference is that at least I am ready to accept who I am.”

Humph! The conversation had started in a much better mood. Why could it not go back to that? Why did he have to say okay for chatting with Hercules? He knew he would ending up fighting with him, if not for his own dislike towards the hero, then for the enmity between their fathers. That was why had had been avoiding the older hero. It was easier to talk to Perseus because the guy was genuinely one of the best demigods Percy had ever come across. That guy should have
been the poster boy for demigods, not Hercules!
Percy watched as Hercules silently fumed and then growled at them before walking away in anger. Yeah, that friendship ship had sailed a long time ago. No use trying to be friends with a guy that Percy knew he would always hate or in the least dislike in the end. He had enjoyed throwing the ten foot wave at Hercules way too much, back when they were on the quest.
Percy himself was calming down now that he wasn’t near Hercules. He hadn’t even noticed but the hair at the back of his neck had been standing up the whole time. He almost jumped a foot when Thalia placed a hand on his shoulder. He had forgotten that she was even there.

“Perce, whatever he said… he was being an idiot, okay?” Thalia said nonchalantly but Percy could hear the concern in her tone.
Percy turned around to face her. She was standing on the step behind Percy so she was face to face with him when he turned around. Percy shrugged and said, “Whate’er. After that I don’t think he will ever be talking to us again.”

“Good.” Thalia said, scowling in the direction Hercules had walked off. She looked at Percy and said, “But he was wrong. You are not like him.”

“No, I am not. But, Thals, I am not a saint either…”

“Of course not. We need a saint to put up with your antics. You’d drive everyone up a wall.”

“Excuse me! You are one to talk! Every single time you visit camp, I receive complaints about you. *I* receive complaints! Do you know how weird that is?”

“That’s cuz they don’t know that you are most of the time with me, helping me screw up whatever they are complaining about.”
Percy chuckled as they walked together in the hallway and continued talking about all their little shenanigans. His mood improved drastically just by talking to her.

“We should involve Jason the next time you visit.” Percy suggested as he spotted Jason and Leo trying to put out a fire on Piper’s shrug. “And Leo too.”

“You know, I can’t imagine Jason being okay with supergluing everyone’s seat in the pavilion.”

“You’d be surprised.”

“Seriously?” Thalia looked at Percy and laughed. “Oh man! Next week is going to be terror week for camp! Well, whenever next week happens, that is.”

“And we can blame everything on the Hermes cabin.”

“Duh! We still have to get back for the itching powder prank.”
Percy and Thalia grinned at each other as they neared Jason. He took one look at them and said, “I don’t like that look. You both look evil.”

“Who looks evil?” Annabeth asked as she hugged Percy from the side.

“Me, apparently.” Percy said and put on an exaggerated angel face. “Do I look evil?”

“You look constipated.” Annabeth deadpanned, making Percy frown at her. Then she looked at
“No! This time if either of you get in trouble, I am not getting you guys out of your punishments.”

“But you love me!” Percy whined and Thalia added, “I am your best and oldest friend!”

Then both of them pouted and looked at her with puppy dog eyes.

“Nuh-uh-uh. Not happening this time.”

“What are you guys talking about?” Leo asked excitedly.

“Prank wars with Cabin 11 every time I visit camp.” Thalia explained smugly. “They still don’t know that Percy helps in most of the pranks. They think it’s only me and we intend to keep it that way. You guys wanna join?”

“Duh!” Leo said and looked excitedly at Jason and Piper. “Come on guys! It’ll be fun.”

“I’m in.” Jason said after some time and Piper sighed.

“You can join me as being the exasperated girlfriend/best friend who has to make sure they don’t get into too much trouble.” Annabeth offered.

“Uh-huh. I can do that.” Piper said with a nod, holding on to her now burnt shrug. Honestly, she looks away for a minute and Leo sets her on fire!

“Did someone say prank wars?” Will asked as he dragged Nico to join the group.

“Against Cabin 11, yeah.” Percy said.

“Count us in.” Will said and Thalia grinned and reminded him that no one could know that she had so many people to help her out.

“What do you mean ‘us’?” Nico asked Will.

“It’ll be so much fun.” Will said excitedly.

Nico looked at Annabeth and Piper and said, “I’m joining you both.”

“Wise decision.” Annabeth said with a smile, thankful that Nico wasn’t fixated on what was to come.

“Guys!” Butch hollered from the end of the hallway, making all of them turn around. “Come on. They are starting.”

“Sweet!” Leo said. “This is like school without the torture.”

“Yeah?” Percy asked. “That’s not too far behind, you know.”

Leo leaned away from Percy and stage whispered to Jason, “Dude, he is scary.”

Nico snorted and said, “If you haven’t had Percy’s sword at your neck outside of training, you haven’t seen scary.”

Percy rolled his eyes and followed Nico. “That was like one time! And you deserved it.”

“I was saving you!”
“From a situation that you put me into in the first place.”

“Any idea what they are talking about?” Will asked Annabeth as they followed the two arguing boys. The four of them had decided to sit together, knowing that Percy would be the best one to provide support to Nico despite their rocky history.

“Nope, but with Percy, sometimes it’s better that way.”

“I heard that.” Percy shouted as he turned around and walked backwards while talking to Annabeth, who gave him a double thumbs up in response and chuckled as he almost tripped over himself.
Hey guys!
So, I know I’m way behind schedule but only cuz I haven’t been keeping well and then had a festival right in the middle of the crazy weeks. Anyway, I finally managed to finish this chapter. Yay! I hope you guys like this chapter cuz this is one chapter where I rewrote almost half the chapter a couple of times before getting this result.

Also, important stuff - My next update will probably be in the second or third week of December cuz I have exams and then I am shifting my house (again... damn college life). So, yeah I'll be busy that time. Really sorry about this, but life sometimes sucks.

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Ch72 – TTC – Nature's Gift

Connor sighed as he finally got to read the chapter. Annabeth had filled the campers in on what they could expect in the next few chapters and now he wasn’t feeling all that enthusiastic to read the book. But it was still a good way to annoy Percy and that was what he was looking forward to.

“I GO SNOWBOARDING WITH A PIG”

“What?”

“Nice!”

“Why?”

“We'd arrived on … that at all.”

“Phew!” Connor interrupted himself. “That’s a lot of pressure.”

“Especially when you have to talk to Nereus.” Amphitrite murmured.

“Are you going to be imitating others as well?” Zoe asked Connor.

“Duh! Don’t worry, I can actually do it, unlike T over here.”

“He can.” Percy vouched. He was actually excited to hear Connor’s impression of Thalia and Thalia’s reaction to that. That would be fun.

“We stopped in … wax paper.”
“Food!” Leo drooled and Grover nodded in agreement.

Thalia was looking at Connor and finally said, “I do not sound like that.”

“You kinda do.”

“No I don’t.”

“Yes, you do.” Annabeth said with a grin and Thalia glared at her.

“It’s a pretty good impression.” Percy said to Connor, who mock bowed.

“I can do yours too, with the New York accent.”

“I do not have a New York accent.” Percy said vehemently. He knew he did, but he tried not to speak in that. In schools, that was the first reason he had been bullied for, never mind that some of his classmates also had thick accents like his, but of course he was the only one who was singled out.

“Yes, you do.” Almost all of the campers said.

“When you are really stressed out, your accent comes out.” Annabeth said with a shrug and Percy frowned at her.

“It does not.” Percy said slowly, paying attention to his words.

“Now you are trying really hard.” Thalia pointed out and Percy groaned. Great! Now he was going to be conscious of his accent all the time.

“Thalia sighed … your own car.”

“In short, you are doomed.” Rachel said.

“Whatever, they have access to rubber rats.” Travis said with a smirk as he thought about some of the pranks he could play using those things. Oh, the possibilities!

“Oh no!” Grover grumbled, burying his face in his hands.

“What?”

“This is when the coffee mania started.” Percy pointed out with a grin and Thalia chuckled. She could still find satyrs in the camp trying out different coffees in the hopes that they too would get Pan’s blessings.

“Don’t remind me. That’s possibly the stupidest thing I have ever done.” Grover mumbled.

“’You could call … a rubber rat.’”

The demigods looked at Percy and shook their heads.

“That’s the weirdest reason to buy something.” Chris said.

“Why don’t you buy anything from us? We are lonely too.” Travis said with a pout.

“Good.” Percy replied with a sigh. He knew it was a bad idea to let the Stolls read. They would find the most insignificant things and highlight them. As a matter of fact, Percy wasn’t looking
forward to reading by any of the demigods.

“Then we headed … Hunter and everything.”

“This is gonna be painful, isn’t it?” Connor asked, having witnessed painful and embarrassing conversations between Percy and some of the girls in the camp. Basically, Percy had trouble with anyone who wasn’t Annabeth, Thalia or Clarisse. Now obviously there were some more additions to that list, but it was still horrifyingly small.

“What is that supposed to mean?” Adrianna asked and glared at Connor when he was about to speak.

“You mean about the hunter comment?” Percy asked and at Adrianna’s nod, he explained, “Well, no one can talk to hunters without having to rethink their sentence a hundred times. A harmless thing could be taken out of proportion, so…” Percy trailed off with a shrug. It was weird explaining how difficult the hunters could be, to the hunters themselves. He just hoped none of them took offence and tried to kill him. He wasn’t in the mood for that.

"'Nice rat,' she said at last.”

“Oh wow. Painful small talk coming up.” Clarisse said with a chuckle.

“I hate small talks.”

“I hate talks.”

“I set it … you're happy.'”

Nico internally sighed and wished that he had concentrated more on his sister’s happiness rather than his anger at her leaving him all alone. All he could remember about Bianca’s last few moments with him was how angry and annoyed he had been with her and her betrayal. If only he had accepted her decision for what it was, maybe he wouldn’t feel so guilty about it. But it was in the past and he could not feel anything but regret, now that the shock and anger from the untimely death had faded. He could not help but wish that their last few days together could be changed to happy times rather than his silent treatment and cold shoulder to her. He wished he could apologize to her and make up for lost time. Normally that would have been possible, seeing that he was who he was, but now she was gone for good. Her soul had moved on to someone else and Nico hoped that whosoever got her soul was at

“'I'm not sure ... the immortality.'”

“Yeah,” mumbled Thalia.

“I stared at ... twelve years old.”

No, she wouldn’t, Nico thought to himself. Bianca was gone, now for good. Bianca Di Angelo would never ever talk to anyone else again, not only because she was no more but because she had let her soul be taken and given to someone else and Nico hoped that whosoever got her soul was at
least worth even a quarter of Bianca. If it hadn’t been for the stupid underworld rules, he would have tried to track her soul down and keep an eye on the child who got such a gift. But he couldn’t. Once a soul moved on for rebirth, no one could track it down because that would mean interfering with the process of moving on to the Isles of Blest and that was something he would never take away from Bianca.

Jason, who was now sitting on the same couch as Thalia, looked at his sister as the meaning of her being a hunter finally dug in. When he had first seen and heard that she was a hunter, all he could think was that he was glad that she was alive. That happiness had consumed him completely and it was only pretty recently that he had started accepting that she was alive and well. That it wasn’t a cruel dream that would be snatched away. But now, hearing Percy’s thoughts, it finally dawned on him. He may have gotten Thalia back but she wasn’t that same sister. She wasn’t the one who would grow up with him nor would she be always there with him. She would always be busy with some or the other hunter stuff and he would be that sidelined person whom she would visit once in a while, between her hunting trips. He realized that this reading was the most time they could spend together, ever. She was immortal and she would carry on in the same manner for eternity while he would die, maybe even soon, seeing that demigods, especially the Greek ones, rarely reached even twenty years of age. Would she forget him, after he was gone? Would she still think about him a hundred years from now? Probably not. She would still be the young Thalia, never aging, and he would be dead and gone. At most, he would be a memory that she would treasure and never forget.

Thalia could literally feel the unhappy vibes coming from Jason and she could only imagine what the topic of such thoughts could be. She too found herself thinking about such things often. Immortality was more of a curse than it was a blessing and if it weren’t for the fact that it had been the only way to escape the damn prophecy, she would have never taken it up. Almost every week, something would remind her of the fact that she would carry on and her friends and family would not. That she would have to learn how to survive without them. And she didn’t think she would ever be ready for such a thing.

Removing the morbid thoughts from her mind, Thalia nudged Jason and brought him out of his own horrible thoughts. Being a demigod, she had learnt pretty fast that the best way to be happy was if she lived each day happily and while that wasn’t always possible, she would try her hardest now. After all, she had her brother to look after and damn if she was going to let him be sad. Not on her watch.

"'Nico didn’t understand … it did her.'"

Annabeth sighed and rubbed circles on Percy’s palm. She knew it was futile to say anything to him and all of this had already happened. She just wished there was some way to get him out of his foul mood every single time something went wrong because he would just not stop blaming himself if he was connected to the situation in any way.

"'Don't blame yourself … good guy.'"

Nico couldn’t stop his eyebrow going up in surprise. Bianca had left him in care of Percy? Because that was what it sounded like. If that was the case, no wonder Percy had always helped him out even when he was horrible to Percy, especially just before the Battle of Labyrinth. That had been one harsh summer.

Hades’ eyes flickered over to Percy. It seemed like the boy had helped out his daughter in making such an important decision. Now only if he could continue the trend and take care of Nico in the way Bianca had obviously thought he would, then Hades could forgive his nephew for destroying
his peace by rudely coming into his realm. His nephew was currently sitting with his son, obviously to support Nico when the time came, so obviously he had taken care of Nico in some or the other way, but the god wanted to hear about it and Percy’s intentions because not everyone had good intentions when it came to his children.

Nico had sought the god out and explained tersely what could be expected in the coming chapters. Hades had known about Bianca’s fate, but to know that it would happen so soon, only a few days after her gaining immortality. He had not been prepared for that. He still couldn’t wrap his mind around that information but was trying his level best to ignore the feeling of dread till the time came to actually acknowledge it. He once again wondered if he had been close to either Bianca or Nico, because just because none could see him, didn’t mean he wasn’t there.

“The compliment took … Zoe Nightshade, anyway.”

“She had that effect.” Nico said in a bittersweet tone.

Zoe smiled slightly despite the words and hoped that she had gotten to know the child before the quest took her away, took both of them away.

“'So what’s the … parents were dead.’”

“That’s a typical story.” Hedge muttered, thinking about the few runaway demigods that he had told the same thing to.

“There was a … that school.’”

“And that’s not so typical.” Hedge said.

“How much money was there in the trust anyway?” Connor asked Nico.

“As much as we needed to live comfortably.” Nico replied. He had finally gotten his dad to tell him a few things about his mother and how he had managed to keep Bianca and Nico safe for as long as he did. Hades hadn’t said a lot but Nico had had enough clues to infer things and it all pointed to how much Hades had gone out of his way to make sure that his children lived well.

The Stolls whistled as they imagined how much money that could have been.

“'Why?’”

“You are like a dog with a bone.” Rachel commented.

“She knit her … going to Westover.’”

“That story has more holes than a crocs sandal.” Chris muttered.

“It was a … for them.”

“Nope. It’s weird even by normal demigod standard.”

“So you've been … hours a day.’”

Thalia wondered whether she would have ever felt that way if she hadn’t lost Jason when she did. Sure, she had Annabeth to look after, but that wasn’t the same thing. Annabeth wasn’t her own sister, despite how the two behaved and probably that made a difference because Annabeth had been a friend first and then a sister to Thalia.
Nico tried not to feel angry at that. The way the sentence was, he was sure that he had been suffocating Bianca. He wondered if it was that bad to take care of him.

Connor turned to give Travis the stink eye and the older one rolled his eyes and whispered, “I don’t take care of you, mom does.”

Connor shrugged and went back to reading.

A frown formed on Nico’s face as he heard those words. The boys were sitting just behind Nico so he could hear their whispers. Their mother. He tried not to think much about her. The tragedy that was her short lived life was too much for him, especially now that he knew that he and Bianca had been the reason she had been killed. Were Maria alive, would any of this had happened? Would Bianca have joined the hunters? Probably not. She would not have had a reason to escape. She would have been only his sister and not his caretaker.

Nico clenched his hands. He had spent a lot of time wondering on the ‘what-ifs’ that were speckled throughout his life, he didn’t want to spend more time doing that. Over the years, he had spent a lot of time doing a lot of stupid and dangerous things but this had been the first time he had been so close to dying and he realized that he didn’t want that just yet. He finally had a family in Hazel and even though at first she was a replacement for Bianca, he realized that no one could replace his older sister and nor could anyone replace Hazel and he wanted to be the older one for a change. The son of Hades snuck a look at his sister and relaxed. He had told her a lot of times to stop dwelling in the past to avoid her flashbacks. It was maybe time to listen to his own advice, starting with not holding a little grudge against Bianca for abandoning him, while he would never forget it, he could forgive her for doing so. She had been young and he wasn’t in position to judge her when he didn’t know how she felt. Maybe her talks with Percy would enlighten him on this topic. Letting go of a grudge was not simple, he had experienced that with Percy, but he could start on concentrating on their good times. That always made it easier.

“I thought about … Bianca was saying.”

“But you knew Tyson only for one summer back then, right?” Hazel asked.

“Yeah, but I was talking about how your identity gets linked to one thing and then you are always identified by that thing or person in this case.” Percy explained with a frown, having difficulty in explaining a feeling. At least Tyson wasn’t taking offence to any of this. The big guy was content with creating something that looked very similar to a fully functional miniature battle ship. Percy really needed to have a talk with Leo about giving Tyson dangerous projects. Just because Tyson could handle it doesn’t mean he should be creating stuff like that.

“So, like how you went from being Percy to the cyclops’ brother for that one summer?” Katie asked.

“Something like that.”

“So, what did Bianca feel like then?” Nico asked in a small voice, loud enough only for Percy to hear and maybe Will, who was being an understanding person and pretending to scroll through the songs on his iPod, that he carried everywhere and Annabeth who was pretending not to listen to them but probably was.

Percy looked at Nico and thoughtfully whispered back, “I’m not entirely sure but I think in her mind she always saw herself as Nico’s elder sister and not Bianca Di Angelo, a separate person. I think it didn’t matter what people saw her as, but more of how she saw herself.” Before Nico could say anything on that matter, Percy continued, “It wasn’t your fault, if that’s what you are thinking.
It was how the circumstances were. I think that even if none of you remembered the seventy years that you guys were stuck in the hotel, she would have remembered taking care of you for her entire life and that would have probably left an impression on her.”

“So what you are saying is that she spent an entire lifetime cuz seventy some years is actually a person’s lifetime, taking care of me and now she wanted to be free of that?” Nico asked thoughtfully. He didn’t understand it all but he was finally able to see a bit of Bianca’s perspective, if what Percy was saying was true.

“Well,” Percy paused, gauging his words, “something like that. I mean I don’t know how all this time thingy works but I think because you guys thought that what, only a few weeks at best had passed, you guys only aged a few weeks, both mentally and physically but somewhere in the back of her mind, it might have registered that it was a far longer time. So when she decided to become a hunter, she was maybe subconsciously ready to move on but you weren’t. You were just a kid, still are. I see this kind of thing in Thalia, like she is technically older than all of us but sometimes acts like a sixteen year old and then sometimes like a twenty something person. It’s all pretty confusing.”

Nico agreed and said, “It is.” All this was giving him a headache but Bianca’s actions made a bit more sense even though he still didn’t agree with them. Digesting Percy’s theory was going to take some time but he could some semblance of sense in it now that he knew what had actually happened.

“That’s a good theory.” Annabeth whispered to Percy, no longer pretending that she wasn’t listening.

“It’s smart.” Nico said with a small smile. “Why is it that people think that Annabeth is the brainy one and you the muscles of the two?”

“Book smart and street smart are two different things but most don’t differentiate between the two. That’s why everyone is usually shocked when Percy says something.” Annabeth said proudly, looking at Percy, who looked uncomfortable with the praise. He usually was uncomfortable with compliments.

Nico gave a slight nod and went back to thinking over Percy’s words and trying to see things from Bianca’s perspective.

“Zoe seems to … the General.”

Connor groaned as he read that and said to Percy, “You idiot! You just confessed to eavesdropping.”

“Yeah, I know.”

“Her face … was giving me.”

“Somebody’s in trouble.” Travis crooned.

“We should do … He froze.”

Connor paused for suspense, his voice dipping low to give an air of impending doom. Travis and Chris looked at each other and in unison sang in a gravelly voice, “Dun-Dun-Duuunnnn.”

Percy and Thalia snorted while Katie looked at the three sons of Hermes in exasperation.
“Guys!” Butch prompted.

Connor cleared his throat for effect and continued reading sotto voce, the volume lowering till it was a whisper in the silent room, “I was about … A warning.”

Percy was shaking in silent laughter at Connor’s antics while almost everyone was completely engrossed in the reading, other than Grover and Thalia who knew what this was about and were looking at each other in amusement.

“Zoe gasped. “Grover, thy cup.””

Most jumped as Connor shrieked out the last part and Zoe frowned at him and said, “I do not sound like that.”

“But you are shocked! Follow the story.”

Zoe shook her head in exasperation and Clarisse kicked Connor in the shin to prompt him to continue reading.

“Grover dropped … real whiskers.”

“Pan?” Hermes asked in hope. It seemed like his son was trying to get in touch with his rescuer.

“Huh, what?” Pan asked, looking half asleep or that could be the effect of the mostly empty pitcher of wine next to him. “Uh, yes, that is probably me,” said the drunk god as he realized what his father was talking about. “I can bring animals to life. Yes, I can.” Then the god went back to absentmindedly sipping his wine.

“Is it not too early to be drinking? Hmm?” Hera asked condescendingly and glared at both the wine god and the wild god.

“No, not really.” Dionysus answered and many others agreed with him.

“Grover collapsed … out of here.”

“Wait! You guys are in trouble? Again?” Gwen asked.

“Always.” Thalia said with a shrug.

“We made it … yellow eyes.”

“Smart skeletons, disguising themselves like that.”

“We don’t need any more smart monsters.”

“They drew their … at me.”

“It’s not bad.” Clarisse said. “But you gotta have good aim and yours sucks.”

“Yeah, I feel it’s easier to learn it if you are good in archery.” Will said and Thalia agreed.

Percy sighed and said, “Never mind then.”

“Thalia tapped her … leaning against her.”

“Why is Grover always unconscious during a fight?” Will asked.
“Absolutely no clue.” Percy replied.

“Yeah, it’s like he is either unconscious or confusing the Hades out of monsters. There is literally no in between.” Lou Ellen said with a laugh.

“‘Back up,’ … on our hands.”

“You had to ask where the others were, didn’t you.” Theseus commented.

“Better to know where all the enemy are.” Percy replied with a shrug.

“‘It’s near,’ … from the Wild.’”

Zeus looked at Pan but didn’t say anything. It seemed like every single one of the gods were going out of their way to help out the demigods, even a god who had been missing for a thousand years and was probably on his death bed. The fact that such a thing was happening made him rethink about his stand on the whole situation. The whole scenario was obviously bad but he was of the impression that it was controllable, but now he wasn’t so sure. Even if each god was inclined to help out his/her favorite, so many of them wouldn’t be doing so on the same quest. This only meant that maybe the whole thing was far more serious than the demigods or rather Percy knew it to be. That was the only reason so many of them were helping the children out, it had to be. Maybe they all had really grown complacent like Poseidon had suggested earlier.

“I didn’t know … And I charged.”

“You should never fight in a fit of rage.” Ares said.

“You always do that, Ares.” Hephaestus pointed out.

“Yes, but I am a god, so it does not matter. If the boy is interested in living then he should not be fighting due to anger. It makes you lose concentration.”

“Just like you lost it when you fought against the boy.” Hephaestus said with a chuckle.

Ares growled at his brother but didn’t say anything when he realized that all of the elder gods were glaring at him as if challenging him to do something stupid. Well, he wasn’t going to give them a reason to admonish him like a child in front of actual children. Sulking, he glared at the child of Hermes to continue with the reading.

“The first skeleton … say I could…”

Connor trailed off and stared at Percy in astonishment. “No frikking way. Just … no way.”

“What?” Travis asked his brother, trying to read over his shoulder but as usual the pages looked blank to him.

“It’s The Matrix man! Like… woah!” Connor shook his head in disbelief and with a huge grin started reading again.

“I won’t say … kept charging.”

“No way!” Travis grinned.

“Oh yeah, this.” Percy said with a satisfied smile. That had been one of the coolest things ever, now that he thought of it.
“You can see bullets?” Leo asked in disbelief.

“Yeah.” Thalia replied. “Not see, per say, but you can kind of anticipate it. But even then I don’t think it’s to that high a degree as it is described here.”

“Yeah, it’s not.” Clarisse said with a nod. At everyone’s looks, she asked, “Didn’t any of you ever train with the shotguns in the armory? You’ll see what I mean. It’s like you can kind of understand where the bullets will land.”

“Like with an arrow.” Will suggested and some of the demigods who had trained well in archery nodded in understanding.

“When we go back, I’m practicing the Matrix scene before going to college.” Travis said with glee and many others nodded while Chiron just sighed. He knew the children would anyway go and do it even if he refused them to do so. It would be better if he was actually present over there to avoid some life threatening injuries rather than finding out later about it all. Percy’s life was seriously giving the others some really bad ideas.

Annabeth seemingly had the same idea and said to Percy, “This whole book should have come with one of those disclaimers that say that the stunts should not be practiced at home.”

“Our lives should come with that disclaimer.” Nico commented.

After some time, when they all discussed exactly how they would recreate the famous scene and the Stolls had calmed down some, Connor read, “The skeleton drew … into the snow.”

“Man! This is like some bad horror movie.” Butch said.

“I want to see animated skeletons that can knit themselves back together.” Paolo said with a sigh.

“I can help with that.” Nico suggested with a cheeky grin.

“No!” Will said sternly. “You almost…”

“I know. I know. I’m not doing it now.”

“Good.”

“I thought I … I wasn’t dead.”

“A good thing.” Tyson commented.

“The impact … to hug them.”

“So not the time dude!” Leo said with a shake of his head.

“I wasn’t going to hug the trees, I was trying to track the beast’s power.” Grover said indignantly and then muttered under his breath, “Hug the trees, it seems! Humph!”

“What beast?” Theseus asked.

“Nothing I’ll want to meet again.” Percy and Thalia said in unison.

“There was a … wary of her now.”

“Of course they were. They should have figured out in the beginning that she was a child of
Hades.” Nico grumbled, thinking about the incompetent undead that served his father.

“Whose side are you on?” Percy asked.

“They pressed … wild and angry.”

“Yeah, I wouldn’t want to meet that thing either!” Chris muttered as he tried to imagine such a huge pig.

“Erymanthian Boar!” Pan exclaimed. “A good choice. Yes, yes, a very good choice indeed.”

Hercules nodded his agreement, but didn’t say anything. He was still angry with Percy about what the boy had said to him, but regardless, he was interested in knowing how they defeated the skeletons and the boar. It had been quite difficult for him to do that.

"'REEEEEEEEEET!' … can kill it.'"

“You cannot.” Hercules uttered before he could stop himself but promptly went back to staying mum.

“You cannot kill it because I have blessed it so.” Pan explained. “It is a great friend of satyrs.”

“Uh…” Grover averted his eyes from Pan. The Boar had been helpful but it was so not a ‘great friend of satyrs’.

"'It's a gift … "It's wild!'"'

“Exactly.” Pan said with a nod.

“How exactly is that a blessing then? Why send something that would want to kill the people you are trying to help?” Nico asked exasperatedly.

“Fair point.” Pan agreed. “But its wild and it should want to kill others. That is how the nature works. If they want any help, they would have to prove themselves worthy of receiving it. I only gave a way out, they have to figure out how to use it.”

"'So how is that a blessing?' Bianca asked.'

“Siblings!” Connor interrupted himself.

“It seemed a … wild boar attacks.”

“Seriously?” Perseus asked. “Another beast that Hercules had fought? How do you end up fighting everything that we have?”

“Bad luck. Serious bad luck.” Percy replied.

“What did you do with this one?” Perseus asked Hercules.

“Made it crash into snow and then chained it up while it was disoriented.” Hercules answered nonchalantly like he did this every day of his life.

“And what did you do with it?” Perseus asked his namesake.

“Transportation.” Percy replied simply and motioned Connor to continue reading, ignoring everyone’s confused looks.
“‘Keep moving!’ … boar charged us.”

“Why do you have to insult the poor boar?” Hedge asked in annoyance.

“Poor?” Thalia asked in disbelief and shook her head. Even after years of interaction with the satyrs, they somehow always managed to surprise her.

“We only managed … a crazy idea.”

Thalia groaned and Annabeth said with feeling, “I hate your ideas.”

“Everyone hates Percy’s ideas.” Frank said, thinking about the weird ideas that his friend came up with. It was a wonder that any one of them even worked in their favor.

“Hey! That’s not true.” Percy said indignantly.

“But it is.” Grover said and many others who had been part of Percy’s ideas over the years, agreed.

“‘Follow me!’ … reluctantly followed.”

“Oh.” Thalia whispered. “Crap.”

“Damn!” Percy muttered and looked apologetically at Thalia, who had slumped into her seat, trying to make herself invisible.

“Behind us … seventy feet below.”

“You did not!” Annabeth yelled at Percy, who grinned sheepishly at her. She knew that anytime they were at some sort of height, Percy’s go to plan was to slide down the side of the hill or mountain. It was probably because of his obsession with skateboarding. Regardless, she always had the unfortunate job of talking him out of such stupid things. It was then that she realized the height they were at and that Thalia was there too. Now she knew why Thalia looked like a cross between murdering someone, preferably Percy, and going invisible. If she had told Percy of her fear of heights to get out of this situation, then it would be in the book and if that happened, Annabeth could only imagine the words that would follow.

“The boar … with fear.”

“What’s wrong?” Jason whispered to Thalia, who muttered something under her breath and went back to ignoring everything.

Phobos raised a brow in amusement as he realized what exactly was happening. The child of Zeus was afraid of heights. How ironic!

“The boar smashed … of the mountain.”

“Are you kidding me? Just like that? Without any safety measures?” Piper yelled.

“So that’s what you meant when you said that you had fallen from greater heights. Just how many times have you done something like this?” Hazel said.

“Eh, not really sure.” Percy replied and Annabeth sighed at his answer, while Poseidon was staring gob smacked at his son. Did the boy have no concern for his own safety or the fact that he was technically in his uncle’s domain at such height?
“We slid on … racing downhill.”

“You are crazy!” Travis said with a grin. “I like it.”

“You should probably be a stuntman or something.” Will chuckled.

“You’re probably gonna love skiing.” Rachel suggested and Percy nodded at that.

“The boar was … in her hair.”

“How is Thalia not banged up?” Leo asked.

“I suppose dad’s powers.” Jason thought out loud. “Once I was fighting with some monster and rolled down a hill and still ended up with only grass and leaves on myself. Not a cut or bruise on me.”

“What?” Thalia asked in disbelief. There was no way Zeus’ powers could save her from being banged up on such a ride. But now that she thought of it, she actually hadn’t been hurt at all apart from being scared out of her wits. It had been Percy who had been bleeding badly. She had been just shaken up. Could it be? Was Jason right? Impossible. But why did Zeus have that stupid gleam in his eyes?

“Yeah, think about it.” Jason said. “When we are going downhill at that kind of speed, we are sort of airborne which could probably count as being in dad’s domain. I think that the air around us would keep on cushioning us or maneuvering us in such a way that we don’t get hurt. That’s how it happens whenever I fly.”

“And that’s how it happens for me.” Percy said. “When I’m in water and don’t see where I am going, I don’t hit any rocks or crash into the fishes or anything. I think it’s natural.”

Everyone turned to look at Nico and he asked, “What?”

“Well, they explained what happens. What about you?” Chris asked.

“Umm… I haven’t hit anything while I’m shadow travelling.”

“You once said that you ran into a wall.” Percy pointed out.

Nico glared at Percy and gritted out, “Because I was out of the shadows by then and the wall was in my way.”

“Sure it was.” Percy chuckled at his red faced cousin.

“That is more or less how it works.” Poseidon confirmed. “You all, being our children, are tuned into your element and in turn the element is tuned into you. If you are not directing it and are in danger, then it will direct and protect you.”

Percy looked at Thalia and gave a tentative smile and she looked at him in disbelief.

“Next to us … afraid of heights.”

All eyes were on Thalia while Percy, Annabeth and Grover glared at anyone they saw.

“It cannot be…” Zeus said, looking at Thalia, but realized that it was probably true, if the put upon stoic look on her face was anything to go by. He said softly, talking only to Thalia, “Why? There is no reason for you to be afraid. It is my domain and yours by extension. You control it all.”
“It is what it is.” Thalia mumbled when she realized that Zeus was actually expecting her to answer. Jason subtly held her hand and she had to remind herself to not shake it off.

Zeus kept silent and Clarisse nudged Connor to continue with the reading. She had been absent for the embarrassing part about her and she had enough humanity to not allow Thalia to endure whatever comments the insensitive gods had to dole out. As it was, she could hear some snickers, predictably from her half-brothers. At least the demigods were intelligent enough to not say anything but that was probably because they all in their own ways were afraid of their own parent’s powers or domains or whatever. In any case, she didn’t have anyone to beat up. Yet.

“Now that we … talk about it.”

“Oh!” Apollo exclaimed. “Sorry about that.” He knew what it was like to be afraid of their father’s powers. He too was afraid of Zeus, even though he never admitted it. He couldn’t imagine what Thalia was going through, having her fear of their father displayed like this.

“She took a … afraid of heights?”

“Seriously, Jackson?” Clarisse said in exasperation while Annabeth punched his arm. “And here I was starting to think you were alright.”

“Sorry.” Percy apologized to Thalia, who just shrugged it off, but the damage had been done and now some of the gods were openly laughing and Zeus was looking at a loss for words.

Irritated, Percy said, “I shouldn’t have said that. That was stupid of me to assume that just because your father controls something means that you are completely in control of that too.”

“You know,” Percy continued and looked at Thalia, signaling her that it was alright, “I was afraid of water for some time. Afraid of drowning.”

“You cannot drown.” Triton said in confusion. “Why would you be afraid?”

“There were reasons.” Percy said nonchalantly. “But what’s important is that I was so afraid of it that I forgot I could control water and almost actually drowned because of it.”

“It’s true.” Frank said, looking at Percy and remembering Percy’s panic when they were locked up. “I was there.”

“Even if you forget to control water, there is still no way that you can drown.” Poseidon said.

“I can if I believe I can. I believed that I couldn’t breathe underwater and so I stopped myself from breathing. Fear does horrible things to one’s logic. It makes you freeze and do things that are normally not what you would do.” Percy said, remembering about the time he had met Tartarus and dropped his sword. Now that he thought about it, he found it embarrassing to have dropped his weapon like that, but back then, all he could think of was the overpowering fear that the primordial emanated.

“That much is true.” Phobos agreed. “That is exactly why Deimos and I are so important for the wars.”

“But you are obviously not afraid of such a thing anymore.” Triton said to Percy.

“Yeah, but I was. I’m sure everyone is scared of something or the other, logical or not, reasonable
or not, god or not and it’s normal.”

By now, the few gods who had been snickering had sobered down, either due to Percy’s words or the glares they were getting from Zeus and Hestia. Zeus thought of talking to Thalia about this later, but the vulnerable look in her eyes made him rethink that. He wanted her to feel safe about talking to him but the few times that he had talked to her one on one, had made him realize that she was hardly comfortable talking to him like that. The king god thought to find out more about this before confronting his daughter about it.

Connor didn’t need any prompting to continue with the reading. As soon as Percy was done talking and it didn’t seem like he or anyone was going to carry on the conversation, the son of Hermes quickly picked up where he had left off.

“She was about … now looked agitated.”

“Why? Till now you were pretty much all over the boar.” Chris asked.

“Well, it wasn’t that. With the boar, came the scent of Lord Pan. But now that the boar was subdued, the scent was gone.”

“I agree … Christmas tree.”

Leo snorted as he tightened a screw on his latest contraption.

“What now?”

“Its funny cuz she used to be a Christmas tree…” Leo chuckled as others just let him be.

“Moving on.” Thalia said with a sigh.

“’Explain to me … pig cowboys.'”

“Dude, you should really try bull riding. We’ll even bet on you.” Travis suggested.

“Never happening.” Percy said.

“You are wasting your talents, Perce!” Connor whined.

“Connor!” Annabeth said in a warning tone and the son of Hermes backed off immediately.

“Grover nodded … straining to get it.”

“Ingenious!” Pan exclaimed and a few other gods smiled at that.

“People do this to get their dogs to exercise.” Rachel commented.

“People are far weirder than I thought possible.” Calypso muttered.

“Automatic steering … presence of Pan.”

The hunters sighed at that. They loved feeling the presence of Pan everywhere in the wild. It was the most refreshing feeling in the world. They wondered how life would be in the absence of that feeling. It was surely nothing to look forward to.

Pan smiled and explained, “Hunters being pledged to Artemis, would be able to sense my presence but unfortunately demigods cannot. They are not attuned to the wild in any way. Still, it is
commendable that Percy was able to feel the change in the atmosphere every time I try to contact Grover. That is more than what I thought possible. Although, that could be because he is connected to the sea, which is obviously as old as the wild.”

“Yes, that could be the reason why he is able to pick up on a few things that normally would not have been possible for the demigods to pick up on.” Hestia said.

Percy sighed and hoped that people would stop talking about him as if he was not sitting amongst them. He asked Connor to continue reading in the hopes that some other topic would come up and the gods would not talk about him.

“Chapter’s over.” Connor declared and gave the book to Jason, who was one of the only persons Nico was comfortable with, for reading about Bianca’s last hours. The others had been Will, Percy and Hazel. But Percy had understandably not wanted to read about his own life like an entertainment book, Hazel had been too close to the topic for Nico’s comfort and Will was still too new to him for such a sensitive and personal thing.

Nico looked at the book in trepidation and braced himself for the recounting of the most horrible thing that had ever happened to him.
Hey guys! Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays! I hope you all are having fun wherever you all are. :D
So sorry that this is so frikkin' late but thank you so much for being patient with me. This was one tough chapter to write. I think, the toughest so far. Also, possibly the longest too. Especially with trying to keep balance of the emotions in it and all that. I hope that I did it justice. *fingers crossed*

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Ch73 – TTC – The Last Ever Gift

Jason felt the weight of the book long before he even touched it. It felt too heavy, too oppressing and had it not been for his promise to Nico to read this part out, he would have definitely dropped the book. But instead he sneaked a look at Nico’s face and turned the page to the next chapter. He could feel Thalia tense up next to him, even though she could not read a letter on the page.

“WE VISIT THE JUNKYARD OF THE GODS”

Hephaestus narrowed his eyes at the title. As far as he knew, he was the only one who kept a junkyard. Just because those creations were defective, didn’t mean that they were useless and he could always revisit and make them better. But those creations were also very dangerous and if the children had visited that place and one of the hunters had died – because it was obvious that neither of the hunters would survive the quest – then he would have to face an angry Artemis and by the Fates, if it was that daughter of Hades then he would have to face two angry gods. He was not looking forward to any of that. He didn’t care whether the hunters made it or not, as long as they didn’t die in his junkyard.

“We rode the … across the desert.”

“Well, somebody’s asking the real questions.” Travis snickered.

“As night fell … GILA CLAW, ARIZONA”

Leo dropped the screwdriver in his hand and exclaimed, “No frikkin’ way! Gila Claw? You guys went to Gila Claw? The Gila Claw?”

“Huh?” Thalia looked weirdly at Leo.

“What’s so special about Gila Claw? I’ve never even heard of it and I’m from Arizona.” Clarisse said.
“It’s a... uh, a legend for us at Cabin 9.” Leo replied. “All of dad’s failed prototypes end up there.”

“In Arizona?” Chris asked.

“No, in a junkyard that he has over there. I’ve always wanted to go there. Everyone in Cabin 9 wants to.” Leo said with a huge grin.

“I wouldn’t recommend going there.” Grover said.

“You want to go to a godly trash can?” Frank asked.

“You won’t understand it!”

Jason shook his head and continued, “… hanging crooked … go on forever.”

“I wish.” Leo said dreamily as he scribbled something on his notepad. “Can you imagine the amount of ideas I can get from there. Wow!”

“I never thought anyone could get excited about a junkyard.” Reyna muttered.

“You have been proved wrong.” Jason said to her.

“’Whoa,” I said… Zoe suggested.”

Zoe snorted and the other hunters chuckled along with her.

“That’s a good one.” Annabeth said with a laugh.

“’Oh, shut up … an alien planet.”

“If the junkyard belongs to Hephaestus, it is trouble.” Hestia said solemnly.

“Anything belonging to the gods is trouble for us.” Thalia muttered and those who heard her, nodded their agreement.

“We decided to … the sky orange.”

The Hunters smiled at that. All of them loved the stars, loved to stare at the twinkling lights when they weren’t busy hunting. It brought about a kind of peace that they could not find anywhere else. None of them could imagine having to live in a world in the future that would hide the beauty of the bright stars.

“’Amazing … light pollution.’”

“Whole constellations?” Phoebe yelled in disbelief.

“A lot has changed over the years.” Thalia informed the horror stricken hunters.

“’You talk like … too often!’”

“It does.” Chiron mumbled.

“Grover sighed … nodded sadly.”

Pan shook his head a little and said, “I am sure that after such horrifying destruction, I could not have done anything that would make a significant impact on the conditions, not without breaking
our ancient rules, anyway. Moreover, you satyrs depend too much on my existence. Instead of waiting around for me to come back and change things, a lot could have been avoided had you taken charge yourself.”

“That is true.” Grover said with a sigh. At first when Pan had told him to start saving the wild on his own, the satyr had been skeptical and disheartened, but it was only now, after having done some work on his own and with the help of the others, that he realized that Pan was right. They themselves had to start changing things if they wanted some improvement in the nature.

""Maybe it was … more coffee…”"

“Yeah, no. That’s not how this works.” Thalia said with a chuckle.

“I know.” Grover grumbled.

“It was entertaining at least.” Travis said.

“But we were low on coffee throughout.” Will scowled. He and his cabin usually depended on coffee far more than required and those months with low coffee supplies were enough to drive them all crazy, not to mention, having to deal with hyperactive satyrs.

“I was pretty … squash Grover's hopes.”

“You should have. At least then I wouldn’t have been running around like an idiot.” Grover grumbled.

Percy shrugged and said, “In any case, nothing would have moved till the next quest came up.”

""What I want … warriors that way.""

“See,” Nico pointed out, “it’s the person, not the metal.”

“Got it.”

""Maybe you have … be Las Vegas.""

“Never going there.” Grover said fervently.

“Never.” Nico nodded.

“I was about … I can't remember…”"

“Which is what I don’t get.” Lou Ellen said. “How come Percy, Grover and Annabeth remember but you don’t.” She looked at Nico with a raised eyebrow. Sometime during the dinner yesterday, Nico had let it slip that he used to be in the same Hotel Lotus as Percy had been in, but he hadn’t said much about it when the Stolls asked him about the games over there. He had said that he didn’t remember much about what happened over there.

Nico shrugged and said, “It’s a long story.”

“And I found out about it over the years, so it’s probably going to be in the book.” Percy added, looking at the book in distaste.

“What are you talking about?” Zoe asked.

“You’ll see.” Thalia nudged Jason to continue reading.
“Suddenly I had … you know that!”

“What is this place?” Rhea asked in confusion and Hestia gave her a brief explanation.

“Why are Hades’ children in this place?” Hestia asked in general.

“The oath.” Persephone said, looking between Hades and Nico, who really did look like a younger version of Hades. She explained, “Most probably Hades wanted to hide his children in this place to make sure that Olympus does not find out about their existence.”

“If that is the case,” asked Amphitrite, “then for how long were the children in that place? Percy spent five days in there when it only felt like a few hours to him. For how long did Hades hide the children?”

Hades, along with the other gods, turned to look at Nico for an answer. His son had only told him that Hades had hidden the children for some time but he had not mentioned for how long. How many days, months or even years were taken away from his children because of a stupid oath that both of his brothers broke?

“It would…” Nico said, startled at the sudden attention, “probably come up.”

“Yeah.” Percy said with a nod and looked at Jason to continue.

“"Oh, great," … talk about this."

“It does not make sense.” Athena frowned. “The child should be able to remember the hotel and what happened over there. The only things she should have forgotten would be her life before entering the hotel.”

Ignoring Athena, Hades asked Nico, “Is this the…?”

“Yes.”

“What?” Persephone asked her husband.

“Nico told me earlier that I had sent one of the Furies to look after them. This person who got the children out is the Fury I sent.”

“Must be Alecto. She is the only one who likes children to some extent.” Persephone guessed and Hades shrugged.

“Zoe sat forward … seventy years ago.”

“What?” Hades roared. Seventy years were taken away from his children because of some oath?! No wonder he seemed to hate Zeus in the future. “What is the meaning of this?”

“Was it not mentioned earlier that the oath was made about seven decades before your time?” Athena asked the children as she came up with the only possibility.

“Can you explain, child?” Hestia asked Nico.

“Allow me to explain.” Chiron said before Nico could say something. Once all attention was on him, he explained, “Nico and Bianca were born before the oath was made, during the Second World War. After the oath was made, they were the only surviving children of the big three under the age of sixteen. To avoid problems, Lord Hades hid both of them in Lotus Hotel and Casino and
waited till it was safe to bring them out. He knew that sooner or later, the oath would be broken and when other children of either Lord Zeus or Lord Poseidon would enter our world, he would bring out his children.”

“Not only that.” Hades mused out loud. “Both Thalia and Percy were older at this time than Bianca or Nico…”

“Which meant that the prophecy would not come to your children immediately and if it did come to them, they would have ample time to prepare themselves.” Chiron said with a nod. “You made sure that your children would not get the burden of the prophecy.”

“Not immediately, anyway.” Nico mumbled under his breath, thinking about the crazy idea his dad had had for capturing Percy and letting the prophecy become Nico’s.

“*That's impossible … he do it?***

“You seriously don’t know when to quit, do you?” Rachel said. “You would make the poor girl cry.”

Percy nodded and said, “In hindsight, I should have shut up.”

“Yeah, you should have.”

“**Before she could … front of us.**”

“What’s a limo doing in the middle of nowhere?”

“What is a ‘limo’?” Apollo asked.

“A luxury car.” Leo replied offhandedly as he waited for an answer.

“Let’s see.” Clarisse said sarcastically. “A limo in the middle of nowhere at nighttime, stops in front of Prissy and his gang of misfits when they are on a quest. Unless monsters now drive around in limos, I’m gonna guess that it’s a god.”

“How many gods did you meet on this quest?” Frank asked.

“More than I would like to meet in one single week for a one-on-one.” Percy grumbled.

“What’s the number for this quest?” Leo asked.

“One-on-one?” Percy asked.

“Yes.”

Percy mentally counted and replied, “6, during the quest. I think.”

Zeus took a deep breath and counted to a hundred like Hestia always told him to do whenever he was about to lose temper. It wasn’t his fault that it didn’t usually work. This was getting ridiculous. Why were there even any rules if none of the Olympians wanted to follow them? As it is, till now, he knew three gods had met the children and helped them on the quest. And now three more were going to do the same thing? His family was incorrigible!

“The back door … filled with flames.”

“You again?” Hermes asked in exasperation and looked at a confused Ares.
Zeus relaxed a little. He was pretty sure that Ares would not help out in a quest. Not one that belonged to Percy, anyway.

"'Ares,' I growled … Thalia asked.”

“Seriously?” Reyna asked. “Everyone knows the lady who travels with Lord Mar-Ares.”

“In my defense,” Thalia said, “I had just been brought back to life a couple months ago.”

Uh-oh, Percy thought and glanced at Annabeth. He had never gotten around to telling her the complete details about this meeting with Aphrodite. Or Thalia for that matter of fact. Grover more or less knew what the talk had been about.

“I feel bad for you.” Piper said to Percy, just loud enough for him to hear her. She would not wish it on anyone to meet her mom. Ever. That usually ended up being trouble for the person she met.

“Ares looked over … place is closed.”

“Not a good excuse in front of a god.” Dakota murmured.

“Ares snapped his … rudeness as I am.”

“She’s not.” Piper nodded and turned to Percy. “You didn’t happen to insult her, did you?”

“I’m not crazy.”

Aphrodite grinned and stopped filing her nails. She needed to pay full attention to this. She wanted to know what the boy thought of her at first glance and what he reacted like. She already knew why she wanted to meet the boy. Even at that time, his infatuation with the daughter of Athena would have caught her attention, especially because of the rivalry between the parents. It would be the perfect opportunity to find out the depth and genuineness of the child’s feelings.

“When I saw her, my jaw dropped.”

Jason blushed and grinned at Percy as he read that. Percy groaned and dropped his head in his hands. This was going to be so embarrassing! He still could not look at Aphrodite without turning the shade of Rudolf’s nose. He looked up at Annabeth when she patted his thigh and tried not to laugh out loud.

“It’s ok.” Annabeth whispered, barely controlling her giggles. She would love to hear this part. Anything embarrassing for Percy was entertainment for her. “Don’t forget, the gods acted like complete idiots when they first met her too.”

“Oh!” Percy groaned and went back to hiding his red face in his hands.

Jason chuckled and continued reading, “I forgot my … complete sentences.”

“You are really trying hard.” Artemis said.

“Not completely.” Aphrodite answered in a lofty voice. “If I was, he would not be even standing.”

“That’s good to know.” Percy muttered into his hands.

“She was wearing … goddess had that.”
Aphrodite giggled and said, “You just see what you want to see. What I want to know is, what did you see?”

Percy looked at Jason and whispered, “Read fast or I will kill you. Slowly.”

“When she smiled at me, just for a moment she looked a little like Annabeth.”

Aphrodite giggled and Piper whispered, “This is really getting on my nerves.”

Annabeth nudged Percy and said, “You saw me when you looked at the goddess of love?”

“Maybe?”

Annabeth smiled and she looked like she was trying to control her laugh. She looked giddy with happiness for some reason.

“What?” Percy asked.

Rolling her eyes at her boyfriend, the blond said, “You met the goddess of love and thought of me.”

“So?”

“Do you want me to spell it out for you?”

“Oh, for the love of Olympus!” Nico groaned. “The first person you think of when you look at Aphrodite, is the person you love. Even I know that.”

“Oh.”

“Yeah, oh!”

“Can you just finish off with this section on my mom?” Piper whispered to Jason.

“Then like this … 'Um uh gah.'”

Most of the gods were suddenly reminded of the first time they met Aphrodite. At least Percy had only lost his ability to think and speak, some of the gods had forgotten how to move or even breath. But then, they had had the privilege of seeing the real Aphrodite and not the imagination of beauty that the mortals saw.

“She smiled … own arm, hard.”

Rhea smiled and said, “It is really good that you can figure out when you are being influenced by the powers surrounding you. That talent would be useful if you are to go against Kronos.”

“'I... I don't … clear my mind.’”

Poseidon frowned at the ground. He could see a pattern. Whenever Percy got angry, he would use his powers or in this case, free himself of outside influence. Despite it being a good thing, he knew from personal experience that using anger as a crutch to channel power would only result in uncontrolable disasters. He hoped that Percy had learnt how to control his anger or at least have some control over himself while being angry. The god could only imagine the scale of disaster if Percy was unable to do either.

“'I don't know … imprison Artemis. Bo-ring!'”
“At least I was being useful unlike someone else.” Artemis muttered.

“For the Titans, maybe.” Aphrodite retaliated. “They laid a trap and you walked right into it. And you call yourself intelligent. Please!”

“Well, at least I was doing something. What were you doing? Chasing love stories?”

“That is better than being abducted by Atlas. And do not underestimate love. Love can start and end wars.”

“Beauty and love is all you care for. What would you understand about fighting wars?”

“Can we have this discussion later?” Zeus interrupted the two goddesses before they could start a proper fight. “Jason, continue. Now!”

“**But she was … in you.**”

“How a love story about teenagers is more important than an impending war with Kronos, I would never understand!” Artemis grumbled.

Aphrodite sneered at the goddess of hunt and said, “I told you, love can start and end wars. You just wait. I can already tell that this love story is going to be epic … and important for this war of yours.”

Artemis scoffed. “And how exactly would that happen?”

With a smirk, Aphrodite said, “We will see.”

Annabeth looked at Aphrodite. Currently, the goddess sported a perfect messy hairdo that reminded her of Percy’s bedhead. She was sure that it wasn’t what Aphrodite looked like but what Annabeth saw – Percy. The goddess caught her speculative look and winked at the girl and Annabeth thought about the number of times either she or Percy had returned to each other during the years and all of that led to both of them being present at the end of the war with Luke in the throne room. She remembered Luke’s last few words, asking whether she loved him or not and she knew that had she really loved Luke, she would have never been able to let Percy hand over the blade. Hades! She would have gone with Luke when he had come to her house and asked her to help him out. Now that she thought about it, all Annabeth could think of was about the various times she or Percy had done something for each other and how that had affected the wars. Both of them. Could Aphrodite be correct? Could they have changed things in the war because of their love? It couldn’t be, could it? They weren’t that important, were they?

She knew of the butterfly effect. Of course she did. Little things could often result in big and sometimes catastrophic changes. But she could not imagine herself being the reason for such things. Then again, who would have thought that not inviting Eris to a wedding would end with the infamous Trojan War and the start of the reason why the gods withdrew from the mortal world?

Maybe things had changed because of her and Percy or maybe things were always going to end up in the same way. One could never tell when the Fates were involved so closely to everything that happened. In any case, thinking about this, as much as she would love to, would only cause problems for her and mess up her mind. She would end up rethinking everything in her life and that would not do her any good. She knew that the gods always messed up the demigods minds. It would be better for her sanity if she just ignored all that happened with the gods during the reading. But even then, her treacherous mind was already collating all the things she and Percy had done that could have possibly affected the outcomes of the wars.
She heard Jason’s voice and realized that he had started the reading once again.

"My heart pounded … That’s so cute!"

"That is way out of context and you know it.” Athena said with a scowl.

"'No! I mean … of the camp?'"

"Excuse me?!” Artemis growled and the hunters glared at the love goddess.

"You changed one of the questers?” Zeus yelled. That was almost worse than direct interference. Almost.

“Not yet.” Aphrodite grinned. “But it was good planning if I say so myself.”

“You cannot interfere in a quest! And you most definitely cannot alter the questers.” Zeus shouted, barely restraining from throwing lightning at Aphrodite. “Do you realize what you have done? …”

"Apparently, won us the war.” Aphrodite replied with a sickly sweet smile. “It is quite obvious that Percy plays a very important part in whatever quest he is on. Who is to say that this quest would be successful if Percy had not been in it?”

“Percy would have gone anyway. He was planning to. You need not have hurt the hunter for that.” Demeter said.

Apollo shook his head and explained, “As loathe as I am to say this, but if Aphrodite had not removed the hunter from the quest, Percy’s inclusion would make it six people, which would have been really bad for the quest. Whatever my Oracle says, needs to be followed to the letter. If there were six questers, things would have gone over horribly.”

“What about the previous quest? They were only supposed to be three questers but in the end it ended up being four of them – Percy, Annabeth, Tyson and Clarisse.” Hermes asked.

"Tyson would not count. He is immortal and moreover, a monster.” Apollo hastily looked at Poseidon and Percy and said, “A good monster and only classified as that because he would turn to dust if killed. His inclusion in a quest, while helping the others, would not essentially affect the prophecy given for the quest.” Apollo clarified. “But in case of hunters, the prophecy specifically included them, which meant for the purpose of the quest, they would be counted as normal questers. And anyway, they can be felled and killed like mortals in battle.”

"Regardless,” Zeus said, “it is against all of our rules to do something like this. What if such a change had resulted in trouble for us?”

“None of us can see the future.” Aphrodite said, then looked at Apollo and added, “Not clearly, anyway. In the end, everything worked out in our favor and here we are. Let us just ignore this little thing.”

“Little thing?” Athena growled. “You could have just changed everything for us and you classify it as a ‘little thing’?”

“We create history on a daily basis, Athena. I said, ignore it and move on with the reading.” Aphrodite said with conviction and everyone just turned to Jason to continue with the reading.

As Jason started to read, Piper turned around to look at her mother. Being able to use charmspeak, Piper had been able to tell that Aphrodite was using charmspeak, in that she could tell that she was
being compelled to do something. She had thought hers and Drew’s charmspeak was powerful and yet it was nothing in front of Aphrodite’s. Piper had always been irritated or angered by her mother’s presence. This was the first time she was honestly scared. Aphrodite almost never showed this side of herself and seeing it being used so casually and none of the gods, except the angered big three, questioning it, made Piper question whether her mother did this on a regular basis. It was obvious that none of the gods could tell, not immediately anyway. Only now the gods had started to glare at Aphrodite. This could mean that her mother could basically do whatever she wanted and probably even get away with it. How the gods were not terrified of her, was beyond Piper. Because she was really terrified of that little casual show of power.

“‘You did that … It's so romantic!’”

“Joining my hunters does not tantamount to throwing one’s life away!” Artemis glared at Aphrodite, having shaken out of the charmspeak effect. “Unlike you, I actually know that there are other things in life other than some stupid need for love.”

“Like killing animals and shunning everything else?”

“Better than seeking love to get some sort of validation. And that too from boys or men who know no better.”

“Validation?!” Aphrodite spat the word out like it was poison in her mouth. “You consider love to be validation of sorts? With that sort of attitude, it is no wonder that none can love you.”

“I do not want it.”

“You do not deserve it!”

“Do not speak in such a manner to her.” Apollo interrupted Aphrodite with a scowl.

Aphrodite turned sharply to face Apollo and snapped, “Unless you want another episode of either Daphne or Hyacinthus, I suggest you stay out of this.”

Immediately shutting his mouth, Apollo’s face turned stormy, enough to rival Zeus’ on a bad day. The temperature outside increased all of a sudden, causing a few of the drier trees and shrubs to catch fire spontaneously. Catching Artemis’ equally stormy eyes, he felt himself calming a bit, enough to gain control and consciously bring the temperature to normal. That was why they needed each other. Artemis’ cool nature was a natural balm to his hot-tempered one and his usually carefree attitude merged well with Artemis’ controlling one.

“And as for you,” Aphrodite continued, turning to look at the other twin, “I will personally make sure that you never receive the love that each person deserves. Because you do not. How dare you compare something as beautiful as love to seeking approval of one’s self worth? Just how dare you?!”

“I’m going to get a headache because of mom’s anger.” Piper whispered to a frightened Jason and he pulled her closer so she could rest her head on his shoulder.

“Do you care for Apollo because of who he is or because he has the power to make you feel better about yourself? Because you see, the former is love and the latter is not and the sooner you learn the difference, the better it will be for you. I should not be telling you the difference but apparently you do not understand it.”

Artemis glared at the love goddess, her eyes shining brightly with anger. But before she could say something, Hera said sharply, “That is enough. I do not want even one word from either of you for
Hera looked in distaste at the two goddesses. Was this how they would behave in front of mortal children? How dare they? Do they not understand the discord that they showed amongst the family to the outsiders? Her family was supposed to be perfect – the only compensation she was supposed to get out of her marriage with Zeus. Instead, it was the farthest from being perfect.

When Aphrodite had walked into the throne room all those years ago, the only reason Hera had accepted her in the family was because she thought that having the goddess of love as a family member would mean more harmony and love within the perfect family that Hera strived to create. Instead, Aphrodite’s existence had only sown seeds of discord in the family, making everyone fight one another and picking fights with everyone. It was like having another Ares and Enyo, combined into one, but prettier. No wonder Ares and Aphrodite got along well together. They were made for each other, what with their inherent madness. Still, it was too late to throw her out of the family or Hera would have done so by now. Hera could only try to put out fires before they turned ugly and burnt down the entire family.

“Read. Now!” Hera commanded the boy, another proof of her husband’s infidelity.

“‘Uh…’ … up with tragic!’”

“Yeah, what’s up with that anyway?” Travis asked. “All of the famous love stories are also pretty tragic.”

“Huh!” Connor huffed. “Romeo-Juliet…”


“Wuthering Heights. We had to read that in school once.” Lou Ellen said.

“West side story.” Leo said.

“That’s an adaptation of Romeo and Juliet.” Piper informed Leo.

“We are Greeks and heroes! We invented tragedy.” Thalia said.

“Apparently mom loves tragedy. Something about it bringing out the essence of love in contrast to the tragedy that takes place as a result and blah, blah, blah. I zoned out for the remaining lecture from Drew.” Piper said.

“As the goddess of love, shouldn’t she be more invested in that instead of tragedy?” Dakota asked and added quickly, “Just a question. No offence.”

“Nothing highlights love and makes you grateful for it, than a good tragedy.” Eros stated, knowing that his mother was still too angry to explain something to the children. “When something horrible happens, you feel grateful for what you have and what you love. The duration and aftermath of wars or epidemics or disasters – all tragedies – are the times when people love unconditionally.”

“Too depressing.” Leo muttered, thinking about how his story with Calypso could have easily ended in such tragedy.

“Yeah,” Jason agreed and cleared his throat.

“‘Love conquers all … of people killed!’”
“This war was the same as one that was mentioned earlier, is it not?” Ares asked. “Did someone not say that it was the worst war in our history? It was started because of a love story?”

“Yes, it was.” Clarisse answered.

“Wasn’t it started because of the beauty pageant?” Katie asked, only loud enough for the demigods to hear.

“Technically, it was started because of Hera.” Annabeth told the demigods. “If she had just invited Eris to the wedding, then there would be no Golden Apple of Discord and no beauty pageant. That means no reason for Paris to get involved.”

“Why does everything come down to either Hera or Zeus?” Percy asked.

“I honestly don’t want to know. I value my life too much for that.” Connor said and everyone nodded in agreement.

“Pfft. That's not … talked about it.”

“That is true.” Ares commented and then cleared his throat and pretended to sharpen his knife.

“Not knowing is … you just wait.”

Percy quickly looked at Annabeth, Calypso and Rachel. Aphrodite really wasn’t kidding when she said she would make it ‘exciting’. He had completely forgotten what she had told him otherwise he would have taken it as a warning. Then again, in the end, he and Annabeth did end up together and for that he was extremely grateful. Just as long as no other ‘exciting things’ happened to them.

“That's really … nice as you.”

“Still don’t believe in that.” Piper murmured.

“Aphrodite's eyes were … trinkets and trash.”

Ares scoffed and said, “He really does care too much for those defective experiments of his.”

“They are important and dangerous,” Hephaestus replied, “which is why no one should try to meddle with them.”

“What?” I asked … the wrath of Ares.”

Ares nodded in satisfaction. If he could not harm the impudent child because of Aphrodite and the future of Olympus, at lease his little curse would work. But the fact that the child was still alive meant it would have been nothing more than an inconvenience for the boy. The god really hated when he had to abide by rules and pull his punches.

“Wait! Is this about the curse that dad put on you when you fought him?” Frank asked.

“Yeah.”

“It came true?” Theseus asked.

“Curses always come true.” Hazel replied, having seen her fair share of curses.

“At the worst possible time.” Percy said with a sigh and Ares smirked at that.
I balled my fists in every direction.

“Damn! You got dumped right in the middle and with no warning that too.” Chris muttered.

“Well, all you have to do is not pick up anything and you are golden.” Gwen said.

“Easier said than done.” Leo said. “Ever been in a toy store? This is even worse. You’ll see so many cool things over there that you can’t help but pick them up.”

“There were some pretty cool things over there.” Thalia said and Grover and Percy nodded.

“‘What did she … can't trust Aphrodite.'”

“Excuse me?”

“Jason, read if you want your sister to live.” Piper whispered.

“Grover was looking … to me about.”

“Yeah, no kidding.”

“‘So," I said … it was real.'”

“It was!” Zoe said in indignation. “As a matter of fact, we killed it only last year.”

Percy frowned and said, “The Ursa Major is a new born baby right now?”

Thalia rolled her eyes and said, “You saw a constellation being created right in front of you but you have trouble grasping that Ursa Major has just been formed?”

“You know,” Annabeth said, “none of the constellations named after the heroes are even up there yet.”

“This is so… weird.”

“Guys,” Grover broke in. “It's delicious!”

Hephaestus ignored the fire in his beard and looked at Grover in disbelief. “Do not eat any of my possessions. Why would you do that?”

“Satyrs!” Ares scoffed and gave Hephaestus a ‘what-can-you-do’ expression.

“Thalia swatted the … like a crescent moon.”

“What?” Zoe asked in confusion and looked at Adrianna for an answer. A hunter’s bow was always given by the Lieutenant to the hunter, which was received directly from Lord Hephaestus as a result of some long standing understanding between Lady Artemis and Lord Hephaestus. But why would there be a bow that could collapse within a hairpin – just like her last weapon.

Adrianna cleared her throat nervously and said, “Well, we…”

“Zoe,” interrupted Artemis, “we knew about Anaklusmos and how it could turn into a hairpin for you. I had thought that you would like some reminder of your old life when you joined us. Most of the hunters do keep some or the other thing that used to be theirs and since you had nothing significant when you came to us, I thought that perhaps your new weapon could be a reminiscence of your old one.”
“Oh.”

“That was before we found out about…” Adrianna trailed off, looking at a sullen Hercules.

“After that I asked Hephaestus to not make the bow, but it was already completed, so I cursed it and asked him to do away with it.” Artemis continued with a haunted look on her face. “It seems that you were fated to see that cursed bow at least once in your life.”

Zoe was touched by Artemis’ thoughtfulness. The goddess had tried to make Zoe as comfortable as possible and it seemed that she had gone one extra step and gotten a weapon commissioned just for her, so that she could remember her old life. After all, the sword had been her most treasured weapon, having belonged to her mother. If it had not been sullied by Hercules’ name, Zoe would have definitely loved a reminder of it.

“Thank you.” Zoe said hoarsely to Artemis. “If you do not mind me asking, what was the curse?”

Artemis took a deep breath and remembered the words that Hestia had once spoken to her. The elder goddess had told her that anything she does in anger or impulsively, would somehow cause her grief later on and now…

“What was the curse, Artemis?” Hades asked with trepidation. His daughter had picked up a cursed object and then had not survived the quest. Granted that the Fates had already written her end by then, but if there was even a chance that another god was involved in the ordeal… Hades didn’t know what he would do, but he would do something. It was his daughter after all, even one whom he had no connection with.

“You have to understand, the curse was created in a fit of anger.” Artemis said in a calming voice and recited, “Any child of god, who touches the bow shall not reach their journey’s end – just like Hercules could not have, had he not had Zoe’s support.”

“It is specially made to target only demigods.” Athena observed.

“Yes.”

“Then it wouldn’t have worked on Bianca, right?” Thalia asked. “We cease being ‘children of god’ once we take up the oath.”

Artemis nodded but Apollo said, “You would be correct in a normal situation. However, here Bianca was a quester which means for the purpose of the quest, she and Zoe were mortal. The curse may not have worked on immortal children of god but a temporarily mortal child… it would have worked on her.”

“No way…” Thalia muttered.

Nico shook his head and whispered, “Even Bianca could not have beaten a prophecy and a curse. No way.”

Will clutched Nico’s hand, having heard the tearful confession. Nico looked up at him and looked so utterly lost that Will had to resist taking Nico out of the throne room. It was Nico’s choice and decision to stay here and Will would stay along with him till Nico changed his decision.

“Continue with the reading, child.” Hades ordered Jason and muttered under his breath, “Before I do something that we all regret.”

“’It’s just like … Or cursed.’”
“Do you think I know of the curse?” Zoe asked Phoebe.

Phoebe shrugged and replied, “There may be a multitude of cursed objects in that junkyard. I do not think you would know of this particular curse and still let the child pick the bow up.”

“Bianca reluctantly set … across the yard.”

“You know,” Percy said, “I never thought about this before but, how do you know so much about all this?”

“Dude, I had been on the road for years before I came to camp. We met a lot of people on the way.” Thalia answered. “Many of them loved telling stories and gossips.”

"'That's the second … some of it.”

“I knew it!” Leo exclaimed excitedly.

“I found an … flap their wings.”

“So, you all picked up something or the other, but nothing happened?” Gwen asked.

“You can pick it up, admire it and then keep it back. As long as you don’t take it out of the junkyard, nothing will happen to you.” Thalia informed.

Chiron nodded and added, “No one likes any one coming to their home and messing around with their things. The junkyard is actually only a part of Lord Hephaestus’ various forges and if you take something out of there, it is tantamount to taking something away without asking.”

Hephaestus nodded absent-mindedly as he worked on some sort of circuit.

“Finally, we saw … wedged tightly together.”

Hephaestus looked up at that and smiled a little before going back to what he was doing.

“Bianca frowned … to climb over.”

“You don’t climb over a monster, okay? Even if it is the easier way out.” Annabeth said exasperatedly. “Actually, especially if it is the easy way out.”

“I’m glad that no one actually listened to me that one time.” Percy said and thought about how they wouldn’t have even made it a quarter way out before the giant metal man would have killed them.

“Ping. Thalia hefted her … like fake feet?”

“Seriously?” Annabeth asked.

Grover shrugged and replied, “It was really creepy, okay? I wanted to see if it was alive or something.”

“'Come on.' Thalia looked at me. 'Around.'”

“You knew he would climb over if given the chance.” Annabeth asked.

“Oh yeah.”
“I didn't argue … in a junkyard?”

“Well, if there are toes, there’s got to be a body attached to it. Why didn’t you think of that?” Leo asked.

“Why didn’t we?” Grover muttered to himself.

“After several minutes … to be thanked.”

“That is very rude…” Pan muttered. Dionysus snorted and poured some more wine for Pan.

“At that moment … They were toes.”

Jason stopped reading for a second and looked over at Percy. Sometimes, just sometimes, he really doubted Percy’s thought process.

“Not one word.” Percy gritted out in embarrassment. He could almost hear Annabeth roll her eyes at him.

“The thing that … words WASH ME.”

“Talos.” Hephaestus said with a smile. “I was starting to wonder where I had put that version.”

“Are you not still working on that?” Hermes asked, having seen the metal giant’s face a few times during his visit to Hephaestus’ forges.

“Why are you working on a metal giant?” Zeus asked in suspicion.

The god of forges shrugged and replied, “I had an idea, so I am working on it. And yes Hermes, it is still a work in progress. I think I am going to remove this one too. I can make it bigger if I adjust the…” Hephaestus continued to mutter to himself, occasionally jotting something down.

“‘Talos!’ Zoe gasped … with a battleship.”

“One of the children took something of mine? Who did it and what did they take?” Hephaestus asked suddenly, making Jason to pause his reading.

“How do you know that?” Artemis asked, worrying for her hunters.

“My main objective of making Talos is for him to be a protector and that is programmed into him. Due to an accident, my first creation of him was defective in some areas but perfect in others. Like protecting. So I assume that he is protecting my things from thieves. He would only become animated if something were taken away.”

Nico put his hand in his pocket and felt the little figurine lie safely inside. Sometimes, he still could not believe that Bianca gave up her life for a stupid figurine and that too, of their dad. She died and left the clue of their parent’s identity. It was not fair.

“If something has been taken,” Athena thought out loud, “then it must be the daughter of Hades. Allow me to explain.” She said as Hades glared at her for the accusation. “Both Zoe and Thalia are too cautious to take something. They have been warning about it since they all entered the junkyard. Grover is too afraid of consequences to do something like that and if it had been Percy, it would have been mentioned by now. That leaves us with Bianca. She is too new to our world to heed the warnings.”
“Did Bianca take something, Percy?” Hades asked.

“Mhmm.” Percy nodded and added, “It’ll come up soon enough.”

“’Someone took something … the Nemean Lion.’”

“That is the best way to deal with someone bigger than yourself.” Reyna pointed out.

“That and trickery.” Clarisse added.

“Thalia drew her … mountain of metal.”

“Who do you think you are calling ‘baby goat’?” Grover brayed in annoyance.

“Not the time, buddy.” Thalia whispered to Grover as she looked at a tense Nico.

“Bianca and I … "Throw it down!””

Hephaestus shook his head and said, “You are outside of the junkyard, are you not? Once something has been taken outside, it cannot be returned, for thievery is thievery and returning the item would not lessen the crime.”

“That’s what you guys do.” Butch said to Leo. “If anyone takes something that you are creating, you won’t take it back or you create a lot of fuss about it.”

“We’ll take it back. We will just destroy it and start from scratch.” Leo said with a huff. “The logic is simple. We are creating masterpieces of our own. Heck, something of our own, even if it is for someone else. You touch it means you mess around with it and ask any artist, they don’t like their things being messed around with.”

“That’s true.” Rachel said and Annabeth agreed.

“My son is correct.” Hephaestus said. “If you take something and keep it back within the limits of the junkyard, then that is alright. But if you take it out of the yard, it means that it is already meddled with and I cannot work on it any further. So, the item is useless to me and simply returning it will not pardon you.”

“And the function of this ‘Talos’ of yours is to?” Athena asked. “Kill the person who took the item?”

“Yes, I suppose it would be.” The god said with a shrug.

“A life in exchange of a machine?” Hades asked in anger. “Is that not a bit too much to ask?”

“A life in exchange of a machine made by a god.” Hephaestus corrected. “Lives have been taken for far less. At least here I am only asking for a life in exchange of the time, effort and skill lost in making something that is rendered useless for any further use, not to mention stealing from my personal property.”

“She didn’t even take a machine. A stupid, stupid figurine.” Nico hissed lowly, the figurine heavy against his thigh.

“’I… I didn’t … we’d been hiding.’”

Nico’s breath hitched and he closed his eyes. That had been too close for comfort. Knowing what
was coming was only making each little thing worse. He anticipated it at every other sentence and could not breathe properly even if it didn’t turn out to be his worst nightmare. For the first time since the starting of this book, he was wishing for Bianca’s death, for then at least his nightmare would be over. For then, he would finally know what had happened. But right now he couldn’t think or breathe or do anything without worrying about the future.

“"Hey, Talos!" Grover yelled, but the monster raised his sword, looking down at Bianca and me.”

“He would not allow himself to be distracted from his intended target. All of you could disappear and he would only have eyes on the young hunter,” Hephaestus declared. That was one of the best features of Talos, defective as he was.

Poseidon caught Hephaestus’ eye and shook his head, indicating him to stop talking. It was having a really bad effect on his brother. It was one thing to know that your child would die and another to listen to the whole ordeal, word for word. Poseidon considered that, the ultimate cruelty on behalf of the Fates. The three old ladies were for sure punishing the gods (for surely in a war there would be other fatalities and those could be mentioned in the books) for whatever ills the gods may have done to the Fates over the years.

“Grover played a … the giant’s backside.”

“How did you do that?” Frank asked.

“Woodland and nature magic.” Grover answered.

“Can Coach do this?” Jason asked.

“Of course, I can! Any satyr can if taught properly.” Hedge gave Jason the stink eye for even questioning his ability to perform woodland magic.

“Even the fauns?” Reyna mused.

“Any satyr can!” Hedge growled at her.

“Why are our fauns so useless?” Gwen sighed.

“I’ll get someone to teach them.” Grover offered.

“Talos whirled around … statue of a god.”

Nico took his hand away from Will and brought out the stupid figurine that was the reason for his sister’s death. Ever since Percy had returned it to him, the statue was like a rare piece of comfort in all the crazy and Nico had always been reminded of Bianca when he held it, now more than ever.

“"It... it was … like this?" I said.”

Hephaestus frowned and wondered what he had to do with a tiny statue of a god that was part of some mortal game.

“She wasn’t thinking about the game. She was thinking about me.” Nico said to Percy in a subdued voice, defending his sister against any accusations, even if they were from the one person who respected Bianca as much as Nico did.

“I know.”
“I had been searching for this one for so long. I used to irritate her about it all the time.” Nico said sadly. “She used to keep warning me to not keep any of the figurines in my pocket because I lost it like that.”

“Lost what?” Will asked.

“The figurine.” Nico answered as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. “I lost it while playing with it in the damn hotel.”

“What?” Percy eyed the statue suspiciously.

“What?” Nico echoed and shook his head as if breaking out of a trance.

“You just said that you lost the figurine – that figurine – in the hotel.” Will said, pointing to the statue clutched in Nico’s hand.

Releasing the tightly held object, Nico turned it over and said softly, “Yeah, I did.” He raised the statue to his eye level and squinted at the side of it.

“Nico?” Hazel asked curiously.

“The pack that I had was custom made. Don’t ask me how or why I remember this, but I do. All the cards had a holographic symbol – you know the type that can appear or disappear in a particular angle – and all of the figurines had the same symbol etched on its side. You can’t see it if you are not looking for it.” Nico explained.

“Eta?” Leo asked. “Anything that dad makes will have ‘Eta’ on it.”

“No, not that. A key.” Nico said and then looked at Percy and Thalia as realization struck him and added in a whisper, “Dad’s key.”

“Your dad got you a custom made Mythomagic pack?” Thalia questioned.

“I guess?” Nico shrugged and looked at the statue and said, “This is the one I lost and Bianca found it. I had an entire pack and I lost this piece. I always had it with me. How did I…?”

“I did not make that.” Hephaestus said as he looked distastefully at the tiny statue in Nico’s hand. “That is shoddy workmanship at best and my son is correct. I put my signature on anything I make. There are a lot of people out there who copy the things I make but none can recreate my signature.”

“If it is not your creation then why is it in your junkyard and why is your monstrous creation protecting it?” Persephone asked.

“It is a junkyard!” Hephaestus exclaimed. “People throw away things all the time, but if something ends up in my junkyard then it becomes my property, even if I did not create it. There are too many things in there to separate my creations from others. Once it is my property, you cannot take it away without consequences.”

“Are you okay?” Will whispered to Nico as the younger demigod had his eyes tightly shut.

“Headache.” Nico whispered back. “I always get them if I try too hard to remember something. I still can’t remember if I lost the figurine in the hotel or before that. I think it was before that, but I am not sure and I can’t remember anything.”

Nico sighed in relief as Will hummed and the headache disappeared within seconds. Will took the
figurine from Nico and looked at the figurine and then at Nico. “This is a pretty good imitation of your dad. So are you – a close enough copy of your dad. If you had this with you when you came to camp and someone compared this to you… we could have guessed.”

Nico frowned and said, “Did you just compare me to a Mythomagic figurine?”

“That’s your takeaway?” Will rolled his eyes. “I am saying that if you did lose it before you went into the hotel, then it is for a good reason. Anyone who knows about our world, can guess which god this is and you look a lot like your dad. Anyone could connect the dots. Well, anyone with a brain. That would have put you in danger.”

“Then why didn’t anyone know when we got him to camp?” Percy asked.

“Same with why no one connected you to Poseidon even though you look like his carbon copy and were good with water. Because of the oath.” Annabeth replied. “And even you didn’t recognize the similarities despite having met Hades a couple of years ago.”

“Now my head is spinning.” Nico muttered and rested his head on the back of the couch.

“He was a baby back then and too hyper. How was I supposed to match that to that?” Percy asked, jerking his head towards Hades. Nico glared at Percy and let out a deep breath to calm himself.

“I’m just gonna…” Jason pointed at the book. “There were tears … which buckled.”

Zeus smirked proudly. He wanted to know more about his daughter using her powers. It seemed that she mostly used her shield to scare others. There were only a few times where she used her lightning powers and obviously the most enjoyable one was the one where she fought against Percy. He wanted to see more of that. The god considered whether he could ask either of his children from the future to fight against Percy using powers. Maybe then he could boast because Poseidon still wouldn’t let him live down Percy’s win over Hercules.

“The giant collapsed … FOR MAINTENANCE ONLY.”

Leo chuckled and said, “I think I know what Percy would do. ‘Cuz I would do the same thing.”

“I think we all know what Percy would do.” Annabeth said with a long suffering sigh.

“Crazy-idea time … to get inside.”

“I knew it!” Leo yelled. “This’ll work.”

“You are crazy.” Hazel declared. “I mean I knew you were crazy with all those weird ideas but this confirms it.”

“Which one of them are you talking about?” Calypso asked.

“Both.”

“I agree.”

“Okay. First of all, crazy works.” Percy said.

“And second?” Connor asked.

“No one expects it.” Leo smirked.
"'How? You'll have ... time it right.'"

"And pray." Reyna muttered and wondered how Percy had managed to live for as long as he did.

"Bianca's jaw ... You'll die.'"

"So, umm, this – this is what she did?"” Nico whispered to Percy.

"I tried to stop her. I really did. But I was distracted.” Percy whispered back and Nico gave a curt nod, trying not to imagine the whole scene in his head.

"She should have listened to you.”

"'It's my fault ... my responsibility. Here.'"

"What is it with the children of big three and being self-sacrificing?" Piper grumbled. She didn’t even know Bianca and she was almost on the verge of tears. It was pretty obvious how it all would end.

Thalia sighed and replied, “Because we feel responsible for everything, regardless of it being our fault or not. We are more powerful than other demigods, no offence guys, so it’s natural to take up the responsibility for anything bad. Plus, it is usually our fault.”

“This trait is unfortunately consistent with each generation of demigods.” Chiron added.

“So,” Leo dragged the word, covering up his distress over that piece of information and how well it tied with Jason’s personality, with his usual humor, “with great power comes…”

“Don’t even complete that!” Percy warned.

“… great responsibility.” Leo grinned. “Ha!”

"She picked up ... monster's left foot.”

Zoe closed her eyes as grief and remorse washed over her. The poor child would die because of her. Her future self should have never taken a new hunter on such a dangerous quest. The girl did not deserve such a gruesome death – no one did – and all because she wanted to take something for the brother. A part of her whispered in the back of her mind that if it had not been for the brother, Bianca would have never picked up the statue and she would not have to sacrifice herself to save them all. But Zoe ignored that part of her in favor of beating herself up over the most idiotic decision she ever took.

“Thalia had its ... are you doing?!”""

For a moment Zoe let herself hope that she had stopped the child from doing something reckless. Maybe they could stall till sunrise. Monsters of any kind (even metal kind) usually hated the sun and would just go away. But her hopes were dashed as Jason continued to read.

"'Get it to ... Olympus-Air refrigerator.”

Percy could imagine what Bianca had done in that little time. How she would have gotten inside the giant, how she would have meddled with his wiring and how she would have died in the aftermath. That imagery had kept him awake for months after the quest. Even though now he had accepted and made his peace with Bianca’s death, hearing all this was bringing the memories back.
Nico remembered the first time Bianca had made an appearance after her death. It had been in front of Percy and only to tell Nico that he should stop blaming Percy for her death. That it had been her own choice. Back then Nico had not understood a word she said but now that he was coming to know about what exactly had happened, even if it was from Percy’s view, he could finally understand his sister’s words. As hard as it was to hear these things, it was better to know it. At least he could come to terms with what had happened.

“The monster was … Then he froze.”

Nico sniffled and gave a short laugh, his eyes starting to water. “Go Bianca!” he muttered and wiped his eyes. He could not help but feel proud of his sister. She managed to save her companions just when they needed it. She was a hero. She was the best hero of all times.

“Talos cocked his … "She is inside?!"”

“How could I have not known?” Zoe muttered to herself, placing her head in her hands. She felt someone rub her shoulder in a comforting manner but it didn’t matter in that moment.

“The monster staggered … Bianca get out?!”

“You didn’t have a plan for that, did you?” Zoe asked, knowing what the answer would be. It was obvious now that she knew the thought process before he did anything – which was usually just the bare minimum.

“No.” Percy replied. “Didn’t think that far.”

“The giant hit … on in there.”

“Unless I have gone and made some changes in that version, I do not think anything is insulated.” Hephaestus explained somberly. A child died inside his creation and he could not wrap his mind around that. This was exactly why he didn’t want to care for living creatures. They were too fragile, too irreparable. “That model was made by me and scrapped before completion. There was no need to take any sort of safety precautions. Nothing, including it blowing to pieces would hurt me.”

Nico stared at the small statue in his hand, not paying attention to things around him. Everything seemed muted, so what was the point anyway? It felt like losing her all over again. Except, somehow this was worse than the first time.

“The giant careened … Talos began to run.”

“Why?” questioned Hermes.

“He will take her back to where she picked up the statue.” Hephaestus explained. He always knew that people had died in his junkyard time and time again for taking things that did not belong to them, but this was the first time he was hearing about it and he wished he had never made death the penalty. Maybe he should change that to something less permanent, like, like making them his workers or something. Yes, that would work. He should definitely do that. He didn’t want any blood on his hands.

“’Wait!’ Zoe yelled … but no luck.”

“You won’t find her.” Nico whispered. “Alecto had taken her back to the Underworld as soon as… Dad told me.” Breathing was difficult, so was swallowing or seeing clearly. Nico rubbed his eyes
furiously but his tears would not stop. He didn’t even know when he had started crying. He didn’t look at anyone and started to rub his thumb over the statue in his hand, concentrating on how it felt, how the sharp edges dug into his skin and how he could distract himself from everything else. Staying in this place was difficult. He needed to leave. Immediately. Taking a fortifying breath, Nico mustered whatever little energy he could feel inside himself and borrowed the remaining from his dad. He didn’t care if Hades didn’t like it. He needed out.

Hazel felt the drop in temperature and atmosphere almost as soon as Nico started to gather his energy. She knew he was calling on the shadows. There were enough in the room to help him out but she also knew he was still recovering from his almost fading away and was obviously grieving. Acting impulsively, she reached over to him, which was easy since she was sitting diagonally behind him, and lent her own inherent shadow energy to him or rather, just let him take it. She really didn’t know how it worked and all he had told her was that the destination had to be clear and the shadows would take care of the rest. So, she thought of her dad’s palace, where they had been staying. She knew she was currently stronger in mind than Nico and hopefully that would be enough to overpower Nico’s destination. If he even had one.

Within seconds, darkness enveloped both Nico and Hazel and they were gone by the time it cleared out. Most stared at the place the two were previously sitting in, in astonishment.

Will growled and said, “I’m gonna kill him.”

“Where did they go?” Frank asked, looking around them.

“They both are safe.” Persephone said and sneaked a look at her husband, who looked like he too would disappear in shadows any moment. “If there is any more in this chapter, please finish it. Then we will take a break for as long as required.”

Jason looked over to where Nico and Hazel had been and hoped that they were fine.

“Zoe sat down … Bianca di Angelo was gone.”

Jason softly closed the book and fiddled with his glasses, trying to digest what he had just read.

“I’d forgotten what she was like.” Percy said hoarsely to Annabeth. He sniffed and said, “I need to – I need to find Nico.”

“The children are in the palace.” Persephone said softly, appearing in front of Percy. “If you would like to see them, come along with me. I am going there and you would require permission to enter.”

Percy got up, about to agree but looked in apprehension at Hades.

“If he would not have allowed it, I would not have offered.” Persephone informed Percy. She knew her husband would prefer to sit in the throne room, where no one would disturb him, despite being surrounded by family, rather than be in his palace, where someone or the other would continuously ask him about his well-being. She looked at a fretting Will and extended him the same offer. Once both the boys nodded, she took them away.

Most of gods didn’t really care about what had happened and swiftly left the throne room in order to find something else to do. After some time, some of the demigods started to leave, each reminded about the people they had lost. Pollux specially was almost in tears as he thought back to Castor’s funeral. The hunters filed out so that they could gather and pray for the girl they never knew, but would always remember. The new recruit who gave her life to save others.

In the end, only the six elder gods and their mother remained, all, except Hades, looking at him.
Hades was sitting on his couch and looking absently into the fire in the hearth. A few several times Rhea thought of going to him but remembered how much he liked to be left alone during times of emotional crisis. She knew he needed some time alone before he could tolerate someone’s company. Motioning with her head, she asked her children to leave their brother alone. They would check up on him later.
Happy New Year guys! How were the celebrations? Mine was just watching old movies with my roommate.
Anyway, here's the new chapter, so hope y'all like it. I think I could have written more in it but it felt perfect like the way it is right now. Also, with Hades, the emotions aren't mentioned properly because somehow that felt in character for him and the same goes for the Nico scenes.

Hazel grunted as she helped Nico on top of her bed. The two of them had materialized in the darkest corner in Hazel’s room and she had spent the better half of the past five minutes trying to get Nico to either move on his own or help in keeping his weight off her. Finally, some time back he had groaned and tried to sit up from where he had fallen on the floor. As Hazel huffed and sat down next to Nico, she was glad that at least Nico hadn’t faded into shadows.

“Ambrosia or Nectar? Which one do you want?” Hazel asked as she leaned towards the bed side table. When no reply came forward, she picked up the small vial of nectar. It worked faster, according to Frank.

As soon as Nico drank the healing drink, tears formed in his eyes and he muttered, “It tastes like jelly beans. Bianca loved those.”

“I’m so sorry, Nico.” Hazel said, putting her arm around her brother and pulling his wiry frame closer.

Nico sniffled and pulled away with a silent nod. Pushing himself further up the bed, he laid down on the soft pillow. Now that the nectar was working on doing away with his fatigue, he felt too tired to hold up his own body and he didn’t want to trouble Hazel further. He closed his eyes and felt the hot tears roll down the side of his face and into the pillow below. Hazel weaved her hand into his long hair and combed her hand through it, hoping that it would have the same comforting and relaxing effect on him that it usually had on her. Her mother, back when they had been a happy family, used to do the same to her to keep away her nightmares.

As soon as Hazel touched him, Nico could feel his resolve break and the tears and the sadness and loneliness that he had kept bottled up, broke through. He pushed his head against Hazel’s body, trying to find comfort and was secretly glad that she tightened her hold on him and let him cry to his heart’s content. It felt like being comforted by Bianca, but different at the same time.

“Come this way, children.” Persephone said as she turned down the hallway. “They are in Hazel’s room.” As much as she hated the reminders of her husband’s unfaithfulness, she could not ignore the heart wrenching look on the boy’s face when his sister’s death had been read out. As a sister herself, Persephone could only imagine the pain of losing a sibling so close to one’s heart. Once they reached the bedroom, she left the boys on their own. She did not want to intrude on the
emotional scene that would lay waiting inside. She was neither too close to the children, nor was she affected enough to offer sincerity in such a situation.

Percy waited till Persephone left the area and looked at Will. He knocked twice and pushed open the door, enough to just peep in. When Hazel motioned him in, Percy stepped aside to let Will enter and followed suit. Nico was sitting up on the bed, next to Hazel, his sobs having been reduced to hiccups. He wiped away the few remaining tears as the two boys made their way towards him.

“I gave him nectar.” Hazel informed as Will worryingly looked at Nico.

“Can I heal you?” Will asked, lifting a hand in offer. Once Nico nodded, Will touched his forehead and hummed under his breath and his hand lit up a little compared to his body. “Better?”

“Yeah. Thanks.” Nico muttered as his fatigue went away completely and he felt only numb instead of numb and tired. That was probably an improvement.

Percy perched on the edge of the bed and looked sadly at Nico. “Nico, I-I’m so sorry. She-I…” Percy stopped abruptly. What could he say? Nothing would make a difference. He didn’t have words to convey what he felt or meant and words wouldn’t be enough anyway. But maybe Nico understood anyway because he nodded and muttered, “Yeah.”

“She was really brave.” Hazel said quietly to Nico.

“Bianca always was. She – she always thought of everyone else.” Nico said with a slight nod and picked at the bedshead in his distress. “Um guys? Thanks for being here but could you leave me alone for some time? I really want to be alone right now.”

“Yes, yeah. Sure.” Percy said and rubbed his hands on his jeans before getting up from the bed. Leaning over, he gripped Nico’s shoulder and said, “You come and find me or anyone else if you need anything.”

“Thank you.” Nico said and looked at Percy with red rimmed eyes. “For staying with her and not giving up.”

Percy nodded and motioned Hazel to come with him. He just hoped that Nico would be alright at the end of it all. Hopefully, he got the peace of mind that he was looking for, through the reading.

“I really don’t think you should be left alone. Your vitals are still pretty much on the lower side and…”

“You can stay if you want.” Nico murmured to Will and heard the door close behind Percy and Hazel. He saw Will’s hesitant nod and explained, “Percy would try to make me feel better and he will feel guilty about the whole thing. He means well but he… I don’t want to be near him right now, there’s too much history, so many things that I did wrong because of all this. And Hazel… she… she is too close to the whole thing in a completely different manner.”

“So, I’m kind of a neutral party?”

“Something like that.” Nico nodded and started when Will pulled him closer. The contact made him dissolve into tears again and Will thankfully didn’t say a word, but just pulled Nico closer and let him cry his heart out once again.

X-X-X-X-X

Poseidon looked inside the throne room. The fire in the hearth was the only light in the room and it
cast long shadows all over the place. The light from the fire flickered and Poseidon spotted his older brother sitting on his throne, staring into the fire. The room was still littered with the couches left behind from the reading. In the distance, the sea god could hear the chatter in the dining hall. Glad for his vision that allowed him to see even in the dark (living at the bottom of the ocean did have its advantages), the god picked his way through the room and reached his throne after almost tripping over a couple of times and a lot more cursing under his breath. Even that didn’t make Hades smile.

“Did mother send you?” Hades asked as he accepted the wine chalice that Poseidon offered.

“No,” Poseidon replied flippantly, “I wanted to sit in the dark on my throne.”

Hades rolled his eyes and said, “If that was your idea of a jest, then I suggest you quadruple your efforts.”

“My sense of humor is the best there is, you will understand it the more you stay with me.”

“Poseidon, I was with you for eons in father’s belly. I know your ‘sense of humor’. It is pitiful.”

“Excuse me? How dare…” Poseidon sighed and continued, “I know what you are doing. Do not try to divert the topic. How are you doing?”

“But you are so easily distracted.” Hades said, the corner of his lips lifting as he took a sip to cover his amusement.

“And you are highly frustrating, but we cannot change who we are. Mother is worried about you.”

“Why? There is…”

Poseidon kept his own chalice down and said softly, “Hades, we all just heard about your daughter dying before she even began to understand who she was, before she even knew about you. Do not pretend that it does not affect you.”

“I hardly even knew the child.” Hades said mockingly and turned to face his brother. “She was just a character in a story that we are reading about. She died. It happens all the time. I would know. You expect me to be affected by the death of some child that I hardly knew?”

“She was your daughter.”

“And I said that I did not know her…”

“And that makes it even harder, does it not?” Zeus said gruffly as he approached his throne. “That she was your child and you did not even know her, but had to hear of her death.”

Hades growled and stood up, moving to block Zeus’ path. “Are you honestly trying to make me angry right now? What is the meaning of this?”

Zeus looked his brother in the eye and said as sincerely as he could manage to, “I cannot even imagine what that must feel like, but I do grieve for your loss.”

“What loss?” Hades growled. “The child is but just a name to me. Nothing more.”

Poseidon moved to stand next to Hades and said, “A child who dies before even being born is still a loss for its parents, despite them never having known the child. Just because you knew not of the child or the fact that she is yet to be born for you, does not take away your right to mourn for her. I
Wish for you to not take away that from yourself.”

Zeus said, “Mother mourned for you five all the time and she had only seen each of you for mere minutes before father took you all away. Your child of the future is still yours. You cannot do away with that just because you did not know her.”

Hades looked at his two brothers and shook his head. “Mother did send you both, did she not?”

“She did not.” Zeus assured. “She worries for you but she told us to give you some time.”

Hades stalked to his throne and muttered, “You should have listened to her. I am in no mood for having company.”

“Perhaps…” Poseidon said. “But we do know you better.”

The eldest god sighed at his insufferable brothers and sat heavily on his throne. Their words had gotten to him. All the while he had sat alone, he had wondered whether he should be mourning that child. Bianca was his daughter in the future and he was not sure whether even in the future, he knew much of her. Could one really mourn and grieve a person’s death when they knew next to nothing about the said person? And why was he even mourning her? Even in death, she would come to his domain. She would be with him. But he already knew the answer to that. He did not mourn for her death but for her unlived life, her hopes and dreams that had been cut short. And he was to blame.

“I should have never brought the children out of that house of the Lotus Eaters. They were safe in there…” Hades lamented.

“Only momentarily, brother.” Zeus pointed out. “We all know that the Lotus Eaters are not safe for anyone, especially a mortal and that too, a child. You very well know that the longer the children stayed in there, the more affected their mental health would be. As it is, it seems that you kept them in there for an entire lifetime of a mortal. Any longer and who knows what would have happened to them.”

“In the future, you were right to bring them out. I have to say, you planned it well enough.” Poseidon said. “You made sure that neither of them would have to face the prophecy alone. We both had children by then. Children, who were older than yours. But even you could not have predicted a prophecy or what the Fates had in store for your child. You must not blame yourself for something that none of us have control over.”

The god of underworld knew that his brothers were correct but it did not ease his sadness. Instead, he drank the entire contents of his chalice and said, “I hate it when you both start making sense.” As his chalice refilled, the
god of underworld thought out loud, “Perhaps that is why we agreed with the Fates in the future to affect the timelines like this.”

“You think that we agreed to this reading because we were tired of losing our children?” Zeus asked.

“Tired of losing children that we could have at least gotten to know.” Poseidon pointed out. “I think it is a possibility.”

Hades silently agreed with Poseidon. He would give anything to go back and get to know each child of his. The three brothers sat there, lost in thoughts about their individual tragedies, but Hades felt better already. He still had a child that he lost far too early than necessary or fair, he still had mixed feelings about his loss and he was still grieving, but he also had his annoying brothers with him, who were actually supporting him instead of irritating him and that made quite a bit of a difference. Sure, sometime later they would get back to their old, bickering ways but their company helped him, loathe as he was to even think of it.

X-X-X-X-X

Will shuffled around the room and picked up the tee that he almost stepped on. By Apollo’s lyre! Nico was really messy. After Nico had broken down and had tiredly fallen asleep in Will’s arms, they had relocated to Nico’s room. Now awake, Nico had left Will to roam around in his room as he freshened up. He had wanted to go out. He seemed pretty tired but had insisted that he would feel better once he showered. In the meanwhile, Will was trying not to clean up the room. There were clothes strewn everywhere and the healer-disciplined part of Will wanted him to clean up the place as he would want the infirmary to look.

“Are you seriously folding my clothes?” Nico asked incredulously.

Will jerked and hastily put down the half folded tee on the bed. “Uhh… no? It’s just… umm I’m used to keeping things really, really clean in the infirmary. I just kind of started doing that everywhere. Seriously, it’s a problem.”

Nico snorted and looked around for his jacket. “Have you seen my…?”

“Do you really wanna wear it? I mean it’s pretty hot out there. Dad’s in a pissy mood.” Will said but threw the jacket in Nico’s direction. “Shouldn’t you rest more? I mean I know you are still wiped out from the shadow travelling and everyone will understand if you don’t wanna see or talk to anyone.”

Nico fiddled with the zip on the jacket and pursed his lips. He leaned against the chest of drawers and spoke in a tired voice, “I’ve been doing that for years.”

“What?”

“Hiding.”

“It’s not hiding, Nico. You need time to adjust and we all understand that. Everyone has lost someone or the other. We know and can understand if you don’t want to socialize or something.”

Nico shook his head violently and said, “No, no, no. You don’t… you don’t get it. I’ve done this already. I ran away from camp because of … this. I didn’t talk to anyone. I went to the underworld and stayed away from even dad. I’ve done this before and I don’t want to do it again.” His voice broke as he continued, “It feels like it, but this isn’t – isn’t the first time I have lost her. At every step, it’s like I lose her all over again and I’m-I’m stuck.”
Will saw that Nico was almost on the verge of tears and helped him to the bed. “Come, sit. What are you saying?”

Nico blinked away his tears and twisted the skull ring on his finger, over and over again. Finally, getting his thoughts in order, he tried to explain, “I was – I was scared… when they first… no, I didn’t even need anyone to tell me. I could feel it. I could feel her soul being carried to the underworld, I could feel her standing in front of the panel, awaiting judgement and I was scared because… because I could feel her but I couldn’t save her. I couldn’t do anything for her and all of my powers were just useless. And then I stopped feeling her soul.”

“I could have returned, you know. Back to camp and all that, but I didn’t.”

“You were ten. You were scared in a new world and you were alone. But you are not alone anymore.”

“Exactly.” Nico looked at Will, hoping that he would understand. “I didn’t let myself see that there were others who were willing to help me and it’s still difficult to believe, but I want to. I want to believe and I don’t want to be alone. Accepting the campers meant letting go of Bianca and I wasn’t ready for that.”

“And you are now?”

“No. I don’t think I’ll ever be ready. But I want to try. I did everything that I could think of, to get her back – I tried to talk to her, I tried to exchange her soul for another, I …”


Nico winced. “Yeah. It’s illegal and dad was so furious with me. I was confined to my room for months and if it wasn’t for the war, I would still be locked up.” Nico sighed and continued, “My point is, I have done all I could think of and nothing worked and she moved on. I even tried to replace her with Hazel. I think Hazel knows that and it’s not true anymore but I still did it. It’s like… every single time I think of Bianca, I’m that scared kid and I…” Nico inhaled sharply and sniffled. “I don’t want to be that…”

“Scared kid anymore.” Will completed and Nico nodded and rubbed his eyes.

“I did what I could so that I could get back old times but I never considered whether she wanted the same thing or not. No wonder she didn’t want to talk to me all that time.” Nico muttered to himself. “But the last few chapters that were read out – they are making me think and I’m thinking that maybe I was wrong all this time. You know, whenever Bianca wanted me to do something and no matter how many times she told me to do it, I wouldn’t do it, she would lead by example. That was her thing. She would… she would try to do all those things that she wanted me to do, like sleeping at the correct time or eating vegetables. Things like that. What if… what if choosing to be reborn as someone else was her way of showing me that she wanted me to move on? I wouldn’t put it past her to do that, you know.”

“Or she just wanted to try for rebirth.” Will said, not wanting Nico to try to read between the lines where there was probably nothing.

“Maybe.” Nico said with a shrug. “But, this… this makes sense to me.”

“She would want you to move on, wouldn’t she?”

“Yes, but I’m terrified of letting go…”
“Moving on doesn’t mean to forget someone. It means to remember them and still continue living your life. Chiron told our cabin that after the war.”

Nico nodded solemnly and muttered a thanks after sometime. Will stood up and held out his hand to Nico. “Let’s go and introduce the campers to the real Nico, yeah?”

The younger demigod stared at the hand and tentatively took it. He reminded himself that he had people who cared for him, who worried for him and who probably liked him if not loved him. He had a younger sister in Hazel and older brothers in Percy and Jason. He had friends. He had all that that he had tried to deprive himself of for so long. Maybe he could once again become the Nico that Bianca had loved.

Nico stood up and looked at Will’s earnest and hopeful face. On an impulse, he leaned in and softly brushed his lips against Will’s. He moved back and looked up at Will’s eyes, trying to see if he overstepped some invisible boundary. As Will broke into a goofy smile, Nico felt his face heat up and he too smiled. Will’s eyes flickered to his lips and the son of Apollo started to lean in.

There was a slight knock on the door that Nico hardly registered before the door swung open and Will sprang back. Hazel peeped in and spoke softly, “Hey Nico. How are you? Umm… we are having late lunch. Do you guys wanna join?” It was only then that she realized the tension in the room and asked, “Am I interrupting something?”

“No.” Will answered with a smile and Nico muttered a ‘yes’ under his breath. “Yeah, we’ll join you guys for lunch.”

“Great!” Hazel said with an awkward laugh. “It’s just us, no gods or anyone. Chiron got it arranged for us… in the main garden. It’s like a picnic.” Hazel pursed her lips and exhaled, “Okay. So, I’m gonna go now.”

“Right behind ya.” Will called out as Hazel left.

“We should… we should go.” Nico said, tugging nervously at his jacket with his free hand. His other hand was still held in Will’s.

“Hmm.” Will nodded and pulled Nico towards the door. “By the way,” he said as they walked out into the hallway, “is that a black camp t-shirt?”

“Uhhh… yeah.”

“I didn’t know they made that in anything other than orange.”

“They don’t. I just told the store people that I don’t like orange. So they dyed it black and gave it to me.” Will turned to stare at Nico in disbelief and Nico said smugly, “Benefits of being the son of Hades.”

“So not fair.” Will muttered. “Do you think you could get me a blue one?”

“Light blue or dark blue?”

“Dark?”

“Sure.”

“Awesome!”
Hey guys!
So, this chapter has a lot of things happening, but mainly the capture the flag game between demigods and hunters. I hope you guys like it all. The game was real fun to write and so was the Zoe-Hercules scene. :D
Lemme know how it is.

Disclaimer: Rick Riordan owns it all.

Ch75 – TTC – Capture the Flag!

True to Hazel’s word, the late lunch was indeed a picnic, complete with picnic baskets, a picnic blanket and even a Frisbee (where had that come from?). But there were somethings that were different than usual, that showed that they were really on Olympus. Instead of dogs running around like in most of the mortal picnics that Nico had seen, there were pegasi and a couple of goats – not satyrs but actual goats – and then there was the whole matter of nymphs randomly popping in and out of the area. The demigods were sitting together around a huge picnic table. It reminded Nico of the camp fire sing along. The hunters, too, were sitting with the campers and were actually interacting with them peacefully. That almost made Nico double take.

Nico was glad that no one said a word or made it more difficult than it already was for him to be there. As he approached, they just wordlessly shifted around and made space for him and Will to sit next to Hazel and Frank and continued with what they were doing. The only thing that was different than usual was that they all smiled at him at least once and were far more familiar with him than they had ever been. There were no cautious glances or whispered words and Nico wondered whether it was because of what they had read or had it always been like that and he just had never noticed. He knew that with the Romans, he was a touchy topic. Camp Jupiter had always given him a wide berth but he could not remember such a treatment from Camp Half-Blood. Maybe it was because he had ran away and by the time he returned, they really needed any help they could get or maybe they were just more accommodating than the Romans. Whatever the reason, Nico found himself actually enjoying their company.

“You look… different. Happy? Different than before.” Reyna observed quietly.

Nico shrugged and looked over to Reyna. She had taken up the place next to him when Will had been dragged away by the Stolls to prank Clarisse. Currently, they all were hiding from her. Nico picked at the fruits on his plate and murmured, “It’s… I don’t know… like no one is paying any special attention to me or you know, whispering. Things like that. It’s nice.”

Reyna hummed and looked around as if trying to soak it all in. “It is nice. I can see why Jason would prefer Greeks over Romans. I mean, I don’t understand it but I see it. There is no strict distinction between people here. No ranks, nothing.”

“Only once they get to know you, but yeah, it’s very different from Camp Jupiter.”

“Hey.” Annabeth said as she plopped down next to Reyna and offered them a bowl. “Custard
“No thanks. Where’s Percy?”

“Kidnapped by pegasi.” Annabeth said and pointed upwards where a group of pegasi were racing. “Jason, Percy and Leo are racing and Piper’s the ref. What are you guys talking about?”

Nico shrugged and replied, “Just how different the camps are.”

“Yeah, I mean, if we were given so much time to ourselves, I’m pretty sure within the first five minutes someone would have suggested to complete the drills.”

“Please! Nobody here wants to run through any drills or do anything at all actually.” Annabeth sighed. “Unless of course we have a quest or some new training or something like that.”

“It is pretty disorganized.” Reyna observed and added, “No offence.”

“It only looks like that.” Annabeth replied with a pained smile. “You will find it disorganized because we are principle based and you are rule based.”

“Are you saying that we don’t have principles?” Reyna cocked a brow and Nico gave his full concentration to his food. There was no need to interfere unless they tried to kill each other. That was always a possibility.

“That is not what I meant.” Annabeth replied with a little chuckle. “It’s just that all your principles are written down as rules and everyone is supposed to do it or they have consequences. At Camp Half Blood, it is different. We have the bare minimum rules like no maiming or killing anyone in the camp through any means, no littering, compulsory curfew hours, no pulling Chiron’s tail, and things like that. Everything else is just decided as a group and implemented. You should stay for some time at the camp. You might just like it.”

“People pull Chiron’s tail?”

“Far more than you think they might and it’s not just the Hermes kids.” Annabeth replied with an eye roll.

“Seriously?” Nico asked incredulously.

Annabeth nodded and said, “You should ask Will. He did it on a dare once and the entire cabin got banned from playing capture the flag for the entire month. But the Stolls recorded it and we still play it on movie nights. Chiron doesn’t know. I think.”

Nico chuckled and repeated, “Will did it?”

“Yeah.”

“Wow.”

The three of them laughed and Nico asked, “So, what time are we playing the game?”

“You wanna play it?” Reyna asked in concern.

Nico nodded and said, “Yeah, about time.”

Annabeth smiled at him and said, “I’ll go confirm it with the hunters and Chiron. It’s gonna be in the evening anyway and there is no more reading for the day so we have some time to go through
our plans. Nice. I’ll be back.” With that, she got up and ran off.

“Phew!” Nico said exaggeratedly. “I thought you guys would start fighting or something back then.”

“Fighting?” Reyna asked. “Annabeth and I? No way. We are friends.”

“When did that happen?”

Reyna shrugged and said, “Sometime while saving the world.” She cocked her head to the side and added, “Can’t believe I said that so casually.”

“You’ll get used to it.”

“I hope not.” Reyna sighed and looked at Nico. “Are you sure about the game?”

“Yeah. It’s actually one of the top five coping mechanisms of Camp Half Blood, right up there with hot chocolate, s’mores, sing-alongs and movie nights, not in that particular order.”

“S’mores? Really?” Reyna asked with a chuckle.

“It kinda works. I mean I stayed back at camp after a pretty bad battle and it was comforting, I guess.”

Reyna looked skeptical but let it go. “You know, this will be the first time I see you play a game. You never participated in the war games.”

“I didn’t have a cohort and anyway, you could have guessed my fighting style. I wasn’t there to interfere, only observe.”

“Nico!” Will shouted as he ran up to the two. “Oh hey Reyna.” Will nodded at the praetor and looked back at Nico. “We are playing the game tonight?”

“Yeah, I think so.”

“Well, in that case we have two hours to teach the Romans. Come on, Annabeth’s asking everyone to gather in the arena.”

Within twenty minutes everyone had gathered in the arena, including the older demigods. Everyone except the satyrs and Tyson were playing the game and were almost equal to the number of hunters there were. Clarisse informed them that Chiron was getting the field ready and would as usual be the referee and that they were still not allowed to use their powers or maim the other team.

Nico looked around for Percy and saw him standing near the seating area, leaning against the railing. “I’ll be back.” He said to Will and Reyna and motioned them to join the others without him.

“Hey,” Nico whispered to Percy as he came to stand next to him.

“Hey. You okay, man?”

“Better than before.” Nico replied. “Listen, I just want to thank you for you know, always trying to help me. You didn’t need to.”

Percy shook his head and said, “I did actually need to do that. For one, I promised Bianca and two, you were way too young to be left alone like that.”
“Okay, I was pretty rude to you throughout and promise or not, if someone had been like that with me, I’m pretty sure I would have just left them alone.” Nico took a deep breath and continued, “You didn’t owe me anything. I mean, your promise to me was to only try and protect Bianca and you did that, but she was the one who made the ultimate decision. It wasn’t your fault…” Nico trailed off and exhaled heavily. That was the first time he had said that out loud to Percy and it made him feel better. Till now, he had only been Percy’s friend because of either his feelings or his guilt for taking Percy to Hades and then to Styx, and being his friend had always filled Nico with guilt as he believed Percy to be the reason for Bianca’s death and felt like he was betraying Bianca. It had all been very confusing. But now that was all cleared up and Nico’s head felt clearer than it had ever been in the past few years. He smiled a bit and repeated clearly, “It wasn’t your fault.”

Nico chuckled and sighed. “I think… I think I’m just realizing it now.”

Percy chuckled along with Nico and wordlessly acknowledged the admission.

“Oh gods.” Nico gasped. “I’m sorry for all the stupid things I did and you got dragged in so many times.”

Percy shook his head and said, “You don’t need to apologize or anything…”

“But I do…”

“No – no, you really don’t. I can relate to what you were going through at that time. I mean all the things you did were not correct or anything but… I was headed down the same path.” Percy admitted. At Nico’s confused look, he elaborated, “When I came to camp, my mom… you know, died. Well, got kidnapped by your dad, but I thought she was… gone, and because of that, my only goal was to somehow get her back. I was willing to trade with your dad or plead or whatever to get her back and when I saw you doing the same thing, I just couldn’t let you continue doing that.”

“Oh.”

“The only thing that snapped me out of that were my friends and I thought that if I could give you the same kind of support that Grover and Annabeth gave me when I needed it, it could help you too.”

“Oh gods! Now I feel worse.” Nico said in a subdued voice. When he saw Percy’s face crumbling, he added, “Not your fault, just… just thinking about what all I did, running around the underworld and labyrinth with that manipulative Minos, and all that time you were trying to help me.”

“Mmm-mm.” Percy shook his head at Nico and advised, “Don’t think about all that. It’s all in the past and what I’ve learnt is that the more you think about it, the more you miss of the things around you, in the present. We all made mistakes and as long as we don’t repeat them, I think we are all cool here.”

“Just like that?”

“Uh-huh. Just like that.” Percy snapped his fingers and smiled. He leaned in and whispered, “You should listen to me. I’m older than you and I have gained a lot of wisdom.”

“You are like only 3-4 years older to me.”

“And I have that much more wisdom.” Percy stage whispered and Nico shook his head in amusement. He clapped Nico on his back and asked, “So, offence or defense?”

“Huh?”
“The game. You wanna play offence or defense?”

“Defense?”

Percy smirked and said, “I think I might just have a plan.”

“I think we should probably stick to Annabeth’s plan.” Nico countered as he and Percy walked back to join the group.

“Why does no one have faith in my plans?” Percy asked with a pout.

“They usually have a high chance of getting everyone killed.” Thalia said, having overheard that bit.

“But this is a game.”

“Even more dangerous.”

“I don’t like you.”

“I don’t care.”

The two of them continued bickering with Nico chuckling at their silly fights till Annabeth came and broke them up and assigned them their positions. Over three hours later, they all found themselves in the field that Chiron had, with the help of nymphs and a few over helpful gods, turned into a pretty good replica of the Camp Half Blood woods. There was even a creek that divided the field into two halves. It was created by diverting water from the nearby river. The surrounding area was filled with seating area for the gods and was filling up pretty fast. In the center of the field, near the creek, stood the demigods and hunters, all dressed in their armors, waiting for Chiron to finish briefing Nike on the rules of the game. The goddess had insisted on being the referee and the Seven were somewhat apprehensive of her thanks to their last encounter with her.

“Alright!” Chiron boomed and everyone fell quiet in anticipation. His voice was being carried over to even the farthest spectator, thanks to the wind gods. Many citizens of the immortal city came running to check out the commotion and settled down for some entertainment. “Campers and hunters, please take your flags and get them into positions.”

He waved forward two nymphs, who handed over a giant banner to each team. The Hunters’ flag was silver in color and twinkled with what could only be replicas of various constellations and had a painting of bows and arrows on it. Sabrina and Phoebe took the flag and disappeared into the forest, on their side of the field. The other nymph unfolded a similar banner, but white in color and with the symbols of the two camps painted on it. Annabeth and Thalia took it deeper into the woods on the campers’ side of the field.

“Today, on popular request of the gods and agreement from the teams, there will be a friendly match between the campers of Camp Half Blood and Camp Jupiter along with the three demigods from the past, Hercules, Perseus and Theseus and the Hunters of Artemis.” Chiron announced as everyone gathered around him, including the ones who had gone to place the flags. “I will now acquaint everyone with the rules. Anyone breaking these rules will be immediately disqualified, however the game will continue till there is a clear winner. So, try not to be disqualified.” Chiron looked pointedly at all of the players.

“This creek is the boundary line and the left side belongs to the demigods and the right side to the hunters. The entire forest is fair game and anyone leaving the forest will be disqualified from the
game. All magical items are allowed, but no one can use their inherent powers. That means the hunters are not allowed to use their superior strength or speed and none of the demigods are allowed to use the powers that have been handed down by their godly parent. Is that understood?”

Once everyone mumbled ‘yes’, Chiron continued, “The flags must be properly displayed and there should not be more than two guards within ten yards of it. Prisoners may be disarmed but not bound, gagged or maimed. In general, there shall be no maiming or killing. Prisoners are to stay within the ‘jail’ area unless released by someone from their own team. The prison is allowed only one guard.”

“How do you make someone a prisoner?” Adrianna asked.

“Disarm and then capture by surrounding them. Once captured, they can only be released by someone from their own team.” Holly answered before Chiron could.

“Right.” Chiron said. “If the opposing team has taken the flag, they need to cross the creek over to their side to actually win the game. Once they have crossed over, no more attacks can be made on them. I will serve as battlefield medic and Lady Nike will be presiding as the referee.”

“Are there monsters in there?” Paolo asked, pointing a thumb at the forest.

“Not here, there are not.” Chiron replied. “Any other questions?”

The hunters cleared a few of their doubts and Chiron said, “Since everyone is already armed, the teams are given ten minutes to discuss anything they want and get to their positions. At Lady Nike’s signal, the game will begin.”

“Guys, come on.” Annabeth hissed and everyone huddled closer to her. “Everyone remembers the plan and your positions?” At their nods, she instructed, “Now, no one, I mean, no one is allowed to leave their positions, even if there is a better opportunity.” She looked at Percy and Thalia at that.

“Hey, that was a one-time thing, okay?” Percy grumbled.

“Just sayin’.” Annabeth shrugged and addressed everyone, “We all have to trust that our teammates know exactly what they are doing. Defense team will stay on defense throughout, no matter what. You do not move from your position even if you see a teammate getting captured. We have people for that, okay? Everyone, positions?”

The demigods, all took turns saying their positions and Annabeth said, “Oh and have fun guys. It’s just a game.”

“But we are still destroying the hunters, right?” Holly asked.

“Duh.” Annabeth smirked and sent them off to find their places as Nike announced five minutes to the start of the game.

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“They seem determined.” Sabrina mumbled as she looked over at the demigods whispering to each other.

“So are we.” Adrianna said. “Sabrina, Diana, you both are on guard duty for the flag. Helen, you have the guard duty for the prison. Make sure that they do not escape, but obviously you cannot hurt them. That goes for everyone. Do not hurt the demigods at any cost, even if it is Hercules.” Everyone grumbled at that and the leader said, “I know, I know, we do not like him but those are
the rules that we have to adhere to. Now, if you think that you might get disarmed and captured, either call for arms or escape from there. Zoe, I want you to be near Percy Jackson or Thalia. They both might be reluctant to hurt you and facing you will startle them in the least.”

“Actually, I would prefer Hercules.” Zoe countered and everyone stared at her as if she had lost her mind. “Let me explain. Both Percy and Thalia seem to have reconciled with whatever happened to me. They are somewhat alright with talking to me, but Hercules is not. He prefers not to engage with me at all and I think we can use that to our advantage. As much as I do not like it, I think that might be a good way to take out one of their stronger players.”

“Are you sure?” Adrianna asked in concern. Zoe had suggested that idea once before but Adrianna had shot it down, not wanting to put Zoe in such a position and yet what Zoe said held some truth. Both Percy and Thalia were alright with Zoe around, but Hercules was a different case altogether. Recently, he had started to ignore Zoe completely or if he made eye contact, he would quickly turn away. Zoe definitely had a higher chance of distracting him thanks to their botched history. But the lieutenant was still uncomfortable with letting Zoe carry out such a task.

“I am. This might also give me a reason to punch him in the face.” Zoe said confidently. “None of us can defeat him sans our enhanced strength but if I could distract him for a bit, it might give us a chance to at least capture him.”

“Okay, you do that then.” Adrianna agreed. “Penelope, Phoebe and I will lead three factions. Phoebe, you are responsible for long range defense. Penelope and I will infiltrate the enemy lines. Naomi, Celyn and Bernice, you three are our best runners even without our powers. You three are to ensure that you release anyone who gets captured and when the time comes, whoever captures the enemy flag will hand it over to one of you to carry it into our territory, if need be. Therefore, stay close by at all times. Alright sisters, we shall win this!”

“Yes!” they all thundered together and split into groups and took up their positions.

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“Ready for your first ever capture the flag?” Percy asked Reyna as they took up their positions.

“It is more or less like Siege that we played when you were there, so we will be fine.”

“Except that there is a fair chance for either team to win.” Jason pointed out as he straightened his glasses. “And we don’t have to go against water cannons.”

“We won when Percy played with us.” Gwen mentioned, tightening her arm brace.

“Two minutes!” Nike’s voice echoed around the forest and Percy turned to face the others.

“First line of defense, ready?” Percy called out.

“Ready.” Holly gave him a thumbs up from where she was hidden.

From up ahead, Chris banged his spear against his shield. That was his signal for being in position. He was the defense at the creek while someone behind him hid Holly and Laurel. Further behind them were the Romans. Since they were experienced in group attacks, they were completely in charge of defense, while most of the Greeks were tasked with taking out the opposition individually. Frank and Will were on tree tops with their bows at ready, while Nico and Hazel were given responsibility of freeing anyone that would be captured. The two of them, even without powers, could hide in plain sight and that was an advantage that Annabeth wasn’t going to ignore.
Jason ran to his position in front of the flag and met with Perseus over there. Both of them, although powerful, were left to guard the flag. Annabeth had insisted that they would need strong defense when playing against the hunters. The hunters were too fast and experienced to be stopped by the first line of defense and anyone who was able to cross the Romans would have to face two powerful demigods to reach the flag.

“Butch is in position.” Annabeth said as she came to a stop next to Percy. Butch was the guard for the prison and had Clovis nearby as backup. Everyone else was going on offence as distraction for Lou Ellen and Chiara to reach the flag. “And I saw Nico and Hazel heading towards the creek from the east.”

“Everyone is ready here. Where’s Thalia?”

“With Leo and Piper, putting up a couple of last minute traps.” Annabeth replied. She took out her cap and smiled at Percy before putting it on. The only way Percy knew of her departure was because she brushed her hand against his as she moved away.

A conch shell sounded in the distance and Nike announced the start of the game. Percy grinned and scaled a tree as thundering footsteps came closer. From his position high up, he could keep track of everyone and interfere when needed.

Annabeth took off her cap as she came up behind Lou Ellen and Chiara. “Psst. Guys. Come on.” She was responsible for getting them safely to the hunters’ flag. The reason they had chosen those two was because the hunters would expect one of the big three children or Annabeth to reach the flag and try to take it and the minor gods’ children to play as patsy. The hunters knew that the demigods were vain enough to want the glory all to themselves and that was why Annabeth decided to change that little detail. The group of hunters they were going against, were rigid in their beliefs and Annabeth was going to take advantage of that. So, all of the Olympians’ children were out in the open, except Nico and Hazel and the minor gods’ children were given the more important roles.

“Let’s do this.” Chiara said in glee and quietly followed Annabeth and Lou Ellen. Annabeth held out her hand, which Lou Ellen held with her left hand that held her shield. Once Annabeth became invisible, it seemed like Lou Ellen was only defending herself, with her shield in front of her and her staff in a ready defense position. Normally, the staff was used only as a training weapon but she had taken a liking to it and had it readjusted to fit in blades on both ends. However, now the blades were hidden. Chiara tiptoed behind Lou Ellen, keeping clear of the staff and keeping her spear as still as possible. They were not supposed to give away their positions to anyone. The two of them were specifically chosen as Chiara had good luck without even using her powers and Lou Ellen could sense where the Mist was concentrated. Just because she could not use her power over the mist, didn’t mean she could not use the existing mist to hide.

“Keep right for now.” Lou Ellen whispered to Annabeth as she felt the mist around her curl and obscure her on its own. She wasn’t using her powers, but that was who she was. “Go towards any place that is densely populated by trees or just have many items in one area. Those will have the most mist.”

“Got it,” came Annabeth’s disembodied voice.

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“Phoebe?” Adrianna asked.

“My team is in position.” Phoebe replied. “Agatha is at the creek.”
As Nike announced the beginning of the game, Adrianna ordered, “Penelope, go ahead and look out for the children of the more powerful gods. They will be difficult to handle even without their powers.”

“Charge!” Penelope shouted and the hunters in her team ran off.

Adrianna looked at their flag that was hung between two trees, pretty high up and yet easily accessible. As per what Chiron had said, the flag had to be taken down by hand only and no weapons of any sort could be used. As Sabrina and Diana took their positions, Adrianna split her own team into two and told Cynthia to lead the team through the right side while she would take her people through the left.

Before she left, Adrianna turned to address the ones on guard duty, “Remember, no matter what happens, Thalia cannot reach that flag. She is the only one who will know instantly how to untie it.”

The hunters had tied the flag using a special knot that they had learnt from Artemis. It was quiet difficult to unravel and only trained hunters could untie it within seconds. Even a novice hunter would need a few minutes to untie the knot, which was why it was important for the hunters to make sure that Thalia did not reach the flag.

Adrianna led her team to the demigods’ side, passing through some of the hidden hunters. By the time she reached the other side, a full scale mini battle was already underway, with Nike hovering way above, no doubt overlooking the proceedings. The lieutenant could make out Xenia fighting with the daughter of Demeter and Desma was distracting another demigod as the hunters ran further ahead. A few demigods jumped into the fray and Adrianna’s team went ahead to fight them off. Adrianna herself was about to join them when she felt something change in the air and ducked not a moment too soon as something went flying just where she was standing.

While crouched, the hunter turned around, her bow and arrow materializing in her hands. She straightened and shot an arrow towards a tree from where the projectile had come. She frowned as nothing happened when the arrow struck the tree. Normally, someone or something should have been hit. Before she could register what was happening, years of training and combat made her hand shield herself and she caught the spear that came down on her from her right. A slight shock ran through her and she knew her assailant even before she looked up.

Clarisse growled and pulled away her spear from the hunter. She didn’t need someone snapping her spear. Again. She doubted Ares would be pleased with that. The demigod moved back a little just as Adrianna’s bow and arrow turned into two long hunting knives. Clarisse could have sent through a higher shock but where was the fun in that? And anyway, her job was to act as distraction and what better distraction than engaging the leader of the hunters.

The hunter stopped the first blow that the daughter of Ares landed on her and used the second knife to drive her opponent backwards. Clarisse smirked and feinted a slash at the hunter’s feet and drive her spear upwards to catch Adrianna’s jaw. Adrianna’s head snapped back and she grunted in pain. She jumped up quickly just as Clarisse kept bringing down her spear on the hunter almost relentlessly. It was after a few moments that Adrianna caught a break and on an impulse did away with her knives, grabbed the spear for leverage and hoisted herself up to aim a kick at Clarisse’s gut.

She was prepared for it and just as she fell, Adrianna’s shield materialized and took the impact of the fall. As the hunter got up and looked at her opponent, she realized that Clarisse no longer held on to the spear and could be captured. Another hunter came to surround the demigod but before she could close the distance, an arrow struck the ground just before her feet, making her skid to a stop.
Another arrow struck a bit closer and the Adrianna fired an arrow back just as the other hunter raised her shield. In the commotion, Clarisse picked up her spear, saluted the tree from where the arrow was fired and ran towards the hunters’ side.

About fifty yards away, Frank smiled as Clarisse ran off, leaving the hunters to shoot at him. As another arrow made its way towards his hiding spot, he slowly start to scale down the tree. He needed to change his position. He was pretty sure, by the time the game came to an end, he would have gone up and down far many trees than he probably cared about. Another arrow hit the space his hand was just resting on and Frank cursed under his breath. Those hunters were damn fast when it came to archery. He glanced around the tree’s trunk and saw the hunters making their way towards him and he jumped off the remaining height. His cover was blown anyway, might as well make a run for it.

He could hear and feel the hunters gaining distance and Frank weighed his skills against the hunters. At least their leader hadn’t come along. Frank hid behind a tree and shot an arrow at the two who were following him. It hit one of their legs and Frank ducked back behind the tree as an arrow hit the trunk. Somewhere in front of him, he saw a mop of brown hair and an impish face leaned out from behind a bush. Connor! Perfect!

Connor held up a finger in Frank’s direction as he set the trip wire in place. He looked up and saw Frank nodding slightly. Connor grinned as the trip wire was in place and looked at the two hunters approaching Frank’s tree. Now all they had to do was get the girls to the trip wire. In any case, Connor had make sure that Frank reached safety. He was important for their defense and Connor had an awesome plan that was Percy-approved.

Connor analyzed the area in front of him and rubbed his hands in anticipation. He got up from his hiding place and caught the attention of one of the hunters as the other one attacked Frank. Connor ran, jumped off a raised root of a tree, gained enough height and momentum to swing off an overhead branch and landed behind the hunter whose attention he had caught.

“Parkour!” Connor exclaimed as he landed and pushed himself against the hunter, making her lose her balance. He then took off towards his hiding place and smiled as the hunter followed him. As he approached the trip wire, Connor jumped over it and skidded to a halt just as the hunter behind him tripped and fell over. He saw Frank too moving towards in his direction. Not waiting for an invitation, Connor blocked an attack for Frank and said theatrically, “Save yourself! Tell my story to the world. Tell them of their hero.”

Frank controlled his laughter, ran into the hunter who had just picked herself up from the ground and made her fall into a tree. Before she could catch her bearings, he ran off deeper into the forest and hoped that the girl didn’t get a concussion with all the times she hit her head.

***

Zoe kicked Piper in the back of her knee and slashed her knife at Leo, making him jump backwards. Piper growled and attacked a blond hunter in front of her. She and Leo had happened upon this particular group of three hunters and they had been fighting around in circles for what seemed forever. Piper parried yet another attack and saw Leo throw down one of his contraptions at Zoe’s feet. The contraption was completely harmless but created sparks at intervals for a few minutes. The sparks too, were harmless enough, but thankfully all creatures were afraid of fire and Zoe moved away from the contraption as it started to spew sparks from it.

As Zoe moved back, she stumbled into Sara, who hissed in her ears, “I spotted Hercules running towards our side. This might be the only time to stop him. I suggest we leave Rhoda to battle the two and stop Hercules.”
“Go.” Zoe muttered and pushed Sara in the direction of their field. She heard Rhoda growl and attack the daughter of Aphrodite.

“Let them go.” Piper shouted to Leo, who looked like he would follow the two hunters. Instead, he turned to help Piper. A few minutes and lots of scratches later, they finally were able to disarm and capture the hunter and marched her towards their ‘prison’.

Zoe soon caught sight of the famed hero and picked up speed and changed her direction. There was no need for Hercules to get suspicious. As much as she hated facing him again, even if in a game, she knew that if she had read him correctly, he was as hesitant to talk to her as she was to talk to him. Then again, she had been once wrong about him. Hence, the need for another hunter with her. She could not afford to be wrong once again.

As Hercules began to slow down once he entered the hunters’ area, Zoe ran a bit ahead and then once again changed direction so as to just ‘happen upon’ Hercules. Once she could see him properly, she motioned Sara to hide and revealed herself to the demigod.

Hercules came to a stop on seeing Zoe. He was so sure that he had passed her sometime back, engaged in a fight with the younger demigods. She looked tense, her hunting knives already in her hand and Hercules wondered whether he should have opted for archery duty instead of offense. He was pretty good with bow and arrow and there were far less chances of running into Zoe on top of a tree or something. It wasn’t that he was afraid of Zoe or anything but ever since his talk with Percy, Hercules just couldn’t stop thinking about what Thalia and Percy had said to him and how much sense it all was starting to make.

“Zoe,” he said with a nod.

“Hercules.” Zoe spat out as she glared at him. True to what she had thought, Hercules was hesitant to appear in front of her. The Hercules she knew and had heard about, would have attacked her by now and continued on with his mission, but this Hercules had not even drawn his weapon yet. Although, she was sure that once provoked, it wouldn’t take him much time to not only draw his weapon, but also defeat her.

She gripped her hunting knives tightly as Hercules unsheathed his sword and the two started to circle each other.

***

Percy spun around wildly, his right hand outstretched as his sword cut through the air, flat side out. That way, anyone who had not managed to move away from him, would only be bruised badly and not maimed. Percy didn’t wait for anything and as soon as he stopped his wild spin, he turned around and ran through the gap between the four hunters that had surrounded him. Well, originally the hunters had surrounded Thalia and Travis, but Percy had intervened along with Paolo and now the two were fighting the four hunters after Thalia and Travis had disappeared beyond the creek.

As Percy ran as fast as he could, he heard Laurel and Holly join Paolo in keeping the hunters busy and leaving Percy to carry out the remaining plan. If he could get close enough, the demigods would definitely win. Well, mostly, they would. Percy looked at the creek in front of him and knew that it was wide enough that if he jumped over it and cleared to the other side, it would be considered using his powers. He could wade through but he got a better idea as he spotted Chris and smiled and picked up his speed.

“Incoming! I need a push!” Percy called out and Chris knelt and lifted his shield up diagonally. This was one of those things that he had always wanted to try and Annabeth had always tried to
dissuade him from doing it. As Percy stepped on the shield, Chris pushed up from below and that
gave Percy enough momentum to catapult over to the other side of the creek. Percy rolled on the
ground as he hit it, to avoid getting badly hurt. He knew that Chris would let any hunter cross over
back to the hunters’ side, which meant he didn’t have much time. Sure enough, he could feel a
hunter wade through the water and the slippery stones. Getting up, he continued running as fast he
could.

Percy hit a hunter with his shield and yelled a ‘sorry’ as he ran ahead. He could hear a few
exclamations and more feet thundering towards him. As a volley of arrows came towards him,
Percy slashed through them when they were close enough and didn’t wait to see the reaction on the
hunters’ faces, although that would have been pure gold. Up ahead, he could see Connor and Katie
playing rock, paper, and scissors in the ‘prison’, while Damien looked bored out of his mind. The
three of them turned to look at Percy just as he somersaulted over a rock, landed with a flourish and
yelled, “Parkour”, making Connor laugh loudly.

He sidestepped just as Helen almost rammed into him and growl as she almost lost her balance. He
struck at her and she blocked it almost instantaneously and pushed back. He could feel time slow
down and he lifted his shield just as an arrow struck it. Soon enough, he was surrounded by three
hunters and with Helen as the fourth, he was completely surrounded. Percy knew he could most
probably get out of this predicament but the hunters were faster and all attacked simultaneously and
soon overpowered Percy. As soon as his sword dropped, Helen grinned and pushed him towards
the ‘prison’.

“Hey.” Percy grinned sheepishly at his friends in the prison and Damien rolled his eyes and went
back to kicking stones.

***

Chiara quickly moved back as a knife passed her. She exhaled and looked to the right where Pollux
was fighting with some hunter. “That was close.”

“Yeah, it was.” Lou Ellen replied in a whisper. Thankfully, till now they had not been noticed,
thanks to Chiara’s luck and Lou Ellen’s ability to hide in a mist without using her powers and
obviously, Annabeth’s cap, but the closer they got to the middle of the field, the crazier the fights
became.

“Guys, let’s keep moving.” Annabeth said, pulling Lou Ellen with her. “Hazel will hopefully be in
place and Thalia and Percy too.”

“Hopefully.” Chiara muttered under her breath. This was the first time, outside of a war scenario
that they were all working together and it had some, if not most, of the demigods on edge. They
were definitely not used to working as a well-oiled team, despite them being one when needed.

As they neared the creek, Lou Ellen asked, “Where is she?”

“On the other side.” Annabeth replied. “There! Let’s go that way. It’s darker over there and no one
will be able to see us.”

“Hopefully.” Chiara muttered and reminded the others, “We cannot depend too much on my luck
once we cross over. Luck in own land is one thing but expecting good luck in enemy territory will
be cheating and will most probably not work. From here on, it’s all on Annabeth and Hazel’s
navigation.”

“We know.” Lou Ellen muttered back as she concentrated on not slipping in the water. Seeing not
much splashes in front of her, she asked, “How are you doing it, Annabeth?”

“Practice,” came the reply, “and I have spent way too much time with Percy on the beach. Walking through water has become easier now.”

“Now I’m all wet.” Chiara complained. “I don’t like being wet. It makes me feel icky.”

“Guys!” Hazel’s voice came from deep in the forest. “This way.”

“We can’t see anything.” Chiara muttered.

“I can feel her.” Lou Ellen said. “She can use mist and she is somehow connected to magic, so I can get a feel of where she is.”

“Hey.” Hazel greeted them as the group came closer. “Where’s Annabeth?”

“Right here.” Annabeth took off her cap and looked at Hazel. “So, what’s going on?”

“Well, I went around the place and it’s seriously weird that no one can actually spot me. I’m pretty sure I’m not using any powers, but… woah!” Hazel shook her head and continued, “Anyway, towards the right is the prison and to the left is where they are keeping the flag. Nico is near the prison and he’ll wait for the signal. I saw Thalia and Theseus moving towards the flag but they are being blocked completely. Thankfully, the hunters are unable to disarm them. Yet.”

“We need to move quickly then.” Annabeth said. “Lead the way.”

***

Adrianna panted as she ducked behind a tree and looked around for Penelope. The two of them, along with five other hunters had been battling around four demigods, but the demigods were somehow pretty good and it was only when they had had the chance to disarm Naomi, that she and Penelope made a run for it. She was sure that the others too had gone to find the flag.

“Adrianna!” Penelope called from somewhere in the front. The sun had already set and it was now getting pretty dark and only their ability to see clearly even in the moonlight was what kept them going.

“There you are.” Adrianna sighed and joined Penelope and Bernice.

“I can see the flag.” Penelope said and pointed to the right. Sure enough, the white flag was fluttering in the slight wind. It seemed to be attached somehow to the rocks below.

“Celyn has gone to rescue the hunters in the prison. There are two of them there.” Bernice informed. “I told her to meet us here. The others with us have scattered and the demigods are busy chasing them for now.”

“In that case, we have to move as soon as the other hunters get here.” Adrianna said. “Any idea who is guarding the flag?”

“Two sons of Zeus.” Bernice reported. “Perseus and the younger one, Jason.”

“Why would they keep two sons of Zeus on guard duty?” Penelope wondered.

“Perhaps they knew that we would anyway reach their flag and they needed the most powerful here.” Bernice suggested.
Adrianna shook her head and said, “No, if you want to keep the most powerful ones here, then why not choose Hercules?”

“Can you imagine Hercules on guard duty?” Penelope asked.

“No.”

“Exactly.”

“Sisters!” Celyn called out as she and the others she had gotten out of prison came closer.

“Oh good! You are here.” Adrianna said. “Alright, we need to get to the flag now. There are two sons of Zeus over there which means that it would probably take every ounce of our non-powered up strength to fight them. You five are to keep them busy and I’ll take the flag. After that, I would need an escort till the creek. Once we cross it, we win.”

With the plan of action decided, Adrianna waited for an opening. The other five with her had gone ahead to keep the demigods distracted. Once that was achieved, Adrianna would make a run for the flag and take it. It sounded all simple and Adrianna hoped that no other demigod would make an appearance at the last moment. She bent in a crouch and massaged her ankle which had gotten caught in a tree root while she had been running into the enemy territory. When it had been suggested that they all play a game, she had been skeptical but now… she could see why the demigods seemed to love it so much. It was not only fun but was actually a training exercise too.

Adrianna grinned as she saw an opening. Both of the demigods were busy fighting her hunters. This was her chance and she ran at neck breaking speed, but was careful not to tap into her enhanced speed. It would not be good if she got disqualified now.

She weaved around Penelope and Bernice, who were fighting with Jason and made a beeline towards the flag. Of her own accord, her arm swung up and she caught the punching-arrow on her arm. That hurt! But at least it didn’t hit her side. That would have slowed her down. There must be that child of Apollo nearby. She had once heard him talk about punching arrows. Although how those worked, she wasn’t too sure of.

She put her shield up as another arrow made its way towards her. This one was a blunt arrow and had it caught her, she would have an ugly bruise to show for it. The lieutenant could also see Perseus and Jason making their way towards her pretty slowly. At least her hunters were able to slow the two demigods down a bit. She knew she didn’t have much time and grabbed the flagpole. It wasn’t much of a pole, but was a thick stick that had the flag tied to it on top and was wedged between the rocks. Adrianna chuckled as she pulled at it. It was too easy.

And suddenly it wasn’t.

Instead of getting pulled out, as she had thought it would do, the stick seemed to get wedged in tighter. That was impossible and she pulled at it again and again it wedged in tighter. Frustrated at both the arrows flying her way – one had hit her calf – and the unyielding stick, she decided to snap the stick and run away with the flag. She could have just untied the flag from its pole but she recognized the knot as a fisherman knot and while she knew that it was easy to tie it, it was almost impossible to untie it and she would need quite a bit of time to do so. Hardly anyone other than actual fishermen used it and the hunters had not practiced untying it that much. So snapping the annoying stick into two was the best course of action.

And yet it did not work. How much ever pressure she applied, the stick refused to break, until she realized that it was a painted piece of celestial bronze and that could only be broken if she used her
enhanced strength. She paused for a minute to marvel at the realistic look of the metal until another arrow hit her back and she saw Jason closing in on her while Perseus had taken up fighting off four out of the five hunters and the fifth was slowing Jason down, but not by much. The boy must have had better training than they thought he did.

The hunter growled and pulled at the pole again, but it did not budge. She could hear Jason laugh at her futile attempts and heard him mutter something along the lines of ‘love Chinese handcuffs’, whatever that was. Annoyed, she turned and caught the next arrow that almost hit her and snapped it into two. She held out her hand and her own weapons appeared. Forgoing the usual archery, she aimed the arrow towards where the attacks were coming from and threw it like a javelin. It too was a blunt arrow and she smirked as she heard some really loud cursing. Turning her attention back on the flag, she decided to wiggle it out and twisted it around, hoping that something would give, but nothing happened. She pushed it in and pulled it out again and this time it worked!

Whooping in joy, she jumped off the rock she was on, with the flag in her hand and almost got hit by a spear. One of Roman demigods was standing in front of her and she ducked just as the demigod swung the spear in her direction once again. Holding the flag in one hand and her hunting knife in another, she slowly started making her way out of the circle that she found herself in.

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Hercules jumped back as a knife whooshed through the air right where he had been standing some time back and swore under his breath. He was stuck with a vicious Zoe and he had never seen her like that ever before. She looked like she was on the war path. He could almost taste the bloodlust in the air and he wondered whether someone would interfere before he was murdered by the hunter. Probably not. He could not feel anyone near him, other than Zoe and probably another hunter hiding in the forest. Normally, he wouldn’t have thought twice before hurting an opponent, but this was Zoe and he didn’t want to hurt her and not only because of what Percy and Thalia had said to him.

“Perhaps we could talk?” Hercules panted out as he jumped sideways.

“Oh, now you wish to talk?” Zoe snarled as her hunting knife elongated into a beautiful sword and she slashed at him once again, making him jump backwards. If they continued in this fashion, he would soon end up the creek again. “I have had enough of your false words, Aclides.”

Hercules faltered as he heard his birth name. He hadn’t known that someone else knew of that name. Not soon after his birth, Zeus had officially changed his name to Herakles in order to please Hera and Hercules hated that name, so when some child of Ares had called him ‘Hercules’ instead of ‘Herakles’, Hercules had taken up that name. That made Hera hate him even more than usual but his life was already worse than ‘Fields of Punishment’ and he figured that having one more issue with Hera would not make much of a difference.

“How do you-?”

“How do I know your real name?” Zoe rolled her eyes and answered, “Everyone knows everything about you. Your name or rather, names, are not much of a secret.” She looked away and muttered, “Nor is your nature and yet I was foolish enough to fall for the façade.”

“What is that supposed to mean?” Hercules asked. “Everyone keeps saying such things – Percy, Thalia – but I do not know what you all talk of.”

“You do not?” Zoe scoffed and said, “Of course, you have no idea as to what people talk of you, you never did.”
“Then please explain it to me.” Hercules begged as he parried an attack.

“Explain it? Are you that foolish? Do you not have a brain to think with?” Zoe countered and swung her sword recklessly. She knew if she let her emotions get best of her, she would end up killing him and so she reeled in her temper. “Do you not think of why Lady Hera tries to harm you at every step?”

“Because I am her husband’s bastard child.” Hercules replied easily. He had heard that far too often from Hera herself to let it affect him any longer.

“Maybe,” Zoe attacked Hercules and he blocked it before countering her and she moved back to take a breather. “But more importantly, she does it because she cannot hurt her husband, but she can hurt his children without consequences.”

“And what does that have to do with your anger towards me?”

“Because, perhaps you do not see it, but everyone else does. You are exactly like your father, in both good and bad.” Zoe yelled at him and the sky lit up with lightning and thunder boomed. Looking up for a second, Zoe muttered, “Apologies, Lord Zeus.”

“Meaning?”

“Figure it out on your own.” Zoe snarled and attacked Hercules relentlessly and he could do nothing but avoid hurting her. He could easily win but he did not wish to injure her in the process and so he continued to block and counter her attacks.

***

Thalia grinned as she slashed at Diana’s legs, forcing the other hunter to move backwards. From the corner of her eye, she could see Theseus making good albeit slow progress with Sabrina. That was the issue with the ancient Greek demigods, Thalia thought to herself, they relied more on their strength than their abilities and the hunters knew how to take advantage of it. In modern times, those tricks only worked with the kids of Ares and that too because they usually attacked in anger. Speaking of Ares’ kids, Thalia could hear Clarisse throw insults at the hunter she was fighting with and some of them were really colorful insults. If trash-talking was an Olympian sport, then Clarisse would definitely win the gold.

Blocking the incoming attack, the daughter of Zeus wondered why the hunters were being extra hard on her. It could be because they thought that being a hunter and their future lieutenant, she would fight alongside them instead of against, but somehow she doubted that was the cause. Maybe Annabeth was right and the hunters did think that only a child of big three would go for the flag. If that was the case, then the plan might just work. Thalia knew from the very beginning that defeating the hunters through just battle tactics would be difficult, after all, the girls were not only highly trained but also lived in a time where battles were fought on a monthly basis. The hunters would have the upper hand there, but the demigods could use strategy to defeat them and Thalia had gotten that brainstorm thanks to something that they had read about – even strength needed to bow down to wisdom – or something like that. Well, if they could not defeat the hunters in sheer battle tactics, then they could try their hand at battle strategy. What did they have to lose anyway? The demigods had already lost far too many games against the hunters that it no longer mattered.

“I hope you are not already tired.” Diana said with a feral grin and Thalia moved away a second before the attack came. She knew Diana’s fighting methods. At least she had that advantage.

“You wish.” Thalia muttered and hit Diana with the flat of her blade. For this game, Thalia had
forgone her hunter attire and weapons and resorted to using her old items. Whirling away from another attack, Thalia hoped that Annabeth would get the girls soon because she was itching to let out Aegis.

Theseus rolled away as the hunter he was fighting, brought her bow down on him and saw Annabeth pushing Hazel towards the left. He quickly got up, tackled the hunter before she could react and shouted, “Thalia now!”

Thalia laughed madly and opened up her shield. She loved watching everyone run away from her as soon as that happened. Diana shrieked and scrambled back, leaving an opening for Annabeth to run in with Chiara and Lou Ellen. The two girls went straight to the flag while Annabeth started tackling a red haired hunter who had started to recover from the scare.

Chiara cursed under her breath as she tried to untie the flag, but the knot was too tight and she couldn’t find any give. She looked over to the next tree where Lou Ellen looked as frustrated as she felt and asked, “Any luck?”

“Funny, you ask that.” Lou Ellen gritted out and sighed in annoyance. Looking up, she saw more hunters trying to get past Thalia, Theseus and Annabeth. Those three made a formidable team but it would be all useless if they couldn’t get the flag. She told Chiara, “You keep trying, I’m going to get Annabeth. Her mom is totally into arts and crafts. Maybe she could help with the knots.”

Lou Ellen quickly scaled down the tree and ran over to where Annabeth was fighting off two hunters. Taking out her shield and staff, Lou Ellen pushed back a hunter and quickly explained the situation to Annabeth. As Annabeth ran to the tree and Lou Ellen took her spot, she hoped that Hazel would return quickly.

Percy patted his pocket to check if Riptide had returned yet. Satisfied that the sword was back, he wondered how long till they would get the signal. “Hey Connor,” he whispered, “Where’s Nico?”

“Over by the tree.” Connor muttered, nodding towards a tree someway ahead of them. “He has been there since forever.”

“Why are we missing out all of the fun?” Damien lamented and Helen sneered at him.

A twig snapped somewhere to their left and Helen suddenly stood at attention, waiting to see if anyone came forward. Then, a bush rustled behind them and Helen turned around and shot an arrow towards the bush while her ‘prisoners’ stood up from where they were all sitting on the ground. With Helen’s back turned to the front, Nico quietly crept out of the shadows and Travis burst out of the trees from the right, startling the hunter. As Travis kept Helen distracted, Nico managed to get around her and to the prisoners to free them and then they all ran as fast as they could.

“What happened?” Percy panted as he ran alongside Nico.

“Hazel sent Travis to come get me. The girls are getting the flag. Fan out.” Nico said and they all scattered to go to their positions. They were going to act as an escort to get flag over the creek.

“Damn!” Annabeth cursed as she untied one small part of the knot. This was going to take ages and they didn’t have that much time. The hunters were gaining. She ducked behind a branch as an arrow flew towards her. Now that the initial scare of Thalia’s shield was somewhat gone, the
hunters had started to gather their forces, although they were still giving Thalia a wider berth than what they should. Annabeth looked at the fight in front of her and ordered Chiara to join them. There was no use of letting Chiara sit over there when they were having no luck with the knot. Taking a deep breath, Annabeth let herself forget about the fight and only cared about the cloth beneath her fingers. She fumbled through another loop and sighed in relief as the knot became easier to untie.

“Hey, search for a little space between the fourth and fifth loop. Count from bottom. Widen the space…”

Annabeth startled and looked at Thalia who had climbed the tree next to hers and was looking at the other knot.

“What are you doing?”

“Chiara told me little about what the knot looked like. This is exactly what Artemis taught us and it’s difficult to untie unless you know what you are looking for. As I was saying, widen the space and there will be a loose piece. Pull on it. It should unravel.”

Annabeth nodded and followed the instructions. Sure enough, when she widened the gap, there was a little loose piece. As she pulled on it, she could feel the entire cloth slack under her hand and she grinned at Thalia.

“Ouch!” Thalia cried, rubbing her forehead, where a blunt arrow had hit her. “Go!”

Annabeth jumped down the tree and gathered the flag in her arms. “Chiara! Come on.” She shouted as she neared Chiara and ran away from the chasing hunters. Shoving the flag in Chiara’s arms, she ordered, “Get to Hazel.”

Chiara ran till she came across Hazel and wordlessly shoved the flag in her arms and turned to stop the hunters. That had been Percy’s plan – a relay. Whenever the flag bearer would feel that they could not carry on without getting seriously hindered, they would pass the flag to the nearest teammate and it would continue till the flag crossed the creek. The hunters were faster than the demigods, even without their powers, and relay was the only way that would confuse the hunters and hopefully win them the game.

Hazel ran, ducked and jumped out the way of the hunters that seemed to come from all sides. But her teammates were not far behind and were blocking the hunters from getting to her. Spotting Nico ahead, she whistled to get his attention and gave the flag to him and rammed into an incoming hunter. That was definitely going to bruise later.

The flag changed hands from Nico to Katie to Damien to Percy.

Percy panted as he jumped over a rock and continued his run. He felt like he was running away from monsters except he could not turn back to fight and he had never been good at running. He was almost at the creek though. Just a bit more and he would be able to wade across, but just then an arrow whizzed by him and he tripped over the thin but strong rope attached to it. Getting up, he realized that he was almost surrounded by hunters and the whooping and cheers from the other side of the creek were too loud. Up ahead, just on the other side of the creek, was Adrianna, holding the demigods’ flag and running faster than should be possible.

Percy flicked open the pen in his hand and felt a sort of peace wash over him as the sword elongated and sat just perfect in his hand. Gripping the flag tighter, he swung wildly, making the hunters move back from him and spotted a mop of brown hair whizzing past the hunters. There
were only two people in the entire camp who were that fast – the Stolls.

“Stoll!” Percy shouted, not knowing which brother it was, but as soon as the demigod was near him, just outside the circle of hunters that had surrounded him, Percy threw the flag and hoped that his friend had caught it.

Travis grinned his trademark grin as he caught the fluttering flag and ran to the creek. It was so much fun and was one of the only legitimate stealing that his cabin could get away with and get rewarded for. He had done this a lot of time – stealing and then running away from his scene of crime and this was just like that. He and his half-siblings should really be chosen to run away with the stolen flag – it is right up their alley.

Up ahead, Adrianna was almost at the creek and Travis picked up his speed. He needed to be able to cross the creek before the hunter and good thing for him, he had experience in running through the creek back at camp thanks to all the running away they had to do from the angry nymphs that he and his brother would steal from or irritate on almost a daily basis.

Chris swiped the flat of his blade at Adrianna’s legs in hopes of tripping her but she just jumped over it. Damn the hunter! On the other side of the creek, his half-brother was ankle deep in the water and as a last attempt, Chris threw his shield like a Frisbee at Adrianna, but at the last minute, it was shot down by an arrow shot by one of the hunters and Chris cursed loudly.

Travis ignored the hunter holding the demigods’ flag as he crossed her in the creek. He was closer to his side than she was to hers. Or at least he hoped so. He tightened his hold on the silver flag and ignored the arrows that were being shot his way. Some of them were getting knocked off by either Frank, Will or Thalia and some hit him on his leg or torso or back, depending on where they were coming from. Instead, he concentrated on running. One step in front of the other and before he knew it, he was on land and the flag in his hand changed from silver to white and the demigods erupted in cheers. At the same time, the hunters cheered too and he turned to see that Adrianna too had crossed the creek, but the flag in her hand didn’t change colors.

A conch shell sounded and Nike flew down from the sky while Chiron appeared almost at the same time.

Nike grinned at everyone and announced, “It was quite a close competition but the demigod crossed over to his side a few seconds before the hunter did. The demigods have won the game!”

“TRAV!” came a shout and before Travis knew it, Connor and Chris were on top of him and he was surrounded by exuberant demigods. They all cheered and high fived each other as the forest around them dissolved into the mist it was and the gods could be seen exchanging money and cursing at each other. Of course they had betted on this.

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“You know, it was you who was at fault, not me.” Hercules snarled as he attacked Zoe and she blocked it. “You were the one who foolishly gave up everything to help me out. I never asked for it. I only asked for your help to cross Ladon, not for your entire life. So do not blame me for your mistakes, Zoe.”

Zoe took a breath and landed a hit on Hercules’ shoulder. “Maybe, I was the foolish one but hear this, if you continue the way you are currently, you will never be happy.”

“Is that a curse?”
“That is an assurance.” Zoe countered. “I made my mistake and had to give up my family for it, but your wife had to give her life for it. How many more people have to give their lives up because they trusted you, before you realize the poison that you are?”

“How dare you!!” Hercules growled and lunged at Zoe. She neatly sidestepped and watched dispassionately as he fell to the ground. Digging her foot in his back, she said, “No Hercules, how dare you! How dare you use people like they mean nothing? How dare you move on like nothing happened when you have destroyed lives? How…”

Cheers erupted from the center of the forest and soon Nike’s voice boomed and declared the demigods as winners.

Hercules chuckled and pushed himself up from the ground and looked at Zoe. “It looks like we won the game. Your stalling tactic did not work.”

Zoe smiled as Sara walked out of the forest into the clearing and said, “Perhaps the demigods won the game, but Hercules, between the two of us, I won.”

Coolly, Zoe turned and linked her arm with Sara’s and walked away as the forest around them dissolved into mist and Hercules stared after her.

“Are you alright?” Sara asked in concern.

“Better than that, I think.” Zoe answered with a smile. “But we need to ask Adrianna as to how we lost the game!”
Hey guys!
Thank you all so much for all the love and kudos and comments and bookmarking this fic. :D You guys make my day.

Disclaimer- I do not own Percy Jackson series or the Heroes of Olympus series. All characters and words in bold are owned by Rick Riordan and Hyperion Books for Children and Disney Hyperion. I do not intend to use the text from the books for any other purpose other than for this fanfiction and nor do I intend to make any sort of profit from the story. All rights go to the actual owner and not me. This is only a work of love for the series.

Ch76 – TTC – Featuring: The Dam joke and Rachel!

The breakfast was a lively affair with many excitedly chattering about the game between the demigods and the hunters the previous night and others discussing the chariot race that had been scheduled for the day. The demigods were working out the teams within themselves and the gods were already deciding to place bets once the teams would be announced, while some of the gods were still settling their bets from the previous game. In between all the chattering, Hestia called for everyone’s attention.

“Everyone, I am aware that we all are excited about yesterday’s game and are eagerly looking forward to today’s chariot race, but let us not forget that we are also here to read these books about the future so that we may be able to make some appropriate changes wherever required. We will have the chariot race after lunch hour so we may be able to finish it before sunset. But till then, let us return to the throne room to continue with the reading.”

There were many groans and grumbles as everyone filed back in the throne room and took their places. Once everyone had settled down, Chris opted to read the next chapter.

“I HAVE A DAM PROBLEM”

“Dam as in?” Connor asked.

“As in dam, reservoir. That stuff.” Chris replied.

“Please tell me that this finally explains the annoying ‘dam’ joke.” Piper said.

“I think it would.” Grover answered.

“Ah man! That takes all the fun out of it.” Thalia grumbled.

“I know.” Percy agreed while everyone was glad that they could finally be in on the stupid joke that made Percy, Grover and Thalia laugh so much.

“At the edge … to keep moving.”“
“We have to keep moving, no matter what.” Thalia said. “When you have lived out there on the streets, you can’t stop for anything.”

“She’s right.” Leo agreed solemnly, then shook his head and went back to playing with the tiny mythomagic figurine that he had made. This one had a tiny flamethrower inbuilt in it and Leo was hoping to make one that could shoot lightening. He was just too scared to ask Thalia for her help and Jason had refused to help him after he had accidently burned Jason’s shirt.

“She navigated us … Nico would know.”

“It’s pretty clear to me.” Nico said as he toyed with the figurine and shoved it under Percy’s nose. Percy moved back and looked properly at it and said, “Yeah, it is. Dunno why I couldn’t see it then. I only realized it once you left camp.”

“ Weird.” Nico muttered and pocketed the statue. He hoped that the chapter didn’t have much about his sister. He wasn’t sure how much he could handle so soon. He was trying his level best to not think about it.

“Oh, gods… might start bawling.”

“Hey!” Grover gave Percy the stink eye. “It was a very important time for me.”

“I know.” Percy nodded and added, “But you were scared out of your mind.”

“So much. Oh my gods!” Grover laughed and Percy joined.

“At least there’s … of the truck.”

“Girl talk?” Travis suggested.

“We made up.” Thalia corrected and added, “Sort of.”

“The tow truck … Great. What now?”

“Some or the other god is helping you even now.” Annabeth said ominously.

“How’d you figure?”

“Well, they found an old truck in a junkyard but it worked properly and had a full tank. What are the odds? And then when it does stop working, it is next to a river, which is right up Percy’s alley. He could help them from there on. That’s too much of a coincidence, which means someone is interfering.”

“No such thing as a coincidence.”

“Absolutely.”

“I scanned the … us aren’t goats.”

“Valid point.”

“Oh shut up.”

“’’We can make … won’t hurt us.’’”

Annabeth beamed at Percy and tucked his hand in hers.
“I glanced at … IOU two canoes.”

“Why can’t you just steal stuff like a normal person?” Chris interrupted himself. “No one would have known if you took two canoes. No one.”

“I don’t like stealing. It makes me feel bad about the people who own the stuff. Like they would miss it.” Percy answered with a shrug and Hermes and his sons just shook their heads in disappointment.

“Such talent and it is all going to waste.” Hermes muttered.

“It is alright.” Apollo patted his brother’s arm.

“No, it is not.” Hermes grumbled.

Chris sighed and read, “‘We need to … 'You know.’”

“We can always control the water as long as it is not too harsh.” Theseus explained. “The harsher the waters, the more difficult it gets to control it.”

“‘I think so … yelling at me.’”

“That is how all sibling relationships are like.” Rhea said and looked at her children. They all would kill for each other and yet at the same time, drove each other mad. Just this morning, she had to break up a fight between Hades and Poseidon and scold Zeus for urging them to continue with the fight.

“She turned and … time understanding naiads.”

“Everyone does.” Triton said with a shake of his head. “And that is when they are speaking coherently.”

“We're heading upstream … Zoe grumbled.”

“You should not have said that. They do not like it when people say anything against them, even if it is in jest.” Triton said.

Zoe shrugged and muttered, “They hate me anyway. It would not make much of a difference.”

“A stream of … Never mind.”

“Forgiven for what?” Travis asked and gave a sheepish smile when Zoe glared at him, but she sighed and replied, “For giving Anaklusmos away and that too to someone not of sea origin.”

“Oh.”

“Yes, that did make them very upset.” Triton said with a nod. “It was a disrespect to your mother and to all of the water spirits.”

“We sped up … the next lieutenant.”

“Oh, perhaps you are getting tired of being the lieutenant.” Adrianna whispered to Zoe in understanding. She could understand what Zoe was going through. She herself had started to feel the strain and she knew she too should start training Zoe to become the next lieutenant.
“That can happen? You can get tired of this?” Sabrina asked. She too was new to the whole hunter thing.

“Yes, immortality can take its toll on you and everything can become monotonous. That is why the gods indulge in so many things at the same time, so they do not get tired of the same things.” Adrianna explained and Artemis looked at her lieutenant. It was perhaps time to let Adrianna go, of course after training Zoe. Adrianna had served her well, but the goddess could see her tiring of the immortal life.

“‘But you're the … is in danger.’”

“It is Artemis’ fault that she is in danger.” Apollo said grumpily. “She could have easily taken her hunters along with her and she would have been fine.”

“No, Apollo, my hunters would have been dead.” Artemis said with a long suffering sigh. “If they were able to capture me, then what chance did my hunters stand against them?”

“You could have called for me.” Apollo said with a huff.

“Maybe she had something else in mind.” Athena mused.

“What do you mean?”

“It is no secret that father favors his daughters and Artemis is one of his favorites.” Athena said and many of the gods grumbled at the unfairness of it. “With Artemis kidnapped by Titans, father would have no choice but to face the fact that the Titans are rising. Artemis could have easily called anyone to her aid if it was needed, but she did not and I think it was because she was trying to convince the Council of the looming danger and it worked. Just look at the number of gods who have already helped the children in getting to their destination, including Pan, who has not given any indication of being alive, for years.”

“That does make more sense than Artemis getting kidnapped.” Annabeth muttered under her breath.

Zeus looked at his daughter and sighed. It seemed like Artemis got better at playing him in the future. As it was, she could demand almost anything of him and he would give it to her, including permission to maim Hercules if he troubled any of her hunters.

“‘Look, you can't … could have done.’”

“The boy has more sense than we give him credit for.” Penelope muttered.

“Zoe didn't answer … just like him?”

“Not really, but many still do.” Percy said and Hercules smirked despite his sour mood. If nothing else, at least he had become a hero to other heroes.

“Whom do you wish to be like?” Zoe asked curiously. Even now, most demigods wished to become just like Hercules. Of course, none of them knew or cared for his true nature. But Percy was the first demigod she had come across who did not like Hercules. He had even told Hermes that he only liked Hercules because he had worse luck than Percy. So, who did the boy idolize?

“No one.” Percy answered with a shrug. “My mom always said that the more you try to become like someone else, the further you are from your own self. Plus, you can’t really be like anyone else because the circumstances that made them who they are, are unknown to everyone else.”
“Yes, but it is more about imbibing the desired qualities of someone else in your own self, right? So, there would be someone like that for you. Everyone has someone like that.” Adrianna said.

“My mom, then.” Percy said.

“Yeah, Sally’s cool.” Annabeth said with a nod and Thalia shrugged and agreed.

“Oh, I wanna be like Sally too.” Grover said and Percy smiled proudly.

"Her voice was … it was cursed."

“In a way, it was.” Chiron said and explained further, “Any hero who had ever wielded it had had a tragic end.” Percy groaned and Hercules wondered whether he was included in that list of heroes. Chiron continued, “I suppose it was because it was always someone not of oceanic origins and the original wielder had become reluctant in its parting after the fact.”

“What?”

“Zoe was the original wielder and she wished she could have taken it back instead of giving it to a hero.” Chiron explained. “That made the blade cursed in a way.”

“But, in the end, Zoe was okay with it being with Percy, so…” Thalia whispered.

“It’s probably not cursed anymore.” Annabeth whispered back and Percy sighed in relief. “Which is maybe why it was not the cursed blade that the Great Prophecy talked of.”

“I’m just happy it’s not cursed.” Percy said, putting Riptide near his heart and Annabeth rolled her eyes. Percy loved Riptide too much.

""Your mother was … all the credit."

“So it is all about me not acknowledging you?” Hercules asked in irritation.

“How would you like to be forgotten by your family, from history itself, all because you helped someone?” Thalia growled at Hercules. “That’s what happened with Zoe. The only people who will remember her are the hunters and now, Camp Half Blood, but that is till the new generation comes. Unfortunately, you will be remembered regardless and that is unfair.”

“Not if we can help it.” Percy muttered and Annabeth nodded and said, “People like Zoe, Bob, Damasen, they deserve to be remembered. I can come up with something to make sure that no one forgets them.”

“A monument to last a thousand years?” Percy whispered to her.

“Something like that.”

""But—" … "It's huge.""

Annabeth sighed wistfully and said, “I still haven’t been there.”

“We can go during winter break.” Percy suggested and muttered under his breath, “Gods permitting.”

“We stood at … know all that?”

“Annabeth!” the three said in unison.
“I still can’t believe that you guys remembered it all.” Annabeth gushed.

“It’s not like we had a choice.” Thalia grumbled. “The number of times you have talked our ears off about architecture, we can’t help but remember all that.”

“I thought it was only Percy who had that issue.” Clarisse said. “He actually points out stuff and talks about when they were built and by whom. It’s annoying.”

“So proud of you.” Annabeth grinned at Percy.

“I feel sorry for you.” Connor said to Percy and avoided the stink eye that Annabeth gave him.

“‘Annabeth,’ … here to see it.’

“We have to go there.” Annabeth said to Percy.

“And visit the dam snack bar.” Grover chuckled and Percy and Thalia joined in.

“I still don’t see what’s so funny about it.” Annabeth grumbled.

“It was the situation that was funny.” Thalia pointed out.

“Or we had lost our minds, but who cares.” Grover said.

“‘We should go up there,’ I said. 'For her sake. Just to say we’ve been.'”

“Did you forget that you are on a quest? Why do you sightsee during a quest?” Reyna asked.

“When else would you?” Percy cross questioned with a grin.

“I honestly don’t want to see a dam.”

“You should.” Percy said. “You never know if you would come up with a stupid joke to last ages or meet a crazy redhead who turns out to be your future oracle or start an epic food fight. Stuff like that.”

“Hey, who do you think you are calling crazy!” Rachel huffed.

“I heard ‘food fight.’” Travis perked up.

“’You are mad … the dam’s vents.’”

“Hey Percy, you want a dare?” Travis asked.

“No, he doesn’t.” Annabeth said with a sigh.

Ignoring her, Travis dared Percy, “Skateboard down a dam.” To Annabeth he said, “There’s water there, so he’ll be fine.”

Percy looked at Travis, sighed and asked Chris to continue reading. Sometimes that guy came up with the weirdest things to do and Percy had recently had way too many close calls with death, to not attempt something like that. Ever.

“Thalia walked in … any more monsters.”

“Time really flies when you are on a quest.” Frank muttered.
“Did you always go on timed quests?” Dakota asked.

“Yeah. If they weren’t timed because of the solstices then they were time bound because of what would happen if we didn’t complete the quest soon enough.” Annabeth replied.

“That’s horrible.”

“‘There’s a snack … gift from Athena.’”

“Those must be powerful.” Hermes mused.

“The mortals think that by rubbing the statues’ toes, they would get good luck.” Thalia said.

“Mortals are weird.” Ares mumbled. “How would a statue dedicated to Zeus, give someone good luck? He is not the personification of good luck.”

“Tourists were clustered … special about them.”

“Oh yes, mortals are able to sense if something is related to our world.” Rhea said as if she just remembered that tidbit.

“‘When you were … big metal statues.’”

“Of course they would not do anything. Zeus does not have the time to look after… demigods.” Hera snarled.

Zeus sighed and said, “They would not do anything unless it is absolutely necessary, especially because you are in a mortal populated area and also because we cannot interfere directly.”

Thalia accepted that excuse and glared at Hera. Being near the queen always irritated her and made her want to either throw her spear at the goddess or get out of the area as fast as possible. Right now, she was trying not to do either.

“I thought about … the dam restroom.”

Percy, Thalia and Grover looked at each other and started laughing. Annabeth looked at the three, unable to stop the smile forming on her face and said, “It’s not even that funny, guys.”

“It… it is.” Grover gasped. “If you could have seen Zoe’s face… hilarious.”

“Oh gods!” Thalia exclaimed. “The dam snack bar. That’s what started the whole thing.”

“Why are they laughing?” Zoe asked in confusion and the three of them laughed louder.

“Because they are immature children.” Annabeth rolled her eyes and explained, “Dam sounds like damn, which is a curse among other things. They,” she pointed at the three, “find it hilarious.”

“Such childish behavior.” Zoe muttered and shook her head.

“Maybe it was … hear a cow?”

“There are cows on Hoover Dam?” Connor asked.

“Why would you think of that?” Katie looked at him in confusion.

“What else am I supposed to think?”
“The Ophiotaurus?” Katie suggested. “You know, the half-cow, half-serpent monster that can destroy Olympus if sacrificed?”

“How is that your first thought when you hear ‘moo?’” Travis asked.

“How is it not yours?”

“‘A dam cow … the cow serpent.’”

“Is it following you?” Theseus asked.

“According to dad, yeah he was.” Percy replied. “He knew that there were monsters after him and because I saved him once, he considered me to be his guardian or something. Or that’s what dad said anyway.”

“It does make sense.” Poseidon said with a nod.

“I looked around … here she was.”

“How could the monster have followed you? You went by land and it would not have known where you would end up going or if you would stop near a water body.” Perseus said thoughtfully.

“The Ophiotaurus does not need to swim.” Chiron explained. “It can turn up anywhere just like summoning someone, except it can do that on its own, without being actually summoned. It was keeping an eye out for Percy and when it felt that he was in danger, it came to return the favor of saving him.”

“Bessie swam in … over skeletal bodies.”

“You just can’t catch a break, can you?” Frank said with a sigh and wondered whether the quests he had gone on were exceptionally tough or was it because of Percy that they were being attacked almost continuously.

“They passed through … I asked her.”

“Why would the snack bar be seven hundred feet below the top of the dam? It will be on the first level itself.” Annabeth pointed out.

“Because people can get hungry?” Percy asked and Annabeth shook her head.

“A few people … my skin tingle.”

“Another monster?” Butch groaned.

“Not really.” Percy muttered and Annabeth whispered to him, “Mom?” She remembered Percy telling her that he had met her mom in Hoover Dam for the very first time. That had been the only time he hadn’t been terrified of her.

“Yeah.”

“‘To the turbines … presentation upstairs?’”

“Yup, that’s mom.” Annabeth murmured under her breath. “Who else would call it ‘fascinating presentation’?”
Athena smiled slightly as she recognized herself – the eyes and the words she spoke were unique only to her. A few of the other gods looked at her as they too recognized the ‘tour guide’ and Zeus muttered, “How many of them have actually broken the rules?”

“The doors closed … I didn’t.”

“Nobody does.” Rachel said and grinned. She had a feeling she would be coming up soon. She too had been in the area at the same time. This was going to be fun!

“Another tour guide … with my sword.”

“Of course you didn’t think it through.” Rachel said.

“Hey! If it was one of those skeleton things, I would have been dead.” Percy pointed out.

“I don’t understand.” Gwen said.

“Wait for it.”

“The girl I'd … with a fork.”

“That’s you.” Gwen said to Rachel.

“Yup. And the first thing Percy tried to do, was kill me. Just saying.”

“Oh come on!” Percy whined. “It was years ago. Let it go.”

“Nope.”

“'Well, it's either … coat to me.”

“Whoa!” Dakota exclaimed. “You could see through the mist.”

“Yup. I’m awesome that way.” Rachel said with a grin. “Although I did think I was mental for quite some time.”

“You are mental.”

“Shut up, Percy.”

“I knew the … manipulate the Mist.”

Thalia snorted and said, “You never told me about this. Oh, this is gonna be hilarious.”

“It takes a lot of practice to get a hang of manipulating the Mist.” Hazel said with a smile.

“Yeah, it’s gonna be epic fail.” Thalia chuckled as Percy groaned.

“I concentrated hard … a sword, weirdo.'”

“That was, hands down, the weirdest thing that happened to me, up till then. After that, it all went to hell.” Rachel said as Thalia snorted.

“'Who are you?' … saved my life.”
“Thank the gods, you listened to her.” Annabeth said in relief and looked at Rachel, “Thanks for saving his life.”

“Good thing I did. Otherwise I would be stuck in the stupid mortal world, thinking that I’m losing my mind.” Rachel said with a shrug.

“I heard the … Maybe he fell.”

“Okay, you are awesome.” Grover said and many demigods agreed.

“I know.”

“The skeletons clattered … gray and sweaty.”

“That must have been scary.” Hazel said, wondering if she could have ever done something like that, especially if she knew nothing about the godly world.

“You have no clue.” Rachel said. “But, on the brighter side, it was nothing compared to a few of the other stuff that I have done.”

“I don’t see how that’s the brighter side.” Frank admitted in a confused tone.

“I peeked around … ever saw me.”

“Life would have been easier if you had done that.” Piper pointed out.

“Please! Like you could have ever forgotten someone trying to kill you with a sword, or three skeletons running around a national monument, that no one but you could see.” Rachel said. “Plus, how else would I have gotten the chance to say that I saved the guy who saved the world.”

“True that.”

“'Forget you tried … for the exit.”

“I still can’t believe you remembered that.” Percy said.

Rachel chuckled and said, “I think I called you Percy Gotta-go the next time I met you.”

“Probably.”

“The cafe was … the dam lunch.”

“You are an actual child.” Annabeth chuckled.

Percy shrugged and said, “Hoover Dam is boring. All monuments are. People come all the way to see water being turned around to make electricity. Boring! Food, on the other hand, is interesting.”

“It’s not just that!” Annabeth exclaimed. “Do you know how important it is and…”

“I get it, I get it.” Percy said in a placating tone. He so did not want a lecture on Hoover Dam. He had already sat through it once and if they were actually going to go to the Dam sometime later on, then he would have to sit through it all over again. Although the look on Annabeth’s face made him think that he might just have to sit through some additional lectures.

“Thalia, Zoe, and Grover … were completely surrounded.”
“Wow! Eleven against four. How did you guys win this?” Jason asked.

“In a nutshell, we created a distraction and flew away.”

“That doesn’t really explain anything.”

“I know.”

“Then Grover had … shrieking and screaming.”

“Oh!” Demeter groaned. “You children wasted food. How can you waste food?”

“It sounds fun.” Hermes said with a grin and the other gods either agreed or groaned. If Hermes decided to have a ‘food fight’, there would be one and it would get ugly real fast.

“The skeletons tried … were flying everywhere.”

“Um, question.” Reyna said. “Why are there bodies flying?”

“It’s a food fight.” Percy replied.

“Oh silly me. Of course people throw other people during a food fight.”

“You haven’t thrown anyone during a food fight?” Chris asked with a straight face.

“You have?”

“Duh!” Chris deadpanned and continued to read.

“In the chaos … really are bright.”

“Why are you noticing their toes?” Theseus asked.

“How are you able to get distracted like that? That too in the middle of a fight where you are most probably going to die?” Jason asked. If it had been him, he could have never thought of anything other than the monsters attacking him.

“I bet you that it’s gonna be another one of Percy’s crazy ideas.” Frank chuckled.

“Isn’t it always?” Thalia said.

“‘Percy!’ Thalia said … to find it.”

Athena smirked. The boy did listen to her. That was good.

“What are you going to do?” Perseus asked. The statues were a gift to his father and his father would never help out a child of Poseidon. He never had before and it didn’t look like he was going to start any time soon.

“Desperate times call for desperate measures.” Percy said with a grin.

“That’s almost always with you.” Grover brayed.

“I know.”

“‘Thalia,’ I said … won’t answer me.””
“He will.” Hera said with disdain.

“How come?” Gwen asked and subconsciously moved back when Hera glared at her.

“Because,” Hestia said with a smile, “the children are at their wits’ end and have no other way to escape their situation. They are asking for help as a last resort and not taking it for granted. Normally, we do not answer prayers unless it is when someone has given up hope of surviving their situation, whether it is physically or emotionally. It is only then that we are allowed to interfere and help and even though direct interference in a quest is still very much against our laws, it can sometimes be overlooked. Obviously, it is not done always, but sometimes if the god you are praying to is feeling generous and it is important to us, we will grant the prayers.”

“It seems unfair.” Frank said.

“Maybe so.” Hestia replied. “But when you have powers over the world, like we do, it is very easy to overlook the consequences of our actions. However, doing something like that would affect the mortals’ way of living and that is why we have all these laws that prevent us from doing things that we possibly would not have thought of twice.”

“It was what Kronos used to do.” Rhea said. “He would do as he pleased without considering anyone else and that was why he was the worst ruler we could have. He was far worse than even father. If the people in power are allowed to do as they please…” Rhea sighed and said, “That is why there are rules and laws and even if they are an inconvenience to us and others, they are to be followed.”

“‘This time is … And nothing happened.’”

“Well, that’s disappointing.” Nico muttered.

“The skeletons closed … shadow of death.”

“Shadow of death?” Nico looked at Percy skeptically.

“I was scared, okay? Shut up.” Percy grumbled and Nico repeated ‘shadow of death’ mockingly.

“You are so dramatic.” Leo said and Percy gave him a judging look.

“Then I realized … across the road.”

A few demigods cheered and someone said, “So the gods did help you guys out.”

“Yeah,” Thalia agreed, “there was no way we were getting alive out of that one without some godly interference.”

“‘Man, it feels … those tourists thinking?’”

“They probably were not thinking.” Apollo mumbled.

“The machines can talk?” Hephaestus asked in general.

“Oh yeah, they are automatons.” Leo replied distractedly. Then his face scrunched up in confusion as he wondered why Hephaestus would ask that question. He had created automatons, right?

“Sentient automatons are not yet created.” Annabeth told Leo with a sigh and Percy whispered to her, “Perdix is still alive?”
“Either that or Daedalus is in hiding from Minos. Only once he creates his first automaton body and leaves the notes to be discovered, does anyone else attempt to make those things.” Annabeth whispered back. “It was in his laptop.”

“At some point in the future, there will be sentient automatons?” Hephaestus asked with a gleam in his eyes. Although he didn’t like most of the sentient beings, sentient automatons were something that he could get behind.

“At some point, yes.” Annabeth answered and sneaked a look at her mother. Athena looked ill and Annabeth realized that of course Athena knew what Perdix had been working on and she knew where those plans currently were – with Daedalus. Mother and daughter looked at one another and the slight nod that Annabeth gave her, made Athena realize that killing Perdix wasn’t the last they had seen of Daedalus. Her son would come back and maybe do much worse things.

“As stunned as … of the mountains.”

“Finally, you guys are out of danger!” Piper sighed.

“And finally this chapter is over.” Chris held out the book and Clarisse shrugged and took it. Hopefully the next chapter would have something embarrassing happening to the punk and she could enjoy reading for once in her life.
A Generous Mr. D

Chapter Notes

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Ch77 – TTC – A Generous Mr. D

Clarisse looked skeptically at the title of the chapter and read it in an amused tone, “I WRESTLE SANTA’S EVIL TWIN”


“He would have been better.” Percy muttered and rubbed his nose. If he thought enough about Nereus, he could almost smell the horrible scent of the immortal.

“’Tell me when … ’Not that high.'”

“Not that high?” Thalia squeaked, looking queasy. She cleared her throat and repeated in a menacing tone, “Not that high? You…” She picked up her cushion and threw it at Percy and continued to throw insults at him as everyone watched in amusement.

“’We are in … 'Back to flying.'”

“Don’t they have to be activated? Like how you did in Manhattan?” Will asked Annabeth.

“Depends on the purpose. Those were created for a specific purpose, so they needed activation but other automatons can come to life whenever they want.” Annabeth replied.

“Shh punks! I’m reading.” Clarisse growled.

“Yeah, it’s a once in a lifetime oppor… OW!” Connor rubbed his side where Clarisse had punched him. Maybe he shouldn’t be sitting so close to her.

“We sped up … Nobody knows why.”

“Actually,” Chiron said and Clarisse resisted glaring at him, “all mortals are like that, at least when they are born. That is why all those ‘silly’ stories about monsters under the beds are directed towards the children.”

“Monsters under the bed are real?” Travis asked.

“And in the closet too.” Lou Ellen pointed out.

“Well, no. Monsters don’t actually go into mortals’ houses, but children may have seen them
elsewhere and their imagination would make them think that the monsters are in the house.”
Chiron explained. “The point is that all those stories of them being fake are the reason why mortals
stop believing. The more they grow up, the less imagination they have left, but a few mortals are
still able to keep their childlike inquisitiveness and innocence around them. They do not dismiss
things they do not understand, but instead try to find out more about it. That is why only very few
are able to see through the mist.”

“That does make me feel better.” Rachel mumbled.

“But my mom says that she doesn’t see as clearly as she used to.” Percy said with a frown.

“She is growing older and still trying to hold on to our world and her knowledge of it. She will have
difficulty because she also has knowledge of her own world and their ways. Both parts will try to
battle for dominance but because she has an actual connection to our world, she will never
completely lose the ‘sight’. But there are mortals who have no connection to our world and
eventually lose the ‘sight’.”

“What about me?” Rachel asked.

“You will never lose the ‘sight’. You are now the Oracle and that creates a permanent link to us.
Even if you are a hundred years old and no longer the Oracle, you will still be able to see
everything clearly. Those who have the gift of ‘foresight’, never lose the ‘sight’.”

“I don’t want to be a hundred years old. I’ll be all skin and bones, just like the old mummy Oracle.”
Rachel scrunched up her face in disgust at that imagery.

“Suddenly I flashed … than I did.”

“Oh, she was terrified for you all the time.” Annabeth said and at Percy’s look, she clarified, “Sally
told me once. You take a lot of time in the shower and she was showing me your baby pictures.”

“I’m going to destroy every last baby picture there is of me.” Percy muttered under his breath.

“’Well, the girl was annoying,’ I said.”

“Excuse me!” Rachel said indignantly and glared at Percy, who just grinned at her.

“’But I’m glad … from a nap.’”

“I still don’t understand how you can sleep at that height!” Thalia said, throwing her hands up.

“I can sleep anywhere.” Percy said proudly.

“Were you not terrified? You were up in the air.” Theseus said.

Percy shrugged and replied, “Well, I figured that if Lord Zeus was helping us out, he wouldn’t just
drop me in the middle of the flight.”

“That is actually exactly what he would do.” Poseidon said nonchalantly and as realization sat in,
he looked at Percy in disbelief. How could Percy just assume that things were fine and sleep while
high up in the air? His son astounded him sometimes.

“Huh,” Percy looked at nothing for a while and then said with a smile, “Well, I was right anyway,
so…”
“You are crazy.” Hazel pointed out.

“I looked down … You Were Here.”

“That’ll be a fun postcard.” Leo said.

“I think you guys might be related.” Thalia said, looking at Percy and Leo. “And not by the weird way we all are related.”

“That’ll be cool.” Percy said and Leo leaned over to high five him.

“'There,' Zoe suggested … angels from Mars.”

Travis and Connor grinned at each other. If only they could get their hands on an automaton.

“We said our … the sun god.”

“It is a good thing you have the satyr with you.” Apollo said.

“The old man … will show thee.’’

“The smell is quite horrible.” Zoe said with a disgusted look.

“It is not his fault that he ended up having to clean up the oceans for all eternity.” Amphitrite said pityingly.

“It is kind of his fault.” Poseidon stated. “He should have never placed a bet with me. He also only started to care about the oceans when I won the seas.”

“That is true.” Amphitrite agreed.

“I knew I … floppy rainbow hat.”

“Suits you.” Clarisse snickered.

“'Oh, yeah,' … about the monster.”

“You should not have much of a problem trying to hold on to him.” Poseidon said. “As long as he does not know of your identity, you should be fine.”

“Yes, father does not like anyone who is related to Poseidon.” Amphitrite said with a sigh.

“Father?” Frank whispered.

“Nereus’ kids are called Nereids.” Percy whispered back. “Amphitrite is a Nereid.”

“It’s hard to keep track of who is whose kid.”

“True.”

“'We've got your … through a landfill.”

“That is Nereus.” Poseidon said in distaste.

“That is disgusting.” Rachel muttered.
“And his smell? … this guy was it.”

“Cleaning up the seas is not a fun work.” Triton said, having had some experience in that department every time he had angered Poseidon by breaking some or the other rule when he was younger. Thankfully, he was now too old to be punished. Hopefully. He did not ever want to have to clean up the oceans.

“Dead fish smell is the worst.” Butch said.

“Dead anything would be the worst smell.” Lou Ellen corrected.

“But fish are still the worst.”

“I tried not … jumped Santa Claus.”

“That’s not a sentence I ever thought I would hear.” Travis said with a grin.

“'Ahhhhhl' he … me to death.”

“Yikes!”

“Did no one tell you that Nereus is a god?” Poseidon asked. “Of course, he would have the upper hand in physical strength. Try to get him into water. It might even the odds of him winning.”

“This has already happened.” Amphitrite and Triton reminded him, but Poseidon ignored them.

“'That's a crime!' … 'Not the water!'”

“Don’t tell me that actually worked.” Frank said.

“It did.” Percy said with a grin.

“Unbelievable.”

“The plan worked … San Francisco Bay.”

“Now I doubt his intelligence.” Poseidon muttered under his breath and Amphitrite shook her head.

“He must've been … water is harder.”

“No.” Frank said as Leo looked at him in anticipation. Soon, the Stolls too joined in and the three of them looked pleadingly at Frank. The son of Mars shook his head and said, “I am not turning into a seal for your entertainment.”

“Hey Percy, can you…”

“I can find you a great white if you want.” Percy deadpanned.

“No, we’re good.”

“Thought so.”

“You can turn into a seal?” Triton asked Frank.

“Any animal actually.”
“Including a dragon, which is awesome!” Leo said excitedly and Frank grinned while Percy sulked.

“I thought you were Ares’ child.” Triton said.

“And a descendent of dad,” Percy said and whined, “which gives him the ability to shapeshift.”

“Dude,” Frank said, “you can cause storms and hurricanes and all that stuff…”

“But shapeshifting!” Percy cried out. “That’s awesome!”

“There are some children of Poseidon who can turn into animals?” Theseus asked.

“No.” Poseidon answered amusedly. “None of my children can actually do that. I mean, the ability is present but it is overshadowed by all the other abilities that you have. It is sort of irrelevant in front of your other powers.”

“How is turning into animals, irrelevant?” Percy asked with a frown.

“It is irrelevant because all gods can do it and it does not get passed down to our children. Usually.” Poseidon explained.

“As Frank said, you can do so many other things. Why are you fixated on this?”

“One word: Dragon.”

Annabeth shook her head and asked Clarisse to continue with the reading. Percy would go on and on about the different animals he would love to turn into and she didn’t want any of the gods who hated him, getting any ideas.

“Nereus plunged straight … in San Francisco.”

Jason snorted and said, “The one time you are in San Francisco and you manage to become a tourist attraction.”

“Damn! Why didn’t we go on a supply run during that time?” Dakota asked.

“Nereus plunged into … was here first!”

“Even if he was, he did not care about anything.” Poseidon said with a frown and Amphitrite shook her head. She had heard far too many complaints against her father over the years. Poseidon continued, “He is not even intelligent anymore. Percy clearly told him that he is a demigod and then was stronger in water and yet Nereus could not even deduce that Percy is my son. He…”

“Poseidon, we get it.” Zeus interrupted his brother’s rant and Poseidon frowned at him but stopped talking.

“Finally he collapsed … a good fight.”

Poseidon smirked at that but didn’t say a word. He knew his family was expecting him to go into another rant about Nereus. He would not satisfy them.

“My friends ran … amazed,” I said.

Hercules frowned and said, “It seemed quite easy for you. Normally, it is far harder to catch him. Perhaps he has not been used to challenges over the years.”
“Nereus moaned … even more important.”

“Good decision.” Annabeth said with a smile. Athena too nodded discreetly. The boy could ignore his own needs and wants in favor of the majority. That was indeed a good quality in a hero. Maybe that was the reason why he was the child of the great prophesy.

“I sighed … me!" I yelled.”

“He cannot trick you or lie to you.” Poseidon said. “The Ophiotaurus must be there.”

“He was.”

"'Wait.' Thalia's eyes … er, him?""

“How is it that you can’t understand all sea animals? Shouldn’t you be able to?” Leo asked.

“Sometimes I can, sometimes I can’t.” Percy said. “But I can usually tell what they most probably mean.”

“That ability evolves with time.” Poseidon stated. “The more time you spend with the sea creatures, the more you would be able to understand them. But the older creatures like the Ophiotaurus, might be harder to connect with because their speech patterns would not evolve with time.”

“Nice.” Percy said with a grin. “I’ve always wanted to be able to talk to a squid. Apparently, they tell the best stories.”

“They do.” Triton agreed.

“You are weird.” Thalia said to Percy.

“Grover nodded … a single moooooo.”

“Oh man! I was just thinking that!” Leo said with a grin and Grover stage whispered in a horrified tone, “Oh no! We have another Percy!”

"'Wait,' Zoe said … destroy the world.'""

“He’s too cute to destroy the world? That’s your argument?” Clarisse asked in disbelief.

“Well, yeah.”

“So are you, but you have the power.” Annabeth pointed out.

Percy grinned and asked, “You think I’m cute?”

“Shut up, Seaweed Brain.”

"'That is how … what would happen?'""

Zeus stiffened all of a sudden. He could imagine the lure of power that Thalia would have felt at being so close to such a power source. He looked at his daughter and wondered whether she would ever let that sort of thing lure her in. If he was being honest with himself, he would definitely take up something like that. The amount of power that would give him would be beyond anything and now thinking about how his daughter would have felt the same thing, he wondered whether it was
too late to change the rule about eating your own children. The age old fear was once again clawing at him. Now he truly understood why his father had let Thalia be brought back to life. It was so easy to manipulate that one character trait. The god just hoped that Thalia had gotten the other major character trait he had – the willpower to do the right thing regardless of how much ever it hurt to do so.

""No one knows," … hungry."

"It is a fatal flaw." Athena said, glaring at Thalia, as if daring her to do something against the gods.

“And that is why you joined the hunters.” Artemis said to Thalia, who nodded back at the goddess.

“If I am no longer a demigod…” Thalia said.

“Then you no longer have a fatal flaw that can control you to go against Olympus.” Artemis concluded and Zeus released his breath. So, his daughter did get his other trait too. She could make life altering decisions if it meant that it was the right thing to do. That was comforting to know. Now, only if his nephew was more like Poseidon, then maybe they were all truly safe from all external forces. For all his faults, Zeus knew that Poseidon would not truly rise against Olympus, not unless he had a very, very good reason. But usually Poseidon’s anger just clouded everything else and it was hard to determine what his next move would be.

""We have to … to be ambushed.""

“Stupid punks!” Clarisse muttered under her breath and continued reading.

“Standing behind us … before,” I said.”

“A manticore is hard to defeat and the previous time you had defeated him was because Artemis had interfered and even then he had escaped. He cannot be defeated by just four children.” Athena said.

""Ha! You could … looked completely stunned.”

“You were considering it?” Connor asked, horrified.

“I… don’t know.” Thalia muttered, thinking back to that time. What had she been thinking?

“You wouldn’t have done it anyways and you didn’t.” Percy said with conviction and signaled Clarisse to continue reading. There was no point in scrutinizing the past. It was done.

""You know it … of her spear.”

“That was the wrong thing to say. I hate him for doing that.” Thalia said to Percy and avoided looking at the gods, who were all staring at her in various degrees of hatred. “I don’t even remember all this properly.”

“You were dazed.”

Zeus wondered how Thalia could think that he didn’t care for her. He did help her out as Percy had pointed out. Why would he do that if he didn’t care? He frowned as he remembered something that Percy had said before, something about the demigods not knowing whether the gods really cared for their children or not. Obviously, the gods cared for their children. Why else would they help out at all? It was just hard to show it to anyone, especially with all the rules in place. Was this the reason the Fates had decided to send these children and this particular boy’s story in the past? The
Hermes from the future had said something about making a decision in the future as a direct result of this reading. Did this decision have something to do with the children? Nothing was clear but it was obvious that the whole reason the demigods hated or disliked the gods was because of the ‘no contact’ rule. Did contact really matter that much to the children? Zeus decided to talk about this with his brothers. Maybe they might have some idea about what the whole reading thing was really about.

“I looked at … in a daze.”

“Thanks.” Thalia mouthed to Percy and he winked at her.

“'Come on!' ... going to end.”

“Always so dramatic.” Rachel said as she shook her head.

“The world is not going to end, not at that minute anyway.” Travis said. “It would take them some time to kill the Ophiotaurus and sacrifice it and all that.”

“You really are not helping anything.” Katie told him.

“'Go over the ... 'Good idea.'”

“Why does literally no one else think of using Iris Messaging?” Butch muttered.

“I uncapped Riptide ... through the refrigerator.”

Everyone groaned and Dionysus just threw his hands up and settled for drinking his wine in an annoyed manner. “You should have specified whom you wanted to talk to.” Iris said with a shrug.

“I’ll keep that in mind.”

“He looked up ... Where's Chiron?’”

“Ah! Classic!” Connor snorted as the demigods chuckled.

“That is still rude.” Dionysus said into his chalice.

“Mr. D considered ... were closing in.”

“For once in your life, I hope you help the children out, D.” Hermes said. Even Zeus didn’t oppose to that and Dionysus just rolled his eyes. He knew he would help out if the situation was serious and it was. So, there was a high chance that he did do something to help the children.

“'About to die ... we'll die fighting.'”

“My daughter had better not gotten hurt because you were not in a helping mood, Dionysus.” Zeus grumbled.

“So, now it is alright to break the rules blatantly? I see the hypocrisy.”

“'How noble ... about the Ophiotaurus.'”

“Actually, that does make a lot of difference.” Poseidon said with a small smile. “You see, we are not allowed direct interference unless either the rules can be interpreted in another manner like Artemis had done previously or if we are informed of a direct threat to Olympus. The Ophiotaurus
is a direct threat to us and once Percy informed Dionysus of that, the ancient law was not in effect. That means that Dionysus can actually do something without there being a terrible consequence.”

“"Mmm." He studied … with poison barbs.”

“You children better ask for help soon.” Apollo said.

“Meaning?” Thalia asked.

“Meaning,” Apollo leaned forward with a smile and said, “in order to receive help, you need to ask for it. How can you expect someone to help you out if you do not ask for help?”

“It is pretty obvious in this situation.”

“Regardless, that is not how it works. You ask and we decide whether we give it or not. That is how we work.”

“Typical demigods!” Dionysus grumbled. “You are so used to having privileges just because of who your parent is, that you forget that not everything will be handed to you.”

“We don’t really have privileges.” Thalia said snappily.

“Oh, you do not?” Dionysus scoffed. “Can you not call upon lightening at your whim and fancy? Can you not fly? Can Percy not breathe underwater or control all the water in the world? Can the children of Hades not summon the dead whenever they want? Can you all not do things that no one else can? If those are not privileges, then what are they? All of you are allowed to do such things, allowed minor control over the territory that your parent controls, that you start taking everything for granted. You get so caught up in all the wrongs done to you that you never see the good that has been handed to you. You did not do anything to deserve those powers, but they are still given to you and then you have the gall to ask for more, like you already have not been provided with so much. So, no, we do not help when we see you in trouble, because just like any other mortal, you need to ask for help and you need to work towards receiving that help.”

Hestia looked at the pondering demigods and said, “I think they understand now. Clarisse, please continue.”

“Uh, yeah… "Excellent," he said … could say please.""

“See, D wants to help you children out.” Hermes said in a pleased tone.

“Please stop talking.” Dionysus grumbled into his chalice.

“When wild boars … nothing happened.”

“Come on.” Someone muttered.

“The manticore grinned … too quickly?”

“Um question!” Dakota interrupted and Clarisse glared at him. She was just getting to the only good part in the whole chapter. “Why do you know that feeling?”

“Two words: school bullies.”

“Ah.”
“There was a … been so terrifying.”

“Told you Mr. D’s powers are awesome and scary, but awesome!” Nico said with a grin. “He’s totally underrated.”

Most of the demigods were shocked. Not only had Mr. D actually helped their own out but was totally cool doing it. There was no way it was the same god. Dionysus himself was smiling but hiding it behind his wine chalice.

Ariadne leaned towards her husband and muttered, “The son of Hades is your new favorite now, is he not?”

“Hmm… he is alright.”

“’No!’ screamed the … was no more.”

“Yay!” the demigods erupted into cheers for Dionysus while he just put on a show of indifference and annoyance.

“That is super cool. Someone better change the rules of mythomagic now.” Nico said and Frank and Dakota agreed with him.

“’Well,’ said Dionysus … How did you—’”

“That’s actually terrifying if you see a totally normal person just go batshit crazy in front of you without any explanation.” Chris muttered.

“’Such gratitude … reports to Father.’”

“Good.” Zeus muttered.

“He stared resentfully … it to camp?’”

“You have the wrong god, child. You should ask Hermes.” Apollo said with a chuckle and Hermes glared at him. The messenger god hated transporting living things and most of them were Apollo’s requests, probably to get back at Hermes for stealing his stupid cows that one time.

“Do not ask me to transport animals or monsters.” Hermes grumbled.

“Mr. D sniffed … off with you!””

“At least he didn’t call you Perry Johansson.” Annabeth said, patting Percy’s shoulder.

“Small mercies.”

“He waved his … must go home.’”

Zoe sighed. It was not going to end well for her. She had always known that returning home was not an option, now more so than ever.

“Who’s next?” Clarisse asked and Katie took the book from her.
A Not-so-good Family Reunion

Chapter Notes

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Ch78 – TTC – A Not-so-good Family Reunion

“WE MEET THE DRAGON OF ETERNAL BAD BREATH”

“'We will never … in the west.'

“You were going to jog from San Francisco Bay to Mount Tam?” Gwen asked.

“Kinda.”

“What happened to good old fashioned cab?” Dakota asked as he took a sip of his Kool-Aid.

“We couldn’t leave the Ophiotaurus.” Thalia said.

“We also didn’t have any cash.” Grover added.

“We never have any cash. Even now I think I have like maybe a dollar or two.” Percy said with a frown.

“That’s two more than I have.” Leo sighed.

“'I don't get … we miss it?'”

“Wait for the next sunset?” Travis said.

“Not in this case. The next day was Winter Solstice.” Percy replied.

“How did it come up so fast?”

“Time flies.”

“'Tomorrow is winter … where he’s going?'”

“Did you get attached to the monster everyone is trying to kill?” Theseus asked.

“In my defense, he is super cute, okay?” Percy replied and Grover agreed while Thalia shrugged.

“'Moo,' Bessie … them at sea.'”

“You would need to sacrifice something important to grant power to the request.” Hestia told
Percy.

“Do you even have something that important?” Perseus asked with a frown and Percy just smirked at him and asked Katie to continue.

"'A prayer like … Hercules used it!'"

“You sacrificed the Nemean lion skin?” Hercules almost yelled in disbelief. “Why would you do that? Do you know how useful it is?” He could never imagine having to do away with the lion skin. It had saved his life way too many times and it made him impossible to defeat. Why would anyone in their right mind give up something like that? And that too for a monster! Well, it was for Olympus in the end, but he would hesitate to do something like that. The skin was far too important.

Percy said, “In the grand scheme of things it wasn’t that useful.”

“It saved your life from those skeletons.” Hercules pointed out.

“Yes, but…”

“It makes you near invincible.”

“Trust me, invincibility is overrated. It really is.” Percy said with a grimace. The months when he had been invincible had been pretty great but the tension that came with it, for his own safety was far too much. Sure, he was all powerful, but one little slip and he could have died. And yeah, the lion skin was nothing like that, but all the enemy would have to do was aim for a part uncovered by the lion skin and voila! You are dead! “I mean, it is useful, but not worth it.”

“What?” Hercules looked as confused as everyone other than those from the future felt.

“I do not know why, but I have a feeling that you do actually know what you are talking about.” Perseus said.

“I do.”

“We better not have granted him invincibility at some point.” Zeus muttered to himself.

“As soon as … all my life.”

Hercules grinned and Perseus sighed. Now he would never hear the end of this. He asked, “What is so great about him?”

“Super strength.” Will said.

“And…” Travis frowned and paused. “Yeah, just super strength.”

“Also, he has defeated so many monsters.” Chris said.

“I think that Percy has met more than that.” Zoe spoke up. Anything to put down Hercules’ ego.

“He has a good PR department. That’s all.” Annabeth said.

“He has a good what?”

“PR… umm… there were people who spread only his name around rather than anybody else’s?” Annabeth tried to explain.
“Well, he does have a lot of followers.” Perseus said and Hercules rolled his eyes. “I am sitting right here, you know?”

“Yes, and we do not care.” Theseus deadpanned.

“Right. Katie?” Percy looked at Katie and she nodded.

“"If I'm going … I'm not Hercules.'”

“I can see why the hunters are friends with him in the future.” Adrianna murmured.

“I threw the … on the water.”

Poseidon smiled proudly. On one hand, he was glad that his son did not want any sort of external help, especially ones that are really not required. But on the other hand, he wondered whether Percy would have the wisdom to accept such help when he really did need it. That would be the real test of his character.

“The sea breeze … like breathing.”

“Obviously.”

“"Well, that is … uh, borrowed one.'”

“Please do.” Connor said with a grin.

“I didn't like … get us noticed.”

“Not the moral dilemma, dude. Just steal a car!”

“"Wait," Thalia said … Annabeth's dad.'”

“I was wondering when it would come up.” Annabeth sighed. “You know, neither of you told me what really happened when you met dad.”

“We realized that old people also play with toys and are still awesome.” Thalia said nonchalantly and Annabeth laughed.

“After hearing Annabeth … the front porch.”

“I still don’t understand why he needs to wear those when working on his research paper.” Annabeth said with a sigh. She looked at Percy and asked skeptically, “You thought he would have devil horns and fangs?”

“No?”

“"Hello," he said in a friendly voice, "Are you delivering my airplanes?'”

“Dad!” Annabeth whined. “Teenagers don’t deliver airplanes!”

“Thalia, Zoe, and I … Has something happened?'”

Annabeth smiled slightly. It was always reassuring to know that her dad did miss her and did care about her despite all the troubles she brought with her.
“None of us … he said.”

“That’s his usual look when he is working on something.”

“That’s my usual look even if I’m not working on something.” Leo said.

“It didn’t look … lived in forever.”

“That’s what happens with the twins.” Annabeth said fondly. “Once we stayed in this hotel room for barely two days and it looked like we had been there for weeks.”

“You have normal siblings outside of the camp?” Gwen asked. “That’s so cool.”

“I wouldn’t call Bobby and Matt normal.” Annabeth replied.

“’Dad!’ a little … ’Okay, Dad!’”

“Pfft. Like that’s gonna work.” Leo said.

“Dr. Chase turned … them their names?”

“I wanted to ask, is that normal?” Thalia asked.

“What? Dad bringing people in the house without knowing anything about them?” Annabeth asked and chuckled, “It’s a weekly occurrence. We are so used to having random people in the house. He’s not allowed to open the door anymore.”

“We introduced ourselves … lot about you.”

“Wow. I did give a pretty bad impression of them.” Annabeth mused out loud.

“Meh.” Percy shrugged.

“Upstairs, we walked … of a dogfight.”

“Your father is into wars?” Perseus asked with a frown. “I thought you said that he was a teacher of sorts.”

“He is,” Annabeth answered, “of military history. He researches about all the wars mortals have fought and how it impacted the society. All that kind of stuff.”

“Why would anyone do that?”

“It is important to know how wars affect the people and how they came to be what they are today.” Clarisse answered and growled ‘what’ when everyone stared at her.

“She is going to study about military history in college.” Chris said in a matter-of-factly manner.

“Ah! That makes so much sense.” Travis said. “I was wondering what she would do in college.”

“That’s it!” Clarisse growled and moved to hit Travis but Chiron interfered and made the two settle down after getting Travis to apologize to Clarisse.

“Dr. Chase smiled … with toy soldiers.”

“It’s weird to mention that part.”
“Zoe came over … you know that?”

“Yeah, how?” Connor asked.

“First of all,” Katie answered for Zoe, “she doesn’t even know what this battle was and second, it is mentioned here.”

“‘I was there … a complete waste.’”

“Mortal wars are actually pretty useless.” Thalia said having heard many stories about wars from the hunters that were so different from the things she had heard from Annabeth and her books. She said in a lowered voice, “Not like godly wars are much different, only the stakes are higher. Like really high.”

“Dr. Chase opened … actual biplane? I said.”

“Don’t distract my dad!” Annabeth yelled.

“Sorry! But biplanes are so cool. How can you not ask about it?” Percy asked.

“You hate flying.”

“Only because I have a 99.9% chance of dying if I do that. Otherwise, it is pretty awesome and fast.”

“Well, you can talk to him all about it when you meet him.”

“What?”

“I told you, they are coming to New York. Of course you are gonna meet them.”

“What?” Percy felt petrified. It was one thing meeting her dad as a friend when she was in danger and another, meeting him as a boyfriend. Jason patted him on the back with a chuckle and Percy gave Annabeth an awkward smile. “Awesome.”

“It’ll be for me.” Annabeth said in glee.

“‘Down at Crissy … Sopwith Camel—’”

“Whoa! He restored a Sopwith Camel?” Leo said excitedly. “Hey, Annabeth, can I meet your dad too?”

“‘Sir,’ Thalia said … destroy your car.’”

“I don’t think that is reassuring to anyone.”

“Mrs. Chase knit … better get going.’”

“Okay, that’s the coolest stepparent I have ever heard of.” Butch said.

“Paul’s pretty cool too.” Nico said. “He killed a couple of monsters. That was awesome.”

“I still can’t believe he did that.” Piper said.

“Nor can he.” Percy chuckled.
"'Right!' Dr. Chase ... I promised."

"Thanks for that." Annabeth whispered to Percy. Had Percy not told her about how worried her family had been, she probably wouldn’t have tried to mend relations with them. She couldn’t believe that only five years ago, she hated to even mention them, let alone think of them fondly and now she couldn’t wait to see them again.

"We ran out ... said in unison."

"Man! I can totally imagine that happening." Leo laughed out and a few others joined him.

"Zoe weaved in ... Especially dragons.'""

"Are you kidding me?" Dakota asked. "Monsters have something in common with koala bears? That sucks."

"I feel bad for the koalas."

"'Dragons chew ... eucalyptus too.'"

"Dragons have horrible breath.” Hermes said in disgust.

"Peleus doesn’t smell all that bad.” Leo pointed out.

"Because once a week, the unlucky cabin gets to clean him. It’s not fun.” Connor shuddered.

"It’s fun for him.” Clarisse muttered.

"Everything is fun for him.” Chris said. “Especially volleyball.”

"Did you feed him a ball?” Chiron asked in exasperation.

"Well,” Travis drawled, “we didn’t feed it to him, per say. It’s not our fault that he took some time to understand how to play the game.”

Chiron sighed and mentally made a note to put in an advertisement for a vet specializing in dragons in the Olympus Weekly and to keep the Hermes’ kids away from Peleus.

"I didn't question ... call it that?""

"Did no one teach you our history?” Athena asked.

"It’s more of a self-reading kind of thing.” Percy replied with a sheepish grin. “It’s just easier for me to get information about this stuff on the go. At least I have something to associate it with.”

"She was silent ... A storm?""

"Worse.” Hercules shuddered. It had been one of the most difficult things he had had to do – holding up the sky. Just thinking about it made him feel heavy.

"Zoe didn't answer ... East Coast to California.”

"Oh, this is bad.” Apollo muttered. He wanted to know how the children got Artemis out of there. He knew they did, otherwise the hunters would not exist. But how?

"So, you have to go against the entire army they have which might include monsters so old that no
one remembers them and the General and rescue both Lady Artemis and Annabeth.” Theseus stated with a frown. “And it is only three of you against everyone else?”

“Yes.”

“How are you alive?”

“Dammit! You guys were so close. We could have actually helped you.” Reyna exclaimed.

“We still couldn’t have met back then. We didn’t know that you guys existed and it would have caused a war between us if we had met.” Annabeth said with a shrug. “So, it’s better that we didn’t meet you guys.”

"'We will have … across the road.'"

“Dad?” Jason asked Thalia in shock.

“Actually,” Poseidon said with a sigh, “for the first time, it is not Zeus who is doing that. That would be Atlas. Once he is out from under his burden, he can do things such as that.”

“I swallowed the … about her dad.”

“We do not hurt our own children.” Zeus said firmly. Why would Thalia think that he would try to kill her? Why did she always assume the worst of him?

"'Oh, hey, that … Where's Zoe? Zoe!'""

The hunters tensed. They knew that Zoe would not make it out of the quest but she could not die before she saved Artemis. She had to do that. There was no way anything could happen to Zoe. She herself wouldn’t allow it. But now that the quest was almost ending, the hunters wondered how long it would be before they would be hearing about Zoe’s final actions. Adrianna put her arm around the young hunter and pulled her closer in comfort.

“'We both got … to wake Ladon?'”

“Oh, you are fine.” Sabrina sighed in relief as she held Zoe’s hand.

"'You mean we're … angry at your dad.'""

“That is actually quite a possibility.” Hestia said sadly. “It would be easier for them to get Thalia to help them out if she was at odds with her father. Our father does like to play with feelings and twist one’s perceptions of the reality.”

“And Atlas is, unfortunately, very much like Kronos.” Rhea added with a shake of her head.

“She took a deep … seen in my dream.”

“Ladon would be just there, out of sight.” Hercules muttered. He hated that dragon.

“If it hadn't … I'd ever seen.”

“True.” Thalia and Hercules said in unison.

“The grass shimmered … I’d ever tasted.”
“And also the last thing you would ever taste, were you able to get past the dragon.” Poseidon said.

“See, apples are bad.” Percy muttered.

“That was not the takeaway from that.” Annabeth rolled her eyes.

“‘The apples of … all the eyes closed.’”

“Ladon!” Zoe sighed in longing. That dragon was one of the best things in the garden. He would always let her pet him, but obviously he would no longer allow that now that she was not part of that family.

“Then the shadows … probably very dangerous.”

“They are dangerous.” Zoe said. “But they are also cowards, unfortunately. They would not do anything at all and would only make threats.”

“Unlike you.” Percy said. “You would actually chop somebody’s head off.”

“I have done that, yes.”

“Huh.” Percy gave a nervous grin and looked away from Zoe.

“‘Sisters,’ Zoe said … is a threat.’”

“The Titans consider you a threat?” Hercules asked.

“He is unpredictable. Of course they don’t like that.” Thalia answered.

“Hey!”

“I said unpredictable not unreliable, dumbass!”

“You are dumb.”

“Settle down, you two.” Annabeth said with a sigh.

“You do not seem all that threatening. No offence of course.” Perseus said.

“You haven’t seen him fight or get angry.” Leo said.

“That’s not true.” Percy said.

“Shh… you don’t know what you are talking about, Percy.” Nico said and Percy shook his head.

“‘Who said I … approach the mountain.’”

“Why does everyone keep forgetting that there is a goddess stuck there?” Apollo threw his hands up in exasperation. It was a good thing that Zoe was there to remember that Artemis had to be freed too. The demigods only worried about Annabeth. It was annoying. His sister was far more important than some demigod.

“‘You know he … ‘Ladon! Wake!’”

“Zoe!” almost all of the hunters yelped in surprise. They did not expect Zoe to do something like
“Child,” Artemis said in worry, “you are no longer a Hesperid. Ladon will not hesitate to kill you.”

Zoe fiddled with her hair and said nervously, “The others are frightened of Ladon. They would not allow us to enter but if Ladon wakes, they would not stay in the same area.”

“That was foolish of you to do.”

“I suppose it was.” Zoe sighed and wondered whether Ladon would kill her before she met her father but it was not possible. The prophecy said that one would be killed by a parent. It was obviously her father who would kill her. He had never forgiven her for both helping Hercules and then joining Artemis.

“**The dragon stirred … should ignore thee.**”

“There must be some other way other than this madness!” Adrianna exclaimed.

“Unfortunately, there is none.” Zoe sighed. “The only other way is to get one of my sisters to help us get inside. That would never happen. No Hesperid would help a demigod.” Zoe looked sullenly at Hercules and thought about how foolish she had been to help the famed hero. If it had not been for her, he would never have made it to her father. He would have died trying. “Worry not,” she said, “I have always known that returning home means certain death for me.”

“And yet you opted to go there. You could have sent any other hunter.”

“Because none other can get inside the gardens.” Zoe said with finality.

“*Should,* I said … of chewed eucalyptus.”

“Now I wanna throw up.” Rachel muttered.

“I promised myself … Dragon confusion.”

“It will not be long before his training takes over his memories.” Artemis said sorrowfully.

“Yes, but it might be just long enough for those two to get to safety.” Zoe said with determination.

“**Meanwhile, the Hesperides … he lunged at Zoe:**”

Someone whimpered and those sitting the closest to Zoe, held on to her as if she would disappear any moment. Hercules winced as he thought about how the dragon would kill the sweet Zoe. He did not want to hear about it. She returned home only to be dismissed by her sisters and attacked by her dragon and somehow it was all his fault. He could see what Thalia and Percy had meant about him using Zoe, but in his defense, she had willingly helped him and he did not know that she would be banished from her home. Still, he worried for her safety.

“**Two thousand years … track for a funeral.**”

“It would be just that.” Zoe muttered.

“**At the top … been half melted.**”

“No!” Zoe gasped. “There are no ruins there. They should not be there.”
“Othrys is rebuilding.” Artemis said solemnly. “The titans are stronger than what we presumed.” The gods looked at each other in worry. Things were far bleaker than what they thought them to be.

“When we went there, it was almost completely rebuilt.” Jason said.

“Kronos had been really, really close to taking over Olympus.” Annabeth said ominously.

"The ruins of … fool as usual."

“Seriously?” Annabeth asked. “I taught it to you.” Percy mouthed ‘sorry’ and looked away and signaled Katie to read before Annabeth or her mother could yell at him for his ignorance.

"The mountain fortress … and held her side."

“You are hurt.” Sabrina whispered. “This is not good at all.”

“There are far more dangerous things there than Ladon’s bite.” Zoe said, knowing that she would meet her father real soon.

"You're hurt," … hold up the sky."

“Oh, right. No one knows that Atlas has escaped.” Perseus said in worry.

“We had reached … roof of the world.”

Apollo leaned forward and glared at the book as if it was the cause of Artemis’ situation. The other gods were tensed too as they wondered how the children would manage to rescue Artemis.

"My lady!” Zoe … too much for Artemis.”

“The sky can only be held by a titan and no one else.” Rhea intoned. “Anyone else who tries to hold it up will slowly die, depending on who they are.”

“But Hercules held it, right?” Leo asked.

“Super strength.” Thalia explained. “And he held it for what, a few minutes?”

“It was actually more than a few minutes. It was more like half an hour.” Hercules said proudly.

“It was fifteen minutes.” Zoe corrected him.

“Zoe was crying … sending me, though: RUN.”

“Like that’ll ever happen.” Percy whispered to Annabeth and she shook her head at him. She knew he would never leave her side if she was in trouble but she had to try, even if it was in vain.


Athena frowned. Why was Luke’s health deteriorating? What was his role exactly in the whole thing? He was never in forefront, never taking any major decisions. So, what was it that he was doing? And why were the titans and monsters not killing him if he was not of much use to them?

“That is the … not challenge him.”

“I think everyone knows not to challenge a titan, let alone the General of them all.” Hermes said
and Annabeth and Thalia said in unison, “Not everybody.”

Poseidon looked at Annabeth and Thalia and then at his son as realization set in. Great! He would not be able to breathe properly till the quest ended completely.

“’Wait a second … with this wretched girl.’”

“I hope, for your sake, that you do not interfere.” Zoe said to Percy.

“No promises.”

“Oh gods!” Jason said as he looked at Percy. He had an inkling of what Percy might have done. “You are crazy.”

“Most definitely.”

“’You're not going … 'Atlas is my father.'”

“Ah, you did not know that.” Zoe said.

“Nope.”

“Shall we take a break now?” Hestia suggested.

“Can we?” Thalia asked, stretching her legs.

Poseidon sighed as Zeus agreed for a break. He wished the break would be over soon so he wouldn’t have to worry about Percy’s actions, although they were becoming somewhat predictable to him. Percy would do whatever no one else would even dream of. Even though the god knew that his son would survive through whatever happened, it was the experience of undergoing those things that the sea god worried about.
Hey!
So, I first thought of making this a break chapter but it wasn't working out. So here's another reading chapter for you guys :D

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Ch79 – TTC – A Herculean Task

“Man! I wanted that horse.” Leo lamented as Butch stuck out his tongue and petted the horse he had taken for himself for the chariot race.

“Leo, let’s just get another.” Piper said and pulled Leo further in the stables.

“But that one looked cool.”

“Leo!”

The demigods were milling around the stables and selecting horses for the chariot race. The chariots were already stationed behind the stables and were randomly selected by Nike for the various teams.

“That one is sick.” Percy said as he pointed out a white horse who was lying on the ground and occasionally sniffing at the hay. “And that one is carrying little horse babies.” Percy said drily as Leo pointed out another horse.

“Dammit!” Leo sighed. “Which one did you choose?”

“Those two,” Percy pointed to outside the stables where two horses were head-butting each other and Theseus was laughing at their antics and talking to them.

“Apt.” Leo gave a sharp nod and pulled Percy and Piper to a chestnut colored horse. “How about this one?”

“Nice choice. Fair warning though, he cusses a lot and his thoughts are pretty violent.” Percy said and frowned at the string of choice words that the horse let out with a single neigh.

“Chariot.” Annabeth said as she pulled Percy away from Leo and Piper. “We need to see which one is ours and Tyson said that he can start working on something for us.”

“It would be that one.” Percy pointed to a sea-green chariot with grey and silver engravings on it. “Nike did say that she is going to paint all the chariots with our parents’ colors.”
“Cool!” Tyson said as he joined his brother and friend to walk to the chariots. He walked two circles around the chariot and nodded. “I know what you need.” With that he ran off to start working on whatever it was that he came up with.

“These look unstable.” Reyna said as she climbed up on the chariot that was hers and Gwen’s. Dakota had opted not to participate and it was fine by everyone. No one knew what would happen if a sugar-crazed person took up chariot racing.

“They are, when compared to Roman chariots.” Annabeth answered and walked over to Reyna and Gwen. “Just don’t cross this line.” Annabeth pointed to a slightly raised piece of wood. “You won’t fall off then.”

“Children!” Chiron called out and somehow was still heard over all the chaos in the stables. He looked at the establishment in distaste and pitied the horses. Looking back at the rarely attentive demigods, he announced, “The gods want to start with the reading once again so as to ensure plenty of preparation time for the race.”

“It’s been like only five minutes.” Will complained.

“It has actually been twenty five minutes. Come on.” Chiron rounded up everyone and walked them to the palace.

“I’ll read.” Lou Ellen volunteered once everyone had settled down in the throne room and had been asked to ‘shut it’ by Clarisse at least twice.

“I PUT ON A FEW MILLION EXTRA POUNDS”

“Oh, I wanna know about this.” Clarisse said.

Poseidon closed his hand tightly in a fist. There was only one thing that could be that heavy and if Percy did something to take that on… no, no, no! Worrying about his son was going to be the death of him!

“You did not.” Piper said in astonishment as she stared at Percy.

“Did not what?” Jason asked.

“I think you’ll see.” Piper replied and looked at Percy. No wonder everyone at the camp considered him nothing less than a god.

“The horrible thing was: I could see the family resemblance.”

“What are we talking about?” Gwen asked.

“Zoe and Atlas.” Calypso replied. She remembered Percy had once told her that he knew a daughter of Atlas and now she knew whom he had been talking about.

“Atlas had the same … come to appreciate.”

Zoe pulled her legs close to her chest and laid her head on her knees. She didn’t like talking about her estranged family, didn’t even like hearing about them and now to hear someone she might have even considered a friend, make such a comparison left a mark on her. At least he had seen some difference between her and her horrible father. That was a consolation. At least there was some good in her and that hadn’t been lost over the years to whatever horrible things she may have witnessed.
“‘Let Artemis go,' … I forbid you.’”

“Oh good!” Artemis sighed in relief. She would not have any maiden take up such a burden even if it was to save her. She would never condemn anyone to such a fate.

“I could have…”

“No, Zoe, you could not have done anything. You know he only taunts you.”

“Yes, my Lady.”

“Atlas smirked … off his fingers.”

Apollo growled and gritted, “Stay away from my sister, you pathetic…”

“Apollo, she is fine.”

“Not now Hermes.”

“‘Hoo-hoo,’ Atlas chuckled … weaklings some humility.’”

All the gods bristled at that. No one could threaten them and live to tell the tale. Unfortunately, they could not kill the titans and had to settle knowing that once Artemis was freed, she would do everything in her power to put Atlas in his place, both literally and figuratively.

“I looked at … should've killed her.’”

“Yes, it should have.” Athena said sadly. “Anyone who is not a titan cannot hold up the sky indefinitely. My daughter gave up a part of her life force to hold it up.”

“Wait, what?” Percy asked in shock. Life force?

“Yes,” Hestia explained, “although it has not happened before, other than for Hercules, after a titan and a god, if there is anyone who can hold the sky, it is a demigod. But it is at a price and it can only be done by a few who possess either god-like strength, like Hercules does or have the purest of heart and intentions. Either of these qualities can give strength to a demigod to hold up the sky.”

“Holding up the sky means to act as a barrier between two primordials.” Rhea said. “It is nigh impossible to achieve, especially by a mortal, even one that has some immortal blood in them. One would need either the sheer strength of body or of mind. Only then can something like this be achieved. But since it is such an impossible task, accomplishing it means to give up whatever it is that you use to hold it up. Hercules used his physical strength for this purpose and I am sure after that day his strength has not been the same. Similarly, Annabeth could hold the sky up because of her inner strength and so she had to give up a few years of her life to do something like that, mainly because inner strength cannot be taken away. If she had stayed longer under the burden, she could have even given up her entire life. The amount given up usually depends on the amount of strength you have. Even if it seems, it is never infinite.”

“What about Luke? He held up the sky, right? His intentions weren’t pure or anything. He was trying to take down Olympus.” Travis asked.

“Inner strength is not based on one’s actions but rather on the character. Despite his actions, Luke must have been a strong person with a good character.” Hestia said.

Annabeth put her head on Percy’s shoulder and whispered, “I could have lived without that
knowledge.”

“Well, on the brighter side,” Percy said with false cheer, “I also gave up some of mine. So, not much of a difference, yeah? Plus, who knows for how long we’ll live anyway.”

“Just stop, Seaweed Brain.” Annabeth whispered and Percy smiled and kissed her on top of her head.

"I don't understand … "And let's see."

“You do not go up to a titan and say ‘fight us’. You just do not!” Triton said in exasperation. This brother of his might be crazier than all of his siblings put together and that was saying something. Poseidon rubbed his forehead and sighed. He knew it was coming up. Why couldn’t his children just get the nicer parts of his character and not the reckless side?

“That sounds a lot like Poseidon.” Demeter said, thinking back to a younger, far more impulsive Poseidon, who would go around challenging anyone who dared disrespect him. Add Zeus to that and they had the perfect mix for disaster. Those had been trying times for them all.

"Have the gods taught … attention to Thalia."

“Are you trying to get Atlas to fight you?” Calypso asked in shock.

“I don’t know.” Percy stated. “I was exhausted and we didn’t have much time for anything. We were also outnumbered. I don’t know what I was thinking but it all worked out in the end.”

“Is that how you operate?” Theseus asked. “Charge in headfirst and hope for the best?”

“Well, that and improvisation.” Percy answered with a smile.

Hades leaned in to whisper to Zeus, “How sure are we that Olympus is not destroyed?” and Zeus answered, “Not that much anymore.”

“Huh.”

'As for you … for the Ophiotaurus.’

“Why does this child have all these powers?” Athena asked.

“Maybe the titans granted it?” Hermes suggested.

“Except that titans do not have that power.” Apollo interrupted. “They can grant protection or health but not a new power and not one that is related to magic unless the titan himself is related to magic, like Hecate.”

“Kronos can.” Hecate said. “But for that, he needs to have been reformed at least a little. The scythe allowed him control over all sorts of magic as required. It would be very easy for him to transfer that to someone else and a child of Hermes would be a very good medium. Hermes has control over a lot of areas which would make his children not tied to just one aspect. Someone with that sort of ability would make a good medium.”

“I could imagine … hear Bessie mooing.”

“Stop summoning the Ophiotaurus!” Demeter said in nervousness. If the beast was anywhere near the titans, none of the Olympians would survive.
“I didn’t know it worked like that.”

“Don't think about … to rule the world!”"

The gods didn’t say anything but they glowered at the book as if it was Luke who was speaking those words. Instead, Rhea spoke up, “How could the child think that gods should not rule the world? The age of Olympus has been the best there has ever been. At the very least, other species are allowed to live and prosper. He wants to bring back Kronos to rule the world? Kronos would destroy everything good in the world and either kill or enslave anyone who tried to oppose him. Perhaps it has been far too long since anyone was taught about Kronos’ rule. Perhaps then the child would have seen the truth behind the manipulation that is Kronos’ rule.”

“You are right,” Chiron said, “it has been far too long and hardly anyone other than the elder gods even remembers those times. No one ever thought that Kronos would ever rise again and no one talked about him or any of the titans as a matter of fact. The children just knew their names and knew not to speak them out loud but other than that, it wasn’t common knowledge. Obviously, now that all has changed.”

“Thalia shook her … you don’t agree. Please.”"

“What ‘other way’?” Hermes asked.

“I didn’t even remember this.” Annabeth whispered to Percy. “There were so many times he was trying to get out of the whole becoming the host thing. I can’t believe we didn’t take notice of that.”

“Well, we were trying not to die most of the times he said something like that.” Percy shrugged. “You can’t blame yourself. I know he wanted to get out but at the end of the day, it was his own decision and I know he couldn’t have done anything against it.” Seeing Annabeth’s saddened look, Percy said, “Hey, even if we – if you – understood what he was going on about, do you really think you or anyone else could have made a difference? No one can go against Kronos. Not alone.”

Annabeth nodded dejectedly. She knew Percy was right. What chance did she have against Kronos? But time and again she would feel horrible for not seeing the pain that Luke must have been in during the whole thing.

“I didn't know … might believe it, too.”

“I did, actually.” Thalia said.

“"Do not, Thalia," … it was hardly his.”

“Because it wasn’t.” Annabeth muttered. “Kronos must have been projecting his own thoughts through Luke.”

“"Once more, it will … would be here.”

“Oh, no!”

“"This is only … need is your help.""

“They already have hundreds of monsters, why do they not attack the camp already?” Theseus asked and added in a hurry, “Not that I wish for them to do something like that, but surely not even all the campers could defeat that many monsters.”
“Camp boundaries.” Thalia replied. “The monsters can’t get in as long as the boundary line exists. Plus, they wanted to try the easy route first. If they had gotten the Ophiotaurus, then there would be no need to do anything else. They could have just attacked Olympus and no one would have stood a chance.”

“For a terrible moment … Together, we charged.”

“Good!” Ares grinned maniacally. Finally, something to enjoy in the book. A mini battle was better than no battle.

“Not good.” Poseidon groaned.

“Thalia went straight … yellow tendrils of power.”

“Should that have happened?” Perseus asked. “The lightening, unless of course, Thalia was using her power.”

“I wasn’t.”

Hestia answered, “The sword is only a manifestation of the scythe. It holds power on its own. As for the shield, it is a copy of Aegis but it too holds a bit of power of the real shield. When godly and titan power interact, it is bound to create a reaction.”

“As for me, I did the stupidest thing in my life, which is saying a lot. I attacked the Titan Lord Atlas.”

“You did WHAT?” Calypso yelled. “Have you lost your mind?”

Poseidon face paled and Zeus said, “Your son.”

“I know. Trust me, I know.”

“What were you thinking?” Jason asked.

“Clearly, he wasn’t.” Annabeth answered for Percy. She still couldn’t believe half the stuff Percy did on a regular basis, like challenging someone he had no job challenging.

“Why would you attack Atlas? The general of all the titans? One of their best warriors? The second in command. And you attack him? Of all the options that you had?” Zoe asked in disbelief. The boy was crazy. She was sure of it.

Percy shrugged and said, “I don’t know why I did it back then and I still don’t know it. But if it is any consolation, I have a lot of experience doing things that I shouldn’t be doing in the first place.”

“That is the opposite of a consolation, brother.” Triton said and ran his hand over his face. This was why he shouldn’t get emotionally invested in his demigod siblings. They were the craziest of them all and this one, even more so than usual.

“I am not surprised.” Amphitrite said and Rhea agreed, “Nor am I.”

“He laughed as … 'Go on, then!'”

“Do not attack him, do not attack him… Just walk away.” Poseidon kept mumbling under his breath.
“‘Percy!’ Zoe said … all his might.”

“You are crazy! You knew that and you still attacked him?” Zoe said.

“Shh.” Ares hissed. No one better interrupt the fight scene.

“I swung my … was becoming real.”

“That should not happen.” Zeus said and Ares hissed at him and got glared at for his troubles.

“‘Fool!’ Atlas screamed … up to me?”

“Excuse me!” Ares screamed. “Who does he think he is calling ‘petty’?”

“You.” Athena answered. “Now keep silent and do not interrupt.”

“How dare…”

“Just read on, child.” Hestia said and glared at Ares and Athena. It was not the time for their petty squabbles.

“The mention of … double my strength.”

“Do not depend on that!” Triton said involuntarily. “Do you honestly search for water bodies near you to strengthen you?”

“Water helps. Always.” Percy replied and Triton shook his head and said, “When you need strength, just summon the water to yourself. It will come from whatever the nearest source is. It will save you time.”

“I don’t think I have done that yet.”

“I’ll show you.” Theseus offered and Percy gave him a thumbs up.

“The javelins point … will fail you.”

“ARES!” almost half the room bellowed.

“What?” Ares threw his hands up. “Now it is getting interesting.”

“If anything happens to my son…”

“Your son is sitting right here.”

“IF anything happens to my son, I will not spare you.” Poseidon gritted and Ares scowled but didn’t say a word.

“This is very important for us, Ares.” Hestia said.

Ares pointed to Percy in exasperation and said, “Obviously he won despite all this. Let us just continue.”

“Not now! I pleaded … 'You must run!'”

“You must listen to Lady Artemis. You were overpowered from the beginning but now with the curse… there is no way you can win this.” Perseus said.
“I can’t but someone else can.” Percy commented and Poseidon muttered, “Just get it over with.”

“Atlas was taking … in Atlas’s armor.”

“No, no, no,” Adrianna muttered under her breath.

“'ARGH!’ He bellowed … stand a chance.”

Everyone stared at Percy for a few seconds and Jason said slowly, “You didn’t.”

Percy shrugged and said, “I did.”

“'The sky,’” I told … weight of the sky!”'

“Why is that always your argument?” Annabeth asked rhetorically.

“I didn't wait … I can do this.”

“Yes, you can.” Poseidon muttered.

“Are you sure?” Zeus asked.

“Obviously.”

“Then Artemis slipped … I couldn't.”

“There are no words.” Hercules said. “But the worst is if you have to hold a conversation at the same time.”

“Every muscle in … weight crushing me.”

“No. Stay up, son.” Poseidon said in worry.

“Fight back! … my fevered brain.”

“No, it wasn’t. That was really her.” Annabeth said.

“Zoe shot arrows … by a blowtorch.”

“I can’t even imagine what that feels like.” Leo said.

“Horrible.” Percy and Annabeth said in unison.

“Atlas advanced, pressing … no match for me.”'

“Not physically anyway.” Athena said smugly. Every god was waiting for the moment that Atlas would be trapped under his old burden once again. That would teach that titan to never disrespect the gods.

“He feinted with … for the kill.”

Apollo tensed and Artemis said sadly, “No, Zoe.” She knew that her faithful lieutenant would come to save her as she had done before but she didn’t want it to happen. Atlas would kill his own daughter without a second thought and it would be because of her, because Zoe would obviously give up her own life to save her goddess.
“‘No!’ Zoe screamed … Zoe had landed.”

Tears sprang up in many eyes as the hunters realized that this may be the last they heard of their sister. Percy took a deep breath. This was the action that killed his could be friend. Zoe didn’t deserve it. No one did.

“Then Atlas turned … he stabbed downward.”

Apollo stopped breathing and closed his eyes. He knew that Artemis was better than that that she could defeat titans but that was at full strength. At this point, she was tired from using up her energy to hold up the sky. Would she really have the strength to escape from Atlas?

“As fast as … flying over her”

Apollo laughed and Artemis shook her head at him. Still, she was relieved. So were the other gods. The hunters whooped in delight and Zoe smiled proudly. So what if she died – she died saving Artemis and that was something no one else could say. She just hoped she got to say her goodbye to Artemis.

“I saw him coming … it was too late.”

Poseidon sighed in relief. Finally his son was out from under the sky. It had been a stupid decision to make but it had been the right one. The god wondered whether his son always had to make such decisions. Whether he had to put himself in danger time and again so that there was a better chance of winning. He wanted to know more about Percy, wanted to know more about his life. His son should be commended for what all he had done. He had fought so many monsters and done tasks that no one else ever had and if after all that the gods didn’t commend him, didn’t appreciate him, then Poseidon was going to get really angry.

“‘Noooooo!’ He bellowed … was burning up.”

“Do not try to move just yet. You would take some time to adjust to being burden free.” Poseidon said.

“Thalia backed Luke … point to his throat.”

“Capture him and bring him home now.” Hermes muttered but he knew it wouldn’t be that easy. His son had resisted any form of reconciliation from the demigods and for sure he would do that once again. But why was he being so stubborn? Why would he want to run even when time after time someone would try to bring him home? What was it that the evil titan was offering him?

Thalia looked at the floor and tried not to think back to that horrible day. She had found one friend but lost another. She sometimes wondered if Luke could have been saved if only he had given up and come with them. She still had nightmares about him falling off the cliff and even though she knew that he came back, it wasn’t easy to remember that all the time. The person who came back had not been Luke. That was all she knew. For her, Luke had died that very day and it was because of her. Even though her brain knew that wasn’t true, that it was an automatic reaction that led to it, her heart would never let her believe it.

“For a moment … and then he fell.”

Hermes froze and stared at the speck of dirt on the ground in front of him. It was never easy to hear about his children’s death, even if he had never known the child and the only thing he knew of the child was of his betrayal.
“Fret not, Hermes.” Rhea said. “Your son may still be alive.”

“What do you mean?”

“Kronos obviously gave him some sort of power over few minor things like summoning and such. Perhaps if the boy is useful to him, he would have given your son some sort of healing protection. If that is the case, then a fall would not kill your son.”

“Is it bad that I hope that that is the case?” Hermes muttered to Apollo.

Apollo shrugged and replied, “It is your son. You should be allowed to want him alive despite whatever his actions may have been.”

"'Luke!' Annabeth screamed … "Kill them!'"

“Oh no! You still have an army of hundreds of monsters after you.” Perseus groaned.

“They also probably still have a goddess.” Theseus said.

“It is not like she can interfere directly.” Perseus muttered and Theseus shrugged.

“Thalia was stiff … But still…”

“No!” Sabrina sobbed and held on tightly to Zoe. Zoe herself was shaking. Just because she approved of her final acts did not mean she was ready in any way or form to hear about her own death. A laugh bubbled up as she thought about how many people could say that they heard each and every detail of their own death but could do nothing to stop it. Still she managed to return Sabrina’s hug and said, “It is going to be alright, sister. Everything is alright.”

Percy tightened his hold on Annabeth’s hand. He had come to terms with a lot of deaths that had taken place but hearing them or remembering them was always tough, especially when he could see the person being well and alive in front of him.

"'The wound is … sapping her strength.'"

“That is our Zoe!” one of the hunters sobbed as silence enveloped them all.

"'The stars,' Zoe murmured. "I cannot see them.'"

Artemis went and sat next to Zoe and hugged her shaking frame. “I am so sorry my child. I am so sorry.” Zoe shook her head but was unable to say a word. It was only now settling in that these were her final words. She would die soon.

"'Nectar and ambrosia,' I said. "Come on! We have to get her some.'"

“Ladon’s poison cannot be healed.” Hestia said softly to Percy. “Not when it has spread so much.”

Zoe stared at Percy. She could see why the hunters were on good terms with him. It was not just how different he was from Hercules, it was just who he was. She didn’t think it was possible for someone to meet him and not wish to be a friend of his. He just had that quality. Just then he turned to look at her and she mouthed ‘thank you’. It was the least she could say in front of the camaraderie he had shown her.

“No one moved … strange buzzing noise.”
“Now what?!” Jason asked. They were already overwhelmed. There was no way they could handle another threat at this point. Thalia grinned at her brother and said, “Something so awesome that it cannot be just told. You gotta hear this in as much detail as possible.”

“Just as the army … monsters into scattering.”

“What the –“ Leo exclaimed.

Jason laughed and said, “That was so unexpected. Oh gods!”

The sudden entrance of Dr. Chase even shook the hunters and Artemis out of their grief and they laughed as did many others. This was the first time anyone had heard of a mortal coming to a demigod’s rescue. The future was really, truly strange.

“That’s all cool, but what would lead do against monsters?” Reyna asked.

“It’s not lead.” Annabeth said proudly and grinned as confusion graced many faces.

”’Dad?’ yelled Annabeth … sulfurous yellow powder.”

“You dad,” Leo said with a grin, “made bullets out of celestial bronze?”

“Yup.”

“I need to meet him, okay. He’s awesome!”

“I know!” Annabeth laughed. Her dad was really awesome.

“Intelligent man.” Athena said with a slight smile.

”’That’s… my dad!” … legend came from?'”

“Artemis is… Santa Claus?” Will asked.

“Does that make the hunters the elves?” Travis asked, making all the demigods erupt into laughter as they imagined the hunters as elves. Even Thalia seemed to have trouble hiding her grin.

“What are they talking about?” Apollo asked.

“Nothing important.” Chiron answered.

“Seeing us safely … a Sopwith Camel.”

“No, that would have been an awesome sight. Why did we never see something like that?” Dakota lamented.

“Behind us, the … weight of the sky.”

“The chapter’s done.” Lou Ellen said and Butch took the book from her.

“Let us get this one done with then.” Zoe said with a sigh and the hunters held on to each other in support.
Hey guys!
So I know this one has been long overdue but I had such a hectic schedule for the past two weeks that I barely had time to come online. Anyway, it's here and it's short. Like really short. But I didn't want to wait to upload this one. So...
Also, those who read my other story 'Assimilation' - you guys would have to wait longer cuz I'm still not done with the next chapter in that.
Sorry for the wait and thanks a lot for understanding. :)

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Ch80 – TTC – The Huntress

Butch read solemnly, “A FRIEND SAYS GOOD-BYE”

“We landed at … I've ever seen!”

“It really was.” Leo agreed with a grin. He knew that they had guns and celestial bronze bullets in the armory, but for a mortal to do something like that – it was really cool.

“Her father blushed … Just a little experiment.”

Athena had a little smile on her face. She did appreciate someone who could dare to look beyond what was told to them. It was a rare gift in mortals. Most were just satisfied with the level of knowledge they had that they didn’t bother to learn more.

“He said it … scientist at heart.”

“He is.” Annabeth conceded.

"'Dad…' … her was fading."

“No.” Adrianna’s breath hitched and Artemis sighed in resignation. It was always painful to lose a hunter but it was worse when they died because of her.

“It is alright.” Zoe said bravely, her voice trembling with emotion. “We knew this would happen. It was bound to happen.”

"'Can't you heal … But I can try.'"

Apollo shook his head mournfully. He had seen hunters die before and in the beginning had even
tried to help out, unable to see the sadness on his sister’s face, but even he could not save someone that the Fates did not want saved. The most Artemis could do was ease Zoe’s pain and allow her to pass peacefully.

“She tried to set her hand on Zoe's side, but Zoe gripped her wrist.”

“Zoe!” Phoebe exclaimed in horror. Why would Zoe not want to be healed?

“It is alright.” Zoe said feebly. She could not imagine not wanting to be healed in such a situation but if her future-self thought that it was time then it probably was. She had a peaceful look on her face that reminded everyone that she was far older than she seemed. She took a calming breath and said softly, “Everything has a beginning and end. This is mine.” She managed a wan smile when Adrianna pulled her close in a side hug.

“She looked into … my brave one.”

“She tried to set her hand on Zoe’s side, but Zoe gripped her wrist.”

“Please let her heal you.” Sabrina muttered but she knew it was useless. Zoe was nothing if not stubborn and if she didn’t want to be healed, then she wouldn’t be.

“But in that … broken her inside.”

Zoe rested her head on Adrianna’s shoulder and willed herself not to cry. There was never any love lost between her and her father and it had only become more pronounced after Hercules, but still, to imagine that her father had so carelessly killed her, without a second thought, without remorse… she felt the traitor tears sting her eyes. She closed her eyes and concentrated on her new family – her real family.

Hercules looked at the pained hunter in the arms of Adrianna and wondered whether it was because of him that she was in such a situation. He had honestly never meant to hurt her or anyone else for that matter. He had just needed to complete the tasks. They… they were important to him. Really important. He looked away and wondered ‘why him’. Why in the entire universe, did Hera find only him to torture? If she hadn’t decided to make his life hell, he would have been happy with his family. He looked at Nico and thought to ask the young demigod about where he ended up after his death. As long as it wasn’t the Fields of Punishment for killing his family, he would be fine. His life was already worse than the tortures of Hades. They should have made Hera in charge of the underworld. She suited it better than his uncle.

“She saw Thalia … men—everything.”

“Not all men.” Zoe murmured into Adrianna’s shoulder, not having the energy to support herself. She felt Adrianna nod and knew that the hunters had accepted Percy as a friend. She should probably try to get to know him better. From what she saw, they both could be actual friends. She wondered if he was the exception or the rule. Perhaps neither. Perhaps both. She would ask Thalia. Those two seemed pretty close.

“Perhaps not all men … carry this sword.”

Percy blinked away the tears that were threatening to roll down his face and sought out Zoe in the crowd of hunters, who were almost sitting on top of one another. Zoe was already looking at him and offered him a weak smile. He smiled back and gripped Riptide over his pocket.

“A shudder ran … not move again.”

All demigods bowed their heads at the passing of one of their new found friends. The hunters were
in tears and Artemis hugged Zoe, having moved to sit amongst her hunters for the time being. Everyone sat in silence as the hunters mourned the fate of one of their own. But Zoe smiled and consoled everyone, “Do not fret, my sisters. We still have time together. The future is still far away.”

Artemis smiled at the brave hunter and soon the hunters managed a watery smile. How could they mourn her when she was right there? Their hearts ached with the knowledge of the future but they couldn’t let go of the present for that.

“If it is alright with everyone, then we could proceed with the reading.” Zoe said bravely after a few minutes, not wanting to dwell on what was set in stone. She looked at the teary faces of her sisters and smiled encouragingly at them.

“We should proceed.” Artemis said with a nod as everyone settled back to listen to what would happen next. The hunters were all shaken up but they were strong too.

“Thalia lowered her … shimmered and disappeared.”

Zoe frowned. What was Artemis doing? She looked at the goddess only to see the satisfied smile on her lady’s face. Whatever Artemis was doing had to be something good, Zoe decided.

“Artemis stood … running across the sky.”

Zoe gasped and launched herself at Artemis, not knowing how to thank her for such a gesture. She had always loved the stars and she was beyond glad that she got to spend forever in their company.

Artemis chuckled and patted Zoe’s head. It was the least her huntress deserved. The other hunters rejoiced and grinned at Zoe. Zoe wasn’t gone, she had just moved to another location!

“So that’s the story behind that constellation.” Piper said in a whisper, having noticed the constellation but never having learned or even heard about it before coming to the camp.

“’Let the world … called me a boy.’

“That is actually an achievement where Artemis is concerned.” Thalia grinned. She knew how much Artemis and the other hunters liked Percy, well most of them liked Percy, and they all kept him in high regard.

“I know.” Percy nodded.

Apollo muttered to Hermes, “I cannot believe the child managed to get Artemis on his side.”

“She mounted her … still prefer Athena.’’”

“Good for him.” Artemis muttered good-naturedly. She could appreciate the man’s quick thinking and love towards his daughter if nothing else.

“Annabeth turned toward … a brave smile.”

“Both of you are damn lucky. You guys have such understanding parents.” Travis said. “Mom blows a gasket every time we go even on a raid.”

“Explaining the war was the worst.” Connor grimaced. “I don’t know how we’ll explain this one.”

“Yeah, I don’t think dad or Sally or Paul are okay with the two of us fighting in wars and all.”
Annabeth said, “But no one can help it, so…” She shrugged. She was starting to miss her family and wondered when they would be allowed to go back to their lives.

“Then I heard … one pure black one.”

“How does he travel so fast?” Jason lamented as Percy stuck his tongue out at him like a two year old.

“'Blackjack!' I called … spoke in my mind.”

“I thought it was only Blackjack. All pegasi talk like him?” Leo asked in excitement.

“More or less. Some are more cultured and some sound British or Australian. Don’t know why.”

“Blackjack looked me … at the pegasi.”

“He is still fascinated by them.” Annabeth said with a chuckle. “Last time he asked me if there were any books that we had on them so he could research more.”

Percy cocked his head to the side and said, “I would offer, but Blackjack doesn’t like meeting mortals. He only tolerates Rachel and mom. Even Paul to an extent.”

“'Fascinating,' he said … keep you safe.'”

“It’s not that bad.”

“What? San Francisco or living with family?” Percy asked quietly.

“Both.”

“Annabeth didn't answer … asking it of herself.”

Annabeth had a small smile tugging at her lips as she thought about those troubled times. How wrong they both had been back then!

“'I didn't say … 'Never.'”

Annabeth grinned as Percy held her hand tightly. She knew he would never let her go, just like she would never let him go. Each time they got separated, they managed to get back to each other, even if they had to battle Titans, amnesia or Tartarus for that.

“She hesitated … he isn't dead.'”

“But he fell from such a height.” Perseus argued.

“But the Titan Lord was also giving him protection.” Theseus countered.

“I stared at her … me too happy.”

Annabeth sighed and said, “That was a pretty bad comparison.”

“The towns were … under Kronos's spell.'”

“If only we knew how deep.” Thalia muttered. That had been the only time they could have saved Luke. She was there. Annabeth was there and Luke had been close to cracking. They could have gotten him back. If only circumstances had been better.
“I didn't feel … wouldn't be fair."

“I was wrong.” Percy conceded. “He didn’t deserve to die.” Now that he knew what it felt like to feel abandoned and hurt by the gods, he knew the rationale behind Luke’s actions. They were still wrong but he understood it. Better than before. And regardless, no one deserved to go through all the things that Luke had gone through.

“'There it is.' … 'The Council of the Gods.'"

“Right on time, then.” Reyna said.

“Yeah.”

“It’s done.” Butch said, offering the book to Pollux.
Hey guys! I'm almost done with TTC - only one more chapter to go. Wow! I can't believe it. Phew!

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Ch81 – TTC – An Olympian Celebration

Pollux looked at the title in amusement and looked at Percy. Of course, something like this would only happen to Percy. With a sigh, he read, “THE GODS VOTE HOW TO KILL US.”

“What?” Leo yelled in shock. Didn’t the gods adore Percy, other than Ares, Zeus, Hades, Hera… oh!

“Oh yeah, that happened.” Percy sighed as he leaned back on his couch.

Poseidon glared at his younger brother. It had to be his stupid idea to vote on how to kill Percy. Well, as long as he was alive, no one was touching a strand of hair on his son’s head.


“You did this. I know it.” Poseidon replied and Amphitrite said, “We all know it. Your son is safe, so do not start an argument right now.”

“And I am pretty sure that you are the reason we did not actually kill your precious son.” Zeus muttered and saw his brother shrug out of the corner of his eye.

“Flying was bad … was even worse.”

“I cannot even imagine it.” Theseus said with a shudder.

“Trust me, you don’t want to.”

“We circled over … lyres and reed pipes.”

Many gods sighed, reminiscing the past winter solstices. Somehow, the winter ones were always better than the summer ones, the music louder, the flowers fresher and the fruits sweeter. They hoped there would be more description of the celebrations.

“Towering at the … would like to.”

“Would love to.” Ares gritted out. He had not and would not ever forget the insult he had to face
because of this annoying child. He thought he could best Ares? The god of War? The boy had some nerves even looking at Ares with the casual air that he carried around with him. The only reason that Ares had not done anything yet was because his uncle’s threat was ringing in his ears and he knew that Poseidon could very well carry out the threat and then some. For a god who placed family above all, Poseidon could downright get nasty with his own nephews and nieces if it came to protecting his children.

“Relax, Ares. The boy is entertaining.” Aphrodite whispered into Ares’ ears and he looked away, huffing in annoyance.

“No one would dare to touch you, Percy.” Poseidon declared – a warning for the gods in general, rather than an assurance for Percy. “Not if they know what is good for them.” he added under his breath, knowing very well that the Council heard him regardless of the volume of his speech.

“Hey, if ya ... Sorry.”

“Nice pegasus you got there.” Leo chuckled.

“He once asked me to draw up a will and leave my belongings to him.”

“Blackjack and his … the throne room.”

“Oh, this is your first Olympian Council meeting.” Rhea gushed.

Percy leaned in towards Annabeth and whispered, “Why do I have a feeling that she is about to ‘mother’ me?” Annabeth rolled her eyes and ignored her boyfriend. She hoped their dance and private talks were not included but she had very little hope in that matter.

“Twelve enormous thrones … seemed like a picnic.”

Most gods turned to look at Percy and he replied in exasperation, “You also get used to it.” But the power alone radiating from all of them was enough to give him a really bad headache. And this was when they had toned it down. He didn’t want to know what it would be like if they were at their maximum.

“By when?” Jason asked.

“By the time they take a vote to kill Bessie and you have to argue in his defense.”

“Of course that’s your answer.”

“Welcome, heroes,” … looked for permission.”

“Good.” Zeus huffed. How could anyone think that they could turn their back on him? At least it was the satyr. He was sure if it had been his insolent nephew, the child would have forgotten even Zeus himself in his excitement. The only god the child always focused on was his own father and the king of gods didn’t like that one bit, but he couldn’t say anything in front of Poseidon.

“Go on,” … hearth fire crackled.”

“Oh man! I hate such silences.” Leo grumbled. Pin drop silences always made him nervous and sweaty.

“It was nerve-racking.” Annabeth admitted and Percy agreed.
“I looked nervously … It's okay.”

Percy smiled a little at that – his face an exact replica of his father’s. Percy’s smile lines were forming only now but anyone could see that one day it would resemble Poseidon’s. Both were glad that Percy could take assurance from Poseidon’s simple gestures. That despite not having known each other for more than a few minutes, he could be comfortable with the god. Poseidon knew that there were many children, who even after having lived with him in his palace, were still stiff and nervous around him and here this little, frail child could accept him so easily. This wasn’t very common amongst heroes. Most half-bloods were comfortable only with their own kind but hardly around gods. This was refreshing.

“Grover gave Annabeth … but nobody protested.”

“Of course no one was happy with the plan.” Poseidon exhaled. “We have been complacent for far too long. No one would want to change that routine.”

There was some grumbling and mumbling among the gods but no one opposed the god of seas. After all, he wasn’t wrong. Now that he mentioned it, it was obvious that they were blatantly ignoring any and all signs of opposition against them and it resulted in war. The fault lied with them and they knew it but none wanted to accept that simple fact. Their egos could not accept such things.

“’At my Lord … bottom of the sea.”

“Finally!” Amphitrite exclaimed while others looked at her in amusement. She did not appreciate those scums roaming around on her sea.

“And as for … their faces individually.”

“None can deny that.” Apollo said with a grateful smile. “After all, they saved my sister.”

“Zeus in his … The Lord of the Forges, Hephaestus.”

The god in question raised his head slightly to look at everyone and went back to tinkering with his latest invention. This one looked tame but no one could ever tell with Hephaestus’ inventions.

“Hermes winked at me … he sharpened a knife.”

Ares stopped sharpening his knife as he heard that and a few turned to look at him. He glowered at them and turned the knife into his sword so he could clean that.

“On the ladies' side … didn't blow apart.”

“That happened once.” Hermes grinned. That had been a spectacular explosion. Obviously, the poor citizens of Olympus had to work double to be able to rebuild the palace at the earliest.

“’I gotta say' … avoid Apollo's poetry.”

“Excuse me!” Apollo exclaimed indignantly and glared at Hermes. “My poetry is beyond excellence. There should be epics written about them.”

“Right…” Hermes trailed off and turned away to share a look with Dionysus.

“'All in favor … Demeter, Aphrodite.”
“They are not getting disintegrated anytime soon.” Hades commented. “Zeus and Poseidon would not let any one touch their children.”

“That is the reason we are never able to disintegrate a hero!” Ares lamented but was ignored by all.

“**’Wait just a … has done well.’**”

“See,” Hades said smugly and shook his head at his brothers’ predictable nature. Not that he would let anyone hurt his child in front of him, but this wasn’t about him so he could act smug.

“**Thalia blushed … the other two.’**”

“Athena!” Poseidon growled at the dark haired goddess.

“What? You know I am right. The prophecy…”

“The prophecy would take place regardless of any interference.” Apollo said with a sigh. He was tired of explaining the simple fact to all, but no one ever listened to him.

“If we can avoid a prophecy…” Zeus started to say and Apollo rolled his eyes. Obviously it was Zeus who would deny the fact that a prophecy cannot be altered or avoided. The gods went into denial every time a horrible prophecy came up, especially one that affected them to this extent. Perhaps he should stop telling the prophecies and let the chips fall where they may, but that posed a risk to his survival. Zeus would strangle him if he didn’t announce a prophecy and then strangle him for announcing a bad prophecy. Sometimes Apollo couldn’t understand what they wanted from him!

Percy spoke up when there was a break in Zeus’ rant about avoiding prophecies, “In my opinion and experience, which obviously isn’t much,” he added as the gods looked at him in disbelief, “but I was the subject of two great prophecies – the more you try to avoid a prophecy, the worse the situation becomes.” He looked at the gods and said with a sigh, “But that is just my opinion and it’s not like any of you are going to even consider it.”

“Percy’s right though,” Rachel supported her friend when the gods seemed to ignore his words, “I am the host to an Oracle’s spirit and the spirit knows.”

“Knows what?” Artemis asked, already knowing the answer. She had heard this line many a times from her younger brother.

“That avoiding a prophecy turns it into a self-fulfilling prophecy.” Rachel with a smile. She knew that the gods would listen to the Oracle. “Meaning that any action taken to avoid it, becomes the reason for the prophecy to be fulfilled.”

“So, the way to avoid a prophecy is to not interfere?” Zeus asked with a frown. That didn’t seem right.

“No,” Rachel resisted the urge to roll her eyes at the god, “I am saying that whatever you do, a prophecy will be completed – you can try to avoid it and make it worse or you can let it happen on its own. There is no escape. It is like trying to avoid something that the Fates have already decided upon. It just is not possible.”

“Take Kronos for example,” Rachel continued. She smiled slightly as all gods gave her their full attention. “He heard the prophecy that his children, the gods, would kill him, so he ate his children.” She said with distaste. What kind of horrible parents did that? “Because of that, you all killed him. But had he not done that, then also you would have killed him because he was a terrible
ruler. In either case, the prophecy came true, but by trying to avoid it, he started cannibalism.”

“And continued the trend of horrible fathers in this family.” Rhea added drily and motioned the child to continue reading. She knew the gods would take some time to digest whatever was told to them and only then would they decide upon whether they would continue trying to avoid prophecies or not and that decision would take ages to come at.

“"Mother!" Annabeth said … Ares has a point.”"

Ares smirked and said, “Exactly…” he scowled at Athena, “What did you say?”

“Not now, Ares.” Dionysus grumbled.

Pollux chuckled as he read out the next part. Somethings never change, he thought wryly.

“"Right!" Ares said … to destroy them?""

“The Council needs to decide that, not me.”

“"I do not pass … have none of it.""

“Well said,” Apollo grinned at his sister and she rolled her eyes at him.

“For once, can we destroy a hero?” Enyo grumbled and winced at the resounding ‘No’ that came at once.

“"Calm down, sis," … of nodding heads.”

Most gods nodded their heads in the present and Percy scoffed. What was the point of Olympian justice if they punished an innocent, especially if the innocent was just a baby cow-serpent?

“It took me a … the Ophiotaurus Bessie?""

“That would be anyone’s first reaction to the name.” Amphitrite muttered.

Zeus frowned at Percy and explained, “The Ophiotaurus is a dangerous creature. Allowing it to live would be our downfall.”

“First of all,” Percy said heatedly and Annabeth kept a hand on his arm to get him to simmer down, “the Ophiotaurus is a baby. I hope we don’t kill babies here. Secondly, he is innocent and harmless and only his death can bring your downfall, not his life. So he can stay alive and as long as no one kills him, it will be fine. Lastly, he is cute and nice and… nice. Just look into his eyes and you’ll never be able to harm him.”

“Your argument for keeping the creature alive is that he is nice?” Hera asked incredulously.

“Yeah, pretty much.” Percy shrugged. “Killing nice people and creatures – that’s what the bad people do. We are not the bad people, we are the good ones. Titans like Kronos kill innocents. I think that gods are supposed to protect innocents, not kill them.”

Some of the gods frowned and some looked at Percy as if he was crazy. How could he protect and defend something that powerful? Something that can destroy Olympus and life as they all knew it? He was mad, they decided.

“"Dad," I said … they might do. It's wrong!""
The gods pondered on that. Kronos was and would always be a touchy topic and by comparing them to him made them reconsider their views on this topic. What Kronos did was wrong and by following in his footsteps and hurting innocents, if they became like him... no, no, they would not allow themselves to turn into that... thing. The elder gods looked at one another, trying to gauge their thoughts and decisions. Perhaps they should revisit some of their decisions.

"Zeus seemed to ... to trust them."

“We can do a lot of things, but trusting a hero is not one of them.” Hera said, her nose turned up in disdain at the heroes.

“Why not?” It was Annabeth’s turn to get annoyed with the gods. She had never had a good relationship with the queen goddess and after her latest stunt of separating Percy from her, Annabeth completely hated the goddess. “What have the heroes done to you that you cannot trust us? When has a hero gone against the gods?”

Hera raised a prim eyebrow at Annabeth’s insolence while the others looked on in surprise. They had expected an outburst from Percy or even Thalia, but Annabeth till then had only ensured that the two didn’t create a scene and now to see the daughter of Athena, herself questioning the gods, it was astounding for all.

“What about the heroes of the future? They supported Kronos, did they not?”

“They weren’t the only ones.” Annabeth muttered under her breath, knowing well enough that the gods would be listening in and she wasn’t disappointed. Scandalized gasps filled the room but Annabeth spoke up before anyone could ask a question that she wouldn’t be allowed to answer. “Everyone has a breaking point. Some demigods had reached that, others were fed up of their own parent’s indifference towards them. Should they have supported Kronos? No. But it was possibly the only way to get some ounce of attention, even if it was for a limited time.”

Percy spoke up, not giving Hera a chance to yell at Annabeth, “We would never reach the end of this conversation if we continue, but the bottom line is that gods need to trust demigods because there is nothing else that you can do, just like we trust you to not kill us randomly.”

“That trust is depleting faster, the longer this conversation keeps up.” Connor muttered and Travis pursed his lips in order to keep his laughter to himself.

Poseidon cleared his throat and asked Pollux to continue reading, taking advantage of the stunned silence in the room.

“Zeus scowled ... under my breath. 'Don't.'”

“Ah! Now I get it.” Annabeth said with a teasing grin.

“You have no clue how terrifying it was... stop laughing!”

Annabeth chuckled and whispered, “I do know how terrifying it is.” She looked into his eyes and he whispered back, “No one is going to separate us. Never again.”

“She frowned at me ... don't want you to—”"

“Oh!” Thalia exclaimed as if a light bulb went off in her head. She looked between Percy and Annabeth and said, “You thought that she... how did you guys possibly take another year and a half to get together? You both are pathetic.”
“It’s his fault.” Annabeth put the blame on Percy while he gaped at the two girls and rolled his eyes at their antics.

"'Percy?' she said … join the Hunt?'"

The hunters grinned at Thalia. It looked like she was a good leader if Artemis was the one to approach her to become the lieutenant. They had assumed that it had been Thalia who had sought their goddess out.

“Stunned silence filled … never tempt me again.'"

“You still should have taken more time to consider such a life changing decision.” Zeus grumbled and Jason squeezed Thalia’s hand in silent support. It was an important choice and she gave up her entire future for the good of Olympus. She was a true hero.

“She knelt before … me a big hug.”

“Are you not supposed to hate men now that you are a hunter?” Theseus asked.

“I am not supposed to fall in love, there is no clause that I cannot have friends that are men… or boys, in Percy’s case.”

“Hey!” Percy threw his cushion at her which she expertly dodged and laughed at his expense.

“I blushed … "Great," I muttered.”

“Sorry for pushing it on you like that.” Thalia said to Percy. “It is a terrible burden and I had carried it for only six months.”

Percy shrugged and said, “It doesn’t matter. I chose it later on.” He waved for Pollux to read as a few frowns came his way. He would explain it when the time came for it.

"'I'm proud to … that's two more years.'"

“A lot can change in two years.” Athena said wisely. “Kronos would continue to gain strength and he would have many more opportunities to sway Percy.”

“It is not that easy to change the course of the sea. You might find it easier to move a mountain.” Poseidon rumbled and Percy grinned at his dad.

“Two years for Kronos … safety of the Ophiotaurus.'"

“You are vouching for a hero you barely know.” Zeus pointed out to his brother.

“I vouched for my son,” came the clear reply.

"'You won't take … the smell of ozone.”

“Why would I use the poor Ophiotaurus as a bargaining chip?”

“Because…”

“Never mind.” Poseidon sighed, not having the inclination to get into a shouting match with his hard-headed brother. He nodded at the demigod to continue.
"'Fine,' Poseidon said … But everybody else…"

"Of course we all agreed." Hermes said. "Poseidon has never vouched for any of his children, or anyone for that matter of fact and he would not do it unless he was extremely sure. Everyone knows that when Uncle Poseidon is serious, you have to follow his lead, because more often than not, he is correct."

Percy bit back his smile. So his dad had not played a huge gamble, he had at least had a little confidence in Percy. That was enough for the boy.

"'We have a majority … triumph celebration begin!'"

The gods grinned and hoped they would get a good glimpse of what sort of celebrations they participated in in the future.

"There are parties … for the Olympian."

"I wish." Katie muttered.

"The Nine Muses … to crank it up."

"The best sort of parties!" Thalia grinned. One benefit of being a hunter was the frequent visits to Olympus and being able to witness the bizarre parties that were thrown on almost a daily basis.

"Dionysus went around … caduceus and walked away."

"I would have already known about it." Hermes told Percy.

"Apollo told me I could drive his sun chariot any time"

"Was I drunk or not in my senses?" Apollo asked with a frown. He never offered anyone to ride in his chariot, let alone drive it.

"I don’t think so."

"Maybe you like him or want to thank him." Hermes offered an explanation to Apollo.

"Hmm… maybe. He is a pretty likable hero and he did save Artemis. Okay!"

"…and if I ever … Best fun there is!"

"Or maybe," Hermes whispered in Apollo’s ears, "you like him. You sound like you are trying to get him to spend some time with you."

"That could also be possible." Apollo replied with a smirk.

"Is it just me," Will whispered to Nico, "or did it sound like my dad was trying to ask Percy out?"

"It’s not just you." Nico replied as he looked at a clueless Percy and an amused Annabeth. "But it is from Percy’s perspective. Anything short of a kiss is not going to register on his flirting meter."

"I know." Will sighed. "He is the most clueless person when it comes to himself."

"I made some excuses … some minor godling."

"And that is the reason why nothing registers on his flirting meter." Will shared an amused glance
"Then a man’s voice … others disintegrate me."

"Nonsense!" Poseidon boomed. “I would not have vouched for you had I not been mostly sure about you.”

"Thanks dad."

""I won’t let you … fight to protect him.""

Amphitrite frowned and said, “‘It will get harder to reach him if the sprits of the old protect him. Trying to drown him should have been done long ago. The time for it has passed now.”

""How can he … upon pain of death.""

“Yes, no one would be foolish enough and yet…” Hephaestus said and looked at the three heroes in their midst who had really been foolish enough to attempt such a feat. It was truly astounding that they had managed to survive that ordeal.

""Luke did it," … top of the crowd."

“Children!” Zeus sighed in annoyance. How could they push around the Ophiotaurus like it was a game?

"'I'd better take care … almost called her that."

“So did I.” Thalia grinned at Percy.

"'Athena." I tried … "You never take risks?"

“Never.”

“But the greater the risks, the higher the returns.” Percy said and added, “I learnt it in Economics. I had to take it up, it was the better option.”

“Of course, it was.” Annabeth chuckled.

"She nodded … as well as yourself."

“Personal loyalty is as much a curse as it is a blessing.” Poseidon mumbled. On one hand, such loyalty would earn the loyalty and support of others and at the same time, it could be the biggest weakness one could have.

"My heart crept into … that is very, very dangerous."

“You would?” Leo asked. “To save a friend?”

Percy was quiet for some time and then spoke slowly, “Yes, but world means different things to different people. I would give up my world to save a friend, give up my life, but the entire world… I don’t think I have that sort of power. Unfortunately, till now, my life has been closely linked to different prophecies, which means that sometimes the mistakes I make, can and have affected how we have fought and somehow, how we have won. If I were left alone to make decisions, we would have lost long ago. But thankfully, I wasn’t alone, in either of the wars and I had others to help me when I lost control. I think we just negate each other’s flaws.”
Chiron smiled at his student’s words. Percy had grown up so much since the day he had come to the camp for the first time. He had learnt well. He had grasped things that Chiron didn’t think were possible to be perceived by such a young child. He had gotten the gods to do something so out of character for them that Chiron still sometimes wondered whether all the claiming in the camp was only a dream or reality. But despite all the growing up he did, the child of Poseidon still held on to his innocence and his sanguine nature and that made Chiron happy.

“I balled my fists … was pretty darn smart.”

“Of course.” Athena said slowly as if Percy was slow in understanding.

“"I hope the Council's … waver in your loyalties..."’"

“Man! That was one scary conversation. It still gives me a nightmare.” Percy sighed. “Thanks for the save.” He whispered to Annabeth, who just smiled at him.

“She fixed me with … it would not fail.”

“It is good that you have finally managed to realize that fact.” Athena smirked when Percy gulped in fear and looked away.

“"Percy!" Annabeth said … she were carrying Aegis.”

“She’s scarier.”

“"Was she giving … friendship with my daughter.”

“I still do not.” The goddess mumbled, glaring at her daughter and the son of Poseidon, but even she could not deny the fact that those two had been through too much to let go of one another. Perhaps, it was a worthy combination. Only time would tell.

“"So," Annabeth said … a little hopeful, too.”

Piper took a sharp breath and said, “That was so sweet!”

“It was. It really was.” Reyna agreed reluctantly but there was no denying the facts.
A Bitter End

Chapter Notes

Aaand... We are done with The Titan's Curse! Wow! Three books down. I never thought that I'll reach here, but here we are. :D Yay! Okay, so this is a small chapter, but I didn't want to start anything else in this. Also, at this point, I just want to thank each and every reader, whether you comment, give kudos or are just a silent reader - thank you all for your support! It means a lot. I started writing this story as a means to cope with the horrible times I was personally going through. That had been the lowest point in my life and then I put this story up on FF.net and I started getting positive comments about it. All that positivity really helped me a lot. And now this is my way of escaping life. Thanks for keeping the story and my spirit alive, guys!

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Ch82 – TTC – A Bitter End

“There’s more in this?” Damien asked as Pollux passed him the book.

“A bit more, like maybe a chapter I guess.”

Damien sighed and read, “I GET A NEW ENEMY FOR CHRISTMAS”

“Because you can never have too many of those.” Travis chuckled and Nico sighed. He had a feeling that this could be about him. He remembered that Percy had told him about Bianca right after he had returned from the quest. This must be it, the start of his downward spiral.

“Before I left Olympus … me the newest blade.”

“That is a lot of swords.” Leo commented.

“Sword making is fun!” Tyson exclaimed in glee. “I miss it now. Boss won’t let me make anymore. Says I am general. General do not make swords.”

Percy smiled at his brother and consoled him, “It’s okay, big guy. When you come to camp, I am sure Leo won’t have a problem with you helping him out in the forges.”

“I’ll show you around the bunker. I made some changes. It’s amazing. You’ll love it.” Leo grinned at Tyson’s infectious smile.

“’The boss says … her friend Mr. Blowfish.”
Thalia snorted and asked, “Does Paul know that you call him Blowfish?”

“Oh yeah. He still laughs about it. He even gave me a blowfish plushy when he and mom got married.”

“It’s true and hideous.” Annabeth shook her head to remove the images that flooded her mind.

“It’s not that bad. I like it.”

“I felt so embarrassed … feeling happy for her.”

Percy smiled. He was glad that he gave Paul a chance. He knew his mom would have stopped seeing Paul if it made Percy uncomfortable and he was thankful that he hadn’t gotten in between them.

“**You promise not … too old for candy.**”

“Nobody can ever be too old for candy.” Pollux said.

“Yeah and Chiron is the prime example of that.” Travis chuckled and Chiron shook his head at the children.

“**I'll see you then.** … nearest espresso bar was.”

Grover groaned at his stupidity while the others just laughed as they remembered the weird days that were the hyperactive satyrs. Good old days!

“**Annabeth and I sat … **  *Bad news.***”

“What could be worse?” Dakota grumbled. How could things always get worse with the campers?

“Oh, things only became worse from that winter onwards.” Annabeth commented ominously.

“Awesome!” Leo said sarcastically.

“**I'll fill you in … annoyed me even more.**”

“I would say sorry,” Annabeth whispered to Percy, “but I’m really not. It was worth a shot.”

“It was.” Percy conceded. He was glad that talks of Luke and Annabeth’s infatuation with him, didn’t bother him anymore.

“**Chiron’s expression was gloomy … they will attack, but—**”

Chris held Clarisse’s hand in support as he felt her stiffen up. The labyrinth and anything connected to it was still a sensitive topic to both of them. He had almost died because of that stupid maze and Clarisse had unfortunately been there to witness it firsthand. He didn’t know what was worse – going through something that horrible or seeing someone you love go through something that horrible.

“**There was a knock … We need to talk.***”

Will clutched Nico hands and Nico felt his face heat up despite the gloomy news that was about to be revealed to his younger self. Nico concentrated on the present, on the feel of Will’s hands on his rather than on the depressing talk that was being read out.
“He took the news … protect her,” Nico said.”

Nico fidgeted and Will held him tighter, not wanting a repeat of Nico’s exemplary shadow travelling abilities.

“He might as … of my promise.”

Will rubbed circles on Nico’s hand, trying to comfort his agitated boyfriend. “I can’t be here.” Nico whispered to Will. “It only gets worse from this point.”

“You have lived through worse. This will pass but you have to face it.” Will whispered back and sighed in relief when Nico sagged against the couch. The son of Hades was still tensed about the whole thing but he remembered his talk with Percy and how Percy had waved everything away like it was normal. He looked at Percy, who was already looking at him and giving him an encouraging smile. Nico decided not to run.

“’’Nico,” I said … nightmares were right!’’”

“Oh.” Hades closed his eyes. Of course his son would be able to see the passing of his sister into the afterlife. It just was not fair to the little boy to witness such things, but it was the way of life when it came to his children.

“’’Wait. What nightmares?’ … ’I hate you!’’”

Nico winced at his younger self. His anger had been justified but not taking it out on Percy. If he had known back then that Percy had spent the entire night searching for his sister, trying to find some ray of hope and feeling guilty for his promise to Nico, then he might have still done the same thing but he would have understood it all sooner.

“’’She might be alive … I can feel it.’’”

“You can feel things like that?” Will asked in surprise.

Nico nodded and said, “If I concentrate enough on just one soul, then yes, I can pinpoint exactly where they are, unless it is the Elysium. No one is allowed to observe it other than dad and the Furies.”

“’’What do you … get help in time.’’”

“They should not have been able to cross the camp boundaries.” Hades muttered. “They may hunt their target to the ends of the world but even then they cannot enter the boundaries. No one can.”

“Unless there is a weakness.” Athena pointed out and Nico and Percy looked at each other. So the skeletons had entered through the Labyrinth. That was the only weakness the camp boundaries had.

“’’You're trying to kill me!’” Nico screamed.”

“I couldn’t have been more wrong.”

“’’You brought these … no sign of the warriors.’’”

“That is…awesome!” Connor exclaimed with a grin.

“Nico’s powers are seriously the coolest.” Travis said and Nico beamed. No one had ever said that
about his powers. Even the gods seemed surprised. None of them liked Hades’ powers, then how
could the children like that child’s powers?

“They are.” Percy had a lopsided smile as he thought of all the cool things he had seen Nico do.

“Really?” Hercules was confused. Were they really talking about the child of Hades?

“Yeah, I mean you can’t appreciate it until you have seen like hordes of skeletons just rising from
the ground. It’s awesome.” Chris commented, thinking about the final battle in Manhattan when
Nico had strolled in casually. The campers still talked about it from time to time.

“Or shadow travelled with him.” Reyna added, “Or seen the other stuff he can do. It’s scary but
really cool.”

Hades had a smug smile on his face as he looked at his dumbfounded brothers. It was not every
day that he or his children were praised for anything, so the fact that the other demigods seemed to
love Nico’s powers was in itself a huge deal for the elder god.

“Awestruck, I looked … swallow me up”

“Thank gods for that!”

“but Nico ran down … Lord of the Dead.”

“Dun, dun, duuunn!”

“Stop it, Travis!”

“Annabeth and Grover helped me search the woods for hours, but there was no sign of Nico
di Angelo.”

“You shadow travelled?” Will asked.

“Nope, fell into the Labyrinth. It took me months to master shadow travel and even then I was
mostly running into things.” Nico whispered back.

“’We have to tell … you mean… no?’

“Exactly! Why wouldn’t you tell Chiron about this?” Reyna asked.

“Irresponsible cupcake!”

“I was still trying … "A son of Hades," Annabeth said.”

“Except Chiron. He knew.” Percy pointed out and turned to face his teacher. “How?”

“Nico is a splitting image of his father, just like you are of yours. It was not that hard to figure it
out. Plus, there was a tree nymph who overheard you and reported it to me. I made her swear on
Styx to not reveal it to anyone else.”

“Ah! That makes more sense.”

“’Percy, do you have … Olympians find out—’”

“It would be disastrous.” Athena admitted.
“And it would start a war between the three of them.” Hestia commented, nodding at her brothers.

“However, you cannot hide something from us. It is not possible. We would find it out eventually.” Athena said.

“I didn’t need to hide it forever, only stall for time.”

“Till when?”

“Till I turned sixteen.”

Hades frowned at his nephew. What was the child saying? Was he trying to stall till he became the hero of the prophecy? Why? To take the glory for himself? But that did not seem like the child’s character. He, till now, had not exhibited any trait that showed that he cared for the spotlight. He liked it but he didn’t seek it.

“’It might start them … It will be about me.'”

Apollo’s eyes widened and he smiled at Percy.

“I thought you cannot chose a prophecy. The prophecy choses the hero.” Hermes looked at Apollo for an explanation. How the boy could chose the prophecy when it could have been made for the son of Hades? It did not make sense.

“Hmm… it depends on the prophecy. You see, the events of the prophecy are set in stone but not the person who carries it out. This prophecy was meant for a child of the big three, meaning it could have been for any one of the three – Thalia, Percy or Nico. Out of the three, Percy took it upon himself, thus marking himself as the hero of the prophecy. Until that moment, even the Oracle would not have known who the child of the prophecy was. Only the Fates know such things.”

“So, any prophecy can be carried out by anyone?” Athena asked.

“Technically, as long as they fit the criteria, yes.” Apollo sighed, “However, practically speaking, not everyone has what it takes to take up such a task and that is why the prophecies are usually only for a few. Just like the burden of lifting the sky, a prophecy cannot be forced onto anyone. It has to be chosen, directly, like in this case or even the process of taking up a quest, or indirectly, through actions and decisions.”

“Like the prophecy of the seven.” Annabeth said in a low volume, so that only the demigods could hear her. “It never mentioned how many Greeks or Romans were to be there and in what composition. It just said that seven demigods were required. We were the ones who chose to go on the quest.”

“’’Why are you saying … kid suffer any more.'’”

“Why are you like this?” Nico huffed. “Even after all that that happened.”

Percy shrugged and said, “I promised Bianca that I’d take care of you, plus I couldn’t have you roaming around when we were almost at war.”

“I would have left me for dead.”

“’’The poor kid who … worry about. Namely, me.'’”
Guilt choked Nico as he thought about how much Percy had been trying to protect him and he had rebuked all efforts at all stages. Percy had been ensuring his safety from not only the crazy Olympians but from even the Titans and instead he had gone and made friends with one of the worst kings in history. Bianca was right. Grudges had blinded him to everything around him. Thankfully, he had seen the truth before it was too late.

“You know,” Annabeth whispered, “this was the moment I realized that you would be the right choice for our leader. Before this, I had some serious doubts.”

“Thanks?”

Hades squinted at Percy. This boy had way more surprises in him than the god had imagined. No one would have cared to look after a child of Hades, especially after the show of power that Nico had presented. Yet, this boy was willing to put himself in danger and take on the full concentration of Kronos’ evil plans just to save Nico from the same fate as his. It was heartening to know that there was someone out there taking care of his son in ways that he was not allowed to. Still, it would have been nice if his son had been the one to save Olympus. At least it would have shown his annoying brothers that he and his children were worth something.

“I wasn't sure Chiron … into the Titans' army.'”

“Word,” Chris said wholeheartedly.

“That idea made me … You will need rest.’”

“When Chiron suggests to rest, it means something horrible is about to happen. He never suggests such a thing in the ordinary course of business.” Perseus said with worry. He wondered if his beloved camp would be ready for a direct assault by the Titans’ army, what with many running away and others probably inexperienced for such a large scale attack.

“I looked at Annabeth ... to think about it.”

“Time flies when you are waiting for the end of the world.” Grover muttered and the demigods agreed.

“'All right,' I said ... he'd seen a specter.”

“Now what?’” Gwen grumbled.

“One good news in the middle of all the crazies.” Grover said with a bitter sweet smile. This may have been the big break he had been waiting for his entire life, but it was also the start of the end of Pan.

”'He spoke.'” Grover … 'I await you...’”

“Not much of a clue.” Jason pointed out.

“It is still better than nothing.” Hermes said. His son was reaching out. That had to be a good sign. Pan sighed at the happiness in his father’s tone. It would be heartbreaking for him when they would read about Pan’s ‘death’. The god of wild didn’t know whether he himself was ready for it, but by the looks of things, he was far more prepared than Hermes.

Damien shut the book and passed it wordlessly to Hestia. Keeping the book on the pile of completed books, Hestia announced, “Since we are done with this book, we will only start the next tomorrow. Things are only going to get worse from here onwards,” at the slight nod from the
demigods, she continued, “so, we might as well enjoy this day. Let us prepare for the chariot race, obviously after we are done with our lunch. We will convene tomorrow.”
The Chariot Race

Chapter Notes

Hey guys! It's been so long since I last updated and I am really sorry for the delay. The past few weeks have been pretty hectic and I barely had time for anything. So, this chapter was written in between the many five minutes breaks that I have been taking on a daily basis, which is also why I am not really satisfied by how the chapter came out to be. Anyway, I still hope that you guys like the chapter. Lemme know what you all think about it.

Next up, we will be moving on to TBoL. Finally!!

Ch83 – TTC – The Chariot Race

The sun beat down on the excited demigods as they milled around the ginormous arena dedicated to chariot races that the gods held annually. The race track was wide enough to fit at least a dozen trucks lined up next to each other, with considerable space still left over. Hundreds of seats surrounded the tracks, raised at a higher altitude, with a special area just for the Olympians. As usual, the word of the upcoming chariot races had spread and once again the citizens had dropped their daily chores to see this latest form of entertainment.

Most of the demigods were concentrated near the chariots, each fiddling with their own chariot and trash talking. The gods were slowly trickling in the arena as the time for the race to commence came closer. Refreshment stalls popped up randomly as Dionysus walked in arm in arm with Ariadne. Ares followed with Aphrodite in his arms and she had yet again changed her chiton for the race. Hera looked down at the chattering demigods in vague disinterest and immediately went to her usual throne.

Gwen rolled her eyes as Butch made some comment about her inexperience. Being in the fifth cohort had made her immune to mild insults such as these. She went back to making sure that Dakota knew exactly what he was doing. Dakota was acting as her and Reyna’s one man pit crew, if the need arose. She just hoped that they stayed in the race long enough to actually need his help. She remembered the race that had been read out in the previous book and couldn’t help but wince at the number of teams that had not even made it around once. She looked up as Reyna came in with the two horses they had selected and went to help her out.

Clarisse fixed the last installation in her chariot and poked her head out to see how Frank was faring. Originally, Frank and Hazel had teamed up but then later had changed their minds in favor of teaming up with their Greek siblings. Clarisse found herself liking her younger and soft hearted half-brother. He was not just some goofy kid as she had thought before but could actually take charge of a situation. Obviously, she had only understood that after she had overheard Piper telling about some of their adventures to a couple of other kids. In any case, Frank was a good kid to hang around with, even if he wasn’t as bloodthirsty as her other siblings. It was a welcome change now that she was able to slightly let go of the instinctive anger that came with being a child of the war god.

“All done?” she asked as she walked up to Frank, who was murmuring something to the horses.
“Yeah, just about.” Frank threw the reins inside the chariot and pointed to the starting point where some of the chariots were already standing. “We should probably move out.” Clarisse nodded and Frank guided the horses to the starting point while Clarisse walked alongside him and challenged everyone on the way.

“Hey man!” Leo popped up from inside his chariot and greeted Frank, who had managed to get his horses to not crash into Leo’s horses. Frank barely managed to stop himself from yelping in surprise and gave a weak wave in greeting.

“Got any tricks in there?” Leo pointed a screw driver at Frank’s chariot.

“You’ll have to wait and see.” Clarisse smirked and Leo slowly went back to what he was doing, not wanting to get involved with the daughter of Ares at the moment. Or ever.

Chiron announced that all teams were required to assemble at the start point and the next few minutes were spent with demigods arranging themselves and hurriedly finishing off whatever last minute contraptions they were putting on in their chariots.

Jason couldn’t help but grin as his horses trotted to the starting point. The amount of excitement in the air was enough to wake up a dead guy and he could feel it rubbing off on him. But the main reason for his happiness was the fact that he had teamed up with his sister. He looked back at where she was casually leaning against the side of the chariot and grinned even wider.

Chiron whistled loudly to catch everyone’s attention and soon enough the entire arena had gone eerily quiet, all waiting for Chiron’s announcement. The centaur cleared his throat and said loudly, his voice reverberating in the arena, “Before we begin today’s chariot race, let me announce the teams followed by the rules for the race.”

Horses neighed and stomped their feet as Chiron said, “We have ten teams competing today.” He looked at the order the chariots were lined up in and introduced the teams, left to right, “On the far left, we have Lady Nike’s children, Laurel and Holly.” The two girls grinned and Laurel tightened her hold on her spear while Holly wrapped the reins around her hand. Their chestnut colored horses neighed as if they knew that the spotlight was on them.

“Lord Hermes’ children – Travis and Conner Stoll.” The two boys waved cheekily.

“Lord Ares’ children – Clarisse and Frank.” Clarisse sneered at the other teams while Frank concentrated on the horses, not liking the attention. Ares grinned at his children.

“Next up, we have a mixed team – Lord Hephaestus’ son, Leo and Lady Aphrodite’s daughter, Piper.” The gods sat shocked, not having anticipated that particular combination. They didn’t know what was more of a shock – having a team made up of the dysfunctional couple’s respective children or having a child of Aphrodite actually participate in something other than a beauty contest? Piper grinned at the stunned silence as she fingered her favored knife, not that she would be able to use it in a chariot race, but it was a comforting weight against her thigh. Leo, on the other hand, was adjusting a projectile.

“Lord Zeus’ children – Jason and Thalia. Thalia, also being the Lieutenant of Hunters in the future, will also be representing Lady Artemis.” Thalia smiled at her fellow hunters. They had opted to not participate in the race because of what they had recently read. Zoe had not wanted the others to miss out such an event because of her inevitable death, but was secretly glad for the support she got from the other hunters. It in turn gave her strength to face everything.

“Lord Poseidon’s son, Percy and Lady Athena’s daughter, Annabeth.” Tyson cheered loudly and
Percy grinned at him, giving him a thumbs up sign.

“Lord Hades’ children – Nico and Hazel.” Hazel grimaced as she pulled her hair into a bun. The audience wasn’t all that receptive of her and her brother, but Nico did not seem fazed by the unpopularity and she kept her emotions at bay. The only way to show them all would be by winning this thing. She took a calming breath and held on to the reins.

“Lady Enyo’s daughter, Reyna and Lady Aphrodite’s legacy, Gwen.” Reyna adjusted her stance and her hold on her spear as she saw Dakota grinning away at them. This was going to be fun!

“Lord Apollo’s son, Will and Lady Hecate’s daughter, Lou Ellen.” Will winked at Nico and watched in amusement as Nico blushed and looked away. Flexing his hand that held his trusted bow, Will looked around and started planning whom all to remove from the competition first.

“Lady Iris’ son, Butch and Lady Demeter’s daughter, Katie.” Travis tried to catch Katie’s eye and Katie mouthed to him ‘not gonna be easy’. He laughed and looked away as Butch said, “We are gonna kill this.”

“That makes up the ten teams that are participating today,” Chiron continued, “Before we start, let me remind the demigods that no maiming or killing is allowed. Everything other than using powers is fair play. Each team is required to make three laps of the race course and Lady Nike will be keeping an eye on the proceedings.” He looked at the children, who were all beaming away in excitement and asked, “Teams ready?”

The participants got into position and nodded at the centaur. Chiron smiled and banged his hoof on the ground. It sounded like a gunshot in the silent arena and soon after, the arena was filled with the sounds of horses neighing and hoofs pounding against the race course as the race began.

Travis grunted as he blocked a particularly nasty hit from Laurel. He knew the two girls were crazy about anything competitive but this was something else. They were barely two seconds into the race when Laurel had targeted Travis. The boy grinned mischievously as his brother sped up the horses and the competitive sisters were left behind, not too far behind but enough to give the Stolls a head start.

“Overtake!” Clarisse yelled at her brother as she flung a spear behind her towards Conner. She grinned when the boy ducked instinctively and their chariot swerved. He got it back on track but the few seconds that he had lost had given Clarisse and Frank the chance to get even farther ahead. As of now, they were the fastest, followed by Percy and Annabeth, the later of whom was busy battling both Thalia and Nico on both her sides.

Leo squinted his eyes as he targeted Jason and Thalia. They were closer to his chariot than anyone else in his vicinity. “Smoke grenade!” he said and few seconds later, a small grenade went flying over his head and into his friends’ chariot. He grinned as Thalia’s curses reached his ears. Piper laughed as they managed to pull up next to the siblings and attacked Thalia with her spear. She wasn’t anywhere near Thalia’s level but with the hunter struggling with the smoke grenade, they were at least on an even ground for the time being.

“Faster.” Percy urged his horses, the sound of swords clashing behind him, spurring him on. How he wished he could be fighting too, but out of the two of them, he was better with the horses and they usually worked like this, with him guiding the horses and Annabeth fighting off their competitors.

“Get next to the Stolls.” Katie said to Butch and he changed directions a bit. “We are getting them out of the race.” Katie grinned widely when they got near enough and threw one of the spare, blunt
lance at the chariot. It hit its mark perfectly when it settled between the spokes in the wheel. The lance broke off immediately, but it had served its purpose. The Stolls frowned as their chariot slowed down and wobbled.

“Your girlfriend!” Conner hissed at his brother and peeped over his shoulder to see Travis and Katie engaged in a fight. He wrapped the reins around his left hand and picked up the sword that was positioned just behind him for easy access. Turning his concentration towards Butch, he swiped the sword at his opponent’s head. Butch ducked and tried to calm the frightened horses.

Will stood straight and nocked yet another arrow. He smirked and let his arrow fly towards Nico and Hazel’s chariot that they had just managed to pass. As he saw his boyfriend glare at him for scaring the horses like that, he yelled over the noise as his chariot pulled away ahead, “Everything is fair in love and war!”

“I’ll show him war!” Nico growled and heard a chuckle next to him. He turned to see a smug looking Reyna and brought up his shield as she attacked him. He quickly countered and adjusted his stance so as to not fall off the chariot.

“Give up, Princess!”

Annabeth rolled her eyes and kicked away the pot of acid that Clarisse had thrown into their chariot. The blond didn’t want to know where the daughter of Ares had even gotten the acid from!

CRACK!

Percy turned back and looked over his shoulder only to see the Stolls’ chariot toppling over into the grassy circle that was in the middle of the arena. Their horses had stopped running in order to sniff at the lush grass. Holly whooped and Percy knew that it was them who had managed to get the Stolls out of the race. He grinned and looked at Annabeth. She said, “One down!”

“Now it begins!” Percy replied and sped up as they reached the starting point again. Some paces ahead were the Ares’ children, having already completed the first lap.

“Come on! Two more to go!” Nico said triumphantly to Hazel as they pulled over the starting line just behind Reyna and Gwen. They were currently the fourth in the race.

“Calm your damn hors… ah!” Holly yelped as Butch lost control over his horses, who had been frightened by one of Piper’s spears landing too close to their hooves. The poor horses crashed into Holly and Laurel’s horses and soon both the chariots crashed into each other. Amidst all the confusion, the horses managed to drag their respective chariots towards the audience and soon enough the chariots came to a stop as both Holly and Butch were forced to detach their chariots from the still running horses.

“Three down.” Thalia whooped as she drew the bowstring towards her and smirked, “And I’m removing the fourth.” The shield, Aegis was strapped on to her wrist and was the major reason why everyone was hesitating in attacking her. She moved a bit to her left and let the arrow fly. It was a flash bomb arrow and her aim had been perfect. The arrow nestled itself in the little cranny in the side of Will and Lou Ellen’s chariot. A few seconds later, the flash went off, startling the unsuspecting duo and their horses. As the chariot wobbled, Thalia told Jason to go faster. They had to get up to at least Reyna and Gwen, who were still at the third position.

Gwen chewed her bottom lip in worry as she saw Will and Lou Ellen’s chariot going off course. They were halfway through the race and already four teams has been removed. She knew that Hazel and Nico were catching up with them and Jason and Thalia weren’t that behind. Up ahead,
she saw Frank and Clarisse neck to neck with Percy and Annabeth. Those two had just finished their second lap.

Annabeth parried the attack in an expert move and pushed back with just the right amount of strength. As Clarisse brought her spear down to meddle with their wheels, Annabeth struck the spear with her own and then hit the brunette’s wrist. The spear dropped to the ground, forgotten in the dust as the daughter of Ares brought out two more weapons within a second. In her right hand, she held a sword and in her left, a lance. The blond groaned and positioned herself between Clarisse and Percy. The bulkier girl was far too comfortable with fighting with both hands and using different moves at the same time. It was a wonder and Annabeth had always wanted to learn it, but right now all she felt was irritation. They had just completed the second lap alongside the Ares’ kids but now were stuck with Clarisse.

Clarisse locked her legs against the wooden sides of the chariot as the chariot tipped precariously before righting itself. She grinned and swiped at Annabeth with her sword while trying to jab at Percy so as to distract him. Thanks to Princess, it wasn’t really working. She kept on blocking each attempt, but that left her vulnerable and Clarisse was taking full advantage of that fact.

Percy reached behind him and tapped Annabeth’s leg as she groaned at getting cut by Clarisse’s sword. The two of them had developed many nonverbal cues and she understood what Percy meant. She braced herself for the turn as the horses picked up speed. Bringing forward Percy’s new shield that he had loaned her for the time being, she crouched as the chariot balanced itself on just two wheels. The shield vibrated with the force of Clarisse’s next hit and Annabeth pushed up, making Clarisse lose her balance. Taking advantage of the situation, she hit a lever with her foot and a small net flew out of the chariot.

Clarisse instinctively brought her hand up to shield her face from getting hit by the flying net and instead ended up getting her hand tangled in it. She growled and hacked at the offending item.

“Ready?” Percy asked and Annabeth covered the meagre distance between them. Standing back to back, the couple braced themselves as the horses picked up more speed and the chariot tilted once again.

The crowd erupted into cheers as the chariot crossed the starting point and completed the third and final lap. Lady Nike announced the end of the race, marking Percy and Annabeth as the winners with Frank and Clarisse as the runner ups.

*Ease up,* Percy ordered the horses as soon as they crossed the finish line. He grinned at Annabeth and looked at Clarisse and Frank, who had just crossed a few seconds after them, at the second place. Behind them, Reyna and Gwen and Nico and Hazel followed at the same time.

“Oh gods!” Gwen mumbled as she joined the others at the sidelines as the gods started exiting the arena to move on to the next exciting event. She sank to the ground, her back to the fence and said, “I can’t feel my legs. They are jelly.”

“You’ll get used to it.” Percy said with a laugh.

“I am never handling the horses again!” Jason huffed as he came to stand next to Percy. “I swear they hate me.”

“Not as much as they hate me.” Nico grumbled from where he was leaning against the fence next to Will, who was healing the cut on Annabeth’s arm.

“I don’t know where he went!” Leo groaned as he and Piper walked to the group.
“Still can’t find your horse?” Will asked with a chuckle. One of Leo and Piper’s horses had somehow been cut away from the chariot and had taken up the opportunity to run wild.

“It’s all your fault!” Leo said pointedly. It had been one of Will’s arrows that had managed to cut the reins on accident… or so Will claimed. Leo knew it was what the blond demigod had aimed for all along.

“Sure is.” Will laughed and everyone chuckled at Leo and Piper’s misfortune.

“Guys!” Rachel ran up to the group of chuckling teens and skidded to a stop. “Who wants to see a Nine Muses performance? They are going to play in the market place in some time.”

They all shrugged and walked towards one of the gates where the other demigods were already waiting for them.
Hi guys!

So, I haven't posted in quite some time and no, I haven't abandoned it and no, it is not on hold. I just haven't found my inspiration to write the next chapter and my writing is coming up pretty slow, so it will take some time till I update this story. Not to mention, I have just a lot going on personally at the moment. But, I will update it... just dunno when as of now. My other story, Assimilation, if any of you read it, is being updated - mostly cuz I am finding it easier to write than this one, for now.

Thanks a lot for understanding :D
The Beginning of the End

Yay!! I'm back! :D
Thanks a lot, guys, for being so patient with me. I know I haven't posted in months, but I honestly needed the break from writing. It was refreshing, to say the least. :) Anyway, onwards to the Battle of The Labyrinth. Finally! I can't believe that I'm actually on the fourth book. Who would've thought?! Happy Reading :D

Disclaimer- I do not own Percy Jackson series or the Heroes of Olympus series. All characters and words in bold are owned by Rick Riordan and Hyperion Books for Children and Disney Hyperion. I do not intend to use the text from the books for any other purpose other than for this fanfiction and nor do I intend to make any sort of profit from the story. All rights go to the actual owner and not me. This is only a work of love for the series.

Ch84 – BoTL – The Beginning of the End

The next morning found the demigods dragging their feet to the throne room. Most of them knew that the next book would be about the second worst battle ever inside the Camp, the first being the Giant War. None of them were particularly looking forward to reading about the first time they all had lost a sibling or a friend. They stalled for as long as they could, but in the end, had to settle down on the couches spread around. The gods picked up on the heavy atmosphere and were curious to know the reason behind it.

Laurel read out, “I BATTLE THE CHEERLEADING SQUAD”

“Ugh!” Percy groaned while Annabeth made a disgusted face, knowing that this was about the annoying Kelli. Rachel just grinned. That had been the beginning of everything for her.

“The last thing … of this place.”

“Out of curiosity…” Hazel said and Percy interrupted her, “Two years. Apparently, schools don’t like when kids go missing for the better part of a year.”

“Just relax. … start the school year.”

“It came very close to that, you know.” Rachel gladly pointed out.

“Man! That’s gotta be a record or something.” Leo muttered.

“Think positive … just Annabeth, Mom. Jeez!”

“Just Annabeth?” Thalia teased the two red faced teenagers. Ah, they made it too easy for her to pull their legs.

“She’s coming all … “Mom!””
“Oh yeah, so not a date.” Jason chuckled.

“Wow, you guys were so clueless.”

“You have no idea! I had to struggle with these two!” Grover lamented while the couple in question just rolled their eyes. They would never hear the end of their pre-dating years.

“She held up her … arms stood straight up.”

“I gave you goosebumps?” Rachel laughed at even the thought. It had sounded like Percy was scared of her or something, which she knew from experience, could never be possible. Percy was hard to scare and she had tried… multiple times.

Percy made a noncommittal sound and explained, “Seeing a random person twice? It’s just weird, especially when you consider our world. I mean it can’t be a coincidence that we both ended up in the same school and in my experience, if I meet someone like that, they are usually trying to kill me.”

“Plus you were freaked out that Rachel could see through the Mist.” Annabeth added and Percy parroted it with a sheepish grin.

“‘Percy?’ my mom … made out Kelli.”

Annabeth growled lowly. She hated Kelli, even more now that they had met in Tartarus.

“She smelled like roses … been waiting for you.”

“Monsters, right?” Frank asked.

“Yeah. I can’t seem to go two steps without running into some or the other monster.”

Triton frowned and muttered, “It cannot all be because of the broken oath and unless you have a Titan stalker, you should not be running into monsters all the time.” Percy shrugged in response but wondered whether his bad luck was because of the many minor gods who had turned against Olympus. Could they have been alerting the monsters? After all, the gods, any of them, would be able to find him at all times. In hindsight, he realized, that his life was far more complicated than it had seemed at that time.

“That sent a major … cheerleaders laughing behind me.”

“What monster would disguise as a cheerleader?” Piper wondered out loud.

“‘There you are!’ … he’d run away screaming.”

“What did he do when you guys told him?” Jason asked.

“At first he didn’t believe us, but then I showed him Riptide and then he went into shock.”

“Didn’t you guys binge watch all Greek mythology movies?” Rachel pointed out.

“Yeah,” Percy grimaced, “I’m never doing that again.”

“I never realized how much they got wrong till I watched ‘Troy’ after getting to know the real story from Annabeth.”
“Those cheerleaders, for instance … I thought I’d lost her.”

“We were going to end up in the same room. Why would you even think you had lost me? Plus, you are like a beacon for all…” Rachel vaguely waved her hand around, “all this. It would be hard to not notice you.”

“She is actually right.” Amphitrite said. “You have a very strong aura. Anyone who is even remotely attuned to our world should be able to recognize you.”

“That… explains so much.”

“A bunch of kids … me want to throw up.”

“Goode is good?” Leo mimicked throwing up. “I would never go there, just for that stupid slogan.”

“It wasn’t all that bad actually.” Percy frowned and added, “Then again, it was the only school that I had allegedly blown up and still got accepted in, so… I’m biased.”

“None of the other … my redhead nightmare.”

Rachel snorted, “I’ve never been called that!”

“This is a nightmare.”

“‘Rachel Elizabeth Dare,’ … time to time, okay?)”

“Whom are you justifying your thoughts to?” Thalia snickered and Percy glared at her. He knew this book was going to be a pain. Stupid puberty and stupid love goddess and Hera messing his life up!

“I always figured she … your typical chance meeting.”

“Seeing as how your life has been, it probably is.” Theseus muttered and Percy wondered whether everyone has silently agreed it to be a ‘tease Percy’ day. Or maybe all these old memories were just reminding him how he used to be.

“Some guy behind us … in the percussion section.”

“Should have just run out of the school. I would have.” Katie pointed out and Rachel and Percy looked at each other and nodded. They should have left when they had the chance.

“‘Get over here!’ … Minotaur and the Hydra?”

“Normally,” Will said, “people just respond with the names of some of the gods or maybe even Hercules or Achilles. Nobody ever starts off with naming the monsters.”

“And that’s how you know I’m special!”

“Plus, Medusa is the most famous Greek monster.” Nico added.

“‘Yeah, just try … we were still alone.’”

“They do not just appear out of nowhere. You do not have the power to summon them, how much ever powerful you may be.” Hades said with a derisive snort.
Hestia looked with reproach at her brother and said to Percy, “If a demigod says the true name of a monster or a god and truly believe in them, then and only then, would the named one be able to find you. It still does not allow them to appear out of nowhere. However, it will be easier for them to trace you down.” She explained further, “A human can go on to yell our name through the lands but if they do not believe in us, then it matters little what they do.” The goddess nodded at Rachel. “She may believe now but back then she did not and therefore anything she said back then, mattered not.”

“Down the hallway … not human, are you?”

“I’ve always wondered,” Percy started, “could you tell that there was a difference?”

“Yes,” the red head nodded, “you all look human but you don’t feel like it. Like there is something there, but I can’t describe it. It’s like sometimes you have a word in your head but you just can’t remember it at that moment. You know what it is but it is just out of your reach. And after a point, you just ignore it.”

“I swallowed. Even though … for your orientation.”

“I hate it when people say my full name. It usually leads to detention/expulsion or near death scenarios and that’s including the Olympian Council. It’s even worse when they call me Perseus instead of Percy. It definitely leads to near death experiences.” Annabeth patted his arm in mock sympathy as she struggled to keep a straight face.

“They’re horrible!” … over her shoulders…

“Enchantment?” Hercules asked in confusion and Hecate frowned. That sounded like the sort of distraction her servants can produce. But why would they go after a demigod? They were forbidden to attack without provocation.

“Percy,” Rachel warned … about a kiss instead?"

“If she wasn’t dead,” Annabeth gritted her teeth, “I would kill her.”

“She smelled like roses and clean animal fur—a weird but somehow intoxicating smell.”

Leo snorted and soon most of the demigods devolved into uncontrollable laughter as Percy turned red in embarrassment. “ Didn’t know you loved animal fur so much.”

“Shut up, Leo!” Percy groaned as Leo continued to chuckle. Instead, he glared at a grinning Laurel till she started reading again.

“Rachel pinched my … teeth grew into fangs.”

“Empousai!” Perseus cried out. “How do you manage to run into every kind of monster there is?”

“Bad luck, I guess.”

“Yeah,” Connor agreed, “for the monsters.”

“They are not supposed to attack demigods, not without provocation.” Hecate chewed on her bottom lip, wondering whether her servants were still under her control in the future.

“Or your explicit order.” Iris added.
“Why would I ask them to attack the son of Poseidon?” Hecate asked with narrowed eyes.

“Who knows?”

“A vampire!” I stammered … servants of Hecate.”

“Should they be attacking demigods then?” Hercules thought out loud. He knew from experience that gods didn’t really care about the demigods, other than for their own children and then too it depended on their mood. So it wasn’t all that surprising that someone who served one of the gods was actually attacking a half blood. Still, gods usually tried to stay out of other gods’ bad books.

“No,” Janus said, staring at Hecate accusingly. He just loved riling things up between the other gods. “Mortals, I have heard, are fair game, but demigods are to be usually left alone.”

“There must be a good reason for this.” Hecate said dismissively. Just because they were her servants didn’t necessarily mean that she dictated what they did for every minute of their day. Moreover, it wasn’t like the child was hurt grievously. He was still alive, wasn’t he?

“Mmmm.” Tammi edged … swatted that away, too.

“You are lucky that Austin isn’t here.” Will commented. “He would flay you alive for harming the instruments.”

“He’s really touchy about the instruments.” Rachel tutted.

“At least you don’t have to listen to him hum the whole day while helping out in the fields. That was more of a punishment for us than for him.” Katie grumbled. “The last time, one of the nymphs almost punched him because he wouldn’t shut up.”

“I don’t usually kill … “Then you’re overdue!”

“Way overdue!” Annabeth muttered under her breath.

“Kelli was a lot faster … have to see that.”

“That is troubling,” remarked Perseus. He couldn’t even imagine how the future demigods survived such situations.

“It was a lot worse than it sounds.” Clarisse said off handedly.

“That is not exactly comforting.”

“It wasn’t meant to be.” Clarisse gave a small, bitter smile and added, “War is not comforting.”

“From down the hall … crashed to the floor.”

“That is your cue to run.” Chris pointed out.

“Stop it!” I said … from hurting the mortals.”

“That’s a trap if I have ever seen one.” Leo said with a wince and Percy nodded.

“Should have ran when I had the chance.”

“Percy, don’t!” Rachel … flames engulfed the doorway.”
“She did not disintegrate, did she?” Theseus asked.

“The blade never even touched her.” Percy said with a shrug.

“Percy?” Paul Blofis … broken band room window.”

“Did you tell Paul after that?” Piper asked, wondering what she would have thought had she been in Percy’s stepdad’s place.

“No,” Percy had a little smile on his face, “mom asked Paul to take a leap of faith and he did. It was actually later when he asked mom to marry him that we told him.”

“I have so much respect for that guy.” Jason said and Percy grinned and said, “So do I.”

“I burst out of the alley onto East 81st and ran straight into Annabeth.”

“Oh no!” Leo cried out, “Your non-date-date!”

“No wonder it took you guys so long to get together.” Frank shook his head in amusement.

Annabeth chuckled and said, “You know what’s funny is that we still haven’t been able to catch a movie. Every single time something or the other stops us from going to the movies.”

“I could help in that.” Aphrodite said brightly and Percy and Annabeth looked at each other in fear.

“I think we should give up on movies.” Annabeth whispered and Percy replied, “Forever.”

“Hey, you’re out early!” … And who is this?”

“Jealousy!” Aphrodite exclaimed happily. She always loved a good love triangle. They kept things interesting for her and usually had tragic endings, at least for one of the people involved. Although, she thought as she looked over at the three in question, it seemed that this was one of those rare times that everything somehow worked out perfectly for all three of the parties involved.

“Oh, Rachel—Annabeth … me in the street.”

“How were you so cool about the whole thing? My brain would have exploded with all the weirdness!” Gwen asked. If she hadn’t already known about the godly world from birth, she would have definitely lost her mind. As it was, she had taken at least a week to adjust to Lupa and that was after she had already known about her existence.

“I was freaking out,” Rachel scoffed. “But that wasn’t really the time to have a complete nervous meltdown. And honestly, I already had weird dreams about all this ‘mythical’ stuff. It wasn’t that hard to see that it was actually all true.”

“Hey!” I jogged after … walking toward York Avenue.”

“Honestly,” Leo guffawed, “I never thought I would ever get to see or rather hear about a jealous Annabeth.” He stopped laughing and flailing around when he caught Annabeth’s glare. Jealous or not, she could put the fear of god in him at any time.

“I’m already hating this book.” Annabeth muttered to Percy.

“Welcome to my world.”
“‘I’ll deal with the … Camp Half-Blood. Now.’”

“That’s the end of the chapter.” Laurel proclaimed as she handed over the book to her sister.

“That was exciting.” Leo rubbed his hands together. This was going to be a good one, he could already tell. He knew that it would turn sad by the end of the book, seeing that it was way too close to the main battle, but still, it would be a good one.
Surprising Changes

Chapter Notes

Hi guys! I'm not dead! *yay*
Yes, I have been gone a long time. I can't even remember when I last came online and for a while there I had stopped writing any of my stories cuz life happened. In a nutshell, I moved to a new city, got a new place and a new job and have been busy with all that shit. But I’m slowly getting back into writing. Unfortunately (for y'all) and fortunately (for me), I got addicted to a new fandom and somehow ended up writing a 50k fic which is still being written, so that's there too.
Anyway, all that aside, here's the new chapter. I actually reread half of this fic to get into the mindset of the fic, so that's another reason for the major delay. Thanks a lot for being patient and amazing as always.

Ch85 – BoTL – Surprising Changes

“How are you doing this?” Annabeth whispered as she leaned against Percy, making sure that only he could hear her. The others were still laughing over some stupid joke that Travis had cracked.

“What do you mean?”

“All of this,” Annabeth splayed her fingers around in an attempt to capture everything around them. “All this… reading of your innermost thoughts, feelings… really private stuff and now everyone knows. How are you doing it?” She could barely hold on to her anger at the whole situation. She had never been open about her feelings on any matter that wasn’t immediately resulting in life or death. So now that there was even a hint of her teenage jealousy being known to others – it was unsettling to her. Sure, some of her close friends like Thalia, Rachel and Piper to an extent knew about her less than stellar days, but now having every single person she could think of, know about it, it angered her because all those feelings, all those thoughts and actions and words were private to her and Percy and any other party they had been involved with at that point in time, but not to the rest of the world. It was one thing having a plausible deniability about the entire thing and another to know without a fraction of doubt that everyone saw and heard things about her that she didn’t want anyone to know.

She felt Percy shrug awkwardly, what with her head being pressed against his shoulder. When he spoke, she let the vibrations in his chest ground her. “I’m not sure if I’m even dealing with it. I didn’t want it. I didn’t ask for it, but like most things in my life, the others decided it for me.”

“Then how are you okay with it?”

“I’m not. At all. But the Fates said that it might help us out in the future…”

“How?” Annabeth turned to face Percy and looked around to check if their conversation was being eavesdropped on. Seeing that the others were now busy listening to Holly read out the next chapter, she once again leaned against Percy and asked, “How is it going to help us? Do you really think that the gods would even consider anything that they learn about us and our struggles, some thousand years in the future?”
“Honestly? No. Absolutely not. I mean, we know from past experiences that they are quite honestly the worst people to uphold a promise. I don’t think they’ll even consider it beyond a few minutes and that is if we are lucky. They are sympathetic, sure. But that won’t continue when we leave their sight.”

“Then?”

Percy rubbed circles on her hand as he spoke, “It’s the fact that the Fates even considered doing something this drastic… I mean there has to be some reason for it, right? They wouldn’t just make all of us go back in time and risk the gods remembering enough of the future to impact it strongly. They have to have a good reason and if they think that it might actually help us right some wrongs then why the hell not?” The black haired demigod sighed and added, “Even if none of this works out, at least we tried.”

“THE UNDERWORLD SENDS ME A PRANK CALL”

Nico raised an eyebrow at Percy but seeing that he was engaged in some serious discussion with Annabeth, the son of Hades realized that he would have to sit through the entire reading to understand what that title meant. He remembered that somehow Percy had always known what he was up to, even if he interpreted it wrong. Maybe it had something to do with that. He realized that whatever the case, he might have some serious explanation to give to his dad. He could vividly recall the day Hades had found out what Nico had been up to. It had not been a good day for anyone involved, least of all, Nico.

“Nothing caps off the … Nico di Angelo (long story).”

“You guys were searching for me the whole time?” Nico asked skeptically. He had not known that. He had obviously known that Percy had been looking out for him but not that the older demigod and his friends had been searching an entire winter.

“Of course, we were.” Grover replied.

“‘Any word on Luke?’ … know if he was.’”

“The year before we stormed Mount Tam was horrible.” Dakota said with a frown.

“Too many monsters and far too many ‘excursions’ into the city,” Jason nodded and looked at Annabeth, “and yet we never met.”

“I hardly left my house,” Annabeth replied, “unless it was to go back to Camp.”

“That didn’t make me … Kelli exploded into flames?”

“You know what’s crazy? I probably could have explained all of that but I hadn’t started seeing the prophecy related stuff just yet.”

“I knew monsters never … glittered in the sunlight.”

“I don’t think we have had the chance to relax in years.” Connor snorted.

“Well,” Katie piped up, “the two months before…” She looked pointedly towards Percy and Annabeth and everyone else agreed with her. Those months were the only peaceful months they had before they were once again pushed into yet another war that they had no business fighting.

“Still…something felt wrong … A typical day at camp.”
“You guys have a large orange sea serpent?” Dakota asked with a frown. He hadn’t seen one when he had visited the camp.

“Had.” Chris pointed out. “He still hasn’t reformed from the last time we killed him.”

“He’ll be back in a week or two.” Clarisse said flippantly.

“‘I need to talk … she was just great.’”

“As if you are something great.” The angered daughter of Ares sniped at Percy as she looked around for something hard enough to throw at the boy. Finding an empty can of soda, she crumpled it and aimed it at Percy’s head.

**THUNK!**

Percy pouted and glared at Clarisse as he rubbed the back of his head. Annabeth rolled her eyes at the two and threw the can at Grover, who was more than happy to have an unexpected mid-day snack.

“I thought they were friends?” Theseus whispered to Frank.

“They have a… weird relationship. I am not really sure if you can or even, should, call it friendship.”

“‘We’ve been working … “Great talking with you, too.‘”

“Aww, poor you.” Thalia snickered.

“Nobody ever gives me a straight answer.” Percy grumbled under his breath.

“As I made my way … Riptide and uncapped it.”

“You tried to kill Mrs. O’Leary?” Travis asked.

“I think, by now, almost all of us have tried to kill her at least once.” Percy replied with a shrug.

“I haven’t.” Chiara said.

“You will if she pees on the garden that you spent months caring for!” Katie glared at Percy like it was his fault that Mrs. O’Leary relieved herself on Katie’s garden. Maybe it was. If he hadn’t been so busy daydreaming about his upcoming first date with Annabeth, he would have paid more attention to where he was taking the hellhound.

“She was apologetic about it.” Percy reminded Demeter’s daughter.

“She almost ate my flowers.”

“She is a hellhound.” Percy said with a sheepish grin. There was a reason that Percy avoided Katie and her siblings whenever he took his hellhound out for a walk.

“‘Yaaaaah!’ I charged … chewing on its helmet.”

“This might be the weirdest thing I have heard about the Greek camp.” Gwen mumbled.

“Oh this is nothing.” Jason said, shaking his head for emphasis. Some of the stories he had heard! And somehow, most of them, till now were true and he hadn’t yet had the heart to ask Percy about
the others. Although, at this rate, he just might find out how many of the crazy stories were actually the truth.

“The swordsman smiled dryly … held out his hand. “Quintus.””

“Fifth.” Reyna said with a frown. Not that ‘Quintus’ was an abnormal name, but it was weird for an older Greek camper/instructor to have such a distinct name. Perhaps he was some Roman legacy kid, with prominent Greek ties.

“What?” Perseus asked.

“Quintus means ‘fifth’ in Latin.” Annabeth explained wistfully as she thought about her half-brother.

“I shook his hand … while Mr. D is away.””

“Oh good,” Dionysus sighed, “I am not there in this one.”

“One of us would be there. We always are.” Apollo commented, looking up from the new verse that he was writing to irritate Artemis.

““Oh.” I tried … EXCRUCIATINGLY PAINFUL DEATHS.”

“I hate that ranch.” Grover muttered.

““What’s in the boxes?” … “excruciatingly painful death” part.”

“It wasn’t all that bad,” Travis commented, “it could have been worse.”

“Way worse,” Connor agreed with his brother.

“Quintus threw the bronze … when I was a boy.””

“What is that supposed to mean?” Theseus asked. “The camp has always been around, well at least since the past couple of decades.”

Percy nodded but didn’t comment and only motioned for the reading to be continued.

““You—you’re a half-blood?” … heard a few things.””

“It would be difficult to be connected to our world and not have heard anything about the prophecy, especially when it could come to pass at any time.” Hestia mused out loud.

“I wanted to ask … if I borrow Percy?””

“Something is wrong if Chiron is uncomfortable with the new instructor.” Hercules said with a frown and looked at Chiron. “Why, did you not like him?”

“Let’s just say that he could make people uncomfortable around him.”

““Not at all, Master Chiron.””

“That should have been the first clue,” Chiron muttered to himself. No one had called him ‘master’ since the olden days, way back when he would teach heroes one on one rather than in a camp environment.
“No need to call … wish I understood…”

“What were you going to say?” asked Annabeth. She knew that the centaur hadn’t known about Quintus’ real identity but he had not shared any misgivings he had had with her.

“I do not remember, child, but it would have been something about how ominous he was and why he had never turned up before that summer.”

“Whatever he was going … now to decide his fate.”

“In other words, the meeting of some of the most annoying satyrs in history.” Clarisse grumbled. She did not like anything to do with the summer when Chris had been struggling with his madness and the satyrs had been really getting on her nerves with all the talks of finding Pan. Could they not see that there had been bigger issues like the upcoming war for instance?

“Chiron said we needed … glade blanketed with wildflowers.”

“There’s always something new to discover at camp.” Connor said. “I doubt anyone knows the full extent of it.”

“Some of the older nymphs and satyrs know, but other than that it is a mystery to us.” Grover said thoughtfully.

“A bunch of satyrs … by trying to kill me.”

“Classic,” snorted Leo, his head bowed over sketching some new design he was working on.

“Annabeth had her arm … words Grover’s girlfriend.”

Percy looked accusingly at his best friend and said, “Still can’t believe you didn’t tell me about her!”

“There was a lot going on!” Grover bleated.

“You have a girlfriend?” Frank asked, astounded, not having met anyone who could pass for Grover’s girlfriend in the time he was at the Greek Camp. When Grover blushed and nodded, Frank muttered, “Didn’t know fawns could even have girlfriends.”

“At least I thought … Grover seemed so nervous.”

“Because they had the power to cancel my licence.” Grover said with a frown.

“This is about your search for Pan, isn’t it?” Piper asked.

“Yeah, it wasn’t going all that well,” Grover shrugged, “and by that I mean, it wasn’t going well at all.”

“Silenus tugged his yellow … speak to…to him.”

“Better him than you,” the wild god muttered. “I hate it when the older satyrs get set in their ways. No one can convince them otherwise. Well, other than me that is.”

“Juniper looked like she … Clarisse muttered. “Wait.””

“Thanks,” Grover said gratefully to the daughter of Ares. “Knowing Juniper, she would have
beaten anyone who tried to disagree with me.”

“I like her.” Clarisse grunted. “She is like the dryad version of a lovechild of Ares, Aphrodite and Demeter.”

“That’s a weird combination.” Gwen muttered.

Dakota added, “And quite frankly, scary to think of.”

“I don’t know what … they were working together.”

“Desperate times,” Annabeth commented.

“‘For six months,” … “You have found nothing.’”

“Have they not been searching for years upon years for Lord Pan?” Zoe asked. “Then why are they being harsh towards Grover?”

Hedge explained, “Because Grover here had managed to find all the children of big three in a short span of time and they considered that enough glory. Moreover, something went wrong each time he brought them to camp, so they did not think that he was fit for the job. It was only because Mr. D voted to give him the licence that they allowed it to happen.”

“Mr. D voted for me?” Grover asked in surprise. “How do you know that?”

“Yeah, dunno why, but Leneus was a family friend. He would often tell my mother about the Council decisions before they were made public. That’s how I know.”

“But, Leneus—” … you one more chance.”

“Oh, good.” Pan said with a smile.

“Grover brightened … “One more week.””

“Okay, not that good.”

“What? But sir! … Clarisse said darkly.”

“What option?” Adrianne asked.

“Something that no one would want to repeat.” Grover muttered under his breath.

“No. No.” Juniper shook … patrol after dinner.”

“Oh,” Theseus sighed in relief, “thank the gods we did not have those when we were at camp.”

Hercules nodded and looked at Perseus. The two of them had only once shared their cabin together and that also briefly but the mess they had created was imprinted in their minds. Perseus had the same idea because he looked at his brother and grinned.

“The problem for me … all around the cabin.”

“How can you live like that?” Jason asked, scrunching up his nose. He had always been used to the cleanliness of Camp Jupiter and it was hard to imagine living any other way. He did spend a lot of time in Percy’s cabin, usually keeping his cousin company when Percy wasn’t feeling up to it but he hadn’t exactly seen it in a mess, barring the couple of t-shirts that had taken permanent
residence on one of the bunk beds.

“Still hadn’t gone to my cabin at that point, otherwise I would have tidied up a bit.”

“You mean, throw everything in the cupboard.” Annabeth said wryly and Percy grinned at her.

“I raced toward the ... good breeze blowing through it.”

“It is still the same then,” sighed Theseus.

“I dashed inside ... wake you up quick.”

“That’s something I want to see.”

“‘Hey, big guy!’ ... make things go BOOM!”

“That has got to be the most enthusiastic description of a quest, ever.” Hazel said with a fond smile. It was hard to stay unaffected with Tyson’s cheerful nature, even if it was only being read out.

“I hoped he didn’t ... kids could whip up.”

“Hey!” Katie exclaimed in an offended tone.

“Why can’t we have someone to do that for us?” Connor whined and pouted when Katie kicked his leg.

“Tyson, the cabin looks ... make things so delicate.”

“It sounds great,” Gwen said with a sigh. She had always wanted to decorate the fifth cohort bunker but there wasn’t much scope for that in Camp Jupiter. Maybe now that she would get her own place to stay, she could finally do some much needed decoration.

“Then I looked over ... and left the room.”

Clarisse snickered at Annabeth’s open mouthed expression while Percy remained oblivious as usual.

“Tyson and I spent ... Beckendorf was impressed.”

“Okay, that’s it.” Leo declared, pointing at Tyson. “Whenever you come over, you have to come to the forges.”

“Yes, yes, I love the forges.” Tyson exclaimed happily.

“While he worked ... wanted us both at camp.”

Poseidon nodded in satisfaction and said, “It is not your fight. You have your own battles to fight above.”

“That’s what you said later when I offered to fight.” Percy said.

“‘Lots of bad people ... ended our Grover conversation.”

“I can’t believe we used to be scared of each other.” Grover said with a snort. He still couldn’t wrap his mind around the fact that a cyclops was terrified of him or rather, used to be terrified of him. It was understandable that he was frightened. He had never had the best history with Tyson’s
species but for Tyson to be… it was inconceivable.

“Before dinner, Tyson and … sword at your throat.”

“Pretty good assessment,” Annabeth said.

“I would love to hear about this one fight then.” Ares said with a grin.

““Good try,” he told … a quail or something.”

Athena frowned at the similarity of that mark to a recent one she had marked her son with, but she decided to keep judgement for a later point, when things were clearer. She already knew that her child would not give up, not when he had gotten his hands on Perdix’s notes, but she could still hope.

““What’s that on your … for any more questions.”

“You pissed him off.” Jason commented and Percy shrugged.

“While he and I fought … got ready for dinner.”

“Something is wrong with that dude,” Leo pointed out. “Who the hell doesn’t sweat after fighting in the arena? That place is as bad as the forge!”

“I was feeling good … careful to step over it.”

“Why haven’t we repaired it yet?” Katie asked suddenly.

“Uh…” Nico grinned sheepishly, “about that. The fissure will appear even if you renovate. It was an entrance to the underworld. It will always show the mark of it even if it no longer is connected to the underworld.”

“Eh, it gives camp some character.” Travis said.

“You mean more than what the Golden Fleece, the dragon, and the dozen other weird things give to camp.”

“You.”

“Big crack,” Tyson … crack in the floor?!”

Nico scowled and said, “That sounds like I was throwing a tantrum.”

“These skeletons attacked us,” … him if they knew.”

“I can’t believe I didn’t think of that!”

“You didn’t even know about the prophecy back then.” Percy pointed out. “Plus, we got to you just in time.”

“Yeah, you did.”

“I stared at him … off I’d have nightmares.”

“Yes, please no more nightmares. Even if they are useful for knowing what’s about to happen.”
“The nightmares happened to me, not to you, Leo.”

“Regardless.”

“See, for half-bloods … you need to show me.”

“That is weird.” Butch muttered. “Even if it is a collect IM, you should have been able to see the other side and then decide if you want to talk.”

“Oh, trust me, that’s not even the weird part in this whole situation.” Percy grumbled. He tried to get Nico’s attention and leaned over to whisper to his cousin, “Fair warning: it is about you in underworld.”

“Oh no!” Nico hid his head in his hands and wondered how his father would react this time. Maybe he should have warned his father about some of his less than stellar ideas and deeds.

“The mist shimmered … living on the streets.”

Will looked at his boyfriend in worry and saw that there was very little difference between the description and the boy next to him. The only thing that he could think of that was different was that Nico no longer had any sort of crazy look in his eyes and maybe was starting to look a bit better, especially now that he had forgone his usual jacket for the day.

“Those were my not so good days.” Nico muttered when he caught Will looking at him.

“We all have them.” Will replied casually and opened his palm in an invitation for Nico to hold his hand. He considered it a victory when Nico actually took him up on that and blushed but held his hand.

“I waited for him … Iris-message, who had?”

“Ghost! Be wary, Percy, be wary!” Connor teased but Percy raised a brow and chuckled thinking how accurate Connor was.

“Nico tossed another trading … see who was talking.”

“Oh no, you did not!” Hades groaned at his son’s guilty expression.

“What?” asked Zeus.

“It is a spirit. They are always looking to manipulate people, especially my children, not only because my children are the only ones that can understand them but also if there is anyone who can help them out in the underworld, it is them.”

“So, this is bad, then?” Hestia asked with a frown.

“For us? It is too early to tell.” Hades answered. “But for my son? Yes.”

“Nico stared across … edge of the river Styx.”

“If you are in underworld, why didn’t you just go to your dad?” Travis asked. “Isn’t there where you have been staying?”

Nico didn’t answer but gave a look that conveyed that no one better ask him any questions about what was being read out.
“I’ve failed,” he muttered. “There’s no way to get her back.”

Hades narrowed his eyes at those words and kept an eye on Nico. Currently, the boy was expressionless, but if this was what Hades thought it was then he needed to have some words with his son. He could only hope that somehow he or his Furies had gotten wind of whatever it was that his son was doing. Losing someone close to one always hurt but there was a line that should never be crossed and the god only hoped that Nico didn’t cross it.

“The other voice … there may be a way.”

“What are you doing, Nico?” Reyna asked with a frown. In the past few weeks, she had grown closer to the son of Hades and had come to see him as a brother and a friend and didn’t want him talking to ghosts, whatever be the reason. She knew that now he could handle himself even though he shouldn’t have to, but back then? She supposed it was a good thing that Percy was at least informed of what was happening with Nico because she had seen Percy taking care of people at the camp and he was a force to be reckoned with when he went into protective mode.

“I was being an idiot, that’s what.” Nico grumbled and tried to become as small as possible. Till now the campers were being supportive of him but once they knew the path he had gone down on? The things he had done? Would they still bother to be his friend? Or would they be too afraid to even look at him? At least from all this he knew that Percy didn’t care about the wrongs he had done despite knowing most if not all of them. Percy still cared for him. That was good.

“Tell me,” Nico commanded … “A soul for a soul.”

“No!” Hades bellowed, his eyes burning with actual black flames and everyone, including the gods, shrank back a bit. Nico flinched as the full force of Hades’ anger hit him and he raised his hands defensively. Pinching the bridge of his nose with his forefinger and thumb, Hades reigned in his anger and then looked at Nico and asked him to explain what was going on.

Nico looked at Percy for help but the older demigod shook his head and said, “I only figured it out towards the end of the quest. It’s better if you explain a bit now.”

“Fine,” the ghost king sighed and explained, “After I left the camp, I somehow wandered into the underworld. I don’t think I can tell you how, seeing that you will find it out later on, but I reached underworld. I tried to find Bianca’s spirit but I couldn’t feel her anymore.”

“She must have been in Elysium then.” Persephone remarked.

“She was, but I didn’t know that then.” Nico agreed. “Instead of her, I found another ghost. He was old and bitter and was using me to get what he wanted. I didn’t know it then. He showed me a few of things that I can do now like summoning spirits.”

“And this exchange?” Hades questioned with barely restrained anger. “Did you go through with it?”

“No, I didn’t.” Nico looked at Percy and said, “I might have had I not been shown the truth.” He looked back at Hades, “That was also the last time I listened to a spirit. Also, you banned me from talking to revenge seeking spirits till I turn 18, so that’s there.”

Hades nodded but didn’t say anything. He was still too angry to attempt such a thing. Meddling with the dead was not something that he took lightly, even if it was his own child who did the meddling. Once dead, the spirit should be left alone and there should be no interference from the living world. His child should know that much. Then again, the god reminded himself, Nico had
only been barely ten or eleven years old back then. He may not have had the knowledge of such things. Moreover, it was hard for any child of his to deal with a death seeing as they had some control over that area. It always bothered them that despite being so closely connected to the underworld, they could not stop a death from happening.

“‘I've offered!’ … who has cheated death?!”

“That should not be possible.” Hestia said. “All souls eventually go to the underworld, do they not?”

“In that sense, yes, I would always get a soul, but in theory, someone might manage to escape Thanatos’ clutches, although it has never happened till now. In that case, I could make an exception to revive a soul for one such soul. However, I would not actually do something like that because the soul that has escaped death once, if given, has met the end it was supposed to and the soul looking for resurrection has already completed its lifetime. So, even if you do get me a soul for an exchange, all you would get is a thank you letter, if anything at all.”

“And since by bringing the once escaped soul to Hades, foul play must have been involved, the person doing such a thing would have to face the appropriate judgement when his/her time came.” The goddess of springtime remarked casually. “Basically, no one except Hades get what they want.”

Nico muttered in a resigned manner, having already heard various version of this speech over the years at the dinner table, “In a nutshell, dad never revives a soul, so don’t attempt to do something like that.”

Will whispered to Nico, “I’m just glad you didn’t go through with it.”

“Me too.”

“Nico’s face darkened. “Not that again. You’re talking about murder.””

“At least you know right and wrong,” the god of underworld muttered.

“‘I’m talking about … as you get older.’”

“Whoever this ghost is, is beyond sense.” Persephone said. “Two wrongs do not make a right.”

“No they do not.” Hades agreed.

“Nico stared at the … she would help me.”

“No, she would not.” Hades huffed. “Your sister would have understood the full extent of all the rules and the reasons behind them once she died. She would not encourage you in your foolish attempts.”

“I know that now.”

“‘I will help you,’” … your sister or not?”

“There is no revenge to be taken,” Hestia said with a shake of her head.

Nico answered in a small voice, “I did not know it back then.”

“What maze?!” Theseus asked with a frown. It couldn’t be that maze, could it?
“You’ll see.”

“I didn’t like the … The connection was broken.”

“Who is the ghost?” Will asked but Nico shook his head and said, “I’ll tell you later. I don’t know when Percy finds out.”

“I stood in the … come looking for me.”

“That sounds so dramatic.” Nico muttered and Percy rolled his eyes at the comment.

“Wait, you didn’t actually go after Percy, right?” Reyna asked.

“No,” Nico shook his head, “but I see now how he thought that.”

“It would not work even if you did go after him, not that I recommend going down this path in any case.” Hades explained, “You see, I would anyway get Percy’s soul one day, like I would get all of yours. He may have escaped death but he didn’t cheat it. He did not live beyond his lifetime. Getting in and out of near fatal situations would not suffice. Many live that way. A person who cheats death does so by going against the Fates themselves and since there is no one who can do that,” the god shrugged, “this method is futile.”

Holly announced, “And that was that. Who’s next?”
Discovering the Death Maze

Chapter Notes

So, yes, the updates are slow but that's how it is going to be from now on. Sorry about that, but I return late from work and my personal laptop is fried. So the only time I get to write is my free time in office. *shrug*

Also, this chapter is not proof read because I have a headache and I wanted to put it up before I forget! So ignore any mistakes. Thanks a lot for being so wonderfully patient :D

Ch86 – BoTL – Discovering the Death Maze

Dakota took the book and sat back with a sigh. He read out, “WE PLAY TAG WITH SCORPIONS”

“We should get more of them.” Connor suggested. It had been a fun exercise, even if he had almost gotten stung.

“The next morning there ... the message and withdrew.”

“I hate that thing.” Will said with a shudder. He had been one of those who had been unfortunate enough to be awake at that ungodly hour and running after a drakon when you are half asleep is not something he would recommend to anyone.

“It's still out there,” ... Some had just disappeared.”

“That is horrible.” Perseus said with a gasp.

“It was.”

“This is a good reason ... headed back to the table.”

No one commented on the number of issues that Percy had been facing back then but they all thought about it. Nico in particular was touched that Percy had considered even praying to his father to help find the younger demigod.

“Once everyone was ... out of the pavilion.”

“Wow! That was so suspicious, Chiron!” Travis commented. “That’s how you put people on edge.” The centaur chuckled at the boy’s words. The Hermes cabin was always trying to get him to do something that would allow them some leeway.

“What’s he talking ... mean right next to me.”

“Not a word,” Percy gritted out as chuckles and giggles erupted all around.

“You’re not supposed ... and I have been investigating.””
“It is a bad idea.” Theseus declared sincerely, “The worst you all have had until now.”

“Probably,” Percy conceded with a nod.

“I shifted my weight … some building in America.””

“I honestly think that thing is alive.” Theseus said with a shudder and Ariadne too shuddered where she was sitting with her husband. The things in that maze… they sometimes still gave her nightmares.

“You are just being paranoid,” Hercules dismissed his brother.

“He is not.” Annabeth answered. “The Labyrinth is really alive.”

“That is not possible. It is…”

“Magic. It’s alive. Trust me.”

“See? It only took … much less a single building.””

“Percy,” Annabeth said patiently, “only the entrance to Olympus is over the Empire State Building. Olympus covers the entire city at the least. You know that right?”

“Yes,” Percy nervously chuckled and glared at Nico, who was attempting to not laugh at him.

“I thought about my dream of Nico at the River Styx. “So…is the Labyrinth part of the Underworld?””

“That would not be allowed. For one, that would mean trespassing into my territory,” Hades said, “and for another, it would then only be used by half-bloods and Hermes. Anyone else would require my explicit permission. That would beat the purpose of the Labyrinth.”

“That monstrous maze shouldn’t even be there.” Clarisse growled and Chris rubbed her arm. He hated thinking about that place.

““No.” Annabeth frowned … anywhere through the Labyrinth.””

“It is basically a shortcut to anywhere in the country?” Dakota asked.

“Something like that.”

“No one should go in there.” Theseus warned, thinking about his own time in there. If it hadn’t been for Ariadne… he didn’t even want to think of what would have happened to him.

“I’m confused.” Piper said. “How far below is the underworld, then?”

“It is like this,” Chiron said and the demigods turned to look at him. He raised his hands and brought his left one up, higher than his head and said, “Olympus is right up here.” Then he brought his right hand to his chest level and said, “The mortal world is here and right beneath it is the Labyrinth.” With that he brought his left hand to below his right hand. Then he brought this right hand to his waist level and said, “And this is where the Underworld is and far below that is…” He didn’t need to complete the sentence and the demigods nodded in understanding.

““If you don’t get … He didn’t die.””
Clarisse glared at the back of Annabeth’s head and Chris patted her hand and whispered her to relax. That it was long ago. But they had gone through something horrible and he knew that Clarisse would be angry throughout this reading. He himself wasn’t faring much better. Whatever Mr. D had done to help, he hadn’t erased his memory of those horrible times and he still occasionally had to deal with something that reminded him of those days.

“‘Oh, joy.’ Grover’s … and a crazy guy?’”

“PRISSY!” Clarisse growled at the black haired demigod and Percy winced and said, “Sorry that was insensitive of me.”

“It’s okay. You didn’t know.” Chris forcefully pulled Clarisse into his side and she held on to him tightly but didn’t give up glaring at their friend.

“Still insensitive.”

“Annabeth glanced over toward … come sit next to me.”

“This is not the time to have feelings!” Clarisse grumbled under her breath.

“It was secret,” Annabeth agreed, “because she found Chris Rodriguez.”

“Found?” Hermes looked questioningly at his son.

“I found out the whole story so you’ll know too,” Percy informed the god.

“The guy from the … exploring the Labyrinth.”

“This is bad, isn’t it? Why are they exploring the Labyrinth?” Reyna asked with a frown.

Theseus looked sadly at the poor boy who had been lost in the death maze and said, “I’m sorry you had to live through that-that thing.” Chris shrugged but didn’t say anything. Hermes, too, didn’t say a word. He didn’t know what he could say about it. It was horrible, what his son had to go through, but eventually he was found and now looked better. He hoped that he had helped out in whatever way he could have when it had all occurred.

“I shivered, though I wasn’t … mumbling about string.”

“That was not the important part,” Ariadne said, having been there when the string was being made. She had helped Daedalus weave it while he had used a sort of magic on it. She didn’t know what it was back then, but now she knew that whoever held it, would be able to look beyond the thin veil that still existed between the mortals and the gods.

“So Luke is trying to … key to Grover’s problem.”

“If you have an entrance inside the camp boundaries, then they can invade, right?” Hercules asked thoughtfully.

“Yeah.”

“I blinked. ‘You think … No coffee shops!’”

“And that is exactly why I would be there,” Pan nodded as he thought more about it. “If I did not want to be found by anyone, especially satyrs, I would go to the one place that no one ever would. The Labyrinth also exists in our time rather than mortal time. It would allow me to elongate my life
“It makes sense,” Hermes grunted, not wanting to accept the bleak future but having no other choice.

“‘But,’” Annabeth said, “the … Labyrinth work for you—’”

“That is impossible. The Labyrinth will kill you. It would not work for you.” Theseus argued.

“In theory it can work for you, not so much in practice.” Annabeth said with a sigh. She had truly tried but it didn’t work. She supposed that her brother made the Labyrinth fool proof. It was, after all, a safety mechanism for him. He would have made sure that he was the only one who could control it and no one else.

“‘It could lead you … start a puppet theater.’”

“Do not lose hope, young satyr. You are quite possibly my only hope.” Pan said gravely and Grover nodded. He had gotten that feeling. It was why he had agreed to go down there.

“‘Don’t say that! … she finds cowards attractive.’”

“She’ll kill you if she hears you say that.” Clarisse said gruffly.

“After he was gone … with a dagger.”

“Okay, that guy gives me the creeps and I don’t even know him.” Gwen said with a grimace.

“Yeah, I know right. Who cuts sausage with a dagger?” Leo said, “Pfft… be a real man. Use the sword.”

“I’m going to ignore you,” Piper announced and told Dakota to read.

“In the afternoon … Blackjack for a long time.”

“You are quite close to the Pegasus,” Poseidon noted. “You are actually quite close to a lot of creatures.”

“If they don’t try to kill me, they are my friend.”

“That night after dinner … look like a ghost.”

“That’s apt,” Nico mumbled.

“Mrs. O’Leary bounded … everybody complained.”

“I hate when they do that!” Travis grumbled.

“You can’t even complain. You got Connor as your partner.” Katie pointed out. “Anyway, the teams chosen were good.”

“They were, but I would still like to be given the option.” Connor shrugged. “It’s the principle of things.”

“When are we ever given a choice?” Will asked and everyone agreed as Leo said, “Good point.”

“‘Your goal is simple … redid my straps for me.’”
Jason snorted at his friends’ expense. “You guys pre-dating are so hilarious.”

“Shut up,” Percy grumbled.

“‘Grover Underwood,” Quintus … going to stay alive.’”

“Yeah right, we would be fine.” Grover sniffed.

“Considering what happened,” Annabeth said, “I wasn’t far off the point there.”

“What happened?” Piper asked.

“You’ll find out.”

“It was still light when … stealthy as buffaloes.”

“Hey!” the boys cried in unison.

“He’s right you know,” Katie pointed out gladly.

“And yet no one knows what all we have done.” Connor said.

“That’s what you think.”

“Nope, you guys really don’t know,” Travis said and burst out laughing and Connor joined in.

“Once the Stolls had … figure out the Labyrinth.”

“I strongly advice against it,” Theseus said.

“It’s not gonna change what already happened,” Percy said and tried to reassure his brother.

“‘Maybe,” I said uncomfortably … there was nobody around.”

“No one goes there anymore.” Leo said.

“You will find out why exactly we don’t like going there anymore,” Clarisse said with a sigh.

“‘Over there,” Annabeth whispered … “In the boulders?’”

“In the juniper!” Grover said and shook his head at his friend. Sometimes Percy could be really absent minded about the obvious.

“She pointed toward the … “What’s wrong, Juniper?”

“Yeah, be polite, Percy.” Thalia snickered.

“Juniper sniffled. She … was seeing another tree.”

“I would never do that!”

“‘No,” Annabeth said … Juniper said miserably.”

“No,” Grover’s protest was weaker this time round. He didn’t know how Juniper found out about that crush. It was for a day! That’s all.
“Juniper,” Annabeth said … “About that…”

“She knows something?” Jason frowned.

“Yeah.”

“Another rustle in the … got the invisibility hat.”

“Good, good.” Athena mumbled.

“She nodded. We’d fought … the monsters come at us?”

“You had the child of big three with you.” Chiron pointed out. “Of course they would come after Percy.”

“That’s something I don’t get. They know a child of big three would be harder to defeat, then why bother?” Leo asked, having seen all of the children of the elder gods in action. He knew that monsters wouldn’t stand a chance.

“Bragging rights,” the centaur simply said.

“I swallowed. One, we could take … a million times, but…”

“I have a bad feeling about this,” Perseus said.

“This already happened. Bad feelings don’t matter anymore.” Annabeth pointed out.

“‘In here,’ I said … were in complete darkness.”

“How is that possible?”

“Our breathing echoed against … thing had happened to us.”

“No, you would have died if that happened to you.” Hades said casually.

“You are in the Labyrinth, are you not?” Theseus asked. “It has the habit of popping up if you think long about it and you all have been actively trying to find it.”

“That opening had always been there.” Nico said.

“Well, you would not be the first generation of demigods to think about searching for the Labyrinth.” Theseus pointed out and Chiron agreed. There had been many before who had wanted to best the Labyrinth but had never found an opening. Now he knew why.

“I lifted my sword … supposed to make sense.”

“It was!” Annabeth said, “We were literally talking about the Labyrinth that morning.”

“I wasn’t even thinking about that.”

“As usual…”

“Uh, okay. What … people yelling our names.”

“Okay, with just this much… that thing is creepy!” Gwen said and almost everyone nodded vehemently. “You guys want to go in that?”
“It was the only option we had.” Annabeth said. “Creepy or not.”

“Percy! Annabeth!” Tyson’s … then at Annabeth.”

“That sounded like the most made up thing ever!” Connor snickered.

“Honestly!” I said. “There … the heart of the camp.”

“The question is… how did Luke know about this if no one else in the camp did?” Reyna asked.

“He… he had his ways,” answered Thalia.

“Who’s next?” Dakota asked and Gwen took the book.

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