Percy Jackson was just an ordinary kid.

Or so he thinks until he learns that his father is a merman – and that Percy shares that supernatural heritage. Everything seems to crash down around Percy when Poseidon learns about the domestic abuse Percy and Sally suffer at Gabe's hands and thinks he has a right to take Percy away from home.

Now Percy has to adjust to living with a father he barely knows and a stepmother and half-siblings he had never really been close to either. And because his life wasn't already complicated enough, he has to enroll in a supernatural, magical high school, where he meets Nico di Angelo, the so-called Ghost King of Summers High – an actual vampire.
Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
**A Not So Ordinary Boy**

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

PJatO || Nicercy || PJatO || Percy and the Ghost King of Summers High || PJatO || Nicercy || PJatO

**Title:** Percy and the Ghost King of Summers High – The Little Merboy and the Vampire Lord

**Fandom:** Percy Jackson and the Olympians / Heroes of Olympus; supernatural high school AU

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**Warnings:** m/m, domestic abuse, self-harm, supernatural, magic, wolves/vampires, courting, mating, heat, crossdressing, D/s, sex toys, explicit intercourse, anal, oral, spanking, f/f, m/f, polyamory (m/m/f, m/f/f)

**Main Pairing:** Nico/Percy

**Side Pairings:** Thanatos/Triton, Octavian/Luke, Ethan/Alabaster, Jake/Will, Frank/Hazel/Leo, Chris/Clarisse/Piper, Thalia/Bianca, Reyna/Annabeth, Charles/Silena, Jason/Calypso, Malcolm/Katie, Grover/Juniper, Dakota/Leila, Nathan/Gwen, Shane/Lacy, Bryce/Drew, Horus/Carter, Howard/Hecate, Chiron/Chariclo, Hades/Persephone, Poseidon/Amphitrite, Paul/Sally, Tristan/Beryl, Erebus/Nyx, Briareos/Kympopoleia, Enalos/Bentesikyme, Proteus/Psamatheia, Nereus/Doris, Oceanus/Thethys, Phorkys/Keto, Aegeon/Percy (one-sided), Tiberinus/Percy (one-sided), Asopos/Percy (one-sided)

**Percy Jackson Characters:**

*Water Nymphs/Sirens/Merpeople:* Perseus Jackson, Tyson, Silena Beauregard, Gwendolyn Ryder, Drew Tanaka, Michael Kahale, Piper McLean, Mitchell Logan, Lacy Hunnigan, Tammi, Kelli

*Vampires:* Bianca di Angelo, Nico di Angelo, Hazel Levesque, Ethan Nakamura

*Valkyries:* Annabeth Chase, Malcolm Cage

*Witches:* Alabaster C. Torrington, Lou Ellen, Bryce Lawrence, Carter Kane

*Seers:* Octavian Simmons, Ella, Rachel Elizabeth Dare

*Storm Spirits:* Thalia Grace, Jason Grace

*Nature Spirits/Nymphs:* Katie Gardner, Miranda Gardner, Leila Fischer, Juniper, Grover Underwood, Dakota Elle, Castor Liber, Pollux Liber
Werewolves/Shapeshifters: Luke Castellan, Nathan McIntosh, Travis Stoll, Connor Stoll, Chris Rodriguez, Cecil Rogers, Frank Zhang (also a hunter)

Dragons: Charles Beckendorf, Jake Mason, Nyssa Black, Leo Valdez, Shane McNabb

Light Elves: Lee Fletcher, Michael Yew, Will Solace, Austin Barton, Kayla Hein

Dark Elves: Zoe Nightshade, Phoebe Burge, Naomi Walters, Celyn Richards, Kinzie Cohen

Hunters: Howard Claymore, Hylla Ramírez-Arellano, Reyna Avila Ramírez-Arellano, Frank Zhang (also a shifter), Clarisse la Rue, Sherman Potter, Mark Meyer

Humans: Sally Jackson, Paul Blofis, Tristan McLean, Beryl Grace, Gabe Ugliano, Nancy Bobofit

Animals: Small Bob, Mrs. O'Leary, Argentum, Aurum, BlackJack, Arion, Tempest, Scipio, Festus

Godly Characters: Poseidon, Amphitrite, Proteus, Kymopoleia, Benthesiskyme, Rhode, Triton, Thanatos, Olethros, Makaria, Melinoe, Hades, Persephone, Demeter, Hecate, Chiron, Lupa, Calypso, Briareos, Enalos, Aegeon, Hydrus, Pontus, Thalassa, Phorkys, Keto, Tiberinus, Asopos, Oceanus, Tethys, Psamatheia, Nereus, Doris, Horus, Erebus, Nyx, Bast

Summary: Percy was just a normal boy, living with his hard-working mother and abusive stepfather. Normally, Percy only spend the obligatory one weekend a month with his dad. But that had been because of Poseidon's secret. Poseidon is a merman and he tried to shield his son from the supernatural world – until it becomes apparent that Percy shares his heritage.

Percy comes to live with Poseidon and his family. Now he has to deal with being a submissive merboy in a supernatural world, making friends and even falling in love with a vampire.

Percy and the Ghost King of Summers High

The Little Merboy and the Vampire Lord

Prologue : A Not So Ordinary Boy

Percy was just an ordinary kid. Maybe even less than ordinary. He was basically invisible, really. He was an average boy – shorter than most, actually. Black hair, green eyes, maybe tanned skin, muscular but not overly muscular. He doubted he'd never even stand out in a crowd. No, he actually knew he'd never stand out in a crowd because he didn't. No one noticed him. He never made any friends at school, he had always gotten bullied. Now that he was in high school, he knew how to fight back – he had taken self-defense classes in middle school, when the bullying had gotten physical. Since they knew he could fight back pretty good, that stopped. There were still the verbal bullies, led by Nancy Bobofit, the nastiest of them all. And Percy just didn't hit girls, regardless of how much he wanted to beat that dumb chick up. But he didn't. He endured.

"See you tomorrow, ugly-ano", called the vicious ginger after him as he left the school.

And when he came home from school, he continued enduring. He endured the physical and emotional abuse from his stepfather. Had to. He had tried fighting back, when he had learned to hold his own in a fight. Gabe had gotten angry and vented by going after Percy's mom. He'd never allow that again, so he just continued to endure. He was good at that.
There were only three things in life that made Percy happy. One was his mom, because she loved him and she cared for him and she was the only one he had at home. The second was swimming – the only thing he did good. He was bad at school, he was bad at reading and writing and learning, he had no artistic talent whatsoever, but he could swim. He was like a fish in the water, was what his mother told him. He swam in tournaments and won medals left and right. When he was swimming, he was feeling completely free and like there was no pain waiting for him anywhere.

The third thing in his life that he cherished was Tyson Jackson. His ten years younger half-brother.

Because Percy was unwanted. Percy was a mistake and he knew that. His father, Poseidon Jackson, had been separated from his wife Amphitrite when Poseidon and Sally met. It had been a relationship that barely lasted the summer, but had ended with Sally being pregnant and Poseidon rekindling things with the mother of his other five children. By their custody settlement, Percy had to spend every second weekend at his father's place, among his stepmother and his older half-siblings Proteus, Triton, Benthesikyme, Kymopoleia and Rhode. Rhode was okay, she was only two years older than Percy and she was quiet and kind. But he had absolutely no connection to the others. Then Tyson was born and to Tyson, they all were his big siblings, to him, Percy wasn't just the bastard born out of bad judgment on their father's side.

"I'm home", called Percy out shallowly as he unlocked the door.

"About time, bastard. I'm starving, you better cook something good", grunted Gabe agitated.

Just another ordinary day in Percy's ordinary life. He sighed softly and closed the door.

Amphitrite was making dinner, humming softly to herself. Her youngest, only seven years old, sat on the kitchen counter, watching her avidly. Tyson was a sweet and adorable boy. He was chatting wildly and animatedly about his day at school – every since he had become a first-grader, his life had become so very exciting for the little one. It was just hard to listen to him while the twins Benthesikyme and Kymopoleia were arguing at the table. They were attending college right around the corner together, though they never seemed to agree anything. Their older brother Triton was trying to set the table while glaring at the bickering girls. Between the twins sat Rhode, trying to read a book and finish her studies without getting in the middle of her sister's fights.

"Guys! Come to the living room! Hurry!", called her oldest, Proteus, out loudly.

The other Jacksons exchanged curious looks. Amphitrite frowned and put the pan off the stove before following her children to the living room. Proteus sat in front of the television, with his laptop on the table, half buried in his work as he watched the news. He worked with his father Poseidon and since they normally worked from home, they were lucky their house was large enough for them all. The adult children shared one floor, so did their parents and Tyson, with Percy's room and the office on their floor too. Right now he was pointing at the screen, redirecting their attention to the news. Cheers erupted and they called out for their father to join them.

"Honey! Come, come, your little star is on television!", called Amphitrite loudly.

Within seconds, Poseidon came stumbling down the stairs and stood beside Amphitrite, smiling proudly as they all gathered around the television, watching the news report on Percy Ugliano and the last tournament he won with flying colors. Amphitrite's smile was not as broad as Poseidon's, but it was as proud. The boy had an amazing talent. She knew he thought she hated him, they all hated him, but they didn't. Nothing about the situation around his birth was his fault. Amphitrite and Poseidon had just drifted apart after Rhode's birth, had hardly communicated with each other
anymore and decided they needed a break. Sally, the boy's mother, had never been an affair or anything. Amphitrite had known about her, Amphitrite had had her own boyfriend in the time of their separation too after all. But being with those other people was what had made them realize that they loved each other and that they had endured all those years together. They still had many years and hardships they would face together, as one. It was a shame the boy felt as though he was unwanted, but Amphitrite understood why. It must be weird and awkward for Percy to come into this set family, feeling like an outsider. And she also guessed that part of the reason why he felt like he was unwanted was because he only got to spend two weekends a month at the Jacksons'. It probably felt as though they weren't making an effort, like they only spend the time with him that they were obliged to. Amphitrite had raised six children with love and care and she could not picture what it must feel like for a child to feel unwanted. It was upsetting.

"Man, I feel like he's getting faster every time I see him", whispered Kymopoleia in awe.

"And cuter", giggled Benthesikyme. "He must break hearts left and right!"

"He's not getting taller, that much is for sure", grunted Triton amused. "Shorty."

"Aw, but he's our shorty", smiled Rhode as she gathered Tyson in her arms.

"Kym is right", grunted Proteus with a frown. "He is getting faster. Very much faster."

Amphitrite adapted a frown of her own at his comment. It was true, for a human, Percy was incredibly fast. Taking a step closer, she took a closer look. She gasped and took the remote control off the table, pausing the program. The others complained, but she shushed them and knelt in front of the screen, looking closely, very closely. Her frown deepened as she spotted the blue fins.

"He's... one of us...", whispered Amphitrite, resting her fingers on the screen.

There was a reason why they couldn't have Percy around as much as they'd want. They were hiding a very big secret from the boy – from the world. They weren't humans, they were merpeople. Part of the supernatural society that was hiding among humans for centuries now. Back in the old days, they used to live freely and in peace. But humans grew weary and fearful, thinking the supernatural creatures would try to rise. They slaughtered and captured supernaturals, until the supernatural decided to hide themselves, to pretend to be human. They vowed to keep their society a secret from humans, never to be revealed. Every larger city had their secret communities of supernatural creatures and the Jacksons were part of them. It was the secret they had to hide from Percy. The boy they had assumed to be like his human mother so far. Yet here it was, clearly visible. The proof that Percy was not human, that Percy was like them. Fins between his fingers, light, blue scales.

"That can't be...", whispered Poseidon in awe and shock as he knelt next to his wife.

Turning into a full mermaid or merboy was a conscious decision for them. Turning half – with fins, or gills – was just as much a conscious thing for them. But Percy was untrained, he didn't even know what he was – no one had known until today – so it must be a subconscious thing, the will to win the competition. Percy was a merboy, he was part of their supernatural world.

"Does that mean we get to keep him?", asked Benthesikyme eagerly.

"We can't just take the boy away from his mother", chided Amphitrite with a frown. "But we do need to change arrangements and get to introduce him to our world..."

"I'm going to visit him right now!", declared Poseidon like an eager child, jumping up and looking at his wife. "I mean, we could take him in every weekend, right? He should come over soon."
"He should", agreed Amphitrite with a tender smile. "He really should."

Poseidon had been grinning happily as he walked up to the door of Sally's apartment. He hadn't seen his ex-lover in years. It wasn't that he held it against her; he had left her on her own when she was pregnant with their child. But there had been Amphitrite, who he had shared five children and two millennia of relationship with. And Sally had always known that Poseidon and Amphitrite had been on a break, they had not been divorced. Still, it seemed to be the safest to keep his distance from Sally, she deserved that much. Today was an exception. He wanted Percy in his world as soon as possible. Finally he could see his boy more often. There had always been the risk of accidentally exposing their community to a human, getting Percy involved in something that wasn't his business. But now it was his business – no more hiding. He could take Percy to the beach, could finally include his boy in their family vacations – which had never been possible before, because they always went to the beach to be who they truly were, but they wouldn't have been able to with Percy. Not anymore. No more hiding anything from Percy. Finally, Poseidon could truly introduce Percy to his friends and could teach Percy all the things a young merboy needed to know. He was so eager.

"Sally? Are you home?", asked Poseidon as he knocked.

He frowned then the door opened with a squeak from the force of his knocking. He entered the apartment, figuring that someone must be in. There were sounds coming from a room and Poseidon found himself relieved to have a destination, because he feared if he'd linger in this living room, he'd start questioning things. Like the empty beer bottles all over the place, or the overall condition of the room. Much less of the whole apartment. The last time Poseidon had visited Sally at home had been when Sally had still been living with her great-uncle. The sounds got clearer. Grunts and groans, a slurred voice. Poseidon reached the room and opened the door. His breath hitched. Was this why Percy always insisted on coming to them, not having Poseidon or Amphitrite pick him up?

"What do you think you're doing with my son?!", roared Poseidon.

The smelly fat man quivered in surprise. But below him laid Percy, holding his stomach, curled together in an embryonic position. Percy was in pain and this man was at fault.

Percy was glaring at the wall. White wall. Boring wall. How much he hated hospitals. But of course his father had come to bring him to a hospital. What had the man even been doing at their place? It wasn't like Poseidon ever bothered with coming to visit. It wasn't like Poseidon cared about Percy. Why bother now? Why make things complicated? Percy knew better than to go to the hospital. They only asked useless questions. Now everything got considerably more complicated.

He hadn't spoken to his father. Not when Poseidon had pummeled Gabe, not during the drive to the hospital, not when the doctors had asked questions. No, that wasn't true. He had told him it was none of his business and that he should forget about it, just like he had forgotten about Percy anyway. Why did Poseidon have to decide to visit now? To get involved now?

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter will focus on Nico's vampire-side of things, as well as a broment between Poseidon and Hades!
In the supernatural community, there was an order. Every community had their own leader, one to guide and rule over their supernaturals. They had to adjust, after all. To the new time, the hiding from humans. They chose the strongest leader, but that leader always had a council composed of one member of each race present in the respective community. The community of New York City was one of the biggest supernatural communities in the USA and its leader was Hades, the mighty vampire lord. Lord of his own coven of vampires, but also lord of their community.

Their coven was relatively large, but it was the New York coven and everything seemed bigger in this city. Lord Hades and Lady Persephone ruled the coven. They had turned others over the centuries – for the longest time, it had only been them and Thanatos, Olethros, Makaria and Melinoe, at one point they had taken in a stray vampire named Calypso, who had lived abandoned at an island for the longest time, then at the beginning of the twentieth century, Hades had turned three new members for their coven; the di Angelo siblings Bianca and Nico and a young girl from New Orleans by the name of Hazel Levesque, then in about the fifties, they had taken in Ethan Nakamura, last of the Nemesis Coven. Eleven vampires in a coven were more than in most others. Many other covens assumed that Thanatos was the heir to Hades' leadership, yet during the second World War, he had met a very special young man who had turned out far more powerful. Nico di Angelo had the kind of potential Hades had been looking for in an heir.

Nico di Angelo was the future lord of the coven and the supernatural community. So the ninety-one years old vampire, who was meant to rule over New York City, had no idea why he had to go to high school. He had been complaining about it for a whole year already, but neither Hades nor Persephone seemed to listen to him on that one. They claimed that he, Bianca, Hazel, Ethan and Calypso were too young, that they needed proper education. The other four had been around for enough centuries to be taught by Hades and Persephone, but these days they had modern supernatural high schools. 'Expensive boarding schools for gifted children', as they were officially called. Humans just thought it was too expensive and too hard to get into, while in reality they simply only accepted creature children. Nico was ninety-one, he did not consider himself a child.

"Just because I died at age sixteen does not mean I'm a child", groaned Nico agitated.

"I feel like we're having this conversation every week. Are we having this conversation every week?", inquired Hades, not amused and not looking up from his newspaper.

"We're having it every Monday morning, because our dear son is quite the Garfield", replied Persephone casually as she served pancakes with blood-syrup. "Eat your breakfast, boy."

Nico groaned and slumped in his seat. He had been doing this since his Freshman year. One and a half years down and Nico was still trying. Huffing, he dug into his pile of pancakes, mumbling to himself while stealing the closest mug of coffee. He hated going to high school.

"What my beloved brother needs is to find himself a mate", declared Hazel as she skipped into the kitchen and kissed Persephone on the cheek. "I'm always looking forward to school because it means I get to spend time with my Frank and my Leo. Nico needs that too."
"He does", agreed Hades, glaring at Nico as he took his mug back. "Maybe you would be more bearable if you got laid. How many decades has it been since you last brought someone home?"

"With all due respect, I am not going to discuss my love-life with you people", snorted Nico.

Even though he knew Hades and Hazel were right. He used to often pick up random lovers, mostly humans for snack-time. But when his family around him started to form mate-bonds to their respective Chosen Ones, Nico had stopping having casual flings. He blamed them. They made him hopeful. Hopeful to find his own Chosen One. The mate who'd complete him. No such luck so far, while all around him, his fellow coven-members had found their Chosen Ones by now.

"Hades! Hades, I need your help!" In came Thanatos, followed by his mate Triton and Triton's father Poseidon, who had been the one to call out entirely far too loudly considering the time. Nico winced. He hated loud noises that early in the morning. He glared at the two mermen. Not that he was allowed to glare at Triton. Thanatos worshiped that merman. Then again, that was only natural.

All supernatural races shared one more thing aside from their overall leader. Every race had naturally submissives and dominants. Not every creature was either of those, the majority of creatures were neutral; 'normal', like humans. Dominants were relatively common too, but it were the submissives that were very rare and very cherished and valued. All females could have children, but naturally submissives were far more fertile, more likely to bear stronger or multiple babies at once and submissives could carry, whether they were female or male. And Triton, he was one of those rare submissives and Thanatos cherished him more than anything.

"You should put the fishes back in the tank. They're too loud", grunted Nico, taking the coffee back.

"Shut up, little di Angelo", growled Triton back, glaring at the young vampire.

Thanatos snickered pleased and laid one arm around his mate, pulling the merman into a tight embrace and a kiss. Nico rolled his eyes and made gagging noises. He may be ninety-one years old, but that did not mean he was too mature to tease his older siblings. Especially not about this.

"What's wrong, Poseidon?", inquired Hades and put his newspaper down onto the table.

"Please, take a seat. Would you like some breakfast?", asked Persephone with a smile.

Poseidon was the merman in Hades' court, the one to represent this incredibly mesmerizing race. Nico had to admit that he understood why Thanatos had chosen a merman as his mate. They were incredible creatures. Not just in the water where they could have those tails and fins that enchanted so many sailors. Even out of the water and in human-form, they were considered the most beautiful.

"My son, the one... the one I conceived when Amy and I had lived in separation, he... it turns out he is one of us", explained Poseidon as he sat down next to Persephone.

No one at the table reacted with particular surprise at that. It wasn't rare for children born to a creature and a human to turn out to be either and it often manifested only after the sixteenth year. Nico grunted annoyed and stole the bacon his sister Bianca was just carrying over to the table.

"Congratulations, Poseidon", stated Bianca with a smile while hitting Nico's hand. "Bad brother!"

"Ouch", huffed Nico and stuck his tongue out at Bianca. "So, when's he arriving here?"

"It's more complicated than that", sighed Triton from his spot on Thanatos' lap.

He was nuzzling Thanatos' neck, eyes closed in bliss. The two had only started their courting a few
months ago, their bond was not yet sealed. Which was one of the reasons why Triton was still living at home, even though they were engaged-to-be-mates. A submissive was often preyed on, so they often stayed to live with their family until they found their mate. That aside, merpeople were pack creatures, they always stayed in their families until they found their mates.

"How come?", yawned Olethros as he entered the kitchen, looking half asleep. "How can it be more complicated than that? Move the brat here, enroll him at school, put him in a tank..."

"I know you picture us merpeople to all sleep in fish tanks, but we do use beds", grunted Triton.

"I went to Sally's place to... well, I suppose I was a bit over-enthusiastic", sighed Poseidon, fingers fisted in his hair as he leaned on his elbows. "I know I'm supposed to call before meeting with Percy, but I am so glad I didn't. When I came there... the husband, the man I never had met before because something had always come up, and now I know why, he... was... he was beating my baby boy up. Percy was laying on the ground, curled together, but... the man kept kicking him..."

It was oddly quiet. It was never quiet in the Hades Coven. Everyone was staring at Poseidon in silence. Children were the most precious ones they had – the reason why they valued submissives so much was because they bore the healthiest and strongest children. The thought that anyone would hurt a child that was given into their care was incredibly off-putting. Nico put the mug down onto the table, staring thoughtfully at the upset merman. He knew how much Poseidon loved his children, all of them. He and Amphitrite were very close to Hades and Persephone, had been so for millennia. Yet over the past years, many of Poseidon’s stories had involved Percy and how proud he was of the boy, how much potential he saw in him. It was really rather endearing. Nico may have never met the kid himself, but he saw the admiration and love in Poseidon's eyes when he spoke of his son, so this Percy, he must be special. The thought that someone hurt Poseidon's boy...

"He... made me lie...", continued Poseidon, staring at the table-top. "He made me lie to the doctors. When I brought Percy to the hospital, he was so... angry. With me. H—He told me... that it was none of my business... that I should... forget about it, like... I had forgotten about him..."

"That's pretty harsh", noted Hazel, raising one eyebrow and sipping her chocolate.

"Not really", sighed Triton and looked over at their father. "I mean, we all know that dad never forgot about him, but Percy doesn't. To Percy, the past years of rarely being over, of never being invited to family gatherings or family vacations... the fact that we were hiding something from him – because he is not stupid, of course he noticed that we were hiding something... It all must have felt like we don't want him around. We kept our distance, how else should he have interpreted it?"

The atmosphere got darker and somehow everyone found themselves looking at the table. They knew they kept humans out of the loop to protect themselves and the human at hand. It had been necessary, but that made it hurt no less to think that this child had felt unloved for all those years.

"I lied to the doctors, told them Percy had gotten into a fight at school, because Percy told me to and... I don't... I need him to trust me, I can't be even more antagonized, not now... B—But... I can't let him stay there. I just wanted more contact with him, that was why I went there, to ask him if he wants to spend the winter break with us, I never wanted to take him away from his mother just because he's one of us, but... but there is a man who is hurting my child in this apartment and I can't let my son stay there. I don't care if he will resent me for taking him away from his mother, but... Hades, you need to help me re-negotiating the custody arrangement..."

Hades stood and walked over to Poseidon, resting his hands on the other man's shoulders. "Of course, my friend. I'll help you with this and we will get your boy settled in our community."
Poseidon looked up at his lord with tired and grateful eyes. Persephone pushed a plate with bacon and eggs toward the merman, offering him a kind smile.

Nico was laying on his bed, staring ahead at the wall in front of him. He was unfocused. The conversation from this morning didn't leave him. Poseidon had been so devastated and Nico understood why. But he couldn't stop thinking about Percy. The boy was being abused at home and thinking that his father didn't love him. He was only seventeen, this kind of pain wasn't something he deserved. No one deserved this. Nico heaved a sigh and closed his eyes.

"Someone looks frustrated."

"Did it ever tempt you to take a life, Valkyrie?", asked Nico softly, not looking up.

The sound of wings could be heard and Nico assumed the Valkyrie flew over from the window. The bed dipped next to him and he cracked one eye open. Annabeth's eyes were pitch-black, the large wings behind her making her look like the most majestic and scary creature ever. She tilted her head like a bird, staring at him with unblinking eyes. Nico sighed and sat up some.

"I am a Valkyrie, vampire", chided Annabeth. "We do not take lives. We deliver those who died to the afterlife they deserve. It is not my place to end a life. That's up to the likes of you, blood sucker. Now, what brought that rather weird question on, mh? I know Tanaka is annoying, but killing her really isn't a solution. I keep telling Piper the same thing, after all."

Nico laughed and shook his head. "Not Drew. And not me. I'm... running scenarios in my head. Poseidon was visiting today. On official business. His son, you know that one who's not Amphitrite's child, he turned out to be a merman too. When Poseidon went to pick his son up and explain things to him, Poseidon found the current stepfather beating the crap out of the boy. It made me wonder, I mean I am ninety-one years old, the thought of being a father had crossed my mind often enough. What would I do? And I... came to the conclusion that if some stranger dared to hurt my child, I would rip him apart limb by limb without a drop of remorse."

Annabeth flapped her wings and nodded in understanding. "Avenging your loved ones is the most honorable reason to end a life, I guess. I'd prefer if you don't, but I do understand the sentiment."

Nico smiled thinly at his best friend. Valkyries were tightly linked to vampires in many cases. Valkyries, or Death Angels as some cultures interpreted them, were the ones who delivered the souls of the deceased to the netherworld. Or to whatever other world they 'deserved'. Nico wasn't quite sure about the terminology and Annabeth was always being deliberately cryptic when it came to the topic of what followed death. Due to their job description, Valkyries weren't exactly the biggest fans of anything immortal, like vampires or merpeople. They often felt drawn to the immortals to observe. Vampires were known to take lives, back in the old days they had been savages who killed for fun and sport. Today's vampires were more sophisticated, knew how to control the hunger or took from hospitals and, in their communities, from donors. Still Valkyries preferred to oversee vampires, to ensure that no innocent lives were ended, that they 'behaved themselves'. Annabeth was still a young Valkyrie, only seventeen years old, but she fascinated Nico. She was incredibly intelligent, a true genius. She also happened to be the mate of Nico's best friend Reyna, which was why Annabeth and Nico, as unlikely as they were, had become friends.

"Well then, Valkyrie, we're getting a new merboy to join our community", stated Nico.

"Shall I tell Piper?", inquired Annabeth, tilting her head again. "Or will you do it, my lord?"
There was always a mocking to it when Annabeth used that title, but there was also just as much respect. Among the students of Summers High, Nico already was the lord. Nico would take over their community one day and the creatures at high school would one day be Nico's subjects.

"It's up to Poseidon to introduce his son to the other merpeople of our community", shrugged Nico, folding his arms behind his head. "I'm just... curious how the boy will be."

"Can't be worse than Tanaka", offered Annabeth and got more comfortable on Nico's bed.

Nico hummed in agreement. They fell into a comfortable silence as they thought about how life in their community was going to change with the new merboy. Every new member of the community changed the community. They brought something new, a new view and aspect and a change in dynamics. How would this new merboy be? What would be change in their little world?

Curiosity was an odd thing. It drove people to do things they would never do normally, yet it ate away on people, gnawed on them until they had to give in. The next day after school, as he was walking home with Annabeth and Reyna, he made a decision.

"Come with me to New York", ordered Nico as he walked backward in front of the two.

He had his arms behind his head, looking at the young couple. Annabeth's wild, blonde hair was laying in many small braids, with what looked like owl-feathers. Owls had been associated with death for a long time now, they were the patron animals of Valkyries. Like many creatures, Valkyries too had a patron animal, a form they could shift into. For vampires those were bats, for tricksters it were canine animals like wolves or foxes and for Valkyries it were owls. Her mighty barn owl wings were impressive and beautiful and a Valkyrie's feathers were rare and valuable objects. It was why they only gave their feathers to those they cared about most. Nico smirked amused as he looked at the earrings Reyna wore, with silver, thin chains carrying the owl-feathers, lined with small shards of moonstone. The white feathers complimented Reyna's tanned skin, dark hair and black eyes and Reyna always wore them with pride. Reyna arched one of her elegant eyebrows as she looked at Nico inquisitively. She was a hunter – not just by choice but by genes. Hunters had superhuman strength, flexibility, reflexes and heightened senses. They were build to kill, to stand tall against the supernatural. Today's hunters however weren't just slaying monsters left and right, because supernatural creatures weren't just monsters. If vampires learned to adapt to society, to drink without killing and without outing their society, then surely hunters had to learn to distinct between true monsters and harmless supernatural creatures who just wanted to live in peace. This distinction was what they learned at Summers High, together with schooling their honed senses and abilities. It was the beauty of a supernatural school; it taught all the races to live side by side and learn about each other and themselves. Though for hunters, their jobs were already pretty much determined even before their school career started. Where they used to mindlessly hunt all the evil creatures of the night, they now had risen to become a kind of supernatural law enforcement. Their community's police. The supernaturals made sure to infiltrate the local police department with their hunters, to ensure their cases would be treated appropriately. Valkyries often also became law enforcers of sorts, because delivering the souls of the deceased to the respective other world was not enough anymore, they wished to bring justice to those who had died and not just play witness.

The hunter, the Valkyrie and the vampire. They were an unlikely set of people. Then again, they were a perfect match. Valkyries often stuck around the immortals, like vampires. And both hunters and Valkyries often became law enforcers side by side – Nico liked to entertain the thought that Reyna and Annabeth would, at one point, become partners in all the senses of the word and they both surely would rock the uniforms. Nico was meant to be their community's lord, so keeping those...
who would one day surpass all others in the NYPD, only made sense. As much sense as it made, they still seemed so unlikely for others. It was how they had earned the nickname of being New York's Unholy Trinity. Nico truly enjoyed the sound of it, it amused him.

"What are you up to, di Angelo?", asked Reyna after they had walked a while. "I don't mind having you treating us to a shopping trip together, but is there a reason for the suddenness?"

"I'd bet you money that this is about the new little mermaid", offered Annabeth with a grin.

Their pinkies were linked and Annabeth had her head resting against the taller girl's shoulder. They were disgustingly cute, causing Nico to wiggle his nose. There were many mated pairs around him but not many who seemed like a true match, like they were soulmates. And Reyna and Annabeth were two of those few. They were strategic, analytic, calculating even, both brilliant and fast to understand anything. They were also both loyal, reliable and understanding.

"What's so interesting about this one?", wanted Reyna to know as the girls followed Nico. "You weren't much interested in Leo and Piper when they joined our community last year."

"Poseidon is...", started Nico, drifting off thoughtfully as he watched the busy people on the busy streets. "He's something like a favorite uncle. He and Hades have been close since long before any of us were around. They had been close when the supernatural had still been public knowledge, when our races were cherished and worshiped as gods. This boy, Percy, he had pained Poseidon for years now. The thought that he would have to watch his child grow old and fade away... But now that he knows this son of his will be immortal, he is joyous. To have this joy stomped by some bastard who thinks he has any right to harm the boy... Poseidon has to keep his distance. If he gets close now, he'll break that man's jaw. But he wants things legal and official and Hades will help him. Hades will help him, but it will take time. I figured maybe a Valkyrie could help me scare the bastard into leaving the little merboy alone until things are all clear. What do you say?"

There was nothing scarier than a Valkyrie who showed someone their real face. They only showed it to those who were the worst of scum, those who would be brought to the deepest and darkest pit of the other world. I was said to be the most frightful thing in existence. Nico had heard that the darkest pit is filled with those driven into insanity by a Valkyrie's true face.

"Sometimes I'm glad you don't have a mate yet", whispered Annabeth softly, looking concerned. "Not that I don't want for you to find love, but... The length to which you go for your uncle, I can't imagine what you would be willing to do to defend and protect your own mate and children."

Reyna hummed in agreement as they reached the apartment building. It was not exactly pretty, but then again they were living in one of the prettier and more expensive neighborhoods. The supernatural was often made up of the upper class, the rich and the famous. Both Reyna and Nico turned toward Annabeth with waiting expressions. The blonde rolled her eyes and spread her wide, gray wings. Both held onto Annabeth as the blonde ascended up the dark alley, counting the levels until they landed on the fire escape outside of the apartment. The three of them huddled together, Nico using his powers to pull the shadows closer and hide them in the darkness.

"And now we're just... going to watch?", inquired Reyna with one eyebrow raised high.

Nico grunted and opened his mouth to argue when someone entered the room they were watching. A teenaged boy, roughly around Nico's height and physical age, only a towel wrapped around his slim waist, sun-kissed skin and nicely defined abs bare, with water running down his torso, dripping from his slightly longish black hair. Following it all up, Nico finally reached that boy's face. A cute button-nose, full rosy lips, high cheekbones and the most incredible eyes, a clash of blue and green like the sea itself. The boy looked tired, exhausted – but not just physically.
"How did Poseidon not notice it earlier?", asked Nico baffled. "It's obvious that he is a merboy. Just look at him, he's perfect. This level of beauty is even beyond mermaid-standards, beyond anything."

Reyna and Annabeth exchanged a look behind Nico's back before returning their attention to the boy. Sure, he was pleasant on the eyes, but that was one of the traits of merpeople. They were the most beautiful ones, with charming voices, because they used to lure sailors into certain death with their beauty and their songs. But this boy wasn't any more beautiful than other merpeople the girls had met at school and around. Looking at Nico again, they saw how much in awe the vampire was.

"He looks a lot like Poseidon and Triton", shrugged Reyna indifferently.

"He's ten times more beautiful than Triton", grunted Nico with an offended glare.

Annabeth opened her mouth to patronize Nico and maybe make a little fun of the vampire, but sounds from the room next to the boy's distracted the hidden trio. A loud and nasty voice, sounding slurred. The voice caused the boy to flinch and stare at the door with fearful eyes. Nico growled, a deep and dark sound made in the back of his throat, fangs growing and eyes pitch-black.

"That must be the abuser then?", concluded Reyna, eyes calculating as she searched for Annabeth's.

Reyna knew humans romanticized supernatural mating. As though they were two halves of the same thing and once they fell into place, they'd know by some symbol, sign or scent. It wasn't something destined to happen, creatures had to make it happen just like humans. It was a compatibility of mind, an attraction of body and a longing from the soul. It was the way creatures went about it that differed from humans. They did everything more extreme, more passionate. Reyna could see the longing and the quite obvious attraction. What had been a favor for his uncle had now become a very personal desire, albeit perhaps subconsciously so. Most creatures didn't even notice that first flare of choosing their mate, because the instinct was a primal one. Reyna and Annabeth however were capable and brilliant enough to recognize it. Annabeth couldn't even begin to imagine what it must feel like to find her mate scared and beaten, abused for years. The thought alone made her eyes flash, so she stood. Nico was special to her, he was her dearest friend. To harm Nico's mate meant to harm Nico and Annabeth took such a thing very personal. She stood and walked along the window sill to enter the living room, surprising the ugly, fat man.

"W—Where do you come from? What do you want?", stammered the startled man.

Face hollow and pale, with shadows across it and eyes mirroring the pits of darkness, hair flowing like it was living as she spread her mighty wings, her voice a high and vengeful screech. "You will never touch the boy or his mother again. Or I will return. I will return and take your soul with me."

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter will focus on Percy moving in with Poseidon and his family. That... is not gonna go smooth. Especially not when they try to explain to him what he is...
"I know about the abuse, Sally."

Percy was sitting in the back of the car, legs drawn up against his chest, arms wound around his legs. He hadn't said a word since he got loaded into the car, together with as many of his possessions as they could fit into the truck of the car. Triton next to him kept watching him in that unnerving way, like he expected Percy to either do something stupid or to break.

"You're in no condition to take care of a child, Missus Ugliano."

The drive felt longer than normal. Sure, they lived on basically the other side of New York, but this time it was longer than ever before. Poseidon and stepmother dearest were talking to each other in the front of the car, stupid, light conversation like they hadn't just destroyed Percy's life.

"I know you're trying your best, Sally, but... your best isn't enough anymore. Not if it ends up with Percy in the hospital. I can't leave him in your care anymore. I just... can't."

The car stopped and Poseidon, his wife and their son got out of the car. Percy stayed inside, staring at the house with a spiteful look. It was fancy and large, baby blue and seemingly out of two centuries ago. Percy hated the house. It was so pretty and perfect and Percy hated it for that. A three story building – what kind of family needed a three story building? And all of Percy's half siblings, aside from Tyson, were over twenty, but still living at home. The five oldest were sharing one floor with bedrooms and a bathroom, the parents, little Ty and Percy's guest-room were in the second floor, together with another bath and Poseidon's home-office. Then there was the first floor with the guest bathroom, the kitchen, living room and a store room. And there was a freaking pool in the basement. In a fancy hotel kind of way that always freaked Percy out.

"Come on in now, Percy", urged Poseidon on, offering his son a smile. "We're home."

Percy snorted and rolled his eyes as he got out of the car. "This will never be my home. My home is with my mom – and you just took me away from her, Poseidon."

His father flinched at that. Regardless of how distant they were, Percy had always called him dad. But Poseidon had wavered that right when getting between Percy and his mom. Getting his backpack with his most precious possessions from the back of the car, Percy made a beeline for the second floor and his room, closing the door with a more than loud 'thud'. Putting the bag down on the desk, Percy flopped down on his large waterbed, glaring up at the ceiling.

"I'm sorry, Missus Ugliano, but until you have sorted your life out, it would be the best for young Perseus to stay in a stable home. I gather that Mister and Missus Jackson can provide for the boy and have in fact a room for him in their house. It's for his own safety. Your priority right now has to be to get your life straightened, Missus Ugliano. There will only be supervised visits between you and the boy until further notice, no contact during the running investigation."

Investigation. Percy sneered at that. Like that judge or that stupid-ass Italian lawyer of his father's had any idea what was going on or what was good for Percy. His home was his mom. Whatever shit they both had to go through, they always had each other. They could endure everything, as long as
they had each other. Now they didn't. Now everything was falling apart. His mom was all alone and he hadn't even been allowed to hold her when she was crying, when Poseidon had taken Percy away, because those idiots thought that his mom had something to do with the abuse. Like Sally would ever, ever hurt him. He growled at the thought, thrusting his fists down against the mattress. He hated feeling so weak, so helpless. He wasn't even his own master anymore. Those strangers had just decided about him, decided that he wasn't safe at home, decided that he should live with his father and stepmother and half-siblings. He didn't even get a say in the matter. And until his mom was cleared from all charges, he couldn't even see her at all. His face was screwed up as tears welled up in his eyes. This family didn't even like him. His father had never cared about him, had never fought for him before, he had been content with just seeing Percy every second weekend. When Percy had been a bit older and not a small child anymore, he had asked his mother why he didn't get to spend more time with his dad. But his mother had told him that she had offered it, that Poseidon could spend every weekend and every other week with Poseidon too, but Poseidon hadn't wanted it. The minimal amount of time to be spend with Percy. After that, Percy grew more sensitive to his surroundings, noticing how everyone acted more distant toward him than to each other. How often their conversations would just fall flat when Percy entered the room. How they never, not once in all those years, had thought about including Percy in one of the many family vacations. Percy was not a part of their family, because they didn't want him.

So why was he here now? Why did they pretend to give a damn now, now of all times?!

"So, that was a disaster", stated Triton and made a face as he sat down on the couch.

It had been a rough week of talking things out with their family and with Lord Hades and with the court. But now, finally, Percy was going to live with them. All of them were excited about it, they loved the little rebel brother who kept sassing everyone. Finally, they would be allowed to tell Percy about their secret, about their society. They could take him swimming, teach him everything a merboy his age needed to know. He'd finally be a real part of their family and Triton, mom and dad had just gone to pick Percy up and bring him back home with them. The rest of the family had been waiting in the living room with a large sign of Welcome home, Percy! hanging over the couch where Proteus, Benthethikyme, Kymopoleia and Rhode were lined up. Tyson sat snuggled up to Rhode's lap, looking confused as their parents entered, but without his Percy. Where was his Percy?

"Where's my Percy?", asked Tyson with a frown.

"I think he went right upstairs to his room", sighed Amphitrite and sat down on the other couch.

"He said this isn't his home. I think... he hates me", muttered Poseidon with a devastated look on his face as he collapsed next to his wife. "Of course he does. I mean, I took him away from his mother."

Tyson's frown deepened as he jumped off Rhode's lap and dashed upstairs. Percy's room was locked, but his and Tyson's rooms were next to each other and there was a connection-door between them that they had put in one summer after noticing how much Percy and Tyson got along, to allow the youngest to sneak into Percy's room when Percy was over. So Tyson went to his room and used the connection door to go to his brother. There he was, laying on his bed, staring at the ceiling. Tyson's whole face lit up. He hadn't seen Percy in three weeks because of this silly official stuff that the adults had to clear, but now he'd get to see his Percy very day, so that was okay.

"Big brother!", exclaimed Tyson excitedly and jumped onto the bed.

Percy grunted at the sudden impact of the small body. Blinking a couple of times, he looked down at his little brother. His eyes softened as he laid his arms around Tyson and hugged him. Tyson was
probably the only member of this family who loved him and seemed to want him around. The only one who shared things with Percy too. It was another thing Percy had noticed over the years of observing the Jacksons closely. They never shared personal things with Percy. Percy didn't know a single name of one of their friends, or their lovers, or even if they were in relationships. He had noticed that when talking to Tyson one afternoon, when the little one had been all excited about Triton's new boyfriend and how he was a vampire. Percy had been very confused, but then he noticed the hickeys on Triton's neck and had to roll his eyes. Just because the guy seemed to be into kissing and marking Triton's neck, that didn't make him a vampire. But Tyson had more fantasy than was good for him at times, so Percy shrugged it off with a fond smile. Still, none of them shared such things with him. Triton had not once thought about introducing Thanatos to Percy, even though they must have been dating for years by now. They didn't care about him, about his opinions or keeping him in the loop. Wasn't that evidence enough that he was not wanted here?

"I missed you tons", declared Tyson, rubbing his nose against Percy's collarbone as he tried to hug Percy as close as humanly possible. "I hate, hate, hate when I can't see you! I'm so happy that you'll live with us now! That means you'll really, really, really be my brother now and not just on the weekends, right? You can walk me to school and help me with homework and we go to the cinema together – I wanna go and see the new Pixar movie, but our siblings don't wanna see it, so you have to go with me! And we can cook together and do Disney-marathons like every day now!"

Percy smiled softly as he kissed the top of Tyson's head. He had forgotten. There was one member of this family who truly loved him and truly wanted him around. At least one person to make him feel at home here. His smile widened as he started tickling Tyson until the boy was a giggling mess.

"Of course we will, little bro", grinned Percy. "Someone has to show me around, after all."

They decided to give Percy some space for now, because they understood why he was angry and upset at the moment. So no one said anything when Percy grabbed his plate and ate in his room, or when he stayed right there for the rest of the night. They also didn't comment when Tyson didn't show up for their movie night either, even though it was Tyson's favorite film on.

"What are we going to do with the boy, Poseidon?", sighed Amphitrite that evening.

They were getting ready for bed. The master bedroom had its own private bathroom only to be accessed by their bedroom. Poseidon stood in its doorway, brushing his teeth with a thoughtful expression on his face. Amphitrite sighed and put her earrings on the nightstand before taking the old-fashioned princess brush to comb her long, wild red hair.

"I have no idea", admitted Poseidon after a minute. "He hates me. And I... I understand why... But... how am I making him not-hate me? How do I explain everything so he understands?"

"Nothing you did was to hurt him, love", whispered Amphitrite softly and stood, walking over to stand in front of her husband. "He will understand. Once you explain it, he will understand."

"Yeah, but how do I explain it?", inquired Poseidon and made a face.

Amphitrite laughed softly and laid her arms around his neck, leaning against him. "You will."

"That's not helpful at all", complained Poseidon with a frown.

Percy had a hard time trying to sleep for the better part of the night, so when he was still rolling
around on his way too big and too comfortable bed at four in the morning, he decided to go for a swim. What good was a pool in the basement if he couldn't use it on a sleepless night?

"Someone is an early bird. Well, fish."

Percy swallowed a mouth full of water out of surprise. Gasping for breath, he looked up to see Triton in swimming shorts and with a towel thrown over his shoulder. Frowning, Percy turned to look at the clock on the wall. Oh. It was already six in the morning. Time truly flew when he was in the water. Glaring at his older half-brother, he continued swimming.

"Still angry, okay", grunted Triton and threw the towel on one of the chairs.

"I'm not angry, I am destroyed", growled Percy and stopped. "You guys swooped into my life and literally destroyed it – and I still don't understand why you even did it."

"Because you're my brother, you're dad's son. We didn't do it to destroy anything, we did it to protect you. This man hurt you and we don't want you to be hurt", replied Triton calmly.

"Oh, really now?", snorted Percy with a rather nasty expression on his face. "You never cared before. So tell me, what changed? None of you ever cared about the bruises before. You were all so perfectly fine accepting that they came from training. You never even questioned it."

Triton frowned and nodded in agreement. "We... failed. Yes, we failed you, a lot. And we're sorry for it. We probably shouldn't have overlooked it, but... I think part of us didn't want to even think about someone intentionally hurting you. But that's... even more reason why you're here now. Because we're trying to make up for lost time. We love you and we want to protect you."

"Love?", whispered Percy, huffing to himself as he returned to his laps.

"Hey. Stop it. Look at me while we're talking", grunted Triton annoyed and dove into the pool.

He wanted to swim up to Percy to hold him in place, but Percy just sped up his pace. Triton blinked surprised, but he again tried to catch up. He could tell that Percy was trying to swim away from his problems, but when in a pool, there wasn't much room to swim away. So they swam lap for lap, both getting faster and faster. Triton had never seen someone swim that fast – not without a tail. If he continued pushing Percy even more, the boy would get to see what was going on himself. Percy wasn't ready for that yet. So Triton cheated, focusing on turning his own legs into a tail to speed up and swim past Percy from beneath. When he resurfaced in front of Percy, his legs were back.

"I said stop it, you insufferable brat!", growled Triton, grasping Percy by the shoulders.

The way Percy flinched in his hold made Triton stare wide-eyed. He hastily loosened his grip and took a deep breath. Percy was angry, Percy was hurt, Percy was scared. It may have been annoying to Triton, but Triton knew why they were lying. To Percy, everything was probably like one big conspiracy against him. Taking another breath, he started rubbing Percy's arms soothingly.

"Listen to me, Percy. Please", whispered Triton pleadingly. "I know we lied. We lied a lot. We kept so many secrets from you and we kept you at a distance – and I know you know that. But I promise you, all of this will stop now. You're here for good and we will never lie to you again, or keep anything from you. Here on out, truth only. Because we want you to trust us. And I know this trust won't come for free, I know we'll have to earn it. And we will. I promise, we will."

Percy had millions of questions running through his head, but out of whatever reasons, he asked something completely random and with low priority (considering the overall situation). "Why have I never met your boyfriend before? It's like... you're trying to keep him a secret from me."
"I... am", nodded Triton and ducked his head. "Because he's a vampire."

Percy snorted and shook his head. "That much for the truth, huh? Well, screw you very much."

"I'm serious, Percy", whispered Triton urgently. "That's the big secret we were trying to keep from you. Supernatural creatures are real. They're real and we're part of them. But humans aren't allowed to know about the existence of the supernatural, so we had to keep it a secret from you."

"Right", snorted Percy and shook Triton off. "Your boyfriend is a vampire and what are you? A werewolf? Is this some big Romeo and Juliet like love story? Twilight without Bella?"

"Don't... Don't mention Twilight, especially not when a vampire is in the room. They're very sensitive when it comes to... sparkling", muttered Triton and made a face. "And no, we're not werewolves. We're merpeople. Like... The Little Mermaid, just... with less singing."

"You're insane", whispered Percy astonished and climbed out of the pool. "Completely insane."

Triton cursed beneath his breath as Percy ran off to his room.

Percy was sitting on his bed with a paranoid look on his face. So his family was insane, that was what they were keeping from him, huh? Some mental disease. What if Percy had it too? Was it genetic? Groaning, he buried his face in his pillow.

"Perseus?", called his father out, knocking on the door. "Triton told me you had a very failed conversation with him. He's sorry, he didn't mean to scare you off. But what he said is true."

"Great, so it is the whole family that's insane!", exclaimed Percy and threw his pillow at the door in anger. "Forget it. I'm calling some charity-case-lawyer, telling him I'm stuck in a home with lunatics and then I'll get back to my mom! Seriously, you're all crazy!"

Turning away from the door, Percy curled together and faced the window. The garden was beautiful and there was a pond in it, with cute ducks and all. Percy preferred watching the ducks over listening to his father talking about mermaids and vampires and witches. Everything kept spiraling downward for Percy. First he gets removed from his mom to live with his lying, distant father and half-siblings, now it turned out they were lying because they were completely insane.

"Big brother?", asked Tyson softly as he sneaked into the room. "Are you alright?"

Percy sighed and peeked up at the little boy. The adults were insane and they were investing Tyson's mind with it too. That was why Ty had said that Triton's boyfriend was a vampire. How had he ended up in the looney bin? Opening his arms wide, he welcomed Tyson for cuddles.

"Our family is mad", whispered Percy with a panicked look.

"Like in Alice in Wonderland?", asked Tyson curiously, looking up at his brother.

"I'm... not sure", sighed Percy and shook his head.

Percy sneaked down at six in the morning on a Sunday to get breakfast before running into anyone else who wanted to share their fairy tales with him. He has had enough for now. There was enough shit happening at the moment without any weird stories about princesses and dragons.
"Good morning, Percy", greeted his stepmother him.

"Amy", grunted Percy and made a face and walked to the counter to get a plate. "Look, I just... want to grab a toast. I'll be out of your hair in a minute, okay?"

"You could also just wait and eat pancakes with the family", offered Amphitrite, looking the boy up and down with concerned eyes. "Are you alright? Poseidon said that Triton came clear with you yesterday. You... didn't take it well. Understandable. It must be quite the shock."

"That my family is insane? Yeah, pretty much", nodded Percy and grabbed the butter.

"We're not insane", chuckled Amphitrite, a little amused. "How about this. Have you never wondered about our names? Didn't you ever think they were a little... odd?"

"I figured my grandparents must have had a twisted sense of humor and Poseidon just went with it and kept the tradition up. Though... Tyson's name kinda confused me", replied Percy with a shrug.

"Do you know what Amy stands for? What it's short for?", continued Amphitrite softly.


"Amphitrite", corrected his stepmother mildly amused. "Wife of Poseidon."

"Okay. So... your parents had as much of a bad choice in names. Yeah. And that's how you met, or what?", sighed Percy, growing a bit bored with the conversation and continuing his breakfast.

"We're not named after the gods. The gods are named after us", corrected Amphitrite, keeping her voice soft and tender, lulling Percy into staying calm and not running off with a subtle hint of charmspeak. "I'm a mermaid, your father is a merman. We're many millennia old. Merpeople are immortal, unless we're killed that is. We've been around, your father and I, back in the days when our kind and humans lived alongside each other in peace. When the supernatural weren't forced into hiding. Back in the day, your father and I used to rule the ocean, with our little princes and princesses Proteus, Triton, Benthikoyme, Kynopoilaia and Rhode. There were other rulers over magical beings – Queen Demeter of the nature spirits, Queen Hecate of the witches, King Hades of the vampires. With time, the knowledge of our races was written off as myths and we, the rulers of our races, became those obscure creatures of legends – we became gods to the humans."

"So... you're not just a mermaid, you're a goddess too? This just keeps getting better..."

"I'm not a goddess", laughed Amphitrite amused, looking at Percy. "I'm a queen, the queen of mermaids, but the human legends turned our truth into those great myths of gods and goddesses and monsters. Those... tales you grew up with, about the Greek gods, they're not true. They're chopped up versions of the truth. We're not gods, we're just normal merpeople like millions others out in the seas and lakes. But we rulers, we survived the phase of denial from the mortals in the form of myths about gods. Your father, me and your older half-siblings, we have been around for a long time. Tyson however, he was born after that time, he was born after you. So we went with the time when naming him, yes. I just... I'm trying to help you understand all of this."

"Yeah, that's not working", grunted Percy disturbed and stared at her. "First you people tell me mermaids are real and that you are mermaids, then you tell me the Greek gods are real, but they aren't gods and that my father is the actual Poseidon, ruler of the ocean. Just not a god. Do you not hear just how insanely crazy all of this sounds, Amy? Sorry, Amphitrite!"

Grabbing his buttered toast, Percy stormed out of the room, muttering to himself. Amphitrite sighed and stared after him sadly. She understood why he denied the truth behind her words. It was all a lot
to take in, but they couldn't coddle Percy right now. They wanted for him to understand why they lied to him, because that was the only way to make him trust them, and for that, he needed to hear the truth, the full truth. They wanted for Percy to feel at home here, for that he needed to trust them. They wanted for Percy to settle into living here, which would include school. He needed to attend Summers High, to learn everything about his own race and the other races. But throwing him into cold water seemed so harsh. Triton had failed, Poseidon had failed and now Amphitrite too had failed. So it looked as though throwing Percy into cold water was all that was left to do.

"Good morning, love", hummed Poseidon as he approached his wife from behind.

"I want you to call Hades and Persephone", stated Amphitrite. "Percy won't believe a thing we say until he sees it. School is going to be his trial by fire. He'll have to see Valkyries, witches and Elves himself to believe it. But it's going to be a shock for the boy. Ask Hades for his coven's protection."

"Ethan Nakamura would be in Percy's class, I believe", mused Poseidon thoughtful and nodded. "I will be right on it. I call Hades, you make pancakes, let's see how many of our kids are awake until then. Who knows, maybe the scent of pancakes will lure Percy out too..."

Nico was inhaling his third cup of coffee in the past fifteen minutes. The phone had woken him from his well-deserved sleep and once Hades would get off the blasted device, Nico would be tracking down whoever thought that seven in the morning on a Sunday was in any way or shape an appropriate time to call someone. Heads would roll, that much was for sure.

"I demand bacon if I have to be up at this unholy hour", groaned Hazel next to him exhausted.

"If you hadn't spend half the night chatting with that little mate of yours, you'd be fit now", chimed Calypso, one judgmental eyebrow raised as she made a second pot of coffee.

Hazel growled lowly but didn't say anything. When Hades entered, all five of them sat up straighter. Ethan and Bianca were reading the newspaper together while their coven-siblings were bickering.

"Who was it, father?", asked Bianca curiously, folding her half of the newspaper.

"Poseidon", replied Hades, causing Nico to straighten even more. "As you know, he and his wife brought young Perseus home with them last Friday. They already enrolled him at Summers High when all of this started to unfold so come Monday, he will start school with you. I expect all of you to watch over him. His own siblings are all too old or too young for school, he will know no one, so I want you to watch out for him. He's young, impressionable and most likely frightened. As of now, he does not believe a single word of what they tried to tell him. Protect him, guide him."

Nico chewed his lower lip as he hid his face behind his mug. This may be the first Monday he was looking forward to. The gorgeous merboy would be there and Nico was going to protect him.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter will have Percy's first day at school, which means Percy meeting Nico and learning that his family is, in fact, NOT insane. Shocker there.

I'm currently - no promise how long it'll last - having an updating schedule. Which
means I'm updating on Wednesdays and Saturdays. This Saturday is "Chasing Fireflies"'s turn, since it'll be a Halloween special.
Chapter 3: Welcome to Summers High

Going to school on Monday had two sides to it. On one side, Percy was wildly relieved to have a valid excuse of avoiding the Jacksons for half the day. But on the other side, he dreaded attending a new school. Not that he had anyone he'd miss from his old school. There were no friends to miss.

Summers High was an impressive, old-fashioned building that must have been a school like a hundred years ago too. People were going in and out, lounging on the steps. All were wearing fancy private school uniforms and most looked very posh and Barbie-like, or Ken-like. Percy instantly disliked it. He looked at his own clothes, noting his ratty bandshirt and the worn-out dark-blue jeans with the holes in the knees. He didn't fit in at all and he could already picture the ensuing mocking. He stood out like a sour thumb, obviously the new kid around due to his clothes. He could feel a hundred pair of eyes on him as he slowly climbed the stairs, hearing the other students' whispers. This was already starting out to be a wonderful day. Now Percy would even prefer staying home.

"Ah! You must be Percy Jackson!", exclaimed a far too excited voice.

Percy winced and made a face before looking up. The perky girl in front of him had fascinating golden eyes and chocolate skin. She was smiling at him brightly, the large Asian dude next to her looking quite intimidating though. Within an instant, there were four others flanking the couple (or at least Percy assumed those two to be a couple). One was a gorgeous Latina, who had one leisure arm wrapped around the waist of a no less gorgeous blonde girl with broad, long curls framing her body. Both girls looked like they had stepped out of one of those TV shows where everyone looked like a model in a surreal kind of way. And then there were two other exotic looking people, both with olive-skin and black, messy curls, one of them a girl and the other a boy.

"Don't call me that", muttered Percy with a glare. "Not a Jackson."

"Well, uh, what do you want us to call you?", asked the chocolate-skinned girl confused.

"Just... Percy", sighed Percy, not wishing to be called 'Ugliano' ever again (maybe the only good thing that had come from being taken in by the Jacksons). "Or don't call me anything at all and leave me be. I'm not gonna bother you, you don't bother me. Simple as that."

"We do not wish to bother you, Perseus", said the olive-skinned boy with the adorable curls.

"Don't ever call me that", hissed Percy and made a face like a kitten that has just been showered.

The boy smiled amused and approached Percy. For a moment, Percy expected to be punched, but instead the boy took Percy's hand and lifted it up to kiss it like Percy was some fancy English lady. He stared down at the stranger with the most unimpressed glare he could muster.

"Dude. What the fuck? From what century are you?", asked Percy with a glare.

When the boy looked up and flashed him a grin, he showed some fang. Literally. Those were some serious fangs right there. And that was not the only thing flashing. His eyes shone a bright red.

"I was born in 1924, I'll admit that", said the boy thoughtful. "I apologize if my manners offend you."
My name is Nico di Angelo, those are my sisters Bianca and Hazel, and our friends Frank, Annabeth and Reyna. We... were send to welcome you and show you around a little."

"What the fuck is up with your eyes?", hissed Percy and backed off. "And what? 1924?"

"I know what you're thinking", said Nico in a smooth voice, lifting his hands up in a placating way. "And I know it's a shock, but yes, it's the truth. And it's fine."

"Dude, I don't think it's fine that you're batshit crazy and obviously broke out of some kind of mental asylum", argued Percy with a disturbed look on his face. "Not fine at all."

Nico's face fell and he blinked. "...What?"

"I think you're crazy. But good that you agree with me on that", stated Percy.

"What? No. I'm not crazy. I'm a vampire. You were supposed to think that I'm a vampire and that I look good for my age", huffed Nico, looking offended. "Not crazy, thank you very much."

The others around them started giggling, earning glares from Nico. Percy used the opportunity of distraction to sneak away and run off. He has had enough of lunatics to last him a lifetime after this weekend, really. He didn't need some crazy stalker on school grounds too – and this guy had to be a stalker, because how else would he know Percy's name was Perseus?

Okay. First stop had to be the principal's office. He needed to say hi and get his uniform, apparently. Though the deeper he ventured into the school, the more he freaked out. There was a blonde guy with storm-gray eyes and gigantic, white wings. Cosplay? At school? Weird much. Then there was a short Latino boy who seemed to have some scale-makeup on his hands and face and weird contact lenses with slit-shaped pupils, as well as long horns sitting between his thick curls as though he was pretending to be a... woah, he was even wearing leather-wings. Yeah, that guy was cosplaying some dragon-creature-thingy. Percy was seriously short of a panic attack at this point. There were four possibilities here. One, all of this was a very sick prank initiated by Percy's half-siblings. Maybe to chase him off because they couldn't stand him anyway? To freak him out? Two, there was a weird kind of celebration or parade or party going on at this school today. Odd coincident to fall onto Percy's first day, but who knew. Three, Percy was actually mentally ill and his condition was just breaking out. Aka, Percy was going crazy. And the fourth, most dreaded one, was that it all was actually true after all. His family, this Nico-kid, they were all right.

He started actually praying for the fourth by the time he entered the principal's office and saw a man without legs. Well, technically he had even four legs. Just no human legs. The principal was half horse. Lower half, that was. Percy blinked slowly as he watched the principal gallop around the table toward him. Those legs looked like the real deal and they also moved properly. They weren't some kind of fake costume. Which meant only options one and four prevailed.

"Oh fuck. Oh fuck, oh fuck, oh fuck", chanted Percy, feeling his throat tighten up.

"Hello, Percy. Please calm down. Don't panic", ordered the half-horse dude in a very soothing and calm voice. "Everything is alright, Percy. You are alright. My name is Chiron Brunner, I'm the principal. And I'm a centaur. Just like you are a merboy, Percy."

"Oh fuck", repeated Percy again, fingers clawed into his bag.

"I would tell you to watch your language, but I'll let it slide for now", chuckled Chiron fondly, walking up to Percy and resting one hand on the boy's back. "Why don't we walk a bit?"

There wasn't much else Percy could do aside from nodding. "H—How..."
"It's okay, Percy. Everybody has a very... intense reaction when they learn the truth", assured Chiron, his voice so smooth it made Percy nearly feel as though it really was okay.

"How is this possible?", whispered Percy, feeling brave enough to talk.

Somehow, Chiron had a very calming presence, making Percy feel down to Earth enough to react. Chiron offered him an encouraging smile as he led him through the halls where all those teenagers – some looking normal, others having odd features – were still lingering. The two he had passed earlier were still standing at the lockers, talking to that blonde girl he had been introduced to earlier – Annabelle, or something like that. The two blondes turned toward the principal with respectful eyes, while the Latino with the horns and wings grinned broadly and waved.

"Oh! The new kid! Annabeth was just telling us about you!", exclaimed the excited Latino.

"Percy. You just ran off like that", chided Annabeth – so it was not Annabelle after all. "Nico was very concerned. He and his siblings were assigned the task of taking care of you."

"I don't need my father's mafia-connections to look out for me", huffed Percy with a glare. "Don't think I didn't notice that suspicious Italian last name from my father's lawyer. Of course that's why the case was run along so fast. This is fishy and weird."

"Fishy", giggled the Latino delighted. "A merboy saying fishy. Ah, that was a good one."

"I—I'm not a... whatever!", exclaimed Percy agitated. "I'm a human."

"No one at this school is human", snorted the blonde boy, rolling his eyes.

"Then what are you?", asked Percy challengingly, arms crossed over his chest.

"Leo is a dragon, Malcolm and I are Valkyries", explained Annabeth patiently.

Percy's face screwed up as he looked at the three teenagers. That the guy with the horns and leather wings was supposed to be a dragon, he could buy, but – oh. Annabeth unfolded her own mighty owl-like wings. Okay, so maybe Percy could theoretically buy her being a Valkyrie. He had watched Lost Girl before and those pretty blonde Valkyries? It fit. But what was up with that Malcolm guy?

"But... But I thought Valkyries were... uh... female?", stammered Percy a bit confused.

Malcolm huffed and glared at him viciously, eyes turning black and voice echoing through the halls. "Don't be racist, Percy Jackson. You don't see me calling you a mermaid either, do you?! Mortals don't get everything right about our races. You should try not being prejudiced."

Percy jumped about three feet high and squealed in surprise. "W—Wow. Okay, okay."

"That was uncalled for, Malcolm", chided Chiron, yet still sounding fond. "The things told in tales do not always hold up, Percy. Valkyrie is the name given to their race by the Norse, who had only been aware of the female aspect of their race. Calling them Death Angels would be more politically correct, actually. Though personally, most prefer being called Valkyries since Death Angel has the bad aftertaste of death etched to their names, you see."

"I think my head is gonna explode", muttered Percy beneath his breath.

"You should totally meet Pipes!", exclaimed Leo with a grin, grabbing Percy's hand.

"That is actually a very good idea, Leo", praised Annabeth in surprise.
"Anyway, I'm gonna go and meet Katie", muttered Malcolm, kissing Annabeth's cheek. "See you after school, sis. Keep me posted on what the mermaid does."

He threw a last irritated glare at Percy. Not that Percy really minded or felt offended. He was still completely not caught up with the situation at all. Leo and Annabeth headed down the hall and Chiron urged Percy to also follow. Together, the four of them arrived at a pool, where a tomboyish native American was just putting her hair up in a bun.

"Hey, Piper", called Annabeth out, waving a bit. "Look who's here. The newest member of your cove. He is in the phase of freaking out about it. We thought you could take him out for a swim."

The girl, Piper, turned to grin at Percy and wave at him friendly. "Hello, Percy. It's always nice to welcome a new guy to the cove. So, you still think everybody is crazy, huh?"

"Yes", hissed Percy, nodding wildly. "And so am I, apparently."

"Come on. Let's swim together", offered Piper gently, something melodic in her voice. "It will calm you down and help you understand. Why don't you go and get changed?"

Chiron had this wise and calm aura that had a soothing effect, but somehow Piper's voice was different. It made Percy want to comply, even though swimming was really not on his agenda. It was a good thing he never left the house without his swim shorts.

"You charmspoke him", stated Annabeth and shook her head judgmentally.

"He's gonna run out of this school and as far away from our community as possible if we don't convince him soon. Besides, it was just a minor amount of charmspeak", defended Piper smugly.

"I texted Hazel", chimed Leo and put his phone back. "Where we are. Because apparently her brother was freaking out about Percy being gone. He really likes the little merboy, huh?"

Chiron crossed his arms over his chest, watching the three teens curiously while they waited for Percy to return to them. Annabeth shifted a bit and sighed, looking left and right nearly paranoid.

"You know Poseidon is close to Hades and the coven, so Nico wanted to make sure Percy was safe until he'd be home with Poseidon. We... may have gone to check on him, together with Reyna. To scare his stepfather off until the whole legal issue was taken care off, a couple weeks ago", explained Annabeth softly. "I think... Percy may be Nico's mate. Or at least there was an instant spark from Nico's side. Not that that thick-headed idiot noticed."

"That's... big", whispered Leo in awe. "Oh, so Percy is gonna be my brother-in-law? Wow."

"Please stop planning the mating ceremony in your head", snorted Piper, flipping Leo's forehead. "For now, we need to get Percy comfortable in his own scales. All this potential mate stuff still can wait a while, mh? So try keeping Nico from freaking out too much."

"That's an excellent plan", agreed Chiron firmly. "Now let's focus on Percy now, mh."

"Where is he? Is he alright? He dashed off like that!", interrupted a disturbed Nico.

The vampire looked around the room with a glare, trying to spot Percy. So he hadn't been handling things too well earlier in the hall. But he had wished to impress Percy instantly. Vampires were cool these days, weren't they? Nico being a vampire was supposed to make Percy swoon!

"He's getting changed to have a little swim-off with Piper", explained Annabeth amused.
Leo smiled brightly as he saw the two girls entering behind Nico. He pretty much ignored Bianca and headed straight for his mate Hazel. The dark-skinned vampire smiled pleased as she wrapped her arms around her little dragon. Leo made a crooning sound in the back of his throat.

"Wasn't she... cozening up to another guy earlier?", asked Percy confused as he reentered.

"Let's not worry about that now", said Piper with a soft amount of charmspeak. "Come, let's swim."

Percy nodded numbly, feeling inclined to listen to her. He didn't really understand how swimming was supposed to help him out in this situation, but the way Piper said it, it would be the solution to all his problems. And considering how his weekend had been and how the first day had gone so far, Percy didn't see why he shouldn't try this out. After all, water did calm him down. He took a deep breath and jumped into the water just as Piper did.

"He's so elegant", whispered Nico in awe, watching from the sidelines. "But what's the point?"

Chiron had to keep from snorting. Annabeth with her sharp and observant eyes was right. Nico had definitely chosen his mate. It was due time too, he was already over eighty years old, if he wasn't a vampire, this would be pretty frustrating for the young supernatural.

"I heard he's very competitive. If anything is going to trigger a change, it's a match. He's still in deep denial and the best way to convince him of the truth is to show him that he is not out of place here, that he finally found a community where he fits in", replied Chiron smoothly. "I will then take him to my office and explain everything to him. Why he felt left out all his life and how coming into his legacy will change his life for the better. Poseidon and Amphitrite did the right thing sending him to me to explain this world."

"Really?", asked Bianca a bit doubtfully, standing next to Annabeth. "How is pushing him into this nest of weirdness better than explaining everything in the safety of their home?"

"Percy lost all trust in his father", replied Annabeth. "He wouldn't believe a word his family said, it's kind of a defense mechanism. Hearing it from a neutral party could help a lot."

"Not to mention I do have a few centuries of experience with this, Miss di Angelo", stated Chiron.

"O—Of course, I'm sorry", nodded Bianca a bit sheepish.

"Ah. I think it's getting interesting", interrupted Hazel, pointing at the pool.

So far, both looked human and Percy was definitely in the lead. Something that Piper couldn't take. She changed into her mermaid-form, legs turning into a sleek, long tail that shimmered a pretty, soft purple. With that, her speed instantly increased. Percy could see, from the corner of his eyes, that he was being left in the dust. His fighting spirit was heating up and he tried to push himself. He pushed himself more and more until he gained speed, until Piper seemed closer. Until he passed her. His heart was hammering in his chest, more so than usual. He gasped for breath as he victoriously resurfaced, fingers clawed into the tiles and broad grin on his chest.

"You... beat me", whispered Piper surprised as she looked at him. "But I was told you have no experience with your tail. H—How could you beat me?"

"Tail...?", asked Percy confused, following her finger as she pointed at his legs.

Only that his legs were missing. Instead, there was an azure-blue tail. A fish tail. Where his legs were supposed to be. He yelped and tried to jerk his legs apart, only to freeze up completely. Losing his grip on the tiles, he slipped back into the pool, unable to move.
"Shit. I think he's actually going to drown, isn't he?", muttered Leo surprised. "But he's a merboy."

Piper dove into the water again and grasped Percy's waist, pulling him back to the surface and swimming over to the edge of the pool, where Nico was more than willing to take the paralyzed merboy from her, pulling him up to the surface. The others hurried to circle them.

"What's wrong with him?", asked Nico concerned, eyes flashing a nasty, dark red in anger.

"Nothing is wrong", assured Chiron, brushing Percy's wet hair out of his face. "Percy, it's alright. It often comes as a shock when your kind experiences their tails for the first time. It's alright, you're fine. Breath normally and try focusing on your tail, moving it. Think of it as your legs, united. Don't try to move them apart, it causes your muscles to lock down."

Percy nodded slowly and flapped his tail once, then twice, staring at it in total awe. "Wow... So... I... I'm a... a... b—but... how? And how do I get my legs back now?!"

Piper giggled from where she sat perched on the edge of the pool. "It's simple. You just have to relax, both your body and mind. And then focus on your legs."

Percy tried it, closing his eyes and concentrating hard. When he opened them again, he had his legs back. He heaved a relieved sigh at that and tried to get up. So, at least he wasn't crazy. Hopefully. Because all of this? It had felt incredibly real. It couldn't be a hallucination.

"Children, I do believe you're all running late for your respective classes", interrupted Chiron, voice firm. "You can see Percy during lunch break and show him around then. For now, would you like to accompany me back to my office, Percy? I promise, I will answer all your questions and explain everything to you, my boy. But first, you should get changed."

Percy nodded numbly and returned to the locker room, while the other teens left unwillingly.

Nico was glaring out of the window during his Magic History classes. He wanted to be there when Chiron explained their world to Percy. Okay, so he had been a bit overly eager to introduce himself to Percy and impress him, but he really wanted the young merboy to understand and to accept. For Percy's sake as much as for the sake of the other Jacksons. Actually, for the sake of their whole community, really. Percy was a new member of the local cove of merpeople. They didn't have too many merpeople, at their school were only seven. Seven teenaged merpeople in the city of New York, that wasn't exactly much considering the size of their city. With Percy, they would be eight.

"Stop looking so grumpy", whispered Frank next to him, nudging him softly.

Nico just grunted and crossed his arms over his chest. "I'm the king of this school, I should be there to the initiation of a new member of my community. Instead, I'm sitting here."

"Ah, yes, I know that history must be boring for someone of your age, but I would still appreciate if you'd pay attention to my class, your highness", interrupted Hecate Claymore loudly.

Nico flushed and ducked his head embarrassed. The woman was impressive, but that came from her ancient soul. She wasn't the actual Hecate, the queen of witches from the ancient times when King Hades of the vampires and King Poseidon of the merpeople used to rule alongside the great kings and queens later known as 'gods'. She was merely the latest reincarnation of Queen Hecate.

Where merpeople and vampires were immortal, witches had the same life-expectancy as humans, but due to their strong magic, their souls were reincarnated and they were reborn. Due to the power that
Hecate Claymore's previous life had held, she was a figure of authority among the witch circle of New York and even beyond its borders. Normally, Nico held high respect for her, but right now, his mind seemed all over the place. It was disturbing and annoying, really.

Percy's head was buzzing as he left the principal's office around lunch-time. Great kings and queens – like King Apollo of the Light Elves and Queen Artemis of the Dark Elves – who were so magnificent that their stories prevailed even the humans' attempt to smother magic. Turned to myth and legend, treated as ancient gods. But it was merely the history of supernatural creatures. Like his father, a merman and merpeople were immortal so even after all those centuries, he was still around, Poseidon, king of the sea. What Amphitrite had said was real, after all. And his father's lawyer was the king of vampires, or lord of the supernaturals in New York, or both, or something like that. It had been kind of a lot of information all at once, really. He was getting a mild headache from it.

"So, how's taking in the supernatural world working for you, Perseus?"

Percy turned, irritated, and started at the Italian vampire from earlier. "Don't call me that."

"I could call you Prince Perseus, if you'd prefer that", offered Nico amused as he fell in step with Percy. "Now, my prince, how do you feel about us supes? Still freaked out?"

"...Supes?", echoed Percy confused, looking around a bit curious. "Where's your entourage?"

"Yeah, it's slang. Or would you like to refer to yourself as 'supernatural creature' all the time? It's a mouthful, really!", shrugged Nico before smiling. "Entourage, huh? I like that. They're probably busy. Having mates and school work and such. I offered to give you a tour on my own, figured you'd also feel less crowded. We probably freaked you out earlier too, huh?"

"Yeah, Mister Born-in-1924", huffed Percy with a glare. "You always introduce yourself like that?"

"Normally not", laughed Nico and shook his head. "And I'm sorry about that. Now, how do you feel about a tour? I'll show you where to be and what's worth seeing at this school."

Percy shrugged, hands in his pocket. "Sure. Why not? It can't get much stranger. Uh, that is... Can you even give me a tour? Isn't the sunlight going to make you go 'boom'?"

Nico laughed again, regarding Percy with a scolding look. "Okay, first things first: Garlic doesn't bother me; I'm Italian, I cook a lot with it. Mirrors aren't allergic to my kind either. I'm not sleeping in a coffin and I don't go 'boom' in the sunlight. Most of those are ridiculous tales invented by vampires to lure humans into a feeling of safety, so they're easier prey."

"That's totally reassuring and making me want to spend time with you", snorted Percy.

"We don't kill our donors anymore. That were the old, savage days", shrugged Nico. "We drink from volunteer donors in our community, or, if available, from our mates. Though the latter is of course preferred. If a vampire doesn't have a mate, or their mate is also a vampire, well, then they go and look for donors. It's all smooth and legal. So you don't need to worry that I'll suck you dry and leave you in an alley, if that's what you're concerned about."

Percy nodded slowly. No reason not to trust the vampire. After all, now he was a merman himself. Everything was upside-down, so why shouldn't vampires be good? He obediently followed Nico down the halls, listening as Nico told him where the labs were, the library, the cafeteria, gym and pool, showed him the lush and beautiful gardens outside. That private school was truly impressive and looked worth the bazillion dollars it cost (an exaggeration, but for a poor kid like Percy, it sure
felt like a bazillion dollars). Once they were done with their tour, they sat down under a tree.
Everyone else had already cleared out again, since lunch break was over. But seeing as the boys had
spend the whole time touring the school, Nico figured it'd be alright for them to have lunch even
though they were supposed to be in class. After all, it was Percy's first day.

"Well then, mio principe del mare, how do you like Summers High?", inquired Nico curiously.
[trans: my Sea Prince]

"Fancy", shrugged Percy, looking around again. "Loud. Weird. I mean, it's totally freaking awesome
if it's really all real. Vampires, werewolves, elves. This is amazing."

"And you're part of it now", offered Nico with a grin, nudging Percy softly.

Percy blinked slowly, staring at the vampire next to him. That was right. There were all those
supernatural creatures. And he was a merboy. That implied he was part of it. He... belonged.

Chapter End Notes

Please don't ask me why, but I thoroughly enjoy Nico failing at social interactions with
Percy these days... xD Now, I do hope this chapter helped those of you who were
wondering why the Jacksons send Percy to school instead of trying to explain things
themselves.

Next chapter will have the biig confrontation between Percy in the know and the
Jacksons in dire need of explaining themselves! How is Percy going to take their
reasoning for abandoning him all those years...?

Oh, due to me having some life going on on the sidelines, Saturday's update has to be
canceled. So next update will be "Chasing Fireflies" on Wednesday!
Chapter 4: Runaway Merboy

When Percy came home, he was alone at the place. Apparently, Tyson was spending the afternoon at his best friend Ella's, his older half-siblings were still at college and Proteus, Poseidon and Amphitrite were at work. The house was too large, too empty and too posh.

He didn't belong.

Not into this house, nor into this family.

For a long time, he had thought he knew, he understood. That they were only avoiding him because he was his mother's son, not their mother's son. That he was a living, breathing reminder of how their family had nearly fallen apart. That they avoided him because they thought accepting him would be like accepting his mother – their father's mistress.

Stripping down, Percy went to take a shower. Lot and hot, so hot that it steamed and left his skin red. Water always helped him clear his head. Maybe it could help him settle this turmoil too.

He now knew he had been wrong though.

He was even less than unwanted.

He was **unworthy**.

They had ignored him, had turned their backs on him, had not paid any attention to him because he had merely been human. A worthless, little human. Not worth their time or affection.

Now he was a merman, like them, and that seemed to make him worthy of their attention, yes?

Sliding down the tiled wall, Percy squeezed his eyes shut. His heart was clenching tightly.


It chanted through his mind like a three-piece mantra, the voice chanting it sounding far too much like Smelly Gabe. Ten years. Ten years of hearing those words. Ten years or having no friends, no family aside from his mother to even care about him. Ten years of loneliness and failure.

He wasn't a good student – he was dumb.

He wasn't good at anything aside from swimming – he was useless.

He wasn't good enough for his family to pay him any mind – he was worthless.

It had been beaten into him for so many years. He always tried to fight it, tried so hard and failed to see a light, any light. He had his mother. His mother loved him. She loved him and cherished him and made him push further. Then they came and they tried to tell him that she didn't. They took him away from his mother, claiming that if she'd love him, she would want the best for him, would want for him to stay in a safe and stable home. They acted like her being stuck in an abusive relationship was her fault, that she should have been stronger and protected Percy. But that's not true. Percy was
the man in their little family of two now and thus he had to protect his mom. And protect he did. He took the brute force of Gabe's abuse while his mother was at work, he made sure she wouldn't see, she wouldn't have to worry. And now they tried to tell him he wasn't doing right, she hadn't been doing right by him. But in the end, it was all Poseidon's fault, wasn't it? How could he so carelessly leave his mom pregnant and alone? Had never cared for the son unworthy of his attention.

His chest felt tight as though an iron chain laid around his heart and squeezed it. His throat tightened up, made it hard for him to breath. His heart was racing, trying to break the chain that held so tightly onto it and regardless of how much he breathed, it felt as though the air couldn't manage to fill up his lungs properly, as though he was suffocating slowly.

He slid his hands over his legs, resting on his thighs and digging his nails in deep. All too soon he could feel the slight burn of breaking skin. He dug some deeper and dragged his nails just a little. Loosening his grip, he put his nails once again to the little crescent-shaped wounds and dug in harder. The burn was stronger this time – and it was so freeing.

The physical pain, albeit so small just, was beautifully distracting from the emotional pain. The chain around his heart seemed to ease and slowly, oh so slowly, his breathing regulated again. All the bad thoughts, the vicious words swirling through his head, it all slowly calmed down to a blissful numbness, leaving him feeling oddly empty and shallow – but without pain.

He hated when his emotions got the better of him, hated when his mind would clog up and darkness took a hold of him, hated that there was only one way he knew how to break free from it.

But he was alone. Now more than ever before, because ever before he always had his mother. Now he had no one. He was stuck in this house, a house that didn't fit him at all, filled with a family that didn't know him – had never cared to know him. All because now he had shown something that made him worthy – but not for long. Percy didn't know a thing about the supernatural, he didn't know a thing about mermaids past what Disney had taught him, he didn't know about having any kind of special powers or anything. He'd only disappoint them anyway. He was not going to show whatever they hoped they'd find in him. Just because he was a supernatural didn't mean he was like them – would be like them. Useless, he'd not do whatever they hoped he would. His nails dug in deeper and this time, aside from just blanking his mind, it also shook the dark thoughts off.

Slowly gathering himself, he stood up and finished his shower, the hot water burning on the small cuts left on his thighs, a painful reminder that he had yet again been too weak to withstand it.

For years, he had entertained that hope, that thought. That things would somehow magically work out. That Gabe would be taken away from them and he and his mom would be able to live peacefully, that he would become strong and brave and maybe even find friends, a place to belong.

As it were, he had been ripped out of the small safe haven he had known before, left all alone.

Dreams were only that, after all. A wish the heart made. And wishes, as no one knew better than Percy, were just thinly veiled beacons of hope that dispersed far too easily in the darkness.

/Nico was lazily sitting around in his living room. After today, others had gotten curious about Percy. His friends wanted more information, wanted to know how Nico came to be so interested in the boy. Calypso, Hazel, Ethan and Bianca were there, of course. His coven-siblings. Bianca's mate Thalia and her brother Jason, who happened to be Calypso's mate, were there too. Both were storm-spirits, human-looking but able to create storms, clouds, air currents and lightning.*/
They had been abandoned by their storm-spirit father, left on their own with their drunk, no-good mother Beryl Grace. Beryl got married to a good man, a kind man – Tristan McLean. Both were actors, had already played alongside each other in the late eighties. But while Beryl's star had long since dimmed and was drowned in alcohol, Tristan's was on the rising. Tristan had a daughter of his own, a young mermaid named Piper. It was thanks to Beryl's marriage to Tristan that Thalia and Jason too had found their way into the safety of Hades' community. Otherwise, the two children would have most likely slipped through the system once their mother would have suffocated her last brain-cells in alcohol. But as it was, that one last chance at a small role alongside Tristan again at the beginning of this century had reignited the spark both actors had first felt during their very first movie. He helped her sober up, kept her clean, took care of Thalia and Jason as though they were his own once Tristan and Beryl were married. Now that she was clean, sober and far more coherent than Thalia and Jason had ever known their mother, she too was persuading her career again. She was finally happy again, finally able to be the mother Thalia, Jason and Piper deserved.

Piper was there too, alongside Ethan's mate Alabaster, a warlock and son of Hecate, Hazel's two mates, her little dragon Leo and Frank the werewolf-hunter-hybrid. And, of course, Nico's far too curious best friends Reyna and Annabeth, who still seemed delighted at his embarrassment.

"So... Nico made a fool of himself in front of the new kid, because he has a very big gigantic crush on him, did I gather that right?", asked Frank curiously, one eyebrow raised. "Man..."

"Shut up", growled Nico and threw a pillow at the larger boy.

Thalia, Bianca, Reyna and Annabeth on the couch laughed and giggled – was it a girl-thing, or more specifically a lesbian thing, to laugh at a boy's misery like hyenas? Nico wasn't quite sure, but either way, he always ended up suffering. Ethan's one dark eye was trained on him, as though the other vampire was trying to dissect Nico's very being, while also running his fingers through Alabaster's messy hair. The warlock himself didn't quite pay them any mind. No, Alabaster thought he was being ridiculous and dumb and he had stated as much, not seeing a point to argue further in the matter. Nico should just swoop Percy up, kiss him senseless, bite his claim and be done with it. Ironically, Nico could imagine his sire-father to say those exact same words about the matter.

"Where it gets complicated is that the new kid, Percy, he has no idea about anything", pointed Piper out from where she sat at Thalia's feet, braiding Calypso's hair. "Poor thing never used his tail..."

Piper, Thalia and Jason sat huddled close together – they were family, one way or another, had pushed together and stood together until their family was mend. Now it was rare and hard to separate them. Calypso herself, she found it rather endearing. For too long, she had been stranded and alone on a secluded island, so this sense of family, it was heartwarming to her. She was all too willing to let Piper braid her hair, resting her own feet in Jason's lap in a silent claim of her mate.

"It's more than just that, Piper", sighed Annabeth with a frown. "He... didn't have an easy life."

"He's been through a lot of pain", supplied Reyna, grasping Annabeth's hand. "It wouldn't do to go all neanderthal on him. I do think that Nico chose the right approach here. First befriend him, support him and show him that you're on his side. Give him time to heal first..."

"But watch out so you won't end up in the friend-zone", warned Jason seriously. "Otherwise he'll just see you as that supportive best friend he can rely on instead of a potential love-interest."

"Right now, all I want is to be his friend", grunted Nico stubbornly.

"You were always that way", laughed Bianca delighted and shook her head. "Even when we were still human. You would glower and pout and claim 'No, I do not care about the puppy!' after father
said you could not keep it, even though we all knew you loved the little mutt. You're just so utterly bad at standing true to your feelings, fratellino."

Nico felt his cheeks heat up as he slipped down further on the couch. Percy was very enchanting and charming and beautiful and cheeky and wonderful to talk to. That was to say, he cared decidedly too much for Percy, especially considering they hadn't known each other for long. They only truly met today, had only spend short, precious hours with each other.

"I just want to get to know him better and... help him", offered Nico with a half-hearted shrug.

"Who are you writing to, Piper?", asked Thalia with a frown as she watched how Piper dropped the braid in her hand and instead started to animatedly type away on her phone.

"My mates", chimed Piper, not taking her eyes off her phone. "Gotta tell them that our little pack just gained a member. I love Claire, but if I don't tell her beforehand, she's gonna pick on the boy."

"'Pick on the boy' is the nice phrasing to what Clarisse would do", muttered Jason beneath his breath, earning a harsh elbow to the ribs from Piper. "Ouch, sis. Sorry, I totally didn't mean it! Your mate is the epitome of self-control and kindness and all things good!"

Piper looked up long enough to glare viciously at Jason, a deep and dangerous growl in the back of her throat that actually had Jason scooting away from her. Nico quirked one unimpressed eyebrow. Sometimes, the supernatural community tended to forget one very important fact. Even though biologically and evolutionary speaking, naturally submissive creatures like Piper were meant to be nurturers, waking a protectiveness in dominants, there were certain scenarios where a submissive could *easily* kick any dominant's ass. When someone threatened either their mates or their cubs. In such instances, a submissive could show a cold viciousness and precise deadliness. Anyone with half a brain knew better than to make fun of a submissive's mate, really.

"Why aren't Clarisse and Chris here anyway?", asked Leo instead, butting in between his two best friends and thus shielding Jason from his step-sister's wrath. "They should have come too."

"Clarisse's dad dragged her to the shooting range", sighed Piper with the slightest pout. "You know she can never say 'no' to that. It's rare enough for him to willingly spend time with her anyway... And Chris got grounded for a prank gone bad that the Stolls had gotten him involved in..."

"...Grounded?", echoed Alabaster ridiculed. "I don't think I've ever heard of a Trickster being grounded. Isn't it like... in the nature of a fox-shifter to play pranks?"

"It wasn't his dad who grounded him", huffed Piper and rolled her eyes. "The prank gone bad had been played on Lord Hades. He did *not* appreciate it. There wasn't much the Tricksters' parents could do but ground their kids to appease our lord at least a bit..."

"So... the Stolls are grounded too?", asked Alabaster intrigued, eyes sparkling. "That, I'd like to see. Keeping them away from mischief and mayhem is basically impossible."

Nico snorted and shook his head. On the long run, grounding them would probably only end up with all the bad ideas bottling up in their heads and leading to a gigantic, horrifying explosion of pranking and trouble. Sure, there were different types of shapeshifters – all of a canine-breed though – and while wolves were mainly just possessive, protective, strong and loyal like Frank, foxes like the Stolls and Chris were wildly referred to as Tricksters, for good reason.

"So, the new kid, Percy, he's a merboy then, yes?", inquired Leo, looking up at Piper. "What is he? I mean, does he smell dominant or submissive?"
"No idea", sighed Piper with a displeased frown. "The scent of fear, panic and adrenaline was spiked too high, it covered up everything else, really."

Even though in the supernatural community, the sexual orientation ranked between dominants, neutrals and submissives, some species like hunters or seers didn't have a special tendency toward dominant or submissive and were 'neutral' like humans, other races laid heavily on the other two aspects of the specter. Merpeople and dragons especially so. It was rather rare for either race to have anyone of a neutral dominance level. It was something Nico wondered about too. If and where Percy would land on the specter, but so far, Percy hadn't blossomed enough into his heritage to completely set his scent free. There were only whiffs of his feelings, just like Piper had said.

"There's enough time for those things", pointed Hazel out, leveling Leo with a glare. "I know you're always keen on gaining more submissives for your sub-cuddles, but the boy is in over his head as it is, if we'd have to explain those things to him now, I think it'd be too much for him."

Naturally submissive creatures had – aside from a fierce protectiveness toward their mates and children – also a strong sense of family in general, of pack. That was the easiest way to spot supernatural creatures with tendencies actually. While vampires would often live on their own, or just with their mates, not necessarily in covens, creatures that relied on submissives and dominants by nature on the other hand only lived in groups. Packs of wolves, coves of merpeople or hoards of dragons. It was because submissives often tended to bond with each other on a platonic level, such a bond ensured that when one submissive would fall pregnant, the others would feel as inclined to taking care of the young and helping out. It kept the community as a whole safer.

"I think he's a dominant", mused Bianca absentmindedly. "He's very headstrong and set on confrontation. Hot-blooded, you could say."

"Mh, that's why I think he's a submissive", countered Reyna, hands playing with the hair of her own submissive mate, twirling a lock of Annabeth's long blonde hair around her fingers. "Unbound submissives are often very aggressive and full of fight, because they... well, they lack the protection of a dominant mate. Being on their own like that sets them on edge."

"And they tend to challenge dominants too, so the dominants can prove themselves worthy", agreed Frank, an amused grin on his lips as he looked at Leo. "Some... not as successfully as others."

"Hey!", whined Leo embarrassed and blushed. "She's a century-old kick-ass vampire lady and you're both a dominant wolf and a hunter! How would one poor, little dragon even remotely stand a chance against you! Besides, the whole point is that the dominants win anyway..."

"Yes", agreed Hazel, her voice nearly a purring sound as she crawled over to sit next to Leo. "And the prize we win are gorgeous and amazing submissives, mh."

Nico rolled his eyes and made obnoxiously loud gagging noises. He hated – positively despised – when other supes rubbed it into his face that they had their gorgeous and amazing submissives.

/\break\/

Things had escalated quickly when Proteus and Poseidon came home. It really had started simple enough. They had just asked Percy about his day, informing him that Benthesikyme and Kymopoleia would be bringing pizza with them in about an hour or so.

"Why didn't you tell me!", had Percy asked accusingly.

"We told you", countered Proteus with a professional frown on his face. "You didn't believe."
"You should have showed me!", spat Percy, eyes furious and dark. "Piper showed me! But you? You didn't even try!" He paused and laughed shallowly. "Then again, you never tried."

"That's not... That's not true", said Poseidon weakly, looking hurt. "We love you. We came to get you as soon as we learned that you need us, we saved you."

"You did not save me", spat Percy, baring his fangs – quite literally, his teeth had sharpened in his anger, something merpeople were known for, a handy feature to rip out sailors' throats. "You came as soon as you learned that I could be of value to you, to your society! As soon as you learned that I'm not just a worthless human, that I have some kind of potential or whatever! You never gave a damn before then. You never cared enough to even realize I was in trouble. Only now, now that you knew I wasn't as useless as you thought, only then did you pay enough attention to realize."

"You're not useless, Percy", chided Poseidon, stepping up to Percy. "I love you, I always loved you. I, no we, wanted to protect you. Always. When we didn't tell you before and kept you at a distance, it was to protect you, I swear. Our world, it's... dangerous. Humans... Humans who are involved with us, they tend to not grow old. But... now that you are part of our world, we can... we can finally show you everything, teach you everything. Please give us a chance."

Percy snorted, ridiculed. "Protect me? Being involved with this world would have been dangerous? How? With the cuddly, jumpy dragon-boy? Or the vampire who was tamer than a kitten when we talked today? Yes? Or the nice, old centaur who calmly and patiently explained all the things you kept from me for years. Looked very dangerous indeed. Oh, what about the charming, pretty mermaid, who managed to just show me her tail, unlike you guys? Fuck, not even this entire school is comparable to any school I was in in the past years! You know how many took drugs in my old schools? How many times I actually got beaten up? Or worse yet, how often I got kicked out because I dared to defend myself? But this pretty, posh world is supposed to be dangerous? Hah. That's fucking rich. When I was ten, I was pretty sure Gabe would kill me. He was so close. And again when I was twelve. And thirteen. And just last year too. But this is dangerous? Sure."

Percy didn't give either of them the chance to reply anything, because the boy stormed out of the room and out of the house. The door was thrown shut so harshly. Poseidon bolted up, wanting to run after Percy, to pull him into his arms, to never let him go again. He hadn't known it had been that bad. Yes, Gabe had abused Percy apparently, but nearly killed? How had he failed so badly, how had he never noticed? How could he have been so blind?

"Don't", advised Proteus, grasping his father's arm. "Give him time to cool off. He surely has a lot of... temper. I understand why he is so furious and he has every right to be. He also has the right to digest things on his own right now. He's feeling crowded. After we've been abandoning him for years, we're now suddenly all around him, suffocating him. Give him some time."

Poseidon heaved a sigh and looked longingly at the door.

Finding his way home was easy, nearly on autopilot, even though he wasn't quite familiar with the neighborhood of his father. His fists were stuffed so deep into the pockets of his sweat-jacket that he feared he'd have holed in them in the end of it. His hands were balled into such tight fists that his nails dug into his palms. Not breaking skin, just putting a slightly distracting pain through him. He needed to get out of here. He needed to feel safe. A place that didn't hurt him, couldn't hurt him. He just wanted his mom. Not more or less, just simply having his mom.

Sneaking into the apartment building was easy – the door downstairs had been defect for about five or so years now, it never closed completely. As soon as she stood in front of the all too well-known
door, he relaxed just a little bit. There was still a brisk tension between his shoulders, one that came from knowing that this was simultaneously his home and his personal hell at once. He knocked rapidly, not stopping until the door was finally opened. His heart filled with warm as he saw his safety, his mom. Azure-blue eyes were wide as she stared at him.

"P—Percy... What...", stammered Sally a little lost, still just staring at him.

"Mom!", exclaimed Percy and jumped her in a tight hug. "I missed you so much!"

After only a moment did she return the hug, pulling him as close as possible, as though she too didn't want to let him go again – and the thought warmed his heart even more. This was it. Now things could get better, could get okay. After all, Smelly Gabe was gone. They could be happy now. Things could get good now, with just the two of them – no magic, no merpeople, no Poseidon. He didn't need any of that – didn't want it. Even though, deep down, he knew it was a lie. Deep down, he wanted nearly nothing more than all of that. All his life, he had dreamed of magic, had adored Ariel, had wished for a good relationship with his father and his older siblings. But he didn't need it. If he had to decide between just his mom and this whole, wide world – he'd want his mom. He'd want the one person he knew loved him. Loved him unconditionally. Had endured years of abuse for his sake, so they would not be separated. Not again. She pulled him into the apartment.

"Percy, what are you doing here?", asked Sally with a small smile, brushing his hair out of his face. "Oh, I missed you so much, my boy. Say, is your... father here too? Did he drive you? I had... I had hoped you may reason with him, so we could see each other. I swear, I got rid of Gabe, for good. I will... I will work hard, harder than ever before, so we could get a better place and then, then we can... Poseidon said we could, we could re-negotiate the custody arrangement again. I had hoped he may be... kind beforehand, let us see each other outside those times the judge said." Percy averted his eyes and bit his lips in shame, causing Sally to sigh. "Oh, Percy. You... you didn't, did you...?"

The two of them sat down on the couch together and Percy tried, he tried to explain it – as good as he could explain it at the moment anyway without using terms like 'magic' or 'merman' – and Sally just looked at him like that. So... disappointed. She kept scolding him, chiding him for running away, telling him he should have talked to his father, should have acted differently. Told him he was being childish, was risking too much for the both of them. She looked so worn-out, so worried for him. Percy squeezed his eyes shut, trying to tune out his mother as she continued to worry about what would happen next. He knew running away was immature and he knew the authorities were already involved and he knew he probably had caused more harm than good. He knew that now.

"Mom", said Percy softly, being ignored in favor of Sally's concerns. "Mom! STOP!"

He just couldn't listen to this anymore. He heaved a relieved sigh when his mother's concerned voice finally ceased. They just needed a moment to think about things and then they could find a good solution. Though what he saw when he opened his eyes was frightening. His mother had indeed stopped. With everything. Her hand was lifted into midair to cut the carrots, mouth open as she had been in the middle of a word. She wasn't even blinking. She wasn't even breathing.

Chapter End Notes

I'm very picky about reading self-harm or writing self-harm, because it needs to fit a character and their situation, often it's just used as a means to... to make the characters seem more broken than they actually are. It always bothers me to see self-harming Nico
or Percy in the canon universe, because they both proved to be stronger than that in the
world created by Rick Riordan. But writing this chapter, I feel like, in this world, I have
pushed Percy to his limits. What always gave him strength in canon were the people he
loves - and right now he doesn't have any friends and the one person he does love has
been taken away from him. Not to mention he had to endure four additional years of
Gabe's physical and mental abuse.

But you know me. There will a happy ending. He will get the support, love and help he
needs. Starting next chapter, actually. Because this evil cliffhanger will be resolved and
Percy will come to a decision that doesn't come easy to him. Cue in the new people who
care about him and will help him - Nico, Leo and Piper!

Next update will be something new! A five-part Nicercy story set in a post-post-
apocalyptic world! An experiment gone wrong created various animal hybrids who took
over the world. Dog-humans control North America. They suppress humans, blaming
them for what nearly became all of humanity's downfall. But other races, naturally
submissive races like cat-people, are suppressed too. Cue in lawyer and dog-human
Nico di Angelo and his errant boy Percy Jackson, who has, so far, managed to hide his
cat-features from the firm and his boss. How will Nico react when he realizes that the
annoyingly timid and plain human is neither timid nor plain or human, but just a kitten
trying to hide his tail...? Well, see for yourselves on Saturday when I post "Like Cats
and Dogs"! ;)

The Merboy Who Lost His Voice

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 5: The Merboy Who Lost His Voice

"You're very powerful, Percy. You carry the blood of the king", had Chiron said when they had talked in the centaur's office yesterday. "You have... powers. Not just a tail. You certainly already felt it when you were with Piper in the pool. How a sense of calmness washed over you when Piper told you to calm down, right? That is called the Siren's Song, or charmspeak as you young people call it. The power to make people do what you want, just by telling them to."

Percy shifted nervously in his seat, looking doubtfully at the centaur. "Like the sirens in the stories? The evil mermaids who sang and caused ships to crash and sailors to die?"

"That's precisely where the name comes from. Your voice is your most powerful weapon. More powerful than your tail. Or at least it can be. Not every merman and mermaid has the same grasp on their powers. Piper and Silena are exceedingly well-reversed in their charmspeak, while Lacy and Mitchell can only perform under either great pressure or great concentration. It's always dependent on the personal strength of an individual. Nonetheless, you should be warned about what you're capable of, Percy. It can be an amazing thing, but it is also just as dangerous."

"Well, I'm not gonna sing a yard into a shipwreck", snorted Percy and rolled his eyes. "You may not see it now, but you should be very careful", warned Chiron sternly.

So Percy was apparently very powerful when under pressure and wishing for a moment of peace to assemble his thoughts was all it took to do something horrible. With tears burning in his eyes, Percy shook his mother, trying to break the trance. He had no idea how. He didn't even know what he had done. Chiron hadn't exactly explained what charmspeak did and how it worked. Really, Percy had thought it was just fancy singing that made men go crazy. Not that it was literal mind-control. Then again, Chiron had mentioned how Piper had manipulated Percy's feelings, hadn't he?

"Mom, please...", begged Percy, voice breaking. "Y—You need to b—breath a—and move, please."

And as if on command, Sally took a shaky breath and stumbled forward, clearly dizzy from the lack of oxygen. She grabbed her head, blinking rapidly to make up for the time without blinking, looking around rather disoriented. Percy sobbed softly in relief, feeling his knees buckle. When Sally saw her son's tears, she hastily grabbed him and hugged him soothingly.

"There, there, honey. What's wrong?", asked Sally softly, not understanding.

She had stopped literally everything, including noticing what was going on around her. She had no idea what had just happened or why Percy was so upset. In a way, that made Percy feel so immensely relieved. He had just nearly killed his mother, all because he wanted her to stop fussing for a second. When Chiron had said he was powerful, the centaur sure hadn't been exaggerating. There was no way Percy could ever endanger his mom like that. Right now, he was not safe to be around. Something else Chiron had said yesterday came to Percy's mind. How Summers High was a special school for supernatural beings to learn to control their powers. Percy hadn't thought much of
it at the time – well, he somehow had imagined a class like in dog school where werewolves learn to fetch or something. Right now however, the idea of a place where he could learn to stop doing whatever it was he just accidentally did, well, it sounded like a beacon of hope.

"Mom", whispered Percy softly, voice pleading as he grabbed her face and looked her deep in the eyes. "Mom, I love you. I love you so much. That's... That's why I have to go again. And you... you need to lay down for a bit, okay? Because you don't look well. Lay down and... and when you wake up, you'll have forgotten that I was here today, okay?"

There actually was something that gave away that Percy's weird magic voice thing worked. A shimmer of sorts, different colors that dulled her eyes for a moment. When she next blinked, her eyes were their normal, clear azure-blue again and she smiled at him before yawning.

"You know, I'm rather tired... Today had been a long day, I guess. I will go and lay down some", said Sally and placed a kiss on his forehead. "I love you, Percy. I'll see you later."

Percy offered her a smile, though it was a pained one. "Y—Yeah, mom. See you later."

When Percy returned to the Jacksons', no one commented on it. He just stated he had to go and get some fresh air – and they were most likely afraid that he'd run again if they chided him. Right now, Percy realized, he had them all wrapped around his finger, because they were so busy bending into every possible direction to please him and make up for their mess, he could probably burn down their house and they'd still pet his head for still being here. He also realized that that wasn't what he wanted. What he wanted – what he needed – was an honest family. A real family. Then again, right at that moment, all Percy wanted was to be on his own, because what had happened had left a heavy lump in his stomach and Percy wasn't sure if he was ready to be among people yet. So he locked himself into his bedroom and went to sleep at seven PM, a fitful sleep filled with nightmares. Sadly, came morning, there was no more avoiding the world. He needed, more than he wanted anything, to learn how to control his new powers, so he had to go to school. Without grabbing breakfast, Percy slipped out of the house, hopeful to be able to avoid at least the family a little longer.

"Hop in. I'll drive you to school", called Triton out from where he stood next to his car. "And no, that's not an offer or a suggestion, it's an order. Someone has to make sure that you actually go to school today and don't take another 'long walk to clear your head'."

Biting his lips, Percy slowly climbed into the passenger seat of Triton's blue Camero. "Why did no one scream at me? Or, like, slap me in the face for running away? Just... silence. Why?"

Triton leveled a glare at him as he started the car. "First of all, no slapping. Not ever. Not in this family. And secondly, what matters is not that you ran away – all of us are aware how angry and confused you are at the moment – what matters is that you came back."

The rest of the drive was spend in silence as Percy glanced out of the window, thinking. When they got to the school, Percy got out of the car without another word and headed into the school building, aware that Triton waited before leaving until Percy was actually inside. Percy managed to hide in the farthest back-row during his first class. Thankfully, the teacher didn't seem too interested in him either, or Percy was giving such intense 'fuck off'-vibes off that even the teacher steered clear.

During recess, Percy found himself safely hiding in a dark corner so no one would bother him.

"Buongiorno, mio principe del mare", greeted a velvety, dark voice. [trans: Good morning, my Sea Prince]
Of course the vampire would find him in the dark corner. It was probably Nico's usual hang-out.
Lifting his head, Percy offered the vampire a smile and opened his mouth to greet him, just to shut it tightly again. What if he was going to accidentally order Nico to do something? He couldn't risk hurting anyone else. Instead, Percy lifted a hand and waved a little. Nico raised one elegant eyebrow and approached, sitting down next to Percy on the ground.

"Cat got your tongue?", asked Nico teasingly, just to have Percy shake his head and shrug a little. "Uhm, you okay? You weren't at school yesterday either. Did you catch a cold when you were racing Piper on Monday? You should have stayed home today too if you lost your voice."

Percy shook his head and waved his hands, unsure how to express himself without his words. Unsure if he wanted to express himself. Frowning thoughtful, Percy got his phone out and typed.

Not sck. M fine. Can I trust U with sth? ...R U on my side or n Poseidon's?

Nico frowned seriously and nodded. "Of course you can, Percy." The Italian paused for a moment, as though he was looking for the right words. "I know that you think I'm on your father's side. But the thing is, and bear with me for a second here, what Poseidon wants is – even if you can't see it yet – to know you happy and safe. Right now, for you to be happy and safe, you need someone in your corner, even if that means opposing Poseidon. I am in your corner, a hundred percent."

The smallest smile found its way onto Percy's lips for a second, before he grew serious again.

I nrly killed my mom yesterday. I ran away, 2 her. She was angry & disappointed, worried how I should go back 2 my dad b4 we got into trubel. Twas 2 much, I told her 2 stop. She stoped. Breathing. Can't thrust my voice. Dun't wanna hurt soemone again

"Okay... Your spelling is making my head hurt", grunted Nico with a frown. "So wait. Wow. Uhm... I want to say 'don't worry', but I suppose that must be an impossible task for you at the moment." Nico paused, forehead wrinkling, before his face brightened and he bolted up, offering Percy his hand. "Come on, I have an idea. There's someone you need to talk to. Well, I can do the talking for now, if you prefer. Because I kind of doubt his dyslexia and your spelling will get along..."

Percy frowned confused, but then Nico took his hand to tug him along. Nico had cold hands, but it was also soothing somehow. Percy squeezed it a little as he obediently trailed after Nico. In the end, the vampire led Percy to the workshops in the basement. Inside the workshop was one Leo Valdez, happily chatting and eating lunch with his two best friends – Jason and Piper.

"Hey, guys", greeted Nico, rubbing circles on the back of Percy's hand with his thumb to calm the nervous merboy down. "Sh, don't worry about it, Perce. Just trust me, okay?"

Percy nodded jerkily and followed Nico as the vampire approached the trio. All three turned to them and grinned broadly, waving in a friendly manner. Percy half hid behind Nico, clinging onto the vampire's hand. Nico liked him. Why, Percy couldn't fathom, but apparently Nico liked him. Nico was safe. Percy didn't know those others, couldn't trust them. But he somehow trusted Nico.

"Hey, Nico. Are you trying to integrate our newbie into the gang?", asked Leo teasingly.

"...We're not a 'gang"", grunted Nico and rolled his eyes. "And I'm here because it'd be good if you'd talk to Percy. He was visiting his mother yesterday and, emotionally overwhelmed, told her to 'stop' when she wouldn't stop talking about how bad of an idea running away had been. She stopped, with everything. Including moving and breathing. So... now he refuses to speak, because he's afraid of the effect his charmspeak would have on others."
"Oh", nodded Leo in understanding, his leathery wings twitching as he turned to face Percy. "Hello, Percy. It's so nice to properly meet you. I'm Leo and I nearly killed my mom when I was seven."

Percy made a surprised and disturbed sound in the back of his throat, causing Leo to smile warmly at him. "You're not the first supe to accidentally hurt someone you care about. Especially half-bloods who grew up in the human society have trouble, because when we come into our heritage, it always comes as a total surprise. When I was seven, I came into my heritage as a dragon. It was a shock and a surprise and I accidentally burned down my parents' garage, with my mother in it. But my father came home and, being a dragon himself, he could withstand the heat and got mom and me out safely. If he wouldn't have been there, my mom would have died. It... It left me scared of my own fire for years. Dad brought me into his society, introduced me to other dragons, taught me how to control my fire, but... it took me years to be able to summon it when others were present."

Percy licked his lips and nodded slowly, fishing his phone out and typing. When he was finished, he handed it over to Nico, tugging on the vampire's sleeve. The Italian nodded and took the phone.

"Percy wants to know how long it took you to control it", said Nico, taking Percy's hand again.

"Actually not long", replied Leo with a reassuring smile. "It's... It's not that hard once you understand the main concept. My wings are part of my body just like my arms or legs and my fire is... it's like a physical manifestation of my emotions, my soul. I just have to concentrate."

Percy yelped and jumped behind Nico, peeping over the vampire's shoulder at the flame dancing around Leo's wrist. Jason and Piper rolled their eyes at the proud and pleased grin on Nico's face. After all, it did stroke both Nico's ego and his dominant tendencies to shield and protect Percy.

"It's alright", assured Jason pitifully. "Leo got a real good grip on his fire by now."

Percy typed something out on his phone and showed it to them eagerly – Can U teech me?

"No, he can't", answered Piper while Leo tried to make sense of the dancing letters in front of his dyslexic self. "Leo's fire is something that... that comes from his gut. Control over water is more a matter of the... heart. And charmspeak is something relying on both the tongue and throat. Most merpeople are taught the basics by their parents, so why don't you ask your dad?"

Percy's eyes were wide and he shook his head so fast, Nico feared it'd fall off, causing Nico to frown worried. "That could be a problem, because those not taught by their parents normally learn at this school. In your race's case, from the swim-coach. Who is your father."

Jason winced at that and nodded. "Yeah... that... could be a problem. You need someone you can trust to teach you. And... uh... you don't happen to have someone like that?"

A slight grin tugged on Jason's lips as he watched how Percy instantly turned to Nico. There was actually a proud, pleased and kind of dorky look on Nico's face at that, but he still shook his head.

"I can't teach you, Percy. Out of the same reasons Leo can't!", answered Nico.

Percy rolled his eyes in a 'well, duh' kind of manner and typed something. This time around, Nico looked kind of embarrassed, rubbing the back of his neck. Obvs. But I thrust U. Who do U know that could teech me? Who do U thrust? Noone from the Jackson family thoos.

Nico paused for a moment, mulling things over. "The merpeople at school have formed their own cove – group of merpeople – and the leader is Silena Beauregard. She's powerful, kind, gentle and patient. And then there's Piper. You saw her swim the other day. So, how about you get to know both of them and see for yourself, mh? Both could help you."
Piper smiled and leaned away to get something out of her backpack. Shaking the Tupperware once, she opened it to reveal chocolate chip cookies. Leo instantly stole one while Jason pushed the chair next to him back invitingly. Percy bit his lower lip hard and looked at Nico doubtfully. He didn't know those people. Sure, he also didn't quite know Nico either, but so far Nico had been kind, he had talked to Percy openly, showed him around, wanted to help him. So right now, Nico was the closest to a friend and confidant that Percy had. The encouraging smile from Nico was a huge relief, because it helped him not feeling like a total fool for relying on Nico so much here. But right now, Percy was so frightened – afraid of himself – and he was so alone.

"Why don't you tell us something about yourself?", asked Piper, voice like a song, nearly coaxing. "It's alright. You can talk to us. We all have enough experience with charmspeak. And... you need to learn to trust yourself, Percy. Nothing is going to happen, mh?"

Percy frowned and shook his head wildly, causing Leo to sigh. "Hey, even if you accidentally charmspeak Jason, Piper or me, then Nico is going to stop you or whatever is about to happen. You can't charmspeak vampires, they're immune to it, you know?"

Looking doubtful, Percy turned to stare at Nico who just smiled and nodded. "You can't charmspeak me. I could have told you earlier, but, well, it wouldn't have changed your fear since we were in the middle of the schoolyard with others who could have heard your voice. But now it's just the four of us. It'll be fine, Percy. I'll protect you, even from yourself, I promise."

"...O... Okay", whispered Percy, barely audible.

"Thank you", smiled Piper kindly, handing him a cookie. "For trusting us, even if it's just for now."

"How about we tell you a bit about ourselves, so you get to know us", offered Leo with a grin.

"If you don't mind?", nodded Percy slowly, nibbling the cookie.

"Jason and I are step-siblings", started Piper. "My father is Tristan McLean, the actor. His mom is Beryl Grace. Both are human, both got ditched by our supernatural parents. The two met on set and fell in love and since then, Jay, me and Jason's big sister Thalia have been family."

"Fancy actors, huh?", asked Percy softly.

"Mom wasn't that fancy the first like seven years of my life", grunted Jason with a glower. "She was a drunk. I mean, she never like hit me or Thals, but she was neglectful as hell. Thalia basically raised me, really. Until Tristan and Piper came into our lives and fixed our family. Thalia and me, we're storm-spirits, we kinda control the weather. Having two supernatural kids, being abandoned by our dad, it really crashed our mom's life, I guess. But dad, Piper's dad, he's great. He supported her, in her career and her attempt at sobering up."

"My parents are still together. Though dad got quite the earful for not telling my mom that he's a dragon, after I accidentally burned the shop down", said Leo as he took over. "They're both great, though my dad is kind of a grump and not the best at expressing his feels, but my mom makes up for it by being very affectionate and understanding and all, you know. She did everything to understand as much as possible about dragons and about how my life changed." Leo grinned fondly, before he yelped in glee and pointed at Percy. "We should totally do the newbie-movie-bonding!"

"...the what?", asked Percy confused, tilting his head.

"It became kind of a tradition lately", explained Piper casually and grinned. "We watch Frozen with the newbies, because it's the best movie to teach the most important lesson."
"...Uhm... to let it go?", guessed Percy, looking at Nico for help.

"No!", exclaimed Leo and thrust his hands hard onto the table. "The lesson, the most important lesson anyone with powers could ever learn, is don't be Elsa."

"It's okay to be afraid of your powers when you have such a great burden, even more so when you have no one who can relate", explained Jason patiently. "What's not okay is to just bundle it up and try to 'ignore' your own powers, because obviously they will grow stronger the older you get. Pretending they're not there and locking yourself up out of fear will never be the solution to anything and neither will be to 'let it go'. Accidents happen, you may end up hurting the person you love the most, but you can't just run away. You can't abandon those you love and even less so those you hurt, you can't just lock yourself in your castle and let others take care of your mess and say 'screw it' to play freely with your powers like they're toys. It's important to be brave, diligent and willing to learn. So, basically, be the opposite of Elsa. Embrace your powers, learn how to control them, don't fear yourself and hide yourself just because you screw up and don't ever abandon others, especially not out of selfish reasons, especially not to avoid a mess you made."

Piper hummed in agreement and rummaged through her bag once again before handing Percy an ice-blue button reading Don't Be Elsa. "That lesson hits home with most of us and I think it's on target for you too, Percy. You hurt your mother by accident, but hiding yourself away and not talking anymore out of fear of charmspeaking someone isn't the solution. Because one day you will snap and then your uncontrolled and untrained charmspeak will do real harm – and I am talking Frozen proportions kind of damages here. Not just the immediate freezing your entire country, also the side-effects of your people dying as they're caught in the sudden change of weather and the long-lasting effects of killing all crops and the vegetation, damning like a fourth of your people to starve to death in the following year. Because your powers are strong and if you unleash them uncontrolled, it will be a disaster if you keep them bottled up and ignore them."

"Be Hercules instead!", offered Jason with a playful smile, trying to lighten the mood again. "He never tried to hide his powers, even though others avoided him for them. He spend years dedicating himself to learning and training. And in the end, he saved the world. Way better goal than just saving your very dumb and empty-headed baby sister."

Leo snickered at Percy's surprised look. "Jason has a special kind of hatred for Anna. The whole 'Our country is facing its greatest challenge and catastrophe and instead of leaving a minister or someone who has helped ruling for the past years in charge, I'll leave it to the guy I met tonight!'."

"Jason has issues about leadership", supplied Nico casually, startling Percy a bit. "Though he is right. A country with people like those two on the throne is literally doomed. How they think that a little girl who spend the past years locked into her room and not interacting with anyone, ministers and her people alike, is in any way or shape fit to rule a country is beyond me, really. Father has been teaching me the important things about being lord of New York for fifty years now."

"How about we just sit down and watch Mulan and everyone is happy?", offered Percy amused.

"Great leadership, wonderful camaraderie, empowering portrait of a female lead, kick-ass fight-scenes, a clever plot... Yeah, let's go and watch Mulan", agreed Piper with a grin, nudging Percy. "Have another cookie for having good taste in movies."

Percy grinned in a nearly shy manner and ducked his head a little as he took another cookie. This was so weird. So new and strange. Those people were being nice to him. Conversation seemed to easy and even when Percy felt like he was falling back, or staying silent too long, then one of them would just jump in and fill the silence or nudge him on to involve him in the conversation again. It nearly felt like he imagined having friends would feel like.
"So, how about you're joining the swim team tomorrow? That way, you'll meet Silena and the others. Believe me, it helps a lot to meet others who are like you", offered Piper when lunch neared its end and the five of them started packing up again.

"Uhm... How many... are there?", asked Percy a little nervously.

"But you have been on swim teams before", grunted Nico, raising one eyebrow. "You never were nervous about them either and you did great fitting in there."

"...Swimming is a little less of a team sport than most others, like football or basketball or basically everything else ending with -ball", argued Percy, gripping his backpack tightly and chewing his lips. "Besides, I was always the fastest there was. It was easier for people to just accept my existence, as long as I was good for the team. Besides, how do you know?"

"Oh please", snickered Leo. "Poseidon talks about you like all the time. 'My Percy won another competition!', 'My Percy could easily swim at the Olympics!', 'Oh, look, my Percy made the swim team of his school again and of course he's the best!' ."

"No kidding", snorted Piper and rolled her eyes. "'Come on, kids! Even my human son would swim that faster than you'!. Totally annoying having to live up to someone you don't know. Though after I swam against you the other day, I gotta admit, you really are fast."

Percy ducked his head again, cheeks a bit red but there was still a doubtful look on his face. "He... talked about me? Even... Even before the whole... custody change situation?"

"All. The. Time. Ever since we moved here five years ago and King Poseidon became a mentor-figure to me, even before high school", huffed Piper and rolled her eyes once more.

"Ever since your birth", corrected Nico, voice soft as he rested one hand on Percy's lower back to guide him through the halls and keep him close so he wouldn't lose him. "I still remember how enthusiastic he was when he came running into the mansion with the first photo of little newborn you. How proud he was when you could swim before you could walk... which actually could have already been interpreted as a hint to your heritage, thinking about it, huh?"

Percy frowned and looked up at Nico doubtfully, so the Italian decided to drop it for now. Percy didn't want to believe that his father – his family – loved him. Nico instead turned to give Jason and Piper a look. Both their faces lit up and they nodded enthusiastically before hooking their arms around Percy's, grinning broadly at the startled merboy.

"Next up is magical history with Professor Hecate Claymore, right?", asked Piper. "It's actually a pretty neat subject. Hecate is a witch, you know? Like, a real Harry Potter like witch and she does magical stuff during classes too. Don't worry, my boyfriend Chris is in your class. He'll watch out for you. You're gonna like him, though I'm biased because I love him...

"I'll see you guys after classes. Hazel is probably already waiting for me", declared Leo with a broad and utterly happy smile. "Have fun and don't let the witches hex you!"

"My two best friends are in your class too", added Nico, looking at Percy reassuringly. "Reyna and Annabeth. They'll help you through class. I'll pick you up afterward and walk you home, mh?"

Chapter End Notes
Next chapter, Percy is going to meet Reyna and Annabeth properly. And he'll join the swim team, which includes one Drew Tanaka, who is not a fan of having the prince steal her spotlight.

Next update will be on Saturday again, since yaaay, my finals start on Monday and I'll be a bit (lot) busy! It'll be "Like Cats and Dogs"!
Chapter 6: A Bad Fish in the Cove

Percy felt immensely much more better the next day. So he hadn't gotten to meet the swim team yesterday, because an impromptu team meeting was a bit hard, but Piper had talked to Silena and send Percy a text in the afternoon that the following day, they'd have a team meeting after school. And she suggested that they should meet up this weekend to watch Mulan, as they had talked about. He hadn't thought that had been serious, but apparently it was. Piper claimed that Leo and Jason had already agreed too. So the three of them apparently wanted to spend their free time with him. Without being forced to do so due to a school project. Just to... hang out. Percy frowned and paused mid-step. He had never hung out with anyone before. What did people do when they hung out? Shaking his head, he continued onward into the school. As his locker came into view, he blinked a couple of times. Nico, Reyna and Annabeth were standing in front of it, laughing and talking. He had met Reyna and Annabeth yesterday during class. They were kind of overwhelming, but nice...

/flashback/

"So... You're Percy Jackson, huh?", asked a blonde-haired girl as she sat down next to him.

Percy, who had just gotten all his things out onto his desk, looked up like a deer caught in the headlights. He was so not used to people just talking to him. The girl was absurdly pretty. Golden-blonde curls that reached her hips, startling gray eyes, full pink lips and a rack that made Percy's back hurt just thinking about carrying around as extra weight. Once she sat, she smoothed out her knee-long skirt and smiled at him. And all of a sudden, there was a Latina that looked like a freaking bikini model sitting down on the blonde's other side, playing absentmindedly with the feathers on her earrings, staring at Percy with nearly black eyes.

"Shark got your tongue, little mermaid?", asked the Latina amused. "I'm Reyna, the beauty who just asked you a question is Annabeth. My... girlfriend. You wanna answer the question now?"

"Uhm. Yes, I'm Percy. I'd like to not be called Jackson though", replied Percy slowly.

"Nico's little mermaid", chuckled Reyna, cocking one eyebrow. "How do you like the school?"

"I'm not Nico's anything and I'm a merboy", corrected Percy with a frown. "And I have no idea what to say about this school just yet. It's like... all over the place."

"You'll get used to it", laughed Annabeth and ruffled Percy's hair. "Come on, I'll update you on what we're doing in this class... in general... so you're not completely lost, mh?"

"...That'd be amazing", grunted Percy with a slow nod. "Thanks." Percy paused for a moment as the blonde got her stuff out of her bag. "Uhm... is it... rude to ask what you are...?"

"I'm a Valkyrie. Death Angel, you could say. And Reyna is a Hunter, or well Huntress", answered Annabeth with a pleasant smile. "And no, it's not rude, especially not for a newbie. Don't worry, as soon as you come fully into your heritage, your sense of smell will heighten and you'll be able to tell what race someone is by their scent. Until then, don't ever feel stupid for asking a question."

"Okay. Thanks", nodded Percy with a half-grin.
"Ah, Percy! There you are!", called Reyna out and waved at him.

Percy waved back at her and grinned at the trio. He was a bit unsure, but the two girls looked positive enough. All of a sudden, Percy found himself in the middle of the two females, with Reyna linking arms with him on one side and Annabeth doing so on the other side.

"Come on, accompany us to our next class", declared Annabeth in a bossy way.

Still a little unsure, Percy looked at Nico who just grinned and shrugged. "You should obey them."

"Uhm, okay", nodded Percy slowly, still questioning why the two seemed so attached.

The couple had helped him yesterday through his classes and even afterward they had given him some pointers and now they were behaving all friendly too. Just like Leo, Jason and Piper had. It was like this school was filled with weirdos who hadn't noticed yet that Percy wasn't friend-material. He hadn't been friend-material in any of his former schools – and there had been plenty of former schools for him – so quite obviously something was wrong with him, seeing as even changed surroundings didn't change his friendless state. Thus, the supernatural beings around here must be slow on the intake because they hadn't noticed yet that something was wrong with Percy. But Percy decided selfishly that he was going to enjoy it for however long it was going to last.

Reyna and Annabeth had willingly worked with Percy when they had been assigned a group project in Demeter's class. And even though he had known nothing and hadn't been any kind of help at all, because her class was biology, but not regular high school biology, more Hagrid teaches you about dragons kind of biology. Still, they had been patient and pulled him along and even explained the stuff to him. He wasn't used to that. Whenever he was in a group project and being his dense self, people just started ignoring him and doing it on their own. So Reyna and Annabeth were kind of doing it on their own too, but they still included him.

And after class, Nico already awaited them together with Jason, Piper and Leo.

"How was your class?", asked Nico with a welcoming smile, stepping into Percy's personal space.

"Good. I learned that... uh, humanoids, like merpeople or Valkyries, can reveal their secondary features with concentration. Miss Demeter mentioned it in passing, but Annabeth explained to me what it means. She's a real Wise Girl", replied Percy with a grin.

"Well, a Seaweed Brain like you needs all the help he can get", teased Annabeth amused.

"Well, a Seaweed Brain like you needs all the help he can get", teased Annabeth amused.

It sounded like an insult, but there was a grin on her face and a teasing glint in her eyes. Percy's eyes searched for Nico's though. He was insanely grateful that Nico had come back here. In a way, Percy had feared that Nico had pushed him off to Leo, Jason and Piper yesterday and then again this morning with Reyna and Annabeth. Like the nuisance Percy was, just to get rid of him and have someone else be forced to put up with Percy. But here he was again, smiling at Percy.

"So, you figured out how to turn at will yet?", asked Leo eagerly, bouncing on his feet.

Percy shook his head and frowned. He had been thinking about it for half the class. It sounded so simple, to turn at will. But how did one concentrate really hard on turning? Was there like a mental button to push so his legs would merge into a tail? Percy's mind was stuck on that, imagining a big blue button with a fish-tail symbol on it, grinning at the thought. He absentmindedly followed the
others as they led the way out of the school building. At least until he slipped. He tried to find his footing again before falling, but that was hard considering his lack of feet. He yelped and closed his eyes tightly, waiting for the impact of the hard floor. Instead, he hit a firm, muscular chest and felt two arms sneaking around his waist, pulling him even closer to that chest.

"Well, looks to me like you figured it out after all", chuckled Nico close to Percy's ear.

Percy cautiously cracked one eye open, first looking up at Nico and then down at his blue tail. "Uhm, that was kind of not... what I intended to do. H—How do I turn it off?!"

"...The same you turned it on, just backward?", suggested Leo with a shrug.

"That's not helpful at all", snorted Jason amused and rolled his eyes.

Nico sighed softly and then gathered Percy up in his arms bridal-style. "Don't worry about it."

It was hard not to worry about it when he had to be carried around because he was too dumb to turn back human. He could see how people looked at them and started whispering and giggling. It was embarrassing and humiliating. When they reached the schoolyard, they went to sit near the flower garden. And even as they started eating and Percy listened with half an ear to the conversation between the others, he could feel the stares and whispers and giggles. Just great. He was finally somewhere where he could belong and find friends, but instead he was already making a fool of himself. He yelped as all of a sudden something cold and slippery hit his arm. When he turned to look at it, he saw that it was Piper's pale purple tail. Piper grinned at him and flickered her tail.

"W—What are you doing?", asked Percy confused. "We're in a garden, not a pool..."

"Yeah, but you're clearly uncomfortable because you can't turn back. So, now it looks like it's intentional, which means no reason for you to be embarrassed", replied Piper. "People will just assume this is some weird merpeople thing and chalk it up to customs they're unfamiliar with."

Percy stared at her in total awe. "...Thanks. That's... really nice of you."

"Don't worry about it. It's what friends are for", assured Piper with a smile. "I've done it plenty of times for those two morons too." At that, she pointed at Jason and Leo, who were grinning.

"And you're not the first one unable to control yourself at first", added Leo and winked at him.

"No kidding. My first month here and I accidentally turned into a cloud during a presentation in Missus Claymore's class", snorted Jason and made a face. "I rained on everyone..."

Percy found himself somewhat stunned. Was this it? Was this what having friends felt like? Friends who got his back and helped him, even when he was being useless or slow...? Because he liked it.

After eating lunch together outside, their group headed over to the principal's office, where the blackboard of clubs was located. Percy was relieved that once Piper had also turned into a mermaid, his nerves eased enough so he managed to turn back again.

"You can sign up for any club you want", stated Nico with a smile, leaning next to Percy.

"Any club aside from the choir!", butted a blonde guy with pointy ears in.

Percy was startled, but seeing as everyone else didn't even react the least, Nico just waving lazily,
Percy assumed that the... Elf?... did this on a regular base. The blonde glared at him pointedly.

"Why not the choir?", asked Percy innocently, looking the teenage Legolas up and down.

"Don't mind Will. He likes to overreact", assured Piper with a smile.

"Overreact?", huffed Will, turning his glare at Piper. "Your kind is not welcomed to the choir."

"Our kind?", echoed Percy stunned. "That's not very nice. That's very racist."

"R—Racist?", sputtered Will, looking honestly baffled. "Do you have any idea what happened the last time we allowed a mermaid to join the choir? Big news. Neither do we!"

"...What does that even mean?", muttered Percy and shook his head. "You can't just exclude an entire race from your little club. Why shouldn't we be allowed to sing with everyone else?"

"Because no one remembers that performance! We had planned on making a Bon Jovi setting, but after 'Who Says You Can't Go Home'... it ended. Everyone woke up at home, not remembering how they got there or how the show had ended. Some woke up in a different state with their grandparents", grunted Will, eyebrows drawn down.

"Well, that's not so bad", drawled Percy slowly. "You just need to chose more carefully what to play. But just because you can't trust a merperson to fully control their powers, you shouldn't be allowed to forbid us from joining! I don't see anyone forbidding the vampires to walk around just because someone could fear that they can't control their blood-lust! And where does it stop? So we merpeople are forbidden to sing in public, but we're allowed to talk, yes?"

"T—That's not what I'm saying!", tried Will to defend himself, stuttering.

Nico was trying and failing to hide his grin. He was actually rather fond of Will, but the mother hen was sometimes getting a little high on telling others what to do and how. It was nice to see Will scrambling for words and trying to defend himself. Percy being all feisty was adorable too. Even Leo, Piper and Jason burst into laughter as Will huffed and stomped off, muttering about 'Fine, join if you want, but you're only gonna sing cheesy, innocent lyrics, I swear!'. Percy grinned victoriously as he got a pen out and signed up for animal care, drama club and the swim team.

"So... if you're not gonna sign up for the choir, what was all of this about?", asked Jason.

"Just because", shrugged Percy with a mischievous grin on his lips. "I don't like bullies and not allowing merpeople to join out of principle is just not right."

"I like you, Percy", declared Piper with a matching grin, ruffling Percy's hair.

Percy smiled nearly shyly and ducked his head at that.

Percy was aware that the swim coach was also part of the swim team and that normally, Poseidon Jackson would be there. Today was an exception, for Percy's sake so he could casually meet the team. Still, on the long run, the pros of joining the swim team would outweigh the cons of spending his free time with his father. Piper next to him grinned encouragingly as the two of them came to stand in the middle of a group of people in swim-suits and shorts.

"Guys! Let me introduce, our newest member", declared Piper enthusiastically, grasping Percy's hand. "This is Percy Jackson. He only recently realized what he is, so be nice to him."
"Jackson like Coach Jackson?", asked a short brunette boy curiously.

"His son", confirmed Piper. "This is Mitchell Logan and those are Lacy Hunnigan, Mike Kahale, Drew Tanaka and Gwen Ryder. And this is our team captain Silena Beauregard."

There was a stretch of silence where Percy grew nervous and instinctively squeezed Piper's hand, who instantly squeezed back in an encouraging manner. Everyone looked at Percy. He was the center of attention and he hated being the center of attention!

"So, you're the king's bastard then?", asked the female Asian with a disdainful look.

Percy physically flinched away, even pulling his hand out of Piper's at that. Some things just never changed. Why had he ever gotten his hopes up to begin with...? Even being a prince won't change a thing, because he wasn't even fully that. He was never fully anything. He never belonged anywhere, was never worth enough. He just was never enough.

"Oh, shut it, Drewsie", huffed Gwen. "He's still fifty percent more royal than you."

That made Lacy, Mitchell and Piper snicker while Drew turned a blotchy angry red. Percy blinked confused as he looked up, just to see Piper's grinning face. She wrapped an arm around Percy's shoulders and pulled him closer, ruffling his hair in an affectionate way.

"You should totally make Drew call you 'your highness'", declared Piper mischievously.

"I—I...", started Percy unsure, frowning.

"Don't worry about her, your highness", hummed Mike with a smile, bowing at Percy and grabbing his hand to kiss it while winking playfully at him. "You're more than welcome here."

Percy's face exploded in dark shades of pink as he stared at his hand. "P—Percy is fine."

"Well then, Percy", started Silena and approached him with the kindest smile Percy had ever seen outside of his mother's face. "What Mike said is right. You're very welcome in our cove. Being new to your powers can be very overwhelming and stressful, so please know that you can rely on us. All of us have been where you are right now and all of us will do our best to help you. If you have any problems or questions, don't you hesitate to come to me, or any other member of the cove."

"...Just like that?", asked Percy, sounding untypically small.

Silena actually cooed at him like he was some little hurt animal and then she pulled him into a bone-crushing hug, surprising him with her strength. "Yes, sweetheart. You're now part of the team. Part of the cove. You're now one of us and we watch after our own."

"Even if they're being bitchy", stated Gwen, throwing a pointed glare at Drew.

The Asian girl was seething while the others laughed. Within moments, Percy found himself being pulled toward the pool by Silena and Piper. He yelped as he hit the water, but he was instantly followed by the splashing of seven other bodies. When he opened his eyes again, he was surrounded by colorful mermaids and mermen. He gasped and gaped as he took in everyone's appearance. They were all so stunningly beautiful. Like Percy himself, they had long, sleek tails, fins between their fingers and they were all soft pastel colors. Only that every one of them was a different color. Mitchell was a soft nougat-like brown, Lacy an apricot-orange, Drew was light red, Mike apple-green, Gwen's body and tail were yellow like a brimstone butterfly, Silena in cherry-blossom pink and Piper in all of her lavender-purple beauty. It was pretty amazing to see them all like this.
"Okay. For today, we're gonna take it totally easy", declared Silena with a smile. "We'll just swim around a little, get you adjusted to your tail and fins, explain it some to you, okay?"

"That... would be nice", replied Percy with a nearly shy smile.

It was already late – even dark outside – by the time the swim-team separated for the day. They got carried away while swimming 'a little' and all of them seemed eager to share their wisdom with Percy. Everyone aside from Drew even seemed nice. He was just waving Piper off as the mermaid climbed onto a bike behind a tall female in a red leather jacket who she had kissed before accepting a helmet. Tilting his head, Percy looked after them driving off.

"Would you like a lift?"

Percy jumped and screamed, startling the biker behind him. The man winced and lifted his own helmet, revealing himself to be Nico di Angelo. Calming down, Percy smiled sheepishly.

"Uhm. Hi", greeted Percy awkwardly. "You startled me. It's late at night and you just walk up to others in the dark. You really shouldn't do that, you know. One day, you'll get pepper sprayed."

Nico grinned equally sheepishly. "You're probably right. Sorry. But Piper texted me when you guys went to hit the showers and told me that the team ran late and that you shouldn't walk around late at night on your own in a neighborhood you're not familiar with. She figured you wouldn't appreciate if she'd call a member of your family, so she instead called me."

Blinking slowly, Percy tilted his head. "You don't have to. I don't want to be a bother."

Nico snorted and got off his bike to get the spare helmet out. "I doubt you could be a bother if you tried. Don't sweat it. You do remember I'm a vampire, right? We don't need much sleep."

Not looking at Nico, Percy instead checked the bike out. It was a gorgeous, sleek black machine with luminescent flame motifs and a skull. Percy hummed in appreciation while being handed the helmet by a very persistent vampire who also gave him a pointed look.

"Nice machine", said Percy in a soft voice, eyes trailing back to Nico.

"I know. The Tartarus, my pride and joy", grinned Nico. "Now hop on, mio principe del mare."

"...I am, ain't I?", whispered Percy with a frown as he put the helmet on.

"Mh? What do you mean?", inquired Nico confused.

Shrugging, Percy climbed on the black beauty right behind Nico, wrapping his arms around Nico's chest (and feeling that sixpack through the shirt). "A Sea Prince, I mean. I am... a prince. That... kind of hasn't really gotten through to me yet, I guess. It's not like I moved into a castle, after all."

Nico grinned amused and paused. "You wanna go and grab a burger?"

"What?", asked Percy, staring at Nico's back dumbfounded.

"You look distracted. You wanna go and talk about it while eating a burger?", elaborated Nico amused. "I'm sure you could eat after training, right? There's a McDonald's right around the corner."

"...Okay", hummed Percy after a moment. "Not going home for a little longer sounds good."
Nico grinned victoriously and started his bike, driving to the fast food restaurant's drive through. Between the two of them, they ordered basically one of everything before heading to a park. They set a picnic out on Nico's jacket and got comfortable in front of a lake. The moon was reflecting beautifully in the lake. For the first set of cheeseburgers, they remained silent.

"You think they're gonna worry?", mused Percy thoughtful. "It's been like five hours since school ended and I'm still not at their place. Are they just gonna sit and wait... again?"

"Oh, Silena texted your dad and told him that practice ran late and that I'd bring you home", assured Nico casually before frowning. "And don't think for a second that they weren't worried when you didn't come home the other night. Your dad nearly made my dad go crazy. He was that short of sending out the hounds and hunters to track you. Mom told him to give you a little time. It was a lot that came over you at once and I guess needing to clear your head is part of that."

"...Oh. I... didn't know that", whispered Percy awkwardly, fishing for a fry.

"No", argued Nico with a slightly chiding look. "You didn't want to know. That's a bit of a difference, Percy. No offense, but you don't want to contemplate or see that your family actually cares for you. And I understand why. Believe me, I understand that they hurt you and let you down in the past and I understand why you have trouble trusting them. I understand, really. But... they were in over their heads. They had no idea how to handle the situation – yes, I know that is no excuse for how poorly they handled it and it'll never erase the pain they caused you, but..."

Nico licked his lips and paused, searching Percy's eyes to make sure the other was still listening and not tuning him out. "If you continue hating them and being bitter, you'll only end up hurting yourself. Yes, you will also hurt them a lot, but not just them. You'll hurt yourself, because you deny yourself the chance to get to know your siblings, your father and your stepmother. I know it may seem like a lot right now, but... consider giving them a second chance, Percy. Not for their sake, for yours. Maybe you will grow to love them and find your place. Or you will continue hating them and they prove you right – but in that case, you can still dump them and ignore them. Still, there is the slim chance that I'm right and that you'll learn to love them. Don't pass that up."

Munching his chicken burger, Percy groaned softly. He collapsed sideways, resting his cheek against Nico's shoulder to seek comfort. Nico stiffened for a moment, feeling his dead heart jump. Taking a breath, Nico calmed down a little and laid one arm around Percy's waist, pulling him closer to comfort the distressed merboy. Percy hummed pleased by that.

"...Maybe I should... try...", admitted Percy, wiggling his nose. "Gimme the milkshake."

"The thing's... goo at this point", snorted Nico and handed it over.

"Just the way I like it", grinned Percy delighted and took a long sip.

"So, you're gonna do it?", asked the vampire to make sure.

"Yeah, maybe", sighed Percy and shrugged. "They can hardly hurt me any more than they already did, right? But... you're gonna make me a promise in return, if you want me to do that."

"Anything", agreed Nico, maybe a little too fast.

"If they let me down again, if they break my heart again, you will fix this", declared Percy.

"F—Fix your... heart?", asked Nico stunned – more than willing to take care of Percy's heart.

"No", huffed Percy and rolled his eyes. "This situation. Your dad's a fancy lawyer, isn't he? If they break my heart, you will make it so I can get back to my mom and never have to turn back again."
Nico frowned, a little displeased by those conditions. On the other hand however did he understand where Percy was coming from. And deep down, Nico had to agree with Percy. If Poseidon and the others truly would screw up again and hurt this precious being any more, then Nico really wanted Percy out of their reach, safe and sound. It freaked him out a little how attached he had grown Percy in that little time they had known each other now. Sighing, Nico nodded slowly.

"Very well, you have my word", promised Nico, looking into Percy's eyes honestly.

The small honest smile on Percy's lips was a beautiful reward. Together, they stayed under the starry sky until the last crumb of Happy Meal was gone and both were relaxed and sated.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter, Percy is going to learn about mates, dominants and submissives! Aaand we'll get a lot of focus on the Jackson family and Percy 'trying'.

Next update will be "Like Cats and Dogs" on Wednesday! ;)


Chapter 7: Blood is Thicker than Seawater

Percy slowly licked his lips as he stood in the entrance to the living room, watching silently and trying to make no noise at all. Poseidon and Amphitrite sat together on the love-seat, he was laughing at something she whispered into his ear. Benthésikyme, Kymopoleia and Rhode sat on one couch, Rhode having a book on her lap and tuning the TV out while Benthésikyme and Kymopoleia were throwing popcorn at each other. Proteus seemed to be the only one really enthralled by the movie, whereas Triton sat on the ground, playing with Tyson.

"Do you... mind if I join?", asked Percy softly after a moment.

There was a sudden stillness and silence as all family members turned toward him, staring as though he was some rare animal and movement or sound may startle him away. Okay, so maybe he had spend every minute of the day locked into his own room since coming here a week ago.

"Yes!", exclaimed Tyson eagerly, jumping up to grab Percy's hand and pull him along.

He was pulled to sit next to Triton and in front of the three girls. He shifted a little awkwardly and adjusted to sit closer to Tyson than to the others – he was Percy's favorite brother, after all.

"It's nice of you to join us", said Rhode with a smile, reaching out to pat Percy's head.

"Why though?", asked Kymopoleia curiously. "No offense or anything, just curious!"

Percy mulled the question over before opting for the truth. "Nico told me that I should give you a chance, for... all our sake. That I'd live to regret it too if I keep... bottling stuff up and closing myself off. So, I guess this is me... giving this a try? But let me make one thing clear, I made a deal with Nico. If you guys do more... lying and hurting me, he promised to help me get back to my mom and you guys will never see a hair of me again."

"Understood", stated Proteus firmly. "We promise we'll not lie to you again. Whatever it is you want to know, we will tell you the truth, okay? We never meant to hurt you."

"Let's see how it goes", shrugged Percy, starting to put wooden blocks up to build a castle.

"So, how was your first week of school?", asked Benthésikyme eagerly. "Did you make friends?"

"Yeah", agreed Percy a little bit enthusiastic. "Nico is really great. He showed me around and introduced me to some of his friends. Piper, Jason, Leo, Annabeth, Reyna... They're all... they're really awesome. They're really nice to me too. It's... It's nice. Really nice."

"That's wonderful", smiled Rhode kindly, patting Percy's head again. "Friends are important."

"And how are you settling into the team? Father has already complained that the team had a meeting without him because of you", inquired Proteus interested.

Percy flinched a little bit. He was expecting anger. He was expecting something more, because of previous experiences. But all Poseidon did was huff and pout. Downright pout. Percy had chased
him away from his own job to have some privacy. But Poseidon didn't even raise his voice, he had even let Percy have it without any protests. And now he was just pouting.

"It... was about meeting the team and all. So I'd get to know them", shrugged Percy slowly. "No need to waste Poseidon's time with that... And we spend a couple hours getting to know each other."

Poseidon perked up a little at that. "And do you like the team? Will you join? Because you would easily become our star! With your speed and agility, you would easily leave them all in the dust!"

Percy stared stunned at his father, cheeks a little pink. Partially, the words itself, sounded as though Poseidon just wanted a star swimmer for his team, for the prestige. For the one thing Percy had always been useful for. It was the way Poseidon said it, however, that made Percy blush. Poseidon's voice practically dripped with pride and awe, like Percy was absolutely amazing.

"I... I think I'll stay, yeah", nodded Percy slowly. "Silena is a great team-captain, she makes me feel, well... like I'm really a part of the team. And most of the others are nice too."

"Most?", echoed Poseidon with a frown, sitting up straighter. "Who's not nice to you?"

Again, Percy had to blink, because Poseidon looked ready to downright murder someone. "Well, I mean, this Drew-chick is... she's downright nasty. But that's nothing I'm not used to."

"You shouldn't be used to someone being nasty to you", argued Kymopoleia with a glare. "You gotta knock the bitch down a peck. You're a prince. She's just some low count's daughter, or something. I don't even remember. See, that's how insignificant she is."

"...That's not right either", countered Percy with a frown. "Just because she's from a different social class doesn't make her worth any less. Just because all of a sudden, I have some royal blood in me, doesn't make me any better. All my life, I was the one worth less. Because I was just the poor kid from a single mother, especially in the posh and pristine schools that only took me due to my sports scholarships. No one deserves to be treated as less because of their blood."

"That's a very healthy and good outlook on things", praised Amphitrite before turning to glare over at Kymopoleia. "One some others could learn from, quite clearly."

Kymopoleia shrugged and went back to throwing popcorn at Benthesisyme. Percy tilted his head a little confused. They were behaving so normal around him. It was weird, unusual. Percy frowned for a moment, tilting his head into the other direction and looking at Triton.

"Who's your boyfriend?", asked Percy suddenly.

"What?", asked Triton confused, blinking up at his little brother.

"When... When you first tried to convince me that you guys weren't going to lie to me again, you told me you never introduced me to your boyfriend because he's a vampire. Back then, I thought you were crazy, but... well... Nico is a vampire, so...", drawled Percy and shrugged.

"I could... send him a text? Invite him over?", offered Triton with a fond look. "You could meet him in person then. Thany is... the brooding, silent guy, but he's very kind and a gentleman."

Poseidon snorted at that, arms crossed and glare on his face. "You may invite Thanatos over, but the lad is going to stay right here, where I can see him. No closed doors, Triton."

"...Isn't Triton a little too... old for you to forbid him alone time with his boyfriend?", questioned Percy with a slightly disturbed look. "I mean, seriously. Thousands of years old and all..."
While Triton texted Thanatos and Poseidon was busy scoffing and Amphitrite smiled and decided to answer instead. "Thanatos is more than Triton's boyfriend. Thanatos and Triton intend to get serious and seeing as Thanatos is now courting our boy, there are certain... rules to abide. Laws have gone more lax in the past centuries, things like casual girlfriends and boyfriends have become quite a popular thing, but if a serious mating is the end game, then, well, especially old families such as ours prefer to stick with a certain... order. A way things are supposed to go. And as things are, it's not very appreciated for a dominant to spend time behind closed doors in a submissive's room."

"...I think you lost me at mating", grunted Percy and blinked a couple times, frowning deeply. "And what do you mean by dominants and submissives...? Because if this is some kind of BDSM community, I would have preferred a... warning of sorts?"

Most his siblings snorted amused at that, while Amphitrite laughed delighted and nudged Poseidon. "Ah, so... you have not learned about... this particular aspect of the supernatural yet then?"

"Oh joy", muttered Poseidon and made a face. "You see, many... many supernatural races have naturally submissives and dominants. Those who... carry the offsprings and those who... do the... the impregnating, you see. It is not... not this... BDSM thing, as you think. Well, perhaps it is for some or so, I wouldn't know. I try not to look into the bedroom habits of others. It's just a terminology, because within those supernatural races, like ours, it's not just the men who can impregnate or the women who can carry children. So, you could say, uhm, that submissive and dominant are like... secondary genders, additional to male and female..."

"...How does that work?", asked Percy a little freaked out and a bit disturbed.

Again his siblings were snickering and as they noticed how Tyson perked up curiously, Proteus volunteered to take Tyson to the park and meet up with his best friend Ella there, which easily distracted the brunette from the curious conversation their dad and Percy were having.

"You see, the thing is, as it is, there is... uhm...", started Poseidon awkwardly, ears dark red in embarrassment at having to talk about such things with his child. "All males have, uh, you know?" Poseidon waved awkwardly at his crotch. "And all women do have..." Here, he waved embarrassed over at Amphitrite, face turning darker red. "But, uhm, additionally, you see..."

"Oh heavens, I can't watch this", laughed Amphitrite, short of doubling over before turning fond eyes over onto Percy. "All men have penises, all women have vaginas. But as things are, submissive males do have a womb and can carry children, they have a strong sense of nurturing, tending to others and also seeking protection from their dominant mate. Not necessarily protection in the sense of a damsel in distress who can't do anything without a strong dominant to take care of them, but just... comfort and the knowledge that your mate will keep you and your children safe. Dominants on the other hand have a strong sense of protectiveness and also possessiveness. Unmated, they can be rather unruly and tend to fight a lot – blowing off steam, you know. They need a submissive to bind them and calm them, balance them out. A purpose, if you like. Dominant females have a penis themselves, to do the impregnating, as Poseidon so nicely phrased it."

Percy stared at them doe-eyed and gaped a little. "Like... Like ABO fics?"

"Yes!", exclaimed Benthesikyme and nodded wildly. "Just think of it like that. But, well, also not. Like, most of those stories have this weird social concept that submissives are treated as... less and like property. Or act really, very mindless when in heat. That's not how heat works. And submissives are actually very, very valued in our society. Because not every race has them and submissives, in general, bear stronger dominants and are the only ones to bear other submissives."

"So, like the good ABO fics then?", asked Percy curiously, tilting his head.
"...What are they talking about?", whispered Poseidon confused.

"No idea", replied Amphitrite softly, shrugging. "But Percy isn't freaking out about the news and seems to understand it this way, so... let's accept it as that?"

"And merpeople are one of the races who have that?", wanted Percy to know now.

"Yes, we have submissives and dominants, other races like shifters do too", answered Rhode softly. "But there are other races, like witches, hunters or seers, who don't. They just have... primary genders, like... normal mortals, you see. Which is what makes us submissives so rare and valued."

Percy frowned numbly and nodded slowly. Somehow, this whole supernatural society thing seemed to take a more complex and confusing turn every time he settled a little. For a few minutes, they just watched TV until the doorbell rang and Triton slipped away to open the door. He led a tall, broad dark-skinned man in and Percy had to gape a little, because there was a whole lot of muscle going on there. The tight black shirt made it easy to see the sixpack beneath and the way his biceps bulged as he laid an arm around Triton's shoulders was very tempting good.

"Damn", whispered Percy impressed, licking his lips subconsciously.

And once again, he made his siblings snort and laugh. Triton looked very pleased though, preening a little as he leaned into Thanatos' touch while leading him over to the couch to sit down.

"Thany, this is my baby brother Percy. Percy, this is my mate-to-be Thanatos", introduced Triton.

"It's a pleasure to meet you", stated Thanatos in a dark, pleasant voice.

He took Percy's hand and lifted it up to kiss his knuckles, making Percy blush and Poseidon and Amphitrite stare a little stunned. It was normally a way of greeting between a dominant and a submissive. So far, however, Percy hadn't shown any tendencies. The mated pair exchanged a confused look while Percy got engaged in a conversation with Thanatos and Triton.

"Wait, so you're part of the same coven as Nico?", asked Percy intrigued.

"Yes, I am", confirmed Thanatos, clearly amused my Percy. "He speaks highly of you. Very highly. And Hazel says her mate seems very fond of you too."

"You know what we should do?", asked Kymopoleia eagerly. "We should have another family meeting dinner! Between the coven and our family. Wouldn't that be great?"

"We used to do that once a month", nodded Poseidon thoughtful. "Yes, that's a nice idea. And then Percy could get to meet all the other coven members and Hades himself. If you want, Percy?"

"That... sounds nice", nodded Percy reluctantly after a moment before looking at the clock. "Well, I, uh. I gotta go. It was nice meeting you, Thanatos. Good to know you're not imaginary."

"You don't... You don't have to go", requested Poseidon nearly pleadingly. "If I said..."

"No. No, it's nothing you said or did", sighed Percy and wiggled his nose. "I just... Piper invited me over for a... movie night? ...If that's okay, I mean...?"

"Oh. You have... plans with your friends?", asked Poseidon, pleasantly surprised. "Of course that's alright! That's wonderful! Piper is such a good girl. I'm glad you're getting along so well."

"But try being back before dinner tomorrow then?", requested Amphitrite. "So we can arrange
something with Hades and Persephone? They're very good at impromptu dinners."

"Sure, will do", nodded Percy before waving his goodbyes.

He headed upstairs to grab his backpack before heading out of the house. Percy spend the entire way over to the McLean-Grace household mulling over the things his family had said. For the most part, it had felt nice being with them and talking to them. He actually kind of felt like he was part of them. But then he remembered the exact words spoken and as interesting as it had sounded at first, it started to scare him the longer he thought about it. What was he? Was he a dominant? Or a submissive? Would he have to protect some submissive and be strong for someone else again? Or was he a submissive and would just turn out to be a bitter disappointment to some dominant in the end? He didn't even really get what it would mean to be a submissive, but so far it sounded better than the pressure and responsibility of a dominant, right?

"Earth to Percy. You in there?", asked Jason amused, raising one eyebrow.

Percy looked up and blinked doe-eyed as he noticed he had already reached his destination. His feet must have brought him here on autopilot. He offered the storm-spirit a sheepish grin and a nod.

"Sorry. Got a lot on my mind", sighed Percy and walked in. "The others already here?"

"Everyone is gathered in the living room. Come on", offered Jason, patting his back.

"Oh, is that the young merboy?", asked a very pretty but aged beyond her years woman.

"Yes, mom", nodded Jason with a grin. "Percy, that's my mom, Beryl. And that's Tristan."

A handsome native American stuck his head out of the kitchen and waved at Percy in greeting. The blonde woman smiled kindly at Percy before going to join her husband in the kitchen, motioning for the boys to follow. Percy only did so because Jason still had his hand on his shoulder.

"I made cookies for you kids", explained Beryl. "And milkshakes. You can bring them over to the living room, two strong young men you are. Tris and I will go see a Broadway show, we'll leave in about... half an hour, I think, right, honey? And then you have the house to yourselves."

"No wild party though", added Tristan sternly. "Or you and Piper will be held responsible."

Jason nodded obediently as he and Percy took the two tablets with glasses and cookies. "Sure thing, dad. We're just gonna marathon Disney movies and apparently eat cookies. I swear."

Tristan chuckled and nodded pleased. After that, Percy was led to a gigantic living room with blankets and pillows spread all over the large space between the couches to make it cozy for everyone. Reyna and Annabeth sat cuddled together, Reyna wearing boxer-shorts and a large black t-shirt while Annabeth was dressed in a nerdy Ravenclaw robe-like night-dress. Leo and Piper sat in a different corner, whispering and giggling. Nico sat on the couch, talking to Annabeth at his feet. Or, well, Annabeth on Reyna's lap at his feet. As Percy entered, they all turned to look at him.

"Uhm, hey, guys?", offered Percy a bit unsure, still not certain if he was truly wanted here.

"Okay, so... let's be straight right away", grunted Jason seriously as he put his tray down.

"Y—Yes?", asked Percy with a hitch, somehow afraid they'd reveal this to be a prank of sorts.

"We... only invited, well, us since you know us, but...", drawled Piper out, biting her lips. "Some of our friends would like to meet you too. And, uh, our... partners. We'd really like to invite them too,
but we didn't want you to feel... left out or like we're pushing them on you."

Percy frowned, honestly lost. "Why are you being so... considerate? You don't have to."

"Don't have to, but want to", offered Leo with a broad grin. "Because you're our friend, Percy."

"Of... course you can", nodded Percy slowly before reluctantly sitting down at Nico's feet next to Reyna and Annabeth. "Uhm... When... When you say partners... like... mates?"

"Oh, so coach finally told you about that", sighed Piper relieved while sending her mates a text. "Great. We were contemplating how long we can act casual and, ah, human about this."

"Yes, they are our mates", confirmed Leo, also sending a text. "And you'll love them! Not love-love like we do, of course, but you're gonna like them, I swear! They're awesome."

Percy bit his lips very hard and folded himself small, arms wrapped around his knees. For a little while, he watched the others just interact, Jason setting everything down on the table that was pushed out of the way for the mass of pillows put out in front of them. He listened to the others talk.

"Okay kids, we are off to see *Finding Neverland*", declared Beryl with a smile, smoothing down her long night-black dress. "Do you think I can go like this, kids?"

"You look awesome, Beryl", assured Reyna with a thumbs-up, Annabeth next to her nodding. "Yeah. Have fun, mom, dad. We'll be good", promised Piper, waving at them.

"Your sister will be back home around midnight. If not, feel free to snitch on her", added Tristan. Jason and Piper grinned and rolled their eyes, all four family members knowing that they wouldn't tattle on Thalia even if she'd be late. But since she was hanging out with Bianca, Zoe and the gang, she would be home on time. They grinned at their parents and waved as Tristan and Beryl left. Percy was honestly impressed by Beryl. Sure, he could still see the tell-tale aftermath of years of alcohol and probably also drug abuse, but it was just as obvious she had left those years behind.

"What... does it mean to be a submissive?", asked Percy softly and a little unsure.

The others perked up again and looked at him, instinctively taking a deep sniff of the air to check for his scent, but they still came up empty. He still smelt human, his scent hadn't broken yet.

"Why do you asked?", inquired Piper curiously, tilting her head to the side.

"I dunno", shrugged Percy awkwardly. "I mean, Amphitrite talked about them and Bentheshikyme said it's kind of like in... fanfiction? You know, ABO fics? But not like the standard omegas aren't valued and worth nothing kind, but more the ones where omegas are seen as precious...?"

"That's... not really how things work", offered Leo with a frown, blinking a couple of times. "Like, we don't do this 'I'm in heat thus I can't form coherent sentence aside from I want dick'-thing. That's not how ovulation for humans works either. Sure, we do have our phase of getting very horny and we also grow very clingy of our mates in that time, but... we can still control ourselves."

"So... you are a... male submissive?", asked Percy curiously, inching a little closer. "How... I mean... You're a guy, but you could get pregnant. So... is it... are you... a... an outcast? I mean, do people look differently at you? They said there are still plenty races who don't have submissives and dominants... So... don't they treat you different, for being... different?"
"That's what we have Summers High for", replied Leo amused, crossing his ankles. "So we learn about different cultures and are taught to accept and relate to them. So racial conflicts like those can be... avoided. Learning to work together. And if there ever is some narrow-minded jerk, I got two amazing dominants to take them out for me. Which is really adorable to watch, actually."

Percy perked up a little in interest. "But, I mean, don't the dominants... patronize you? Boss you around? I mean... isn't that what it comes down to in the end?"

"Not at all", huffed Nico with a frown. "A dominant's job is to take care of their submissive. Not to boss them around or own them. A dominant cherishes their submissive."

Percy couldn't help but stare at Nico with large eyes, filled with wonder and curiosity as he listened to the vampire's words. He also couldn't help the slightest blush creeping up his cheeks as he automatically pictured Nico doing such things. Of course he would. Nico was being so considerate and kind and sweet to Percy, surely he was a very caring mate to some cute submissive.

"We have arrived and we bring pizza!", declared a very cheerful and loud voice all of a sudden. Two boys Percy remembered from some of his classes rounded the corner – Ethan and Alabaster. They were followed by a redheaded girl he also remembered from class, as well as four he didn't really recognize. A beautiful dark-skinned girl holding hands with a broad Asian boy, a grumpy looking brunette girl holding hands with a mischievous Latino and lastly a beautiful caramel-haired girl.

"Introductions!", declared Jason dreamily as he pulled the caramel-haired girl into his arms. "This is my mate, Calypso. A coven-sibling of Nico's, so... vampire. Don't worry, she doesn't bite... outside of the bedroom, that is. Ouch, Cally. Don't always elbow me!"

While Calypso was glaring sternly at Jason, Nico decided to take over. "Hazel here is also my coven-sister, as well as Leo's mate. So is Frank – he is a hybrid, his mother is a shifter and his father a hunter. Clarisse and Chris are Piper's mates, Clarisse is a hunter and Chris a shifter. Ethan, also one of my coven-siblings, and his mate Alabaster the warlock. And this is Rachel, she's a seer."

Percy nodded slowly, trying to process and keep all the names in mind. Growing a bit more insecure – which he hated, hated so much because he was tough, he could stand his own man, had always, for so long, but this was a small room with so many strangers and he was still so vulnerable because he was willing to open up to those people he started to consider his friends – Percy scooted back closer to Nico again. The Italian seemed to pick up on Percy's mood, because he spread his legs to welcome Percy between them, patting his head in a reassuring manner. Alabaster and Ethan sat down on the couch right with Nico, so did Jason and Calypso. Clarisse, Chris, Frank and Hazel joined Leo and Piper on the floor, pulling their respective submissive into their middle.

"Is it normal to have two mates?", asked Percy boldly after a moment.

"Well, not normal-normal, but also not abnormal!", offered Leo thoughtful, sitting on Frank's lap with his feet in Hazel's lap. "It often happens when two mates with the same tendencies are together. Like... Frank's wolf-side is dominant and Hazel is a vampire and all vampires are dominant in nature. So... they love each other, but they often also clashed, because they were missing something, right? And, well, I'm a submissive. I'm that something."

"Or when someone from a race without a secondary gender – like hunters – is together with someone from a race with a secondary gender. Like Clarisse and Chris", added Piper, head resting against Clarisse's shoulder. "Chris is a dominant wolf and Clarisse is a hunter, so... I even things out between them. Not that they weren't working before, but..."
"You perfect things", offered Chris and kissed her cheek. "I love Clarisse, but she's not good with emotions and expressing them. You're, by nature, a very emotion-bound person."

"Chris doesn't understand the emotions I'm trying to convey all the time", grunted Clarisse a bit annoyed. "While Pipe doesn't require me to explicitly express my emotions to understand them."

Piper looked so ridiculously happy as she was laying cozily between her two mates. Percy was in awe as he watched the serene love radiating off them. He startled a little as he noticed that he had subconsciously leaned against Nico's leg, enjoying the feeling of Nico running his fingers through his hair. He blushed slightly, trying to shy away, but Nico expertly laid his other leg over Percy's shoulder to hold him in place. When Percy turned to him, Nico raised one quizzical eyebrow.

"It's okay", whispered the vampire with a shrug. "Stay, if you want. Leave, if you really want."

Percy paused before reluctantly leaning back again, while Jason clapped loudly. "Okay. Time for the movies, or else we'll never get done. As previously decided, we'll start with Mulan."

Cheers of agreement and suggestions for following movies followed while everyone moved to grab milkshakes, cookies and pizza before settling down comfortably. Most who had arrived late hurried to get changed into comfortable night clothes. Percy for his part wasn't that comfortable yet. He relaxed against Nico and enjoyed the soft touch, preparing for an actual fun night with friends.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter will feature the family dinner between the Jacksons and the vampires - and Percy's perfect timing on having his heritage come through and his scent breaking!

Next update is going to be "Like Cats and Dogs" on Wednesday!
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Chapter 8: Dinner and a Surprise

Percy had fallen asleep somewhere during Big Hero 6, by the time he woke up, they were already halfway into Lilo & Stitch. Yawning softly and blinking blearily, Percy instinctively snuggled up to the safe, warm embrace. Humming contently, Percy rubbed his nose against the firm pillow.

"You drool in your sleep", noted a dark voice fondly and tenderly. "It's endearing."

Blinking again, Percy slowly woke up properly and sat up like he got bitten by something. Blushing, he stared at the stain on Nico's shirt. "It's not endearing, it's gross. I'm so sorry."

"It's alright", chuckled Nico as he sat up and pulled his shirt off.

Percy made a small noise in the back of his throat as he watched Nico's muscles flex and be revealed. The vampire was hot. Percy couldn't help but let his eyes follow from the sixpack to the happy trail that disappeared in Nico's pants. He was only pulled out of his thoughts by Piper.

"You should get changed too, you know?", pointed the mermaid out. "Isn't it uncomfortable in the jeans and all? No idea how you could sleep in jeans..."

Percy blinked sleepily and looked around. Somehow, Nico had ended up on the floor, right next to Percy, which must have been how Percy had fallen asleep with the vampire as his pillow. The others were cuddled up, not just in their mated pairs but also just among friends, watching the movie and still eating the pizza Alabaster and Ethan had brought along. So Percy couldn't have been out for too long. Chancing a glance at the clock, he realized it was only shortly past ten. Which meant they must have moved on to Lilo & Stitch right after Big Hero 6 and he hadn't missed too much.

"Right. Yeah, I'll... uhm... where's the bathroom?", asked Percy as he got up and grabbed his bag.

"Right down the hall", replied Jason, waving one careless hand into the general direction.

Percy passed the kitchen and a study with the door open, before finding the bathroom. It was a nice, large piece of paradise with an actual yakuizi in the center of the room. Gaping, Percy started to strip down. He paused before getting dressed again, because there was a giant mirror on one wall and Percy found himself forced to see his image. He bit his lips as he went to cover up the scars on his thighs, putting on loose dark-blue jogging-pants and a worn-out soft-blue Captain America shirt. The moment he stepped out of the bathroom, he nearly had a heart-attack because Piper was standing right in front of the door, grinning. He frowned and stepped aside so she could enter.

"Oh no. I just, I wanted to show you around the house, since you already missed half the movie anyway and you're the only one who's never been to our place", explained Piper excitedly.

"Right down the hall", replied Jason, waving one careless hand into the general direction.

Percy passed the kitchen and a study with the door open, before finding the bathroom. It was a nice, large piece of paradise with an actual yakuizi in the center of the room. Gaping, Percy started to strip down. He paused before getting dressed again, because there was a giant mirror on one wall and Percy found himself forced to see his image. He bit his lips as he went to cover up the scars on his thighs, putting on loose dark-blue jogging-pants and a worn-out soft-blue Captain America shirt. The moment he stepped out of the bathroom, he nearly had a heart-attack because Piper was standing right in front of the door, grinning. He frowned and stepped aside so she could enter.

"Oh no. I just, I wanted to show you around the house, since you already missed half the movie anyway and you're the only one who's never been to our place", explained Piper excitedly.

Percy nodded slowly and wet his lips. She grinned at him and took his hand, pulling him along and upstairs. Piper pointed out the bedrooms of her parents, Thalia and Jason, before entering her own bedroom. It was plastered with K-pop band posters and movie posters from both Tristan and Beryl, as well as photos of Piper and her friends. There was a large vanity, though on its mirror were mainly said photos pinned and on it were various art-supplies and a laptop instead of make-up. The bed was gigantic and round, formed like a shell that stood open, the lid against the wall and having silken
drapes handing down its sides. Piper grinned as she sat down on her bed.

"So, you... asked about how it is to be a submissive. But not how it is to be a dominant", observed Piper and hugged a pillow to her chest. "You wanna talk about that, Perce?"

"What's there to talk about?", shrugged Percy embarrassed and sat down opposite her on the bed.

"Well...", drawled Piper. "You learned about secondary genders before you know yours. That's a bit rare. Most who attend Summers High are brought there after they come into their heritage. I was already a submissive mermaid by the time I got taught about mates and all. So, I'm curious, since for you it's still... open, you have the possibility of being either, what is it you'd wish for?"

"What good is it to wish for anything? In the end, it may turn out to be the opposite and I'd end up disappointed", replied Percy with another shrug as he got more comfortable. "I mean, sure it... sounds the best to be a submissive. Having... someone to take care of you, to... protect you. Is it... good? Because... as good as it sounds, it also sounds so... helpless and weak."

Piper smiled compassionately. "I know what you mean. When I was first told that I was a submissive, I threw a tantrum too. Because I thought it meant inferior, weak, vulnerable... But it doesn't, believe me. It's actually pretty empowering. To have a dominant mate, knowing you have someone willing to tear other's apart at your account. You get a lot of respect from the society, because we submissives are... more fertile. Can bear more children, stronger and healthier children. That's something the leaders want, strong and healthy subjects, many younglings. It's kind of what I never understood about human society, how women were seen as worth so much less for so long, even though the human race would easily survive on many women and few men, because you don't really need too many of those, since it's the women carrying the kids, right? So, yeah, that's what I like more about the supernatural society, because those who carry life and give birth are valued."

"That... sounds nice", admitted Percy and tilted his head. "And they really do that? The dominant mates, I mean. What Nico said before. All the... cherishing and valuing and stuff."

"Yeah, they do", laughed Piper with a soft smile. "I mean, Clarisse in particular tends to be a bit overbearing, but she knows better than to mark the big, bad girlfriend. She occasionally tries to put Drew into her place when she's being too much of a bitch toward me, but I repeatedly tell Clarisse that I'm more than capable of fighting my own bullies. It's... still kind of nice, knowing what she's willing to do for me. Knowing that in a pinch, I can always count on my mates to have my back."

Percy nodded, more than intrigued. Before he could say anything more, there was a soft knocking at the door and seconds later, Jason poked his head in, one eyebrow raised as he looked at them.

"You guys going to come back and join us again? Lilo & Stitch just ended and we're debating on the next movie", stated Jason, looking from Piper to Percy. "You two coming, or not?"

"Yeah, sure", nodded Percy and got off the bed to follow Jason together with Piper.

When they returned to the living room, Nico was staring very intensely and amused at Percy, making him a bit uncomfortable. "What... are you staring at, Nico...?"

Grinning, Nico got up and stretched, pointing at his own shirt, the shirt he had changed into after Percy had drooled onto his other shirt. It was black, with an artsy version of the Winter Soldier movie poster on it, Bucky in half-profile with his hair hanging into his face, intense, dark eyes staring out of the shirt. Percy's eyes slowly wandered to his own shirt, with Steve's shield on his chest. At the realization, Percy grinned a bit and found himself blushing a little as he climbed over the couch to sit down on the pillows on the ground. Piper came to sit next to him and Clarisse and Chris instantly
scooted over to sit with their mate. Percy sat rigid for a little while, while they discussed the next movie choice, no one really agreeing on anything.

"What do you want to watch?", asked Nico, looking straight at Percy while adjusting himself.

"...The Little Mermaid?", requested Percy a little bit embarrassed.

"Seconded!", exclaimed Piper excited. "Haven't seen it in ages!"

"If my siren wants to see it, so be it", grunted Clarisse, daring anyone to object to her.

Nico smirked amused while Jason went to put the movie in. He lounged comfortably, one arm draped over the heap of pillows behind him. The one Percy sat in front of, with his back straight.

"You could relax a little", offered Nico amused, patting the pillows. "You already slept half on top of me today. I don't mind, you know. Those sleep-overs always turn into cuddle-fests."

Percy took another moment before cautiously laying down, not too much against Nico. Within moments, Piper was attached to him, resting her head on his shoulder and grinning at him. He returned his friend's grin reluctantly before relaxing. Somehow, Piper put him at ease. Not in a way that he felt romantically inclined to her, but more as though she was trying to show him the path. The more Percy relaxed, the more he also snuggled up to Nico, arching against his body and enjoying the rest of the movie and the next movie and the movie after until he fell asleep again.

/\break/

When Percy woke up the next morning, he had slept better than in a long time, with Nico's arm around him and his own head resting on Nico's firm chest. He was woken up to the smell of bacon and eggs and the sound of laughter and chatter. He spend a comfortable and nice breakfast with his new friends, afterward they watched two more movies together before getting changed and ready to leave. After all, Percy wasn't the only one who had to attend tonight's impromptu dinner. After a lot of goodbye hugs, Percy was escorted to the di Angelo mansion by Nico, Ethan, Alabaster, Calypso, Jason, Thalia, Frank, Hazel and Leo. Apparently, vampire mates were also seen as part of the coven even when they weren't vampires, so they were very much welcomed too.

"So... you had fun last night?", asked Nico casually as they walked.

"Yeah", nodded Percy, offering Nico the brightest smile the vampire had ever seen. "I... never... I never had friends before, to hang out with. This was kind of... my first sleep-over?"

"We're gonna change that", declared Leo with a broad grin, wrapping one arm around his shoulder.

"Yeah. There are plenty of sleep-overs with our tribe", snorted Alabaster amused.

"That... sounds nice", admitted Percy with a small grin.

They continued their way with light chatter, mostly about school. Alabaster had a lot to complain about, seeing as both his parents were teachers at school. Percy hadn't known that.

"Hecate and Howard Claymore", sighed Alabaster forlorn. "It's a horrible fate. Lou and I suffer."

"But... I thought your name was... Torrington, was it?", asked Percy confused.

"Alabaster C. Torrington. The C stands for Claymore", answered Alabaster and shrugged. "I prefer to go by mom's maiden name, because I don't want the whole school to know..."
"Understandable", agreed Percy, feeling oddly honored to be in the know.

"There we are. The di Angelo Mansion", announced Nico proudly. "Come on in."

"...That's a castle", argued Percy doubtfully. "Looks like Xavier's School for Gifted Youths..."

Alabaster and Ethan snorted amused by that as the group walked inside. Percy's mouth hung open a little as he gaped at everything they passed. The fine, beautiful carvings on the doors and doorways and stair-rail. The paintings on the wall looked like originals – probably were, from all the big names throughout history. Percy was intimidated and somehow, he was glad that his father, even though he was a king, lived in a normal family-house. He would have run away and not returned if someone had tried to make him live in a palace like this. His nerves eased only the slightest bit when they reached the dining hall, where his family was already waiting. With them was the rest of Nico's coven – Hades and Persephone, the heads of the coven, Thanatos, Olethros, Makaria and Melinoe, the four oldest sire-children of Lord Hades, and Nico's big sister Bianca.

"It's so nice to finally meet you, Perseus", smiled Persephone kindly, hugging him.

"Uh, thank you, ma'am", nodded Percy unsure. "But I prefer Percy."

"Percy?", echoed Persephone amused. "Very well. Now sit, sit down children."

Hades and Persephone sat at one head of the table, opposite of Poseidon and Amphitrite. All others – merpeople, vampires and their mates – sat somewhere in between. Percy smiled gratefully as Nico sat down next to him, Tyson occupying Percy's other side. The beginning of dinner was actually really nice and comfortable. Percy spend most his time just listening to them though. Apparently, Thalia was Bianca's mate, which was why Jason's big sister had tagged along. Half-way through the main course, Percy started feeling incredibly hot. His stomach was turning and twisting. Groaning softly, he put his fork down and pressed a hand against his abdomen. The others around him slowly paused eating one by one, attention drawn to the sweating boy with the pained expression. And then, all of a sudden, a wave of pheromones hit them all. Overwhelmed by the sweet, spicy scent, other forks and knives clattered down onto the dining table, the eyes of the dominants present narrowing as they zoomed in on the source of the ripe smell – the scent of a submissive in need. Poseidon looked stunned and mildly horrified when he realized Percy had just come into his heritage, in the middle of dinner with the local vampire lord and his coven. What timing. That moment, Poseidon wished Percy would get along with Amphitrite, because normally she took care of the kids when they went through heat or post-heat symptoms, or had some cute dominant they were fawning over. As things stood, Poseidon didn't quite know who should approach Percy right now, but before he could put anymore mind to it, Nico already had Percy gathered in his arms. Frowning, Poseidon stood to approach them and take over. Nico was sitting on the ground, Percy on his lap, arms protectively around him. As Poseidon approached them, Nico looked up and hissed at him, fangs not just bared but also extended, eyes pitch-black and not just the iris either. Poseidon paused, not even moving a single finger. He had never seen a vampire that agitated before.

"Niccoló, cease the nonsense and hand Poseidon his son", demanded Hades irritated, getting up.

The whole room froze when Nico flat-out growled at his sire as Hades approached. The mated vampires pushed their mates behind them protectively, while those closest to Nico slowly retreated.

"What... What's gotten into him?", asked Jason concerned, hand on Calypso's shoulder.

"Percy just came into his heritage. It's not as strong to smell for you since your species doesn't have submissives and dominants, to top it off you're also mated, but his scent is very intense", replied Ethan cautiously. "I can only guess, but seeing as Nico is an unmated dominant, the overdose of
sudden pheromones from Percy must have kicked his primal instincts into overdrive."

"Uhm... Put that in terms that someone without secondary gender gets it?", asked Jason confused.

Percy whimpered and curled together tightly in Nico's embrace, making the vampire turn to look at him and coo softly, soothingly. Alabaster snorted in amusement, the sound catching Nico's attention and the vampire once more bared his fangs and hissed viciously.

"Percy smells like unmated, distressed submissive. Very much and very suddenly so. Nico is an unmated dominant, the most primal urge of any dominant is to protect their submissive", answered Hazel slowly. "Overwhelmed with Percy's scent, Nico's mind is currently clogged with the urge to protect Percy. The rational part of his brain is turned off, or otherwise he'd know we don't pose a threat. To the primal part of his mind, we're some random dominants who are too close to his distressed submissive, so he tries to fight us off. I fear approaching him may end deadly."

"But that's crazy. It's not like Percy and Nico are mates. Heck, until last night, Percy didn't even know what mates are", argued Frank next to her, watching Nico with sharp eyes.

"You don't have to be mated to a submissive to view them as your mate", pointed Thanatos out, shielding Triton behind his body. "Sometimes, the protectiveness can be even stronger when the mate-bond isn't completed, because the dominant doesn't know that the submissive is his. So, uncertainty plays into it too. If Nico chose Percy as his mate beforehand and is now being dosed in a sudden wave of Percy's pheromones, the effect may be even more intense."

"We're going to have a conversation about this", muttered Poseidon with a pointed glare.

It was unclear if he was talking to Thanatos about the implication, to Hades about the fact that his uncontrollable son was currently hogging Poseidon's son, or to Nico. It was however clear that whoever would be on the receiving end of this conversation was not going to have fun.

"Anyway!", interrupted Persephone loudly. "We need to get Percy away from Nico and have him checked out, to make sure the boy is alright and so Nico can clear his head again."

"And how do you propose we do that, my love?", asked Hades, pointing over at Nico.

The mere movement of his hand toward Nico send the crouched vampire into another hissing fit. Leo let his eyes wander over the table, noting the fact that everyone present was either a dominant, secondary gender-less or they were part of Percy's family. Grinning, Leo stepped forward.

"Leo, what are you doing? Stay here!", hissed Hazel displeased, grabbing for him.

"No can do", shrugged the dragon with a cheeky grin. "As previously mentioned, he feels threatened by all the dominants in the room. So how about we slowly and calmly remove said dominants and let the mated submissive handle the situation, huh?"

Before either of his mates could protest any more, Leo moved closer to Nico. Nico was still growling, though the sound grew softer. He looked confused and intrigued as the non-threatening little dragon approached him. Nico sniffed the air and deemed him harmless. He was watching Leo with sharp eyes though and there was no doubt that if Leo made a wrong move, Nico would hurt him.


Nico's eyes were drawn down Percy and he tilted his head. "...Pain. Mine's in pain. Help mine."
"Really?", snorted Alabaster, trying hard not to laugh. "He's just gonna refer to Percy as his?"

"Yes. Yes, yes. I will help yours", nodded Leo eagerly, slowly reaching out for Percy. "Just... give him to me. We're going to take good care of him, you just have to give him to me..."

The vampires all the while were doing as Leo had suggested and slowly retreating from the room. On her way out, Persephone was calling up her mother. Now that ten vampires had left the room, Nico seemed to relax a little. The merpeople slowly approached to also help. As soon as they eased Percy out of Nico's grip, they hurried to get him out of the room, Triton carrying him bridal style. Nico was not a fan of them taking Percy out of his sight, but before he could lung after Triton, the vampires and others stepped back in and blocked his path.

By the time Nico came back to himself, he was a bit fuzzy and very confused. "What... happened?"

Ethan, Alabaster, Hazel and Frank, who had been put up as his guards, looked at him pointedly before his sister started explaining. "In the middle of dinner, Percy came into his heritage. We assume it was triggered by the big ratio of dominants present. So far, Percy had never been in enclosed space with that many dominants before. Classes are always relatively evened out between dominants, submissives and designationless. So, since he is a submissive, the presence of so many dominants triggered him. Oh, by the way, he's a submissive."

"...H—He is?", asked Nico with large, hopeful eyes.

"Oh, don't give us that look", snorted Alabaster. "You really don't remember, do you?"

"...What happened?", asked Nico again, this time with a dreadful expression.

"You went full on primal caveman on Percy's ass", pointed Frank out. "You were a hissing, growling, fang-baring mess that referred to Percy as 'mine'."

"And yes, that did happen", confirmed Hazel with a compassionate look on her face. "You mentioned that you like Percy, I wasn't aware that your like was quite that... deep. You chose him as your mate. And now the entire coven as well as Percy's entire family knows that."

"...Including Percy?", asked Nico with horror written all over his face.

"Excluding Percy", corrected Ethan. "He was as overwhelmed by this as you were. He was too busy doubling over in pain and breaking a fever to care about your weird behavior, Nico."


"Okay. Someone is still pretty high on pheromones", chimed Alabaster teasingly.

When Nico turned black eyes on him, he flinched though and Hazel held her hands up cautiously. "It's alright, Nico. We're going to take you to him, so you can see he's alright."

When Percy came to it again, there was a roundish, friendly looking woman with intense green eyes leaning over him. There was also his entire family squeezed into this unfamiliar room with the very large and comfy bed. Tyson was nestled against his side, looking worried even in his sleep and Piper and Leo were sitting on Percy's other side. Percy frowned confused. He distantly remembered that he
had been at a dinner with vampires. Piper hadn't been there.

"What's going on?", asked Percy, holding his head. "And who spilled the perfumery? It stinks."

"It doesn't", chuckled the woman, Miss Demeter the nature spirit biology teacher. "Hello. I'm Persephone's mother. No one spilled anything, everything still smells the same. Your senses are just enhanced. Congratulations, you came into your heritage as a submissive merboy."

"...Oh", muttered Percy and nodded. "So, that's where the pain comes from. And this is... what everything smells like to you? It's so... intense... Makes the hair on the back of my neck stand up."

"It's going to settle a bit", assured Leo with a grin. "First few days are more intense. I called Piper, I figured another friendly face would help you. And us submissives do like to... stick together when distressed. First coming into your heritage is very distressing."

"I made a total fool of myself by fainting in front of everyone, didn't I?", groaned Percy. He hid his face as realization dawned on him. Curling together, he leaned toward Piper and Leo. Leo laughed as he started running his fingers through Percy's hair. All of them as a group had agreed not to tell Percy about what had happened to Nico during all of this; both deserved the start of courting to be more dignified than that. And Poseidon still wanted to have 'words' about this.

"None of that nonsense", chided Demeter and put a cooling rag on Percy's forehead. "This wasn't your fault, Perseus. It's a natural process for any mermaid and merboy. You can be glad it didn't happen at school during class, you know? That is what's generally considered embarrassing."

"Percy! Percy, are you alright? Are you feeling better?", asked Nico panicked. The young vampire came running into the room, pushing past all the vampires outside and the merpeople inside, until he stood in front of the bed and could see with his own eyes that Percy was awake and physically okay. His primal side was still very raw, not taking over his mind, but it still demanded for him to make sure his Percy was fine. Percy. Not his. Shaking his head, Nico took a deep breath to calm himself. Big mistake. The entire room was flooded with Percy's scent and now Nico got to inhale it and progress it in peace. It was intoxicating. Very sweet, but not sickeningly sweet or sugary like some submissives, no, Percy was sweet like strawberries. Refreshing. There was also a salty note, like the ocean, a very typical smell for merpeople. And something else, something Nico couldn't quite pinpoint, something that simply smelt as though it was his.

"Nico!", yelped Percy and stared wide eyed at him. "Yeah. Uh. I mean, you must have seen my great performance of the fainting merboy. I'm told I have talent."

Nico snorted, obviously relieved that Percy was up to joking again, which indicated that he was feeling better again. Percy grinned sheepishly at Nico, embarrassed that the vampire – and everyone else, apparently – seemed to be so worried about him. His father and stepmother were sitting on a couch opposite of him and they both looked like they had just woken up. Turning a little, Percy noticed that is was the middle of the night. Everyone had stayed here for hours, at his bedside. The thought was oddly heartwarming. Blushing a bit, Percy heaved a sigh. When breathing in, his senses were flooded with the most amazing scent ever. Like dark chocolate, the earth after a thunderstorm and somehow also darkness, if darkness had a scent to it. The scent hadn't been there before, only now that Nico had entered the room. Which meant it must be Nico's scent.

"I think it's due time to turn in for the night", sighed Poseidon as he stretched some.

"It's gotten very late, why don't you and your family stay here tonight?", offered Hades.
"I'm staying too!", chimed Leo just to get scolded by Hades. "N—Not in Hazel's room. Here."

"Me too. I'll just send my parents a text", agreed Piper excited.

Within minutes, the room was cleared aside from Tyson (still asleep), Leo and Piper. Poseidon had actually kissed Percy's forehead before leaving. Percy was still drained from the ordeal, so he just accepted it and curled together in a nest with Tyson, Leo and Piper, feeling comforted by them.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter is going to be filled with Nico/Percy moments and comfort, because right now, Percy is very vulnerable and he hates that feeling. It's a good thing Nico is there to make him feel safe and assure him that the feeling will pass.

Next update is going to be "Like Cats and Dogs" on Wednesday!
Chapter 9: Exploring the Vampire Castle

Percy yawned as he stretched himself as far as his bones allowed. He had never felt that worn out, not even after a really bad beating from Gabe. He was sore all over and his senses were overflowing with all the input they got – and with that, Percy slowly remembered what had happened yesterday. Groaning embarrassed, Percy turned to check the time. It was barely past four in the morning. Leo, Piper and Tyson were still deep asleep next to him. But Percy wasn't tired anymore. He was restless with buzzing energy. Probably also from coming into his heritage. Sneaking out of the heap of people, Percy tiptoed out of the bedroom. Time to explore the creepy vampire castle.

There were a bunch of guest rooms like the one he had slept in – many occupied by his family. Instead of risking to wake anyone, Percy decided to explore the downstairs, where he found a very spacious study with a connecting door to the biggest library Percy had ever seen; including the public library where he used to study (and get away from Gabe). Feeling like Hades would materialize any second to scold him, Percy slowly retreated from the study. Instead, he went to search for the kitchen, because he was positively starving. Most likely a side effect of coming into his heritage and all. The kitchen was awesome, as large as everything else in this place and top modern, unlike the rest of the house. The oversized fridge was filled with more than just blood bags, thankfully. Though there were... blood bags, which did gross him out a little.

"Was dinner not enough for you?"

Percy nearly jumped out of his skin and dropped the plate with the leftovers. Thankfully, the teasing vampire who had scared him had heightened reflexes. Nico easily caught it and put it down on the table. There was concern written all over Nico's face and... and in his scent? Percy frowned confused, unsure how he knew this, but he knew that Nico smelt like worry. Worry and very much deliciousness. Percy found himself subconsciously stepping closer to inhale deeper.

"You were very busy passing out. Of course you're still hungry", whispered Nico softly. "Are you feeling well? You don't look too well. Do you want to sit down?"

Percy nodded slowly as he stepped into Nico's personal space, causing the vampire to freeze up. Nico wasn't sure what to do, or what Percy was doing. And then, the next second, Percy leaned forward and wrapped his arms around Nico's shoulders, burying his nose in Nico's neck.

"You smell like chocolate", hummed Percy pleased. "Do you have chocolate in the house?"

Nico snorted amused as he relaxed a little and returned the hug. "Yeah, we do. But there's a merboy attached me, hindering me from getting said chocolate..."

"...But I don't wanna move", complained Percy and sighed. "You feel safe? I feel weak and dizzy and generally not good, but you feel like... I'm... going to be fine...? Which is weird. I never feel like I'm going to be fine. I'm... always on... edge... always... always..." There was a faint pause, as though Percy was unsure if he should speak his next words. "...Always expecting the next punch..."

Nico's grip on Percy involuntarily tightened at that and he buried his nose in Percy's hair. "It's okay. It's... natural. You're a submissive and you're currently... very vulnerable, because you're still getting
used to yourself. I'm a dominant, I radiate natural protection. We dominants are made to make submissives feel safe and protected. I will protect you. I promise. He's never going to hurt you again, you won't have to expect a next punch again. I won't allow that, Percy."

"I hate feeling like this", mumbled Percy upset, tugging his head under Nico's chin. "So... weak and confused and overwhelmed and... vulnerable... I... I don't like this, Nico... This isn't me..."

"I know, Perce, I know", cooed Nico softly, caressing Percy's back. "It's only been a few hours though. Your body is catching up with your biology, it will take a few days, but I promise once this overwhelming sensation passes, you'll be back to your normal self, okay? It's just a lot for your body right now and it's very draining for your body. It leaves you exhausted and... raw."

"And you promise it'll stop...?", asked Percy and tilted his head up to peek at Nico hopefully.

"Your kitten-eyes are mean", grunted Nico as he stared stunned at the large, green orbs. "But yes. I promise, Percy. Give it a couple days and your biology will settle again, which will give your body the time to relax and you won't be so stressed and vulnerable anymore. All you can do for now is lay down, eat and drink a lot to give your body the fuel to get through this and rest."

"Eat, sleep, wait?", summed Percy up, displeased. "I'm not good at waiting..."

"Then me and the others will keep you entertained", promised Nico. "Now, you wanted to eat something, mh? Why don't you sit down and I'll get whatever you're craving?"

"Even the chocolate?", asked Percy eagerly as he was guided over to a chair.

Nico smiled fondly as he went to get the good chocolate from where Hades tried to hide it. Percy hummed pleased as it was placed on the table, before he started prompting other foods from Nico, until there was a buffet spread out in front of them. Percy groaned as he ate a cherry pepper filled with cream cheese, before reaching for the mushrooms, the bar of chocolate in his other hand.

"...And you're sure you're not upsetting your stomach?", asked Nico a bit worried and disgusted.

"Uhu", confirmed Percy before taking a bite from the chocolate. "I'm starved. And... And it all tastes so different. So... So intense and more spicy and more... just like more, you know?"

"Yeah", chuckled Nico amused. "Like I said, your senses are in overdrive. All of them, including taste. Everything is an edge sharper; smells, tastes, colors. It'll take some getting used to."

"That much even I realized", grunted Percy around a mouth full of artichoke.

Nico made a face as he watched Percy devour the weirdest food combinations. But Percy looked content with that and that was enough for Nico, really. Once Percy seemed pleased with the array of food in front of him, Nico sat down next to the merboy. He stole one or two things for himself.

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"So... you eat food", observed Percy curiously. "I mean, I saw that before, but... do you need food?"

"No", replied Nico and shook his head. "We need blood. Food and drinking is more for... fun. For the taste of it. After becoming a vampire, all senses become sharper. The way you feel at the moment, just even more intense. And for my kind, it stays that way. Eating is fun."

Percy nodded in understanding as he continued eating. He felt a little more at ease. Maybe because he now had the food in his stomach to settle it a little, or – and that was Percy's best guess – it was Nico. Nico smelt so safe and good and he helped putting Percy at ease.
"Show me around", demanded Percy with a broad, cheeky grin. "I explored a little on my own, but I don't know what there is... So, show me. I wanna see the mausoleum and all."

"If you say so", chuckled Nico amused and got up. "But if you feel light-headed or anything. I'm bringing you back to your room so you can rest. Otherwise Demeter will tear me a new one."

Percy had not expected to actually visit a mausoleum. He had been joking about this. A shudder wrecked his body as he scooted closer to Nico. It was mighty and beautiful, but also very creepy.

"You cold? Shall we go back?", asked the vampire concerned.

"No. I'm freaked out because I'm standing in a mausoleum! Why do you have a mausoleum in your backyard?", asked Percy, taking another step closer to Nico. "This is so creepy..."

"...Oh. You were joking when you asked about the mausoleum, eh?", chuckled Nico in realization. "Well, we are many centuries old, but... before we became vampires, we were mortals with families. When we became immortals, we... well, those of us who still had anyone left... we were doomed to see our loved ones grow old and die. This mansion is as old as the settlement of New York. Hades and Persephone have been here for... a long time. We others, we... brought our family with us. Burying them in our respective homes, their graves would have been... long gone at this point. Maybe even the entire graveyard in some cases. No; this mausoleum on our grounds is safe."

Percy's eyes saddened a little as he nodded in realization, his eyes found the plate in front of them – Maria di Angelo. "Your... mother? I'm... I'm sorry, Nico. I can't imagine..."

"It gets... easier, with time", whispered Nico, voice raw. "It never gets easy, but easier."

Percy nodded and wanted to say something else, unsure what exactly, but he interrupted himself by sneezing high-pitched. Okay, maybe it was cold. Shuddering a little, he rubbed his upper arms.

"Wait a sec", grunted Nico and pulled his black hoodie off over his head. "Here."

Before Percy had even a chance to protest did he get the hoodie pulled over his own head. Nico tugged a little and Percy reluctantly obeyed and put his arms through the sleeves. He blushed and glared when he noticed that only three fingertips were poking out of each sleeve and the entire thing reached about his mid-thighs. The glare easily melted when his nose was flooded with the scent though. He was literally surrounded by Nico's scent and the hoodie was warm – still warm from Nico's body-heat – and it was soft because it was worn out. Percy's protests died a fast death.

"Let's go inside. I'll show you the grotto", offered Nico, instantly catching Percy's attention.

Nico led the way back inside, through a very beautiful garden, as far as Percy could make out in the dark of the slowly graying morning. Downstairs was indeed a gigantic, beautiful grotto that looked very artistic. Percy gaped and gasped as he whirled around, trying to take everything in.

"Can... Can I come over some time to... swim here?", asked Percy, offering his kitten-eyes again.

Like Nico would ever be able to deny those. "Of course you can. Whenever you want, Percy."

"Thank you!", exclaimed Percy with sparkling eyes. "Okay, now continue the tour, please."

Nico snorted. He could already see that once Percy would be his mate, Nico would be utterly whipped. Hell, he already was, even though he had known Percy for only like a week now. He
proceeded to show Percy the billiard room, the bar, the winter garden, the jewelry room (mostly occupied by Persephone, Makaria, Bianca and Hazel), the cauldron room that Ethan had installed for Alabaster so his warlock could perform all the magic he wanted.

"That about concludes our tour", announced Nico as they left the wine cellar.

"Nope", disagreed Percy mischievously. "You haven't shown me your room yet."

Nico was a bit embarrassed, but he found himself, once again, obeying. His room was an utter mess; clothes and books all over the place. Weapons on his desk and some of the shelves. While Percy slowly looked around, Nico rushed over to his desk to hide the sketch book, because there were a few rough sketches of Percy in this. He relaxed in relief once that was hidden, though when he turned around, he found a pouting Percy standing next to his bed.

"There's no coffin", huffed Percy. "I mean, you already said so, but still... I kinda hoped you lied."

Nico snorted ridiculed. "I am so sorry to disappoint you, Percy. You can look around, if you want."

Nico got comfortable on his bed and watched Percy, who sniffed around like a curious kitten, checking out the bookshelf, the DVD shelf and the amazing merchandise products. Nico grinned as he watched Percy. Every now and again, he would squeak or yelp and nearly touch something. He'd always stop short though, like he was afraid to break something. Nico's grin softened.

"You can also touch stuff", chuckled Nico fondly. "Those are toys. They're to be played with."

Percy paused and turned to smirk at Nico. "Are you telling me a ninety-one years old vampire is playing with his Doctor Who figures? Actually, honest to god playing with them...?"

"Of course", huffed Nico nearly insulted. "Jason and I usually reenact the scenes that hurt the most. It's why the Rory figure looks a little worn... Moffat does enjoy hurting him... Precious Rory..."

Percy giggled at the look on Nico's face before cautiously taking the Iron Man figure (not without making eye-contact and checking if it was really okay) and walking over to the bed. He slowly sat down next to Nico. Calmness instantly washed over Percy and he relaxed, sliding down to snuggle into the pillows and into Nico. The vampire snickered amused as Percy rested his cheek on his shoulder and practically melted into Nico's side. The snicker developed into a full-blown laughter when Percy started walking Iron Man up and down Nico's abs like he was patrolling them.

"You're a nerd", accused Percy with a pleased grin. "Somehow, I was under the impression you're some kind of sophisticated vampire. You're all... serious and strong and sarcastic, I kinda did not expect this... But it's actually... really endearing and dorky."

"Thanks", snorted Nico and rolled his eyes. "I've been there when Marvel published their first comic book. I watched the premiere of the first Doctor Who episode; classic Who. It's... nice having something that has been with me for... so long now, you know? Besides, you must have something to nerd out about too, right? After all, you did say you read ABO fics. Care to elaborate?"

"M—Mh?", grunted Percy embarrassed, cheeks a little red.

"Oh come on", grinned Nico and nudged Percy a little, using the move to smoothly lay his arm around Percy's shoulders. "You saw all my fandoms, now share yours. What do you read?"

Sneakily, Nico started caressing Percy's hair and the motion was so soothing and tender that Percy felt obliged to tell Nico anything he wanted to hear, as long as it meant Nico would continue with the patting. "My favorite ship is HiJack... You know, Hiccup from How to Train Your Dragon and Jack
Frost from *Rise of the Guardians...* I'm mainly into cartoon fandoms and stuff..."

"Hiccup and Jack Frost?", echoed Nico thoughtful, frowning for a moment. "Mh. Interesting. They're both DreamWorks and technically, Jack Frost as Jökul Frosti is a Viking god... Yeah, I think I can see it. Now, tell me. Who do you prefer as Alpha and who do you prefer as Omega?"

Percy blinked curiously. It was strange. These kind of things, he normally only talked about online, with other fans, discussing fanfictions or fanarts. He had never actually verbally talked about the things he enjoyed. But Nico didn't bash, he kept inquiring. Just a normal conversation.

"I... I like Hics as Alpha better. I mean, have you seen *How to Train Your Dragon 2?* Damn", said Percy softly. "I do like the dry-witted, sarcastic, well-build and clever Alpha-types..."

Nico nodded and filed that information away for later usage. "Well, I can see the appeal in a snarky, cheeky, mischievous and sassy sub... They sure are a good match for those dry-witted, sarcastic, well-build and clever doms, don't you agree, Percy?"

"I just told you that that's my OTP, so well duh", grunted Percy, a bit confused by Nico. "Your turn. What's your OTP then? Because I suspect that you read ABO fics too, don't you?"

Nico grinned amused. "I do, occasionally. My preferred pairing to read is IronWinter though. Bucky is so relateable – sometimes I too feel out of my time in these modern days..."

"And Tony Stark is your type of sub?", asked Percy with a frown. "Older genius guys...?"

Chuckling, Nico shook his head. "Headstrong, funny, snarky, sassy and still... with a hidden vulnerability. The kind who's his own hero, but could still use a hero to save him too..."

Percy hummed noncommittally and yawned widely. The merboy snuggled closer to Nico until his breathing evened out. Nico turned to look fondly down at Percy and pulled the blankets up to Percy's shoulders and adjusting to lay more comfortable with the snarky, cheeky, mischievous, sassy, funny and headstrong sub in his arms. Not to forget gorgeous and kind and sweet.

"Nico! Nico, come on, it's time to wake up! Percy is *gone!* Poseidon is losing his-"

Leo came to an abrupt halt as he rushed into Nico's room just to find Nico and Percy curled together on Nico's bed. Leo blinked doe-eyed for a couple of times before backtracking to go and get the others. Five minutes later and basically everyone was gathered in Nico's room or trying to sneak a look from the doorway. Hades, Poseidon, Amphitrite and Persephone stood at the foot-end of the bed, Poseidon having a more than constipated look on his face, while the women grinned.

"Niccoló Antonio di Angelo", grunted Poseidon dark and even. "Let go of my son *now*.

"...Antonio...?", mumbled Percy sleepily as he looked up at Nico and yawned.

"My nonno's name", answered Nico, seemingly wide-awake and alert already.

He reluctantly let go of Percy, who stretched and yawned widely. Triton snorted amused and shook his head. He stepped up to Percy to smooth his hair down. The younger Jackson scowled.

"Time to go home, kiddo", declared Triton. "We were worried when the others woke up with you missing and we searched practically everywhere for you. It was a hectic morning and yesterday was stressful too. Get changed and we can leave. I brought your overnight bag with me."
Percy slowly crawled out of the bed and grabbed the bag to get his jeans. He noticed that the others really did look distressed, as though they had been frantically searching for him. They really did worry about him, just like Nico had said, huh? Frowning, Percy shouldered his backpack.

"Okay. Let's go. I could use a shower and fresh clothes", sighed Percy softly.

"That is not your hoodie", pointed Poseidon out, glaring at the piece of clothing. "Give it back."

Much to his surprise did Percy growl darkly and glare at his father, before blinking and looking mortified. "I—I have no idea why I just made that sound. O—Or how."

"It's alright, sweetie", assured Amphitrite with a kind smile. "You seem to feel safe with Nico, so it's just natural that you don't want to part with something that holds his scent, because it comforts you. Your instincts tell you to defend what's yours and to the more primal side of your mind, the person comforting you is yours and so is his scent."

Percy blushed darkly at her words, but no one laughed at him or looked at him judgmental (well, Poseidon was glaring rather deadly at Nico...). Nico turned toward Percy with a smile, caressing his cheek tenderly before grasping his shoulders and pulling him into a tight hug. Percy practically melted against him, burying his nose in Nico's collarbone and downright purring at the scent.

"It's okay, Perce", whispered Nico soothingly. "You can keep the hoodie. Call me if you need anything, okay? We're friends. I'm here for you, whenever you need me."

It didn't take more than a moment after the door closed behind the Jacksons did Hades and Persephone turn toward him, the first with a pointed look and the second with a fond smile. Bianca, Hazel, Calypso, Makaria and Melinoë were watching them curiously, while Olethros, Ethan, Alabaster and Jason tried not to snort or laugh. Nico squirmed uncomfortably, but at least Thanatos was giving him a compassionate look. Hades heaved a very deep sigh.

"You chose a mate and failed to bring the matter up with me?", inquired Hades, cutting to the chase.

"Straight to the point", muttered Nico embarrassed, shuffling under the gaze of every single coven member present. "I... was unaware that I chose him as my mate, to be honest."

"...How blind are you to your own feelings?", asked Hazel stunned. "He practically spent like all of our movie night cuddled up to you and you were holding him as protectively as any of us held our subs. Honestly, brother... You are so busy guarding his back..."

"Yeah, no kidding", snorted Jason, one eyebrow raised. "You've been hovering above him from a distance since he entered the school. Got him introduced to me and the others, made sure he got someone to help him catching up with the classes, making sure he got the connection with the swim-team, you even encouraged him to talk to his family – Piper told me that."

"I'm just trying to make the newest member of our community feel... included", protested Nico.

"Sure", snorted Alabaster and rolled his eyes. "Dude, you kissed the top of his head when he fell asleep in your arms during movie night. You are definitely a goner, man."

"I am aware I developed feelings for him, but I was unaware he... became that important to me", admitted Nico embarrassed, staring at the ground. "In my defense, I never met anyone... compatible. No one's ever been as interesting as... Percy. Okay, maybe I could have seen this coming. But in my defense, him coming into his heritage hit me like a train."

"I noticed when you wanted to rip my throat out for approaching him", snorted Hades.
"...Sorry about that", muttered Nico, growing more embarrassed.

He really hadn't noticed just how attached he had grown to Percy. But it wasn't really a surprise, because Percy was the most impressive creature Nico had met in his long life.

Chapter End Notes

Poor Percy is a bit out of it for now. So he needs some comfort. Cue in his new awesome friends and more Nico-cuddles! He's also going to have a serious conversation with Amphitrite; let's see how that goes.

If you haven't seen it yet, you can now find my updating schedule on my profile!
When Percy woke up the next day – after a big dinner, a long shower and going to bed really early – it was by the sound of birds chirping and the sun tickling his nose. Which was very confusing, because it was Monday. Rolling over, he peeked at his alarm clock. It was way past ten. Suddenly wide-awake, Percy bolted up and stumbled out of his bed. He already missed Defense Against Supernaturals with Professor Claymore and biology with Miss Demeter. If he'd hurry like a lot, he may still be on time for... math. Well, that wasn't a motivating thought.

"...Percy, what are you doing out of bed? I thought you'd sleep for another two hours at least."

Percy yelped and fell over, turning toward the source of the voice. His stepmother stood in the doorway, holding a tray with a water bowl, a cloth and a glass of water. Percy frowned confused as Amphitrite approached him and put the tray down on the nightstand.

"I'm late. For school. I was so sure I set the alarm last night...", replied Percy slowly.

"Oh yes, you did. Your father turned it off this morning, before he left for work", corrected Amphitrite with a kind smile. "You came into your heritage not even two days ago, Percy. Your hormones are all over the place and so are your emotions and senses. You're staying home, at least for a few days until everything is more balanced and settled. I took a few days off so I can take care of you. I know you don't want that and I know you don't trust me, but there's no way around this, Percy. You're in no condition to stay alone at the moment. Depending on how well your body adjusts, you may break a bad fever and you could get an infection. I know it's not what you want and I'm sorry you don't get a say in this, but I am going to take care of you, Percy."

Percy just sat there, at the foot of his bed, blinking confused as he observed his stepmother. "Okay."

Now it was Amphitrite's turn to blink a bit confused, while Percy was getting up and crawling back into his bed. "That was far easier than anticipated. Testing my luck here, but... why is it so easy?"

Percy shrugged as he rolled onto his stomach. "Guess you're right. Staying all alone isn't a... good idea at the moment. I noticed that yesterday already. So... sure. Why not. Whatever."

"Very generous of you", laughed Amphitrite amused. "Very well. I put two painkillers next to the water. If you feel like you need them, take them. If you feel hot, there's a cold cloth. But please, call me if either of those symptoms flare up, okay?"

Percy nodded slowly, burying his nose in the collar of Nico's hoodie that he was still wearing. "Wait. Before you go... I... I think we... we should probably talk."

"Yes, Percy?", asked Amphitrite with an edge of anxiety. "What do you want to talk about?"

"Want? Nothing", grunted Percy and wiggled his nose. "But... Nico told me I should try getting along with the family and... you're... part of the family. So, if I'm supposed to try and get along with the family, I guess there are things... you and I need to talk about..."

Amphitrite straightened up some, picking up on the seriousness in Percy's voice. She slowly pulled
his desk chair over to sit down opposite the teen. He also sat up some on his bed, making a face.

"What... do you want to talk about, Percy?”, asked Amphitrite softly.

"You must hate me. Or have hated me", stated Percy after a beat, staring at his hands. "I mean, I'm... your husband's son. With another woman. I'm like a constant reminder of when your marriage wasn't working. I'm... literally a walking mistake of your husband's."

"Hey, now", whispered Amphitrite firmly and reached out to cup Percy's cheek. "You were an accident, that much can't be denied because you weren't planned, but that does not make you a mistake. No one in this family thinks we'd be better off without you. You're a bright and amazing young man and we're all glad that you're with us."

"...So you don't hate me?", asked Percy doubtfully.

"I... know I wasn't motherly to you, I know we all didn't make enough of an effort to get to know you and be there for you, but... we never missed any of your competitions. Poseidon has your victory pictures framed on his desk. We never missed or put off the day you'd come over here. We care about you, Percy. We just... couldn't show you, we didn't want to endanger you", sighed Amphitrite and shook her head. "We all love you, Percy. I love you, like you're one of my own."

"From what were you trying to protect me?", asked Percy with a pointed look. "You keep saying that, that you did it for my own good. I don't see why. Everyone in this supernatural world is so nice and welcoming. They're monsters, but they're not monsters."

"Not everyone may be, but there are true monsters. And... your father, he is a king. He has enemies. As a human, you were... pretty uninteresting. Now you're a target. Your father is widely loved under the sea, but there will always be those who oppose the government. We couldn't pull you into the middle of all of this while you were human. It would have been irresponsible. And... And part of Poseidon still wishes you were human – safe from the dangers our world poses. But the bigger part, the far bigger part, is so happy to have you with us now. You should have seen your father's face when he realized that you're one of us. I haven't seen him that happy since Tyson's birth."

Percy was silent for a long moment and Amphitrite wasn't sure if he was going to say anything else. "You... You always go on vacation during spring break... A—And I... I was always stuck at home, with Gabe, all day long while my mom was at work. And I... I hated you for it. For not taking me with you, for not even asking if I'd want to come with you... L—Like I didn't matter..."

There were tears shimmering in his eyes and it broke Amphitrite's heart a bit. "Honey, we would have loved to take you with us, but we literally couldn't. We spend spring at the underwater palace. As king and queen, we can't be on the shore the entire time. Once a year, there's a big meeting between the rulers of the seven seas. Without fins and gills, you wouldn't have been able to come with us. But of course we're going to take you with us this year, Percy. I promise."

Percy nodded slowly, averting his eyes. "...Okay. Thanks, for... staying home and taking care of me, Amy. You... didn't have to. You... wouldn't have if you really hated me, I guess..."

"I guess", agreed Amphitrite amused and leaned in with determination, kissing Percy's forehead. "Now rest and get better, Percy. I'll check on you and bring you some tea later, yes?"

Percy blushed a bit embarrassed and nodded before curling together on his bed again.

Percy blinked blearily as his door opened. He had tried to sleep, but it was too hot and too cold and
too tight a space but also kind of too empty and large. Nothing felt right. He did brighten up a little as Annabeth, Piper, Leo and Silena entered his room. Then he blinked a bit confused.

"What are you doing here...?", mumbled Percy and curled together tighter on his bed.

"Leo and Piper told us what happened at the dinner and of course we came right after school!", exclaimed Silena, looking like a worried mom. "Oh, you poor little sweetheart. Lacy and Mitchell wanted to come along too, but Annie suggested that we shouldn't crowd you. Still, as the head of our little school coven, there is no way I would have missed out on this! Now, tea?"

"...Huh...?", grunted Percy and blinked sluggishly.

"Leo and I planned it yesterday already, to come over to comfort you. Other subs can help with those things, because doms upset your hormone household", explained Piper slowly. "Annabeth said she wanted to come along too and Silly, she easily feels bound to her coven members."

"You're... here... just for... me?", asked Percy unsure and sat up a little.

"Of course, honey", cooed Silena and kissed Percy's forehead. "Now, do you want some tea?"

"I dunno", shrugged Percy a little lost. "I'm all... over the place... I don't know what I want..."

"And that's totally fine, Percy", assured Leo as he crawled onto the bed too. "Cuddles?"

"Uhu", nodded Percy without missing a beat. "...Huh?"

"Instincts", supplied Piper amused and snuggled up to him. "You're over-thinking things, because you were raised with human values so you over-think things instead of listening to your instincts."

"It's what makes all of this harder on you", added Annabeth, also sitting down. "It's a rather frequent problem for us Valkyries too because we are more... brain-focused than instinct-focused."

"Why don't you lay down and relax?", suggested Silena, her voice like a lulling song.

Percy found himself instantly obeying, cuddled up between Annabeth, Leo and Piper. He distinctively suspected that Silena was using her charmspeak on him to make him loosen up, but at the moment he was too far gone to care. His head felt like there was cotton candy inside his skull.

"Now, do you want to tell me what you want?", asked Silena, a little heavier on the charmspeak. "What can we do for you, mh? To make you feel better? What is it you really want at the moment?"

"Nico...", hummed Percy softly, eyes closed and pretty content where he was, at least until he realized what he had just said. "$—No. I didn't mean to say that one. I already embarrassed myself enough yesterday... and the day before that. Nico must already think I'm pathetic enough..."

"Hey, no. None of that", chided Leo with a frown. "Amphitrite told you yesterday already. It's totally natural, man. You're a submissive and you're currently very vulnerable, so you seek out protection from someone capable of protecting you, you know?"

"It's not like you know a lot of dominants", added Annabeth with her even, logical voice. "$Poseidon, Proteus and Kymopoleia may be your most obvious choices because they are your family. Which is exactly why they're the wrong choice for you, because you don't trust your family. Aside from the four of us, the only friends you made since joining school are Jason and Nico. Jason is a storm spirit, they don't have a secondary gender. The others you only got to really know at the sleepover literally one day before you came into your heritage. Nico is the most logical choice in your situation, Percy,
When Percy still looked doubtful, Piper laughed amused and rested her chin on his shoulder. "I ended up seeking out Bianca when I came into my heritage, you know. She was already dating Thalia by the time it became apparent that I am also a magical creature. I already knew Bianca and trusted her and, well, Thalia was already attending Summers High, had met Bianca and started dating her and brought her home regularly. I already knew her and trusted her, so I clung onto Bianca for dear life. I was so embarrassed, because she is my sister's girlfriend and all. But Bianca was very calm and reassuring about everything and Thalia accepted that it wasn't anything sexual or romantic, but purely platonic. It's just instinctual, really. We all did it."

"When I came into my heritage, I sought comfort in Silena's mate", continued Leo now, grinning a little. "Charles worked at my dad's car shop back then and we had bonded even then, even though I didn't know what he was or what I was. He's like a big brother to me, was even back then. And since I felt instinctively betrayed by my dad for keeping this big secret from me and mom, I instead sought comfort in Charles. He was very embarrassed and proud at the same time. And Silly was totally chill with it. She even helped, since he was pretty lost back then."

"For me, it was no one, actually", admitted Annabeth casually. "I had no idea about the supernatural and I had no connections to anything. Only my mortal father, stepmother and half-brothers. I locked myself into my room for the entire time. Suffered horribly. It was an awful experience, makes you feel really paranoid and all. Can't really recommend that, Percy. Seriously."

While she talked, Annabeth was playing with her phone, making her look like it didn't quite matter to her anymore. Percy frowned confused, but he was feeling too fuzzy to think about it. He snuggled up to his friends as he felt himself slowly drifting off into sleep. He was only woken from his slumber by the sound of knocking and then by a very specific scent.

"...Nico...?", mumbled Percy confused and looked up.

"Uhm, hello, Percy", greeted Nico awkwardly. "Annabeth texted me. I brought everything you requested, Annie. Still not really sure what you need it for, but... okay?"

Percy watched in mild confusion as Nico unpacked the large bag he had brought along. More of Nico's scent flooded Percy's senses as what appeared to be Nico's pillows and blanket were being unpacked and placed on his bed. Percy turned to look at Annabeth in confusion, but she shrugged.

"Silena said that the easiest way to comfort a submissive in this phase is by letting them build a nest of things smelling of their chosen protector. In this case, Nico. I figured his bedding would make most sense to build a nest out. So, do your nesting."

Percy looked both embarrassed and doubtful, while Silena rolled her eyes fondly. "So straight to the point, Annabeth. But yes. So, Percy, dear, Amphitrite said you barely ate a thing today. While we will be making you some mild food downstairs, you are free to adjust however you want."

She ushered Nico, Annabeth, Leo and Piper outside, knowing Percy would be too embarrassed to nest with them around. She hoped he'd feel more at ease following his instincts if he was on his own. Nico looked utterly confused as he was pulled toward the kitchen.

"Am... I just the delivery guy?", asked Nico slowly. "Or am I allowed to stay?"

"Percy wants you here", replied Annabeth simply. "So you stay. But don't get any impure thoughts or you will be in trouble. He's vulnerable at the moment and needs someone he can trust."
Nico glared at her, clearly offended. "I'd never abuse his trust!"

"Oh, we'll hope so", grunted Piper with a pointed glare. "If you hurt him, I will send Claire after you to rip your heart out, you know? Because Percy is a sweetheart and he deserves a break."

"I know that", growled Nico on edge. "I know that and I've done nothing but try to help him catch said break ever since I met him. And even now – I don't want to do anything like that to him. I just want to... to scoop him up in my arms and hold him until he feels better..."

"Interesting", hummed Silena with a fond smile. "When I came into my heritage, I spent the days with Charlie. He was an utter gentleman, but he admitted to feeling in a similar way as you, Nico."

"Yes. Yes, it's like public news at this point – apparently I want him as my mate", grunted Nico frustrated and glared at the submissives. "We can just post it in the press at this point, really..."

"There, there", smirked Annabeth teasingly, patting Nico's head condescendingly.

Nico huffed and pouted as he watched Silena, Leo and Piper put together different sorts of food for Percy. After about fifteen minutes did they return to Percy's room – and what they found was the most adorable thing Nico had ever seen in his entire life. Percy, still wearing Nico's hoodie in which the merboy seemed to disappear. The pillows surrounded him in a circle, the blanket thrown over them and Percy buried deep into the literal nest he had built on his bed. Percy blinked blearily, looking over at them by peeking out from beneath the hood.

"...Food?", asked Percy curiously. "Ham and sweet mustard...?"

"Well, your nose is working good", chuckled Leo amused. "That sound good or bad for you?"

"Gimme. And chocolate", demanded Percy and sat up slowly.

Leo laughed amused as he handed over the plate. Percy instantly devoured the sandwich in three large bites. Piper all the while hurried to ask Amphitrite for some chocolate. As she came back, everyone was gathered on Percy's bed again, getting comfortable. Nico however still stood a bit confused in front of the bed, not wishing to push Percy or anything.

"So... Perce, how are you feeling?", asked Nico concerned.

"Tired and sluggish", admitted Percy annoyed. "Like a mixture of a hangover and having spent like ten hours swimming without a break... The food helped a little... And the cuddles do... I enjoy those. Mom... used to cuddle me whenever I'm sick... I really like the cuddling..."

"Would you like some Nico cuddles?", asked Annabeth with a teasing edge.

Lulled into comfort by the food, the scent and the other submissives, Percy hummed. "Yes, please."

Annabeth smirked at Nico pointedly. The vampire looked equally pleased and flustered as he sat down on the bed under the critical eyes of four submissives, until he had Percy latching onto his chest. Percy made a content sound as he used Nico as his pillow. The two of them were laying in the center of the nest, while the four other submissives were laying around the nest like a guard. Percy had never felt safer and more content than in that moment and he easily drifted off to sleep again.

When Percy woke up, there were even more people in his room. But, weirdly enough, that made him feel rather content at the moment. There were Gwen, Mitchell and Lacy from the swim-team, sitting
on the floor and playing cards with Silena, Piper and Leo. And there was a very tall and rather well-trained blonde with a scar running down his face, laying on the bed, with Annabeth using him as a pillow. The two blondes being the only ones aside from Percy and Nico on the bed.

"Who's the oversized Ken-doll in my bed?", asked Percy confused, turning toward Nico.

"Oversized... You're a cheeky brat", huffed the blonde offended and amused. "I'm Luke, Annie's and Thalia's big-brother-like best friend. Annie called me, figured this was a good time to introduce us. Sub-bonding and all that stuff. Since coming into your heritage is kind of stressful and all."

"Luke's good", promised Nico softly, his breath tickling Percy's ear and soothed him. "He's the Alpha of our school's shifter-pack, a fox-shifter. A trickster. I figured, since you're a prince and all, meeting a submissive leader would be good too. And Luke's rather... He's a good friend. Very protective of those he considers his and he's fun to be around."

"Aw, stop flattering me, di Angelo", cooed Luke with a smirk. "When my mate hears about this, he's only going to get jealous. You know Tavy, he... really loves you."

Percy hummed contently. If Nico said Luke was okay, then Percy could live with that. And somehow it was scary, just how much Percy trusted Nico. When the vampire started caressing Percy's side in a soothing way, Percy started humming a bit louder.

"Didn't you say he's a... merboy?", asked Luke suspiciously. "Because the way he's curled around you and the very loud purring coming from him, I'd say he's a Bastet."

Percy looked up with an upset look. "I—I'm not a bastard..."

"Bastet, not bastard, Percy", chided Annabeth with a concerned frown. "You know, the Egyptian goddess of war, the one with the cat-head. She wasn't actually a goddess, just like your father. She's the most famous leader of the cat-shifters. There aren't just canine shifters, you see."

"I generally don't go around insulting people I just met", stated Luke, ruffling Percy's hair.

"Luke's right though", agreed Nico, putting a bit more pressure against Percy's ribs as he rubbed them, making Percy purr even louder. "You are a kitten. If I wouldn't be able to smell your heritage, I would bet good money that you are a catboy, Percy."

"I am not a cat. I'm a fish, if anything, since I'm a merboy", protested Percy with a huff.

"Whatever you say, kitten", grinned Nico teasingly, scratching Percy beneath the chin.

Percy blushed a crimson red and averted his eyes. It was hardly his fault that he had barely gotten any positive physical contact so far, so now that there were all those people hugging him and patting him on the back and cuddling him – how could he not relish in it?

"Hey", whispered Nico, grasping Percy's chin to tilt his head up again. "I'm not... teasing to be mean. You're not taking this as an insult, right? Because I don't... I don't want you to feel bullied or anything, so if you really don't like the nickname, I'll can it, okay?"

After all, Percy was rather raw at the moment. That heartbroken look in his eyes when he had misheard Luke and thought the other had called him a bastard? It nearly broke Nico's soul in two. He would never want to be the one to put such an expression on Percy's face.

"No", muttered Percy embarrassed. "It's not that. I just... I never had a... nickname before. I mean, everyone calls me Percy, but that's... mostly because no one cares enough to know that that's not
even my actual name. I never had a... personal nickname before. And you keep... giving me nicknames. First you called me Sea Prince, now you call me kitten. I... I like it...?"

Nico was pretty sure that a blushing Percy ducking his head was the cutest thing in existence. "So you don't mind if I call you kitten? Because I think that's a very fitting name for you."

Percy offered the smallest smile, feeling oddly warm and content as he snuggled up deeper into Nico's embrace while Leo crawled closer and rested his chin on the bed. "Wait, Percy isn't your name? What do you mean by that? Is it like... short for Percival?"

"He doesn't look like a Percival", pointed Gwen out, looking curious herself.

"It's short for Perseus", replied Percy embarrassed. "My mom named me after him because he was a brave hero and basically the only one who got a happy ending."

"That's actually really cool", hummed Leo and tilted his head. "My parents named me Leonardo after Da Vinci, because well duh, great inventor and awesome dude all around."

"Yeah, Da Vinci is awesome", hummed Percy in agreement. "I like the show, Da Vinci's Demons. He's really hot in that one. A bit whacky, but that makes him all the more adorable."

"Agreed", grinned Leo mischievously. "Jason was named after a Greek hero too, you know."

"You should rest some more, Percy. Your temperature is rising again", whispered Silena.

"Will... you be there... when I wake up...?", asked Percy unsure, curling together.

"Always", promised Nico softly, brushing Percy's hair back out of his face.

True to Nico's word, they had been there when Percy woke up again. But they left when dinner was coming close. Not that Percy was left alone; he had Tyson curled together with him on the bed and Benthesisikyme and Rhode sitting on either side of him, while Triton sat opposite him.

"Mom said you want to come with us to the underwater palace this year", started Rhode slowly.

"I wanted to go on family vacation for years, but it wasn't 'convenient' until now", countered Percy.

"Well, you have to admit that it would be a bit hard to take a human to an underwater palace", pointed Triton out, raising one eyebrow. "We wanted to bring you along for years."

"Whatever", sighed Percy and rolled together around Tyson, hugging his little brother like a teddy.

"It's awesome. There's water ponies and so, so, so many other mermaids and merboys!", exclaimed Tyson excitedly. "And our palace is real pretty. You'll like it, big brother!"

"Children", interrupted Poseidon as he entered the room. "Can you give me a moment alone with Percy, please? Your mother could use your help downstairs."

Under protests, the other Jacksons cleared out, leaving Poseidon and Percy alone. Percy frowned as he shifted some under his father's stare. Poseidon sighed and sat down next to Percy.

"You talked to Amphitrite", said Poseidon slowly. "That's... good. It's nice of you to give her a chance. Thank you for that, Percy. How are you feeling, my boy?"
"Better, I guess", shrugged Percy and pulled Nico's blanket closer around himself.

The notion wasn't lost on Poseidon; neither was the scent. He disliked that Percy was seeking shelter with the young vampire. Poseidon should be the dominant Percy sought out, because Poseidon was his dad and the leader of their family. But Percy didn't trust him. Percy trusted a stranger more than he trusted his own father – and that thought just broke his heart and made him feel so guilty, because it was his fault that Percy didn't trust him. He knew, on a rational level, that he should be grateful that Percy had someone he could trust, he also knew that Nico was a good person and wouldn't harm Percy. But Poseidon wanted Percy to trust him, Poseidon wanted to make up for the years wasted, wanted to protect Percy and keep him safe.

"That's good", smiled Poseidon, cautiously reaching out to rest a hand on top of Percy's head.

"Nico and the others were here, that helped", admitted Percy softly.

"Nico seems to be a good friend to you", observed Poseidon neutrally.

"Yeah", replied Percy with the smallest, pleased smile. "Nico is a good friend..."

Chapter End Notes

Sooo, Percy's conversation with Amphitrite is a hint to what is yet to come in this story ;). Next chapter, Percy will be back to his normal self, which means he can finally visit his mom for the first time since moving in with Poseidon! Aaand there will be some Poseidon-Percy-bonding too!
"Never thought I'd say this, but damn I'm glad to be back in school."

Piper laughed as she linked arms with Percy and the two friends entered the school together. "That's because Summers High isn't like your regular boring school, Percy."

Percy hummed in agreement as the two made their way to the lockers. Percy took a deep breath of that high school air. This unmistakable mixture of sweat, too much perfume and too much deodorant, coupled with the unique scent of teen-angst. It just smelt different now. Now that Percy had his full powers, he could smell all the different shades, all those different little emotions.

"Hello, Nico!", greeted Percy lightly while searching for his books in his locker.

"...How did you... I'm a bloody good lurker, you're not supposed to notice me sneaking up on you!"

Percy grinned to himself. "Your scent. You have an... extremely unique scent."

When Percy turned around, Nico looked worried, sniffing himself. "...Really? Like, uh, what?"

Frowning thoughtful, Percy tilted his head. "Dark chocolate. And that scent that's in the air right after a thunderstorm, when the earth is all wet and stuff. And, uh, this sounds weird, but like... darkness? Like, if darkness had a scent, that would be it."

The vampire looked both flustered and flattered at that, earning him a snort and an elbow to the ribs from Ethan and Alabaster who stood next to him. Percy frowned confused by that, but he shrugged it off as he shouldered his backpack and continued on his way with the others falling into step.

"I'm really glad to be back in school", stated Percy with a small smile. "I already missed enough of this school year and I'm kind of... not wishing to fail the year."

"Good. Very good. So you will obediently let me tutor you about what you missed?"

Percy grinned as he turned toward Annabeth who came to join their group. "Yes, please."

"Good boy", praised Annabeth, patting Percy's head in a teasing manner. "Then I'll come over to your place today after school, that alright?"

"Oh, is Annabeth having another study group?", asked Chris when they reached their classroom.

Nico and Piper unwillingly parted with the group to head to their own class. Chris was standing in the doorway, talking to three others. Percy smiled a little as Annabeth, Ethan and Alabaster paused, feeling obliged to also stand still himself. He knew Chris, Piper's and Clarisse's mate, but he didn't know the other three. No, one of them – a blonde Elf – seemed familiar, Will if Percy remembered right. Next to him stood a dark-haired guy who had one arm possessively wound around Will.

"Those are Will, his boyfriend Jake, and that's Connor", introduced Chris. "So? Study group?"

Percy sniffed the air curiously. Chris smelt like Luke a bit; like the forest floor and the zoo. Shifter.
But unlike Luke, who had a sweet spice to his scent, Chris smelt more musky and dark, commanding a certain authority, just like Nico or Ethan did. A dominant shifter then. Percy grinned proudly, because he was schooling his nose. His big sister Kymopoleia had told him that his nose was his most important tool as a supernatural, because with it, he could asset who and what the people in front of him were. And especially as a submissive, it was good to know if he was in a dangerous situation or if he was safe. The dominant mermaid had made it abundantly clear that as a submissive, he always needed to make sure the dominants around him didn't pose a threat, physically or sexually. Which, in a way, he was grateful to hear from his sister and not his dad. Taking another breath, Percy tried to dissect the scents. Will smelt like sunshine and summer heat, even though Percy wasn't really sure how he knew what those things smelt like. So that was what a Light Elf smelt like, because he remembered Will's race from their first encounter and his resemblance to Legolas. The guy next to Will, Jake, smelt like fire and metal and motor oil, but also like fresh leather – dragon, like Leo. But unlike Leo, the scent wasn't sweet and alluring, it was dark and commanding. Dominant dragon then. Last but not least, there was Connor. Submissive shifter. Now that he had both Luke and Chris to compare it with, it was actually easy to figure that one out.

"Percy? You heard what we said?", asked Alabaster playfully, waving a hand in his face.

"Mh? Sorry, I was distracted by all the scents", admitted Percy embarrassed.

"No problem. It's only natural when you came fresh into your heritage", assured Connor with a grin. "We were just asking if me, Chris and Alabaster could tag along for the tutoring?"

"Uhm, if... if Annabeth doesn't mind?", shrugged Percy, searching for Annabeth's eyes.

"Oh. Annabeth is giving magical history tutoring?", asked a peppy redhead. "There still some room in that tutoring group? Hello, Percy! My best friend is very frustrated that you stole his mate last weekend. I'm Rachel Elizabeth Dare, it's nice to formally meet you."

Percy nodded and smiled. "Hello. Like I said, if Annabeth is fine with tutoring more people..."

"Great, I'll bring snacks!", declared Rachel excitedly.

By the time afternoon rolled around, Percy stood a bit awkwardly in the living room door, looking lost. Being tutored by Annabeth was, apparently, the best thing that could happen to anyone and there was a test coming up in magical history. Chris, Connor, Alabaster, Rachel, Grover and Grover's girlfriend Juniper – the last two being Nature Spirits – were slowly getting comfortable in the living room, putting snacks and drinks out while talking lightly.

"It's good to see you making friends, Perseus", commented Proteus softly.

The oldest son of Poseidon rested a reassuring hand on Percy's shoulder. "I don't know. I mean, I don't know half those people yet. And... now I'm a little nervous..."

"You'll be fine", chuckled Proteus, squeezing Percy's shoulder. "They'll like you."

"Why are you so sure about that?", asked Percy doubtfully, looking at his big brother.

"Because it's impossible not to like you", smiled Proteus gently. "If you need anything, I'll be in the office upstairs. Father and mother are at work, Benthesikyme has ballet classes, Kymopoleia has karate classes and Triton went to the park with Tyson."

Percy nodded slowly and watched how Proteus went upstairs. He was a bit uneasy at first, because
he didn't know most of them, but after two hours of tutoring under Annabeth's guidance, he was much more at ease with them. Both Percy and Connor were laying curled together against Chris, instinctively seeking out the dominant in a moment of mental exhaustion. Percy and Connor were talking in whispered voices, laughing and planning pranks. Alabaster sat close by and occasionally also added details to their prank. Once Connor fell asleep with his head resting against Percy's shoulder, Percy instead turned to talk to Rachel, Grover and Juniper while running his fingers through Connor's hair. Amusingly enough, Connor was relaxed enough to show his half-form – as a trickster shifter, he could produce his fox-ears and his bushy fox-tail even as a human.

"So you're a seer. Why are you even studying?", asked Percy softly, turned to look at Rachel. "I mean, can't you just... see the answers beforehand, or whatever?"

Rachel snorted amused and rolled her eyes. "It doesn't work like that. I'm still a young seer. I can't control my visions yet. Especially not that precisely. And most of the time, they're so obscure that at this point, I can only figure them out in the aftermath and piece things together..."

"Ah. That sucks", nodded Percy in understanding.

Rachel huffed with a pout and nodded. Grinning, Percy watched how Grover and Juniper stood at the windowsill and re-animated the dead flowers. It had been something that Percy always found hilarious; just how bad Amphitrite was at keeping plants alive. Though the two Nature Spirits were really cute as they healed the flowers. So in synch and with such loving expressions.

"Is that what it's like to have a mate of the same race?", asked Percy curiously. "I mean the teamwork. All other mated pairs I met so far are, uh, mixed-racial, I guess?"

"Yes, that's what it's like to have a mate of the same race", agreed Grover, tearing his eyes away from Juniper to look at Percy with a grin. "Perfect harmony. There's a connection that can't really be recreated. I mean, no one will ever understand what it's like to be a Nature Spirit aside from another Nature Spirit. You know what I mean?"

Percy tilted his head and nodded slowly. "I guess. I mean, I'm a merboy. So technically I can roam the sea and live underwater. But I wouldn't be able to share that with my mate if he's not another merman. Guess there are things... you really can only share with someone of your own race. Huh."

"That may be true, but... there are perks of having a mate of another race", argued Chris, voice very soft so he wouldn't wake Connor in his arms. "When I see Piper, in all of her scaly beauty, I just... I never cease being in awe. To me, as a Shifter, it's... it's exotic and beautiful on an entirely different level than some other fox would ever be. Even though the idea of Piper as a vixen is very alluring. And Clarisse? When the two of us are in the forest, when she uses her keen Hunter abilities to hunt me, that's... that's a kind of chase that is even more thrilling and more of an adrenaline high than any playful pack-hunt that we ever had. Every race has its very own and very special thing and once you find your mate, their race doesn't matter at all. Whatever it is, you will learn to cherish and value those special things like they mean the world, believe me."

Percy stared up at Chris in awe, contemplating his words. He wanted someone to talk about him that way. And he was really happy that Piper had such a caring and sweet mate. Not just because of what Chris had just said, but also because Percy and Connor had been cuddling with Chris for the last twenty minutes and Chris just held them protectively, without judgment or anything.

"Say, does anyone know where our great tutor went?", asked Alabaster suspiciously.

"If you're referring to Annabeth, she's in the kitchen on the phone with Reyna, by the looks of it", replied Amphitrite amused as she entered the living room. "Hello, children. So you're having a
"That sounds awesome, Amy, thanks", grinned Rachel pleased.

"Percy, would you... mind coming with me for a moment?", asked Amphitrite with a smile.

Percy frowned confused, but he still wiggled out of Connor's tight grip – the fox apparently mistook Percy for a teddy bear – and walked over to follow her. She led the way to Poseidon's office and sat down with him, looking oddly serious but also kind. Percy frowned worried.

"What's wrong?", asked Percy, both eyebrows raised high.

"Nothing is wrong, sweetie", assured Amphitrite softly. "It's just... You're better now. We, that is me and Poseidon, were thinking about that you could... go and visit your mother this weekend."


"Yes", nodded Amphitrite. "We wanted to talk to you about this today, so we can also inform your mother. Give her a head's up. But... you know, your father will come along too."

"Okay", nodded Percy slowly, startling Amphitrite a little. "So, can I go back to my friends?"

Amphitrite nodded, watching Percy surprised and a bit confused. That was not exactly the reaction she had expected, but she wasn't going to argue it with Percy. When he returned to the living room, Chris lifted his left arm invitingly for Percy. The merboy smiled and eagerly took the place again. It didn't take Connor five seconds to attach himself to Percy again.

"He does think I'm a teddy bear, huh?", asked Percy amused.

"Normally, he has Luke and Travis for cuddles", answered Chris softly. "Him and Travis have been through a lot together. Had a rough childhood. Add in the fact that they came into their heritage while on the streets in the mortal world... They've been living with Luke for a while, but... well, after everything, Connor feels the most comfortable when he has someone close by that feels like safety. Guess you're a good substitute for Luke; a fellow submissive for cuddles."

Percy's cheeks flushed with a bit of pride. So Connor thought Percy felt safe? He smiled a little as he looked around the room filled with those people who just got along with him. Was that it? Had he always been so lonely because he had been different? But here, among those other supernaturals, he felt so content and like he belonged here. He finally had a place where he belonged.

Percy smiled softly as he caressed the face of the most amazing creature he had ever seen. The pitch-black pegasus whined and nudged him. Signing up for animal care club had already paid off. Sure, he had missed it last week due to coming into his heritage, but today was his first day of animal care and Grover was very eager to show him around. Rachel was there too, which was nice. After their tutoring two days ago, he had started hanging out with them and sitting with them during class. He was still astonished by how fast he was making friends.

"It's good to see you smile again", whispered a dark voice into his ear.

Percy would have startled if the dark chocolatey scent wouldn't have given the vampire away when he had entered the stables. "Mh? What do you mean, Nico?"
"You've been... withdrawn this week", stated Nico as he stepped up to brush the pegasus' mane. "Mh, you seem to get along with Blackjack, that's nice. So, what’s been on your mind, kitten?"

A light blush colored Percy's cheeks at the nickname that somehow stuck. "It's... I'm... This Saturday, Poseidon is taking me to go and see my mom. And I'm... I'm..."

"Afraid to hurt her again", nodded Nico in understanding, eyes softening.

"Oh. So that's the big thing!", exclaimed Leo, sounding worried and excited. "And I got worried you were thinking about, like, running away or something."

Percy turned around a little. Leo was laying in the arms of a very possessive looking actual dragon. There were Dragons, the shifters, and dragons, the scaly big protectors and guides of the shifters. This one was called Festus and he had adopted Leo at first sight. Currently, Festus was licking Leo's cheek and hair. Jason and Piper were laughing at Leo's messy hair where they were taking care of Tempest, a storm-spirit horse that Tristan and Beryl had bought their three kids.

"Leo's right. We were worried", agreed Piper as she walked over to Percy to stand next to him. "You were... very gloomy. But this? We talked about this, Percy. Remember, don't be Elsa."

"I know, I know", sighed Percy, fidgeting with his small Don't Be Elsa button on the strap of his backpack. "I can't lock myself into my own room and refuse to meet the people I love because I'm afraid to hurt them. I need to learn how to control my powers to be part of the world."

"Good boy", praised Piper with a smile, patting his head. "So this? This meeting your mom? You're going to be fine. Coming into your heritage, it... it gave you more of a connection to your powers."

"Yeah, but what if I slip?", asked Percy doubtfully. "Hurting my mom... it's... my worst nightmare."

"Percy", said Nico urgently, grasping his shoulders and making him look at the vampire. "You will be fine. You love your mother. You wouldn't let anything happen to you. Yes, you slipped before, but you also found the strength to help her again, because regardless of what happens, you will always protect and love her. You will be fine, Percy. I know it."

And when Percy looked deep into those dark eyes, having Piper rest one hand on his shoulder and Leo and Jason also standing close by, he felt like they were right. Suddenly, Leo wrapped his arms around him and pulled Percy into a hug that was joined by Piper and Jason. The latter also tugged Nico closer, who looked a bit awkward about it.

"Wait, we're doing group-hugs? Why are we doing group-hugs?", asked Rachel scandalized.

Moments later and Rachel and Grover came to also join the hug. In that pile of friends, Percy really felt like he'd do good. And that his mom would be proud of the person he had become.

Percy was semi-amused by the silent tension in the car. Poseidon kept glancing at him every couple seconds, but since getting into the car, his father hadn't spoken a single word.

"Okay, I cave. What's with the looks?", asked Percy uncomfortably.

"I just... I was expecting fighting", stated Poseidon, looking close to pouting. "Kicking, screaming, maybe some name-calling or something. You were so angry about having me come with you to visitations when we first told you about it. But you were... very... how do I say this? Tame? Amy already told me you took it very good when she told you about this. I'm... quite frankly, I'm waiting
for the second shoe to drop. I've been through enough teenage drama to know that if one of your kind is being obedient through something you don't like, then you're plotting some evil kind of way to get back at me. Can't we just do the screaming now to get it over with?"

Blinking slowly, Percy tilted his head. "No screaming, Poseidon. I... I'm... glad you're coming."

"Mh?", grunted Poseidon with the dumbest expression possible on his face.

Percy turned to stare at his hands. "When... I ran away that one day, when I was gone a couple hours, I... went to visit my mom. And I... I... used my powers on her. Accidentally! B—Because of something I said, she stopped breathing and I panicked and only barely managed to break the spell." Percy paused, fingers clawed into his jeans. "I'm afraid I'll accidentally charmspeak her again. Miss Demeter explained that humans are the weakest for our magic. What if I say something really bad? I'm... I'm glad you're coming along, because you have more experience with our powers and if something happens, you... you could undo it. Make sure mom stays safe."

Poseidon paused as he parked the car, looking at Percy slowly. "Okay. But Percy, you..."

"I know, I know", sighed Percy as he got out of the car. "I already had the 'don't be afraid of your powers' from Nico, Piper, Jason and Leo. We've been through that. But... just to be safe."

"Just to be safe", agreed Poseidon with a small smile, following behind Percy.

They climbed the stairs and barely made it through the door before Sally tackled him in a hug. Instantly, Percy's doom-and-gloom mood of the past days vanished. His mom smelt like cookies and cotton candy and love and home and safety. Smiling, Percy wrapped his arms around her too, leaning his head against her shoulder as she pulled him even closer in his hug.

"Oh Percy, I missed you so much", whispered Sally as she kept kissing the top of his head. "Have you grown? I'm pretty sure you've grown since the last time I saw you."

"...It's only been like one and a half weeks, mom", whispered Percy, eyes closed and smile in place. "I missed you too. A lot. I'm so sorry I wasn't able to call for so long..."

"It's alright. Your father told me you were down with a very nasty flu, completely out of it", sighed Sally, smoothing down Percy's hair. "I was worried. I'm glad you're feeling better."

"Yeah", grinned Percy. "Amy has been taking care of me."

Sally slowly ushered him over to the couch to sit down together, barely even taking notice of Poseidon, who obediently trailed after them and sat down on the armchair, watching silently.

"So, she is no longer the step-witch?", asked Sally playfully.

Percy gave a half-shrug. "I... guess she's okay. I mean, she's no you, but she's... not that bad."

"And your father?", asked Sally, looking over Percy's shoulder at Poseidon.

Percy turned just a little to also look at the by now a bit uncomfortable merman. "He's... trying. I guess he's doing his best and all. But he's still on probation."

Poseidon huffed and ignored the fact that they were talking about him like he wasn't in the room. Instead, he got up and headed over to the small kitchen to get himself something to drink.

"And how is school?", asked Sally, dreading the answer a bit.
"Uh, school's actually great", admitted Percy with a half-grin. "I mean, they got some wicked classes and... and I actually made friends. Like... a lot of friends."

"Friends?", asked Sally surprised and happy at the same time. "Tell me some about them."

"There's Leo, who's really mischievous and adorable. You'll like him. Though... he'd probably take the toaster apart. He does that, taking stuff apart and rebuilding it", started Percy animatedly, eyes sparkling in a way Sally had never seen before. "And Reyna and Annabeth, who are this really cute couple. Reyna is a real badass, but if Annabeth wants something, Reyna does whatever it takes. And Annabeth is probably the most intelligent person I ever met. She's helping me with school work. And then there are Jason and Piper, who are step-siblings. Jason is kinda awkward sometimes, but he's cool. Piper is really awesome, she's been helping me a lot and I love spending time with her. I even got to stay over at their place when they had a sleep-over last week. And... uh... and then there's Nico... He's..." Percy paused, trying to find the right word. "...Perfect."

"Okay...", drawled Sally out surprised, eyebrows nearly up in her hair. "How so?"

"Well, he's the one who introduced me to them all", replied Percy slowly. "He's been... really, really helpful with like everything. And supportive and encouraging and sweet. When I was, uh, sick, he came over and took care of me too. He... helped me feel strong when I wasn't feeling that way. He makes me feel like I can get through this whole... new... phase of my life and come out on top of it."

"That really does sound very perfect", agreed Sally with a small smile. "Like a good... friend."

"Yes, he is", agreed Percy brightly, not really catching on with the special tone Sally had used on 'friend'. "Oh, there are others too! Like, Luke. Luke's great, he's up to no good and gets more detention than anyone else in this school, but... it's really entertaining and just because of pranks, nothing dangerous or drug-related or anything, I swear. And Rachel, who's in the drama club with me. She's very excited about me going to attend it next Monday for the first time. I missed it because of the whole being sick thing. And Grover and Juniper, who are like... the cutest eco-couple ever. Oh, and Silena, who's the head of the swim-team and a real mother-hen!"

Sally smiled lovingly as she listened to Percy's enthusiastic voice. He finally had friends. Real friends that he cherished and that seemingly cherished him too. Poseidon reentered the room, carrying a pot with tea and three cups with him. Deep down, Sally was angry that he had taken Percy away from her, but she knew very well that what he had done had been the best for everyone. It had shaken Sally awake, had finally been the last push to rid herself of Gabe. To get her life back on track. She was visiting night school to get her college degree. With no longer having to pay off Gabe's gambling debts, she had less worries about money. Less worries in general.

"So, what about you mom?", asked Percy, interrupting Sally's thoughts.

"Mh?", asked Sally a little surprised, blinking a couple times.

"What have you been up to?", asked Percy with a grin. "You look great. Not so... tired. And I like your new hair! It makes you look all... serious and stuff, but not strict-serious, you know?"

Sally laughed and ruffled his hair. "Yes, I know. Well, I... have a new job. That's why I have the new hair and look more well-rested, I suppose. I'm working as a secretary."

"Really?", asked Percy eagerly. "Where? How is it? Are the people nice to you?"

Her azure-blue eyes flitted over to Poseidon for a moment. "At a... law-firm. It was your father's lawyer. He... has been checking in on me a couple of times. Not in a patronizing way, Percy, stop
glaring. I think he wanted to help me. I think he wanted to help me because of you, Poseidon.”

Poseidon offered a half-smile and shook his head a little. "I... may have asked him to keep an eye on you, because I didn't trust this... Ugliano-character not to make a reappearance. But him asking you to work for him is all on you, Sally. You have always been a very bright and charming woman.”

Now it was Sally's turn to smile at Poseidon. Percy frowned a little. His dad was being nice. Just to be nice. He had helped Sally, but he hadn't done it to impress Percy or anything. He had come along, but wasn't imposing. He tried sticking to the background, allowing Percy and Sally to just talk to each other. Maybe, just maybe, Nico was right after all and Poseidon really did deserve a second chance. Right now, however, Percy's focus was on his mom. She looked so much better and happier now that Gabe was gone. He was glad about it. Smiling, he leaned into her warmth.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter will feature Nicercy fluff and Silena and Annabeth investigating something that I've been, ah, hinting at *grins*
Chapter 12: The Cat and Bat

"Thank you, dad."

It took Poseidon a lot to keep driving and not hit a tree or something. "W—What?"

"I said thank you", huffed Percy and rolled his eyes. "For... For being there. Protecting mom in case I screwed up. Guess that helped me feel... more secure in controlling my powers. If that makes sense. I might have been too stressed and nervous on my own and may have hurt her accidentally."

"Yeah, that's not the part that made me stumble", clarified Poseidon. "I understand why you thank me. I meant the 'dad'. You haven't called me dad since you came to live with us."

Shrugging, Percy turned to stare out the window. "You are my dad. And maybe I was being a little petty. Even though I still don't understand or agree to the way you did things... I guess you are doing your best to make up for it. So, consider it an olive-branch, dad."

"Understood", nodded Poseidon slowly, large proud smile in place.

Percy snorted a little as he saw the smile on his father's face. Oh, he was still mad and he probably would stay mad until he had proof that simply being his father's son was putting him in danger. In the end, staying mad was going to hurt him too though, so he was trying to let go of the vicious nagging voice that wanted to punish his father and family with the silent treatment and the cold shoulder.

Before Percy managed to sneak upstairs into his room, Poseidon pulled him back into a tight hug. Rolling his eyes, Percy briefly returned the hug before making his way to his room. Closing the door behind himself, Percy heaved a relieved sigh to finally have some privacy. Luckily, he had managed to avoid the nagging siblings and their inquisition. Sinking down against the door, he pulled his legs up against his chest and wrapped his arms around them. He was exhausted, on an emotional level. All the panic and fear he had built up before today, fear of hurting his mother again, had left him feeling drained. Now it was all gone, all okay, his mom was okay.

He yelped startled when something fast and small flew in through the open window, circling the lamp. Percy bit his lips to keep from screaming startled. It was already late and dark outside and Tyson was already in bed – Poseidon and Percy had stayed later than originally planned because Percy and Sally had been so engrossed in their conversation about everything Percy had experienced since moving in with his father – Percy didn't want to wake his little brother. Bravely, Percy took a shaky breath and got up. He grabbed one of the cups on his desk and emptied the pens inside so he could use the cup to capture whatever this black, fast creature was. At least until the little thing landed on Percy's bed. Now Percy was trying not to squeal, because it was a tiny fluffy bat! An adorable little fruit-bat, with the black fur, gigantic dark eyes that always looked so cute. Biting his lip, Percy grinned broadly and crouched down on the floor to slowly crawl closer to it.

"Hello there, fluffy little creature of the night", grinned Percy, voice soft. "No need to fly away. You startled me, because I thought you were some kind of weird giant bug. But you are the cutest little thing ever, aren't you? You don't need to be afraid of me, I won't hurt you. Promise."

The bat tilted its head in the cutest way possible and Percy just wanted to scoop it up in his hands.
and cuddle it. Other people liked cat videos, Percy preferred bat videos. Those little creatures were way too adorable. He carefully lifted a hand and reached it out to the bat.

"If you allow me to catch you, I could bring you to the vet and make sure you're alright and maybe, if I use the best kitten-eyes I have, dad will allow me to keep you?", mused Percy thoughtful. "Pretty sure he's still feeling guilty enough to allow me to keep a bat. I could name you Bruce."

The bat shook itself and slowly turned into a vampire. Nico sat where moments ago a bat had been. "Before you start buying bat-nests online, I think I should inform you that I'm not pet-material."

Percy was still kneeling on the floor, right in front of Nico, staring up at him doe-eyed. "You... You can turn into a bat?! How have you not mentioned that before? You are so cute. With the tiny snout and the tiny wings and the large eyes! You should have told me you could do that!"

Nico dodged Percy as the merboy tried slapping his shoulder. "You never asked. And stop calling me cute. I am the night. I'm a dangerous, deadly vampire. Not a cuddle-toy."

"Looked very cuddly to me", frowned Percy as he sat down next to Nico. "What are you doing here though? And why did you fly here? And can you turn back into a cute little bat?"

"I can't talk to you when I'm a bat, so no I won't right now", snorted Nico amused. "And I flew here, because it's nearly ten in the night and I highly doubt your father would let me in that late. Though... I actually doubt your father would allow me anywhere near you to begin with after the disaster that was dinner when you came into your heritage..."

"Why?", asked Percy, frown turned confused at that.

Nico blushed faintly. "Well, I was a bit... overly possessive of you back then."

"What... does that even mean?", asked Percy suspiciously, one eyebrow raised.

"You're a submissive. I'm an unmated dominant. I was a bit... overwhelmed by your pheromones and became... protective", admitted Nico embarrassed. "To the point where I threatened Hades and your father... Your father has looked at me with very much skepticism since then..."

"Oh", nodded Percy, fighting against his own blush as he imagined Nico going all feral and growly on anyone to defend Percy. "Uh, well, dad doesn't really have a say in who I can see and who I can't see. He hasn't earned that right. Not that he ever will, really. I mean, I'm not an idiot. I'm not going to hang out with drug dealers or murderers or something, so I can really make my own choices. And I think it's sweet that you became protective of me when I was that... vulnerable. You're a good friend, Nico. But sneaking past my dad aside, why are you here?"

Nico was inwardly relieved that Percy was not yet familiar enough with their society to catch on with Nico's instincts and their implication and he was proud that Percy didn't think him weird. Sighing, Nico got a bit more comfortable on Percy's bed – Percy's bed was very comfortable and Nico could easily picture cuddling Percy to sleep in it, which was so not the train of thoughts he should have right now, but at least he wasn't thinking about fu—damn, too late, now he was thinking about fucking Percy in this bed. Shaking his head, he tried very hard to focus on anything that was disgusting, like Hades and Persephone having sex, or that weird vegan casserole Demeter had tried force-feeding them the other day but that had looked like it had already been eaten before.

"I was worried about you", replied Nico honestly. "You were pressuring yourself so much about visiting your mother that I wanted to see if everything went well and if you're alright."

Percy nearly melted on the spot. How could anyone be that sweet? Smiling, he shook his head.
"I'm fine. And so is mom. We spent hours just talking and then we even got around to watching a
movie. Dad... stayed. He even laughed with us at the ridiculous parts of the movie and... it was...
nice", admitted Percy softly. "To be honest, I've never seen my parents interact with each other, so I
never really... understood why they had been together to begin with, but... now I can kind of see it
and now I don't know what to think about it. I mean, I'm not in some teenage drama chick flick
where I'd try to force them to get back together, obviously. But... it feels weird understanding why
they were together at one point and also... understanding why they're not, you know?"

"Yeah, I think I understand what you mean", nodded Nico slowly. "But... I'm glad it went well."

"Mhmh, me too", sighed Percy, subconsciously leaning against Nico, head tilting in a sleepy way.

"Exhausting day, mh?", whispered Nico fondly, laying one arm around Percy's waist.

He carefully started caressing Percy's sides, earning himself soft purring sounds that made Nico grin
fondly. He knew submissives were inclined to pettings and cuddles. He had also already seen other
submissive mermaids with their mates and even though they enjoyed cuddling, he had never actually
heard them purr. It was what had made him call Percy 'kitten'. Once, a couple life-times ago, Nico
had owned a black little kitten and it had been similarly enthusiastic about cuddles as Percy was.
Nico smiled gently as Percy slipped off his shoulder and into his lap, having fallen asleep. He had
mentally exhausted himself with his worries over the past week, he earned his sleep. Nico just
wanted to carefully slip out of the bed and make his way back home when Percy's arms sneaked
around his waist and the merboy clung onto him like Nico was an oversized teddy bear. Sighing,
Nico decided to stay just a little longer. After all, he did seem to have some kind of soothing effect on
Percy – something that made his chest swell with pride every time the thought crossed his mind. And
he did have a right to pride himself on that; for a dominant, it was like a badge of honor to be seen as
non-threatening and safe by a submissive, even more so considering both of them were unmated.
Times where dominants were known for their aggressiveness and made their names by being the
most brutal and vicious one around were long past. The preconceived idea that a dominant had to
prove himself by fighting other dominants had long since been replaced by having to prove their
worth to submissives and not to each other. Personally and as a gentleman, Nico enjoyed this far
more. After all, one planned to mate the submissive and not the other party they were fighting. Now,
in dominant pairs, the fighting was still an often used practice, to prove themselves worthy of each
other, two dominants would repeatedly duel each other. He vividly remembered the courting phase
between Frank and Hazel. Bared fangs, long drawn-out hunting sessions and the coupling that had
followed was far too loud for Nico's poor sensitive ears. Traumatizing, really. Yawning widely,
lulled into a sense of comfort by the nostalgic thoughts in his head and the steady, soft purring
coming from Percy, Nico felt himself drifting off to sleep.

When Nico woke up in the morning, it was to the sensation of being poked in the cheek. Repeatedly.
Frowning, he slowly cracked his eyes open. The first thing he saw was a broad, toothy grin aimed
his way. The poking did not stop, so Nico swatted at the finger.

"I – (another poke) – want – (more poking) – chocolate!", was declared in a soft, demanding voice.

"...What?", grunted Nico, still drowsy with sleep.

"Cho – (poke here) – co – (another poke) – late (final poke)!", repeated his little alarm clock.

"Ty... you're already hyperactive enough as it is. I'm not going to give you chocolate", sighed Nico.

Tyson huffed and crossed his arms over his chest. "Thany gives me chocolate."
"...So?", asked Nico, really not following the conversation or what it meant.

"Vampires can turn into bats", stated Tyson, slowly driving Nico insane with randomness. "Thany turns into a bat. Thany flies into Tri's room at night. Thany gives me chocolate so I won't tell dad."

Nico's eyes widened in realization as he turned to look at the still peacefully sleeping Percy in his arms. Then he turned to look back at the toothily grinning Tyson, bouncing on the balls of his feet.

"You're the devil", muttered Nico surprised. "I did not expect that."

"I want chocolate", hummed Tyson, tilting his head. "I could ask daddy if he'll give me chocolate... Wait a moment, I'll just call him and ask him!"

"You are the devil", hissed Nico, covering Tyson's mouth. "Yes, yes. You get chocolate! I swear!"

Tyson looked very pleased with himself at that. "Okay. I'll tell daddy that Percy is still tired from yesterday. But if he wants pancakes, big brother should come down soon."

Nico snorted as he watched the little devil leave the room. Sighing, Nico rolled onto his back and tugged Percy closer. That explained so much though. Nico had been wondering how Thanatos survived with such a strict and long-wearing courting-process. As far as the public knew, Thanatos and Triton were only alone on their dates; in public. It was utterly old-fashioned to a borderline painful degree, but Triton was the oldest submissive child of a king, it was expected that the prince's suitor would do things properly. Nico frowned as he thought about it, carefully carding his fingers through Percy's hair as the young prince in his arms snuggled closer to him.

"Why did you bribe my baby brother?", asked Percy suspiciously, yawning widely.

"Because it's... very uncommon for an unmated dominant and submissive to sleep in the same bed", offered Nico reluctantly. "And, as mentioned yesterday, your father is already not my biggest fan."

"What? The supes not yet caught up with the twenty-first century?", grunted Percy.

"For the... common folks, yeah, but you are a prince, Percy", reminded Nico softly. "It's why Thanatos and Triton have been dancing around with their courting for quite some while now."

"What's the big deal? I mean, seriously. I don't understand a lick of politics. Amy said she and dad used to rule the entire sea, but now there are other rulers too, so...", drawled Percy out, shrugging.

"Seven", supplied Nico. "Just like the seven seas, there are seven rulers over the sea. Only seven. The sea makes up most of this planet, Percy. And look at just how many royals and governments humans have. But there are only seven royal families to the sea. It is a big deal. And many, if not most, supernatural races don't have any kind of leadership at all anymore. Most are mixed racial communities like ours, ruled by the strongest – both in body and wisdom. In New York's case, that is my sire Hades. There are shifter-packs that have their Alphas, but commonly even those belong to a council where all supernaturals of the city are represented. Hades is the head of the council."

"Okay. So, everyone gets real hung-up on the sea being old-fashioned then?", joked Percy.

"It's more than that", huffed Nico amused and rolled his eyes. "Look at this. This community. We have nature spirits, storm spirits, elves, dragons, shifters, hunters, vampires, valkyries – so many and such different races. There is no other way but democracy to unite them all. And even though Hades is the leader of New York, he makes no decision without the input of the council, without listening to all races and their opinions. Under the sea, things are a bit... easier. There are different races, other than merpeople, but they... have much more in common, are 'of a breed', as Hades likes to call it."
They're loyal to their royals and with the kind of power and influence the seven royal families have, it is... admired and romanticized, you could say. Marrying a real prince or princess one day, like in the Disney movies? Pre-teens eat that up, I tell you."

"So... I guess the love-life of me and my siblings is kind of like... a big deal?", asked Percy.

Nico nodded gravely and sighed. "Thanatos was the first vampire Hades had turned and thus his second in command. He's considered a good match because of that. He's strong yet gentle. The perfect dominant for a submissive prince like Triton. A good choice, you could say."

Percy frowned thoughtful. "Never given it much thought, but what about my other siblings?"

"Proteus has made a good political choice, being the firstborn", answered Nico slowly, adjusting both himself and Percy to lay more comfortably, with Percy sprawled out over his chest, looking at Nico very attentively. "His mate's name is Psamatheia, very sweet submissive mermaid. A princess herself, daughter of King Nereus and Queen Doris. The kind of mating one would expect of a dominant prince and firstborn, you know. They met as a political match, but as far as Thanatos told me, they very much fell in love pretty soon. It was one of those fairy tale stories."

"Weird", grunted Percy. "And what about my other siblings, Gossip King?"

Nico snorted with a pointed look. "That's Ghost King, you mean little kitten. And it's not exactly gossip. I've known your family for more than half a century now. You get to know people when you've known them for that long. Relationship status is kind of basic there. Your sister Kymopoleia is... well... in an on-again-off-again relationship with a merman named Briareos, a dominant himself just like her but of no notable heritage. And while dominant-dominant matings aren't frowned upon anymore, I guess people are expecting a bit... more of her. Not that she gives a damn about what people think though. I guess her bad taste and refusal to settle down with a proper mating is what made the other royals steer clear from trying to make a match with her."

"Sounds like Kym", grunted Percy half-amused. "She's always been my favorite. Always broke a lot of rules and helped me break them too, which was my favorite pastime."

Nico smiled amused by that and shook his head, picturing a cute little Percy getting into trouble with the help of his rebellious big sister. "Benthesikyme is mated to a dominant merman of... well, minor nobility, I guess. Some kind of duke or whatever. A moderately good match. Rhode's single and she has proven to be very adamant about dodging possible suitors." Nico chuckled amused before smoothing down Percy's hair. "And now, now they also have you. Poseidon had been considered blessed with three submissive children in Triton, Benthesikyme and Rhode, but with you it makes four. The best thing a dominant can do is mate into a good family with a good submissive mate to start their own family with. And you are a damn good political match for many."

Percy frowned thoughtful, chin resting on Nico's chest as he stared at the vampire intensely. It figured Nico would know such things, he had heard enough about how many considered him Hades' heir. Percy wasn't really sure how that worked what with most the coven having been turned before Nico. But apparently being heir didn't have too much to do with being the firstborn, especially not among vampires. Some vampires learned more in a century than others in a millennia, as Hazel had put it. To think Proteus, Triton and Benthesikyme had made 'good matches' made Percy wonder. Was he going to make a good match? Or would he disappoint like Kym? Maybe just stay single at all, like Rhode seemed to have chosen? And here Percy had thought dating in general was already hard and complicated enough. No, dating as a royal was going to be a nightmare.

"Are there others like me in the school?", asked Percy softly, tilting his head and thus resting his cheek on Nico's chest. "I kinda feel... like I'm some, uh, big deal? I don't really like that feeling. I
mean, I'm not special. I'm just me. Are there... others at the school who are a big deal?"

"Well, me, of course", huffed Nico and puffed his chest out in a cute way, winking at Percy. "Sure Thanatos had been the first Hades had turned, but everyone in the coven and beyond knows Hades has a particularly soft spot for me. I am already forming my own coven among the supes at school. In a few years, I'm going to be pretty powerful and probably joining Hades' council to represent my own mixed-racial coven. Then there's Luke. Even though Lupa is the Alpha of New York, Luke has already become the Alpha of his own pack with Travis, Connor, Chris, Cecil, Nathan and Frank. That's a big deal, because it's very rare for a wolf to become Alpha before their graduation."

"I like Luke", hummed Percy pleased. "Maybe I should ask him how he's handling things?"

"Maybe", agreed Nico fondly, tracing Percy's cheek. "Alabaster and Lou are also of... important heritage, you could say. The ancient witch queen was Hecate. She was so powerful, she's being reborn every time her natural life ends. And Al and Lou are the kids of Hecate's current reincarnation. You could say they're like a prince and princess of the witch-folk, even though they don't call it that officially. It's how they're perceived by the other races though. But the one that comes closest to your situation would be Silena. She's the granddaughter of one of the other six rulers – Queen Thalassa. Queen Thalassa's only child and heir is Princess Aphrodite and Silena is her daughter. Yes, Aphrodite like the goddess of love. She's considered the most beautiful of the ocean's princesses and her being a 'bastard child' is what led to the myths around her birth, I guess. You know, the whole chopped off dick thrown into the sea thing. Very condescending way of talking about Queen Thalassa, really. But that's just it; you can't take all the myths by face value."

"No kidding. Them calling guys like Hades and dad gods", snorted Percy amused. "But I think I get that. Things humans don't understand, so they create myths about it and worship it, huh. Even though they changed some things. But... Aphrodite being a bastard, I mean, I'm a bastard too, so..."

"Times have changed quite some since then", pointed Nico out softly, caressing Percy's cheek. "If anything, they're going to be very giddy to finally have some fresh... prey. You might notice how most of the mentioned kings and queens have been around for a very long time and so have their children. To have a new prince in their midst, a new potential match for the never ending chase for a good mate to their children, it's going to put them in a good mood, I think."

Percy frowned as he nodded, unsure which idea frightened him more. Them hating him for being a bastard, or them being in a good mood about Percy being 'new prey'. He was pretty sure he was going to be a disappointment to whatever royal thought he would make a good match for their kids. Sighing, he tried shaking those thoughts off. For now, all he wanted was to lay here with Nico and maybe listen to the vampire's voice for like the rest of the day, not thinking about anything and especially not thinking about how complicated his life had become.

/Silena had the most polite smile possible on her face as she rung the doorbell of the Chase-household. Annabeth looked surprised and suspicious as she opened the door to find no one else aside from Silena. It wasn't that the two blondes were on bad terms with each other, but the only thing they had in common was Piper, really. Still, Annabeth did her best to smile, even though it was still rather early in the morning on a Sunday. Thankfully her younger brothers were already out and had dragged their mother along with them, while Annabeth's father was in his lab. Annabeth wasn't too fond of explaining her supernatural friends to her human family."

"Silena. Can I... help you with something?", asked Annabeth and tilted her head.

The taller blonde motioned for Annabeth to step closer in a nearly conspiring motion, making
Annabeth even more curious. "Can you... run some tests on this for me, please?"

Upon being handed a zipper-back with some dark hair in it, Annabeth raised both her eyebrows. "...Whose hair is this and what exactly do you want me to test, Silena? Drugs? For the swim team?"

"No! No, no, no. No drugs. No one on my team would ever do such a thing", replied Silena before she heaved a sigh, looking troubled for a split second. "It's... Percy's. I took it from his hairbrush when we were over last week, but I took some time convincing myself to ask you..."

"Ask me what? What do you want me to test?", asked Annabeth a bit more sharply.

There was a certain protectiveness when it came to Percy. At first maybe only because Nico had picked an interest in the boy and that made Percy worthy of protection, but over the past weeks, Annabeth herself had also grown quite fond of the adorable merboy.

"Test it for Bastet DNA", requested Silena, frown etched into his face.

"You know the boys were only teasing Percy about it", pointed Annabeth out, frowning herself.

"They were, but...", started Silena before pausing. "Something has been bothering me about this ever since we all went to comfort Percy when he came into his heritage, you see. His behavior... It was... untypical for merpeople. No race generally shares their... most private behavior with other races, so you wouldn't know what the typical behavior of a mermaid or merboy is when we come into our heritage. We're water-bound creatures. We spend at least half the time it takes for us to settle into our heritage in water. Sure, we do nest, to a degree, but we normally only use them for sleep and spend every waking hour in the comfort of water to ease our nerves. Even if it's just a bathtub, but the Jacksons even have a pool, yet Percy spent nearly all his time in his bed, curled together in warm, soft places. Amphitrite told me that he did spend half his mornings in the pool, but still... It's not quite... normal behavior. I think everyone notes it down as Percy not knowing his own instincts and understanding how our people work, so perhaps he's been denying himself such things. But... After what Luke and Nico said, I... did some thinking. Curling together in warm, soft places, yearning for physical contact to that extend – sure, my kind does seek... hugs too, but he wanted pettings and caresses, basically curling together on Nico's chest. And the purring. That was purring. You can't tell me otherwise. I just... Just test it, please, Annie."

Annabeth frowned doubtfully. Hybrids were rare. Absolutely not unheard of, but rare. Normally, when two races mixed, one DNA would turn out the dominant one and settle. Very rarely did a child turn out to be a mixed breed. There were a few that Annabeth knew, like Frank who was part Hunter and part shifter. But Percy...? The purring, okay. The cuddling was also a bit suspicious. And maybe even the way Percy moved. Very bendable and elegant even, at times.

"Very well. I will check for Bastet DNA", sighed Annabeth in defeat after a moment.

Chapter End Notes

There's gonna be some Silena-Percy-bonding in the next, because heeey, royals! Which so doesn't sit well with Drew. So heeey, tension, bitching, problems! Also, hand-signs, who saw the hybrid-twist coming?
So the Drama

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Chapter 13: So the Drama

Drama club was basically awesome. He sat tugged between Connor and Piper. The trickster's fox-ears twitched as he leaned in to whisper something into Percy's ear, making the young merboy giggle. On Connor's other side sat Travis, watching his brother fondly. The moment Connor had decided that he liked Percy, Percy had de facto also fallen under Travis' protection. They were supposed to form groups of four and come up with a short scene improvised with the four words they had drawn from a hat. A warm-up, Rachel had called it. Percy found it rather exciting. The others in the club had accepted him as a late arrival really easily too; but then again, Percy had already befriended most of the members of the drama club. Percy purred slightly as Travis ran an absentminded hand through Percy's hair, the other hand doing the same with Connor's. The only submissives Travis had regular contact with were shifters, more precisely Connor and Luke. So he guessed that what he did for them would also work for Percy, probably. Which it did.

"You really do purr", whispered Piper teasingly. "That's so weird."

Percy blushed and ducked his head. "I like it and... I thought the whole point of being a supernatural is to follow your instincts more... Being truer to yourself, or whatever."

"I'm not telling you to stop purring. I'm just saying it's kind of a funny sound", huffed Piper and elbowed Percy softly. "It's also nice to see how much more relaxed you've become since you came into your heritage. Listening to your inner voice really is doing you some good, Perce."

Percy relaxed a little. Part of him still sought out a kind of validation for whatever it was he was doing; this was a new world, he didn't know if what he was doing was right or wrong, he needed to know if he was doing good or failing at being a merboy. For the next two hours, he was able to just relax and have fun with his friends while doing silly voices and playing pretend.

"Chase, will you stop it!", growled Nico with irritation and authority in his voice.

To her credit, Annabeth looked completely and utterly unfazed as she turned toward him. She was sitting in the library, together with Malcolm, Reyna, Thalia and Luke. All eyes were on him as he slammed cut-outs from jewelry magazines onto the table while still glaring at Annabeth. Normally, any sane submissive would show signs of, well, submission when faced with the wrath of a dominant – especially when it was a predatory race like vampires. But Annabeth had always been different and she knew Nico long enough to know he'd never actually harm her.

"What... is that?", asked Luke curiously as he went through the ripped-out pages. "Jewelry?"

"I'm merely making subtle suggestion for courting jewelry that Nico could buy Percy", drawled Annabeth out while playing with the silver owl- pendant around her neck. "Subtle and all."

"Oh. Oh, in that case...", chimed Luke before he grabbed a red pen from his pencil case and started circling special items on the different pages. "There, I think those fit his style best, don't you?"

Annabeth leaned over to check and hummed in agreement. "Good choices, Luke."
Luke grinned as he started playing with the pure golden ring that hung from a chain around his neck. The courting gift he had gotten from a very embarrassed Octavian and his most cherished possession. On the inside was a quote from *Alice in Wonderland* – If you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there. It reminded him of the early stages of his and Octavian's friendship when they had debated Luke's future as the Alpha. He had mulled over what path to take, what the right next step was to get there, but since 'there' was a more than vague concept at that point, Octavian had argued whatever he'd do next would bring him forward. The quote was just a little piece, a symbol of how Octavian stood strong next to Luke, willing to support him.

"But you'd still have to... individualize them", added Luke softly, still playing with the ring.

"I'm not buying Percy courting jewelry", sighed Nico a bit exhausted and with a glare. "I need a new best friend, by the way. Damn traitorous Valkyrie."

"Aw, did you just call me your best friend, di Angelo?", snorted Annabeth mockingly. "How sappy."

"Why aren't you buying the sweet submissive who's basically all over you all the time no courting jewelry?", inquired Malcolm, adjusting his glasses as he looked pointedly at Nico.

"Sweet submissive?", echoed Nico, trying to keep the edge of possessive jealousy out of his voice.

"Calm your fangs, di Angelo", sighed Malcolm and rolled his eyes. "I have no intentions of adding a submissive to my relationship with Katie. But I am not blind. He's very attractive and damn is he smitten with you. Now, answer my question. Why aren't you courting him?"

"Because-", started Nico with an annoyed look, just to be interrupted.

"-what he needs right now isn't a mate-", continued Annabeth in a good Nico-imitation.

"-but a good friend-", continued Luke with a large grin and a mocking look in his eyes.

"-and I wouldn't want him to feel betrayed by me", Thalia with a dramatic sigh.

Reyna chuckled fondly as she turned to Malcolm. "He thinks Percy will feel manipulated, as though Nico was only nice to him to get into his pants. Because Nico is an idiot."

"And no one disagrees with my mate", chimed Annabeth with a smirk, leaning against Reyna.

Nico huffed and glowered, arms crossed over his chest. He needed an entire set of new friends.

"So you're a princess, huh? Could have mentioned that, you know..."

Silena blinked slowly and pulled herself up on the edge of the pool, crossing her arms and resting her chin on them. She swatted her cotton-candy-pink tail in the water to splash Percy. Percy laughed where he sat on the edge of the pool. When Silena looked up to him, it was in an apologetic way.

"In my experience, people treat you differently when they know you're royal and I always find it easier to first get to know someone before mentioning who my grandmother is", admitted Silena. "But you are right, I should have told you sooner. Things just happened so fast, mh?"

"You mean my coming-into-my-heritage-thing?", huffed Percy and wiggled his nose before he slipped into the water too. "Yeah. But still... Well, doesn't really matter now, I guess. I just..."
Silena smiled a little and nodded. "If you need help, I know my way around the royal courts."

"Thanks", sighed Percy relieved, gently brushing his own tail against hers in gratitude.

He was slowly getting the hang of this whole turning at will thing. Piper and Mike were already going at it hard, racing each other in what was supposed to be casual warm-up laps. Then again, both of them were pretty competitive when it came to swimming. Gwen, Lacy and Mitchell were taking it slower, while Drew was... staring at Percy in utter distaste. Great. He loved feeling like that disgusting piece of something stuck under someone's shoe.

"Hey, Drewsie, would you like to race me?", asked Percy with a broad, charming smile.

Drew huffed, nose high in the air. "I normally wouldn't scoop that low, but... for you, I'd make an exception. Someone has to show you that just because you're the bastard son of a king, you're certainly not worth anything."

Percy huffed with a snarky grin, but it still hit home like a punch to the gut. He knew better than anyone else that he wasn't worth a thing. Maybe even less because he was just a bastard. Gritting his teeth tightly, Percy pushed off and started racing Drew. He didn't even notice how his father entered the pool area. He had to admit, regardless of how arrogant Drew was, she was actually a very good swimmer. Percy was already breathless and exhausted by the time that race was over, even though the real training hadn't even started. And damn, Poseidon was a hard-ass.

It was kind of cool to see this new side of his dad though. The very proud one – he was literally glowing whenever he was praising Percy and that was just so embarrassing, but at the same time it also felt so good. He finally felt validated by his father and damn was he working hard for it. He was practically swimming for his life, every muscle in his still pretty new tail aching and burning. He knew he should take it slower, because he wasn't as versed in using his tail as the others on the team were – but that only made him push himself harder. He didn't want to be left behind.

He was the last one left in the showers – Mitchell and Mike had both gone ahead. Percy was glad about it. Finally allowing himself to breathe harshly, he slid down the wall to sit on the ground. He hadn't been that exhausted in a long time. His legs were shaking even now that he was sitting with them spread out in front of him. He rested his hands on his knees, digging in tight and drawing his hands up. He wasn't trying to hurt himself – it was barely leaving a red rash, really – he was just trying to force his legs to stop doing that. How in the world was he supposed to walk like that?! He gritted his teeth, eyes closed tightly. He was weak. He couldn't even keep up with Gwen and Lacy, who were the weakest swimmers on the team. Not long-term. Sure, he had beaten both Piper and Drew now in a short race. He was fast then. But after the race against Drew, he had already reached his limits. And then two more hours of training followed and he was fighting his own body to keep up. He needed to get stronger. He needed more stamina. He needed—more.

Supporting himself with both hands against the wall, he slowly stood and then made his way to the changing room. He still had classes. Lunch now, but after that... history, or something? Didn't know. Mind was a bit fuzzy with exhaustion. Somehow, he managed to get dressed and made his way out of the locker room, just to be greeted by a fist to the stomach. He gasped, breath knocked out of him as he stared wide-eyed up at the nastily grinning boy.

"Bryce Lawrence. Don't forget this name", whispered the boy as he leaned down. "And if you humiliate my girl again, I will do far worse, you worthless little bastard."

Shit, Percy didn't even have a sassy quip on his lips. No wait, that was wrong. Percy would still have a sassy quip on his lips even on his deathbed – and hey, it might not be the cleverest thing to provoke the guy who just hit him, but who was saying Percy was good at being clever?
"Well, maybe you should tell your girl to make it less easy to humiliate her then. Damn, she's weak. Then again, I guess you two are a match made in heaven. Even my little brother hits harder."

The next hit definitely hurt more and Percy could see funny spots at the edge of his vision, but it was so worth it because damn did Bryce look furious. So easily baited, it was pathetic. All Percy did was grin up at him like the cat that just ate the goldfish. Never show the pain. While he straightened very, very slowly, Bryce snarled and turned away from him, leaving with haste steps as people started pouring out of the classrooms. Once fully upright, Percy took a shaky breath, which okay, hurt a little. Lot. Damn it. He was tired, exhausted, every muscle in his legs and arms still burned from training and now this. All he wanted was to be somewhere safe.

Nico was looking more grumpy than he normally did as he was sitting in a half-circle together with some of his friends and coven-members. Thalia and Bianca were laying together on one side of him, Hazel, Frank and Leo on the other. Next to Thalia and Bianca were a displeased Octavian with a happy Luke curled together on his lap. Reyna and Annabeth sat opposite him. Hence the him being grumpy part. All the happy couples; it was disgusting, really. It was also natural, of course – they were supernaturals, they had a far keener sense to find their best match and most supernaturals found their mate in their late teens.

"Ah, look, Nico will stop being pouty", stated Annabeth relieved.

She was laying half on Thalia and Luke, with her head in Reyna's lap. It was pretty common for submissives to claim comfort among those they trust the most, especially during lazy periods like these. Right now, they had all sat through long enough hours already so a bit of recharging was good. Annabeth hummed pleased as she got her hair caressed by her mate. Everyone turned into the direction Annabeth had pointed at her words to see a practically sleep-walking Percy heading their way. Thalia frowned concerned, exchanging a look with Luke. Percy looked exhausted.

"Are you alright, little one?", asked Luke gently, tilting his head.

Percy grunted to show he had heard the question, but he didn't bother formulating an answer. Chris and Piper were coming from the other side and joining them. Piper chuckled amused as she snuggled up against her boyfriend, leaning against Thalia with her back.

"Someone's been working real hard during training", hummed Piper amused.

Her hair was still wet from the shower she had taken after training, she hadn't bothered blow-drying it in favor of seeking at least one of her mates – Clarisse still had club-duties. Percy grunted in agreement as he knelt down and then crawled into Nico's lap. The vampire froze up, staring stunned down at the submissive merboy as he curled together tightly on Nico's lap to best fit on it.

"Uh, Percy... Percy? Are you alright, Perce?", asked Nico concerned. "Percy?"

Percy groaned and grabbed Nico's face as he pulled himself up to face the Italian. Nico's heart – thankfully not in use anyway – stopped as only less than an inch was between their mouths. Was Percy going to kiss him...? Percy was in his lap and so close now-


He patted Nico's cheek before sliding down again, arms wrapping around Nico's waist as he practically buried his face in Nico's sixpack, a happy look on his face as he was out like a candle within the second. Nico blinked slowly, doe-eyed. He was still rigid as he stared at Percy.
"Uh... help...?", whispered Nico confused.


"He must be really exhausted", noted Annabeth with a hint of worry. "Is he alright?"

She looked at Piper, who just shrugged, eyebrows knitted. "I don't know. I thought he was doing fine. He really rocked training. But it seems it took more of a toll on him than he was ready to admit. Just... relax, di Angelo. If Percy exhausted himself enough to be out that easily, even though he's not exactly familiar with the environment yet, he really needs it."

"Yeah. Be grateful", added Frank with a frown. "It's a huge sign of trust if a submissive falls asleep on you like that. Especially in public. Just... roll with it, man."

"Do the patting", suggested Chris. "He really enjoys being patted. Even more than Con does."

Nico frowned and nodded. It was a known fact that submissive shapeshifters enjoyed being caressed or patted, to an extend. He didn't really understand why that would work, but he was willing to give it a try. He carefully started caressing Percy's sides. Percy did the cute purr-like sound again as he turned some to bare his stomach to Nico. A gesture that made the vampire blush just a little. It was a sign of submission, even though Nico knew Percy was doing it by instinct right now to get more of the gentle caress. The pleased flutter in his chest stopped however when he caressed Percy's stomach and the boy gave a pained whine and curled together on himself again.

"What... was that?", asked Luke with a glare, looking like a protective momma wolf.

"Maybe he pulled a muscle during training?", suggested Piper with a frown. "Be gentle?"

"I'm always gentle with him", growled Nico, hackles raised at the mere suggestion.

"Don't growl at my mate", growled Chris back, eyes flashing golden.

"Tune the testosterone down", sighed Annabeth annoyed, rolling her eyes. "Both of you. Piper didn't mean to suggest you'd hurt him, dumbass vampire. And Nico doesn't mean harm to Piper, dumb-wolf. Now, both shut up, because Percy's not the only one who wants to nap."

Nico huffed at the Valkyrie before focusing his attention on the merboy in his lap again. He carefully avoided Percy's stomach, instead caressing his sides and hips, making Percy purr again. He relaxed as he saw Percy relaxing once more. For the rest of lunch break, Nico was completely engrossed in caressing Percy's sides and making him purr louder.

Percy could have done without the last couple hours of class. He would have preferred going home at lunch. But laying in Nico's lap had helped – weirdly and embarrassingly enough. Honestly, he didn't even remember going to them or laying down in Nico's lap. He just remembered leaving the gym seeking out a safe place and then waking up in Nico's lap when classes started.

And then he hadn't even gotten to go home right after school, because the united force of Leo and Piper had roped him into going to get some ice-cream. Which was cool, Percy still wasn't used to having friends to hang out with outside of school. But that only added to his overall condition, so by the time he finally got home, he dodged his family, went straight to the bathroom and drew himself a nice, hot, relaxing bath. Everything still ached, but it was a little better. He stood in front of his large mirror, shirt lifted to check the slowly forming bruises on his stomach. Well, he's had far worse than that and with a bit of water-proof concealer it wouldn't even be an issue during training. He was
quite good at covering up bruises; an expert even.

"What. Is. That?"

Percy stiffened as he heard the angry hissing from behind him. He turned around to find Nico standing there, in front of the window, eyes flashing an angry and vicious red. Percy pulled his shirt down to hide the bruise, knowing it was already too late.

"Nothing. And you should start knocking", grunted Percy with a glare.

"I flew in through the open window – how should I have knocked?", growled Nico as he stepped up to Percy and pulled his shirt up enough to reveal the large bruise. "And that is not nothing."

Percy dug his nails into Nico's wrist and forcefully pulled it off before straightening his shirt again, baring what looked rather prominently like fangs at Nico. "I said it's nothing. Just leave it, Nico."

"Percy. Tell me who did this", growled Nico demandingly, straightening up to loom over him.

Even without fully grasping the whole dominant-submissive-thing yet, Percy still realized that Nico was trying to assert his dominance over Percy and make Percy do this based on their nature. Well, screw nature big times. Percy also straightened up, despite the ache in his stomach, hissing at Nico. "Don't order me around, di Angelo", warned Percy dangerously. "I don't need a dominant to play knight in shining armor for me, I don't need you to go around intervening! I'm fine. I can handle myself. I've been handling myself for years now, so get out of my room."

Percy glared angrily at Nico until the vampire sighed and turned into a bat. Thinking the conversation was over now and that Nico would leave, Percy let himself fall onto his bed and decidedly faced away from Nico to stare at his wall. At least until a cute little bat landed right in front of his line of sight. Percy glared at him in irritation. The bat made an adorable tiny sound and his eyes seemed to double in size as he stared up at Percy. Percy's glare softened just a little. The bat made another squeaky sound and tilted his head in the most adorable way as he shook his little wings. Percy bit his lips hard, trying to stay strong. The bat hopped forward and nudged his tiny head against Percy's cheek, nuzzling him – and gosh, the fur was so soft and he was so tiny and cute and fragile and Percy couldn't help but scoop him up in his hands carefully.

"That's cheating", huffed Percy with a pout. "You can't just turn into a bat and be adorable when I'm angry with you. It's just not fair, you hear me, stupid vampire?" Nico squeaked and licked Percy's cheek – heaven, how was Percy supposed to stay mad? "Stop it with the cuteness. Cheeky vampire." Percy heaved a sigh. "Look... I don't need you to look out for me. I've been looking out for myself all my life. I'm not some fragile, useless submissive who can't fend for himself without a strong, brave dominant, okay? Don't make me feel like that, Nico. Please."

He was holding up the cute little bat over his face to glare sternly at him, just to suddenly have the bat turn back into human-form and having Nico kneel over him, supporting himself on his hands on either side of Percy's face, making the merboy blush. "...Okay. You're right. You've been looking out for yourself all on your own. But... please know that I didn't mean to patronize you, Percy. This isn't about me being dominant and you being submissive. This is about you being... important to me. I'd be just as furious if Hazel or Alabaster would turn up bruised. I don't want you to be harmed."

Percy was staring up at Nico with large eyes and red cheeks. "I... I'm not used to having people be worried about me. My mom, yeah. But... other than her? I'm still getting used to having friends. And I like having friends. But I don't need protectors, okay?"
Nico slowly sat up, leaning against the foot-board of the bed. Percy also sat up, leaning against the headboard and facing Nico with a very serious look on his face. This was important to him; he didn't want Nico to feel as though Percy needed to be protected. Percy didn't want others to fight his battles, he had done that all his life himself and he would continue doing so.

"I can't promise you that", sighed Nico after a long moment and shook his head. "It's against my nature to just... shrug it off when someone I care about is being hurt, Percy."

"Look, I won't let this happen again. I can take care of myself. I will take care of this myself."

"Fair enough", muttered Nico, still not looking too happy. "But if I find any excessive bruising on you again... I'm not going to let it slide, Percy. I won't allow you to slip back into being abused by anyone. And just because you may think that bullying is happening to many others doesn't mean it should happen to you. And just because you may have handled it all on your own in the past doesn't mean you'll have to face it alone. Do you understand me? If I see something like that again, I will send the united front of Luke, Piper and Annabeth after you and you won't be able to deflect them with the excuse of not wanting to be patronized by a dominant."

"I like you better as a bat", muttered Percy, arms crossed over his chest. "Less talking. More cute."

Nico snorted and rolled his eyes. "I care about you. Just accept that, mio gattino."

Percy's ears turned red at the nickname and the declaration. He was still getting the hang of having people care for him. He didn't really know how to handle it or what it really meant. He just knew that he wouldn't allow Nico to march up to this Bryce guy and beat him up or something equally neanderthal. Percy was going to take care of Bryce and Drew himself. Just didn't know how yet.

"Why are you here anyway?", sighed Percy softly, as an olive branch.

"I was worried. You were so exhausted during lunch, I wanted to see if you were okay", admitted Nico and ducked his head. "I... worry a lot. Hazel teases me about it."

"...That's sweet", mumbled Percy, cheeks a bit pink. "I'm fine."

"Yeah, saw that", snorted Nico beneath his breath before lifting his hands up in a pacifying manner when he saw Percy's glare. "No more fighting. Just... doubting you're that fine."

"I am", stated Percy firmly, locking eyes with Nico. "I'm exhausted; training with Poseidon is harder than with any of my other coaches. Training with a team of merpeople is harder than with a team of humans who struggle to somehow follow my lead. But I'll adjust, so I'm fine."

Nico carefully crawled up to Percy and pulled him into a hug. "Okay. I'll buy it. No more fighting for tonight? Today was annoying and exhausting. I just wanted... to see you."

Percy sighed and snuggled up to Nico. The 'to cuddle with you' was unsaid but obvious; the vampire seemed to be quite the cuddler, especially for comfort. Percy didn't mind. He liked it.

"Thank you. For worrying about me", whispered Percy. "I promise I'll... try to get used to it?"

"That sounds good", nodded Nico relieved as they both settled into the bed together. "You think you could at least ask for help if things with... whoever did this get out of hand?"

"I'm not the kind of person to ask for help", snorted Percy with a sarcastic look on his face.

Nico heaved a deep sigh. He didn't think so either. And of course Nico couldn't find a sweet little
submissive who'd allow Nico to shelter and protect him. No, he picked the stubborn one. Nico smiled a little as he looked down at Percy. Well, he wouldn't really want Percy any other way.

Chapter End Notes

It's fun having Nico's friends tease him about being an old-fashioned moron! ^o^ Next chapter will have the biig reveal; Annabeth did the testing and got the results! How will Percy handle it? Who will he tell? And most importantly: Will Nico survive seeing Percy with kitten-ears and a kitten-tail or will he be the first vampire to die of bloodloss...?
Chapter 14: The Purrfect Pack

Annabeth had no idea how to approach the topic. For the past week, she has had this piece of paper weighting heavy in her pocket. It had taken her a couple days to get around to testing the sample Silena had given her and now it was taking her even longer to come up with a gentle way of telling Percy about it. After all, the boy had had a hard enough time wrapping his head around being a merboy, then around being a royal merboy, then being a submissive, royal merboy. And now he'd have to adapt to being a half-breed? She genuinely didn't know how he'd take it. In a way, it had always comforted him to belong somewhere. As a merboy, he belonged to the cove under Silena. As a submissive, he had found especial connection with Piper, Leo and Connor. The problem about half-breeds was that it was pretty hard to find two of the same mixed races. Not to mention that New York didn't have any cat-shifters. It was canine territory.

At first, Annabeth had contemplated bringing Nico. But then she remembered that the moron still hadn't started courting Percy, so he wasn't exactly a 'natural source of comfort' and Annabeth wasn't sure how comfortable Percy would really be having him there. The same went for Piper or Connor.

So in the end, Annabeth was sitting alone in Percy's room. His sister Rhode had let her in; she had always been Annabeth's favorite Jackson. Rhode was a bookworm and she often lend Annabeth from her books – of which the mermaid had quite the collection. Annabeth was currently reading one of the books from Rhode's collection, considering that she had forgotten about the swim team's training schedule and Percy wasn't home yet. Annabeth was so engrossed in the book, she nearly missed how the door opened and a sluggish Percy walked in. The boy headed straight for his bed and collapsed face-first on it. An elegant, blonde eyebrow was raised skeptically. In the past week, Percy had been working himself to the bone. Piper insisted that he just needed to find his own pace and that they should leave him be, while Nico just grumbled and tried to glare a hole into the next wall. Annabeth was giving him precisely two more weeks to find his rhythm before she'd do something herself. Putting her book down, Annabeth got up and walked over to Percy to sit down next to him and pat his hair gently. Percy grunted, muffled by the pillow his face was buried in.

"Percy? You... okay?", inquired the Valkyrie, slowly taking her hand away again as Percy sat up.

"...Not Nico", hummed Percy with a confused frown for a moment before shaking his head. "Uh, hey Annabeth. Didn't expect to find you in my bedroom..."

"...But you were expecting to find Nico?", asked Annabeth skeptically, both eyebrows raised.

Percy gave a half-shrug before he sat up properly and leaned against the wall. "He's been visiting me in the evening most days. You, on the other hand, have never just dropped by unannounced. Flew in through the window too, bird girl? What brings you here anyway? Must be important..."

"Only if you're feeling... up to an important conversation", offered Annabeth cautiously.

Percy tilted his head and blinked those large, curious green eyes at Annabeth and yes, from that perspective, she quite clearly could see the resemblance to a kitten. She smiled at that.

"Well, now you got me curious, so there's no backing out", hummed Percy with a grin. "Spill it."
Annabeth opened and closed her mouth slowly before folding her hands in her lap. "You remember how Luke was teasing you about your kitten-like behavior, Percy?"

"Sure. I mean, Nico still calls me 'kitten', muttered Percy with a very prominent blush.

Annabeth grinned amused for a moment before turning serious again. "And what do you think about Frank? Him being a half-blood, that is."

Percy frowned confused at that before shrugging. "I dunno. I mean, Frank's Frank. And I'm still struggling with all the different races and their abilities, to be honest. He's a hunter and a shapeshifter and that... works, I guess? As long as he's happy with it."

"And... And would you be happy? With being a half-blood?", asked Annabeth carefully.

The frown on Percy's face deepened. "I dunno. If you'd have asked me three months ago if I'd be okay with being a merboy, I probably would have laughed in your face for the weird question. So... Why the weird question, Annabeth? I kinda doubt it's just curiosity speaking..."

"...Luke teasing you, it made Silena think", started Annabeth slowly. "According to her, your behavior when you came into your heritage was not entirely... typical for merpeople. Normally, your kind seeks out water and spends nearly all the time of coming into their heritage in water. You however spent nearly all of it cuddled up in nests of warmth and fuzziness. Add in your... purring and general cuddliness and the comment from Luke and, well, Silena had an idea. She thought that maybe you're... not just a merboy. She... took some of your hair from your hairbrush that night and she gave it to me to test it for Bastet DNA. I... did that. And... you're one eighth Bastet. Considering both of Poseidon's parents are merpeople, it must be one of your mother's parents."

Percy just stared at him with those large, large eyes of his. "...I'm a... cat? I'm actually a cat?"

"You're one eighth of a cat-shifter, Percy", corrected Annabeth with a slightly pointed look. "I did some research and I'm guessing that your Bastet DNA was dormant, just like your mother's, until you fully came into your merboy heritage. It... awakened your shifter-gene."

"Wait. Wait, so I can shift? Like Luke and Con and Trav?", asked Percy excitedly.

"Not exactly; they're fox-shifters. You're a cat. But yes, essentially", nodded Annabeth.

"Okay. Cool. I think", stated Percy, blinking slowly. "Uh, thanks for the info, Annabeth?"

"No problem. If you... want me to be with you when you want to tell someone, then just call, okay?", offered Annabeth, patting Percy's thigh gently. "Or if you're having a mental break-down because it becomes too much when you over-think it, yes?"

Percy nodded and offered her a smile before she excused herself and went home. After that, Percy went to bed pretty early but spent nearly all of the night staring at the ceiling and mulling things over. He knew that grandma Laura was a cat-lady – it was what Sally called her most of the time when talking about her. But now he guessed that his mom had no idea just how true that was. On every picture of grandpa James and grandma Laura, his grandma had at least one cat on her lap. Sally always joked that her mom had been as graceful as a cat and used her famous kitten-eyes on Sally's father, always getting whatever she wanted. Percy had inherited his kitten-eyes from her, had Sally always accused, because she could never deny him either. Turned out she was right with that.

"You're up early", noted Amphitrite surprised as she walked into the kitchen.
Percy and Tyson were already in the kitchen, eating pancakes that Percy had made. Granted, Percy had planned to eat a fast breakfast on his own, but then Tyson had heard him sneak about and of course did the youngest Jackson attach himself to Percy eagerly. Percy looked up and offered his stepmother a reluctant smile. In the weeks that Percy had been living with them, he actually found her to be good company. He still felt crowded between all of his siblings, if he was being honest.

"I wanted to go visit some friends", hummed Percy. "Wanted to get an early start."

"I wanted big brother's pancakes", chimed Tyson happily.

After a moment, Percy pushed the plate closer to Amphitrite. "Want some too? I made a lot."

She smiled genuinely happy and accepted the offer. Half the time, she still wasn't sure if she was putting too much pressure and expectation on the boy, if she was smothering him, or if she was wanted around, so a clear invite like that was very appreciated.

"Will you be back for family dinner?", asked Amphitrite softly. "It's just... if you won't be there, it'd be nice to know that we don't have to wait for you, but you don't have to, if you got plans."

"Nah. I'll be home for dinner. Your pulled pork rocks", grinned Percy lightly.

Amphitrite blinked surprised and smiled in return. "You're in a very chipper mood today, Percy."

"Yeah", shrugged Percy with a light blush, ducking his head. "Tonight's movie night?"

"It's Kym's turn, which means it'll be an overly aggressive action movie", sighed Amphitrite.

Percy grinned at that and for the rest of breakfast, they kept light smalltalk about school and such. Afterward, Amphitrite offered to clean up so Percy could leave. He gave her a last smile before rushing out of the house. He was genuinely looking forward to family movie night, actually. Even though they were a bit too much at times, Percy really started to settle into being part of the family. So he may not have decided if he was going to tell them about his new genes just yet, but hey. First, he needed to wrap his head around it himself. And that was where he was heading right now. With a bright smile on his face did he knock on the door once he reached it. He blinked surprised when a more than sleepy Connor opened the door for him, rubbing his eyes confused.

"...Percy...?", mumbled Connor before yawning widely. "Why are you here...?"

"Uh, I wanted to talk to Luke, but I don't have his number or address, so I wanted to ask you for it and I wanted to ask if you and Trav would maybe come with me?", asked Percy a bit nervously.

Connor looked even more confused as he stepped aside. "Luke and Trav are still asleep."

"...Asleep? Here?", echoed Percy surprised.

Connor looked a bit more awake and a little amused as he wrapped one arm around Percy's shoulders and started steering him upstairs. "We got the same foster mother. Luke's mom never really... got over the fact that his dad was a shifter and that he left. She's been in a psychiatry for years now. We visit her regularly though. And Trav's and my parents, they're... both dead. Lupa took us in, because she's a wolf-shifter and Luke's a fox-shifter, so she thought it might do him some good having other foxes around. He's been like a big brother to us ever since."

"Lupa...? Like... Romulus and Remus' foster mom?", asked Percy surprised.

"Those two were even more troublesome than Travis and Connor."
Percy jumped a little and turned around to see a beautiful but strict looking woman. She had stark-white hair and intense gray eyes. She tilted her head inquisitively at Percy who ducked a little behind Connor out of instinct. She screamed Alpha wolf with just one gaze.

"Mother", whined Connor softly, trying to nudge Percy out from hiding. "Don't frighten my friend. Percy, this is Lupa. Mom, this is Percy, Poseidon's son."

"Ah. My boys have been telling me a lot about you", nodded Lupa, softening up a little at that. "And yes, I am the Lupa. I've taken in a lot orphaned shifters over the years to guide them."

Percy nodded very slowly, blinking as he watched her in awe. Connor nudged him again and pulled him along into one of the bedrooms. Biting his lips, Percy tried to keep from snickering. The Stolls had bunk-beds. Actual bunk-beds. Connor walked over to the bed and climbed the latter to poke Travis until the older boy swatted at his hand and growled threateningly.

"Come on, Trav. We got a visitor. Early rise and shine today", chimed Connor teasingly.

"...Visitor...?", mumbled Travis and blinked his eyes open, blearily looking past Connor. "Perce...?" Travis sat up and yawned before frowning. "You alright? Something happened...?"

Percy smiled a little at the concern. "I'm fine. I wanted to ask your help with something. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to... wake you up. Connor didn't have to wake you up just because I'm here."

"Nah. Is fine. Just gimme five minutes", grunted Travis and stretched.

"Perfect. We'll go and wake Luke!", declared Connor with a broad grin.

Ten minutes later and Percy found himself at the dining table with Lupa, Luke, Travis, Connor and a lot of coffee. The four shifters were staring at Percy expectantly. Taking a deep breath, Percy thought about what to say while taking a large sip from his own coffee.

"Annabeth ran some tests on my DNA because Silena prompted her to and it turns out I'm one eighth shifter and I wanted to ask if you can help me learn how to shift", blurted Percy out.


Percy hastily filled Luke's cup again, which made the fox-shifter grin amused. "I'm a shifter. My mom's mom was a cat-shifter, apparently. Annabeth said that me coming into my merboy-heritage is what triggered my cat-genes? Anyway, so... Piper and Silena helped me with learning to control my merboy-ness and I figured that maybe you could perhaps help me with my shifter-ness?"

"You're a shifter?", asked Connor excitedly, sitting up straighter. "Wow. That's... awesome."

Percy yelped as he was grabbed by his hand and pulled out of the kitchen and into the garden. He blinked surprised before finding himself pulled in by Travis who then ruffled Percy's hair.

"I knew it was strange how protective I felt over you", huffed Travis amused. "You became pack."

"...I... did?", asked Percy in a very small voice, looking up at him doe-eyed.

"You did the moment I helped taking care of you when you came into your heritage", confirmed Luke, looking at him in a calculating way. "I started taking care of you and I'm the Alpha of our small pack. You being a shifter... it involves instincts on all our sides."

"And... is that okay?", asked Percy a bit unsure, gulping softly.
"Dude, that's not okay, it's awesome", declared Connor, brushing his cheek against Percy's.

Travis and Luke offered him reassuring smiles before Luke clapped loudly. "Okay. Let's teach this kitten how to turn into a fur-ball. First things first; you gotta picture your alternate form."

"How am I supposed to picture it if I've never seen it?", asked Percy doubtfully.

Connor rolled his eyes affectionately. "You do know what cats look like, right? Just think of a cat."

"But not just think about it, try... try picture yourself as a cat."

Percy looked even more doubtful. How was he supposed to picture being a cat? And what if it didn't even work? What if purring was all there was to his cat-genes? That was why he had decided to come here alone, without anyone – not Annabeth, or Nico, or parts of his family. In case he failed. For now, he tried to concentrate on being a cat. Whatever that meant. He tried to imagine having fur and paws. Right. Four-legged-creature. Just to make sure, he sat down. Then he closed his eyes and took deep, calming breaths. Maybe it worked like turning into a merboy, only that he had to focus on fur instead of scales...? He tried to channel the same concentration he used to summon his tail, but kept the image of a cat firmly in place in his inner eye.

"Well, someone is a natural at this", noted Travis amused.

Percy blinked slowly and then he jumped, because Luke, Travis and Connor were giants and looming over him. He hissed on reflex, before being startled by that too. Blinking again, he looked down at his... paws. Tilting his head, he lifted his right front paw up to inspect it and sniff on his toe-beans. He sneezed when the fur on his paw tickled his nose, prompting Connor to coo.

"Oh my gosh, he makes adorable sounds! And he's so tiny! Can we keep him?"

Percy mewed surprised when he was lifted up into the air and onto Connor's arms. Connor proceeded to coo at him and pat him. Purring softly, Percy pushed against the hand patting him.

"Okay, boys, how about we also shift and go on a little pack-run?", offered Luke amused.

Percy mewed in protest as he was put back onto the ground. He wanted more of the patting! Though he shut up when he got to watch the three tricksters shift too. Percy had never actually seen them fully shifted – they occasionally had their ears and tails out, but never went full animal at school. Luke was the tallest out of the three, but he was more slender than Travis, while Connor was the smallest. But all three, of course, were taller than Percy – since they were foxes and he was a cat. He carefully walked over to sniff Connor, just to get his cheek liked.

"Cute little kitten", said Connor's voice inside Percy's head.

Percy jumped a couple feet high and hissed in surprise. "W—What was that...?"

"Oh. Right. You don't know that yet. Shifters can communicate with each other when in animal form. Telepathy", explained Travis amused, nudging Percy. "Want to go on a run with us?"

"Yes! Yes, I wanna try my paws! Oh, oh I know where to run!", exclaimed Percy excitedly.


Percy looked genuinely surprised by that. "Yes. I gotta show Nico what I can do. How did you...?"

"Kit, your first instinct is always to run to Nico", chuckled Luke teasingly, nudging Percy. "Go."
And that they did. They ran fast, raced each other – three foxes and a kitten, running through the streets. Some humans gave them rather startled and confused looks. They made two stops on their way, to pick up the rest of their pack. Cecil, who was also a fox, as well as Frank, who actually was a wolf. Frank and Cecil seemed very startled to see a cat with them and were even more surprised when they learned the kitten was actually Percy. From thereon out, they were heading straight to the vampire castle, just like Percy had requested. The little kitten was very out of breath by the time they finally reached it, because he wasn't used to this yet, but he really needed to show Nico. He was ridiculously proud that he had managed to make the shifting work. He wanted to show it to Leo and Piper and Jason and Annabeth and others too, but first of all; Nico.

Due to family tradition, Nico found himself slouching on the couch in their living room, eating fruit loops and watching cartoons with Hazel, Bianca, Ethan and Calypso. Those quiet mornings with the coven were nice; they felt like being a normal family. Not supernatural, super-strong creatures that were over a century old each. Just siblings, hanging out together.

"Meow! Me—eow!"

Bianca frowned and blinked as she turned to look at the closed veranda door, nudging Nico. "Look. It's been a while since you took in a stray kitten, if we don't count Percy. Is this yours?"

Hazel and Ethan snickered at that comment, while Nico just glared at them heatedly. So he called Percy a kitten; it wasn't his fault the other was so cat-like. And even though he really hadn't taken in any strays lately, he was not going to leave the miserable little creature outside in the cold. It whined in such a heartbreaking manner, after all. And those large, large eyes. As soon as he had opened the door, the little kitten sneaked in and brushed against Nico's leg, purring loudly. Nico smiled pleased and leaned down to caress the affectionate little creature.

"Buongiorno, gattino", greeted Nico amused and picked the kitten up. "Are you hungry?"

"And here we go again", sighed Hazel dramatically. "Someone falls in love way too easily."

Nico glared at his sister as he went to sit back down on the couch, pressing the tiny little kitten against his chest and caressing its exquisitely soft, long fur. It was a true beauty. Long, well-kept fur, sparkling green eyes, cute tiny nose and little paws. It nestled against him instantly and he smiled pleased by that. The door had been ajar, at least until a hoard of foxes and a large wolf pushed in. Nico raised both eyebrows while settling down more comfortably, half laying on the couch. The kitten sat up some, patting over to lean over Nico's face to look at him curiously.

"You're a curious, little kitten. And so cute", grinned Nico, poking the kitten's nose.

The wolf was the first one to shift back, Frank instantly going to Hazel to steal a kiss. The foxes were next to shift, Luke sitting down next to Ethan, elbowing his friend and whispering something into the vampire's ear that made Ethan chuckle. Nico frowned suspiciously as Connor came over to him to poke the cute kitten in the cheek, making the tiny creature meow.

"You gotta shift back, you know", pointed Connor out amused. "Think you'll manage?"

The kitten nodded – actually nodded – and before Nico could question what Connor was talking about, he had a lap full of Percy Jackson. The cat suddenly turned into Percy, straddling Nico's hips and having his hands resting against Nico's chest. Nico made an embarrassingly high-pitched noise, eyes nearly falling out of his head as he saw that between Percy's messy hair, two pointy triangular cat-ears were poking out. And a long tail wrapped around his waist. Nico completely forgot to breath
and was very happy that he didn't actually need air to live, because holy hell, there was a catboy Percy sitting on his lap so who needed to breath, really?

"P—P... ercy...", stammered Nico unintelligently.

"Uhu", confirmed Percy with a bright smile, ears flickering.

"Oh gosh, you're adorable!", cooed Hazel as she rushed over to trace his ears. "H—How?"

"Did Alabaster put a spell on you?", asked Bianca concerned. "Ethan-

"No. No, Alabaster didn't!", assured Percy, shaking his head, flickering his tail. "Uh, the thing is, turns out I'm actually part shifter. I'm a half-blood. Annabeth confirmed."

"...You're...", muttered Nico, unable to finish the sentence, because wow.

Percy was so perfect with the kitten-ears and the kitten-tail teasingly caressing Nico's leg. This was going to haunt him in his dreams for weeks. Or eternity. He carefully reached out to fondle one of the ears himself, causing Percy to purr loudly and nudge into the caress.

"A kitten. Yes", nodded Percy with a light smile. "It's... I mean, it's alright, right? Being a...

"Being a half-blood is very alright", grunted Frank gruffly.

"Absolutely", confirmed Hazel with a gentle smile.

Percy grinned happily as he rolled off of Nico and looked around curiously. "Can you shift? I wanna play with you, Nico. I already ran the others into the ground."

Cecil grunted in agreement where he had collapsed on another one of the couches. It took Nico a moment to understand what exactly Percy meant. When he did, all he could do was nod and turn into a bat – because those kitten eyes of Percy's? They were a hundred percent more effective when there were kitten-ears involved, all pressed flat against his skull in a pleading manner. Percy also turned back into a kitten and excitedly jumped around Nico the bat. The other shifters and vampires smiled amused and fondly as they watched the kitten and the bat circle each other.

"You're so cute and fluffy! Can we go outside and race?", asked Percy eagerly.

"Anything you want, gattino", chuckled Nico amused.

The two of them headed outside where they ran around aimlessly for a while. Well, Percy ran around aimlessly while Nico flew above him, watching protectively how his kitten was having fun. What an odd combination. A cat and a fish. Then again, Percy was very unusual in every other aspect, so why not this too? Nico smiled as he flew down and landed on top of Percy, startling the kitten. The bat just got comfortable on Percy's shoulder-blades, brushing his muzzle against the fur at the back of Percy's head. Percy meowed softly, tilting his head to look at Nico.

"What? You have the right size so I can ride on you", hummed Nico. "It's early and I'm tired."

Percy huffed slightly before he started walking again. "Lazy little bat. Not my fault you sleep in so long. You guys were still eating breakfast, right? But who in their right mind would eat cereals with ketchup? You guys are so—o gross, really."

"We're vampires. That wasn't ketchup", stated Nico amused.

Percy made a gagging sound before shaking himself. "Totally gross."
Nico chuckled amused, clinging onto Percy's neck as the kitten picked up the speed. "Are you... okay with this? You were pretty shocked and half-way traumatized when you realized you're a merboy. And being a cat is... okay?"

"I guess. I dunno. I mean, the supernatural. Everything's possible. Magic. So, why not a cat?", shrugged Percy lightly before throwing himself onto his side, shaking the bat off and startling Nico.

Nico squeaked as he was caught between Percy's front paws and pressed against the kitten's chest so Percy could start grooming him. The kitten's tongue tickled and scratched as it combed through Nico's fur, while Percy purred rather contently. Nico would be blushing if he could, because this was a pretty intimate thing normally reserved to mates or close pack-members for shifters.

"Did you tell your father? Or do you plan on telling them?", asked Nico carefully.

"I haven't. I... needed to know if I even could shift before telling someone else. And then I wanted to tell you. But... I guess I'll tell them... probably", shrugged Percy thoughtfully.

Nico nodded pleased. That was more than he had hoped for. Percy really was settling into his family and Nico was glad to witness that. The vampire squeaked as Percy tickled him with his whiskers.

Chapter End Notes

Percy is a Norwegian Forest Cat, because those precious pieces of perfection are the most beautiful creatures on this planet and need to be worshiped.

Next chapter is going to be all about learning more - his family will learn he's a kitten, Percy will learn more about what it means to be a shifter and he'll also have a conversation with Silena about the royal families, because he's getting curious about those! ;)


Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 15: Learning More

Percy spent the entire day at the di Angelo mansion. Mainly because he had completely exhausted himself by running around with the other shifters and with Nico, so he first of all needed a nice nap. Nico's lap was very comfortable for napping and Nico was very good at giving belly-rubs. The small black kitten had completely enjoyed his lazy Saturday with his friends before he had to return home. Dinner was waiting. And he had to tell them. Not because he particularly trusted them to share everything with them, but because he valued honesty. After all, them keeping secrets from him was what had caused the rift between their family to begin with. He was not going to do the same. He was not going to keep secrets to split the family.

By the time Percy returned home, the family was already in the middle of setting the table and everything already smelt like dinner. Which was nice, because him and his friends had a small lunch, but Percy had already burned it all by playing hide and seek with the foxes. His pack. The thought made him smile and his cheeks flush dark with excitement.

"Ah, Percy! Just in time!", called Poseidon out, sounding relieved and happy.

Percy made a beeline for the kitchen, where Rhode and Amphitrite were cooking. Rhode smiled gently at him and lifted the spoon out of the sauce to offer it to Percy. He more than eagerly tried it, making a pleased sound and giving his big sister the thumbs-up. Triton and Proteus were setting the table and Percy decided to help them. Dinner was soon ready and their large family was gathered around the large table. Percy took a moment to look around in appreciation. Poseidon and Amphitrite were at the head, while Proteus, Triton and Percy were on one length of the table and Kymopoleia, Benthesikyme and Rhode sat opposite them. Tyson had the other head of the table to himself, smiling proudly as he shoveled food onto his plate until it was a mountain.

"Mom said you were with friends. Who did you wake at fuck o'clock in the morning...?", asked Kymopoleia curiously, looking at Percy. "Can't imagine anyone being happy about that..."

"Yeah... I did accidentally wake Luke, Connor and Travis", admitted Percy embarrassed.

"Accidentally? You left home at seven thirty. I saw you when I zombie-walked to the toilet", pointed Benthesikyme out, both eyebrows raised. "On a Saturday. What were you expecting people to do at an ungodly hour like that, little bro...?"

Percy frowned for a second, looking at his siblings. "Well, I... needed their help."

"Help?", echoed Poseidon and perked up with a guarded, worried expression.

Percy rolled his eyes a little, because oh dear, his dad really was too overly worried. Which was kind of nice, actually. Percy liked that they worried about him, that they cared about him.

"Annabeth was over yesterday, because she wanted to tell me something", admitted Percy slowly while poking his pulled pork. "I... Silena said that I wasn't behaving very typical for a merboy when I came into my heritage. Why... didn't any of you say something?"

"You're not very used to your instincts yet", offered Rhode gently. "We figured that you might be
fighting your instincts, or doing things you... expected you should do? We didn't wish to make you feel uncomfortable or like you're doing something *wrong*, because there's no wrong way to come into your heritage as long as it feels right for you."

Percy actually had to smile at that, because he had been thinking about this last night a lot. Why wouldn't any of the seven adult merpeople in this house say something about him coming into his heritage in an untypical way? He shifted a little as his father still stared at him worried.

"Well, unlike you, Silena thought it was something worth investigating, so... she had Annabeth run some... tests. On my DNA. Because she had a hunch", offered Percy reluctantly, slowly feeling his nerves pick up (What if they rejected him? What if they thought he was a freak? What if him being just a half-blood made him less worthy of being part of the royal family? What if they didn't *want* him anymore?). "Turns out I'm actually one eighth cat-shifter."

No turning back. He could hear the doubtful screams in the back of his mind. He had felt that way since Annabeth had told him, but he kept them down. He was a master of suppressing his own fears. Besides, hey, if they decided they didn't want him anymore because he wasn't a pure-bred merboy, then he'd just return to his mom and forget all of this ever happened. Percy nearly scoffed at that thought. How could he *ever* forget the friends he had made at Summers High? Nico, Piper, Leo, Annabeth, Connor, Travis, Silena – everyone, really. He had made all those amazing, important friends. He... didn't think he could go back. He could go back to his mom, yes, but he could never go back to that old school, with the bullies and people who didn't care any about him. He liked being liked. He liked being cared for. He liked feeling kind of important thanks to them.

"So you take after your grandmother", hummed Poseidon with a thoughtful frown. "Interesting. It's not rare for a kid with dormant creature-DNA to become a half-blood once the more dominant heritage kicks in. Though it is... a little unexpected. How... How are you feeling with it?"

"You knew grandma?", asked Percy while squinting, because she had died when Sally was a kid.

"Laura Linwood used to be on Hades' council until her death. One of the handful of cat-shifters that were in New York back then. She was a real leader, but after her passing, her pride scattered and left. There... are no cat-shifters currently registered in New York", replied Amphitrite kindly.

"Oh my gosh, *do the ears!*", exclaimed Benthesiskyme all of a sudden, making Percy jump slightly. "Come on, shifters can part-shift! I wanna see you with kitten-ears, I'm sure you must be the most adorable little thing in the history of *ever*! Can you, can you, can you?"

"Now, now", chided Proteus with a frown. "Don't pressure him. If he only learned the truth yesterday, he most likely can't even control the shift yet."

"I actually kinda can", chimed Percy in. "That's why I went to Luke and the others. I asked them to show me how to shift so I could see if I can even shift. They taught me how and we went on a pack-run together and I... guess I'm kinda... part of their pack now. So... yeah."

"And are you okay with it?", asked Poseidon once more, looking at Percy with concern.

"Dunno", admitted Percy with a half-shrug. "I mean, it's all still pretty new and I don't really know what to think about anything. I guess I'll need a couple more days to think about this... But being a cat *definitely* rules. It's awesome. Sure, becoming a supernatural in general already heightened my senses, but that was nothing compared to being a cat. Also, those paws are *fast*. It's so cool."

Triton snorted amused and affectionately as he reached out to ruffle Percy's hair. That boy could see the positive in everything. It was pretty endearing, really. It was also pretty relieving, to see him
experience those changes as cool and not as frightening. He was a remarkable boy, really.

"Then we're happy for you", smiled Amphitrite kindly. "Now, does anyone want seconds?"

And that was it. Percy was a little surprised, in a positive way. No prodding or doubting or looking at him like he was a freak. Well, being a hybrid was probably something Poseidon and Amphitrite had seen a lot over the millennia. They most likely also had encountered a cat-merboy hybrid before. Chances for it were pretty high considering their long lives. So... it apparently really was okay to be what he was. Percy was still trying to get used to being accepted.

Nico was flapping his wings frantically as he entered Percy's bedroom through the open window. He was ridiculously eager to see kitten Percy again, even though it had been just a couple hours since Percy had left. But Percy had said he wanted to tell his parents about being half-shifter and Nico wanted to be there to comfort him, depending on how things went. Percy was nowhere to be seen though when Nico entered. But Percy could now turn into a small, adorable kitten, so him not being visible anywhere didn't mean he wasn't in the room.

"Percy? Are you here somewhere?", called Nico out, flying in circles around the lamp.

"I'm in the closet", called the kitten out loudly.

"Really? You are? I thought the way you were drooling over Sebastian Stan was a dead-give-away."

"Oh, you're such a funny ball of fuzz", snorted Percy. "The literal closet. Been out of the figurative one for years. I'm in here because my comfy sweaters are even comfier when I'm a cat."

Nico flew over and through the ajar closet-door. He raised one amused eyebrow. All of Percy's sweaters were thrown onto the ground of the closet, set up like a nest and in the center of the nest was the small black kitten, laying on his back, pawing the air and purring. Curiously enough, the sweater that was on top of the pile of clothes was Nico's. The one Percy had 'borrowed with the intention of never-ever returning it' when the merboy had come into his heritage. Which reminded him that yes, Nico's blanket and pillows made a reappearance on Percy's bed too. Must have been in the wash last week, but here they were again. So Nico started doubting he'd get those back either. Percy sure had some cat-like tendencies there, because cats loved to take what they liked and just claim it as theirs. Smiling at the little kitten, Nico carefully landed next to him.

"So things went well?", asked Nico curiously before he was grabbed by two paws.

Percy curled around Nico and nosed the bat's cheek. "Guess so. They had no problems with it and didn't even seem that surprised. Apparently, they knew my grandmother. Laura Linwood."

"...I knew your grandma too. She was on Hades' council decades ago, last cat-shifter to be on the council", acknowledged Nico curiously. "She was from a long line of proud cat-shifters. So your mother is... her daughter. Well, then it really isn't that much of a surprise you're a hybrid, between her blood and your father's blood. Mh. You'd have loved your grandma, she was a strong lady."

Percy purred softly as he settled down a bit more comfortably and started grooming the little bat between his paws. "Can... you tell me about my grandma? I don't know much about her."

"She kind of fell into disgrace by marrying a human, because her bloodline was rather strong and proud. She abandoned that for the sake of a little farmhouse and a normal human man. But he made her happy and her pride still stood strong with her, even when her parents turned away from her. She was very head-strong and fierce. I... think I even saw your mother once. When Laura couldn't
find a babysitter for a council meeting”, replied Nico softly.

Percy smiled and grew sleepy as he listened to Nico telling stories about grandma Laura.

Sunday morning and a small black kitten sneaked out of the house to make his way over to Luke's place, where he slipped in through the cat-door (or was it actually a fox-door in their case...?). Sniffing the air, he followed Luke's scent to his bedroom. A broad grin spread over his little face as he saw the normally so stoic and annoyed seer Octavian laying sprawled on the bed with a serene expression on his face and one arm around Luke's shoulders, both deep asleep. And okay, maybe Percy needed to get a schedule that aligned better with that of other people.

"Mornin', little fluff", yawned Luke as he woke up and stretched.

Percy meowed softly and rubbed his chin against Luke's nose. Luke laughed a little and shifted into his fox-form to sneak out of his lover's embrace. The fox sniffed the kitten for a moment before leading the way out of the bedroom, down the stairs and out into the garden.

"What can I do for you, kitty-cat?", asked Luke curiously as they started chasing each other.

"I dunno. I just... I spent half the night brainstorming about this whole... situation. There's not so much instinctual stuff for us merpeople. But this whole cat-thing... I just... My father said that my grandmother used to be the head of the... local pride and that the cat-shifters... dispersed afterward? So... shouldn't I be like... with other cats? I'm confused", admitted Percy.

Luke caught Percy's fluff tail and nipped it playfully before letting go and allowing the kitten to chase him this time around. "We're all shifters in the end. Yes, if possible one animal-race of shifters prefers to stick together – bird-shifters forming a flock, cat-shifters forming a pride. Back in the old days, towns used to be territory. Only one shifter-race per village, but the larger the cities grew, the more multi-cultural they grew, the more we shifters adapted. Nowadays, whether it's a pack or pride or flock is mainly defined by the respective Alpha. Due to Lupa being the Alpha of New York, we define ourselves as a pack. So... shifters still try to stick to their kind and most New York shifters are canines. Back in the day, so I was told, there was a pride of cats alongside Lupa's pack. There's a flock under Alpha Horus situated in Brooklyn too. Birds and mammals are... kind of a different matter, you know? You could say that maybe a pride of cat-shifters would be better suited for a cute little kitten like you, but foxes and wolves are better than nothing."

Percy nodded, pleased by that answer. He kind of understood it, he guessed. They were all shifters, when it came down to it. And him and the foxes, they could do the grooming and hunting and playing that seemed very essential – at least according to the instinctual urges Percy felt.

"What about the, uh... nests? Like, when I came into my heritage and then... last night I might have turned my closet into a big nest and slept in it...? Is that... A Thing?", asked Percy next.

"It so is. Me, Con and Trav, we actually have a burrow in the garden because it's... well, it's an important refuge for us foxes. That you like to curl together in nests or boxes is totally normal, don't worry about it", assured Luke and gave Percy's cheek a gentle lick.

"And am I gonna have like a litter of kittens?", asked Percy next, startling Luke a little.

"...What?", laughed the fox, rolling onto his back and holding his belly.

"I just... wondered. I mean, so I'm a submissive and I can get pregnant. I kinda managed to wrap my head around that, sort of. But like... what if I give birth as a cat? Will I have like six kittens, or
what? And what about the merboy-thing. I mean... can like... some of my children turn out to be guppies while others turn out to be kittens? Is that a thing?", wondered Percy concerned.

"Huh. You thought more about this than anticipated. Okay. So, first things first; you're not gonna have a litter of literal kittens. A big... downside for us submissive shifters is that after the first trimester, we won't be able to shift anymore. You won't be able to turn into a cat or a merboy during those six months, because, quite frankly, changing the very structure of your body – bones, organs, physiology – it's a bad idea while you're carrying little ones inside of you. Besides, you won't know if they are cats, merpeople or normal humans, so you can't know if they could even shift with you", reasoned Luke gently. "Due to that, the pregnancy is pretty... human. Aside from, you know, being male and being pregnant. But the pregnancy itself, it won't be cat-like. Your cravings might be, depending on what your child turns out to be. That can be a dead giveaway to the baby's heritage, but those cravings don't necessarily need to kick in. Pregnant merpeople carrying guppies, for example, often crave raw fish. Or, if you were, say, pregnant with a vampire's child, you might start drinking blood even though you yourself aren't a vampire."


"Hey, anytime. I'm kind of your Alpha now, after all", grinned Luke pleased.

/I\break\}

"I like this. We need to make this a regular thing", declared Leo happily, leaning against Percy.

Percy hummed in agreement and bit into his burger. Amphitrite was at a parent teacher night and Benthesikyme had threatened to cook, which was the worst idea possible, so Percy had decided to steal his friends and go get McDonald's take-out. Right now, Percy, Leo, Piper, Jason, Nico, Reyna and Annabeth were sitting together at the lake, having an unhealthy picnic.

"So... guys... there's something I actually wanted to... tell you", drawled Percy out.

"Yeah?", asked Piper curiously from where she sat on Percy's other side.

Percy munched slowly on a fry until Nico nudged him with a foot and gave him an encouraging look. "I am... uh, well, I guess I'm a hybrid? I'm like one eighth cat-shifter."

Annabeth hid a small smile behind her burger as she leaned more contently against Reyna. She had wondered whether or not Percy would share it with the others. Considering the smile on Nico's lips, he had already known it beforehand too. Figured that Nico had been the first one Percy had told. It was actually rather cute to watch Percy and Nico slowly gravitating toward each other.

"That is like so cool. You're literally a catfish", cackled Leo delighted.

Percy, Jason and Piper joined in on the laughter at that while Reyna, Nico and Annabeth rolled their eyes. Piper smiled at Percy and grabbed his hand, squeezing it gently and nudging him. It was easy to see the relief on Percy's face that his friends acted so normal about this.

"Oh! Oh, we have to play together then! Can't wait to chase a kitten!", stated Leo eagerly, eyes sparkling as he sat up some. "I'll tell Luke I wanna come along for the next pack-run!"

Percy blinked, eyes wide. Right. Leo was a dragon, Leo could shift into a dragon. Percy had never seen Leo fully shifted before, but oh how he wanted to. Leo probably was even more adorable than Toothless. But dragons weren't exactly 'pack animals', or so Leo had explained. They normally stayed on their own. Leo was just different from other dragons, so he was kind of a part-time member of the pack. Percy smiled brightly and brushed his cheek against Leo's.
"That'd be totally awesome", agreed Percy pleased. "I've never seen your dragon-form before."

"Yeah. Unlike for most other shifters, it's pretty exhausting for dragons to shift so I don't do it too often", shrugged Leo awkwardly. "I'm not that good at it yet either, so yeah..."

"Come on, eat up, kids. No shifting at the dinner table", chided Reyna lightly.

Annabeth chuckled and leaned up to kiss her mate's cheek, making Reyna puff out her chest slightly. Just enough to make the others tease her about it.

Came Thursday, Percy had come to the decision that he was definitely glad to be a hybrid. Being a merboy was so cool, swimming with the cove was awesome. But being a shifter and running with the pack was also awesome. So he got twice the awesome-experience out of this whole supernatural gig. Today, he was staying longer at training, because he was still too slow. He wasn't good enough to keep up with the team long-term. Short races? Oh, he rocked those. But the longer it went on, the more exhausted he got because he still wasn't quite used to it.

"Percy?", asked Silena tentatively as she re-entered the pool-area. "What are you still doing here?"

She had left with the rest of the team when Percy had claimed he'd stay 'just a little longer'. Then she had showered, left for lunch with Beckendorf and after a little while of being with her mate, she decided to return for a few more late-night lapses. Something told her that Percy hadn't returned like her but was still here. She knew Annabeth was worried about Percy for pushing himself too much and Silena could see where she was coming from. Sighing, Silena put her towel onto the bench and walked over to elegantly jump into the pool. Her legs turned into the sleek, pink tail of hers.

"Training", replied Percy as he resurfaced and looked at the older mermaid.

"I can see that. But... why? You're exhausting yourself", sighed Silena concerned.

Percy sighed and paused, looking at her with worried eyes, chewing his lower lip. "I'm... not good enough. I can't keep up with the rest of the team. Not during long training. I need to become stronger. Faster. I just... need to train more, okay?"

Sighing again, Silena shook her head. She did understand. Where he came from, he was an unbeaten swimmer. Always the best on his team. Now he was the slowest. It had to eat away on his pride as a swimmer. Not to mention that he quite clearly tried to prove himself to his father; that much anyone could see who watched Percy and Poseidon during training.

"Very well. Then let me join you", stated Silena and kicked off.

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"Very well. Then let me join you", stated Silena and kicked off.

Percy blinked surprised and took a second before he followed her lead and started racing her. They went at it for a solid hour without a break. Silena then insisted on them stopping. The two of them just floated around in the water, staring at the ceiling of the pool in content silence.

"So...", drawled Percy after a little while to break the silence. "Can I ask you something, Silena?"

"Anything", assured Silena with a gentle smile.

"What... are the other royals like?", asked Percy with a curious frown. "I mean, I've been wondering that for a while now. But I don't want to ask my family. And I figured, since you're also princess and so far you and I didn't really have any alone-time to really talk, I just..."
"It's okay. I understand", smiled Silena and turned her face to look at him. "Well, you already know that there are seven kingdoms under the sea from the geography classes at least, right?" Percy nodded and turned onto his stomach, arms folded under his chin as he watched her curiously while they were still floating in the pool (being a merboy ruled). "Your parents rule over one of the seven kingdoms. My grandmother Thalassa rules over another kingdom, my mother Aphrodite being the only heir to the throne, but due to her being the product of an... affair, well... let's say the whole 'chopped-off dick thrown into the sea to create Aphrodite' is a metaphor for that, you know?"

"Huh", nodded Percy and blinked a couple times. "Okay. Two down. Five to go."

Silena laughed a little and nodded. "There's King Hydrus, the oldest of the kings, his wife has died long ago, but he still has his daughter the crown-princess Ananke. They're both highly respected among the other kings and queens, so being in their favor can be very helpful."

Percy nodded and made a mental note of that. "What about Proteus' girlfriend...? Nico mentioned."

"Princess Psamatheia", said Silena with a slight nod. "She is the adopted daughter of Nereus and Doris. They're a bit... don't quote me on this, but I'd call them whacky. Kind enough though. The thing is, she's technically your adopted aunt too, because Nereus and Doris are Amphitrite's parents. But since they adopted Psamatheia only a couple millennia ago, while Amphitrite had moved out and married Poseidon centuries earlier... It's all a bit complicated with the immortal."


"Suppose so", shrugged Silena amused. "But Psamatheia is the youngest of Nereus' and Doris' children, so she's not even close to becoming heir to the throne, which fits rather well because being adopted makes her not the most... desired to sit on the throne, you could say. Amphitrite's older siblings are way ahead of her. Don't wreck your brain over it, Percy."

"Trying to", hummed Percy. "So... Who are the others...? Poseidon and Amphitrite. Your grandma Thalassa. My siblings' grandparents Nereus and Doris. Super respected King Hydrus."

"King Oceanus and Queen Thetys are actually the parents of Queen Doris. Very proud to have reached out like that, you know. Aside from her, they have five more daughters. I think it's currently expected that Princess Clymene and her husband Iapetus are going to succeed them, unless one of their two dominant sons might finally find a good mate. Honestly, they've been trying to set up their kids with basically all your older siblings at this point. Oh. Princess Clymene and Iapetus are the grandparents of Calypso, by the way. Though since she had been born a human and then accepted immortality as a vampire, she... doesn't count as part of our royal houses", continued Silena. "And then there are King Phorkys and Queen Keto, who are... different. They're the rulers over those you might more or less consider sea monsters, really. Have a crazy brood too; their daughters are known as the Gorgon Sisters. All with a short temper and not much humor. Lastly, Queen Keto's father King Pontus, who had a couple children with his late queen, but most are already mated."

Percy nodded slowly, filing as much of it away as possible to make notes on them later so he could make a 'crazy wall' of relations to help him memorize it for the future. After all, he was going to meet those royals at one point and he didn't want to make a total fool of himself.

Chapter End Notes
We're going to do something fun next chapter! Well, Percy and his friends are going to do something fun, because they're going on a winter break vacation to a ski resort! Hot cocoa, cuddles for warmth and Nico and Percy ice-skating under the full moon!

Also, in case the whole filtering-the-royal-relations-out-of-a-conversation thing is a bit too hard, lemme put it in simple list form here, though of course it'll be explained again when it becomes more relevant later on;

1. Poseidon/Amphitrite and their family

2. Thalassa -> Aphrodite -> Silena

3. Nereus/Doris -> Amphitrite and her siblings, Psamatheia

4. Oceanus/Thetys -> Doris, Clymene (who's married to Iapetus) -> four sons, among them Atlas -> Calypso

5. Phorkys/Keto -> Medusa and her siblings

6. Pontus -> Keto and her siblings

7. Hydrus -> Ananke
Chapter Summary

There was supposed to be more ski-trip in this chapter, but then I remembered that somewhere between start of the school year and Christmas, Thanksgiving is a thing that happens in America and I figured it should be included too, what with Percy's family situation.

Next chapter is going to feature Nicercy's first not-date (because they're both total dumbasses :D)! But no worries, that's what you got Annabeth for; to lecture Nico about being a dumbass û__Û

Chapter 16: Thanksgiving a la Jackson

Percy had been right, as was to be expected. Leo Valdez was the cutest dragon ever. He was still about human-sized, but a real full dragon. His scales were a shiny brown, like bronze when the sun hit them. And as cute as Toothless – if not even cuter. He sure wasn't big enough for a human to fly on him, but a tiny black kitten? A tiny black kitten could claw onto the golden horns on Leo's head and enjoy the ride. He watched in amazement how the pack ran underneath them, in the shadow of the flying dragon. Luke, Nathan, Connor, Travis, Frank, Chris and Cecil, all chasing each other. Percy thoroughly loved being in a pack. He mewed softly as they soared through the sky.

"You okay up there?", asked Leo worried.

"Of course! This is amazing!", exclaimed Percy excitedly.

And it really was. Not just the fact that Percy was flying on an actual dragon. More so the fact that he had those amazing friends he could share this joy with. Oh, Percy knew exactly what he was going to be grateful for on Thanksgiving. He nuzzled the top of Leo's head gently.

"Ey! Watch the whiskers, I'm ticklish!", complained Leo playfully.

"Come on, let's get back down to Earth. Time to catch up with the pack. I wanna play with them too before I have to leave", requested Percy, swatting at Leo's ear.

And wow, that was another thing he couldn't really believe. He had so many friends that he had to try and manage his time. Leo made a whining, complaining sound as he landed in a circle of foxes. Percy jumped off the dragon and instantly tackled Luke to the ground. The alpha took it good-natured and rolled around with the kitten for a little while, until Connor and Travis came to his 'aid', closely followed by Cecil and Frank and in the end, by Leo curling around all of them. Percy smiled a little as he watched how Frank draped himself all over Leo, the massive wolf nearly larger in size than the dragon. Frank growled lowly and pleased as he started grooming his submissive dragon.

"Why do you want to leave us already?", whined Connor with a pout.

The fox had Percy trapped between his paws, snout resting on the kitten's belly. "I'm going to the movies! So, can't be late. I'm sorry. I'd love to play longer..."

"Stop guilt-tripping the ball of fuzz, Con", chided Luke with a roll of his eyes. "Wait. Movies?"
"Ooh, are you going on a date, Perce?", asked Cecil with a teasing snicker.

"Do we have to intimidate anyone?", asked Travis eagerly, wagging his tail.

"W—What? Date? No! I'm going with Piper", huffed Percy and rolled his eyes. "She asked me if I wanna see Moana – and how could I not? A kick-ass Disney-princess controlling the sea?"

The others snickered amused by that while Percy preened a little bit. He never had a best friend before, but if he'd have to figure out what exactly it meant to have a best friend, then Piper was what came to mind. Over the past two months – and he really couldn't believe it had only been two months that he had been here – she had been a great support and friend.

Percy was on time and Piper was already even waiting for him. The two of them got enough snacks to feed a small army and went to enjoy their movie. They sat together in the back so they could whisper without bothering anyone. It was great that Percy could fanboy with someone like that, because Piper liked the movie as much as Percy did. Afterward, both were so full of sweets that they were craving something a little more savory so they went to McDonald's. With four BigMacs, four McRibs, a set of Chicken McNuggets, a milkshake with two straws and four packs of fries did the two friends settle down. Percy blushed as he saw the amount of food. Sure, McDonald's did not exactly fill a stomach, but Percy was always a bit embarrassed about the amount. Piper? Not so much. She just ordered after their hearts' content and smiled brightly at Percy.

"You really don't have a problem with eating that much junk food? After all the snacks we had at the cinema?", asked Percy softly while taking a large bite from his McRib.

"Why should I?", huffed Piper and rolled her eyes. "My heat's coming up. Large appetite is normal then. And... if I'd have to make a guess, yours is coming up too."

"W—Why would you say that?", asked Percy wide-eyed.

"Leo, Annabeth and I synced up like months ago. You've been spending so much time with us, it'd make sense if your cycle would sync with ours too", shrugged Piper, gesturing at the food. "Besides, you're already eating a lot more than usual. You've also been spending more time with the pack, haven't you? It's pretty typical for shifters before they go into heat. Soaking up attention and love from the pack before a heat. Maybe you should talk to Connor more about this?"

"Huh... guess I should", nodded Percy with a frown. "Wait. When you say 'coming up'...?"

"Oh, no. You're not going into heat for like at least two more weeks", dismissed Piper cheerfully, taking a couple fries and biting them off. "But since heat burns a lot of calories and... leaves little mind left to focus on, you know, eating and other things like those... Submissives always eat to save up enough for the time when they'll need it. And that, the saving up, needs some time, obviously."

Percy nodded thoughtful. That made sense. Okay. Two more weeks at least. That was good.

"So we'll be safe for the trip?", asked Percy, stuffing a nugget into his mouth.

"Totally", nodded Piper in a chipper voice. "No worries. You are not missing this trip."

Percy grinned at her. A few days ago, Poseidom had announced that the annual school ski trip was coming up and if Percy wanted, he was more than welcomed to go along, but if the thought made him uncomfortable, he could as well stay at home. Percy loved snow. Nearly as much as he loved the sea. The idea of a week long vacation with all of his friends? Skiing? He had been so overjoyed, he
had grinned like a total idiot for the rest of the day. So there was no way Percy would allow his first heat to ruin his first vacation. No way in hell.

"So, what are you gonna do tomorrow?", asked Piper curiously. "Visit your mom?"

"No", replied Percy and shifted some when he saw the confused furrow of Piper's brows. "Because she's visiting me. It... was... Amy's idea, actually. She and Poseidon talked this through a lot in the past weeks already, apparently. They want me to spend my first Thanksgiving as part of their family with the family. But... they also know my mom doesn't have any family aside from me and that I won't be enjoying Thanksgiving if my mom was to sit all alone in her apartment. So... they... invited her to spend Thanksgiving with us. Which is going to be weird and awkward on so many levels."

"Uh, yeah", nodded Piper, looking half-amused. "Well, and here the most exciting thing that's going to happen at my place is going to be how mom burns the turkey."

Percy laughed at that. Beryl Grace was known for many a talents, but cooking was none of them. Percy grinned as he tried to picture Thanksgiving at the McLean-Grace household.

"Maybe you should just... order in?", offered Percy, getting a fry thrown at his head.

The two friends laughed and settled in to talk some more about the movie.

Percy was feeling joyous, excited and awkward at the same time as he led his mom into the Jackson home. Rhode and Amphitrite were in the kitchen, having been busy with cooking for hours now. Sally looked curious as she took in everything about the house. Percy purposefully avoided the kitchen and the living room for now, instead pulling her upstairs and to his own room.

"And this is my room!", declared Percy, unable to keep the excitement out of his voice.

Sally's eyes were wide but also a bit mournful as she looked around the room. It was larger than his room at hers. She was saving up to move into a better neighborhood, get an apartment without memories of Gabe. With a nicer room for her son. Her eyes were soft as she took in everything about the house. Percy purposefully avoided the kitchen and the living room for now, instead pulling her upstairs and to his own room.

"Oh. And you have your own private bathroom too?", asked Sally surprised.

"What? No. The connecting door leads to Ty's room", grinned Percy and opened it.

With a yelp did Tyson fall right into the room as the door was pulled away from him. The child looked sheepishly up at them, giving them a toothy grin. Sally smiled amused and knelt down.

"Hello, Percy's mom!", exclaimed Tyson excitedly. "I really wanted to meet you! Percy talks lots about you all the time! If you're my brother's mom, what are you to me?"

"How about you call me Sally, sweetie?", chuckled Sally amused.

Oh, this one was precious. As energetic and bright as Percy had been at that age. Tyson looked thoughtful for a moment before he nodded pleased and then grabbed them both by the wrists.

"Come, come, come! Food!", declared Tyson determined.
Percy was mortified at the thought of his mom in the same room as Amphitrite. He was beyond disturbed when... absolutely nothing happened. The two women smiled at each other, shook hands in greeting and then Sally offered to help. Percy was sitting perched on a chair, watching them doubtfully. They were mainly talking about Percy, Sally asking all the questions Percy wouldn't like to answer – like how he was doing academically and how he was settling in and all.

"They're not bombs. They're not going to explode on you. They're moms", chuckled Triton amused.

He sat down next to Percy. There was a large hickey just peeking out from beneath his collar.

"How was it at Thany's?", asked Percy, drawling the words out, grinning teasingly.

Triton flushed a little and glared at him, prompting Sally to coo. "Oh, sibling banter. How cute."

"We're not bantering!", exclaimed both Triton and Percy at once.

Amphitrite and Sally laughed at that, flustered both boys. After that, both Triton and Percy got roped into helping too. All too soon, dinner was set out and the family gathered around the table. Percy and Sally sat next to each other opposite Poseidon and Amphitrite. No one was anything but civil and friendly. Poseidon and Sally were a little awkward around each other, but Amphitrite and Sally seemed perfectly fine. Even Proteus, Benthesikyme, Kymopoleia and Rhode were perfectly nice and sweet toward Sally and Tyson seemed totally fascinated by her.

"Have you packed already, Percy?", asked Proteus as they finished the salad.

"Packed? Oh! That school trip you were telling me about earlier this week?", asked Sally.

"Yeah. Ski trip", nodded Percy with a broad grin. "I... guess I packed. I've never been to a ski trip before, so I don't really know what I need, but I packed all the warm clothes I own, so..."

"And what about the equipment?", asked Sally concerned.

"Oh, that's covered at the lodge", assured Poseidon with a pleasant smile.

"How... very generous", noted Sally doubtfully.

"Hades di Angelo, a very big supporter of the school, he owns a ski lodge in the Italian Alps", explained Amphitrite. "It's been the highlight of every school year. It is very generous of him."

Percy really couldn't wait. Nico had told him all about the giant castle-like mansion Hades owned in the Alps. Most of the students at Summers High were going – some didn't want to, or had other plans during break and the school itself wasn't exactly large considering it was only for the supernaturals, but the mansion would be easily able to host them all. Piper and Leo had already called dibs on rooming with him, which only made him blush happily. Dinner was actually surprisingly pleasant. As in; Percy enjoyed it a lot. It was the first time he really got to spend time with his mom and his dad. It was the first time he got to spend a big holiday with his entire family. He was nearly sad when the day ended and he had to accompany his mom out.

"I'm... glad you came", whispered Percy softly as he hugged her tightly.

"So am I", admitted Sally, face buried in his neck. "I know you thought this would be 'awkward'. I know you think that Amy and I are at odds, but... we haven't been for many, many years. Granted, we never officially met, but... It's been many years now, Percy. I may have resented her at first and she certainly resented me, but we're... all adults here. Things had happened and no one was at fault. And Thanksgiving especially is not about holding grudges, it's about being grateful. If there is one
thing all three of us can agree on it's that we are grateful to have you. They love you. We all do."
Percy blushed and nodded, not verbally answering. He slowly started to believe that. That Poseidon loved him. That even Amphitrite might... love him. That he was being loved in his family.

"I love you, mom", whispered Percy instead, tightening the hug. "I'll call you as soon as I'm settled in at the ski lodge, okay? And I'll take a ton of photos to show you when I get back."

"Of course you will", laughed Sally and kissed his forehead. "Just... enjoy yourself, sweetie."

"I'm sure I will", promised Percy with a broad smile. "It's gonna be awesome."

Carter Kane was not impressed by his mate. Not the least bit. He looked around the room before he turned a pointed glare at his mate. His mate who was going to spend the next week sleeping on a couch. He just hoped this place had the most uncomfortable couches on the planet.

"What? Why are you glaring at me, Car?", asked his mate innocently. "I promised you a vacation."

"Yes. Yes, a vacation. I do not count a trip to a ski resort with like a hundred hormonal teenagers a vacation, because a vacation is meant to relax you, Horus", argued Carter irritated.

Horus feigned innocence as he wrapped an arm around Carter's waist to pull the shorter supernatural against him. "I know you love that school. I figured you'd be delighted."

"...Delighted?", echoed Carter a bit disturbed, both eyebrows raised. "What's really going on?"

They were standing in the middle of Hades di Angelo's private ski resort in the Italian Alps. Private might be a little bit of a stretch considering that Hades always granted every council member access and he rented it out to Summers High once a year for a school trip. That 'once a year' happened to be right now and Carter found himself standing in the entrance hall, with a hundred plus students, Demeter Fýsiphloros, Hecate Torrington and Howard Claymore. With Hecate and Howard stood their two completely unimpressed children, Alabaster and Lou. Carter had to chuckle a little at that, because he could picture how irritating it must be to go on this epic school trip just to have both their parents tagging along as chaperones. Strange though, three chaperones for that many... oh.

"Horus Godson, did you sign us up as chaperones?!", exclaimed Carter agitated.

"It's a favor", sighed Horus, caving in after a moment, pulling his mate closer.

"A favor for whom? Hades?", asked Carter dubiously, squinting up at him.

Horus Godson was the leader of the local flock of shifters and thus a council member of Hades’. Rather untypical, actually, considering that the ancient supernaturals from different clans preferred to stay away from each other – the Norse lived in Massachusetts, the Greeks were centered in New York and the Egyptians had moved to Florida. The only reason Horus was living in New York was Carter. They had met when Horus and the Floridan council had a meeting with Hades' council three years ago – and the falcon-shifter had been smitten and obsessed ever since. So much so that Horus had been willing to leave his clan's territory and move to New York, where he had of course been welcomed and invited to join the council. Horus gave Carter a slightly sheepish look.

"Bast", corrected Horus, shrugging when his mate raised both eyebrows. "Remember when Anubis had that meeting with Fenrir, Lupa, Lycaon and the others? Lupa told him that she has a new member in her pack. A cat-shifter. Anubis told Bast. Bast asked me to keep an eye on the kid."
"Ah. And considering that creepy old men lurking about a high school look suspicious, you figured you'd sign us up as chaperones to get a closer look on the shifter", sighed Carter a bit agitated.

"You know me so well, my love", grinned Horus and leaned in to kiss Carter.

Only that Carter dodged him and got out of his mate's grasp. "You're going to sleep on the couch this entire week. Don't think you're getting laid while we're here."

"Oh come on, Car", argued Horus with a miserable expression on his handsome face.

"No", stated Carter, voice calm and firm. "No. I will not be tricked by you, Horus. You should know better. I won't stand for you manipulating me like this. I wanted a vacation. Now, if you'll excuse me, I am going to search for that kitten. And maybe after this week, I'll take a trip to Orlando. Alone. Without you, because surely you will be rather busy with council things and babysitting."

Horus made a miserable sound at that and was forced to watch his mate walk off. Carter made a beeline for Hecate. He was a warlock himself; she had been his inspiration and favorite teacher. Her face brightened when she saw him because he had left a lasting impression himself. Before she got to greet him, he was scooped up into a hug by Alabaster. Carter smiled a little and returned the hug. Carter's sister Sadie used to tutor Alabaster and he had come over to the Kane's house a lot.

"Carter! What are you doing here? Trying to pass for a student?", teased Alabaster.

"Carter and his mate Horus volunteered as chaperones", supplied Hecate pleased as she also pulled Carter into a hug. "How are you? And your sister? I was so proud of her improvements!"

Carter's little sister had graduated earlier this year and yes, Carter too was quite proud of Sadie. "She's good. Currently on a year abroad in Egypt. Sending post cards every week."

"Though Heca and I have been wondering what made you volunteer", questioned Howard.

"Horus did", grunted Carter displeased. "Because he promised Bast to check out your new local cat-shifter. Now if you'd just point me into the general direction? Because I have to admit, if Bast asks Horus for a favor, I am kind of curious about this particular shifter myself."

"Just come along with me", declared Alabaster, hooking arms with Carter.

Carter allowed the younger warlock to drag him over to the vampires. Alabaster's mate Ethan turned toward them on instinct when Alabaster came closer. Carter smiled a bit amused. There were others, Carter wasn't that familiar with the local vampires, but he did recognize Nico di Angelo, the unofficial heir to Hades. Carter raised one curious eyebrow as he watched Nico talking to someone. The dominant's whole attention was on this other person. He wasn't very tall, but had a nice build, like a swimmer. Messy black hair on top of his head and his eyes a remarkable, bright, sparkling sea-green. And those eyes, they were trained on Nico with the same intense, sole focus as Nico's were on him. It made Carter smile a little, to see such clear and innocent affection. The early blossoms of what would become a truly strong matebond. Carter could see it. Could see it clearer than most others. He was a particularly strong warlock, no match for Hecate of course, but very strong nonetheless. He could see the magic within a supernatural creature, swirling around them. Nico's, like the magic within every vampire, was pitch-black, like thick ink. The pretty stranger, his magic was a soft, gentle azure-blue. And the thing was, the thing that made Carter say with such conviction that they would one day form a strong matebond, their magic was reaching out for each other. As the two talked, black tentacle-like whisks of magic reached longingly for the green-eyed boy and azure-blue whisks of magic reached out for Nico with just as much longing.
"Percy! This is Carter. He wants to meet you", stated Alabaster with a grin.

The green-eyed boy turned away from Nico – though his magic remained focused on reaching out for the vampire. "Uhm. Hello? I'm Percy and you are...?"


"Percy Jackson. Uh... mer-cat-shifter...?", stated Percy, wiggling his nose cutely.

Carter's eyes widened in surprise. Not just a cat-shifter, but a hybrid? And a merboy hybrid at that? Now, that really was quite the odd combination. It did explain why Bast herself got curious.

"It's good to make your acquaintance", smiled Carter, turning toward Horus and pointing at him. "See that man over there? He's a total creep. And if the creep seems to be following you around, just scream 'Stranger Danger' very loudly, okay?"

Alabaster and the others, who knew Carter and Horus, snorted at that. They didn't even question it; they knew Horus most likely deserved this. Percy however, he seemed to take Carter very seriously, nodding with a frown on his face as he eyed Horus. Nico chuckled softly, resting one hand on Percy's lower back to gain the hybrid's attention. It looked beautiful how their magic intertwined.

"Perce! Come on, I wanna check our room!", called a pretty native American girl out.

"Right. Coming, Pipes. Uh, see you around, Mister Kane?", offered Percy with a smile.

"I'm sure we will, Percy", nodded Carter amused.

Percy's eyes stayed on the warlock as he retreated to follow his friends. The worst of the day had been the flight to Italy, really. Percy had thrown up trice. He had been so embarrassed. Piper next to him kept holding his hand, but she was just as green as him. Turned out ocean-bound creatures like them did not appreciate being in the air. He had been so glad when they got off the plane. And the mansion was amazing. As large as the one the di Angelos had in New York, but it looked different. Kinda ski-y. Nico had snorted at him in amusement when Percy had said that.

"Who's this Mister Kane?", asked Percy curiously as he followed Piper.

"Carter? He's a couple years older than us. Not a 'mister', he doesn't like that", giggled Piper. "He's quite the legend around school, actually. One of the strongest warlocks of the last centuries. Hecate's protege. Carter's younger sister Sadie graduated in spring. She was kind of like a mentor to Al and Lou. She's also close friends with Annabeth, you know."

"Huh. So Mis—Carter is okay then?", asked Percy and tilted his head.

"Totally. He's cool. Guess he must have volunteered to chaperone the trip", shrugged Piper with a frown. "Last I heard, he was training to become a teacher, to join the staff at Summers High."

"Cool", nodded Percy, eyes trailing over the interior of the mansion.

"Percy! Percy! Percy!"

Percy grinned as him and Piper entered their suite. The whole place was more like a hotel; apparently Hades had rebuilt it after the first school trip he sent up here. He had claimed that this way, the mansion was at the very least regularly used. Each suite had two bedrooms that shared a bathroom and a small living room like common area, while each bedroom held two beds. Percy and Leo were sharing a suite with Piper and Annabeth, something he was really looking forward to.
"Wow", whispered Percy as he looked around.

Leo was jumping on one of the large, comfy-looking beds, waving at them through the open bedroom door. The common area held a TV, two couches and a table, as well as three doors – two to the bedrooms and one for the bathroom. Annabeth stuck her head out of the other bedroom.

"Ah. There you are. Congratulations on prying Percy off of Nico, Piper", stated Annabeth gravely.

Percy blushed and glared at the Valkyrie. "I was questioning him about the place."

"Su—ure you were", nodded Annabeth with a mocking roll of her eyes.

"Why's she always teasing me about Nico?", complained Percy irritated.

"Because it's like super obvious that you have a crush on him", called Leo out from the other room.

Percy's blush reached all the way down to his navel, though thankfully enough, they couldn't tell due to him not walking around naked. His cheeks however were red enough to make the other three submissives snicker and laugh at him. It was hardly Percy's fault that he had a crush on Nico. Nico was nice, kind, protective, strong, understanding, handsome, gorgeous, funny, delectable, cute – and one of his best friends. He had also only known Nico for like two months now! He was so not going to do anything stupid like tell him and ruin their friendship. Besides, why in the world would a powerful, strong vampire like Nico want some sea brat? Percy was only seventeen. Nico was ninety-one. He probably wanted someone older, more sophisticated. There was no way in hell that Percy would even stand a chance. So why ruin a totally perfect friendship...?
Chapter 17: Wicked Winter Wonderland (Part 1)

"I'm sorry about kicking your mate in the balls. But you told me he's a creep!"

Carter blinked amused as he leaned against the doorframe of his and Horus' suite. Horus had crawled in about five minutes ago, holding his crown jewels and whining like a dying man. Turned out that when someone told Percy Jackson to watch out for a creep, he did not just scream like a girl and wait for rescue – he took charge himself. As in; when a creep followed him around, Percy served a very hard direct hit to the man's junk. In Carter's defense, he had not expected that.

"It's alright, Percy", laughed Carter and shook his head, reaching a hand out to ruffle the guilty looking hybrid's hair. "It's not your fault. I did tell you he's a creep, after all."

"You di—id. And it's not alright. It hu—urts", whined Horus from the next room.

"Oh, ignore the big baby", dismissed Carter as he wrapped an arm around Percy's shoulders. "Come on. I know my way around here and you must be hungry. Let me show you the dining hall."

Percy threw one last doubtful glance past Carter at the suffering Horus laying on the couch before he allowed the warlock to steer him out and through the halls. He had barely gotten settled in his room and was just on his way to dinner – alone, because he had taken a shower and told his roommates to go ahead alone. But then he had seen the older man with the mismatched eyes following him along a dark corridor and since Mister Kane had said the man was a creep, well, Percy twisted the guy's arm when the man had touched Percy's shoulder and then Percy had placed one very precise kick. That was about the moment that Rachel walked around the corner, yelped and informed Percy that Horus was actually Carter's mate and not a danger.

"I really am sorry though... I know I have a lot of force behind my kicks", admitted Percy.

"Maybe you should try out for the soccer team?", offered Carter jokingly.

"Nah. Swim team is enough", grunted Percy and shook his head. "So, uhm... Why did you tell me your mate was a creep? Are you... not happy with him...?"

Percy thought that matebonds were forever and all that. But if Carter didn't like Horus...?

"I love the big idiot", chuckled Carter and rolled his eyes. "He just... upset me. You see, he's friends with Bast and she asked him to... keep an eye on you, which is why Horus signed us both up as chaperones for this trip. Without informing me. I thought we were on a romantic vacation. Not off to babysit a hundred fifty hormonal supernatural teenagers..."


"Like Poseidon and Hades. Yes, quite", confirmed Carter amused. "Old and powerful enough that the humans weaved legends and myths around them."

"...Why would Bast be interested in me?", asked Percy with a confused kitten look.
"I would assume that it might be your... rather rare hybrid-status’, offered Carter, one eyebrow raised. "A hybrid of a cat and a merboy? That is... interesting. Not to mention that there aren’t any other cats in the New York territory. She easily worries about her kin. So... How are you fending, as the only kitty-cat in New York, without a pride...?"

"I’m happy with my foxes, my wolf and my dragon”, replied Percy with a smile. "And with my cove. I don’t need other cat-shifters, as long as I have them."

Carter smiled a little as he nodded. As soon as they entered the dining hall, Carter could see where Percy’s magic was reaching out to. The blue whisks instantly found Nico di Angelo, way before Percy even realized that the vampire was already sitting at a table. The smile took a teasing edge as Carter gave Percy a nudge into the direction of Nico. Instantly, the hybrid brightened a little.

"Well, I hope we’ll get a chance to talk some more later”, offered Carter.

Percy nodded and waved the warlock off before finding his spot between Nico and Luke, opposite Annabeth and Reyna. Annabeth offered him a curious frown as to why he had been so late.

"I might have kicked Horus in the dick?", offered Percy and made a face.

"Someone should have told him about Carter's antics", grunted Luke, blinking with an amused look on his face. "Though Lupa is going to love hearing about this one."

"Nico. You wanted to ask Percy something", stated Annabeth rather sharply.

Nico glared viciously at his best friend, who just smirked and then got support from Thalia and Luke. "Yes, Nico. You wanted to ask Percy something."

"Uhmm. Perce. I thought, maybe you wanted to... go ice-skating after dinner?", asked Nico.

"Oh! Sure. I love that!", exclaimed Percy eagerly, looking at the others. "You coming too?"

"Oh. I do have to show Tavy that very dark corner in the library”, drawled Luke mischievously.

"I hate ice-skating", stated Annabeth firmly. "Too much danger of breaking in."

"Can’t. I have an appointment to beat Phoebe, Zoe and Bianca in a snowboarding race”, declined Thalia with a smirk aimed at the aforementioned girls. "Because Bia pouts prettily when she loses."

"I do not pout", exclaimed Bianca offended.

"Yeah, you do", chorused Zoe and Phoebe pointedly.

Percy blinked slowly, cheeks slowly heating up as he looked at Nico. "Well, it’d just be... the two of us, if you don’t... mind, Percy? I mean, surely there’ll others skating too, but..."

"I—I wouldn’t mind”, whispered Percy, cheeks heating up even more.

A waiter came to take the orders of those arriving late and not much later, Percy had three burgers, a giant heap of fries and a bowl of chicken-wings and ribs in front of him. He looked embarrassed when all others stared at him a little surprised when he started wolfing down his food.

"...Uhm. Piper said my heat’s kinda coming up?”, tried Percy semi-defensively.

"S—She said it'd be fine? Like, I'd have at least two more weeks before it hits!"

"Let's hope so", muttered Luke beneath his breath.

"...You're starting to worry me. Stop it, Alpha", ordered Percy with a frown.

"I'm sorry, cub", grinned Luke, nudging Percy gently with his cheek. "It's just... Predicting how exactly your heat is going to be... it'll be hard. Merpeople normally go into heat twice a year. Shifters go into heat once a month, roughly. So it'll be hard to tell when or how often or how long you will be in heat. The time beforehand is just the same. It might take you longer than two weeks considering it's your first heat and you'll need to build up more... reserves. You might also end up going into heat early because your body hasn't developed routine yet."

Percy gulped and nodded. Just great. Now he was getting nervous. What if his heat was going to ruin the ski trip? He had been looking forward to this so much though! He startled a little when Nico reached for his hand and grasped it, squeezing it gently.

"You'll be fine, Percy. We're all here for you and we'll make sure you'll get through it safely."

Percy knew that Nico was referring to the circle of friends Percy had now made and he also knew that Leo and Connor and Piper and Annabeth were totally going to be there to help Percy through it, but Percy's brain opted to focus on the idea of Nico helping him through his heat. He had to think of all the Hijack ABO fics he had read, of Hiccup helping Jack through his heats while Jack whined and begged. Percy's cheeks instantly heated up. Would Nico be a gentle and considerate dominant who'd take all the heat and edge away and make it all good? He hastily shook his head to stop trying to picture himself writhing in pleasure beneath Nico while the dominant whispered soothing, sweet words of praise and love into his ear. Wrong train of thought during dinner. Way wrong. Taking a shaky breath, Percy turned to look at Nico, blinking when he saw Nico eating a steak.

"You know, for a dead guy I see you eating quite often", pointed Percy out playfully.

Nico shrugged casually and cut another piece from his raw, bloody steak. "Food tastes good. And I don't really know why human myths insist that vampires don't eat? I mean, we walk, we talk, we have sex, we need blood circling our veins. Why shouldn't we eat?"

Percy grinned a little. He was really giddy to finish eating so he could go skating with Nico. Just him and Nico. Kind of like a... date.

Percy was so giddy as he paced in the entrance hall to the mansion, his ice-skates firmly hugged against his chest. Amphitrite had given them to him the morning they left. They were white, with blue fluff at the rims and a beautiful kind of silver frost-pattern on it.

"Percy. Have you been waiting long?", asked Nico worried as he arrived.

"Uh. Nah. I just... figured I could as well wait here", shrugged Percy a bit embarrassed.

Oh, he really needed to get his act together. Really now. He had managed perfectly fine to go to the movies with Piper alone. This was just the same. He was just spending alone time with a friend. He wasn't like this was a date or something. Not that he wanted it to be a date.

"Have you ever skated before?", asked Nico as he led the way out of the mansion.

"I used to. With my mom. In winter, we'd always go skating together at Rockefeller Center", replied
Percy with a small smile. "I... I have to go skate with her when we get back."

"You miss her", observed Nico softly as they walked through the snow.

"A lot", nodded Percy, staring at the ground in front of them. "It's just... she's always been there. And now I rarely see her. And I know I could visit her more often or even just call her more often, but then I feel shitty for lying to her about everything. When she asks me what I did with my friends, I can't just tell her that I went on a run with the pack, or that I'm planning a camping trip with Piper and Silena and the cove to a lake where we'll camp under the water."

"I understand", whispered Nico with a sad smile as he grasped Percy's hand. "I know it's hard for you, Percy. But believe me, it's... it's far safer for her not to know the truth."

"Sure about that?", asked Percy with a bit of a sneer.

"Positive", confirmed Nico seriously. "Luke's mother? She never got over the fact that she had slept with a shapeshifter. When she started realizing that Luke was one too... She literally lost her mind. It often drives the humans insane when they actually learn the full truth. Hazel's mother too. It's what drove her into an early demise. Not to mention, it's also dangerous. After Bianca and I were turned, our mother became a target for a rivaling coven. And... well... she died. It's safer to keep the humans you care about as far away from this world as possible, Percy. Believe me."

Percy still looked a bit doubtful, but he also looked sad on Nico's behalf, tugging on Nico's hand to pull him into a tight hug. Nico was a bit startled at first but he very willingly wrapped his arms around Percy to pull him even closer and enjoy the proximity and scent of the submissive.

"Ah. We're here", stated Nico awkwardly as the hug lasted longer than anticipated.

Percy was a little flustered as they ended the hug, heart thumping. Then he looked around and was instantly distracted from the nervousness about what kind of weird moment that had been. It was absolutely breathtaking. A frozen lake with pine-trees all around, powdered white snow all over. The moon stood high up in the sky already, casting a beautiful silver glow onto the lake. Percy hurried to put on his skates and Nico did just the same. Giddy, Percy rushed forward and raced a circle along the outskirts of the lake, bright smile in place. He blinked confused when he reached Nico again, just to find the vampire nearly at the exact same spot he had left him in. Nico stood with his knees together and feet pointing awkwardly, arms spread a little for balance.

"...Have... you ever ice-skated before?", asked Percy doubtfully, observing for a moment.

"Well... no?", admitted Nico embarrassed, watching Percy spin elegantly once.

"Why did you ask to go skating then?", laughed Percy amused, circling Nico curiously.

"Because Luke told me you like skating. That you're especially looking forward to that", admitted Nico, trying to take a step forward just to land on his ass. "Ouch. I... wanted to do something you enjoy. And... I also didn't think this would be so hard."

Percy's teasing grin softened into a small smile as he offered Nico a hand to help him up. His heart was now positively racing. That was so adorable. Nico was so adorable. This. Was. Not. A. Date. Calm down, you silly heart. Percy shook his head a little as he pulled Nico close.

"It really isn't that hard", promised Percy with a small encouraging grin. "Let me show you."

Nico had done a lot of dangerous, ridiculous or exciting things in his life. But having Percy Jackson teach him how to ice-skate under the moonlight was most definitely the most heart-racing thing he
had ever done. Percy's cheeks were flushed from the cold and his eyes sparkling in excitement. He was the most beautiful sight ever, showered in the silver glow of the moon. Nico wanted to look at Percy forever, he was so breathtaking. The laughter ringing from Percy every time Nico slipped. How elegant and graceful Percy looked as he danced over the ice. Yes, Nico was in love. Absolutely and undeniably in love. In all his decades, Nico had met and been with quite a couple of submissives, but there had never been anyone comparable to Percy. Listening to Percy laugh and watching him dance like that, holding him close as they danced together – Nico knew that even an eternity with Percy would be too short. He wanted Percy as his mate.

"We should... We should return back to the mansion", whispered Nico, getting lost in Percy's eyes.

"W—What?", asked Percy startled, so focused on Nico holding him, dancing with him.

"It... It's getting late"', said Nico, slowly shaking off that daze of Percy. "And we're going on a ski-trip early tomorrow, remember? We should both get some sleep before that."

"Yeah. You're right, I guess", nodded Percy embarrassed.

They returned to the shore to change their shoes and then headed back to the mansion in silence. Both were so lost in reminiscing about the evening to even talk. Percy offered Nico a last smile as Nico dropped him off at his bedroom. Percy was still a little dazed from the evening as he stumbled through the door and closed it behind himself, leaning against it with a sigh.

"So the date went well?", asked Piper with a broad teasing grin.

"I—It wasn't a date!", exclaimed Percy flustered, glaring at his best friend.

"Sure. That's why you got that dreamy look on your face", snickered Piper.

Percy's flush brightened even more as he sank down on the door. Piper seemed to pity him because she actually put her bowl of popcorn aside and got off the couch to walk over to him. She knelt down in front of him, looking at him with one raised eyebrow.

"Is Percy back from his date already?", called Leo out from the bathroom, poking his head out. He was wearing a fluffy red bathrobe as he exited the bathroom when he saw Piper and Percy sitting in front of the door. When it was silent for too long, Annabeth came out of hers and Piper's bedroom to check what exactly was going on right now.

"What? Did Nico do something wrong? Don't tell me he was already trying to grope you on your first date", stated Annabeth sternly. "I will kick his ass to kingdom come. Literally."

She flashed her Valkyrie face for just a second, making Percy yelp high-pitched. "N—No!"

"Well, I didn't really expect him to", drawled Annabeth with a shrug as she closed in on them. "I mean, he's a total moron, but he's not that kind of bastard. I was just teasing you, Percy."

Percy flushed and glared up at her. "It. Wasn't. A. Date."

Leo, Piper and Annabeth exchanged exasperated and disappointed looks over Percy's head. Not disappointed in Percy, but in Nico. While Percy was busy being embarrassed by his friends, he missed their silent conversation. Leo, Piper and Annabeth silently agreed that Annabeth was going to have Words with Nico. Capital letter deserved, because really now.

"Okay, children. I will head out for a little bit of fresh air", stated Annabeth with a charming smile.
Percy looked confused, but Leo and Piper instantly distracted him with the promise of a movie, while Annabeth headed out to track down her idiotic best friend. She easily found the room of the vampire coven and knocked firmly, scowl in place on her face. The moment Nico opened the door, he instantly closed it again when he saw the scowling Valkyrie in front of him.

"Ha, ha. Very funny, di Angelo", grunted Annabeth. "Open the door. Now."

"Niccoló di Angelo! Open the door right now!", called Bianca out from inside.

"I hate when you team up on me", groaned Nico frustrated.

He did open the door, glaring at Annabeth. His suite-mates and coven siblings Bianca, Hazel and Ethan were sitting on the couches, all three staring pointedly over at Nico.

"Why the glare, Annie? If my stupid brother did something stupid again, I will punish him", promised Bianca with a cheerful smile.

"Percy is determined that your little date wasn't a date. Were you really dumb enough not to clarify that it was a date, di Angelo?", asked Annabeth pointedly, hands at her hips.

"...Well... I mean...", drawled Nico awkwardly, prompting the other vampires in the room to groan and Hazel to even throw a pillow at Nico. "We're friends. Before he came to Summers High, he's never had real friends before. He trusts me. So much. I just... didn't want to ruin that."

"Didn't. That's past tense", noted Hazel curiously. "Go on. Elaborate and I might just consider not feeding you to my pet-dragon. Because my pet-dragon is very fond of Percy."

"I thought that I shouldn't risk the friendship, but... when we were out there, just him and me...", drawled Nico, getting a dreamy look on his face as he stared off into the distance. "It was just so perfect. Just him and me, dancing together. He's so beautiful. I know he's the one for me. I know he's the only one I'd ever want to become my mate."

"...That's big", grunted Ethan impressed. "Congratulations on catching on with what everyone else who knows the two of you has known for a solid month now."

"So, what cha gonna do about that?", asked Hazel eagerly.

She was crossing her arms over the backrest of the couch, her chin resting on them. Nico glared viciously at his younger coven mate. Annabeth shook her head exhausted, playing with her hair.

"Well?", prompted Annabeth pointedly.

"Tomorrow. When we go skiing with the group. I'll take a detour with him. Just him and me, together. And then... I'll ask him out on a date", whispered Nico determined. "Without any noisy, irritating friends who might have some comments on the matter."

Hazel grinned broadly and stuck her tongue out at him. "It's cute enough, I guess."

"Dating then?", inquired Bianca, looking at him suspiciously.

"He's only been a supernatural for two months now. I'm not gonna court him right away", huffed Nico. "Besides, as far as I know, he's never even had a boyfriend before. No. I'm going to do this right. Ask him out. Become his boyfriend. Make him fall maddeningly in love with me. Court him and then become his mate who will cherish and love him for the rest of eternity."
He was so inside his head, he missed the collective eye-roll of everyone present. Everyone present knew that Nico could already check out box number three on this list. But okay, with the two of them this might just work that way. Annabeth smiled just a little as she looked at her love-struck best friend. She knew how overwhelmed Percy was with everything, so it might be better to take things slow for Percy's sake. Dating was a good enough start, she guessed. And his plan was kind of sweet. Percy was probably going to like it. Well, Annabeth couldn't wait for that ski-trip tomorrow.

Percy groaned dizzily as he looked around. What had happened? He remembered skiing with Nico. And then...? There had been something. And now he was in a deep, dark cave. Nico. His eyes widened as he looked around frantically. He gasped strangled when he did spot Nico. The vampire was laying close by, but his leg was awkwardly twisted and he was laying in a puddle of blood. Too much blood. Panicked, Percy tried getting up, wincing in pain as he put pressure on his ankle. So instead he opted for crawling over to Nico worried. Once he reached the vampire, he pulled Nico's head into his lap, gently caressing the blood-damp curls.

"N—Nico... Nico, please wake up", requested Percy. "You know, I can just repeatedly slap you like they do in the movies. But I'd prefer if you'd just wake up."

"Y—Yeah, I'd prefer if you didn't hit me too", groaned Nico hoarsely.

He slowly cracked his eyes open to stare up into worried sea-green ones. Nico offered Percy a reassuring smile, though there was a wince to it, so it didn't help reassure Percy at all.

"What... happened?", asked Percy confused while pulling his scarf off.

He carefully spread Nico's legs and wrapped the scarf around the gashing thigh-wound that was the cause for the puddle of blood beneath the vampire. Nico winced and leaned a bit more into Percy.

"A landslide. Or... snowslide?", grunted Nico. "We were falling. I tried to shield you best as I could. A—Are you alright, Percy? Are you hurt?"

Percy stared at him ridiculed. "My ankle hurts, but that's it. And you're the one bleeding all over the place! You shouldn't be the one asking about injuries. Idiot."

"...Percy. I'm a vampire. I'm dead", pointed Nico out with a bit of a deadpan. "As long as there's no fire, decapitation or stake through the heart kind of situation going on, I'll be fine. You, on the other hand, might just break your neck and die. Or puncture a lung and die. Or bleed to death and die."

"...Bleed to death and die?", echoed Percy dubiously. "Okay, so you might not die, but the blood loss is definitely going to your head, Dracula."

"...That might be the case", agreed Nico reluctantly, blinking with unfocused eyes.

Percy sighed softly, returning to caressing Nico's hair. "Is... Is it going to be bad?"

"I don't know, Perce...", sighed Nico. "I lost a lot of blood already and I kind of... haven't really eaten yet since we left yesterday... It might happen that I slip into a blood-loss-coma."

"W—What does that mean?", asked Percy worried. "It doesn't sound like fun."

"Well, you know from your vampire shows how vampires sometimes dry out and just... play mummy until they feed again? That", grunted Nico with a grimace.
"And... now tell me why you haven't fed since we left", prompted Percy with a judgmental glare. Nico averted his eyes embarrassed. "...You were grossed out by the blood-cereal when you came over during breakfast before and... I didn't... want you to go and sit somewhere else because you were disgusted by me drinking blood, so I figured I'd just stick to a bloody steak."

"You're an idiot", whispered Percy stunned and a little flustered. "Sure, I thought it was kinda gross, but... You eat it. You need it. I don't need to eat it, so it's fine. I wouldn't have gone somewhere else just because you were drinking blood. I mean, have you seen the gross stuff Leo eats? He was dipping a pickle into his milkshake the other day. A pickle. Honestly, I'd take someone drinking blood over that any day of the week. And besides... I like spending time with you."

Nico marveled at just how pretty Percy looked with that blush. "I like spending time with you too, Percy. A... A lot. Y—You're shaking. We should... should make a fire somehow."

Percy blinked a few times and looked at the vampire in his lap. He carefully shed his backpack and pulled out the copy of *City of Bones* that he was currently reading. Annabeth was probably going to gut him for doing this, but Nico was right. They needed a fire. For once, Percy was glad that Nico was a smoker; he got the lighter out of Nico's pants and set the book on fire, mourning the loss.

"Nico", whispered Percy, nudging the vampire when he saw him close his eyes.

"...Mh...?", muttered Nico exhausted. "M sorry, Perce..."

"No. No, no, no", chided Percy fiercely, grabbing Nico by the upper arms and pulling him up some. "You will *not* opt out of this cave-experience and play Sleeping Beauty while I'm freezing my ass off. You are so going to stay awake and keep me company, di Angelo."

"Don't... have the energy", whispered Nico with a half-smile.

"Then *drink*", ordered Percy and tilted his head to the side, baring his neck to the vampire.

**Chapter End Notes**

Ah, cliffhangers. I live for torturing my readers :D

Whatever may happen next? Will Nico slip into a coma, will Percy be left all alone? Will the others find them in time? Or will Nico drink from Percy's blood? Will they use their time in the cave wisely and, like, talk about their feelings? Whooo knows? Ah, me, of course. You guys will have to wait, I'm afraid ^-^v
Wicked Winter Wonderland (Part 2)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 18: Wicked Winter Wonderland (Part 2)

"Come on, Dracula. Just drink. I got enough blood to spare."

Nico was staring at the beautiful neck, the way it arched, so sun-kissed and perfect. Nico could hear the blood pumping through his carotid, loud and like an alluring song. It was calling to Nico like a siren's song. Not to mention how wonderful it smelt. Nico could feel his fangs extending.

"No. Percy, I can't", groaned Nico, forcing his eyes close.

"Bull", huffed Percy and rolled his eyes. "I know you can drink from other supernaturals. I know that Leo is like Hazel's favorite food-source. And Alabaster is Ethan's. Also, I already saw fresh bite-marks on both Grace-siblings before. Or are you trying to tell me it's merpeople blood you can't eat? What? Does it taste too salty?"

"...The only salty thing here is your attitude", grunted Nico with a half-hearted glare. "Is there anything you notice about that list there, kitten? Anything at all?"

"They're mates", shrugged Percy casually, baring his neck some more. "So what? Are you really telling me you can only feed off your mates, or what? I call bullshit on that, you know."

Nico took a shaky breath, which might be a mistake because he was flooded by the scent of the beautiful submissive in front of him. "You're right. We can drink from random strangers too, but... it's... it's something very intimate, Percy. More intimate than sex. And I'm not a one-night-stand kind of guy. Neither am I a one-drink kind of guy."

Percy frowned at him, quite clearly not fully believing what Nico had just said, though he still wavered a little. "...Nico, please. I don't... I don't want to be here alone, waiting for someone to find us and rescue us. Please. It's... dark and... small and cold and..." Percy took a shaky breath, looking at Nico so pleadingly. "I don't... I don't like it. It reminds me of the wall-closet I used to hide in as a kid whenever Gabe would get especially drunk and especially nasty. Please don't just pass out and leave me alone here, Nico. Please don't."

Percy averted his eyes, glaring angrily at the ground as he felt tears prickle in the corners of his eyes. He hated being weak, he hated how weak this situation made him feel. But he was in pain, it was dark, it was cold, it was a tight place. All in all, it reminded him far too much of his childhood and as long as Nico was there and awake, he could distract Percy and keep him from slipping into a flashback and panic attack. But if Nico really fell into one of those thirst-comas, then Percy really would be all alone in here and he didn't think it would end well for Percy.

"...It'll feel intense. Overwhelming", whispered Nico softly. "I doubt you've ever been on any kind of drugs, but... it's a high. A very intense kind of high. No pain, because that would be the exact opposite of what a vampire would want from a human – we want more blood, not for our 'food source' to run away and hide. It... It can be addictive, Percy. Are you sure?"

Percy blinked doe-eyed at Nico in surprise. "Y—Yes. Please, don't leave me alone here, Nico."

Nico took a shaky breath as he slowly sat up, resting one hand in the nape of Percy's neck and
drawing the hybrid closer. Percy's heart was racing, Nico could hear it, could feel it, could smell it. His fangs extended even more as he was so close to the one food-source he really wanted to taste. His submissive smelt so divine, Nico had been dying to get a taste from day one. The sweetness of strawberries and the saltiness of the ocean. He pressed his lips gently against the soft, vulnerable skin, placing a tender kiss on Percy's neck. Percy's breath hitched at the contact, a shudder wrecking his body. Nico couldn't deny how much he loved the feeling of Percy shuddering in his arms like that. He sank his teeth in hard and fast, figuring that would be better than doing it slow and having Percy wince and flinch away from it. Percy moaned, loud and gluttonously, arching his back as Nico started sucking on his neck. Nico growled deeply and darkly as the warm liquid flooded his mouth and overwhelmed his senses. He had eaten strawberries before, but Percy tasted better than the most delicious strawberry Nico had ever eaten, so fresh and sweet. That salty note to it only made it more intriguing and made Nico want to have more. There was also a rich note, like the most expensive red wine he had ever tasted. All in all, Percy was a full-blown banquet, really.

"N—Nico", moaned Percy, weakly clinging onto the vampire.

Percy had never felt anything comparable. It wasn't like Percy had ever had sex before, but being penetrated like that by Nico felt pretty much how he had imagined a different kind of penetration to feel. Holy hell. He felt so connected to Nico, not just on a physical level. On a mental one. He was pretty sure that some of the things he was feeling weren't his feelings. There was a possessive urge and a hunger that weren't Percy's, so he could only guess that they might be Nico's. This was way too intense and overwhelming; Nico hadn't been kidding. Arousal hit Percy fast, making his hole clench on nothing in a greedy way, cock twitching as it slowly hardened. He thrust up against Nico's crotch, feeling that the vampire was no less affected by whatever the hell this was. All the arousal and intensity aside, Percy slowly started feeling lightheaded and not in a good way.

"Nico, Nico, stop, you need to stop", gasped Percy a bit panicky.

For a split-second, Percy feared he'd have to somehow fight off a hungry vampire, but Nico instantly let go off him, bringing some distance between them. Percy gulped hard, somehow finding the image in front of him no less arousing than the feeling of Nico drinking from him. Nico's eyes were pitch-black through and through, not even a bit of white left. His fangs were longer than Percy had ever seen them, peeking out over Nico's lips which were still painted red with Percy's blood. It should not arouse him to see a guy's face smeared with his blood.

"Hold still for a second, kitten", requested Nico gently as he leaned down again.

He licked a broad stripe up Percy's neck, placing a last gentle kiss on the bite-mark that instantly scarred over. Nico gritted his teeth, far too pleased by his mark on Percy's neck. Percy wasn't his. He couldn't get attached to that mark. Nico slowly licked his lips, chasing the last taste of his chosen mate. Like Nico had needed any more motivation to claim Percy as his mate, but oh, that sweet taste was utterly addictive. He never wanted to taste someone else's blood again.

"Are you... Are you alright, Percy?", asked Nico, panting hard as he shifted some.

He couldn't help but look at Percy's tented pants. Part of Nico felt guilty for arousing Percy like that, in a dark, wet cave, by biting him. Another part of Nico knew it had been the right decision. The way Percy had looked at him, so heartbroken and afraid, Nico couldn't leave Percy alone in this cave. He was glad that Percy had admitted to it though, instead of keeping it all bottled up inside. Nico knew Percy did that far too often. He knew that someone at school was bullying him; he would never forget the image of Percy bruised up, refusing to talk to Nico. All Nico wanted was for Percy to trust him. Percy had been willing to admit that this whole situation was kind of a trigger to him and that he didn't want to be alone and he had asked for Nico's help – there was absolutely no way Nico
would ever deny Percy any kind of help, especially not when Percy asked for it.

"I'm... I'm a bit lightheaded. But... it's okay", whispered Percy. "How do you feel?"

Nico smiled strained as he settled down and carefully pulled Percy closer. "I'm good. Your blood is... amazing. I haven't felt that refreshed in a while. Then again, it's been a couple decades since I last drank from a living person. I forgot just how intense it truly felt."

"Well, I think your earlier warning was pretty accurate", muttered Percy, cheeks flushed as he stared into his lap. "Wow. I mean, wow. I totally get why this is a mate-thing. Any longer and I would have ruined my pants. ...Can you forget I said that last part, please?"

Nico laughed softly, pulling Percy even closer so he could bury his nose in Percy's hair. "It's alright. It's a natural reaction. Our fangs secrete a venom that works as an aphrodisiac to make our victims more inclined to just allow us to drain them completely."

"That's kinda scary and not cool", hummed Percy with a frown, nosing Nico's neck.

"Do you... Do you want to talk about... what you said earlier?", asked Nico carefully.

"There's nothing to talk about", muttered Percy, decidedly hiding his face in Nico's neck now. "He got especially drunk whenever he lost a poker-game and he liked to make me pay for it. Those were the kind of beatings I was most afraid of, so I usually tried hiding in the old wall-closet. We... didn't really have that good isolation so it was always damp. Damp, enclosed, dark... I don't like those kind of places, they make me expect what... usually followed when he'd pull me out of the closet."

Nico took deep, slow breaths to stay calm, because angry Nico would not help making Percy feel safe. "You're so strong. I'm... amazed by how strong you are, Percy."

"Sure", snorted Percy with a slight sneer. "Very strong. I literally just cried and begged you to please stay with me because I'm afraid in the dark."

A frown marred Nico's features as he gently caressed Percy's hair. "Percy, you were just a child and you endured all of that. You didn't just survive it, you came out on top. Despite everything, you still stand tall and proud and you have nothing but kindness to offer to those around you. You have such a pure, gentle heart, you still see the good in people where others would be weary and dark. You're amazing, Percy, you're absolutely amazing and you're so strong. And admitting that you need help doesn't make you weak; it makes you human."

Percy flushed as he peeked up at Nico. "...Thanks." Pausing a little, Percy got more comfortable so he could really look at the vampire's face. "Thanks for everything, Nico."

"Everything?", echoed Nico a bit confused.

Averting his eyes, Percy shrugged a little. "You introduced me to all of those amazing people. You help me when I need you... You're always there when I need you. I'm not used to that."

Nico only had to contemplate for a short moment, because looking at Percy like that, hearing that – he knew there was no going back. "I'd like to always be there for you, Percy."

There was a small smile that was strangely torn between happy and sad as Percy looked up. "You're a good friend, Nico. I never... thought I'd make a friend like that."

"Friend", echoed Nico slowly, tasting the word on his tongue and deciding that it was strangely bitter, by no means as sweet and alluring as the taste of Percy had been. "And... And would you be
able to maybe think about... having a... boyfriend like that...? Me, more specifically. Urgh. When did I get so bad with words? I... want to be your boyfriend, Percy. If you'd want that too." Nico paused awkwardly and as Percy didn't react, Nico grew fidgety. "You don't have to, of course. I'm very happy being your friend. I wouldn't want to make you uncomfortable. Damn it, I told Annabeth this was a really stupid idea. What you need is a friend, not a boyfriend who'd make you unc-

Nico was interrupted by Percy grabbing his face and pulling him into a kiss. Nico had kissed a lot of people before – humans, vampires, elves, the occasional shifter – but Percy? Percy was so different from anything he was used to. Percy's kiss was nearly as sweet as his blood, but Percy's lips most definitely felt even better against Nico's than Percy's neck had. Eagerly, Nico deepened the kiss and pulled Percy closer and closer, until Percy was sitting on his lap. Percy was panting hard, eyes half-lid and pupils blown as he stared down at Nico once they parted.

"Holy hell, you're adorable when you ramble nervously", whispered Percy in awe.

"Do you... really want to kiss me, or was that just the aftermath of my venom?", asked Nico.

Blinking slowly, Percy frowned at him dumbfounded. "You're... You're perfect. H—How could I not want to kiss you? No one's ever taken care of me like that, no one's ever cared about me like that. You're brilliant and handsome and quirky and funny and nice and sweet and you make me feel safer than anything but my mom's hugs when I was a little child. I don't... I don't get why you want me, but I definitely know that I want you so bad."

Now it was Nico's turn to blink and look dumbfounded. "Are you... Are you serious?"

Shrugging, Percy curled in on himself just a little. "You're nearly a century old. You fought in World War II – which, yes, I know about that – and you dated more people than I have years on my life. I'm a brat, you're decades old. Sophisticated. You could have everyone you want."

"And I want you, Percy", countered Nico with a frown. "You're beautiful, you're breathtaking. You make me laugh and smile. You are the kindest person I know, I'm amazed by how golden your heart is. I could get lost in your eyes for hours, Percy, just... counting shades of green and blue and I would be content with that, just holding you and looking into your eyes. You're a prince, Percy, you could have everyone you want too, you know? You're literally one of the most sought-after submissives of your generation. Don't sell yourself short, Percy. You're amazing."

Percy flushed brightly as he stared at Nico. "So... So does that mean... we're boyfriends now?"

Nico smiled brightly at him and Percy found himself really loving that smile. "Yes."

"And... being boyfriends comes with... kissing and cuddles too?", asked Percy eagerly.

"All the kisses and cuddles you want", chuckled Nico as he pulled Percy closer again, until the hybrid was comfortably laying on Nico's chest. "But... Percy, how do you know that I served in World War II? I never... I never told you that."

"There are a lot of photos in the mansion. I may not have seen them all, but I saw a couple pictures of you in a World War II uniform, holding Bianca close", replied Percy with a shrug. "I didn't want to pry though, figured if you wanted me to know, you'd tell me."

"Ninety-one years of life are a lot", whispered Nico softly. "I'd love to tell you about everything, but that's going to take a lot of time. And... that particular... I... I don't like to think about it."

"Just like I don't like to think about Gabe?", guessed Percy, voice low.
Nico snorted a little. "Cheeky. You're going to use my own words against me, aren't you?"

"Well, I mean, there's this very wise vampire who told me that talking about my feelings is far healthier than bottling them all up", drawled Percy with the smallest, teasing grin.

Shaking his head, Nico leaned in a little to kiss Percy's temple. "Fair enough. But... I think for both our sakes, let's talk about neither war nor your stepfather while we're stuck here."

"You're probably right", agreed Percy thoughtfully. "Okay. So. Tell me about our first date."

"W—What?", laughed Nico amused, eyes sparkling a little.

"Oh please, I know you well enough by now to know you wouldn't do anything without a plan. Including asking me to be your boyfriend", teased Percy, smile soft and beautiful. "Tell me the plan. I know you already made a plan, didn't you? C'mon."

Nico pouted just a little at that, clearly embarrassed. "Honestly, I would like to... wait until we're back in the states, because I'm pretty sure that if we'd have our first date here, there would be half a dozen shapeshifters, a Valkyrie, a coven of vampires and a cove of merpeople lurking about with their cellphones ready to film the whole thing from two dozen different angles. And... quite frankly, I would want something a little more private. I thought I could take you out to my favorite little Italian place, it's run by a family, third generation now. I was there when it first opened. It's mine and Bianca's favorite place, because... well.. the original owners came from the same neighborhood as Bianca and I and... even though they updated their recipes, they're still very accurate to home. I'd love to take you out to candlelight dinner there, just you and me. And afterward, I'd like to take you out on a stroll in the park in the moonlight, end the night with a kiss by a lake."

Percy made a slightly high-pitched noise as he stared wide-eyed at Nico, cheeks flushed. "That... That sounds really... really great. I'd love that."

"Yeah?", asked Nico with a small, relieved smile.

"I knew you're a big, giant romantic", teased Percy, looking ridiculously happy. "I love that."

"Well then. I'll properly romance you", promised Nico with a smirk, kissing Percy gently.

"So. We spent three hours searching for you and all you two do is make out?!

Percy and Nico bolted apart to look at Bianca, who was staring down at them pointedly. "Bia?"

"Yes, Bia", echoed Bianca and rolled her eyes. "I turned into a bat and got into the cave through the tiny opening. You do know both of you can shift into tiny creatures, right? The others are outside, trying to remove the stones that are blocking the way. They sent me to see if you're hurt."

"We are", pointed Nico out with a glare. "I was nearly out of blood. And Percy's ankle is twisted."

Bianca's eyes softened as she leaned down to reach out for Percy's arm. Nico also got up and the two di Angelos sandwiched Percy between them, stabilizing him as they slowly made their way back to the entrance of the cave. Bianca kept glancing at her brother curiously.

"Yes", grunted Nico irritated after a little while. "Yes, I asked him out. Yes, he said yes. Stop staring, Bia. It's unnerving. And stop looking so smug, that's even worse."

/break/
"How does it feel? Does it hurt like that?"

Percy frowned as he leaned against Carter and carefully put some weight on his foot. "Ouch."

"Yeah, thought so", sighed Carter with a frown of his own. "You need to keep weight off it for at least two days, even with the healing magic. That wasn't twisted; that was broken. How do you not notice breaking an ankle, Percy?"

"I've had worse", shrugged Percy casually before sitting back down on his bed.

The others had been looking for Percy and Nico for hours and they had found them and brought them back to the mansion, instantly calling for Carter, who was a warlock specializing on healing magic – one of the reasons the school had been glad when Horus had signed the mated pair up. While everyone, after three hours of stomping through the cold harsh snow-storm on their search for Percy and Nico, tried warming up again, Percy got checked over by a concerned Carter.

"That is not reassuring, Percy", chided Carter a bit worried.

Percy just shrugged casually. "So. A couple of days. But... But I will be able to go ice-skating and skiing again before this vacation is over, right? Because otherwise, that'd just suck."

Carter leveled a glare at him. "Because that's what's important here. No shifting, no skiing, no ice-skating. Just sitting on your bed, keeping your ankle leveled and having your suite-mates bring you your food for three days, then I'll check on you again and if you actually listened to me, you might just be cleared to enjoy the last two days of this trip. Understood?"

Percy deflated a little at the prospect of missing about half of the ski-trip, but then he smiled a little and nodded, surprising Carter. The warlock frowned curiously as he sat down next to Percy.

"...Why do you look happy about that?", asked Carter suspiciously.

Shrugging, Percy blushed just a little. "I just thought how it sucks that I'd have to miss so much of the fun, but then I remembered that I got something better than a ski-trip out of this."

"Oh? Care to share?", inquired Carter, one eyebrow raised.

"I... I got a boyfriend out of that little accident?", admitted Percy, cheeks growing even redder.

Carter blinked surprised before he smiled at the teen. "Nico, huh? That's great. I'm happy for you."

It started to feel as though Percy's blush wasn't going to stop any time soon. "Thanks."

After Carter's diagnosis, Percy thought he was doomed to a lonely, boring three days alone in his room. He hadn't accounted for all the amazing friends he had made. They actually made a schedule to stay with Percy so Percy was never alone unless he requested some time to rest. But since not everyone would be outside in the snow, they had decided to spend their time at the mansion with Percy. Chris, Travis, Connor, Cecil, Nathan, Luke and Frank would all shift and curl together like a giant fluffy blanket on top of Percy, giving him something to pat and some company. Silena, Piper, Mike, Mitchell and Lacy sat together with him, watching *The Little Mermaid* and gossiping. Leo, Piper and Annabeth curled together with him to watch *Mulan* (because Leo totally adored Mushu and Piper and Annabeth loved Mulan, while Percy loved Khan – something for everyone) in the evening. Grover, Juniper and Rachel came to bring him dinner and eat with him, even though Juniper insisted on there being vegetables and salad involved instead of the protein party that Percy
has been throwing for himself since his heat started building up. Even Calypso and Jason came visit him. Ethan, Alabaster, Luke and Thalia came to play poker with him one afternoon. Sometimes, just one of them would come and just lounge with him for an hour. Most of the time either Piper or Connor. The fox liked just curling together on Percy's lap, allowing him to pat his belly while the two would watch *Fox and the Hound*. Bianca and Hazel crowded in on him one time to tell him all the embarrassing stories about Nico there were, now that he would be 'part of the family'.

And then there was Nico. Nico, who was always there, whenever the others weren't. Nico, who had made sure that Percy wouldn't have to stay alone. Nico, who had actually organized all the Disney movies for Percy and his friends to watch. Nico, who just held Percy in his arms in companionable silence. Nico, who tasted so good when they would kiss. Nico, who had *very proudly* told the others that the two of them were boyfriends now, right from the start, not the least bit doubtful or ashamed.

"And you're sure you're ready for this?", asked Nico very concerned. "Tell me if it hurts."

"Don't treat me like a glass doll, Batman", huffed Percy and rolled his eyes before wincing.

"Too much?", wanted Nico to know, concern written all over his face. "We shouldn't..."

"I can handle it. I want this, Nico", sighed Percy with a pout. "Please, stop worrying."

Nico was still staring concerned at Percy when a wide-eyed Piper rounded the corner just to deflate. "...And here I thought I'd get to protect Percy's virtue. What exactly are you doing?"

Percy blinked doe-eyed, holding onto Nico's arm and slowly taking one step at a time. "Carter said I could go out again, but I'd have to be careful. And I really want to go skating with Nico at least one more time before we leave Italy. Please don't tell Luke so he'll play pack-mom and ground me?"

Sighing, Piper approached them and grabbed Percy's free arm to support him some. "We all just don't want for you to aggravate your injury any further and make it worse, Perce."

"And I want to enjoy this vacation for the rest of the week", pouted Percy.

"Okay, fine. But due to the track-record the two of you have when being alone outside, I will go and get some back-up. Besides, it'll be nice to do something together", grinned Piper.

Half an hour later and Percy found himself in his skates, on the lake together with a grumpy Clarisse who tried not to fall on her ass, a slightly bemused Chris, a very happy Piper, a constantly falling Annabeth who kept cursing Piper for making her do this and a protective Reyna trying to keep her Valkyrie from constantly falling. Out of safety reasons, Leo was sitting this one out. When he got happy, his body-temperature could rise just a little too high and no one wanted to melt the lake (he had left puddles all over the ski slope already over the past week already...).

"This isn't safe. This is an awful idea. Can't you do something *normal* with your boyfriend?", complained Annabeth with an agitated glare aimed at Nico while clinging onto Reyna.

"I don't know, I enjoy this", grinned Reyna as she held tightly onto Annabeth.

The blonde glowered up at the Latina, prompting Reyna to gently kiss her. Percy giggled a little as he held onto Nico, at least until the Italian mimicked Reyna and also leaned down for a kiss. For a moment, Percy froze, because this was the first time Nico and Percy had shared affections while others were around. Part of him was a bit nervous, but then there was cooing all around.

"You two are so adorable!", declared Piper happily as she skated up to them and grabbed Percy by the arm. "But your boyfriend can't skate for the life of him and neither can mine, so come."
Nico huffed as he joined a cement-footed Clarisse and a still smiling Chris in observing their partners. Piper and Percy were perfectly synchronized and so breathtaking and elegant as they skated together for a while, at least until each submissive found their dominants again. Percy was panting hard as he practically crashed against Nico’s chest again, cheeks flushed with excitement and eyes sparkling as he offered Nico a blinding smile. And Nico knew, that was the face he wanted to look at for the rest of his immortal life. With that thought, he kissed his boyfriend, his Percy.

Chapter End Notes

Contrary to how that chapter-ending feels, this is not the fic’s end (honestly, somehow that ending ran away from me and looks pretty much final... ôÔ°°°)! Though there are only six more chapters left, as far as "things I want to happen in this story" go. Sooo, if that sounds to you like "Wait, that's not enough, there's a shit-ton of stuff that should still happen", then feel free to leave a review with shit that should definitely still happen before this story ends ;) 

For now, the next thing that will happen will be Nicercy's first date. Hint: It won't go as planned, because when does anything ever go as planned? :D

EDIT: I am so sorry! I promised a reader of mine that I’d include a list on dominants/submissives in this chapter's A/N!

Dominants: all vampires are naturally dominant (Bianca, Ethan, Nico, Calypso, Hazel, Melinoe, Makaria, Olethros, Thanatos, Hades), Proteus, Kymopoleia, Poseidon, Mike, Travis, Nathan, Frank, Chris, Cecil, Horus, Beckendorf, Shane, Jake, Nyssa, Malcolm, Dakota, Grover


All witches/warlocks (Hecate, Clovis, Butch, Alabaster, Bryce, Carter, Lou), Light Elves (Will, Lee, Michael, Austin, Kayla), Dark Elves (Zoe, Phoebe, Naomi, Celyn), Hunters (Clarisse, Reyna, Howard, Hylla, Sherman, Mark), Seers (Octavian, Rachel) and Storm Spirits (Thalia, Jason) are neutral and neither submissive or dominant. Hope that helped!
Chapter 19: First Date, Not as Planned

He hadn't done this in weeks, was the thought passing through Percy's head as his nails dug in deep and sharp into his thighs. He was stupid for doing it now, was the thought following that as he slowly dragged his nails down his thighs. The too-tight knot in his chest, the one that felt like he was suffocating from the inside even though there was plenty of air all around him, seemed to ease off as the pleasantly burning pain of bleeding scratches on his thighs distracted his mind.

It was just too much. Everything was just way too much. He had never had people with expectations in him. Now there were so many people expecting so much of him. He had brought home the first test of the school year and it had been a D+, which was kind of really good for him, but Poseidon had acted all worried and if Percy was really able to keep up with classes or if he might need some more tutoring since there were so many subjects he has never had before. Then there were his friends, instantly fussing too. It wasn't like they meant it in a bad way, they did it because they believed in him and thought he could do better. It was just... It was a passing grade and he was fine as long as it was a passing grade. But now he had all of this well-intended pressure of people expecting more than just passing from him. Not to mention the swim-team. Their first competition was up soon and he was on the starter-lineup and he knew that Poseidon and the entire family expected him to become the star of the swim-team, but he was already having such a hard time keeping up with the team as it was. The others were so much better at controlling their tails and using it to speed up. But Percy had at least managed to kick Drew's butt at the entrance race that determined the lineup for the official race. Which, of course, did not sit right with Drew.

And what didn't sit right with Drew didn't sit right with Bryce. Hands shaking as he raked his nails up his thighs one last time, he reached up to touch the tender bruise on his stomach. At least he could control the pain he inflicted on himself, unlike the pain inflicted on him by others.

The pressure of tonight's first date was also not helping his emotional state any. Nico was going to take him out on a date tonight. Their first actual date. And Percy was so afraid of screwing up. What if he was being really stupid and Nico changed his mind about dating him? It was a ridiculous fear, he knew that deep down, but the fear was still there. He blinked slowly and looked down at the bloody scratches on his thighs. Taking a shaky breath, he got up to get changed for the date.

"Nico di Angelo."

"...King Poseidon, it's a pleasure to see you again, sir", nodded Nico slowly and awkwardly.

Poseidon was posturing, arms crossed and serious frown on his face. Nico felt very small and very insignificant and also kind of weak. He knew it was very ridiculous and stupid and that Poseidon would never do it, but this man could take Percy permanently away from him. Legally, Percy was a minor and under his father's care so Poseidon could easily move Percy to Atlantis. Heck, theoretically Poseidon could arrange a 'good match' for Percy and mate him off. Not that Poseidon would ever do that, because he knew he would be permanently chasing Percy off with such a move.

"I know you, Nico, but I feel like I should still at least mention it", stated Poseidon very firmly as he
grasped Nico's shoulder tightly. "Percy is my son and he has been through too much pain as it is. So if you add any more pain to that, I will personally rip your little leather wings off. Understood?"

"Of course, sir, that's only fair", nodded Nico seriously. "I'd never hurt him."

"Pe—erce!", called Benthesikyme very loudly. "Hurry up before dad buries your boyfriend!"

She threw a mischievous look at Poseidon and Nico as Percy came running down the stairs. Nico's face lit up as he saw Percy. He was so beautiful, wearing skin-tight jeans and a light-blue button-down shirt, his hair as neatly combed as humanly possible. Which wasn't much, considering his hair had a bit of a life of its own. Poseidon's grip on Nico's shoulder loosened when he saw the genuine expression on Nico's face. Now that was a look Poseidon wanted to see on the face of Percy's future mate when looking at Percy. Total amazement, adoration and love. All the things Percy deserved.

"Percy, you look amazing", smiled Nico happily as he pulled Percy into a hug.

"Have fun, you two. But not too much fun", warned Poseidon.


Nico chuckled amused, but when Rhode, Kymopoleia and even Proteus crowded in on them, Rhode cooing and Benthesikyme holding a camera to take pictures, Nico decided that Percy was right. Outside, Nico got Percy a helmet and then climbed onto his bike. Percy grinned brightly as he climbed on behind Nico, clinging onto the vampire. Nico's dead heart was racing in excitement at getting to have the perfect first date with his beloved future mate.

"So, this is your favorite restaurant?", asked Percy curiously as they got off the machine.

"It is. I do hope you like it too. Because if you don't, that might just be a deal breaker", teased Nico.

Percy knew it was a joke. He knew Nico wouldn't put such a silly thing as an actual deal breaker, but part of him still panicked for just a second at those words, because he was so afraid of screwing up. One of his hands rubbed hard over his thigh, where he felt the scratches burn for a second, calming him down. Nico took his free hand, linking their fingers.

"Come on. We'll share an antipasti plate and then we'll share pizza and dessert?", asked Nico.

"Sounds... perfect", smiled Percy softly.

And it was, for about half of dinner. Then, while making a sneaky comment, Nico elbowed Percy playfully, hitting him straight on the bruise. Percy hissed and flinched and with that, the mood was ruined. Nico looked suspicious right away, slowly pushing the plate of pizza out of the way to have a little more room. Then he tugged on Percy's shirt, pulling it up enough to see the bruise.

"Percy", growled Nico upset. "You promised you would tell me if something like this happened again. You promised me. I trusted you to tell me if something like this happened again."

Percy averted his eyes in guilt. He had promised to talk to Nico if something like this happened again, though if he was being honest he hadn't really meant that. He wasn't used to talking to others about his problems. Nico grasped Percy's chin, serious expression on his face.

"Whatever internal conversation you're having right now, share it with me", requested Nico.

"I'm not... used to burdening others with my problems", sighed Percy. "And I kind of didn't want to ruin our first date with this stuff. It was stupid. It doesn't matter. Just forget about it."
"It matters, because someone hurt you", said Nico very slowly and very seriously. "Percy, please. I want this relationship to work out and for that we need to talk. Talk to me, Percy."

"...What... do you want to talk about?", sighed Percy in defeat, looking down at his hands.

"Who did it? Who's hurting you? Who's making this school that is supposed to be a safe and inclusive space for all of us unsafe for you?", asked Nico, voice soft and gentle.

Taking a shaky sigh, Percy clawed his fingers into his jeans. "It... was Drew's boyfriend, Bryce. Because I got her spot on the official rooster for the next race."

"I'll k-", started Nico with a growl before freezing when he saw Percy. "I'll confront him in an orderly fashion. And we have to talk to your father about this. No, Percy, really. He's the coach. He needs to know if a member of his team is making another team-member feel unsafe."

"Nico, please, stop intervening", sighed Percy in frustration.

"No. Percy, you don't understand. I care about you, it's why I want you to stop hurting", stated Nico firmly, grasping both of Percy's hands in his own. "I know you want to fight your own battles yourself, because you're strong and independent and you've dealt with your problems all on your own so far, but you're not alone anymore. Remember when your dad took you away from your mom and you were so angry with him for doing it? But... are you still angry with him?"

"Well, no...", drawled Percy with a frown. "I get that he did it because he... Oh, come on."

"No", chuckled Nico mischievously. "Go on. Finish that thought."

"He did it to protect me because he loves me and doesn't want to see me hurt", grunted Percy.

"And how do you feel now?", asked Nico. "How did you feel, until Bryce started pushing you around? How do you feel at home and with the friends you've made?"

"...Happy. Safe. Good", whispered Percy, staring down at his hands.

"And you deserve to feel that way. Always", stated Nico very firmly. "Please, please don't fall back into a pattern of letting someone else take that feeling away from you. You're so strong. Show that not by surviving the abuse but by speaking up and ending it."

"Nico...", muttered Percy, eyebrows drawn together.

"Percy, kitten, doll, please", pleaded Nico nearly desperately, lifting Percy's hands up to kiss his knuckles gently. "Please, Percy, let's go home and talk to your dad about this. Please."

Percy faltered as he saw the pained expression on Nico's face and how much this seemingly meant to the vampire. And Percy kind of hated that Nico did have a good point about how much Percy had been against the change of scenery just to have it actually help him in the end. And Nico was really convinced that letting his dad handle things would also fix this problem. Percy hated this idea. He hated asking his dad for help, he hated looking weak. He wanted to take care of his own problems. But the problem was... he didn't really know how. How was he supposed to take care of Drew and Bryce on his own? So far, all it had gotten him were even more bruises because he provoked them.

"...Fine...", muttered Percy as he held his bruised side.

What a great way to end their first date early.
Poseidon and Amphitrite shared a concerned and confused frown as Percy and Nico returned home early and asked to sit down with them. A million strange things went through their heads, wondering what could have gone wrong on that first date for them to be here now so serious.

"What's going on, boys?", asked Amphitrite gently.

"Percy. Please?", whispered Nico softly, nudging his boyfriend.

Percy heaved a frustrated sigh, rubbing his face. "I... I have some kind of... trouble. At school."

"Trouble? What kind of trouble?", asked Poseidon anxiously.

"Love, calm down and let the boys talk?", requested Amphitrite, squeezing Poseidon's knee.

"Drew's been hard on me from day one", started Percy softly. "And... And when she got more... annoyed by me, she... started asking her boyfriend to... talk to me. To beat me up."

"W—What?", asked Poseidon surprised, eyes wide.

Chewing on his lower lip, Percy slowly pulled his shirt up some, making Amphitrite hiss and Poseidon swear. For the next half hour, it was mainly screaming and cussing and fussing. Amphitrite put a cooling balm on the bruises and dressed them, while Poseidon called Chiron and set up a meeting with the principal first thing in the morning. When Amphitrite was done wrapping Percy's bruise, she ushered him and Nico upstairs, telling them to give Poseidon the chance to cool off. Not without hugging Percy and kissing his forehead though.

"So... that went...", drawled Nico slowly.

"You should go", whispered Percy softly as he opened the window. "Please."

"Percy, don't-", requested Nico with a frown, reaching out for his boyfriend.

Percy took a shaky breath and looked up at Nico with a firm look on his face. "Nico, please. You pushed me to do something I didn't want to. So I'm asking you to respect that I need some time to myself right now, okay? Because I have a meeting with the principal first thing in the morning."

There was a certain edge to his voice and Nico looked like a kicked puppy, but the vampire nodded in understanding before he turned into a bat and flew out of the window. Percy stared after him for a long moment before he closed the window and shifted into his cat-form. Meowing softly, he climbed into his closet and curled together in his nest, face buried in one of Nico's hoodies.

Leo was pacing like a caged animal and Frank and Hazel could only stand by and watch. Clarisse was more practical than that; she had stopped her submissive from pacing by simply pulling Piper down into her lap where the mermaid was now comfortably seated, being kept in place by Clarisse's possessive arms around her waist. Clarisse had her chin resting on Piper's shoulder. Chris was sitting next to them, resting a hand on Piper's leg to squeeze.

"I can't believe this happened under my nose", growled Luke with a glare.

He was sitting on Chris' other side and Chris reached his other hand out to pat Luke's knee too. Octavian had a hand resting in Luke's neck, squeezing gently to calm his submissive down. Reyna,
Annabeth, Connor and Travis were there too. Ethan and Alabaster rounded the corner, Nico stuck between them. He had his eyes averted, glare on his face as Bianca, Thalia and Jason pushed from behind. He didn't want to come. It was bad enough that word about the meeting between the Jacksons and the principal had spread like a wildfire. Mostly so since Silena was the team captain and she had been called into this meeting too and she had panicked. Nico was feeling guilty about all of this fuss and he was also feeling guilty about having pushed Percy.

"What's wrong, Nico?", asked Annabeth, the moment he was forced to sit down next to her.

"...I made Percy talk to his parents last night", sighed Nico, rubbing his face slowly.

"You knew?", asked Piper – and not even Clarisse's strong hold could keep her down anymore. "You knew and you didn't tell anyone?! How long have you known?! How dare you-"

"Piper!", barked Reyna in warning. "Give him a chance to answer."

"I've known for a few weeks. But we had a really big fight about it", admitted Nico, rubbing his face even harder. "I just wanted him to not be angry at me anymore and I made him promise to tell me if it happened again, but he didn't. When I noticed yesterday that he broke the promise, that it's still happening, I made him talk to his parents. And now... he's mad at me again."

Luke heaved a deep sigh. "Don't be angry at yourself. You did the right thing. He'll come around."

When the door opened, Poseidon, Amphitrite and Percy were the first ones to exist. Percy stared at them all in surprise for a second before he zoomed in on Nico and glared in utter betrayal. When Piper, Leo and Connor walked over to him to hug and coddle him, Percy ducked right out of Leo's arms and went to walk on Amphitrite's other side. The mermaid queen was surprised for a moment, unused to being the one sought out, but she wrapped a protective arm around him nonetheless.

"Maybe give him some time, children?", requested Amphitrite gently. "Percy will go back home with us for today and he might be staying home for a few days."

The others looked put out, but judging by the way Percy was practically hiding with Amphitrite, none of them wanted to push it. After the Jacksons left, Silena emerged from the office, looking drained and devastated. Beckendorf stepped up right away and pulled her into a soothing hug.

"What's wrong? What's happening? What's going on?", asked Leo and Piper eagerly.

"Drew got benched for now and Bryce is suspended for the next week while Chiron will sort this matter out, but the way it stands right now, we're expecting him to be expelled", sighed Silena.

"Okay. Good. That sounds very good", nodded Luke, running his fingers through his hair.

"And how is Percy?", asked Nico, looking at her pleadingly like a kicked little baby bat.

"Uncomfortable. Angry. Frustrated", supplied Silena. "Which is understandable. But... give it time."

"...You think my relationship is over before it even really began?", asked Nico softly.

"Oh, don't be a drama queen, brother", chided Bianca and rolled her eyes. "Give the poor kid some time. He's angry and he needs some time to get over it. But you did the right thing."

"I just hope I did", sighed Nico frustrated, rubbing his forehead.
"Are you alright, big brother?"

Percy blinked surprised when his little brother stared up at him with large, worried eyes. "Yeah?"

"You've been home for three days. So you must be sick, right?", asked Tyson.

Seeing as Percy was staying home for the week, Amphitrite had asked Percy to babysit Tyson so she could get some me time too. And considering that Percy had only been sitting in his nest, moping, it was a great and welcomed distraction. The two youngest Jacksons were sitting in a pillow-fort watching a Voltron: Legendary Defender marathon. Sighing, Percy kissed Tyson's cheek.

"I'm not... not sick. I'm just... kind of... upset", explained Percy slowly. "Something upsetting happened and I... I needed some time to digest it, you know?"

"But you're better now?", asked Tyson with a worried frown.

Percy paused for a long moment before he nodded. "Yeah... I... I think I am."

With that realization, Percy smiled gently and kissed the top of his brother's head before settling in more comfortably and eating another cookie. Tyson hummed and snuggled up closer to him.

Nico was pretty miserable, even with his coven trying to cheer him up. Hazel, Bianca and Ethan had taken him out for ice-cream. Percy had been gone from school the entire week and it was Friday now and Nico hadn't seen or spoken to Percy since then. Nico had tried texting Percy a few times. Not too often and he had kind of surrendered his phone to Hazel two days ago to keep him from turning into one of those crazy guys who kept sending a million texts. When his siblings parted ways with him upstairs, all Nico wanted to do was crawl into his bed and continue moping.

"Okay. So. I... didn't get a dessert because I figured the ice-cream would melt until we're done with the rest, but... I got the antipasti and a giant pizza to go and I hope that's the right ones."

Nico blinked very slowly as he looked up at the fidgeting Percy standing in front of Nico's table, where a pizza box from Nico's favorite restaurant stood, together with another take-out box with most likely the antipasti. Two glasses of cola were set out too and Percy looked nervous.

"I'm sorry, but what is this?", asked Nico slowly, confused.

The next moment, he had Percy wrapped around him, face buried in Nico's chest. "I'm sorry I ignored you this past week. I... I know you had good intentions. I know you did what you did because you care about me. A—And... I know that... on the long run... I probably am going to be grateful or whatever. But I'm still angry and frustrated right now. But... I also don't want that to ruin our relationship, because I really like you. So... can we... can we put that all aside for now and continue our first date, maybe? Unless... you changed your mind because I ignored you."

"Of... Of course not", whispered Nico as he wrapped his arms around Percy and pulled him in close. "I... I know I was asking a lot of you and I know that it was too much when the others all piled in on you because they were worried about you. I would understand if you needed more time."

"I will need some more time", grunted Percy. "But I... want to not think about any of that right now. I want to think about how much I missed you in the past week and how much I enjoy spending time with you and that I would never want to lose our relationship before it even got a chance to start and like I said, I do know that your intentions were good. So, please? Winter Soldier and pizza?"
"Winter Soldier and pizza sounds absolutely perfect", smiled Nico happily.

Percy smiled pleased as the two of them curled together on the couch in front of the TV and finally got to finish that meal that got ruined by the bruises. Percy absentmindedly ran a hand up and down his thigh to soothe the scratches he had left there last night. The last week had been extremely rough on him. He had been avoiding all of his friends and his boyfriend for the past week because he was afraid of their pity. He had been pampered by his siblings and treated like a delicate flower and it just made him feel even more awful. He just fell down a really deep hole there. Which was kind of why he allowed Tyson's comment from Wednesday to push him here, even though deep down he was still in the angry-bitter phase about Nico pushing him into talking to his parents and then talking to the principal and Drew's and Bryce's families. It had been an awfully awkward and uncomfortable conversation that Monday morning, but Percy suspected that in the end, it would help him. The thought of going to practice without the fear of Drew's sneers and getting out of the changing room without having to brace himself for a punch to the stomach was... nice.

On the other hand, it was absolutely mortifying to him that everyone was going to look at him like some kind of victim and was going to coddle him about the whole experience again. He had barely gotten over the whole mess of being a poor, abused child. He was just so tired of being a victim. Survivor. Sure, but... did that label really change how others saw him? How they looked at him with pity in their eyes, with this need to protect him? When was that going to stop?

"I... know you didn't want to talk about stuff right now, but can I say something? I talked to the others about it, Percy", whispered Nico softly. "About... About dropping the matter. I saw the way you were hiding with Amphitrite. Everyone saw the way you were hiding with Amphitrite and... no one liked that. No one wants for you to pull away from us, because we all care about you and we want to support you in whatever way you want. You just... You just have to talk to us. If you want for us to drop it, we will. If you want a movie marathon weekend to take your mind off stuff, you know I could call everyone right now and they would be over in twenty minutes."

Percy bit his lips, burying his face in Nico's neck. "I... I wouldn't mind a Lord of the Rings marathon tomorrow, maybe? But nothing tonight. Tonight is supposed to be our second first date."

"I love that idea", nodded Nico with a smile, kissing the top of Percy's head. "I just... I just need you to know that I'm here for you, for whatever you need."

"I... know. That's why I'm here", whispered Percy, voice a little shaky. "But please, can we stop talking about this now and focus on the movie and maybe something... fun?"

"Of course, kitten", assured Nico relieved. "You know, Carter called."

"He did?", asked Percy and perked up a little. "How is he doing? What did he want?"

"Well, he wanted to check in on Alabaster, actually. Apparently, he has forgiven Horus for tricking him into the whole chaperone-thing, but Horus had to do a lot of grovelling for it", chuckled Nico amused. "Carter really has the guy whipped."

"I should totally get lessons on how to whip an unruly dominant into shape", grinned Percy teasingly, poking Nico in the ribs until the vampire chuckled.

"You don't need any lessons on that. You already got me at your beck and call, Perce", stated Nico softly, leaning in to kiss Percy's lips. "You're amazing and I would do pretty much anything for you. I care so much about you, I just want you happy."

"Urgh. You're so... cheesy", snorted Percy teasingly, cheeks dark-red.
"You like it", accused Nico with sparkling eyes.

Percy ducked his head as he snuggled up to the warm safety of Nico's embrace. And yes, he did like it, he liked it a lot, really. And for the first time in the past week, Percy felt at ease, because he knew that Nico got his back. He knew that, being here and having Nico so willing to accept him back even though they kind of had a sort of outfall there? Percy had been so worried that him pushing Nico and Nico's attempt at help away like this would have been too much. But apparently, Nico was serious about wanting to help him and accepting all that would entail. Sighing softly, Percy snuggled up some more to Nico as they enjoyed their pizza and their movie.

Chapter End Notes

I've been asked a lot about Percy's self-harm and if it was a one-time-thing. No, it wasn't. Self-harm doesn't have to be a daily routine, somethings things are good for weeks or even months before they become too much again. And yes, Nico is, at one point, going to learn about that habit of Percy's too. But one disaster at a time; for now we have Bryce and Drew removed from Percy's life, so yay!

In the next chapter, things are going to, ah, get heated... if you know what I mean :DDD

Also, you might notice that I changed the chapter-count from 25 to 30. For one, because I suck at math and hadn't included that this story started with a prologue and not a chapter and that it thus should also include an epilogue, so my original math should have led to 27 parts already. And then I figured some other stuff out that I want to include in the story. Like more Sally. We definitely need more Sally.
Chapter 20: A Heated Encounter

Their second first date had been a total success and Percy was very happily agreeing to a movie marathon the next day. So Lord of the Rings and take-out at the Jackson house happened on Sunday, with Percy's friends being very casual. They were hovering because they worried, but no one coddled him or talked extra softly or anything; they respected that he wanted to move on. Well, most did. Silena and Luke were totally mother-henning him, flanking him on either side and bringing him food and drinks and soft pillows. Essentially, they had all built a large nest by pushing all the couches into a half-circle and laying everything out with blankets and pillows to make it safe, soft and comfortable. So Percy was smushed between Silena and Luke, with Annabeth and Piper trying to crowd in from Silena's side and Connor and Leo coming from Luke's side. A cutely grumpy Nico sat further away on Annabeth's other side, together with Hazel, Ethan, Alabaster and Reyna. Calypso and Jason were sprawled out on one of the couches, Frank sitting on another one together with Charles. Grover and Juniper were trying to make the others eat salads instead of chips (well, Juniper was trying, while Grover was sneaking chips whenever he could). Clarisse and Chris sat with Charles and Frank, overseeing the submissive cuddles happening beneath them.

"Guys", commented Rachel curiously as she carried in a new bowl of popcorn. "I know we're all worried about Percy and want to cuddle him, but you're been suffocating him with cuddles for the entire first movie. How about you lend him to his boyfriend?"

Percy heaved a relieved sigh, prompting Luke and Silena to look at him in utter betrayal. "...I love you guys and I love the sub cuddles we do, but... Can I please curl up in Nico's lap for a while?"

Before Silena could protest with a dramatic speech, she was pulled up into Beckendorf's lap by the dragon. Octavian rolled his eyes as he entered behind Rachel. When the two seers sat down on the couch, Octavian patted his lap and Luke reluctantly left Percy's side to snuggle up to his own mate.

"Hello, Ghost King", grinned Percy as he crawled over to Nico, pecking his cheek. 

"Hello, kitten", smiled Nico and stole a proper kiss while wrapping his arms around Percy's waist. 

"I demand Percy back for the third movie", called Connor out as he turned to curl against Travis. 

"Motion seconded!", agreed Leo, using his best pout to summon Hazel and Frank from the couch. 

"Motion granted", chuckled Nico amused. "But right now, this kitten is mine."

Percy shuddered at the possessiveness, burying his face in Nico's neck. If possible, the vampire smelt even better than normally. This was even more comforting than the pack-cuddles. Especially since Nico, as a vampire, was naturally running very cold and Percy felt just so hot. Sighing contently, Percy squished his cheek against Nico's neck, soaking up the cold.

"Perce?", asked Nico softly, curiously. "We're taking a short break between the second and third movie. You wanna stretch your legs some? Leo and Clarisse are fighting over what to order in."

"Everything", called Percy out instantly as he turned toward the bickering duo.
He blinked a bit blearily. Strange, he had been so sure that they had only just started the second movie? Had Nico's comfy scent and body made Percy doze off...? Yawning widely, Percy climbed out of Nico's lap and decided to go outside, get a bit of fresh air. Everything was feeling a little crowded in the living room. He wasn't surprised when he was being followed.

"Percy, we need to talk", stated Luke firmly.

"You... should have talked to me, sweetie", sighed Silena as she approached him. "I do understand why you didn't immediately want to talk to your father about it, especially with... what you've been through with your stepfather and with how overprotective Poseidon has gotten of you in the immediate aftermath. But you should have come to Luke or me."

"To Silena even more so; it's her team, Perce", added Luke gently. "It's her responsibility to keep her team, her cove, safe. You need to learn to trust us with those things."

"I'll... try", sighed Percy reluctant. "Can you stop playing mom and dad now?"

"Never, young man", chuckled Silena, hip-checking Percy. "We're here to hover and worry and protect. You better get used to it, guppy."

Luke grinned at Percy and went to brush cheeks with the younger submissive, just to pause. "You're... burning up, pup. Don't tell me you caught a cold?"

"Nah. I feel fine. Just a little jumpy", shrugged Percy with a frown. "...And starving."

With that, he left Silena and Luke outside to exchange concerned looks, while Percy went and added some input to their plans of ordering in. He really was starving, but it was also the perfect solution to the little debate between Leo and Clarisse to which Juniper had decided to give some input too now. They ended up ordering Chinese, pizza, Greek and a couple salads to please Juniper. At first, the others were making light of how much Percy ate, but he easily ate a third of the buffet all on his own and the others started looking at him a little dubiously.

"Didn't they feed you at all last week?", grunted Clarisse doubtfully.

Percy huffed and rolled his eyes, stuffing the last piece of pizza into his mouth and grabbing Nico's arm to pull him back to the living room where most others who had been full far before Percy were already gathered again. Decidedly pushing Nico down onto the heap of pillows, Percy climbed on top of him, legs on either side of Nico and arms tightly wrapped around Nico's neck.

"Kitten? You alright?", asked Nico a bit cautious.

"Mh. Just... stay like that. Perfect", purred Percy, rubbing his cheek against Nico's face all over.

The purring increased as Percy practically melted against Nico. And at first, the vampire really enjoyed the affection, though then Percy brushed their crotches against each other – and Percy was actually half-hard – Nico froze. He froze and then he inhaled deeply, just to growl.

"Perseus", growled Nico, voice dark as he grasped Percy's waist tightly. "Kitten, you're in heat."

Silence. The entire room had fallen silent and everyone was staring at Percy and Nico. Not that it bothered Percy, because by all the gods available, that vampire beneath him smelt divine and Percy could just devour him. Latching onto Nico's neck, he bit and sucked it.

"That's a way to kill the movie marathon", sighed Luke pointedly.
Silena all the while fished out her phone to call Poseidon. The coach was on a weekend getaway with his wife; the main reason why they were having their marathon at Percy's place. Proteus had left for some diplomatic quest to the underwater palace and both Benthalisymne and Kymopoleia had tagged along so they would get to spend some time with their boyfriends.

"Rhode", called Piper out, phone pressed close against her ear in a nervous habit. "Uh, we, uh, have kind of a situation. Can you... come back soon? Percy kind of went into heat."

"Thanatos! I know, I know, no bothering you during your date-night with Triton, but... Percy went into heat, so do you think you could deliver Triton back home?", asked Hazel on her own phone.

"Percy, love...", started Nico very slowly, trying to pry Percy off himself. "Percy, you're in heat."

"...I... what?", grunted Percy confused, very displeased that Nico tried to get rid of him.

"Sweetie, come, let's go upstairs. Your heat won't fully hit until tomorrow, so while you're still just a little horny, you should use that time to build a proper nest and stock up on food and water", suggested Silena, resting a gentle hand on Percy's shoulder. "Come, Luke and I will help you until your siblings return home. Nico and the others will clear out. Dominants especially."

There was a sharp enough edge to Silena's voice at the end to prompt everyone into moving.

"Father and mother won't return home until later tonight", sighed Rhode where she was seated in front of Percy's bed, carefully unfolding clothes. "Proteus and Kym said they would be spending the rest of the week in the underwater palace and Benthy offered to return alone, but I think it might be good to keep the circle of scents around you small, Percy."

Percy groaned frustrated and nodded. He felt like he had a real bad fever at this point, feeling too hot and also very uncomfortable. His senses were sharper too, so he kind of agreed to Rhode's assessment that reducing scents would be great. The others had left this afternoon, but the members of his pack had returned with some clothes for Percy to build his nest with. They had offered to stay and help out, but right then, Percy was still kind of overwhelmed and having Triton and Rhode here was more than enough. They talked in soft and soothing voices, they had gone through hundreds of heats themselves, they knew what they were talking about. Percy groaned again in utter frustration.

"What is it, Perce?", asked Triton gently. "If you're growing frustrated, that means something is wrong. Your nest needs to be perfect. Tell us what else you need, we'll get it for you."

"I need more... more...", muttered Percy while smoothing Nico's blanket out. "More Nico."

The three Jacksons had been working on building Percy's nest together, in the space between the wall with the window and the bed, dozens of pillows and lots of clothes used to made the space comfortable, cozy and safe-smelling. At the head of the nest, three sixpacks of water-bottles and a couple boxes of protein and granola bars. At the foot of the nest, two piles of clean towels.

"More... Nico?", asked Rhode curiously while handing Percy more of the clothes his pack had brought earlier. "But... don't you already have so many clothes from him?"

"It's not enough", growled Percy frustrated, nose buried in Nico's hoodie.

"Okay. That's okay. I'll go and get them for you", promised Triton as he got up. "And I'll bring dinner too, okay? So you'll get another proper meal in. That sound good?"
"Yeah... Thanks, brother", grunted Percy, looking up at Triton.

/break/

"What do I do? What do you do normally? Is there like... any appropriate way to behave? I don't want to overstep any boundaries. I just... I just..."

Thanatos smiled amused as he watched Nico pace in his bedroom. "First of all, you need to relax."


"It's good advise", stated Thanatos simply, one eyebrow raised. "You're old. You have more self-control than that. The only way you could be there for Percy was if you actually displayed that control. Otherwise, no one's going to let you even close to a submissive in heat."

Nico stuttered in his steps and then he sighed. Taking a deep breath, Nico tried to calm himself.

"Okay. What now?", asked Nico, only mildly salty and not panicky anymore.

"You do love him a lot, don't you?", asked Thanatos with soft, sparkling eyes.

"...Yeah", grunted Nico and made a face. "I... I hate the thought of... Percy, all alone, not knowing what exactly is happening to him because it's his first heat. It's not even that I really want to fuck him – which I do, of course, especially with his hormones – but that's... not the important thing in my mind. All I want is for him to be safe and taken care of."

Thanatos' smile was knowing and tender. "Then you truly love him. You know, dominants tend to lose control around a submissive in heat, it's a primal thing. A submissive in heat wants to get fucked, wants to get bred, to attract suitors for exactly that. And an unmated dominant can't resist the call of carnal pleasure. But... But if you have true intentions toward a submissive, carnal pleasure would never be able to override your heart's desire, Nico."

Nico heaved a sigh and sat down slowly. While Nico was doing that, Thanatos went downstairs. He could smell his own submissive approaching. A surprised Triton already stood in front of the door.

"I could smell you, love", smiled Thanatos amused as he pulled Triton into a brief and gentle kiss.

"Ah", chuckled Triton amused, resting one hand against Thanatos' chest. "I'm here to get... 'more Nico' for my brother. I'm not entirely sure what that would translate to, but... I've also never actually seen a cat-shifter in heat either, so I suppose for now the best we can do is whatever makes him the most comfortable with his nest and with the situation as a whole. So... do you have 'more Nico'?"

"Oh, I have all the Nico. And if you like, you can take all the Nico with you", offered Thanatos.

Triton raised both his eyebrows before frowning. "...Well. I mean... Very well, if he behaves."

"All he wants is to protect Percy", offered Thanatos and the implication was strong.

/break/

"Percy, little brother?", asked Triton gently as he entered the younger merboy's bedroom.

"He's been in and out. But it's a very fitful sleep", supplied Rhode, voice low and soft.

She was sitting on the ground, with Percy's head in her lap, gently caressing his hair while reading him City of Bones. Not that he caught a lot of what she was reading him, but it was more about the
soft, soothing voice. Triton sighed as he approached them. He knew that Percy was getting along particularly well with Rhode, because she was the one reading Tyson his bedtime stories and Percy used to listen in through the adjoining door between his and Tyson's room, until he had mustered the courage to go and join them. Since then, it had become a cozy night-time ritual that Tyson and Percy would curl together on the bed while Rhode read them a story.

"Did you bring me more Nico, Tri?" asked Percy sluggishly, turning large, pleading eyes on Triton.

Heaving a sigh, Triton went to sit down with his siblings. He reached out to cup Percy's cheek, already flushed and feeling heated. Percy's pupils were blown as he stared up at Triton.

"Perce, I brought you a whole Nico", replied Triton softly. "But you need to understand that... sex is off the table. Heat-sex is far too dangerous for someone as inexperienced with the supernatural as you are; the risk for pregnancy is far too high and you would be too out of control to prevent injuries. Not to mention that father would not condone sex between an unmated pair in this house."

"...I don't wanna have Nico to have sex with him", grunted Percy with a frown and a blush just to pause. "I... I mean... I kinda totally... do. But not like this. We've only been on one date."

"Me and the others will still stay close enough to make sure that's the case", stated Triton firmly. "But then, if he can behave himself, we will allow him to stay with you, for your sake. I'm taking responsibility for it and I'll convince father, how does that sound?"

"Like you're the best big brother in the world", hummed Percy with a dopey grin, nuzzling into Triton's comforting hand. "But don't tell Proteus I said that, okay?"

"Of course not, guppy", whispered Triton gently and kissed Percy's forehead.

"Can you... get me my Nico now, please?", asked Percy with large, hopeful eyes.

"Anything to make you feel better", assured Triton as he got up.

When he opened the bedroom door, Nico was already standing in front of it with large, hopeful eyes. Triton gave him a stern and serious look before stepping aside and allowing Nico in. Percy instantly latched onto Nico as soon as he was close to the nest. He grabbed the vampire by the waist and pulled him down. Rhode smiled amused, kissing Percy's forehead before she left the room.

"Hey, how do you feel?", whispered Nico softly while getting comfortable in the nest.


"You... built a very nice nest", praised Nico slowly as he looked around. "It's very comfortable and it's very big and soft. You built a very nice nest there, kitten."

Thanatos had advised Nico to say that; to praise his submissive's nesting abilities and to take good care of the hybrid during the heat, making sure he drank and ate enough. The way Percy smiled up at him and relaxed even more told him that this had been good advise from his coven-brother.

"Thanks", hummed Percy contently, nosing Nico's sixpack. "You smell perfect."

"Yeah? Perfect?", asked Nico a little amused, caressing Percy's hair. "What's that smell like?"

"Safe and comfortable and musky and delicious and so good", purred Percy pleased. "If this is what heat's like, I will so be okay. Just cuddling you and laying here for a couple days. Perfect."
"This is only the beginning, Percy", chuckled Nico amused. "But you'll be fine."

Percy was not fine. He was so insanely horny. Two days later and he felt like he was going insane with the craving. He was naked and writhing on his nest, thrusting a nice, thick dildo into his tight, wet hole, imagining it to be Nico. Nico, who was outside, somewhere in the house. Okay, so Percy was glad that heat wasn't as bad as ABO fics had made him fear they'd be; he didn't need supervision, he could eat and drink on his own and shower. Showers were important. He just masturbated a lot and when he wasn't masturbating, he was basically touch-starved because technically he was supposed to not masturbate and instead have sex with his mate and then get the entailing cuddles. Nico was obediently ready to give Percy all the cuddles he needed when he came down from his orgasms. Nico would be perfect to satisfy Percy's other craving too, gods did Percy want to be fucked by Nico. He could not wait until they would move on to that level of their relationship. With a whimper on his lips did Percy come for the third time in a row. Gasping breathlessly, he reached a shaky hand out for one of the water-bottles and emptied it in one go. Frowning softly, he looked around the mess. He went to grab the nice big plug he had and eased it in to calm himself a little before he gathered up the now dirty towels he had laid out and carried them to the bathroom, noticing Nico seated in front of his bedroom like a loyal puppy.

"I'll get a shower. Do you... Do you think you could get me some food that is not granola bars? And can I have cuddles afterward?", asked Percy softly, voice rough from moaning.

"Of course, love. I'll take care of it", smiled Nico as he got off the ground.

Nodding in appreciation, Percy continued on into the bathroom to take a nice, long and hot shower. Once he was clean and cooled down just a little, he sighed contently. Percy grabbed one of Nico's hoodies and put it on, together with a pair of boxers. When he poked his head into his bedroom, he found Nico and Amphitrite in it, Nico sitting next to the nest and restocking the water-bottles, while Amphitrite was cleaning up a little. His stepmother turned to smile at him.

"How do you feel, Percy?", asked Amphitrite as she approached him and rested a hand on his forehead. "Your fever has gone considerably down. It seems you're fending rather well?"

"Yeah. I'm totally fine. Starving, but fine", grinned Percy, spotting a tray next to his nest.

"I made some of your favorites", replied Amphitrite. "And... even though you will have a lot of catching up to do once your heat is over... Your mother called and I told her you'd be staying the weekend at hers. It's been a while since you got to spend more than a couple hours with her and I thought after everything you've been through lately, you deserve a little break."

Percy stared at her wide-eyed before he tackled her in a tight hug. "T—Thanks. You're... great."

Amphitrite smiled proudly at that, returning the hug all too gladly before letting go of the boy so he could start devouring his food. She was glad Percy didn't forget his meals and she suspected that part of the reason Percy was so collected was the nearly constant presence of Nico.

"And you think you'll be fine for some cuddles?", asked Nico playfully when Percy curled up against him and pulled the tray of food closer. "Just... tell me when I need to get back out again."

"Sure", grunted Percy as he nuzzled Nico's neck. "Ah. You smell great. Leave your shirt when you go again. My nest smells too much like me at this point. I need more Nico in it. Roll around."

"...You... want me to roll around in your nest?", snorted Nico amused, though he sobered up when
he saw the serious look on Percy's face. "Uhm... Okay. Sure. Just enjoy your food, gattino."

Percy ate happily while Nico soaked the nest in more of his scent.

"I missed you so much, mom!", exclaimed Percy as he hugged her close.

His heat had lasted him until Wednesday and by Thursday he got to go to school again and he crammed in three hours of tutoring and study sessions with Annabeth, Octavian and Ethan so he would be caught up with what he had missed in the past one and a half weeks at school before he actually got to go to his mom's place Saturday morning to stay until Sunday evening.

"I missed you too, honey", smiled Sally as she engulfed him in a long hug. "I was... surprised when Amphitrite offered that you could spend the weekend. She... said it was a peace offering, because she and Poseidon do want a good relationship between all of us and with how well Thanksgiving went... You know, that woman is quite impressive."

"Yeah, she is", agreed Percy softly as he let her lead him to his new room. "I love your new place."

"Our new place. Even if you don't live here, this is your home and you are always welcomed. Always", whispered Sally firmly as she opened the door to his new room.

She had gotten a new apartment not long after Percy had come back from the ski trip. It was a small apartment, but definitely in a better part of town than their old one and it looked so much better than what they had shared with Gabe. Dumping his stuff on his bed, he walked back to her.

"Okay. What do we need to do?", asked Percy eagerly.

"What? Need to do?", asked Sally confused. "Honey, we will bake cookies and watch movies."

"Yeah. That too. But I figured, since you moved only recently, you must have stuff to unpack or furniture to finish", declared Percy with an eager expression on his face.

"Oh, Paul helped me with most", smiled Sally as she led him to the kitchen.

"Paul?", asked Percy very curiously while they got everything out that they'd need for cookies. "Wait. You've been mentioning him in a lot of texts, mom."

"Because he's a good man and I've spent a lot of time with him", stated Sally, cheeks a little red. "Oh, don't look at me like that, Percy! Rather tell me, how is that... boyfriend of yours? The pictures you sent me from your ski trip were way too adorable."

"He's great", grinned Percy in a dopey way. "I've been... uh... sick, last weekend. And he stayed with me the entire time, taking care of me. He's so, so, so amazing. But don't think I'll let Nico distract me from the fact that my mom has a crush on her lawyer."

"It's not a crush. He is just a friend", chided Sally, cheeks darkening even more. "Instead of interrogating me, go and get the chocolate for the chocolate chip cookies."

"Not a crush, just a friend. That is like the standard excuse everyone gives", chimed Percy while rummaging through the cabinets for the chocolate. "Hey! No throwing flour at your only son!"

Sally huffed and grabbed another handful of flour to throw at her son. "If my son is teasing me, I get to throw flour at him. Now, will you stop it? Or I will have to ask Nico over to grill him and
embarrass you in return, young man. Don't think I won't."

"I'd... I'd love for you to officially meet him", whispered Percy softly, looking at his mom.

She paused, hand with flour lifted up in the air, as she smiled gently. "I'd love that too, sweetie."

"Okay. Good", nodded Percy pleased before he grabbed the flour and threw some in revenge.

"Oh, you cheeky little-", yelped Sally before laughing. "Whoever taught you such bad manners?"

"I got it all from my mom", grinned Percy cheekily. "But I think that we won't have enough flour for
the cookies if we continue like this. So... cease fire?"

Sally frowned contemplatively at her flour-covered son, dusting her own flour-covered hands off on
her skirt. "Very well. Let's call it a truce for now. We shall continue this battle after baking."

"And how? Without flour?", laughed Percy curiously.

"Oh, I bought balloons. And we have a backyard to this apartment building", stated Sally solemnly
before cracking and grinning. "You got an old set of clothes, because I bought acrylic paint."

"Very well. We shall paintball duel at dawn", nodded Percy in fake seriousness before cackling.

Chapter End Notes

If you know my ABO-fics, you know of my dislike of the trope of "heat turns the omega into a brainless slut ready to get fucked by anyone and alphas turn their brains off when smelling omegas too so there's actually kind of mutual non-consensual fucking going on here, but hey". So instead, have some tender, caring Nico. Sex shall follow when they're actually ready to take that next step in their relationship.

So, I decided we need more Sally. And I decided Nico needs to formally meet Sally, which is what he will do next chapter! And after all the protecting Nico did and the victim-feeling that Percy had, Percy is going to get a chance to step up and kick some ass next chapter ;)

Also, I finished one of my multi-chap stories last week and decided to keep the slot open
for now, because with my weekly "Malace take on Shadowhunters season 2B" on top of the ABO-oneshot collection and the weekly Wednesday Oneshot, I think I'm stretched thin enough without starting a new multiple-chapter story for now. When season 2B ends, probably. So, for now, you will be happy to hear that due to one story being off the roster, the next update for this story will be a week earlier than it'd normally be ;D
Percy smiled happily as he was laying in the center of a... fish-pile? It couldn't be called a puppy-pile, considering his siblings were merpeople. But during his heat, Percy had been very touch-starved and had been seeking his family out more for cuddles too, leading to them catching on with the special needs a cat-shifter had that may not be that natural to merpeople. They wanted to be there for Percy and they wanted to strengthen their familial bond, so the Jackson-siblings could now often be found in the living room, all curled around Percy. Proteus and Triton were behind Percy, Benthesikyme and Kymopoleia on one side of him and Rhode and Tyson on the other, all in some way touching Percy, providing him with the scent and warmth of family. It also gave the siblings a wonderful opportunity to bond more with Percy, on an emotional level. They had lived thousands of years of life that Percy had no idea about, after all. They had started watching Disney's *The Little Mermaid* cartoon series together as a nightly ritual. Twenty minutes of sibling bonding and watching everyone's favorite Disney princess. It was the perfect new family tradition.

"So, you want to introduce Nico to your mom?", whispered Kym with a teasing grin. "Nervous?"

"About what?", asked Percy confused, tilting his head to look at his big sister.

"Her potential disapproval. Him being an awkward century old vampire", offered Kymopoleia.

Percy stiffened and stared at his sister wide-eyed, while Benthesikyme elbowed Kymopoleia with a serious glare. "That was useful, Kym. Thanks for deflating our little brother."

"Sweetie, I'm sure it'll be alright", cooed Rhode gently, caressing Percy's hair.

"Yeah. The brat—Nico is so enamored by you, he would do anything to charm your mother", agreed Triton, a firm hand in Percy's neck to massage it. "It will all end well."

Percy relaxed a little and hummed softly in agreement. It was probably all going to be okay.

Percy was nervously biting his lower lip. Him and Nico were going to spend all day together today. A day away from all stress. They had earned it. First, they'd go on a lunch-date and afterward, Percy was going to introduce Nico to his mom. Though, Nico was kind of running late. Frowning, Percy checked his watch once more. His boyfriend was running seriously late though. Closing his eyes, Percy inhaled deeply, trying to detect if Nico was at least close.

And wow, he has really gotten good with his heightened senses and he has really gotten used to Nico's scent, because he could detect it. Close-by, in the park. Percy quite literally focused his nose, but what he found was so not what he was expecting. Nico was hovering about two inches over the ground, wheezing as he was out of breath. A curious purple aura was surrounding him, linking him to the viciously snarling Bryce standing in front of him, hand lifted high and curled around an invisible throat. No. More like long distance curled around Nico's throat.

"I got suspended because of you. Drew lost her position because of you", growled Bryce darkly. "I don't care who your sire is, you will regret this!"
Percy saw red. All he saw was Nico wheezing, unable to breathe, unable to move due to Bryce's magic. All Percy saw was a hostile warlock hurting Percy's Nico. A vicious, animalistic snarl tore from Percy's throat as he tackled Bryce without the warlock seeing him coming. Bryce made a nasty gasping sound as the air got completely knocked out of his lungs at the impact of Percy colliding with him and pinning him to the ground. Percy was kneeling over him, claws – yes, claws, not fingers – digging into Bryce's throat the same way Bryce's magic had just done with Nico. Percy bared his fangs – not teeth, he could feel the sharpness of them as he ran his tongue over them – at Bryce in a malicious snarl. Considering how much his vision had sharpened, he would bet that his pupils were currently tight, angry cat-slits. He was half-transformed, anger seeping through every pore in his body as he pressed down even harder on Bryce's throat until the warlock made a choking sound. Only when Bryce paled considerably did Percy loosen his grip just a little.

"You will never touch him again, not with your hands and not with your magic", growled Percy, voice deep and dark and deadly. "If you ever hurt what is mine again, I will rip your throat out with my claws and I will send it to Drew in a pink gift-box. Have I made myself clear?"

Bryce looked shocked, like he had seen a ghost. To make his point, Percy dug his claws in deeper, until blood was running down Bryce's pale throat as Percy gave a very visual example how how the throat-ripping was going to go down. He also showed just how impatient he was.

"Are. We. Clear?", asked Percy, very slowly scratching his claws along Bryce's carotid.

He might not be the best student, but even he knew enough about anatomy to make his threat very obvious, until Bryce literally squeaked. "Yes. Yes, you made yourself clear, half-blood."

Percy smiled very pleased, but he made sure to make it a smile full of fangs and malice, when he got off the warlock, dusting his pants off. "Good. Get lost and never show your face to me again, or I might feel like chopping bits and pieces off. Nose, ears; not exactly needed after all." He narrowed his eyes at Bryce as the warlock slowly got up. "Don't mess with the kitten if you can't take the claws, Lawrence. Now get out of my sight before I change my mind."

Bryce was gone so fast, Percy could barely blink. Pleased by that, he turned toward his vampire, who was laying a few feet away, eyes wide and stunned as he watched Percy nearly wearily, a hand on his sore and red throat. Percy tilted his head in a cat-like manner as he stalked over to Nico, pushed him back and crawled into Nico's lap. Gently, he tilted Nico's head back to look at the magical bruising caused by Bryce. Growling deep in his throat, Percy leaned in to lick the bruise. He was immensely pleased that despite the stunned, wide-eyed expression Nico had, the vampire was apparently not afraid of him, because Nico didn't even flinch when Percy licked over his carotid. Percy pressed a gentle hand against Nico's chest.

"P... Percy...", whispered Nico, voice raspy from the strangulation.

Percy frowned displeased at how raspy it was and reached for his phone with his free hand, dialing without even looking, still busy gently lapping at Nico's neck. "Jackson. Why are you calling? Can't you text like a normal person. Carter is busy right now, bother someone else."

"Horus", growled Percy. "Give me Carter. A bad warlock hurt my vampire. Carter is a warlock specialized on healing. He needs to fix my vampire for me."

There was struggling on the other end and seconds later, Carter was on, asking where they were. Once Percy obediently gave their location, he hung up and continued lapping at Nico's neck.

"Percy", tried Nico again, running soothing fingers through Percy's hair. "What are you doing?"
"You reek of the warlock's magic. I don't like it", growled Percy and switched to light kisses.

"...What even was that?", sighed Nico, gently tracing Percy's triangular cat-ear. "You're half-transformed. You were baring your fangs and snarling like a wild animal. There's... blood on your hands. You threatened Bryce's life. You... That wasn't you."

"Why not?", asked Percy, clearly confused as he started peppering Nico's face with kisses.

"Because we're talking about you. You don't like violence. You... You didn't fight back when Bryce was hurting you and you forbade me from going after him", argued Nico.

Percy blinked with large, cat-like eyes, tilting his head. "That was because... he was hurting me. Now he hurt you. No one's allowed to hurt you, or anyone else I care about."

"So what? People hurting you is okay?", snorted Nico and made a face, before he froze at the look Percy gave him. "Percy, no. Percy, really, no. It is not okay for people to hurt you."

"I'm used to it", shrugged Percy confused, gently kissing a darker spot in the bruising around Nico's throat. "I've always been hurt by someone. I can deal. But I don't allow for others to hurt those I love. I've always... endured the brute force of Gabe's abuse so he would leave my mom alone. It's why she didn't notice for such a long time, because he barely ever laid a hand on her. And I... hid it, so she wouldn't know he laid a hand on me. I don't... I don't allow the people I love to get hurt."

Nico's undead heart fluttered at being called one of the people Percy loved, even though Percy was talking more in a broader sense right now and was most likely including Leo and Piper and the others on that list too. The vampire sighed in frustration as he cupped Percy's face. What a beautiful moron. So he hadn't been against Nico fighting Bryce because he was against violence. He had been against it because Nico could have been hurt and because Percy wasn't worth the effort?

"Stupid, beautiful hypocrite", muttered Nico as he leaned in to kiss Percy. "Will you try to understand why I did what I did now? That I feel the same way about you? That no one is allowed to hurt you, that I can't stand the thought of someone hurting you?"

It gave Percy pause, which was already being booked as a success by Nico. While Percy was processing that, Nico was processing what a deadly badass his cute little kitten could be. The hard-on Nico got from watching Percy manhandle and threaten Bryce was wildly inappropriate. But damn. Percy with his fangs and claws out, eyes narrowed and wild, cat-ears flat against his skull and tail bushy and wildly whipping around... Damn. Not to mention, Percy being so protective over him, being two seconds from tearing a guy's throat out for Nico. Nico continued gently caressing Percy's back and hair, trying to calm him down. Percy was still in a very primal state, sent into it by the attack on Nico apparently. Which was all kinds of flattering in itself.

"Percy, sweetie, what happened? Where is your... ah, there's your vampire."

Percy perked up when a concerned Carter and a pissed-off Horus neared them. Only reluctantly did Percy climb off Nico's lap to allow the healer to take a look. Horus looked weary as he took in Percy's half-transformed state. Percy tilted his head in a cat-like manner.

"Afraid of the kitten, big bad bird?", asked Percy mockingly.

Horus scoffed and shook his head. "I'm a falcon. A predator. Tiny little kittens like you are prey."

"He's not prey", grunted Nico, still a little dazed. "If you had seen what I just saw, then you would so not call him 'prey', believe me. Ouch, Carter, watch out a bit, will you?"
"Then hold still and stop talking. You have some serious magical injuries there", grunted Carter.

"Great", groaned Horus frustrated. "Which means you will exhaust my warlock to the point of me not getting laid today at all. Thanks for that, Jackson. Learn taking care of your vampire yourself."

Percy cooed softly, trying to reach out for Nico. Horus heaved a sigh, knowing Percy's instincts were acting up and that he was just going to get into Carter's way, prolonging this mess. So the bird-shifter reached a firm hand out to rest in Percy's neck, holding the submissive in place. He tried calming Percy with some soothing dominant hormones. Percy slowly relaxed in his hold.

"How about we invite you guys to lunch?", suggested Nico softly. "As a thank you."

"Now we're talking", hummed Carter pleased as he finished his magic. "There. All healed up. Your throat will be sore for another hour or two, but the bruising and harmful magic are gone."

"Thank you, Carter", nodded Nico gratefully.

"Now tell me who did this. I might not be Hecate, but I'm still a high-ranking warlock in New York and if one of my own goes rogue, I need to know", demanded Carter seriously.

"Bryce Lawrence", growled Percy, voice so dark and feral that it startled both Carter and Horus. "If he ever touches Nico again, I will rip out his throat."

"Sounds fair", nodded Carter curiously. "Okay. Now, about that lunch..."

"Fair?", echoed Nico ridiculed. "That he rips out a warlock's throat sounds fair?"

"I'd do worse if someone hurt Horus and I'm not even a submissive", shrugged Carter casually. "Honestly surprised there aren't stray body-parts here."

Snorting, Nico shook his head. As he got up, he pulled Percy into a gentle, sweet kiss, trying to calm his boyfriend down. They were in a secluded area of the park, but if they wanted to go and get lunch, Percy needed to put away the ears, tail, fangs and claws. Regardless of how sexy they were.

"Hey there, gorgeous", whispered Nico pleased. "Back with us again?"

Percy blinked very human eyes at Nico before nodding. "Yeah. Man, that was intense. Wow."

"Instincts", grunted Horus. "You're a submissive. Someone threatened your dominant. There's only one thing more feral and that's a submissive whose children are being threatened. No dominant, or unclassified, with half a brain would mess with a feral submissive."

Percy flushed and shrugged, half-hiding under Nico's arm as the two couples made their way to the small Italian place where Nico and Percy had intended to go for their date. Now it was a double-date. A double-date with a pissed-off looking bird-shifter and a very amused-looking warlock.

"So the two of you are serious then?", asked Carter casually while they ordered.

"Mh...?", drawled Percy out, looking confused.

Carter motioned between Percy and Nico. "If you go feral over somehow choking Nico, you're... rather serious about each other. This isn't just a casual little dating-situation, huh?"

"We're boyfriends. I don't do casual dating", frowned Percy, still confused.

Nico smiled strained as he tilted Percy to kiss him gently. Percy still didn't quite grasp everything that
was supernatural. He probably didn't even realize what his deep feelings might mean. That it indicated the two of them were heading toward a matebond. But Nico didn't want to push it. He wanted for it to come to them naturally, he wanted to take this slow, one step at a time. Percy smiled at him in a dopy way when they parted, nuzzling a little into him.

"Damn, you two are adorable", commented Carter fondly.

"I know", chimed Percy with a bright grin. "It's part of my natural charm! You, on the other hand, are such an old, married couple. It's kind of adorable in its own way."

Carter flushed an adorable, light pink while Horus looked decidedly too smug. Percy found it both kind of adorable. They had a pretty cool relationship, nothing like any relationship Percy had ever seen, but it was still very obvious that they loved each other deeply.

"...Why did you steal my leather-jacket?", asked Nico with a slight pout.

They had parted ways with Horus and Carter a block ago, Carter ordering Percy to always call when he needed a healer and Horus telling Percy to never call again ever (for which Horus got elbowed hard by Carter). As they rounded the corner to Sally's place, Percy took away Nico's jacket and stuffed it into his own backpack – a ratty, old thing Nico had never seen before.

"I told you to wear worn-out, ratty, old clothes that you don't care about", sighed Percy. "I know how much you love this jacket. And it is a very nice, fancy jacket."

"Do you really believe your mother will judge me for... wearing expensive clothes?", asked Nico concerned, frown marring his features. "Are you trying to... poor me down here?"

Percy raised both his eyebrows before elbowing Nico hard. "My mom's not that shallow. Idiot."

"Ouch. Pardon. I've never met your mother before", muttered Nico, rubbing the sore spot. "And you've been so nervous about me and her meeting, I figured there must be something..."

"No. Silly. Just... wait. You'll see why I asked you to put on your worst clothes soon enough."

Nico frowned in displeasure, still rubbing the sore spot. Honestly, he had no idea how Sally was going to be. Who she was. Yes, Percy always spoke very highly and lovingly of her, but she was his mom, so there was that. And with just how jittery and fidgety Percy had been about the whole affair, starting with how adorably nervous he had asked Nico to meet his mother, Nico was seriously afraid that she kind of really wasn't going to like him at all. Maybe there was something about him she wouldn't like? And the first thing that came to mind had been the money, particularly when Percy told him to wear something old and worn-out. What other reason would Percy have to-

"Cazzo!", yelped Nico and jumped back, shuddering at the cold, gooey feeling and shaking the bright-pink paint dripping off his arms. "Che casino! Che rabbia!"

There was giggling, a female voice, coming from above and Nico turned to look up, while Percy next to him heaved an exasperated sigh. "Mo—om! Could you not have waited until I like formally introduced the two of you before you throw neon-pink paint at my boyfriend...?"

"Now where's the fun in that?", laughed the brunette woman delighted as she dropped a balloon.

Percy squeaked when it hit him on the head and exploded to cover him in the same pink paint, only that this one also contained glitter. Nico blinked very slowly as he watched how his boyfriend was
now dripping in sparkly pink paint to match Nico.

"What... just happened?", asked Nico slowly, still trying to rid himself of the pink paint.

The woman disappeared from the window, so Nico instead turned to give Percy all of his attention. Percy was grinning at him sheepishly while taking off the backpack slowly.

"That was revenge", chuckled Percy amused. "I might have kind of parted with mom by hugging her and sneakily breaking a paint-filled balloon over her head before running off, cackling like a hyena, so I would win our paint-ball battle. She promised me revenge, which is the reason why I told you to wear something ratty. Because that paint is a pain in the ass to get out of clothes and I don't want your favorite jacket to be ruined. The glitter is new though. Nice touch."

"You think so too?", asked the same brunette woman from the window before.

She opened the apartment building's door and smiled charmingly at Nico. Honestly, she didn't look a lot like Percy – which was a given considering Percy and Triton in particular were basically carbon-copies of Poseidon. The brunette curls, the blue eyes, her features. There was something to the mischievous smile on her lips that reminded Nico immensely of Percy and Nico had to instantly think of how blue and bright Percy's eyes looked when he was happy – exactly like hers.

"Hello, I'm Sally", introduced the woman herself with a bright smile. "Sorry about the mess."

"I... don't mind", offered Nico reluctantly when they shook hands. "Nico di Angelo, it's a pleasure to meet you, ma'am. It's an honor to date your son."

"Honor?", giggled Sally delighted as she shook her head. "Oh, he's adorable. Did you steal a time-machine and abduct him from another time-period, Percy? I'm upset if you did. We swore to do all time-traveling together, young man. And you. No ma'am."

"Yes, ma'... Sally", agreed Nico hastily, while Percy was actually cackling like a hyena.

And Nico had thought his cute, sweet kitten had been exaggerating there. But apparently, Percy was very capable of being a mean little hyena thriving off the suffering of others. Nico glowered.

"No time-traveling. He's just real old-fashioned", grinned Percy brightly as he grabbed Nico's arm and tugged him down to gently kiss his cheek. "He's a real charmer too though."

Nico flushed a little as he wrapped an arm around Percy's waist to pull him close. Sally smiled gently as she looked at the two of them, looking so adorable together. There were really only two things she could do. She threw paint at them, causing them both to squeak in surprise and nearly jump into each other's arms, while Sally filmed it with her phone, laughing delighted.

"Sorry. I couldn't help it. It was just too sappy", smirked Sally. "Now get your ammunition and get this war properly started. Your boy here has some catching up to do."

"Catching up?", echoed Nico concerned, wiping pink glitter off his face.

"Uhu. Mom and I have been doing this for ten years now", nodded Percy eagerly.

He let go of Nico to walk over to the two large buckets she had brought. There were a lot of deflated balloons in them both, as well as bottles of paint and glasses of glitter. Crouching down, Percy grabbed the blue balloons and the blue paint to get to work mixing his own ammunition. Sally all the while went back inside to get two more buckets with paint-bottles.
"Percy told me to get 'blood-red' for you", offered Sally with a smile. "Come on, you gotta fill your own balloons. I'll show you how to best measure glitter and paint."

"...Uhm, thank you?", offered Nico doubtfully as he approached her and allowed her to explain.

It didn't take long for them to fill two dozen balloons each – Sally's in pink, Percy's in blue and Nico's in red, pardon, blood-red because Percy was thinking he was being funny there what with Nico being a vampire. After that, the three of them parted ways, each with a bucket filled with their balloons. The rules, as explained by Sally and Percy, were that they'd head into different directions, counting to sixty, and then the game would start. Whoever got the other – or others, in this case – covered in most of their own paint would win. What came in handy here was the abandoned old train station around the corner of the apartment building, which was exactly where they had headed with their buckets before commencing in parting ways. Nico was highly confused, at first, and quite startled when he was hit by paint left-and-right until he was an odd mixture of pink and blue. It took him some time to get into it and cover Percy in paint. It took him even longer to start also aiming at Sally, considering he wanted to make a good first impression on his future mother-in-law. But once he was really settled in, he was having the time of his life. When the three ran out of balloons and paint, they simply collapsed next to each other on the ground, trying to catch their breath.

"You've never had a paint-ball war before, huh?", inquired Sally fondly.

"Not... really", admitted Nico, panting softly. "It's highly entertaining though. I should suggest this to my family. This could be a great way of bonding for us."

"Oh my gosh, ye—es", yelped Percy, half rolling over so he could lean over Nico and give him the begging-kitten-eyes Percy knew his boyfriend couldn't deny. "You have to invite me over then! I would totally pay money to see Hades covered in pink glitter paint!"

Nico snorted fondly and wrapped one arm around Percy's waist and curled his other hand around Percy's neck to pull him down into a gentle kiss, not caring about the additional paint dripping onto him from Percy. The kitten-merboy purred into the kiss and rested his hands on Nico's chest.

"But you know I'm still here too, right?", asked Sally flippantly.

Percy and Nico bolted apart, their red cheeks hidden behind layers of pink-blue-red paint. Sally laughed at them, amusement and fondness sparkling in her eyes as she slowly sat up.

"You two really are adorable", smiled Sally gently. "It's very sweet. I approve."

"You do?", asked Percy hopefully and relieved, aiming the kitten-eyes at Sally.

"I do", assured Sally. "Nico is a good kid. Not many would have gone along with today. And he fought quite bravely, I have to hand him that. And he makes you smile in a way I have never seen you smile before, Percy. It's obvious he makes you happy, which is all I want for you, sweetie."

Percy crawled over Nico to hug his mom tightly. "Thanks, mom. I love you."

"I love you too, Percy", whispered Sally, kissing her son's cheek. "I'm so glad to see you so happy. Not just with that cute boyfriend of yours, but also with your... father. I'm glad the two of you finally worked through your issues. I'm sad what it took to bring you there, but the strained relationship between the two of you has worried me for years. And your new friends, they seem to also do a lot to make you happy. I love hearing your stories about them. I'd..."

"Yeah?", prompted Percy gently when his mother didn't continue.
"I'd like to meet them", admitted Sally. "I was thinking maybe... our annual weekend trip to Montauk, maybe we could take your friends with us? And your boyfriend of course. I just want to match faces and stories to actual people. I want to be a full part of your life again, Percy."

"I...", started Percy, choking down some tears as he hugged her even closer, burying his face in her neck. "I'd totally love that. I'll ask them on Monday, okay?"

Nico's eyes were soft and filled to the brim with pride and love as he watched his boyfriend. Today had definitely been better than expected. Sally approved of him and Nico found himself liking the cheeky woman quite a lot too. And that she truly wanted to be a part of Percy's life still, something that had been troubling Percy for a while now, it made him feel relieved. Sure, it would be complicated to hide their supernatural heritages if they all were to spend a weekend with her, but both she and Percy deserved it. Nico made plans to help out organizing that weekend.

Chapter End Notes

Sooo, I bumped the chapter-count up to 35 because I want more Sally and generally just... more?

Next chapter will feature preparations and the start of Sally's camping-trip with Percy and his friends. There's nothing that could poossibly go wrong there, right? ;D
Hades looked like a unicorn had diarrhea all over him. He was not amused by that. Carefully, he wiped the grass-green paint his wife had used from his forehead to prevent it from dropping into his eyes. He also caught some of the sparkly-purple that Hazel had been throwing. The rest of him was dripping in the greenish-brown paint that Ethan had mixed up, the silver-blue from Calypso, Nico's blood-red paint, Bianca's silvery-green paint, Makaria's dark magenta, Melinoe's lavender-purple, Olethros' gray and Thanatos' turquoise-green – because the color had reminded him of Triton's tail.

Hades' eyes softened as he looked over his coven, all sprawled out on the grass of the backyard. Bianca, Calypso and Hazel laid in a heap of limbs and paints, all with soft smiles. Makaria and Melinoe weren't far away from them, Makaria using her sister's stomach as a pillow. Thanatos sat upright and was trying to free himself from the paint so he could at least go inside to get cleaned up. Olethros however continued throwing paint at his brother, flicking the paint from his own arms and body over at Thanatos. Persephone was still laughing as she went to receive a hose to get them all moderately cleaned up. And Nico? He just stood there, taking pictures.

"Boy, what are you doing?", asked Hades sternly.

"I'm sorry, but Percy asked with the kitten-eyes to see you covered in glitter-paint. And well, some of us did use glitter in our paint", grinned Nico unapologetically. "You know I can't deny him."

"Yeah, no kidding", snorted Olethros and rolled his eyes real hard.

"I can relate", sighed Thanatos, a gentle look on his face. "Those merboys are... enchanting."

"You're both pathetically gone on your boyfriends", snorted Hazel fondly and shook her head. "Me? I love my boys too but I am capable of denying Leo's dragon-pout."

"Oh? You are?", asked Bianca interested, both eyebrows raised.

"...Most times", amended Hazel slowly.

"Most times?", echoed Calypso, giving Hazel a look.

"...Some times", grumbled Hazel with a pout of her own. "Oh, shut up, both of you. Like you and your storm-spirits aren't just as bad. I know the Graces made you go on that awful double-date of marathoning all the Bourne movies. And you both hate action movies."

Bianca and Calypso remained silent but smiled charmingly. Nico snorted. He knew what Jason had to do for Calypso to make her watch those movies. It was definitely too much information on what straight people did in the bedroom. Far too much information.

"Father...", drawled Nico hesitantly. "I have a request."

"Yes?", inquired Hades curiously as his mate approached them and turned on the hose.

Calypso, Hazel and Bianca screeched and sprang apart as they were hit by the cold water. It was the
beginning of December and albeit this year's winter seemed rather spring-y in nature, it was still too cold to get an ice-cold shower like that. Hades turned his attention toward his son.

"I... met Sally. Percy's mother", started Nico. "She's a very... impressive lady."

"She gave you the idea for this, didn't she?", asked Melinoe curiously.

"Yes", confirmed Nico with a fond smile. "She... She said she wanted to go on a camping trip. Just a weekend. To meet Percy's friends. Because she heard so much of us and... she wants to put faces to the names. But Percy, he's... popular at school. And his mother just moved, she... I don't know if she has the means... There are so many of us and she planned on renting cabins and that's expensive. I just thought perhaps we could... We do have the money, after all."

Hades smiled amused. There was a lot of himself in Nico. And Nico was right, they did have more money than they would ever need. The upside of being millennia old immortals; they gathered a lot of riches in their life-time. His eyes found Ethan, Hazel and Calypso. He knew that those three were close friends with Percy Jackson too. Hades frowned thoughtfully as he nodded.

"Very well. Go and tell her that your father insists on pitching in considering she offers to take three of my children with her. ...How exactly did you explain our coven-situation to her anyway?"

"You and mom are real big on adoption", shrugged Nico casually. "She thought that was very sweet and 'very you'. Apparently, she sees you as a very honorable and caring man, father."

"She's right with that", grinned Persephone as she approached them.

"I'll tell her. Thanks, papà", whispered Nico relieved, smiling softly.

"She's practically family, Nico", chuckled Hades, resting a hand on his shoulder.

Persephone ruined the father-son moment by spraying them both down with the cold water.

Percy was laughing freely as he rode ahead on Blackjack. The black pegasus whined in agreement, as delighted as Percy. Close on their heels were Hazel and Arion, while Jason on Tempest and Reyna on Scipio were farther behind. Animal care club was definitely a lot of fun. Percy loved it.

While drama club had this pressure of doing good and memorizing his lines, the swim team had the pressure of him being good and swimming hard. This? This was just pure fun.

"A—and the winner is – again – Percy!", declared Leo with a broad, amused grin.

He was waiting for them at the stables, with Festus the dragon curled around him protectively. Blackjack whined as they came to a halt, a smiling Hazel stopping just shortly after them. She climbed off Arion and went to kiss her little dragon, Leo melting into the kiss. Reyna and Jason took a little longer before they also reached the stables. All four of them went to bring their equestrian companions back to their respective section of the stables. Taking care of Blackjack was a wonderfully calming routine for Percy, particularly when he was stressed. And oh was he stressed. His mom's planned weekend trip was so close and he had asked his friends if they were willing to come and they had all eagerly agreed. They were actually honored to meet Percy's mom. Like it was some kind of big deal and big honor that Percy wanted for them to meet his mom.

"Hey, what's on your mind, Percy?", asked Reyna gently, grasping his upper arm.
"Just... you guys", shrugged Percy with the slightest blush. "I... I invited sixteen people and my boyfriend to meet my mom. Sixteen people. And that was already me narrowing it down! I had to narrow it down. I... I never had enough friends to count on one hand. Now I'd literally need a friend's hands to do the counting. A—And... everyone was so... eager."

"Of course", chuckled Reyna gently. "Your mom sounds like a wonderful woman. Then again, anyone coating Nico in pink glitter is already my kind of person."

"Not to mention! Free mini vacation", grinned Leo broadly.

"I bought a new swimsuit for the camping trip", chimed Hazel with a smile at that.

"Oh. Oh, I can't wait to see that", hummed Leo intrigued.

Reyna snorted, at least until Hazel turned to smirk at her. "I went shopping with Piper and Annabeth. And they bought new bikinis too. Piper and I helped Annabeth pick one too."

Reyna's eyes darkened at the mental image of her girlfriend in a bikini. Percy snickered at that. It was way cold, but he so didn't care. He was definitely going to enjoy the ocean, there was no way he wasn't. Oh. Nico in swim-shorts. Percy licked his lips slowly. Nice image. Very nice. He was pulled out of his thoughts by soft whining. Frowning confused, Percy slowly approached the partition where the whining had come from. He opened the door and gasped.

"Holy hell", gasped Percy surprised. "W—What..."

Within seconds, Jason and Leo were right at his side, looking curious and then grinning. "Oh, that. That's Mrs. O'Leary. She's a hellhound. Used to belong to one of the teachers, but he... passed."

"No need to be afraid", assured Hazel gently. "She's not dangero-"

"You're the cutest puppy ever", yelped Percy as he approached the horse-sized dog.

Mrs. O'Leary yelped and tilted her head before she sniffed him and started licking his face. While Percy started laughing and cuddling the giant puppy, his friends regarded him amused.

"She... isn't supposed to stay here, but no one... well...", sighed Reyna and shook her head.

"Hellhounds are a lot of work and they're huge", added Jason softly.

"Oh", grunted Percy with an upset look on his face as he ruffled her fur. "First you lose your human and then you have to stay here because no one wants a grown up dog? Everyone just wants hellhound puppies, huh? Poor thing. And you're such a good girl too. So cuddly and sweet."

His friends exchanged fond smiles, while Hazel's eyes sparkled with a forming plan.

Sally screeched surprised as cold paint showered her. Blinking slowly, she looked at the sparkly red paint on her arms. She had been outside, doing some garden-work behind the house, wearing a worn-out shirt that was already splattered with paint. As she turned around, she came face to face with Nico di Angelo. The Italian looked a little nervous and a little curious until she cracked.

"Oh, boy", laughed Sally and shook her head, effectively splattering some paint on him too.

"I wasn't... sure if it'd be... appropriate, but I felt like I owed you for the last greeting", stated Nico.
"I knew I liked you", chuckled Sally fondly, smiling at the boy. "You fit right in with the Linwoods. You know, my mother was the one to... to establish the paint-war. She'd have liked you."

Nico's breath hitched at the mention of Laura Linwood. She had liked him. But he couldn't tell Sally that. It was strange, because for the first time, Nico looked at Sally as Laura's daughter and not as Percy's mother. He had been so busy focusing on her as his future mate's mother that he had forgotten this was the same cheeky little girl who had shot him with water guns too when he used to babysit the two-year-old. Sally hadn't changed much since then, not at the very core. That bright and playful heart. And she had passed that on to Percy too.

"Did you want something aside from covering me in paint?", asked Sally amused.

"Yes", nodded Nico a little embarrassed. "I... My father, when I told him about your plans, he insists on pitching in for the trip, considering we'll need a lot of cabins to house us all. He insists."

"He does now, does he?", grunted Sally with a thoughtful look.


"I might do that", nodded Sally, regarding Nico. "Well, while you're here, you could help me."

Nico looked surprised for a moment, but then he nodded pleased. He was eager to get to know Sally better and to be in her good graces. And gardening was something he was good at. Persephone was a nature-spirit, after all, and their garden flourished beautifully. He smiled as he settled in to help.

Paul Blofis was a little nervous as he knocked on his boss' door. He had been requested by the man himself and he wasn't quite sure why. It wasn't often that Hades di Angelo summoned someone personally. Especially not Paul. Granted, Hades had shown some mild interest in the Linwood/Ugliano case, but that had been closed for a few weeks now.

"Come in", came the voice from inside, accent heavy with clear exhaustion.

"Sir? You wanted to see me?", inquired Paul as he entered the office.

Hades' office was the one with the most impressive view in the entire building. Hades sat behind his desk, a little hunched over in clear end-of-day exhaustion. He rubbed his face as he straightened.


"May I... ask what this is about?", wanted Paul to know as he obeyed his boss' wish.

"I heard you and Miss Linwood have moved your relationship from a professional to a... romantic one", started Hades. "Now, considering business with Miss Linwood has ended, this is none of my business. Not beyond the point where she is the mother of my son's boyfriend."

"Oh. Nico", nodded Paul in understanding. "Sally spoke very animatedly of him, yes."

"Now, why I wanted to talk to you was...", started Hades and sighed. "Miss Linwood might have mentioned that she has plans for a camping trip? And three of my children will be part of that trip. My wife has been dying to meet Miss Linwood too, considering. So I was thinking that perhaps, we could arrange a double-date, if that is not too... awkward for you, Mister Blofis."

Paul frowned surprised and maybe a little calculating. Making personal connections to his boss might...
be beneficial for his career. And Sally would really love this too, considering she had been talking about Nico and singing his praises for taking everything so well – Paul had tried to convince her not to attack him with paint right from the start. But apparently the boy had taken it in good humor and since then, Sally was officially Team Nico.

"I think that's a lovely idea", agreed Paul after a beat and with a charming smile.

"But don't forget", stated Hades firmly. "She can not know, Mister Blofis."

"I'm aware", sighed Paul with a sharp nod, knowing Sally could never know about the supernatural.

Sally smiled, even though she felt out of place. This was one of the – if not the – most expensive restaurants in the city. But Hades di Angelo had insisted. She turned to look at her date. Paul looked truly handsome in his suit. So sophisticated. Smiling a little more, she leaned up to peck his cheek. He blushed a bit, which was quite adorable really. Hades and his wife were already sitting at the table, both smiling in a welcoming manner and getting up as Paul and Sally approached.

"Mister Blofis, Miss Linwood. I'm glad you could make it", greeted Hades.

"Oh, honey, please", chided his wife instantly before she turned to smile at Sally and offered a hug. "I'm Persephone, this is my husband Hades. I don't think we need formalities, do we?"

Sally instantly liked the woman. Returning her smile, Sally bridged the last inches and went for the hug. The woman was breathtaking and smelt like flowers. Not in an artificial way. More like Sally was literally standing in the middle of a flower-field. It was rather pleasant.

"I concur to that", agreed Sally with a smile. "I'm Sally. And it's a pleasure to meet you."

"I can just imagine Nico being a nervous wreck at home, fearing we're going to tell embarrassing stories", laughed Persephone as they all sat down. "Though we did bring a couple stories."

Sally's smile eased as the four of them received their menus and started picking meals. "Now, Nico visited me yesterday and told me that you insist on 'pitching in'."

"We do", confirmed Hades with a smile. "You're taking four of our children off our hands for the weekend. And Nico did let it slip just how many of his friends plan on being there."

"Yes, but it was my idea and it is my trip", argued Sally amused.

"How about we order first and argue then?", suggested Paul.

The others laughed a little at that, but did as he suggested.

Nico groaned in utter frustration as he collapsed forward onto Percy's bed, grabbing the merboy's pillow and hugging it close. He knew that Percy was downstairs in the pool, training. He did a whole lot of that, still working hard on gaining more muscles in his tail. Groaning again, Nico buried his face in the pillow, inhaling the beautiful scent of his beloved submissive.

"Why are you in my brother's bed? Does that mean I get even more chocolate?"

Glowering, Nico reached into his jacket's pocket and got the chocolate bar out that he had brought his blackmailing little future brother-in-law. Tyson smiled brightly and took the chocolate, instantly
opening it and taking a bite while getting comfortable on Percy's bed too.

"I came to see your brother. Your brother's downstairs", grumbled Nico with a pout.

"Uhu. He's training with Benthy", confirmed Tyson. "Why do you look pouty?"

Heaving a sigh, Nico rolled onto his back and stared at the boy. "My parents being embarrassing."

"Oh. I know that", nodded Tyson with a solemn look on his face. "Mommy insists on kissing me on the cheek when she brings me to school, but I'm way too old for that now and it's embarrassing."

Nico offered a fond smile at that. Honestly, Tyson was definitely his favorite future brother-in-law. The bedroom door opened and Percy in all his half-naked glory entered, still a little wet from his swim, hair clinging to his head. He had a towel wrapped around his neck, only wearing his swim-shorts. He had probably come to get some fresh clothes before taking a shower.


"Didn't catch him. He was just already here, sprawled out like a blanket", frowned Tyson.

Percy's grin widened as he went to kiss the top of his brother's head, ruffling his brunette unruly hair. Then he leaned over to kiss Nico gently on the lips and Nico instantly felt better. Tilting his head, Percy spread the towel on his bed and sat down on it. He obviously caught on with Nico being here because he was upset about something, though he didn't know what it was.

"My parents just got home from a double-date", sighed Nico frustrated.

"That's... nice?", offered Percy confused. "With Howard and Hecate?"

"No. With your mom and her boyfriend", drawled Nico, eyebrows raised. "And they got along great! Our mothers are going to an... art-class together starting next week. And now the worst part of it: They agreed that a trip with twenty teens needs a bit supervision so my father insisted on paying for the cabins. Four cabins. Each holding up to six people. One of them for my parents, your mom and your mom's boyfriend. Our parents are all going to be there."

"...I don't see the problem", frowned Percy confused. "I think it's nice that Persephone and mom get along! And... I'm... I'm kind of... glad Hades offered to... help out. I've been on a real guilt-trip about inviting so many people and that mom shouldn't pay and doesn't have the money for that kind of thing and now I feel awful for just taking you and your money for granted, but I swear-"

"My love, shut up", requested Nico gently as he sat up and grasped Percy's face to pull him close and kiss him gently. "No one thinks that you're after our money. Father offered this because he cares. And... I care. I saw how happy you were when your mother asked to get to know your friends. I want this to happen, I want for your mother to be... to be a part of your life."

"I love you, Nico", whispered Percy softly at that, pecking Nico's lips.

"I deserve more chocolate for this", huffed Tyson next to them.

"How about we put our stuff away first before we get to know each other and maybe start lunch together? We got five cabins for you kids. I think it's best if you just pair up yourself. But Percy, sweetie, you're not sharing a cabin with your boyfriend", declared Sally.
Percy blushed and ducked his head, Connor next to him snickering and elbowing him. Shouldering his backpack, Percy looked around. Clarisse, Piper, Silena, Hazel, Reyna and Annabeth were heading toward one cabin together. Luke, Travis, Connor and Chris already went ahead toward one cabin. Percy startled a little as Grover linked arms with him, grinning and nudging him to follow the shifters. Percy's eyes found Nico, who was following Frank, Leo, Jason, Ethan and Alabaster. Percy's stomach was in knots of nervousness. They had just arrived at Montauk, with multiple cars.

"You need to relax", stated Grover amused. "You're way too tense, man. It'll be alright."

"Sure. Sure, what could possibly go wrong with my mom, who knows nothing, four vampires, two nature spirits, four fox-shifters, two mermaids, three hunters, one warlock, a dragon, a Valkyrie, and a storm-spirit. What could possibly go wrong?", muttered Percy.

Grover laughed and shoved him a little. The cabins weren't big; they had two bedrooms, each with two beds. Percy ended up sharing a room with Grover, the Stolls taking one of the others and Chris and Luke sharing the third room. Percy tried taking calming breaths as he unpacked his stuff slowly.

"Your ma is good people. It'll be fine. And we all agreed to behave", chuckled Grover fondly.

"I know. I know. I'm just... still nervous. What if... What if you guys don't like her? Or she doesn't like you. Or something happens. Or... I don't even know, G-man", sighed Percy frustrated.

"Du—ude. Seriously. Calm down", sighed Grover, nudging Percy. "It'll all be fine."

Twenty minutes later, when they were outside at the picnic tables and preparing lunch, Percy actually started to believe what Grover had said. Everyone had eagerly introduced themselves to Sally and Sally kept asking them questions and in return telling embarrassing baby-stories about Percy. Sally, Persephone and Grover were currently preparing salads. Paul, Hades and Frank were manning the grill while Luke, Ethan, Reyna and Clarisse were preparing the meat.

"Oh! Percy, Piper, Leo! The water is way too cold! You'll get sick!", called Sally surprised.

With nothing to do, the three of them had decided to hit the water. Being what they were, it had no real effect on either of them. Leo always ran cold, he'd be able to make snow-angels while in his boxers. The three of them stared wide-eyed and flustered at her. That much for no suspicious behavior. Connor, Chris, Travis, Alabaster and Hazel were playing a card-game, while Nico tried to linger close by with Sally and Persephone to make sure his mother didn't tell too embarrassing stories to his future mother-in-law. Now that his boyfriend got out of the water though, Nico headed over to him with a towel, wrapping him up and pulling him into a brief kiss. Percy was stiff and nervous. He had been on edge about this as much as he had been looking forward to this.

"Come on, I'll bring you to your cabin so you can get changed and warmed up", offered Nico.

The others looked after him curiously and concerned as Nico guided him back to the cabin. They headed to Percy's bedroom where Nico pulled Percy into his lap, wrapping his arms around him.

"Percy, love", whispered Nico gently. "It's alright. Everyone is getting along great with your mom because your mom is amazing. We're about to have a wonderful lunch, all together. Our moms are that short of just braiding each other's hair and exchanging friendship books."

Percy laughed shakily at that, burying his face in Nico's neck. As Nico continued caressing Percy's hair and back, Percy started to melt into his boyfriend. He knew it was stupid to worry so much, but he just never had real friends before. And those friends, they basically were like a family to him. The idea of them not liking his mom or finding her weird, or her finding them weird and disapproving of
Percy's friends, it was making him tense. Nico's scent and warmth and touch and soothing words however calmed him down considerable. He couldn't help but purr, triangular ears emerging and twitching as Nico started caressing his hair right between the ears. His tail wrapped around Nico possessively. He couldn't control it well enough just yet; when he was content and being cuddled like this, he would relax into a half-shifted form for full cuddle-capacity.

"You're the best boyfriend ever", sighed Percy, kissing Nico's cheek.

"I know I'm awesome. So are you", smiled Nico, nuzzling Percy's neck. "And this is going to be the best camping trip ever. Look at it. All of your friends are here, supporting you, looking forward to getting to know your mom better. And you? You'll get to know your mother's boyfriend."

"And I get to make a good impression on your parents too", teased Percy with a small smile. This was pretty much perfect. Nico was right. This weekend was going to be amazing. Camp-fire stories with everyone, swimming and barbecuing and his mom getting to know his friends. Perfect.

"Percy, Nico? Lunch is slowly getting ready and they're already fighting over the first steaks", laughed Sally's voice as she entered the room, laughter in her voice that died fast.

Her eyes were trained on Percy's bushy cat-tail, then snapping up to his triangular cat-ears.

Chapter End Notes


On a slightly different note; Christmas is coming up! And I want to do a Christmas Calendar Project. For that, I take prompts! Click the link and send me an ask on tumblr with one or two Christmas/winter related words and the pairing of your choice; aside from Nicercy, you can also ask for Voltron's Shklance, DreamWorks' HiJack or Shadowhunters' Malace or Jimon.
Chapter 23: Sally and the Supernaturals of Summers High (2)

Percy stared with wide, panicked eyes at his mother, tail bushy and ears erect in tension. There was literally no way to explain this in any kind of logical manner. His claws dug into Nico’s shoulders as he stiffened in his boyfriend’s hold. Nico too was staring at Sally, who just stared back.

"P—Percy", whispered Sally, voice shaky.

She approached the bed with fast steps and her hands, as shaky as her voice, reached out to trace the ears carefully. They twitched at the touch. She blinked with wide eyes. His world shattered.

"Mom, I... I can explain", whispered Percy, fear seeping into his voice.

He hated feeling like an outsider. He could not feel that way with his mom. He couldn't.

"Sweetie, you can't just walk around showing those to everyone! Not even your boyfriend", hissed Sally softly, eyes flitting over to Nico in concern. "What did you tell him?"

"...What?", asked Nico slowly.

"What?", squeaked Percy confused.

Sally opened her mouth and pointed up with both hands before closing her mouth again. Only then did she point at Nico before grabbing Percy and pulling him out of the bedroom.

"You. Stay", ordered Sally at Nico. "And don't talk. To anyone."

Percy stared confused over at his boyfriend, who seemed as lost as him. Sally dragged Percy to the living room and sat him down on the couch with a stern look that melted within seconds.

"Oh, they're beautiful", whispered Sally as she went back to patting Percy's ears with a smile.

"M—Mom...", started Percy, unsure where this was going.

"How long?", asked Sally concerned, cupping Percy's cheek. "When did it start? Why didn't you tell me? Oh, oh, sweetie, you must have been so scared and confused. I'm so sorry."

She pulled him into a tight hug and Percy was completely lost. "...What is going on?"

Sally took a deep breath as she brought some distance between them. "Sweetie, there is something you need to know about our family. And maybe... maybe I should have told you this many years ago. Supernatural creatures – vampires and werewolves, the things you love to watch on TV – are all real. And you are... you are a cat-shifter, honey. You got that from your grandmother, you know. My mom. But I thought you wouldn't be, since... I'm not. I didn't inherited my mother's shifter-genes and I had hoped you wouldn't either. I just wanted a normal life for you, sweetie. Which is why I never told you. But if you had to carry this burden all on your own, I wish I would have."

"...Mom...", started Percy, still trying to figure out what to say.
"Now, it's very important that you tell me what exactly you told Nico", stated Sally sternly. "Because humans aren't supposed to know about the supernatural."

"But you know", whispered Percy. "You... know."

"Well, my mother turned into a tiny kitten. Yes, I noticed that", laughed Sally before pausing. "You can shift into a full cat too, you know. It might take you some training but-"

"Mom, I know", interrupted Percy, brain slowly catching up.

"Oh, you're already able to turn fully?", asked Sally excitedly.

"No. I mean, yes. But, no, that's not what I meant. I know about the supernatural", grunted Percy.

"...You... do?", asked Sally slowly, frowning.

Percy wanted to explain to her, but he just couldn't. He was way too hyped. He laughed loudly, hysterically, collapsing side-ways onto the couch. Nico emerged from the bedroom, a fond look on his face as he approached Percy and gently patted Percy's hair.

"Sweetie?", asked Sally concerned. "I know it's a lot to take in, but-"

"No, what Percy said is right. He already knows about the supernatural", interjected Nico, looking her up and down. "And I... didn't expect for Laura to break the laws and tell her daughter."

"How do you know my mother's name?", asked Sally confused. "And how do you know?"

"Your son is dating a vampire", replied Nico and flashed his eyes black for a brief moment. "And I've... met your mother. I've met you too, though you will not remember the boy who babysat you when you were two, three years old. Your son knows about the supernatural. He's well integrated into our community at this point, you don't need to worry about explaining things to him."

"...A vampire?", asked Sally slowly, looking Nico up and down. "Who's older than his mother? How old exactly is the 'boy' dating my seventeen year old, only son?"

Nico's cockiness faded into nervousness. "Uhm, ninety-one years old, ma'am."

"Mo—om", whined Percy as he finally stopped laughing. "Don't give Nico a hard time now. He's been my biggest help about accepting who and what I am. He is so sweet and I love him. I really do. And he loves me too, mom. He's been nothing but a sweetheart on me."

Sally nodded slowly, though she still regarded the vampire suspiciously. ""Wait. But how do you know about the supernatural then? Percy, what is going on?"

"Nico?", asked Percy and turned to look at his boyfriend. "Would you... give us a moment? And maybe tell the others outside about, uh, the new development in here?"

"Will do, amore", nodded Nico and exited the cabin, leaving son and mother alone.

"Okay. Where do I even start...?", sighed Percy, rubbing his face. "Dad's a merman."

"...What?", grunted Sally doe-eyed.

"Yeah", nodded Percy. "Dad is Poseidon. Like, the Poseidon. The mythological god from ancient Greece. Because Amy's name is Amphitrite. And yeah, the Amphitrite. Because merpeople are immortal and... uhm. Yeah. Dad's kind of a 'god'."
"...I thought his parents just had real bad taste in names and that he was being funny by picking those names for his kids", whispered Sally wide-eyed before pausing. "Wait. Your boyfriend's parents. Their names are Hades and Persephone. That's... not a coincident, I gather?"

"Nope. He's a vampire, she's a nature-spirit", replied Percy with a shake of his head.

"So your father told you then?", asked Sally and took a shaky breath.

"Well. I mean. They kind of only told me because I'm... half merboy", replied Percy, cheeks red. "They only told me the full truth after they learned that I'm like them. Because they're not supposed to tell anyone the full truth. That's... That's why I couldn't tell you either. They told me that normal humans can't know the truth about the supernatural, but I really wanted to tell you."

"Is... Is that why you didn't call very often when you first moved in with your father? Because you were keeping this secret from me?", asked Sally softly, her eyes pained. "Oh, sweetie..."

She pulled Percy into a tight hug and he clung onto her. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry, mom."

"No. No, it's not your fault, you have nothing to be sorry about, my boy", assured Sally as she held him tight and safe. "I'm so sorry. If I had told you the truth earlier, all of this... Oh, Percy."

"No, I mean. I get it. You didn't tell me because you wanted a normal life for me. A—And dad, he didn't tell me either", muttered Percy. "For which I was very cross with him."

"But not anymore?", asked Sally softly.

"I mean... It's no use staying mad. And they've been... a good family for me... I kinda love them."

"That's good", nodded Sally with a slightly pained smile, kissing Percy's forehead before pausing. "Wait. You're half merboy and half catboy? How does that even work?"

"Dunno", grinned Percy sheepishly and shrugged. "I'm trying to do both, like have the fish-tail and the cat-ears. But I guess there's some truth to the whole cats don't like water thing, because I kinda can't do both. But I can turn into a merboy and I can turn into a cat."

"That's... amazing", whispered Sally, looking clearly overwhelmed.

Percy's eyes sparkled as they widened. "Come with me outside! I can show you! I can finally show you! Oh, Silena and Piper are mermaids too, you know? And technically, uh, all my friends are?"

"...Merpeople?", asked Sally stunned.

"No!", laughed Percy, the sound free and happy. "Jason is a storm-spirit and Ethan and Hazel are vampires and Alabaster is a warlock and Reyna and Clarisse are like demon-slayers and Chris, Luke, Travis and Connor are fox-shifters and Annabeth is a Valkyrie, which is basically like a Death Angel, and Leo is an actual dragon!"

"Oh dear, I don't know if I'll be able to remember all of those", laughed Sally, as free and happy.

The others watched them wearily and confused as Percy ran straight into the ocean, Sally following him with an amused and excited look on her face, her dress soaked up to her knees as she paused. Percy dove and then he jumped, like a dolphin, his blue tail flapping through the air.

"Oh heaven above", gasped Sally, covering her mouth.

Percy did it again and then he swam up to his mother, an utterly happy and excited look on his face
as he flapped his tail. Sally marveled at the blue scales, at how pretty a merboy her son was.

"Pe—ercy", called Piper out as she ran over to him.

"Oh, are you also blue?", asked Sally eagerly.

"Uhm. No. I'm purple", grunted Piper doe-eyed. "Percy?"

"Mom knows!", exclaimed Percy, tugging on Piper's hand. "She already knew about the supernatural and I could finally tell her what I am! I, uh, also told her what you are?"

"Can I see?", asked Sally with the excitement of a child.

"Silly!", called Piper out, amusement in her eyes.

Silena joined them and Sally got to watch the three merpeople swim around her. It was like out of a fairy tale. Silena was bright-pink, Piper a gentle purple. They circled her and she had to laugh.

"If you're done playing in the ocean, the steaks are getting cold", called Hades out gruffly.

The three merpeople got out of the water and turned back human. They all sat down around the picnic tables together, Sally between Paul and Percy, opposite them were Hades, Persephone and Nico. She paused as she looked at Hades and Persephone.

"You're gods, but you're also not?", asked Sally fascinated.

Persephone laughed at that. "You could say that, yes. You see, some supernatural races, we're immortal. And immortality... it leads to encounters with the mortal world throughout time. And back in the day, we weren't so concerned about hiding what we are. To normal humans, we were... more. The only explanation for them was that we must be gods. So the immortal merman gained a reputation as the god of the sea, the immortal undead became the god of death, the immortal spirit of nature became the goddess of spring. It's funny how that happens."

"How do you know?", asked Sally as she turned sharply on her boyfriend.

Paul paused in the middle of taking a bite from his burger. "Ah. I was involved in a case once, when I was just a newbie lawyer, with a rogue vampire. Hades, as the coven-leader, was on the other side of the case, trying to track down my client. Since my client was rogue, he didn't care about exposing himself, when Hades cornered him, the guy threatened me with his teeth. There wasn't much to cover it up and Hades invited me into his firm to keep an eye on me."

"That's not entirely true", chuckled Hades. "I reviewed your work and you were an impressive young lawyer with a bright future. You made a good addition to my firm, Paul."

Paul smiled at that and so did Sally. This all felt so surreal to her. Her eyes kept wandering down the rows of teenagers, trying to remember what Percy had rattled off there earlier. Dragons? Foxes?

Dragons and foxes. Yes. Sally couldn't help but giggle as she leaned against the broad chest of the happy dragon. Leo was curled around her, Frank, Hazel and Percy. Hazel kept patting her boyfriend's head, the dragon blowing fire at their bonfire. He was warm, very warm.

"A real dragon", whispered Sally while patting Travis' head.

Travis was currently in fox-form. So were the other foxes. Connor was laying in Percy's lap, rolled
onto his back and legs spread so Percy could caress his white belly. Chris however was comfortably sprawled out over both his girlfriends' laps – Piper playing with his tail and Clarisse petting his head. This was truly utterly fascinating. Annabeth had her wings spread out, one wing protectively wrapped around Reyna, Reyna leaning against Annabeth and enjoying the warmth of the wing, while the other wing half-laid over Luke, the large fox having his paws resting on her thigh.

"I feel like I'm sitting in the middle of a fairy tale", whispered Sally softly.

Alabaster was performing little magic tricks to amuse her, most others just snorting in amusement. Grover was playing a pan flute. The song he was playing caused the flowers around them to grow, tangling up toward the flute. Sally watched it in utter fascination.

"Ye—eh", nodded Percy, tilting his head to rest it on his mom's shoulder. "That's what I felt like too at first. This is all so weird and surreal, but also totally cool, right?"

"Totally", agreed Sally with a half-grin.

"I still can't believe Laura told her daughter", sighed Hades and shook his head. "She knew..."

"Oh, I was just too curious a child", laughed Sally sheepishly. "I kept snooping. But... I guess I kind of buried it after my parents... died. My uncle, he was just human, he didn't know. And I started to forget. When Percy was born, I was half afraid he might turn out to be a little ball of fuzz. But he was a normal, healthy baby. And I figured that, with me being non-supernatural, he must have taken after me, that the... genes just stopped with my mother."

"They definitely didn't", grunted Clarisse. "Because that one definitely is a 'little ball of fuzz'."

"Oh! Yes. I gotta show you that one too", nodded Percy excitedly.

Connor whined in complaint as he was pushed off Percy's lap so Percy could shift into his cat-form. Travis squeaked and got off Sally's lap to lick his brother's cheek and make room for Percy. The tiny black kitten jumped up onto Sally's lap, tail shaking as it stood erect and bushy.

"Oh my gosh, you're the most adorable thing ever", whispered Sally in awe.

"Ye—eh, he is", chuckled Annabeth fondly, shaking her head.

"It's unbearable how cute he is", grunted Alabaster pointedly.

"And I swear, he weaponized the kitten-eyes", pointed Frank out seriously.

"He has conditioned Nico into doing whatever he wants with those looks", giggled Hazel.

"Hey!", protested Nico with a glare. "We established that you are totally weak to the dragon-eyes."

Hazel grumbled, even as Leo whined and nudged her with a leather-wing while the others laughed. Sally smiled as she started running her fingers over Percy's tiny head, the cute kitten-ears twitching. Percy meowed and pushed his head up against her hand. He was so adorable.

"My boy, a literal fish out of water", whispered Sally amused.

Percy meowed in agreement, curling together and purring softly. He dozed off to the voices of his friends, explaining their school and community to Sally.
He woke up later in the bed in their cabin. Blinking slowly, he looked around before turning back human. Stretching, he groaned softly, which woke Grover. The other yawned widely.

"You're easy to carry to bed when you're a cat", stated Grover amused. "How do you feel?"

"More at ease than I have in months", grunted Percy with a smile.

"Good for you, dude", grinned Grover. "I'm glad your mom takes it all so well."

"Me too", agreed Percy. "Holy shit, I swear this day couldn't get better. Ah. I take it back."

A cute fluffy bat fluttered in through the open window and flew straight at Percy to nuzzle against his neck. Percy smiled happily, patting his boyfriend's head as the little cat snuggled up to him.

"No funny business. I wanna sleep and I'm not sleeping on the couch", grunted Grover.

Percy threw his pillow at his friend, making Grover squeak and laugh. Nico licked Percy's cheek, making Percy squeak. He was still not used to the tiny bat-tongue. There was a teasing look on the bat's face and Percy decided to retaliate. He turned into a cat and tackling his boyfriend onto the bed, paws on the leather-wings. Nico bared his tiny sharp vampire-teeth at him.

"*Feline fiend, let go of me!*", demanded Nico playfully.


"*If I'm Batman, does that make you Catwoman?*", countered Nico.

"*Well, I mean they are OTP and I would definitely rock the skin-tight leather-do*", mused Percy.

Nico squeaked in a way that indicated his brain was temporarily fried. Percy laughed and rolled off his boyfriend. He rolled onto his back and started pawing the air, purring contently. Nico hopped over to bury himself in his boyfriend's soft, comfortable fur.

"*I love you, kitten*", whispered Nico softly as Percy's tail wrapped around him.

"*I love you too, Batman*", grinned Percy, licking Nico's cheek.

Sunday, they started with a little race between the merpeople, everyone watching, cheering and betting. Sally, of course, put her chocolate-bars on Percy and ended up having to split her winnings with Nico, Connor, Travis and Grover. Percy was glowing as Sally handed him one of the bars.

"But if everyone on your swim-team is a mermaid – or merboy – then isn't that unfair toward the other schools?", asked Sally with a frown as she looked at the captain of the swim-team.

Silena smiled at her while drying her hair off. "Not at all. Our league of schools, they're all pure supernatural ones. We only swim against teams of sea-nymphs, sirens, mermaids, selkies, kelpies."

"So truly everyone at your new school is supernatural?", asked Sally curiously.

Percy hummed and nodded. "I got a lot of cool new classes that I couldn't even tell you about. Like, Professor Claymore – Alabaster's dad – teaches defense. Like, magical defense. He's a hunter. And Alabaster's mom teaches magic and magical history. There were really a lot of supernatural creatures in positions of powers, you know? It's so cool. History, revisited. And Persephone's mom teaches biology. Like, how dragons produce fire and how exactly shapeshifting works and such."
"That all sounds really fascinating", hummed Sally sincerely.

"Yeah. We're also taught how to read the future and all. Some of my friends are seers, but they haven't really figured it out just yet. It's more like random 'You will have apples for lunch' stuff and not 'The answers to the test tomorrow are the following'. Sadly enough", sighed Percy.

He winced when Annabeth cuffed him with a wing. "You're supposed to study and not cheat."

"Well, I mean, one can try", pouted Percy and stuck his tongue out.

Sally laughed, eyes sparkling as she watched her son. For the first time in months, she felt like she was a true part of her son's life again. And having him tell her all those things made her feel so warm. He was so excited and eager to tell her every little detail, he truly wanted her back in his life. For a long time now, Sally had feared he wouldn't. That he would resent her for not being strong enough to leave Gabe on her own, for putting him through all of this. That he would find he was much happier with Poseidon and Amy and didn't need Sally anymore.

It was the most liberating feeling Sally had ever experienced to know that her son still loved her, still needed and wanted her around. That she was still part of his life.

Later on that day, not long before they would have to pack and leave, Sally managed to corner Silena and Luke alone. After everything she had heard in the past two days, she had pieced together what vital roles both of them played in Percy's life.

"I wanted to thank the two of you", stated Sally with a small smile. "I know all of you play big parts in my son's happiness, but I also know that you two, you're some kind of protectors, right?"

"His cove-leader", nodded Silena with a grin.

"And his Alpha", confirmed Luke, a grin to match Silena's on his face.

"I know my Percy, he has... problems, finding friends. And that you two take care of him, help him, it's... I'm grateful Percy has people in his life who are willing to protect him", continued Sally.

"Oh, everyone at this beach is willing to protect Percy. He's one of us", smiled Silena.

"And I think the one who's the most protective of our little fur-ball is definitely Nico", chuckled Luke. "That boy's ready to tear the world apart for your son. He really loves Percy."

"I can see that", nodded Sally, turning a little.

She watched with fond eyes how Nico tried to make sandwiches, but Percy kept sneaking in to kiss him on the cheek and the lips, every time effectively stealing something off the sandwiches.

"I taught him that trick", grinned Luke proudly. "How to distract your boyfriend to steal his food."

"...Like the both of you couldn't just get the food with one look", snorted Silena amused.

"You kids are all totally adorable", laughed Sally fondly.

She smiled as Percy sauntered off to join the card-game between the Stolls, Ethan, Alabaster and Leo. He left Nico to take a huge bite off his sandwich, just to blink in confusion and stare at the two loafs of bread... with nothing in between them. Percy looked very satisfied with himself.

"I like you, Luke", laughed Sally and shook her head.


"Wha—at are my three moms talking about? Not about me, right? I'm not in trouble?"

Sally, Silena and Luke turned toward an innocently smiling Percy munching on a piece of cheese that had previously been on Nico's sandwich. He blinked those large, very cat-like sea-green eyes at them. Sally tilted her head as she noted the parallels between Percy and a kitten.

"Your three moms?", chuckled Luke and elbowed him. "Cheeky brat. I will have you know that you will be grounded starting tonight, young man!"


"Lucas, don't be so hard on our boy", chided Silena, the smile lighting up her whole face.

Leaving the three to their antics, Sally decided to instead head over to Nico and have some Percy-free words with the vampire. Vampire. Still trying to process that part. Still trying to process that Nico was older than Sally, older than Sally's parents had been. Ninety-one years old. That meant, if Sally's math wasn't failing her here, that Nico had been born in 1924.

"Your son is a menace", stated Nico when Sally approached him, the boy making a new sandwich.

"I think that was pretty sneaky and adorable", offered Sally amused, leaning against the table. "But you're right. It's not nice of him to steal a senior citizen's food."

"Senior citizen?", sputtered Nico and blinked.

"Ninety-one does qualify", drawled Sally, watching Nico intensely.

"I'm not... Age and mentality work differently for immortals", whispered Nico softly. "But yes, you're right to worry for your son. I am... old. I saw a lot of things. Fought in wars when your parents were barely children. Traveled the world. I live because I drink blood. I can understand if you think I'm a bad influence on your son, but you need to know that I love him with my whole heart and I have serious intentions for him. I want to spend the rest of our immortal lives with him."

Our immortal lives. The words made Sally's heart skip a beat. Her son was immortal. Somehow, with all the words spoken in the past two days, she had not quite put that together. But the sincerity to Nico's words was truly heartwarming. The way he looked at her, Sally believed every single word. Nico truly loved Percy and he really wanted to spend eternity with her son.

Chapter End Notes

Did the cat eating the bat because mouse thing make sense in English too? Because the German word for bat is "Fledermaus", which... kind of translates to "fluttering leather mouse". But they look enough like mice for it to make sense even without mouse in their English name, riiight? Right?

Next chapter is gonna have Sally having Words with both Poseidon and also with
Percy. About the whole immortality thing. Also, time to do some Christmas shopping! ;D

Oooh! And if you go and check my DeviantArt (Takara-Phoenix), I've drawn an illustration of merboy!Percy and also a cute little something about bat!Nico playing with kitten!Percy!
Poseidon frowned curiously as he opened the door to see his former lover. Sally smiled at him charmingly, which somehow only made him more suspicious. He returned the smile.

"Hello, Sally. It's good to see you", greeted Poseidon and stepped aside. "Percy isn't home."

"Oh, I know. I came to talk to you, King Poseidon", stated Sally firmly.

Poseidon gulped and watched her enter the house. She walked toward the living room, where Amphitrite was sitting. Amphitrite smiled and put her book aside, getting up to properly greet Sally. It was still so strange for Poseidon to see his former lover and his wife hug and be friendly with each other. Somehow, he had always expected a cat-fight of sorts.

"So Percy told you after all? It... shouldn't surprise me", sighed Poseidon, rubbing his forehead. "He adores you. Keeping this a secret from you was tearing him up on the inside."

"Oh, well, he didn't tell me. I already knew. I just didn't know that he knew – or that he was a merkitten", replied Sally. "I saw him with the ears and the tail and then... the cat was literally out of the bag. And the kitten looked very surprised. I... I thought he just had my mother's genes-"

"So Laura was the one to tell you", snorted Poseidon and shook his head. "That somehow surprises me even less. ...Actually, Percy is quite a lot like his grandmother in that aspect."

"...Do all the immortal supernatural beings in New York know my mother?", mused Sally.

"Actually, yes", chuckled Amphitrite with a smile. "Every large city has a council where the leaders of the respective supernatural races meet regularly. Your mother was the representative of shifters and most of us elders did know Laura."

Sally shook her head in amusement. "Your society is... ridiculous."

"So you saw Percy half-shifted and told him then that you know?", pieced Poseidon together.

"Yes. And then he introduced me to all of his supernatural friends", confirmed Sally. "And he told me that he's a half-merman. That... That I had basically sex with Disney's Triton."

Amphitrite laughed loudly at that, startling Poseidon. "Well, your son is a bit of an Ariel."

"Not just a bit", stated Sally flatly before smiling. "But oh, he is so beautiful. He showed me his tail. He's gorgeous! And so fast. He invited me to his next tournament. I thought he hadn't invited me because he was... ashamed, of me, compared to all the new rich friends he made. But it's because this is going to be an all supernatural tournament. I'm very excited for it!"

"It is quite impressive", agreed Poseidon with a fond look. "And Percy is going to be the star of our team. But, did you just come over to chew me out about not telling you?"

"I did want to guilt-trip you a little", confirmed Sally. "Though I also thought we should talk about this. About our son. Nico, our son's ninety-one year old boyfriend by the way, told me that... that
Percy is immortal. And have you talked to him about this yet? About... what it means? For his life?"

The awkward silence she got in return was all the answer she needed. She heaved a sigh.

"Okay, and this? This is Carter. He's a warlock. His boyfriend is a falcon-shifter named Horus. Like, the Horus. It's pretty cool that he can perform magic though. Like Alabaster, just that Carter is more powerful", explained Percy as him and his mom went through the photos on his phone.

Now that Percy knew that Sally knew the truth, he had been talking about nothing else aside from the supernatural. There were so many things he had been dying to tell his mom in the past three months and finally he could. Sally smiled softly as she looked at the photos and listened to her son.

"That's amazing, sweetie, but there's actually something else I wanted to talk to you about", interrupted Sally once Percy finished the next story.

"Mh?", grunted Percy confused, looking into his mother's serious face.

"Something you said...", started Sally, gently running her fingers through Percy's hair. "About merpeople being immortal. Something your boyfriend said, about spending your immortal lives together... Percy. You're immortal and I feel like that is something we should talk about."

"...Right. That", muttered Percy and deflated some. "I kind of... ignored it so far? Was planning on ignoring it for maybe another decade or two... or three?"

"Perseus", chided Sally with a frown. "You can't ignore something like that."

"Well, I mean...", started Percy before sighing. "You're right. I just... I just don't want to think about it... About still being this young when you're... old and gray and... and..."

"Die", finished Sally gently for him, cupping his cheek. "Sweetie, I was always doomed to die before you. It's not me I'm worried about. It's your friends. And your future. How... What it will hold for you. What... this new life means for you. This isn't exactly the 'high school graduation, college, open my own dojo' plan that you've had for years now."

"Nah, that plan still stands", replied Percy and tilted his head. "I will do that. Dad and Amy have normal regular jobs in the mortal world too. They just also dabble as king and queen of one of the seven seas. I'll... meet the court and see the palace for myself in spring. They promised to take me. And Benty and Rhode promised that if I'm uncomfortable with it all, they'll help me sneak off. But they also say that there are dojos and a training camp for merpeople, so maybe... that would be something too. I... I don't know. I don't know what my future holds but I now literally have all the time in the world to figure it out, mom. And I have my friends and siblings to help me."

"And your equally immortal boyfriend", pointed Sally out, both eyebrows raised.

Percy ducked his head with the smallest grin on his lips. "I don't know."

"You don't know what?", asked Sally curiously.

"I kind of... I don't know where this is going. It's still really fresh – we've only been dating for like a month now – and I really do love him, but we're in high school and who knows what else will happen", shrugged Percy. "He's the future head of the New York coven of vampires. That's like a big deal. He'll take over once Hades retires slash moves back to the 'old world', which he's planning on doing and which is like the reason why immortals even have heirs and stuff, you know? So, one
day, Nico's gonna be a real big deal around here. And I'm, uh, kind of... a prince. So it's all a little more complicated than some high school romance and I'm aware of that."

"Okay", nodded Sally, grasping his hand and squeezing it gently. "I just wanted to make sure how you feel about all of this and if you are aware of those things. I love you and I want to be there for you, sweetie, as best as I can, what with me not being some supernatural creature."

Percy smiled softly and hugged her tightly. "Thanks, mom. I love you too."

"You've been incredibly chipper since the camping trip last weekend", stated Leo on Friday.

Percy grinned and ducked his head, his hands deep in his pockets. "It's like this huge weight was lifted off my shoulders and I just... can't help but feel... incredibly relieved."

"I get that", grinned Piper, nudging him. "Bu—ut back to the topic at hand: Which knife do I buy my weapons-obsessed girlfriend? The one with the fox on it, because it'll remind her of Chris, or this one that's more... practical? She's a practical girl."

"Follow your guts. You know Clarisse the best", chuckled Percy amused. "But if I had to make a suggestion, I think she really got enough practical knives. Get her something cheesy for Christmas."

"Ah. Well, then it's the prettier knife", chimed Piper with a smirk. "What about you guys?"

"I bought an elf-costume", hummed Leo happily.

"...For which one? For both?", asked Percy confused.

"For myself! That's the present for them", grinned Leo impishly.

"So much TMI", groaned Piper, burying her face in her hands.

"Okay, how about you help me find something for my super-rich boyfriend who probably already has everything", requested Percy with a frown. "I have no idea what to get him."

"Oh, we're gonna find something", promised Piper excitedly.

She linked arms with Percy on one side and Leo did the same on the other side. Together, the trio headed along through the chilly mid-December streets of New York. Percy was completely lost as to what to buy Nico, because Nico was so rich, he already owned everything he could want.

"Something personal. Something that... reminds him of you", mused Piper gently.

"Ye—eah. Well. Not helpful", sighed Percy with a frown as they passed a toy store.

"Oh my gosh, look", yelped Leo, stopping the other two dead in their tracks. "It looks just like you, Perce! Even the green eyes! And it's like extra-fluffy."

Percy blinked as he stared at the life-sized stuffed toy cat. And it really did look ridiculously fluffy. A broad smile lit up Percy's face as he tugged his two friends into the store. Since Nico loved cuddling Percy so much, this would be the perfect present! It looked so adorable.

"Nico is going to love it", smiled Piper gently.
Nico was sprawled out on his bed, though not relaxed. His eyes were wide and haunted, his breathing shallow. He forgot to blink so his eyes were slowly tearing up, but he couldn't focus on that. Every time he took a stuttering, shaky breath, it felt as though his lungs were physically not capable to take any more air in. He felt like he was suffocating and he felt so disconnected from his own body, everything touching him felt like too much. His nerves were hyper-sensitive and he started feeling dizzy, he couldn't tell if it was the panic setting in or because he wasn't breathing enough because he was trying too hard not to hyperventilate.

"He—ey, Batman", purred a soft, much beloved voice.

But Nico couldn't find it in himself to focus on his boyfriend, he was too preoccupied by trying not to have a panic-attack. Much to Percy's credit, he instantly understood that something was wrong. Carefully, Percy approached Nico and sat down next to him on the bed.

"Hey, Nico, love, come on, look at me", whispered Percy very gently. "Come on, look at me."

Reluctantly, Nico did it and unlike the ceiling that was playing tricks on him and appearing to be something it wasn't, Percy's face was clear. And worried. Percy reached out, just to pause.

"Can I touch you, Nico?", asked Percy softly. "Is that okay?"

Nico managed a shaky nod and the next moment, Percy laid down next to Nico, grasping his hand and pulling it up to kiss it gently. One knuckle after the other, slowly. It was precise and rhythmic and slowly managed to distract and calm Nico down until he managed to take a full breath again.

"T—Thank you", grunted Nico, struggling with the words.

"What happened, Nico?", asked Percy concerned.

Nico took a shaky breath and shook his head. "It's stupid. You don't need to worry about it."

"Don't be an idiot, Niccolò", grunted Percy with a frown. "You literally just had a panic-attack so something happened that is not stupid. And I love you so I want to know what happened. If it's something I can or should watch out for too? I want you to talk to me about things that worry you. You want to be worried about me all the time; allow me to be worried about you."

Nico got lost in those determined sea-green eyes. Sighing, he leaned in to rest his forehead against Percy's. Percy gladly laid one arm around Nico's waist, the other still holding his hand.

"The neighbor's children – loud, obnoxious teenagers – illegally bought fireworks early for New Year's and they've been testing them earlier. I... didn't know. I wasn't prepared for the sound", replied Nico, voice rough. "I'm not good with fireworks."

"Care to elaborate? You don't need to, if it's too fresh right now", whispered Percy gently.

"War", whispered Nico back, closing his eyes and breathing deeply. "The firecrackers, during day when I'm not even prepared to hear them, they sound too much... too much like gun-fire. I've never spent Independence Day in the US before, I'm usually making sure to spend New Year's away from any loud, big city too. I know that it's too much for me."

"I'm sorry", sighed Percy, kissing Nico softly. "If there's anything I can do..."

"Just... stay with me for a while, let me hold you?", requested Nico.

He buried his face in Percy's hair as he pulled Percy as close as possible. Percy gladly snuggled up to
him, still in his shoes and jacket as he had crawled through the window. But Nico really couldn't be bothered with letting go of Percy for long enough to get out of those clothes.

"I was in the Regio Esercito... The... The Royal Army", started Nico, voice low. "I was sixteen when my country joined the war. I... had lost my mother only recently and my sister was a freshly turned vampire. I thought, at the time, that I had lost her too. I was alone and I thought fighting for my country would give me a new purpose. I was there when we were trying to invade Greece, October 1940. We were stuck in Albania for months. So many... so many died. So many of those who had become my new family, my brothers in arms, I saw them slaughtered left and right."

Percy clung onto Nico a little tighter. He could hear the pain in his boyfriend's voice, he could feel Nico shake in his arms. His Nico, who was always so strong for him and protective of him. To see him like this really hurt Percy a lot. Closing his eyes, Percy pressed closer against him.

"Sometimes...", whispered Nico roughly, voice low. "Sometimes, I hated Hades and Bianca for trapping me in this... eternal hell. For years, I struggled with the PTSD, back when PTSD was not a thing someone had. I hated them so much for it that... I left. And joined the next best war I could find. I thought that maybe, fighting would be the only purpose I had, since I had the supernatural healing now. And maybe... part of me hoped that the Vietnam War would be enough to end it. That I could die a hero, instead of a... a monster."

Percy stared, with blank and fearful eyes. His boyfriend had... wanted to die? When he had been turned? The thought of Nico throwing himself into a war, hopeful to die, it broke a part of Percy.

"I'm glad you didn't", whispered Percy hoarsely. "I'm glad they turned you and I'm glad you're alive, because I got to meet you and I love you and I... I'm sorry you had to go through all of this... I... I... I'm sorry, Nico. I don't know what to say."

"It's okay, love", assured Nico with a pained smile. "I came around on it. I've been working on my issues for years now. I've not regretted being turned in over a decade, Percy. It was just... very hard, in the beginning. And certain things, certain sounds, still... send me into flashbacks, make me feel just like I did back then. Helpless, lonely. Weak."

"You're not", assured Percy firmly. "You're strong and amazing and I love you."

"Keep doing that", hummed Nico, slowly relaxing as the panic-attack had left him drained.

"Keep doing what?", asked Percy confused. "I'm not doing anything."

"You're doing everything, amore", murmured Nico. "Just... holding me and telling me that you love me. At my lowest, I thought... no one would be able to love a soulless monster like me, which was how I perceived myself back then... As though I lost all humanity."

"You're totally human", huffed Percy, clinging onto Nico and kissing his forehead. "And totally lovable. I love you a lot. And your friends do too and your family."

Percy kept listing things he loved about Nico well-until the vampire fell asleep in his arms and even then, Percy didn't let go of Nico, kept holding him and telling him that he loved him.

"You seem distracted, Nico", hummed Annabeth, looking at the windows.

Nico had already bought a Christmas present for Percy a month ago, but this morning, Annabeth had gotten a call from Nico for some 'emergency last-minute shopping' for Percy. She wasn't going to
deny her best friend, though she didn't quite understand what had happened.

"Earlier today, I... had a flashback. To the... war", whispered Nico, voice low.

Annabeth looked at him in concern, resting a gentle hand on his upper arm. "Are you alright?"

"Yeah. Yeah, I just... needed to get out of the house. Thanks for making the time", sighed Nico and shook his head. "It was just... I was alone at home and it came unexpected. But then Percy came in through the window and... and he calmed me down. He was so sweet and stayed with me for hours. I nearly had to kick him out so he'd get to training on time."

"Ah. So you want to get him a special gift because you're grateful that he's there for you and not rejecting you", nodded Annabeth with a solemn and calculating look.

She knew that Nico still had it deeply integrated that PTSD was not a thing. He had gone through too many fights before it had been a recognized mental problem and not just something that a soldier just endured silently. A part of Nico would never be able to shake it off, the thought that his PTSD made him weak and would make them reject him. She pulled him into a brief hug, startling him. The two of them had never been overly physically affectionate, but Annabeth would always be there for her best friend when needed. He slowly relaxed in her hold.

"I need something special for him. He's... special, so special, Ann", whispered Nico lowly.

"I know, Nico", assured Annabeth, patting his back. "I know. Okay. Let's go and get him something very special to show him just how much you love him."

She smiled reassuringly at him as the two of them entered a jewelry shop. When Nico said 'special', all Annabeth could hear was 'I finally gathered the courage to buy him courting jewelry'. Nico glowered at her, knowing exactly why they were in a jewelry store.

"I will not buy him a courting gift for Christmas. We've only been dating for a month now, Annabeth", sighed Nico with a pointed look. "He's seventeen and new to this whole world. I will not ask for his tail in courting just yet. We have literal eternity and at the very least, we should have high school together before making life-altering decisions."

"I do so hate when you make sense, di Angelo", drawled Annabeth with a small smile. "Okay, fine. But still, you should get him something... special. Personal."

"Enlighten me, Chase", prompted Nico.

"Talk to your sister about it", smirked Annabeth. "Because Hazel knows just the thing."

Nico raised his eyebrows curiously, but he knew to trust her.

Percy sighed contently as he laid curled together between Luke's paws, the fox grooming him. Chris, Cecil, Travis and Connor were with them on Luke's bed, all of them napping. Pack-bonding was so nice. Percy adored pack-bonding. Next to submissive-cuddles, it was the best, especially after a long, hard day of training. Drew was back at school after having been suspended for just a week after what had happened. Still, she had a warning; one more stunt like that and she would be expelled which would be a major disaster because in all of New York City, this was the only supernatural school. She'd have to move away. Or, the more likely outcome, she'd have to leave the state because another such incident and Poseidon would bring it before the council, which might get her banned. She hadn't even looked at Percy since she returned to school.
And honestly? It was more unsettling than the bullying had been, because back then he at least knew exactly where he stood with her. Now he had her be this silent threat he couldn't really seize. It left him tense and on edge, which was why he had been 'abducted' by his pack right after training. Courtesy of Silena texting Luke about it. Because merpeople didn't have the same kind of comfort and mentality as shifters did. Percy sighed contently, nose buried in the white fluff on Luke's chest.

"Lucas. You stood me up for... this fluffy mess? I am not impressed."


"You doing okay with Drew back at school?", asked Luke softly.

"I mean... I guess. With the threat of literally being kicked out of the state... she won't try anything else again. And I scared Bryce pretty much shitless the other day", laughed Percy.

"I'd have paid to see that. I can totally imagine you kicking his ass", grinned Connor pleased.

"I was a bad kitten", purred Percy mischievously, pawing the air.

"Percy, honey. Me and your mother have been talking on the phone a lot in the past week, since she visited us after your little weekend trip", started Amphitrite as the family set the table on Friday. Friday was family dinner night and Percy had really grown very fond of that tradition. He had grown really fond of this family. Looking at his stepmother like a startled deer, Percy put the salad down and sat down between Triton and Tyson. He wasn't sure where this was going.

"I'm still feeling weird about my mom and my stepmom being friends", stated Percy.

"That's what I said!", exclaimed Poseidon. "Well, I was talking about my wife, not mom, but..."

"Men", sighed Amphitrite fondly and shook her head. "I talked to her about her Christmas plans and... since Thanksgiving went so well, I suggested that she could spend Christmas with us too. Since she ever only had you as her family to spend the holidays with... She said she'd like that, if you're okay with it. She'd also understand if you'd feel weird about it, Percy."

"Weird? About having my whole family at Christmas? Sure, totally awful", snorted Percy, blinking slowly. "Really? Mom can... can be here? And... And you guys... would be okay with that?"

He turned toward his siblings with doubtful eyes, just to have them all smile at him. Tyson actually yelped excitedly at it and nodded wildly in agreement, eyes sparkling.

"Yes! Stepmom will come for Christmas! Oh, do you have Christmas traditions too, big brother?", asked Tyson. "Because we have a lot! Like, baking cookies and we all help making dinner! And we play games before dinner and after dinner, we watch movies and-"

"Ty, slow down", requested Proteus gently, patting the boy on the head.

Tyson had decided, since Percy and him had the same dad, but Percy had a mom and called Tyson's mom 'stepmom', then logically speaking, Tyson had to call Percy's mom 'stepmom' too. No one
dared to argue with the boy on that point. Percy smiled softly as he relaxed.

"We'd watch a compilation of Christmas specials of our favorite shows and cartoons in the morning and order Chinese for lunch and just... not really do a lot, to be honest?", admitted Percy. "With Gabe around, Christmas was never really... a big thing. Most of the time, mom had to work after lunch, because she'd get extra pay for the holidays..."

"I like the idea of watching a best of of Christmas specials for the morning and maybe a light lunch would be a good idea considering that cooking does leave you hungry", mused Amphitrite.

"That sounds amazing", smiled Benthesikyme delighted. "Oh, and the di Angelos have a huge ball on the 25th. That's going to be amazing and you'll love it. And you're gonna meet mine, Proteus' and Kym's mates, you know? They're usually spending the holidays with us."

Percy grinned as he tried to picture this huge, fun Christmas. He couldn't wait for it.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter is going to be all the Christmas. Fluffy fluff and romance and what present Nico got Percy ;D
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 25: Cheerful Christmas Chaos

"...Nico, this seems really impractical. I should probably get a ladder."

"What? No. This is working perfectly. I won't drop you, I promised. And I'm a vampire so lifting you up is really no problem. Light as a feather, gattino."

"...I was kind of more talking about the fact that you're nuzzling my stomach and groping my ass."

Nico blinked slowly where he had his face mushed against the firm, comfortable six-pack of his boyfriend he was currently holding up by the ass. And okay. So maybe he was abusing the moment to get a little bit of groping in. But hey – Percy did the same all the time! The cheeky kitten never missed a chance to grope Nico's arms and ass, just offering a wink in return.

"I am just holding you safely so you don't fall forward into the tree", grumbled Nico flustered. "I'm supporting you here. Your ass is just... very good holding-onto-material."

Percy snorted as he looked down at his boyfriend. Shaking his head, Percy returned to the task at hand. He and his siblings were decorating the house for Christmas. Nico had dropped by because he was hoping for some kissing and maybe making out. Instead he was helping Percy decorate the tree. While Tyson was decorating the lower half of the giant tree, Percy was decorating the upper half. Only that Percy was not exactly tall, so Nico had volunteered his vampire-strength and just picked Percy up to lift him higher (which, really should not be as hot as it was, but Percy was definitely going to file this away for later usage). Percy squeaked a little as Nico pinched his butt again.

"Can't help it. It's very tempting", whispered Nico against Percy's six-pack.

Percy snorted and smiled a little before he returned to putting up the blue crystal balls. The house already looked like Christmas had thrown up all over it and Percy really loved that. He and Sally had never truly celebrated Christmas, especially not in this way. To have this house decorated in sparkly, blue colors, the giant tree, mistletoe, heck they had reindeer on their roof and three snowmen in the front yard that Triton, Percy and Tyson had built this morning.

Everything looked perfect and Percy could not wait for Christmas to roll around. The plans they had made as a family, they got him excited. To celebrate with his family like that – and then a gala on the first day of Christmas. Oh, he loved that idea. It sounded so Christmas Prince Charming like. He was looking forward to dancing with Nico, exchanging presents with his boyfriend.

"Nico. Stop it", hissed Percy flustered, swatting at Nico's head.

The vampire had snuck his head beneath Percy's shirt to kiss his stomach. And yes, Percy got that. He was growing more and more handsy with Nico by the day too. Because he had an absolutely gorgeous boyfriend and he wanted to touch and kiss and feel. Though the two had not yet talked about doing more than the above mentioned three. Percy blushed as Nico nibbled on his hipbone.

"Remove your mouth from my brother, vampire", warned Triton with a deadpan.

Nico nearly bolted on instinct, but then he remembered that he was the one holding Percy up. So
instead he just pulled his head away and offered an innocent look to the older Jackson brother.

Triton smiled softly where he was running his fingers through Percy's hair, his little brother laying with his head in Triton's lap, arms wrapped around Tyson who was laying right on front of him on the broad couch, Percy's feet in Rhode's lap. Benthesyktine and Kymopoleia were sitting right in front of them on the floor, with lots of pillows. Proteus sat on the other couch together with Poseidon, Amphitrite and Sally. The family had been marathoning Doctor Who Christmas specials for the past three hours. They had started out with a light breakfast during the first and had by now moved on to lunch – ordering in Chinese because that was what Percy and Sally usually ate on Christmas. Before they had started their marathon, they had prepped the turkey.

So far, Percy really truly loved this Christmas. He had been woken up by an enthusiastic Tyson and then his mom had come over. They had all been together, working together and eating together. Finally, Percy had his whole family here, together. Finally, he got his real, proper Christmas.

"After this one, we really have to take a break and continue prepping dinner", stated Sally.

Percy and most of the other children hummed their reluctant agreement. And working together after the special ended was actually as much fun as laying together and watching specials. They worked well together, Sally and Amphitrite taking over the lead and bossing the others around. It was nice to see his mom and stepmom get along so well. Honestly, it generally was amazing how well he got along with Amphitrite by now. She was kind and caring and seemed to genuinely love Percy too.

"If you two don't stop taste-testing everything, we won't have anything left for dinner", chided Sally half-heartedly, smiling softly down at her son.

Percy blinked doe-eyed, spoon sticking out of his mouth. Tyson next to him mirrored his big brother's expression. Sally snorted and shook her head, while Amphitrite laughed softly. Percy couldn't deny that part of him had always wondered what it would be like to celebrate Christmas with both his mother and his father. Like in the movies, where those happy families were together.

"Thank you", whispered Percy very, very softly.

Everyone was busy setting the table and it was only Percy and Amphitrite in the kitchen at the moment. Sally was just outside, laughing at something Rhode had said. Percy looked at his mom.

"Mh?", inquired Amphitrite confused as she finished up the last dish.

"It's... You didn't have to invite my mom, but you did. You've been nothing but nice to me since I moved in here and I... I'm sorry I've always been such a brat", elaborated Percy, fidgeting with his hands. "I just... The things you were hiding from me? Going on vacations without me, keeping me out of the loop of something, I always... I always thought that was you, hating me for being dad's bastard son, keeping my dad and siblings away from me. And... And I now know that's not true. That you're not some Disney villain evil stepmother. I'm... I'm sorry."

He yelped a little as Amphitrite pulled him into a hug. "Sweetie, no. I know why you disliked me. I know your father and I never truly gave you a reason to trust us, to... to feel welcomed here. And I'm so sorry that we made you feel that way, Percy. I truly am. But... We thought you were only a mortal boy and... you could have been so easily used as leverage. Do you know how often your older siblings had been abducted and threatened in their first few centuries? We couldn't risk that for a... fragile human child who had no idea what kind of world this even was. We wanted you to be safe, to have a safe, normal childhood with your mother."
The two of them were still hugging, not noticing the small audience in the form of Proteus and Sally that they had gathered. Proteus smiled pleased to himself. As the oldest, he had always felt most responsible for his siblings. That he could not act as Percy's protector in the same way as he did for their other siblings, it had always bothered him immensely.

"You raised an amazing boy", whispered Proteus gently. "I've seen it, I've been there for all of my siblings and I saw how much my parents struggled very often. When Kym was being rebellious, when Rhode was being bullied, when Benthesikyme was determined to drop out of school and become an explorer, when Triton ran away – yes, that happened. But my parents always had each other, their own parents and me. You... only had yourself and yet you raised him to be such a strong, courageous and kind young man."

Sally blushed and smiled. "Thank you."

"Thank you", countered Proteus. "For giving me this amazing little brother. I promise I will watch over him. Even when... you will be long gone. I know that's a concern of yours, mother has told me. And I promise you that me and my siblings will take care of Percy. He's our precious baby brother."

Sally blinked the tears away at that. Yes, it was a huge concern of hers. Who was going to protect her baby when she wasn't around anymore? To hear those reassuring words was nice. She surprised Proteus by pulling him into a hug of their own.

"You're a good man, Proteus. Your parents did well raising you too", whispered Sally.

"Why is everyone getting mom hugs? I want mom hugs too", complained Tyson as he looked from Sally and Proteus over to Amphitrite and Percy.

The next moment, Tyson found himself sandwiched in a hug from Amphitrite and Sally, making the boy giggle pleased as he received kisses on his cheeks from them. When he was being put down again, Tyson ran back to the dining room to get seated because he was hungry. Percy, after letting go of Amphitrite, wanted to join his baby brother, but before he had a chance to, Kymopoleia grabbed him and steered him toward the main door. He frowned confused as his big sister pushed him forward to where Benthesykime was leaning against the wall next to the door and in the door stood... Percy smiled brightly and pushed past his sister to wrap his arms around his boyfriend.

"Aw, Benty, you got me a great gift there. Can I keep him?", asked Percy playfully.

"I have to get going to my own Christmas dinner, but I wanted to see you and... exchange gifts with you, amore", whispered Nico gently and wrapped his arms around Percy's waist.

"Oh. Yes. Come, upstairs. I have your present in my room!", exclaimed Percy.

Before Nico had a chance to say something, he was being dragged upstairs and to Percy's room. The next moment, Nico got a blue-wrapped present pushed against his chest, Percy's large kitten-eyes sparkling in utter excitement as he watched Nico intensely.

"Open it", ordered Percy, leaning in even closer, eyes seemingly even larger.

Nico smiled softly, feeling touched by how adorable his boyfriend was. Carefully, he started unwrapping the gift and then he started laughing. A life-sized fluffy plush kitten, with black, extra-fluffy fur and green eyes. It looked almost identical to Percy's shift-form. Nico opened his mouth to say something when he noticed the thing attached to the cat's neck. He snorted fondly and shook his head. It was a stuffed toy bat, with its wings wrapped around the kitten's neck in a hug.

"Percy", laughed Nico and grabbed his boyfriend by the neck to pull him into a kiss. "This is..."
adorable. Thank you, love. It's... you and me. As fluffy stuffed toys."

"Ye—es. Exactly", nodded Percy with a giant grin. "It made me think of you and me and I thought you might like it because you like cuddling me all the time."

"I love you", chuckled Nico, kissing Percy once more. "It's perfect and so adorable. I love it."

Percy relaxed against him, grinning pleased. "Okay. Good. I was... really worried what to get you. I mean, you're kind of a century old, rich vampire. What could I get you that you don't already have."

"Well, there's one thing. And you already got me that one thing", stated Nico, looking deeply into Percy's eyes until his boyfriend blushed in realization. "I mean it. I do love you."

"You're such a sap, urgh", groaned Percy with a broad grin, pecking Nico's lips. "Now. What did you get me? Because I totally just set the bar there."

His grin grew and Nico couldn't help but laugh softly. He grasped Percy's hand to lead him back out of the room and down the stairs. Percy frowned curiously as he was led out of the house. He blinked stunned at the giant hell-hound obediently waiting in front of the door. The man-sized dog smiled broadly at Percy, tongue hanging out as she tilted her head.

"...Mrs. O'Leary?", asked Percy confused, tugging on the bow around her neck. "What...?"

"Hazel saw how much you adored Mrs. O'Leary and Mrs. O'Leary has been alone in the stables for so long now. She deserves a home and someone to love her and I swear I talked to your father first, because I didn't want to give you a puppy and then have your dad take her away again and he was fine with it, so if you want her, she's all yours", replied Nico.

"Oh my gosh, you got me a puppy!", squeaked Percy and jumped Mrs. O'Leary.

He wrapped his arms around her neck and hugged her tightly, prompting her to wag her tail and yelp happily. His laughter ringed loud enough to get the attention of his family and they all got out to check on him. Sally gasped as she saw the large beast.

"Mo—om! Look! My super amazing boyfriend got me a puppy!", yelped Percy.

"...A... puppy...?", echoed Sally softly, tilting her head up to look at the dog. "...How... nice."

Amphitrite next to her chuckled and rested a hand on her shoulder. "She's not dangerous, don't worry. She's well-trained and... essentially just wants a lot of cuddles."

Percy let go of Mrs. O'Leary to instead tackle Nico in a hug and shower his face with kisses and 'thank you's. Nico was practically glowing as he received the thanks. The others watched them for another moment before returning inside and leaving Nico and Percy in the snow. Percy was curled together on Nico's chest, smiling brightly as he buried his face in Nico's neck.

"You're totally awesome and I love you", whispered Percy happily.

"I'm... glad I could make you happy", smiled Nico, gently caressing Percy's hair.

"And tomorrow, you will be my Prince Charming, right?", asked Percy with a teasing grin.

"I will whirl you over the dance-floor", promised Nico, leaning in to kiss Percy. "Now go back to your family before dinner gets cold. I have to get going too, or else nonna Demeter is going to kill me. I'm looking forward to seeing you tomorrow, gattino."
Percy reluctantly got off Nico's chest and pecked his lips in a quiet goodbye, with a last 'thank you'.

Princess Psamatheia, daughter of King Nereus and Queen Doris, was very sweet and soft and apparently close friends with Rhode and Benthesykmne. She made Proteus look at her like a lovesick school boy at his first crush and she sent him into instant gentleman-mode because he held the door open for her, pulled the chair back, continued getting up to get her something to drink or eat or a scarf or whatever she asked for. Half the time, she was teasing him and Percy could see that. It made him instantly like her. She was also really nice to him.

Briareos was kind of an arrogant ass, total bad boy biker with an attitude problem and from what Percy had accidentally walked in on since the three had arrived this morning, Percy was pretty sure that what Briareos and Kymopoleia had was mostly just physical and to piss off dad.

Enalos was kind of very... bland. He continued smiling at Benthesikyme, but he stuck to the background and mainly just made polite conversation when prompted. But he obviously made Benthesikyme happy, so that was a big plus in Percy's books.

"I gotta go", chimed Percy, poking his head into the living room where his family sat, everyone turning toward him. "I'm meeting the others at Piper's for getting 'my hair done'. I'm 92% convinced that Silena will be lurking behind the door with a dress in my size though, to be honest."

"...Have fun, sweetie", stated Amphitrite, blinking slowly. "See you at the gala."

"Pe—ercy!", exclaimed Leo as soon as the door opened.

He pulled Percy into a hug and then toward Piper's bedroom. Percy grinned and waved at Tristan and Beryl in the living room before being dragged past them. Piper looked stunning in her tie-dyed dress that was very closely leaned toward Aurora's dress in Sleeping Beauty, right as the fairies were battling for pink and blue. But it suited her. She had even her highlights matching, some pink and some blue. It looked amazing on her. Percy smiled, before turning his attention to the three suits laid out on her bed. One with a blue dress-shirt, one with a yellow one and the third with a red one.

"Red is Leo's, yellow is for Jason to match Calypso's sunflower-colored dress and yours, of course, the blue one. Now get undressed, boys", ordered Piper with a bright grin.

Jason groaned as he walked past Leo and Percy to go and grab his suit. "I hate that you supported Cally on this. I don't want to wear a suit. This is awful."

"Oh, stop whining, brother", snorted Piper and rolled her eyes. "You two, get changed."

"...You mind getting out?", asked Percy, both eyebrows raised.

Piper rolled her eyes even harder as she threw her hands up in the air. "Fine, fine. I have to force Thalia into her dress anyway. The sedative I put into her drink should have kick in by now."

"Ha, ha, ha. Very funny, Piper", called Thalia out not amused. "No dress, sis."
"Bianca promised, and I'm quoting here, 'the thing with the sparks' and I swear I do not want to even know", grunted Piper and shuddered. "But anyway. I got you a dress. Your decision."

Seconds later and Thalia was back standing in the doorway, glaring in a calculating manner. "And she said that? The thing with the sparks? A dress... Hng. Urgh. Stupid vampire is gonna kill me."

Grumbling, Thalia stalked up to the bed and grabbed the dress to return to her room. Percy blinked amused before turning toward Piper and Jason with curious looks. Jason was very green as he snapped his fingers, causing sparks to fly around his fingers. Percy couldn't help but reach out and shudder at the electric jolt going through him. He blinked, before he caught on.

"Oh... That is... more than I needed to know about Bianca and Thalia's sex-life."

"What do you think how we feel", muttered Jason and shuddered.

"Okay, okay. Now, get changed so we can get going!", demanded Piper loudly.

Percy, Leo and Jason started getting changed. As Percy was down to his boxer-shorts, his eyes caught the faded, white scars sticking out from the rim of his boxers. He ran his hands over them roughly, sighing. He had always scarred fast and barely visibly – now he knew it was due to his supernatural heritage. It was weird. He hadn't even thought about hurting himself lately.

There was just so much going on. He was so... happy. He didn't remember ever having been this happy before. He knew sooner or later, he was going to crash. Something was going to break the flow of this euphoric feeling, but for now, he was just... content. He was being loved, shown that he was being loved, by all those people who genuinely seemed to care about him. He was so busy with the swim-team, with the drama-club, with animal care, with his friends and family. He barely had time to think or focus on the bad things that had happened.

So far, he had hidden the scars well. It wasn't that many people saw him down to his boxers anyway and then they would still have to focus on his thighs to even see the few scars that did stick out. It was why Percy and Nico hadn't done anything without clothes yet, because Percy was terrified of Nico finding out and judging and being this overbearing, overprotective boyfriend again. The thought alone sent him into a dark corner where he wanted to hurt himself. So he took a deep breath and focused on literally anything else. For now, denial worked really well for Percy.

"Damn, you clean up nice, Perce", commented Leo with a whistle.

Percy grinned as he finished buttoning his shirt. He did look good. The suit fit him perfectly, complimenting his ass and long legs and broad shoulders. He looked amazing. He hoped Nico would think so too. Today could be a lot of fun, hopefully.

"Okay, ducklings. Ready so we can go?", asked Thalia grumpily.

She looked so weird in her blue princess dress. Glaring like death warmed over. Leo, Jason, Percy and Piper eagerly followed her to the car to get going. A Christmas ball, with princes and princesses – Percy was literally a prince, he was still trying to get used to that.

"The funniest part of balls like those is seeing people like Lou, Clarisse and Thalia in dresses and people like Nico and Alabaster in suits", pointed Leo out with a broad grin.

Percy frowned thoughtfully. Thalia definitely did look funny. Unusual. And when they reached the mansion, Percy had to say that yes, Leo was definitely right. Lou was wearing a black dress, but seeing the punk in a dress was weird nonetheless. Clarisse was not wearing a dress but a suit and she instantly pulled Piper into a kiss when they reached her. And Nico... looked like a Dark Prince out of
a very twisted fairy tale where the villain got the princess. Percy, in this analogy, was super eager to submit to this handsome villain. Grinning, he grabbed Nico by the hand.

"You. Dance with me. Right now, handsome", ordered Percy with a grin.

"How could I possibly deny you? You look gorgeous, love", whispered Nico.

Percy's grin softened into a soft smile as he wrapped his arms around Nico's neck. Nico laid his arms around Percy's waist as they stood in the center of the dance hall – who even had such a thing. Music picked up again, soft and beautiful, and they started to sway. Out of the corner of his eyes, Percy could see others – Reyna and Annabeth, Luke and Octavian, Jason and Calypso (whose dress looked very much like Belle's and fit perfectly to Jason's outfit) – dance around them.

"I feel like a prince", whispered Percy lowly, leaning into Nico.

"You are a prince, silly", chuckled Nico, kissing Percy's cheek.

"Yeah. But a prince who goes to high school and eats McDonald's and stuff. Right now, I feel like a prince out of a Disney movie", huffed Percy, nudging Nico.

"Mh. So, how was your Christmas so far, amore?", asked Nico gently.

"Yesterday was amazing. Christmas dinner with mom and the rest of the family... We watched Doctor Who Christmas specials and prepared dinner in between. We ordered Chinese for lunch, just like mom and I have been doing for years, but dinner itself... it was... it was just how I always had hoped Christmas dinner could be. We laughed and joked and ate together, all of us, and we laid together in the living room, trying to get over having eaten too much", replied Percy, voice animated and excited. "And today, those three arrived." Percy motioned over to where his siblings were dancing with their respective others. "I adore Psamatheia. Enalos seems pretty cool and... Briareos is like... They're mainly together to piss off dad, right?"

"Ye—eah. We all agree on that", chuckled Nico amused. "So, you like them?"

"Yes", nodded Percy with a smile. "I always wanted to meet their partners. I always thought... they just didn't want me to be a part of their lives. But... I mean, they are literal fishes out of water. They know nothing about the human world, it's downright comedic. They couldn't introduce me to them without majorly blowing their cover. Enalos talks about literally nothing else but Atlantis. If he talks. And Psamatheia talks about her classes too. With the merpeople."

"Yeah, grew up in Atlantis, never truly left it. They didn't grow up in this world like you and I did", whispered Nico gently, kissing Percy's neck softly.

Percy shuddered as Nico's fangs graced his neck like that. Dating a vampire was definitely nice.

"Excuse me, but do you mind if I cut in?", asked Poseidon half-amused.

"Of course not, your highness", grunted Nico with a sharp nod.

"Don't look so put down", laughed Poseidon and shook his head. "I promise you get him back."

Percy grinned fondly as his boyfriend blushed and left, before he accepted the dance with his dad. His grin melted away a little as he realized how royal his dad looked. All groomed up and in a suit literally fit for a king – even with the funny medals that Percy always found so fancy on the kings in movies. It was the first time Percy realized that his dad with the Hawaiian shirts who liked to go fishing was... actually a king. His father was a king and he was a prince.
"Psamatheia is a princess", mused Percy softly, catching his father's attention.

"She... is", agreed Poseidon slowly, tilting his head. "She is Proteus' wife and they are our official heirs to the throne. The perfect royal couple, you know. Since... Kym is so... uncooperative."

"But you don't mind", pointed Percy out curiously. "That Briareos isn't a perfect match politically."

"I don't care about that", grunted Poseidon and blinked slowly. "All I want for my children is to be happy. And since my firstborn did make a good political match, there is no real pressure on you and your siblings. Kym is living proof of that. Bently too."

Percy hummed and looked over at his vampire boyfriend. "Merry Christmas, dad. I... love you."

Chapter End Notes

Weeell, next chapter is gonna cover Nico's birthday and it miiight be even a little bit smutty ;D
Chapter 26: The Ghost King's Birthday

Percy moaned softly, just to have his annoying boyfriend shush him. Glaring pointedly, Percy tried to figure a way out to muffle his moans. Smirking like a maniac, Percy simply bit down on Nico's neck, causing the vampire to groan. Percy's smirk widened as he let go.

"Shush, Nico. We don't want anyone hearing us", teased Percy pointedly.

Nico growled at Percy and deliberately slowly ran his thumb over the head of Percy's dick. This time around, Percy actually had to bite down on Nico's neck because otherwise Kym or Proteus might really hear them. And Percy was not so eager for his siblings to barge in during their mutual jerk-off session. Nico huffed stiffly, his free hand finding its way to Percy's ass, squeezing tightly and clinging onto it. Percy bucked up as he came hard into his boyfriend's hand. He tightened his own grip on Nico's cock for a second, making the vampire hiss, before he resumed his task of bringing Nico over the edge. Nico came, his moans swallowed by Percy's lips. For a long moment, they remained like that. Percy with his legs around Nico's waist as he was situated on Nico's lap, both of them fully clothed but with their pants open and their hands down each other's jeans. Percy was panting softly, with his forehead resting against Nico's shoulder.

"Love this", mumbled Percy, tilting his head enough to kiss Nico's neck.

They had started jerking each other off two weeks ago, between Christmas and New Year's. It just had become too much. Too much pent-up energy and desire. A dominant and a submissive, loving each other, kissing each other, it was really hard not to want more. And while Percy wanted more, he was still very aware of his scars that he tried to hide from Nico for as long as possible. So it was jerking each other off without stripping down. Pretty effective method of oh-so slowly growing closer on a physical level. Smiling, Percy tilted his head to kiss Nico's neck.

"Love you, bat-boy", whispered Percy gently.

"Love you too, my little vampire", grunted Nico, lifting a hand up to his now marked neck. Percy grinned broadly, not the least bit apologetic as he stared at the large hickey on his boyfriend's neck. The sight made Percy puff his chest out in pride. His. His dominant. His Nico. Marked. Others would see that this pretty vampire was claimed, taken, belonged to someone else. To Percy.

"Wow", grunted Percy and blinked slowly. "Man. That was a power-high."

"Huh?", grunted Nico confused, slowly cleaning himself up some.

"I just... had this... intense feeling of pride. That I marked you. That I put my claim on you", admitted Percy red-cheeked. "Pretty overwhelming sub-instincts right there..."

Nico grinned amused and leaned up to kiss Percy. "So... are you... busy in two weeks...?"

"On Thursday?", asked Percy with a lopsided grin. "Mh... super busy. Totally." He laughed softly as Nico deflated. "Dork. I know it's your birthday on the 28th. I had it noted in my calendar for weeks. I have huge plans for you, di Angelo. But no worries, you will be back home in time for the surprise
party Bianca has planned. Oh come on, I know you've known for at least two months now."

Nico grinned sheepishly. "In my defense, after nearly a century with her, I know her and I know her
tells. She can't lie to me. So... plans? For you and me? Yeah? Tell me more?"

"No—ope", chimed Percy mischievously as he leaned in to kiss Nico again. "Now get out of your
clothes. Let's go downstairs to the pool. Gives us a legit excuse to get changed after the... mess."

"Legit, huh?", chuckled Nico amused.

Percy huffed and shoved Nico before grabbing a change of clothes and ran ahead. By the time Nico
followed him, changed into swim-shorts, Percy was already in the water and changed. Into his
merboy form. It felt good letting the tail free for something else than training. As always, Nico just
stood there and marveled at him for a very long moment.

"Stop staring at me like this is some kind of museum, idiot", snorted Percy.

"But you are my favorite piece of art", argued Nico with a pout before joining Percy.

Nico sighed as he got to soak in the heated pool. It was nice, the warm salt-water. He had come to
truly appreciate it ever since he had started dating a merboy. He laughed softly as Percy splashed him
with his tail. The merboy was swimming circles around him, looking absolutely gorgeous.

"Do you have plans for spring break?", asked Percy suddenly, emerging right in front of Nico.

Nico blinked, surprised by the sudden pretty merboy all up in his face. "I... uhm. Yes. Yes, I do.
Hades and the clan are going on a bit of a... tour. Clan leaders like to meet up regularly, visit each
other's jurisdictions. This spring, we're going to New Orleans and Las Vegas."

"That... sounds so cool", whispered Percy in awe before grinning. "I mean, not as cool as going to
the underwater palace and meeting all the kings and queens of the oceans. Dive with me."

Sometimes, Nico had a hard time keeping up with his beautiful boyfriend. Smiling amused, he
allowed Percy to pull him down under the water. He loved how excited Percy was to meet the other
royals. Nico himself was also excited, even though he would not be there – but he was excited for
his boyfriend to get the proper royal treatment, to be treated and seen as the prince he was. Because
Percy deserved it. Nico offered his merboy a small smile as they hit the bottom of the pool. Percy sat
in front of him, his tail wrapped around Nico possessively.

This was odd for Nico, to stay under water for minutes at time. He had never done it before, not
before he met Percy. He could, yes, because he was technically dead and didn't need air, but he had
never thought about doing it. Not until New Year's, when Percy had abducted him...

/flashback/

Nico frowned as he was being pulled away from the festivity. The mansion was decorated as the
clan hosted their annual New Year's Eve Gala – an even bigger event than the Christmas party had
been for that had only been for friends of the family. The gala however, it was for everyone of rank
and name. A who's who of New York's supernatural society. And he being pulled away from it.

"Where are you taking me, Perseus?", asked Nico a little irritated.

As much as he hated this gala, he hated the idea of being outside during New Year's Eve even more.
And it was already getting dark. Earlier, some idiots had already fired their fireworks into the
evening sky and it had taken everything Nico had to keep himself from slipping into a panic attack.
"Babe", whispered Percy as he finally came to a halt in front of the lake, turning toward Nico and grasping both of his hands gently. "I saw you have a panic attack over one firecracker earlier this month. Tonight... You told me how you feel about that..."

"Yes, I did", grunted Nico confused. "That's why I would prefer to be deep inside the mansion, where the loud music and chatter will tune things down... considerably..."

"No", huffed Percy seriously, locking eyes with Nico. "I've been thinking about this ever since you told me. Because I just had to find a better solution for you. So I dove into your pond, to test how deep it is, and I let Leo roar over it and... the water is pretty deep and isolates sound really well. So, you and I, we will leave the gala to the others and we will spend New Year's in the pond."

"...What? In the pond?", asked Nico surprised. "I'm... I'm not a merboy."

"Yeah, but you're dead. So you kind of don't require air either", pointed Percy out. "Now come."

Nico had no time to protest anymore because Percy pulled him over into the pond, Percy changing shape into his merboy self and as he dove deeper and deeper, Nico let himself be dragged along, to the bottom of the pond. Yes, Nico knew exactly why the sirens managed to seduce and kill sailors in the past. He too would allow for his pretty siren to do anything to him. Nico was a bit uncomfortable as they settled down on the ground of the pond, Percy getting comfortable and pulling Nico up against his chest, holding him safe and comfortable. The longer they stayed, the more Nico relaxed. He found himself sprawled out on top of Percy, comfortable and at ease, with Percy's fingers carding through his curls, the fishes curiously circling them. And as the fireworks started, all Percy and Nico registered were the colors painting the surface of the pond. No sounds, no flashbacks. Only colorful lights and the safety of his chosen mate. Yes. In that moment, at the bottom of the pond, where Percy Jackson had spent weeks trying to figure out a way to help Nico and make him feel safe, where Percy Jackson had done the impossible and protected Nico from the greatest fear and trigger he had, taking a time of year that usually plagued Nico with terrors and panic attacks and making it warm, comfortable and filled with love. In that moment, Nico knew that there would never be anyone else for him. In all his years, no one had ever gone through such troubles for him, but here Percy was, doing everything to protect Nico, even just emotionally.

Reaching out, Nico grasped his lover's neck and pulled him into a slow, awkward kiss. Percy laughed into it because both of them ended up with a mouthful of pond-water, but somehow it still was the most romantic kiss they had ever shared because it was filled with love and safety.

/flashback\end/flashback\end

Percy and Nico stayed at the bottom of the pool until Tyson tackled them. Surprised, they resurfaced, with a giggling child attached to them. Tyson flapped his tail to splash them.

"Ty! When did you get home?", asked Percy as the brothers started chasing each other.

"Only just! Mom and I bring dinner! I was supposed to get you, but now I wanna play with you first! Dinner can wait, first you have to catch me, big brother!", declared Tyson with a giggle.

Nico watched them with a fond smile, one merboy chasing after the other. It was frighteningly easy for Nico to picture Percy, happy and cheerful, chasing after their own little guppies. It made Nico wonder; would they have little kittens or little guppies? Vampires, they could not be born, they could only be turned, so their children would have Percy's legacy. But oh, they would be beautiful either way. Not yet. Not for a while, not for years, maybe a decade or even two. But one day, Nico knew they would have those beautiful little kittens and guppies, because Nico knew there was no other love than Percy Jackson for him. Not anymore. There was no going back.
Nico's eyelids fluttered open as he was kissed awake like a damn princess in a fairy tale. He locked eyes with bright emeralds and relaxed into the kiss. As they parted, Percy very slowly kissed along Nico's jawline, hands spread out on Nico's chest. Smiling pleased, Nico wrapped his arms around Percy's waist, easily using his vampire-strength to manhandle Percy so the catboy was sitting straddling his lap. Percy's tail brushed against Nico's thighs.

"Happy ninety-second birthday, old man", whispered Percy teasingly.

"Thank you, gattino", whispered Nico with a small smile. "What a nice way to wake up..."

"Oh, it can be even nicer. If you'd want that", hummed Percy gently.

"How...?", asked Nico intrigued, fingers in Percy's hair, playing with the cat-ears.

Percy leaned in to lick along the shell of Nico's ear. "If you... If you want to, I could... suck you?"

"W—What?", grunted Nico slightly high-pitched. "Y—You don't have to."

"I know", huffed Percy and rolled his eyes before looking into his boyfriend's eyes. "But I want to. I really want you. Been thinking about it ever since we started jerking each other off. Feeling the weight and girth of your cock, tasting your cum... I was wondering what it would feel like..."

"W—When did you...", stammered Nico, eyes round and large.

"C'mon, you don't really think I never licked my fingers afterward?", teased Percy amused, kissing Nico's nose. "You're so adorable. So... If you'd want it, I would give you a birthday blowjob."

"Yesyesyesyesyes", chanted Nico gladly and greedily. "You have no idea how much I want you."

Percy smiled gently and kissed down Nico's neck. Nico shuddered as Percy pushed his shirt out of the way and pulled it off Nico, making a pleased purring sound as he got to stare at shirtless Nico.

"Horny kitten", grunted Nico a bit flustered but also amused. "Stop staring at me like I'm salmon."

"Why?", asked Percy confused while tugging on Nico's boxers. "I am going to devour you."

Nico spotted a full-blown blush at this. And then his boxers were gone and the catboy in front of him licked his lips greedily, zooming in on Nico's hard member. He licked a broad stripe up the shaft, making Nico shudder. Generally, Percy approached the matter like Nico was some kind of ice-cream treat. He greedily licked up and down, nibbling on it, gently kissing it, wrapping his lips around the head and swallowing more and more of Nico. Percy was clearly inexperienced, but oh he was enjoying himself – and that was what mattered to Nico. He groaned darkly, bucking up on instinct as Percy sucking him off with more vigor.

"G—Gattino", groaned Nico hoarsely. "I'm close!"

Percy hummed in acknowledgment, which was so not helping. The vibrations shot through Nico as pure bliss and he found himself coming hard. The vampire stared bleary-eyed down at Percy. Percy, with his lips swollen and red, cum dripping down his chin and his pupils cat-like slits, looking at Nico like a predator who had just made wonderful prey. Though Nico couldn't keep from laughing as Percy brought a hand up to rub the back of it over his chin and then lick the back of his hand.

"You groom yourself like a kitten", laughed Nico fondly. "Come here, kitty-cat."
Purring pleased, Percy crawled up to lay in his lover's arms. "Shut up. I am a kitty-cat. Now reach over to the nightstand to go and get our breakfast, okay?"

"...Breakfast?", grunted Nico with a frown, turning toward the nightstand. "Oh. Huh."

"Did you really not notice the breakfast?", asked Percy teasingly.

They both sat up some and placed the tray on both their joined laps. Two plates with piles of pancakes, covered in red and with strawberries on top. When Nico dug in, hungry from his orgasm, he paused to note that the red covering the pancakes was his favorite blood-type.

"You... covered them in blood", pointed Nico out.

"Well, your blood orange juice is also... true to its name", noted Percy amused and tilted his head to kiss Nico's cheek. "I love you. All of you. And being a blood-drinking vampire is part of you. I'm not gonna make you eat human food that does nothing but taste good to you, silly."

Nico fell more and more in love with Percy with every little, thoughtful thing the hybrid did. Though the next moment, Nico's eyes widened in mortification as he watched Percy dig into his own plate of pancakes covered in red. Percy made a show of licking his lips before laughing.

"You're so cute, di Angelo", snorted Percy. "Mine are covered in strawberry syrup. Not blood."

Nico took a relieved breath and nodded before settling in and continuing with the meal. "So... two weeks ago, you promised me a surprise. What is it? I mean, did you have more plans, or...?"

"First breakfast, then we get dressed and will be on our way. We're meeting Carter in an hour..."

"Carter? Carter was not what I was expecting for my birthday", grunted Nico a bit disappointed.

"How about you shut that pretty mouth of yours and just wait and see?", teased Percy amused.

Waiting and seeing was worth it, because Carter Kane had only been a short stop. The warlock had opened a portal for Percy and Nico to go through and the next moment, they were in a large, dark forest. Nico slowly started to understand why he had been supposed to dress in comfortable clothes that were suited well for quick navigation. Nico tensely looked around.

"The lesser di Angelo. Happy birthday", grunted Zoe Nightshade, amusement in her eyes.

Nico frowned curiously. Zoe was the leader of the local Dark Elves – or Night Elves, as they preferred because there was a certain connotation to 'Dark' that sat wrong with them. While the difference between Dark Elves and Light Elves was not that ones were good magic and others were evil magic. It was simply that Light Elves preferred harvest and tending to crops, thriving in the sunlight, while Dark Elves were hunters who used the cover of night to stalk their prey. It was night, wherever they currently were, it was deepest night. Zoe's best friend Phoebe was with her, so were three others from their hunting party – Kinzie, Naomi and Celyn.

"What... are we doing here, Perce?", asked Nico lowly.

"You're a predator", pointed Percy out. "I did some research on vampires. You're not just a dominant, you're a natural predator and that's why you went to war so often too. It's in your blood. So I was thinking about a maybe better outlet for that, for you. A hunt. You and me, letting out our inner predators and hunting our own lunch. Zo says this is the best spot for deer."
"Don't call me that, Jackson", grunted Zoe and elbowed Percy. "So, the two of you will be on your own. You can use our camping grounds to prepare your food afterward. See it as a birthday present from us, lesser di Angelo. We expect booze at your party tonight, by the way."

Nico huffed and ignored the women in favor of honing his senses. Percy had his tail and ears out, eyes narrowed as he too focused on the potential prey. Before the kitten could bolt off, Nico grasped his wrist and held him back, tilting his head with a frown.

"Percy. I appreciate this, but... for an unmated dominant and an unmated submissive to hunt together, for each other, it's... it's a very old... it...", started Nico awkwardly.

"First step in courting, yeah, I know", hummed Percy, eyes focused on a deer in the distance. "I have actually been paying attention to my classes, you know. Don't really know how it will be judged though. Whoever catches the bigger deer is going to be the better mate, or what...?"

"No. It's... to prove you are willing and capable of taking care of each other", grunted Nico, pausing. "Wait. You know. But... why do you... what..."

Percy rolled his eyes fondly as he patted Nico on the shoulder. "Stop worrying so much. It's just one tiny step. It's not like a proposal. This whole courting thing is like a years long process if you do it proper and you can end it at any given point, right? So... do you want to hunt with me now?"

Nico's eyes flashed at the challenge in his chosen one's voice. Percy formally started their courting process. Percy wanted Nico. And now Percy was already gone ahead, rushing off toward the deer. Oh, that sneaky little kitten was challenging him. Sure, if that was how Percy wanted to play it. Nico's eyes flashed blood-red and he dashed after Percy. It was a wild and animalistic chase, Nico lured in as much by the scent of the deer as he was by the scent of his beautiful submissive.

By the end of it, as instincts had taken both predators over, they found themselves drenched in the blood of two deer, kissing wildly and passionately as the adrenaline from the hunt was still coursing through their systems. Percy shuddered as Nico licked the blood off of him greedily.

"Beautiful mate", growled Nico lowly, possessively, licking along Percy's neck. "Successful hunter, strong, pretty, fierce, perfect, so good and gorgeous, mine."

Percy just purred in delight, arching his body and baring more of himself to his chosen one. He enjoyed being showered in praise and affections like this. As the adrenaline ebbed off and they were less messy, they returned to the camp-side with their prey, ready to prepare it for eating.

Percy had spent a lot of time and thought on what to get his boyfriend. In the end, he did research – with the help of Annabeth, Piper and Leo – to find out what courting even meant, what it implied, what it entailed. Percy had thought of it as a proposal and he was definitely not ready for that yet, but it was more the slight nudge into a shared future. It wasn't as serious as a proposal, at least not in the beginning. If done proper, it could take years. It was, essentially, like being in a relationship just with the intention of proving to each other that you were committed to this relationship and wished to make each other better. That was what Percy wanted. He wanted to show Nico that he supported him, wanted Nico to support him. And with their important statuses, it might come off as more respected if they were courting. But he also liked that it wasn't necessarily the all strings attached kind of thing like a grand proposal with ring and all. It was a more private matter, that only belonged to them – and Percy thoroughly approved of that.

"You two work well together", noted Zoe softly as they were all eating together.

"Mhmh", confirmed Percy with the smallest grin. "But we really should hurry up and get back home
to get changed before the party. Blood is so last season."

"Not for vampires", threw Phoebe in, eyeing Nico, who just huffed.

/\break\/

"...Why is there a pair of antlers on your bed, di Angelo?", asked Annabeth mortified.

Nico, who was only half-dressed at that point, turned toward his best friend. "Because... Percy's birthday present for me was a hunt. We killed this deer together. And I brought the antlers home as a trophy. I will... I will carve the first piece of courting jewelry out of them, to make them... more meaningful, because we hunted and killed this beast together, we prepared the meal we shared together. It was... an intense feeling. Far more intense than any hunt the clan ever had."

"Mh. So Percy took the first step after all", smirked Annabeth. "Good. Now move your ass, everyone is waiting downstairs and Frank is struggling with keeping Leo from the cake."

Nico put a shirt on and followed the Valkyrie out of the bedroom and downstairs, where the entire clan and all of Nico's friends were waiting with a real feast. Not that Nico was hungry; the deer they had eaten earlier had been very filling and good. Still, Nico gladly took a piece of cake or two.

Exhausted from the day, Nico found himself curling together on the couch in the corner, piece of cake on a plate in his hand, Percy pressed up against his side, eyes closed and seemingly asleep. Nico was lazily running his fingers through Percy's hair, his boyfriend's head resting on his shoulder. Bianca, Thalia, Hazel, Frank, Leo, Ethan, Alabaster, Annabeth and Reyna were sitting with them. Though Leo was clearly trying to get Hazel to dance with him, straddling her lap and nuzzling her neck in silent pleading. Hazel was mainly ignoring him and instead talking to Bianca and Frank, much to Nico's amusement. He sure knew he wouldn't be able to ignore Percy if his kitten was on his lap like that. As though he had heard Nico's thoughts, Percy snuggled closer.

"Your boyfriend is being rude", commented Bianca with a pout. "I went to great lengths to organize this party for you and I thought that he would... dance with you, or something. And not sleep."

"Leave him be, Bia", growled Nico protectively. "He is good. Good kitten."

"Good kitten, eh?", snorted Alabaster. "Carter's magic clings to you. What were you up to?"

"None of your business", replied Nico smoothly, locking eyes with his friend. "Go dance with E."

"E seconds that motion", agreed Ethan amused, grasping his boyfriend's hand. "Come, Ally."

Snorting amused, Nico tried to maneuver a fork of cake toward his mouth, but a quick hand shot forward, grabbed his wrist and redirected it toward Percy's mouth instead. Sea-green cat-eyes stared at him mischievously as Percy licked the fork in slow-motion.

"Damn. Can you like... eat and not make it look so obscene?", asked Thalia stunned.

"You should have seen the way he tore the flesh off the hide of the deer", growled Nico, voice dark. "It was absolutely magnificent. My kitten has fangs like any vampire."

"Oh goodness, you two are going to be the absolutely disgusting kind of couple", groaned Annabeth, burying her face in Reyna's neck. "Suddenly I regret having encouraged this."

"Little liar", whispered Reyna gently as she spotted the pleased smile on Annabeth's lips.
"Don't tell them", whispered Annabeth back amusement shining in her eyes.

Percy and Nico all the while were indeed busy being absolutely disgusting by getting lost in each other's eyes and exchanging kisses as though there were no problems in the world. Like everything was rainbows and unicorns and eternal happiness. When the others looked at Nico and Percy, they could even believe it, for that brief moment. The thing about happiness; it wasn't so simple.

Chapter End Notes

THERE WAS NOT SUPPOSED TO BE ANY COURTING. Percy just decided to do whatever he wants! *glares at Percy* That was only supposed to happen in like three chapters. *continues glaring* Stubborn kitten.

Next chapter is gonna feature a little bit/lot of trouble for our darlings. Also, there will be dancing ;D
Chapter 27: The Spring Queen and the Ghost King

Percy smiled as he stood on a ladder, being held by Jason and Frank. He was hanging up a banner together with Annabeth. It was large, glittery and very artistic. Rachel had painted it.

"Annual Summers High Spring Ball", read Percy for about the hundredth time.

"It's a silly tradition. Since the school is named Summers High, it's a bit of a word-play to have a spring ball. Even though our school is not named after the season", sighed Annabeth frustrated.

"Oh", grunted Percy, blinking slowly. "It... isn't?"

"It's named after the greatest hunter in history", grunted Frank slightly amused, looking up at Percy. "Anne Summers. The first hunter to distinct between good and bad, instead of supernatural and human. She stood up for the rights of the supernatural and helped unite us all."

"That's cool", grinned Percy pleased. "So what's the deal with the ball, exactly?"

"Nothing much", shrugged Grover, holding Annabeth's ladder. "Just your regular vote for king and queen, lots of dancing, someone – mostly Pollux and Castor – spiking the punch. The usual."

"And I will be this year's queen."

Percy froze on his ladder for a second before he turned to look at Drew, her normal smug self. A sneer was aimed up at Percy, but she didn't speak. She knew she was on thin ice. Huffing, she whirled around and left. Something inside of Percy was bucking up.

"So, who's qualified to run for Spring Queen?", asked Percy, eyes still on Drew.

"Boy, you are way too much into trouble", snorted Piper delighted.

"Any girl and any submissive. Just like any boy and any dominant can run for king", replied Jason.

"You're going to run for Spring Queen?", asked Frank doubtfully. "Wouldn't you rather... run for Spring King? I mean, you're a dude and you're still new to the whole supernatural-stuff."

"Eh, not that new anymore", shrugged Percy thoughtfully. "Besides, I wouldn't be able to directly beat Drew if I ran for king. Not to mention, I already have the perfect king in mind."

"Oh, Nico's gonna love this", snorted Jason amused. "He hates those dances."

"He may hate school dances, but he loves me", hummed Percy pleased.

Percy was curled together against Mrs. O'Leary's side. They had been playing around for two hours and Percy was extremely exhausted. Leo and Festus were curled together next to them – the hellhound loved playing with the dragon. Their respective partners were with them, considering they were at the estate of Hades di Angelo. This was the largest 'park' that was exclusively accessible for
the supernatural, after all. Frank looked pleased as he had Leo sat on his lap, Hazel leaned against
Frank's side and playing with Leo's curls while the little dragon was napping, Festus a constant
presence around them, guarding the little dragon and his mates.

"Ni—ico", drawled Percy softly, tilting his head up.

The softness of his voice was betrayed by the mischief in his eyes. Nico frowned as he looked at his
boyfriend. Percy was playing with the necklace he had gotten from Nico on Valentine's Day – the
first official courting gift and Percy's most prized possession.

/flashback

Nico was unnecessarily nervous. He had worked hard but also fast on finishing the first piece of
courting jewelry. After all, a little over two weeks after his birthday was Valentine's Day coming up
and that seemed like the perfect day to give Percy the first courting jewelry. That didn't make him
any less nervous though. The hunt with Percy had been one thing – and oh it had been glorious and
thrilling and just mesmerizing – but this was a far more tangible step of courting. Truly official.

"You look like you're on the way to the guillotine", teased Percy amused. "Is dating me truly that
awful, Mister di Angelo? Because I will have you know that I could go and have my pick."

He was clearly teasing, but Nico still sighed as he sat down opposite Percy at the restaurant. "I'm
sorry. But you are right, Percy. You could have your pick. I'm a... burdened, old vampire."

"Oh, shut up", grunted Percy and threw his napkin at his boyfriend. "Have I not proven enough in
the past three months that I love you. I love you, with all your burdens, and I'm more than willing to
do everything I can to help you with any such burdens. Stupid vampire."

something special for Valentine's Day. Happy Valentine's Day, gattino."

He pushed the little box over toward Percy. The merboy frowned curiously and took it. Inside was a
pendant, a round disk but engraved with a cat and a bat chasing each other in a circle. It was white,
bone? No. Oh. Percy blinked surprised when he realized it was made out of antler.

"You made this yourself", accused Percy softly, cracking a grin. "You made it out of the spoils from
our courting hunt. You... You utter sap, this is absolutely gorgeous."

"You... like it?", asked Nico nearly shyly. "I'm not the best at carving, though I used to do it a lot."

"It's beautiful, Nick", whispered Percy gently, eyes sparkling. "Now I feel super cheap for just
making your a giant chocolate heart. Shesh. Way to make me look bad, di Angelo."

Nico laughed as his boyfriend leaned in to kiss him. As they parted, Nico put the necklace over
Percy's head. It was about an inch in diameter, with the cat and the bat standing out. Percy smiled
gently before leaning in again to kiss Nico once more, just a gentle peck but filled with love.

/flashback|

Percy always played with the pendant when he was deep in thought and it was an endearing habit
that made Nico's chest swell with pride. His chosen mate loved the first courting gift. Nico had done
good pleasing his beloved mer-kitten. Percy batted his long lashes temptingly.

The kitten wanted something from him. Nico wasn't an idiot, he knew when he was being
manipulated by his precious kitten. He just couldn't really do anything about it, because he was way
too weak to the kitten-eyes. Percy started purring, nudging his head against the underside of Nico's chin in a very manipulative way. Nico chuckled and leaned in to kiss Percy.

"What do you want from me, gattino?", inquired Nico amused.

"There's this... dance coming up", hummed Percy casually. "Spring Dance. And apparently, Drew is running as queen. And I kind of don't really want that. I want that crown. I want that official first dance to open the dance. I want... to be Spring Queen. Will you run with me, Ghost King?"

Nico heaved a long-suffering sigh. Apparently, the others had already warned Percy about what Nico thought of those silly dances. Otherwise the kitten wouldn't be so manipulative about the matter. Leaning down, Nico stole another kiss from his boyfriend.

"Okay. Fine", grunted Nico, easily grumbling under the look of kitten-eyes.

"...That was utterly anticlimatic. I came here to see my brother squirm and try to argue his way out of this", pouted Hazel, staring at the couple opposite them.

"There is no squirming out of any situation with the kitten-eyes aimed at me", grunted Nico with a deadpan. "There is absolutely no escape for me. I am doomed to obey those eyes."

Percy huffed and slapped Nico's chest. "Stupid vampire. Annie and Piper agreed to help plan our campaign. As stupid as Annabeth thinks those things to be, she is excited about the strategy behind planning a campaign. Piper promised to keep her in line."

"This is a disaster", muttered Nico fondly, shaking his head.

There were a couple close calls where Drew nearly got physical, but constantly being in public kept her in line. The campaign went pretty much without a hitch thanks to the help of everyone. Rachel eagerly painted and designed all signs and posters. Annabeth organized the best strategy, Piper knew how to present Percy and Nico as future king and queen. It was utterly ridiculous, but it was also so much fun, if Percy was being honest. What had started out as slightly petty attempt to better Drew had actually turned into a fun little project that Percy really enjoyed.

"No, Benthy, you're doing it all wrong!", complained Rhode frustrated.

"Why? Perce needs a special hair-style", argued Benthesykime confused.

"No. You're both doing it wrong. He needs to look badass because he's gonna be a badass Spring Queen", grunted Kymopoleia agitated, elbowing both her sisters to get to Percy.

Percy was just obediently sitting there and waiting for his sisters to do whatever they wanted to. Silena, Piper and Mike had jumped at the chance of prettying him up for the dance, but when Percy had told his family about the Spring Dance and about him running, his sisters had practically jumped him. Apparently, they were really invested in this. They really wanted their little brother to win this crown and they had asked to help him get ready for the dance. He had even allowed them to pick an outfit - though he wasn't quite sure whether he was regretting that right now.

He was wearing a soft-blue silken dress that was very form-fitting and very low cut in the back, held up around his neck and falling loose enough around his torso to elude the fact that he lacked the breasts to fill out the dress. It even sparkled, in the right light, and reached the floor. It was absolutely beautiful and Percy kind of liked the feeling of the silk on his skin. All three of his sisters had gone through their jewelry boxes to find the right accessories to go with the dress.
"The pendant really doesn't go well with the outfit", pointed Kym out.

Percy actually hissed at her for the suggestion. "Mine. No taking it off."

"Wow. You are really in love with Nico", grinned Benthy teasingly, nudging him.

Percy blushed and ducked his head, holding tightly onto his pendant. Rhode smiled and gently brushed Percy's hair out of his face. He ducked his head just a little more at that.

"No need to be embarrassed, Perce", chuckled Kym. "We might be immortal but there's no timer on when we find the one. If you find them, even early on, then... Well. Good for you."

"I don't know. I mean, I absolutely love him, but I don't know much yet", sighed Percy softly. "It's all still kind of overwhelming, even after over half a year. This whole... world and its rules. I just... For now, I'm just happy dating my boyfriend and still learning. I'm not gonna jump the gun. At the very least, I want to graduate high school, learn everything I can about how this society works, before I do anything rash. Nico and I, we're immortal. We have all the time in the world."

"That's a very mature look at things", praised Rhode with a smile. "You're right. You do have all the time in the world and if you don't feel ready for it yet, you should take all the time you need to get used to your... self. But you know that if you have questions or feel overwhelmed with anything, you can come to us anytime. We'll help you as best as we can, okay?"

"Word", agreed Kym, nudging Percy. "You're our precious little brother. We're here to guide and protect and all that stuff. Also to be bridesmaids when you actually do get mated."

Percy laughed softly, looking at his sisters. A year ago, he would have never even dreamed of a day like today. Of a conversation with his sisters like this. Benthy hummed as she finished up.

"Okay. All done. You're ready to take court now", declared Benthesikyme pleased.

"Just in time. Because your prince arrived in his chariot to pick you up for the ball."

Percy rolled his eyes as he turned toward Triton, sticking his tongue out. "First of all, it's a dance, not a ball. And secondly, Nico is my king and not my prince."

Triton rolled his eyes right back at his little brother. "Come on. Mom and dad want to take at least two dozen photos of you two before you're allowed to go, because mom promised Sally a detailed report on how tonight went down and how pretty her only son looked."

Blushing softly, Percy followed Triton out of the bedroom and downstairs to where Poseidon, Amphitrite and Nico were waiting. Nico's dress-shirt was in a matching color to Percy's dress. The vampire's jaw was essentially on the floor as he gaped at Percy.


"You broke Nico", noted Amphitrite in praising. "Well done, sweetie. Now come and pose next to your broken boyfriend so we can take pictures for your mother."

Laughing, Percy went to stand next to Nico, wrapping an arm around Nico's waist. Nico automatically wrapped his own arm around Percy's shoulders, staring down at him still in awe. The flashes nearly blinded Percy as both Poseidon and Amphitrite started taking pictures of them.

"Okay, okay, that is enough, parental units", grunted Triton amused. "The kids have to get going if they want to be on time for their coronation."
Percy mouthed a 'thank you' at Triton before leading Nico out of the house. The limousine was filled with impatiently waiting friends of theirs. Of course, Bianca and Thalia, as well as Hazel, Frank and Leo, also Jason and Calypso. Percy grinned as the two climbed in with them.

"...You're wearing a dress", noted Calypso surprised, eyebrows raised. "And you look good in it."

"Thanks, Cal", grinned Percy pleased, smoothing his dress down. "What can I say, I kind of expected Silena to put me in a dress for the Christmas ball already, so I figured, why not try it for this? To look like a proper queen. My sisters did some quality recon to find out what this year's crown looks like so my jewelry and dress fit perfectly with the crown."

"There is absolutely no way you could lose this", offered Bianca with an encouraging smile. "After all, Silena didn't run this year. She is usually the one running against Drew. But when she heard your determination, she figured she'd sit this one out."


"Look at my pretty boyfriend", murmured Nico in awe, still staring at Percy.

"You're pathetic, di Angelo", grunted Thalia and rolled her eyes. " Seriously."

"Shut up. Percy looks incredibly pretty", growled Nico irritated. "I'm allowed to fawn over my pretty boyfriend when he looks ridiculously gorgeous like that."

Percy smiled broadly, leaning into his boyfriend. God, he was so in love with Nico and with how much Nico basically worshiped him. He felt so cherished and valued by the vampire. This was what he had always imagined true love to be; being invested in making each other feel valued and worthy, cherishing and making each other better.

"Ready to dance with me, my king?", asked Percy with a teasing grin as they reached the school.

Nico took Percy's hand and together they headed toward the gym, where their other friends were already waiting. Silena squealed and jumped Percy the moment she laid eyes on him.

"You are beautiful. If I had known you were up to wearing a dress, I would have put you into one for the winter gala already!", exclaimed Silena, looking him up and down. "We are going shopping after spring break. You, me and my mother's credit card."

"Sounds like a plan", grinned Percy and ducked his head.

Tomorrow was the start of spring break. Today was the last day of school – and if Percy was being honest, running for queen had totally distracted him from the jitters. This would be the first spring break that Percy was going to spend with his father and half-siblings. He was going to the underwater palace. With them. He was super nervous but also excited about it. They were going to leave early tomorrow morning and Percy already knew he was going to be extremely exhausted from the night of dancing and partying, but he really didn't care too much.

"Jackson. In a dress. Why am I not surprised?", sneered Drew with distaste.

"Tanaka. In a cheap and tasteless dress. Why am I not surprised?", countered Percy unimpressed.

Drew huffed and turned red, just as Percy left her in his dust. He laughed softly with Piper and Leo as their group claimed two tables. Nico kept looking at him like the most smitten teen ever, which was flattering but also a bit embarrassing considering how old Nico was.
"Nico, this is getting weird, stop staring at me", muttered Percy red-cheeked.

"...I apologize. I didn't know I had a thing for pretty boys in dresses", muttered Nico embarrassed.

"...Ah", nodded Percy, spotting the smallest smile as he leaned in to kiss Nico.

"Well then, before the dance truly begins, I think it's time to announce our king and queen", called Principal Chiron as he stepped onto the stage and toward the microphone.

"Oh. Come!", exclaimed Percy excitedly, tugging Nico along.

Drew and Bryce already stood there, proud and tall and with a matching set of sneers. Mitchell and Kayla, as well as Nathan and Gwen, had already joined Drew and Bryce. Percy smiling gently as he and Nico fell into line with the others. The gentle smile turned smug as Nathan whistled at him.

"Looking good, Jackson", hummed Nathan.

"Your girlfriend isn't looking shabby either", pointed Percy out, winking at Gwen.

She grinned as she returned his wink. Chiron cleared his throat, gaining their attention. Everything went quiet as they watched how Lupa walked up to the principal with a golden envelope.

"The royal couple of this spring a—are...", started Chiron as he very slowly opened the envelope, taking the card out in slow-motion. "Please bow to your king – Nico di Angelo." Cheers and clapping as Nico stepped up to accept his crown and scepter. "And now the one you're truly waiting for. Your queen. And with the crown and the title comes the honor of deciding and officiating prom night too. The one to get bestowed this great honor this year is – Percy Jackson."

Drew took five steps forward before she paused, a horrified look on her face. Percy smiled at her as he paused next to her for a moment, before joining Nico in front of Chiron and accepting his tiara with the white and aquamarine gems; going along perfectly with his dress. Smiling gently, he turned toward Nico, who stared at him with gentle, loving eyes.

"My gorgeous queen", whispered Nico softly. "Would you like to dance with me?"

"Of course I will, my handsome king", grinned Percy, accepting his boyfriend's hand.

A soft song started playing as Percy and Nico took the first dance. Slowly, other couples started to join them on the dance-floor. Not Drew and Bryce though. They stood aside, glaring heatedly at Percy, but being clever enough not to speak up.

"May I take this dance with the queen?", asked Luke teasingly after a while.

Nico glowered a little but he stepped aside to let the fox-shifter dance with Percy. He couldn't hog Percy all night, even though he really really wanted to. Instead, Nico went to sit at the table with Ethan and Alabaster, who were heavily drinking the by now spiked drinks.

"So. Tonight's the night?", asked Alabaster playfully, earning a confused look from Nico. "Come on, you're lusting after him so ridiculously obvious that you could as well be literally drooling over him. You two still haven't had sex. So, is tonight the night, before Percy leaves for two weeks?"

Nico blinked slowly, unable to form words. Sex? Oh. That was actually... he would like that. But he didn't think they were there just yet. Though he could maybe give Percy a blowjob? So far, it had only been Percy going down on Nico. It was ridiculous, every time Nico tried to go down on Percy, the merboy somehow managed to twist them over and take Nico apart instead. Tonight. Tonight,
Nico was going to give his queen the pleasure he had been getting for two months now.

Percy gasped softly as he was being pushed against the wall. They had gotten into Percy's bedroom through the window, thanks to Nico's wings and Percy's quick paws. Nico growled lowly as he kissed Percy's neck. A shudder wrecked Percy at the scratch of Nico's fangs on his throat. Gladly, Percy bared more of his throat to his lover, though he gasped once more as Nico untied the dress, behind Percy's neck. It unfolded and slipped down Percy's body. The heat of the moment, the excitement of the day, left Percy blissfully distracted. The crown on his head and the boxers were the only pieces of clothing on his body. Then, Nico started kissing down Percy's torso, licking and biting along the way, leaving bite-marks and saliva in his wake. He dipped his tongue into Percy's naval as he hooked his fingers into the boxers and pulled them down. Percy's erection sprang free and Nico's eyes darkened at that. It was his first time seeing Percy's cock. Licking his lips in pure hunger, Nico licked along it, using his hands to slowly push Percy toward the bed until the merboy was actually sitting on it. Slipping his hands between Percy's legs, he gently pried them apart.

Nico froze, resting a hand on Percy's inner thigh. His eyes were glued to the faint scars running up Percy's thighs, inside and front. His eyes darkened even more as a growl ripped from his throat.

"Who did this to you?", asked Nico, voice angry.

"...Mh?", grumbled Percy confused, opening his eyes. "Why did you sto..."

Percy swallowed hard as he realized he was naked in front of Nico. And Nico was very decidedly staring at Percy's scars. Dread overcame Percy and he scrambled to sit up and cover himself.

"Who did this?", asked Nico again. "Tell me. I'll rip their throat out. Who hurt you?"

"No one hurt me, Nico", sighed Percy and glared defiantly. "I... I did this."

"...What?", asked Nico shocked, backing off some. "W—What do you... mean?"

Biting his lower lip hard, Percy sat up. "It's... I've been doing this for years. It's my coping mechanism. When I..." Percy paused and blinked slowly. "When I have a panic-attack. It anchors me. Helps me focus when I'm overwhelmed with just... everything..."

He startled when Nico gathered him up in a tight hug. "Percy..." His voice was so broken and filled with so much pain that Percy just wanted to take it all away and fix this. "Please don't. Please don't hurt yourself, please don't hurt yourself, you're so... you're my... please don't..."

"Nico...", whispered Percy stunned, running soothing fingers through Nico's hair. "I..."

When Nico looked up at him, there were tears in his eyes. "You are the most precious thing in my life right you. You did... so much for me. Please. Please don't hurt yourself. Not for me, but for yourself. You are so amazing and you deserve better. You worked so hard to find ways to help me with my problems, please... please give me a chance to help you? Because you deserve to get better. I... I know your past has been... lonely... and you didn't have anyone to turn to. But you do now. You have your siblings and friends and me. If things become too overwhelming for you, please... please try to talk to someone. The thought that you hurt yourself because you don't feel like you can trust anyone enough to open up, it breaks my heart, Percy."

"I... I've been doing it for years. It's quick. Effective", mumbled Percy slightly defiantly.

"I know I can't expect you to drop an unhealthy coping mechanism overnight", sighed Nico, voice
rough. "I... there was a decade where I self-medicated against the PTSD with alcohol. And I didn’t see why I should stop either. Not at the time. So I'm not... going to set you an ultimatum, because I know it won't work. But... But I need you to promise that you'll try. Try to fight against the easy path and seek out someone else to help you. Me. Anyone. Please... Please try..."

They stared at each other for a long moment and it felt like all the things they had been through together now caught up with them – being alone in the cave, fighting against the bullies at school, defeating Bryce when he attacked Nico, dealing with Nico's PTSD. Both of them had learned how to approach the other about something he didn't want to deal with. They were both stubborn.

"...If you tell anyone. If you tell my parents. I never want to see you again", stated Percy very firmly, holding Nico's gaze to show how serious he was. "I'll... try to... talk to you instead. But I can't promise. I'll... give you a chance to... find a different solution for me, if that's important to you, but... but if you go behind my back on this, we are really through."

Chapter End Notes

Riiight. This chapter totally ran away from me, because Nico and Percy were supposed to break up at the end. You know. Percy panicking that Nico would be overbearing or tell his parents and thus breaking up and Nico having to work to get him back, but then this odd thing called character development happened where Nico and Percy both learned from what happened in the past and thus managed to deal with each other like grown ups?? Totally weird? :O

Aaanyway. Next chapter is gonna focus all on the family, because Percy is spending his first spring break under the sea! Getting to know the other royals and bonding with his siblings ;D
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 28: Spring Break Under the Sea (Part 1)

Tyson was giggling and kept glancing at Percy as they dove deeper and deeper. They were like a rainbow in itself – Rhode's yellow tail and tinted skin, Proteus in orange, Kymopoleia in red, Benthesikyme in purple, Percy in blue, Triton in green, Tyson in a soft brown. Percy loved that, loved that he had not yet seen two merpeople in the same shade of color. Benthesikyme's tail was more of a lilac purple, while Piper's had more of a darker shade of purple.

"Stop giggling at Percy, it's impolite, Ty", chided Rhode gently. "It's Percy's first time."

"I know—ow. That's why I'm giggling, Rhodey", pouted Tyson. "I can't wait to show Percy everything and it's so cool how he stares at the palace like it's awesome which it is!"

And yes, Percy was staring at the palace below them like it was awesome because yes it was. The palace was luminescent, like many large gems all around the surrounding city, providing the light this deep down below the surface. It glowed and it was beautiful. There were merpeople and dolphins swimming around the palace. Fishes, schools of fishes in bright colors. Coral reefs looking like gardens – probably actually being gardens. It was breathtaking.

"You have to come see the summer-camp!", exclaimed Tyson excitedly. "And the human museum! You'll laugh a lot! I laughed a lot too! It's funny. And you have to meet grandparents!"

"Not... your grandparents", interrupted Poseidon softly. "They... are dead. Amy's parents."

"Oh, you will meet many", smiled Amphitrite. "My parents will not be the only royals over. We expect all the kings and queens for dinner tonight, to celebrate our return. It's tradition."

"...Yeah, I'm totally not nervous about that", muttered Percy, eyes wide.

"You'll be fine, baby bro", laughed Kym and ruffled Percy's hair.

Percy sighed exhausted as he collapsed on his bed. He had his own room. Poseidon had it decorated for him and while relatively generic, Percy liked it. Blue luminescent stones provided the light. His bed was a giant dark-blue shell with a large soft-blue sponge as the mattress. He was laying sprawled out and staring at the ceiling, trying to process. Tyson had pulled him through the entire palace in lightning speed, showing him everyone's rooms and the kitchen and dinner hall and stables – hippocami, actual real hippocami! It was just so much to take in and he was pretty sure he was going to get lost tonight for that great banquet thingy.

"Percy?", asked Poseidon as he knocked on the door and poked his head in. "Ah. There you are. I've been trying to track you down for two hours now... Every time I just missed you."

"Ye—eah. Tyson gave me a ten hour tour in under two hours", muttered Percy with a slightly mortified look on his face as he sat up. "What's up, dad?"

Poseidon sighed as he swam over to the bed and sat down next to Percy. "The kings and queens will
be here tonight, but they will not all be alone. For one, your siblings' lovers will be here too. Which
you might have expected, but King Pontus brought his unmated dominant son. And so did Oceanus
and Tethys. I thought it would be good to give you a heads up. They're here because of you. The
unmated submissive prince. I... personally don't want to get involved."

"Mh?", grunted Percy confused, tilting his head.

"I know Nico is your first boyfriend and I do not want to be the father who tells you your high
school sweetheart won't last and that you should think long-term. But I also don't want to tell you to
flat-out decline their offer", sighed Poseidon, looking a bit troubled. "They're good matches, good
men. But I don't want to meddle in your decision. I want you to get to know this world, but to be
careful; many might just try to charm you for your status."

"Ah", nodded Percy and blinked slowly. "Thanks, dad. For... the warning and for bringing me."

"Oh, boy, I would have brought you many years ago if I had known", whispered Poseidon and
pulled his son into a hug. "I'm... sorry I never did. I hope you'll enjoy this trip."

"Yes, yes, he will. Now get out so we can get him ready, dad!", ordered Benthesikyme.

The next moment, Benthya, Kym and Rhode swam into the room and ushered Poseidon out. They
were carrying silver jewelry adored with sapphires and aquamarines, blue silk in about two dozen
different shades. They started wrapping it around him like a toga with various layers, overlapping in
ways that displayed all the shades and layers, keeping it in place with pins and pearls and wrist-bands
and belts. It looked really amazing in the end, made him look truly royal and the silk flowed
beautifully in the water. He looked amazing. Blushing brightly, he turned toward his sisters. They
were dressed in a very similar manner, only that their colors complimented their own tails.

"Oh, I have to take a picture to send it to Nico!", declared Benthesikyme excitedly. "He'll be so
pouty that he missed this. You look amazing, baby brother."

Percy blinked as she got a phone out and took a picture. "We... We're literally at the bottom of the
ocean. How... uhm... How do you have 

"Honey, we have internet", pointed Kym out. "What? We don't live in the stone-age. And with a bit
of magic, we can all make it work pretty well. We got you a shell-phone too."

"Ah. Like cell-phone", giggled Percy as he was handed a phone in shell-form.

"Ye—ep. Now come", ordered Kym and pulled Percy along with her.

But before they could leave the bedroom, Amphitrite stopped them at the doorway. She looked
breathtaking in her own rosy gown, added on with a heavier stola that had silver embroidery.

"There is just one thing still missing and that's why I'm here", declared Amphitrite with a smile.

She revealed a pillow she had been holding behind her back. On top of it rested a crown, delicate
and designed like a silver coral growing in a circle, with pearls and sapphires. It was beautiful. Percy
blinked slowly as she set it atop his head and fixed it in his hair.

"There. Now you look like the prince you are", smiled Amphitrite and kissed his forehead. "Now
come along, children. We shouldn't be the last ones at the banquet."

Laughing, her daughters and Percy followed her along the halls and toward a giant ball-room. Percy
bit his lips and paused, grabbing Rhode's and Benthya's hands for support as they waited to be
announced. There was a roaring trumpet-like sound.

"Presenting our fair Queen Amphitrite and her daughters Princess Kymopoleia, Princess Benthesikyme and Princess Rhode", announced a dolphin-merman who looked way too serious for Percy's liking. "And introducing King Poseidon's son, Prince Perseus."

Still biting his lips, Percy allowed his sisters to lead him in. They swam toward the table where their brothers and father were already sitting. The table faced a U-shaped seating arrangement with who Percy believed to be all the other ocean royals. All of them had gotten up upon their entrance and were now bowing toward Amphitrite – and them. Percy blushed involuntarily.

"May I introduce? My son!", declared Poseidon with a bright smile, resting his hands on Percy's shoulders. "See! As handsome as I told you! And a clever boy too. He's going to be the star-swimmer during all competitions this year. He has been training very hard."

"Poseidon, honey, slow down", requested Amphitrite fondly, taking her husband's hands to remove them from Percy. "Let the boy sit down before you overwhelm everyone."

Percy was positively blushing by now. A lot. Was this how Poseidon talked about him? With so much... pride? Because the royals in front of him looked mostly amused and fond, like they had heard all of this a dozen times already. Slowly, Percy sat down between Poseidon and Tyson.

"Right. Of course, love", grunted Poseidon embarrassed. "Percy, please let me introduce you..."

Percy nodded and looked around as he was being introduced. There was King Hydrus, sitting together with Queen Thalassa. He had already lost his queen, or so Percy had been told on their way here. And Queen Thalassa never had a king at her side. She was Aphrodite's mother. Percy knew that – Silena's grandma. Next to them was a slightly grumpy and a bit mean looking couple; King Phorkys and Queen Keto. At the corner where Proteus sat was Psamatheia, his wife, and next to her her parents – King Nereus and Queen Doris. Next to them were King Oceanus and Queen Tethys, with two of their sons – Prince Tiberinus and Prince Asopos. Lastly, there were King Pontus and his son Prince Aegeon. There was no way in hell that Percy was going to remember even a fifth of those names and faces. Honestly, he had been trying for months now, but he just wasn't that good at it – and even worse at the whole family tree entanglement. In the back of his mind he had that Nereus and Doris were Amphitrite's parents, were thus the grandparents Tyson had been looking forward to so much. That seemed important. Faintly, Percy also remembered that Oceanus and Tethys were the grandparents of Calypso. Silena had told him that before.

"We were mighty surprised when Amy told us you were a merboy", laughed Nereus. "We had not expected that. After all the drama around you, my boy – not that any of it is your fault. It was quite the news though. An illegitimate heir, after all those years."

"Ye—eah. I'm good for surprises", hummed Percy with a smile.

"Oh, he is", confirmed Triton and Proteus in a chorus.

"Now! Let's eat before any interrogations!", declared Hydrus with a grunt.

"Hear, hear", agreed Oceanus, Pontus and Poseidon.

Merpeople in fancy vests came in carrying large trays of the weirdest food in. It was sushi, mainly, and fish filet and the most fascinating things. Not really like human sushi, larger and with more algae and less rice. Like, no rice at all. Percy hummed and gasped every now and again as he ate his way through the array of food, apparently bringing joy to the others who found him endearing. Well, it
was his first time eating merpeople food so he was totally justified to be in awe. All of it was raw fish – but there were so many fishes he had never eaten before. So many tastes he had never experienced before. Dips and wrappings and side-dishes in odd colors and textures that Percy was too afraid to even ask what they were. But it was all so good. Which, granted, might be the merman in him speaking, considering he had eaten nearly raw deer after his hunt with Nico because he had been channeling his inner cat. Right now, he was all merman. Which was a nice change, he hadn't been able to fully embrace that side of himself just yet. Being in a pool or a pond was vastly different than being down here, under the sea, with other merpeople.

"Hi. You're Silena's grandma, right?", asked Percy with a friendly smile.

Percy and some of the others had already finished eating by now, two hours later, so everyone had started switching around their seats. Amphitrite had gone to sit with her parents, talking to them excitedly, while Proteus and Triton were talking to the sons of Oceanus – Tiberinus and Asopos. So Percy had decided to go and sit with Thalassa and talk to her.

"I am", confirmed the queen with a smile. "My girl told me all about you. Says you're a real sweetheart. My daughter would have loved to meet you too, but someone has to stay and be in charge while the queen is out of the house, mh?"

"I guess so", hummed Percy and tilted his head. "Silena is awesome. She helped me a lot settling with... uh... everything. Even tried drawing me a family tree of all the royals. Didn't quite get it all. But she tried. She's helped me, uh, with stuff like heat and things too? And faster swimming."

"That's my girl", grinned Thalassa proudly. "She's a true pearl."

"That she is", confirmed Percy with a smile.

He talked with Thalassa for a while, before Hydrus joined them and asked a dozen questions too. The oldest of kings was a kind and sweet man, talking highly of his only child and heir Ananke, who had remained to rule in his absence. He seemed rather excited about all of this, the socializing among kings and queens. And Percy had to agree, it was pretty nice. Pretty exciting.

"How about some music?", requested Kym loudly.

"Kymopoleia!", hissed Amphitrite with a glare. "Your manners."

"What? I'm a princess. I wanna dance", grunted Kym with a frown.

Within minutes, an entire band assembled. Percy put his money down for those instruments being magic, because despite them being under the sea, he could hear the beautiful soft jazz perfectly clear. Kym and Briareos were the first ones out on the dance-floor, soon joined by Enalos and Benthesikyme – and even Poseidon and Amphitrite, though Amy looked mildly flustered as Poseidon asked her to dance with him. Percy grinned softly as he watched his dad and stepmom dance together. Well, what constituted for dancing under the sea. The way they swayed their tails back and forth, how they flipped and twisted their fins to the tune. It looked fun.

"Would you like to dance, my prince?"

Percy blinked slowly, needing Thalassa to elbow him to notice that he was being spoken to. Right. Royal. Currently at the court of his very royal family at their very royal palace. He was still not used to being a prince. When he turned some, Aegeon floated in front of him with a charming smile. The dominant was broad and muscular, bulking arms shown off by the red robes he wore. He was
holding a hand out to Percy, waiting for Percy's answer. Percy wasn't really sure what to say. He really wanted to go and try how this dancing worked, but he didn't even know this guy.

"Come on, go and have some fun, boy", chuckled Thalassa with an amused twinkle in her eyes. "You're only young once and a handsome prince just asked you for a dance."

Biting his lips and ducking his head, he took the offered hand after all. Aegeon offered the most dazzling smile as he led Percy to the dance-floor and then wrapped his arms around Percy's waist. It was just dancing and Thalassa was right, he should be having fun.

"You... look a lot like Kym's boyfriend", pointed Percy out slowly.

"Briareos is my twin-brother", replied Aegeon amused, strong arms around Percy in a secure way.

"Ah. Right. Pontus. Lots of kids, right?", nodded Percy, concentrating hard on his tail. "Ah!"

"Relax, my prince", laughed Aegeon. "Just follow the flow of the music, one fin at a time."

"That's easier said than done", grunted Percy with a glare. "Urgh. This is hard."

"You're doing fine", assured Aegeon gently.

"You're charming", hummed Percy amused, looking up at the taller merman.

"I do try my best", smirked Aegeon with a teasing wink.

"I have a boyfriend", stated Percy. "Just... Dad told me you and the other two princes mainly tagged along because I'm an unmated submissive prince and you are unmated dominant princes and someone did the maths. So, just, letting you know that I'd like to get to know you, make friends, learn more about this world, hang out. But I'm not single, just because I'm unmated."

"Fair enough", hummed Aegeon, resting one hand on Percy's cheek. "It figures such a beauty doesn't stay alone for long. But dating is not mating. And a bit competition is... healthy."

Percy sub-consciously grasped the pendant around his neck. The carved disk from the deer's antler, with the bat and cat engraved on it. The first courting gift he had gotten from Nico.

"Dating is not mating, but courting is close enough", pointed Percy out.

"Did you know you could be courted by multiple people? Without a commitment?", stated Aegeon.

Percy hummed at that and shook his head. "I... feel a little dizzy. This dancing is weird. If you'd excuse me... I think I'll... go and rest for a little while."

"Very well, my prince", nodded Aegeon, bowing for Percy.

Percy sighed softly as he made his way out of the ball-room and back toward his room. It had been a loud and exhausting day and now having this prince blatantly state that he wanted to court Percy? Just because Percy was a prince? Honestly, he could feel the headache building behind his eyes. Once in his room, he threw himself onto his bed. Blinking slowly, looked at the shell-phone on his nightstand. Rolling onto his back, Percy grabbed the phone and looked at it. Interface was pretty standard, just more shell-themed. And it was pretty easy to spot that he had a text from Nico. Apparently, his siblings had already programmed the most important numbers in – their own and Nico's. Snorting softly, Percy read the text. Miss you. Love you. Hope you have fun. Sighing, Percy decided to call Nico. It took not very long for the video-call to connect and a grumpy Nico appearing
on the screen. Nico's face instantly brightened when he saw Percy.


"Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't even think about... are there time-zones in the ocean...?", frowned Percy. "I just... wanted to talk to you. I missed you too. How's your family trip so far?"

"Exhausting. As you might be able to figure out by the look on my face", grunted Nico and yawned. "Calypso and Bianca are being a pain. As expected. Ethan keeps sexting with Alabaster, which, urgh. I accidentally glanced at the screen and saw pictures of parts of Al I never wanted to see."

Percy laughed loudly at that, rolling onto his side and getting more comfortable. "But you're still enjoying it because you love your family. I'm having fun too, you know. It's pretty... gorgeous down here. And I ate merpeople food for the first time and it's like the best thing ever."

"It figures you'd say that while a merboy, amore", chuckled Nico fondly, also settling. "Tell me everything about Atlantis and the palace and how much you like it."

Percy grinned pleased and did just that, fawning about everything Tyson had shown him today, enjoying how attentively Nico listened to him. Oh, he loved that vampire so much.

Percy was humming softly as he sat on a coral reef just outside the palace. He was feeding hippocampi – who, by the way, the most adorable things Percy had ever seen. Behind him was his sister-in-law, Psamatheia. She was humming too, a bit off-key copying what Percy was humming, as she was braiding Percy's hair. Enalos and Benthesikyme sat curled together not far off, Briareos and Kymopoleia keeping a bit more distance and being a bit more hands-on. Proteus, while continuously turning to look lovingly at Psamatheia, was engaged in some kind of underwater-chess with Triton and Rhode. By the looks of it, Rhode was winning. The only sibling missing was Tyson, who was way too excited to join the boring siblings he got to see everyday – no, he had to tell grandma Doris and grandpa Nereus all the things that he had done in the past year.

"Why aren't the two of you living together?", blurted Percy out after a while.

"What?", asked Psamatheia surprised.

"You and Proteus. You're married. Not just... dating like those four", grunted Percy, vaguely motioning at Enalos and Benthesikyme as well as Briareos and Kymopoleia. "You're married. But Proteus is living on land, with his parents, and you're... down here."

"Oh", laughed Psamatheia.

And she laughed loudly and freely, wrapping her arms around him and hugging him when he just stared blankly at her. "You're precious. You really don't know? Truly not...?"

"I mean. You guys explained why you aren't on the surface. Not liking the whole walking on legs thing and thus only rarely and for special occasions visiting. And I get that. Being a mermaid and having your tail and this entire city and world, but... like... why did you leave the sea behind, Proteus? If your wife didn't", asked Percy with a frown.

"...He really doesn't know", muttered Enalos surprised and blinked.

"Ungrateful brat", snorted Briareos and shook his head.
"What...? What did I do?", asked Percy confused and mildly offended.

"You were born, Percy", supplied Rhode kindly and smiled at him.

"...What?", grunted Percy, now even more confused than before.

"Look at us. We are millennia old. All of us. Did you truly think we all crammed into one house on the surface to live with our parents because it was fun?", snorted Triton amused.

"You did", argued Benthesikyme unimpressed. "Because of Thanatos."

Triton sighed and rolled his eyes. "Well, yes. I lived on the surface with our parents before. But then you were born. Our new little sibling. You were... only human. Human lives are so fleeting. Over in only the blink of an eye for us immortals."

"There was no way we could miss our baby brother's life by staying at the palace", stated Kym.

"So we came. But we are... inexperienced in the world of the surface dwellers", admitted Proteus, scratching his chin. "And thus, we decided it was more practical to live with our parents. Not to mention, technically we do that down here too. Just... in larger dimensions."

"Wait. So... all of you left... the sea – and your partners – behind for me?", asked Percy surprised.

"It was an easy choice. When father introduced you to us. Chubby-cheeked tiny, squishable human with the brightest smile I have ever seen and those large, green eyes", replied Benthesikyme fondly. "You were easily the cutest thing I had seen in my life. And I knew your life would be over... far too soon and I didn’t want to miss it. The ocean had always been there and it would always be there and my immortal boyfriend would also still be there, even when you... would have died old and gray."

"There was no choice to make, Perseus", assured Proteus with a smile.

"And I accepted that", added Psamatheia with an equally gentle smile. "Time is different for us immortals. You will learn that too. But Proteus having been gone for the past sixteen years? It hardly feels like much time for me. More... like this vacation must feel to you. It's the same for me. He is gone on a brief vacation and he will be back at one point. We love and trust each other, we do not need to be together every hour of every day. And someone has to take care of the throne and the royal affairs while the royal family is on the surface."

"So... all of you are in New York... because of me?", asked Percy very softly.

"Of course", chuckled Rhode and reached out to caress his cheek. "You're our precious baby brother and we thought we would only have a few fleeting decades with you. We could not waste them."

Biting his lower lip, Percy pushed off and tackled er in a hug, soon joined by their other siblings. Honestly, he had been wondering that for years now. Why all those college student kids were still living at home. Not to mention, he had never really been able to pinpoint what they were doing. They kept switching majors, like they were just doing it for fun. Which they were, apparently. And it got even more confusing when he had learned that his siblings were actually millennia old, even more so when he learned they were dating/married. Now all of this looked quite different.

"Wait. But... I'm... immortal now?", piped Percy up, looking at his siblings. "Does... that mean you guys are going to... stay here...? After the vacation?"

"Brother, just because you're immortal now... you still only have this one childhood", pointed Benthesikyme out, one eyebrow raised. "You'll stop aging around twenty. But you'll only be going
to high school once – hopefully – and we'll only get to accompany through that once. We already missed so much of your childhood by having to keep secrets and driving a wedge between us. We're not going to miss out on your high school competition and the school play and your prom and graduation. We've been in New York for sixteen years now, we can stay two more years."

"...My prom?", echoed Percy skeptically.

"Oh yeah. I'm going to chaperon", grunted Triton with a serious glare. "Because someone has to make sure di Angelo keeps his greedy paws where I can see them.”

Percy blushed and glared, but he stayed quiet at the mention of his boyfriend. Honestly, he still hadn't quite digested the way him and Nico had parted. Nico now knowing about his... habit. Promising not to tell, but... Nico had a habit of being a bit too invested and trying to help Percy by telling others about his problems and thus putting Percy into situations he didn't want...

Chapter End Notes

Some family bonding! And because someone asked why Proteus and the others were all living at home. I thought that one was obvious, but if not, I figured I should point it out more explicitely. ;)

Next chapter's gonna be fun! Percy gets abducted! ^o^v
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Chapter 29: Spring Break Under the Sea (Part 2)

Being kidnapped was absolutely no fun.

Percy glowered where he was tied to a coral. Honestly, he kind of had different plans for today. He had wanted to go out for a ride with Tyson – Poseidon had promised to teach Percy how to ride a hippocampus and both Percy and Tyson had really been looking forward to that. But then Percy had decided that he wanted to tour Atlantis first. He had seen something the other day that he really wanted to buy Nico. A courting gift, because the longer he stayed down here – four days by now – the more he knew he wanted Nico and no one else. Aegeon, Tiberinus and Asopos were nice and very eager to get to know him, but the more they courted him, the more Percy appreciated Nico.

Aegeon kept acting like he was a gift from the gods, Tiberinus treated him like he was some kind of delicate flower and Asopos was borderline aggressive in his courting. Not like he was threatening Percy or anything, but he was kind of making Percy feel like he had no other choice, like Asopos was the only available dominant for him. It was... weird and uncomfortable.

Sure, Nico had done some things that Percy hadn't like. Telling Percy's parents about the bullying. But Nico had done it because he cared about Percy. Not to make himself look better in the eyes of the future in-laws (something Aegeon kept trying to do here). Nico cared for Percy.

So, the more Percy came to appreciate Nico for how he was courting and treating him, the more Percy wanted to get a courting gift for Nico, to show that he was also invested in this. Sure, Percy had kick-started the courting process, but Nico had so far given the only gift. And Percy knew that theoretically, it was the dominant courting the submissive. But really, when did Percy ever do things the way they were supposed to be done? Nope, Percy needed Nico to know that Percy wanted him too, that Percy wanted his stupid vampire as much as said stupid vampire wanted him.

There had been a ring, in one of the shops in Atlantis. Silver, like corals, growing around a round ruby. It looked like a drop of blood caught on a coral. Somehow, that seemed like the perfect second courting gift, like a good metaphor for the vampire and the merman.

Percy had just been about to enter the shop when he had been grabbed from behind, knocked out with something and then woke up tied up to a coral in some shady corner or a coral reef that Percy didn't recognize. Which, figured, because he had only been here for four days. He didn't know his way around the palace, much less the various coral reefs around Atlantis.

"Unmated submissive's gonna pay a high price on the market", sneered a nasty voice.

...And he hadn't even been grabbed because he was the prince. Seriously...?

"Has... anyone seen Percy?", asked Poseidon with a concerned look.

Proteus, Psamatheia and Triton all looked up in confusion. Proteus put his book down.

"Father, I thought you were supposed to go on a ride with him and Tyson?", asked Triton.
"That's why I'm asking where he is", stated Poseidon. "We were supposed to meet at the stables an hour ago. After half an hour, I grew concerned so I went to look for him, but I seem unable to find him. He's not in his room, with none of your other siblings either. I can't find him."

"That's strange. He's been looking forward to this all day", pointed Psamatheia out.

"We'll help you find him, father", assured Proteus as the three got up.

Together, they left the room and went to get the rest of the family to help too. They searched the whole palace, top to bottom, even the corners Percy had never visited before. But Percy was no where to be found. No one from the staff had seen him either and after two more hours of searching and not finding him, the worry slowly morphed into straight out panic.

Being kidnapped was insanely boring.

He was just sitting there, with nothing to do, having to listen to his kidnappers talking nonsense about him. How much he would be worth, even talking to potential buyers. Percy had a good memory for names and faces. Well, when it was important anyway. And black market slave traders definitely filed as important. For a while, he considered trying to run, but then some of the idiots actually noticed that Percy was the prince. Turned out by then, his family was actually looking for him everywhere and all of Atlantis was looking for Percy.

The prince? Well, that was a whole new level.

"Little bitch's gonna bring us a shit-ton of money!"

Percy whimpered fearfully, cowering together smaller, making the men laugh, while he internally rolled his eyes so hard, he felt like he was going to pull a muscle. Being the prince meant that the henchmen were bringing in their boss, because the prince was something else alright.

Obviously, that canceled out Percy's plans of fleeing. If he waited some longer, he could get to know the big bad behind things. If he'd escape now, then the bad guys would just flee and might never be caught. Not to mention, Percy saw and heard the other captives. There were at least ten other submissive merpeople, chained to the walls alongside him.

Percy was not going to leave them all here with slave-traders.

"Poseidon, love", tried Amphitrite softly. "Please, try to calm down."

"Calm down? C—Calm down?", echoed Poseidon in utter disbelief, pacing the throne-room even faster now. "I take Percy down to the palace once and he... he gets abducted."

"Poseidon-", attempted Amphitrite once more.

"No!", interrupted Poseidon with a glare, throwing his hands up in the air. "They saw. We have witnesses who saw how Percy was grabbed off the streets! It was this gang, those bastards who keep abducting our people! Oh, I can't believe they took my boy!"

"I'm sorry", sighed Psamatheia, feeling guilty. "I tried my best to catch them..."

"Sweetie, no one is blaming you", assured Amphitrite. "We haven't been able to catch them either."
"How do I tell Sally?", spat Poseidon, looking panicked. "She's going to want full custody again and I'll never see him again and she'd be right. I got our son abducted!"

"Father, for the love of the ocean, please shut up!", exclaimed Triton exhausted. "Sally is not going to take custody away from you. It's not like you tied him up with a red ribbon and put him out onto the streets with a sign reading 'please abduct me'."

"He must be frightened for his life!", growled Poseidon irritated. "He's somewhere, being afraid, thinking I abandoned him again because I haven't found him yet!"

"Father. Everyone is looking for him. We will find him", assured Triton. "Now come."

Grumbling, Poseidon followed Triton out of the throne-room. The only reason they had come back to the palace was to rally the troops. They had gathered whole teams of volunteers to look for Percy. Those who had already met him and seemed to really like him and those who were simply loyal to the royal family and wanted to help find the missing prince.

"King Poseidon, we will find your son", promised Aegeon with a charming smile.

"The poor thing must be frightened for his life", grunted Tiberinus.

"Do not fret, I will find your son and return him unharmed to you!", assured Asopos.

Triton heaved a sigh as he watched the three princes postering in front of Poseidon like that. Clearly, neither of them knew Percy. There was no way Percy was damsel-in-distress-ing this. He was definitely not sitting frightened in a corner, crying to himself and waiting for rescue.

"Man, I feel so bad for those kidnappers", muttered Kymopoleia.

"Because of dad, or the three princes?", asked Rhode curiously.

"...Because of Percy", snorted Kym and raised both eyebrows while Benthesikyme nodded solemnly in agreement. "The boy knows how to fight. Hand-to-hand combat. And have you seen what Perce did to Bryce Lawrence after the bag of dicks went for Nico?"

"Well, yes, but Percy isn't very good at standing up for himself", pointed Rhode out.

That gave Triton a little pause. What Rhode said wasn't wrong. Percy was, though not a push-over, definitely the kind of person to rather swallow it when someone treated him wrong, but fiercely protective of those he loved. He took Gabe's abuse, but wouldn't stand for his mother to be abused by him. He took being bullied by Bryce, but wouldn't stand for Nico to be harmed.

"Hey", whispered Percy gently. "Hey. You'll be alright."

The girl next to him, younger than him, had been sobbing for a little while now. She was afraid. Panicked. Of course she was. She looked at him with a quivering lower lip, sobbing some more.

"Quiet back there!", snarled the uglier one of their captors.

The girl whimpered at that, clearly frightened. When she didn't stop crying, the thug came swimming up to them, hand raised and bending down to smack her. Despite the chains, Percy was able to twist his body enough to elbow the douchebag. He grunted as he went down.

"What the fuck, you little bitch!", snarled the man.
The man made the mistake to go for Percy next. He landed a hit, solid in Percy's stomach. For a moment, everything was fuzzy and Percy felt like throwing up. As he doubled over, the guy laughed, like he was somehow powerful or anything for beating someone who was literally chained to a wall. The girl next to Percy gasped and looked at him with worried, orange eyes.

"I—I'm sorry", whispered the girl. "Now you got... hurt because of me."

"It's fine. I needed him to punch me anyway", shrugged Percy with a grin.

"...Boy's insane", muttered the girl on Percy's other side.

But Percy just grinned and looked at his tail, where he had the keys to the chains now wrapped up in his fins. When the kidnapper had bent over to hit Percy, he had been close enough for Percy to steal the keys. It was a good thing Percy had learned a lot about stealing and pick-pocketing from Luke, Connor and Travis. They deserved cake for this when Percy got home.

"Haha! Perseus, we are here to rescue you!", exclaimed Tiberinus.

He came rushing into the hide-out first, just to be pushed away by Asopos and Aegeon. The three had agreed to work together to find Percy, to heighten their chances. They would find the missing prince, then their alliance would end and it would be every merman for himself. Whoever got to Percy first got to carry him out of the cave bridal-style so Poseidon could see and appreciate.

"Yeah, thanks. I got it covered", chimed Percy carelessly.

The three princes paused and stared, so long so that king and queen and the royal guards entered the cave. Poseidon gasped when he saw Percy and rushed over to his son to hug him tightly, while the royal guards were left to stare in stunned silence at the scene in front of them.

"What... happened here?", asked the head of the guards surprised.

"H—He saved us!", exclaimed a short, pink mermaid.

"Who did? Was someone faster than us?", asked Asopos irritated.

"Prince Perseus!", chorused the thirteen young merpeople sitting around the cave.

They were rubbing their wrists, sitting on the ground and checking on each other, while eight unconscious dominants were chained to the wall, some of them bleeding from injuries. Percy grinned mischievously over his father's shoulder as Poseidon kept hugging him.

"You... Your highness, you took out all of those men?", asked the head of the guard.

"Yeah, like, it's hard or something?", asked Percy playfully.

"We've been tracking these guys for years", grunted another guard. "And this man, he-

"He's the leader, yeah. That's why I was gone so long. They called in their big boss after they realized I'm the prince so I figured I'd wait with the escape until after the boss arrives. Annabeth says it's always better to cut off the head of the snake, unless the snake is actually a hydra", replied Percy. "So, I figured, before the guy can... get away and just... continue doing this, I'll just stay and wait. I'm so sorry I worried you, dad."

"Y—You got abducted and you apologize to me?", muttered Poseidon.
"For worrying you", shrugged Percy. "Can we go back home now? And take my new friends with us? I promised them all a hot meal and that a medic would check them."

Amphitrite smiled softly. While Percy would never be queen simply due to his many older siblings, Amphitrite could see his leadership qualities. And in some way or shape, he would find his place in their society, he would manage to improve Atlantis and make it better. And if not Atlantis, then he would at the very least be a good mate for Nico, to rule New York together.

"That's a wonderful idea. Please, everyone, come with us, let the guards take out the trash", offered Amphitrite, motioning for the young mermaids and mermen to follow the royal family.

Percy grinned pleased as he fell in line with them. Triton wrapped an arm around him from the other side, Poseidon refusing to let go of him. It was oddly nice to see them all fretting like this, that they all had come to his rescue, even though he was okay. Maybe that was, in the end, what Nico had been trying for months. To tell Percy that just because he was okay on his own didn't mean he had to deal with everything on his own. That it would be possible to allow others to try and help.

"Abducted?!"

Percy winced and held the phone farther away from himself. "It was just a minor abduction."

"H—How do you get minorly abducted?", sputtered Nico, looking frantic.

"Hey, babe, Nico, love, please calm down", requested Percy gently, looking a bit amused. "It was just a couple hours. Not even a whole day, Nico. So, minor abduction."

Nico sighed and leaned back, glaring at his own phone. "Percy, how... Pe—ercy. What happened?"

"I was snatched off the streets", shrugged Percy with a frown. "Missed out on riding lessons with dad and Tyson though... We had plans for today."

"You... You got abducted and you feel mildly inconvenienced by it?", muttered Nico.

"Well, yeah. But hey, I took down a major slave-trading ring", shrugged Percy.

"...What?", asked Nico baffled.

"Oh, yeah. I stole the keys from one of them and freed myself. Then I lured the guy back and knocked him out. For the split second he was disoriented, I tied him to my chains. Then I unchained the other captives and made my way to the guards outside. Took them out pretty easily because they underestimated me", replied Percy with a grin. "From there on out, it was a piece of cake, really. And once everyone was chained up and I was checking on the other captives, the three princes came bursting in like knights in shining armor, with their weapons raised, posing. So stupid."

"...Three princes?", echoed Nico.

"Yeah. Tiberinus, Asopos and Aegeon", shrugged Percy. "They've been courting me."

"They... have", muttered Nico and deflated a little.


"...Oh", nodded Nico, looking like a kicked puppy.
"What cha think?", asked Percy and got the silver ring out to hold it into the camera of his phone. "You know, the ruby looks like a drop of blood falling onto a coral reef. I figured it'd be really metaphorical and all for you and me, right? You like it?"

"Me?", asked Nico surprised.

"...Idiot", snorted Percy with a wry smile. "Of course you. What? You expect me to see some glorious princes and swoon at them, fall into their laps and forget about you altogether?"

"I mean, they're royalty, I'm just a possible future vampire lord", grumbled Nico flustered.

"Cutie pie", cooed Percy teasingly, words dripping sarcasm. "You're such an idiot. I love you. And being here, being courted by other dominants, just makes me realize how much I love you."

"Really?", asked Nico, relaxing just a little. "I thought... after the way we parted... I mean, I felt like you weren't really sure if you still trusted me. It felt very..."

"It felt like I was unsure if I could trust you", agreed Percy slowly. "Because you betrayed my trust before when I trusted you to keep a secret of mine. But... I know you did it because you meant well. And you didn't do it to patronize me or to be a knight in shining armor. You did it because you care and because you thought that it was for the best. And as long as you do realize that this is different and that I know better what is good for me, then we won't have a problem."

"We... We can have an agreement there, if you promise to come to me first when you have any such... such urges", whispered Nico with pleading eyes. "I love you, amore. And I want to help you. I'm glad you realize that I just want to help you. That... That I didn't try to go behind your back. I promise I learned from it. I promise I won't go to your parents, unless you betray my trust. Because I'll trust you to talk to me. Even... Even if you end up... hurting yourself. I just need you to realize I'm there for you and I want to listen to your problems, I want to help you."

"Even if I end up hurting myself?", echoed Percy a little surprised.

"Perseus", whispered Nico gently but firmly. "I know that the road to recovery isn't an even and paved path. You know I was an alcoholic for a... long time, self-medicating against my own pain, my PTSD. I had set-backs, a lot. Even after people offered me help, I still chose the bottle over talking to them. And... And I don't expect you to magically be good again, to come to me every single time you feel... feel like hurting yourself is the only way to deal with it. I'm willing to go through that. I'm willing to collect the pieces when you fall apart and then I'll try and help you put them back together again. I just want you to trust me. To call me if it gets too much, or if you ever hurt yourself... too... badly. I don't want anything to happen to you. I just want to help."

Percy nodded, watching his boyfriend closely. It was a bit of a relief to hear Nico say that he knew this won't go without a hitch. That Percy can't just change something he had been doing for years in a specific way. And while Percy did mean it when he had said he wanted to reach out to Nico, he truly couldn't promise anything. Biting his lips, Percy smiled at Nico.

"I love you. I love you a lot", whispered Percy. "Now tell me how your day's been."

"Well, for one, I didn't get abducted", drawled Nico playfully.

Percy laughed at that and curled together more comfortably on his bed, listening to Nico talk about the vampires' tour through the states. Visiting other vampire lords and checking in with other communities. It sounded pretty cool, actually. And it was great for bonding between the vampires. It was nice to listen to Nico complain about Calypso and Bianca teaming up on him. Percy kind of
loved that the vampires were just as much a family as Percy and his family. This sense of belong, of having someone to rely on, this *community*, it was something Percy had really come to value.

"This. Is. Awesome!", exclaimed Percy excitedly.

He was sitting on a hippocampus, a mighty horse with a fish-tail. It shimmered in all the colors of the rainbow. It was absolutely breathtaking and riding it was definitely one of the coolest things Percy had ever done in his life. Tyson was riding a pony hippocampus just next to Percy.

"Uhu! Rainbow is awesome!", agreed Tyson with the largest smile.

Poseidon also smiled as he watched his boys, riding up just behind them. Two days ago, Percy had been *abducted* by slave-traders and today, he was riding through Atlantis like he had no care in the world. Sometimes, Poseidon was startled by just how strong his son was.

Even though it really shouldn't be a surprise at all, all things considered. Percy had lived through years of abuse, he had always fought hard for himself and for those he loved. Percy held an admirable amount of strength and Poseidon couldn't possibly be prouder.

"Okay, boys, slow down, we're nearly there", called Poseidon out amused.

"We're nearly *where?*", asked Percy confused. "Where are you taking us?"

"Some place I thought you would really enjoy", replied Poseidon mischievously.

"Oh my gosh! Oh my gosh! But you said I was too young and can't come here!", exclaimed Tyson. He had clearly recognized his surroundings already, but to Percy, he only caught up moments later when they were over the hill. He gasped as their horses came to a halt in front of what looked like a ship graveyard. Some were old-fashioned pirate ships, others more modern yachts.

"What... What is this place?!", whispered Percy amazed.

"This is the sea of monsters", grinned Poseidon. "Or that's what we call it. Because ships wreck here a lot and humans find their end down here. It's a dangerous place, which is why Tyson was never allowed here, because he's still young. But I think that... looking for pirate treasure is an adventure you would hate to miss and as long as I'm here to supervise..."

"Pirate treasure?!", exclaimed Tyson and Percy equally excited.

Poseidon laughed as they tied the reigns of their horses to a nearby coral and then headed into the ship graveyard. Hundreds upon hundreds of ships laid here, even in multiple layers. Young, adventurous merpeople always loved to dare each other into coming here, looking for human treasure. And while Poseidon's initial instinct had been to wrap Percy up in blankets and lock him into a safe room in the palace, posting two dozen guards outside, Amphitrite had made a very solid case for that being a really stupid idea. Especially considering that Percy had taken out eight armed and dangerous merpeople traffickers on his own. Percy didn't need to be coddled.

Still, Poseidon felt a bit better being here, keeping an eye on Percy. When seeing the excited sparkle in Percy's eyes, Poseidon was glad he had listened to his wife. This was exactly what Poseidon had needed and wanted. Bonding time with Percy, where he wouldn't put his other children between them, too afraid that him and Percy didn't have anything in common. It was Poseidon's greatest fear, that Percy would be bored, would hate spending time with Poseidon.
"Da—ad! Dad, look what I found!", exclaimed Percy loudly.

Poseidon smiled to himself as he swam deeper into the belly of the four-hundred year old ship. Percy was holding a mirror in his hands, golden and with jewels adorning the handle.

"You're good at this", praised Poseidon impressed. "We've only been here for half an hour."

"Can I keep it?", asked Percy hopefully. "If I clean it up, I could give it mom."

"I'm sure Sally will love it", assured Poseidon with a smile.

"Okay. Cool. Come!", prompted Percy, putting the mirror into his bag.

He grabbed Poseidon's hand and pulled his father along, out through a hole in the wall and over to where Tyson had been looking through the other room. Poseidon smiled to himself as he joined his sons and all three spent the next five hours digging through wrecked ships.

Chapter End Notes

Percy wasn't supposed to get kidnapped. It just kinda... happened? *shrugs helplessly*

Neeext chapter will feature what Nico, and the others, have been up to during spring break ;)

ALSO I added 5 chapters to the overall chapter count, because this story would have ended in five chapters and I have more that I want to tell in this universe. So new chapter-count is 40. I already announced that on my tumblr (follow me at takaraphoenix to stay updated on news about my fics and announcements of new stories), but yeah one more time here for those who don't follow me ;)

Chapter 30: What the Others Were Up to

Luke smiled lazily as he was sprawled out in the warm spring-sun. Spring break was a blessing. Sleeping in every day, pack-cuddles in the warm sun and since his boyfriend was as anti-social as it could get, Octavian wasn't going on any kind of vacation either, meaning Luke had his boyfriend all to himself too. Whining softly, Luke rolled onto his back, paws in the air. Octavian huffed amused, holding a book with one hand and using the other hand to scratch the now bared stomach of his mate. Luke's whining turned into a nearly purring sound as the fox got his belly rubbed.

"I do appreciate the peace and quiet. But I'd love if the two of us could also be alone."

Luke cracked one eye open and tilted his head in innocent confusion, making Octavian snort. Travis and Connor were curled together on either side of Luke's stretched-out body, with Chris on the other side of Octavian's lap so he could lick Luke's cheek and groom the Alpha.

"Stop complaining. It's a beautiful picture", chided Rachel irritated, voice muffled. She stood in front of an easel, with one paint-brush in her hand, one in her mouth and one tucked behind her ear. She held a palette with paint in her free hand as she captured the serene scene of Octavian sitting beneath a tree, with four foxes sleeping peacefully around him. This was exactly how Rachel loved spending her breaks. With her grumpy best friend and a lot of paint.

"My precious little vampire. You've grown up so much!"

"Mother! We are immortal. I haven't aged since I was turned!", groaned Hades embarrassed.

"I swear", whispered Calypso with a mischievous smile. "That alone is always worth the trip."

"Agreed", laughed Bianca softly where the younger vampires stood.

Nico huffed, though he was spotting a grin of his own as the teenagers were watching how their sire was being showered with hugs and kisses by his own sire. Lady Nyx had Hades' face squished between her hands and was peppering his cheeks with kisses that left black lipstick all over. Hades looked utterly embarrassed as he squirmed in her arms.

"Shush it, young man. It's been years!", chided Nyx seriously.

"How about you come in, children?", suggested her mate Erebus amused.

He motioned for the teenagers to come and follow him. Erebus and Nyx were their grandparents, by everything that mattered. They were the sires of Hades, who had taken him in millennia ago. They had raised him, had become his parents. Technically, Nyx was also the sire of Olethros and Thanatos. But when Hades had left, they had joined their coven-brother.

"It's good to see you again, father", greeted Thanatos with a smile, hugging Erebus.

"Ah, my boys. You've grown up so much", chuckled Erebus.
After hugging Thanatos, he pulled a very unwilling Olethros into a hug too. And after them, his grandchildren were up. Makaria, Melinoe, Bianca, Nico, Hazel, Calypso, Ethan – they all got a turn. These little family outings were actually really nice. Nico enjoyed getting time to bond with his coven-siblings. He enjoyed traveling and visiting other states, other covens. That their grandparents were on the list too this year was nice. Nyx and Erebus traveled a lot, they rarely stayed in one place for too long – and why would they. They were rich immortals, why shouldn't they travel the world and enjoy it to its full extends. Nico wanted to do that too, after school some time. Travel and see all the places he had ever dreamed of going. He had already seen a lot over the decades, but oh the world was too big a place for even just one human life-time.

"Honey, will you please bring the boy in and come?", requested Erebus.

"Oh, yes. I have more sons to hug", agreed Nyx and went after Thanatos and Olethros.

"All the hugging", groaned Olethros.

"Why don't you all get settled in the rooms we prepared for you, while I go and make sure dinner will be ready soon", suggested Erebus with a friendly smile. "Will you be okay sharing rooms?"

"I mean, it's not exactly going to go down easy. We're an uneven number", offered Ethan.

Thanatos and Olethros were already heading to their room – they had a room in every house their sires owned. Persephone smiled as she wiped off lipstick from Hades' cheek. Makaria and Melinoe were off too. Ethan motioned at himself and Nico, to share a room, and then at Bianca, Hazel and Calypso. The three girls exchanged a look and shrugged.

"Slumber party", chuckled Hazel, lifting her hands high.

She received high-fives from either side as Bianca and Calypso grinned at her. That settled that. Nico grinned wryly and ducked away before Nyx could attack him with kisses and hugs too. Not that he'd be able to dodge grandma for long. But at least long enough to get settled. The drive had been long and exhausting and the stay with the last coven they had been with had been with had been as tiresome.

"I like your new screensaver", noted Ethan amused.

It was the most beautiful picture possible. Percy, in royal robes, complimenting his merman-tail. He looked absolutely stunning. Percy's sister Benthesikyme had sent it to Nico days ago. Apparently, Percy was enjoying his stay at the royal palace, the time to bond with his siblings was important for him. Sure, Percy was living with them, but somehow, at home there was sometimes still that distance between them. Now, out there, together, it gave them a great chance to actually bond.

"Me too", hummed Nico softly, smiling gently.

He'd just hope he would not accidentally look at Ethan's phone again. Over the past couple days of traveling, Nico had seen enough of Ethan and Alabaster sexting already. Alabaster was on a family vacation with Hecate, Howard and Lou somewhere in the mountains, which left Alabaster mainly bored out of his mind and led to him sending Ethan photos of body-parts Nico never needed to see from his friend. Sadly, usually rooming with Ethan meant occasionally catching sight of Ethan's phone and the... traumatizing texts and pictures on it.

"You missing Percy a lot, mh?", asked Ethan curiously while they unpacked their stuff.

"I... Yes", replied Nico briefly.

"You've been behaving weird since we left New York", observed Ethan with a frown. "What
happened? And don't try to bullshit me, Nico. You and I, we fought in too many wars side by side. You know you can trust me, so don't insult me by lying."

"Me and Percy, we had... kind of a fight before we left", admitted Nico and threw himself onto his bed, staring up at the ceiling in utter frustration. "It... It could be serious and I was afraid that it might end badly, but... After Bentesikyme sent me the picture, Percy called me later that day and... I... We talked. Normally. Like, maybe what I thought was a fight wasn't really a fight?"

"The way you talk, you can't tell me what you two were fighting about", observed Ethan.

"No. I can't. That's... I promised Percy not to tell anyone", replied Nico.

"Good enough", grunted Ethan amused. "Well, then... if things seem good... Maybe you should still talk to him. Bring whatever happened up in your next conversation. Clear the air. If you two just push your problems away and ignore them, it will only... grow. Fester. Don't allow that to happen. If whatever happened is still fresh, then you can still talk it out."

"You're right", agreed Nico after a moment. "I'll talk to Percy about it the next time we speak. But for now, we should probably get ready for dinner."

"And now you're right", chuckled Ethan. "Grandmother doesn't like waiting."

Beryl Grace-McLean smiled pleased where she was kneeling in her garden. Thalia, Jason and Piper were not the biggest fans of gardening, but she knew how to guilt-trip her children into helping. And since neither of them had anything better to do, they had rallied up some of their nature-spirit friends to help too. Beryl was particularly fond of Grover and his girlfriend Juniper. Juniper sat with Katie, talking animatedly, while Grover was with Thalia. What had surprised her was that Katie had brought her boyfriend along – Malcolm was a book-worm, not much for nature. Turned out that he had come less to help Beryl and more to get her help.

"Thank you so much, ma'am", sighed Malcolm. "Don't get me wrong, writing that play was a lot of fun, but I have no experience with actual actors and we want this play to be good."

"Oh, no. I would love to help you with that and when Tris comes home, I'll tell him and I'm sure he'd love to help too", laughed Beryl, wiping her dirty hands off on her apron. "I wished at least one of my own children would have some appreciation for the finer arts of theater!"

"For the record, I'm the jock of the family. I'm not required to be artsy", pointed Piper out.

Thalia grumbled where she was planting petunia and Jason acted like he couldn't hear them.

"It's so nice to have the family together like this", noted Nyx pleased.

She sat tall and proud at the head of the table, watching said family. Over the millennia she had sired quite some vampires. She had kept the number low, fifty vampires. Considering how old Nyx was, the number seemed incredibly low. But due to her age, Nyx knew how dangerous it was to pass this gift on and she only chose very special people who deserved it.

She had found Hades, an orphan whose father had tried to kill him, and she had turned him. Now, so many years later, she couldn't be prouder of the boy. Many of her children had become lords, all over the world. But Hades, he was making huge strides in uniting different races. He had a dream – a
vision. One where humans and supernaturals would live side by side in peace. Nyx liked that dream. She knew they were still far, far away from it, but they were immortal, so if there was one thing they had, it was time. They could invest decades and centuries in uniting humans and supernaturals.

"Okay, children. I expect to be updated on all of your lives", stated Nyx.

The banquet decked out for them would certainly last them three hours – all different kinds of blood-types, human as well as various animal species, meat from as many different animals, prepared in the most delicious ways. She smiled pleased as everyone dug in.

"Oh, I have to show you the pictures from the spring-dance. Thalia looked absolutely beautiful and I even got her to dance with me", started Bianca with a smile.

"Still dating the storm-spirit?", asked Nyx, nodding pleased. "A strong one. I liked her."

"And I'm still dating her brother", tagged Calypso on with a small grin of her own.

"And you're still with Hecate's boy, right Ethan?", asked Erebus interested. "I met with Hecate a month or so ago. She was talking about what a good influence you are on her son."

"I try my best", replied Ethan, puffing his chest out a little bit.

"Hazel started dating", rattled Makaria out, grinning impishly at Hazel.

"She has two boyfriends now", confirmed Melinoe smugly.

Hazel huffed, glaring at her older sisters, while Nyx perked up. "Dating again? It's been decades since you were with that human boy... Sammy was it, right?"

The look on Hazel's face darkened as she averted her gaze. "Yeah... It's... It took me a long time to get over seeing him grow old and die. But... Yes, I met someone. Frank and Leo. Frank is a hunter, well, half a hunter, he's a shifter on his mother's side. And Leo is a dragon."

"A dragon?", exclaimed Nyx excited, straightening up. "Oh, I haven't met a dragon in far too long. They're very loyal toward their mates. Wait, I have some beautiful, old golden jewelry. You should take some with you. Dragons like gold, it's the perfect courting gift."

Ducking her head, Hazel smiled. "That... would be nice, grandma. Thank you."

"And how is the courting going, Thanatos?", asked Erebus curiously. "King Poseidon still giving you a hard time and making you drag out the courting time?"

"Yes", grunted Thanatos with the slightest pout. "I adore my angel fish, but... I have to admit I'm growing antsy. Once Percy graduates, Triton promised me..."

"Who's Percy?", asked Nyx confused.

Everyone else turned toward Nico with sly smirks, but it was Thanatos who answered. "Percy is Triton's younger half-brother. For his sake, the siblings all moved in together with their parents and being crowded in with them all like that has made Triton snap, I suppose. He loves his family, but after Percy graduates and moves on with his own life, they will also move out again – and Triton agreed that he really wants to start a life of our own."

"Oh, so how old is this Percy? How much longer until we get to attend a wedding?", asked Nyx.

"Percy is seventeen. He grew up in the human world, with his human mother", answered
Persephone as she sipped her wine. "He only recently moved in with his father's family, because Poseidon came to realize that Percy was taking after his side of the family."

"I did hear rumors about that", hummed Erebus curiously. "A sudden new heir to the throne. I thought it was bogus, to be quite honest."

"Oh no, Percy is real", replied Bianca and showed off Nico's phone – when had she stolen Nico's phone?! "There, that's Percy. Prince of the ocean and boyfriend of Nico."

"Boyfriend of Nico?", echoed Nyx and perked up. "Really?"

"...Yes", admitted Nico red-cheeked. "I... love him a lot. He's very... amazing."

"Oh, my little boy is in love", cooed Nyx excitedly. "And with a prince."

"Tell us about him", requested Erebus intrigued.

"He's brilliant", started Calypso casually. "He's only been introduced to the supernatural society a couple months ago, but he's taken to it so well."

"That's true", agreed Bianca. "He's a quick study when it comes to those things."

"And he's not just a merboy", added Hazel with a grin. "He's half cat-shifter on his mother's side too. A cat-fish. He's been accepted into the pack already."

"Fascinating combination", hummed Erebus curiously.

"And Nico and Percy already started courting", stated Ethan casually. "They're very... cute together. They compliment each other."

Nico blushed from all the comments and the way his grandparents were looking at him. "Well. Yes. Percy is... I can't imagine a life without Percy anymore."

"Really?", asked Persephone surprised, looking up at her son.

Humming in agreement, Nico nodded slowly. "Yes... really. Percy gives me a strength I had never felt, not in all of my decades. With him at my side... I... I love him."

"That's... beautiful", smiled Nyx gently.

Alabaster groaned in utter frustration as he let his forehead collide with the table. Dinner was... well, let's just say Hecate was good at brewing potions. Brewing stew... not so much. But Howard and Hecate were hosting, having invited Carter Kane and his mate over for dinner. Like being stuck in New York while Ethan was out and about wasn't bad enough. No, he also had to partake in boring family dinners. Lou kicked him from beneath the table, both eyebrows raised. Frowning in confusion, Alabaster turned to look at what she meant. Oh, Alabaster's phone was blinking with a message. Grinning broadly, he carefully sneaked his phone beneath the table so he could read.

Ethan: Miss you, a lot. We rattled Nico out to grandmother and grandfather. It was... amusing.

Alabaster grinned broadly at that, just to scream in surprise when his phone turned into melting ice-cream. While Lou giggled did Alabaster turn to glare viciously at his mother. Hecate was entirely unimpressed and not even paying attention to him as she continued talking to Carter. Howard smiled amused over the rim of his whiskey glass where he sat and talked to Horus. Urgh. Adults were the
worst. He wished he could be with E right now.

Groaning, Nico threw himself onto the couch so his head came to rest on Bianca's lap. Humming curiously, Bianca looked up from her book. Slowly, she started to card her fingers through her brother's hair while Persephone curiously tuned down the television. Makaria, Melinoe, Calypso and Hazel were out shopping together, while most others were gathered in the living room.

"What happened?", asked Hades concerned.

"You missed breakfast this morning", noted Persephone, one eyebrow raised.

"Percy woke me up in the middle of the night with a phone-call", grunted Nico.

"O—okay, that's more than I need to hear", declared Bianca and made a face.

"They didn't have phone-sex", muttered Ethan amused, not looking up from his book. "I would have heard that. Nico did scream a couple of times, but it sounded more frightened than..."

"We get it, we get it", interrupted Bianca and wiggled her nose.

"So what did Perseus want?", asked Hades slightly impatient.

"He's been abducted", muttered Nico exhausted.

"Who dared to, I will rip them apart", growled Persephone, eyes glowing red.

"How dare someone kidnap that precious boy! I haven't even gotten to meet him yet!", exclaimed Nyx, looking just as vicious as Persephone as she got up. "Where. Who?"

"Oh, no, no. It's all fine", dismissed Nico, waving a hand casually.

"All fine?", echoed Hades doubtfully. "You say he got abducted and now you say it's all fine?"

"Yeah, yeah. He... freed himself and a dozen other abducted submissives and single-handedly took down a slave-trader ring that Poseidon and Amphitrite have been after for years", replied Nico.

"...I would really love to meet that boy of yours", muttered Erebus impressed.

"Yeah that's Percy for you", chuckled Nico fondly. "But the frustrating thing is that I can't be there with him. He... He gets to meet the other royals and go on his first official balls and be introduced to society as the prince and then he gets abducted and I'm just... not there."

"You really are smitten with the boy", noted Nyx fondly.

"Very much. It's horrible", confirmed Bianca dryly, patting Nico's head.

"Shut up, stupid sister", grumbled Nico embarrassed.

Annabeth growled as she blocked a hit from Frank. The best way to spend the break, the most efficient way, was to spar. Sherman and Mark, Clarisse and Reyna, as well as Annabeth and Frank were paired up as they were sparring inside the school's gym, having permission to train there even during the break due to the hunters needing to train even during a break – and well, Annabeth had
just tagged along. She was agitated and bored, with Nico being gone. Sure, he kept texting her how he was doing, but mainly everyone was very busy during this break. Not to mention the part where Annabeth was never going to miss an opportunity to watch sweaty Reyna in a tank-top train.

"Don't get distracted by your mate, Valkyrie", growled Frank, half-shifted into his wolf-form.

It was why they were such a good match-up. Annabeth with her wings, Frank with his shifting. Grinning, Annabeth took to the sky to dodge him, just to have the large wolf jump her and ground her again before she had a chance to twist out of his hold. Hazel was gone with the other vampires and Leo was on a long flight with Beckendorf and the other dragons, just roaming the skies. Frank was agitated and bored and missing his mates. Sparring did wonders there. Giving a high-pitched cry, Annabeth attacked him viciously. Sparring did wonders for her too.

"I went out to the ship-wrecks with dad and Tyson again today. It was amazing. I found this old sword and I think that maybe Leo could restore it. It's beautiful. Dad says it's like an old family heirloom that some great general and distant relative of ours had lost during one of the wars. Ana... I dunno, he said the name translates to Riptide. That's a pretty cool sword-name. He said if Leo could restore it for me, I could keep it and Proteus would train me."

Nico smiled as he listened to Percy gushing about the latest adventure he has had in Atlantis. It was endearing to see how excited Percy got over the supernatural world. He sighed contently as he rolled over onto his side, the phone laying on his ear. In the other bed, Ethan was already asleep.

"I hope you and Ty aren't being too much trouble for your dad", teased Nico.

"Well, I haven't gotten abducted in three days. So that's a plus", laughed Percy cheekily.

"Not funny, my love", warned Nico frustrated. "Please refrain from ever getting abducted again."

"I'll try", chuckled Percy. "Now it's your turn. Tell me where you're right now. Last time we talked, you were still at your grandma's. And you warned me that she would 'smother me to death' with kisses and hugs once she'd get to meet me, which... very ominous."

"Nyx is a complicated woman", drawled Nico unimpressed. "We're currently with Lord Veles."

"Veles... yeah no doesn't ring a bell. Tell me more", hummed Percy curiously.

"He's... regarded as a Slavic god", offered Nico. "He was very close friends with Hades during their youth. That's why the myths humans came up with around them are so eerily similar."

"Ri—ight", drawled Percy. "Let's pretend that I have no idea about Slavic mythology..."

"Yes, let's 'pretend'...", chuckled Nico fondly. "You know how Hades' myth centers around how he stole the pretty Spring Goddess Persephone and made her his queen. Veles kind of did the same thing. He saw a pretty Spring God and kidnapped him. The thing is, Veles and Hades were vampires and friends, drunk as they stumbled into a grove where nature-spirits were living. Persephone and Jarilo were actually friends. And that's the story of how Hades and Persephone met."

"Huh. So that means Hades and Persephone must have really been looking forward to the stay at theirs, if they've been friends for this long", hummed Percy and Nico could hear the grin.

"Oh yeah. And Jarilo, he's got a twin-sister. Morana. She is close friends with Makaria and Melinoe and it's unbearable. The three have been giving me a headache since we arrived", huffed Nico.
"Aw. Poor baby", cooed Percy teasingly. "But spring break is nearly over, so you'll endure. And all too soon, you'll be back home with me and we can... go on a date?"

"Mh... I like the sound of that", sighed Nico contently. "I wanna take you out for pizza."

"Pi—izza", moaned Percy. "Oh, I miss pizza. I mean, I really like the whole merpeople food down here, but I've had a craving for pizza for days now. Fish is nice and all, but... but fish for breakfast and lunch and dinner every single day. Ni—ico? Can we go on a hunt?"

"Hunt?", echoed Nico, eyes darkening. "A chase together through the woods?"

"Ye—es", groaned Percy pleased. "You, me, the chilly night-air and a frightened deer. Juicy meat, dripping warm blood... Hng. Nico, pizza is canceled. I want deer."

Nico laughed loudly. "I love you so much, amore. Yes, let's hunt together once the break is over."

"Oh. I'll have to leave, babe. Psamatheia wanted to go shopping with me", hummed Percy. "Talk to you later, bat-boy. Don't let your siblings annoy you too much. Love you."

Nico smiled pleased and sighed contently. He was truly too blessed.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter will have them all return to New York again. Percy and Nico will go on a hunt and Percy has some gifts to hand out - to Nico and to his mom. ;)


Chapter 31: Returned and Reunited

Nico smiled slightly as he watched his best friend. He had essentially been attacked the moment he arrived home—apparently, Annabeth had been highly bored. While she had spent some time with Reyna and the other hunters, she just wasn't a hunter, so their off-time was quite different from hers. She had a book-club with Malcolm and Octavian, among others, but even they had abandoned her regularly. Malcolm got roped into gardening with his girlfriend Katie, while Octavian missed out in favor of going to the lake with Luke. Annabeth's chess-skills did not beat a shirtless Luke.

"You're going to abandon me as soon as your kitty-cat gets home too", accused Annabeth.

"I'll have you know that my kitty-cat is perfectly fine curling together on my lap", huffed Nico. "I'm really glad we're back home though. Only having the others around was exhausting. I'm grateful to see another face again. But your spring-break can't have been all bad."

"Well, no. Me and Rey went to the pool a couple times, with Thalia and Piper. And when the others could tear themselves away from their partners, we had some good sessions about the assigned readings over spring. You... did read them too, right?", asked Annabeth curiously.

"Whe—en?", groaned Nico and collapsed backward onto the bed. "We were on the road most of the time. Then sharing a room with Ethan, while Bia, Calypso and Hazel kept barging in. Urgh."

"Poor baby", cooed Annabeth unimpressed. "Check."

"What? No!", huffed Nico wide-eyed and sat up again. "When did you... Damn it."

Annabeth smirked slyly at him. Before she had a chance to properly gloat however did Percy barge into the room. As anticipated by the blonde. He immediately zoomed in on Nico, pupils narrowed to a slit and cat-ears out and flat against his skull as he pounced. The air got knocked out of Nico as he was pushed back onto the bed by Percy kissing him hungrily.

"My bat", purred Percy, trailing kisses along Nico's jawline and neck. "Good dominant. Proper dominant, who doesn't think I'm some useless little damsel in distress, who treats me right and who's so good for me. I missed you so, so much."

Nico smiled pleased, wrapping his arms around his kitten and relishing in the affection. Annabeth huffed at them, at least until she got kissed on the shoulder. Turning some, she was surprised to see Reyna standing behind her. Blinking slowly, Annabeth tilted her head to allow Reyna to kiss her.

"What are you doing here, Rey?", asked Annabeth curiously, caressing Reyna's hair.

"I was as surprised when Percy rang my doorbell", chuckled Reyna. "He said that Nico had texted him about spending time with you. And apparently, Percy didn't want to just steal Nico from you, so he called me to come too. Make it a double-date."

Raising her eyebrows in surprise, Annabeth turned to look at the cat in question. "And... what...?"

"Apparently, Percy and Nico had planned a hunting trip for when Percy would return. Since I'm a
hunter and you're a bird of prey...", drawled Reyna with a smile. "What do you say?"

Annabeth perked up, eyes turning black at the idea of a real hunt. "Let's go."

"Good. Perfect. I am starving", declared Percy and sat up on top of Nico's chest. "I also brought along an Alabaster for Ethan. He agreed to open us a portal to the nearest dense forest. But we should probably hurry up before he's too... distracted by Ethan."

"You really thought of everything", mused Nico fondly, kissing his boyfriend.

"Ye—ep", chimed Percy with a broad grin. "Come, come. I'm hungry."

Nico was touched that Percy had, even though he really wanted to spend time with Nico, taken into account that Nico might also want to spend time with his two best friends after the past two weeks. And Percy had found the right group activity for both couples.

Percy growled softly as he was perched up on a tree together with Annabeth. Her wings were out, one wing half-shielding Percy. The two were actually a pretty good duo. They were laying in wait, hoping a deer would soon show its face. Reyna and Nico had gone to herd the prey toward their submissives. Once the herd of deer came rushing toward the clearing that was being watched by Percy and Annabeth, both predators pounced the moment their prey was in sight. The animals scattered and their four hunters parted ways to catch them. Percy inhaled deeply. That fresh air, smelling like forest. The rush of using his legs again after the past two weeks as a merman. The thrill of the hunt. Growling, Percy jumped one of the deer and sank his fangs in.

They regrouped soon enough with the game they made and started preparing their food. Reyna was an expert in taking the animals apart and cutting out the best parts of the meat, while Annabeth was preparing the meat. Nico and Percy had volunteered to look for branches and fire-wood, though they got a little distracted by each other. Laughing softly, Percy rolled around on the ground with Nico, every time he had the vampire pinned beneath himself, Nico would roll them over.

"I love you", whispered Nico gently, kissing Percy and licking the deer-blood off them.

"I... love you too", replied Percy a little surprised, nipping Nico's earlobe.

His hands were running all over Nico's body and as Nico leaned down, their hard cocks brushed against each other. Percy gasped and arched his back, claws sinking into Nico's shoulders and making the vampire hiss. His eyes were still black from the thrill of the hunt and the blood.

"What do you want to do?", panted Nico, licking along Percy's tempting neck. "Calm down and return to the camp-side... or... maybe... jerking off...?"

"Do you...", started Percy before he stopped. "No, that's silly."

"It's not silly", growled Nico. "Tell me what you want, my love, my pretty kitten."

"I wanted you to suck me off for weeks now, but... but I never... because of the scars. Now that you know, I thought, maybe you would... if you don't mind", shrugged Percy flushed.

He yelped when Nico opened his pants and pulled them down to his knees. Blushing, Percy watched Nico. There was pure hunger in Nico's eyes as he zoomed in on Percy's cock. His hands were greedy as they caressed Percy's thighs, spreading them for better access. It was a good thing vampires didn't need to breath and this vampire didn't have a gag-reflex. Nico devoured him whole,
sucking and licking with vigor until Percy was a moaning mess beneath him, fingers clawed into Nico's curls. With a loud howl did Percy come into Nico's mouth.

"Oh wow... oh wow... I regret not having done this sooner", panted Percy, sprawled out on the ground between the leaves. "What about you...? Want me to...?"

Nico grinned at him and shrugged, pulling one hand out of his pants. "I... already took care of that. With all the pretty sounds you were making, I really couldn't wait."

Percy's blush returned tenfold. Tilting his head, Percy grabbed Nico's hand and very slowly and deliberately licked Nico's cum off his fingers, sucking on the digits one by one. Nico's eyes darkened even more as he watched his cheeky kitten. Grinning, Percy sat up and put his pants on right again. After doing so, he got a small box out of his pocket.

"Hey. So. Courting gift", stated Percy and handed the box over. "It... made me think of you and the trip to the underwater palace made me miss you so much and those three stupid arrogant asshats who thought a submissive needs a dominant to rescue him just made me appreciate you so much."

With a small grin on his face did Nico open the box. The ring was broad, cut to look like corals, with a round ruby set at the center. Putting the ring on, Nico admired it. It did remind him of them both. Blood on a coral. Smiling, Nico leaned in to kiss Percy fiercely.

"I love you so much", whispered Nico gently. "But we should really get back, or else we will end up with those sticks up our asses because Annabeth does not do waiting."

"Right. Yeah. Good plan. Solid plan", agreed Percy amused. "But the hunt was fun, right?"

"It... was. It's been a while since Annie and I went hunting together", confirmed Nico softly. "Thanks. This was good. To be with you and with them."

With enough branches to make due did they return to the girls. The deer were already cut up and prepped with the spices Annabeth had brought along from the mansion.

"Oh, so you decided to return after all?", drawled Annabeth unimpressed. "You reek of sex. I swear. Boys are so disgusting. Why am I friends with you, di Angelo?"

Nico shrugged casually as he started piling the fire-wood. "I don't know. But that's a nicely sized hickey you have on your neck there, Chase. That wasn't there before."

Blushing, Annabeth covered her neck and glared at her best friend. Reyna and Percy laughed softly.

"Mo—om? Are you home?", called Percy out curiously as he unlocked the door.

"Percy? Sweetie? Oh, you're back already! We're on the balcony!"

We? Frowning curiously, Percy made his way into the apartment and toward the balcony. He smiled pleased when he found his mom and Paul sitting together, drinking wine and playing scrabbles. She was wearing a pretty blue summer-dress and he was wearing a shirt that matched her dress, suggesting that the two of them must have gone out earlier.

"I missed you, sweetie", declared Sally and hugged Percy tightly, kissing his cheek.

"I missed you too. That's why I decided to come over", grinned Percy. "And I bring food. I hope
"Those sharpened senses are terrifying", noted Paul amused, before he too hugged Percy. "Hello, kid. It's good to have you back. Your mom was worried, especially after your father called and told us about that little stunt you pulled. Getting abducted and taking out a slave-trader ring."

"Well, the trip turned a bit boring", chimed Percy with a shrug. "I needed some action."

"But... seriously, Percy. You're alright?", asked Sally seriously, cupping his face.

"Yes, mom. I promise", assured Percy soberly. "Now. Who's hungry?"

"What's for dinner?", asked Paul curiously as they followed Percy toward the kitchen.

"I went hunting with Nico, Reyna and Annabeth. We caught deer. A lot. Even with the wolfish hunger we all had, we didn't finish it. So I packed up the left-overs and figured I'd come over for dinner", replied Percy. "No worries, it's not raw meat. Annabeth prepared it. She's pretty good at that. It's super tender and delicious... So, hungry?"

"Definitely", grunted Paul at that.

"I'll just clean up outside. It looks like it'll rain soon", noted Sally and left the kitchen again.

"So, Paul... when did you move in with my mom?", drawled Percy casually.

"W—What? I... I...", sputtered Paul. "...She told you? I thought we'd do that together."

"She doesn't have to. Everything in here smells equally like you and her", chuckled Percy. "Heightened senses, remember? Not to mention, your clothes match her dress and I can't imagine her sending you a pic of the dress she'd pick before the date, suggesting you got ready together."

"...You're a bright young man", noted Paul, both eyebrows raised. "I... hope that you don't have a problem with it. And I'm sorry we didn't tell you sooner."

"You don't owe me an apology, Paul", replied Percy while he heated up the left-overs. "I don't even live here anymore. And even if I did, I'm not a brat who tells his parents who to date. You're... a good man. You treat my mom right, you respect her. You make her laugh. Believe me, after everything she's been through, she deserves that."

"I'm glad-", started Paul with a smile, just to falter at the face Percy made. His ears were out and erect, his eyes sharp and like a predator staring at his prey. "But if you ever hurt her, or if you ever intentionally make her cry, I will not stand by. I'm not a little child anymore. I'm not scared anymore. And I already saw her go through enough. I'll not stand by and let that happen again. Just... to make sure you're aware of that."

Paul just smiled and nodded. "I'm aware. And... I know that with the history you two share, you won't just believe that this can be good. But I will promise you anyway that I'll never disrespect or hurt your mother on purpose. I... can't promise that I'll never screw up and hurt her on accident, but I'll always do my best to make her happy and to keep her safe."

With a pleased expression on his face did Percy nod. "Good. Now, I believe dinner is ready."

Paul had finished setting the table while they had talked. A small smile was playing on Sally's lips as she watched them from the doorway. She brushed the tears out of the corners of her eyes as she
stepped up to her son and kissed his forehead. Blinking slowly, Percy turned toward her.

"Come on, I didn't threaten Nico either", whispered Sally amused.

"Couldn't help it", shrugged Percy, biting his lips. "He's... a good man. I really like him. But... But I just... I love you mom and I want you to be happy and to be safe."

She just hugged him tighter while Paul watched from the corner of his eyes. Part of him found the threat and worry Percy displayed endearing, the other part of him knew to take it very seriously because Percy was a predator. Clearing his throat, he motioned at the table, just to be joined by Sally and Percy. While they ate, Percy told them all about his adventures at sea – even though he had already told his mom most of what had happened during their phone-calls.

"Oh, and I brought you a souvenir", exclaimed Percy as they finished dinner.

"Really? What is it?", asked Sally eagerly.

Grinning, Percy got the beautiful hand-mirror out that he had found on his treasure hunt. After returning to the palace that day, Amphitrite had gotten it cleaned and repaired for Percy to give to his mother. Sally gasped softly as she took the beautifully crafted mirror.

"This is gorgeous. And you just... found this in a ship-wreck?", asked Sally amazed.

"Ye—ep. Dad took me and Ty treasure-hunting", grinned Percy proudly.

"You're a real-life Ariel", laughed Paul amused.

"Mh. Life-sized statue of Nico would look good in the coral garden", mused Percy half-seriously.

Sally laughed and nudged Percy at that, making Percy crack a grin too.

"...Percy. I would be way faster if you would remove your chin from my shoulder."

"But this is awesome", complained Percy with a pout.

He yelped as he was grabbed around the waist and just carried off to be seated on the large couch. He glared in betrayal over at Beckendorf who just shook his head in amusement before returning to work. Leo sighed relieved that the Percy had been removed from his shoulder.

"And you say you found this sword in an old ship-wreck?", asked Jake interested.

"It's a beauty. Been through a lot, but damn it's gorgeous", sighed Shane.

"Eh. I'm more into knives than swords", frowned Nyssa unimpressed.

The two of them were looked over Leo's shoulder from either side to look at Riptide, causing Leo to groan. Beckendorf shook his head again and continued working on the bike he was currently taking care of together with Nyssa. The five dragons were working in Esperanza Valdez' garage and car shop. It was the perfect environment for a tinkering dragon and since Percy knew five capable sets of hands, he had figured he'd ask them if one of them could restore Riptide to its old glory so Percy could pick up sword-fighting with it. Percy grinned apologetically at Silena, Will and Lacy, all three of them already sitting on the couch. Granted, Silena had only come here to drop off lunch for the dragons and to watch her boyfriend oily and sweaty. It was high-quality entertainment for her. Will and Lacy however had come here to pick up Jake and Shane respectively, Lacy having come
together with Silena right from the lake. Will sighed and crossed his arms over his chest.

"I just wanted my boyfriend", sighed Will frustrated. "And I was just about to tear him away from the damn bike. Then you had to come along with something shiny. Everybody knows you can't dangle something shiny in front of a dragon."

"Don't mind Will. He gets grumpy when he doesn't get laid", offered Silena casually. "Anyway, while you were off in the ocean, me and the team have been training hard. There's still this weekend left. Do you want to come to the lake with us tomorrow?"

"That sounds awesome", nodded Percy eagerly. "By the way, your grandma? Super awesome."

"Oh, I miss her", sighed Silena softly. "I should go and visit her again too."

"You should. She was already rehearsing the guilt-trip with me", grinned Percy.

Silena groaned at that, hiding behind her fashion magazine.

"Your stance is important when handling a sword", stated Proteus as he circled Percy. "Don't try to imitate the things you see on TV. They're mainly flashy."

"Got it", nodded Percy sharply, looking at Proteus curiously.

Smiling fondly, Proteus got a sword of his own and got in position. Attentively, Percy immediately copied him. The two of them were outside in the backyard, after Percy had used the irresistible kitten-eyes on his oldest brother. The two were by no means alone out in the backyard, Benthesikyme and Kymopoleia were playing feather-ball while Amphitrite and Rhode were tending to the garden. There was no way Proteus could deny his little brother. He was happy that he got to teach Percy something, something that he held pride in. He wasn't a big competitions swimmer like Triton and Poseidon, he couldn't help Percy with his homework like Rhode, he couldn't help Percy rehearse for his theater performance like Benthesikyme and he wasn't a cook like Kymopoleia (not that Kym would ever actually admit to being a good cook). He didn't have something of his own that he got to share with Percy. Not until now, because now, he did.

"You're a quick study, Percy", praised Proteus with a smile as they went through some motions.

"Well. Good reflexes are like literally in my genes", grinned Percy, looking proud at the praise.

"Your friend did a good job with the sword", noted Proteus. "And it seems well-balanced for you."

"It does feel awesome", admitted Percy. "This is pretty cool."

"I'm glad you're enjoying yourself", chuckled Proteus fondly.

"Yes, but please watch out for my roses!", exclaimed Amphitrite miffed.

She pointedly held a cut-off rose-bud up, causing Percy to wince. "I'm sorry, Amy."

Sighing Amphitrite shook her head. "Just make sure you don't cut anything important off. All my children report back with ten intact fingers for dinner. Clear, boys?"

"Yes", chorused Proteus and Percy with matching grins.
"Look at the kitten, purring and spread out in the sun like that...", snorted Mike amused.

He was sitting down next to Percy to reach the baskets of food. The team had been training hard before splitting up for some fun activities. Lacy had gone back to the blanket to cuddle with her boyfriend Shane, while Mitchell, Piper, Silena and Mike were playing water-ball – and the kitten chose a nap in the sun, where Gwen was laying and tanning some.

"So... who are the two other mermaids?", asked Percy as he adjusted to lay half in Mike's lap.

Chuckling, Mike started playing with Percy's hair, knowing that exhausted kittens were affectionate. Percy's purring increased while Mike turned to see where Percy was looking at. Drew had abandoned the team to instead sit at the shore with two other mermaids, tails dipping into the water.

"Kelli and Tammi. Drew's... what do you call them, Lace?", offered Gwen.

"Entourage", giggled Lacy where she was curled together against Shane.

"Minions", corrected Shane dryly, causing his girlfriend to flip his nose. "What? It's true."

"But they're not on the team", pointed Percy out in utter confusion.

"Ye—ep. They don't like to work. They just want to look pretty", huffed Mitchell as he joined them.

Last to sit down with them were Piper and Silena and by then, the food was already set out on the blanket for everyone. Piper bumped shoulders with Percy and stayed leaned against him. He purred softly as he nuzzled against her before grabbing one of the bacon sandwiches.

"Bacon. Bacon is like one of the main reasons why I couldn't permanently live under the sea", stated Percy around a mouthful of sandwich. "Mh. This is good. Really good."

"Ye—eah, agreed", nodded Piper seriously, grabbing the other bacon sandwich. "I mean. Clarisse and Chris are a close second, but bacon. Mainly the bacon."

"I will tell them that you said that", threatened Silena with a fond, amused grin.

"That's okay. I have ways of making it up to Claire", chimed Piper, very slowly licking her lips.

"Ew. Ew, that's gross", groaned Mitchell and made a face.

He threw a piece of his muffin at Piper when she started laughing. For a little while did they all just sit together peacefully, eating. Percy's eyes never left Drew though. She was... She had behaved civil during training today. Not friendly, but civil. And that was suspicious.

"She wants to win the competition too", whispered Piper softly after a while, nodding into Drew's direction. "She'd not have joined the team otherwise. Much like Kelli and Tammi, she's all about looks. But she also has ambition. She wants to be the best. Sabotaging the team would hurt her too. So, since the big competition is coming up, she's not going to do something to you."

Percy nodded slowly. That made sense, in a way. Drew was a manipulative bitch, but she also wanted to win. Silena, Piper, Percy and Drew were going to be on the team for this competition, with Gwen, Mike, Mitchell and Lacy on the bench. If Drew did anything to Percy now, then they'd have to switch up the team this shortly before the competition and it'd make things worse. Still. Percy didn't trust the peace, she was definitely up to something post-competition.

/\break/
Percy was carefully balancing along the rain gutter, tilting his head as he spotted the exact window he wanted to get on. With a swift jump, he landed on the window-sill. Purring pleased, the small black kitten snuck into the room and then pounced onto the bed, startling the sleeping boy on it.

"Percy. Just because I'm dead doesn't mean I can't have a heart-attack", groaned Nico.

Grinning, Percy shifted back to human, right on top of Nico. The moonlight made Percy's fangs glint dangerously. It should not turn Nico on that much. Grabbing Percy by the neck, he pulled his kitten down into a slow kiss. Sighing contently, Percy cuddled up to him.

"What are you doing here? It's Sunday night. Tomorrow is school", whispered Nico.

"I dunno. I...", started Percy, before he sighed shakily. "The big competition is next week. And the week after is the drama club play and I... I... When I went to bed, my thoughts were swirling with all the pressure of doing good... and... so... I don't know. I figured I'd just... go to you. Instead of..."

"Oh", grunted Nico surprised, eyebrows raised as he pulled Percy even closer, kissing his head. "I love you. It'll be okay. You've been rehearsing so much, you'll be a brilliant Juliet. And the competition? You're an amazing swimmer and you have your team. It'll all be good. And me and everyone will be there to support you. Even if you'd fail, which you won't. I love you, kitten."

By the time he had finished speaking, Percy was already sound asleep in his arms. Nico smiled, strained but proud, as he kissed Percy's forehead and got more comfortable to sleep too.

Chapter End Notes

The swim-team's first race of the season is coming up next! Percy is still extremely nervous, so... will he do good, or will they lose...? Stay tuned for more. ;D
Chapter 32: A Midspring's Nightmare (1)

Percy blinked blearily when he woke up, his hands fisted into Nico's shirt. Oh. Nico. Right. Slowly, Percy sat up and looked down at his boyfriend. Yesterday, he had felt so incredibly bad, he hadn't known what to do but just before he could hurt himself, he found himself outside of Nico's window. Thankfully enough, Nico had let him in and just held him. Frowning, Percy rubbed his eyes. He had felt so awful yesterday, but somehow, today it felt slightly better.

"Hey, how did you sleep, babe?", whispered Nico gently.

He leaned up and kissed Percy's cheek. Smiling, Percy turned to kiss Nico properly.

"I... well", nodded Percy slowly, leaning into Nico heavily and closing his eyes. "Thank you."

"Anytime, gattino", assured Nico, wrapping his arms around Nico. "I promise I will always be there for you. Please know that. You can come to me anytime."

"Okay...", agreed Percy, burying his face in Nico's neck.

"Fratellino, time to get ready for school or I'm going to leave without yo—oh."

Bianca paused in the doorway, staring surprised at Nico's bed. Nico glared pointedly at his big sister and pulled the catboy closer around them both. Percy turned to stare wide-eyed at Bianca.

"I swear it's not what it looks like, we-", started Percy a bit panicked.

"You're literally wearing jeans and a shirt, Percy. I somehow doubt that the two of you had sex and you got fully clothed again", drawled Bianca amused. "You should both still get ready though. Breakfast will be done in five. I'll tell Persephone got make enough for one more."

Percy groaned and buried his face even deeper in Nico's chest. "This is so embarrassing."

"So... does your family know where you are, or will they panic when you won't come down to breakfast at your house...?", asked Nico cautiously.

"Shit. I should text Tri", grunted Percy and scrambled for the phone.

He quickly texted Triton that he had left very early to get some private training done at school. He hoped the lie would be believable and that Triton could sell it to their parents. By the time he looked up from his phone, Nico was down to his boxers. Wide, sea-green eyes stared over at Nico.

"...Yummy", hummed Percy as he openly leered at Nico.

Nico blinked a couple of times before he snorted and got dressed. "You can shower if you want."

"Right. I probably should. I slept in those clothes. Speaking of...", sighed Percy.

"You can have a change of clothes", offered Nico amused.
He pressed a kiss against Percy's cheek as he handed him a set of clothes and sent Percy off to the bathroom. It was nice, that Nico had a private bathroom connected to his room. Sighing contently, Percy got undressed and went to take a hot shower. Exactly what he needed right now.

Hades was leaning against the counter in the kitchen, slowly drinking his blood-spiked coffee. Ethan had eaten early and left for a morning jog together with Thanatos. Olethros sat in a corner, drinking his coffee and glaring at everyone who approached him – not a morning person, never had been one. Makaria and Melinoe were still upstairs and getting ready, honestly sometimes Hades wondered how those two ever were punctual for anything. There was a suspiciously wicked grin on Bianca's face as she sat down with Hazel and Calypso, talking and eating.

"Honey, I love you, but stop brooding", sighed Persephone and kissed Hades' cheek.

"Bianca is plotting something", accused Hades. "That early in the morning. That's never good."

"Good morning, di Angelos! I smell bacon. And fish. Mh..."

Hades and Persephone raised their eyebrows and everyone turned toward the door where Percy and Nico walked through, Percy with a broad, chipper smile. For a brief moment, Hades wanted to scold them – but then he remembered that Nico was ninety-two and just because Hades was coven-leader, he could not dictate their coming and going. Though Percy was only seventeen and an unmated submissive. Glaring pointedly, Hades turned toward Nico.

"Nothing happened. Percy came over late last night because he was nervous about the play and asked me to rehearse his lines with him and then we fell asleep", assured Nico smoothly. Hades did not look convinced, but he just nodded and took his seat next to Nico. Percy kept smiling throughout breakfast, enjoying the bickering between the girls.

"So, Percy, the play is coming up?", asked Hades curiously after a while.

"Mh?", grunted Percy around a mouth full of bacon. "Oh. Yeah. I'm nervous. And it's not really good that it's just days after the competition..."

"Right. That is this week", grunted Hades, raising both eyebrows. "A lot of pressure."

"Darling", said Persephone sharply, elbowing him. "I'm sure Percy is going to be fine. He knows what he's doing. I saw you swim the other week, Percy. You were amazing. You beat your teammates, I'm sure you will manage with the opposing teams."

"And the play is going well too", added Bianca.

"Thanks, Mercutio", chuckled Percy dryly.

"I'm serious", grunted Bianca and turned fully toward Percy. "You're an amazing Juliet. I had tears in my eyes during your death-scene. You got your lines down, your acting is amazing and you look gorgeous in the dress. You'll be fine, Perce."

"...Dress?", echoed Hades surprised.

"Yeah, it's a role-swapped version. All the boys play the female parts and all the girls play the male parts, including costumes. Rachel is Romeo", explained Bianca with a grin.
"And I have still not seen Percy in his costume", sighed Nico with a forlorn look on his face.

Everybody gave him a deadpan look at that, not that Nico really minded.

"Someone's wearing his boyfriend's clothes", chimed Piper.

"Someone got laid on a school night", tagged Leo on with a wicked grin.

Percy blushed as they hooked arms with him from either side. "I did not. I swear."

"Sure", teased Piper with a cheeky look in her eyes.

"I wasn't feeling so good, so I went to see Nico and talk to him and then I fell asleep on him", shrugged Percy, wiggling his nose. "We didn't have sex yet."

"Wait. Not at all?", asked Piper surprised, looking over Percy's shoulder at Leo.

"No! We haven't been together that long", shrugged Percy with a blush. "We don't want to rush things. We had, uh, you know... blowjobs. But only like... three."

"Okay", nodded Leo. "Well. Then it's really cute that you fell asleep on him."

He grinned and nudged Percy, making Percy laugh softly. "Ye—eh. Nico is the cutest."

"You're so in love", giggled Leo at that.

Percy glared pointedly, though his blush darkened even more. "...Yeah I am. Now shut up and let's get to class before we get detention for running late."

"Point. Very valid point!", agreed Piper and tugged the boys both along.

Amphitrite frowned as she walked down to the basement. It was already well past two in the morning and every one of her children had already said goodnight for the day. Poseidon was heavily snoring in their bed and Amphitrite had only left to get a glass of water (and a chocolate-covered cherry, but no one needed to know about her habit of sneaking sweets at night).

"Percy?", asked Amphitrite with a sigh when she approached the pool.

"Amy!", yelped Percy, looking guilty and flipping his tail a couple of times. "I... uh... just..."

"Ye—es?", asked Amphitrite, both eyebrows raised and waiting curiously.

"I felt like taking a little late-night swim?", offered Percy reluctantly.

He yelped again when he was splashed as Amphitrite just jumped into the pool. The next moment, a pink fin lightly slapped his arm as his stepmother smiled at him teasingly.

"Want some competition to make this casual late-night swim that is in no way or shape related to your upcoming race more fun?", suggested Amphitrite.

"...Yeah?", agreed Percy after a moment.

After five rounds, Percy seemed far more relaxed than when Amphitrite had entered the pool area.
The two of them had resurfaced near the edge of the pool, resting their arms on the tiles and flipping their tails casually. Percy had his face resting on his arms, tilted so he could look at his stepmother.

"So, you couldn't sleep because you're nervous about the race, mh?", whispered Amy softly.

"Guess so", sighed Percy, closing his eyes for a moment.

"That why you weren't home last night?", asked Amphitrite, causing Percy's eyes to snap open and the boy to stare at her. "Oh, sweetie. I've been managing five children for centuries. Don't think I wouldn't notice when someone sneaks out of the house. Also, I'm friends with Persephone."

Percy blushed and buried his face in his arms. "Yeah. I was... I just needed to get out of my own head. Out of the... house. I'm sorry. I should have said something before leaving."

"You should have", agreed Amphitrite with a frown. "And the next time, you will be grounded for a month. For now, I'll let it slide. I know you have a lot on your plate right now, with the race and the play coming up. And while I love Poseidon, I also know he puts a lot of pressure on his students. Not intentionally so, but he always makes them want to do their best. I can't imagine how bad it must be for you... You're not just his student. You're his son too."

"I just... don't wanna disappoint him", muttered Percy, biting his lips hard.

"Sweetie...", started Amphitrite slowly and reached out, resting a hand on Percy's cheek. "There is no way you could ever disappoint your father. He loves you, with all of his heart. And he's so proud of you. Losing some silly swim race? That's not going to disappoint him."

"That's easy said", huffed Percy. "I know how much those competitions mean to him. Especially now that he is my coach. He's not just my dad. This is... about his reputation too."

"Right", nodded Amphitrite with a thoughtful frown. "Has Donny ever told you about Aegir?"

"Who?", asked Percy slowly. "Aegis? Isn't that like some super powerful shield-thing? Annabeth talked about it, that her mother owns it or something...? She's really proud of that."

"Not Aegis. Aegir", corrected Amphitrite with a smile. "When we were young, Poseidon and I went to the same school. Things were different back then, you know. Hydrus was the king of our part of the ocean, Njörd was the king of a different part of the ocean. I wasn't... royalty back then, my parents didn't rule anything back then. And the different realms under the sea, they had quite the rivalry going on. Aegir was a big shot from Njörd's realm and everyone had a crush on him, really. Me and my girl friends included. Gossiping and giggling about him, the fastest swimmer under the sea. Your father, he had a crush on me back then and he wanted to impress me. So, he decided to challenge Aegir to a race, imagining how impressed I would be if he could beat the fastest swimmer around. He... lost spectacularly. It was a huge humiliation for him and everyone laughed about it, and him, for decades. Personally, I found that endearing actually and I tried to cheer him up. That's how we got close before ultimately getting together. The point is that your father lost his first big race and he worked hard, trained hard, to improve afterward. Because losing isn't the end. Losing is just the indication that you need to work harder – that you can still improve yourself."

"Dad... really lost his first race?", asked Percy surprised.

"Oh, he lost many races over the years", assured Amphitrite with a smile. "Aegir and Mannanan love to tease him about being the slowest of the lot every time they meet up. I know he is some kind of hero to you, because you see his trophies and know the stories of the great successful king, but... that's because the stories of loss and failure rarely make it. And it will be the same for you, Percy. 
They will remember your successes, all the trophies and medals you have and will collect. You lose some race during high school? In five, ten, fifteen years – no one will think of that. If you win however? You take the trophy home with you and in five, ten or fifteen years, you will still have that and you can still talk about your great victory. That's... just how history goes.

"Okay. That... Thanks, Amy. That actually helped", whispered Percy with a small grin.

"I'm glad I could help", smiled Amphitrite. "Now off to bed. It's past three in the morning. You have to get up in four hours – I will not let you skip classes over this."

"I'm going, I'm going. Thanks", smiled Percy and kissed her cheek before leaving. "Good night."

Amphitrite smiled pleased as she watched her stepson leave. She was going to be so dead tomorrow, but it was worth it if she managed to ease Percy's nerves some.

/I/break/

"I am so nervous", groaned Piper, hiding her face in Percy's neck.

The two of them were sitting next to each other on the bus. Percy grinned and turned toward Piper, wrapping an arm around her shoulders. Silena was sitting all the way in the front, talking to the coach, Gwen and Mike behind them and on the other side of the aisle were Mitchell and Lacy. Drew sat in the back-row with her friends Tammi and Kelli. Aside from the swim-team, a lot of other students were with them. To cheer on their friends and support their school.

"Babe, there is no reason to be nervous", assured Clarisse from behind them. "You're my kick-ass mermaid. You're gonna show those nereids who's boss. And tonight, to celebrate, I have a surprise for you. But for that, you'd have to win."

Piper perked up some and turned to look behind them through the space between her and Percy's seat, seeing a wicked grin on Clarisse's lips and the reassuring smile on Chris'. Percy made a choking sound at the implications, causing Clarisse to kick his seat.

"Hey, no harming the star-swimmer!", called Nico out irritated from behind.

"I'd never harm my girlfriend", replied Clarisse smugly, causing Piper to laugh.

Percy sat up on his seat and folded his arms on the backrest, looking at his boyfriend two rows behind. Nico smiled at him in a proud and dopey way that made Percy's heart flutter. He could do this. He knew he could do this. And he wasn't alone. Piper, Silena and... urgh, Drew... would be there with him, swimming with him. As much as he and Drew disliked each other on a personal level, they both wanted to win this race.

/I/break/

So their competition were nereids. Which. Percy had not met those yet. They were essentially made of solid water, or so it looked. They were beautiful, but Percy really wasn't sure about this. He bit his lips as he turned toward the stands one last time before the race. Nico and Leo were holding a giant sign saying PIPERCY ROCK!, Piper's name written in purple and Percy's name written in blue, with the overlapping letters doubled. Percy grinned at that, blowing a kiss at Nico, before spotting his family. The grin on his lips grew even more, because his siblings were holding their own large, embarrassing sign up. And Proteus, Triton, Benthesikyme, Kymopoleia, Rhode and Tyson weren't the only one there – with Amphitrite sat Sally and Paul.

"I can do this", whispered Percy as they all approached the pool. "I can do this."
"Wrong", hummed Piper next to him and interlaced their fingers. "We can do this."

/I/break\

"I knew you would win! You left them in the dust! You-"

"I am soaking wet, Nico, put me down", laughed Percy as he was lifted up and whirled around.

"I don't care", hummed Nico as he lowered Percy enough to kiss him. "I'm so proud of you."

"We won", whispered Percy in utter disbelief. "We... actually won."

"I told you we can do this", declared Piper and clapped him on the back hard. "Now leave your lover-boy behind so we can get showered and changed. Coach is paying for pizza."

"And milkshakes", tagged Silena on delighted.

"You kids will make me go bankrupt", argued Poseidon half-heartedly, chuckling to himself. "I'm proud of you. All of you. You did amazing."

He rested a hand on Percy's shoulder at that, squeezing some. Percy's heart was pumping his blood so fast through his body, all he heard was the buzzing in his ears. The adrenaline from the race, from winning, was still going strong. Ducking his head, he followed his team to the showers so they could then rejoin the others at the bus. They'd go to a restaurant close to this school for pizza and milkshakes before the bus would take them back home.

Toward the end of the race, Percy thought he'd lose. He felt like he was losing. And for a long moment, he was gripped by a nearly paralyzing fear. Well, it was only a split-second probably, but it felt like it had dragged on forever. The thought of disappointing his dad and the team who relied on him had weighed him down, but then he remembered the squeeze of Piper's hand, the proud smile on Nico's lips, the loud cheers from his mother, Amphitrite's words from the other night.

Even if he'd lose, they'd all still love him. They'd probably try to cheer him up afterward. Whether he won or lost, he would go home with people who loved and supported him.

And with that thought, he broke the fear that had gripped him so tightly and got past it – and he got past his competition, claiming victory in the nick of time. It was only the first step, they had only eliminated their first competition, but the first one was what set the mood for the year.

"I can't believe you did it", grinned Leo as he jumped Percy and Piper from behind, wrapping one arm around each their necks. "You were so awesome. We are totally gonna win the states championship this year, with the two of you!"

"Way to put pressure on us", huffed Piper teasingly.

They boarded the bus together, but before Percy had a chance to sit with his friends, he was being pulled into a kiss by Nico and then, consequently, onto Nico's lap. He had his arms tightly wrapped around Percy's waist. Sighing softly, Percy leaned back against him and closed his eyes. He was so exhausted after the race. All the adrenaline had drained by now and he just wanted to nap.


"...Pizza...", hummed Percy please. "...But moving..."

The others around him laughed at that, Jason nudging him slightly. "Come on. Hungry. And there is
no way the coach will let us order anything if his son and star swimmer is in a coma on the bus."

Grumbling, Percy got up and followed the others out. As soon as he was out of the bus, he was essentially being handed around for hugs. His siblings, his parents, his friends. Everyone seemed to want a turn at hugging and congratulating him. This was... so different from any competition he had ever won before. And Percy had won a lot. But to have friends to share this with? To have his siblings and father this involved in his life, right there, supporting him? It felt amazing.

"You were so amazing, sweetie", smiled Sally proudly.

Percy grinned and ducked his head. "Thanks, mom. I... It was a lot of fun, actually. It was so different, swimming with friends, than just a team."

"Despite Drew?", drawled Leo teasingly.

Percy turned some to spot Drew at a different table, with Kelli, Tammi and Bryce, apparently boasting about how smoothly it had gone. "Yeah... Despite Drew. She's a great swimmer."

"Still amazed that the truce lasted", grunted Calypso in disbelief, dipping her fries in something red that was definitely not ketchup. "Guess her ego and need to be the best won out."

Percy yawned and hummed in agreement before grabbing another slice of pizza. "I'm so dead."

"You earned your rest, babe", grinned Nico and kissed Percy's cheek.

The day didn't end with pizza though. They still had to drive back. By the time they returned to Summers High, it was already late and dark. The entire drive from the school back home, Percy got showered with praise and compliments from his siblings, his dad always topping them off with one more. He was really glad when he reached his bedroom though.

"Percy", interrupted Poseidon, stopping him so short of his destiny and destination – his bed.

"Yes, dad?", yawned Percy and stretched.

"I know everyone, including me, already told you how proud they are of you", started Poseidon. "But... I can't say it enough. This was your first competition using your tail and you didn't let the pressure, or your personal vendetta with Drew, get in the way of victory. You're incredibly strong, son, and I couldn't be prouder." Poseidon pulled Percy into a tight hug. "Now go and sleep for the next three days straight, you earned it. You look more dead than your vampire boyfriend."

Percy laughed softly, a slight blush on his cheeks. It was strange, for weeks now – months even – this competition had been his worst nightmare. The weight of potential failure so heavy on him. But now, after they had won this first race? Somehow, he wasn't really worried about the next. Smiling faintly to himself, Percy collapsed face first onto the bed. He turned his head a little when he saw something fluttering in the half-dark. He hadn't closed the curtains, not even the window.

"...that's a big, big bug", mumbled Percy sleepily.

"I take personal offense to being called a bug", huffed Nico when turning from bat to human.

"Oh... Sorry. It's late and I'm so exhausted", sighed Percy. "What are you doing here...?"

"Well, you worked so hard today, I wanted to offer you a massage? To relax your muscles? Also
after having to share you all evening, I wanted some alone-time with you", shrugged Nico.

"Massage, mh?", grunted Percy and stretched out. "That sounds ni—ice."

He smiled and closed his eyes, happily accepting the massage. Nico started out on Percy's calves and worked his way up Percy's body. Under the very cunning hands of his boyfriend did Percy slowly drift off to sleep, for the first time in weeks without some kind of nightmares.

Percy smiled faintly when he woke up with Nico curled up against his back. The massage had been really helpful, his muscles were by far not as sore as they could have been. Turning around, he curled up against Nico's chest, head tucked beneath Nico's chin.

"Mornin', kitten", yawned Nico, kissing the top of Percy's head.

"Not morning yet", mumbled Percy. "Just five more hours, yeah?"

"Okay", sighed Nico before pausing. "Wait. Did you just say hours? Percy? ...Percy?"

Percy hummed softly and closed his eyes again, shifting so he had Nico effectively trapped beneath his body, stopping the vampire from potentially escaping. Nico huffed amused at that and wrapped his arms around his boyfriend, holding him as Percy drifted back to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter is going to cover the play. But way more importantly, Nico and Percy are going to ~take the next step in their relationship~. *wiggles eyebrows*
Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 33: A Midspring Night’s Dream (2)

Percy yawned as he was sprawled out on his bed, head hanging upside down from the bed. Leo, Bianca and Rachel were spread out on his room too, Leo having his head resting on Percy’s stomach while Bianca and Rachel sat opposite the bed on the small couch Percy had in his room.

"It's way too hot to rehearse", complained Leo. "I just wanna eat ice-cream and nap."

"Yeah, but no... we have to rehearse. The play is in four days", chided Bianca.

"But we could really do with some more ice-cream", hummed Rachel. "Percy. Get ice-cream."

"Why me—e?", groaned Percy and threw a pillow at Rachel.

"It's your house", huffed Rachel and threw the pillow right back at him.

Grumbling to himself, Percy got up and left his room to go and get ice-cream. It was mercilessly hot today, even though it was still just spring. But the play was coming up and they really needed for it to be perfect. He was humming to himself as he entered the kitchen, where Kym and Amy were in the middle of preparing a couple sandwiches for themselves.

"O—Oh. Can I steal one?", asked Percy as he sniffed the air. "Bacon sandwiches."

"You gotta make your own sandwiches", grumbled Kym, glaring at her little brother just to be faced with the large, innocent begging kitten-eyes. "...Urgh. Fine. Half a sandwich."

"Tha—ank you, best big sister on the planet", chimed Percy and grabbed half a sandwich.

"Don't let Benthesikyme and Rhode hear you", warned Amphitrite amused. Percy hummed around his mouthful of bacon-sandwich."I won't. Thanks for the sandwich, Kym."

Kym huffed and hip-checked Percy. "Don't tell them either. Otherwise I'll have to share my food with the others too and I don't do that. You just... you do the eyes-thing so well. That's all."

"Su—ure", chimed Percy as he finished the sandwich and licked his fingers. "So, do we still got any ice-cream left, or has Benthy devoured it all...?"

"You gotta check, but don't touch the chocolate-mint. I bought that particularly for your father and he is... definitely going to need it after the council meeting today", replied Amy.

"Why? Council meetings that bad?", asked Percy with a frown.

"Well... sometimes", drawled Amphitrite vaguely. "It can be exhausting, having so many people with so many different opinions in one room, not agreeing on anything..."

"Why do you need ice-cream? I thought you guys were seriously rehearsing upstairs", grunted Kymopoleia suspiciously. "You're not just lazing about eating ice-cream, right?"
"No. We are rehearsing. But it's also hot as hell so we need something to boost our concentration. Namely – oh, the good stuff! Cookie-dough!", yelped Percy excitedly. "And it's still sealed. How?"

"...How indeed", hummed Amphitrite with a frown. "That barely survives the drive home..."

"Well then, I'll be stealing this", chimed Percy and grabbed four spoons. "See you later!"

He skipped upstairs with the ice-cream and the spoons to find his friends. All three made appreciative noises as they all crowded in on the bed to share the ice-cream. While eating, they gossiped about what was going on at school and, fully re-energized, they went back to rehearsing.

"I'm torn between being impressed by how good you look or annoyed that you look better in a dress than I do", huffed Calypso amused as she looked Percy up and down.

"Ah, but Paris, isn't all of this why you wanna marry me?", asked Percy teasingly.

Calypso chuckled and shook her head. "You want stupid Romeo instead, so there's that."

"Someone called me?", chimed Rachel in, smirking broadly.

"Oh Romeo, oh Romeo", gasped Percy and collapsed forward into Rachel's arms.

Rachel grinned and pulled Percy close. "Looking hella fine, Juliet. Wanna ditch this joint and run away to Vegas together to get married? Mercutio will drive the getaway car."

"No rewrites to the play! You will stick to the script or I swear, I will shove-", started Malcolm.

"Malcolm! Mal, calm down", interrupted Katie gently, grabbing her boyfriend. "Come with me. Let your stars live. Shoving anything anywhere this short before the play will not help."

"Does this dress make me look fat?", asked Leo as he walked past Malcolm and Katie.

"No, it doesn't. Red is totally your color. You look beautiful. And your hair looks amazing", sighed Calypso with a smile. "You look wonderful, no need to feel self-conscious."

"Yeah, my dearest, most trusted nurse", agreed Percy with a grin, wrapping his arms around Leo.

"You're in a really chipper mood, Juliet", commented Bianca as she approached them.

"Ye—ep", chimed Percy. "I know all my lines. I get to play with my friends. It's all fun."

"Good", smiled Bianca. "You were so nervous two weeks ago that I was afraid you'd suffer from stage-fright this short of the play. But you seem more than fine."

"I am", confirmed Percy. "Totally fine. Thanks for asking."

And he actually was. The swim race had somehow really calmed his nerves down. He had won the race, everyone had supported him – and deep down, he knew that even if they had lost, everyone would have supported him. So, this play, even if he would screw up, Annabeth would be there to feed him his lines, everyone was prepared to jump in and help out if anyone lost their plot. Even if Percy completely froze on stage, his friends would push and help him along. And playing was so much fun. He loved it, he loved pretending to be someone he wasn't and having fun with his friends.

"Well then, let the show begin", declared Rachel and took a deep breath. "Ready, Juliet?"
"Ready, Romeo", confirmed Percy with a smile, taking her hand.

"You couldn't possibly look prouder if you tried, Nico."

Nico blushed and tried to tune down the ridiculous grin on his face, though when he turned some, Sally was smiling fondly at him and not teasingly. "I... I helped him rehearse a lot and I know he's amazing in this and I am just... so proud of him... He's been looking forward to it so much..."

"It's okay, sweetie", laughed Sally gently. "I appreciate that Percy has found someone as dedicated and supportive like you, Nico. You're... I know that you are very important to him and that your support means a lot to him. You really don't need to be embarrassed of that."

Thankfully, Nico was saved from a reply by the curtain rising and the play starting. Honestly, in all of his decades, he had never quite gotten the hang of Shakespeare. It just... wasn't his. He preferred a solid science fiction or steampunk novel over the cheesy old stuff, but the play had a really strong selling point: Percy Jackson in a dress. And just how good Percy looked in the dress and wig.

"Nico? Nico, you're actively drooling", whispered Hazel next to him, elbowing him with a grin. "Come on. I can keep it together despite Leo in a pretty dress too. And he looks so good."

Nico grumbled and crossed his arms, concentrating on the play instead. He admired how Percy seemed like he was actually having a lot of fun. That was good. After how stressed Percy had been before the swim race, with not just the race but also the play on his mind, part of Nico had been worried that Percy would lose joy in the play due to the pressure he put on himself. But apparently, all the support he had gotten during the race had helped him see things in perspective.

"This is actually fun", hummed Nico in appreciation. "Beyond the pretty Percy in a dress."

Hazel laughed and nudged him a little. "It really is fun. Didn't expect them to do so good."

"It's fascinating to see Bianca so funny though, she always seems so... serious", mused Sally.

"In the fifties, she was a movie star", replied Nico casually. "There's one or two obscure black and white movies she stared in. I do have copies, if you're interested."

"Sometimes, I forget how old you are", whispered Sally surprised. "I'd love to see those! Yes! You and Percy should come over for movie night next weekend, how does that sound?"

"That... sounds wonderful", agreed Nico, nodding slowly and smiling.

"For now, can we go and congratulate our stars?", asked Hazel, clapping loudly.

Everyone was standing, clapping loudly and whistling as the drama club was standing on the stage, bowing and smiling brightly. The play really had been a lot of fun and amazing and Nico could not wait to steal his boyfriend away today. Which was something that was definitely happening.

"You were amazing, sweetheart!", exclaimed Sally as she hugged Percy.

"Yes! My boy, the next big movie star!", agreed Poseidon, hugging Percy from the other side.

Nico couldn't help but sneak a picture, because Percy looked overwhelmingly happy as he was sandwiched between his parents and showered with praise. Nico grunted as he was knocked out of the way by Tyson, who jumped Percy in utter excitement.
"Lion cub, you were breathtaking", commented Hazel as she and Frank stole Leo.

Frank smiled broadly as he handed over roses to their boyfriend. "Yes. You were amazing."

"Listen, guys, Silena is throwing a party for the cast, I can go, right?", asked Percy hopefully.

"Well, it is Friday and you have worked hard for this", drawled Poseidon, turning toward Silena.

Silena smiled broadly. "He can crash at my place, coach. He won't have to find his way back home late at night. We'll make it a slumber-party."

"This is so not what I expect when the head-cheerleader throws an after-party."

Nico looked around a little unimpressed, seeing everyone in pajamas, eating sweets and popcorn and watching Titanic. He had returned home with his family before joining the others. Piper was snugly stuck between Chris and Clarisse, Travis and Connor were sharing an arm-chair, Leo was cuddling with both Percy and Mitchell, while Annabeth was sitting with Silena and Rachel. Bianca and Calypso had also abandoned the coven in favor of being with their fellow drama nerds. Jason and Malcolm came from the kitchen, carrying large bowls with pop-corn in.

"When I say I throw a slumber-party, I throw a slumber-party, Nico", chimed Silena. "And we all deserved some Leo – not you, little dragon. The di Caprio."

"We watched Romeo + Juliet", tagged Percy on. "And then we figured we'd stay on the Leo."

"How much more time should I have wasted to get to a good movie?", drawled Nico.

"We're gonna watch Catch Me If You Can next", assured Percy. "Now come here, Dracula."

Nico huffed as he slipped in behind Percy and cuddled up to his boyfriend. For a while they watched in semi-silence – major conversations about the movie were happening all around, but Nico and Percy didn't talk to each other at first. Only after a while did Nico lean down.

"So... you fine?", whispered Nico lowly. "I mean, you were rather... nervous... before the race."

"Mh. It was great. It felt incredible. This was easily the most exciting thing I've ever experienced", grinned Percy delighted. "It was so cool and everyone did their best. I feel great."

Nico smiled softly and rested his chin on Percy's shoulder. The two stayed cuddled up throughout the entire movie and the next, until they fell asleep, still holding each other. Most of them woke up with a kink in their necks the next morning. It was totally worth it when the first thing Nico saw in the morning was Percy's face though. Percy smiled at him and leaned in for a kiss.

"Morning, babe", hummed Percy contently, snuggling up to the vampire.

"Good morning, kitten", sighed Nico with a small smile. "Slept well?"

"Ye—es. You are a very comfortable pillow", grinned Percy. "So... what... are you doing today?"

"Mh? I don't... know?", offered Nico confused and yawned widely.

"Well, I was just thinking... Amy is taking Tyson to the birthday party of one of Ty's friends, Proteus, Bently and Kym went to spend the weekend with their respective partners. Dad is at work and Rhode and Triton actually had plans for today too... after I suggested for them to make plans."
"Why would you do that?", asked Nico, now even more confused.

"He wants to take you home with him", groaned Leo annoyed and hit Nico with a pillow in the face. "Because you two would be all alone there. Seriously, do I have to spell it out?"

Nico's eyes widened and Percy's cheeks turned dark-red. Nico looked around, noting that aside from them and Leo, everyone else was seemingly still asleep. So Percy wanted to take him home? Really? Judging by the bright blush on Percy's cheeks, that was the plan indeed.

"I mean...", whispered Percy, blush intensifying. "I had... kind of... planned on taking you home today. Yes. I figured we could sneak out here together and... you know..."

"A—Are you... sure?", asked Nico stunned. "This is so... so... sudden?"

"Not really", shrugged Percy. "I mean. You and I, we've been... dating for months now. And I've been kind of planning this for... I mean, ever since... you know, last time I sneaked into your room."

"Oh", nodded Nico slowly, his own cheeks heating up. "Okay. Let's go."

"Let him get changed first?", suggested Leo with a deadpan.


Percy laughed and kissed Nico's cheek before he hurried to the bathroom to get changed. When he returned, he pressed one finger against his lips and motioned for Nico to follow him. Leo lazily waved them off, face still buried in the pillow beneath him.

"Let's get going", chimed Percy as they climbed onto Nico's motorbike.

Nico just grunted, unsure about this. Well, he wasn't really unsure about it. He really wanted Percy. Had wanted him for months now. But this did come rather unexpected to him, if he was being honest. They definitely needed to talk about this some more once they were home.

He took a deep breath as he parked in front of the Jackson house and followed his boyfriend inside and upstairs toward Percy's room. Once there, Percy paused in front of the bed, bouncing back and forth on the balls of his feet, looking over at Nico from beneath his lashes.

"Are you... Are you really sure about this?", asked Nico cautiously.

"Nico...", sighed Percy and stepped up to Nico, cupping his cheek. "I've been thinking about this ever since... I mean, since spring-break, I've actually been thinking of this as a concrete possibility. And after you and I, in the woods, you know... But when I... After the race, last week, I felt so... it was so different from how I usually feel. After races, I'd just go out for pizza with my mom and that'd be it. Instead, everyone... I just... I am still amazed that I have people now. My people. And... you. You have been so amazing for me in the past months. So I figured... I just..."

Percy paused and took a deep breath before locking eyes with Nico. "Yes. Yes, I am a hundred percent sure that I want to have sex with you. Today. I mean, preferably last night after the play but things were so... with so many other people. So I planned this morning for us. If you want to. I don't want to push you, if you think it's still too early, Nico."

"I do want to have sex with you, Percy", assured Nico, resting his hand on top of Percy's.

Nico laughed at that, making Percy laugh too. Both of them leaned in to kiss very slowly while tugging on each other's clothes. Though it was less effective to strip each other while still kissing. They broke the kiss sheepishly and properly stripped down. Nico paused to take in the sight. He had never actually seen all of Percy naked before and he definitely had to enjoy that view.

"Du—ude. You are making me feel really awkward", huffed Percy embarrassed.

"I'm sorry. You're just... so beautiful", whispered Nico.

Percy blushed and grinned. "You're such a fucking dork, di Angelo."

"I know", hummed Nico fondly and leaned in to kiss Percy. "I just love you so much, babe."

Percy smiled fondly, resting his hands on Nico's chest and slowly running them down said chest. He shuddered as he wrapped his fingers around Nico's already half-hard cock. The vampire cussed slightly, fingers digging into Percy's waist. With the grin growing on his lips did Percy push his boyfriend onto the bed to sit down between his legs. Slowly, he jerked Nico into full hardness while trailing kisses down along Nico's chest.

"How... do you want this, Perce?", asked Nico slowly, running his fingers through Percy's hair.

"I want you... inside of... me?", offered Percy, cheeks dark-red. "If you want that too?"

"Oh yes, so much", groaned Nico and collapsed back onto the bed.

Percy laughed softly as he looked at him. "Okay, good. Gimme a sec to get the lube and condom."

Nico hummed in appreciation as he watched Percy's ass while the other walked over to his desk to get something out of the lowest drawer. When Percy turned around, he was spotting a cheeky grin, lube in one hand and condoms in the other. A fond smile found its way onto Nico's lips.

"Okay. So. This is where my planning ends", admitted Percy, cheeky grin faltering and being replaced with a flustered expression. "I... never did anything like this. I have no idea, beyond some bad porn I watched before. So... I'm gonna trust you to take the lead, okay?"

"Thank you", whispered Nico, earning a confused expression from Percy. "For trusting me."

"Urgh. So cheesy", groaned Percy and threw the lube at Nico. "Just fuck me. Or make gentle, sweet love to me, as you'd probably phrase it, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, that", agreed Nico with a grin, kissing Percy. "Just lay down and let me take care of you."

Humming slowly, Percy laid down on his bed, propped up on his elbows. He looked at Nico expectantly. Smiling at Percy, Nico leaned in for a very slow and deep kiss. It helped Percy relax. And once Percy was properly relaxed beneath him, Nico rolled one of the condoms over his own cock and lubed his fingers up. He trailed them down Percy's chest teasingly, making Percy shudder beneath him. Percy seemed pretty eager and relaxed as he laid sprawled out beneath Nico like that – and Nico had to admit that he really enjoyed this view. He could get used to this.

"Okay, Perce, I'm... gonna prep you, okay?", whispered Nico softly. "You gotta relax, yeah?"

"I'll... try", offered Percy, wrapping his arms around Nico's neck to hold onto him.

Closing his eyes, Percy tried to relax, though he had to admit, he was really nervous about this. He had been fantasizing about this for so long now. Taking a deep breath, he held tightly onto Nico. It
wasn't like he hadn't played with himself before – heck, his first heat had been intense and he had done a lot of stuff he hadn't done during masturbating before. But there was a difference between his own fingers and his boyfriend's fingers. He gasped as Nico breached him, one lubed-up finger very carefully slipping into him. Nico took his time, wanting to make sure that he didn't hurt Percy and that Percy had enough time to adjust to it all. He leaned up and pulled Nico in to kiss him. Nico more than gladly obliged, gently running his tongue over Percy's teeth while slipping a second finger onto his boyfriend. Percy froze for a second, before he adjusted. Nodding slowly, he signaled Nico that it was okay to move his fingers. Carefully, Nico started scissoring Percy, spreading his fingers and digging them deeper. When Percy moaned softly, Nico added a third finger.

"You're doing really good, babe", praised Nico gently. "Want some more?"

"Mh. Ye—es, please", groaned Percy, hooking his legs around Nico's waist.

Laughing softly, Nico added a fourth finger, properly spreading Percy wide. The moans spilling from his gorgeous boyfriend's lips grew louder and louder, which Nico took as a very motivating sign. As Nico pulled out, Percy whined. Blinking his eyes open, Percy glared at his boyfriend.

"What are you doing?", grumbled Percy with the cutest pout.

"Oh, I'm sorry, I was under the impression that you wanted my cock, not my fingers", chuckled Nico teasingly. "Unless you changed your mind. I can also finger you and jerk you off. That's fine too, babe. You just... have to say so. There's no pressure for us having sex now."

Percy rolled his eyes and sighed softly. "You're way too sweet. Don't worry, Nico. I'm fine. I want you. I really want you. Please put your dick inside of me. Is that... Is that clear enough? Yeah?"

"Stop being so cheeky, Jackson", warned Nico and flipped Percy's nose.

Percy laughed, wiggling his nose. "Sorry. It's just... It is adorable how concerned you are. But I know what I want and what I want is you. So, can I have you?"

"You already have me. Heart, soul and body", whispered Nico gently as he eased his way in.

"So—o che—esy", groaned Percy, clawing his nails into Nico's shoulders.

Nico hissed a little, but he continued pushing into Percy. Percy's eyes were wide, pupils dialed and... fangs out. Blinking slowly, Nico turned a little to look at Percy's head. Yeah, the kitten-ears were out too. He barely startled when something fluffy caressed his thigh. Percy's tail.

"Your... wild side is showing", whispered Nico amused.

"Says the vampire with the pitch-black eyes", chimed Percy teasingly. "Also, your dick's not the only long, hard thing poking here."

Slowly, Nico ran his tongue over his teeth. Fangs out. It seemed he didn't have as much control as he'd want either, not when it came to Percy. Leaning in, he kissed Percy deeply once more. Their fangs clashed a little, but for the most part, they made it work – aside from the nicked lips. Nico gladly licked the blood off though. He smiled as he bottomed out.

"So, how does it feel?", asked Nico slowly, kissing along Percy's neck.

"Good", sighed Percy contently. "So much better than my toy. Real and warm and good. So, you going to move any time soon, or do I have to fuck myself?"
"So greedy", sighed Nico as he snapped his hips, making Percy hiss.

"Always for you", hummed Percy with a smile.

Nico chuckled gently, pushing in and out of Percy in a slow, shallow rhythm. He worked his way up, until Percy seemed nearly lax beneath him, a mewling little kitten, running his sharp claws along Nico's shoulders. Only then did Nico pick up the pace and start fucking Percy for earnest. After that, Percy couldn't hold back much longer, coming after only a couple of hard, sharp thrusts from Nico, three of which hit Percy's prostate. Gasping for breath, Percy collapsed back onto his bed. With Percy's orgasm, Nico didn't last much longer either. With a drawn-out moan on his lips did Nico come, face buried in Percy's neck and riding out his orgasm.

"That... was... fun", panted Percy as he curled up on his side, resting his head on Nico's shoulder.

Nico hummed in agreement as he got rid of the used condom and grabbed a shirt from nearby to clean Percy up some, dumping both on the ground. Percy smiled contently as he snuggled more up to his boyfriend, gently kissing Nico's cheek.

"I love you, Nico", whispered Percy, nosing Nico's neck. "I really, really love you."

"I love you too, Percy", replied Nico, a tad bit confused by the intensity of the declaration.

"No. You don't... understand how much", sighed Percy, resting his chin on Nico's chest and staring at him. "You have no idea how much you've been helping me. Supporting me, with the race and the play, with the... the self-harm. That you're not trying to force me to do what you want, force me to stop, but offering me to... be there for me. You're not pushy. Not just with the sex, but with... everything. You accept me and my pace. And I... I really truly love you for it."

"Percy, I love you. I truly love you too", assured Nico, grasping Percy's hand and kissing it, the light catching on the ruby on Nico's ring. "That's why we're courting. Because I mean it. I do want to spend eternity with you. I will always support you, with everything. And I will always help you, through whatever you are going through. Even if you might think it's silly, I will be there for you."

Percy blushed intensely at that, blinking slowly. Eternity. That was what they had ahead of them, both of them being immortal. And while the thought of eternity was scary and Percy knew he couldn't judge their relationship by a couple of months alone, the thought of having this kind of support and love in his life for eternity... that was a pretty nice thought.

"So... since I totally can't feel my legs, you'll make breakfast, right?", asked Percy with a grin.

"Only because I love you", sighed Nico amused, kissing Percy once more.

Chapter End Notes

FIRST OF ALL - because I have been forgetting this for the past two fucking months now - I did an illustration of how Percy looks as a merboy vs a catboy. You can find it here on my DeviantArt! ;)

Secondly, question: Since this is 34/40, how'd you feel about me bumping the chapter count up again? Is this running dry and you actually want to see it end, or do you want to see, say, Percy meeting Nyx and Percy and Nico going to college, starting their own
life...? More introduction into the political side of this world, aka the council meetings and all?

Oh and for those who were so afraid Drew would do something. I mean. She's not an idiot. Not during a race, or when she knows all eyes will be on Percy for the play. Now that the play and race are ooover... weell... *wink wink, nudge nudge*
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 34: The Devil Wears Pink

Percy was laying on the floor of the living room, with Tyson next to him, their arms pressed against each other. The two brothers were watching Percy's favorite anime – Free! - together, while eating pancakes. It was a nice and lazy Saturday morning. They were allowed to eat breakfast in front of the TV this morning, because most of the family weren't here anyway. Rhode, Triton and Proteus were on a trip together – museums in Washington and Percy would just rather not. Poseidon had some 'official business' to attend to and when Amphitrite had realized that he would be in over his head, she reluctantly allowed the remaining children to go and eat in the living room. Benthesikyme sat on Tyson's other side, leaning against the couch behind them, while Kymopoleia was on Percy's other side, both their legs spread out in front of them, against their brothers.

"This is actually pretty cool", commented Kym, throwing a blueberry at Percy.

"I think Haru-chan is highly relatable", grinned Benthy delighted. "He's a merman, right?"

"Not in canon", chuckled Percy amused. "But after everything I learned to be true... Yeah, I think the creator definitely knew about the supernatural and made Haruka a merman."

And just before the swim-race on TV ended did the doorbell ring. Benthesikyme sighed and headed over to open for whoever bothered them at 9AM on a Saturday. Pressing pause, Percy turned to watch, also curious. And maybe a tiny bit hopeful. Ever since Percy and Nico had had sex for the first time last week, Percy might have been a tiny bit... clingy. It was just that it had been an intense connection and every time they touched, it sparked an echo of a memory of that connection. At first, he had been a bit disturbed and embarrassed about that. But then Piper had pulled him aside and explained to him that it was not just in his head. It was a connection. There was a bond, slowly forming. Not necessarily a matebond – those were permanent after all – but the... foundation of a matebond, that was what Piper had called it. So Percy was kind of hoping that it was Nico ringing the doorbell so he might get some lazy Saturday morning cuddles in with his boyfriend. It was a di Angelo, but a very different and unexpected di Angelo.

"Hades?", asked Benthesikyme surprised. "You want me to get dad for you?"

"Good morning to you too, Benthesikyme", chuckled Hades amused. "But no, your father is not the Jackson I came to talk to. Is Perseus at home...?"

"Ohh, someone is in trouble with the in-laws", whispered Kym teasingly.

Percy glared at her as Hades entered the living room. The vampire was intimidating. Tall, with sharp features, dark eyes and that serious expression on his face. The perfectly cut suit did not help. Wiggling his nose, Percy got up from his spot on the floor.

"Uh, Mister di Angelo, sir, uhm, what can I... do for you...?", asked Percy awkwardly.

Why was he so awkward? He was never awkward! Urgh. Somehow, it felt as though Hades could see with just one look that Percy and Nico had had sex. Blushing brightly, Percy shifted around.

"I'd like to speak with you for a moment, if you don't mind", offered Hades. "Alone."
Kym and Benthy exchanged a pointed look at that, while Percy nodded and led Hades out of the living room and upstairs to his own room. Hades looked around curiously, inspecting the room, while Percy flopped down on his bed, watching Hades curiously and wondering what exactly the vampire lord wanted from him. They had never actually had a one on one conversation before.

"So... what can I do for you?", asked Percy with a curious frown. "It's... not about Nico, right?"

"Percy, relax", chuckled Hades amused. "You are good for the boy. He's never been this happy before. I don't have any intentions of meddling in your relationship. You're both clever boys."

"Okay...", nodded Percy with the faintest blush. "So, uhm... What can I do for you?"

"You know you're immortal, right?", asked Hades, knowing the answer fully well.

"Uhm. Yeah?", shrugged Percy with a frown.

"You have no grasp of what that means yet", stated Hades, with the smallest, kindest smile. "It's okay. It's a huge responsibility and it will take you centuries to truly understand just what it means. But there is a future filled with responsibility for you."

"That's great", grunted Percy with a pointed look. "Thanks for the pep-talk, dude. ...I mean..."

"It's okay", laughed Hades amused and shook his head. "I live with a bunch of immortal teenagers. I'm used to being called a dude by now. But this wasn't what I meant, Percy. I am a lord. Your father is a lord, not just a king. And while you will most likely never be king yourself – between Proteus and your other siblings, there are too many between you and the throne – there are still... responsibilities, Percy. And I wanted to talk to you about them."

"Okay. Can you be... any more vague?", asked Percy doubtfully.

"You are a special one", muttered Hades sounding downright fond. "Your father is raising your brother Proteus to be his replacement as king one day and your brother Triton to be his replacement on the council. After all, Triton is currently being courted by a vampire. And having a merman who will stay living on the world above is the best choice to join the council of New York."

"That sounds more like you're telling me about the responsibilities of my siblings", pointed Percy out, kicking his feet back and forth in the air as he laid on his stomach on his bed.

"Insufferable impatient brat", snorted Hades with a sigh. "Patience is yet another thing that the centuries of your life are going to teach you, Percy."

"Naaah, that's not gonna happen", hummed Percy. "Now, what's... the point of this?"

"You're special, Percy", stated Hades and sat down on a chair opposite him. "You're immortal because you're a merman, but you aren't just a merman. You are an immortal feline shifter."

"I am", agreed Percy with a frown. "I... never really thought of it in those terms, but... Yeah. That's, uh... rare, right? Am I... Am I the only one...?"

"You're not. Bast herself is a half-blood", offered Hades. "Her father Ra was a falcon shifter, but her mother Isis was a warlock. And while warlocks have a different form of immortality through rebirth, they are still immortal – because they keep the memories of their past lives."

"Cool", hummed Percy and tilted his head. "So, I'm an immortal cat. What does that entail?"
The giant grin on Percy's lips told Hades that Percy was mighty proud of the tail-pun. "You are currently the only cat-shifter in New York. There hasn't been one since your grandmother. But you are immortal and... if you truly do end up mated to Nico, you are going to spend... a lot of time in New York. He is my heir. He will one day be the lord of New York. With the years, you will attract more cat-shifters. Knowing there is a strong and even immortal cat-shifter will attract other shifters to seek refuge here. They will come, seeking a leader in you. You might end up being the mate of a lord, but you will end up being a lord yourself one day. A leader to your own pride of shifters. And even before that, you will already become a member of the council. Simply based on you being the only cat-shifter around. Every race is represented in the council."

"Oh...", grunted Percy. "You know, you could have just lead with that."

"Where's the fun in that?", smirked Hades, looking downright mischievous. "You're sixteen years old, Percy. You still have time before you will be legal to join the council. But I figured you might perhaps be interested in joining a council meeting, just... to see what to expect."

"Oh. That... That's a cool idea", grunted Percy surprised, blinking slowly. "Uhm. Thanks."

"You're welcome. Just... tag along with your father in two weeks", offered Hades.

"Cool. Yeah. I'll... I'll do that. Thanks", grinned Percy and tilted his head. /break\

"...So I guess I'm going to my first council meeting in two weeks", summed Percy up.

"That sounds really cool", hummed Piper, tilting her head as she shouldered her backpack.

"I know—ow. But it also sounds kinda fancy and I don't do fancy?", offered Percy.

"Did someone just say 'Silena, please take me out for shopping and a fancy make-over'?"

"...No one said anything close to that, Silly", commented Mike dryly. "Literally, not even close."

Silena huffed as she pushed past Mike. "Shush. So—o, Percy, what was that I just heard?"

Percy did a double-take and blinked slowly, looking over at Piper, who just shrugged. "Uhm. Silena, please take me out for shopping and a fancy make-over...?"

"Perfect!", exclaimed Silena excitedly. "Wednesday next week? This week, we really have to focus on training for the race this Friday. But next week. Piper, you will come too. No arguments allowed. This shirt is nearly see-through, the one you wore yesterday had holes—"

"Those are fashion-statements!", groaned Piper.

"No. That's worn-out clothes that need replacement", huffed Silena.

Smiling at his friends, Percy ducked past them to get out of the gym-area to find his boyfriend already waiting for him. Grumpy and leaning against the wall with his arms crossed. When Percy kissed him gently on the cheek, the grumpy look melted into a pleased smile.

"There you are", sighed Nico. "Come on. Let's go and grab some pizza."

"I love you", groaned Percy. "My mind-reading vampire."

"So, you know... I... uhm... was thinking that we could maybe do something this weekend?
"Something special", started Nico a little awkwardly. "I wanted to come over. To your mom's."

"That... is special", noted Percy surprised. "Is there a reason? I mean, not that you need-"

Nico interrupted him by kissing him gently. "Your mother and I talked about acting during the play. And I told her how Bianca used to be a movie star in the fifties. I... spent the whole last week digging around our attic and basement – there is so much stuff that keeps collecting when ten immortals live together – and I finally found it this weekend. The box with the movie reels. And since your mom expressed interest in seeing them... I figured maybe you and I could visit your mother this weekend and watch a movie or two together."

"Oh, my mom and my boyfriend bonding. That sounds nice", grinned Percy pleased. "Also, seeing Bianca in an actual movie? That sounds so cool. I won't be much use Saturday anyway because of Friday's race, so just relaxing and watching movies with mom and you sounds awesome."

The team had qualified for the state-wide relay competition and, in individual competitions, Percy had qualified for the 200 meter and the 100 meter breaststroke competition, Drew for the 100 meter butterfly stroke, Piper for the 200 meter backstroke, Silena for 200 meter and 100 meter freestyle. So, basically, they had won nearly all of their competitions – Piper had lost the 100 meter butterfly, Drew the 200 meter backstroke. This competition however was farther away than the last – the last had been a relatively short drive, so they could take a lot of people with them. This time around, it was mainly just the team and the very dedicated parents who had driven along. Including Percy's family, both sides. And one very dedicated boyfriend who gave Percy a good-luck kiss before the race.

Taking a deep breath, Percy jumped into the water at the go.

Everything faded out as Percy swam for his life – and won the 200 meter competition. He was panting hard and laughing as Piper pulled him out of the pool and into a hug. Next up was Drew and even though Percy really hated her guts he went to wish her good luck before he joined the team. She won, not entirely unexpected so. She was a really good swimmer.

Percy won the 100 meter, Piper lost her race, Silena won the 100 meter and lost the 200 meter – and the team won the relay together. Exhausted and happy beyond belief did the team essentially collapse in their bus. Percy had a broad, excited smile on his face as he was leaning heavily against his boyfriend, still panting and out of breath. Nico was smiling, one arm around Percy's waist, nose buried in Percy's hair, pressing gentle kisses against his head.

"Sweet, wonderful, amazing little mercat", whispered Nico with a proud smile.

"I kicked a—ass", groaned Percy happily. "We made it to the next stage."

"Okay. We got everything, right? Popcorn, cold drinks, pillows", mused Sally.

"We're all set, darling", assured Paul amused as he sat down. "Come here. Sit with us."

Paul sat on the right of the couch, Nico on the left, with Percy and Sally now in the middle between them. Percy grinned pleased at having his mom and his boyfriend here. Closing his eyes contently, he snuggled up to Nico. This was good. He had gotten better with the need for physical attention, because the bond had settled some. He felt more relaxed now. Winning the last competition had also helped him unwind some of the tension. He just got to enjoy Nico's scent, the comforting warmth of his boyfriend next to him. His fingers curled around the amulet around his neck. The first courting
gift. Percy was always wearing it, wearing it with pride. He opened his eyes and saw the ruby ring glister on Nico's finger, worn with the same pride as though it was an engagement ring.

"Okay. Run by me again what we're watching", grunted Paul, eyeing the old-fashioned projector that Nico had been putting together while Sally and Paul had made snacks.

"My sister used to star in some obscure and cheesy black and white movies back in the fifties", explained Nico. "And Sally said she'd like to watch them."

"Oh, I love old movies", confirmed Sally excitedly. "My mother and I, we used to watch them when I was really small. It's one of the very few memories I have of her."

Paul looked at his girlfriend with gentle, soft eyes, before he pulled her close enough so he could kiss her cheek. Percy watched the exchange with a small smile. After everything they had been through, his mom deserved to be happy. Leaning up, he kissed his own boyfriend's cheek.

"I love you", whispered Percy softly. "Now press play, or whatever you do with those things."

Nico huffed amused and did as Percy requested. He himself enjoyed watching the old movies. Seeing Bianca during her time of glory. She had truly loved Hollywood back in the day. She had been such a good femme fatal and if Hades hadn't put a stop to it, she could have been a big star. That kind of attention was not beneficial for immortals. Angry and frustrated, she had run off to Europe for a couple of years to cool down.

"And what did she do in Europe?", asked Sally interested.

They had made a pause between movies and Sally and Paul had started asking questions about the movies and why Bianca had stopped making them. Nico smiled amused as they stood on the balcony, getting a little fresh air before they'd watch the second movie.

"Bought a small island, started a lesbian empire of debauchery and party", replied Nico.

"...What?", asked Paul slowly, looking at him surprised.

"Oh, yeah. After playing the straight evil lady in movies for years, she decided to go back to our roots", chuckled Nico with a shrug. "She's always been fascinated by Artemis – a dark elf turned vampire, who had her own all-female coven. Bianca joined it for a while, bought them an island, partied with them, before returning to the US and rejoining our family."

"That... sounds fascinating", noted Sally, eyebrows raised.

"Did you ever?", asked Percy with a frown.

"Ever do what exactly?", wanted Nico to know, tilting his head as he looked at his boyfriend.

"Leave the coven", elaborated Percy.

"Oh", grunted Nico. "Well... in a way, I suppose. I didn't leave it. But I did leave for war. Every deployment meant I had to leave my coven behind, in a way."

Frowning, Percy wrapped his arms around Nico's neck and pulled him down into a warm, soft hug. For a moment, Nico looked startled, but then he smiled and returned the hug. Percy was good. Inherently good. He was the support and love Nico had always wanted.

"So—o. Tell me what one wears during a council meeting", asked Percy lightly to change topics.
"...Not this", offered Nico, vaguely motioning at Percy, before pausing. ".Is that my shirt?"

Grinning smugly, Percy tugged on the shirt. "What? This worn-out, black band-shirt of a band I can't even pronounce? That's totally mine! Why would you even think-"

"It's from before you were born!", pointed Nico out, poking the concert date.

"To—totally mine", chimed Percy with a smug grin.

"Hold on. Council meeting?", interrupted Paul, before Nico could throw any more accusations.

"Oh. Yeah. Hades totally invited me to one for next weekend", declared Percy proudly. "Said that... one day, I'll be the representative of cat-shifters and that going to peek into what a council meeting looked like might help me prepare for what's about to come."

"My boy, being so responsible", smiled Sally. "Now. How about we watch the next movie?"

"Ye—es!", exclaimed Percy eagerly, heading back to the living room.

"And this. And this. Also this. Oh, this will look lovely on you!"

"...Si, I'm not going to wear a dress to the council meeting", grunted Percy pointedly.

"Oh, silly", chided Silena. "Not for the council meeting. You can wear it for Nico!"

Rolling his eyes, Percy accepted the blue summer-dress as Silena continued picking clothes for Percy and Piper. Piper looked super annoyed and frustrated as she walked next to Percy. She absolutely hated shopping, but there was no saying no to Silena Beauregard.

"Now, go and get changed!", ordered Silena. "I will be in the shoe-section, children. I'll be back in... say... ten minutes. You will show off the outfits you picked. And you will pick outfits, Piper."

Piper grumbled and rolled her eyes. "If Clarisse wasn't that much into this, I wouldn't even be here."

Percy laughed as he entered his own changing room. Stripping down to his underwear, he grabbed the dress first, putting it on. He had no qualms wearing dresses, didn't really get why some guys made such a fuss about it. But he did know that Nico liked it. He had seen it in Nico's eyes when he had dressed up for the play. Smiling, Percy gave it a whirl once.

"Dresses, Jackson. That's just... shouldn't surprise me."

"Drewsie. Don't tell me you wanna hook up?", smiled Percy brightly as he turned around. "What can I do for you? I'll need the room a little longer. Got a lot to try on."

"Listen", snarled Drew, backing Percy into a corner. "I am so tired of you. Smiling brightly, wrapping everyone around your little finger. Winning the competitions without even any effort. Being the golden boy of school. With your king daddy protecting you."

"Oh yeah. I have it so easy", agreed Percy with a dramatic sigh. "So sorry to ruin your life."

Drew snarled – straight-up snarled – her teeth all sharp fangs, her eyes pitch-black like a shark's. She was going full siren on Percy. Staring surprised, Percy backed up against the wall.

Closing his eyes and taking a deep breath, Percy straightened up. When he opened them again, they were as black as Drew's. It startled him when he saw himself in the mirror opposite.

"Back off", ordered Percy, putting all of his authority into the voice.

She obeyed. He started to feel slightly afraid. He was still nervous about his charmspeak, tried not to use it. Never to use it against people. But he had to learn how to control it. He couldn't be afraid of his powers. Licking his lips slowly, Percy tilted his head a little.

"I am... I am a prince. I am not going to be intimidated by you, Tanaka", stated Percy, voice cold and firm. "Barge in like that again, it'll hurt you. I'll hurt you. Keep threatening me, you're going to regret it. I will make you regret it."

"Y—You...", squeaked Drew, bumping against the other wall. "Why are you so strong?"

"It's the genes", smiled Percy. "You will not speak to me like that again. I'm done being pushed around. I am strong. I am stronger than you. Stronger than I thought I was. I will never be pushed around again. You'll keep your distance. From me and from my friends. From my boyfriend. You'll be civil, because I need you on the team. But I am so done with your attitude. Am I understood?"

"I never thought you'd...", hissed Drew, narrowing her eyes at him.

"What? Stand up to you?", asked Percy, tilting his head, eyes still black as he smiled, showing off his own fangs. "Go. Leave now. That's an order."

His charmspeak left her dizzy as she obeyed the order. Wow. He really was stronger than expected. Watching her go, he smiled to himself before turning to the mirror. There was something entirely feral to his siren-face. Different than the feral side to his cat-form. Grinning, he got out his phone and took a picture of himself – dress and fangs and pitch-black eyes, before sending it to Nico.

|break|

Nico made the most broken sound as he stared blankly at his phone. Annabeth rolled her eyes. She didn't even have to look to know what was going on. Percy must have sent him a photo.

"Don't get distracted", chided Annabeth irritated. "I don't need the advantage. I'm already kicking your ass as it is, di Angelo. Please try to concentrate."

"I'll remind you the next time Reyna sends a post-training photo", grumbled Nico.

Annabeth blushed and glared. So she tended to be distracted by her girlfriend too, but still. Finally, she got to tease Nico. Sighing, Nico put his phone down and picked his controller back up. He wasn't much of a fan of video games, though strategic games were intriguing – as long as they weren't war games. Annabeth shared his passion for strategy.

"Percy went shopping with Silena", offered Nico. "He sent a picture of himself in a dress."

"Fair enough", sighed Annabeth and shook her head. "I heard he'll go to the next council meeting. Are you going to accompany him? To hold his hand?"

"He's a big boy, Annie", snorted Nico. "He doesn't need me to hover. I've been to multiple council meetings before, I don't need to go. This one is Percy's and he... he has to see if he likes it on his own, I suppose. We're not attached by the hip and if I come with him now, if I continue hovering during such events, he'll rely on me for it. And he's... incredibly strong himself. He has leadership qualities. I know Silena wants him to be team captain after she leaves. He's going to be the leader of
a strong pride one day. So he needs to find his own way of handling a council meeting."

"You are very focused on the future", pointed Annabeth out curiously.

"Because for the first time, I can... see it clearly. I spent decades drifting around aimlessly, from war to war, not knowing where my place is. I have always fought Hades' decision that I should be the heir to the coven. I thought it was stupid. Makaria and Melinoe were the first vampires he had turned. Bianca was turned before me. But for the first time... I can actually see myself as the lord. With Percy at my side, giving me strength."

"I always understood why he picked you", offered Annabeth gently. "Bianca isn't a leader. She left the coven before. That's... a big no for a coven leader. Makaria and Melinoe are... not fit to be leaders at all. They are focusing too much on the fun parts of immortality. Thanatos and Olethros are not Hades' blood, even though Thanatos would make a good leader. You are the first in line who would make a good, strong leader. You'll do good, Nico."

Nico heaved a sigh. Hades had been lord of New York for... as long as New York existed. He understood why his sire wanted to move on. To spend a century or two traveling with world with Persephone, instead of having the responsibilities of being lord and leader.

Chapter End Notes

Sooo after overwhelming enthusiasm for the idea, I decided to bump the total chapter count up to 50, to include more of their lives beyond their high school years. ;)

And next up will be Percy's first council meeting - and his first meeting with the only other immortal cat-shifter.
Chapter 35: The Best from Bast

Percy had to admit that he was really nervous. A council meeting. His first council meeting. Sure, he had absolutely no say in it. He wouldn't be more than a silent observer. But still, the knowledge that this was his future, essentially... This would be what he would do once he was older. Once he was an adult, a leader of his own people. And that was the thought that was so scary.

"Perseus. Lucas asked me to keep an eye on you."

"What are you doing here, Tavy?", asked Percy disturbed as the annoyed blonde stepped up to him.

"I am the senior seer in New York", grunted Octavian pointedly. "There are only a handful of seers in New York and all of them are younger than me. I have a seat on the council."

"...Right. You're a senior. You already are eighteen", grunted Percy with a frown. "Huh."

"Indeed", drawled Octavian out. "Now, come along, kitty-cat. Lest you want to be late."

Biting his lower lip, Percy followed Octavian into the meeting hall. He paused, as soon as he was through the door, gaping in stunned silence and utter awe. Octavian sighed and rolled his eyes.

"They're... This is... Wow...", whispered Percy in total awe, gaping.

"Ah. Percy, you made it", smiled Hades, amusement sparkling in his eyes.

"The... The clothes!", yelped Percy, motioning around vaguely with both hands.

"Less pointing and less gaping", sighed Octavian and rolled his eyes.

Percy blushed and stuffed his hands into his pockets. Hades chuckled and rested a hand on Percy's shoulder. The vampire was wearing a fancy old-fashioned suit with a cool frilly shirt. The way Percy always pictured a vampire to dress. On top of that, a black cloak, beautifully adored with silver embroidery. It was absolutely gorgeous. And Hades was by far not the only one. Demeter was wearing a beautiful green dress, with actual flowers growing around the collar and decorating her hair. Hecate was wearing a beautiful dark-purple dress with a hood sewn onto it, decorated with amethysts and other gems. Lupa was wearing a dress of leather and fur, definitely from prey she had hunted and slayed herself. She was loudly arguing with Horus, whose leather-robies were decorated with his own falcon-feathers. Percy smiled amazed as he looked around. He spotted who must be the leader of the storm-spirits, floaty silk of black and gray and white like clouds, electric golden jewelry holding it and looking like lightning. They all looked so amazing. There were dozens more, some he could tell by their clothes alone what kind of supernatural creature they were, with others he could not even guess. But all of them looked absolutely stunning.

"So, that why you're wearing bed-sheets, Tavy?", stated Percy, slapping Octavian's chest.

"It's called a toga", grunted Octavian offended, straightening his purple bed-sheets. "And it is what augurs traditionally wear. I am an augur. Other seers might prefer a different approach, but I adhere to the Roman ways. Stop snickering like a child, Perseus."
Percy did not stop snickering. Hades chuckled and shook his head. Though the moment was disturbed when the still arguing Lupa and Horus approached them.

"Hello, Carter's kitten", greeted Horus, looking at Percy briefly.

"Hades, this disrespectful bird-brain-", started Lupa irritated.

"Oh, please, like it was my idea", snarled Horus annoyed. "I have no say in the matter!"

"Enough!", interrupted Hades irritated. "I can't make heads or tails of what you're trying to say when you keep screaming and snarling at each other."

"What they were trying to say is that you have a special visitor today, Lord Hades."

Percy frowned. He didn't recognize the voice. There were murmurs around them and conversations quieted as they all turned to stare at the woman who had just spoken. She was beautiful. Nougat-colored skin, charcoal-dark eyes and black hair in thin braids, cascading down to the middle of her waist. Her hips were adored with a golden belt. Dark-red and white silk in a very distinctively ancient Egyptian fashion style. She had fur draped over her shoulders and her ears and tail were out, proudly showing off her cat-shifter heritage.

"You're a Bastet, like me", whispered Percy eagerly.

"No, kit", chuckled the woman kindly. "I am not a Bastet, I am Bast."

"...Oh", was all Percy could get out.

"Yeah. That", grunted Horus, vaguely motioning at Bast. "The old hag decided to come visit."

Bast glared at Horus and just threw him over her shoulder with ease. Horus huffed as he gathered himself and dusted himself off like that was a regular thing to happen between them.

"Now, before this meeting begins, I think this young man needs a fashion-upgrade. If you'll excuse us for a moment", stated Bast, not minding Horus and what had just happened.

Instead, she rested a hand on Percy's shoulder and tugged him along. Out of the room and toward what looked like an empty bedroom. Percy had never been in this mansion before, but it was similar to the di Angelos' mansion. It apparently belonged to the supernatural community?

"Undress", prompted Bast as she went over to a suitcase.

"Uhm... slightly uncomfortable with that", noted Percy awkwardly.

"Ah. Modest", observed Bast. "Here. Take those to the bathroom and get changed... as far as you manage... and I will help you with the rest."

Nodding, Percy headed to the bathroom. This was not how he had expected to meet Bast. Getting undressed, he grabbed the white skirt-thing and put it on, trying to tie the dark-blue sash around it. He felt a little naked though, with no shirt. A bit lost, he tried to wrap the second part around his shoulders, but failed completely. Giving up, he gathered it up and walked out.

"Uhm... Yeah, I give up", sighed Percy embarrassed.

"It's okay", reassured Bast with an amused smile and approached him.

She tied the second white sheet around his chest in a way that actually looked good. Then she
adjusted the sash and then added the golden jewelry, as well as what looked like a deer-fur.

"Your... Nico... gave me that", noted Bast. "We do not just wear fur like humans do. We only wear what we hunted ourselves. What we ate. To show that we are great hunters and to respect those that gave their life for us. We do not just... throw away half the prey. With time, you will also gather jewelry made from what you hunted. Though as I see, you already do."

Percy growled on instinct as she attempted to touch his amulet. "That was Nico's first courting gift."

"Ah. Pardon me", nodded Bast and retreated her hand.

"Wait, Nico gave you this...?", asked Percy, backtracking some.

"Well, I asked Carter Kane, he apparently talked to Nico and got the fur for me", elaborated Bast.

"So he knew about this dress-code?", grumbled Percy, narrowing his eyes.

"Of course he did. He has gone to council meetings himself before", offered Bast confused.

"Well, he didn't tell me", replied Percy. "He probably didn't want to spoil the surprise or something. Which. Just... I'll find a way to make him regret this."

Bast smiled amused at that, tilting her head. "Can you show only your ears and tail...?"

Nodding, Percy did as requested, whipping his tail back and forth. Bast hummed pleased and placed something similar to a crown on his head, mindful of his ears. Percy shifted nervously.

"Why are you here?", asked Percy. "I mean, you... you're from Florida, right? Luke said so."

"Well, yes", confirmed Bast. "But... There are no other cat-shifters here. You are... alone with canines and birds. I wished to... meet you, to see if I can help you. And because you..."

"Because I'm a half-blood like you?", offered Percy slowly.

"...Yes", nodded Bast after a moment. "You're an immortal cat-shifter. There... There aren't many of us. Immortal shifters in general. You are not just a regular cat-shifter who will just spend one lifetime here, being a leader. You... You have eternity ahead of you and I would like to... help shape what kind of leader you will become. Because immortals are... problematic."

"Ye—eh, I can see that", mused Percy thoughtfully. "An immortal leader with warped morals... sounds like not a good idea."

"Exactly", agreed Bast with the smallest smile. "That's why I want to... observe you."

"Okay", shrugged Percy and tilted his head. "So... I'll just follow you and watch you today then?"

"No. You watch everyone in that room", corrected Bast. "They have all been at this for many years, centuries in some cases. You will be able to learn a lot from them all. I just decided to come to... remind them all that cat-shifters will need representation again and that, until you are off-age, I will take responsibility for you."

"What does that mean?", asked Percy skeptically, frowning.

Bast smiled reassuringly. "I know you have joined Lupa's pack and Silena Beauregard's cove. And I am not asking you to join my pride. But there are issues that you might face that neither of them might understand and I want you to have someone to come to with those things."
"...What would be... purely cat-related problems?", wanted Percy to know doubtfully.

Bast opened her mouth and closed it again. "That'd take too long now. And the others are already waiting. How about lunch will be on me and we can talk more then?"


Smiling amused, Bast led Percy back to the conference room where everyone had already sat down. The room was round, with many rows of expensive looking chairs and desks. The meeting hall was gigantic and the steps led down to the center. It reminded him a little bit of the Colosseum or one of the rooms where political meetings took place. Which this was, actually. Somehow, that reality hadn't fully set in yet. This wasn't just for fun, this was actually serious. Each chair had plates, stating the species and the name of the representative. Bast led Percy to the desk with the plate saying *Shapeshifter; Bastet*. The name part was blank, because there was no current representative. The ones closest to them were all also shifters – Horus and Lupa and others Percy didn't know. Still looking around in total awe, Percy took his seat right next to Bast.

"I didn't know there were this many supernatural species in New York", whispered Percy.

"New York is a big city", chuckled Bast as she leaned back.

Percy yawned as he plopped down on a garden-chair on a balcony in the mansion. Bast smiled as she sat opposite him, between them two bowls of pasta and salads on the side. Percy turned to look out at the beautiful view. He smiled in awe at the garden in front of him.

"Council meetings are *boring*", stated Percy with a frown.

"It's just boring to you because you have no personal attachment to those things", chuckled Bast.

And that was probably true. It were negotiations about territory, complaints about visitors – tourists were apparently a huge problem when they did not actually file with the council beforehand. Which, something Percy had to keep in mind. If going to another city, it was important to inform the council beforehand. It was just regulations. Moving from one place to another too, of course, but so the council can know who is currently in the city's territory, to watch out for them. Because in case of any crime, it was important that the council had the records and knew that the person robbed (or worse) was a supernatural so they could pull strings to make a supernatural detective take the case. Then there had been some who talked about new arrivals to the city, negotiations between the groups. Trade negotiations had happened too. Apparently, the nymphs and nature-spirits had their own farmer's markets in different parts of town and provided there, including territories of other groups. Merpeople from the harbor-region provided fishes on said markets. Elves had butcher shops all over the city, providing meat they had hunted themselves. It was pretty cool to get an insight like that and Percy made a mental note to check out a supernatural farmer's market next weekend. Could be a nice, romantic thing to do with Nico.

"You'll learn to appreciate it", assured Bast with a smile. "And it's not always just trades and negotiations. Sometimes, there are crimes to be discussed. If something happens to a supernatural, the whole community has to be informed. We don't know what the crimes are, if it was just a coincident or an actual attack. We always have to stay on the safe side."

"So—o, what's the deal with this place?", asked Percy, looking around.

"See it as an embassy of the supernatural", offered Bast. "You come here for your ID, driver's
license, you register here if you move from somewhere – every city where supernaturals live has such an embassy. It also works as a safe haven. If someone seeks shelter from... from something. Sometimes, humans are suspicious, hunt our kind. And in other cities... the different races don't live together that peacefully. There's a lot of prejudices still. Sometimes, it escalates... Sometimes our own have to flee from other supernaturals."

"How's that work?", asked Percy with a frown. "I mean... a whole city only belonging to one race?"

"Not every city houses 8 million people, Perseus", pointed Bast out. "Small towns especially... Some towns with only hundreds or a few thousand people, they... they had been owned by one race for centuries. Sometimes, some villages were very distinctively founded by a particular supernatural race, you know? A pack of wolf-shifters settling down, building houses for themselves, staking a territory. Humans move to the settlement, the settlement grows into an actual town. But at its core, it still belongs to the wolf-shifters, you see. Sometimes, they are very much against having other supernaturals invade their territory, others do accept visitors. Live side by side with the next town over that might be populated by nature-spirits."

"How come there are no other cat-shifters in... in all of New York? I mean, you just said it, eight million people. And I am... the only cat-shifter?", asked Percy softly, looking a little lost.

Bast smiled faintly and poked around in her salad. "Your grandmother was an absolutely amazing woman. She had charisma and strength. She was... filled with love and kindness. People felt drawn toward her. She had a strong pride. When she died... the pride fell apart. There was infighting for the title of Alpha. In the end, the pride did not survive the loss. Normally, most of the time, leadership is passed down through the family. That doesn't mean it's a strict monarchy. Others in the group can always challenge leadership, in a fair duel for power. But still the stability of passing it down is what provides a certain comfort. The fact that your mother was only human and not supernatural herself tipped the balance. Had your mother been a cat-shifter, the pride would have been protective over her, until she would be old enough to become the leader."

Percy sighed and nodded slowly. He guessed that made sense. When a good leader died and there was no one to fill those shoes, the whole thing kind of fell apart. Frowning, Percy stuffed his face with pasta, staring out over the lawn and watching a couple kids play ball.

"So, until I'm off-age, I... go to you if I have any issues and you come all the way here from Florida?", asked Percy doubtfully, finishing his pasta.

"If it's something decidedly cat-shifter, yes. If it's something broader, you can and should go to Lupa. I understand you're part of her pack. But sometimes, there might be something that a wolf can't handle for a cat. Sometimes... it might even be an issue Lupa can decidedly not handle", offered Bast. "At one point, you might be threatened by a wolf and it might put her in an awkward position. I know you are getting along with your current pack, but even a visiting wolf could."

"Okay... I guess...", muttered Percy, frowning deeply. "Thanks. For... coming over."

"Of course", nodded Bast with a smile. "I'll give you my number, you text me every time you have a problem, okay? I'll help you and if you need me, I will come over."

"Thank you", smiled Percy.

Nico startled awake from his nap as a weight landed on his stomach. Sitting up surprised, he stared at the black ball of fur. His eyes widened when the black fluff turned into his boyfriend – his boyfriend...
wearing traditional Bastet robes. The deer-hind over his shoulder, proudly wearing what they had hunted together. Black cat-ears twitched as Percy tilted his head.

"Yo—you neglected to tell me about the damn dress-code", growled Percy pointedly.

Nico grinned up at Percy, reaching his hands out to cup Percy's ass. "I wanted it to be a surprise. I knew that Bast wanted to come and help you with that."

Huffing, Percy leaned down and kissed Nico, slowly and deeply. "Jerk."

All Nico did was grin and pinch Percy's ass. "You look hella fine, doll."

"Mh... don't sweet-talk me with your old-fashioned nonsense", purred Percy, kissing down Nico's throat. "Still, you could have told me when I asked you what to wear."

"Sorry, sorry, babe", sighed Nico, tilting Percy's head so he could actually kiss him. "I thought it'd be a nice surprise for you and I didn't know when Bast would come."

"Stupid bat", grumbled Percy, nibbling Nico's collarbone. "It... was a nice surprise. It was insanely awesome seeing everyone in those clothes. Wearing them myself. This is nice."

"Looks nice too", hummed Nico, caressing Percy's thighs.

"So... you up for some... fun?", asked Percy mischievously, tugging on Nico's shirt.

"I haven't even had breakfast yet", grunted Nico.

"Mh... that a problem?", asked Percy, decidedly tilting his head and baring his throat.

Nico's eyes flashed black. He had fed on Percy before. Casually so too, but never during sex. Percy grinned and shrugged before tugging on Nico's shirt. The vampire allowed it to be tugged off, though when Percy wanted to shed his own clothes, Nico stopped him.

"You, leave it on. You look... ridiculously hot", grunted Nico, eyes still black.

Grinning amused, Percy started working on Nico's pants, until the vampire was naked beneath him. Percy got up and removed his boxers while also grabbing the lube out of the nightstand, throwing it at Nico. Roaming through the nightstand, Percy also got a condom out. With a victorious smile did Percy join Nico on the bed again. Unwrapping the condom, Percy rolled it over Nico's already hard cock. It was way too easy to get Nico hard. Nico groaned, leaning back. Percy knelt on top of Nico, lubing up his fingers and reaching behind himself. Closing his eyes and sighing contently, Percy slipped his fingers in and started prepping himself. Nico was rock-hard and leaking by the time Percy was finally done. Leaning down, Percy kissed his boyfriend and slowly eased himself onto Nico's hard cock.

"I lo—ove your cock", groaned Percy, burying his face in Nico's neck, kissing and nibbling it.

"Thanks", grunted Nico a bit amused, reaching his hands out to cup Percy's ass.

Percy was biting and kissing Nico's neck. Emphasis on the biting though. Eager to leave a mark on his Nico. His fingernails were digging into Nico's shoulders, making the vampire hiss as they pierced skin when they kind of accidentally turned into claws. Nico growled, grabbing Percy by the hips and rolling them over, trapping Percy beneath him on the bed.

"I'm the vampire, I do the biting", growled Nico amused.
Purring, Percy bared more of his neck. A shudder wrecked him as Nico sank his teeth in. Vampire fangs. Vampire venom. Percy had been careful, after the first time Nico had bitten him. Reading up on any potential side-effects – addiction or loss of autonomy like those mind-controlled people in the movies. It seemed it were the sirens who had more the mind-controlled powers. The vampire-venom? Less like drugs, more like alcohol. Still with the potential of getting addicted, but most people could control and just enjoy the ride every now and again.


Nico growled as he drank from Percy while thrusting into him. Percy wrapped his fingers around his own cock, jerking himself off while enjoying the feeling of Nico inside of him, on all sides. Nico's fingers were digging into Percy's ass as he lifted Percy off a little while fucking him. The catboy was the first one to come into his own hand. Gasping, Percy collapsed back on the bed and enjoyed how Nico fucked him through his orgasm, until the vampire also came and slowly withdrew his teeth from his neck. Gently, Nico licked over the wounds until they healed over.

"That was a nice way to wake up", hummed Nico as he collapsed next to Percy. "And an amazing breakfast. Urgh, how do you taste this good, gattino?"

Love you too", yawned Percy and curled against Nico, closing his eyes.

"...Perce? I thought you came over because you wanted to do something with me?", asked Nico, frowning confused, nudging Percy. "Hey, babe...?"

"Mh...? Was an exhausting morning", yawned Percy. "I got up at like six AM and spent ho—ours in that damn meeting. And you're just, laying here, still sleeping at one PM."

"Point taken", chuckled Nico. "I gotta admit, I spent half the night playing video games with Thanatos... and I figured I had no plans for today. Now, apparently, I do have plans."

Percy blinked and tilted his head to stare up at Nico. "Batman, you still got no plans."

"So what, you just came for a quick fuck and are going to leave me again?", asked Nico amused.

"No. I'm just saying you don't have plans because I am exhausted", yawned Percy. "I'm here to take a nap and you will be my pillow. What, you just said you don't have any special plans today either, right? So can we just curl together and totally do nothing together?"

"That actually does sound like an amazing idea", sighed Nico contently.

"Ye—ep", agreed Percy and got out of the bed.

"What are you doing? We just established not to do anything?", complained Nico.

"Dude. That jewelry and the the pelt are super uncomfortable", snorted Percy.

He slowly started to peel off layers of his clothes and jewelry, putting it aside. Then, he walked over to Nico's closet to raid it. Putting on a pair of sweat-pants and a black hoodie. Nico smiled pleased as he saw his kitten in his clothes. Wiggling into the comfortable hoodie, Percy returned to the bed and curled against Nico once more, pillowing his head on Nico's chest.

"Love you", hummed Percy, kissing Nico's collarbone.

"Love you too, kitten", smiled Nico, kissing the top of Percy's head. "Now, tell me. How was your first council meeting? Aside from the... make-over?"
"Interesting. I mean. Boring, but interesting", chuckled Percy. "Lot of things I didn't quite understand or that didn't really matter to me, but... I guess one day it will matter to me, on behalf of the... people under my care. Which is still such a weird concept for me, you know."

"I get it", sighed Nico. "But you'll do good. And I'll be there for you, help you, mh?"

"You and Bast both", chuckled Percy. "Ye—eh. She gave me her number and offered me to help me and be my representative until I'm old enough to take over the council seat."

"Generous", hummed Nico. "I figured something like that after Carter called."

"Can you... tell me more about my grandma?", asked Percy reluctantly.

Nico frowned for a curious second before nodding. "I mean, I haven't met her very often. She was a kind and caring woman. She was being adored by everyone who met her."

"And that... was why the whole... pride fell apart, huh?", muttered Percy with a frown.

"What's on your mind, Perce?", asked Nico carefully.

"I don't know", shrugged Percy. "I mean, Luke and the others are awesome. Silena and the others are too. I just... being with Bast, having her tell me even just a little bit about my culture... I came to wonder what it'd be like if there was an actual pride here. If I had other cat-shifters here..."

"You will, at one point", promised Nico, pressing a kiss against Percy's temple.

Sighing, Percy closed his eyes and snuggled up to Nico, enjoying the gentle way Nico was caressing his sides, until Percy fell asleep in his boyfriend's arms.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter, Sally has a surprise for Percy and for you and that is all I will say! ;D
Chapter 36: A Surprise and a Baby

Percy was staring wide-eyed at his mother. She smiled, a little nervously, shifting.

"You... You're... p... pregnant?", asked Percy stunned, still staring at her.

Sally blushed and brushed her hair behind her ear. "I know. It wasn't planned. We didn't... I didn't... I'm too old for this. You're nearly seventeen already and... and I was prepared that... you know... now the next stage of life would come, instead of a repeat of the last..."

"It's not a repeat, mom", argued Percy, grabbing her hands and squeezing. "It's not. You were alone the first time around and you were... you were still so young. But you're not alone now. You got Paul and me and you already did this once, so you also got your experience."

Sally smiled faintly. "I guess... you're right with that."

"So... you want to keep the baby?", asked Percy tentatively. "I just—You didn't sound very sure of it there and I don't want to make you feel like you have to, for my sake. I mean, I'd love another sibling, but if you don't want the baby, I'll back you up too!"

"I don't...", started Sally before she sighed softly. "I don't really know. I really never thought I'd be a mother again. The thought is kind of scary. But... I'd never harm my own child. I didn't... abort you, even though I was young, alone and had no idea what to do. I will not abort this baby either."

"Okay. So... So I'm going to be a big brother", grunted Percy with wide eyes before jumping his mom and hugging her tightly. "I'm going to be a big brother!"

Sally laughed, wrapping her arms around him and returning the hug. "I'm glad you're taking it so well. I was... a bit nervous about your reaction."

"I love you, mom. And I love being a big brother", grinned Percy happily. "But, never scare me like that again, mom. When you texted me to come over because we need to talk, I thought I was in trouble for something I did."

"Oh no, you've been doing well lately", chuckled Sally. "Your play was amazing. You've been winning races lately. You've been bringing home better grades than ever before. You have a honorable and great boyfriend. I... I am so proud of you, Percy."

Percy smiled and ducked his head. "Thanks, mom. So... we going to order pizza or something?"

"Pizza and Star Wars?", suggested Sally. "I still haven't seen that Rough Two."

"Rogue One, mom!", exclaimed Percy with a laugh.

Hades paused and put the file he had been going through down as he saw who just walked past the glass-walls of his office. Blinking slowly, Hades got up and left his office.
"Percy?", asked Hades slowly. "What... are you doing here."

Percy paused mid-step and turned around slowly. "...Right. That giant-ass di Angelo in the lobby. Kind of forgot that this is your firm. Oops. Hello, Hades."

"Hello, Percy", greeted Hades a bit amused. "What are you doing here?"

"Ju—ust visiting Paul?", offered Percy with an innocent smile.

Hades raised one suspicious eyebrow, but then Percy shrugged off his backpack and got a box of Tupperware out. Opening it, he took what looked like the fluffiest brownie out and gave it to Hades.

"Here. I baked them myself", grinned Percy. "Oh, no. Take two. One for Persephone."

"Persephone?", echoed Hades.

"Yeah. You're wearing that green tie that she really likes so I'm guessing you two are gonna meet for lunch later", shrugged Percy with a mischievous grin.

Hades narrowed his eyes and nodded slowly. The boy was far more observant than people gave him credit for. Accepting the two brownies, Hades shook his head a little and decided to let the boy do whatever he planned on doing. Which, Hades was pretty very sure Percy was doing.

"If those are good, feel free to leave some for Thanatos and Olethros down the hall too."

"Wow. This is super a family business, huh?", chuckled Percy amused. "Will do that. Have a good day and say hi to Persephone from me!"

Waving at Hades, Percy continued on his way toward Paul's office. The lawyer looked as surprised as Hades had when Percy poked his head in and smiled. Returning the smile, albeit a little confused, Paul got up to greet Percy half-way. The two of them had never spent time alone. Never without Sally. And especially not at Paul's place of work.

"Uhm... did I forget something?", asked Paul. "Did we have... plans?"

"No", replied Percy with a shake of his head. "No, but I figured we should... talk."

Paul frowned for a moment before it dawned on him. "Sally told you."

"Ye—ep", nodded Percy and hopped up onto Paul's desk, staring at the lawyer.

"And what do you wish to talk about, Percy?", wanted Paul to know, standing in front of Percy.

Percy crossed his arms over his chest, staring at the man with unsettlingly intense eyes. "My dad left her. I love him, I... forgave him, by now. But he still broke her heart and left her to raise a baby alone. I just... I need to know where you stand on this, Paul."

Paul raised both eyebrows at that, nodding slowly. "Fair enough. It's... unexpected and I get why you'd think I might bail on your mom. Track-record and all. But... I won't. He paused and looked up at Percy, trying to convey just how serious he was about this. "I've... always wanted a family, Percy. I just never thought I would. I never thought I would meet a woman like your mother. Sally is absolutely amazing and the thought of... of raising a child with her? I'm excited, whether you believe me or not. I will not leave her, or my child."

Percy nodded slowly, still looking kind of doubtful. "Pardon me for not entirely buying it..."
"I understand where you're coming from", assured Paul and walked around his desk.

Percy turned some and watched curiously. Paul opened a locked drawer and got a little black box out. Percy's eyes widened, widened even more when Paul popped the lid. The ring inside was absolutely beautiful. Silver with three stones, a larger one in the center, two smaller ones, one on either side, both dark-blue. The ring was really gorgeous. Percy narrowed his eyes.

"So, she's pregnant and you want to get married to her now?", asked Percy suspiciously.

"I bought the ring two months ago", admitted Paul, cheeks flushed. "But... But I realized it was too early and it might freak her out so I kept it locked away. And now that... I thought it might be the right time now, because I'm sure your mother might have similar doubts as you. I want to show her that I am here for her and the baby, that I want us to be a family."

"Two months, huh?", asked Percy, eyebrows raised high.

"We were barely dating half a year. It was definitely too soon, but I saw the ring and I... couldn't not buy it", nodded Paul. "And if you don't believe me, you can ask Hades, he was with me when I bought the ring. I've been thinking about marrying her, about... spending the rest of my life with her... for months now. I meant it when I said that I have never met anyone like her. She is an amazing woman and I can't imagine my life without her anymore."

"Wow", grunted Percy surprised. "I... Okay. That... I just want her to be happy. And I know you make her happy. So don't screw this up, okay, Paul?"

"I have no plans on screwing it up, Percy", promised Paul honestly.

Pleased with that answer, Percy got the box of Tupperware out. "Okay. Here. I made those, in case I liked your answer. I do, so you get brownies."

Paul chuckled fondly at that and accepted the brownies from his future stepson.

Nico tilted his head curiously as he looked at his boyfriend. Percy had suggested it nearly a week ago, that they should go to the farmer's market together. And sure, Nico was always excited about dates too, but for the past three days, Percy had been particularly chipper. Ever since he had visited his mom on Wednesday. Not that Nico didn't appreciate a happy Percy.

"So, are we getting anything specific or...?", asked Nico.

"Mh. I was thinking maybe I could cook dinner for the family tonight", shrugged Percy. "So... fresh fish and... uh... let's see. Vegetables for the side-dishes. Fresh salad."

Nico smiled fondly as the two walked around the farmer's market, holding hands and buying all the things they wanted. It felt so oddly domestic and calm. Nico really liked it. And he really liked the sparkle in Percy's eyes as they went through the different stands and chatted with the various supernaturals. There was something oddly reassuring about getting supplies from their own community, out here, instead of a human grocery store.

"Oh, that's so cute!", exclaimed Percy all of a sudden, startling Nico.

Nico frowned curiously. The stand was selling hand-crafted wooden things. The one Percy was squealing about was a children's toy, a blue dolphin. For a moment, Nico flat-out panicked.
"Y... You're... You're pregnant", whispered Nico, squeaking. "Oh gods, the condoms failed. Your father is going to murder me."

"...Dude? Calm down", grunted Percy confused and disturbed. "Wha—at is going on?"

"You're picking out baby toys!", sputtered Nico. "It's... It's instincts, right? You're pregnant!"

"O—oh", grunted Percy before he started laughing loudly. "Wow. You're adorable. Nico, dude, we're using condoms and I am using magic contraception tea thanks to Amy. I am not pregnant."

"Okay", nodded Nico and took a relieved breath. "But... the... toy?"

Percy looked around for a moment before leaning in to whisper. "My mom's pregnant."


"Yeah, my reaction too", laughed Percy. "So, I'm buying the dolphin for my... little... sibling."

"That's... cute", grinned Nico, wrapping an arm around Percy's shoulders.

"Man, at least I now know what your 'help I will be a dad'-face looks like", chuckled Percy.

"Don't tease", grumbled Nico flustered and pointedly.

Smiling, Percy leaned in to kiss Nico on the cheek. "So... you're coming to the finals, right?"

"What kind of question is that?", asked Nico offended. "My gorgeous boyfriend got all the way to the finals and I will be there, to cheer him on. You're... not too nervous, right?"

Percy shrugged and tilted his head. "The school year is nearly over, only a couple more weeks. I actually didn't fail my exams so far, thanks to Annabeth being totally awesome. And... And even if we lose the race, it was... I've never had that much fun with a team before. Even though Drew is on the team. I'm just... I am so excited about it and even if we lose, we had so much fun."

/Percy frowned disconnected. He lost. He had lost the 100 meter breaststroke. Second place.

"Perce, hey?", asked Piper, nudging him. "Hey? You with me?"

His hands were shaking as he was flexing his fists. Piper rested a hand on his shoulder, looking at him concerned. The next moment, Piper pulled him into a tight hug, making soothing sounds.

"He—ey. It's okay. And we still got the relay", whispered Piper. "It's fine. You got us silver, Perce. That's more than me or Drew could get, we got kicked out last round already. You got this far."

Taking a deep breath, Percy nodded. "Okay. Let's go. Time for the relay."

Piper smiled and linked fingers with Percy, tugging him along. Just last week, he had claimed he would be fine. And he... he would be fine. He had lost, but he had not disappointed his team.

"You were amazing, Percy!", called Benthesikyme out. "You did great!"

Smiling faintly, Percy turned toward his family. They all stood there, cheering for him. Nico was with them, looking just as proud, even though Percy had lost. His smile grew some.
"We're gonna win this, Jackson", declared Piper, hip-checking him.

"Of course we are, McLean", grinned Percy.

And they actually did. The four of them, together, won the relay. Silena had won the 100 meter freestyle race and they together had won the relay. They got a shiny, golden trophy to take home.

"You were amazing, amore", declared Nico as he picked Percy up and kissed him.

Percy smiled as he was put down. "I lost. I mean, but the team won. So..."


"Actually, pizza is on me, Nico", grunted Poseidon amused. "Since my team won."

"He—ey, don't take my free pizza away, dad", protested Percy.

"You'll get free pizza from me next week?", suggested Nico amused.

"Fair enough", nodded Percy pleased.

"Now come, time to get changed", called Silena out. "The sooner you're changed, the sooner we can go and get that free pizza. Come on team, move it!"

"Someone worked up an appetite when winning", teased Piper with a grin.

Percy stared up at the ceiling with a confused frown. He had lost. Normally, he'd be feeling shallow and like self-harming at this point. But the thing was... it oddly didn't hurt. They had won the team-competition. They had gone out for pizza afterward, had gotten to hold that golden trophy. His family and friends had showered him with praise and compliments, even about his lost race.

"He—ey, babe", whispered Nico softly.

Percy startled, nearly yelping out loud as all of a sudden, Nico materialized in his room. Well, it was more likely that Nico had flown here in his bat-form and turned human just now. Sighing, Percy brushed his hair out of his face and glared pointedly at his lover.

"What are you doing here? It's Saturday night, three AM", pointed Percy out.

"Yeah and my boyfriend just lost a race and I know that means a lot to him", countered Nico.

Percy smiled faintly, sitting up and scooting over. "You're sweet and I love you."

"I know", chuckled Nico as he joined Percy in bed, kissing his forehead. "So, how you feeling?"

"...Better than expected", admitted Percy as he cuddled up to Nico. "The... team-race was what really mattered and... we won... We won together and celebrated together."

"Okay. Good", nodded Nico pleased, pulling Percy closer.

Sighing contently, Percy closed his eyes with a faint smile. He was so exhausted after the race, all he needed was sleep right now. Sleep and Nico. That was a surprisingly good combination.
"Do we have any plans for the summer?", asked Percy curiously, sprawling out.

He was soaking up the sun, his head resting on Nico's lap, his feet resting in Luke's. Piper was resting on him, using his stomach as a pillow. Percy was running his fingers through her hair.

"Wait. Has no one told you about summer-camp yet?", asked Leo wide-eyed.

"...Summer-camp?", echoed Percy doubtfully.

"Yeah. Camp Dawn", shrugged Piper. "It's run by Chiron. Kind of like an extension of school, only in cool and without exams. There's a lake, canoeing classes, there's strawberries to be picked."

"...More school but in summer?", muttered Percy doubtfully.

"Not school. No math or physics", chuckled Luke. "Only the fun things. See, school is all about the theory. But summer-camp is where you get to actually put it to good use. Believe me, you want to be there. You get to spend the entire summer at a lake, connecting with your merman-side. You get to run free and wild in the mountain and the forest. Bonfires and barbecues. You want to be there."


"No fair! My Percy!", argued Silena with a gasp.

"Wha—at's going on now?", asked Percy confused.

"You're a half-blood", shrugged Leo. "That... makes it a little more complicated. See, we're divided by species. There's a cabin for the dragons, one for the shifters, well and so on. You however, well, you get to pick which cabin you want to stay in. With the pack or the cove."

"Great", grunted Percy with a frown. "Either disappoint one group or the other."

"Oh no. No, sweetie", stated Silena very firmly. "You get to pick, neither side is going to be upset with where you sleep. It's not like you'd leave the pack, or the cove. I completely understand if you want to spend your summer pack-bonding, sleeping in a literal puppy-pile."

"And I would understand it if you'd prefer to spend your summer with the cove, because their cabin is literally underwater and it'll allow you to enjoy the water", offered Luke. "Seriously, Perce, it's okay. You can choose whatever you want. You can also opt to alter sleeping in the two cabins. It's all your decision and there is absolutely no wrong answer, Perce."

"Damn, you people are way too kind and fussing", muttered Percy fondly, smiling to himself.

"So you want to attend summer-camp?", asked Poseidon pleased.

They were sitting at the dinner table together. It was something that Percy really absolutely loved. He loved listening to his siblings' days and telling them about his day. On today's topic, of course, the summer-camp. The others had really sold him on it. It sounded pretty awesome. Though the best part about it was most definitely that he'd get to spend his whole summer with his friends.

"I mean, uhm, if I... can", shrugged Percy unsure.

"Why wouldn't you?", asked Kymopoleia confused.
"I...", started Percy before putting down his cutlery. "I don't know. I just... I always wanted to go as a kid, but I knew mom couldn't afford it so I never even... asked for it. So... I don't know..."

"Percy, sweetheart", sighed Amphitrite. "Money is absolutely the last problem. And in fact, it never was. You... You could have asked us for the summer-camp."

"Well, it's not like we had the best relationship back then", pointed Percy out, raising one eyebrow. "I would not have asked you for expensive stuff, because I'd have felt like making mom feel bad for not being able to afford it."

"...Point taken", admitted Amphitrite. "But things are changed now. Our... relationship has changed. You can ask us for things. Granted, nothing utterly unreasonable. But a summer-camp? Yes, Percy. Of course can you go to a summer-camp."

"Okay. Okay, that's... cool", nodded Percy a little relieved.

"You know, summer-camp is the one reason that made me regret not going to high school", sighed Kymopoleia with the smallest pout. "Always sounded awesome."

"Camp can be glad your teenage years are millennia behind us", pointed Proteus out.

"He—ey!", yelped Kym, throwing a roll at Proteus.

"No food figh—", started Amphitrite as everyone started throwing food. "You asked for it."

She glared as peas hit her. The next moment, she was hitting them left and right. Okay, Percy had not expected Amphitrite to be such an expert food-fighter. He laughed as he ducked carrots. Tyson yelped and hid with him before the two attacked Rhode and Benthesikyme, making the girls screech and laugh. In the end, Amphitrite won the battle though, leaving the others to clean up.

"Where are we going?", asked Nico confused. "This is... more than normal date-attire?"

Percy had texted him two hours ago, excitedly, that he needed to wear a tux. Then, Percy showed up in front of their door, broad and excited grin on his lips, wearing a tux himself. Definitely not what Nico's Friday afternoon plans had been – whatever this was going to be.

"We're going to a wedding, son", stated Hades amused, resting a hand on his shoulder.

"What?", asked Nico stunned as Hades and Persephone steered him out of the house.

"Paul proposed to mom and mom, being as spontaneous as me, decided they should get married right away, because she doesn't want to be showing on the wedding photos and it's not like either of them have actual family. Aside from me", explained Percy with a smile. "They went clothes-shopping and said to meet them in... an hour. Hades is Paul's best man, Persephone is mom's bridesmaid. You are my date, so look pretty and hang off my arm, Nico."

Percy grinned excitedly as they got in the car and drove off. His mom had texted him five hours ago, told him when to be there. It was insane and spontaneous, but very much in their wheelhouse. They were on time and Percy was stunned by how beautiful his mom looked in her white dress. Not super expensive princess wedding dress, but elegant and beautiful. Paul looked so flustered and nervous as they greeted each other. Smiling, Percy kissed his mom on the cheek as they hugged.

"You sure about this, mom?", asked Percy softly. "It's so... sudden."
"Percy, there are only two people who absolutely have to be on my wedding. That's Paul and you. I never needed or wanted a huge wedding", smiled Sally. "But I do want wedding pictures I can show your sibling without making them feel as though their parents only got married because of the pregnancy, because I would already be showing. And... he's the right one. I love him. So what's the point in spending months being engaged, wasting time. I said yes. I want to say I do."

Percy smiled softly as he led his mom down the isle. Well, they were at the court-house so not really an isle, but still. He came to stay next to Nico, clinging onto him. Persephone was wearing a beautiful green dress as she stood next to Sally, smiling. The two women had become really good friends by now, apparently. That was another thing Percy was happy about. His mom making friends, not just working herself to the ground trying to feed them both and Gabe and Gabe's gambling addiction and alcoholism. Now it was just Sally, Paul and the unborn baby. Percy had thought it was a punishment that he had to move in with his father. He never thought it would actually improve both their lives. And he had also feared he would lose his mom, but in the end, it might have actually brought them closer together.

"You may now kiss the bride."

Percy took a series of pictures as Paul and Sally kissed. Sally Blofis. An honorable woman. She would now finally get the chance to have the life she always wanted. The way it should have always been. But Percy didn't feel the same bitterness he used to at that thought. He wasn't... angry with his father anymore for abandoning them. He was still angry about the things he and Sally had been through, but he had come to accept that he couldn't change the past – and he came to embrace the present. Nico kissed his cheek, smiling. Sally threw her small bouquet and Percy caught it.

"Now, dinner is, of course, on me", declared Hades with a kind smile. "To celebrate the new married couple. What are you feeling like, my friends?"

Percy couldn't be smiling brighter if he'd tried as he, his boyfriend and their parents went out for a very fancy dinner. His eyes found the matching wedding-bands on Paul and Sally's fingers all throughout dinner. Sally Blofis. Percy couldn't be happier for his mom.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter, we're going to summer camp! ^o^
Chapter 37: Summer Camp (1)

"Welcome to Camp Dawn. I know for most this isn't your first stay here, but for some it is, so bear with me. You're assigned to your cabins based on species – no whining, it's not to keep you separated, but because every cabin is designed to specifically accommodate each species' special needs. Each cabin has a cabin-head, who will be responsible for those in their cabin.

There are rules. The cabin-heads are familiar with them and will tell the newest additions, to save some time here. If you're of mixed heritage, it's entirely your choice which cabin feels more comfortable to you, you're also free to switch cabins on a weekly base. There is a schedule with set classes until noon, but in the afternoons you are free to train on your own and enjoy yourselves. The main goal of this camp isn't more school, it's for you to strengthen your bonds and get to explore the more practical sides of your supernatural heritage without fear of exposure. Meals are shared in the dining pavilion and no, taking your food and eating in your cabin is not an option.

There will be bonfires and other evening activities that will mainly be organized by the cabins. Each cabin will organize at least one evening. In the end, you'll be able to vote which was the most fun and there'll be a small prize for the winning cabins. For now, go and get settled in."

Percy tilted his head as he listened attentively to Principal Chiron. His eyes were wandering the camp though. They were at a remote patch of land. A valley, with high hills and even a mountain surrounding them, a giant lake right next to the camp, surrounded by woods. The entire valley was protected by magical borders, according to Hecate Claymore on the bus-ride here. They were free to run in shifter-form, for the dragons to fly about. It was the perfect place to roam in their supernatural forms without risking exposure, indeed. Camp itself was composed of about twenty or so cabins, set in two rows, with a large white Victorian-style house on one end of the aisle and what Percy assumed to be the dining pavilion on the other end. True to Chiron's word, every cabin did give off wildly different vibes. He poked his head into as many as he could on his way. The dragon's cabin where he said bye to Leo for now was insanely hot, like a sauna really only with lava instead of steam. It made sense that no one but a dragon could even stay there and that it was particularly comfortable and enjoyable for the dragons. The cabin of the nature-spirits was overrun with ivy and there was grass growing on the roof-top. Percy was really impressed by about everything.

"Every cabin is two story, because there is a separation by gender", offered Luke as they reached the shifters' cabin. "Now, this is our humble abode and you are more than welcomed to stay with us here however long you want to, Percy."

Percy made a little noise as he looked at the interior of the cabin. Instead of beds, there were bed-sized pits lining up at the walls, each filled with pelts and other soft things. Nests, to sleep in. Travis and Connor already threw themselves onto their own nests, rolling around.

"Okay, now... how does this work?", asked Percy curiously, watching everyone pick a nest.

"Today's free. We get settled in, show the new kids around, then it's time for dinner", shrugged Chris. "And tomorrow morning, we start with classes and activities."

"Yeah, but how does that work? Are we all separated? And how... I mean, I gotta attend like twice
the classes then, or what?", asked Percy with a frown as he picked a nest of his own.

He purred softly as he rolled together on the soft fur, making Frank laugh a little. "No worries. You don't necessarily have more classes than everyone else. There are core-classes that every species has to attend – but Chiron usually lays the schedule so the core-classes don't overlap for half-bloods like you and me. It's not like there's a lot of half-bloods around, after all. Then there are various voluntary courses everyone gets to pick from. So, you gotta have a full schedule anyway. Like, you can pick archery classes even if you're not an elf, you can pick the gardening classes even if you're not a nature-spirit. And while you gotta pick merpeople activities and shifter activities, others just have to pick more of the free studies. The point of the camp isn't to separate the supernatural species, after all, it's for each to connect more with their heritage but also to bond with others."

"That's why today's free too. So everyone can organize their schedule, sign up and Chiron has time to review it", tagged Nathan on with a grin. "It's just overwhelming at first, but believe me once you're more settled in, it's a lot of fun. Luke, you got the schedules for us?"

Luke made a confirming noise and went around to hand out stacks of paper. It was pretty overwhelming when Percy took the papers and looked through all the classes he could pick from. The first page on his stack of papers, marked with Jackson, Perseus in the upper right corner, was the schedule itself. Time-table on the left, days above. Some sections were already filled in, highlighted in dark-blue and others highlighted in turquoise. Peeking at Cecil's schedule next to him, turquoise indicated the shifter-activities apparently. Percy made a bit of a face when he saw the time though. Before dawn, every day, there was a 'pack-run' marked down. Before dawn? Ew.

"Don't knock it until you tried it", advised Cecil when he saw Percy's face. "The time may sound disgusting but there's nothing like a run before sun-rise and until the sun actually rises."

"It's pretty primal", agreed Luke with a grin. "Don't worry too much, Perce."

Percy nodded absentmindedly and put the set schedule aside for now. Instead, he looked at the other sheets of paper. Apparently the set schedules for the other supernaturals. He tilted his head as he compared it to his own to see what hours he even still had free to fill. He made a small, confused noise when he saw that the hunters and elves had hunting classes, but at different times than the shifters did. With a frown did he look up and see who had the time to explain.

"Why don't we have hunts with the hunters and elves, Luke?", asked Percy curiously.

"Because we hunt different than they. They use arrows, man-made tools. We use our fangs and claws", replied Luke. "It... clashes. Usually, it ends with shifters and hunters fighting among themselves about the prey, accusing each other of chasing away the prey. So the hunts have been scheduled separately."

Percy hummed, staring at the different schedules in overwhelmed thoughtfulness. "Perce? You know, you can... go to the other cabins and ask their friends what additional classes they're taking."

At that suggestion from Connor, Percy perked up and gathered his stuff. It was really hard to pick from the twenty different schedules what seemed interesting. He dashed out of the cabin and looked around, trying to find his friends. They were lingering around just outside the vampires' cabin (which was really cool because it was black marble and designed to look like a mausoleum). Jason sat on the steps, with Calypso between his legs, both discussing their schedules with each other. Piper, Leo, Annabeth and Reyna were sitting in a half-circle in front of the stairs, Hazel and Nico standing next to the stairs, having their schedules sprawled out on the broad balustrade that ran left and right of the stairs. Grinning broadly, Percy sneaked up on Nico, wrapping his arms around Nico's waist and kissing his neck. The huffed and leaned back against Percy.
"Gattino. How do you like the shifters' cabin?", asked Nico gently, turning some.


"After we hand in our schedule, you can come with me to the underwater cabin", suggested Piper.

"O—oh. Yes. Silly had mentioned that the merpeople cabin is inside the lake, right?", asked Percy with eager eyes. "I definitely wanna see that. But for now, I'm struggling with my schedule."

"Take hiking. We all agreed on hiking", offered Leo. "Exercise, exploring, fun."

"On what schedule is hiking?", asked Percy confused and scanned through his.

Nico took the papers from Percy and pulled one out. "Here. The general schedule."

"General...? Oh. I didn't even see that", hummed Percy intrigued.

It featured things like hiking, cooking, canoeing. Stuff that was more general and not specific to any supernatural. And all those classes were set so they didn't overlap with any of the other schedules, to give everyone the opportunity to sign up for them. Damn, making those schedules must have really been a pain and Percy did not envy the person who had to make them.

"Wait, why's canoeing a general activity...? It's water, shouldn't it be like... ours?", asked Percy.

"No!", huffed Piper, turning a little green. "That's not... Percy, that is different. We don't... Most merpeople do not do well on boats of any sort, because we're meant to swim in the water, not be cooped up in something man-made on top of the water..."

"Are... Are you telling me merpeople can get... sea-sick?", grunted Percy stunned.

"We can. We do. It's an awful feeling", muttered Piper and shuddered.

"Okay. No canoeing then. But what about fishing...? Do we not do that in a boat?", asked Percy.

"No. We don't... We...", started Piper, trying to find the right words. "We hunt the fishes. With our bare hands. Not exactly human fishing, you know."

"Oh. Okay, that sounds actually wicked awesome", grinned Percy pleased.

"You could sign up for stargazing?", suggested Nico.

"Stargazing...? Just, staring into the sky?", asked Percy with a confused look.

"Some of us, like me, do it to categorize the stars. Astronomy", supplied Annabeth.

"Others, like us seers, do it for the astrology", tagged Rachel on as she joined them. "And the witches and dark elves do it for entirely different, ethereal magical reasons."

"Personally, I suggested it because it'd be romantic to spend two nights a week looking at the stars with my boyfriend", sighed Nico pointedly, earning a kiss from Percy.


"You know, there's also a drama class", tagged Rachel on with sparkling eyes. "It's what the muses' cabin puts together on their assigned night of entertainment. No huge play, but still a fun short one."
Muses. That was still a trickier one for Percy to understand, because technically the seers were a sub-species of the muses. Astrology, art, drama. People with 'special talents' were supposedly muses. Rachel was a muse, with artistic, dramatic and seer abilities. Most other species were pretty cut and dry and easy for Percy to grasp, but muses were... wild cards, really.

"Consider me signed up", grinned Percy. "Drama club was a lot of fun."

"We're doing a trimmed-down version of *Midsummer Night's Dream*", offered Rachel with a grin. "And any of you are more than welcomed to sign up."

"Ah, you just came here to recruit us", huffed Annabeth and rolled her eyes.

"I me—ean...", drawled Rachel with an impish look. "Leo would make a great Puck."

"Personally, I see him more as a Bottom", frowned Hazel thoughtfully.

"No one wants to hear about your sex-life", commented Nico dryly.

"Ha, ha, ha", grunted Hazel and rolled her eyes at him.

Percy snickered softly at that and filled out his schedule some more. Drama classes. Hiking. Stargazing (which, due to being out of the regular time-table of classes, meant he could have a day start either later or end earlier). He peeked over at Nico's schedule, pleased to see that his boyfriend had signed up for hunting with the shifters. He was very much looking forward to a hunt with Nico.

"You should most definitely sign up for sparring classes", noted Annabeth. "Self-defense is important and this will be a good opportunity for you to learn some hand-to-hand combat."

"There are also sword-fighting classes", tagged Reyna on. "You're learning that from your brother, right? Could be interesting to have a different teacher for a few weeks and it'll help you not get rusty in the time your brother can't teach you this summer."

"That is true", agreed Percy. "Ni—ico, can we take cooking classes together?"

"Mh, that sounds romantic too", grinned Nico and kissed Percy's cheek.

"Urgh. Will we have to endure this the whole summer?", commented Annabeth teasingly.

"Ye—ep", chimed Percy and leaned back against Nico's chest. "Most definitely."

Percy was in awe as he dove deeper and deeper into the lake. It was pretty, well, deep. And the wildlife down here was amazing. So many fishes of different sizes, really a lot. On purpose, most likely. Having been bred here for the merpeople to have game to hunt. There were gardens of corals and other merman-made beauty down here. Among them, something that looked like an ancient temple though converted into the cabin apparently. It was located pretty close to the shore, so that an average-sized teenager could stand on the roof-top and not be submerged with their head. But before checking out the cabin's inside, Percy naturally wanted to explore the lake some.

"It's... gorgeous down here", noted Percy in awe as he circled a statue of his father and stepmother. "Heh, hey dad, Amy. Looking... ah, sharp, huh."

"Hello, Percy."

Percy yelped high-pitched and bolted away from the statue. Laughing, Amphitrite emerged from
behind the statue, eyes sparkling with mischief. Percy blinked surprised and turned to look at Piper.

"What?", asked Piper with a grin. "One of the supervising, and teaching, adults has to be a mer. What with our cabin being underwater and our classes being very specifically underwater. That... is super not Chiron's wheelhouse."

"Yeah, but... how did no one tell me my stepmom would supervise?", asked Percy with a frown.

Amy shrugged innocently. "Honestly, I had no plans. I'm actually only a substitute. Lacy's mom was supposed to, but she had an accident last week and broke her leg. Broken legs, while not being fatal or a major issue for humans, are a problem when it comes to shifting for merpeople. She'll not be able to shift for a couple of weeks and phoned around the other parents to find a fit substitute."

"We actually kinda expected coach to just tag along and abuse this as an opportunity for even more training. Getting a head-start for next year", admitted Piper skeptically.

"Oh, believe me, Don was more than happy to volunteer. And then I told him no", replied Amy with a smile as she led the two teenagers toward the cabin. "For some, such as Gwen and Silena who graduated, this summer is the last to spend with the school's community. They won't be on the team next year. Training is training. This summer however, it's meant for bonding. Just because they'll leave the school does not mean they leave the community. It's important to use this summer to strengthen your cove-bonds, to make sure you'll be fine with your leader's graduation."

Percy's face fell a little. Silena and Gwen were graduating. So were Luke, Travis, Clarisse, Silena and Beckendorf. The thought did sit in his stomach like a stone. He had grown so used to how things were right now... being able to rely on Silena to control Drew a bit, having Silena and Luke as his guides to this crazy magical world. The idea of them being gone was a bit terrifying.

"Hey", whispered Piper and grabbed Percy's hand. "That's why even the seniors attend their final summer after graduation. So we others can adjust to the idea of them being gone."

"For now, you're meant to just enjoy the summer", stated Amphitrite. "Don't forget, dinner is in an hour. Remind everyone to hand in their schedules after dinner, at the latest."

"Yes, ma'am", assured Piper and grabbed Percy's hand.

The two of them entered the cabin while Amphitrite swam back toward the surface. This was going to be interesting. Spending the summer with his stepmom. Another thought crossed his head, making him grin. Poseidon was left to his own devices with Tyson, Kym, Benthy, Rhode, Proteus and Triton. Though the latter three were less of a problem, Percy knew his father was pretty useless in the kitchen and his siblings tended to fight over food and chores all the time. Amphitrite was the voice of reason who organized that their household even functioned.

"I hope your mom is going to be alright, Lace", offered Percy once he and Piper entered the cabin.

Lacy was sitting on a shell-bed playing cards (engraved shells) with Mitchell. The orange-tailed mermaid looked up at him with a smile and shook her head dismissively.

"She's fine. It's just a broken leg. But she's complaining about it so much", chuckled Lacy. "She really misses shifting already and it's only been a week. But it was an even break, it'll heal well."

"That's good", smiled Percy and swam around, looking at it.

The cabin was similar to the interior design of the palace. It was pretty, colorful luminous stones lining the ceiling to light up the room and make it sparkle. The lower area was the boys' room by the
looks of it (and the lack of Drew, Tammi and Kelli). Mike was sprawled out on one of the beds, arms crossed behind his head and eyes closed, clearly napping.

"Silena...", started Percy as he swam past Mike and toward where Silena, Nathan and Gwen were sitting and playing a board-game. "I, uh... wanted to ask you what... what's gonna happen to the cove when you graduate...? I haven't even thought about it before..."

"I'll take over for you", chimed Piper and sat down next to Silena.

"How generous of you", huffed Silena as she got up with a sigh. "Okay. Come with me, Percy."

The two left the cabin again and swam a little more through the lake. "So—o...?"

Silena smiled reassuringly at Percy. "It's all going to be okay. It's... normal. When the seniors graduate, a new team-captain and cove-leader is chosen from those who become seniors next."

"But... that'd mean... Drew", grunted Percy and made a face.

"Or you", offered Silena amused, surprising Percy. "What? You've integrated well into the cove and the team. I've been thinking about it for months. You'd make a good leader. But I'll not make it official if you don't want to. You have time until the week before summer ends."

"I'll... think on it", muttered Percy with a troubled look.

"Percy. You just recently realized you're going to be a leader anyway, of the Bastet in New York. Maybe being team-captain for a year will be a good trial-phase for you", suggested Silena. "But yes, the summer is for me to step back, let my chosen replacement take the lead while I help out as an adviser of sorts. Why don't you give it a try this summer and at the end, you can still say no?"

"And if I say no... you'll make Drew leader?", grunted Percy and made a face.

"Well, no", chuckled Silena and shook her head. "Drew is a good swimmer, but neither a good team-player, nor a leader. I would skip one generation and pick Piper then. Would have done had you not transferred here. It's not rare, not every batch of new students features every species."

"Piper would make a good leader", nodded Percy and tilted his head.

"So would you", countered Silena with a smile.

For the first week of camp, Percy decided he wanted to stay in the shifters' cabin. Sleeping in an actual nest of fur was new to him, while he did know what a sponge-bed felt like from his spring-break in the underwater palace. The first night, he had a lot of fun just circling the bed and pawing at it, trying to straighten it all out and making it smell more like himself. He grabbed the furs between his teeth and dragged them around, which was apparently a great source of entertainment for the still human Stolls, watching a tiny black kitten drag around a whole deer-hind.

"Leave the kitten alone", warned Luke amused. "Besides, it is time for lights out anyway. We gotta get up early tomorrow for the first pack-run of the summer."

Travis and Connor made miserable sounds, but they came to agree after all. Morning runs were way too early and they were all not used to it anymore. Well, Percy wasn't used to it at all. He wondered what an early morning run would be like. And then the first class. He generally wondered what it'd be like. Summer-camp. So far, it all looked and sounded like fun.
Getting up at five in the morning was not fun. They'd have half an hour before sunrise, meaning they left right away. No getting changed – well, not changing their clothes at least – just changing skins and running off into the foggy gray of pre-morning. Percy's tail was raised high in excitement as he trailed after the foxes and wolves of the pack. Running was a lot of fun and it helped him burn the extra-energy and excitement that was normal for him.

"Okay", announced Luke as he sat down in front of the pack, orange-red tail wiggling back and forth. "This is just a pack-run. Not a hunt. Which means: Do not get distracted by bunnies and other small mammals. Do not get separated from the pack. Follow Chris' lead. Are we clear?"

Percy blinked a couple times and turned to look at Chris. The wolf had his chest puffed out. Both Chris and Connor were in Percy's grade and while Connor's head was filled with mischief and pranks, Chris was responsible and calm. He would make a good stand-in for Luke, after Luke, Travis and Nathan would leave come the end of summer. Though, honestly, the most surreal thing about that was the separation of the Stolls. Thinking of Connor without Travis was odd.

"I was thinking about failing on purpose to graduate with Con, but certain members of the pack wanted to rip my fur off in stripes for that and it didn't seem worth it", explained Travis and tilted his head, apparently being able to read Percy's face. "Come on. Don't worry about it, kitty-cat."

"Hey. That is my kitty-cat, Stoll", grumbled a voice from above.

Percy tilted his head back, so far back that he actually fell backward. Laying on his back, he stared up into the sky in awe. There were half a dozen bats circling him overhead. He tilted his head when one of them landed right on Percy's stomach, nuzzling into the soft fur of his underbelly.

"Coven-flight", explained Nico. "It's on the vampire-schedule. You're off to your run, amore?"

"He is, so would you kindly get off the kitten?", asked Luke pointedly, swatting at the bat.

Nico huffed and flapped his wings, taking off. "Have fun, Perce. I'll see you at breakfast."

"Bye-bye, Batman", chimed Percy as he rolled onto his stomach and hopped up.

"Urgh, I can't wait to get back to bed until breakfast", groaned Hazel as the bats flew off.

Percy barely had the time to react as the foxes and wolves suddenly took off. Thankfully, Percy was quick and agile, so he had no problems sticking close to them. But they were definitely right. There was a certain magic to running before dawn. The morning fog made the air wet and cold, the leaves and grass they ran through covered with morning dew. The last of the moonlight shining down at them, even as the horizon started graying with the slowly rising sun. They zigzagged their way through the woods, maneuvering around trees and through the underwood. Occasionally, one of them would follow a hare or something with their gaze and once or twice, Percy had been tempted by a mouse to abandon the run, but he kept Luke's words in mind.

Chris led the run, with Luke directly behind him. It was his first action taken as the future alpha of the school's pack. Percy and the others followed him without protest, accepting Luke's choice without challenge. It made Percy wonder if things were going to go as smooth with the cove, considering that Drew Tanaka existed. She was not going to just swallow it that Percy would be made the leader, even though he had only just joined the school this year.

"Okay, pause and then we head back to camp", declared Chris as they hit the high-point of a hill.
For a moment, they stopped to take in the view. The canines were panting hard as they rolled over and collapsed next to each other. The sun was rising over the lake, painting everything in beautiful colors as the fog lay over the lake, giving it a mysterious, magical vibe. Percy stared ahead in awe as he snuggled up to Luke, who wrapped a paw around him.

"You won't have to worry about it", whispered Luke reassuringly. "The pack's gonna be fine, even after I graduate. Chris will have everything under control."

"But I'll miss you", muttered Percy with a frown, looking up at Luke.

"Kit, I'm graduating not dying", laughed Luke and swiped his tongue over Percy's cheek. "I'll still go on pack-runs with you, we'll still hang out, we're still friends. I'm not leaving New York."

Percy hummed and cuddled closer against the red fox, enjoying the last of the sunrise.

Chapter End Notes

A two-parter because hey, I extended the chapter count and this new setting of summer camp is fun to explore! So, next chapter, more of the summer camp! As in, the other activities Percy signed up for ;D
Chapter 38: Summer Camp (2)

"You know, when you said that star-gazing would be romantic, I thought we would just... lay on a blanket and, you know, *gaze at the stars*", grumbled Percy. "Not run errands for Annabeth."

"Sh. Now bring the telescope up the hill", ordered Annabeth seriously.

Grumbling to himself, Percy hoisted the unnecessarily large and heavy thing up. Nico smiled apologetically as he came to aid his boyfriend. Seriously, Percy had been carrying equipment back and forth for the past ten minutes because the nerds couldn't agree on a spot.

"Okay, okay. This spot seems actually good", declared Zoe loudly, looking around.

"Finally", groaned Phoebe as she spread out a blanket for the two of them.

The Dark Elves were leading this little exercise. Only that the seers too thought they should lead it. And then there was Annabeth, who had her own two cents to add too. After putting the telescope down, Percy went to grab one of the blankets too and spread it out. Rachel came to sit with Percy and Nico, having her sketch-book and pencils with her to draw the constellations.

"So, how was your first proper day at camp, amore?", asked Nico gently. "I haven't seen you since that brief run-in after the dusk-flight..."

"Are you... Are you pouting?", asked Percy with a teasing grin, leaning in to peck Nico's lips. "Cute. But yeah, today was mainly packed with mer-activities and afterward, Piper properly showed me around the lake. And when I had free time and wanted to hang out with you, Annabeth told me that you had classes with the witches..."

Percy leaned back against Nico, both of them facing up toward the night-sky, watching the stars in mild awe. Out here, the sky was far clearer than in New York – all the stars visible were simply amazing. Percy sighed contently when Nico wrapped an arm around his shoulders to pull him closer. Okay, so maybe his vampire had been right after all – this was pretty romantic.

"It was exhausting but actually fun", offered Percy after a moment, snuggling into Nico's side. "And sleeping in the den with the other shifters is... it's awesome? I didn't know I needed this until I actually experienced it. The furs are great. I need more furs for my own bed too."

"That can be arranged", hummed Nico, burying his nose in Percy's hair. "And, the sleeping-arrangements are one of the reasons this camp is so important. In modern, human society, many can't really live the way our races were meant to. Others just... never got to it because they grew up with their human parent, like you. Experiencing what it's like to live in a pack is important."

"Agreed", hummed Percy, nuzzling into Nico's chest. "I... like this camp. And tomorrow, we're going hunting, right? Together? Yes?"

"Yes", confirmed Nico. "We'll catch some nice furs for you."

"I'd prefer if you'd catch dinner", noted Rachel casually, her coal scratching on her paper. "I signed
up for cooking classes too and depending on what you catch, we'll cook it and it'll be dinner."

"Mh... deer", purred Percy, eyes darkening.

"You could eat game every day", snorted Nico amused.

"Not true. Every other day. The other-other days, fish", declared Percy with a shark-like grin.

Quite literally so, because his teeth had sharpened. Nico huffed and kissed Percy's cheek.

"My strong, little predator", whispered Nico lowly. "I love you."

Hunting with the pack and his Nico was most definitely one of the best things possible. Percy snarled as he jumped over a ledge, never letting the young deer out of his sight. Nico wasn't the only vampire who had signed up to hunt with the pack – Hazel was right there with Frank. Percy took a leap and tackled the deer to the ground, watching how his pack continued on to follow the rest of the herd. Percy was very pleased with his hunt. He sat down on the deer, with his tiny fluffy chest puffed out and his tail wagging in excitement as he stared at Nico. Nico looked actually a little flustered as he caught on with what Percy was doing. Presenting Nico with what he had hunted.

"Thank you, gattino", whispered Nico before sinking his teeth into the deer.

Percy all the while went to curl together on Nico's lap, exhausted from the hunt. Nico started carding his fingers through Percy's fur while drinking the fresh deer-blood. Purring contently, Percy pawed at Nico's thighs, getting properly comfortable. It was still early, they had decided to use this morning's run for the hunting trip so they could prepare the meat fresh and have it for dinner.

Actually taking apart a deer was a tiny bit gross for Percy, but he was also morbidly fascinated by the precise and expert movements Reyna used to take it apart.

"Once the fur is properly prepared, you can use it", stated Reyna while cutting the meat off.

"Awesome", grinned Percy pleased. "I wanna build a nest with my own furs."

It was, honestly, one of the things Percy enjoyed most about the magical community. While hunting was a primal urge for many supernaturals, they never hunted for fun. They used absolutely every part of the animal they killed. Pelts and furs were turned into clothing or nesting materials, meat was for eating, organs were either for eating or were sold to the witches for potions and magic usage, bones were turned into jewelry or also sold to witches.

"You can bring the meat to the kitchen", stated Reyna as she dumped the last of it in the container.

"You got it, boss. And thanks again", grinned Percy.

He carried the container over toward the kitchen, where Rachel, Grover, Juniper and some others were already preparing everything for the cooking class. Looking around, Percy couldn't spot his boyfriend yet. After putting down the meat, Percy went to join his friends instead then.

"I thought you were vegan, Juniper", noted Percy curiously.

"Yes, I am. Nymphs generally can't digest any form of meat", supplied Juniper. "So someone's gotta prepare the meat-free dishes. And just look at these beautiful zucchini, Percy. Look at them."

"And the aubergines", sighed Juniper happily. "We're going to slice them up, prepare them and fry them. It's going to be so good. Grover, be a darling and get the red bell-peppers."

"So just... fried vegetables?", asked Percy with a frown.

"And rice, of course. Not the boring white one. You season it and with some vegetables in it.", started Juniper to ramble, her eyes bright as she pointed at various ingredients.

Percy grinned as he settled in and listened to her. She had a real enthusiasm about food. Which might just be a part of what Grover had fallen in love with, because he really loved eating.

"Sorry I'm late. I'm pretty sure Annabeth actually attempted to murder me", panted Nico.

Percy grinned as he turned toward his very exhausted boyfriend. Nico actually looked beaten. Hair messy, dirt and feathers sticking out of it, clothes ruffled, sweaty and dirty.

"You will leave my kitchen right now. Get showered and changed, then come back."

Nico looked ready to protest, but then just hung his head with a sigh and nodded before leaving.

Percy watched his boyfriend leave with amusement dancing in his eyes, before the woman demanded everyone's attention by clearing her throat. She demanded respect, that much was for sure. Taking his seat next to Grover, Percy turned to face her.

"Hello, everyone. For the new ones, I'm Chariclo, Chiron's better half", said the woman in ways of introduction. "Whereas my husband likes to teach the young how to fight and go through life in his own ways, I've always taken more toward teaching the more... practical aspects of life. Cooking, for example. I run this summer-camp. I'm a mountain-nymph, by the way."

Percy hummed. She was dark-skinned, with long, black hair, kind eyes, wearing a flowing gray dress. He somehow hadn't expected Chiron to have good taste in women. Huh. Apparently, Chiron was a stud after all. He cracked a smile at his own pun.

"Okay, now. Thanks to a very successful hunting party, we have a lot of fresh meat to work with. Deer ragout for everyone tonight", stated Chariclo with a smile, clapping her hands once. "And on the vegetarian side, fried vegetables with rice."

Percy started preparing everything so far, until Nico rejoined him. They worked in teams of two – though Rachel and Annabeth next to them were rather hilarious to watch because they kept arguing. Percy appreciated that Chariclo had sent Nico to shower, because Nico's hair was still wet and he looked so good when he returned. Grover elbowed Percy with an amused eye-roll.

"Shut up", mumbled Percy, blushing faintly.

And really, the whole cooking-together was actually very romantic. Percy and Nico worked so well in sync. It came nearly natural to them to work with each other, to rely on each other.

"Okay, people. Time to burn some calories, since everyone ate far too much of that ragout", declared Clarisse with a nearly mad glint in her eyes. "Time for a little hike."

"Ba—abe. Can't we like... go hiking some other time?", asked Piper with an endearing pout.
"Don't pout at me, princess. You know it's useless", warned Clarisse, one eyebrow raised.

Though she still pulled her girlfriend in for a kiss, making Percy giggle a little (which, in return, earned him a pointed glare from Clarisse). Lee, Michael, Austin, Kayla, Zoe, Phoebe, Kinzie, Naomi, Celyn, Jake, Will, Chris, Malcolm, Leo and Frank were with them for this little exercise, with it originally being an elvish exercise – Percy saw the determined seriousness in Zoe's eyes. Honestly, Percy had never really gone hiking before, but he figured why not try something new. Though he was a little too enthusiastic in the beginning, causing him to fall back after a while. He should have walked a little slower. The steep climb was something different than walking on the flats. Leo and Piper grinned at him as they fell back to walk with him.

"I didn't do well my first time hiking either", offered Piper. "High mountains and merpeople don't mix all too well. I'd advise you against flying too, it's hell."

"Then why—y did we sign up for this, Pipes?", groaned Percy, leaning against her.

"Because real life doesn't allow you all the comfort you want, your highness", commented Clarisse with one raised eyebrow. "You can't just stay in your preferred territory all the time and challenging yourself makes you stronger. Don't wimp out."

"No, ma'am!", replied Percy and straightened up to salute her.

"Don't be cute, Jackson", sighed Clarisse and rolled her eyes.

"I'm sorry I can't do that. It's in my nature to be cute", countered Percy with a grin.

"You'll be the death of me", snorted Clarisse.

"Why are you back here anyway instead of leading the troops?", inquired Percy.

"There's something very valuable back here", smirked Clarisse and wrapped an arm around Piper's waist, slipping her hand into the back-pocket of Piper's jeans. "What good is walking around in this heat if I can't get to see my girl sweat, mh?"

"Ew", cackled both Percy and Leo at that.

"You're both just salty your vampires didn't come along", accused Piper.

"Eh", shrugged Percy casually. "I don't need to sit on Nico 24/7."

"Sit on him, huh?", echoed Piper with a snicker.

"Bad choice of words", mumbled Percy flustered.

"No, no I think it was a pretty good choice of words", snickered Clarisse.

Pouting, Percy crossed his arms over his chest, glaring pointedly at them. All the while, Frank was slowly falling back to walk next to Leo and hold hands with his boyfriend too. It was cute how the dragon blushed and ducked his head at that. Percy turned to watch their friends at the front. Will and Jake were holding hands, while Will and Malcolm seemed engaged in a very serious discussion. Chris threw something in every now and again, but mainly the two blondes were dominating the conversation. The five dark elves were leading the hiking trip, with the light elves, Malcolm, Jake and Chris falling a little behind them. Austin and Kayla were talking animatedly with each other, so were Lee and Michael. It was nice, the weather was calm and warm, the view was beautiful.
"Say, why did we have to leave this early anyway?", asked Percy curiously. "I mean, we barely finished dinner. What's the rush, Clarisse?"

"You'll see when we reach the peak", replied Clarisse casually.

Percy, not doing too well with waiting, rolled his eyes at that, pouting just a little bit.

"You're just pouty because your bats didn't come along", pointed Piper out, looking over at Chris. "At least our shapeshifter decided to come along with us."

She grinned when her boyfriend turned to look at her at that, smiling at the two girls. Percy huffed at that. What a show-off. It wasn't like Piper didn't have Clarisse and Chris well wrapped around her little finger. Not that Percy didn't know very well how wrapped around his little finger Nico was.

"Does anyone know what the vampires are doing anyway?", asked Percy curiously.

"They're exploring caves", huffed Leo and rolled his eyes.

"...Seriously?", asked Percy, blinking slowly.

"There are local bats living in the caves of this mountain", supplied Chris, now that the group was walking closer to each other. "Some of them are vampires who have gone native."

"What does that mean?", wanted Percy to know, eyebrows drawn together.

"Going native is something shapeshifters sometimes do. When they choose to live in their animal-skins instead of their human ones", replied Leo with a tilt of his head. "You never heard of it?"

"Nope. Must have napped during that lesson", hummed Percy. "So wait, there's bats who are actually vampires but they chose to live as bats instead...?"

"Ye—ep. It's where the vampire bat actually got its name from", grinned Piper.

"Cool", grinned Percy and tilted his head. "So it's like a diplomatic mission, huh?"

"A little bit, I suppose", shrugged Piper thoughtfully.

Percy hummed, hands in his pocket as he tuned in on the conversations around them. They reached the peak only twenty minutes later. Well, 'only'. A twenty minute steep climb in the sun was still not that much fun. At least not as much fun as Percy had hoped it would be. Hiking, apparently, was not something he'd book as a 'fun activity'. He wiped his forehead while watching Lee and Michael spread out blankets for everyone. Lee and Michael were joined by Austin on their blanket, while Kayla sat with Celyn and Naomi. The third blanket was claimed by Zoe, Phoebe and Kinzie, the latter sprawling out with her arms crossed behind her head. Clarisse and Chris had Piper curled between them, her feet in Chris' lap and her head in Clarisse's. Jake and Will were joined by Malcolm, which really only left one spot for Percy anyway.

"Sorry to butt into your romantic cuddle-session", chimed Percy as he sat down next to Leo.

Leo grinned where he was leaning against Frank's broad chest. "It's okay, Perce. This is a friendly outing, not a couple's thing. I just happen to bring a boyfriend."

"So handy, to bring such a thing", drawled Percy amused. "Wish I had brought mine, but I misplaced him. Really, a shame. He would have loved pointlessly walking up a mountain..."

"It wasn't pointless, Perce", noted Frank softly and nudged him. "Look."
For a moment, Percy frowned confused, but when he actually turned toward where Frank had pointed, he gaped in awe. The sun was setting over the mountains, reflecting on the lake. The sky was painted reds and oranges and yellows and pinks. From up here, they had the perfect view on the whole valley. The camp – just how large it was – with its gardens and fields, the woods surrounding it, the lake and docks, the large green fields and hills. It was beautiful.

"Worth the trip, Percy?", asked Frank with an amused look on his face.

"Ye—eah. It sure's pretty to look at", hummed Percy pleased.

He shuddered a little at the cold, wrapping his arms around himself. Frank huffed and shed his jacket to offer it to Percy. When Percy raised his eyebrows, Frank grinned and pointed at Leo.

"Portable space-heater", stated Frank, pulling the dragon on his lap some closer.

"I prefer the term 'beloved boyfriend', but sure", grinned Leo.

Percy laughed as he leaned against Frank and Leo, watching the sunset in awe. Now it started making more sense that this was an activity of both the dark elves and the light elves. They started out during the day and would return under the moon's light.

"You're doing good, as the leader", noted Amy very gently.

The merpeople had played capture the pirate-flag. Piper against Percy. Silena had figured it'd be the perfect exercise to give both the chance to be leaders. So far, she had just let them alter. Percy's team had won, though Piper took her loss well, grinning broadly as they took a brief pause. The one whose team won would lead tonight's hunt. Percy sighed as he looked at the other merpeople.

"I don't know", muttered Percy with a frown. "I mean, being... team-captain... I guess. That's just a few of us. But there's actually more merpeople. And I'd be responsible for them all."

"Even though you seem so much against the responsibility, you're doing really well", countered Amphitrite with an amused smile. "Now go and hunt us dinner."

"Okay, guys", called Percy out to gain everyone's attention. "We're splitting up into teams of five to chase the prey from four sides. Chase it toward the statue and then we surround it. Piper, Drew, Mike, Gwen, with me."

Drew raised a displeased eyebrow, sneer on her face, but she said nothing. She... generally had not a lot to say this summer-camp. Mostly, she just stuck with her girls, doing the things they enjoyed. Percy didn't trust the peace – or Drew, for that matter. The teenagers split up to do as Percy had ordered. They found a school of fishes all too soon and the chase sent so much adrenaline loose that Percy had no time to even think of Drew. Both of them driven by instincts as they hunted their prey. The predators of the sea. Percy went for the largest fish, just to be nearly head-butted by Drew. He snarled at her, baring his fangs. But she did not back down. They were both in a primal, feral state of mind right then and there. The others noticed as the hunting party fully reunited. While some caught their intended fishes, others just scattered as Drew and Percy clashed.

Pent-up irritation and anger of the past months seemed to finally tip over as they were in such a primal state, both set to hunt and harm. Percy bared his fangs as he slapped her with his tail. Drew clawed at him, snarling as the two entangled in battle.

"Shouldn't we-", started Lacy unsure, looking up at Amphitrite.
"No. No, we should not", hummed Amphitrite, looking oddly pleased. "There's been tension between them for months now. The fact that both are the same age but Silena chose Percy to be her successor, even though Drew has more experience, has tipped things over even more. This is it. Percy needs to establish his dominance once and for all. Either Drew comes to accept it..."

"Or?", asked Mitchell tensely.

"Well, we will see", mused Amphitrite thoughtfully.

Drew was by far not defenseless in hand-to-hand (or rather tail-to-tail) combat. Then again, it might be the fight-reflexes that had kicked in. All merpeople were predators in nature, after all. Still, Percy was better trained and stronger than her. In the end, he had her pinned to the ground, snarling wildly until she tilted her head down and conceded.

"Let's see how this goes", smiled Amphitrite. "Let's hope blowing off steam once will help them."

"Your methods are... interesting, Queen Amphitrite", noted Silena.

"Mh, my husband keeps saying that too", grinned Amphitrite. "Now, let's eat dinner, shall we?"

Nico smiled as he played with the pendant around his neck. Percy had made it during a jewelry-class over the summer. It was a simple leather-band with a purple shell dangling from it, a fang on either side of it, followed by a small, green pearl. The purple shell was an amulet that could be opened though – craftsmanship with which Leo had helped him out, apparently – and inside was a photo of Percy and Nico together. Percy had presented it to Nico only nights ago, as a courting gift. With that, the official count was that Percy had given Nico two courting presents, while Nico had given Percy only one. It was a bit amusing to Nico that he was now one behind, even though he had been so nervous initially that it would be too much for Percy too early.

"As every summer, the drama course will end our time at camp with their play", announced Chiron with a smile. "Now, presenting for you A Midsummer Night's Dream."

He clapped as he walked off the stage and went to sit next to his wife, wrapping an arm around her waist and pulling her in to kiss her softly. Nico was impressed how they made it work, though Chiron was working in New York City and Chariclo lived a good five hour drive away from the city. Yet their love was still so strong, even after millennia. He could only hope that he and Percy would be able to do that too. To not just love each other so truly and fiercely, but to also always support each other, even if it might keep them apart at times. Because this camp was what Chariclo loved. And Summers High was by far not the only school to visit it; schools from all over the US came to spend weeks all over the year here. Occasionally, even adults. Some purely supernatural businesses took retreats here, to reconnect with their roots. Especially working in as busy and human a city as New York, it was good to remind themselves that there was more. But Chiron also loved his job as a principal and teacher, retiring and joining Chariclo at camp was just not his. Though he did spend all of his breaks over here, with his wife.

It did give Nico a little pause as to what he wanted from life. Odd, to ask oneself such a question after so many decades. Yet so far, life had just been something he went through. Going through the motions. Through the wars, through various jobs and also places to live in. But courting, the prospect of one day sharing his life with Percy, it made him contemplate settling down, in a way. He'd graduate high school, he might go to college, find a job of sorts.

"Percy really has a talent for acting", whispered Annabeth next to him.
"He's been diligently learning his lines throughout the summer", grinned Nico proudly.

"There's more to acting than just memorizing lines", countered Piper, eyebrows raised.

Which was true. It made Nico wonder what Percy wanted from life. After all, Percy was going to start his senior year in only a few weeks. Nico was just concerned as to how well Percy would be able to handle this kind of pressure. Ever since learning about Percy's self-harming tendencies, Nico had grown far more anxious about, well, everything. He just... wanted Percy to be alright with it. It was stupid to think he just would be, without anything. Getting better was always a long process, Nico of all people knew that. Too many years of PTSD and denial had taught him that.

"It was a long summer", sighed Annabeth as she stretched. "I'm kind of glad to get home."

"Of course you are. You need your technology. Your internet and computers", teased Nico.

Annabeth huffed and elbowed him, though she didn't argue. Nico smiled as Percy did something particularly hilarious. It really had been a long, but good, summer.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter, a new school year begins for Percy and the others. How will he settle into being leader...?
"Percy? Are you ready to leave?", asked Poseidon curiously.


Poseidon frowned as Percy packed something else out of his bag to replace it with another thing. Percy had been doing this for over twenty minutes now and slowly, they were actually running late for school. Amphitrite had left ten minutes ago to bring Tyson to school.

"Percy", grunted Poseidon and reached out to rest a hand on Percy's shoulder. "What's going on?"

"It's... I'm a senior now, dad", muttered Percy and ruffled his hair awkwardly. "I just... I guess I'm nervous. Becoming team-leader and cove-leader..."

"You know you're not alone, right?", asked Poseidon gently. "I'm right there, if you need me. Silena is not out of the world either. She is just one phone-call away if you need any advise from her. And you have Piper right here, who will support you, you know that, right?"

For a moment, Percy paused, before he sighed and nodded. "Yeah. I guess you're right. It's just... I don't know. This is new territory for me. Not just becoming leader, but also... this is going to be my second year at this high school. I've never been to one school this long before...?"

Poseidon heaved a sigh before pulling his son into a hug. "And you will do fine, my boy."

"So wait, your cousin is a Light Elf?", asked Percy surprised during lunch.

"Dad's sister fell for a Light Elf", shrugged Annabeth, taking a bite of her sandwich. "And for me, my mother is the Valkyrie in the family, so yeah."

"That's cool. And he's now a freshman?", asked Percy with a small grin. "But... not on this school?"

"Mh, different lineage. He lives in Boston, attends Valhalla High now", replied Annabeth.

Percy hummed and frowned. He knew Annabeth had two younger half-brothers who were both human, but he hadn't known Annabeth had a supernatural cousin around.

"It'd be probably easier if he were a Valkyrie too, right?", asked Percy after a moment. "I mean, then you could really show him the ropes and all."

"True, I suppose", mused Annabeth. "But then again, it's not like we're living close. And I think he's going to be fine. Dad... didn't really know about the supernatural when my aunt died. I guess sometimes, now that he does know, he regrets not taking Magnus in, but then again... Magnus is pretty happy in Boston. He was adopted by a gay dwarf-elf couple who loves him a lot."

"...Gimli and Legolas adopted your cousin?", whispered Percy stunned, getting elbowed.
"You're such a child", chuckled Annabeth and shook her head. "But yeah, Mister Hearthstone is a Light Elf himself, he could show Magnus what being an elf really means. And Magnus has good friends over in Boston – his best friend is a very impressive Valkyrie, Sam. I like her. And he's... totally having a crush on a shapeshifter friend of his named Alex."

That made Percy grin amused. "You know, it's cute how you worry about your family."

"Oh, shut up", huffed Annabeth and elbowed him. "You'll be way worse once that little sibling of yours is born. I ran into your mom the other week and she's already showing a lot."

"Ye—eah. Paul is fussing so much", snickered Percy just as the others started to join them.

Nico slipped into the seat next to Percy, gently kissing his cheek, while Reyna sat down opposite him so she could sit next to Annabeth. Piper, Leo and Jason were the next to sit down with them.

"So, who checked out the new freshmen?", asked Leo eagerly.

"There aren't many freshmen this year", replied Reyna. "Only a handful."

"Why's that?", asked Percy with a frown, stealing a cookie from Nico's lunch-box.

"Thieving little kitten", grunted Nico in protest, mourning his cookie.

"Well, the magical community is made up of many immortals and beings with an expanded life-span. The time between generations is obviously a bit larger than with short-lived humans", pointed Annabeth out. "There's not a hundred new supernaturals every single year. It's only natural that there's only a dozen or so new supernaturals to join the school. And then there are the others like you, living in the mortal world and attending regular high schools."


"You nervous, love?", asked Nico softly. "Newbies? First training?"

"...Yeah", admitted Percy after a moment, ruffling his own hair sheepishly. "I was fussing all morning too, I guess. It's just... I've never been the leader of anything, you know?"

"Well, if I dare say so myself, you have a very trustworthy second-in-command", pointed Piper out. She smiled as she nudged Percy, who then laughed a little. It was true. It wasn't like he was alone. And sure, maybe it was due time he got used to having his friends to back him up, but it was still kind of strange for him at times. For now, he concentrated on his lunch and afterward, him and Piper headed toward the pool to get ready for the first team-meeting of the year.

"Stop being nervous. It's so unlike you", whispered Piper as they entered the pool-area.

"I kno—ow", groaned Percy and closed his eyes to take a deep breath. "I guess I just... never saw myself as the leader-type, Pipes. This is weird, new."

"And new can be scary", hummed Piper and took Percy's hand. "But I got you."

Percy grinned at that, feeling more at ease as the duo reached the pool. The rest of the team was already gathered. Drew, Mike, Mitchell, Lacy and... a new girl. A short Latina with stark-blond dyed hair, wearing a pink swim-suit and kicking her feet back and forth.

"Hello, team", started Percy before clearing his throat. "Last year... was a good year. We were winners, but... this year, I think we can win even more, if we train hard. I know with Gwen and
Silena graduating, we lost two strong swimmers, but... we can make up for it, together."

"Hear, hear", cheered Mitchell and Lacy.

They started clapping and the rest of the team joined in. It helped Percy feel more at ease. He smiled as he easily fell into the routine of training. While the main roster of the team dove right in, Percy approached the new girl with a reassuring smile.

"Hi. I'm Percy Jackson, I'm the... team-captain", said Percy in ways of introduction.

"I'm Stella. Hi", replied the girl with a bright smile. "My mom said joining the swim-team is really great for merpeople like us and that the coach is like the king? That sounds so awesome."

"Yeah, my dad's the coach and he's a pretty good coach too", replied Percy. "I'm sure you'll have lots of fun with us. It really is very liberating because it gives us the chance to push our limits, something merpeople living in big inland cities don't get the chance to very often. But if you have any problems, with the training or with the team or even just... adjusting to the school, you can come to me and I'll see if I can help, okay?"

"Thanks", replied Stella a little surprised before smiling brightly. "So, training?"

Percy laughed at her eagerness and nodded, giving her the go-ahead to join the others.

Halliwell University was actually quite pretty. It was relatively small, a mansion the size of the di Angelo house, easily blending into the rich, old neighborhood. It didn't stand out as a university – which was probably exactly what the supernatural community intended. This wasn't meant for mortals to find or attend, after all. Percy tilted his head as he entered the old-fashioned building on his quest to finding a very specific dorm-room. When he found it, he knocked with a grin on his lips.

"You're not Piper", grunted Clarisse annoyed when she saw Percy.

"Hello to you too", countered Percy, one eyebrow raised.

"Silena said one of the team would come by. I had hoped it was my little mermaid to surprise me", sighed Clarisse and let Percy in. "Figures that you can't go two weeks without Silena."

"Hello, Percy, it's so good to see you!", exclaimed Silena as she engulfed him in a hug. "Oh, I miss you guys all so much already! I can't wait to see your first competition!"

"Slow down. We barely started training two weeks ago", huffed Percy. "We're far from in shape."

"Sit. Sit and tell me everything!", ordered Silena eagerly, motioning to her bed.

Percy however was too distracted by looking around. Two more clashing tastes could not have roomed together, really. One half of the bedroom was all pink and frilly, with flowers and designer pillows and fashion-magazines and model-posters on the walls, while the other half was totally messy, training equipment all over the floor. Clarisse grunted as she threw herself onto her own bed.

"Well, I guess you were right. I think I'm doing well", started Percy as he sat down next to Silena. "The team's listening to me. Even Drew. Stella is adjusting really well into the team."

"And how are you doing with the pack?", asked Silena gently, already knowing all about the team from their texting ever since the school year had started. "You were nervous about Luke leaving."
"I... miss Luke. And Travis and Nathan. But... Chris is doing good as the leader. He's not as talkative and instinctively affectionate as Luke, but he's doing good", replied Percy. "And when we go on pack-runs or meet outside of school, the others are still joining us, so..." Percy interrupted himself by laughing and shaking his head. "I was really being overly dramatic this summer, huh?"

"Ye—eah", agreed Clarisse flatly.

Silena threw a pink laced pillow at her. "No. It's only natural. You've been part of this community for less than a year, you were just fully settling in and then the structures of the things you learned to rely on changed fundamentally. You're allowed to freak out about that, Perce."

"I... I think being leader now might actually be a good... like, trial-run for me? For when I one day have to lead a pride of my own. Far, far, super far in the future", grunted Percy doe-eyed.

"You're right. It still is far in the future. You still have time", assured Silena with a smile.

"Now. Tell me about college", prompted Percy, supporting his weight on his elbows. "What's it like? What do you even study here? What does a supernatural college... do?"

"Pretty much the same as a regular one, only for the supernatural", countered Clarisse earning a pointed glare from Percy. "What? It's true. Archaeology? Instead of speculations on mythologies, you learn about what races, what clans lived where and left what kind of relics. That's what Kane is studying, you know. Me? I'm studying to become a licensed hunter. Basically the supernatural police-force. After graduation, we're being systematically placed in the local police departments so the supernatural community has cops on their sides, to solve their cases."

"Fashion design", stated Silena with a smile. "Only that we also learn to use magic elements, magic stones and special fabrics and of course what's important are the traditional designs of the clothes of specific species. Like, we merpeople under the sea can hardly wear the same as those above, right?"

"Okay. That's... pretty cool", hummed Percy and tilted his head.

"Maybe you should look at the different paths Halliwell University offers you. You're... You're a senior now too, Percy. You're only a year from graduation yourself and it comes faster than you might think", advised Silena gently. "No one says you have to decide right now, but it might be a good idea to... look into the different options you have, you know."

"That might be a good idea", agreed Percy thoughtfully.

All Percy could do was stare in slightly stunned silence. Then he blinked a couple of times.

"Perce. Stop staring at him", advised Leo in a hushed voice.

"But he's a kitten", hissed Percy back. "Like me."

"Your observation skills are outstanding", commented Annabeth and rolled her eyes.

"Sorry. Sorry, didn't mean to stare. I just... I've been the only cat-shifter around, like around all of New York. And the school year started three weeks ago", pointed Percy out.

"Well. I don't know you. I'm not gonna walk up to a total stranger and be like 'Hey so I hear you're the superior kitten around"", huffed the freshman, shuffling his feet. "So I kinda... watched you. Not in a creepy way. Well, maybe a bit in a creepy way. But you seem really popular around here so it's
not like it's hard learning more about you. And now. I figured I'd say hi. Yeah. Hi."

"Hi. I'm Percy Jackson", nodded Percy, holding his hand out.

"Sam. Sam Raser", replied the other cat-shifter. "Though, well... I'm only... a half-blood."

"So am I! Half-cat, half-merman. You?", asked Percy with an easy going grin.

Sam ran his fingers through his mohawk as he shrugged. "Hunter. Half-shifter, half-hunter. My dad was the hunter, though he's not... around anymore."

For a moment, Percy wasn't sure how to feel. So the boy's mom was a cat-shifter? That meant there was an adult cat-shifter in New York now. It was an odd mixture of relief and disappointment.

"So, your mom's a cat-shifter too then?", asked Percy slowly as he sat down.

It was lunch break and Percy had meant to join his friends in the shadow of the large tree when the freshman boy had approached him. The younger cat-shifter ducked his head a little before he joined Percy and sat down too, a little away from Percy's friends to give them some privacy to talk.

"Well, yeah. But my mom's a marine and... I live with friends, but it was important to mom to find a place where I wouldn't, you know, be alone. We move a lot around because of my mom's job and she always wants to make sure I'll have another cat-shifter to connect with", replied Sam.


So he now was responsible for a younger cat-shifter. Great. He could... do that. Right? Sure. Yeah.

"What am I supposed to do with a kitten?!", exclaimed Percy as he entered through the window.

Nico, who had just taken a wonderfully relaxing nap, startled and looked sleepily at Percy. Before he could even say 'hello', Percy started pacing the room and gesturing nervously with his hands.

"I thought I had years to actually, you know, adjust, before I'd have to look after a kitten!", continued Percy, not even minding his boyfriend on the bed. "I'm too young and unprepared-"

"You're pregnant", sputtered Nico with panicked, wide eyes as Percy's words caught up.

Finally, Percy stopped pacing, just to look at Nico with a deadpan. "We gotta have a conversation about that. Seriously, di Angelo, I'm on magic contraception. Not 'might fail by 0.1% ooops' human contraception. Magic. Literal magic. For that, your mind jumps to unplanned pregnancy way too often. No, I'm not pregnant, a young cat-shifter moved to New York and now I have someone I have to look after and care for and I feel vastly under-prepared for that."

Nico heaved a sigh and collapsed back onto his bed. "You'll be fine."

"Really? That's all I get? 'You'll be fine'?", huffed Percy and went to slap Nico's chest lightly.

Catching Percy's wrist, Nico smiled up at his kitten and kissed his knuckles. "You will. I know that. You're amazing and adaptable and everybody adores you so that new cat in town will too."

Grumbling to himself, Percy sank onto the bed, right next to Nico. He leaned up against the headboard, legs stretched out in front of himself and hands on his thighs. His fingers dug in, until his knuckles turned white, eyes closed as he tried calming down.
"Hey", whispered Nico lowly, gently resting a hand on top of Percy's.

"It's too much, Nico", muttered Percy frustrated. "Being team-captain on top of having to, you know, perform well for the team. Now having a cat-shifter who'd actually look at me for guidance – what do I know about being a shifter, really?! And Silena and Luke are busy at college. Like, sure, I can text them but I have to be... responsible now... What if I fail them?"

"Have... Have you been...", started Nico tensely, looking down at Percy's hands.

"...Maybe, a little?", replied Percy honestly. "I just... It's how I deal with pressure, how I've dealt with pressure for years. You can't expect me to just change completely without compensation!"

"You're right", agreed Nico tentatively, reaching out to cup Percy's face. "That's why I... I've been thinking about a... compensation. A different, healthier coping mechanism."

"...Really?", asked Percy surprised, staring at his boyfriend. "Uh. What?"

"You know what BDSM is, right?", asked Nico, his cheeks darkening just a little bit. "You said that pain helps you let go of your stress and release some pressure. I've been reading up a lot on BDSM lately, thinking about it for a while as a... possible replacement for you. Controlled pain, that's not going to leave scars. Safewords so we don't go too far. And maybe... maybe the sub-space can help you reach that same level but perhaps, with time, we can work up to it... without pain?"

"You... want me to stop hurting myself so you offer to hurt me instead?", asked Percy doubtfully.

"That sounds awful when you say it like that", grunted Nico and made a face. "I don't want to hurt you – not like that. But if that's what you need to reach a peaceful state of mind, I want to help you. And like I said, maybe with time, if you'd get used to it, the sub-space in general might... become a good replacement for what you are currently doing. And also safewords and precautions, not just hurting yourself without thinking. Would... you be willing to give it a thought?"

Percy frowned thoughtfully and tilted his head. "What... did you have in mind?"

"S... Spankings? For beginners?", offered Nico, ears red.

Biting his lips, Percy leaned in to kiss Nico's cheek. "You're cute, Neeks. Thank you for actually... looking for something to help me. I guess... I mean, trying won't hurt, right? Or, well, it will – oh you know what I mean. So... wanna give it a... try?"


"I mean, I'm tense and could use something to relax me right now", shrugged Percy and tilted his head. "So, why not now? It's as good a time as any."

Clearing his throat, Nico sat up straight and adjusted himself a little. "Okay. Uhm. Jeans off and then... come here and lay down on my lap? Uh... safeword? What do you think?"

Percy wiggled his nose as he shed his jeans and did as his boyfriend had suggested. "Seashell? Seems like the kinda thing that usually doesn't come up in bed...?"

"Okay. If you get uncomfortable or it becomes too much, we stop, yes?", agreed Nico.

"Yes", confirmed Percy and took a slow breath.

The first slap was very cautious and weak, but with every following one, Nico seemed to grow more
sure. Percy startled a few times at first, but he had to admit that the burn was very... relaxing. He closed his eyes, enjoying the feeling and the slowly kicking in ache.

"I think that's enough for a first... what... do you think?", asked Nico lowly.

"Ye—yeah", nodded Percy and stretched. "That was... interesting. Good interesting. It hurt, but different than when I hurt myself. Oof, but I am totally gonna lay down and not move now, yeah?"

"Fine by me. I was literally in the middle of a nap when you stormed in", huffed Nico.

He laid down and Percy gladly snuggled up to him, resting his head on Nico's chest, a small smile on his lips. He really had a great boyfriend and depending on what else Nico had in mind, this... could actually be a lot of fun. Yawning widely, Percy closed his eyes exhausted, all the tension melted away and the only real thing he could focus on was the aching in his butt.

Annabeth looked frustrated and exhausted as she sat down on Nico's free side. It was the first minor swimming competition. Preliminaries. Of course did they have to cheer the team on. Percy, Drew, Piper and Mike were the official roster for the relay, with every team-member participating in at least one of the individual competitions. Nico side-eyed Annabeth as Mike jumped into the water.

"You okay there, blondie?", asked Nico curiously.

"Just... frustrated", grumbled Annabeth. "Four new hunters and Reyna is now in charge of them. She spends so much time training and planning the training and taking care of the newbies. I feel like I've barely seen her in the past two months, Nico." She paused, clearly frustrated and not wanting to talk about it. "Anyway, how's the team doing?"

"Good. The new girl won her first race", replied Nico, accepting the change of topic. "And my Percy did too, of course."

"They're doing amazing!", exclaimed Silena from Nico's other side. "I'm so proud of them!"

Annabeth smiled a little bit. Of course did Silena not miss the very first race of her team without her. Though she had joined the college swim-team. The three of them cheered loudly with anyone else watching. Among them, a rather pregnant Sally Blofis.

"Oh, Percy, I'm so proud of you! You broke your own record!", exclaimed Sally.

Percy, just having gotten changed after the competition ended, smiled as he was being pulled into a hug by his mom and then handed off to his siblings. His eyes were on his team though.

"He's been working hard after all", pointed Poseidon out, puffing his chest out proudly. "He's working the team hard, but he's not slacking off himself either. Our boy is a good leader."

Percy ducked his head at that and turned to look at his team, even while his boyfriend wrapped his arms around him and kissed his cheek in praise. "You all did great, guys. So it's time for the obligatory pizza and milkshakes, on our coach of course!"

Poseidon chuckled at that, smiling as he watched his son and his team.

For the first time, Percy started to understand why Bast had told him that a pride was different than a
pack. Running with the wolves and foxes was fun, sure, but somehow going on a hunt through the underwood with Sam was very different. Showing the younger kitten the ropes was fun and the two, same agility and instincts, were far more attuned as they hunted.

"You're getting good at this, Sam", praised Percy as they sat next to their game.

"My grandpa taught me hunting", replied Sam as he licked his paw.

He had dark, fluffy fur and he was smaller than Percy. Somehow Percy had always considered himself small in size due to who he stood next to, but by cat-shifter standards he was pretty large actually. If he considered meeting a cat that reached his knees, that would be a nicely sized cat.

"Wanna tell me more about your family?", asked Percy cautiously.

Sam shrugged, ear flickering. "My mom's family lives in Dublin. Grandpa, aunt... my aunt's married to a warlock. I got four cousins. And... I guess I could have stayed with them, but mom wants to keep me close. The US are my home."

Percy hummed and nodded. "I'm a bit envious of that. I mean, growing up with a whole family of shifters, knowing about the supernatural. I only learned the truth a year ago myself and I'm still lost at times, you know? It's... a lot. How are you settling into school?"

The younger kitten snuggled up to him as the two started grooming each other. "Good, I guess. I made a few friends. Sara, she's a hunter too, and Derek, who's a nature-spirit."

"I heard from Annabeth that you're edging on with the new Valkyrie. Trend?", asked Percy. "You shouldn't... pick fights. If it's something serious, you can talk to me, or to Reyna."

"It's not. We're just... rubbing each other the wrong way", shrugged Sam. "Don't worry about it."

Percy raised one eyebrow and for the first time he started to grasp what his mom must feel like raising a little troublemaker like him. This whole pride-thing was going to be a lot of work, though he had to admit it was also rather... nice. He couldn't wait to have a proper pride at his side.

Chapter End Notes

Due to this story having been planned to end with graduation and all, I never calculated for a new generation to join the school with the new year and I kinda used up all the PJatO characters. Sooo have my PJatO OCs join for realism of actually having new kids! xD"

Aaanyway, next chapter Paul/Sally's daughter is going to join this world and Percy gets to be a fussing big brother again! What does Ty have to say about that? ; )
Chapter 40: Senior Year

"This place is awesome", stated Percy and looked around.

"I figured this might be nice. Since... you know, it's... a special occasion", replied Nico.

He looked adorably flustered, making Percy smile softly. "Happy anniversary, dork."

It was deepest winter. A year ago, they had gotten together during their ski-trip. Percy really couldn't believe that it had already been a whole year since Percy and Nico had gotten together. And to celebrate, Nico had made a reservation at an exclusive, expensive supernatural restaurant. They served special meals with blood for vampires and actual merpeople food. They even had tanks, a tank with a glass-chair in it so merpeople could sit at the table and eat. Percy himself sat on such a chair right now, his lower body beneath water so he could have his tail out and enjoy the food.

"I... got you something", said Nico slowly, pushing a small box over the table. "I know we said no anniversary present. Just... us. But it's... a courting gift. So..."

Percy frowned curiously. "You cheated the rules. You're horrible, di Angelo."

He smiled playfully at Nico as he accepted the box and opened it. It was an earring, crafted from bone to look like a fang going through the earlobe, with a ruby on it to look like blood. He grinned amused up at his vampire. It could go either way; vampire drinking blood or cat-shifter after a hunt.

"It's beautiful, Nico. Thank you", smiled Percy gently. "Now come over here so I can kiss you, because I'm literally sitting in a glass box, Batman."

Huffing, Nico got out of his seat to walk around the table and kiss Percy softly. "I love you."

"I love you too", replied Percy, nipping Nico's lower lip.

"Have you already... packed for the ski-trip?", asked Nico when he sat down again.

"Ye—es. No injuries or incidents this time. Just snow and us", grunted Percy determined. "I can't wait. Especially since I wanna teach Sam so much."

"You really like the kid, huh?", asked Nico fondly.

"Ye—eah. He's great", admitted Percy, ruffling his hair. "It's... nice mentoring someone."

"You're doing great with it too", confirmed Nico. "You'll be a great leader."

"Don't be so charming", huffed Percy and threw a piece of bread at Nico.

Nico laughed amused as he brushed it off his dress-shirt. He was so stupidly in love with Percy.

"You know, you should... really stop picking fights. I know that's odd to come from me because I used to pick a lot of fights, but... damn. You and Trend have been edging on a lot."
Percy frowned as he handed Sam a snowball. The other cat-shifter grumbled and pressed it against his eye. They had arrived in Italy two days ago. Him and Trend had been edging on all year, fighting – both verbally and physically – but being in an enclosed space like this tipped them over.

"He's a dick", grunted Sam annoyed.

"Is it because he's a dominant?", asked Percy cautiously. "Well, no. You're getting along with Derek and Marshall just fine, aren't you? So, come on, talk to me, Sammy."

Sam growled, ears flat against his head as he turned away a little. Percy heaved a sigh and got up. This parenting-thing was hard. Looking around, he spotted Piper, Jason and Leo waiting for them a little away. Annabeth was kneeling with Trend, checking on her own charge.

"Fine. Be that way. Sulk. I have skiing to do", grunted Percy and shook his head. "When you're ready to talk about it, you know what room I'm staying in, Sam."

With that, he drove off to catch up with Piper, Leo and Jason. He cared about Sam, but he knew from experience that there was absolutely no point in forcing someone to talk about something when he didn't want to. Besides, this school trip wasn't going to last forever and he wanted to also enjoy himself and not just worry about Sam. The kid had problems, Percy knew that.

By the time him, Leo and Piper returned to their shared room, Annabeth was not the only one waiting for them. She sat with her arms crossed in the common room, glaring over at Sam. Percy exchanged a look with Piper, who just smiled and tapped Annabeth on the shoulder to gain her attention and make her go to their shared bedroom for now. Leo made a show of going to take a shower while Percy went to sit with Sam, staring at him and waiting.

"He's... I... I think I like him", grumbled Sam embarrassed, cheeks red.

"Who? Trend?", asked Percy surprised and raised both eyebrows.

Sam shrugged, glaring and not looking at Percy. "I... He... He's stupid, with his stupidly handsome face and he keeps asking stuff that's none of his business and I don't need some big, strong Valkyrie to protect me. I'm a shifter and a hunter, I'm more than capable to protect myself."

"O—oh", hummed Percy with a grin. "Huh. And here I thought you liked Derek? The two of you have been spending so much time together."

"I do", growled Sam and made a face.

"O—oh", grunted Percy, now frowning thoughtfully. "Okay. Mh. So you lash out because you don't really know how to deal with your feelings, huh? I know that feeling. But maybe you should try to talk to him. Them. Both of them."

Pouting, Sam crossed his arms over his chest, prompting Percy to snort amused. Yeah with this whole pride-leader thing, Percy was definitely being tested for his parenting skills.

"Look. I have a date with Nico, so I gotta go. You, think about what you really want."

He reached out and ruffled Sam's hair in amusement before heading out again. He had only meant to dump his ski-gear to get his ice-skates, after all. And Sam had to make that decision for himself. If the fighting continued, then Percy was going to step in, but for now the kid had to think on it.

"You ready, amore?", asked Nico when the two met.
"To spend time with you? Always", grinned Percy and stole a kiss from Nico.

He grabbed Nico's hand and pulled him along toward the lake. This ski-trip was totally what Percy had been looking forward to since the school year had started. Once in their ice-skates, Percy happily led Nico onto the ice. There wasn't much more romantic than this. Just them, under the moonlight, dancing over the ice. It felt good, just getting lost in Nico's eyes and pretending like there was absolutely nothing but the two of them. No exams or graduation or future to worry about.

"I want children", stated Percy at one point, causing Nico to stumble. "Not now, you dork."

"Your ultimate plan is to test if you can give a vampire a heart-attack, right?", grunted Nico wearily as he gathered himself off the lake's surface. "What... are you talking about then, Perce?"

"Sam", replied Percy with a shrug, trailing his fingers over Nico's chest to catch the purple shell necklace that Percy had given Nico as a courting gift. "I really do like the kid. And Ty and my not yet born baby sister. And now living with all my siblings in a way I never experienced before just... I want children. More than one. At one point. And I figured since we are courting and the endgame of courting is, you know, being married, I think this is... basic, right?"

"Basic?", echoed Nico, still processing.

"Yeah. Basic life-goals", replied Percy and tilted his head. "If two people want to spend the rest of their lives together, there are some basic life-goals they should share. Like, do you want to get married, do you want kids, do you want pets, where do you want to live. Basics."

Nico nodded slowly, frowning thoughtfully. "Okay. Yeah. You're... You're right. We said when we started courting that this doesn't seal the deal, but it is the start of something, if we want it to be. And there are... things we gotta... agree on, I guess. So. Children, huh?"

"Yeah", replied Percy and nodded. "Children. Not any time soon, but at one point, I know I want to be a dad. I want children. More than one. What about you?"

Nico got a small and very dopey smile as he tilted his head. "Cute little mer-kittens?"

"That a yes?", asked Percy with the fondest look.

"Yeah. That... That's a yes", agreed Nico. "At one point, I guess I too want kids. And I do want to get married. I always wanted to get married. A big wedding in all white. A traditional supernatural wedding, Hades holding the ceremony, yes... I don't just want a private sealing of the matebond. I want the... world to know, you know."

"That's... not a surprise. You're such a sappy romantic", grinned Percy teasingly, kissing Nico's cheek. "I like that. As long as mom and Paul can attend a supernatural wedding too."

"Of course", nodded Nico, wrapping his arms around Percy's waist to pull him close. "And I want to stay in New York. I will be the clan-leader of the New York vampires one day."

"My mom is here. It's my home", nodded Percy. "I want to see the world. I mean, we're immortal. But New York will always be home. So... I guess... our life-goals don't stand in our way, huh?"

"They don't", agreed Nico, kissing the top of Percy's head. "I love you."

/DAD! Dad, you need to drive me to the hospital! Dad!/

"DAD! Dad, you need to drive me to the hospital! Dad!"
Poseidon nearly fell off the couch at the loud screaming. "Percy! What happened? Are you hurt?"

"What? No", grunted Percy, phone still between his chin and shoulder. "Paul called. The baby is coming! I want to be there when my baby sister is born! Please drive me?"

At first, Poseidon took a relieved sigh, before startling. "Wait. The baby's coming? I'm getting my jacket! Amy, dear! We're going to the hospital, the baby is coming!"

"What? Already?!", exclaimed Amphitrite surprised. "Call me when you hear something."

"Wait! Wait, wait, wait! I wanna come too!"

Tyson came barreling down toward Poseidon and Percy, while their other siblings all poked their heads out to tell them to send Sally their best wishes and take a picture of the baby once it was there. They got into the car and drove off toward the hospital, where a nervously pacing Paul welcomed them, looking utterly distressed. And granted, the next three hours were rather uneventful for the men in the waiting room. Tyson busied himself playing on Poseidon's phone while Percy texted with Leo and Piper in their group-chat. He was tired and short of falling asleep when the doctor finally got them. Poseidon had to hold Tyson back so Paul and Percy could go in first.

"Sally, how are you feeling?", asked Paul gently.

He went to brush his wife's hair out of her face, making Sally smile up at him. "She's perfect."

For only a moment did Paul look confused before a nurse handed him an indeed absolutely perfect baby. He looked like he was having a stroke. Poseidon laughed and patted his shoulder.

"Congratulations to fatherhood, Paul", chuckled Poseidon before he moved on to Sally. "She indeed is absolutely perfect, Sally. The best wishes from Amy and the children."

He placed the flowers he had bought in the shop downstairs on the table next to her. Percy and Tyson went to look at the baby in awe, Tyson standing on a chair to look at the baby.

"It's very small", noted Tyson with a frown.

"She, Tyson", corrected Sally amused. "That's... Laura Blofis."

"Laura?", echoed Percy and looked up surprised. "That... That's the perfect name, mom."

Sally smiled at her son at that and sighed softly. Tyson all the while tugged a little on Paul's shirt to make him go down a bit so Tyson could properly look at the baby.

"Hello, I'm Tyson", said Tyson in a soft voice, gently poking Laura's cheek. "I'm your big brother now, if you want. I know we're not really siblings because you have a different mommy and daddy than I do, but we have the same super-awesome big brother. Percy is the best. So, since we share Percy, I could also become your big brother, if you want...?"

That made the adults in the room smile fondly. "That's very sweet of you, Ty."

"Yes, now. You take this and take pictures and give me my sister", nodded Percy, exchanging his phone for his sister, carefully cradling her in his arms. "Hello, Laura."

Paul chuckled amused and obediently took pictures of Percy, Tyson and Laura together.

/break/
"You know what the best part of the swimming competitions is? The free pizza", stated Stella.

"The swimming. The swimming was supposed to be the answer", snorted Lacy amused.

The two girls had grown really close over the past months. Percy smiled and leaned back, watching his team in post-competition bliss. They had done good. Surprisingly, even he and Drew were working together really well this year. But even without them, once they would graduate, he knew he'd leave Piper with a good team – Mike, Mitchell, Lacy and Stella.

"You look nostalgic. Why are you looking nostalgic?", asked Piper, nudging him.

"Just... thinking about the future of this team", shrugged Percy.

"Do—on't", groaned Piper, hitting her forehead against Percy's shoulder. "Don't remind me that you'll be gone next year. Please let me live in the now, yeah?"

"Sure thing, Pipes", chuckled Percy and patted her head.

"Though... do you... you know... have plans?", asked Piper reluctantly as she peeked up at him.

Percy made a face at that and stuffed his face with pizza, causing Piper to raise her eyebrows. "I don't know yet, Pipes. This is... I really don't know. Especially now that there are so many more options for me than before... What about you, Drew?"

Drew looked startled for a moment and like she contemplated whether to answer or not. "I have already written my application for Halliwell University. Fashion design."

"Mh. Fits you", nodded Percy, not in a judgmental way.

There was an awkward pause for a little moment before Drew cleared her throat. "You're... surely going to find the right thing too. You're... resourceful."

Percy grinned a little at that and tilted his head a bit. It's been too many months since they last had their actual outfall. They had been working amicably for the entire year so far, so he figured why not. Why shouldn't they be able to just talk? They were on the same team, after all.

Poseidon was working on his training schedule. They had made it far in the competition again this year, but Poseidon knew two of his stars were seniors so he had to adjust to their schedules too. They couldn't miss study time for the sake of the competitions either.

"Can I do something for you, Perce?", asked Poseidon without looking up.

Percy, who had been standing in the doorway to his office for about ten minutes now, startled a little. "Uh. Hey, dad. I didn't want to interrupt you or anything..."

Putting his pen down, Poseidon sat up and turned toward his son. "You are not interrupting me, my boy. If there's something you need to talk about, I will always have an open ear for you."

Sighing, Percy approached his father and sat down on the couch opposite his desk. For a few moments, it was quiet between them, Percy fidgeting thoughtfully and Poseidon watching him.

"What... What would I have to do to become a coach?", asked Percy softly.

"Mh?", grunted Poseidon surprised and confused.
"Well, I'm... graduating this year", started Percy to answer. "And I've been thinking a lot. Thinking about what to do after I graduate. I never really thought about that before, because, well, high school was already hard enough and all and I figured I'd just, you know, get from one job to the next or whatever. Now I want... more, I guess."

"More?", echoed Poseidon, nodding slowly and leaning back. "And you want to be... coach?"

"I... guess", replied Percy with a small nod. "The swim-team just... did so much for me. And I love it. And I can imagine to be that. To train young merpeople, coach them. And you and Amy, you're going to return to the underwater palace at one point – this was never a permanent gig for you. It's all about me, you said so. And once you leave again, the school won't have a coach and I figured... I could. I mean. I just... wanted to know, what would I have to do to become a coach?"

Poseidon wanted to follow into Poseidon's footsteps. Of course did that make him proud.

"Well, you'd have to study education, of course. Halliwell University offers wonderful courses", started Poseidon slowly. "We can go together to talk to the advisers there. You can look around college to see if it might be something for you, maybe even sit in on a class or two."

"That sounds... good", nodded Percy with a small smile. "Thanks, dad."

"Always, Percy", assured Poseidon gently.

Percy looked up to see a bat circling him from above. He grinned amused as he sat up some.

"Honestly, you know we got a door, right?", asked Percy teasingly.

His boyfriend turned back human, coming to stand behind Percy and curiously looking over Percy's shoulder. Percy's room had been remodeled after the summer, his bed replaced by a nest. Three steps leading up to it, the mattress in it, together with furs. Currently, Percy was sitting in his nest, arms resting on the highest step of his nest and papers spread out in front of him. Nico sat down next to Percy in the nest, pulling him in to kiss him briefly.

"Says the sneaky little kitten who keeps climbing in through the window too", pointed Nico out.

"What are you doing, gattino? You look busy. I could... come back another time?"

"Mh? No. I just...", started Percy before shrugging. "So, I talked to my dad the other day, about what I want to do after graduation. And... I think I want to become a swim-coach."

"That... That fits you", smiled Nico fondly.

"Dad said I'd have to study education, be prepared to teach two different subjects, so PE can't be my only thing. So I looked into that first and...", started Percy before ruffling his own hair. "Drama."

"Drama?", echoed Nico, perking up some with a smile that surprised Percy. "You love drama. You have a real talent for it. I like that you don't want to give that up."

"Yeah. Drama and PE. And dad said that Halliwell University teaches both and...", started Percy, shrugging a little. "Dad said that before I apply, I could looking into it. I mean, behind the curtain, you know? So... all of those? That's schedules. Training schedules. How dad makes them, based on what. The sheets of the performance of each team-member, their individual school-schedule since we
can't have training while someone has class. There goes a lot of thinking into this stuff. He also told me that in my free periods, I could tag along to him teaching PE, as an observer."

"You really are thinking about your future, huh?", asked Nico with a smile.

"Ye—eah. I just... graduation is not that far away? And... Halliwell University seems like a great place. I've been visiting Luke and Silena every other weekend or so", shrugged Percy. "I want... I guess I know what I want now. Huh."

He leaned back against Nico's chest, nuzzling into him. He grabbed the paper he had been studying before Nico interrupted to continue while just cuddling up to his boyfriend.

"What about you?", asked Percy after about half an hour. "I mean, you got a year more than me, but... What do you want? Study abroad? Study at all? Because... Because I don't know how I'd feel if you were to join the military again, to be honest..."

"No more war", whispered Nico and shook his head. "I threw myself into war because I didn't know if I wanted a future. Now... Ever since you came into my life, I've been looking at the future... differently, I guess. But that I have to go through four years of high school because Hades and Persephone thought this was a good idea is more than enough. I'm not going to college."

"Okay. So... what then?", asked Percy curiously, tilting his head to look at Nico.

"Remember the restaurant I took you to for our anniversary?", asked Nico slowly.

"Gaea's Garden?", nodded Percy. "Ye—eah. That was damn delicious."

"It belongs to Demeter", continued Nico while slowly running his fingers through Percy's hair. "I've always loved cooking, you know? I just... did it only for myself and the coven. I figured... maybe... I could start, as a cook there? I mean, an apprentice. Learn the craft."

"Mh... dating a cook... good plan", purred Percy teasingly.

"So selfish", huffed Nico, flicking Percy's cat-ear and making him hiss.

Piper chuckled fondly as the three reached their lockers. "I don't know yet. I'm going to spend a year abroad, or rather below the sea, with grandma Thalassa."

Percy knew that already but still the thought of a year with Piper gone was a bit depressing. Still, he kind of understood where she was coming from. She grew up in human society just like Percy and the idea of first sorting herself out, exploring her aquatic roots, sounded good.
"Why are there flowers all over our lockers?", asked Leo slowly.

"Because the vampires wanted to one-up each other", grunted Chris amused before pulling Piper close by her waist. "Say, love, will you go to my senior prom with me, and Clarisse?"

Chris smiled, offering one white rose to Piper. Percy and Leo exchanged a grin before focusing on their overly decorated lockers. The vampires one-upping each other emerged slightly embarrassed.

"I wanted to be more romantic than her", shrugged Nico. "But it turned into a bit of a mess...?"

"You know, you could have just asked and I would have said yes, even without big romantic gestures, you dork", laughed Percy softly, wrapping his arms around Nico's neck.

"What can I say? You make me want to be romantic?", shrugged Nico awkwardly.

"My dork", stated Percy contently as he kissed Nico. "Yes, I'd love to go to senior prom with you."

Leo looked just as happy as he tugged first Hazel and then Frank down into a kiss.

"You running for prom queen?", asked Frank curiously, looking at Percy.

"Running definitely. But I know I have strong competition this time", stated Percy with a grin. "Reyna apparently coaxed Annabeth into running for queen while Reyna runs for king."

"Tough competition indeed", grunted Nico. "And I will completely keep out of this one, because quite clearly I can not win when it's my boyfriend against my best friend."

"Woe is you, my poor little bat", chuckled Percy and kissed Nico's cheek.

"Show some more respect to your future king", huffed Nico with a pout.

"Mh, I do quite like the sound of that", purred Percy mischievously.

Chapter End Notes

If Percy continues percying, then he might just manage to kill a vampire via heartattack! :D Poor bat... Anyway, next chapter is going to feature prom and Percy's second heat! ;)

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Chapter 41: Prom(ising Future)

Percy smiled amused as he watched Sam pace. The boy was glaring rather fiercely, arms crossed over his chest. The two of them were in the infirmary of the school. Sam had asked him to come along, because the younger catboy had no idea if he could handle this situation alone. From Percy's expert point of view, Sam was handling it perfectly fine, because the two dominants in the beds looks heavily chastised from just the pacing and glare alone; Sam hadn't even spoken a word yet.

"Why would you two idiots-", started Sam, ears flat against his head and fangs out.

His tail was raised, very bushy in agitation. Percy was purring in amusement. This was great lunch break entertainment, really. Trend Austin, a young Valkyrie with messy blonde curls, raised his dark-gray wings higher like he took offense to being chided like that, though even he was wise enough to not speak up. Derek Rhys, a nature-spirit wearing dark-green clothes that complimented his dark-green eyes, looked equally chastised. Percy took a sip from his boxed chocolate-milk.

"He groped you", stated Derek, arms crossed in defiance. "He deserved it."

Sam whirled around and pointed at Derek in utter irritation. "You-"

It seemed as though he was absolutely lost for words. Percy put his chocolate-milk down.

"You really think Sam needs you to defend his honor?", offered Percy, one eyebrow raised.

"Thank you!", exclaimed Sam and threw his hands up. "Exactly, that! I'm a hunter. I'm a natural predator. Just because I'm a submissive doesn't mean I'm some... some kind of useless, defenseless little damsel in distress! I don't need you to protect my honor! I coulda decked him myself in one punch, if I wanted to! But some gross little shithead pinching my ass isn't worth a fucking suspension for punching someone! But oh no, you two, you glorious, great, strong dominants, you had to go in and start an all-out fight with him and his friends. You fucking idiots."

Percy ate a cookie, nodding pleased. Good boy. Damn, he was very proud of Sam. A bit of quarrel with the kids from their own school, a physical fight with Trend sometimes, that's one thing. Neither boy was going to report it to the principal. But a member of the visiting baseball team? Getting half of both teams involved? Chiron was still busy trying to smooth things over and all kids involved were going to face serious punishment for it. It was nice that Sam knew this, that Sam himself knew better than to get himself into this kind of trouble. Though it was still a bit surreal that Percy Jackson had managed to become a good influence on someone. Huh.

"So you were just going to let him slap your ass?", grunted Trend irritated. "Just like that?"

"No, you utter morons!", exclaimed Sam and threw his hands up once more. "I was going to tell the coach. Sara was with me, she saw the whole thing. The guy would have been benched for the game and gotten his due punishment. Now the game's canceled because four members of their team and three members of our team are in the fucking infirmary!"

"Sammy-", started Derek tentatively.
"I don't want to hear it", growled Sam. "I'm going back to my lunch with Sara and you two would do good not showing your face to me again today, or I will put you into the infirmary. Knuckleheaded, overbearing idiot dominants..."

Percy smiled pleased as he watched Sam storm out of the infirmary. He turned to look at Derek and Trend with a very pointed and disappointed look (he channeled his inner mom whenever Percy got called to the principal's office). Both boys looked orderly chastised.

"We didn't mean...", started Trend frustrated. "I just don't know how to act around him, he drives me insane! He keeps acting tough as nails but he's still a submissive. He confuses me."

"The best of us do that", hummed Percy amused. "You have to act like your self. And you have to treat him with respect. How would you feel if someone stepped into your fight like that? And from what Sam just said, he had a plan to deal with this himself."

"I'd be... annoyed", admitted Trend slowly and sighed. "Urgh."

"How do I make it up to him?", asked Derek.

"Well, a proper apology tomorrow might help. For now, do as he said and stay away", advised Percy and shook his head. "You will have enough to deal with today, because Mister Brunner did not look happy when I last saw him and I'm sure he called your parents."

Both looked justifiably mortified by that. Deciding that the boys had been chided enough for today, Percy left the room to find Sam pacing in front of it, still looking annoyed. Percy reached out for Sam's neck and pulled the boy into a calming hug, brushing his cheek against Sam's and purring.

"You did good, kiddo", praised Percy. "They'll learn their lessons."

"Is... it bad that even though I think they're entitled knuckleheads for doing it and being totally annoyed by it, I still kind of found it... hot?", whispered Sam unsure. "I mean, I never had someone just step in like that, ready to throw for me?"

Percy laughed and shook his head. "No, that's not bad. You're annoyed by the way they went about it and that they didn't ask you first, but you still like the notion behind it. The protectiveness and the fact that they got this angry on your behalf, because someone wronged you. Now, how about ice-cream? My treat."

"We have classes", argued Sam.

"You still have much to learn, young Padawan", sighed Percy. "You gotta use your cards right. You are still distraught about what just happened and clearly need someone at your side. We're gonna have an easy time selling that to Mister Brunner and then we'll get ice-cream."

"You truly do have much to teach me", gasped Sam eagerly. "Ye—es. Ice-cream."

Percy stood at the foot of the steps, smiling amused as he peeked around the corner. Nico looked hot in his suit. And adorable when fidgeting like that. Triton, Proteus, Benthésikyme and Kymopoleia were surrounding him and making him sweat.

"Don't you want to save your boyfriend?", asked Rhode softly next to Percy.

"Mh... He's cute when he's trying to justify that he has 'pure intentions'. Honestly, I didn't know
Proteus could be that much of a sadist”, snickered Percy.

"If you deflower our precious little baby brother, I will break one finger at a time", stated Proteus.

"I—I...", started Nico, looking rather close to a heart-attack.

"Hey there, Batman. Looking sharp!", announced Percy as he rounded the corner.

"...Wow", whispered Nico stunned, mouth hanging open.

Percy had asked Silena for help with his clothing for his senior prom and she had been absolutely excited (especially since she would be able to use it as a semester project for one of her classes). His robes were a perfect blend between traditional Bastet robes and the flow-y nature of merpeople clothing. In about a dozen different shades of blue, with gems and silver corals decorating it.

"I love when you look at me like that", grinned Percy pleased.

He wrapped his arms around Nico and pulled him into a slow kiss. Waving a last time at his siblings before they could say anything else embarrassing, Percy pulled his boyfriend along. They made their way to the school and into the gym, where – under the supervision of Drew Tanaka – the prom committee had actually put together a very gorgeous prom. Percy and Nico quickly found some of their friends. Reyna and Annabeth were sitting with Rachel, Grover and Juniper.

"I hate this", grunted Nico as they sat down. "I hate that you guys are all going to graduate. What am I supposed to do in this school for a whole year without my boyfriend or my two best friends."

"Aw. I feel bad for the little bat", teased Annabeth with a smirk.

"You'll be fine", shrugged Reyna, fingers interlaced with Annabeth. "Dance with me, my queen."

"Excuse you, the vote's not over yet!", exclaimed Percy. "I can still win!"

Grover raised one eyebrow as he eyed his friend. "You really think so?"

"Nah", shrugged Percy with a grin once the girls were gone. "I voted for Annabeth too. I'm just teasing. She's been ruling this school way before I came around."

Nico smiled fondly and rolled his eyes. They all knew that Reyna and Annabeth were going to win prom king and queen. So by the time it was officially announced and the crowns were placed on their heads, everyone was cheering loudly. Annabeth looked stunning in her silver dress, the tiara matching her dress perfectly. Reyna was wearing a purple suit that had no right to look as hot as it did, in Percy's opinion. The two looked perfect together as they had their first official dance.

"You know you're my queen, right?", whispered Nico lowly. "Dance with me?"

"You sweet-talker", grinned Percy and leaned in to kiss Nico.

Percy and Nico spent the whole evening dancing and laughing with their friends. It was exactly how Percy had always pictured prom to be, even though he never thought he'd ever have that kind of prom. And honestly, Percy thought it was just the fact that Nico looked really hot in his suit, that had him all bothered all evening. Hornier than normal, more eager to touch Nico, to keep him close. Once outside the gym, Percy was downright grinding on Nico.

"My vampire", growled Percy pleased, biting Nico's neck.

"Ouch! Yes, your v-", started Nico, trying to appease his boyfriend.
Only that Percy's scent gave him pause. So sweet. So good. Nico had also kind of pushed it onto the fact that Percy looked stunning in his dress-like robes, but now that they were outside of the stuffy gym with all of those scents mingling, many of them artificial perfumes, now that it was just Nico and Percy in the fresh night-air, Nico could smell it. His eyes widened.

"You're...", started Nico surprised, looking deep into Percy's cat-like eyes.

Percy's eyes narrowed at first because how dare his dominant stop kissing him, but then that thought and the entire situation seemed to catch up with him properly. Damn it, he was in heat.

"I love you", groaned Percy, face buried in Nico's neck. "You are amazing and I love you."

"I would love me too if I were you right now", grumbled Nico and pulled Percy onto his lap. "Those were entirely unpleasant conversations to have."

Calling Thanatos to pick them up from prom and then calling Poseidon to let him know that his beloved darling son of a prince had decided he was going to spend his heat at the vampire mansion with his Nico. Then, of course, Nico had to also let Hades know that they'd be needed some privacy and supplies. Persephone and Bianca had gone on a late-night grocery trip, because they usually didn't have what a cat-shifter required, especially not during a heat. But Nico's still rather clear-minded boyfriend had decided that he would not spend this heat with a dildo, now that he had a boyfriend with a perfectly working dick to use. Which, somehow not the romantic "Do you want to spend my heat with me?" proposal that Nico had imagined, but fair enough. The two of them had been having sex for months now so it was a logical conclusion to spend Percy's heat together. And the rationality of Percy's arguments sold it far more that Percy was in fact still in his right mind.

"Perce", gasped Nico as Percy cupped him through the pants.

"You were distracted. You gotta concentrate on me, here", whispered Percy cheekily.

Nico grunted while Percy started palming him through the suit-pants. For a moment, Nico contemplated whether or not he could survive Percy's heat. Probably not. But it'd be a worthy death.

"How about we get out of the expensive clothes first before they're ruined?"

"Mh... Naked you... even better than the suit", purred Percy delighted. "Yes, please."

Nico hastily but carefully removed both their clothes and found himself actually cursing the beautiful outfit Percy was wearing because it was complicated. His kitten however looked like he was enjoying Nico's troubles. Glaring up at Percy, Nico pinched the catboy's nipples, making him hiss and arch off the bed. The expression on Percy's face was not unlike when they were hunting. Feral, hungry, like a predator who had found his prey. And Nico was the prey. The vampire gasped as Percy suddenly rolled them over and pinned Nico to his own bed.

"We haven't had sex in weeks", growled Percy. "That's just not acceptable."

"Well, there were exams and you were finishing up your college application-", started Nico.

Percy just glared pointedly at him to shut him up, before sealing Nico's lips with his own. Nico groaned into their kiss, closing his eyes slowly and resting his hands on Percy's waist. During their kiss, Percy pressed down, rubbing their hard cocks against each other, his hands pawing desperately against Nico's chest and six-pack. Feeling Nico's cock against his own, giving him friction, was enough to draw the first orgasm out of Percy. He mewled as he sprayed his cum all over Nico's six-
pack and then he started kissing down Nico's body to clean the mess up again. His fingers all the while found their way between his own legs, two quickly shoved inside himself to scissor himself.

"You were looking like the yummiest snack all evening", groaned Percy as he pushed against his own prostate. "Wanna eat you up, but if I do that now, I gotta wait until you're hard again before I can get you to fuck me so I gotta delay my snack..."

All Nico could do was groan. Percy in heat was so hot. Especially when he popped out the ears and tail, his fangs gleaming in the light as he grinned down at Nico. The next moment, Percy crawled on top of Nico, carefully positioning himself right above the vampire's hard cock. Slowly, he lowered himself onto the aching hardness, making Nico gasp for breath and reach out to grab Percy's thighs, to have something to hold onto. Percy moaned helplessly once Nico was fully inside him.

"Love you, love you, love you", chanted Percy while peppering Nico's face with kisses.

Nico grinned pleased, running his hands over Percy's thighs in a reassuring manner. Now this was quite the way to celebrate Percy's graduation. Percy started rolling his hips and lifting himself off Nico to bring himself down again. He gasped every time Nico's dick hit the right angle. The only sound Nico managed when he came was a strangled moan. Percy slammed himself down on Nico hard before he also came. Gasping for breath after his second orgasm, Percy collapsed on top of Nico. For now, he was appeased. He knew it won't even last the whole night, but it was good now.

"Good dominant", hummed Percy pleased, kissing the underside of Nico's chin.

"Not feeling overly 'dominant' down here", snorted Nico amused.

"You can tie me down next round", assured Percy before drifting off.

"You... You can't say stuff like that and then fall asleep, Percy!", complained Nico.

Bianca exchanged amused looks with Hazel and Calypso. Percy was sitting opposite them, humming contently to himself while eating what might be the largest serving of bacon Bianca had ever seen. On another plate, there were pancakes piled up, with blueberries and blueberry syrup.

"Here, orange juice, amore", offered Nico and placed a large glass in front of Percy.

Hazel raised her eyebrows. "You must be really good in bed, Perce."

"Why?", groaned Hades and lifted his newspaper some. "Why did you have to say that?"

"No—o. Nico just knows how to treat his future mate properly", hummed Percy innocently.

Persephone tilted her head curiously at that. While everyone knew Percy and Nico were courting, this was the first time either of the boys had actually referred to the other as future mate. Courting was not a definite thing, in many cases the parties involved would end things before a mating ceremony took place. Some just did it for appreciation of their partner.

"I hear from Nico that you applied to Halliwell University", started Persephone to change the topic.

"Yes. I'm going to study to become a teacher", replied Percy. "I just... I really love the swim-team. I want to be able to provide that for future merkids. And now that Sam's here – now that I'm not the only cat-shifter in New York anymore – I noticed that... I really like this... mentor-role."
"Good", nodded Hades pleased, folding his newspaper. "A very admirable career choice."

Percy grinned pleased at that and leaned into Nico, bumping his head against Nico's. He had spent the whole weekend at the mansion, most of it naked with Nico. After his heat finally subdued Sunday evening, he was happy to properly eat again and to feel less itchy and needy.

"Thanks for letting me stay here. I'm sorry for the inconvenience."

"Oh, don't be sorry", chided Persephone. "You're still young, it was only your second heat. They don't come regularly for you yet. I'm just glad you weren't alone and that we could provide you with a safe place to be at, that's what matters, Percy."

Percy smiled at that, his tail wrapped around Nico's waist. He really was grateful that the vampires had been so welcoming. And that he had gotten to be with Nico this time around. Honestly, heats were way more fun when he got to have sex with Nico and cuddle with Nico and shower with Nico and also have shower-sex with Nico. Very, very good, really. Percy could get used to it.

"Look at your big brother, looking all proper and prim."

Laura cooed and reached out for Percy's face. Smiling, Percy caught his baby sister's hand and kissed it before looking up at his mom. Sally couldn't look prouder if she actively tried. Paul stood next to his wife, one arm around her waist. Poseidon and Amphitrite were right next to them.

"Poseidon, please stop crying", requested Amphitrite with an exasperated sigh.

"I can't. Look at my boy", sobbed Poseidon, puffing his chest out.

"If you'll excuse me. I'm joining my friends", laughed Percy. "Love you guys!"

He ran off to stand with Reyna, Annabeth, Grover and Rachel, grinning at them as they all stood nice and proper, waiting for their diploma. The pride Chiron radiated at every single diploma he handed out was incredible. He really did care about each of his students. That, that was what Percy wanted. He wanted to stand tall and proud and watch kids get a diploma, kids he helped to get there.


Percy smiled brightly as he turned toward the crowd and lifted his diploma up. He did it. He actually managed to graduate high school – and his grades weren't too shabby either.

"Stop looking mopey, Pipes", grunted Percy and shoved his friend.

"I can't help it. This is the last summer you'll be here", sighed Piper with a pout.

Percy sighed too. He was kind of mad that he had only joined Summers High so late. This was only his second summer and yet it would be his last. He had graduated and he had been accepted into Halliwell University, so this summer was the last one before real life started.

"I mean, it's really hot having a college girlfriend and a college boyfriend, but one by one everyone seems to leave and the idea of being team captain of a team without Silena, Gwen, you and... even Drew because she is a good swimmer... urgh", elaborated Piper.

"I know, Pipes", agreed Percy and patted her back. "You'll be fine. And hey, you'll be a senior
yourself. You're going to be so busy planning your future, you won't even notice we're gone."

At that, Piper huffed and shoved him a little. "Go and annoy your boyfriend. I have a practice set with my future team. I saw Nico sulk by the lake earlier, you know."

Percy grinned brightly and kissed Piper's cheek before skipping away. Piper, Mike, Mitchell and Lacy were going to be the core team next year, though hopefully they'd get some more fresh blood, because otherwise they were going to have a problem once Mike and Piper graduated – Mitchell, Lacy and Stella would be one person short to even join any competition. Percy smiled as he found his indeed sulking bat sitting at the shore together with Nyssa, Jake and Will. The two dragons were playing some kind of card-game, while Will seemed deep into a half one-sided conversation with Nico, laying sprawled out and with his head in Jake's lap so Jake could play with Will's hair.

"Hey, Percy", greeted Nyssa without looking up. "Wanna join the game?"

"Oh. Yeah. That looks good", agreed Percy pleased, basically flopping down on Nico's lap.

It was cute how Nico seemed to brighten immediately, wrapping his arms around Percy and pulling him close. While Percy joined Jake and Nyssa's game, Nico was suddenly far more invested in his conversation with Will because he got to cuddle his kitten. Granted, perhaps a part of his lack of enthusiasm had rooted from the fact that Will too had just graduated and was also leaving. This entire summer was just Nico looking at his closest friends and boyfriend who were going to leave.

/\break\n
Sam was a fast runner, sneaky too in where he ran. Beneath the underwood, where the larger members of the pack couldn't follow, ducking under branches and jumping over tree-stumps. Percy smiled as he followed at full-speed. Running with another cat-shifter really was different from running with the wolves and foxes. After their morning run and their shower, they had another two hours to sleep before breakfast. Shifting back into his cat-form, Percy curled together around Sam, grooming the smaller kitten while Connor, Chris, Cecil and Frank all settled into their own nests.

"You going to be alright after the summer?", asked Percy softly.

While he had assured his friends and Nico that they'd be fine, they also all had someone else. Nico still had Calypso and Hazel from his coven, he'd be fine. Piper still had Leo, Mitchell and Lacy. Leo had Hazel, Piper, Nyssa and Shane. People of their own species, as well as other close friends. But Percy and Sam were the only cat-shifters. The brown kitten shook himself.

"I got Sara and Marshall. I'll just... spend more time with the hunters than the shifters probably. And I have... I guess... Derek and Trend. If those two idiots would just stop being idiots."

"That's unlikely. They're teenage boys and as you know from experience, we can be idiots."

Sam laughed at that, burying his face in Percy's stomach and pawing at his side.

/\break\n
Percy, Nico, Reyna and Annabeth were laying on a blanket, staring into the night-sky. Yes, even Annabeth was not cataloging stars in favor of just using her girlfriend as a pillow and enjoying one of their last nights of summer together like that, before they'd have to become adults.

Reyna was going to train to join the police force, just like Clarisse. Annabeth continued blushing every time it was brought up, because apparently she had a thing for women in uniforms. Annabeth herself was going to become an architect, which honestly Percy could totally see.
"I can't believe they expect us to become adults now", whispered Percy lowly.

"Yeah, you're absolutely not qualified for that", agreed Annabeth seriously.

"Hey!", exclaimed Percy, aiming a glare at the blonde.

"What? You know it's true", snorted Annabeth, elbowing Percy teasingly.

Huffing, Percy turned away to bury his face in Nico's chest. It was scary. College. A whole new chapter of his life. Here, at school, he had formed his safety net of people he could trust. In a way, he would regain some of those – Luke, Silena, Clarisse – and keep others. But still, everything would be different starting next year. A whole new phase of his life. And he was excited for it.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter, Percy is going to move into the dorms! How will college-life suit him? ;)


"Can't believe I have my own place now. Well, our own place. But..."

Percy paused, still staring up at the ceiling from his bed. Grover on the bed in the other corner laughed at that. The two of them had moved into a shared dorm-room. It helped make the transition way easier, because Percy had one of his friends living with him.

"I'm still surprised you didn't just stay at home", admitted Grover curiously. "I mean, it took you so long to grow close to your family so I figured you'd take more time with them..."

"I guess that'd make sense", sighed Percy. "But... Proteus, Benthya and Kym actually have lives. They have lives that they have built for centuries, in Atlantis. They all put them on halt when I was born, to be there for me. But now I am moving on with my life. I am... I am taking the next step in my life, right? So... I don't need to keep them tied to the surface world. When we last visited the palace this winter, I... I saw just how much they miss it all. How much they miss their partners and also the sea itself. Besides, it's not like they're out of the world. We have phones. I'm going to visit them during my breaks. I want this to be a proper next step for my life, that includes living here."

Grover grinned as he looked over at his roommate. "Honestly, I had considered moving in with Juni, but... We've only been dating for like two years now and the thought of moving in together makes me anxious, you know? So like, your idea was perfect."

"Where's Juniper now?", asked Percy curiously.

"Sharing a dorm-room with Katie", replied Grover. "The two always got along real well so it's like... Juni didn't have any complaints about not moving in with me."

"O—okay. Enough admiring of our own room. Gotta annoy the girls", declared Percy suddenly.

Grover chuckled and waved at Percy from the bed until Percy was out of the room. Making his way down the hall, he went to find the room he was looking for. He made a triumphant sound as he found it and knocked on it hard until the irritated face of Annabeth Chase showed itself. Her hair was put up in a messy bun and her shirt was askew a little. Percy grinned knowingly.

"You know what, I don't think it's good for your academic career to share a room with your girlfriend, Annabeth. Your grades are going to suffer", chided Percy seriously.

"Oh, shut it", grunted Annabeth and rolled her eyes as she stepped aside.

Reyna chuckled amused. "You underestimate how much Annie loves knowledge."

"Fair enough", shrugged Percy and tilted his head before sitting down on the empty bed.

"You getting settled in alright?", asked Reyna as she reached for a hoodie to put on over her bra. "You're rooming with... give me a moment... Grover, right?"

"Ye—ep", replied Percy. "Already took a tour of the campus like a proper first semester. Had a third
“You're happy to be back with Luke, huh?”, noted Reyna fondly.

“We're going on a pack-run together tonight. Luke, Chris, Nathan, Travis, Connor and me”, confirmed Percy excitedly. "And I'm joining the college swim-team. It's... weird. Due to the relatively small size of the community, this is like... just the next step of school?"

"Agreed", grunted Reyna with a nod. "I got classes with Hylla and Clarisse now, well, some of them. It is the safe thing to do for us supernaturals. You could go to a human college, but..."

"You'd be missing out on so much!", exclaimed Annabeth. "Mondays, I have an introductory class into merpeople architecture and how the conditions under the sea change the way you have to design your buildings and then there is the class on ancient temples that takes the supernatural usage into consideration. There are so many hidden things humans don't know about."

"Your girlfriend is such a nerd, Rey", noted Percy dryly, a grin on his face.

"She is", sighed Reyna contently, smiling at Annabeth.

Nico had grown decidedly closer to Lou and Cecil since their senior year started. Sure, he knew them and shared classes with them but he had never really been close to the witch and the fox. Now that Nico's best friends had graduated, he found himself spending more time with others. Not just them, also with Frank, Piper and Jason. Him and Frank were spending many of their lunch-breaks playing Mythomagic and they had even taught Jason the rules. Both of them had always been kind of in Nico's orbit – through Calypso and Hazel respectively – but he had never exactly been close to them. It was odd how changed circumstances changed such dynamics.

"Are you missing your boyfriend?", asked Lou teasingly.

She and Cecil had, reluctantly so, learned how to play Mythomagic too. Their group was currently in the middle of a game, Nico, Frank, Lou, Cecil and Jason. Calypso sat with them, though mainly for the sake of being with her boyfriend, her legs thrown over Jason's lap casually while she read a book. Nico grumbled at Lou's teasing. Everybody knew he was missing Percy.

"We haven't seen each other in a week", muttered Nico. "But we text a lot and he's been sending me photos all through the week. He's happy but also totally overwhelmed."

"College's a different caliber than high school", grunted Cecil. "But hey, he got Luke to help him around, right? They're studying the same thing, aren't they?"

Nico hummed in confirmation at that. "The future generations of Summers High students will have a great swim-coach and a great baseball-coach, that's for sure."

"What about you?", asked Frank curiously while drawing a card. "I mean, you got any... plans?"

"I... was thinking of becoming a chef. I already asked grandma Demeter for a letter of recommendation to get into Hestia's culinary school", replied Nico.

"Ni—ice. Aiming high there, huh? There's no better education than hers", whistled Jason. "And her food is absolutely divine. She co-owns Gaea's Garden, right?"

"Together with grandmother", confirmed Nico. "Hence the weight of the letter."
"Huh. Somehow I was expecting you to become a teacher too so you can sneak around the school with the coach, being all cutey and such", snickered Lou.

"Mh... I mean, Demeter doubles by teaching herbology classes here and Hestia occasionally gives cooking classes during the summer, so... who knows where I'll end up", shrugged Nico thoughtfully. "Gotta admit, the idea of working together with Percy, but not **totally** together – I don't think that sitting on each other all day long every week is very healthy for a relationship... But it could be nice. And working in a kitchen is stressful, that much I know."

"Because teaching teenagers is a walk in the park", noted Calypso dryly without looking up.

Percy was laying on his bed, a disgruntled look on his face as he stared at his roommate. Grover was stretched out on his own bed, three books laying around him as he took notes.

"Taking a break from studying?", asked Grover. "Angry at the books?"

"Partially", muttered Percy. "It's just..."

They were two months into the semester, meaning the exams were slowly coming closer. When Percy didn't continue talking, Grover looked up and closed his own book. He had noticed that something was up with his best friend lately; Percy had been very agitated.

"I haven't seen Nico in **three weeks**. And with exams coming up, there's no way I can make time either!", complained Percy irritated. "It was all so much easier in high school, you know?"

"You mean because you two had to be in the same building five outta seven days a week and your schedule and requirements to pass were far more lax so you didn't have to put as much work into it as you do now, for college?", offered Grover, half-amused. "Gee, who would have thought?"

"**Not** the time for sarcasm, G-man", grunted Percy with a deep glare.

"Oka—ay", started Grover slowly, leaning against the wall and facing Percy fully. "Three weeks? Is it really **that** bad? I mean, that's not that much time."

"Says the guy who met his girlfriend for lunch **today**", muttered Percy beneath his breath. "And... yeah. It kind of is. I just, aside from seeing each other nearly the whole week at school, we lived close enough so I could just... literally... run over to visit him in the evening. And sure, in theory I could still do that, but most nights I am way too exhausted from classes to shift and run, or I have too much school work to do to even think of it. And Nico too! He's so busy with his own school work because he wants to better his grades for his graduation since it's hard to get into the culinary school he wants to go, even with his grandmother's letter of recommendation. And even on the weekends when I don't have much to do for classes, he's busy with a coven-thing. Or, on the flip-side, on the days he is free, I have a pack-run or training with the swim-team, or it was that one weekend where my siblings came to visit with their partners and I couldn't skip out on that family day. It's... It's less the three weeks no seeing each other but more the... stuff that gets in the way."

Grover heaved a sigh at that and nodded. He got that, really. It was very frustrating when one was looking forward to some alone-time just for their plans to be sabotaged by life. And for Percy and Nico in particular, where 'easy access' to each other had been a key-element of their relationship from the get-go, this was taking some getting-used-to. It was... testing their relationship.

"I believe in you two. You can make it work", stated Grover seriously.
"What did the poor phone do to you that you had to throw it against the wall?"

"Shut up, Haze", growled Nico angrily.

Hazel just lifted a very unimpressed eyebrow, quietly conveying the 'you do not talk to me like that'. Nico gritted his teeth hard, a habit he had picked up in recent months. He crossed his arms stubbornly. Heaving a sigh, Hazel decided to just turn around. This was not her problem. Though she had an idea who might be able to help way better than she could.

Nico was just gathering up the pieces of his phone when Persephone entered his room. Her eyes found the phone and she threw a judgmental look at her stepson. Nico avoided looking at her.

"I know I'm being irrational", growled Nico after a stretch of silence. "I know I have no reason to be angry. I know it's not his fault or that he's doing it on purpose, but—I haven't seen him in two months now, mother! Two months. And I can feel my inner dominant itching."

"Because you two are courting", offered Persephone gently. "It's natural that your instincts don't like that you're being apart for so long. But, as you said, he's not doing it on purpose. And neither are you. From what I gather, you had to cancel as many dates as he did."

"Well, not as many", grumbled Nico defensively. "Percy joined the swim-team. Like his first semester isn't keeping him busy enough, with pack-runs and him still mentoring Sam Raser..."

"So you'd rather your chosen merboy would not swim in his free time", drawled Persephone.

"No!", snarled Nico. "Swimming makes him happy! He needs the exercise to get rid of nervous energy and... it helps him deal with stress! Of course do I not want him to quit."

"So you'd want him to stop going on pack-runs? Or stop mentoring the kitten?"

"No!", sighed Nico, clearly very frustrated. "Pack-runs are like swimming. He's a hybrid, he needs both. He can't just neglect one of his sides like that. And... Sam's part of that too. He's the only other cat-shifter in New York and the kid's pretty in over his head, because he only recently got together with two dominants who have... very clashing personalities, to put it lightly."

Persephone hummed and nodded, smiling amused as Nico continued with more enthusiasm. "You should hear just how proud Percy sounds when he's talking about Sam, you know? He's... He's born for this. He's a born leader. It's amazing. Of course I can't take that away from him."

"You're frustrated because you can't see Percy and there's nothing either of you can do about it", supplied Persephone gently, smiling at him. "You know my mother was against my relationship with Hades, right? Hades and I had started courting when my mother demanded for me to return home. And oh, I was so angry. I hated being kept apart from Hades and it took so long for us to find together again. But... we loved each other, truly and deeply even back then, and even though months had passed, our feelings hadn't changed. And what had been a torturous wait seemed so distant and... insignificant all of a sudden, because that wait was over and we were together."

"So you're saying once we get to see each other again, it'll just not matter?!", asked Nico doubtfully.

"Well, it won't matter in the face of you being together again", replied Persephone with a shrug. "It's frustrating, I understand that. Especially when the both of you are very busy with your own life. Seeing your chosen mate is... such a relief then, but when you're too busy for that, it only adds to the stress you feel from everything else."
While Nico was glaring down at his hands, Persephone was inspecting the schedule pinned onto the wall next to Nico's desk. Percy's schedule. At first, that had served for them to find dates, now it was mainly a reminder of what was keeping them apart.

"Mh. You know, you look rather feverish", noted Persephone.

"What? I don't-", grunted Nico confused.

"Oh yes. You clearly look sick. The stress is getting to you", continued Persephone. "I think you should stay home tomorrow. I'll call Mister Brunner and tell Hades. You just... do what is best for your health tomorrow, mh?"

She smiled mischievously, her finger on the schedule. Nico's eyes widened surprised. Was... Persephone seriously telling him to ditch classes to see Percy? Tomorrow was Percy's late day. He only started classes in the afternoon. Also known as: By the time Nico's school-day ended.

"It's good to respect what is important in your lives beyond your relationship, but it's also important to take the time to be with each other", advised Persephone. "And from all I know, you've not missed a single day of classes this year so far, right?"

It was barely sunrise when someone was pounding against the door. Percy groaned and threw a pillow. It was the one day of the week where Percy could actually sleep in because he didn't have to get up early for classes or training. The pounding did not stop.

"I swear, if you're in one of your perky mornings for early breakfast, I will skin you alive and eat you, Connor", warned Percy with a growl as he ripped the door open.

And then he paused. That wasn't Connor. His eyes widened. He reached his hands up to rub them. Nope, still the same image. Nico di Angelo, in the flesh, grinning like a lunatic.

"But you... What are you... You're here... You're you", muttered Percy, unsure how to phrase it.

"I'm having a horrible fever", nodded Nico very solemnly and faked a cough. "Horrible. Can't go to school today. Have to stay in bed. It was never specified what bed though, so... you got some room in your bed for a horribly sick vampire...?"

"Holy shit. Nico di Angelo skipping class. I gotta tell Annabeth", grunted Grover from his bed. "...In like... two hours when I get up. Please don't have sex before I leave for class."

With that, Grover pulled his blanket over his head and turned to face the wall. Percy was still staring at his boyfriend. Was it cheesy to say that he had forgotten just how blinding Nico's cheeky smirk was? And how good his cheekbones looked, like, in the flesh and not on a video-chat? He started purring on instinct as he wrapped his arms tightly around his vampire, burying his nose in Nico's neck and inhaling deeply. Nico's scent had faded from most of the clothes he had borrowed-without-any-intention-to-ever-return, including the shirt he was currently wearing. Nuzzling Nico's neck, Percy also wrapped his legs around Nico's waist, not quite caring whether or not Nico could balance them both. Worst case, they crashed onto a floor. Would still mean Percy got cuddles, so he didn't really see a downside there. But thankfully enough, Nico's vampire-strength allowed him to carry his heavy – with muscles, thank you very much – boyfriend. He placed his hands on the underside of Percy's thighs, squeezing and holding onto him. Percy was purring ridiculously loudly in happiness, kissing and biting Nico's neck and shoulder.

"Mine, mine, mine, mine, mine", purred Percy happily. "My bat."
Nico smiled fondly as he carried Percy inside and kicked the door closed before heading straight for the bed. He carefully sat down and got comfortable, Percy gladly curling up on his chest, still purring like the content kitten he was right then and there.

"Wait. You're skipping class to see me. That's not good. You should focus on your-

"Shush", interrupted Nico and leaned in to steal a proper kiss from Percy. "My grades are excellent and I'm not going to fail any exams because I missed history, literature and PE once."

The smile Percy aimed at him was absolutely blinding and made Nico's heart do jumping-jacks. Leaning in, Percy kissed Nico, this time more passionately. This felt so good. After months, to actually be able to hold Nico again and kiss him again and smell him again and just everything.

"Exams will be over in two weeks", murmured Percy. "And then I'll be on my break and then I can see you more often again. And the others. Urgh. You know how much Laura has grown since I last actually held her? It's not fair. She keeps getting bigger and bigger."

Nico smiled fondly at that, running his fingers through Percy's hair. "Tell me how things are."

"Good. I dunno, it was easier to adjust to living here than I thought", mused Percy. "I've only been here for four months, but I already feel so... at home? I didn't expect the whole... dorm-thing to be like this. I mean, I've seen frat-houses in TV and all, but being here... It's great. I got Luke just down the hall, Reyna and Annabeth aren't far off. Clarisse and Silena are in the next dorm-building. You have a... different dynamic than we did during high school? But it's... great. For the most part. It's a good safety net, for when you crash under the pressure. It just also... puts a lot of social obligations on your plate that keep you from, say, that date you had planned with your favorite vampire."

"This is a hard time", whispered Nico gently. "It's your first semester. You have to adjust to the change of pace and surroundings. And it's my final year and I gotta focus on my graduation. Things will get... easier. You'll get more used to all of this and we'll manage to balance things better. We can make it work together, gattino. Right?"

"Ri—right", confirmed Percy with a relieved sigh. "For now, I'm just happy to have you here."

"For now, I'm just happy to be here", smiled Nico pleased.

The swim-team at college was a whole different level than high school had been. Percy hadn't made it onto the official roster this semester. Though that was more than fine; he did have enough on his plate with classes and training like this. If he'd also have to worry about actual competitions, it might have cracked him. This way, he just got to cheer Silena on loudly.

"Look at her. Look how amazing she is", grunted Charles Beckendorf.

He sat next to Percy, his chest puffed out in pride at his girlfriend. Percy grinned softly. The big dragon was a big softie. Percy knew that Charles and Silena's relationship had suffered under the first year of college too; while Silena was studying to become a fashion designer and seamstress, Charles was training to become a mechanic under Esperanza Valdez in the other end of the city.

"She's been working really hard this semester", noted Percy. "She really is amazing."

If possible, Charles puffed his chest out even more. Percy's grin grew some. Next semester. Next semester, he was going to make it onto the active team too. He was doing way better than expected.
College was different from high school, sure of course – but not just because things got harder. They also got easier, in a way. He didn't have to worry about math or chemistry or physics and any other of the subjects that just made him feel dumb and like a failure before. No, he was now studying education, PE and drama. He was studying things he was passionate about, he was interested in and – in case of the latter two – was naturally talented in. The practical aspects of PE came easily to him and in drama, even the dry theory was less dry because Percy loved to learn where certain methods came from and how the cultural differences had evolved theater differently. So yes, he had to study hard because they expected their students to learn far more in half a year than school did in a whole year, but it was also more fun to learn.

He had worried a lot about breaking under the pressure, but studying, even when it was hard, he knew where to go to help. Study-groups. And he lived with Grover, who was like a live-in motivator. Luke and Silena were back right here, closer than ever before, to help guide him. He had his pack-runs and he had his new swim-team. He texted Nico, Piper and Leo regularly and if he could make it work, he even got to see them. His siblings sent him texts and pictures from Atlantis all the time, trying to lure him in to come live down in the palace there. At least once a week, he had a video-call scheduled with his mom, Paul and Laura.

He had grown. He wasn't the self-destructive teen anymore that had first moved in with Poseidon and Amphitrite. He wasn't full or anger anymore and he knew where to channel his feelings to now. With the help of the friends he had made in Summers High, he had developed better, healthier coping mechanisms. Running, hunting, swimming. He now had what he never had before; a safety net of friends, people he could be with when he felt too heavy and somehow self-destructive. People who'd distract him, even when they didn't quite know that.

Percy booked it as a huge personal victory that during his first semester, he hadn't self-harmed once. Maybe he had just been too busy and too tired to even think on it, or maybe he had grown and changed as a person enough to find different ways to deal with his problems.

Regardless of how much stress he, personally, felt, he had managed to push through it. Even in the time Nico hadn't been there. Especially that had been a test, because he had to admit that particularly when the two had freshly gotten together and after Nico had learned of Percy's self-harm, Percy had used Nico as an anchor of sorts. He had built himself around Nico, had made himself reliant on Nico to help him cope with his own issues. And while, sure, that had helped, it had never been an actual solution. In a rosy-colored corner of his mind, Percy had even believed that maybe 'true love had cured his mental issues'. Which, obviously, utter bullshit.

Back then however, he was still rather good at putting himself down, so it had been easier to make himself believe that it had been all Nico, that only Nico had made him better. Sure, Nico had given him a push, but in the end it had all been Percy. Percy had made himself better.

Percy had allowed other people close, into his heart, had trusted them. He had started to actually build a life instead of simply going from day to day, filled with too much resentment.

It was Percy who had grown as a person. He now had a life-goal. He was working hard to get there. He had been working hard to get there; improving his high school grades, studying, giving his best. It was all Percy who had chosen to trust Nico, to go to Nico when he felt like self-harming and to allow Nico to help him through those phases. Yes, Nico had been his crutch back then, but in the end it had been Percy who had done it. With Nico and also without Nico.

Because even in the months he hadn't seen Nico, in the months he had been swamped with stress, the new coping mechanisms he had taught himself had helped him push through without harming himself, or relying on Nico to make due. And Percy knew he could be damn proud of himself there.
Chapter End Notes

They overcame their first major hurdle in their relationship! ^o^ Ain't Persephone a good mon? ;D Well, and next chapter, Percy gets to meet the grandparents, because Nyx and Erebus are going to attend Nico's graduation! Wonder how well that'll go :O
Percy grinned as he sat on the couch at the Jackson home. It was nice. For the first time in a year, everyone was back home again. And not just “everyone”. Everyone and their partners. Benthesikyme sat curled together against Enalos, Kymopoleia was upstairs with Briareos not being as quiet as they could be, Proteus was in the kitchen cooking with Psamatheia.

"Will anyone please make mother stop pacing?", inquired Triton a little tired.

"There is still so much to do, Triton!", chided Amphitrite irritated.

"It's my wedding. Should I not be the one pacing?", snorted Triton and shook his head.

"You! I have no idea why you're so calm", argued Amphitrite. "It's your wedding. There will be so many royal guests attending. And there is still so much to do!"

Triton heaved a sigh and collapsed onto the couch, right next to Percy. Grinning at his big brother, Percy poked Triton with a foot to get his attention.

"You're going to be such a pretty blushing bride", stated Percy.

"Perseus, I would cut back on the teasing. One day, you will get married and I will pay you back", warned Triton pointedly. "But honestly, I just... want to get married to Thanatos. It's a half an hour affair, really. There is no need to add all of those social obligations around it. Champagne greetings and speeches, the ceremony drawn out unnecessarily, then afterward the dancing and food."

"You would get married in front of an Elvis impersonator if it weren't for me", hissed Amy.

"Would that be so bad?", asked Triton mischievously.

"Triton, stop torturing your mother", interrupted Poseidon seriously. "You are my son. You are my second born son and prince. Your betrothed is one of the eldest children of Nyx. This is a rare event in the supernatural community. It goes beyond just you and Thanatos."

"You should have seen our wedding", agreed Psamatheia as she sat down on Percy's other side. "Proteus is the heir to the throne, I'm a princess in my own right. It was the royal wedding of the century. Amphitrite nearly got gray hair in the time leading up to it."

"...I know how long dad and Amy made Thanatos and Triton court. Do I have to expect that too?", whispered Percy and leaned in to Psamatheia. "I mean, I'm not planning on getting married to Nico this summer or anything, but uh... I'd rather not wait for a century either?"

"You're not the heir to the throne in any capacity", offered Psamatheia gently. "For Proteus and Triton in particular, it's different. Triton is second in line for the throne. But with you... Something would have to happen to your father, your stepmother, to Proteus, Triton, Rhode, Kymopoleia, Benthesikyme and – due to the fact that you are not the queen's son, also to Tyson."

"What you're saying is that I'm not important enough for the fuss?", asked Percy amused.
"Honey, no, you're very important", chided Amy and paused her pacing to kneel down in front of Percy, grasping his face. "You are very important to your father and to me. And you are a prince. I will fuss, don't worry about that, even if I'm not your mother, I will be fussing over your wedding too. And Nico di Angelo is expected to do this proper."

"But no, no one is going to grill him as long as they did with Thanatos", grunted Triton. "I am expected to take over certain responsibilities of my father, in a royal capacity. So everything does have to be proper. Not to mention, back when Thanatos started courting me... it was... socially shocking. For one, he is not royalty, even if he is the son of Nyx he does not have royal blood, and for another, he is a vampire and I am a merman."

"Acceptance of mixed species unions has not been that common for very long. Why do you think there are only so few hybrids at your school?", offered Poseidon tentatively. "It's a rather... modern concept. For millennia, it was even unthinkable for two of different species to be together. It's been a slow process of the past centuries to bring people together."

Percy nodded slowly. He remembered being told just how special Hades' council had been when it was first introduced. How it used to be, that cities were divided into territory. Different supernaturals keeping only to their own territory. He had learned some of that stuff in class, history of the supernatural, but somehow... he hadn't quite made the connection between a centuries long struggle and the fact that most supernatural were either immortal or very long-lived. People from different species not being allowed to mate was a thing of centuries ago, but not of life times ago. Everyone in his family had been alive back then. This was something happening within one generation, it wasn't ancient history. Time applied differently to immortals than to short-lived humans. What happened in immortal history over the stretch of centuries translated to mere years to decades of human history, in comparison.

"What do you think why the tale of Hades and Persephone is oh-so widely known?", offered Poseidon after a long moment. "Back then, for two people from different species to be together? Persephone is a nature-spirit. Her mother was furious that a vampire would try to court her."

Percy raised both his eyebrows. "Guess me and Nico are lucky, huh."

"Lucky in deed", agreed Triton, giving Percy a long look. "And if you two want to run away together, I will cover you to protect you from this madness."

"Triton!", exclaimed Amphitrite irritated.

Nico blinked startled when someone placed something on him. Looking around, he noticed that he had fallen asleep at his desk. He had been studying for his final exams with no break. When he turned his head fully, he found... Percy, smiling at him.

"What are you doing here? It's late, you should be studying or sleeping", noted Nico.

"Babe. I learned how to pace myself after the first semester. So, actually, I am doing way better this semester", stated Percy with a grin. "And I know you are fretting about your finals. So I had to sneak out and check in with my favorite bat."

"I love you so much", sighed Nico contently and leaned back to kiss Percy.

"But enough studying for today", declared Percy and took the book away from Nico. "Come on. Lay with me, relax some and then sleep."
Nico followed Percy, more willingly than anticipated – then again, laying in bed with Percy was quite the motivation. And once he laid down, with Percy in his arms, he noticed just how much he had needed this. Just closing his eyes and enjoying Percy close by and his scent.

"Talk to me", requested Nico softly. "Just tell me something, please..."

"Okay, so, my house is total chaos right now", stated Percy delighted. "I went over there last weekend. And it's so crammed. Psamatheia, Enalos and Briareos came too, so it's like... eleven people living there at the moment. Amy is driving everyone insane with the wedding planning. There is a constant supply of wedding cakes and menus to taste-test, we have flowers in every room, trying to figure out the perfect flower arrangement and color-coordination. My room is ground zero, you know? That's where Amy has been planning the wedding in. There is a... honestly, it looks like a conspiracy theory board. But it's really just the seating arrangement."

"How... does that look like a conspiracy theory board?", asked Nico curiously, tilting his head up.

"Amy got differently colored threads connecting each chair. See, she cut out small tables and pinned them to the board, with differently colored pins holding the different name-plates there – colors indicating species, to keep a bit of order there. Not so much to separate, but say so the vegan nature-spirits don't have to sit next to the very meat-loving hunters, or the rivaling sun and moon elves aren't seated right next to each other. And then she also has the threads. The threads indicate... wait, blue was family, pink was lovers and red was former lovers, green was friendly with each other, yellow is for people who really hate each other's guts..."

"That... sounds unnecessarily complicated", yawned Nico as he closed his eyes.

"It is", confirmed Percy amused. "By the way, Amy's placed my family next to yours. So we get to sit at the same table. Mom is super excited. A royal wedding. She's going dress-shopping with Persephone and Amy this week, you know."

"I'm happy your mom and stepmom get along so well", mumbled Nico sleepily.

Percy smiled fondly as he watched Nico drift off. Kissing the top of Nico's head, Percy pulled the blanket around them both and closed his eyes too. He was honestly quite excited about the wedding too. And he knew Triton was too, regardless of how irritated he acted, he was nervous and excited that he finally got to marry the love of his life.

"Look at our baby, Silena. She's all grown up. In her graduation robes and all", sobbed Percy.

"You're such a dork", grunted Piper and rolled her eyes pointedly.

"No, no, he is right", disagreed Silena seriously and shook her head. "I am so proud of you. Both."

She pulled Piper and Mike into a tight hug. They were going to graduate today. And Piper had been such a good team-captain in the past year. She smiled as she hugged them proudly.

Percy all the while turned around, looking for his boyfriend. Nico stood in a corner with Lou and Cecil, looking as though he was trying to hide from someone. Though Percy couldn't imagine from whom he'd be hiding. Hades and Persephone were loving, but not overbear-

"Oh, look at my sweet cutie! How adorable he is in those robes!"

Percy nearly had a heart-attack at the high-pitched voice. In vampire-speed did a woman dash past
him and toward Nico. Nico, who now looked absolutely mortified. It gave Percy a little pause when he got to properly see the woman. She had dark skin and hair pitch-black but with blue highlights and her dress, it was dark blue but sparkling as though it contained stars. She was stunning.

"Look at our baby, all grown up", sighed the woman, peppering Nico's face with kisses.

"I'll... leave you guys for a moment. This looks way too interesting", grunted Percy.

He slowly walked away from Silena, Piper and Mike and instead headed for the stranger currently pinching his boyfriend's cheeks. Those were not pinchable cheeks. Percy had seen death-glares for poking at those cheeks. But this woman was pinching them!

"Hey, babe, wanna introduce me to whoever this is?", asked Percy cheerfully once he reached them. "Because I have just so many questions right now."

The cheerful smile froze though when the woman let go of Nico and instead turned her full attention on Percy. He had never felt more like prey in his life. Which, naturally, brought out a very instinctual reaction – he was a predator, after all. So he snarled in warning. That did not have the desired effect though, because all the woman did was squeal in delight.

"Oh, he is adorable! You must be Nico's Percy! Triton's baby brother! Oh, you're precious!"

"Nico", hissed Percy as his face was suddenly being squished and the woman inspected him.

"Yes, that is Prince Perseus Jackson. My boyfriend", confirmed Nico, trying to rub black sparkly lipstick off his cheek. "Percy, this is my... grandmother. Lady Nyx."

"...Oh", whispered Percy stunned. "Hades' sire. Thanatos' sire. Uhm. Hi. Nice to... meet you?"

"Such a polite sweetheart", laughed Nyx happily. "Oh, and he's pretty, Nico you didn't mention just how pretty he is. Those eyes they're like looking into every part of every ocean all at once."

"Uh... thank you?", said Percy a bit unsure. "Nico. Nico, help me, will you."

"I'm sorry, Percy. I truly am, but a sacrifice has to be made", stated Nico solemnly.

"You little shit", hissed Percy as he was being hugged and whirled around like a ragdoll.

And Nico had the audacity to walk away, cackling to himself. What a damn traitor. Percy was going to remember this. At least someone came to his aid. Bianca cleared her throat.

"Nonna, please. We talked about this. No poking strangers", sighed Bianca.

"Oh, but from everything I gather, he is far from a stranger", argued Nyx, patting Percy's cheek. "Nico's chosen mate, which practically makes him my grandson too, after all."

"Come now. Let's sit with nonno and the others and let Percy go and sit with his friends", requested Bianca, tugging on Nyx's arm. "You can talk to Percy later."
Percy mouthed a thank you at Bianca before high-tailing it back toward Silena, Reyna and Annabeth to sit down. Judging by the smirk Annabeth threw his way, she knew Nyx. But Percy's attention was soon caught by the stage and the announcement of the graduates.

When Nico's name came up, Nyx was genuinely startled that she was not the one to cheer the loudest. She turned to look at Percy Jackson who was screaming and cheering so loudly most who knew him were ducking their heads a little and grinning amused, while Nico looked embarrassed.

"This one", stated Nyx, swatting at Hades. "I like him."

"I thought you might, mother", sighed Hades amused.

By the time the long-anticipated wedding of Thanatos di Angelo and Triton Jackson rolled around about a week after graduation, Nico genuinely regretted introducing Nyx and Percy to each other. They actually got along well. Nyx loved telling embarrassing stories of not just Hades but honestly everyone from Nico's coven. Including Nico. And Percy? He seemed to love hearing those stories.

"You should be happy, you know", stated Hades lowly. "That your family is accepting him."

His eyes found Persephone and Demeter who were adding some finishing touches to the flowers.

"I know", sighed Nico and straightened his bow-tie. "I am grateful for how welcoming you and Persephone and the coven are. I am grateful that Nyx is embracing him like that. And also for how accepting Poseidon and the queen are. It's still embarrassing though."

"No arguments there", chuckled Hades amused. "Now, if you could maybe coordinate the... younger guests a bit. I have some royalty to attend to, as the host."

The wedding was taking place at the di Angelo manor. Its garden was large enough that it was close to a small park anyway. They had set everything up there, enough to hold the five hundred guests. A proper stage, to elevate the couple so everyone could see. Decorations only of the most beautiful and rare flowers, thanks to the nature-spirits involved (particularly Demeter and Persephone).

And everyone was there. Literally everyone. The seven kings and queens of the sea, the leaders of the strongest covens not just from the states, some had flown in all the way from other continents. Horus and Carter Kane were standing together with Bast and Lupa not far away. Chiron and Chariclo stood arm in arm, talking to Hecate and Howard Claymore.

Nico headed past them all toward where his friends stood and gossiped. With as many guests as they had, they really did have to reign them all in to make them sit down in time.

"Guys. It's time to quiet down and also sit down", offered Nico amused.

"Annabeth, you look lovely", said Annabeth in a mocking impression of Nico.

She was indeed looking lovely, in her silvery gray dress adored with sparkling gems. Her silver was complimented by Reyna's dress in gold. They looked like goddesses, truly. Nico smiled at them.

"You look lovely, Annabeth. Now sit down", offered Nico. "But... has anyone seen..."

"Percy is with his brother. I don't think you'll have a chance to drool over him before the ceremony", replied Reyna before he could finish his sentence.
Nico deflated some, earning him a chuckle and a shove from Jason, who then headed toward the front seats with Calypso. Of course did their coven and the Jackson family have the front row seats, directly followed by all royals and otherwise important leaders. Most of Nico's friends were really excited about this; truly most invited guests were high ranking and important. So for them to make it due to their connections, to get to be here during the wedding of the century – it really was exciting. Nico watched Grover and Juniper, Charles and Silena, Ethan and Alabaster, Clarisse and Chris and Piper, Cecil, Lou, Rachel, all of them walking toward their designated seats. There were many he didn't see anywhere, but it was a rather large affair after all.

"Chiron", stated Nico gently as he reached the principal. "It's time."

"Chari, my love, I'll see you after the ceremony", offered Chiron, kissing his wife softly.

Chariclo smiled before heading toward her own seat, while Chiron made his way up on stage. He was an ancient one and it had felt wrong to ask either a vampire or a merperson to officiate the wedding. Chiron was a trusted member of the community, respected by the sea and the dead.

On one side of the stage stood Hades and Persephone, together with the rest of the clan. Nico found his place in that line, together with Bianca, Hazel, Ethan, Calypso, Olethros, Makaria and Melinoe.

On the other side of the stage were King Poseidon and Queen Amphitrite. Behind them were all their children slowly lining up. They looked so colorful and amazing that it stunned Nico for a brief moment as he took his seat in the front row, right next to Bianca. Like a flowing rainbow.

Rhode in yellows, Proteus in oranges, Kymopoleia in reds, Benthesikyme in purples. Each wearing the colors of their tails, their clothes made of fine and wavery material, making it look as though they were swimming through the ocean. Pearls and gems decorated them.

They were quite the contrast to the vampires. It was tradition for vampires to wear black and reds only during a wedding. Nico himself was wearing a black tux and a red silken-shirt, with a matching red rose. But for merpeople it was different; they celebrated marriage in all colors, every merperson would wear clothes in shades to match their tails, with many decorations.

Yet even knowing that, Nico was still left stunned when Percy hurried up the stage to join his family. So far, Nico had only seen Percy in formal mer-clothes once in person, when he had come to Nico after his first council meeting sneak-peek. But this? This was celebratory wear. And it was breathtaking. Lightest shades of blue – a dozen at least, in half a dozen layers, flowing around Percy like the currents of the sea. Sapphires and aquamarines adoring him as much as pearls. And atop his head sat a delicate silver crown, fashioned like corals and adored with pearls.

"I really am dating a prince", whispered Nico in awe.

"Yes, you are, you utter sap", chuckled Bianca fondly. "And Thanatos is marrying one."

Everyone was seated and as the music started, things finally fully quieted down. All attention was on the aisle. Tyson walked down, chest puffed out proudly as he carried a pillow with the golden rings sitting atop of it. He looked adorable and was trying really hard not to stumble over his own half dozen layers of nougat colored robes. Once he reached Chiron, everyone clapped.

The music changed and the grooms approached the stage. Thanatos came from the right, while Triton came from the left. Though on those respective sides of the stage stood not their own but the other's family, as was tradition. When Thanatos climbed the stairs up the stage, he paused in front of the royal family and bowed his head. Everyone present seemed to be holding their breath for the moment it took before the royal family returned the gesture and stepped aside.
It was a rite, an ancient ocean tradition, passing the family you were about to marry into and being accepted by them. So while it was a little peculiar for Nico and the other vampires, they were still all prepared to face Triton as he climbed the stairs. Damn. He looked good too; no Percy, of course, but gorgeous nonetheless. His robes were longer, additional layers fastened to his wrists and falling from his head like veils, all of them shades of green. Once in front of Hades and Persephone, Triton bowed his head. Together with the rest of the coven, Nico bowed his head too and then stepped aside to make way. The two families formed a half-circle around Chiron, Thanatos and Triton, symbolizing the families' protection and approval of the union.

"Today is a special day", started Chiron, voice amplified by the microphone in front of him. "We are gathered here today to celebrate the union between Prince Triton, second son of King Poseidon and Queen Amphitrite of Atlantis, with Lord Thanatos of the Elysium clan and of the bloodline of Lady Nyx. Both families have given their blessing, so it is time for our grooms to speak up."

"I", started Thanatos before clearing his throat. "I, Thanatos, vow to always hold you precious, to protect, love and cherish you for all eternity. My loyalty lays with you. You are from now to the day I die part of my cove and my family. I will be at your side, through good and bad, hard times and happy times, and I can not wait for our life together."

He held Triton's hand and took the ring from the pillow Tyson was holding before slipping it onto Triton's finger. Triton smiled as he took the other ring from Tyson's pillow.

"I, Prince Triton, vow to always support you. I will stand by you and endure any hardships with you, I will share all happiness with you. Your family shall be mine and my family shall be yours. I love you, with all of my heart, and I will do so to the end of my life."

"Now, if no one here has any objections...", announced Chiron loudly. "...I may now pronounce you husband and husband. You can kiss now."

Cheers erupted all around them as Triton and Thanatos finally kissed. Everything was set up for the banquet that followed. As soon as Triton and Thanatos were off the stage, Nico was grabbed and pulled into a kiss by a bright-eyed and excited Percy.

"I love you in a tux", whispered Percy with a manic grin. "And this is so romantic."

"Please don't make out on stage", requested Poseidon, resting a heavy hand on Percy's shoulder and one on Nico's. "Come and let's sit to enjoy the wedding cake, mh?"

Percy grinned sheepishly at his dad, though he took Nico's hand to tug him along. At least their families were sitting together so he wouldn't have to part with his handsome vampire. The grin on his lips grew even more when he saw his mom excitedly talking to Amphitrite.

"This was beautiful", said Sally in awe, rocking Laura on her arm a little.

"Wait until you've tried the food", chuckled Amphitrite, tickling Laura's cheek.

"Let's sit", offered Poseidon with a polite and amused look.

They made their way toward the table where the rest of their family were already gathered. Percy was pleased to find that he got to sit next to Nico. It was nice, though the optics were a little weird considering all vampires were dressed all dark and gloom.

"It looks like a goth pastel wedding", whispered Percy with a grin.

"...It does", grunted Nico amused.
Percy gasped and slapped Nico's chest to gain his attention. Triton and Thanatos were cutting the cake and cutely feeding each other the first bite. Nico had to smile, not just at the cuteness but also at Percy's excitement about everything. Was it strange that all Nico could think of was how beautiful their own wedding would be? Nico had officially graduated high school now, Percy was one year into college. Things were getting more serious between them.

"Let's dance", suggested Nico, voice low as he whispered into Percy's ear.

That seemed to be the right thing to say before Percy eagerly got up right away to join the people on the dance-floor. Nico wrapped his arms around Percy's waist, getting lost in those beautiful eyes. Nyx really had been right, looking into them was truly like looking into every part of every ocean all at once, all the riches and beauty captured in them. They swayed to the music, the laughter and conversation around them fading out as all Nico could think of was how it would be to dance on their own wedding. Not that he was ready to share those thoughts with Percy just yet.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter, Nico's going to start college - and him and Percy are going to take the next step in their relationship. ;)
Chapter 44: The Bat Cave

"You know, when you got the blindfold out... I was kind of getting excited. I didn't expect you to drive me around town for five hours though. Kind of a mood-killer, you know."

"...It's been ten minutes, Percy. Don't be dramatic", muttered Nico fondly.

"Where are we going?", asked Percy bored. "Lemme peek? Why am I blindfolded if it's not going to lead to some kinky sex? This is a total waste of a perfectly good blindfold, you know."

"Babe, please stop talking about sex. I gotta concentrate on driving."

Percy hummed innocently and smiled to himself. Yesterday, Nico had suddenly called Percy, all excited, telling him to wait early in the morning for Nico to pick him up.

"Okay we're here. No you don't get to take off the blindfold. Let me lead you."

Percy huffed at that and waited for Nico to round the car, open the door and take Percy's hand to help him out. It was a bit weird, not seeing anything as he was being led... somewhere. He tried to find out where they were with his nose, sniffing the air. No scent was familiar though. Aside from-

"Aw. So no sex at all, huh. Why are Reyna and Annabeth here?", asked Percy and deflated.

"...Of course did he immediately think of sex when you got out the blindfold, huh."

"Don't be judgmental, Annabeth. What else was I supposed to think?", countered Percy.

"Okay. Now we can take the blindfold off", interrupted Nico with a huff.

Percy blinked as the blindfold was removed. He frowned as he looked around. They stood in an apartment that Percy had never seen before. It had a nice hardwood-floor, open kitchen-space that had a bar between it and the empty living room the four teens were standing in. There was a fireplace, a giant window-front – the entire wall opposite the main entrance was windows, some leading out to a spacious balcony. Percy ran out there immediately to check the view.

"I can see Central Park. And our college", whispered Percy. "Damn. Nice place. Where are we?"

"If... you want to... then we're home", replied Nico softly.

He was holding up a key, with a blue dolphin key-chain on it. Percy frowned confused before he looked past Nico over at Reyna and Annabeth, both girls looking mildly amused by this all.

"Nico had me pick out the place", offered Annabeth. "Said I don't just understand architecture, I'd also be best at finding the perfect apartment for you guys. There is a pool on the roof-top that is only privately accessible from this penthouse, while a 'public' pool for the entire building is in the basement, together with a gym."

"Wait. You're serious?", asked Percy stunned, staring back at the key. "You wanna... move in? With me? Here? But... damn, this place looks expensive."
"Gattino", started Nico gently, amusement in his eyes as he cupped Percy's face. "I – not just me through the coven, but me personally – I'm rich. You... know that, right? I've been living with the coven for decades now. It was due time I'd get to move out."

"I'm not gonna move in with you on unequal terms", grunted Percy with a frown.

"But you... do know you're a prince, right?", asked Nico softly, raising his eyebrows. "Your father was ready to buy you an entire palace after graduation. And don't say you wouldn't take it from him either; he's your dad. And in the Jackson family, him and his wife have been buying all of your older siblings their first apartments."

"Wait. Did Annabeth say private pool?", asked Percy and blinked. "Like, a whole pool just for me?"

"I mean, I'd like to use it too", chuckled Nico fondly.

Percy bit his lips and looked around on the balcony before walking back into the living room. He wandered the halls and counted the rooms. Four rooms. One huge, gigantic one – the master bedroom. Percy's frown deepened as he continued walking and Nico grew nervous.

"I mean, I do understand if you didn't want to move in with me. You've only moved out a year ago and you were really happy living at the dorms. And we've only been dating for two years now and you might just not want to move in yet. It's too early, right? I rushed this."

"Percy, for the love of gods, please say something", requested Reyna. "He's giving me a headache."

"Nico. Please calm down and shut up for a second", sighed Percy, gently cupping Nico's cheek. "Stop being so panicky. This apartment is... it's a dream."

"Every tenant in this building is a supernatural", tagged Annabeth on. "There is a dog-park just around the corner, meaning Mrs. O'Leary can not just live here, there's also space to walk her."

"A real dream", amended Percy, eyebrows raised. "And... are you sure?"

"Sure?", asked Nico with a huff. "I love you. Of course I'm sure. We've been dating for two years now. I love spending time with you. You and me, we help each other. When I worked too hard before my graduation, you'd sneak all the way to the mansion to drop off treats and make me go to bed. When you were having a hard time, I skipped classes to be with you. Imagine... Imagine if we'd at least have this. I just... I have seen how your first semester was. Mine is not going to be much different. And I don't want to spend weeks not seeing you. We could have this, just... coming home, sharing meals, falling asleep together. Even when we don't find the time to go on dates, we would at least have home together."

Percy's face softened before he reached out to pull Nico into a soft kiss. "That... was very beautiful and very true. Thinking about not seeing you for weeks is urgh... Even if I'd just get to see you in the mornings when getting up and falling asleep with you in my arms."

"So you're going to do this?", asked Reyna. "You're going to throw a huge house-warming party for everyone though, right? Because I'm expecting that."

"Obviously", huffed Nico with a grin.

"Look at how pretty your room is, Laura", whispered Sally with a soft smile.
Laura was waddling her way through the room, gaping. Her brown curls were put up in two pigtails with cute large bows. The room was all blue, in different shades of blue that curled in waves on the walls. The entire cast of _Finding Nemo_ and _Finding Dory_ were painted onto the walls (thanks to Rachel), while Ariel was breaking through the waves over a stone in her most iconic pose and the mermaids from _Peter Pan_ were on a lagoon on the opposite wall.

"It was really not necessary for you boys to give her an entire room", noted Paul.

"Why not", shrugged Nico where he leaned next to the door. "The apartment got enough rooms. And I figured, you'd like your apartment... and your wife... all to yourself every now and again. And Percy loves Laura and, if it's not exam phase, why shouldn't she stay over a weekend every now and again? It'd be nicer for her to have a proper bedroom then, instead of sleeping on the couch."

Paul tilted his head and regarded Nico thoughtfully before he returned his attention to the three in the bedroom. Sally and Percy were crouching next to Laura while Percy very excitedly showed off everything. Another one of the additional rooms had gone to Tyson, in case Percy's brother wanted to stay over – because Tyson was _super_ not a fan of Percy not living with them for over a year now and Tyson not getting to spend as much time with his big brother.

"You're very considerate of Percy and what he needs", stated Paul, nearly casually.

"Of course I am. I love him. And do you know how considerate he is of what I need?", asked Nico, his voice very soft to not draw the attention of the three inside the room. "He drops _everything_ when my PTSD flares up. He was... He was _the first one_ to actually figure out an effective method to help me through New Year's and the Fourth of July. When I overwork myself, he is right there. On Monday, he drove _three hours_ to get me the perfect ingredient because I was driving myself crazy about not having the exact right brand of spice for when culinary school starts next week."

"You two...", started Paul with a tender smile. "You're really going to make it work, mh."

"I plan on", stated Nico honestly. "I've... I've been in love before. I have been trying to figure out where I want my life to head to before. But... I never felt _this way_ before, no one ever helped me figure out what I want like Percy has – not our relationship, not that I want him, I mean what I want, for _my_ life, for _my_ future. He helped me figure out my own goals and then he strengthened my belief that I can do it, he helped me prepare for the entrance exam, he was there for me all the way leading up to this. And I _know_ he will support me throughout it. I can't imagine being with anyone else but Percy _ever_ again. Even in centuries, I still want to wake up with him and support him wherever our lives take us then."

Paul simply smiled at him, because he could feel the honesty and the affection in Nico's words.

Clarisse huffed amused as she looked at the calligraphic invite. Black ink on light-blue paper, inviting her and Silena to the house-warming party at the... Batcave. If Clarisse were a betting woman, she'd put her money on that having been Percy's call.

"This is cheesy. Even for them", muttered Clarisse as she grabbed her jacket.

"Oh, shush. It has _style_", chided her roommate delighted.

Silena was smiling brightly as the two made their way out of the dorm to head to the penthouse. They were in their final year of grad school. For Clarisse, _the_ final year. Three years of classes and training and then she'd be a rookie cop. Reyna was only a year behind her and the two women
already planned on partnering up once they'd join the NYPD. The supernatural society always tried to match supernaturals with other supernaturals in the force; it made things easier. Not to mention Clarisse's father, the police chief, could easily pull some strings there.

It was currently hard, because Piper was gone. And Clarisse was not doing well with that, even when Silena did everything she could to distract her best friend. Chris was pacing just as badly as Clarisse about the fact that Piper was backpacking in Europe.

She was happy and she kept texting and calling and video-calling and sending pictures – but it was not the same as having her here. And now di Angelo had to go and rub it in that he got to move in with his submissive. Just how unfair was that. Silena elbowed her.

"Stop looking so grumpy", chided Silena softly. "Believe me, Piper is just as grumpy about missing this. You know she and Percy are best friends. She'd love to be here to check out Percy's own, first apartment and to celebrate that with him. And to be with you and Chris, of course."

Clarisse continued looking grumpy even as Beckendorf and Chris joined them. Though having Chris with her did improve her mood some. It'd simply feel better for them to be – complete.

"Damn", whistled Chris as they reached the apartment building. "You know, I keep forgetting Percy is actually a prince and Nico is like vampire-royalty too and that they're both loaded."

"This is going to be nice though", mused Silena. "It's been a while since I saw most from high school, ever since... well, we became college students and they were still high school students."

When the four of them reached the penthouse and the elevator doors opened, they were greeted by loud music and quite the big gathering already. Rachel was sketching on the wall, with Calypso, Annabeth and Juniper sitting in a half-circle around her, watching, all with glasses next to them. Tables were pushed against the window-front with a whole buffet set out.

"What? Did you order in for this? Don't be fancy", snorted Clarisse teasingly as she spotted Percy. Percy huffed and pulled her into a hug. "That was not ordered in. That was Nico panicking about the first week of classes so he just... cooked about two dozen different meals."

"Dating a future chef. There's certainly perks to that", hummed Silena, hugging Percy next.


"Oh no. First, you gotta show us the place", chided Silena and swatted at his chest.

Percy laughed, though he happily took the two couples to lead them inside. First, he showed them the living room and the large balcony, then the open kitchen (where there was even more food), followed by the bedrooms – Silena cooed at how precious the bedrooms for Tyson and Laura were. Then there was one room that doubled as library and office for both Nico and Percy to do their studies there. And, of course, a gigantic bathroom with a whirlpool, a shower and a normal bathtub as well as two sinks and a towel-warmer. Silena fell in love with that bathroom immediately.

"A—and of course, the bedroom", chimed Percy with a broad grin. "I am super proud at that."

The bedroom was the perfect mix. It had a pit leading down into their bed, furs decorating the lowest step of the pit, the color-scheme between black and blues, a private balcony leading out. It was absolutely perfect for the both of them. A large TV, as well as a bookshelf with all the comic-books and figurines they had. It was an absolutely the perfect mix between Nico and Percy.
"Though, honestly, if our families hadn't all come and helped, we would have never finished furnishing the place in time", mused Percy with a tired sigh.

On top of the whole vampire coven, Percy's siblings and their partners had even come to help with the place, putting up everything, painting the walls, installing everything in record time. Some of their friends had also come – though not everyone had the time since college classes had already started. For Nico, doomsday was on Monday. First day of culinary school.

"Nico's so nervous", sighed Percy with a fond look on his face as the five of them returned to the living room. "I keep telling him he doesn't have to, he'll do great, but..."

"First days are always a challenge", chuckled Silena. "I'm sure it'll get better after the first week."

"The place is great though", grunted Beckendorf. "Would have turned the office into a workshop, but that's personal preference."

"Okay, guys. Now, spread out, enjoy yourselves. I gotta track down my favorite bat."

With a broad grin on his lips did Percy make his way to the kitchen where Nico was currently handing out tiny cupcakes (like super tiny. Percy found them adorable and yummy).

"Open up", hummed Nico, offering one with a blueberry on top to Percy.

Percy licked his lips. The cream on top of it was a light blue. Opening his mouth, he allowed Nico to feed him, causing Alabaster to make gagging noises before Ethan stuffed a cupcake into his boyfriend's mouth to make him shut up and not be rude to their hosts.

"You really worked overtime on this place", chuckled Reyna curiously.

She was sitting on the counter, with Annabeth leaning against it between her legs, eating a slice of pizza. Percy grinned before he jumped up onto the counter right next to her, making Nico groan.

"It's a kitchen-counter. It's for food. You two are not food!", complained Nico annoyed.

"You should have told Annie that last night, because she sure was eating me out", chimed Reyna.

"Reyna!", hissed both Annabeth and Nico, looking equally uncomfortable.

"I mean she's right. Just last week, you ate my ass like it was dinner", countered Percy.

"Oh, you're all disgusting, why am I even friends with you?", complained Katie.

She grabbed her salad and marched out of the kitchen while Reyna and Percy high-fived. Nico glared pointedly at his boyfriend before taking his place between Percy's legs and pulling him down into a slow kiss. Percy sighed contently as he wrapped his arms around Nico's neck.

"We've been working five days non-stop, with our families really pitching in", offered Percy after a moment. "It was... really exhausting. And some parts are still not perfect, but for the most, we can now live here and it's... honestly, the place is absolutely perfect."

"You're welcome", chimed Annabeth with a smirk.

"Seriously, when Charlie and I are moving in together, you are so doing the apartment hunt for us too", threw Silena in as she and Luke walked into the kitchen.

"Same", agreed Luke. "This place is wicked. It has all the Percy-needs and the Nico-needs. You
should really do that professionally, Annie."

"I'd rather design the place than just sell it", replied Annabeth. "There aren't many buildings like this. Fully supernatural-owned, with special accommodations for us. I want to design more skyscrapers like this, because we shouldn't – we shouldn't live torn-up among humans if we don't want to. This, having a community inside the house, no one asking questions about wolves."

Luke smiled at her proudly before ruffling her hair.

It was late, really late, when the last of their guests left. Percy was exhausted as he leaned against the door and closed his eyes. It was so quiet now, without the music and chatter. The only sound was Nico, gathering up the plates with the leftovers to put them away before going to bed.

"This... is going to be our first night in our own place", mused Percy softly.

"Having second thoughts, amore?", inquired Nico.

Percy huffed before tackling Nico in a hug and kissing his cheek. "You crazy? I'm looking forward to this. Finally, the place is all ready for us to actually sleep here, without having to work deep into the night to finish something else that isn't done. Just sleep. Just you and me."

Mrs. O'Leary whined lowly at that. "Right. And Molly and Bob."

The hell-hound looked pleased by that and curled back together in front of the fireplace. Small Bob was laying on top of the fireplace, his tail swinging back and forth lazily. Letting go of Nico, Percy went ahead to help him put everything major away for now so they could go to bed.

"You know, I think that we might be getting new neighbors soon", mused Percy.

"Really?", asked Nico with a frown.

"Silena is also a a princess, you know. Pretty sure if she tells her grandma about this, Thalassa is going to buy her an apartment in the building too", grinned Percy. "And Octavian looked very interested in it too after Luke started listing all the great things about the building."

"Silena and Beckendorf, okay. But living next to Octavian...", muttered Nico and made a face.

"Oh, shush it", huffed Percy, swatting at Nico's chest.

After they wrapped and packaged everything, Percy took a moment to look around their kitchen. Their kitchen. It was weird. He had lived with his mom and Gabe, had then lived with his dad and Amy. The dorms had been kind of different too since him and Grover shared a room but it was really only for sleeping. But this? This was an entire whole apartment. Their own kitchen to stock, their own bathroom to clean, their own balcony to sit on. Everything was wholly theirs.

"You look happy", hummed Nico gently as he pulled Percy against his chest.

"I am happy", replied Percy. "Let's go to bed? We gotta clean all of this up tomorrow."

They made their way to their bedroom and got changed and both were spotting giant, dorky grins as they crawled into their bed together. Percy purred to himself as he pawed at the soft, fluffy blanket before curling together. Nico tilted his head, amusement written all over his face as he watched his boyfriend, before Percy finally laid down and closed his eyes contently.
"Good night, kitten", chuckled Nico and relaxed.

"Night, Batman", yawned Percy, stretching out.

Nico woke up with Percy in his arms. The first thought that crossed his mind was that this was going to be his new normal now. Waking up with Percy in his arms. Instantly, he had to smile. Leaning in, he kissed the top of Percy's head, prompting Percy to yawn and wake up.

"Good morning, Neeks", greeted Percy, voice rough from sleep.

"It indeed is", hummed Nico, stealing a proper kiss from Percy. "You can have the bathroom first while I prepare breakfast for the two of us?"

"Urgh, you're perfect", groaned Percy delighted. "I don't remember the last time I got to be the first to use the bathroom. You know how long the line is when you live together with eight other merpeople? And in the dorms, yikes..."

Percy slipped out of bed first to head to the bathroom and get ready. Nico had never been one to use the bathroom first. He always needed a coffee first, he liked eating breakfast still in his sweatpants and night-shirt (a black shirt with the yellow Batman symbol. Because yes, Percy insisted on calling their place the Batcave so why not be on brand?). Nico hummed softly to himself while he made bacon and scrambled eggs. Half-way through, Percy joined him and started setting the table.

"I should totally get a Silena Kyle shirt, right?", mused Percy.

"What?", asked Nico confused.

"Well, this is the Batcave. And you're Batman. That, quite clearly, makes me the hot, seductive cat-burglar, right?", grinned Percy, popping his ears and tail out for emphasis.

Nico choked a little and shook his head. "You're horrible. I love you."

"I love you too", chimed Percy, kissing Nico and stealing some bacon. "But if you want this living together arrangement to work, you have to up your bacon-game. That's too little bacon."

"...That's a pound of bacon", pointed Nico out.

"So... it's all for me and you don't want any bacon?", asked Percy with innocent eyes.

"Duly noted", snorted Nico and shook his head.

"Hey. I'm a predator. I need my bacon", defended Percy. "Oh, also! I bought you something! Blood-orange juice. From the supernatural deli on the other side of the street. Get it? Orange juice mixed with actual blood. Heh. Saw it and thought of you."

"I love that. Persephone occasionally gets that!", exclaimed Nico. "But I rarely get any. You know, living together with ten vampires... you'd have to get a lot of bottles of this stuff."

"Well, in this household, we only have one vampire and he gets all the blood-orange juice he wants", declared Percy with a grin, kissing Nico's cheek.

"And in this household, we only have one merboy, who can have the bathroom first", smiled Nico.

Percy sighed contently and sat down before frowning. "...You know what. As awesome as all of this
sounds... I know that by the end of the week I'm probably already going to miss everyone."

"...Me too. But don't tell them", muttered Nico. "I lived with the entire coven for decades now and there is always noise and fighting and... here, it's just going to be you, me and the pets."

"Uhu. It's gonna take some getting-used-to", agreed Percy. "Huh. Also it feels so weirdly... adult."

"Agreed!", huffed Nico, gesturing a little. "I mean, sure, I'm like eighty years old, but also when I wasn't at war, I liked hiding out in the mansion. I've never quite... taken responsibility for my own life like that. I always—delayed that."

"I guess we gotta figure that stuff out now. Together", suggested Percy.

Nico smiled faintly as he put the food on their plates. Sitting one down in front of Percy, he leaned in to kiss Percy's cheek gently before getting the bottle of blood out of the fridge for his own eggs.

"You know. When I squint, I can pretend you put ketchup on your eggs. Which would still be gross, but like...", drawled Percy teasingly.

"Babe. I saw you eat a live goldfish the other day. You don't get to complaint about my eating habits", countered Nico pointedly and squinted blood all over his eggs.

"Okay, point taken", huffed Percy and rolled his eyes. "I like it best when we go hunt and agree on our food though. Mh... We should do that, maybe during Thanksgiving break?"

"We could make plans to rent a cabin and do that", agreed Nico with a smile.

Percy looked pleased at that and got comfortable as they both dug into their first shared meal in their own apartment. This was going to be a whole new phase of their lives.

Chapter End Notes

Isn't it nice when everything goes smoothly and all are happy? Yeah, let's disrupt that with some trouble in paradise and a potential threat next chapter! ^-^

End Notes

If you want to know when the next update is, you can find my updating schedule here on my profile!

On another note, I finally got a tumblr account! If you enjoy me ranting, you'll find plenty of that, as well as sneak-peeks to what I'm working on, plans for upcoming fics and whatever else comes to my mind there! takaraphoenix

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!