Watching the Pictures
by hot_potato

Summary

Jason, Piper and Leo are curious. The three of them want - no, they need to know about
Percy Jackson before they set off to find her. And Annabeth knows just the magical item to
show them.

Notes

Hey! So I guess that it's not totally out of the realm of possibility that some of you are
noticing a similarity between this story and another one on ff.net. Same name and
everything!. The thing is, that story on ff.net is mine and I hate it. I started writing it when I
was 12 and well, I never really gave it up. But I wanted to make a lot of changes to it, so I
decided to do that here. Fitting, since that was my first fanfiction ever and this is my first
fanfiction on this site. If you want to check out my old one, please don't! I'm not joking when
I say it's bad. Anywho, I hope you all enjoy my new and improved Watching the Pictures!
• Inspired by Watching the Pictures by me
Piper stared down at the training grounds anxiously. It was empty, save for one teenage girl with curly blonde hair tied up into a messy ponytail. To Piper and the rest of the campers, Annabeth was a wise leader, kind and stoic and strong. She was a safe person to talk to, understanding and knowledgeable, and she always helped the younger and newer campers get settled in.

Until she got like this, that is. When Annabeth approached the training grounds with her dagger held firmly in her hand and a storm of emotions clouding her eyes, everybody knew to clear the area.

Even though having witnesses there would have made this a thousand times easier, Piper couldn’t blame the panicked campers. Leo had given hastily made excuses when Piper had asked him to come with her, and even Jason looked at her with guilty eyes and a mutter of, “Annabeth is scary Piper.”

And they were supposed to always have her back.

Piper let a shaky breath out, and started descending down to certain doom. Annabeth was usually fun to be around, but not like this, not after she had stayed up several nights so that she could review the blueprints for the Argo, not when Grover had just come back to camp shaking his head saying that he couldn't find any trace of Percy at all.

Piper reached the training grounds and hesitated still. She gulped and tried to tell herself that Annabeth wouldn't do anything bad. What was the worse that could happen?

Her brain instantly jumped on the rhetorical question. Images of Annabeth never talking to her again ran through her mind. Then worse; Annabeth attacking her for asking her such a thing when she was so upset - perhaps Piper should have given Annabeth a better time to approach her than when she was in such a bad mood. Then even worse; Annabeth crying, Annabeth upset and in tears because Piper had been so insensitive to ask her about her girlfriend who had been missing for months and months on end.

So lost inside her horrified musings Piper failed to notice Annabeth pausing in her methodological destruction of the training dummies. She failed to notice Annabeth walking over to her, she failed to notice anything until Annabeth sharply cleared her throat.

“Oh! Annabeth!” Piper laughed nervously. “Uh, I didn't see you there!”

Annabeth raised an eyebrow. “Obviously,” she said dryly, and she looked even more tired up close, with the dark bags under her eyes, the weariness practically radiating off of her, and her eyes, oh her eyes. Annabeth may have a disturbingly good poker face, but her eyes would always give her away. Annabeth was tired, tired down to her very bones. She was tired and stressed and was very, very close to breaking down. And Piper may just ask her something that would push her over the edge.

Piper may have been curious about Percy, but she would never put Annabeth through any pain solely to sate her curiosity. Piper had to ask for her boys. For Jason who had tearfully confessed that he was scared that he wouldn't get along with Percy, that she would hate him, that they would fight and what if their fighting caused the world to end what if that happened what if he was the cause of the end of the world? For Leo who constantly bombarded everybody who had ever talked to Percy with questions - not Annabeth though, never Annabeth. Would Percy like the Argo? What should Percy’s room look like? Should he include anything for her that wasn't already planned on being added? Would Percy like his jokes? What was Percy like? How did she manage to get Annabeth,
who was hands down the scariest person that he knew, to fall in love with her?

And maybe it was a little bit for Annabeth too, because hiding that much emotion, not allowing herself to feel it until she was all alone could not be good for her. She acted strong, she acted like there was nothing wrong, and the only way she expressed her emotions was through what she was just doing - tearing through all of the dummies.

“Piper?” Annabeth prompted. “Did you need something?”

Piper jumped again, giving Annabeth a guilty look. “Ah, yeah sorry. I - I ah, I need to ask you something,” Piper steeled herself. “I - er, Jason, Leo and I - that is -”

Annabeth held up a hand to stop her, a deepest sadness growing on her face. “I think I know what you're trying to ask,” Annabeth sighed and mumbled, “I promised myself that I would tell you guys if you asked about her.”

Piper's eyes widened. She hadn't thought that Annabeth would react so well, and in her surprise, she allowed her excitement to show. “Really? Oh that's - that's great! Thank you so much, Annabeth! I know that Jason's been stressing out over how well he's going to get along with her and Leo has been talking all about jinxing the ship without the daughter of the Sea God there -”

“- and yet they sent you down to talk me into it,” Annabeth said wryly. She looked deeply unimpressed. “Chickened out, did they?”

Piper couldn't stop herself from snorting. Maybe she remained a little bitter that the two boys couldn't find it in them to support her while she asked Annabeth something that could cause her to be set off. Rolling her eyes, Piper agreed with a scoff of, “Boys.”

Annabeth laughed in agreement. It was worn out and forced, but at least it wasn't fake. “I know, right?”

Piper sighed, about to speak, when she noticed a movement on the top of hill that she had just been hesitating on. Annabeth had obviously seen it too, because the older girl shared a look of annoyance with her.

“How about Jason do you think?” Piper asked, irritated. So they chose to hide while Piper faced the threat of Annabeth’s ire by herself? It was better though, then them not coming at all, she supposed.

“What we just saw was probably Leo,” Annabeth muttered. “Jason is much too cautious to allow himself to be seen. Though I wouldn’t be surprised if Jason was up there too.”

“Oh, they’re definitely both up there,” Piper said firmly. She narrowed her eyes and cleared her throat. She could feel the power of her Charmspeak, a power that would override her friends free will and force them to do her bidding, burning within her throat and then raise into her mouth then out in a simple command. “Get down here.”

Annabeth could feel it too, Piper saw. She saw it in the way that her knees shook in the effort that it took to keep her from sinking lower and the way her whole body tensed in resistance. Piper instantly felt guilt flood her. She hated using Charmspeak on her friends.

She didn’t have much time to wallow in her guilt though, because within seconds Jason and Leo were standing in front of Piper, faces horrified.

“We’re sorry Piper!” Leo burst out, looking for all the world like he had just been caught with his hand in the cookie jar. How could Piper possibly be angry at that? “We should have been with you.”
Jason nodded, his eyes flicking towards Annabeth gingerly. “Very sorry,” he added, his blue eyes filling with remorse.

Piper sighed. However much she tried, she could never stay mad at them. Besides, she used her Charmspeak on them, and that more than made up for them abandoning her, in her opinion. “It’s fine,” she assured them. “Just…” she shrugged. “I don’t know. Don’t do it again.”

Leo nodded his head vigorously and Jason gave her a sheepish smile, rubbing the nape of his neck. “I promise,” he said. “And I really am sorry.”

Piper waved him off. “All forgiven,” she said easily.

Leo cleared his throat. “So Annabeth, did you and Piper talk about, you know…”

Annabeth inclined her head coolly. “We did,” she confirmed. “Come with me.”

Leo’s eyes widened in alarm. As Annabeth started walking in the direction of the cabins, Leo and Jason came up on either side of Piper as they followed her.

Leo loudly whispered to Piper and Jason, “Is that a good come with me or a bad come with me? Is she going to kill us?”

Jason bit his lip thoughtfully, something that Piper was momentarily distracted by before she ruined away, face slightly pink. “I don’t think so,” he said, not noticing Piper’s slightly flustered state. “She didn’t seem very upset.”

That wasn’t true, Piper noticed. Annabeth was upset. She was very upset. She was sad, she was stressed, and she was anxious. But most of all, she missed Percy.

She was simply good at hiding it.

“How did talking to her go?” Leo asked Piper eagerly, not satisfied with Jason's answer. “Did she say that she'd talk to us about Percy? Is she going to tell us about her? Is she going to kill us?”

Piper let out a pondering hum, enjoying the look of building anticipation on Leo and Jason’s faces.

Ahead of her, Piper could almost feel the amusement rolling off of Annabeth. She nearly smiled - anything that got Annabeth to feel better was great in her book.

Finally, it got to be too much, and Leo, nearly bursting with impatience, demanded, “Well?”

Piper chuckled. “Yeah, she's going to tell us about her,” she told them.

Jason let out a quiet sigh of relief and Leo let out a whoop.

Annabeth spun around to face them and gave the three of them a deadpan stare. “You guys know that I can hear everything that you’ve been saying, yes?”

Jason flushed lightly. “Oh. Um, I’m sorry, Annabeth.”

Annabeth rolled her eyes. “Gods, you all don’t have to act like you’re treading on thin ice all the time. I’m not as delicate as you all seem to think.”

Annabeth turned back around, and the group walked in silence for a few seconds, before Leo questioned, “Annabeth, where are you even taking us? You could’ve told us about her anywhere secluded, and we’re at the cabins, and all of us have siblings that wander around all day. Except
Jason’s, but I don’t want to go in there. Sorry bud.”

Piper shuddered at the thought of Jason’s cabin. It always had a chilly feel in it, no matter how warm it actually was. She felt bad for Jason to have to sleep in there all the time.

“No don’t apologize,” Jason said grimacing. “I totally understand.”

Annabeth continued to walk without turning until they reached the base of cabin number three. Piper felt anticipation start to thrum within her. After a moment of tense silence, Annabeth responded with, “You want to know her full story, do you not?” Annabeth turned around and walked up the steps to her girlfriends cabin. “And for that to happen, there’s a certain magical item which belongs to her that we need.”

Piper felt her breath catch in her throat. Percy Jackson’s cabin. The Percy Jackson’s cabin.

Cabin number three just so happened to be infamous. Many a camper (Leo mostly, actually) had tried to take a peek inside the cabin, but to no avail. According to the Stoll brothers, Tyson, Percy’s cyclops half-brother had modified the door so that it would only allow people in if they pressed a certain part of it. Piper didn’t know how much of that story was true, as the Stolls were notorious for their pranks, but that didn’t change the fact the Leo failed to enter, no matter how much he tried.

Annabeth pressed a small, discoloured part of the doorframe and the door swung inward, showing a hint of what was inside. The older teen hesitated a moment, and just enough of her face was visible that Piper could see a look of anguish flicker across Annabeth’s face, and she seemed as though she might cry for a moment. The look passed as Annabeth took a deep breath to compose herself and disappeared into the cabin. The door hung open invitingly.

Piper shared a look with her boys. The unrestrained curiosity and excitement that she felt were reflected back at her in their own eyes. Jason nodded once at them, and together, they started up the steps after Annabeth.
Annabeth rolled her eyes when Piper, Leo, and Jason entered the cabin, determination on their faces. The three of them were acting as though she was going to give them a test to calculate if they were worthy of what she was going to show them. She wasn’t - though it might have brought her some amusement. Perhaps she could understand the motivation behind some of the gods actions a little better, sending half-bloods out on pointless quests.

That, of course, didn’t mean she forgave it.

Annabeth held out her arms, showcasing Percy’s admittedly messy (Percy never cared much for organization) cabin. Messy though it was, her cabin was beautiful.

“It looks like we’re at the bottom of the ocean,” Piper breathed.

“It’s beautiful,” Jason agreed, awe clear in his voice.

“Oh I have so many ideas for the Argo,” Leo said, reaching into a pocket to grab a notebook and a pen, which Annabeth knew for a fact that he kept on his person at all times in case inspiration struck. He hurriedly started writing quick jot notes down.

Annabeth could understand their wonderment. The walls of the cabin had an illusion of movement, flowing like it was real water (Annabeth hid her pain, the walls looked like Percy’s eyes). The floor of the cabin glowed like abalone. The bunks in the cabin were made out of coral - still alive, somehow - instead of wood. All in all, it had a very dream-like effect.
“I didn’t bring you here to only see the inside of her cabin,” Annabeth said.

All three immediately stopped their observation of the cabin as their attention focused on Annabeth.

“What I’m about to show you is confidential. I don’t want to hear talk about this among campers,” Annabeth said, her tone promising danger if they didn’t obey. “If you don’t think you can keep your mouth shut, we won’t be using the magical item.”

Jason and Piper looked interested, while Leo’s face lit up. “Magical item?”

Annabeth simply raised an eyebrow and crossed her arms. The trio shared a look, then Jason solemnly promised to keep his lips sealed, quickly followed by Piper and Leo.

Annabeth was satisfied, and she dropped to the floor beside the only messy bed in the cabin. She reached under it and pulled out a large book.

“What is that?” Piper asked, her curiosity getting the better of her as she hovered over Annabeth’s shoulder. “A photo album?”

“Is that the magical item?” Leo’s fingers were twitching in his eagerness to get his hands on it and figure out how it worked.

Jason laid a hand on Leo’s shoulder, partly to calm him, and partly because Annabeth would gut him if he touched something of Percy’s without her permission.

“Yes, this is the magical object,” Annabeth said. She opened it to the first page. “How it works is when we all touch a certain picture, it will show the story behind it. Her dad got it for her. She and the camp scribe worked to piece it together and they might be making a book of sorts as a sort of a cautionary tale for campers when they first get here. People don’t seem to relate to myths anymore, and this is a much more accurate depiction of what being a demigod in modern times anyway.”

“I admit, that sounds like it would’ve been really helpful,” Piper said.
“Mega helpful,” Leo confirmed.

“It probably would have helped my memory,” Jason said. “Or maybe it would have confused me. I don’t know.”

“Either way, we should be able to make it through our first quest by the end of today, if you’re up to it,” Annabeth said, laying the album across the floor.

Jason, Leo, and Piper immediately sat down, and hesitantly reached out to the album, only laying their hand down on a photo after Annabeth purposefully laid the tips of her fingers on a photo, with ‘I Accidentally Vaporize my Pre-Algebra Teacher’ scrawled over the photo in messy Ancient Greek.

“Why’s it black?” Leo’s voice sounded faintly panicked. “Why can’t we see anything?”

Annabeth’s thoughts raced, but then a memory popped up of a brief conversation with Percy. “Ah, Percy once said that she made little introductions before each of our adventures. That must be what this is.”

“So basically Percy’s going to be speaking to us?” Piper couldn’t quite keep all the awe out of her voice.

Annabeth barely could keep herself from laughing. Knowing Percy, this was going to be good.

**Look, I didn't want to be a half-blood.**

“That’s really weird,” Leo muttered, rubbing his ears.

Annabeth knew what he meant. The words appeared in her mind as if Percy was right beside her and had spoken them herself, and yet, there was nobody there. She knew better than to get her hopes up, however, the first few times that she used the book to view their adventures, it had been a disappointing experience.

**If you're watching this because you think you might be one, my advice is: get out right now.**
Believe whatever lie your mom or dad told you about your birth, and try to lead a normal life.

Being a half-blood is dangerous. It's scary. Most of the time, it gets you killed in painful, nasty ways.

Annabeth stifled a snort at how dramatic Percy was, and glanced at the trio of demigods. She was a little startled to find that they were completely serious, even nodding along to Percy’s words.

If you're a normal kid, watching this because you think it's fiction, great. Watch on. I envy you for being able to believe that none of this ever happened.

But if you recognize yourself in these pages - if you feel something stirring inside - stop watching immediately. You might be one of us. And once you know that, it's only a matter of time before they sense it too, and they'll come for you.

Don't say I didn't warn you.

Annabeth finally let out the giggle that she had been holding in. “Percy always did have a flair for the dramatics,” she explained to the other three.

Jason blinked, realizing that he wasn’t supposed to take it so seriously. “Why was she speaking as though she knows that so many people might see it? Like mortals might see it?”

“Like I said, Percy always had a flair for dramatics. Usually, it’s more subtle than this though,” Annabeth snorted.

My name is Percy Jackson.

An image of the young androgynous looking girl appeared in front of them. She looked to be sitting down, but the scenery around her was indiscernible, blurry, while she was the only one in focus.
“Huh,” Leo said. “Isn’t that the kid that went missing after kidnapping his mom then it turned out that he was kidnapped by some other dude like, four years ago?”

“Oh yeah, I remember that kid,” Piper said pensively. “I always wondered what happened to him.”

“That’s Percy. Percy is a girl, not a boy and you should use the proper pronouns for her,” Annabeth said sharply.

“Really?” Jason looked shocked. “She looks very different from the photos I’ve seen of her.”

Annabeth blinked at them in realization. “Did you guys not know that Percy is trans? This is before she started taking hormones, her mom couldn’t afford to get any. Thankfully the medics at camp keep up with the times and we have some stored here.”

“Sorry I misgendered her,” Piper said. “It won’t happen again. And I’m really glad that she found support here.”

“Yeah, I won’t misgender her again. Sorry about that,” Leo added.

Annabeth raised an eyebrow at the surprised looks on their faces. “None of you knew this?”

“Nobody told us,” Jason said.

Annabeth tilted her head to the side. “I see. Well, you’ll know everything after this.”

For better or for worse, Annabeth thought, grimacing at the more horrifying moments of Percy’s past.

I’m twelve years old. Until a few months ago, I was a boarding student at Yancy Academy, a private school for troubled kids in upstate New York.

Am I a troubled kid?
“You’re a demigod,” Piper told Percy’s voice. “Of course you’re troubled.”

“Ain’t that the truth,” Leo muttered while Jason frowned.

Yeah. You could say that.

Annabeth rolled her eyes with a fond smile on her face.

I could start at any point in my short miserable life to prove it, but things really started going bad last May, when our sixth-grade class took a field trip to

Manhattan- twenty-eight mental-case kids and two teachers on a yellow school bus, heading to the Metropolitan Museum of Art to look at ancient Greek and Roman stuff.

The background suddenly came into focus; like she said, Percy was on a bus surrounded by rowdy kids around her age.

“That sounds like it’ll end well,” Piper said, voice drowning in sarcasm.

“A museum?” Leo crinkled his nose. “Boring.”

“Hey,” Jason protested. “They can be interesting.”

Annabeth sighed wistfully. “Oh, I wish I could’ve been there. I’ve never been able to go to that museum.”

I know - it sounds like torture.

Annabeth made an affronted noise at the back of her throat as Leo nodded his agreement.
Most Yancy field trips were.

But Mr. Brunner, our Latin teacher, was leading this trip, so I had hopes.

Mr. Brunner was this middle-aged guy in a motorized wheelchair. He had thinning hair and a scruffy beard and a frayed tweed jacket, which always smelled like coffee.

“He sounds like Chiron,” Leo mused, fiddling with some spare parts that he pulled out of nowhere.

Piper pressed her lips together consideringly. “He does, doesn’t he?”

“No way,” Jason shook his head. “Chiron wouldn’t leave camp. Who would look after everybody?”

All three turned to look at Annabeth.

Annabeth but down on the inside of her cheek to keep from telling them everything. No spoilers, she swore to herself. No matter how much they begged, she wouldn’t give them any spoilers.

You wouldn't think he'd be cool, but he told stories and jokes and let us play games in class. He also had this awesome collection of Roman armor and weapons, so he was the only teacher whose class didn't put me to sleep.

Annabeth clucked her tongue in disapproval, shaking her head at her girlfriend’s antics.

And he always, always got my pronouns right. I hoped the trip would be okay. At least, I hoped that for once I wouldn’t get in trouble.

“Pfft,” Annabeth scoffed. “The day Percy doesn’t get into any trouble is the day I stop learning.”

Leo grinned. “She sounds like my kinda girl,” he declared.
Annabeth paled. “You two would be a nightmare,” she pressed a hand to her forehead. “I can already feel a headache coming in.”

Piper and Jason exchanged alarmed glances. If Annabeth, the person that was basically in charge of a whole camp of kids that were the offspring of gods was shaken at the thought of Leo and Percy meeting each other, then it was perhaps time that they too considered the possible consequences.

**Boy, was I wrong.**

“Shocker,” Annabeth muttered.

See, bad things happen to me on field trips. Like at my fifth-grade school, when we went to the Saratoga battlefield, I had this accident with a Revolutionary War cannon.

Jason lifted an eyebrow. “An ‘accident’?”

**I wasn’t aiming for the school bus,**

Leo barely stifled a snort of laughter. “Oh my gods,” he gasped. “That’s the most brilliant thing I’ve ever heard of.”

Piper’s hands flew up to cover her mouth as laughter wracked her frame. Jason coughed to hide his laughter but couldn’t hide his smile.

Annabeth merely shook her head in amusement. “There’s a lot more where that came from,” she promised.

**but of course I got expelled anyway. And before that, at my fourth-grade school, when we took a behind the scenes tour of the Marine World shark pool, I sort of hit the wrong lever on the catwalk and our class took an unplanned swim.**

“That’s the best prank I’ve ever heard of and she didn’t even mean to do it,” Leo was beaming.
“She’s officially my hero.”

“No!” Piper gasped, before giggling, “Fitting for the daughter of Poseidon.”

Jason finally succumbed to laughter. “I can’t believe the trouble she gets into! And she’s not even doing it on purpose!”

“You don’t even know the half of it,” Annabeth exclaimed. “The things that Sally has told me…”

And the time before that... Well, you get the idea.

“Nooo! I wanted to hear more,” Leo lamented.

“There, there.” Piper patted his shoulder consolingly. “I’m sure Annabeth will share some more of her escapades once we take a break.”

“Like Hades I will,” Annabeth denied. “Watching this will give him enough ammunition, I’m not adding even more to that.”

Taking a look at Leo’s disappointed face, Jason admitted, “That’s probably for the best.”

This trip, I was determined to be good.

“Let’s see how that goes for you,” Piper murmured, already knowing that it would not turn out.

All the way into the city, I put up with Nancy Bobofit, the freckly, redheaded kleptomaniac girl, hitting my best friend Grover in the back of the head with chunks of peanut butter-and-ketchup sandwich.

Annabeth’s eyes darkened in anger and she seethed.
“Who’s that?” Piper asked curiously. After all, if Annabeth was so angry about him being mistreated, then she must know him as well.

“Grover was Percy’s satyr protector,” Annabeth said. “He’s one of our best friends. He does not deserve to be treated that way.”

Leo imagined one of the kids from his class try to throw a peanut butter and ketchup sandwich at Coach Hedge and he desperately tried to hold in his snickers. Gods help the poor fool that attempted to terrorize Hedge.

Grover was an easy target. He was scrawny. He cried when he got frustrated. He must’ve been held back several grades, because he was the only sixth grader with acne and the start of a wispy beard on his chin. On top of all that, he was crippled.

Piper had her hands clamped over her mouth to keep herself from bursting out laughing. Leo had no such restraint. He howled with laughter, and even the usually composed Jason was snickering.

Annabeth laughed too, more so at the accuracy of the description than the bluntness of it. Poor Grover, he really didn’t deserve to be called out that way.

“Are the rest of her descriptions going to be this… uh,” Leo scratched his head, searching for the right word. “Hilarious?”

“Yes,” Annabeth smirked. “Percy’s never had a filter, and she always, always speaks her mind. You’re going to be getting a lot more of that.”

“I can’t wait to see how she describes anybody else we know,” Piper giggles.

He had a note excusing him from PE for the rest of his life because he had some kind of muscular disease in his legs. He walked funny, like every step hurt him, but don't let that fool you. You should've seen him run when it was enchilada day in the cafeteria.

Annabeth snorted, rolling her eyes. “Of course he would blow his cover for food,” she muttered.
Anyway, Nancy Bobofit was throwing wads of sandwich that stuck in his curly brown hair, and she knew I couldn't do anything back to her because I was already on probation. The headmaster had threatened me with death by in-school suspension if anything bad, embarrassing, or even mildly entertaining happened on this trip.

“From the looks of it,” Jason said dryly. “Percy’s chances of being suspended are very, very high.”

“Percy’s never gone to a school without some incident happening,” Annabeth sighed. “It’s a skill of hers.”

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

Grover tried to calm me down. "It's okay. I like peanut butter."

He dodged another piece of Nancy's lunch.

“That bitch,” Annabeth seethed. “If Percy doesn’t hit her, I will.”

Jason raised a brow. “Wouldn’t you know if she hit her already? Haven’t you seen all of these?”

“I don’t often watch the ones this early on,” Annabeth said. “Percy didn’t like others to see her this way. I was really reluctant to show this to you, but I think you need to know, need to see.”

"That's it." I started to get up, but Grover pulled me back to my seat.

"You're already on probation," he reminded me. "You know who'll get blamed if anything happens."

Looking back on it, I wish I'd decked Nancy Bobofit right then and there. In-school suspension would've been nothing compared to the mess I was about to get myself into.
Piper hesitated. “This sounds more like she gets into real trouble than entertaining trouble.”

Annabeth hummed, neither confirming or denying.

**Mr. Brunner led the museum tour.**

He rode up front in his wheelchair, guiding us through the big echoey galleries, past marble statues and glass cases full of really old black-and-orange pottery.

It blew my mind that this stuff had survived for two thousand, three thousand years.

“Some of it even longer than that, Percy,” Annabeth said. “You should see the Egyptian artifacts, now those are old.”

He gathered us around a thirteen-foot-tall stone column with a big sphinx on the top, and started telling us how it was a grave marker, a stele, for a girl about our age. He told us about the carvings on the sides. I was trying to listen to what he had to say, because it was kind of interesting, but everybody around me was talking, and every time I told them to shut up, the other teacher chaperone, Mrs. Dodds, would give me the evil eye.

Mrs. Dodds was this little math teacher from Georgia who always wore a black leather jacket, even though she was fifty years old. She looked mean enough to ride a Harley right into your locker. She had come to Yancy halfway through the year, when our last math teacher had a nervous breakdown.

“I’ve always had a theory that math teachers were monsters, but I think she’s the one that proves it,” Leo said. “So, what kinda monster is she?”

“You’ll see,” Annabeth promised.

“Why would a monster pose as a math teacher?” Jason questioned. “There’s a lot of responsibility involved with that. Wouldn’t it be easier to be a student?”
“Well teacher’s have more authority, don’t they? If you’re a demigod in school, it would be much easier for them to get you alone than it would be for a student,” Piper said.

From her first day, Mrs. Dodds loved Nancy Bobofit and figured I was devil spawn. She would point her crooked finger at me and say, "Now, honey," real sweet, and I knew I was going to get after-school detention for a month.

“Harsh,” Leo muttered.

One time, after she'd made me erase answers out of old math workbooks until midnight, I told Grover I didn't think Mrs. Dodds was human. He looked at me, real serious, and said, "You're absolutely right."

“That is absolutely not ominous,” Jason said. “Poor Percy, I would be freaking out by then.”

“Percy is good at ignoring the obvious,” Annabeth said. “Oh, she’ll know when something is going on, but until she wants to acknowledge it, it’ll fly right over her head.”

Mr. Brunner kept talking about Greek funeral art.

Finally, Nancy Bobofit snickered something about the naked guy on the stele, and I turned around and said, "Will you shut up?"

It came out louder than I meant it to.

“Uh oh, I’ve had a few of those moments,” Piper giggled.

The whole group laughed. Mr. Brunner stopped his story.

"Miss. Jackson," he said, "did you have a comment?"
My face was totally red. I said, "No, sir."

Mr. Brunner pointed to one of the pictures on the stele. "Perhaps you'll tell us what this picture represents?"

“I hate it when teachers do that,” Leo groused. “I have no idea what it is, that’s why I’m not the teacher.”

I looked at the carving, and felt a flush of relief, because I actually recognized it. "That’s Kronos eating his kids, right?"

“That’s some foreshadowing right there,” Annabeth said, wrinkling her nose as if she smelled something foul. Her memories associated with Kronos were unpleasant.

"Yes," Mr. Brunner said, obviously not satisfied. "And he did this because ..."

"Well..." I racked my brain to remember. "Kronos was the king god, and-"

Both Annabeth and Jason were shaking their heads. “Not god,” Annabeth muttered.

“Definitely not,” Jason agreed. Piper and Leo shared a look behind their back.

"God?" Mr. Brunner asked.

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

“ Weird to think, isn’t it, that Jason’s dad made Jason’s grandpa barf up Jason’s aunts and uncles, one of which is Percy’s dad,” Leo said.
“Thank you, Leo, I did not enjoy that commentary at all,” Piper said.

“It is quite strange to think about how Poseidon was once in both his mother’s and his father’s stomach,” Annabeth said.

“Could you like, stop?” Jason said, very conflicted about thinking of gods as food to be thrown up.

"Eew!" said one of the girls behind me.

"-and so there was this big fight between the gods and the Titans," I continued, "and the gods won."

Some snickers from the group.

Behind me, Nancy Bobofit mumbled to a friend, "Like we're going to use this in real life.

“Yeah, ok,” Piper scoffed. “You go on believing that, sweetie.”

Like it's going to say on our job applications, 'Please explain why Kronos ate his kids.'"

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

“So we don’t get fucking killed,” Annabeth answered.

"Busted," Grover muttered.

"Shut up," Nancy hissed, her face even brighter red than her hair.

At least Nancy got packed, too. Mr. Brunner was the only one who ever caught her saying
anything wrong. He had radar ears.

Annabeth stifled a giggle. That was Percy, noticing all the details but not the big picture.

I thought about his question, and shrugged. "I don't know, sir."

"I see." Mr. Brunner looked disappointed. "Well, half credit, Miss. Jackson. Zeus did indeed feed Kronos a mixture of mustard and wine, which made him disgorge his other five children, who, of course, being immortal gods, had been living and growing up completely undigested in the Titan's stomach.

“That must’ve been awfully boring,” Leo said. “If I had grown up in a stomach with four siblings, I would’ve gone insane. It’s hard enough in a cabin full of them.”

Piper grimaced, imagining spending all of her time with Drew in such a cramped space.

“I mean,” Jason said. “It’s not really much difference from Athena emerging from Zeus’ split open head as a grown woman.”

“Wait. Does Athena have a belly button? Annabeth do you have a belly button?” Leo asked.

Annabeth rolled her eyes. “Of course I have a belly button.”

The gods defeated their father, sliced him to pieces with his own scythe, and scattered his remains in Tartarus, the darkest part of the Underworld. On that happy note, it’s time for lunch. Mrs. Dodds, would you lead us back outside?"

The class drifted off, the girls holding their stomachs, the guys pushing each other around and acting like doofuses.

“That’s just how we normally act though,” Jason noted.
“Amen to that,” Piper muttered.

Grover and I were about to follow when Mr. Brunner said, "Mr. Jackson."

I knew that was coming.

I told Grover to keep going. Then I turned toward Mr. Brunner. "Sir?"

Mr. Brunner had this look that wouldn't let you go- intense brown eyes that could've been a thousand years old and had seen everything.

“That is Chiron, without a doubt,” Piper declared.

“It does sound like him,” Jason agreed. “But not every guy with wise brown eyes is Chiron.”

"You must learn the answer to my question," Mr. Brunner told me.

"About the Titans?"

"About real life. And how your studies apply to it."

"Oh."

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

“That’s Chiron,” Leo decided.

I wanted to get angry, this guy pushed me so hard.
I mean, sure, it was kind of cool on tournament days, when he dressed up in a suit of Roman armor and shouted: "What ho!" and challenged us, sword-point against chalk, to run to the board and name every Greek and Roman person who had ever lived, and their mother, and what god they worshipped.

“Yeah ok, that's Chiron,” Jason caved.

“That sounds pretty hard,” Leo said, wrinkling his nose.

But Mr. Brunner expected me to be as good as everybody else, despite the fact that I have dyslexia and attention deficit disorder and I had never made above a C- in my life. No - he didn't expect me to be as good; he expected me to be better. And I just couldn't learn all those names and facts, much less spell them correctly.

I mumbled something about trying harder, while Mr. Brunner took one long sad look at the stele, like he'd been at this girl's funeral.

“Maybe he had,” Piper said sadly. “Imagine all the people he’s seen die over all these years.”

“It takes a toll on him,” Annabeth agreed.

He told me to go outside and eat my lunch.

The class gathered on the front steps of the museum, where we could watch the foot traffic along Fifth Avenue.

Overhead, a huge storm was brewing, with clouds blacker than I'd ever seen over the city. I figured maybe it was global warming or something, because the weather all across New York state had been weird since Christmas. We'd had massive snow storms, flooding, wildfires from lightning strikes. I wouldn't have been surprised if this was a hurricane blowing in.

“What’s dad so angry about?” Jason asked.
“It sounds like Poseidon is mad too,” Piper noted.

“Don’t they fight like, all the time? This could be normal for them, couldn’t it?” Leo said.

Annabeth shook her head. “That fight was anything but normal.”

Nobody else seemed to notice. Some of the guys were pelting pigeons with Lunchables crackers. Nancy Bobofit was trying to pickpocket something from a lady's purse, and, of course, Mrs. Dodds wasn't seeing a thing.

Grover and I sat on the edge of the fountain, away from the others. We thought that maybe if we did that, everybody wouldn't know we were from that school - the school for loser freaks who couldn't make it elsewhere.

“Ugh, I totally relate,” Piper groaned. “I used to hate school trips for that reason, I was so embarrassed about the chaos everybody made.”

"Detention?" Grover asked.

"Nah," I said. "Not from Brunner. I just wish he'd lay off me sometimes. I mean-I'm not a genius."

“She always underestimates how smart she is,” Annabeth said softly. “She may not be a genius, but Percy has more street smarts than most.”

Grover didn't say anything for a while. Then, when I thought he was going to give me some deep philosophical comment to make me feel better, he said, "Can I have your apple?"

Leo snorted. “Grover? Not a good way to break the ice after a friend says something bad about them.”
“Wow,” Piper agreed. “‘Can I have your apple?’ That’s cold.”

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

I watched the stream of cabs going down Fifth Avenue, and thought about my mom's apartment, only a little ways uptown from where we sat. I hadn't seen her since Christmas.

“Percy is really lucky in the way that she has a pretty stable relationship with both of her parents,” Annabeth explained, unable to keep the hint of bitterness from her voice.

“Her mom must be something else,” Jason said.

Annabeth nodded. “Sally is amazing. You'll see.”

I wanted so bad to jump in a taxi and head home. She'd hug me and be glad to see me, but she'd be disappointed, too. She'd send me right back to Yancy, remind me that I had to try harder, even if this was my sixth school in six years and I was probably going to be kicked out again. I wouldn't be able to stand that sad look she'd give me.

“Percy sounds like she loves her a lot,” Piper said, thinking of her father. She wishes she could have that kind of relationship with him. Leo was silent as he went over his childhood memories of his mother.

Mr. Brunner parked his wheelchair at the base of the handicapped ramp. He ate celery while he read a paperback novel. A red umbrella stuck up from the back of his chair, making it look like a motorized cafe table.

I was about to unwrap my sandwich when Nancy Bobofit appeared in front of me with her ugly friends - I guess she'd gotten tired of stealing from the tourists - and dumped her half-eaten lunch in Grover's lap.

“That bitch,” Annabeth fumed. “Oh, Percy better’ve gotten back at her, or I’m going to have to find her.”
“Wow you’re really protective of Grover,” Jason said.

“Grover was the satyr that brought me to camp. He’s one of my oldest friends,” Annabeth said. “I wouldn’t be here without him.”

"Oops." She grinned at me with her crooked teeth. Her freckles were orange, as if somebody had spray-painted her face with liquid Cheetos.

“Sometimes freckles just don’t suit people, but that’s the worst description I have ever heard of them,” Piper snorted.

I tried to stay cool. The school counselor had told me a million times, "Count to ten, get control of your temper." But I was so mad my mind went blank. A wave roared in my ears.

I don’t remember touching her, but the next thing I knew, Nancy was sitting on her butt in the fountain, screaming, "Percy pushed me!"

Annabeth smirked savagely. “I hope she gets a cold.”

“What did Percy do?” Leo asked.

“Probably something with water, considering she’s the daughter of Poseidon,” Jason said, with a hint of sarcasm.

Mrs. Dodds materialized next to us.

Some of the kids were whispering: "Did you see-"

"-the water-"

"-like it grabbed her-"
“Damn that sounds cool,” Leo said. “Hey, what would win, her water or my fire?”

Annabeth took the question seriously. “Well, you’re able to conjure the fire out of nothing, but Percy needs a water source, even if it is underground. So I would say that it depends on the location. If Percy had enough water though, you’re going to be sleeping with the fishes.”

Jason and Piper snorted at the joke, but Leo pouted.

I didn't know what they were talking about. All I knew was that I was in trouble again.

As soon as Mrs. Dodds was sure poor little Nancy was okay, promising to get her a new shirt at the museum gift shop, etc., etc., Mrs. Dodds turned on me. There was a triumphant fire in her eyes, as if I'd done something she'd been waiting for all semester.

“She just proved she was Poseidon's kid,” Jason realized. “She’s probably not going to take that very well.”

"Now, honey-"

"I know," I grumbled. "A month erasing workbooks."

That wasn't the right thing to say.

“No duh,” Leo said. “If you guess your punishment it only makes them mad.”

"Come with me," Mrs. Dodds said.

"Wait!" Grover yelped. "It was me. I pushed her."

I stared at him, stunned. I couldn't believe he was trying to cover for me. Mrs. Dodds scared
Grover to death.

She glared at him so hard his whiskery chin trembled.

“Oh, Grover,” Annabeth sighed. “He tries so hard.”

"I don't think so, Mr. Underwood," she said.

"But-"

"You-will-stay-here."

Grover looked at me desperately.

"It's okay, man," I told him. "Thanks for trying."

"Honey," Mrs. Dodds barked at me. "Now."

“This is a really bad situation,” Piper said, starting to feel scared for Percy.

Nancy Bobofit smirked.

I gave her my deluxe I'll-kill-you-later stare.

“Is it any good?” Leo asked.

“Not when she was 12,” Annabeth smirked.
Then I turned to face Mrs. Dodds, but she wasn't there. She was standing at the museum entrance, way at the top of the steps, gesturing impatiently at me to come on.

How’d she get there so fast?

“Cuz she’s a monster and she wants to eat you. You gotta make a break for it,” Piper said to the image of Percy.

I have moments like that a lot, when my brain falls asleep or something, and the next thing I know I’ve missed something, as if a puzzle piece fell out of the universe and left me staring at the blank place behind it. The school counselor told me this was part of the ADHD, my brain misinterpreting things.

I wasn’t so sure.

“Good,” Annabeth said. “Don’t believe it.”

I went after Mrs. Dodds.

“No, no, no,” Leo muttered, Piper’s anxiousness fueling his own. Jason too was looking pale.

“She looks so young,” Annabeth said, trying to imagine the girl before her fighting all of the monsters that they encountered on their quests. She couldn’t see it ending well, even though she knew it did.

Halfway up the steps, I glanced back at Grover. He was looking pale, cutting his eyes between me and Mr. Brunner, like he wanted Mr. Brunner to notice what was going on, but Mr. Brunner was absorbed in his novel.

“Dammit Chiron, the kid needs you,” Jason muttered.

I looked back up. Mrs. Dodds had disappeared again. She was now inside the building, at the end of the entrance hall.
Okay, I thought. She's going to make me buy a new shirt for Nancy at the gift shop.

But apparently that wasn't the plan.

I followed her deeper into the museum. When I finally caught up to her, we were back in the Greek and Roman section.

Except for us, the gallery was empty.

“That’s not good,” Piper hissed. “That’s not good, get out of there.”

Mrs. Dodds stood with her arms crossed in front of a big marble frieze of the Greek gods. She was making this weird noise in her throat, like growling.

Even without the noise, I would’ve been nervous. It's weird being alone with a teacher, especially Mrs. Dodds. Something about the way she looked at the frieze, as if she wanted to pulverize it...

“She needs to leave,” Jason said. “She needs to go right now.”

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

I did the safe thing. I said, "Yes, ma'am."

“Huh, Percy taking the safe route. Never thought I would see the day,” Annabeth said.

“Gods, please tell me this ends well,” Piper said. “She doesn’t get hurt, does she?”

Annabeth smiled easily. “She’ll be fine.”
She tugged on the cuffs of her leather jacket. "Did you really think you would get away with it?"

The look in her eyes was beyond mad. It was evil.

She's a teacher, I thought nervously. It's not like she's going to hurt me.

“You might want to rethink that,” Leo muttered.

I said, "I'll-I'll try harder, ma'am."

Thunder shook the building.

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

“What in Hades is going on?” Jason asked. “Does it have anything to do with Zeus and Poseidon fighting?”

Annabeth waved his question off. “You’ll see eventually.”

I didn't know what she was talking about.

All I could think of was that the teachers must've found the illegal stash of candy I'd been selling out of my dorm room. Or maybe they'd realized I got my essay on Tom Sawyer from the Internet without ever reading the book and now they were going to take away my grade. Or worse, they were going to make me read the book.

“Honestly? I think I'm in love,” Leo said, trying to break the tense feeling among his friends.
“Back off,” Annabeth said instantly. “Don’t even think about it.”

Jason turned to Piper. “When Leo and Percy meet we’re going to have to keep an eye on them to make sure they don’t start an illegal mortal foods ring here.”

Piper thought for a minute. “I mean, do we really though? Think about it Jason, soda, candy, chips. All the unhealthy food that we miss out on here.”

Leo’s stomach grumbled at her words and Jason shook his head in disappointment but was unable to stop a small smile.

"Well?" she demanded.

"Ma'am, I don't..."

"Your time is up," she hissed.

Then the weirdest thing happened. Her eyes began to glow like barbecue coals. Her fingers stretched, turning into talons. Her jacket melted into large, leathery wings. She wasn't human. She was a shriveled hag with bat wings and claws and a mouth full of yellow fangs, and she was about to slice me to ribbons.

“Shit,” Piper said, her eyes wide with fright. “What the hell is she? She sounds like a serious one.”

“A Kindly One,” Annabeth said. “A servant of Hades, better known as a Fury.”

“And now Hades is involved too,” Jason said. “Great.”

“How did a 12 twelve-year-old with no weapon beat a servant of Hades?” Leo asked, sounding highly impressed.

“How did this kid make it past the age of 12?” Piper questioned. Annabeth shook her head. She
didn't know either.

Then things got even stranger.

Mr. Brunner, who'd been out in front of the museum a minute before, wheeled his chair into the doorway of the gallery, holding a pen in his hand.

"What ho, Percy!" he shouted, and tossed the pen through the air.

“A pen,” Jason said flatly. “Lot of help that’ll do.”

Mrs. Dodds lunged at me.

With a yelp, I dodged and felt talons slash the air next to my ear. I snatched the ballpoint pen out of the air, but when it hit my hand, it wasn't a pen anymore. It was a sword-Mr. Brunner's bronze sword, which he always used on tournament day.

“So the pen turns into a sword?” Leo asked, his eyes gleaming as he took out his notebook, furiously scribbling down whatever was running through his head. “Interesting.”

Mrs. Dodds spun toward me with a murderous look in her eyes.

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

She snarled, "Die, honey!"

And she flew straight at me.

Piper clasped her hands over her eyes, unable to watch. A half second later, she spread her fingers to peek through them.
Absolute terror ran through my body. I did the only thing that came naturally: I swung the sword.

The metal blade hit her shoulder and passed clean through her body as if she were made of water.

Hiss!

“She did it,” Piper let out a huge sigh of relief. “She’s ok.”

“Wow,” Jason said. “That was intense, but what in Hades did she want from Percy?”

“I mean, we’re probably not meant to know until Percy does,” Leo pointed out. “It would be kinda unfair if Annabeth told us then we had to watch Percy’s confusion.”

“That’s reasonable,” Jason said, but he was still visibly frustrated.

“You’ll see in the next few chapters,” Annabeth smiled. “I wouldn’t worry about it too much, there’s nothing that you can do now, this was years ago.”

Mrs. Dodds was a sand castle in a power fan. She exploded into yellow powder, vaporized on the spot, leaving nothing but the smell of sulfur and a dying screech and a chill of evil in the air, as if those two glowing red eyes were still watching me.

I was alone.

There was a ballpoint pen in my hand.

Mr. Brunner wasn't there. Nobody was there but me.

My hands were still trembling. My lunch must've been contaminated with magic mushrooms
“That sounds like something one of those monster kids from that school would do,” Piper muttered. “Drugging somebody else’s lunch would probably be funny to them.”

Had I imagined the whole thing?

I went back outside.

It had started to rain.

Grover was sitting by the fountain, a museum map tented over his head. Nancy Bobofit was still standing there, soaked from her swim in the fountain, grumbling to her ugly friends. When she saw me, she said, "I hope Mrs. Kerr whipped your butt."

“Who’s Ms. Kerr?” Piper asked. “The mist couldn’t have replaced the monster that fast, no way.”

“The mist works in mist-erious ways,” Leo said, smirking at his pun. Everybody else only groaned.

I said, "Who?"

"Our teacher. Duh!"

I blinked. We had no teacher named Mrs. Kerr. I asked Nancy what she was talking about.

She just rolled her eyes and turned away.

I asked Grover where Mrs. Dodds was.

He said, "Who?"
But he paused first, and he wouldn't look at me, so I thought he was messing with me.

Annabeth shook her head. “Grover is the worst liar ever.”

“Probably not a good trait for a satyr guardian,” Jason pointed out.

Annabeth bristled. “Grover is loyal, kind, and he never gives up. He could do anything he set his mind to and he’s the best satyr this camp, or anywhere else in the world, could produce.”

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to insult him, I just was thinking aloud,” Jason said, taken aback a little bit.

"Not funny, man," I told him. "This is serious."

Thunder boomed overhead.

I saw Mr. Brunner sitting under his red umbrella, reading his book, as if he'd never moved.

I went over to him.

He looked up, a little distracted. "Ah, that would be my pen. Please bring your own writing utensil in the future, Miss. Jackson."

I handed Mr. Brunner his pen. I hadn’t even realized I was still holding it.

“Poor kid must be going into shock,” Piper said.

"Sir," I said, "where's Mrs. Dodds?"
He stared at me blankly. "Who?"

"The other chaperone. Mrs. Dodds. The pre-algebra teacher."

He frowned and sat forward, looking mildly concerned. "Percy, there is no Mrs. Dodds on this trip. As far as I know, there has never been a Mrs. Dodds at Yancy Academy. Are you feeling alright?"

Abruptly, the scenery around them faded and they were back in Percy's cabin, sitting on her floor.

“Damn, that would mess me up so bad,” Leo said after a moment. “I can’t even imagine what it was like for Percy.”

“She was certainly confused when she came into camp,” Annabeth said. She shook her head. “She had no idea what was going on. I thought she was an idiot back then, I hadn’t realized that nobody ever told her anything.”

"The transition to camp must've been really confusing for her too," Piper said. "I mean, it was a huge shock for me and I was what, four years older than her?"

"Percy is a resilient person, there's no need to worry about her," Annabeth assured her. She paused. "I suppose I should take that advice too."

"I'm sure she'll be fine," Piper was quick to assure her. "Percy sounds like she's a good person in an emergency, I doubt she'll let anything shake her."

Annabeth nodded. "That's true. It's onto the next photo then."
Hey folks! I present the much-awaited third chapter. Sorry it took so long! Speaking of, if any of you guys wanna sign up to be my beta reader, that would be lovely! The job includes bugging me to write and correcting my many mistakes. Seriously. I need some help getting the motivation to write, please yell at me to do so.

The next photo was labeled Three Old Ladies Knit the Socks of Death. Leo snickered at the title, and asked, “Does Percy come up with these? What does this one mean?”


Jason and Piper’s eyes widened in shock and worry. Leo frowned. “The Fates? Like the ones with the scissors?” He pantomimed scissors with his hands.

Annabeth gave them a tight smile. “Those would be the ones, yes.”

“That’s not good,” Piper muttered.

“We should see what happens before we jump to any conclusions,” Jason said, clearly already expecting the worst. He reached his hand for the book anyway, and everyone followed suit.

The scenery opened up to a school, students walking throughout the halls. Percy was walking alongside Grover, the two of them keeping to themselves.

I was used to the occasional weird experience, but usually they were over quickly. This 20-4/7 hallucination was more than I could handle. For the rest of the school year, the entire campus seemed to be playing some kind of trick on me. The students acted as if they were completely and totally convinced that Mrs. Kerr - a perky blonde woman whom I’d never seen in my life until she got on our bus at the end of the field trip - had been our pre-algebra teacher since Christmas.
“Man does that sound familiar,” Piper said, tapping her finger on her chin. “I wonder where I could have experienced something like that before.”

“Oh yeah I would hate to feel that confused,” Leo added.

“At least she didn’t lose her memory of the event,” Jason pointed out, but he was grimacing.

Annabeth rolled her eyes. “Percy’s too stubborn to let go of it just because of the mist. I bet only the Gods could spin enough mist around her to make her completely susceptible to it.”

Every so often I would spring a Mrs. Dodds reference on somebody, just to see if I could trip them up, but they would stare at me like I was psycho.

It got so I almost believed them - Mrs. Dodds had never existed.

Almost.

But Grover couldn't fool me. When I mentioned the name Dodds to him, he would hesitate, then claim she didn't exist. But I knew he was lying.

“Grover is such a bad liar,” Annabeth said, shaking her head fondly.

Something was going on. Something had happened at the museum.

“Yeah, she almost got killed by a monster sent by Hades,” Piper muttered.

Leo nodded knowledgeable. “Hades was being a bitch.”

“Careful Leo,” Annabeth warned with a smile. “Hades might start sending Alecto after you if he hears that.”
Leo shuddered. “No thanks, I’ve dealt with enough demonic teachers to last me a lifetime.”

I didn’t have much time to think about it during the days, but at night, visions of Mrs. Dodds with talons and leathery wings would wake me up in a cold sweat.

The freak weather continued, which didn’t help my mood. One night, a thunderstorm blew out the windows in my dorm room. A few days later, the biggest tornado ever spotted in the Hudson Valley touched down only fifty miles from Yancy Academy. One of the current events we studied in social studies class was the unusual number of small planes that had gone down in sudden squalls in the Atlantic that year.

“Woah, Poseidon and Zeus aren’t messing around,” Jason said, his eyes wide. “That’s really bad weather. That’s not a normal fight.”

Annabeth snorted. “Oh just you wait. The fight gets so much worse.”

“You know, I think I remember that,” Leo said. “All those storms. It was terrible.”

“All those lives lost, just because two gods were having a fight,” Piper said softly.

I started feeling cranky and irritable most of the time. My grades slipped from Ds to Fs.

Annabeth made a face, disappointed because she knew that if she applied herself more, Percy could get good grades.

I got into more fights with Nancy Bobofit and her friends. I was sent out into the hallway in almost every class.

“I don’t think even I was ever that bad,” Leo said.

“It was hard for Percy to be away from her mom for long periods of time at that point in her life,” Annabeth said. “Plus, the terrible weather must be affecting her mood. I know that when there’s something wrong with Poseidon, Percy can feel it.”
Jason nodded. “I can feel it with my dad too. Something about the weather just feels different.”

Finally, when our English teacher, Mr. Nicoll, asked me for the millionth time why I was too lazy to study for spelling tests, I snapped. I called him an old sot.

“A sot,” Piper said blankly. Annabeth futilely tried to stifle her laughter.

“I dunno what that means, but he deserves it,” Leo declared. “She has dyslexia you bitch.”

“Leo, watch your mouth,” Jason scolded.

“Yeah ok mom,” Leo said.

“Did you really just scold him for swearing? What are you, middle aged?” Annabeth snorted.

“Watch your mouth,” Piper parroted, grinning.

I wasn’t even sure what it meant, but it sounded good.

“Percy, it means a drunkard,” Annabeth sighed, still grinning at Jason.

“From what I’ve heard of him, Percy should’ve saved that insult for Mr. D,” Piper muttered.

“Oh yeah,” Annabeth said. “Percy tested his patience more than any other camper, but she’s probably his favourite demigod. Besides his own children, of course.”

“Sounds like she’s a lot of gods favourites,” Jason said. “I would’ve thought they didn’t like to be challenged.”
“It’s what makes her so memorable,” Annabeth said, a soft smile growing on her face. “Percy didn’t let them get away with shit, but she also sacrificed so much for them.”

The headmaster sent my mom a letter the following week, making it official: I would not be invited back next year to Yancy Academy.

Fine, I told myself. Just fine.

I was homesick.

“She misses Sally,” Annabeth clarified.

I wanted to be with my mom in our little apartment on the Upper East Side, even if I had to go to public school and put up with my obnoxious stepfather and his stupid poker parties.

“She misses him,” Piper pointed out.

Annabeth had a troubled frown on her face. “I never met him. She doesn’t speak very favourably about him.”

“Was he not good to them?” Jason asked.

“Percy doesn’t seem like the kinda person who would dislike others without a good reason,” Leo said.

“She had a good reason,” Annabeth said, her voice flat. All three got the message to move on.

And yet... There were things I’d miss at Yancy. The view of the woods out my dorm window, the Hudson River in the distance, the smell of pine trees. I’d miss Grover, who’d been a good friend, even if he was a little strange. I worried how he’d survive next year without me.

“Oh Percy, you got Grover in more trouble than he could ever get himself into,” Annabeth muttered.
I'd miss Latin class, too - Mr. Brunner's crazy tournament days and his faith that I could do well.

“Chiron sounds like an amazing teacher,” Piper said. “So patient. I wish there were more like him.”

“Gods, I would have loved him,” Leo said. “All my teachers sucked.”

Annabeth grimaced. “Mortal teacher’s can’t deal with us the way Chiron knows how to.”

“What a glowing recommendation for mortal schooling,” Jason said dryly, who had never been to a normal school a day in his life.

As exam week got closer, Latin was the only test I studied for. I hadn't forgotten what Mr. Brunner had told me about this subject being life-and-death for me. I wasn't sure why, but I'd started to believe him.

“Good,” Piper said. “She needs to be careful. Only one chapter in and I’m already worried about her.”

“At least you’re not Annabeth. Look. She’s started to go grey,” Leo said.

Annabeth stopped fiddling with her hair, the grey streak nearly unnoticeable when not in her hand. “There’s a story behind that. You’ll learn it later.”

The evening before my final, I got so frustrated I threw the Cambridge Guide to Greek Mythology across my dorm room. Words had started swimming off the page, circling my head, the letters doing one-eighties as if they were riding skateboards.

“Ah, the general experience of demigods,” Piper said.

There was no way I was going to remember the difference between Chiron and Charon, or
Polydectes and Polydeuces. And conjugating those Latin verbs? Forget it.

Jason made a surprised sound. “But Latin is so easy.”

“You’re Roman, Percy is Greek,” Annabeth pointed out. “She’d have a harder time at it.”

I paced the room, feeling like ants were crawling around inside my shirt.

I remembered Mr. Brunner's serious expression, his thousand-year-old eyes. I will accept only the best from you, Percy Jackson.

I took a deep breath. I picked up the mythology book.

I’d never asked a teacher for help before. Maybe if I talked to Mr. Brunner, he could give me some pointers. At least I could apologize for the big fat F I was about to score on his exam. I didn't want to leave Yancy Academy with him thinking I hadn't tried.

“I get the feeling that Chiron knows Percy did her best,” Jason said.

“She really didn’t want to disappoint him,” Piper said.

“Well if I had a teacher who pushed me to do my best I would hate to disappoint him too,” Leo said.

“It was probably the first teacher that showed Percy the respect she was due,” Annabeth said, frowning. “Mortal teachers can be truly abysmal.”

I walked downstairs to the faculty offices. Most of them were dark and empty, but Mr. Brunner's door was ajar, light from his window stretching across the hallway floor.

I was three steps from the door handle when I heard voices inside the office. Mr. Brunner asked a question. A voice that was definitely Grover's said "... Worried about Percy, sir."
“Oh boy,” Leo rubbed his hands. “It’s time to eavesdrop.”

“But it’s a private conversation,” Jason said, scandalized.

“Her best friend is talking about her to her favourite teacher,” Piper said. “Wouldn’t you listen in?”

I froze.

I’m not usually an eavesdropper, but I dare you to try not listening if you hear your best friend talking about you to an adult.

“See!” Piper said. “I know that I would listen if I heard any of you talking to somebody else about me.”

“That just proves that you and Percy think alike, which I’m not too sure is something to celebrate,” Annabeth said, but she was smiling.

I inched closer.

"... Alone this summer, " Grover was saying. "I mean, a Kindly One in the school! Now that we know for sure, and they know too-"

"We would only make matters worse by rushing her, " Mr. Brunner said. "We need the girl to mature more. "

“Yeah, that never happens,” Annabeth scoffed. “Percy is about as mature as a toddler.”

"But she may not have time. The summer solstice deadline-"

"Will have to be resolved without her, Grover. Let her enjoy her ignorance while she still can."
“What’s going on? Deadline for what?” Jason questioned.

"Sir, she saw her... . "

"Her imagination, " Mr. Brunner insisted. "The Mist over the students and staff will be enough to convince her of that. "

"Sir, I ... I can't fail in my duties again." Grover's voice was choked with emotion. "You know what that would mean."

“Oh, Grover,” Annabeth said softly.

"You haven't failed, Grover," Mr. Brunner said kindly. "I should have seen her for what she was. Now let's just worry about keeping Percy alive until next fall-"

“Oh shit,” Leo said.

“Leo, watch your language,” Piper cried, imitating Jason. Jason buried his face in his hands.

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

Mr. Brunner went silent.

“Double shit,” Leo muttered.

My heart hammering, I picked up the book and backed down the hall.

A shadow slid across the lighted glass of Brunner's office door, the shadow of something much
taller than my wheelchair-bound teacher, holding something that looked suspiciously like an archer's bow.

Annabeth tsked in disapproval. “He shouldn’t have been out of his wheelchair when surrounded by mortals.”

I opened the nearest door and slipped inside.

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

A bead of sweat trickled down my neck.

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

“It was a tense time,” Annabeth murmured.

“When isn’t it though?” Leo said.

“Chiron should be used to conflict, at least enough not to let it affect him,” Jason agreed.

"Mine neither, " Grover said. "But I could have sworn ... "

"Go back to the dorm," Mr. Brunner told him. "You've got a long day of exams tomorrow."

Piper, Annabeth, and Leo groaned at their memories of taking exams. Jason stared at them in blissful confusion.

"Don't remind me."
The lights went out in Mr. Brunner's office.

I waited in the dark for what seemed like forever.

“It’s good that she waited, Chiron would’ve caught her for sure if she walked out right after that,” Leo said, sounding a little bit too experienced with getting away from Chiron.

Finally, I slipped out into the hallway and made my way back up to the co-ed dorm I shared with Grover.

Grover was lying on his bed, studying his Latin exam notes like he’d been there all night.

"Hey, " he said, bleary-eyed. "You going to be ready for this test?"

I didn't answer.

"You look awful. " He frowned. "Is everything okay?"

"Just... Tired."

“Percy is also pretty bad at lying. At least to people that she cares about,” Annabeth explained.

“Yeah, I’d also be pretty bad at coming up with a good lie if I just heard that,” Leo said.

I turned so he couldn't read my expression, and started getting ready for bed.

I didn't understand what I'd heard downstairs. I wanted to believe I'd imagined the whole thing.
But one thing was clear: Grover and Mr. Brunner were talking about me behind my back. They thought I was in some kind of danger.

“I don’t even know her, but I already know that she’s always in some kind of danger,” Jason said.

The next afternoon, as I was leaving the three-hour Latin exam, my eyes swimming with all the Greek and Roman names I'd misspelled, Mr. Brunner called me back inside.

“Three hours?” Jason exclaimed.

“Ugh, that’s not to mention all the other exams she must have taken,” Piper said.

“Poor, poor Percy,” Annabeth sighed.

For a moment, I was worried he'd found out about my eavesdropping the night before, but that didn't seem to be the problem.

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

“Oh no Chiron,” Piper buried her head in her hands. “Not in front of her classmates!”

“Yikes, that wasn’t a good call,” Leo said.

His tone was kind, but the words still embarrassed me. Even though he was speaking quietly, the other kids finishing the test could hear. Nancy Bobofit smirked at me and made sarcastic little kissing motions with her lips.

“What a bit-”

“Language Leo! Do you pray to the gods with that mouth?” Piper teased.
Jason groaned. “You guys aren’t going to let this go, are you?”

“Nope!”

I mumbled, "Okay, sir."

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

“Ouch, Chiron,” Annabeth muttered. “He really could’ve worded that better.”

My eyes stung.

“Oh Percy,” Piper said, feeling close to tears herself. She never could keep herself from tears when others were crying.

Here was my favorite teacher, in front of the class, telling me I couldn’t handle it. After saying he believed in me all year, now he was telling me I was destined to get kicked out.

"Right, " I said, trembling.

"No, no, " Mr. Brunner said. "Oh, confound it all. What I'm trying to say ... You're not normal, Percy. That's nothing to be."

“I don’t even know what to say, that’s such a trainwreck,” Leo said.

“Normally I appreciate how blunt he can be, but gods, this just keeps getting worse and worse,” Jason said.

"Thanks, " I blurted. "Thanks a lot, sir, for reminding me."
"Percy-"

But I was already gone.

“That… that really sucks,” Leo said. “I’m really glad that wasn’t her last interaction with Chiron.”

“Gods, could you imagine?” Piper said. “That one interaction must’ve tainted all of her good memories of him from that year.”

On the last day of the term, I shoveled my clothes into my suitcase.

The other guys and girls were joking around, talking about their vacation plans. One of them was going on a hiking trip to Switzerland. Another was cruising the Caribbean for a month.

They were juvenile delinquents, like me, but they were rich juvenile delinquents. Their daddies were executives, or ambassadors, or celebrities. I was a nobody, from a family of nobodies.

“Zeus must not of liked her saying that,” Jason said.

“As her cousin, how does that make you feel, Jason?” Leo laughed.

“Good question Leo, since you’re also her cousin, why don’t you tell me?” Jason asked innocently.

“Ok, ok, boys,” Piper quickly intervened. “Lets calm down before somebody points out that Annabeth is also technically her cousin and we all die.”

“A good plan,” Annabeth said, idly picking at her fingernails with her knife, a move that they’d all seen Clarisse do when intimidating others.

They asked me what I’d be doing this summer and I told them I was going back to the city.
What I didn't tell them was that I'd have to get a summer job walking dogs or selling magazine subscriptions, and spend my free time worrying about where I'd go to school in the fall.

"Oh, " one of the guys said. "That's cool. "

They went back to their conversation as if I'd never existed.

“Rich kids are so rude,” Piper muttered.

The only person I dreaded saying good-bye to was Grover, but as it turned out, I didn't have to. He'd booked a ticket to Manhattan on the same Greyhound as I had, so there we were, together again, heading into the city.

“How convenient,” Annabeth said.

“Well at least Percy doesn’t seem to think too much about it!” Leo said, a tad optimistic.

During the whole bus ride, Grover kept glancing nervously down the aisle, watching the other passengers. It occurred to me that he'd always acted nervous and fidgety when we left Yancy, as if he expected something bad to happen. Before, I'd always assumed he was worried about getting teased. But there was nobody to tease him on the Greyhound.

Finally I couldn't stand it anymore.

I said, "Looking for Kindly Ones?"

“Oh. Nevermind then,” Leo said. “I guess now's the time for the confrontation.”

Grover nearly jumped out of his seat. "Wha - what do you mean?"
I confessed about eavesdropping on him and Mr. Brunner the night before the exam.

Grover's eye twitched. "How much did you hear?"

"Oh ... Not much. What's the summer solstice deadline?"


He winced. "Look, Percy ... I was just worried for you, see? I mean, hallucinating about demon math teachers ... "

“Now is way past the time to be covering your ass, Grover,” Jason said. “Now’s the time to haul ass to camp.”

“Jason! Language!” Leo exclaimed.

"Grover-"

"And I was telling Mr. Brunner that maybe you were overstressed or something, because there was no such person as Mrs. Dodds, and ... "

"Grover, you're a really, really bad liar."

His ears turned pink.

From his shirt pocket, he fished out a grubby business card. "Just take this, okay? In case you need me this summer.

“...Why are we giving dyslexic kids business cards?” Piper asked, her voice coloured faintly with disbelief.
“Do you even have to ask? Mr. D,” Annabeth rolled her eyes. “He writes them in cursive too, just to be even more of an ass.”

The card was in fancy script, which was murder on my dyslexic eyes, but I finally made out something like:

Grover Underwood

Keeper

Half-Blood Hill

Long Island, New York

(800) 009-0009

"What's Half-"

"Don't say it aloud!" he yelped. "That's my, um ... Summer address."

My heart sank. Grover had a summer home. I'd never considered that his family might be as rich as the others at Yancy.

“Poor kid surrounded by the rich asshats, I for sure know what that's like,” Leo said. “Sorry Pipes, but we should eat the rich.”

“Please, be my guest,” Piper said. “Most of us are assholes. I’m just glad that my dad donates a lot of what he makes. Otherwise I’d totally be on his case.”

"Okay, " I said glumly. "So, like, if I want to come visit your mansion. "
He nodded. "Or ... Or if you need me."

"Why would I need you?"

“Don’t be mean, Percy,” Annabeth scolded the image of her 12 year old girlfriend.

It came out harsher than I meant it to.

Grover blushed right down to his Adam's apple. "Look, Percy, the truth is, I - I kind of have to protect you."

“That’s not gonna fly so well after Nancy ‘Cheeto Freckles’ Bobofit,” Jason pointed out.

I stared at him.

All year long, I’d gotten in fights, keeping bullies away from him. I’d lost sleep worrying that he’d get beaten up next year without me. And here he was acting like he was the one who defended me.

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

Annabeth smiled sharply. “There’s the million dollar question.”

There was a huge grinding noise under our feet. Black smoke poured from the dashboard and the whole bus filled with a smell like rotten eggs. The driver cursed and limped the Greyhound over to the side of the highway.

“That,” Leo said. “Is not a good sign. Also if I was there I coulda fixed that real quick.”

“You can’t fix something the Fates themselves have decided to break, Repair Boy,” Piper said.
“That’s what Annabeth said this chapter was about, remember? So they’re probably the ones that broke it, and she’s going to run into them now.”

After a few minutes clanking around in the engine compartment, the driver announced that we’d all have to get off. Grover and I filed outside with everybody else.

We were on a stretch of country road - no place you'd notice if you didn't break down there. On our side of the highway was nothing but maple trees and litter from passing cars. On the other side, across four lanes of asphalt shimmering with afternoon heat, was an old-fashioned fruit stand.

Leo’s stomach chose that moment to gurgle. He patted it sheepishly, and pulled a granola bar out from his tool belt.

“... You have another one of those?” Piper asked after a moment. She nimbly caught the bar that Leo tossed to her. “Thanks!”

The stuff on sale looked really good: heaping boxes of blood red cherries and apples, walnuts and apricots, jugs of cider in a clawfoot tub full of ice. There were no customers, just three old ladies sitting in rocking chairs in the shade of a maple tree, knitting the biggest pair of socks I'd ever seen.

“I thought it was the thread of life, not the socks of life,” Leo said. “I wonder what colour my socks are? I hope they’re awesome and fire coloured.”

I mean these socks were the size of sweaters, but they were clearly socks. The lady on the right knitted one of them. The lady on the left knitted the other. The lady in the middle held an enormous basket of electric blue yarn.

“Shouldn’t her yarn be greener? If the yarn is supposed to represent the person than why isn’t her’s all sea green?” Jason asked. “Or at least a darker blue? That shade of blue can hardly be related to water at all.”

“Then it’s probably not her yarn,” Piper said.
“Maybe it’s somebody from one of her quests! She just completed the last great quest, didn’t she?” Leo suggested.

Annabeth looked sad as she explained, “Leo is right. The death that completed the last great quest… that was his yarn. He was a hero.”

All three women looked ancient, with pale faces wrinkled like fruit leather, silver hair tied back in white bandanas, bony arms sticking out of bleached cotton dresses.

The weirdest thing was, they seemed to be looking right at me.

I looked over at Grover to say something about this and saw that the blood had drained from his face. His nose was twitching.

"Grover?" I said. "Hey, man-"

"Tell me they're not looking at you. They are, aren't they?"

"Yeah. Weird, huh? You think those socks would fit me?"

“Well, you know what they say! Big feet means big-”

“Leo!”

“What? I was going to say big socks. Jeez guys, what did you think I was going to say?”

"Not funny, Percy. Not funny at all. "

The old lady in the middle took out a huge pair of scissors-gold and silver, long-bladed, like shears. I heard Grover catch his breath.
"We're getting on the bus," he told me. "Come on."

“You can’t run from the Fates, Grover,” Piper said.

"What?" I said. "It's a thousand degrees in there."

"Come on!" He pried open the door and climbed inside, but I stayed back.

Across the road, the old ladies were still watching me. The middle one cut the yarn, and I swear I could hear that snip across four lanes of traffic.

“Yeah, that’s pretty creepy,” Jason decided.

Piper shivered. “I don’t know if I can ever look at knitting the same way again.”

Her two friends balled up the electric blue socks, leaving me wondering who they could possibly be for - Sasquatch or Godzilla.

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

Leo gaped. “That’s… not even a part of a bus engine! Why couldn’t they make the breakdown more believable?”

The passengers cheered.

"Darn right!" yelled the driver. He slapped the bus with his hat. "Everybody back on board!"

Once we got going, I started feeling feverish, as if I'd caught the flu.
Grover didn't look much better. He was shivering and his teeth were chattering.

“Being close to that much power... they were both affected pretty bad,” Annabeth said.

"Grover?"

"Yeah?"

"What are you not telling me?"

He dabbed his forehead with his shirt sleeve. "Percy, what did you see back at the fruit stand?"

"You mean the old ladies? What is it about them, man? They're not like... Mrs. Dodds, are they?"

“First the Furies, then the Fates... gods, she’s going to keep running into worse and worse, isn’t she?” Piper asked.

“You don’t even know the half of it,” Annabeth said.

His expression was hard to read, but I got the feeling that the fruit-stand ladies were something much, much worse than Mrs. Dodds.

“She can be really observant, can’t she?” Jason asked.

He said, "Just tell me what you saw."

"The middle one took out her scissors, and she cut the yarn."
He closed his eyes and made a gesture with his fingers that might've been crossing himself, but it wasn't. It was something else, something almost - older.

“Really observant,” Jason repeated.

He said, "You saw her snip the cord."

"Yeah. So?" But even as I said it, I knew it was a big deal.

"This is not happening," Grover mumbled. He started chewing at his thumb. "I don't want this to be like the last time."

“Wh- last time? He ran into the Fates before?” Leo asked.

“No, no, uh, the last time Grover got a kid that powerful it… didn’t turn out well, to say the least,” Annabeth explained.

"What last time?"

"Always sixth grade. They never get past sixth."

"Grover," I said, because he was really starting to scare me. "What are you talking about?"

“That would really freak me out too,” Piper said.

“Yeah, she has like, no clue what he’s going on about. I mean, at least with us the whole thing wasn’t dragged out. No dreading anything, just boom! Monsters are real and your missing parental figures are gods,” Leo agreed.

"Let me walk you home from the bus station. Promise me."
This seemed like a strange request to me, but I promised he could.

"Is this like a superstition or something?" I asked.

“Or something,” Piper muttered.

No answer.

"Grover - that snipping of the yarn. Does that mean somebody is going to die?"

He looked at me mournfully, like he was already picking the kind of flowers I’d like best on my coffin.

Annabeth snorted. “Percy, he already knows you want blue water lilies and moonlace and you know it.”

“Percy has her funeral planned?” Jason asked.

“No, those ones are just her favourite. Plus, over the last year a lot of us, well… we didn’t really think that we were going to survive. We drew up funeral plans and wills for our families,” Annabeth explained as the scenery faded back to Percy’s cabin.

“On that sad note, I’m going to ask what the heck moonlace is. I’ve never heard of it before,” Piper said.

Annabeth waved her hand. “Oh, it’s a rare magical plant. It doesn’t do much besides glow at night. You’ll see more about it. Eventually.”

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!