Summary

It's nice not being the last demigod anymore. I'm back, better than ever, in my totally unbiased opinion, and ready to shake things up.
I'm back

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Ah, to be a kid again. Well, physically at least. I can never again be as innocent as I used to be. 'Who am I?', you might be wondering. Or not. I'll tell you anyways. My name is Percy Jackson. Or, well, technically it's Perseus Jackson, but I just go by Percy. Why can I never be innocent again, you ask? I'm a demigod, and not just any demigod.

I am the demigod son of Poseidon and Sally Jackson, and I just have to say, it's nice not being the last demigod anymore. Being the last demigod hero in the world isn't fun, let me tell you. Especially when you're being chased by Giants. Especially that bastard Porphyron. I can't even count the number of times I almost became grilled sea food for the king of the giants. Or, well, not technically grilled, but you get the idea. Polybotes was hardly a challenge in comparison, for all that he was born to oppose my dad. And by hardly a challenge, I mean he was a little less impossible to beat.

And now I won't have to deal with the giants for another five years. How great is that? Of course, I'll have to face other monsters, but that should be a piece of cake. I've been killing monsters for so long I can hardly remember a time when I wasn't. Or, well, they'll be a piece of cake once I get back in shape. Hey, that rhymed, sort of.

See, that's the downside to once again being a twelve year old. I've got a twelve year old's body. I'd never really cared about my appearance before, but seeing my scrawny preteen body was kind of depressing. I'd really need to work on fixing that.

You know what else is depressing? Homework. Going back in time certainly hadn't cured my Dyslexia, and it wasn't like I'd been doing a lot of math in between running for my life and facing down giants. Mostly running; even with the great shape I'd been in before I came back, I still certainly hadn't been able to fight all day, and the most I could do to damage the giants was trivial in the long run. With no gods left, there'd been no way of killing a giant in the longterm. Even before Apollo had died and before we- I could no longer kill the gigantes, they still tended to reform within a week. I could beat them to death all I wanted; they just wouldn't compromise on the 'death' part. It was honestly really demoralizing.

I think you're getting the idea of where I came from. That's right: the future. I came from the future. 'Bullshit,' I bet you're saying. 'Time travel isn't possible.' Well, I didn't think monsters were real about eight years ago. You've just got to learn to accept things like that. Want to know how I came back? Well, too bad. I'm sure you're all really great and trustworthy people- oh, wait, no I'm not. But really, I don't think there's anyone I can trust with a time travel method. Being all alone and hunted tends to make you paranoid. I'm no exception.

I mean, I'll still do the hero gig, but I'm gonna be questioning a lot more, and making sure the person I'm helping isn't a monster in disguise before doing anything. I was far too trusting last time, and I tended to get lucky quite a bit. I can't rely on that again. Just by coming back, I've changed things; in the short term, maybe for the worse. But I will not let it get as bad as it did last time; that's a promise. I'm not keen on living the greek apocalypse over again.

Speaking of the short term . . . homework. Yeah, I really hate math. Like, I would be fine never seeing any numbers over three digits ever again. At least I aced Latin; that time with the Romans really paid off, at least in that regard. On the other hand, I really really hate math. In case you
didn't understand me, I really really really hate math. Ok, I think you've got the idea, and if you don't . . . you've got problems, my friend.

Back to the important matters; I'm in the past. And I gotta say, so far I'm really not having fun. I tried to stop my mom from getting stolen by Hades, but he just ended up sending a small army of skeletons at me once I took out the minotaur a little bit more easily than someone of my age and supposed experience should have been able to.

Now, normally skeletons wouldn't bother me, but again, I'm twelve again, with only Riptide in the weaponry department. If only I could just shoot them down from afar, it would be so much easier. The thing is, looking back on it, I realize that it's rather ironic that I wanted a bow to face the skeletons. I used to be pants at archery. But having Apollo's blessing does that to you. Makes you a better marksman; as far as I know, it doesn't make you addicted to bows. I was decent before the blessing; Apollo had decided to teach me enough archery to get by, partly to help me, and partly because we were both bored out of our minds. Running from giants was somewhat exciting the first time, maybe even the second through tenth times. After that, it just got repetitive and mind-numbingly boring.

Getting a blessing from a god is a big deal. I know that, even after only being blessed once. But what a blessing it was! Apollo had blessed me as he lay on the ground, soaking ichor through his tunic. And I was glad he had in the months I'd had to survive without him there.

When you think of Apollo, you think of the Sun first. Then, you probably think of archery, music, medicine, and prophecy, in that order. His blessing gave me all of that. Where I'd been barely a decent archer before, even with Apollo's personal instruction, I suddenly knew how to shoot perfectly. It didn't make me a perfect archer right off; it took work, and I had to train my muscles to pull back the bow string. Let me tell you, shooting a bow and arrow uses entirely different muscles from swinging a sword.

And the flashes of precognition were particularly helpful. I'd only get them in battle, and at no other times, so it wasn't like I'd turned into a seer or taken the mantle of the Oracle of Delphi or something ridiculous like that. But I could see flashes of the future in battle; I'd seen those flashes when I faced the minotaur, and I was seeing them while facing the skeletons. It was actually pretty helpful when I was facing titans and giants; the early warnings made up somewhat for the fact that I was actually pretty physically inferior, strength-wise and sometimes in the speed department as well. Demigods are usually better physically than normal humans, but even we have limits.

And I think I'm actually a decent singer now. I tried all of once after the blessing, and vowed never to sing again, even in the shower. It was just so weird, having a good singing voice. I'm Percy Jackson, demigod hero and professional monster slayer. I am not and never will be a singer.

I didn't get any major powers of healing and I certainly didn't achieve the skill of any Apollo kid in the subject. The only thing I really noticed was a slightly faster regeneration from injuries; a healing factor, if you will. And when I say slightly faster, I mean it's hardly even noticeable. The only thing it's really done is heal some minor scrapes, bruises and rashes overnight. So, helpful, but any of the bigger injuries, I'll need water to heal.

The precognition was the main reason I knew I still had Apollo's blessing. What I wouldn't give at that moment for a bow and some arrows, so I could pick the skeletons off from afar. Don't get me wrong; I still love sword fighting. But you also need to understand that against some enemies, Riptide is no more than a toothpick. I preferred- and still prefer actually- to hit enemies of that level with a few sonic arrows before actually engaging in open combat.

I haven't mentioned any powers relating to the sun yet, have I? Well, that's because I didn't get any.
Maybe I'm more heat resistant, but I was already pretty much flame proof from being a son of Poseidon, and I have no desire to reach my heat limit. So no, I didn't test that and I assume I didn't get any powers related to the sun. I don't feel more powerful during the daytime or anything either.

"Damn you, Hades," I growled out as I tore through a skeleton. "You're a vindictive bastard, aren't you? And you did it for nothing; I don't have Zeus' precious bolt," I told what looked like the leader before I sliced through his waist, separating his torso from his legs and dissolving him. I knew Hades had to be watching somehow; he really was somewhat of a sadist. After being forced to stay in the Underworld for Millennia, I don't blame him. Doesn't mean I wasn't majorly pissed off at his stealing my mother. I finished off the last of the skeletons and headed up the hill towards where Grover was still lying, passed out. The one good thing about fighting skeletons is that there's no blood or flying monster dust to mess up my clothes.

"Can you get him to the infirmary?" I asked the blonde girl on the other side of the barrier. "I need to go talk to Chiron."

"Yeah," she said. Nothing more. She seemed wary of me, which was really only natural after seeing me kill all those monsters with relative ease. Even in my twelve year old body, I'll still be one of the most powerful demigods in camp. Once I get back in shape, I predict I'll be back on the front lines as a leader. No, that's not any kind of prophetic power; just a hunch.

I did a double take, turning around and glancing at the girl lifting Grover. It was Annabeth. Now that I thought about it, I could vaguely remember Chiron telling me that Annabeth had found me and Grover the first time, back when I was actually twelve.

Now, Annabeth was a tricky subject for me. I had loved her at one point, and I'll always hold a soft spot in my heart for her. But she had been one of the first casualties in the giant war, and I hadn't seen her alive in three years. I definitely wasn't going to date a fourteen year old, especially because she wasn't the same Annabeth and probably never would be. I wouldn't dishonor her memory by getting together with her doppelganger, no matter how much I could probably convince myself that they were the same person if I tried.

I turned and began walking purposefully towards the big house. And lo and behold, there was Chiron, standing just outside. Thankfully, he'd had time to get ready; I didn't really want to see his hair in curlers. It was a pretty weird sight. His eyes widened when he saw me, and he visibly started. Probably hadn't expected to see me, or he'd have brought out his wheelchair.

"Ah, young Perseus," he said. "A pleasure to meet you."

"Drop the act," I said flatly. "I know you were Mr. Brunner and I'm not in the mood for games right now."

"Well then," he said. "Shall we head inside?"

"Might as well," I said, following him in.

"So," he said, turning around to face me as soon as I entered. "I do have a few questions."

"Okay, wait," I said. "I'll give you some information, and we'll see if you still have questions after that." He didn't look satisfied with this arrangement, but I continued. "Ok, so, first, yes, I did just kill a minotaur and a ton of undead soldiers. Yes, Hades did kidnap my mother, and yes, she is still alive. No, I did not steal the master bolt, or Hades' helm of darkness. My demigod father is Poseidon. Still have questions?" A little belatedly, a trident appeared over my head, glowing and everything.
"Yes," Chiron said drily. "Yes, I do."

"Fire away," I said, waving my hand.

"How did you learn about this world? You obviously are a bit more experienced than a new demigod."

"I went through Grover's things. He went through mine before when he was searching for the sword pen. So yeah, only fair. And then I found an Apollo kid kinda by accident. Michael Yew, I think? Anyways, you can check with him but I asked him some questions and he told me about the camp. And then my mom confirmed the information that she could." I had made sure to find Michael and ask him some questions, so he would end up corroborating my story. But I had lied about it being an accident. I still remembered his address from when I'd personally gone and informed his parents of his death. Others offered to do it for me, but that was one death I couldn't let someone else take credit for. Even if he had told me to, it had still been my decision to sacrifice him in the end.

"And how do you know that it was Hades who kidnapped your mother?" Chiron prodded.

"Really?" I shrugged when he continued staring. "I was attacked by a bunch of undead soldiers. Figured Hades had to be involved." Actually, I'm a bit thankful that happened now. My claims of it being Hades' doing would mostly have fallen flat if everything had gone the way it had the first time.

"Ah, fair enough, Perseus," Chiron said.


"If that is what you wish," Chiron said. "How did you know that Zeus' master bolt had been stolen? I only learned of it two days ago, when Dionysus personally informed me."

"Ah, that," I said. "I did some searching after that Fury accused me of stealing it."

"Do not call them by their names or titles, Percy," Chiron chided me.

"Fine, fine." I actually wasn't used to not calling the furies by name. After Gaia took over, they were some of the few monsters to ally with me, other than Mrs. O'leary. They actually had been rather attached to the Lord of the Dead, and hadn't been too happy with the giants when they had killed the Furies' master. But now . . . guess I'd have to get used to avoiding their names and titles again.

"What did your searching turn up, then?" Chiron asked me, trying to get the conversation back on track.

"Not much," I admitted. I had researched it online just so I could say that I had, but it really hadn't been very fruitful. "But I do know that I didn't steal it. I don't have it on me and I don't know how I'd hide something like that." Not true. I could hide it in a backpack and give it to a questing demigod. Although, honestly, that was incredibly stupid of Ares. To be fair, though, he was being manipulated.

"And how do you know that Hades has lost his symbol of power?" Chiron asked. "I was not informed of this."

"Just an educated guess, really," I said. "I don't have any concrete proof but Hades seems to have specifically targeted me. He sent a Fury after me, as well as the Minotaur and the skeletons. I don't
believe he would do that just for some leverage over Zeus and a weapon that he probably couldn't use to its full potential."

"So no evidence," Chiron said. "And please stop naming the monsters."

"No," I admitted, ignoring his request. "But it seems kind of fishy that Hades would kidnap my mom right when Zeus and Poseidon started fighting, or a little after."

"Judging from your answers to my previous questions, you most likely have a completely rational explanation, and I doubt there's any point in asking but . . . how do you know that Zeus and your father are fighting?"

"Well," I said. "Maybe it's the fact that there's a lightning storm going on, and there was pretty much a full force hurricane starting when we left Montauk. Not that the hurricane wasn't helpful when I fought the Minotaur and the skeletons, don't get me wrong. The water really made it a lot easier."

"How so?" Chiron asked, seeming genuinely curious.

"The water," I said "makes me faster, and stronger. I assume it's something from being a son of Poseidon. Whatever it is, I'm pretty thankful for it."

"Very well then," Chiron said, sighing. "Now that we've sorted out your information, and your sources, you might as well head to your cabin."

"Um, what?" It would have been nice to just have people know that I knew everything, but it would be really inconvenient if everyone knew that I'd come back. So for now, I had to let myself be shown everything.

"Ah, that's right," Chiron said. "You already knew so much that I forgot that you are, in fact, a new demigod. This way please." I followed Chiron to my cabin in silence. Luckily, he did happen to remember that I'd been claimed by Poseidon, so he led me to my father's cabin instead of Hermes'. I'd have to find some other way to meet Luke. While his long and somewhat maniacal speeches had gotten boring around the first time he'd recited one in my presence, he was a useful source of information, what with his habit of boasting. Come to think of it, he'd only really preached to me about twice; what can I say? I get bored really quickly.

And then there was the fact that I planned to save him; it wasn't his fault that he felt abandoned by the gods; since I was hoping to fix that little problem, and since he'd been genuinely regretful at the end last time, technically saving us all, I couldn't in good conscience leave him to die again. And yes, despite my acquired paranoia, I do still have a conscience.

"This is where I leave you, young Perseus- Percy." Chiron corrected himself, thankfully, which probably boded well for him remembering my chosen name in the future. Heh, in the future. Okay, I'll admit that really wasn't that funny. I don't know why I laughed, actually. I was probably delirious from lack of sleep.

"Night," I said, holding my hand up in a still wave as Chiron turned and presumably headed back towards the big house.

Sleep didn't come easily to me- it hadn't in a long time. I did manage to get some, at least, and being in my old bed in the Poseidon cabin helped somewhat.

When I woke up, I just splashed some water on my face to counter the lack of rest. Luckily, water had always been a little like coffee for me; it granted me energy in the morning when I was too
tired to even think straight. It was really fortunate actually, since I'd never really acquired a taste for the bitter drink.

I was reminded of the fact that I was actually a new camper when Chiron stood up for morning announcements. "Good morning heroes, and welcome back to the camp for our non year-rounders. We also have a new camper. Please welcome Percy Jackson, son of Poseidon." I groaned under my breath as he sat back down.

Somehow I hadn't realized that when I had assured my early claiming, it would be broadcast across camp. I should have, I know, but I'd had a lot of things on my mind last night. So sue me. Or don't. I'd rather you didn't really; I have very little non demigod money and even less drachmas.

I regretted not having the chance to just be Percy; it was really frustrating last time, but I figured I could have handled it way easier this time. Well, I'd just had to go and ruin it immediately, hadn't I? Although I probably would have felt a little bad about being mistaken for an Apollo kid when they saw my archery skills. That certainly hadn't been a problem last time.

I'd just have to get used to being hailed as a son of one of the big three, without being known throughout the camp as a stand up guy first. Or at least an amiable sort- an average demigod like everyone else. Oh well.

There was a lot of clamor when Chiron announced my demigodishness and parentage, but it had died down by the time I was led around the training grounds by Grover. It was nice to see him again, even if he was a fledgeling satyr rather than a more experienced lord of the wild.

Of course, this time, he knew I was a son of Poseidon, so he actually led me to the pond and the canoes first. I spent almost the entire time smiling awkwardly at the Naiads. I could vaguely remember Annabeth telling me the first time that they were terrible flirts. That was one thing I could do without; being older hadn't made me smoother with the fairer sex, at all. I hadn't become some Casanova while fighting giants and running for my life. Especially with all the demigods wiped out, and only having Apollo for company for a good two years. I'm not into guys, at all, no matter what rumors people might have started up about me and Jason. In fact, just so you know how inexperienced I still am, I'll tell you this: I'm still a virgin.

What a shock, right? How can you have been a virgin at the age of twenty, you may ask. Oh wait, this is the first time I've told you my mental age? Oops. Well, now you might be asking that question. And I'll answer. Just so there aren't more unsubstantiated rumors about my covering up some one night stand or failed relationship or something like that.

Thing is, I like to have a connection with someone. Like, my sexual partner. Not that I've ever had a sexual partner, though I'd like to think Annabeth and I were getting there. But if or when I do have one, it won't be with someone I don't know or someone I'm just acquaintances with.

So yeah, I spent the whole time smiling awkwardly at the Naiads, and zooming around in a canoe way faster than it probably should have been going. But I enjoyed using my water powers, especially for something as trivial as canoeing. It was a nice change from summoning tidal waves and hurricanes and knocking myself out for days by summoning a massive storm.

Next, Grover took me around to the archery range, mostly due to my insistence. He actually had wanted to take me to sword fighting next. But I knew that I was still good at sword fighting, at least against monsters. I was confident in my sword skills, and I really just wanted to make sure that I hadn't lost my archery skills in the transfer. It had taken years to work my way up to my previous skill level, with training from the god of archery himself, and I just wanted to make sure that it was a skill that I could still count on.
It was a much better way of fighting giants than sword fighting for sure. I'd mainly tried to keep my distance and pick them off with various arrows that Apollo had seen fit to give me. Even after he was gone, I tended to prefer sonic arrows over fighting up close with Riptide. I tended to save that for the small fry, the monsters that I was sure I could take without being fatally wounded. You know, laistrygonians, hyperborean and southern cyclopes, hellhounds, drakons. Yeah, small fry like that. Most other monsters weren't really worth mentioning at all.

I rocked at the archery range. Well, not completely. It took me a couple tries to center my aim and my muscles were burning after only ten shots, but I had an Apollo kid nodding in appreciation of my talent, so I'm gonna say my archery skills have held up pretty well.

Next was the arena. It wasn't a very fulfilling experience, seeing as there were only a few kids from the Demeter and Hermes cabins fooling around. So I mostly kicked butt; I didn't really enjoy kicking butt, seeing as I'd much rather get some actual practice, but unfortunately, that wasn't an option. Too bad Luke wasn't there, really. Say what you will about him, but he's an extremely talented swordsman.

Sadly, I was as slow as I'd been the first time. Still unable to outrun trees. To be fair, dryads weren't actually trees; they certainly weren't unable to move. And most of them had been outrunning gods for centuries or Millenia, so I didn't feel horrible about my loss. It did, however, remind me that I really needed to get back in shape.

That night at dinner, I belatedly realize that I didn't really have any toiletries. I'd slept on the bed in the Poseidon cabin with only a thin blanket, and hadn't thought much of it, mostly because I'd been used to conditions like that in the future. In the other timeline, it had been Luke who stole some for me from the camp store. To this day, I wasn't sure if he'd been joking about that; what with him being a child of Hermes, it could very well have been true.

When we were sacrificing to the gods, I made sure to sacrifice to Dad first. "To Poseidon," I muttered. "Um, I hate to ask for favors when we don't even really know each other, Dad. But I kinda need allowance. Maybe just five drachma; enough to buy some basic necessities from the camp store." I really did feel kinda bad about asking for that, because it felt a little like taking advantage of my dad, since I was twenty mentally. I should have my own money. And also because I knew dad felt guilty for not being around and would probably agree to almost anything right now. I couldn't wait until I actually met him for real again and got all that sorted out, with quickly stifled tears, manly hugs, and some dad-son bonding time. Maybe this time, I could actually secure a visit to Atlantis without almost getting blown up in the process of destroying a monster cruise ship.

In the morning, I found five golden drachma under my pillow. Don't ask me how my dad had gotten them there, or how he managed to put in the fountain before I went back, because I have no idea. I always just chalk it up to 'godly powers'.

The next morning, I had a different god to sacrifice to. "To Apollo. Uh, I know you don't know me, but there's something I kinda need to discuss with you. I'm probably going to be getting a quest soon, so if you could just stop by for a chat . . . you're probably really busy with your sun chariot and all, but I'm not trying to get godly interference on the quest or anything. If you could stop by for like ten minutes during the quest, there's something I need to tell you personally." Hopefully, he'd listened to my rambling, and not just ignored it.

I mostly spent the next few days until capture the flag just obsessively training. Sword fighting, archery, interval training. I even took a couple tries on the climbing wall, lava and everything, though I wouldn't get back to my former ease with it for a while.
And then it was time. At least a hellhound would be easy to deal with if Luke brought one in this time. I'd chosen to side with the Athena cabin, mostly because I'd been avoiding Clarisse all week. I don't want to get the newbie introduction, but I also don't want to alienate her. So my goal was to avoid her for a year, until the Sea of Monsters debacle comes around. So far, it had been working pretty well.

"You're on border patrol," Luke told me. Even though everyone knew now that I was a son of Poseidon, I was still a newbie. Untested. And so I'd get the boring jobs, like border patrol, until I'd proven myself.

We were sort of friends this time; I'd made sure to spar with him a few times, and he had offered me pointers, even while praising my exceptional sword skills. The fact that I still couldn't beat him with all my experience just goes to show that Luke really was an extraordinary swordsman. Of course, that was mainly due to my reduced reach and average- poor for a demigod- physical condition. I was getting stronger and faster, but not as quickly as I'd have liked to. I was fairly sure that in a couple of years, I would be able to beat Luke nine times out of ten- not because I've ever been inherently better than him, outside of water, or because I'm some speed demon at full physical capacity, but because I knew how Luke fought. I knew his style and I'd been scheming up ways to counter it ever since I'd started planning on going back.

"Got it," I said. As he had before, he'd gotten me outfitted with a shield the size of an NBA blackboard. I'd considered grabbing a bow and arrows, but border patrol was a more close up job. I wouldn't have much time to shoot when Ares kids came rushing out of the trees. And I also just wanted to have some use for my sword in a straight up fight after using only hit and run tactics for so long. So I stuck with Riptide, and ditched the shield by the river. I'd pick it up later and return it; I'd used a shield before, but only the wristwatch shield that Tyson had given me. A big bulky shield would hinder me more than it would help.

The border patrol was mostly pretty boring until Clarisse came rushing out of the woods with her four siblings. The difference between this time and the first time this had happened was astronomical. Last time, I'd been a new demigod, inexperienced and genuinely afraid I'd be killed during the game, I'd also had practically nothing in the way of actual skills back then. Now, I was an experienced demigod and an expert swordsman. I was also confident that I could beat the Ares campers, and I was ready for their attack.

As soon as the five barreled out of the trees, I was on the left one, smashing the hilt of my sword over his head before ducking Clarisse's spear, which I made sure to slice in half as I ran past, body slamming the second nameless Ares camper into a tree; he crumpled and didn't get up. As the third went down from an elbow to the face, I took the opportunity to trip the fourth one as he came rushing at me. I crouched down to smash his face into the ground with the hilt of sword.

Clarisse looked a lot less confident without her cronies- ahem, siblings- and without her primary weapon. When I glared at her, still flushed with adrenaline, she held up her hands and surrendered. It honestly hadn't been what I was expecting. I'd been expecting Clarisse to be much more hotheaded and to fight against her inevitable defeat, but apparently she could recognize a lose-lose situation.

I supposed I was biased against her, due to our mutual animosity for my first few years at camp, and the fact that I hadn't really seen her since I'd come back, and so had been building up the image of a hot tempered bully. Which she was, somewhat, but evidently not to the degree I'd been picturing her as.

"I'm tying you to a tree," I told her. "No sudden moves, or I'll smash you over the head as well,
ok?" She nodded, and I took a rope from where I'd left it near a tree and did just that. Luckily for her, she didn't try to struggle or sneak attack me. 'Why did I have a rope?', you might ask. 'Why not?' is my answer.

I heard cheering and watched Luke sprint across the boundary line twenty feet away, securing victory for the Athena cabin. That meant the hellhound couldn't be far behind. It hadn't been that long last time. Sure enough, thirty seconds into the celebrations, I found myself dodging a wall of black fur. I twisted past its next lunge, slicing it along its side with Riptide as I went. The cut was deep enough to cut halfway through the hellhound, and it was obviously fatal, as the hellhound exploded into golden dust seconds later.

Really, did you expect a hellhound to give me trouble? I think of drakons as small fry. That should really tell you something. Okay . . . to tell you the truth, even I had expected it give me trouble. Drakons aren't exactly small fry; it's just that sonic arrows take them down just as easily as they do any other monster, and I'd kind of gotten used to not having to face it up close with a sword. And I had faced hellhounds up close even just hours before I'd come back, but that had been with my older body.

I'd expected my lack of agility to be my downfall here. Which was why my quick victory over the hellhound was a little surprising. Well, I reasoned, it was most likely the fact that hellhounds telegraph their attacks a lot. Sure, they're fast, but when I see one leaping, I just have to roll or twist out of the way, and I'm safe. They never feint; it's always just a straight line, from their position to their demigod victim.

I heard a couple panicked screams from people who noticed the hellhound, but most people hadn't really had that much time to notice it. So I headed over to Chiron. "Uh, sir, are giant black dogs part of the game?" I tried to sound as young and naive as I could. For one thing, it would make sure that he didn't look too much into the fact that I was ready for the hellhound, and would just chalk it up to luck or good awareness. For another, it was actually a little funny.

"Uh, so it's not part of the game?" I asked as Chiron flinched and started pulling his bow off of his back.

"I already killed it, don't worry." He froze, turning his head slowly to face me. "It was over there, by where I tied up Clarisse!"

"Erm, yes. Very good, Percy. If you could untie her . . . that would be much appreciated." He didn't seem to be paying me much attention anymore, lost in his thoughts, so I shrugged and headed over to where Clarisse was tied up.

"Hey, good game," I said as I reached her and began to untie her.

"Maybe for you," she muttered. "You were ready for us."

Damn, I'd been hoping she wouldn't notice. But it was kinda hard for her not to at least guess that I'd known they were coming, given my literally immediate response.

"Yeah, I heard you coming," I lied nonchalantly.

"You won't get me so easily next time," she growled at me.

"Oh, I know," I said. She looked a little taken aback by that. Probably expected me to refute her statement or talk about how much of a one sided battle it had been. It had been, but mostly because I had eight years of experience fighting monsters, and she'd been mostly sheltered in camp since
she arrived. That didn't mean she would ever beat me. She would probably be a teensy, tiny bit more difficult to deal with during our next clash, so I technically wasn't lying. But I'd mostly said it because there was no point in alienating her.

"Um, ok," she said, blinking.

"Your siblings are still where they got knocked out," I called over my shoulder as I began to head over to the celebrations that I knew were being set up in the pavilion. I didn't wait for her response. I probably should have waited for a thank you or something, but whatever. I just wanted to get something to eat and go to bed. I had a big day tomorrow.

I got to bed around nine, which was really rather early for me, but I knew I needed the rest. I woke up once or twice in the middle of the night, but managed to get back to sleep each time.

Chapter End Notes

Percy's not majorly overpowered here. He's also not a genius, but he is somewhat wiser- probably because he survived on the run for a few years after witnessing pretty much the end of the world. He's a little paranoid, but not to a ridiculous degree. He'll be more careful but most monsters can't disguise themselves from him, as experienced as he now is, so he's not super worried about being caught off guard.

This is a Percy/Artemis pairing. In my not so humble opinion, I think I can pull off the relationship better than all the idiots who've written it on ff.net. There's no harem, because anyone who thinks that Artemis would accept being in a harem or being just a fling is an idiot- can't walk and talk at the same time levels of idiocy. The relationship won't commence until a time between Titan's Curse and Battle of the Labyrinth. I've actually already written that particular scene, but I still have a number of chapters to go before it'll get posted. The get-together itself isn't the climax of the story; the fic doesn't focus a lot on romance, aside from a few scenes. I just had the overwhelming urge to write the scene prematurely, a while back. I'll update whenever I can- at some points, the updates will be about a week apart, while at others, it will take me over a month to finish the next chapter.
I murder and rob an old lady

Chapter Summary

It's nice not being the last demigod anymore. I'm back, better than ever, in my totally unbiased opinion, and ready to shake things up.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

In the morning, I went through with my normal routine. Splash some water on my face, brush my teeth, get dressed. That was pretty much it. I'm not really a complicated guy, and I luckily didn't have any kind of acne to cover up. My face was remarkably clear for a teenager, although that might just be some demigod thing. I hadn't really seen anyone else in camp with any. Haven't ever, come to think of it. So was it some demigod power? The power to not get pimples?

I had blue waffles and orange juice for breakfast, and I made sure to sacrifice some to Dad first. I took my time eating, since I planned to go to the big house right after I was done. I remembered vaguely that it had been another week or so before I'd gotten the quest last time, but I wasn't looking to maintain continuity.

If I can do something faster, do something better, I'll do it. I'm not going to try to make everything go exactly the same until the Giant war. That would be literally impossible, for one thing, and for another, it just isn't my style. I'm not going to sit back and let all of those scorned demigods get killed for just being on the wrong side; I'm not going to let Grover get kidnapped. I'm not going to let Annabeth get kidnapped. I'm not going to let myself get kidnapped, and I'm not going to let Jason get kidnapped. I will do everything in my power to prevent any sort of tragedies that I can remember. Screw the fates. I'll never say that out loud, because they might hear and make my life complete Hades- more so than it already is, I mean- but I was sure thinking it pretty strongly.

When I got to the big house, I knocked on the door. Argus was the one to open it; the sight of his many visible eyes was still a little creepy, but I tried not to dwell on that. "Hey. Can I talk to Chiron?" Of course, Argus didn't say anything; he physically couldn't. He stepped aside so I could go through the door, closing it behind me.

I found Chiron near the pool table. I cleared my throat and he visibly started. It looked like he'd been working on some kind of map, but I decided I didn't care enough to ask about it. "Ah, Percy," he said. "What can I do for you?"

"I want to go save my mother," I told him bluntly, projecting the image of a stubborn, hotheaded young demigod. I couldn't tell him about the future, so I would instead make a big fuss about my mom, as I might have had I known for sure that she was alive the first time around. I also couldn't come right out and say I wanted a quest, but Chiron would use this opportunity to kick start my quest for the lightning bolt.

"All in good time," he told me sagely.

"Now's a good time," I said, rolling my eyes. "I'm leaving with or without your permission. I'd just like to have it, you know, because I do respect you, and your opinion . . . but this is too important
"Very well," Chiron said. "The only way you will get my official permission is if this is a quest."

"So assign me a quest," I prompted, knowing full well I'd have to visit the oracle.

"I'm afraid it doesn't work that way," he told me, shaking his head. "You will need to enter the attic and speak to the Oracle."

"Oracle?" I asked. "Like the Oracle of Delphi?"

"Exactly," Chiron said. "Well done. You did ace my class, if I'm recalling correctly."

"So, by attic, you mean the attic of this place?" I asked, mostly just to maintain my cover as a 'new camper'.

"Yes," he said.

"Got it," I said, flashing him a grin. "See you in a few."

I trudged up the stairs to the attic, wondering the whole way about the prophecy. Would it be different because I'd traveled back? I reached the top and headed straight for the mummy, on one side of the attic.

"Hit me with it," I told it. Yeah, I'm not going to go with something lame like 'I seek guidance from the esteemed Oracle of Delphi' or 'Read me my fate, great Oracle'.

The prophecy was the same as last time, luckily. I'd made my plans based on it being the same, and so this was the best option I could have hoped for.

"Well?" Chiron asked when I came down from.

"She told me, and I quote, 'You shall go west, and face the god who has turned. You shall find what was stolen, and see it safely returned. You shall be betrayed by one who calls you a friend. And you shall fail to save what matters most in the end.'" I saw no reason to keep it from him this time. The only worrying part was the part about being betrayed by a friend.

I knew Luke was going to betray me, and I'd specifically made sure to spar with him regularly to make sure I was friends with him again. However, I hoped that him giving me the flying shoes would be the only betrayal and that I could get by without being stung by a paralytic, highly deadly scorpion.

"That is troubling," Chiron said. "But most prophecies are. Don't fret. They often have surprise meanings."

"Surprise meaning or not," I growled. "I'm not failing to get my mother back, prophecies be damned."

"It is not wise to scorn the Oracle's warnings, young demigod," Chiron told me sternly.

"I'll scorn its warning when it tells me that there's nothing I can do to stop my mother from dying. Sorry, Chiron, but I'm not going to give up just because a prophecy tells me I'll fail. If I stop trying to save my mother, I'll fail anyways."

"Very well." Chiron sighed, but I caught the hint of a smile, and I realized that Chiron was proud of me, of my conviction. Of course, that was a quality he probably enjoyed seeing in heroes; the
willingness to keep going when everything is against them. "You will need two more quest members."

"One's easy," I said. "Grover."

"And do you have an idea for the third?" Chiron asked.

"Nope," I said, popping the P. Well, I did have an idea, but I'd rather that Chiron suggest it. I'd really never met Annabeth in this timeline, aside from asking her to take Grover to the infirmary.

"Luckily for you, I do," Chiron said. "If you'll have her, the third member has already volunteered." I glanced around, wondering if Annabeth was going to remove her cap and become visible, before realizing that I'd come here unexpected, and Chiron had had no time to get her.

"Who?" I asked.

"Annabeth Chase," he said. "She is a child of Athena. As such, I believe she will be a great help on your quest . . . and stop you from jumping into Tartarus head first." He didn't make any effort to muffle that last part, or to apologize for it. I suppose I had built up a reputation of being reckless and headstrong already. Oh well.

I tried to look offended, but couldn't quite manage it. "It's nice to know you care, Chiron," I said drily, rolling my eyes and smiling.

"Off with you, young demigod," he told me, trying to look stern. He barely managed it, and I saw his lips twitching before I turned to head out of the big house. One really good thing had come from the conversation. I was starting to build a relationship with Chiron once again. I'd been a little worried that my different attitude would keep me from connecting with everyone who I'd been friendly with before. And maybe it would, when it came to some people, but it was nice to know that it wasn't completely ruining my chances of connecting with former friends and allies.

It only took me a minute to get to the Athena cabin, and when I did, one of Annabeth's brothers opened it, looking slightly annoyed. I'd probably interrupted his studying, or cross word puzzling, or sudoku-ing, or whatever Athena kids did in their spare time. I'd only really interacted with Annabeth and a couple others before; they'd been the more social ones. And even they spent way too much of their time doing smart people things. I really didn't want to know what even less social Athena kids did with their time.

"Yes?" he asked. "What is it?"

"I'm here to see Annabeth," I said. He didn't respond, but he turned around, closing the door behind him. Thirty seconds later, when I was starting to get impatient, Annabeth opened the door.

"Yes?" She sounded just as annoyed as her brother.

"I'm looking for a third member on my quest," I said. "Would you be interested?"

"This isn't a prank, is it?" she asked skeptically.

"No."

"I'm in," she said, looking as determined as I'd ever seen her. This was making me feel good pretty about my decision to include her. I'd debated taking someone else, or forgoing the rule of three and just taking Grover, but in the end I'd decided on Annabeth, mostly because I remembered that she'd been waiting forever to get out of camp and into the real world before.
"Good," I said. "We're leaving at ten AM tomorrow."

"I'll be there," she said, and that was that.

I found Grover by the strawberry fields, where he was playing 'So Yesterday' to the strawberries. I tapped him on the shoulder and as he stopped, I swear I heard the strawberries sigh in relief.

"What's up, Percy?" he asked me.

We weren't exactly as tight as we'd been before. I'd been pretty standoffish, even when we'd been 'best friends' this past year. But can you blame me? I'd found a way to save the world, and I was trying to cope with my years without rest or relief. I didn't have a lot of attention to spend on casual relationships when I first came back. But we'd still technically been best friends, so maybe I could get this relationship back to the point it had been before, if I put some effort into it.

"Hey, G-man," I said. "I'm going on a quest. Wanna come?"

"What kind of quest?" he asked me, seeming to perk up slightly.

"Oh, you know," I said.

"No, no I don't."

"Just small stuff," I said nonchalantly. "Finding and retrieving Zeus' master bolt, getting my mother out of the underworld- we'll probably kill a few monsters on the way. Nothing too big."

Grover stared at me in disbelief until I finally couldn't keep a straight face anymore and burst out laughing. He giggled nervously, releasing the tension he'd probably felt when he thought I was either delusional or in shock.

"So, you in?" I asked.

"Yeah," he said, nodding. "When do we leave?"

"Tomorrow, ten AM," I said. "We'll meet in front of Thalia's tree. Argus is gonna drive us to a bus stop where we can hopefully catch a bus to LA."

"Sounds good, Perce," Grover said. "Wait, how do you know about Thalia?"

"You didn't tell me?" I asked. Really, it's pretty difficult to keep track of what I should and shouldn't know. He shook his head. "Ah, well, I probably heard it around somewhere."

"Yeah, probably," Grover said, still staring at me a little strangely.

Late next morning, we were all gathered in front of Thalia's tree. Me, Annabeth, and Grover. Chiron was there as well and Argus was standing off to the side, waiting for us to get in the camp van, which was parked on the side of the road in front of the hill.

Luke came running up, clutching a pair of sneakers, just like last time.

"Hey!" he panted. "Glad I caught you."

Annabeth blushed, as per usual. Good to know some things never change- or hadn't changed yet. However you want to look at it.

"Just wanted to say good luck," Luke told me. "And I thought . . . um, maybe you could use these."
He handed me the sneakers, which looked pretty normal until Luke activated them by saying "Maia."

"Awesome," Grover said.

Luke said something about his dad and a quest, but I wasn't really paying attention, instead taking a moment to push down my distaste so I could seem sincere when I thanked him. He didn't seem to notice anything off about my thank you for the shoes, so I guess I succeeded.

"Listen, Percy . . ." Luke looked uncomfortable. "A lot of hopes are riding on you. So just . . . kill some monsters for me, okay?" He shook my hand, patted Grover's head, and hugged Annabeth. I thought for a moment she might pass out, but luckily, she got her hyperventilation under control. I chose not to comment on it.

"Percy," Chiron said as I picked up the shoes.

"I know," I said, stuffing the shoes in my backpack. "I won't wear them. Don't wanna get shot out of the sky." Chiron gave an approving nod as I zipped up my bag. There was definitely no way I was giving Grover the shoes this time. The best way to avoid the shoes working was to not have anyone put them on.

I specifically remembered Chiron lamenting my lack of training last time. Don't ask me how I did, but it had just stuck with me. He didn't this time, probably because he knew I was a lot more skilled than I had been last time. Or at least he knew that I was skilled; as far as I knew, he had no inkling that I'd time traveled, and I hoped to keep it that way.

"Anaklusmos," Chiron said, snapping his finger.

"Uh, bless you?" I said hesitantly. I knew it was the name of my sword, but I wasn't supposed to yet, so I feigned confusion. And it's also always fun to pretend someone sneezed whenever they say a supposedly unfamiliar word.

"No, your sword," he said.

"Yeah. What about it?"

"That's its name," Chiron said. "Anaklusmos. It's Greek for-"

"Riptide," I interrupted. "It's Greek for Riptide."

"That's correct," Chiron said, staring at the pen as I took it out of my pocket. "Your father gave it to me, many years ago. I think you should have it; think of it as a gift from your father. I only wish you hadn't stolen it . . . I would have given it to you in due time."

"Sorry," I said sheepishly. "It's just a really nice sword, and it just felt right in my hands. I couldn't bring up the motivation to give it back. Didn't mean to steal it." Actually, I had meant to steal it, but at least I had a plausible excuse. And Riptide really did just feel right in my hand. Always had, and probably always would. I wouldn't trade it for anything, except possibly my old bow. Even then . . . I'd probably trade it away and just wait for it to return. Really handy, that.

"And about the sword-" Chiron began before I cut him off.

"I already know about how it comes back," I said. "I've lost it a couple times already, and I found it in my pocket later when I knew I'd left it in my dirty jeans or something."
"Ah, good," Chiron said. "It's a remarkable weapon, isn't it?"

"Yeah," I agreed. "It really is."

We didn't say much after that. Most of the discussion last time had been due to my questions, which I already knew the answers to this time. I knew about the mist, and I knew what had come before the gods. I knew it only too well.

We all climbed in the car, except for Chiron, who waited at the bottom of the hill, raising his bow in salute.

Argus drove us in silence. He was silent because he literally couldn't speak. I was silent because I had nothing to say. Annabeth still seemed shocked that she was actually in the outside world, and Grover looked to be taking in the sights as well. Really, I was too. It was nice to just see everything normal again; the future had been a very depressing place, let me tell you.

He dropped us off at the bus stop, and we waited about half an hour for the right bus. To amuse ourselves, we played Hacky Sack with one of Grover's apples, just like we had before. Just like he had before, Grover ate the apple in one bite, and I cracked up again. It was nice just being on a quest with these two once more. I felt lighter, and more normal than I had felt in a long time.

I knew that soon we'd be underway with the actual quest, but I savored this time with my best friends; not that Annabeth really was one at this point, and she might never be again. But I could pretend, and that was almost enough.

Soon, we were on the bus, and paid our fare with some of the money that Annabeth had gotten on loan from the camp store. I was glad she'd done it, since I'd completely forgotten about it this time. If she hadn't, we'd have been unable to ride the bus.

Sure enough, the last few passengers were three very familiar old ladies. There was no point waiting for them to come for me.

"I've got something to do, guys," I told Grover and Annabeth.

"Percy," Grover bleated nervously. "You know those are Kindly Ones, don't you?"

"Yeah," I said. "Don't worry, G-man. I've got a plan."

"Maybe we could escape out of an emergency exit?" Annabeth suggested hesitantly.

"If we need to," I said. "We might not have to fight at all. Just give me a minute."

As soon as the bus started moving, I made my way to the front.

"Alecto, Megaera, Tisiphone." I addressed each of them by name, and they growled at me on cue.

"Where is the bolt?" Alecto hissed.

"I don't have it," I said, speaking quickly as they made to get up out of their seats. "But I do know who does." Luckily, they stopped their efforts to get up.

"Who?" Alecto asked me, still growling slightly, but more curious than angry now.

"I can't tell you." And she was back to angry. "Wait, it's not because of what you think. I can't tell you because I'm trying to trap him. If I tell you, he'll know I'm onto him."
"Not good enough," Alecto snarled.

"Wait, wait," I said, holding up a hand. "I know Hades is missing his helm of darkness as well. The same person who has Zeus' lightning bolt has it as well."

"But you will not tell us who it is," Alecto growled. I noticed that she was doing all of the speaking, which was kind of weird. She'd been that way in the future too. I'd only heard her sisters speak about five times each. Over the eight years I'd known them.

"Give me a week," I pleaded. "I'll have the helm for him in a week."

"One week," she said, conceding. I breathed a quick sigh of relief. "And if you do not have the helm by then, we will kill you." Nothing surprising there.

"You can try," I taunted them, before turning towards the other passengers nearby. I snapped my fingers and everyone's eyes glazed over. "You will not remember this conversation," I told the passengers and the driver, and they forgot.

"What happened?" Annabeth asked me as soon as I got back to my seat. "You were up there for a long time. I thought they were going to attack a few times."

"We sorted out our differences," I said, ignoring Grover's snort. "But we do have to leave the bus at the next stop."

"What did you actually say to them, Percy?" Grover asked.

"I told them I'd find their master's helm of darkness within the week," I said nonchalantly as they both gaped at me. "Hades is missing his symbol of power as well."

"You can't promise that," Annabeth hissed.

"Yes I can," I said. "I know who has it and I know just how to get them to come to us."

They both gave me the silent treatment for the rest of the ride. Kind of immature, but they were both mentally around fourteen. I don't know if they thought it would change my opinion, or just didn't want to talk to me, but I ignored them in turn.

We did get off at the next bus stop. It wasn't because the Furies had told me that we had to. It was mostly so we could head towards Medusa's place. Thing is, I was pretty sure I could surprise her, and her place had food and a bunch of extra drachmas, along with some mortal money as well.

It took some convincing, but soon we were walking in the general direction of Medusa. The walk took a while, and I managed to coax Annabeth's story out of her, or at least as much as I'd gotten last time.

Grover eventually began trying to play a path finding song, which really just sounded like Hilary Duff. We reached Aunty Em's Garden Gnome Emporium before Grover figured out the correct notes, and he put his reed pipes away.

"That statue looks like my Uncle Ferdinand," Grover said conversationally. I winced. It actually was his Uncle Ferdinand, which he'd probably find out in about ten minutes. We stopped at the warehouse door and I raised my hand to knock.

"Don't knock," Grover pleaded. "I smell monsters."
"Your nose is clogged up from the furies," Annabeth told him, and I winced again. Luckily neither seemed to notice, and she continued. "All I smell is burgers. Aren't you hungry?"

"Meat," Grover said, wrinkling his nose. "I'm a vegetarian."

No one said anything for a minute, and Grover looked like he was gearing up to pull us away forcefully when the door creaked open. Medusa was standing right there in front of us, and I wondered how I'd ever missed her obvious monster-ness potential. Oh, right, I'd actually been twelve back then. There was no way I would have failed to see Medusa for what she was, even when I was just sixteen.

"Children, it is too late to be out alone," she said in a Middle Eastern accent. "Where are your parents?"

"We're orphans," I said, forcing it out through gritted teeth as if it was a sore subject.

"Orphans?" Medusa said. "But, my dears. Surely not!" She didn't really sound concerned about our orphan status, but Grover and Annabeth seemed to buy it.

"Yeah," I said sadly. "We were staying together in Grover's dad's apartment," I gestured to Grover, "Because our parents were all coworkers before they died." True, in a way, except for the dying part. Well, Grover's dad had died but I was fairly sure neither Poseidon nor Athena had died. "But then we ran out of money. And we had to leave. But our bus broke down, and we kind of got lost in the woods." I smiled self deprecatingly, and Medusa seemed to buy it. Well, not that she didn't know me and Annabeth were demigods and Grover was a satyr. But she might just mistake us for naive and innocent, having never been to camp, and having stumbled across her in a stroke of bad luck. Annabeth almost ruined the story by gaping at me, but luckily her face had straightened by the time Medusa glanced her way.

Medusa led us inside and it was creepy in a way that it hadn't been before, now that I wasn't completely distracted by the smell and knew what was going to happen.

"Please sit down," Medusa said.

"Um," Grover said reluctantly. "We don't have any money, ma'am."

"No, no, children," Medusa said. "No money. This is a special case, yes? It is my treat, for such nice orphans.

"Thank you, ma'am," Annabeth said politely.

Medusa stiffened, before visibly forcing herself to relax.

"Quite alright, Annabeth," she said. "You have such beautiful gray eyes, child." No one had told her Annabeth's name. If Annabeth had been paying attention last time to what Medusa was saying instead of the burgers, she would have seen through the ruse right there. As it was, she didn't this time either, and Medusa went around making our food.

The moment she returned to the table, I pulled my pen out of my pocket. I waited until she had bent down to set the tray on the table before I uncapped it and sliced her head off in one smooth stroke. I grinned at the shocked faces of Annabeth and Grover. "Well, that went well."

"Percy!" Annabeth screamed. "How could you! You just killed some poor old lady for no reason!"

"Actually," I said. "She was Medusa. And she was planning on turning us to stone."
"M-medusa?" Annabeth stammered out, her eyes widening.

"Yeah, see?" I said. "Everything but her head's dissolved." The wrapping had come undone and all three of us could see some of the hissing snakes that had stretched out of it.

"I told you I smelled monsters!" Grover said, smug as can be, before he noticed me. "Percy, what are you doing?"

"Eating," I said with my mouth full. Annabeth wrinkled her nose in disgust but I ignored her.

"How can you eat with that head down there?" Grover asked incredulously. "That thing's disgusting."

"Thanks for reminding me," I said, glaring at him, but I still didn't stop eating. Annabeth and Grover watched in horrified fascination as I finished the burger in another twenty seconds.

"What?" I asked, gesturing to the remains of my double cheeseburger. "I'm a growing boy. A guy's gotta eat. And it was there. So . . ."

"Yeah, but did you have to talk with your mouth open?" Annabeth asked me rhetorically. "That was disgusting. I can believe you're a son of Poseidon. Head of kelp and all."

"Hey," I said halfheartedly, but I was actually happy that she'd gotten close to her old nickname for me. Now I just had to do something stupider so she would once again start calling me 'Seaweed Brain.'

I walked over to the cash register and began pulling out money. There was actually twenty dollars and a few golden drachma in there. Score! I vaguely remembered taking the money the first time and using some of the drachma to send Medusa's head to the gods.

"What are you doing?" Grover asked me.

"Taking the money that she's obviously not gonna use anymore," I said. "Why do you think I wanted to come here?"

"You . . . planned this?" Annabeth asked incredulously. "You took this incredible risk, all for some food and a little bit of extra cash? I take it back. Your head isn't made of kelp. You've definitely got seaweed instead of brains."

"Hey," I protested.

"I think I'll call you Seaweed Brain from now on," Annabeth said. I was lucky to be facing away, as neither of my friends could see the broad grin on my face at hearing my old nickname.

"Wait a second," Grover said, staring straight at the satyr statue. "That is my Uncle Ferdinand."

After that, we got out of there pretty quickly. I burnt Medusa's head with some matches I found. It would have been nice to keep it for use on Gabe, but I didn't want to send it to the gods again; it really wouldn't be conducive to my reforms getting pushed through early. And I didn't really want to carry it around with me, so the best option was destroying it. We started heading back towards the bus stop, but it got dark before we got there, and we were forced to camp out.

"It makes me sad, Percy," Grover said when I told him I would take first watch. I floundered for a moment, trying to figure out what he was talking about, before I noticed him looking at the night sky.
I couldn't for the life of me remember what I'd said last time, so I'd have to make sure to say something equally insensitive this time too.

"Nighttime?" I asked him. "Nighttime makes you sad? You satyrs must be pretty anti vampire then, huh?"

"Not nighttime," Grover said. "All of this pollution; I can't see the stars, Percy! There's all this garbage on the ground." He gestured around us, at all sorts of litter.

"How did it used to be?" I asked.

"It was wonderful," Grover whispered before raising his voice again. "You could see the stars, every night. The forests were all clean and there were so many. All kinds of flowers and berries growing everywhere and even humans used to appreciate it. Now . . . with Pan missing . . ."

"Pan?" I prompted.

"The great god Pan," Grover said. "For years, satyrs have been searching for him, hoping to find him, upon which he will restore the wild. Why do you think I want a license?"

For a second, the smell of garbage disappeared. I could smell berries and wildflowers and clean rain water.

"Tell me about the search," I said.

He looked at me cautiously, as if he was afraid that I was making fun of him. But I was serious, and I knew he really wanted to tell me all about it.

"The God of Wild Places disappeared two thousand years ago," he told me. "A sailor off the coast of Ephesos heard a mysterious voice crying out from the shore. 'Tell them that the great god Pan has died!' When humans heard the news, they believed it. They've been pillaging Pan's kingdom ever since. But for the satyrs, Pan was our lord and master. He protected us and the wild places of the Earth. We refuse to believe that he died. In every generation, the bravest satyrs pledge their lives to finding Pan. They search the earth, exploring all the wildest places, hoping to find where he is hidden, and wake him from his sleep."

"And you want to be a searcher."

"It's my life's dream," he said. "My father was a searcher. And my Uncle Ferdinand . . . the statue you saw back there."

"If it's any consolation," I said. "No one expects Medusa."

"You did," Grover said. "But they knew the risks. I'll succeed. I have to. And I'll be the first searcher to return alive!"

"The first?" I asked.

"No searcher has ever come back," he told me, taking his reed pipes out of his pocket. "Once they set out, they disappear. They're never seen alive again."

It took a moment to remember that I'd really doubted him at this point, and it couldn't have done much for his shaky confidence. I wasn't going to do that this time.

"I believe you," I told him.
"You do?"

"Oh yeah," I said. "You're brave, Grover. And you're so determined. I think you can do it."

He sniffled a bit. "Thanks, Perce. That means a lot to me."

"Yeah," I said. "As interesting as this conversation is, you should probably get some sleep."

"You look like you need it more than me," Grover said. "I'll take first watch."

"I already volunteered," I argued, before yawning. I blushed; my own body betraying me. It makes sense, I guess. I am physically only twelve years old, a growing boy who needs sleep. Before I came back, I'd been able to go much longer, and it was fairly frustrating to be this young again.

"Yeah... get some sleep," Grover told me, once again looking at the sky.

Chapter End Notes

As I said, Percy's shaking things up. He's not going to do everything the same. He negotiated with the furies rather than fighting them because he didn't want to fight them; they'd been his allies before he went back in time. Also, he didn't want the bus to get all messed up either; he was trying to avoid being portrayed as a criminal on national television. I borrowed some lines in the text, but only where it really fit in or when someone had no reason not to say the exact same thing they said before.

Why haven't I written anything involving Mr D yet? He's out of the camp, spending most of his time arguing on Mt Olympus. And Percy's avoiding him as well. Chiron is much nicer and much more accommodating, and Percy knows it, so Percy makes sure to go to him whenever he needs something.
I kill a chimaera with a lightning bolt

Chapter Summary

It's nice not being the last demigod anymore. I'm back, better than ever, in my totally unbiased opinion, and ready to shake things up.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

In my dreams, I was in a dark cavern, standing before a gaping pit. Something compelled me to walk forward, but I ignored it. If I could resist charmspeak, I could resist the faint pull from a chopped up titan. "Go fuck yourself, Kronos." The dead tried to pull me back, and I let them. I didn't need to hear the titan again. Kronos was a bastard, and that was all there was to it. I didn't need to stare into Tartarus. I'd been there, and I never wanted to see it again.

The rest of my night was dreamless, and I woke up normally. Grover had found Gladiola once again in an incredible stroke of luck and coincidence, and we used her reward money for tickets to Denver. Soon, we were on an Amtrak train.

I set my backpack down with Annabeth and Grover, and told them that I needed to go to the bathroom. I headed back further in the train, searching for a bathroom, before I ended up in an empty compartment. Well, mostly empty, except for a homeless looking man. I wondered for a moment how he'd afforded a train ticket, before I sighed.

"Apollo?" I asked.

"Shh," he stage whispered. "I'm incognito. Call me Fred."

"Ok, Fred," I said, rolling my eyes. He'd used that alias when he was helping on the quest to rescue Artemis.

"So, you called," Apollo prompted.

"Ah, yeah. Is this room completely secure?"

"If you mean, can any mortals stumble through," Apollo said, "then no. And if you mean, can any of my family be watching us, no, no they can't."

"Ok, good," I said. "Then I'll just say it bluntly. I'm from the future."

He blinked. "Ok. That's interesting. Don't know why you'd come to me- for all that I'm connected with the future and all, I really have nothing to do with time travel."

"You were the last god," I said, and I watched as he straightened up in shock.

"Well, that's a little more interesting," he said, staring at me intently, as if he were reading my mind. He probably was, come to think of it. I'd never really had the need or the means to block out godly psychic powers. "So you didn't just come back on a lark, huh?"
"No," I said. "You died and when I managed to find a way to reset things, I took it."

"Care to share that method?" Apollo asked nonchalantly.

"No," I said forcefully. "And don't take it from my mind either, Apollo. No one can know. It's a dangerous power, one that no one should have. Even Kronos, with his domain of time, can't travel back and forth; he can only stop it. I won't tell you."

"Whoa," he said. "Alright, I won't press you, kid. Or not kid. How old were you, anyways?"

"Twenty," I said, and he whistled.

"Congratulations," Apollo said. "Demigods rarely survive that long these days."

"No one else did."

"Ah," he said. "So I was the last god, and you were the last demigod?"

"Sounds about right," I said.

"So, let's get down to business," Apollo said. "There's gotta be some other reason you called me here. If I were to believe your claims, which I'm not saying I do, I'd be obligated to help you. Thought you said you weren't looking for Godly interference, though."

"Well, that was the main reason," I said. "But, I could use a bow."

"Hmm, not exactly what I was expecting," he said slowly. "To be honest, I thought you were going to ask me for power. Although, you're probably looking for a magical weapon."

"Don't need the power," I said. "I've already got your remaining power-you gave it to me when you were fading."

"Yeah, I didn't notice before, but I can see it on you when I look more closely. That right there proves your story more than anything you've said." He did a double take. "Wait a second . . . faded? When you said that I was the last god, I assumed you meant the rest had been killed, and were in Tartarus, slowly being reborn. But faded . . . how was that possible?"

"You survive on the worship and belief of mortals," I said. "Humans were massacred left and right. Soon enough, when gods started dying, they didn't come back. Hermes went to search Tartarus for reborn gods-he didn't return, and we were forced to assume the worst."

"Well, I can't feel any lies from you, kid," Apollo told me. I stiffened, but he waved his hand casually. "I didn't read anything further than your intentions, but your mind's an open book. How do you expect to keep anything from my family like you are? We can be quite persistent when we want to be, and many would not be above just stealing thoughts right out of your head."

"I . . . I don't know," I admitted.

"We can't have that, now can we," he asked rhetorically. He snapped his fingers. "Ok, I've placed a fog over your mind. It's just a stopgap measure, for if you meet any gods in the next six months or so, so they won't be able to read your thoughts and memories. We'll have to work out something later, but this will do for now."

"Thank you," I said.

"No problem," Apollo said. "Let's get this conversation moving again. I don't have forever."
Someone's bound to notice I'm nowhere to be found if we take too much longer."

"But you've only been here for . . . about ten minutes," I said. "Why would anyone attribute it to nefariousness? Wouldn't they just think you're having an affair or something?"

"You really don't understand our politics," Apollo said. "You've got a lot to learn, my friend. But again, that can come later. Let's wrap this up."

"Yeah," I said. "I need a bow." I realized what I'd said a moment later, but luckily Apollo realized that I was talking about an archery bow, instead of a present bow.

"I'll take your word about the future as gospel for now," he said, staring at me. For a moment, it felt as if he was looking through me, but the moment passed as quickly as it had come, and he was grinning again when I looked at him next. "So, any preferences on the bow?"

"It should be a simple curved bow," I told him.

"Naturally," he agreed. "I assumed I would have taught you with that style."

"How do you know you taught me?" I asked him defensively. Had he read my mind after all?

"Jeez" Apollo said, holding up his hands in a sign of peace. "You need to chill out, dude. It was a simple extrapolation. I know for a fact that my curse still remains in effect to this day."

"Curse?" I asked, freezing.

"You don't know?" he asked incredulously. "Orion. I cursed all of my Uncle's future children after him. The only way you could be a halfway decent archer would be if either I nullified the curse, or Artemis gave you her blessing. And she hasn't blessed a male since Orion. I'm not even sure she blessed him."

"Oh," I said dumbly. All those years of being a terrible shot were because of a curse that I'd had no way of knowing about? Man, that sucked.

"Yeah," Apollo said. "So I most likely nullified the curse when I decided to teach you Archery. And then I blessed you when I later laid dying. I'd be shocked if you weren't an expert archer before traveling back in time."

"I was," I said proudly.

"Good." Apollo nodded approvingly. "So, about the bow. I was thinking something like . . . this." His hands glowed, and a second later he was holding a bow. It didn't look special, but I of all people knew that appearances could be deceiving. It was a reddish brown color, which was tinted gold. I guessed that the gold would shine through more in the sun.

"It can set fire to arrows if you want it to. Just think about it." He held the bow out to me.

"I've thought about it," I said, not taking the bow. "I want that feature."

"What?" he said. A moment later, he laughed loudly. "I didn't mean decide whether you wanted it or not- although it's nice to know that you do. I meant that you have to think about the arrow tip being set on fire for it to happen."

"Oh," I said again. I was sure that in that moment, my face was burning like the sun. How could I have misinterpreted his words like that? I took the bow, still blushing, and took the quiver he
handed me as well. It matched the bow; I'd half expected it to have a bright flame pattern, but he probably understood the need to not stand out. It's much easier to take a shot when you don't have a monster charging at you because they saw your eye catching quiver.

"Huh," I said, turning over the bow. "Does it collapse into anything?"

"Ah," he said, snapping his fingers. "Knew I was forgetting something. Give 'em here." I handed them back to him and he held his hand over each before they shrunk and fused into one ring; a sun was depicted on the top like a coat of arms ring or something.

"Uh, where am I supposed to wear a ring?" I asked, feeling a little stupid. This was yet again something I really hadn't had a need to know in the future.

"I could go into ring etiquette," Apollo said, before noticing my cringe. "But that's boring. So just put it on your left index finger."

"Thanks," I said, following his instruction.

"So," he said. "Is it anything like the one I gave you in the future?"

"No," I said, with a small smile. "I had to make my own bow and arrows. You didn't give me a bow before you died, and I'd been using a rather plain one before then."

"So you decided to con me into giving you one now?" Apollo asked.

"it was worth a shot," I said. "And it worked, didn't it?" I smirked at him, and he smiled self deprecatingly.

"Well, excuse me for trusting your intentions."

"You're excused."

"And you're impossible," Apollo said, rolling his eyes. "It's a wonder I put up with you in the future."

"I was different," I said shortly. "And we were already friends before we had to spend over a year on the run together. I'm sure we would have killed each other within a few days if we'd barely known each other before working together."

"Fair enough," Apollo said. "So you've got your bow. Anything else you need?"

"You're being awfully accommodating," I pointed out.

"I don't like the idea of fading," he said, shrugging. "So sue me."

"Makes sense," I said. "But nope, that's about it."

"I'll be off then," he said. "Turn away, please." I did so, and I felt the heat as Apollo flashed away a second later. I headed back to the compartment where I'd left Annabeth and Grover. Annabeth commented on my long stay in the bathroom, but neither seemed to suspect I'd done anything else.

I made idle conversation, not really paying attention until something Annabeth said caught my attention. I'd asked her what she'd have done if her dad was in my mom's place, and she'd said she would leave him to rot.

"Why?" I asked. I remembered her story of her past for the most part, but I wanted to hear it now,
so I could refute it, and maybe get rid of some of the tension between Annabeth and her father early.

Annabeth stared at me intently, and I shifted uncomfortably. "My dad's resented me since the day I was born, Percy," she said. "He never wanted a baby. When he got me, he asked Athena to take me back and raise me on Olympus because he was too busy with his work. She wasn't happy about that. She told him heroes had to be raised by their mortal parent."

"Your dad wasn't expecting a kid," I said reasonably. Or at least I thought it was reasonable. Annabeth didn't agree, if the glare she was giving me was anything to go by.

"I appeared on my father's doorstep, in a golden cradle, carried down from Olympus by Zephyr the West Wind. You'd think my dad would remember that as a miracle, right? Like, maybe he'd take some digital photos or something. But he always talked about my arrival as if it were the most inconvenient thing that had ever happened to him. When I was five he got married and totally forgot about Athena. He got a 'regular' mortal wife, and had two 'regular' mortal kids, and tried to pretend I didn't exist."

"My mom married an awful guy," I told her. "Like, he stunk, constantly. So much so that Grover could smell him on me a week later. He also abused her. And she did it all to hide me from monsters. I'm not saying your dad did the exact same thing, but maybe he married a mortal to give you some sense of normality? He knew you'd have to face monsters later on, and he might have wanted to just let you live a normal life. If they were mad, it was probably at the monsters."

"Maybe," Annabeth said, and trailed off in thought. We didn't speak more than a few words after that, until we were passing through St Louis.

"I want to do that," Annabeth said as we passed the Gateway Arch.

"Climb the giant handbag?" I asked, only half paying attention to the conversation.

"Build something like that," she said, apparently choosing to ignore my handbag comment. "You ever see the Parthenon, Percy?"

"Yeah," I said. "It was pretty cool, but not worth the trip, to be honest."

"Wait, what?" She asked. I ran my last words through my head and cursed silently. "When did you go to the Parthenon?"

"I didn't," I said shortly. "I misspoke."

"Didn't sound like it," she said.

"Well, I did," I said. "Why did you bring it up, anyways?" She still looked doubtful, but took the hint that I wouldn't talk anymore about having gone to the Parthenon.

"Someday I'm going to see it in person," she vowed. "I'm going to build the greatest monument to the gods, ever. Something that'll last a thousand years."

I stared at the Arch, not really seeing it anymore. Annabeth had completely remodeled Mount Olympus. It had been quite the architectural feat, and that salad bar . . . still, I didn't think that was what she had in mind when she said 'monument to the gods'.

"I can believe that," I said softly, still looking out the window and away from Annabeth. I was afraid that if I looked at her I might start crying. Kind of funny; the only water I couldn't stop from
moving was my own tears.

"What, just 'cause I'm a child of Athena? Just because my mom's the wisdom goddess doesn't mean it'd be easy to build something like that. I have to work at it, you know!"

"Whoa, I wasn't saying anything like that," I said, holding my hands up. I remembered this conversation going differently last time. And I did remember it, although it had taken me a while to place it.

"Sorry," Annabeth muttered. "It's just- everyone expects Athena kids to do any kind of 'smart thing' with ease, and they don't understand that just because we're intelligent doesn't mean everything comes easily. We're half human too."

"I know," I said. "I mean, I can create waves but I can't completely control the ocean."

"Yeah," she said. We trailed off into silence for a minute or two before the train came to a stop and the intercom told us we'd have a three hour layover. I reached over and shook Grover awake.

"Food," he muttered, still half asleep.

"Come on, goat boy," Annabeth said. "Sightseeing."

"Sightseeing?"

"The Gateway Arch," she said. "This may be my only chance to ride to the top. Are you coming or not?"

Grover and I exchanged looks. I knew that he didn't really care for human architecture, as it was just another thing the wild was destroyed for. I didn't really want to go, because I suspected that the Chimaera would be there again, even a week or two early. But if it was there, along with Echidna, then it was up to me to stop it; I'm a hero, after all. Just . . . I wasn't looking forward to it. I like not having to work for monster kills, and the Chimaera isn't exactly a run of the mill monster.

Grover shrugged. "As long as there's a snack bar without monsters." Well, that would be nice, wouldn't it? Sadly, it wasn't to be. However, if everything went how I wanted it to, Grover would get his monster free snack bar. I wouldn't.

We didn't really speak until we got to the elevator to the top of the Arch. And right on schedule, there was the fat lady and her 'Chihuahua'.

"No parents?" she asked us.

"They're below," Annabeth told her. "Scared of heights."

"Oh, the poor darlings."

The chihuahua growled and the woman said, "Now, now, sonny. Behave." I was pretty sure she'd said the same thing last time, but this wasn't exactly an event I'd tried to remember before, so I couldn't be completely sure.

Annabeth and Grover got into one of the cars to the top, and I noticed that there were already two tourists in there. I think that was what had happened last time. Funny how that worked. It kind of made me wonder if the two were disguised monsters or something.

I waved off Annabeth's offer to wait. As soon as she and Grover were out of sight. I snapped my
fingers and the other tourists all cleared out, thanks to mist manipulation. I sometimes felt bad, because of just how well it worked on mortals, but that wouldn't stop me from using it to save their lives.

I turned towards the fat lady and sighed. "Hello, Echidna."

"Saw through my deception, did you?" she asked rhetorically. "No matter. Your fancy tricks won't save you, demigod. Lord Zeus rarely allows me to test heroes with one of my brood. For I am the mother of monsters, the terrible Echidna!"

"So when are you turning into an anteater?" I asked her. "Just like Zeus to send an anteater after me. He's got nothing but air up there- or you know, he probably fried his brain with too much lightning. It can happen, you know. Or at least I think it can." I began to wonder how I was going to actually deal with the chimaera, and instantly regretted not coming up with a strategy earlier. Then, thunder crackled overhead in response to what I'd said, and I got an idea.

"I am NOT an anteater!" she howled. "I despise Australia! Naming that ridiculous animal after me. For that, Percy Jackson, my son will destroy you." She'd made the full transformation into her true self by then, and calling her revolting would be far too kind.

Her 'son' breathed fire at me the moment she finished yelling, and I rolled out of the way. Looking behind me, I saw a hole melted through the side of the Arch, and I winced. I'd need to get out of there before anyone saw and connected me to the 'bombing.'

"So, Zeus," I said. "He needs to send you to do his dirty work? Honestly, he's probably too weak to do it himself." I slashed at the chimaera's leg and jumped away from its fiery mouth when I missed.

"Probably can't even really throw lightning bolts," I mused. "Legends are always hyped up. I bet dad's way stronger than him anyways." My plan was probably really, really stupid, I mused, but I didn't have much time to think about it as I was forced to roll away from the lightning fast viper's lunge.

"Oh, he's missing his master bolt, isn't he," I said as I ran in and managed to score a shallow cut along the Chimaera's side. "I doubt he could throw lightning even if he had it, but he definitely can't now." The sky had darkened further and further as I continued taunting him, and I was sure that the mortals would have a field day with the strange weather patterns.

"Zeus is just an old has been," I yelled. "Is he really even a god? I'm sure even someone like Janus could beat him!" I'd been edging closer and closer to the opening as I spoke, and when I heard the warning clap of thunder, I took a running leap straight off of the building. I saw a flash of yellow and felt a searing heat at my back, but I'd timed the jump well. A few seconds later, I collided with the water, and quickly sank to the bottom of the river. Even if I wasn't dying from poison this time, it was nice to just rest in the water for a minute and regain my energy.

The stunt I'd just performed had probably just cost me a lot in my quest to get those reforms early. Eh, I'd just apologize later. It had been so totally worth it. I snorted. That led to a giggle, and soon I was laughing helplessly at the bottom of a river.

Percy.

"Wha- Oh. Hey, can you tell Dad that I'm not really that stupid, please? I was actually trying to get Zeus to destroy the Chimaera like that. And it worked, so . . . just tell him that please?"

I do not have much time, Percy.
The sea spirit who looked so much like my mother definitely looked amused. But she was right; there was only a limited amount of time she could spend in rivers as dirty as this one.

Go to the beach in Santa Monica.

"Will you at least tell my dad what I said?" I asked.

I will see what I can do, brave one.

"More like stupid," I muttered. "But hey, it worked, right?"

Anyone who knowingly goads Zeus into destroying a monster for them must have both bravery and stupidity in equally great quantities.

Oh yeah, she was definitely amused. I was willing to let the stupid comment pass. I mean, I'd known that what I was doing was stupid, and I still knew that.

You must go to Santa Monica! And, Percy, do not trust the gifts . . .

"I won't," I promised. I trusted those winged shoes as far as I could throw the Athena Parthenos using only physical strength. At hearing my declaration, the spirit looked relieved and faded away.

"A lightning bolt," a reporter was saying when I walked out of the river. "It was the craziest thing. . . right into the side of the building. Again, no casualties. It seems that everyone was off of the observation deck when it happened, thank God." Or thank demigod, I thought.

I walked around, trying to find Grover and Annabeth. I'd started to get bored when I heard a familiar bleat. "Perrrcy!"

I was tempted to dodge out of the way of Grover's tackle hug, mostly due to boredom, but I refrained. "We thought you'd gone to Hades the hard way," he said.

Annabeth stood behind him, trying and failing to look angry. "We can't leave you alone for five minutes! What happened?"

"I decided now was a good time to practice my newly discovered high diving skills."

"Off the top of the Arch?" Grover asked weakly. "Maybe you should have started with something a little less than six hundred and thirty feet?"

"What really happened?" Annabeth asked.

I gestured that we should get moving as I began speaking. "So, you know the lady and her chihuahua?" I asked.

"Yeah, but what's that got to do with . . ." Grover trailed off in realization. "She was a monster, wasn't she? I knew I smelled monsters but I thought it was just because we'd been underground. Oh, I'm so stupid!"

"It's ok, G-man," I said. "You couldn't have known. She was well hidden."

"So what monster was she?" Annabeth asked.

"Not just her," I said. "The chihuahua too."

"Oh, was the dog a hellhound?" Annabeth asked.
"Nah," I said nonchalantly. "The lady was Echidna and the chihuahua was the Chimaera. Nothing too difficult."

Annabeth and Grover both missed a step at the exact same time and had to jog for a few seconds to catch up.

"Uh," Annabeth said. "I could have sworn you just said Chimaera, but I must have misheard you, right? Please tell me yes, Jackson. You'd better tell me yes." Her voice sounded a little bit higher than usual.

"Nope," I said, popping the P. "I said Chimaera."

"You- you know what . . . just . . . how did you beat it?" Annabeth seemed more exasperated than angry now, and I hoped it was a sign that she was getting used to being around me. I tended to run across tons of monsters that normal demigods didn't, and the sooner she became acclimated to it, the better.

"I just started insulting Zeus," I said, bringing my hands up behind my head. "Eventually, he got mad enough that he hurled a lightning bolt at me. I assume that killed the Chimaera." Both of them froze again, for almost ten seconds this time. When they caught up again, Grover was the first to speak.

"Balls of steel," he said, shaking his head. "You have balls of steel, Perce."

"You insulted the King of the Gods!" Annabeth hissed. "Oh, we're doomed now, aren't we? My first time outside of the camp since I was seven, and I'm gonna get killed by Zeus."

"Nah, don't worry," I said. "It was only me. He shouldn't be angry at you guys."

"That's such a relief," Grover said sarcastically. "In case it's slipped your notice, Perce, we're friends and I don't exactly want you to get sent to Hades the hard way."

"Like I said, don't worry. Zeus is really just a big softy deep down."


"You know," I said. "I speak latin, but I'm not so good at pig latin. It's all English to me."

"That was terrible," Grover deadpanned.

"I try."

"Wait," Annabeth said. "When did you learn latin?"

"When does anyone learn latin?" I asked. "I picked it up."

"What?" she said. "Wait, no. I don't want to know. Just . . . did you piss off any other gods while we were separated, Percy?"

"Well, no," I admitted. "But my dad did summon me to Santa Monica. So we'll be making a detour there."

"What's next? A tea party with Hades?" Annabeth asked sarcastically.

"Nah, Hades doesn't do tea parties. We're having a picnic."
"Ok, now I know you're not serious," Annabeth said, rolling her eyes.

"We should back to the train," Grover reminded us. "It's going to be leaving in twenty minutes."

It wasn't until lunchtime the next day that I remembered the Iris message.

"Hey, guys."

"What's up?" Annabeth asked. Grover was too busy chewing on my empty coke can to respond.

"I'm gonna go into one of the bathrooms and call Chiron, alright?"

"Iris message, right?" Annabeth asked.

"Of course," I said.

"Ok. Just checking. Thought you might have had a cell phone and were about to make a big mistake or something."

"How stupid do you think I am?" I asked.

"Stupid enough to piss off Zeus," she deadpanned.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. I'm gonna go make the call." Luckily, I got Chiron this time, and not Luke, as I probably would have if we'd waited until the car wash to call.

"Percy?" he asked. He looked stressed, so I suppose that Luke had leaked the information about my dad and Zeus' fight again. Best not to dwell on the fact that most things were happening the same way, even though I'd made sure we'd left at least a week early.

"Hey, Chiron." I grinned.

"Is there a particular reason for this call?" he asked. "I am quite busy at the moment . . ."

"Just a status update," I said.

"Please make it quick," he asked me. "Things are hectic here at the camp. Someone leaked news of your father and Zeus' fight, and campers are all taking sides."

"Alright. So we killed Medusa, made a deal with the Furies . . . what else? Oh yeah, I killed Echidna and the Chimaera and I majorly pissed off Zeus. And my dad wants to meet me at Santa Monica. I think that's it."

Chiron's mouth moved soundlessly for a moment before he sighed. "I know I am going to regret this, but please explain."

I did. It took a good fifteen minutes, and Chiron had to leave right after I finished.

"Oh, wait!" I said when he turned away. "Tell Luke that his shoes are really helping me!" Not really a lie. I'd asked Chiron to tell Luke for me, so if anyone was lying, it was the Centaur. He nodded before slicing his hand across the image, disconnecting it.

At around five in the evening, the train reached Denver, and we disembarked. It took fifteen minutes of wandering around, but I managed to get us into the same diner as last time. I think. I really barely remembered what it looked like, and I don't know if I'd ever known its name. Whatever. Ares would probably find us in any diner.
Sure enough, Ares came sauntering in and threatened our waitress. I hadn't even gotten the chance to say that we could pay. We had about one hundred and forty dollars or so left, after all.

"So you're old Seaweed's kid, huh?" I clenched a fist. I knew that I was being influenced by his power and felt angrier than I probably should have, but I didn't try to fight it. I'd never liked Ares much anyways.

"If you mean Poseidon, yes. None of your business anyways."

"Percy, this is-" Annabeth tried to say before Ares cut her off.

"S'okay," he said. "I don't mind a little attitude. Long as you remember who's the boss." Certainly not you, I thought, thankful that Apollo's protection would keep Ares from reading my thoughts, which would have given everything away. "You know who I am, little cousin?" I was super tempted to answer 'Aphrodite's bitch,' but I got a hold on my anger before I could enrage Ares in the middle of a crowded diner.

"Ares," I said.

"God of War," he affirmed. "So, I heard you broke Clarisse's spear."

"Hey," I said. "It was her own fault for choosing to attack me near water." Or at all, really. Clarisse had never really been on my level in swordplay, aside from before our first capture the flag, god of war's daughter or not.

"Probably. That's cool. I don't fight my kids' fights, you know? What I'm here for—I heard you were in town. I got a little proposition for you."

I ignored Ares threatening the waitress this time. She could probably get a ton of money for those gold coins, since no mortals knew they were godly currency, and Ares hadn't actually hurt her or really shortchanged her much.

"What favor could I do for a god?" I asked. He ignored my sarcasm.

"Something a god doesn't have time to do himself. It's nothing much. I left my shield at an abandoned water park here in town. I was going on a little . . . date with my girlfriend. We were interrupted. I left my shield behind. I want you to fetch it for me."

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"What favor could I do for a god?" I asked. He ignored my sarcasm.

"Tell you what," Ares said. "Do this, and I'll arrange a ride west for you."

"Deal," I said. "So, where are we going?"

"The water park is a mile west on Delancy. You can't miss it. Look for the Tunnel of Love ride."

"Got it," I said.

Ares stared at me for a moment. "I like you, punk. No 'why can't you do it yourself' or 'I'm too lazy to do a little quest like this.' Just straight up I do this, and you do this for me. I'll meet you back here when you're done. Don't disappoint me." Oh, he wouldn't like me for long. That, I guaranteed.
So, a wild Apollo appears. Someone was asking about that, so there you go. I hope I kept Ares in character; he's a difficult character for me to write because I have trouble writing extremely emotional and/or irrational characters.

I hope you enjoyed Percy's 'solution' to the Chimaera. I wanted him to win the fight, but he didn't really have a source of water to draw on, and he was physically twelve. He wasn't ready to match up to the Chimaera in open combat, and so he did something a little bit unorthodox. He's not overpowered. It's not like he can just crush giant monsters under his heel. So, he goads Zeus into doing it for him.

In case anyone is wondering, Artemis will have her first appearance in chapter five. Percy will interact with her a lot more during the time in between books where I can pretty much write whatever I want without contradicting or totally messing up canon in some way.

I hope you're enjoying the story. If you are, follow and/or favorite it, and leave a review. If you're not, or you notice any errors, let me know.
I avoid tasting the master bolt

Chapter Summary

It's nice not being the last demigod anymore. I'm back, better than ever, in my totally unbiased opinion, and ready to shake things up.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

I felt a compulsion to go to sleep, but I shook it off and watched as Ares exited the diner and zoomed away on his motorcycle.

Annabeth and Grover seemed to think I would try to blow off Ares' quest, but I remained silent. It took us a few hours to find the water park, by which time the sun was already going down.

We climbed over the fence. Last time, Grover had flown over, but there was no way I was giving him the shoes for any reason. We found the gift shop again, and pillaged it for fresh clothes. We'd had a couple changes of clothing, but there was only so much you could pack in a backpack, and these t-shirts were definitely useful.

We reached the pool and saw the shield lying there.

"Too easy," Annabeth muttered.

"I guess we're gonna go down there," Grover said hesitantly.

"No we're not," I said.

"Why not?" Annabeth demanded. Hadn't she just been saying that it was too easy?

"See the eta?" I pointed to it on one of the Cupid statues. "This is a Hephaestus trap. Hasn't he been trying to capture Ares and Aphrodite together since forever?"

"You're right," Annabeth said, smacking her forehead. "So how are we gonna get it?"

"Easy." I smirked as I felt the familiar tugging in my gut. Water began filling the pool. Slowly, the shield floated up, until it was at the point where I could scoop it and the now soggy scarf out of the water.

"Hey Annabeth," I said.

"What?"

"Want Aphrodite's scarf? It can be a trophy."

"Sure," she said absentmindedly. She picked it up before noticing that it was wet. "Uh, Percy?"

"Yeah?" I asked.

"Can you dry this off, please?" She held out the scarf.
"Oh, yeah." A second later, she was holding a dry scarf.

"Thanks," she said, stuffing it into her pocket.

The war god was waiting for us in the diner parking lot.

"Well, well," he said. "You didn't get yourselves killed."

I tossed the shield at him and he caught it. He was probably going to say something, but I cut him off.

"I challenge you, Ares," I said. "With conditions."

"And why would I accept?" Ares scoffed.

"Because I'm one Iris message away from telling everyone about how you stole the bolt and the helm." I smirked at him as his eyes widened. "And no attacking me here either. Divine laws. You're forbidden from attacking me unless you accept my challenge and conditions."

"Name them, Jackson," he growled. "I'll beat you down right here, right now."

"Nope. That's one of the conditions. We'll fight somewhere where mortals won't be in danger."

"Fine," Ares said, appearing bored. "Is that all?"

"Of course not," I scoffed. "I'm not dumb enough to challenge a god without covering my bases. You'll swear on the styx to not curse me or go to your divine form to spite me if you lose. And the last condition; you swear that if I win, you give me the master bolt and the helm."

"And what the hell do I get out of this?" Ares growled. He probably would have said Hades if he hadn't wanted to keep this conversation quiet.

"First, I don't tell anyone about you stealing the bolt or helm, win or lose, as long as you fight me and agree to my conditions. Second, you get to keep the bolt and helm if you win, no repercussions. And you can curse me to your heart's content- if you win."

"I agree to your terms," Ares said, holding out his hand to shake. I wasn't falling for that one.

"Swear it," I said. "On the Styx. I will not curse Perseus Jackson or resort to my divine form if I lose against him, or take retribution against him in any other way. I will give Perseus Jackson the Master Bolt and the Helm of Darkness if I lose."

Ares repeated the swear and thunder rumbled overhead to signify its validity.

"My turn," I said. "I swear on the styx I will not tell anyone about Ares stealing the Master Bolt and the Helm of Darkness, and neither will Annabeth or Grover." Thunder rumbled when I finished.

"Now that's done," Ares growled. "Where are we fighting, Jackson?"

"Santa Monica," I said. "Be there thirty six hours from now."

With a curt nod and one last glare, Ares began to glow, and the three of us looked away as he flashed out.

"I take it back," Grover squeaked. "You don't have balls of steel. Your balls have got to be made
"Percy!" Annabeth yelled. "Of all the stupid things to do . . . you, you-"

"Challenged a god, yes. Next question, please."

"That wasn't a question," she said. "It's a fact. You're an idiot. A total seaweed brain."

"Thanks," I said. "But we should get going. Gotta be in Santa Monica in thirty six hours."

"Which is also your fault," Annabeth said. "Ares left before getting us that ride west."

"I think I've got a solution," I said. I wondered why I was only thinking of this now as I tapped into what I like to call the pegasus wavelength.

"Son of Poseidon calling any pegasi. I need three fast pegasi for a trip from Denver to Santa Monica beach."

Grover and Annabeth didn't ask questions, as they could see me concentrating. I pretended to still be concentrating for about twenty extra minutes to get out of dealing with their reasonable concerns, until I heard the sound of wings. We all glanced up in unison and saw three pegasi heading our way. Two white and one black.

I grinned at them for a second, but as they landed, my mouth dropped open in shock. What the Hades! No, seriously. What? I thought I was dreaming, and I pinched myself just to be sure. It was real? What the Hades?

"Blackjack?" I asked out loud.

"That's my name, Lord," the black pegasus said, clopping over. "Have we met?"

"No," I said quickly. "I . . . uh . . . I honestly don't know how I knew your name. And don't call me Lord. I'm just Percy." Weak, I know, but it was the best I could come up with. "Mind giving me a ride?" I asked him.

"Sure thing, Boss." I grinned. It was good to have him back, however it had happened. I hadn't even tried to go find him, assuming that he'd already been captured by Luke's army and that I wouldn't be reunited with my faithful pegasus until next summer. Which was a little stupid of me, seeing as it was Luke's army and he was still at camp. I wasn't going to turn down this lucky break, anyways.

"You can speak to pegasi?" Grover asked curiously.

"Yeah. Son of Poseidon thing. Can you?" I asked. I knew it was something that satyrs could learn, but I didn't know if Grover had taken the time to.

"No," he said. "I haven't had time to learn. I've been really focused on-"

"Your Searcher license," I finished.

"Yeah."

"Stay as low as you can," I said, turning to Blackjack and the other pegasi.

"Scared of heights, Boss?"
"You would be too if you knew Zeus was just waiting for an excuse to blast you down."

"True," Blackjack agreed. "Got any apples?"

"No," I said apologetically. "I will if you come to Camp Halfblood a few days from now."

"Darn. Got any sugar?"

"No to that too. I will have some if you come to Camp," I told him.

"Yeah, I get the hint."

"It wasn't a-" I began before cutting myself off. It probably had seemed like I was hinting that I really wanted him at camp, which I did, but it wasn't what I'd been doing. I'd really just been answering honestly. I could get my hands on apples and sugar pretty easily at camp, much more easily than out here.

"Hop on, Boss," Blackjack told me. "And, uh . . . where exactly is 'Santa Monica'?"

"I know where it is, Lord," one of the white pegasi said. "I'll lead. Just put the wisdom child on me. I don't like carrying satyrs- their hooves are very uncomfortable."

"He's wearing shoes," I pointed out.

"They'll fall off," she insisted.

"Fine," I said, rolling my eyes. "Annabeth, you ride on . . ." I held out my hand towards the white pegasus who had been speaking.

"Pinky," the pegasus supplied, and I stopped to stare at her for a moment.

"Uh, Annabeth, you get on 'Pinky.'"

"My human was five, Lord," Pinky said, obviously embarrassed.

"Whatever," I said. "I'm not here to judge. Grover, you can get on . . ."

"Factor, Lord."

"Factor," I finished. "I'm not even going to ask. I'll ride Blackjack."

"That's so weird," Annabeth said.

"Me being able to speak to pegasi? Well, my dad did create horses, so it sort of makes sense."

"No, just listening to the one sided conversation," she said.

"Well," I said. "I know satyrs can learn to speak pegasus, but I'm not sure about demigods."

"As far as I know, they can't," Grover supplied.

"Sorry, Annabeth," I said.

"It's fine." She made a face. "Just, try to tone the speaking out loud to pegasus down to a minimum. Or at least make it clearer what the pegasus said, please."

"Out loud?"
"You called the pegasi somehow," she explained. "I assumed you had some form of telepathic communication with them."

"I do," I admitted. "But for all you knew, it could have been a very vague feeling of needing help."

"It was an educated guess, Percy." She rolled her eyes. "A correct one, at that."

"Yeah, ok," I said. "Let's get going."

We made good time, and actually reached Santa Monica early enough that we had to camp out on the beach and wait for a while until Ares showed up. The pegasi flew away to graze and wait for my call. Ares did finally show up at a minute before the agreed time, sauntering onto the beach like he owned it.

"Didn't expect you to actually show up," he said when he saw us. He didn't look surprised at all, so he had probably meant that as a taunt.

"Sorry to disappoint," I deadpanned. "Annabeth, Grover, get out of range." They backed up with resigned expressions on their faces. They'd known I'd have to go through with this since I swore on the styx, but they probably still hadn't wanted to see me go to my certain death. Or what they thought was my certain death, anyways.

"Let's get to it," Ares said. "I can't wait to crush you, punk."

"Not happening," I said confidently.

"How about a warmup?" He asked, snapping his fingers. Just like last time, a giant boar charged out of the sand. Unlike last time, I was ready for it.

Before it had a chance to move more than three feet towards me, my bow was out and I was firing with quick practiced motions. It made it another foot before I hit it in the forehead with a flaming arrow. My second shot hit it in its right leg, and it collapsed. I watched dispassionately as it bled out. I regretted forgetting to ask for sonic arrows from Apollo.

"Lucky shot," Ares growled.

"Want to fight now?" I asked. "My next lucky shot might be between your eyes." As I spoke, I let another arrow fly straight at his forehead. He rolled away and pulled out a baseball bat in one smooth motion. I remembered this part.

"How would you like to get smashed: classic or modern?"

My bow and quiver shrunk back into a ring, and I pulled out Riptide. I uncapped it and gave it an experimental swing or two. I hadn't really had a good sword fight since I came back, and I was really looking forward to this one.

"Classic it is," Ares said. "You've chosen a slower death, demigod." His baseball bat morphed into a sword. It was huge, and there was a silver skull with a ruby in it for the hilt. The blade itself was red, like blood. Fitting for the war god.

"Can you back up your words? Or are you all talk and no bite? Come on, War God." Wow, if I'd added 'show me your might' at the end there, that could have been a cheer chant. Or fight fight fight. Yeah, good thing I'd stopped there.

"I've been fighting for eternity," he growled. "My strength is unlimited and I cannot die. What have
"Everything can die," I said, smirking at him. "You're no exception, Ares."

"Whatever helps you sleep at night, kid." He feigned a yawn. "Why are you stalling?"

"Me?" I mouthed, pointing to myself. "I'm not stalling. Just waiting for my opponent to make the first move. Good strategy, you know. I'm just a helpless little demigod. Surely the god of war doesn't need my cue to get started?"

He growled, and a second later I dodged his downward cleave by the skin of my teeth. I lunged, but he got his blade up in plenty of time to block Riptide. I 'felt' that he was going to stab at my shoulder, and I deflected it with the flat of my blade. I feinted a stab at his shoulder and instead turned it into a swing towards his leg at the last second.

He tried to dodge, but I still managed to score a shallow cut on his right leg.

"You're dead, Jackson!" Ares screamed. "Dead! I underestimated you, but no more."

"You sure?" I asked. I was planning to say something else, but I couldn't get it out as I had to dodge a series of lightning quick slashes. He wasn't going for technique anymore, and relying on brute force to push me back. The best defense was a good offense after all. And it was working.

I couldn't get any hits in, forced to use every ounce of my attention to not get skewered. My precognition was working over time. I knew every move before he made it, which kept me alive, but it didn't allow me to attack. I grunted as I was pushed further away from the water.

Ares had predicted me heading to the ocean, where I would be strongest. It was only logical that a son of Poseidon would seek the water. So he'd done his utmost to maneuver me away with his relentless onslaught. Thing is, I didn't need to go to the sea. It would come to me.

I concentrated, allowing my body to act on instinct to block each one of Ares' blows. I felt the familiar tug in my gut and smirked at Ares. His eyes widened and he threw himself backwards.

Unfortunately for him, it wasn't fast enough to avoid my attack. I'd formed a giant fist out of the water, just as I had once with the little Tiber, and had used it to punch him in the back of the head. He went flying, flipping end over end twice before smashing into the sand face first.

The water had been condensed into a hard fist, and I knew it had to hurt. The real question was 'how much?' Ares hadn't moved, but it could just be a trick. I edged towards him slowly.

I was only a few feet away when I heard him moan and saw him start to push himself up. I acted quickly, smashing the flat of Riptide into the back of his head. It looked like he was still conscious after the first hit- seriously, how hard was his head?- so I hit him in the same spot with the hilt twice, as hard as I could. When he stayed down, I sighed in relief.

Unzipping my backpack, I pulled out a rope, coincidentally the same one I'd used to tie up Clarisse during capture the flag. It wouldn't hold him at all, but it would be humiliating, and I could use it to drag him over to Annabeth and Grover. Which I did. Of course, as soon as I came over, they bombarded me with various questions and comments.

"When did you get your own bow?" That was Annabeth.

"Wow, Percy. That was awesome!" That was Grover.
"You know tying him up isn't going to do anything," Annabeth again.

"Can you stand over by his head?" Grover asked me. I complied somewhat bemusedly. He pulled his backpack off his back, and I snorted when I saw him taking out a camera.

"I brought this to take pictures," Grover said. "I haven't had much time, but this more than makes up for it. Who else can say they got a picture of their best friend with the unconscious god of war right after their friend beat him up?"

I grinned and posed for the picture, sword hanging by my side and bow slung over my back. I wanted both of them shown; I had a tendency to treat my weapons like people sometimes, and I felt that they'd both done a lot in taking out Ares, even if I hadn't used the bow except to kill the boar and instigate the fight.

Once we were done, I turned Ares over and smashed him in the back of the head again.

"Percy . . . what was that for?"

"That, Annabeth, was to make sure he didn't wake up. I've got to go collect the helm of darkness and master bolt. I've got a feeling that they're on his motorcycle." The helm of darkness was sitting on one of the handlebars, disguised as a bike helmet. I wouldn't have known for sure what it was if I couldn't feel the darkness sliding off of the thing in waves. You tended to get a feel for certain weapons after a while, and it was different for each one.

I grabbed the helm and the blue backpack I recalled containing the bolt last time and walked back over to where Ares still laid.

"We'll need to wait for him to wake up," I told them.

"Why?"

"The bolt's in this backpack," I said. "But it's under an enchantment so that it won't appear unless the backpack is in the Underworld. Speaking of the Underworld . . . Alecto!"

Seconds later, she was flapping in the air above us. I had no idea whether she had been watching the fight, or shadow traveled or something when she heard my voice.

"I have the helm," I told her. She held out a claw expectantly.

"Not yet," I said. I held up my hands at her. "I'm not refusing to give it over. But I want my mother back."

"She will be returned," Alecto promised.

"Not good enough." I shook my head. "I need a more concrete promise. On the Styx." Annabeth sucked in her breath from where she was standing nearby. She was probably frustrated with me not trusting a god's word, but Hades was the one who'd originally taught me the harsh lesson. Trust no one without a promise on the Styx.

"Your mother will be returned as soon as Hades receives his helm. I swear it on the Styx," Alecto finished. Thunder clapped, and I smiled.

"Here," I said, tossing the hat at her. She flapped away and I lost sight of her as she crossed paths with the sun.
Half an hour later, Ares started to stir again. Annabeth and Grover were dozing a little ways up the beach. We hadn't really gotten much sleep while riding on the Pegasi, and so they'd given into their exhaustion. I could keep going for a bit longer, but that didn't mean I wouldn't be really grateful for my bed the instant we got back to camp. I didn't hit him again this time, however tempting it was. I needed him awake.

"So, congratulations I guess," he drawled. He didn't seem angry at all, and I wondered why.

"I'll need the bolt," I said. "I already returned the helm to Hades."

"Ha, you work fast, demigod." Ares snapped his fingers and I was holding the bolt in place of the blue backpack.

"You seem pretty amiable about this," I said cautiously. "Not at all what I was expecting."

"I know when I'm beat." He shrugged. "We fought, you outplayed me. It was a good fight, even if it was shorter than I'd have liked. Don't get me wrong... I kind of hate you right now but I continuously underestimated you. It was my own fault, and I can't take revenge on you. So I'll be accommodating; even we gods can only break an oath on the styx in the direst of circumstances or times of great need."

"Ah, that's cool," I said. "I thought you'd be cussing me out or something."

"I considered it," Ares said. "But, thing is, I did lose fair and square. And I'm technically getting off scot-free since you can't tell anyone about my stealing the bolt. All in all, it was a bit humiliating, but it's not like I won't have chances to pay you back later."

"It wasn't your fault," I said.

He tensed up. "What are you talking about?"

"You were being manipulated by Kronos. He influenced you to make poor tactical decisions and to not expose his agent, Luke Castellan."

"I am the God of War," Ares growled. "Nobody controls me."

"Didn't you just say something about overconfidence?" I asked him.

Ares deflated instantly. "That's true. I'll consider what you said." He flexed his muscles and ripped through the ropes like tissue paper. "Until next time, kid. I'll expect a rematch."

I turned away as he started to glow and felt the heat from being right next to him when he flashed away.

Got to say- I really prefer this Ares. And to think that the animosity between us was Kronos' fault. Mostly, anyways. I doubt I'll ever like him, but I can respect him for his good sportsmanship here. The main difference was this time I had won fair and square, whereas last time I scored a single hit on him, mostly due to luck, and he'd been ordered to back off, leaving our fight incomplete. I'd taken the credit for the victory anyways, which Ares probably hadn't appreciated one bit.

That had pretty much been the start of our animosity. And, well, his curse had been extremely inconvenient last time. This time, being unable to take revenge had forced Ares to temper his knee-jerk reflex and actually think it through. I was honestly just relieved that he hadn't cursed me again; I was pretty sure that his previous curse had been a one time thing, stopping me from saving Zoe, as it hadn't really shown up again in any more inconvenient times.
I put my fingers to my mouth and let out a loud whistle. It had really been meant to summon the pegasi, but it had the added effect of waking my friends.

"Wha-" Grover began before interrupting himself with a yawn. "What's going on?"

"Sorry," I said sheepishly. "Just summoning the pegasi."

"Ares!" Annabeth yelled.

"Sorry, you just missed him," I said.

"That's what I'm saying," she said heatedly. "He's gone."

"We worked out our differences," I said nonchalantly. "So he left."

"Worked out your differences?" Grover asked incredulously. "Only you, Percy. Only you."

"And what's that supposed to mean?" I huffed.

"Hey," Grover defended. "Strange things seem to happen to you. And I doubt anyone else could blackmail Ares into a duel, win, and then make friends with him."

"We're not friends," I said. "We respect each other but that's it."

"No, but Percy," Annabeth cut in. "The bolt, Seaweed Brain!"

"Got it right here," I said, holding up my left hand. "I'll put it in my backpack so it doesn't drop out during the ride back to Olympus."

"Won't it burn through your backpack?" Grover asked reasonably. "It is a lightning bolt, you know."

"Don't think it works that way, Grover. I can hold it without burning myself. I assume Zeus activates it with some kind of mental command or something."

"As long as you're sure," he said.

"I am," I confirmed.

There wasn't really anything else to say, so we climbed on the pegasi. Or at least I'd thought that there hadn't been anything else to say. Apparently, I was wrong.

"Wait," Annabeth said. "We're going to fly all the way back to New York? On pegasi?"

"Well, yes," I said. "With a number of rest stops, of course. Do you have a better way?"

"We could take a plane," Annabeth suggested.

"With what money?" I asked. "And Zeus would probably blast me out of the sky. Unless you know how to teleport . . ."

"Ok, that makes no sense," Annabeth pointed out. "Why can you fly on a pegasus but not on a plane?"

"Something to do with the fact that equestrians are Dad's domain, and not Zeus'. He has to let me fly on them . . . I think. I should probably ask someone about that."
"That gives me so much confidence," Annabeth said, rolling her eyes. I chose to ignore her sarcasm.

"Great," I said cheerfully. "Let's go."

She grumbled about it, but didn't offer anymore valid dissent, and we got on our way.

It took a few days to get back to New York, with, as I'd said, a number of rest breaks for the pegasi. Well, I guess we used those breaks too. We did need to eat and sleep a little bit, after all. Luckily, the forty dollars held us until we reached the Empire State building.

"Stay here," I said as we stood before it.

"No way," Annabeth said. "We're coming with you, Seaweed Brain. No way you're leaving us behind. This is our quest too."

I shook my head. "It's not that. You know how I like to do whatever I want, and that generally ends up pissing off gods? You do know that's not going to stop just because I'm on Olympus, right?"

"It might be a good idea if you did stop sometimes," Annabeth said drily.

Grover snorted. "Sorry, Annabeth. From what I've seen, it's just one of Percy's baser instincts to piss off everyone more powerful than him."

"Don't I know it," I muttered. Grover had good hearing, however, and he picked up on it.

"I thought you liked pissing people off," he said.

"Well, you're not wrong," I admitted. "However, there are some times that I wish I didn't have this . . . gift. It's a pretty dangerous ability."

Annabeth snorted. "Yeah, dangerous to you maybe."

I cocked an eyebrow. "Of course. What did you think I meant?"

"Of course," she said, rolling her eyes. "Like you've cared about being in danger before. For gods sake Percy, you've faced so many things on this quest that most demigods never get to see, much less battle, it's ridiculous."

"Never want to see," I corrected.

"And I didn't get to see most of them with you!" she finished.

It was my turn to roll my eyes now. "You saw Medusa. And you watched me fight Ares."

"But I didn't see the chimaera or Echidna," she argued. "And it's not like I really did anything during the fight with Medusa! It was hardly even a fight."

"Would you rather have been turned to stone?" I asked. She opened her mouth, but apparently couldn't think of anything to say and closed it again. Score one for the son of Poseidon, 'wisdom's child.' "Yeah, that's what I thought."

"You know that's not going to stop her for long, Percy," Grover pointed out.

I sighed. "Yeah, I know. Just a stopgap measure, sadly. Fine. I see you won't be dissuaded. You can get vaporized along with me, then."
"Wait a second," Grover said, suddenly looking a lot more nervous. "It was Annabeth who wanted
to come with. Not me!"

"Come on, goat boy," Annabeth said. "I'm not getting vaporized alone."

"You won't be alone," Grover argued. "Percy will be there too!"

"I just said that she wouldn't be dissuaded, Grover." I grinned at him. "You will never do anything
in this world without courage. It is the greatest quality of the mind next to honor. I think Aristotle
said that. Find that courage."

"I don't think it's courage to willingly go to a meaningless death," Grover deadpanned. "And when
did you start quoting Aristotle?"

"To be honest, it's like one of the only quotes I know," I said. "And our deaths won't be
meaningless. They'll sate Zeus' anger! You don't want him taking it out on the other gods. Think of
the poor hair day they'll have with all that static electricity around!"

"It wouldn't be static electricity," Annabeth cut in. "There's a difference between electricity and
static electricity."

"Yeah, yeah," I muttered. "Stop ruining my great jokes with your 'logic and correct definitions.'"

"The gods can handle it," Grover said. "We can't!"

"You don't know that," I chided him. "Have you ever been hit by a lightning bolt?" While he was
gaping at my obviously flawless logic, I grabbed his right arm and dragged him through the door.
Annabeth grabbed the other one, and together we hauled him to the elevator.

"Six hundredth floor, please," I told the elevator security guard.

"There is no six hundredth floor, kiddo," he said, rolling his eyes.

"Ok, we all know that's a load of bull," I said. "I just happen to be a demigod, and in possession of
Zeus' master bolt. Maybe you'd like to let me in so I can return it? Or you can test yourself against
your boss' symbol of power." Definitely a bluff. It's not like I'd ever had a reason to learn to use the
gods' symbols of power. I wasn't even sure that anyone but Zeus could use it. Maybe Porphyrrion
could? I had no idea, but I definitely knew that I couldn't.

Luckily, he had no way of knowing that. The guard paled and fumbled around for a key card. "No,
no. Insert this in the security slot."

Annabeth and I dragged Grover into the elevator and I used the key card. I didn't pay much
attention to whatever muzak was playing, other than to note that it was terrible as ever. Instead, I
mentally planned out what I was going to say as well as I could.

Grover gasped as we stepped out of the elevator, and even Annabeth and I stopped to stare.
Grover hadn't been to Olympus before at this point, and while I had, and I knew Annabeth had too,
it was still an awe inspiring sight.

It was a completely new looking Greek city, including an amphitheater, a coliseum, a hippodrome,
and even an open air market. I hadn't seen it in over three years, and I took a moment to take in the
sight.

We passed through the market- we would have gone around it, but I wanted to buy some
overpriced ambrosia. Or, well, I assumed that it was overpriced. I didn't really know the normal price for it, but everything else looked overpriced as well, so the ambrosia probably was too.

I bought it anyways. I'd definitely need it, or at least one of my friends would. I could heal all but mortal injuries with just a minute of water exposure, but I couldn't really transfer that power. And believe me, I'd tried before. Things had been rough in the future, and we really hadn't had any ambrosia or nectar left at all. I'd tried multiple times to heal people with my water powers, until I accepted the fact that it wouldn't work, and that there was nothing I could do to stop my friends from dying right in front of me.

Possibly overpriced or not, I still figured I'd gotten a pretty good deal, personally. It wasn't like there were many other places selling ambrosia, after all. And I was only spending the remaining drachma from Medusa's place, anyways. I got fifteen ambrosia squares all in all, and I packed them away in my backpack. Grover seemed to have been eyeing a set of new pipes when we decided to leave the market, and I regretted not having more drachmas to spend.

Don't get me wrong; I wouldn't buy Grover a set of pipes instead of ambrosia, even if I'd known he wanted them before I bought the godly food. But if I'd had more drachma . . . as it was, we had the twenty drachma left from the camp store's loan. But I was saving that to, well, pay back the loan. We had one hundred and five dollars left, so I'd made a five dollar profit on the quest. Score, I guess.

Annabeth stopped us so she could stare at the architecture a few times, but I didn't really mind. I was pretty amused in fact; Zeus must have been getting pretty pissed at our slow pace, and he couldn't even blame me for it. I wasn't going to turn down a chance to annoy Zeus, especially when I wouldn't even get in trouble.

Eventually, however, we did reach the palace. Annabeth stopped to stare once again, and I couldn't blame her. Even after having seen it a number of times previously, its size was very impressive. Annabeth was probably paying more attention to the details, but I was mostly just marveling at how big it was. I could tell that Grover was doing the same right beside me.

I waited a minute, but Annabeth had seemingly forgotten the reason that we were here.

"Annabeth," I said. She didn't hear me. "Annabeth!" I'd shouted right next to her, and she flinched away.

"Gods, Percy!" she shouted right back. "What was that for?"

"You were completely out of it," I said. "I know you've got a fetish for architecture and all, but there are gods right ahead. So, yeah, maybe save it for another time? How about this? I'll let you look at it on the way out."

"I'm not two, Percy," she said, rolling her eyes. "You don't get to 'allow me' to do anything."

"Last I heard, I'm the quest leader," I said, sticking my nose in the air. I maintained my straight face for about six seconds before I broke down laughing.

"You're not mature enough to be quest leader," Annabeth scoffed. I glared at her. I was six years older than her, whether she knew it or not. Which she didn't, and wouldn't, so I guess I'd have to put up with being thought of as immature. Didn't mean I had to like it.

Actually, I could kind of agree that I was a bit immature. We'd had to find whatever laughs we could in the future, whether they came from stupid jokes or brutally eviscerating a giant. So my
humor was a little bit warped, and I honestly tried to not take things too seriously if I could help it. Sure, I’ll focus if I’m facing a big monster like a chimaera, a god, a titan, or a giant, but otherwise, I’ll keep whatever humor I can alive.

"I kind of agree with Annabeth," Grover said.

"Gee, thanks for the support, Grover," I said. "Your views on my maturity won't change the fact that we should probably get moving. You made quite a few stops on the way here, and I'd wager Zeus knew the moment we stepped onto Mount Olympus. Probably impatient as Hades right now." And I meant that as a curse and as the actual Hades.

I started climbing the steps of the palace, and I heard Annabeth and Grover following my lead. It took a while to climb the steps. Seriously, there were a lot of them. I was tempted to let Kronos destroy Olympus again, so that Annabeth could build a ground level temple this time. Sadly, I'd already promised myself to stop anything bad from happening when I could, and that included the destruction of Olympus.

I could feel Zeus and father's power the moment I entered the room. However powerful I'd gotten, major gods could still destroy me on a whim. I didn't let any of my apprehension show, however, as I knelt before Zeus. Annabeth and Grover remained back at the entrance, allowing me to take the spotlight.

"Uncle," I said as respectfully as I could manage. I could still feel his glare, but it had most likely lessened a bit with my decision to address him first. I remembered that he'd made a big fuss about it last time, and I wanted to stave off his temper tantrum. I turned to Poseidon. "Father."

"Speak, boy," Zeus said. "Before I decide to blast you into dust."

"I apologize," I said. "For goading you into attacking me at the St Louis Arch, Lord Zeus. I was desperate, and desperate times call for desperate measures. I meant no disrespect, and I humbly beg your forgiveness." Yes, desperate times did call for desperate measures. Like actually pretending to respect one of the most powerful crybabies in the world. Kronos was probably more powerful, but Zeus was definitely the bigger baby. I mentally thanked Apollo for the mind fog thing. I'd have been dust before I'd started speaking without it.

"That does not excuse-" He glanced at his brother, and Poseidon stared at him impassively, practically daring him to continue. "That is to say, I accept your apology, demigod. However, if you ever do such a thing again, I will vaporize you."

Poseidon inclined his head, silently showing his gratitude. Yeah, big favor, Zeus not vaporizing his brother's son. I decided that now was a good time to take out the master bolt. I'd hopefully appease Zeus by giving him back his biggest toy. I stepped forward to place it at his feet, before stepping back and kneeling again. Strangely, he didn't pick it up, probably afraid that I had trapped it or something. Zeus and his paranoia; that was one thing I could count on to stay the same, past or future.

"Address Lord Zeus, boy," Poseidon told me. "Tell him your story." I felt like it had taken longer to get to this point in the conversation last time, but oh well.

"I cannot tell you who held the bolt before me," I said. Zeus made as if to stand, and called his master bolt into his hand. Apparently, smiting demigods took precedence over checking for traps. "I swore on the Styx. But I can tell you who stole the bolt." Poseidon glared at Zeus for jumping to conclusions, and Zeus sat down again, still stony faced.
"It was Luke Castellan," I said. "Son of Hermes."

"Do you have proof of this, Perseus?" Poseidon asked me.

"Not exactly," I said. "But I do know that he's been working for your father since shortly before the solstice. I found that out when Kronos tried to use me to drag himself out of Tartarus in a dream. I escaped, barely." That was a lie. It had been easy to escape, since I'd left pretty much immediately.

"Lies," Zeus snarled.

"Peace, brother. Let us hear him out." Zeus glared at Poseidon before making a visible effort to calm himself. It didn't work very well, and he ended up just looking constipated. Wisely, neither I nor my father mentioned this fact.

"I do not have proof, but I guarantee you that Kronos is nearly strong enough to escape the pit. He manifested a consciousness and seemed to have a lot of information about the outside world. He shouldn't have either. I suspect that he'll be going after mythical healing artifacts sometime soon."

"You seem very well informed," Zeus said, eyeing me suspiciously.

"Just theories and assumptions," I said. That was mostly true. I was theorizing and assuming that Kronos would do the same as he'd done before. But theorizing and assuming all the same. "But they're based on my mythological knowledge. And I did ace Chiron's class." I saw my father's lips twitch up at the corners, but Zeus just looked a bit confused. It made sense; he probably hadn't paid that much attention to my classes or even that Chiron was teaching at my school. Why would he? I wasn't his kid; just a potential enemy who he didn't actually care much about. Until I'd insulted him a bunch and gotten him to kill a chimaera for me.

"Yes, well, I suppose that is not unreasonable," Zeus said. He really needed to learn that he didn't need to act all knowing all of the time. I don't think anyone would think less of him for not understand some obscure private joke. But he had his crippling pride to consider.

"But the main point here," I said. "Is that Luke Castellan stole the bolt. And I got it back." His reward would probably be 'not killing me' again. Oh well. Couldn't be helped.

"I sense the boy tells the truth," Zeus muttered. "But his mind is clouded. No doubt hiding something."

"You bring up a good point, brother," my father said. Seriously, in what universe should parents be advocating for reading their kids' minds?

"Uh, what?" I said, feigning confusion. I'd have to be careful here, now that I knew they could still tell somewhat whether I was lying or not. Asking questions was probably best, so I wouldn't technically be lying at all. "Do you mean like the mist? Because I've gotten really good at mist manipulation lately. Could that have something to do with it?"

"I suppose it is possible," Zeus said dubiously. "But it could also have something to do with the ocean. It is often indiscernible. Brother?"

"That is a distinct possibility," Poseidon said. "Even after millennia, our children are still inheriting different aspects of our powers." Perfect. I ask questions, they figure out plausible answers, which they will then take as fact. Because gods are obviously never wrong.

"Very well," Zeus said. "I must go personally to purify this thunderbolt in the waters of Lemnos, to remove the human taint from its metal." It took a great effort to keep from scowling at that.
Remove the human taint? That was just rude, and extremely demeaning.

He turned to me next. "You have done me a service, boy. Few heroes could have accomplished as much."

He glared at me. "I do not trust you, Perseus Jackson. I do not like you-" He faltered at Poseidon's renewed glare, "what your arrival means for the future of Olympus. But for the sake of peace in the family, I shall let you live." I can promise you that I won't be the one to ruin the future of Olympus, if anyone does, I thought.

"Thank you," I said through gritted teeth, somehow managing to make it sound somewhat sincere.

"Do not let me find you here when I return. Otherwise you shall taste this bolt. And it shall be your last sensation."

Thunder shook the palace. With a blinding flash of lightning, Zeus was gone.

And then it was just me and Dad. "Your uncle," Poseidon sighed, "has always had a flair for dramatic exits. I think he would've done well as the god of theatre."

I grinned at that. Then my smile turned a little more awkward, as I realized that I was in a room alone with my dad. My dad who was still kind of a disappointment at this time, what with the laws that he had to follow. There was an uncomfortable silence for a few seconds, and looking around, I saw that Annabeth and Grover had left, presumably to give us privacy. A few more seconds, and Poseidon shrunk down to the size of a normal man, standing in front of me.

"Perseus-" he began.

"Just Percy," I interrupted.

"Percy. I'm truly sorry that I have not been in your life." Well, a bit blunt, but good for kickstarting the discussion.

"It's fine," I said.

"It really isn't," Poseidon said, shaking his head.


"I should still have visited," he said, closing his eyes. "Other gods make excuses all of the time to visit a favored mortal or to see their children once in a while. I just . . ."

"I understand, Dad," I said. "I really do."

He opened his eyes to stare at me intently. "Yes, I believe you do. But I need to say this," he said. "Your mother- your mother is a queen among women. I had not met such a mortal woman in a thousand years. Still ... I am sorry you were born, child. I have brought you a hero's fate, and a hero's fate is never happy. It is never anything but tragic."

"And this explains why you couldn't visit?" I asked.

"No," Poseidon said. "I could not visit you due to Zeus' laws. If I had even let slip one hint of your existence, he would have destroyed you on the spot."

"And Zeus is paranoid," I said. "He would have been keeping track of where you were at all times."
"Yes," Poseidon said. "He was."

We stood there in silence for almost a minute, both evidently trying to think of something further to discuss, something important enough to use as an excuse to prolong the conversation. In the end, we both failed.

"You should go," Poseidon said. "But know this, Percy. Whatever else you do, know that you are mine. You are a true son of the Sea God."

"Thanks, Dad," I said, smiling. "That means a lot to me."

I turned away and walked to the exit. I turned back and lifted my hand in farewell, and my father did as well. Maybe I'd have to deal with unfathomable monsters. Maybe I'd manage to defeat the giants, and we'd find out that there were worse creatures on their way. But for now, I felt that we could handle anything life threw at us. No, I knew that we could handle it, if we just stood together. Demigod and God. Human and Deity. Together as one.

Annabeth and Grover were waiting outside. We didn't say anything, and we walked back to the elevator in silence. Everyone knelt as we passed and I was glad for Annabeth and Grover being there. It made it feel less like I was singled out, like everyone was bowing to me.

I'll accept kudos and credit for being a hero. I'll accept a simple thank you. But I don't want to be bowed to. I'm not a god. I'm just me- just Percy Jackson. And I always will be, whatever happens. I've never been comfortable being an object of admiration, but I guessed I'd just have to stomach it. A lot of my actions were going to be public, at least as public as demigods got, and I'd have to live with it.

When we exited the Empire State Building, I called the pegasi and we rode them back to camp. Chiron greeted us briefly when we got back, but seemed to recognize our desperate need for sleep. So he kept it brief.

"I know you must be tired," he said. No kidding. I was going to sleep for a week, no joke. "But you need to know. Luke has gone rogue. His father came by earlier and said that he'd been ordered by Zeus to apprehend his son. We searched for Luke, but he had disappeared already."

"No . . . no. Just . . . no. It's not possible!" Annabeth seemed to be having some kind of mental breakdown, but I really couldn't be bothered right then. That probably sounded really callous, but I hadn't slept for more than six hours in more than a week. I couldn't really muster up enough feeling to sympathize with or comfort her. I was more focused on the fact that I could barely keep my eyes open.

Grover looked sad, but understanding. He'd probably known about Luke's animosity towards the gods. I knew for a fact that Luke had hated his father and gods in general since he ran away from home, and he'd probably been more than willing to share his opinions with Grover when he came to take them to camp.

I'd talk to them both about it later. See how they'd taken it and if they needed any help. But for now, I just wanted to sleep. I headed back to my cabin and crashed on my bed. I was asleep seconds after my head hit the pillow. I dreamt of sandy blonde haired titans and an identical hero who saved Olympus.

Chapter End Notes
So, Ares in this chapter. This is what I was talking about in the author's notes of the last chapter. I personally think that Ares is in character here, but I'd like to hear other opinions. Review if you have a specific opinion or advice on it. Anything helps.

So, Zeus in this chapter. I'm not bashing him, believe it or not. Percy is. Percy's spent the past three years in the future with the knowledge that they weren't prepared for the giants mainly due to Zeus' stubbornness, and his opinion on Zeus stems from that. So basically, he dislikes and looks down on Zeus even more than he does in canon.

For those wondering, Artemis will have her first appearance next chapter. Apollo will show up again for a little bit as well. Chapters five and six will cover the time between LT and SoM.

On the subject of Blackjack . . . he hadn't been captured yet at this point, and so could be anywhere. I decided to add him in earlier on a whim.
I manage to avoid becoming a Percalope

Chapter Summary

It's nice not being the last demigod anymore. I'm back, better than ever, in my totally unbiased opinion, and ready to shake things up.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Do it again. You can't let it down for a second; at any moment anyone could be there waiting to steal your secrets from your head."

I groaned, but complied all the same. Learning to protect my mind was hard work. Worth the effort? Yes. Painless? No. Had I wanted to learn to protect my mind? Yes. Had I wanted to learn this early in the morning? No. Did I have a choice? No.

See, I'd gotten back to camp from the quest, and it had only been a week or so before camp let out. I hadn't really wanted to waste my summer months on training in camp when I could be sleeping, so I'd left and gone home. My work ethic may have improved in the future, at least a little. However, that didn't mean I wasn't going to take full advantage of any opportunity to sleep in an actual bed, away from any sort of activity.

I'd vowed to train myself back up, but really, there's only so much you can do when you're twelve. So I figured it would be fine if I didn't really do much until the time when I knew I'd have to start the quest for the golden fleece. I kept thinking that until I found myself waking up at the crack of dawn every day. And I couldn't get back to sleep! Wasn't hard to figure out who was causing it; Apollo has a terrible sense of humor.

Of course, it had still taken him a week of his stupid prank to actually contact me and give me a location to meet. I mean, I'd known that certain places were named after or even commissioned by gods, but somehow I hadn't expected to meet at Apollo theatre.

"I hate you right now," I said to the unnaturally energetic god. Sure, I knew gods didn't technically have to sleep, but it was seven in the morning, for gods sake!

"After all I've done for you?" Apollo pretended to cry and laid a hand over his heart. "I'm wounded, Percy. I'm dying. You just struck me right in the heart with a poisoned arrow! I knew it; this was your plan all along! Kill me again so that I'd give you the rest of my power. Well, it won't work!"

I rolled my eyes at his melodramatics. Just because we were in a theatre didn't mean that he needed to hone his nonexistent acting skills.

"I heard that," Apollo said. "Focus on keeping me out. And for your information, my acting skills are great. You're just really unappreciative; you haven't even thanked me once for all I've done for you."

"Waking me up at ungodly hours in the morning?" I asked, scowling. "Not exactly something good. Or maybe it's brutally trying to break into my head. Or maybe waking me up really early in
"You said that last one already," Apollo pointed out. "You seem strangely fixated on it. Tons of people rise with the sun every day! Believe me, I know. You need to get over your fear of being awake."

"I'm not afraid of being awake," I said. I tried to maintain the fog over my mind even as I spoke and Apollo tried to blow it away. Metaphorically of course. I didn't literally have a fog over my head and Apollo wasn't literally blowing on it. "I'm not a child of Hypnos."

"It's okay to admit your fears," Apollo said faux compassionately. "I've feared things before, you know. I know what you're thinking! How can such an awesome god like me be scared of anything?"

"I wasn't," I said. He ignored me.

"Well, it was my father really. I always used to fear that he'd off me in one of his especially bad fits of anger... Come to think of it, I still fear that. Some fears are sensible, Percy. Never forget that."

"Okay, I fear waking up early in the morning," I said, rolling my eyes. "Will you stop doing it now?"

"You must pay your dues," Apollo said sagely.

"What dues?"

"You need to pay me back for getting rid of your stepfather."

"But you didn't..." I trailed off.

"Seriously, how oblivious can you get?" Apollo asked, rolling his eyes. "The smell alone is enough to knock out a hellhound!"

"I was honestly just trying to ignore him," I admitted. The decision to burn Medusa's head had seemed good at the time, but I'd regretted it when I'd remembered Gabe. Maybe pissing off the gods really had been worth getting rid of him. When he'd stopped bothering me, I'd assumed that he was away for something, or that he'd gotten bored of tormenting me. Both highly unlikely, of course, but you can't blame me for hoping.

"It's relatively easy to ignore someone who isn't there."

"Fine. Thank you." I really did appreciate it. Smelly Gabe was a blight on our lives, and I especially didn't want him around my mother.

"Wanna know what I did with him?" Apollo asked, looking like he wanted nothing more than to tell me right there, right then.

"Nope."

"Ok, so I- wait, what?" Apollo gaped at me. "You don't want to know what happened to him?"

"Nah," I said. "If I don't know what happened to him, I don't really have to feel bad."

"That's no fun," Apollo said, pouting.

"Tough luck." I rolled my eyes. "Can we get back to teaching me how to defend my mind?"
"You've pretty much got it down," Apollo said. "It's not that difficult once you start learning. Most of what you can improve on can be practiced on your own time. But I'll keep working with you for now if you want."

"Sure," I said, shrugging. It wasn't like I really had anything better to do.

"How'd you get rid of him the first time?" Apollo asked curiously.

"Petrified him," I said.

"With what?" Apollo asked, before realizing. "Oh, Medusa's head. Gotcha. So am I to assume you didn't burn it last time?"

"How do you know I burned it?" Can someone say 'stalker'?

"I heard that," Apollo said, scowling.

"I know," I said. "I meant for you to."

"I wasn't stalking you," Apollo said. "Stalking you would be up close, following you everywhere. I mostly just watched your quest whenever I felt bored. After all, I was still looking for a good moment to pop in at that point. So when I saw you facing off against Medusa, I got some popcorn and settled in for a good show. And then you just had to ruin it . . ."

"Better safe than sorry."

"Excuse me if I don't agree with you. I could take Medusa, blindfolded!"

"First of all, you'd kind of have to be blindfolded," I deadpanned. "Second, I know you gods will have sex with pretty much anything in sight, but Medusa? Really? I mean, I get that she might have been beautiful once, as hard as it is to imagine, but now?"

"I didn't mean take like that and you know it," Apollo said, rolling his eyes. "That's racist, dude."

"Gods aren't a race."

"How dare you!" Apollo shouted, dramatically pointing a finger at me and pretending to shake with rage. "Just because we're a minority! Well, I see how it is! I thought you were better than this, Percy."

"Shows how much you know," I said, sticking my tongue out childishly.

"Just for that, I have a present for you," Apollo said, pulling a giant gift wrapped box out of . . . somewhere. And by giant, I mean as big as or bigger than me.

"You're giving me a present . . . for being racist?"

"Yes, and what a present it is!" Apollo said, setting it on the ground. "Go on- open it!"

I did, cautiously. I doubted it was something really harmful, seeing as Apollo could have killed me any time he wanted. I tugged the bow off and tore the wrapping paper apart. Underneath it was a big brown box, and I took off the lid.

"This is . . . camping gear?" I said hesitantly.

"Got it in one!" Apollo grinned at me, flashing his blinding white teeth, and I had to blink the spots
"But I'm not going . . . why are you sending me camping?" I sighed. I knew this was gonna suck, whatever it was.

"Just because you're so racist," Apollo sniffed. "No, but seriously, I hope you're not sexist as well."

"I'm not either," I protested. "You're making a big deal out of nothing!"

"That's what they all say," Apollo said. "So, anyways, deal is . . . my little sister needs help. I assume you were acquainted with her in the future if there were so few of us gods and demigods left, and as I've never heard of a time traveling jackalope, I'm going to assume you know what to do and not to do in her presence."

"But I thought one of the rules was that males couldn't be in her presence," I said. Of course, that rule wasn't always enforced, and probably wouldn't be if she knew I was sent by Apollo, but I still felt like it needed to be mentioned.

"You obviously got around that before," Apollo said, waving his hand casually. "I'm sure you can figure it out again." I saw him snapping his fingers as if in slow motion, and before I could stop him, the scenery changed. Of course, the momentum from my lunge forward wasn't stopped and I ended up crashing into a tree. Ow.

A glance to my feet showed my new camping gear, with the box nowhere in sight. I stared uncomprehendingly at the unnaturally bright, flame colored tent. "There is absolutely no way I'm sleeping in that thing," I muttered.

"Halt, boy!" Huh. Should've figured. He had said that Artemis needed help with something. Oh man, I really didn't want to become a jackalope. I'd have to be extra diplomatic. It was possibly the greatest challenge I ever have or ever will face: diplomacy. My most fearsome enemy!

Ok, maybe that was stretching things a bit. "You say that like it's an insult." Or maybe not. Alright, that was my one allotted mistake. No more.

"It is." Rude.

"It's not nice to judge someone based on appearance," I said. Oops. I get two mistakes, right? Right? Seriously, I mostly wasn't kidding when I said that diplomacy was my greatest enemy.

"If I were to judge based on appearance," a girl in silver- not one I recognized- sniffed, "I would believe you to be some form of vagrant."

I gave myself a quick once over. Blue t-shirt, blue jacket, blue jeans. Aside from the 'gang colors,' I wasn't really seeing anything that justified the insult. Did all of the hunters have eyesight this poor? Luckily, I managed to keep myself from saying it aloud.

"Regardless," I said. "I need to see Ar- Lady Artemis."

"You will not be granted an audience, boy," another hunter growled, stalking out of the trees.

"Apollo sent me," I said. "Said she needed me to do something. I've got no idea what, though."

"That is preposterous," the second hunter scoffed.

"It's true," I said calmly. Or at least I'm sure I looked calm. I was actually more disinterested than
"Stand down." That was one voice that I was relieved to hear, funnily enough. Artemis swept into the clearing, closely followed by Zoe.

"My Lady!" The two other hunters straightened to attention.

After a second of being frozen in place, one decided that they hated me more than they feared the repercussions of disrespect.

"My Lady, what this boy says is preposterous. He seems to truly think that we will believe his story that Apollo sent him!"

"My brother did send him," Artemis said calmly. "As much as I hate it, we must try not to dispose of this boy; he is necessary— for now." Wow, I was really feeling the love.

"What could we possibly need a . . . boy for?" the first hunter asked.

"This boy had an encounter with Echidna and the chimaera. We will use him to draw them out." I ignored the part where she'd basically just said that I was bait.

"Wait, wait. I killed them a couple weeks ago," I said.

"And they have reformed." Artemis fixed me with a glare. "Echidna and her monstrous son have gone rogue. They were adequate servants until they met you, boy."

"Why would me killing them turn them against Olympus?" I asked, genuinely confused. Some demigods must have bested them over the centuries that they had worked for Olympus, and I doubted that they had taken the chance to desert back then.

"It was . . ." Artemis' lips twitched, and it looked like she was about to smile before her face blanked again. "More your method than your results."

"Ah, that." So Echidna probably hadn't enjoyed being killed by her boss. Yeah, that made sense.

"Regardless, you shall help us draw them in," Artemis said.

"You mean act as bait," I said drily.

"You may call it what you wish. We shall not provide for you, boy. I assume that if my brother sent you, he made sure that you would be able to survive?"

I grimaced, glancing at the unnaturally bright tent material. But I nodded all the same.

"You are not to come within thirty feet of our camp."

"How am I supposed to know where your camp is?" I asked. "I'm a fighter, not a hunter."

"I suspected such," Artemis said, nodding. "Very well. You may stay here for the night. In the morning, I shall send one of my hunters to lead you to a new location a sufficient distance from our next camp."

And with that, the four hunters faded into the trees. And when I say faded, I mean faded. It wasn't instantaneous, but within seconds the hunters had blended in with the surrounding forest and silently left.
I cursed Apollo again as I realized that it was only about seven thirty in the morning. And then I cursed the fact that I didn't have a watch.

I spent the rest of the day training as best as I could alone without any sparring partners. Some sword routines, some archery practice, that kind of thing. I caught a rabbit and ate a third for both lunch and dinner. It wasn't actually that bad; I'd sometimes been forced to stay away from any cities to avoid some of the more persistent titans and monsters. The giants didn't tend to chase me much. Anyway, point is, I'd eaten all sorts of wild animals and knew which ones I did and didn't like by now. Rabbits tasted a lot like chicken, and I like chicken as much as the next person. Which is to say, exponentially more than brussels sprouts and exponentially less than pepperoni pizza.

In the morning, I woke at the crack of dawn, as usual, and half heartedly practiced some sword routines while I waited for the hunter who was supposed to lead me to the next camping spot. I nearly dropped my sword when I saw who it was.

"Artemis?" I asked hesitantly.

Zoe's bow was up in an instant. "Permission to kill, My Lady?"

"No, Zoe," Artemis said. "I'm certain that he meant no disrespect. He simply didn't know better." Zoe glared pointedly at me until I sighed.

"Lady Artemis," I amended. "What are you doing here?"

"Yesterday, I noticed that you had some of my brother's power in you. I wish to discover the answer to that mystery."

"Were the rest of your hunters fine with you coming back to talk to me? They seemed kind of protective." Seriously, I knew from experience that they were extremely protective of their goddess, especially around males. They seemed to forget that she could turn any male into a jackalope if she actually felt threatened.

"They do not know that I am gone," Artemis said. "They believe that only Zoe has gone to lead you. As my lieutenant, I often assign her similar tasks."

"Are they not awake yet?" I asked. "Or, are you in two places at once?"

"The latter," Artemis said, seeming entirely unsurprised that I knew of that power.

"Alright then," I said. "As long as you've gotten that sorted out, ask away."

"We should begin moving," Artemis said. She lead the way out of the clearing. I had absolutely no idea where we were or where we were going, so I decided that the best option was probably to follow her.

"So," I said. "Why aren't we running?"

"You would not be able to keep up," Artemis said bluntly without looking back. I winced. Ouch. Okay, so maybe I was still sort of twelve physically at this point, but so were a lot of her hunters. It was probably just her poor opinion of males shining through.

"You know what?" I said. "Whatever. I'm fine with walking. So you said you had questions?"

"Yes," she said. "Why do you have a portion of my brother's power?"
"Ah, that's kind of a tricky explanation," I said. "But long story short, Apollo gave me his blessing."

"He has not done so in many years," Artemis said.

"So I'm unique," I said. "Good to know."

"Unique." Zoe snorted from off to the side. "That is one way of putting it, boy."

I ignored her interruption, and aside from a glance at her lieutenant, Artemis did as well.

"How did you meet my brother?" Artemis asked.

I thought quickly and managed to come up with something reasonable. "I ran across him when he was moping around on a park bench. He'd just been rejected by someone, I think, and was being melodramatic as usual." It had happened; it just hadn't been our first meeting. Far from it, actually. Apollo had sought me out, actually, mostly because I had been the closest demigod who he could find, and probably one of the only ones he knew wouldn't just fawn all over him- not that he at all disliked the respect and worship, but he likes messing with people, and it's kind of hard to do that with someone who will accept everything you say at face value while they're on their knees, licking your shoes clean. I'd humored him, mostly because I had nothing better to do. And believe me, I'd tried to find something. Luckily, Artemis hadn't specified which occasion, so I wasn't really lying at all.

Her eyes narrowed. "As usual?"

"He's always melodramatic," I said, rolling my eyes, even though she wasn't looking back and I knew she wouldn't see. "What did you think I meant?" She ignored me, taking a moment to think of her next question.

"Why did you provoke my father?" she asked.

"That one's simple," I said. "I knew that he had a pretty huge temper, and I needed a quick solution to the chihuahua problem. Plus, there's the fact that he sent them after me in the first place, and Echidna straight up admitted it. I wasn't really on his good side already, anyways, since he knew that I was Poseidon's son and thought that I'd been the one to steal the master bolt."

"Chihuahua?"

"Yeah," I said. "You know, tiny dog with a curly tail?"

"I know what a chihuahua is," Artemis said. "I wished for you to elaborate on your chihuahua problem."

"Oh," I said. "Well, it's not actually a chihuahua that I have a problem with. It's the chimaera."

"Ah."

"Yeah," I said. "See, the chimaera was disguised by mist as a chihuahua the first time that I met it."

"The first time?" she asked. "I was under the impression that you first encountered it approximately two weeks ago when you orchestrated its death."

I cursed silently. "I mean, I'm gonna see it again during this quest, bait thingy. The first time was back at the Arch and this'll be the second."
I got the feeling that she didn't believe me, but Artemis chose to drop the issue.

"Why do you not show proper respect to the gods?" she asked instead.

"Remember, you asked," I said. "If you don't like the answer, you don't get to change me into a jackalope or something."

"Like that," Artemis said, sounding exasperated.

"Well, honestly," I said. "No one's perfect. I mean, sure, you and your family are powerful, but you make mistakes all the time. And being treated like you're the best thing since blue food has got to be good for your egos. Good, as in it makes them grow like weeds. I don't think me treating you all like you believe you deserve will actually help anything, and I also just don't feel like it ninety-nine percent of the time, so I don't."

"Blue food?" she asked, thankfully not seeming to take offense.

"An inside joke between me and my mother," I explained. "She married a really horrible guy to keep me safe from monsters. And when I say horrible, I mean absolutely the worst man there probably is. He stunk so much that my a satyr- my best friend Grover- could smell him on me a week later. He was also really abusive and didn't seem to believe that my mother had a brain. Once, he said that there was no such thing as blue food. She managed to prove him wrong, a ton of times, and ever since, she's served me blue food whenever she can."

I almost ran into Artemis when she stopped right in front of me, and I barely stopped myself from flinching back when she spun around, pinning me with a glare. It became clear with her next words that it wasn't actually aimed at me.

"Where do you live?" she asked in a somewhat normal tone of voice, before it rose in volume. "I will smite him where he stands! He does not deserve to become a noble animal! The fields of punishment are too good for him!"

"Whoa," I said, holding up my hands and backing away a few steps. "Apollo took care of him about a week ago. I don't know how he did it, so you'll have to ask him if you want to know, but he's gone for good."

"Good," she muttered. "That's good. I suppose my brother can do something right after all. It is a very rare occurrence, but it is nice to know that he has a shred of common decency."

"Why do you hate your brother so much?" I asked.

"He is a womanizer," she said simply, as if it should explain everything. And it kind of did, considering who I was talking to. "But I do not hate him. I strongly dislike many of his actions, but he is my brother in the end."

"Makes sense," I said. "Maybe we should get moving again?"

"Ah, yes." She turned. "We are a ways behind my hunters by now. We will have to run. I highly doubt you can keep up, but I will be optimistic." She turned and began a light jog. Seriously, I could keep up that speed all day. I didn't tell her so, since she would probably take it as a sign of arrogance and shift to a speed that I couldn't keep up with.

"Thank you for answering my questions," she said. "You have already asked one, so I will grant you two questions, which I will answer truthfully. Choose carefully, boy."
"My Lady," Zoe protested. Huh. I'd pretty much forgotten that she was there.

"No, Zoe," Artemis said. "It is only fair. He did answer my own." I felt a little bit guilty, due to my slight lies, but I doubted that mentioning them would be good for my health.

"Huh," I said. "I didn't really expect this."

"Choose wisely," she warned.

"Wisely," I mused. "That's not usually used to describe my actions. In fact, I'm not sure it ever has been. I'll try, though. Hmm . . ."

We jogged in silence for a few more minutes before I thought of something.

"Oh," I said. "I've wanted to know this for a while. Ever since I heard your myth, really. Why did you want to be a virgin at three years old? I mean, I can understand wanting to be later in life, but you were three. You probably hardly knew what sex was. Of course, correct me if I'm wrong. That was only an assumption."

"I did have a basic understanding of sex," Artemis said. "Enough to understand that women generally mated with men. You must understand- back in the early days of Greece, when I was born, things were not nearly as equal as they are now."

"They're not exactly completely equal now, either," I said. "I mean, I'm assuming that you're talking about equality between men and women."

"You would be correct," she said. "But the situation is better now, even if it is still far from ideal. Back in the early days of Greece, women were treated almost like slaves. They were kept hidden at home, and men were often at liberty to do whatever they wanted with their wives. I did not wish to be shackled, and so I begged my father to let me remain a virgin, to remain unattached to any man who could gain control over me, forever. Men back then were terrors; many were far worse than my brother at his lowest. There was no positive reason to be connected to a man, and far too many negatives. Does that answer your question?"

"Yeah," I said slowly. "Yeah, it does."

"Very well," she said. "You have one remaining."

"I don't really have one right now," I said. I made sure to not phrase it in the form of a question as I continued. "We should pick up the pace. I can run faster than this, at the very least."

"If you are certain," Artemis said dubiously, sharing a look with Zoe. Seconds later, they sped up to a sprint. Or at least to what was a sprint for me. For them, it seemed like a very fast jog. I was once again unpleasantly reminded of my physical age.

I probably wouldn't have been able to keep pace with them without my power to heal using water. I had been pretty lucky that Apollo had packed a sports bottle into the camping supplies, and I had taken full advantage of it. I hadn't purified the water I'd filled it with, which I could do without the use of tablets. I hadn't really needed to purify it, however, since I'd actually intended it for something like this.

Every time my muscles started burning, I would pour water over my head. Every time, I'd be reenergized, the burning would go away for a while, and I'd find that I suddenly had a much easier time breathing again. It was still pretty pathetic that I needed the water revitalization approximately every ten minutes, but it was still much better than being left in the dust. I cursed my younger body
silently for pretty much the whole run.

After almost three hours of the grueling punishment, Artemis finally slowed to a walk, and Zoe followed her example. I was thankful, since I only really had enough water left for maybe twenty more minutes of running. I noticed that we'd stopped in the middle of a forest, which made sense if the hunters were setting up a campsite. I vowed to find out where exactly we were next time that I had a chance.

I opened my mouth to ask, and without even looking back, Zoe used her hand to muffle me. I glared at her for a second before noticing Artemis moving slowly, and probably more important, noiselessly. Oh- she'd most likely sensed a monster nearby or something. Zoe removed her hand from my lips and gestured for me to follow quietly, by waving her hand forward, before putting her finger over her own lips.

We actually made it about two more minutes before the monsters caught on to us. It probably would have been fine if it was just a hellhound, but by the sound of falling trees, I judged that to probably not be the case. Artemis had stopped moving, apparently resigned to the fact that we were going to need to fight.

I enlarged my bow and notched an arrow, noting out of the corner of my vision that the other two had done the same. The tree approximately ten feet in front of me was knocked down and I let my arrow fly. It didn't seem to do much damage to the chimaera . . . I'd half expected it, with my luck. I'd definitely suspected that Echidna would be there, I thought as the snake woman stepped out from behind her 'son'.

I hadn't really expected the hydra.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, so minor cliffhanger. Yay. Whatever. In this chapter, Percy meets Artemis. This is a reasonable relationship, meaning that there is literally nothing romantic between them upon first meeting. Just a powerful goddess meeting an insignificant boy. Or something along those lines.

There's no "And her auburn hair was the most beautiful I'd ever seen. I quashed the immediate crush, since I knew she would never return my feelings." Absolutely nothing like that- I'm serious.

I'm trying my hardest to keep everyone in character, which means that while Artemis is much more reasonable than many of her hunters(which she is in canon), she still doesn't like boys or men. And it has more to do with men in general than her being depressed over her nonexistent relationship with Orion millennia ago. That will probably be mentioned once by Artemis in the entire story. Maybe twice. And by mention, I mean literally just mentioned. She's not going to go in depth about her feelings for Orion or his attractive qualities, or even go on a rant about how much she hates him and that she knew he was a scumbag from the moment she saw him. I'm not buying into those clichés at all.

No hunters will randomly develop crushes on him just to make his relationship with Artemis harder, and I really won't be coming up with names for many of the hunters. Percy's relationship with Artemis is, for the most part, completely separate from her
hunt. He's not going to get chummy with them in order to get in Artemis' good books. Or just out of the goodness of his heart.

Honestly, while I don't expect there to be much suspense until I reach the end of Titan's Curse, I really couldn't help adding the hydra. It's more interesting than just facing Echidna and the chimaera yet again.

As usual, if you're enjoying the story, please follow and/or favorite and/or review. If you don't like it or you spot an error, review and tell me please. I mean it! I want to catch those errors so I can make this story as perfect as possible.
I forget to fail

Chapter Summary

It's nice not being the last demigod anymore. I'm back, better than ever, in my totally unbiased opinion, and ready to shake things up.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"So," I said nonchalantly, "Echidna, Echidna's son, and a hydra."

"The hydra is her son as well," Artemis said.

"Uh, wow," I said, blinking. "How did that work? Some of these monsters seem like they would have been too big to come out of her, even as babies. Are we sure Typhon wasn't the one to give birth?"

"I would assume there was some form of c-section," Artemis said.

I stared at her for a moment, wondering why she knew what a c-section was when she'd never had any kids and when most of the other gods weren't exactly caught up on the minutiae of modern mortal technology, before I remembered.

"Oh, goddess of childbirth," I muttered.

"Enough talk," Echidna snarled. "You will die, Percy Jackson."

"And then you'll go back to Olympus and work for Zeus again?" I asked hopefully, trying to figure out how to fake my death convincingly.

"I will never work for that betrayer again!" she yelled. "I followed his command for millenia, and how does he thank me? With a lightning bolt!"

"It was really just an accident," I tried to explain. "He was aiming for me, not you."

"Lies!" she hissed. "As usual, he is making excuses. Excuses, excuses and more excuses! No longer shall I accept his lies! I was struck down by Zeus, and now that he has realized my worth, he wishes for me to return. It is too late for that, demigod!"

Okay, so it looked like faking my death wouldn't do anything good. And to be honest, I hadn't come up with anything in the thirty seconds I'd had to think of a way to do it.

"Permission to kill, My Lady?" Zoe asked, her bow pointed directly at Echidna.

"Permission granted," Artemis said. Her bow vanished and she pulled out her hunting knives. I followed her example, shrinking my bow and quiver and drawing Riptide.

Zoe let the arrow fly, and Echidna barely managed to get an arm up in time to block a headshot. She still hissed in pain as the arrow sunk in between her scales.
"Kill them!" She yelled, pointing at us. I wondered if she was just being dramatic or if the chimaera and hydra were really stupid enough to not know their targets without their 'mother' pointing us out for them. Either way, they knew their targets now.

Or at least I assumed it did, due to the spray of acid that I'd just been forced to dodge. Who knows? The hydra could have been aiming for the tree behind me, in which case its aim was spot on. Oh, wait. It was following me. Never mind. It knew its target.

I was peripherally aware of Artemis and Zoe facing off against the chimaera, but I couldn't focus much on that as I was forced to dodge even more acid.

I twisted around even more acid to smash the hydra on its middle head. I cursed it for its stupid ability to grow back its heads, even as I used the now lowered middle head as a stepping stone and stabbed it further on the back of one of its necks. As long as I didn't actually cut off one of its heads, it shouldn't be able to regenerate.

I jumped off and rolled when I hit the ground. Looking back, I breathed a sigh of relief upon seeing that my theory had proven true. The injury wasn't healing! But that was only really going to slow it down; I didn't think the hydra could die without all of its heads being cut off and cauterized.

We didn't have any fire- or did we? But I needed to be up front with my sword, cutting off its heads. It took me a moment, but . . . "Aha."

"Zoe!" I shouted. "I've got a plan but I'll need your help!"

"Go, Zoe!" Artemis shouted without even looking at her. Of course, she was a little busy with the chimaera; I momentarily felt rather bad for being the reason she couldn't just revert to her godly form and vaporize it instantly, before I realized that even if I hadn't been here, Zoe would be, and probably the rest of the hunters as well.

Zoe arrived a second later, glaring at me for interrupting her all important task of shooting what were effectively toothpicks into the chimaera. "What is thy plan?"

I un-shrunk my bow and quiver, holding them out to her, before we both rolled to opposite sides in order to avoid the hydra's acid. Once we were both standing again, I lobbed the bow and arrow, once more in ring form, over the hydra.

"Catch!" I yelled.

She didn't look happy, but she caught it all the same. She stared at the ring for a moment as I feinted at the Hydra, trying to draw its attention. I saw her understand and un-shrink my bow out of the corner of my eyes.

"What use have I for thy bow, boy?" she yelled.

"You know my name is Percy, right?" I shouted back, before slicing through a young tree with my sword. Or at least it was probably young; it was super thin anyways. I'd made sure to cut it at the right time, so it fell on the hydra just as it charged at me. It didn't really injure it, but the hydra was forced to abort its attack to untangle two of its heads from the branches.

"It can light arrows on fire if you think about it happening!" I yelled to Zoe. "I'll cut off the heads- you cauterize them! Tell me when you're ready!"

"Ready," she shouted a second later.
I charged at the hydra, feinting at its leftmost head before cutting off one of its right heads in one smooth stroke. A second later, a flaming arrow was lodged in the stump, cauterizing it. I thanked the gods that Zoe was such an expert archer.

I was forced to roll to the side a moment later as it spat acid again, hissing angrily. I was up again in an instant though, sidestepping even more acid. I'd heard somewhere that Hydras could only spit acid from their middle head, but whoever had said that was definitely wrong. Three heads were currently spitting at me in tandem.

I tried to run around past the acid to cut off one of the side heads, but the hydra turned with me. It sure had a lot of speed for such a giant monster. As I watched it spit acid another time, I realized that the heads were spitting all at once, and that there was about a two second delay where the hydra presumably gathered more acid. I just had to wait for it . . . there!

I leapt forward and sliced off one of the three acid spitting heads before throwing myself backwards a second later to avoid the other two streams of acid. I had hoped that the heads it was spitting with were the only ones that could spit acid, but I'd also known that it was too much to hope for. Which was why I was more resigned than surprised when the middle head took over for the head that I'd just cut off.

The hydra was catching on to my tricks by now, and I'd gotten nothing out of the last three feints that I'd tried. I circled it, waiting for an opening. Suddenly, the hydra spun around, and I almost laughed as I saw the arrow lodged in the back of one of its heads. Trust Zoe to come through for me!

I wasn't one to waste an opportunity, and I lunged at it, slicing off the last head on its right side. The hydra spun to face me, and as soon as it stopped spinning, another flaming arrow sprouted from the stump, just in time.

I needed to find some other way to distract it. I couldn't really expect Zoe to keep putting herself in direct danger, especially when I needed her as ranged support. I looked around desperately, and happened upon a number of large rocks. Huh. Oh wait, Hydras couldn't see, could they? Or if they could, it wasn't well.

I grinned briefly, picking up a stone. I flung it over the hydra, but away from Zoe and the hydra spun to follow the sound. I took my opportunity and cut off the two leftmost heads. And it looked like Zoe had been prepared this time, because she managed to hit both stumps with arrows before the hydra could even spin back around. Only two heads left now!

I threw another stone, and the hydra spun to face the sound again. Apparently, it hadn't learned from the previous time I'd done it, I thought as I sliced off its left head. Only one to go.

The hydra was quicker in spinning around this time however, and Zoe's arrow went awry. I grimaced as I saw one of the trees on fire. I'd have to deal with that later, but I put that thought to the side as I cut off the regrowing head. This time, Zoe's arrow connected. It really wasn't hard to dodge the next spray of acid, due to the Hydra only having one head left.

I easily dodged it by leaning back and then jumping around it, casually slashing through the neck of the final head, and sighing in relief as Zoe's arrow connected and the hydra collapsed into monster dust. A moment later, I was catching my bow- once again a ring- as Zoe rushed to off to help Artemis. I followed a second later.

Artemis was fighting similarly to how she'd fought against Atlas, and it was truly a sight to behold. She changed form smoothly, choosing the animal to suit her purposes, using their attributes to
maneuver herself into an advantageous position, and then striking. It was nice to confirm that I hadn't been hallucinating last time, from the pain of holding the sky.

Zoe's arrows were peppering the chimaera, but didn't seem to be doing much to it in the long run, and I knew this fight would need to be won in a decisive blow rather than in a battle of attrition.

I circled it, occasionally trying to stab it when I thought it wasn't paying attention, but the snake head managed to fend me off each time, forcing me to jump back out of range. Finally, I circled back around to the front and saw my moment.

The chimaera had lunged after Artemis, breathing fire, and I took the opportunity to slice right through its extended neck. It was almost anticlimactic, I thought, as the chimaera dissolved. Echidna stared at her 'son' in shock for a moment, before lunging at me with a scream. I stepped aside, easily cutting through her head, and she dissolved as well.

For all of her skill at popping out monsters, Echidna really wasn't much of a fighter at all. Zeus had probably only kept her around to secure the loyalty of the chimaera, who would probably only obey its mother.

"So . . ." I said. "You needed me to kill the chimaera and Echidna; done with that. Need anything else?"

"No," Artemis said, sighing as she stared at me for a moment. "Preferably, we would have returned to Olympus with Echidna and the chimaera as prisoners, but evidently, that was not possible."

"So I think I'll be going now," I said.

"Wait!" Zoe shouted. "Thy sword!"

"Yeah?" I asked. "What about it?" I knew what it was about, of course, but I wasn't technically supposed to at this point. I could claim that I'd had a demigod dream, but it would probably be much simpler to just let her explain.

"That blade," she said slowly, visibly making an effort to calm down. "Where did you obtain it?"

"You mean Riptide?" I asked. "Chiron gave it to me and told me that it was a gift from my dad, Poseidon. Why?"

"It is nothing," she said quickly, turning away. Artemis gave her a concerned glance as she wandered over to the nearest tree still standing- the rest had been either burnt from acid or set . . . on . . . fire.

"Uh, Artemis?" I asked. "I think there might be a fire starting over where we battled the hydra. Any chance you could use your godly powers to put it out?" I smiled sheepishly.

"Boys," she muttered, shaking her head. "Yes, I can take care of that."

"Cool, so I think that's everything," I said.

"Yes," Artemis said. "Go now, Percy Jackson, but know that you did well, for a boy." Damn. It had been nice having Artemis' respect before- there were very few males that she had ever respected. However, I supposed that helping out in some monster hunting didn't quite add up to holding up the sky, helping battle a titan, and trying to save her lieutenant from a certain death. Oh well- I'd earn it back eventually. Preferably without Zoe dying this time.
"Thank you," I said. "Apollo! Beam me up!"

I felt an intense heat and closed my eyes as I realized that he was flashing in- I would have rolled them if they weren't closed. I opened them again once the heat died down to see Apollo standing in front of me casually, hands in his pockets. He glanced around me as if trying to spot someone else- oh.

"Damn," he said. "Missed her again. If I didn't know better, I'd think she was avoiding me."

I wondered what his definition of knowing better was, since it seemed pretty clear to me that Artemis avoided him whenever possible. Whatever; someone else could burst his bubble.

"So," I said. "How are we getting back now? You can't flash me there, since I'll just be vaporized."

"Who said I was going to flash you?" Apollo asked.

I groaned. "Please don't. I'm not into guys!"

"You know that's not what I meant," Apollo muttered. "But why do you think we gods can only get places by flashing around?"

"Uh," I said, suddenly uncertain. "I don't know . . . I think I heard it somewhere?"

"Well, you should stop listening to false information," Apollo said, rolling his eyes. "It's simply our fastest method of transportation." He snapped his fingers and we were suddenly standing outside my apartment.

"That seemed pretty fast to me," I said dubiously.

"To you, yes. A lowly mortal with dulled senses."

"Wow, now who's racist?"

"Not racist," Apollo said. "Just a fact."

"That's like saying that gods all carry a caduceus, and then saying it's just a fact, not racist."

"It's not even close to the same thing," he said. "That's not even factually correct, anyways. It is a fact, however, that Gods are better than mortals in every possible way."

"Pompous windbag," I muttered.

"Pompous windbag is my father," he said, winking. "Just call me Apollo."

I snorted. That one had actually been pretty good. I reached out to open the door before hesitating. "Oh shit. My mom's gonna kill me!"

"Don't worry," Apollo said in what he probably thought was a soothing tone. "I'll revive you!"

"Really?" I asked, rolling my eyes.

"Nah. Too much effort."

"Figures," I muttered.

"Make sure to write something good on my gravestone," I told Apollo solemnly.
"I'll do even better," Apollo said. "I'll speak at your funeral. 'Percy Jackson was a decent fighter, but his greatest skill was being extremely racist for no particular reason.'"

I rolled my eyes again. "On second thought, just let Chiron do the speaking."

"Well," he huffed, making a big show of stomping his foot like a little kid. "I can see when I'm not wanted . . . Hmm, where would I actually be appreciated? The Japanese are really polite and respectful, right? Right! I'm going to Japan! Au revoir!"

"Wrong language!" I shouted at him, turning around as he flashed away. I shuddered when I realized that he'd likely pick up Haikus again soon. And to think I'd actually been able to stand him recently.

I opened the door and stepped inside. "Mom, I'm home- oof." I sometimes wonder if my mom's a legacy of Hermes; she can move really fast when she wants to.

"Mom," I gasped. "Can't . . . breathe." Okay, so maybe I was being a little over dramatic, but it was a really tight hug.

She finally let me breath, drawing back to look me in the eyes. "Percy, where were you? I thought you'd been kidnapped! You didn't call; you just left yesterday morning and you didn't come back!"

Okay, wait for it. Three . . . Two . . . One . . .

"I was really worried," my mom said, deflating. "Where were you?"

"Well, I did get kidnapped," I said. At her wide eyes, I elaborated. "Well, sort of. Apollo was teaching me to defend my mind yesterday morning. And then he said that his sister needed help and sort of just sent me to help without asking."

"What could a goddess need your help with?"

I winced. "Well, you see, um . . . shewastrackingthechimaeraandwantedto-"

"Slow down," my mom interrupted. "All I really heard was 'chimaera.' Wait, chimaera?" And now she was staring at me with wide eyes again.

"Ok, see, thing is," I said. "I ran into the chimaera and Echidna this summer over at the St Louis Arch. And then I kind of goaded Zeus into killing them with a lightning bolt. They didn't really like getting killed by their boss and so they ran away after reforming. Artemis tracks down pretty much all of the monsters that Zeus specifically wants killed, but she wasn't getting close to them. So she needed me, since Echidna was probably harboring a grudge towards me after the Arch. And it worked!"

"I haven't pressed much about your quest, Percy," she said. "But I think you need to tell me exactly what happened."

And so I did. Really, she'd have probably found out eventually, some way or another. My mom's resourceful like that. She's also a really good listener. I told her all about the quest and then how I'd helped Artemis take down the monsters earlier in the morning. She gasped at all the right parts- or all the wrong parts, seeing as I was really trying to tone it down so it didn't really worry her.

"So let me get this straight," she said once I'd finished. "You killed Medusa. Then you went and killed Echidna and the chimaera, who's apparently her son. Then you did something that was probably incredibly dangerous but you swore an oath on the styx not to tell. And then this morning you killed the hydra and the chimaera again. Does that about sum it up?"
"I had help," I muttered. Or at least I had for the hydra and chimaera. I'd done everything else solo on purpose. But she didn't need to know that.

"Do you have a death wish, Percy?" she asked me seriously.

"Wh-what? No," I spluttered. "I wasn't trying to die!" One drawn out conversation with my mom, and I'm suddenly acting my physical age again. Great. Some demigod hero I am!

"But you could have," she said, frowning at me. "I really worry about you, and you go putting yourself in all these dangerous situations . . ."

"Sorry," I said. "But I'm a demigod. If I don't do it, who else will?"

"Maybe another demigod?" she asked drily.

"Nah," I said. "I'm not trying to sound arrogant or whatever, but what with Dad being Poseidon and all, I'm probably literally the only demigod in camp right now who can deal with the really large scale threats. Aside from maybe a few Hephaestus campers who have way too much greek fire, but they don't really go on quests anyways."

"I've always known that you would do great things, Percy." It was nice to know that she had confidence in me. I loved my mom, and I took her words pretty seriously. Call me a momma's boy if you want to; I don't care. "But please try to be careful."

"I'll try, Mom," I said sincerely.

"I suppose that's all I can ask then," my mom said with a sigh.

"Now about Artemis," my mom said. "I've heard the legends; please don't do anything to make her angry. I don't really want a jackalope for a son-"

"Percalope," I interrupted.

Her lips twitched. "Yes, Percalope. I'd rather not have a Percalope for a son. I wouldn't really mind having a daughter, but I've gotten rather used to having a son . . . so just be careful around gods. They're not to be taken lightly."

"You think I don't know that?" I asked, rolling my eyes. "And I don't think Artemis turns boys into girls anymore. Pretty sure it's just the animals these days- mainly jackalopes."

"That's nice, Percy," my mom said, rolling her eyes. "If you feel comfortable being turned into an animal, don't let me stop you."

"Thanks mom," I said brightly, grinning at her, and she rolled her eyes again. "I've always wanted to be a Percalope!"

"Regardless of your wish," my mom said. "We do still need to discuss your schooling for next year."

"What's to discuss?" I asked, not really paying much attention to the conversation. "Aren't I going to Meriwether College Prep?"

"Percy," my mom chided. "You don't have to switch schools. You didn't get kicked out last year!" Oops. I'd been so focused on planning what I'd do about the future that I hadn't remembered to get kicked out.
"Uh, I kinda need to switch schools," I said hesitantly.

"Percy," my mom said. "I know you're used to being kicked out, but you weren't this time! You don't need to switch schools at all." I was a little insulted that she still sounded a bit disbelieving, even months after the fact, that I hadn't gotten kicked out of school.

"What?" I asked flatly. "I'm not too used to failing to know that I passed, mom. Come on. Even I'm not that oblivious."

"Then why do you think that you need to switch schools?"

"Demigod stuff," I said.

"Ah," my mom said. "And I assume this has something to do with that Meriwether College Prep school?" She stared at me for a moment, and I made sure to look as confident as I could.

She sighed. "I suppose I'd better look up this school then. Come on, Percy."

She led me to the computer. It wasn't a very fast computer, but it could get online, and that's really all that my mom or I ever needed. When it comes to demigods- aka, me- it was often best to have less technology, or at the very least worse or older models.

"Meriwether . . . College . . . Prep," my mom muttered as she typed in the school name.

"No grades?" she asked somewhat incredulously. "Encouraging teachers? Beanbag chairs? Percy, are you just trying to get out of doing any kind of real work?"

"No," I said with a snort. "There's someone I need to meet there. Just trust me. Please, Mom." The lack of actual work was just a bonus. I'm opportunistic like that.

"Alright, Percy," she said reluctantly. "I'll trust you on this. Just please, be careful."

"I will, I will," I said. "Thanks Mom! You're the best!"

"And don't you forget it." She hugged me again, and I didn't resist this time.

The rest of the summer passed fairly quickly. I Iris messaged Grover at regular intervals in order to make sure that he hadn't been kidnapped yet. I was like eighty five percent sure that he'd been taken near the end of the school year, but it never hurt to be certain.

Well, it probably hurt Dad's wallet. I'd had to petition him for allowance again. At least this time I'd been able to include in the prayer 'You don't need to do this just because you feel guilty, Dad. If you don't want to give me money, then that's cool.' I hoped that would at least assuage his guilt a bit and it would let me know that he was doing it because he cared for me, and not because I was guilting him into it.

I Iris messaged Annabeth once or twice to see what she was doing, and I was glad to see that she seemed pretty happy. I remembered that she'd actually been getting along with her dad again before he'd moved to San Francisco the first time. Thankfully, Apollo had stopped his early wake up curse thing, and I could finally get a little more sleep.

He did still drop by from time to time, however, to judge my mental abilities. I'd be the first to admit that I'd been lazy about practicing them. To be honest, it was mostly because I knew that this would be the longest monster free period of time for a long while, and I wanted to rest and enjoy it.
Apollo didn't seem to understand it, as he also showed up to teach me more archery. I hadn't yet
gotten the chance to go in the sun chariot, but I knew that I would when I was fourteen, so it was all
good.

The worst part of Apollo dropping by, really, were the haikus. You heard me. He'd started on the
haikus, and they were as terrible as ever. No, worse! Turns out he'd actually improved some before
I'd first heard him before; of course, anything would be an improvement over how bad he was right
now.

If I never hear a haiku again in my life, I'll die happy. Sadly, I doubt I'll actually die happy if those
are my standards. Apollo was far too obsessed for that. It did make some sense, however. He is, in
fact, the god of poetry. Which apparently doesn't make him good at it. Not even a little bit.

Seriously, I died a little inside every time I heard him recite a haiku. They were slowly chipping
away at my soul. I couldn't wait until school started, if only so I could get away from the haikus.
It's not running away; it's a tactical retreat! Really! I bet you'd run- I mean, hold a tactical retreat
almost immediately if you heard even one of his haikus. I'd better go to Elysium for humoring him;
seriously, I think my version of the fields of punishment would just be Apollo continuously reading
bad haikus to me.

Finally, the new school year did come around and I headed off to Meriwether College Prep. For
once, I was actually excited for school, and not entirely because of my desire to escape Apollo. I
was going to see Tyson again!

Chapter End Notes

If the chapter hadn't been so short, I might have left off after Percy sorted out his
schooling situation, without the summer summary. It's still a little bit short, but not
nearly as short as before.

If you notice any inconsistencies in Zoe's speech patterns, that's normal. It was that
way in the books too. From what I can tell, she reverts to archaic speech in stressful or
high tension situations, but can talk 'modern' just fine otherwise. I really hope I got her
speech mostly right; I'm terrible with old english.

So, Percy's planning on Grover being kidnapped. That's probably not the mark of a
good friend, and I'm pretty sure I had him say somewhere that he wouldn't let his
friends get kidnapped again. But he's kind of banking on the quest to the sea of
monsters so that he can save Thalia. Everything worked out well last time, and he
hasn't really changed enough yet to affect Polyphemus' choice of hunting ground. So
yes, he's planning to let Grover get kidnapped, but he's also planning to reach the sea
of monsters, and consequently Grover, earlier this time.
Chapter Summary

It's nice not being the last demigod anymore. I'm back, better than ever, in my totally unbiased opinion, and ready to shake things up.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Grover's getting married." My mom stared at me like I'd just said my best friend, someone who was physically and mentally about fourteen or fifteen, was getting married. Oh, wait . . . oops.

In my defense, I'd had a lot on my mind when she'd asked me if something was wrong. It was the last day of school, and I'd just gotten the dream about Grover running from Polyphemus.

Which meant I'd have to play dodge the cannonball and probably ride in the Gray sisters' taxi. And then the whole sea of monsters thing would start. And I'd have to stop by Circe's island without becoming a guinea pig, navigate through the sea of monsters without running into Scylla or Charybdis, and rescue Grover before he got eaten on his wedding day.

Anyways, I'd been deep in thought when my mom had noticed that I was, well, deep in thought. She'd asked me if something was wrong, or what I was thinking, or something- I wasn't really paying attention. And I'd been thinking about Grover's impending wedding . . . oops?

"Ha ha," my mom said flatly. When I didn't say anything to indicate that it had been a joke, she sighed. "You were kidding, right?"

"Nah. Grover's getting married to Polyphemus- he's a cyclops." I said this cheerfully, as if Grover's wedding was normal and I was just happy for my friend's great luck in securing a bride- uh, groom. Hey, I'd already let on that something was up; might as well just roll with it. It was actually kind of hilarious; Grover getting married to a male cyclops, not dying.

"I did read the Odyssey, Percy," my mom said. "I kind of had to when your father told me the truth."

"Cool, then you know that I need to get to camp, right?" I asked, making to get up. She grabbed the back of my jacket, and I resigned myself to explaining.

I waited for her to ask a question, but she just stared at me until the silence got uncomfortable. I mean, I knew the tactic, but that didn't mean I was immune to it, especially when it came from my own mom.

It's like how when you're thirty something, and you go back to your house for thanksgiving. And then even though you're bigger, stronger, possibly even wealthier and more successful than your mom, you cower as she berates you for not washing your hands before dinner. Same thing here; being a demigod hero didn't make me immune to my mom's patented child rearing tactics.

So I talked. "Uh, okay. So, thing is, Grover's been captured by Polyphemus and taken to his lair in the sea of monsters. The Golden Fleece is on the same island as his lair, and I'll need to get the
fleece and rescue Grover. I need the fleece because Thalia- she's Zeus' daughter, and he turned her into a tree a while back when she was dying- anyways, Luke, the Kronos sympathizer I told you about, who was also her first demigod friend, poisoned her tree recently and so she's dying again. But if I get the fleece, I can un-tree her, which is good, cause, you know, I doubt she likes being a tree."

I took a deep breath before finishing with, "So, if that's all, I'm going to go to school, destroy some cannibal giants, and then I'll head to camp with Tyson, who's actually a cyclops and my half brother, by way of the Gray Sisters' taxi. Any questions? No? Good. I'll be going the- ack." Now, I thought my explanation was rather comprehensive, or at least enough to get by on. My mom showed that she disagreed by once again pulling me down by the back of my jacket. Maybe I should consider fleshing out my explanations a bit? Nah.

"Percy, I was going to tell you," my mom began. "Well, that you couldn't go to camp . . . but how did you know about the tree being poisoned?"

"Demigod dream," I said. Seriously, it was the answer to everything. Any information I shouldn't know, I could just blame on a dream. Why hadn't I thought of this earlier? "The dream also showed me that Chiron's been replaced with someone who's a greek criminal, an idiot, and a total dick. Seriously, who thought placing him in charge was alright? Well, probably the same person who thought placing Mr. D in charge of the camp was okay. No offense, Zeus!"

"Percy," my mom said weakly. "You should probably avoid antagonizing Zeus, after what you did last summer."

"Hey! I said no offense!"

"I doubt that helped," my mom said, rolling her eyes. She seemed a little more cheerful than she had a moment ago, which is what I'd been going for. She was usually really worried about me, and so anything I could do to make light of the situation helped. Which was the main reason that I'd explained all in one breath. She hadn't had time to process all of the dangerous things that had happened or would happen.

"At least I tried," I argued. In a manner of speaking; the Phlegethon would freeze over before I cared about what Zeus thought.

"I'm sure you did," my mom said sarcastically, cracking a small smile. "Now, we'll talk about this more after school."

"Uh, no," I said. "I gotta get to camp after school. Sooner I get all this stuff over with, the better. Sorry, mom."

"Are you sure you can't wait a day?" my mom asked. It sounded a little bit like she was pleading, which she probably was. It was difficult to forget how much she worried about me, when everything she did seemed geared towards my safety. I was really lucky to have her as a mother, and there was no way I was going to fail, if only so that I could keep her safe. I mean, I had tons of other reasons, but that was one of my biggest.

"Like I said, sorry, but I can't wait. The more time I have, the safer I'll be."

"Okay, Percy," my mom said, backing down. "Just be careful, please."

"Don't worry, mom," I said, winking at her. "I'm always careful." She snorted, and I grinned.

I finished my waffles quickly after that, and rushed to catch the train.
I caught a glimpse of blonde hair when I stepped outside, before it vanished. I smiled, glad to know that none of the changes that I’d made had affected Annabeth’s arrival.

I spent the train ride talking with Tyson; I’d been trying to boost his confidence all year. I hadn’t told him about me being a son of Poseidon yet, but I knew he’d find out today.

We got to school and headed to English class. I didn’t remember much about my schooling before I went back, other than the various monster related incidents, but I did remember the Lord of the Flies activity.

It had taken me a lot of effort to not just attack Sloan every time I saw him over the school year. Figuratively- I knew attacking him was a bad idea, and just the wrong thing to do. He was actually a mortal, so I couldn’t kill him even if I had wanted to.

But I was certainly pissed off by all the bullying, and my frustration had been building up. This was the last day of school, so I could at least vent my anger on the laistrygonians. I’d been watching as Sloan tried to give Tyson a wedgie, gritting my teeth. It wasn’t in my nature to be passive, but as I said, I can’t really attack him, both because he’s mortal and it wouldn’t be fair, and also because I didn’t want to get expelled. Then Tyson had swatted him away, and I decided that I didn’t have the patience to wait until gym class.

And there was my opportunity. I had my bow out in an instant, and Joe Bob stared uncomprehendingly at the arrow that sprouted from his forehead a second later. He dissolved and everyone turned to stare- at me. I glanced at my bow, at the class, and then back to my bow. I kind of wondered what they saw, because it wasn’t like a bow was all that mythical in and of itself. They might have actually just seen me murder a student in cold blood. I couldn't risk it. I concentrated and snapped my fingers.

"Mr. de Milo wants everyone back inside early. Nothing exciting happened, which was really disappointing, but no one wanted to start anything because we knew that the teacher was actually secretly watching us." It was easy to just straight up manipulate the mist without words and give everyone a vague message to go somewhere else when it was only a couple of people, as it had been at the Arch. It was a lot more difficult to will an entire class of students back inside with just a snap of my fingers. So I'd simply made them highly suggestible and suggested a plausible reason that they needed to go back inside.

That left seven giants staring at me, cracking their knuckles. Wait, seven? I turned to see the eighth following the rest of the class inside, glazed eyes and all. I hadn’t really expected the monster to be so easy to manipulate, but it looked like that one was just really stupid, even for a laistrygonian.

I took advantage of the opportunity, firing an arrow into the back of its head, and it dissolved as well. Now, there were only seven- and that’s when I got punched into a wall. Man, I really need to work on my situational awareness.

Luckily, the giant hadn’t been fully transformed, so I just ached all over instead of being knocked out. I pulled a piece of ambrosia out of my pocket and ate it as quickly as I could.

When I glanced up, Tyson had actually managed to kill one, but that still left six. He’d barely managed to get behind the tree holding up the tire swing before a flaming cannonball- when had they summoned those?- slammed into it, nearly knocking it over. Luckily, it was a really sturdy tree.

I was kind of proud of Tyson. He seemed to have assessed the situation pretty quickly- or he might have just decided to defend himself against the giants throwing glowing cannonballs.
It seemed that they all thought that I was out of the fight, as no one was paying me any attention. I used their inattention to snipe two more of the giants in the back of the head. I didn't get any more than that, as the four whirled around and two of them tossed cannonballs at me. I barely managed to avoid it by throwing myself to the side.

When I looked up a second later, I saw Tyson punch one in the crotch. Its eyes widened and its mouth opened in a silent scream even as it dissolved. I winced. So apparently even humanoid monsters didn't like to get hit down there. Especially not by someone with the strength of a cyclops.

Another one dissolved for seemingly no reason, and it took me a moment to realize that it had probably been Annabeth. I growled as I was forced to dodge another cannonball. I hadn't even had time to get another shot off. Although that was probably mostly my fault; I'd spent quite a few seconds just watching the fight.

This time, I glanced up just in time to see Tyson catch a cannonball. Last time, I'd freaked out about it, because I hadn't known that Tyson was a cyclops. This time I gave it only a passing glance, even as he threw it right back at the giant, dissolving it. I raised my bow to shoot the last one, but it dissolved before I could.

And the fight was over. Huh, I vaguely remembered a lot of talking going on last time, but Joe Bob had probably been the only one intelligent enough to speak in complete sentences among them.

"I could have handled it," I said to thin air.

Annabeth rolled her eyes as soon as she was visible. "I know, but I actually wanted to kill some monsters this time. You did literally everything on the quest." Then she glanced at Tyson, and her face twisted.

"Okay!" I said faux cheerfully. "Introduction time! Tyson, Annabeth. Annabeth, Tyson."

"Say hello, Annabeth," I prompted.

"Hello, Annabeth," Tyson repeated obligingly.

"I didn't mean- okay. That's good. Annabeth, your turn. Say hello to Tyson."

"I'm not saying hello to him," she said firmly.

"Okay," I said, more seriously this time. "Annabeth, I don't care what your problem with cyclopses is, but Tyson is my brother and I'm going to treat him like it." I frowned at her. I knew she'd learn to get along with Tyson eventually, but unless I put a stop to it now, she'd be pretty rude to him before and during our quest.

"It's nothing," she muttered.

"As long as it stays that way," I conceded. She could tell me the story on her own time, so I'd let it be as long as she did her utmost to avoid taking out her fear on Tyson.

"So, I guess I owe you an explanation, huh?" I asked rhetorically, turning to Tyson. "Okay, quick explanation then. I'm a son of Poseidon. So are you. Dad sent you to me so I could help you, so I'm gonna do that. We're brothers."

Next thing I knew, Tyson was sobbing and I was wrapped in a crushing hug. Huh. I didn't remember this happening last time. Though, admittedly, this time, I'd said what I knew needed to
be said to at least temporarily alleviate his fears, whereas last time I'd been more focused on the fact that Tyson, my supposedly mortal friend, knew anything at all about the mythological world. Tyson had always been emotional, but he'd been even more so back when he was a baby cyclops. Which he was now.

"It's okay, big guy," I managed to gasp out. "But... can't... breathe..."

Just when I'd started considering how ironic it was to die like this after all that I'd survived, he released me, still sniffling.

"So," I said, rubbing my hands together. "Let's get to camp!"

We debated our method of travel for a while, before we unanimously decided that we would take the Gray Sisters' taxi, as I'd expected and planned for. And by we, I mean me and Annabeth. Tyson was listening intently, but it wasn't like he actually knew anything about mythical transportation.

Annabeth fished around her backpack for a minute before finding a coin.

"Stêthi," she shouted in Ancient Greek. "Ô hárma diabolês!"

The coin sunk straight through the street, and a second later the Gray Sisters' smoky taxi appeared. Then the passenger window rolled down.

"Passage? Passage?" one mumbled.

"Three to Camp Half-Blood," Annabeth said.

She opened the cab door and told me to get in. I didn't, choosing to glare at the gray sister instead.

"Ach!" she screeched. "We don't take his kind!" She pointed a bony finger at Tyson.

I cut Annabeth off before she could offer a higher price. "He's a son of Poseidon too. Do you really want to turn down one of his kids based on species?"

"We don't take his kind," she repeated.

"You'll take his kind," I growled. "Or you won't be taking anyone else anywhere for a long time."

"Percy," Annabeth gasped as I drew Riptide. "You can't just threaten the Gray Sisters! We can pay-"

I held up a hand to cut her off, still glaring at the old woman.

"We don't take his kind!" she screeched again obstinately, glaring right back.

"That's it," I growled. I swung the sword at the Gray Sister. It would have connected, but the car dissolved into mist again before I could hit her. It sunk back into the ground and I capped my sword again with a sigh.

That had probably been a really stupid mistake, but I hated seeing people pick on Tyson. He was just a baby cyclops right now, and he'd never hurt a fly. I hadn't known what he was when we first took the taxi, but this time I could see the discrimination for what it was, and I didn't like it one bit.

"Percy," Annabeth sighed. "You-" She seemed to be searching for something to say. After a moment though, she gave up and sat down on the curb with a tired sigh.
"What are we going to do now?" she asked quietly.

"Hmmm." I thought for a moment. What other forms of transportation were there? We couldn't take a normal cab- that would cost a fortune. My mom was at work, so we couldn't ask her to drive us. Oh, wait- got it. "Pegasi."

"Huh?" Annabeth said. I could tell that she'd been deep in thought and probably hadn't really heard me.

"Pegasi," I repeated. "I can call Blackjack and have him bring two friends to give us a ride!"

"Uh, Percy?" Annabeth said slowly. She jerked her head to her left and I stared in incomprehension for a second before realizing that she was drawing attention to Tyson. I stared at him for another moment as he blew on a dandelion he'd found in a crack in the sidewalk.

"What about him?"

"He's too heavy," she said. "Come on, Percy. He's a cyclops! He can't ride a pegasus!"

"Damn," I said. "Let me think . . ."

We sat there for about two minutes. I spent that time cycling through different forms of transportation. We could try to find some hippocampi to give us a ride, but there was no guarantee that there would be one that could fit Tyson. That had only come about last time because Dad had supplied the hippocampi for the quest, and that one had been specifically for Tyson.

"Wait," I muttered. "If we're asking gods for rides."

"Got it for sure this time," I told Annabeth.

"Let's hear this wonderful idea," she said, sounding skeptical. Which was fair, I guess. My last idea hadn't really panned out.

"Apollo," I said.

"No," she said slowly. "My name's Annabeth, Percy."

I snorted. "I know that. I'm saying that we should call Apollo."

"We can't call a god to ferry us to camp!" she said heatedly. She seemed scandalized by the suggestion, and it took me a moment to remember that she didn't actually have much experience with gods. Whereas I'd been around a ton in the future and even befriended a couple, she'd never spoken to any other than Ares, and they hadn't even really directly talked to each other. Oh, and Mr. D. She'd probably spoken to him, but it's not like he gave the impression of being helpful- at all.

"Nah, it's cool," I said nonchalantly. "Apollo owes me a favor. Follow me."

It took me a moment to realize that no one was actually following. "Tyson!" I shouted, and he clambered to his feet. "Annabeth. Come on!"

She got up with a world weary sigh. Annabeth had a bad habit of being overdramatic at the worst times possible. Was she only learning just now that her life had ceased to be normal- or what passed as normal for a demigod- the moment she agreed to go on a quest with me?

About ten minutes later, we reached our destination.
"This is an apartment building," Annabeth said, stating the obvious. "Are you sure we're going to find Apollo here?"

"Obviously we're not going to find Apollo here," I said, shaking my head. "This is my apartment. I need a source of water to send him an Iris message. Make yourself comfortable while I do that." I unlocked the door to my apartment as I said that, holding my arm out in an after you gesture.

They did. Annabeth seemed like she was going to sit on the couch, but she decided against it when she saw Tyson sit down right in the middle of it; it sagged and I winced as I heard the springs breaking.

I headed to the bathroom and used my power to create a mist suitable for an Iris message. I tossed a drachma into it.

"Oh Iris, goddess of the Rainbow, please accept my offering. Show me Apollo, on the sun chariot." I didn't know for sure that he was on it, but at least part of his essence would be there, and that would probably be enough. Sure enough, he shimmered into view a second later.

"Hey Percy," he said cheerfully, nearly blinding me with his smile even through the Iris message. "What's up?"

"I kind of need assistance getting to camp, if you've got the time. We need to get there quickly and I . . . uh . . . might have . . . pissed off the Gray Sisters, so we can't take the chariot of damnation."

Apollo snorted. "Only you, Percy. Only you. A lift, huh? I'll see what I can do. Just give me five minutes."

"Cool. Thanks," I said, swiping through the Iris message to disconnect it.

I headed back to the living room to, thankfully, find it in one piece. I hadn't exactly been sure about leaving Annabeth in a room alone with Tyson, but everything seemed to be fine, even if they evidently hadn't spoken to each other the entire time I'd been in the bathroom.

"Apollo's meeting us in five minutes," I said. "Let's go back outside."

"You know," Annabeth said, once we'd left my apartment. "I didn't actually expect you to follow through on that."

"And what's that supposed to mean?" I asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Well, you have been known to be overconfident before. Like, all the time."

"It's only overconfidence if you end up failing," I said. "I succeeded in everything I set out to do on the quest."

"That's-" Annabeth struggled to find something I'd actually done wrong on the quest, but ended up drawing a blank. I mean, maybe my methods had been unorthodox, but I'd succeeded in all of my goals on the quest in the end.

"Fair enough," she said finally. "You're not necessarily overconfident- you're just absurdly confident. It kind of gives the impression that you'd boast that you could turn into a giant red snake and eat the sun right before actually doing it just to show that it wasn't empty boasting, if you were able to."

"Ah, key words: if I was able to. I'm not, and so I haven't boasted that. I know my strength,
Annabeth. And I'm a son of Poseidon. Hate to break it to you, but he's no pushover, and neither am I."

"I was just giving my opinion," she said. "If you think you've got it under control, then that's fine with me. Still annoying, but mostly fine."

Apollo chose that moment to flash in and Annabeth turned around. I averted my eyes a second later, after I'd made sure that Tyson had turned around.

"I am really bright. My light shines on demigods. I am the hot sun."

Apollo grinned as if he'd succeeded at something great, rather than just a crappy haiku.

"Damnit," I said, wincing. "I shouldn't have let you go to Japan."

"You don't let me go anywhere," Apollo said. "I'm a god. You couldn't have stopped me if you tried."

"I could have suggested a better vacation place," I argued.

"True," Apollo conceded. "But you didn't. So I chose the Japanese. Because they're awesome." He grinned again, and it took me a moment to realize that he'd attempted another haiku.

"Lord Apollo," Annabeth interrupted. "The first line was only four syllables."

"Thank you," Apollo said, accepting the critique gracefully. "And what might your name be?" He smiled at her, making sure to show his shining teeth, and I rolled my eyes.

"Her name's Annabeth," I said. "And please don't flirt with her. She's only like fourteen. You look a lot like the guy she has a huge crush on. It would just be taking advantage of her." Annabeth turned red and looked away from Apollo to glare at me.

"No it wouldn't," Apollo argued before realizing his mistake. "And I wasn't flirting! I was just introducing myself! You need to have more faith in my absolute awesomeness!"

"And this is Tyson," I said, introducing my friend and half brother.

"Nice to meet you," Apollo said amiably. "So, you need a ride, huh?"

That was when I noticed the sun chariot behind him, in the same form it had been in the first time I met him: a red convertible Maserati Spyder.

"You brought the sun chariot?" I asked.

"Yeah," Apollo said. "It actually doesn't play that much of a part in the sun's route. I can't spend twenty four hours a day babysitting it, after all. But it does play some part. So we should probably get moving before the mortals notice anything different."

"You might want to change it into something that can seat four," I pointed out somewhat sadly. I liked the Spyder. Apollo pulled out his keys, clicked them, and the chariot began to glow.

I perked up a bit, though, when it finished glowing. It had turned into a Maserati GranTurismo. Not quite as cool, but for a compromise, it wasn't bad.

"I call shotgun," I said. I doubted that Annabeth or Tyson would care about that, but I needed to make sure. It was a somewhat irrational need, I'll admit, but shotgun was cool. That was enough of
a reason to me, for now.

Besides, I reasoned to myself, Tyson wouldn't fit in the front seat and Annabeth wouldn't appreciate it. There was also the fact that Annabeth and Tyson could do some quality bonding from the back seat. Or so I told myself.

"No, no," Apollo said. "You're driving, Mr. I'm from the future." He said the last part just loud enough for me to hear.

I laughed. I could see his reasoning; I was old enough to drive mentally. And Apollo did seem to enjoy watching others learn to drive the sun chariot, if his allowing Thalia to was any indication.

I felt somewhat nervous as I got in the driver's seat. Not because I didn't think I could fly it, but because we were heading into the sky, Zeus' territory.

He wouldn't shoot us down, I assured myself. Apollo was his son and he wouldn't want to risk harming his son. Right? Right?

Wrong. We'd been in the air for about thirty seconds when the sky darkened.

"Uh-oh," Apollo said, chuckling nervously. "Huh. New challenge, Percy. Survive the nine and a half minutes until we reach Camp Half-Blood."

"Thanks," I hissed. "I didn't know that I needed to survive at all. I was thinking that I should just let myself get hit by a lightning bolt!"

"No need to get touchy," Apollo said.

"Percy!" Annabeth shouted. "Go left!"

I swerved out of the way of a lightning bolt.

"Shit," I muttered. "Won't Poseidon get mad at him for doing this?"

"Nah," Apollo said. "His domain, his rules. Poseidon can't interfere, because you were the one stupid enough to fly."

"You told me to!" I shouted over the rumble of thunder.

"I didn't order you to," Apollo said. "It was just a suggestion- a strongly worded suggestion. On another note, our ETA is now eight minutes."

"Bull," I said immediately. "You can call it an order, a command, a divine commandment, or whatever, but it was not a suggestion!"

"Left," Apollo said nonchalantly. I swerved. "Down and to the right."

"Don't feel so good," Tyson moaned from the back. Oh, yeah. I forgot. Tyson gets carsick. I probably should have remembered that. I could have easily picked up a paper bag or something back at my apartment.

"No puking in the sun chariot, please," Apollo said without glancing back. "Seven minutes, Percy."

"Right!" Annabeth yelled, and I swerved again. I swerved back to the left a second later as another lightning bolt lanced down exactly where I'd moved to avoid the previous one.
I suddenly got the feeling that this was one big video game. On both sides. On one side, Zeus' lightning target contest would probably be a fun game to play- if I wasn't the target. And on the other side, my side, the game was avoidance of that lightning. Either would translate well into a video game.

"Up and to the right," Apollo said, placing a hand on my shoulder.

"I don't know why you have your hand on my shoulder," I said as I made a sharp turn to avoid the lightning bolt. "Unless you're trying to calm me. It's not calming; please take it off my shoulder."

"Well, since you said please," Apollo deadpanned, removing his hand.

"What's our ETA?" I asked almost a minute later. We'd only had to dodge three lightning bolts in the past minute; that was an all time low for this trip.

"You've got . . . three and a half minutes," Apollo said.

"Urk." That was Tyson, doing an admirable job of not throwing up.

"Just three more minutes, big guy," I said.

I saw him nod slowly in the rear view mirror. I suspected that if he moved any part of his body at anything faster than a snail's pace, he'd hurl, so I was glad for his forethought.

"Eyes on the road, Percy," Annabeth said through gritted teeth.

I glanced up again in just in time to see and avoid two consecutive lightning bolts. And then I had to literally roll the car out of the way of another two right after that.

"Oh my gods," Annabeth whimpered. "We're gonna die."

"A little late to be having an existential crisis, isn't it?" I snarked.

"This is not an existential crisis," Annabeth said, even as I followed Apollo's directions to zigzag through three consecutive lightning bolts. "An existential crisis would be me questioning if my life has meaning. I know that my life has meaning; I just don't want to die. Oh gods, look out!"

I had to dive under a cloud, executing a barrel roll at the same time. The lightning bolt barely missed us, so closely that Annabeth literally screamed, although I was sure she'd deny it vehemently later.

"If that scratched my paint job," Apollo muttered threateningly to no one in particular.

"Oh, man up, you big baby," I said irritably. "Your car transforms- your paint jobs aren't actual paint jobs."

"And how do you know that?" Apollo asked, head high in the air. "I could have painted every single one of them myself! Left, by the way."

"Because I know you," I said. "You're far too lazy."

"Percy, another poison arrow to the heart? This is downright cruel. ETA is fifteen seconds."

"I can see that," I muttered, pressing lightly on the break. And I could- camp was literally dead ahead. Or, well, not literally like that. I mean it was literally right ahead; I didn't mean that we were literally going to die upon landing.
I eased it down as gently as I could, and I breathed a sigh of relief as soon as it did. And then another lightning bolt shot right at us and I knew there was no way that we could avoid it.

Of course, that was assuming we needed to avoid it. The lightning bolt fizzled out against an invisible force field, and I looked over at Apollo. He was scowling at the sky.

"That was a cheap shot," Apollo muttered. "I'll give you that one for free, Percy, because you did so well for everything else and you're not even in the sky any more. This isn't Zeus' domain; he technically wasn't allowed to target you with that last bolt."

I heard a retching sound, and I glanced over to find out what I'd expected; Tyson, emptying his breakfast into the bushes. Of course, I also saw Annabeth stumble out on shaky legs.

When I looked forward again, I saw pretty much everyone in camp crowding around, Chiron in the lead.

"Hey guys," I said, smiling my best smile- or at least the best one I could put up after that wild rollercoaster. "How was my entrance? I'd give it ten out of ten, but you know, you're all entitled to your own opinions."

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed the second half of the chapter. It wasn't planned, but I decided on a whim that Percy wouldn't just be willing to take the discrimination against Tyson. And then it took me a while to think of any other forms of transportation. Percy's thought process there was pretty much my thought process when I was deciding what to use.

Then I chose to use the sun chariot. I decided to stretch canon slightly (they never specifically say that Apollo's sun chariot flies along the exact path of the sun, and there didn't really seem to be any repercussions when Thalia went completely wacko. So if you think about it, I'm barely stretching canon at all. Then again, in canon they were forced to wait for the sun rise . . . so think of it what you will.), with the excuse that Apollo, as sun god, has some control over the timing. And I drew inspiration from when Apollo said in canon that the sun is basically made up of people's dreams and perceptions of it; I used this to 'explain' in my mind that the sun chariot doesn't matter enough that Apollo couldn't stop to give Percy and friends a ride.

During 'Zeus' lightning extravaganza,' Percy's only avoiding many of the lightning bolts due to his minor precognition. I'm not going to mention it in the story when it happens; you can think of it for a BS explanation as to why Percy avoids super fast or unpredictable attacks.

I kind of goofed up when I first started writing this chapter, since it's been so long since I've actually read anything in this series but The Last Olympian, which is my favorite. My goof up involved making Matt Sloan into a laistrygonian. Oops. Again, in my defense, it had been quite a while since I read the Sea of Monsters. I did fix that mistake once I realized it, though.

Oh yeah. Chiron still being there was not an error. He leaves camp later in the day; Percy's arriving like five hours earlier than he did in canon.
I speed things up a bit

Chapter Summary

It's nice not being the last demigod anymore. I'm back, better than ever, in my totally unbiased opinion, and ready to shake things up.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Well," Apollo said, turning to me. "You kids have fun. Don't do anything I wouldn't do!"

"I don't even want to imagine what you wouldn't do," I groaned.

"That gets me right here, Percy," Apollo said, placing a hand over his heart. "Everyone turn away, please!"

Luckily, none of the demigods were stupid enough to ignore his warning, and Apollo managed to flash away without any casualties.

We all stood in silence for a few seconds before Travis Stoll decided to break it.

"I'd give it an seven point five out of ten, Percy. The landing was nothing to sneeze at and the lightning bolt was awesome, but it hit after you'd already landed, so you only get half credit for it."

"I can understand where you're coming from," I said, nodding as if he'd said something profound. "However, you really should consider the dramatic background." I gestured to the dark sky, still flashing with lightning. "And the fact that I avoided a number of lightning bolts right before landing."

"Fine," he conceded. "I'll give you an eight."

"Thank you," I said. Then I turned to Chiron. "So, what's been going on? I've had a couple of demigod dreams but I kind of want to confirm it."

"All in good time, Percy," Chiron said. I wondered briefly if he'd already been fired. "But first, there's someone I think you should meet. He was absent last time, but this is Mr. D. He's the camp director."

Mr D. stepped forward, and my eyes were, as usual, drawn to his loud Hawaiian shirt.

"Ah, Perry Johansson, was it?" he asked me, giving me a quick once over before turning to raise an eyebrow at Chiron.

"That's right," I said. "And you must be Dido!"

"Er, Percy," Chiron said, staring at me like I'd sprouted a ninth head. Heh. Hydra jokes. "His name is-"

"I know," I said, cutting him off. "But if he can mix up my name, I can mix up his." I'd actually
been looking forward to this moment for a while—over a year, so I could do just that.

"You're very lucky that my father frowns on me turning campers into dolphins," Mr D. said, taking a sip of his diet coke. "I'm fairly sure he'd be willing to make an exception in your case, however."

Knowing him, he might actually be willing to do that, in front of everyone. So I did the only thing I really could. "Dad? Help?"

The symbol of a giant glowing trident appeared in the air between us for a second before fading out of existence.

"Drat," Mr D. muttered. "It's looks like you'll be living another day, Peter."

"Oh, joy," I said sarcastically, rolling my eyes.

Mr. D didn't say anything in response, and so I left a few seconds later. A quick glance back showed that the rest of the campers were dispersing, now that their pre lunch entertainment was over. Annabeth and Tyson fell into step beside me as I led the way to the pavilion.

When we got to the pavilion for lunch, Tantalus wasn't there. So Chiron would be fired later in the day, then. Sure enough, about half an hour later, Mr. D left the pavilion, leaving his diet coke half full.

When he got back, he whispered something in Chiron's ear, and the centaur's shoulders slumped, before he left the dining pavilion as well.

Of course, no one had failed to notice the interaction, and everyone noticed when Mr. D remained standing. He glanced around at us all for a moment, before sighing loudly.

"Yes, I suppose I'd better tell you. Chiron will not be continuing as our activities director this summer. Yes, boohoo and all that. His replacement will be arriving later today. That's it; you can all go off and do . . . whatever it is you do."

The rest of the day, things were rather grim. Where before people had been tense, now they were tense and completely morose. I led Tyson around camp, answering his many questions and feeling a little thankful for his oblivious nature. It was a lot easier to ignore the overall mood when Tyson was acting like an excited little kid. Which, to be fair, he was.

I was tempted not to go to dinner, since I knew that Tantalus would be there, but I ultimately decided to anyways. It would be better to start the quest on a full stomach. Thats right; you didn't think I was just going to sit around wasting time and waiting for Clarisse to get her quest, did you?

I slipped a note to Annabeth at dinner as I walked past the Athena table. I saw her unfold the piece of paper I'd written it on, and I watched as her eyes widened. I knew she'd have doubts; she always had doubts about my crazy plans. However, I'd answer them later.

I doubled back to lead Tyson unobtrusively through the pavilion. Sadly, we were noticed.

"And where do you think you're going?" Mr. D asked me, sounding as if he couldn't care less.

"Over to the Poseidon table," I said, turning to him. "Where I always eat. Unless you have something to say about it?"

"Oh, no," the madman- Tantalus- said. "You may go. But the monster stays up here until we decide what to do with him."
"Just try it, bastard," I growled.

"And you'll what?" he asked, leaning forward and leering at me.

"I'll send you back to Tartarus like the monster you are."

"Do I look like a monster to you?" he asked challengingly, gesturing to himself.

"Yes," I said, turning away. "Let's go, Tyson."

"Stop right there!" Tantalus said loudly, half standing from his seat and placing his palms down on the table.

"How about . . . no." I continued leading Tyson to my table. I was almost there when I heard his chair clatter back, and I sighed.

He reached out to grab my shoulder and I spun around, blade out in an instant and poised to pierce his throat.

"Like I said," I repeated. "Just try it, bastard."

"I'm afraid your celestial bronze won't work on me," Tantalus said calmly. "I'm full human."

"Shall we test that?" I growled. Having him so close was . . . well, let's just say I was very tempted to actually slice through his throat in one smooth smoke. "I'd say that after millennia in Tartarus, you're something other than human. I'd have classified you as a monster the moment you tried to feed your children to the gods, Tantalus!"

I heard some campers gasp, which was the desired effect. If I could undermine Tantalus' authority early on, he might not be able to terrorize the camp as much as last time. Hopefully, people would stand up to him; then again, I could have just made them all scared enough of him to follow any order.

"Now, now," Mr. D said, waving a hand and looking like he wanted nothing more than to smite me right there. Without actually looking like he cared, still. He had an amazing amount of apathy for pretty much everything. "There will be no killing of our new activities director, Johansson. Tantalus, perhaps you could allow the beast to eat where he wishes to, for now? We can deal with him later." The way he said 'deal with him' made it obvious that he meant 'kill him.'

Hmm. Apparently, I'd made the situation worse for Tyson this time. Good thing I was already planning on leaving camp and taking him with me tonight. The rest of dinner passed in silence, with the occasional whisper. Pretty much everyone had their eyes on Tyson the whole time, and I made sure to frequently glare around at those staring a bit too long.

Finally, dinner was over. Tantalus looked like he was planning to come kill Tyson right there. So I kept my sword out and made sure he saw it as I had Tyson lead the way out of the pavilion.

Once Tyson and I were back in the Poseidon cabin, I explained my plans to him. He agreed; I didn't think he understood a lot other than that I was leaving and that he could come with me if he wanted to.

An hour later, I led Tyson to the beach where Annabeth was waiting.

"I got your note," she said as soon as I arrived. "Leaving camp to search for Golden Fleece at six pm. Can't stop me.' Seriously, Percy?"
"Uh . . ." I chuckled sheepishly. "Well, I wasn't lying. You can either come with me and Tyson—no, we're not leaving him behind in a camp full of people who want to kill him— or you can try to tell on us before we can escape."

"Why do you need to escape?" Annabeth asked. "This is camp! This is the only place we're safe!"

"This?" I asked rhetorically, waving my hand back in the direction of camp. "This isn't Camp Half-Blood. It's Half-Blood military academy. Our new activities director is a spirit from the fields of punishment. Everything is so gloomy and depressing, because Thalia has been poisoned! It won't be camp again unless we manage to retrieve the Fleece!"

"But— but, Chiron!"

"He's gone, Annabeth," I reminded her.

"I know that, Seaweed Brain! But I swore to him that I would keep you safe."

"By any chance, was this swear on the styx?"

"Yes," she said firmly, as if she believed that it would stop me from leaving.

"Then you're literally oath-bound to come with me," I told her. "The only way to keep me safe would be to come with me."

"Or you could stay at camp!" she yelled, throwing her hands in the air.

"Not happening," I said firmly. "Do you want to let Thalia's tree die?"

A low blow, I know, but we needed to get moving before someone realized that we were missing.

"Fine," she said, shoulders slumping. "Let me just go get supplies."

"Already in the ship," I said.

"I need clothes, Percy," she reminded me. "Wait, the ship? You're stealing a ship?!"

"We are stealing a ship," I corrected her calmly.

"Ugh," she growled. "You total idiot— you Seaweed Brain!"

"Guilty."

"There's no stopping you?" she asked, checking one last time. Or at least I hoped it was one last time. We really needed to get moving. I shook my head.

"Oh, fine," she said, finally relenting. "Let me just go get some clothes to bring."

She turned away, before she was interrupted by a new voice.

"That won't be necessary."

I turned to face the new speaker. "Lord Hermes."

"None of that Lord stuff," Hermes said, shrugging with the shoulder of the arm that didn't have two backpacks hanging from it. "Any friend of Apollo's is a friend of mine. With a few exceptions of course, but you seem like a cool guy."
He offered me one of the backpacks. I glanced inside it before looking back up.

"Uh . . . It's empty."

"Oh yeah," Hermes said, pulling out his cell phone. "I think we're going to need original form for this."

His phone quickly expanded into a caduceus, and I stared at the snakes for a moment, waiting for an introduction.

He seemed to notice my staring and seemed to assume that it was shock. That worked just as well, since he introduced them either way. "These are George and Martha. Don't worry; they don't bite."

"Hello," I said obligingly.

"Hello," Martha said.

Of course, George was just how I remembered him. "Got any rats?" Hungry.

"Sorry, no rats," I said with a small smile. I turned back to Hermes. "So, your caduceus is cool and all, but unless you're planning to stick it in the backpack, I'm kinda lost."

"I'm afraid I rather like this caduceus," Hermes said faux apologetically. "But I do have- Martha, if you would?"

Martha's mouth opened wide. And then it opened even wider, not stopping until it was as wide as my arm. She belched out the Hercules thermos and I glanced at it.

"You know," I said idly. "Hercules used to be my favorite hero."

"What changed it?" Hermes asked.

"I found out that the guy's a huge dick." I shrugged.

"That's-" Hermes began, before pausing. "You know, I can't dispute that. He does tend to whine a lot. While we're on the topic, however, who is your favorite hero now?"

"Achilles," I said.

"You wouldn't be the first," Hermes mused. I glanced around to see Annabeth frowning thoughtfully and Tyson just watching curiously. I supposed neither of them felt worthy or able to join the conversation. I'd have to disabuse them of the notion at a later point. For now, the conversation would be more predictable, and more importantly, shorter, if they didn't join in.

"Not for anything he did while he was living," I said.

Hermes cocked his head. "What then?"

"He's in elysium, you know," I said. "He doesn't have to leave it at all; he doesn't need to care about the living. And yet whenever someone presumes to take the curse of the Styx upon themselves, he's there to attempt to dissuade them. He lets them choose, of course, but only after he's told them the consequences. He could just do nothing, but instead he chooses to fight what he knows is a futile cause simply because he wants to help. He's pretty noble like that, and it's for that that he's my favorite hero. Not because he was a hero but because he's been trying to help people for millennia with absolutely no reward, and in a mostly futile but very noble effort."
"That's certainly an interesting view," Hermes said. "In fact, I'd love to ask how you know all of that, but we really do need to get this conversation back on track."

"Let me guess. The Wine Dude will notice us if we're outside of his jurisdiction for long, even though you're shielding us."

"Good guess," Hermes said. "Now, to actually move this along. Pick up the thermos please."

I did. "Hmm," I said. "I'd say a compass, but you probably wouldn't give me a thermos for that so . . . the four winds?"

"I've never thought of it like that," Hermes said, before inclining his head. "But you're correct; it's not just a compass. As you guessed- and can I just say that your guesses are scarily accurate? Anyways, as you guessed, yes, this thermos contains the four winds. Be careful to only open it a little bit when you need it. The winds are a bit like me- always restless. Should all four escape at once . . . ah, but I'm sure you'll be careful. And now my second gift. George?"

"She's touching me," George complained as Martha slithered around the pole.

"She's always touching you," Hermes said. "You're inter-twined. And if you don't stop that, you'll get knotted again!"

They stopped, and I was pretty sure that they would be blushing if they could.

George unhinged his jaw and coughed up a little plastic bottle filled with vitamins.

"I'd argue that we don't need it, but with all the evil sorceresses running around, I think it's better to be safe than sorry."

Hermes gave me a strange look. "Right. Anyways, these are potent. Don't take one unless you really need it."

"Um, thanks." I knew the answer to my next question, but it needed to be said. "But quick question: why exactly are you helping me? I mean, I know I'm a friend of Apollo and all that, but still . . . I've heard about your vitamins, and from what I've heard, you don't just hand these out willy-nilly. So why?"

He closed his eyes, smiling somewhat sadly. "Perhaps because I hope that you can save many people on this quest, Percy. Not just your friend Grover."


"I can't promise anything," I said at last. "Well, except that I'll try if I run into him. He's my friend, and I suppose my family, when you really think about it. But I don't know if he'll be willing; I'm not saying I won't try. I'm just saying . . . well, don't get your hopes up? That seems cruel, I know, but I don't really know what else to say. Sorry."

"I understand," Hermes said, holding out the multivitamins. I took the bottle from his hands and he started talking again. "And I suppose all that I can really ask is for you to try. But know this; I will get my hopes up as many times as it takes. I'll never give up on Luke, no matter what he or anyone else says. He's my son- no supposing about it- and if there's one thing I've picked up over the eons, it's that you don't give up on family. No matter what."
"Duly noted," I said, giving what I hoped was a supportive smile. Whatever that meant anyways. I suppose I was really just smiling at him. Best case scenario- he took comfort from it. Worst case scenario- he thinks I'm some weirdo who gets off on other people's pain. Luckily, he looked like he appreciated it.

"I do really need to be going," Hermes said, before pausing. "Ah, I almost forgot. Here." He tossed the second backpack to Annabeth.

She glanced inside and paled just a little bit. "You packed my clothes?"

Hermes nodded. I wondered if he even realized that there was something more than a little strange about a man packing some girl or woman's clothing, especially when that person is someone he doesn't really know. Maybe things had been different in ancient Greece when everyone wore chitons or togas. But nowadays . . . I mean, when Aphrodite gifts girls- or even guys- clothes, that's more ok; still a little strange, but clothing probably is within her domain. With Hermes, it was just creepy. Not that any of us really wanted to tell him to his face. Heck, Tyson probably didn't understand what was wrong with it anyways.

"And since I don't think those backpacks are quite large enough to hold everything . . ." He conjured three duffle bags. I vaguely remembered having them last time but couldn't for the life of me remember when we had lost them. "I hope I packed well for you. I do have some experience with travel. Waterproof of course, just in case. I probably wouldn't have bothered if it was just you- water doesn't deter you- but your friends?"

"Thank you for the gifts, Hermes," I said somewhat stiffly, before I relaxed again. "I promise I'll do everything I can to bring Luke back."

"Yes," Hermes said, peering at me. "I do believe you will. I feel like I should warn you that I will only be shielding you from my brother for about ten more minutes. I suggest that you get moving. Goodbye, cousin, and dare I say it? May the gods go with you."

"Goodbye," Martha told me.

"Bring me back a rat." George, of course.

Hermes jogged down down the beach, shimmering out of sight once he was about twenty feet away.

"So," I said cheerfully, clasping my hands together as I turned back towards Annabeth and Tyson. "Let's get going!" Without waiting for a response from either of them, I lead the way over to the trireme to which I'd spent the early afternoon ferrying supplies.

"You were serious about a ship?" Annabeth asked rhetorically.

"Big boat," Tyson said, gazing at the ship with wide eyes.

"I'm always serious," I told Annabeth. She snorted.

Barely five minutes later, we were on the trireme, ready to set sail. Or, well, I was.

"How are you going to get it all ready in time?" Annabeth asked me, gesturing towards all of the folded sails and the rest of the mostly unprepared ship. I took it as a good sign that she was asking me how rather than simply telling me that it couldn't be done.

"Simple," I said, smirking. I snapped my fingers. "Mizzenmast!"
"What?" Annabeth asked, gaping around at the the ship as it readied itself. "How?"

"Son of Poseidon power," I said. "Pretty neat, huh?"

"I'll say," she agreed. "Somewhat situational, but very handy when applicable."

"Not like it's my only power," I reminded her.

"True," she conceded. "So are you going to use your powers to guide the boat then, Percy?"

"Mmm," I said, cocking my head to the side as I considered it. "Nah. Easy as it would be on the ocean, it'll be even easier if we just use the winds. And probably a bit faster."

I pulled the thermos out of the backpack where I'd placed it temporarily.

"Careful," Annabeth reminded me.

"I got it," I said. Nevertheless, I was very cautious as I gave the thermos cap a quarter turn. I'd already experienced the effects of all of the winds being released at once. It wasn't something I wanted to go through again, especially not at the very start of our unofficial quest.

Luckily, I didn't screw up, and we were on our way. I remembered what had happened last time and tensed up.

Surprisingly, Tyson was the one to notice it.

"Percy," he said slowly. "You . . . scared?"

"Nah," I said. "Don't worry about it, big guy. I'm just a bit nervous."

Annabeth and Tyson both stared at me, waiting for an explanation.

I sighed. "I was expecting a cruise ship full of monsters. It was also supposed to have Luke on it."

"You were expecting it?" Annabeth asked, narrowing her eyes. Oops. So she was finally putting things together. It was to be expected really. I'm not a great liar and Annabeth is scary smart.

"Percy . . ." she said slowly. "You're friends with Apollo and you have a penchant for knowing things you shouldn't."

"Yes?" I said nonchalantly. "Your point?"

"Do you have some kind of seer powers?" she asked bluntly.

I blinked. To be honest, I'd expected her to guess time travel. Mostly because my perception was a little skewed. I'll be the first to admit that I have a high opinion of her intelligence and I'd expected her to just put things together correctly and get the right answer. However, after thinking about it for a second, I realized that time travel really isn't a likely scenario at all. And she'd done admirably with the information that she had. Though that certainly didn't mean that I was going to give the game away.

"Maybe?" I said. If I could avoid outright lying, it would be a lot easier to mislead her. And I did have some kind of 'seer powers,' even if they only manifested during a fight. "I mean, I guess I have dreams of the future sometimes, but they're not always true." I did have dreams of the future, or more specifically, the future that I'd left behind. And many times, my nightmarish experiences distorted my dreams, creating even worse situations for me to dwell on, so technically, my 'dreams
of the future' weren't always true.

"Probably because by seeing it, you're changing it already," Annabeth decided. "What can you think of that might have changed this specific vision?"

"Most likely the time that we left camp," I said.

"Does this have to do with why you didn't try to get a quest from the oracle and why you had that confrontation with the new director?"

"Yes," I said. "Without things changing, we would have stayed for a while longer - I don't remember exactly how long. And someone else would have gotten the quest because Tantalus is a dick. We would have snuck out of camp to go on this quest anyways. It would have just been a while later and after a couple other occurrences."

I noticed Tyson wandering away to explore out of the corner of my eye.

"And you believe that it's the difference in timing?" Annabeth asked.

"Yes."

She nodded. "That makes a lot of sense. If the ship was supposed to be here a week or so from now, then our departure date would definitely keep us from running into it. Of course, leaving early also gives us more time for our quest."

"Don't get cocky," I warned her. "Quests tend to go wrong when demigods get overconfident."

"How do you know-" Annabeth began, before cutting herself off. "Ah, your dreams?"

I inclined my head, and I saw her smirk slightly at getting her guess right. Or what she thought was right. When I'd inclined my head, I hadn't been telling her yes; I'd been telling her that she was free to believe her conclusion if she wanted to. Again, I wasn't lying - just misleading. There's a big difference, even if my signals could easily be misinterpreted - as intended.

"So," Annabeth said. "Do you at least know where we're going?"

"Of course." I smirked. "Sea of Monsters."

"And do you know where that is?" Annabeth asked, rolling her eyes.

"Thirty, thirty one, seventy five, twelve."

"That's . . . uh, very nice? Sorry, but I'm not going to help you with your math homework right now."

"But Annabeth," I said. "Coordinates."

"Yes," she deadpanned. "I know. And I'm not helping you with any graphing problems right now."

"Not for that," I said, finally figuring out her train of thought. "On a map. Map coordinates, Annabeth!"

"Oh," she said. She held her hand over her forehead. "I can't believe I thought you were actually asking me for math help! I'm so stupid!"

"Don't worry," I told her. "We all have brain farts sometimes, even you. Besides, it was kind of a
fair assumption. I suck at math. Not unlikely that I'd ask someone to help me with it- but during the school year. Even I know better than to treat a quest lightly." More like especially me. Especially I? Is that grammatically correct? Whatever. I didn't really feel like asking Annabeth, even though I had no doubt she'd have the answer. Brain farts aside, she was pretty smart.

"How do you know the coordinates?" Annabeth asked. "I mean, I know you probably saw them in a dream but why would you get such a specific dream?"

"Ah," I said. "That, I can explain. See, we were supposed to take the Gray Sisters' taxi. And at some point their eye would almost literally drop into our laps. So I blackmailed them into telling me. But I decided to just not go through with it and use the information that I'd already been given when they got all snippy with Tyson." Still not lying!

"Good idea," Annabeth said. "I've heard stories about the Gray Sisters' taxi. We'd probably have all spent the whole time vomiting up our breakfasts." She shuddered at the thought.

"Mmmm." I groaned as I stood up from where I'd been sitting against the side of the boat. "I'm gonna go get something to eat for an early dinner."

"What did you bring anyways?" Annabeth asked. She got up as well, choosing to stand against the side of the boat instead.

"For food? Uh, I brought along a bunch of chips and a ton of oranges. And then also some cold pizza. It should last us a day or two at least, and after that, we can just eat fish if we need to. I would've brought along more but I'm not the most knowledgable about which foods won't go bad."

"Don't you feel bad about eating fish?" Annabeth asked me.

"Huh?" I said, before realizing that she meant because I was a son of Poseidon. "Not especially. I mean, they're not my first choice in food, but that's more preference. Thing is, while I would never eat a larger or smarter sea creature, the smaller ones that we can eat aren't even smart enough to talk. So I don't really see it as anything wrong."

I started to walk away before I turned back. "You coming, Annabeth?"

"No," she said, turning towards the sea. "I'm not really hungry right now. You can go ahead, Percy."

"Suit yourself." I shrugged. If she wanted time alone, she could have just said it, but whatever. With that, I left to get some food. I knew that we'd be tested in the days to come, but for now the only thing on my mind was pizza. I'm a growing boy again- I need my sustenance.

Okay, fine, that's an excuse. I just really want pizza. But pizza is an excuse in and of itself- I mean, come on. Pizza!

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was pretty tricky for me. Mostly because I wanted to basically just fast forward through camp. The next chapter should come faster, seeing as I'm over the hurdle of kick starting the Sea of Monsters portion of the story.

I know Percy says that Tantalus has spent a millenia or two in Tartarus. I know that's
not true, he knows that's not true. He's embellishing a bit in order to make Tantalus look more 'monstrous.'
"Clear skies," I said. It was the next morning. We were actually nearing the Sea of Monsters already, mostly due to the wind. Which, as I'd predicted, had ferried us much more quickly than my water powers could have without capsizing the ship. I could push the ship forward using the water, but it would most likely break under the pressure at high speed. With a strong wind in its sails instead, there wasn't much pressure on the ship itself, aside from the usual when sailing in the open sea. And I didn't have to constantly concentrate on it- that was a definite plus.

"True," Annabeth said. "However, it seems almost too good to be true."

"Don't worry," I told her cheerfully. "The hard part comes soon."

"Okay, now I'm worried. Percy, what do you know?"

"That we shouldn't try to pass through Scylla and Charybdis," I told her grimly. I had another plan, a risky one.

"Then what?" Annabeth said. "If we don't go through them, we can't- unless . . ."

"Yeah," I said. "The clashing rocks."

"The Symplegades," Annabeth said.

"Huh?"

She rolled her eyes. "It's the name of the rocks in Greek."

"Yeah," I said. "I, uh . . . I totally knew that."

"Hilarious," she deadpanned, rolling her eyes. "What's your plan, Percy?"

"Plan?" I said. "I thought that was your job!"

She rolled her eyes again.

"In all seriousness though," I said. "We need to time it perfectly."

"Will we use a dove?" Annabeth asked.

"Hmmm," I considered it. "No. In the legends, only part of the stern ornament on the Argo was sheared off. But I don't really want to risk that. Besides, we can't really control a dove. And then there's the question of how we would get the dove anyways."
"So what then?"

"I'll send a lifeboat through first and we'll follow after. I'll use my powers and the wind to make sure that we make it through."

"Why do we have lifeboats on a trireme?" Annabeth asked.

"What?" I gasped, feigning shock. "The most great and wise Annabeth Chase doesn't know something?"

"Shut up," she growled, glaring at me.

"Sheesh," I said, unable to get rid of my grin. "Fine. Be that way. Just for your information, all of the ships are equipped with a few lifeboats. Believe it or not, but it's not really expected that a ship will survive any particular quest, especially the more dangerous ones."

"Makes sense." Annabeth nodded.

We stood in silence for a moment.

A thought occurred to me. "Where's Tyson?"

"You don't know?" Annabeth asked. "He said he was going to take a nap."

"Times like these remind me that Tyson's only really about eight, mentally," I said. "No self respecting teenager would ever admit to taking a nap. But I was kind of deep in thought, in case you hadn't noticed."

"Oh," Annabeth said, grinning savagely. "And here I thought you were just constipated."

"Very funny," I deadpanned.

"So what were you thinking about?" she asked.

"Mostly just about the rocks," I told her. I'd really just been lost in thought, daydreaming about a perfect future where everyone lived and we beat Gaea with no casualties. But I couldn't really tell Annabeth about that. Or, well, I could. But it would lead to a lot of awkward questions.

"Do you even know how to find them?" Annabeth asked me.

"Of course," I said indignantly. I sort of did. Okay, so maybe I didn't.

"Good," Annabeth said, nodding. "I think I'm going to get some rest." She turned to head back to the cabin she'd claimed for herself.

"Good idea," I said, raising my voice a little so she could hear me as she walked away. "We'll be nearing the Sea of Monsters in about three hours so be prepared!"

She waved a hand back to let me know she'd heard. I headed to the side of the ship. With a minor act of concentration, I made a screen of mist in front of me. I pulled one of my last drachma out of my pocket.

"Oh Iris, goddess of the Rainbow, please accept my offering. Show me Chiron in . . . Miami?" I knew that he'd been there at the end of our quest last time, but this time, he'd just left camp earlier in the day. I could only hope that he'd used his 'pony portal powers.'
He shimmered into view. "Chiron!" He turned towards me.

"Ah, Percy," he said. "What's the matter? Has something catastrophic happened in the half day that I've been gone?" He tried to play it off as a joke, but I could tell that he was actually pretty concerned.

"Nah," I said. "Not unless you count the new camp director being a total dick. Quick question: are you by any chance in Miami?"

"No," Chiron said, frowning at me. "Why would you believe me to be in Florida? Currently, I'm on Honolulu in Hawaii. I'm spending some time with my brethren at the moment."

"No reason," I told him nonchalantly. Interesting; it seems that location isn't as important as I thought it was for Iris messages. I made a mental note of it for the future. "Just wondering, I actually have another question, though."

"I pray that it is in my power to answer it, then," he said.

"Where exactly are the clashing rocks? Annabeth called them the Sym- somethings."

"The Symplegades," Chiron said, now focusing on me with laser intensity. "And why, pray tell, would you need to know such a thing, Percy?"

"Uh . . ." I floundered for a second before deciding to just go for it. "So, we- me, Annabeth, and Tyson, my cyclops brother- may or may not be heading to the Sea of Monsters to rescue Grover from Polyphemus and find the Golden Fleece."

"Percy!" Chiron exclaimed. "Please tell me that you at least received a quest?" From the way he said it, I was pretty sure that he knew that I hadn't. Well, it would make sense. He'd left earlier in the day and I'd already built up the image of impetuousness, when I left early on the lightning bolt quest. It would make a lot of sense to him that I'd left without a quest. It was just a bit annoying that he could say something that deprecating and be right on the mark.

"Uh, no?" I said it like a question on purpose, just so you know. When I'm getting grilled by any grownup- Mom, Paul, Chiron, Dad- acting a little stupid can help take the heat off. It's a patented strategy, or it would be if, you know, practically every other kid in the country hadn't tried it at one point.

"Percy . . ." Chiron groaned.

"In my defense," I said. "I needed to act. Besides, Grover's my friend. I'm not going to just leave him in danger because a spirit from the fields of punishment has it out for me."

"A spirit from the fields of punishment?" Chiron asked, looking worried. "Are you certain?"

"Yep," I said. "Tantalus. Can't eat. Dido told him that his curse should wear off soon. I'm pretty sure, yeah."

"That is troubling news," Chiron said, stroking his beard.

"Tell me about it," I said. "He'd sooner see us all die than assign a quest to save the camp or any campers." A slight exaggeration, seeing as he'd bowed to peer pressure the last time around, but Chiron didn't need to know that.

"In that case," Chiron mused. "I can't believe that I'm saying this, Percy, but perhaps leaving as
promptly as you did was truly the correct choice."

"Yes!" I fist pumped, not very subtly.

Chiron chuckled. "Yes, yes. On another note, you said that Annabeth was with you?" I nodded. "I'd so hoped that she would keep you out of trouble."

"Gee, thanks for the vote of confidence," I said drily. "But she did try, just so you know. She even told me about her vow to you about it- and can I just say that it's super insulting that you got her to swear an oath on the Styx to keep me out of trouble! I mean, seriously?"

"Desperate times call for desperate measures," Chiron said solemnly, somehow managing to keep a straight face. I gave him a blank look and he chuckled again.

"Now that we're done insulting me- we are done, right?" He nodded, still looking amused. "The clashing rocks. I need to know how to find them."

"Yes," Chiron said, looking more serious. "Down to business."

"So, spill."

"Give me a moment, Percy," Chiron chided. "It's been quite a while since I've even heard mention of the rocks. Ah, yes- I think I remember now." He paused for a second, and I got impatient.

"C'mon, Chiron," I said.

"Patience, young demigod," he said, somehow managing to make me feel like a five year old rather than the twenty one year old I was mentally and the thirteen year old I was physically. "To find Charybdis and Scylla, you must sail straight from the coast of Florida towards the Bermuda Triangle. To find the clashing rocks, you must simply sail around to the other side of the Triangle."

"Sounds simple," I said.

"For you, it should be," Chiron agreed. "As a son of Poseidon, you are not susceptible to nearly as many of the dangers that an extended stay in monster infested waters would bring. Still, best not to get too overconfident."

"Got it," I said. "Thanks for the information, Chiron."

"Any time," Chiron said. "Now, is that all?"

"Yep," I said. "So . . . goodbye?"

"Yes," he agreed. "Goodbye, Percy, and may the gods be with you!"

"You too," I said somewhat belatedly right before he cut the connection. That greeting had fallen out of use somewhat in the future, what with more and more gods getting cut down each day. Hearing it from Hermes first and now Chiron was a little strange, but I was slowly getting used to it again.

"So." I jumped a bit, I'll admit. "You said you knew where to find the rocks, Percy."

"Why are you still here?" I asked, searching around for the source of the voice.

"You're not a very good liar," she told me, and I finally spotted her as she pulled off her Yankees cap. Ah. That's why I hadn't been able to see her. "I knew that something was up. And I was right."
"Fine, fine," I muttered. "You caught me. What now?"

"What now?" she repeated. "What do you expect me to do? I'm not your mother. I can't take away your TV time or whatever, Percy. I am, however, somewhat disappointed that you lied to me."

"Annabeth-" I started before pausing. I spoke again after taking a moment to gather my thoughts. "I got the information well within the time we needed it, though." I thought it was a pretty good defense, but Annabeth didn't seem to agree.

"You lied for absolutely no reason," she said, and I winced. Okay, so that was sort of true- at least from her point of view. I'd had a reason. It wasn't a great reason, but it made sense to me. I'd just gotten so used to doing everything when no one else was looking that it had almost become a habit. It had pretty much been my game plan when I went back, in fact.

"Annabeth-" I started again, but she cut me off.

"I don't want to hear it, Percy," she said. "I'm going to rest for real this time. Try not to have any secret conversations while I'm gone." She stalked off, presumably to, as she said, rest for real. I slumped down against the side of the ship, feeling somewhat ashamed of myself.

Not super ashamed of myself, I feel the need to add. There were just some things that I knew that I couldn't tell other people about. However, I hadn't really needed to have that conversation with Chiron alone. I hadn't needed to lie to Annabeth right then. That was the part that I was ashamed about.

I spent a while down there. I actually fell asleep for a while, but I woke up in time to adjust our course correctly. Annabeth and Tyson both came out for an early lunch. Or late breakfast. Either one. I guess it was more of a late lunch, since we were eating pizza, and pizza isn't really a breakfast food usually.

Annabeth refused to talk to me through the entire 'meal,' and Tyson noticed. He seemed pretty confused by the silence, but he didn't ask about it. He pretty much just followed Annabeth's example and didn't talk. I didn't feel like breaking the silence so I didn't talk either. I don't know if he was just being more perceptive than I expected or if he wasn't confident enough in his deduction to say anything.

Finally, Annabeth talked.

"How much longer until we get there?" she asked.

"We should be at the rocks by nightfall," I answered.

She nodded and left the bench we'd been using as a table. And with that, the discussion was possibly one of the shortest I'd ever had. Well, in recent memory at least.

That was when Tyson made his move. Or, you know, as much as a baby cyclops with no sense of subtlety who isn't intending any harm can. So I probably shouldn't have called it him making a move. Oh well.

"Percy and Annabeth are angry?" he asked.

"She is, big guy," I said. "I'm not. It's nothing big- I just did something kinda stupid and she's kinda rightfully angry."

"Oh." And with that, we lapsed into silence. Tyson was probably taking the time to figure out what
exactly was going on. I was just enjoying the silence.

Three hours later, we reached the Sea of Monsters. It took us nearly another three to circle around to the other side of it. And as the ship turned to face the area in which the Sea of Monsters resided, they came into view.

"The Symplegades," Annabeth said from literally right behind me. I jumped about two feet into the air.

"Annabeth," I said, fairly calmly, considering. "Don't do that!"

"Do what?" she asked bemusedly. "Talk?"

"Don't startle me like that," I said. "I'm hyper alert for this quest . . . and you knew what you were doing. I'll bet you snuck up just so you could do that."

"Don't be ridiculous," she said, her lips twitching as she attempted to hold a straight face.

"Shut up," I said halfheartedly. "Why are you out here anyways? I thought you'd keep doing . . . whatever you've been doing for the past six hours."

"It's called sleeping, Seaweed Brain," Annabeth said, rolling her eyes.

"Sleeping?" I asked, feigning ignorance. "What's that?"

"Figures you wouldn't know," she said pointedly. "Have you even slept since we left?"

"I . . . took a nap," I said. It sounded unconvincing even to my own ears. Even though it was technically the truth. I chose not to think about or mention the fact that it had only been for about twenty minutes.

"You need to sleep," Annabeth said, glaring at me. At least this time it was more of a 'you're such an idiot' glare, rather than an 'I'm trying to show some restraint, but I really want to gut you like a fish' glare.

"Can't yet," I said, gesturing to the rocks. "Kind of need to be awake for this part."

"Where's the lifeboat?" she asked, trying to peer behind me. I snorted and moved out of the way so that she could make sure I wasn't hiding a lifeboat behind my back.

"Don't worry," I said lazily. "I've got it covered. Tyson! Lifeboat!"

"Percy," he said, closing the ten feet we'd been separated. It was a short enough distance that I probably should have gone and grabbed the lifeboat myself, but I actually did in fact have a better reason than 'I was lazy' for having Tyson do it. See, I knew that I hadn't really been letting either Annabeth or Tyson do much of anything yet, and I felt the need to include Tyson. Because I'm just that great a brother.

"You got it then?" I asked, somewhat redundantly.

"Yes," he said, giving me a big grin. "I brought tiny boat!"

"Awesome," I said, smiling back. "Great job, Tyson. Toss it over the side of the boat, please."

He looked a little confused, but he did it anyways.
I concentrated momentarily and the lifeboat sped up to the front of the ship. It looked a bit comical, really, an empty rubber- or whatever it was made of- boat moving at high speeds on the open ocean.

"We're gonna need more precision than I can get here," I said, turning to Annabeth. "Or, well . . . I can get it- it's not a matter of my powers being insufficient. But . . . basically, what I'm asking is: can you time it?"

"Can you stop the ship?" she asked. "I'll need time to figure out how long the rocks take to open and close and calculate it exactly."

"Sorry," I said, turning back to look at the rocks. "No can do. We wouldn't be able to build up nearly enough speed again in time to make it through. Assuming that I can even figure out how to get the wind to send us in the right direction again."

"Fine," Annabeth said. "In that case, the best I can do is tell you when to go full speed."

"That's all I really need," I said, rolling my eyes- not that she could see from behind me. "Exact calculations aren't necessary in the slightest, Wise Girl."

"Well, excuse me for trying to assure our safety," she said with a huff.

"You're excused," I said.

She sighed. "Shut up, Percy."

"And let you do your job," I said, "right?" I turned back to her briefly, miming zipping up my lips.

"Yes," she said, completely serious. "Exactly. We'll be hitting the rocks in less than a minute at this speed. Send the lifeboat . . . wait for it . . . now!"

I focused, I felt a slight tug in my gut, and the lifeboat went whizzing forward.

"Good," Annabeth said. "Send it as fast as you can."

I concentrated on the lifeboat for a second it sped up even more.

"Tell me when," I said.

"Wait," Annabeth said. "I need to see how quickly the rocks open and close. Give me a second . . . or twenty."

I didn't respond; it was best not to interrupt Annabeth while she was thinking. I watched as the lifeboat went through with about two seconds to spare. The rocks clashed together with a resounding boom and I used my control over water to keep the ship from shaking much.

"Right," Annabeth said a second later. "I was just checking, to make sure, but it appears that the rocks actually do take twenty seconds to close from when they're fully open. We can't go until they're open again or they'll just switch directions and try to crush us, giving us a shorter time frame to work with."

"How fast do we need to go?" I asked.

"Hmmm . . . at least nineteen and a half knots, by my estimate." She sounded uncertain, but I knew for a fact that she didn't mess up math problems.
"When should we speed up?" I asked.

"I'll tell you when," Annabeth said distractedly, watching the rocks.

"Aye aye, Captain."

"In fact," she muttered, before raising her voice, "get ready, Percy. On my mark- in three . . . two . . . one . . . go!"

"Brace yourselves," I said quickly, focusing on pushing the ship as fast as it could conceivably go without breaking into pieces. It lurched forward, and it was only due to the fact that I had excellent sea legs as a result of my divine heritage that I didn't fall over. I saw Tyson stumble a bit out of the corner of my eye and I heard Annabeth curse behind me. I couldn't spare the attention to look, but I had a sneaking suspicion that she'd fallen on her butt.

The ship sped forward and I focused intently on maintaining the line between going max speed and capsizing. We'd almost hit maximum speed- about twenty two knots, by my estimate- when we reached the rocks.

They immediately began to close, jostling the ship a bit as they displaced the surrounding water. I growled- or made some similar noise- as I forcefully straightened the ship. I was annoyed at myself for not expecting something so obvious. I'd stopped the ship from shaking after the big wave, the one caused by the rocks closing after the lifeboat went through, but I hadn't done anything to stop the churning water from jostling it.

A second later, I was frustrated with myself again. When I'd started concentrating on straightening the ship, I'd stopped focusing on maintaining its momentum and its speed had dropped significantly without my powers allowing it to cut through the water. I berated myself as I once more focused on pushing the ship to its max speed.

"Percy," Annabeth said, "we need to go faster."

"Working on it," I said, gritting my teeth. My lapse in concentration had cost us and I wasn't entirely sure that the whole ship would make it through. Which was a problem- getting into the Sea of Monsters was great and all, but having only half a ship, or two thirds of a ship as the case may be, would be a big problem.

I realized a second later that it wasn't going to work. We had about ten seconds before the rocks closed and that wasn't enough time for us to push through, factoring in the moment when the ship slowed down. Options flashed through my mind. I could have Annabeth or Tyson open the thermos more, but there was no guarantee that we'd be pushed in the right direction or that the winds wouldn't escape entirely.

I could try to push the boat even faster, but when I'd said maximum speed earlier, I'd meant it. I didn't think I could push it any faster without it capsizing. Then there was always the pray and hope for the best approach- incidentally, one that I rarely, if ever, use.

None of those three options were exactly appealing to me, so I took the fourth. You know, the insanely stupid one that I didn't think I could do but did anyways. Yeah, that one- actually holding back the rocks.

"Percy," Annabeth hissed, "faster."

I grunted, not bothering to respond, mostly because I didn't think I could without killing us all. I felt the pressure in my gut and it was getting to the point where it was painful. You know, like
when you have to go to the bathroom really bad, but you decide to wait it out through the school day because you've got stuff to do or you're lazy or whatever. And you have to go that entire time but it's really just your stomach gurgling, offset by bad gas, for the most part. And then as soon as you start walking home, you get these really bad stomach cramps. And I don't really know why I didn't just say stomach cramps, but oh well. You got a longer analogy; yay. So my point is that it wasn't necessarily debilitating pain but it hurt like Tartarus all the same.

"Rocks slowed down?" Tyson asked.

"Don't be silly," Annabeth said. "Wait, I think they actually are. Percy, are you seeing this?"

I rolled my eyes and decided that ignoring her was the best policy. Again, I couldn't respond even if I'd wanted to. I didn't really want to respond, just for variety; partly because I wasn't feeling very sociable at that moment and partly because I was kind of offended that she wanted me to look at my own handiwork when I was focused on the probably somewhat important task of keeping us alive.

"Percy, are you—oh . . . wow. Whatever you're doing, don't stop." And there's the comprehension. For a child of Athena, she can be unbearably slow sometimes.

I hadn't been planning on stopping anyways, for hopefully obvious reasons, but it was nice to hear the encouragement. And just so you know, yes, that whole exchange took place in like ten seconds. They were talking quickly—or well, Annabeth was at least. And my excellent analogy and my in depth analysis of my feelings are after the fact; I'm not really a genius, so it would have been kind of impossible for me to have thought that entire thing in like ten seconds.

And then we were through. I heard a faint yes from Annabeth and a somewhat louder cheer from Tyson. Then I heard someone thump to the deck. Probably Annabeth—I highly doubted that she'd fainted but I wouldn't blame her for just laying on the solid ground—solid deck, whatever—and making sure that she was still alive. Gods, I was almost regretting not choosing to go through Charybdis and Scylla.

"Wake me up if you need me," I said tiredly. I could have stayed awake if I'd really wanted to. While the effort I'd exerted was considerable, it wasn't debilitating, and I wasn't running on fumes quite yet. Still, there was no reason not to go to sleep now that we'd passed the rocks. Without my water powers, it would be a while before we hit any of the recognizable landmarks. You know, the various monster infested islands and whatnot.

And then there was also the fact that I hadn't slept in a while, since I'd chosen to sacrifice some of my rest in exchange for a much faster journey. It would be more detrimental than anything else for me to stay awake, really. So two seconds later, I was out like a light.

Which is a phrase I've never really understood, actually. Don't lightbulbs usually flicker before going out or, you know, explode? And yet, the phrase is used to describe people who have fallen into a deep unconsciousness, whether they're sleeping, suffering from blood loss, or have been bashed on the head too many times. As far as I know, lightbulbs also never 'wake up' from their 'sleep' once they go out. So every time you say someone's out like a light, you're basically saying they're dead. Which can be misleading, unless, you know, they're actually dead.

Anyways, the point is, I fell asleep.

If I'd been awake, however, I would have seen the tiny figure watching us from a small island nearby. If I'd been awake, I might have chosen to check out the strange phenomenon. If I'd been awake, I might have prevented some very . . . frustrating events in the near future. As it was, I wasn't awake, so the point is moot. So I didn't notice the man, we didn't confront him, and events
continued on the course that I had set by choosing to enter the Sea of Monsters by way of the Symplegades.

Chapter End Notes

Yes, I had them go through the Clashing Rocks. Percy has personally experienced Charybdis and Scylla and he has no desire to go through that ever again. Annabeth has probably heard of the aforementioned monsters and believes that the rocks are the safer bet, once Percy suggests them. Tyson doesn't know any of them and doesn't have an opinion either way.

The mysterious figure? You'll have to wait to find out. And I promise he'll be important to the plot- very important. All I'll say is that his existence is actually necessary for Percy and Artemis to get together. His actions indirectly lead to their relationship. Not that it's his intention in any way. Though I will tell you that he's not in the PJO books; I needed a certain type of character, one that doesn't exist in the original series. He is an actual mythological character, however, so I wouldn't classify him as an OC.

The scene with Annabeth catching Percy lying is kind of awkward, admittedly, but I felt it needed to be done. Percy isn't used to relying on people and he's certainly been trying to do everything by himself ever since he came back in time. He's also not in the habit of sharing his long terms plans, or even his short term ones. This isn't going to go unnoticed forever, of course, and it's likely to cause problems in his relationships with various friends and acquaintances. Annabeth hasn't forgotten it; she just chose to set it aside because they had more pressing things to do- like getting through the clashing rocks.

If you're enjoying the story, please leave kudos and subscribe. Or you can comment if you want to tell me so explicitly. If you don't like it, review and tell me what I'm doing wrong, please. I need constructive criticism if I'm going to improve.
I commit fratricide

Chapter Summary

It's nice not being the last demigod anymore. I'm back, better than ever, in my totally unbiased opinion, and ready to shake things up.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

So there I was, swimming along in the Sea of Monsters. Had to keep in shape, you know?

Okay, fine, it wasn't just exercise. I was scouting. Now, you'd think that as the leader of the quest I wouldn't get such a lame and boring task. Unfortunately, I'd been outvoted. I'd voted for no scouting while Annabeth had voted for me scouting in the water. And, well, I didn't really have the energy to argue.

So I was swimming along in the calm waters when I met a shark. He was a friendly shark; most are, to me, considering my lineage, but this one seemed particularly nice, so I named him Bob. After, you know, Bob the Titan.

Anyways, I was swimming along with my new friend Bob when we saw a ship. A big ship. Like, a big old honking trireme. You know, the normal kind, with black sails with a painted gorgon's head. The normal kind.

Bob saw him first- Sharks have way better vision than you probably think- and sort of nudged me. When I saw it, my eyes widened. Now, you might have noticed that I said the ship had black sails and a painted gorgon's head. When I called it normal, I lied.

I'd encountered the ship once, years ago or years into the future, whichever way you wanted to see it. My half brother was on the ship. He was the leader actually, with a crew of- get this- dolphin men. Which may seem hilarious, but isn't in the moment, when there are like fifty of them pointing spears at you. Trust me; I've been there.

So I hightailed it back to our ship, saying goodbye to Bob quickly.

"Hey, Annabeth!" I shouted as I landed on the deck, propelled by a miniature wave.

"I'm right here," she said quickly, looking up from where she'd been reading on one of the trireme's benches. "What's wrong?"

"We've got incoming," I said grimly. "Now, I'm not saying that I agree with the whole scouting decision still, but it did bear some fruit."

She gave me a deadpan look. "So basically I was right but you don't want to say it."

"Tomato, tomahto," I said flippantly.

"So what kind of incoming are we looking at?" she asked.
"Guy named Chrysaor," I said. "Also known as Golden Boy. He's my half brother, the son of Poseidon and Medusa, so he'll probably be able to counter my water powers somewhat. He's also got a crew of about fifty dolphin men, who were cursed by Dionysus once upon a time. They've got spears and are relatively skilled, though even if they weren't they could probably overwhelm us with pure numbers."

"Great." Annabeth sighed. "And we can't go around them?"

I shook my head. We could try, but I needed to get to Circe's island anyways, to destroy it so Reyna and Hylla could leave and start their new lives. And if Chrysaor was in the Sea of Monsters, it was likely that he was here to do business of some sort with Circe, so it was, consequently, likely that we would run into him at the island.

"Go get Tyson," I said. She shot me a dirty look. I rolled my eyes. "All you've gotta do is find him and tell him to come up here, not socialize."

With a huff, she went running off. I walked over to where I'd left my backpack, pulling out the wind thermos. If we were going to survive this, we needed to strike preemptively.

I pulled on the backpack, tugging the straps over my shoulders and stretching at the same time. I'm efficient like that. I felt around in my pocket briefly for Riptide, breathing a sigh of relief when I felt it. Logically, I knew that it was going to be there, but it was always comforting to know where one of my two greatest weapons was.

A second later, I heard footsteps as Annabeth ran up behind me, Tyson's heavier thuds following her.

"What's the plan?" Annabeth asked, panting a bit.

"Thanks for asking," I said. "It's pretty simple, really. We can't beat the fifty of them in a straight up fight, no matter how strong Tyson is or how incredibly skilled I am or how invisible you are, so we're going to strike preemptively."

Annabeth tilted her head slightly. "Percy, how exactly do you suggest we strike preemptively against another ship?"

"We have cannons," I said simply.

"The ammunition isn't damaging," Annabeth pointed out. "It's either fireworks, for celebrations, or fake cannonballs, for the war games."

"Huh," I said. "Well, shit. There goes that plan. Luckily, I have others."

Yeah, that wasn't something I'd known. I'd assumed that the triremes on standby in the harbor had been battle ready. Apparently, I had assumed wrong.

"Fine, new plan," I said. "Annabeth, you go invisible. You're our trump card, or one of them at least. Tyson and I will board them once we ram their ship. And then--"

"Wait, wait, wait," Annabeth said quickly. "Ram their ship? We need our own ship in one piece, Percy."

"We need it mostly in one piece," I corrected. "I can hold it together long enough to find somewhere to stop for a couple hours to patch it up, if it's damaged badly enough."
"That won't work," Annabeth said, shaking her head. "A major hole in your plan is that we don't have the supplies to fix the ship. It also might be much more damaged than you think, and even if it isn't, you'll still need to concentrate on holding it together for hours, maybe days."

"Right," I said. "Well, we've got twenty minutes. What do you suggest?"

"Well," she began. "You have fire arrows, right?"

"Yes."

"Good," she said. "Then, you'll start out by trying to shoot the leader, if he's on deck. Right after that, whether you hit him or not, shoot the sails. If they get set on fire, it'll definitely distract at least some of them. I'll go invisible, like you said, because it's almost inevitable that one of us will be boarding the other if my first plan fails.

"After that, you'll use your water powers, as quickly as you can so Chrysaor has no time to counter you, to try to capsize their ship. If that doesn't work, we'll have to actually fight. Tyson will fight them with his fists."

"No," I interrupted. "He'd die quickly. He's strong, yes, but Chrysaor's incredibly fast. Faster than me, even. He'd slice through Tyson with his imperial gold sword before we can blink."

"Imperial gold?" Annabeth asked.

"Like celestial bronze," I said. "Except, well, the Romans used it." Use it, I corrected mentally. But I couldn't exactly tell her that yet.

She looked at me strangely, and I worried she was beginning to see through my little foresight deception, before she shook her head quickly as if to clear it.

"I was planning on having you shooting from afar," Annabeth said, "while I picked them off invisibly. What do you suggest, Percy?"

"Unless you can shoot-" Annabeth shook her head, "we're going to need to go all melee. I'll take Chrysaor while Tyson distracts the dolphin men and you slice and dice 'em from behind."

"It's a stupid plan," Annabeth said bluntly.

"It's the only one I've got that'll get us through alive," I said. "It's a backup plan, anyways, so hopefully we won't need it. Hopefully I can actually capsize the ship."

"Backup plans are created for a reason," Annabeth said. "We'll probably end up needing it."

"Fine," I grumbled. "We're on course to reach Chrysaor and his crew in about ten minutes. Be ready."

Our plan A failed the moment Annabeth said, "Wait, do they keep prisoners?"

"Uh . . ." I said eloquently. I squinted to see, grimacing as I saw some of the dolphin people pointing and undoubtedly sounding the alarm. And . . . yep, that looked like people tied up. Two people- girls if I hadn't missed my mark. "Yeah, that's not good."

"Percy, we fight?" I flinched slightly; I'd almost forgotten Tyson was there. Can you blame me? He'd been silent for the past twenty minutes or so and hadn't even really entered my field of vision.

"Looks like it," I said grimly. "Get ready for a collision."
"Dammit, Percy," Annabeth growled. "I thought we weren't going with that plan!"

"How else do you propose we get onto their ship to rescue the prisoners?" I asked. I clenched a fist, silently urging our ship to speed up. It lurched forward. "Brace yourselves. I'll see how much I can blunt the blow with water, but this is still gonna hurt." I pulled my ring off my finger, enlarging it and nocking a fire arrow.

I gritted my teeth as we rammed into the ship a second later. There was a loud crunch as the helm of our ship punched a hole in the side of Chrysaor's. I fired at the sail quickly, since I couldn't see Chrysaor on deck yet, before minimizing my bow and slipping the ring back onto my finger. I managed to keep my footing, somehow, though Annabeth wasn't so lucky, and I heard her cursing again as I enlarged Riptide.

"I'm getting really sick of that," I heard her mutter.

I ignored her grumbling, taking a running jump off of our ship and onto Chrysaor's. I rolled, coming up in time to dodge to the side and slice through a spear. I saw a spear piercing my chest and brought my sword up just in time to deflect it, ducking another spear from behind, twisting as I came up, Riptide slicing through my second attacker's stomach.

I swayed to the side to avoid a third attacker, grabbing onto his spear and pulling, his own momentum giving him no resistance, and consequently no avenue to avoid the first attacker's spear through his side.

I deflected the first attacker's spear again, using two hands on my sword to shove him back. I had a flash of foresight and stepped out of the way of a thrust from someone behind me which would have gone through my shoulder, almost casually reaching back with my blade and slicing off his head. I quickly turned back to the first attacker, only to find him lying on the ground, blood pooling through his shirt. Annabeth must have been there.

I growled as I had to avoid another spear that would have gotten me in the heart- from behind. "Is this attack Percy from behind day, or something?" I rammed into the dolphin man with my shoulder, slamming him into the railing of the ship. I spun around, but saw no dolphin men near me.

The instant I saw Tyson, I knew why. He was occupying a lot of them by himself. They couldn't really do more than nick him as he swatted them like flies. My eyes widened as I caught a flash of gold and I took off running.

I sped up, realizing that I wasn't going to make it in time, pushing myself as fast as I could go to get across the deck in an instant. I lunged and just barely managed to deflect Chrysaor's sword before it could slice through Tyson's neck.

The cyclops in question managed to knock out his dolphin man opponent with a headshot.

I turned to face Chrysaor quickly in case he chose to attack again, but he seemed perfectly content to stand with his sword held in a ready position.

"It's not often that I'm boarded," he growled. "But it ends now, demigod."

"It does, does it?" I asked. "From where I'm standing, you're outnumbered." We were still outnumbered slightly, actually, but it was only by about five dolphin men, which wouldn't be too difficult to get rid of.

"True," Chrysaor admitted, realizing, as I did, that his crew didn't mean much against a well trained
demigod and a cyclops. "But are you willing to kill two prisoners to beat me?"

"Two prisoners?" I asked, slowly turning, just enough to see the mast, where the two girls had been tied up. My shoulders slumped when I saw two of the dolphin men holding spears to the girls' throats.

"Yes," Chrysaor said smugly, and I just knew that he was smirking under his Medusa mask. "Two prisoners. So unless you want them to come to harm, Hero, you will stand down and cede your ship to me. As well as everything in that backpack."

I steeled my face. "What makes you think we even want to save those girls?"

He laughed. "For one, you said save, not keep alive, which seems to indicate that saving them was first on your mind."

"It was just a word," I said. "I could easily be using it as a fill in for keep them alive."

"You could be, but you're not," Chrysaor said, calling my bluff. "Furthermore, I know that you're a son of Poseidon. You probably could have capsized my ship, since you did catch me off guard. But you didn't, which indicates that you saw the prisoners and didn't wish to kill them. It wasn't my crew that stayed your hand, certainly, with the way that you were cutting them down a minute ago."

I gritted my teeth. "The instant those girls die, I will gut you."

"Gut me?" Chrysaor laughed again, cold and harsh. "Do you know who I am, Demigod?"

"Yes," I said slowly. "Chrysaor, Golden Boy, son of Medusa and Poseidon, first known user of imperial gold weaponry."

"First known?" he growled. "I was the first, Brother, before the Romans. Me! I'm surprised you even know of me, as much as my name has been stricken from history."

"I didn't," I said. "I have prophetic visions and in one I saw you explaining all of that. You really are unknown, pathetic, really." I kept talking, hoping to distract him.

"Pathetic!" Chrysaor yelled. "Pathetic?! We'll see who guts who!"

"We will?" I asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Yes," he said, visibly calming down. "One on one, a duel to the death. If you don't want the girls to die-"

"What girls?" I asked, smirking.

"Those girls," he said, before looking behind me and freezing. I glanced back as well, my smirk growing. Where the two girls had been were the corpses of the two dolphin men who had been holding them hostage. They'd evidently been killed quickly and silently. Chrysaor's eyes swept the deck wildly, looking for a sign of the two girls. "Where are they?"

His cold tone probably would have sent shivers through someone who hadn't faced the end of the world, but it was me, so my answer was simple and a bit flippant. "No clue."

"You're lying," he said. "You have to be."

"Nope," I said, "Nothing but the truth. The cold, hard truth, Chrysaor. What are you going to do
He lunged towards me almost immediately and I deflected his blade once, twice, pushing myself to keep up with the physically older and obviously much more experienced swordsmen. Another exchange and I was struggling to hold onto my blade. Just when I thought he was about to disarm me, he lunged forward. I desperately brought my blade up, hoping against hope that my second chance wouldn't end so suddenly, that I wouldn't be taken out by someone like Chrysaor.

A second later, Chrysaor was impaled on my blade and I had no idea how. Or at least until I looked over his slouched form and saw Tyson, fist still extended. Huh.

Chrysaor coughed up blood. "Next time we meet." He paused to cough again. "You're dead, Hero. Dead." He glared at me- or I guessed he did, considering I hadn't bothered to de-mask him- as he dissolved. Huh. So he was a monster after all.

"Well," I said slowly, falling to a knee, breathing hard as my adrenaline began to dissipate. "That went well."

Tyson let out a whoop, and I grinned.

Annabeth rolled her eyes exasperatedly. Still, she couldn't stop a smile from materializing.

A little while later, I headed down to check on Chrysaor's former prisoners.

"Huh," I said, eyes widening as I beheld the two girls we had saved. We were in the cabin of Chrysaor's ship, where Annabeth had led them. It was golden all over. Everything was gold plated, from the bed to the table to the walls. Say what you will about Chrysaor, but he certainly lived up to his moniker.

I wasn't sure I could really call both of the former prisoners girls, considering that one of them was about five years older than us. Not mentally, I knew, but still. The other girl seemed around our age. I noticed that they were each wearing Camp Half Blood shirts. They were practically swimming in them, so I guessed that they were some of the XXL ones I'd bought for Tyson at the camp store before the quest. I guessed that they hadn't had much on before, something I hadn't really noticed while I was fighting to rescue them.

My eyes had widened because I was surprised. And I was surprised because the two girls- which was what I'd decided to keep calling them- were ones I knew. Reyna and Hylla. Hylla looked eighteen or nineteen while Reyna looked my age, give or take a year or so.

"Annabeth, I think you'd better leave the room," I said.

The two girls began shaking and Annabeth shook her head quickly. "I can't just leave them. I don't think they should be alone with a male so soon after Chrysaor."

"I saved them," I protested.

"I know," Annabeth said. "They're still a bit traumatized, obviously."

"Fine," I said. "Just know that you'll probably be memory wiped after hearing the conversation."

Her eyes narrowed. "You can erase memories?"

"Not me," I said, rolling my eyes. "The gods can, though, and this is a secret that they will do practically anything to keep."
"And you won't get your memory wiped?" Annabeth asked skeptically.

"Nope," I said. "I've had training on defending my mind, so if any god did try, they'd probably end up breaking me and making me go mad. Considering there's a prophecy about me saving or destroying Olympus, I don't think they want that."

Annabeth looked shocked. "How do you know about that?"

"Apollo told me," I said quickly. "Anyways, you have a choice. Leave now and have some inkling that there is a secret or stay and forget this entire conversation."

Annabeth looked uncertain, glancing between me and the shaking girls, before she stood a bit straighter and said, "I'll stay."

"On your own head be it," I said, shrugging. I was a bit annoyed, and not at all happy that she'd chosen to get her mind wiped, but there wasn't anything I could really do about it short of knocking her out, which would just scare Reyna and Hylla and make the entire situation much worse.

We waited a moment in silence as I fumed and the other three waited for my explanation. Finally Annabeth said, "Well?"

"Right," I said. "First things first, don't interrupt me until I'm done. You'll probably have quite a few questions, which I'll answer, even if you, Annabeth, won't remember them, but I want to say everything first. It probably won't take too long.

"Okay. First things first, you two are Romans." I pointed to Reyna and Hylla. "Roman demigods. Me and Annabeth are Greek demigods."

"Annabeth and I," Annabeth muttered. I chose to ignore her.

"These are two separate things. Someone born to Zeus would not have the same abilities or inherit the same disposition as someone born to Jupiter, ignoring their mother's possible influence.

"You two are daughters of Bellona, who's a fairly big goddess for Romans, but not one of the big twelve. You probably just have better minds for strategy and an instinctive understanding of weapons, since she's a goddess of war. Maybe some good leadership capabilities.

"Now, while we could take you back to Camp Half-Blood with us, it probably wouldn't really work out long term. There are two main options for you two, really, besides that. One is joining the Roman Legion in San Francisco. Another is joining the Amazons, who are somewhere along the west coast. I can't remember exactly where, sorry.

"I'd suggest both starting out in the Legion and going from there. You'd have to start out by going to Lupa, the wolf goddess who raised Romulus and Remus, and get training from her. That's how it works there, I think. And that's all I really have to say. Any questions?"

"Um," Reyna said in a small voice, "Is this all real?"

"Uh," I said, turning to Annabeth.

She gave me a dirty look before turning to Reyna with a kind smile on her face. "Yes, this is all real. Demigods, gods, monsters, all of it's true. I've lived this life since I was seven."

"Who was the person who kidnapped us?" Hylla asked, glaring at us both. It seemed like she didn't trust us yet.
"Chrysaor," I said. "Also known as the golden boy. He's a pirate; the first pirate, he claims. He sells girls to Circe and she ensnares them, trapping them on the island for eternity in her sorceress cult or whatever." She actually treated the women on the island fairly well, but I wanted to dissuade Reyna and Hylla from ever seeking her out.

"Anyways," Hylla said, "Reyna wasn't asking if the monsters were real. We've had to deal with them from a young age. She was asking if the camps were real, if there's really a place- or places- for people like us to go where we can be safe."

"The answer is still yes," Annabeth said. "I go to Camp Half-Blood and so does Percy. I didn't know about the . . . Legion before Percy said it a second ago, so you'll have to ask him about that."

"It's true," I said, shrugging. "It's called Camp Jupiter and it's separated into five cohorts; everyone goes to one. You can get in with a letter from a previous member of the Legion or with a god's approval, but the most common way is through the Wolf House, where Lupa hangs out. It's led by two people, the praetors, who control the military, while most major decisions are made by the senate. It's a lot like Rome was back in the day."

"Can you take us there?" Reyna asked. I hated how quiet and scared she sounded, so unlike the Reyna I had known before.

"Of course," I said. "As soon as this quest is over, I'll get you to Camp Jupiter."

"I still remember," Annabeth said as soon as we stepped out of the cabin and closed the door, leaving the two sisters to themselves.

"Give it a minute," I said. "I'm not entirely sure how this works. I don't know if you'll forget in like five seconds, if a god needs to actually be in front of you, or if you'll forget overnight. I'm not an expert on this."

"Do you see me getting my memories wiped?" she asked.

"Huh?" I said. See her getting her memories wiped? I had no idea what she was asking.

"In the future," she said, rolling her eyes. "Your visions."

"Oh, those," I said, kicking myself. "No. No visions about that."

"So it might not happen," Annabeth said triumphantly.

"Sure." I waved a hand. "Or I might just not have had a vision about it. I don't see everything. It's not like I'm constantly seeing the future. I see things when I see them and I see what I see. I can't really influence it."

She huffed, glaring at me.

"I'm just telling it like it is," I said. "I'm not going to go out of my way to get your memories wiped, but it's no skin off my nose, really. This isn't something you need to know right now."

"When, then?" she asked. "When will I need to know it?"

"You might not," I said, shrugging.

"Why don't I know?" she asked, changing tracks. "Couldn't our two camps coordinate, meet up, train together?"
"Greeks and Romans don't get along," I said. To me, it explained everything. Annabeth didn't appear to agree so I continued. "In the past, whenever the two camps have met, there's been bloodshed between them. Eventually, the gods decided that enough was enough and that they didn't want their children to massacre each other simply because of ancient nationality."

"How long ago was this?"

"No clue," I said. "I know basic stuff, but history of anything isn't my strong suit."

"You know a lot about all the monsters we face," Annabeth countered.

"History and mythology are different," I said. "And anyways, most of my information comes from my visions."

"They really aren't," Annabeth said exasperatedly.

"Are too," I said, sticking out my tongue.

"Why do I even try?" she asked, looking straight up at the sky.

"I ask myself that every time," I said.

"Why you try?" she asked.

"No," I corrected. "Why you try. We both know I'm always right."

She snorted. "Keep dreaming, Percy. Just keep dreaming."

"Whatever," I said. "I'm gonna go take a nap."

Annabeth suddenly looked sly. "But Percy, no self respecting teenager would-"

"Shut up."

Chapter End Notes

This is the third rewrite of the chapter, because the first two sucked. I'm still not sure about this, but I liked the addition of Chrysaor. I was planning for this chapter to be half Chrysaor, half Circe's island, but then I decided to just have Reyna and Hylla on Chrysaor's ship. After all, he did business with Circe in canon, and though the type of business is never mentioned, I inferred that he brought female demigods to her island and sold them.

Is it true or not? No idea. Either way, I had him bringing Reyna and Hylla. This can also be considered part of the butterfly effect, considering that it's highly unlikely he brought them to Circe's island a week before Percy and Annabeth arrived in canon. It's a pretty weak excuse, I know, but whatever. Considering the fact that the fates are absolutely canonical, you can consider it them messing with Percy or something.

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