Skeletons and Blacksmiths

by The_Firebird

Summary

What if Leo went to Westover Hall instead of all those foster homes? What if Nico had always spent more time there instead of the Lotus Casino? What would the world do if they had someone to care for, to care for them? If these two boys weren’t alone to fight the world before camp?

I just wanted to warn y'all that this will be going through all of the books starting with The Titans Curse, with my own little twists of course, and instead of having a big baddie they are fighting like in the books (since it switches series) the plot will pretty much be the love story between our favorite fire wielder and ghost king.
Notes

I had help with this chapter. You can check out the beta I found through his tumblr. I would love prompts at any time so you can send me those here. Please please please send all those prompts. This one should be a long one and I try to update every 1 to 2 weeks, but that may vary depending on my surgeries.
When The Day Met The Night

Chapter Summary

When the moon fell in love with the sun
All was golden in the sky
All was golden when the day met the night

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Nico clung to Bianca as they stepped out of the dark car in front of the Westover Hall Boarding School’s main building. They had lived in this casino/hotel combination for the past few months, but once the two came out of the hotel… everything seemed different.

At that time Nico was eight and Bianca was ten. They “lived” there for a month but before that they were just on their own for a bit. People came and went but Bianca and Nico stuck to each other like glue the whole time. They hadn’t gotten very far in terms of schooling when they were without a guardian, but Bianca tried to teach Nico everything she knew about the world and about English, so he could speak with locals and tourists. To read and understand basic math so that no one would make fun of him.

They were behind in their schooling (that much was a given) but they didn’t really know how much the missed until they left the casino. The world had seemed to grow fifty years in the course of their one month stay.

Everything changed. This new world brought new challenges- “What’s a smartphone?” Nico had asked. But Nico knew that they would excel in this new world, despite everything they knew having been changed. Each one of the new concepts the two had tried to grasp when they were little were easily obtained, Bianca made sure of it. She made sure that Nico knew a little bit everything he learned and that they wouldn’t move on until both of them didn’t have any more questions.

Now they were gonna live here for the time being. A new place without any familiar faces and some odd lawyer in a black suit that took them here was their first sign of a whole new problem.

Now they would have to learn what to do in this new world. Nico didn’t really remember a lot but the look on his sister’s face told him that a lot else had changed. They had guessed that it was to be expected because a lot of things could change in a month.
And changed it had.

With that thought, they made their way inside.

Leo Valdez had made his way through many foster homes by the time he was nine.

His mom had died just a year before and nobody had really wanted him since. His newest ‘family’ had just dropped his off at Westover Hall Boarding School to grow up so that they wouldn't have a problematic foster kid on their hands.

Leo would’ve cried when he was five, but he was used to it by now. People just didn’t want him. Abuse and neglect taught him that. The only person who did like Leo was his mom, and she’s gone now, so he became just plain unlikable.

Leo knocked on the door with his possessions in tow. His foster parents were long gone, having clambered back into their beat up station wagon and left nothing they wanted behind.

The door swung open to reveal an older woman who ushered him inside when she didn’t see any other adults.

Nobody had talked to Leo for the first week. That skinny kid who looked like he was going to hurl a thousand words at you from every direction because of that spark in his eyes and his mischievous grin. He had pointy ears and a crooked smile. Leo looked like a troublemaker from the start.

But Leo knew it was going to be different this time because this time , he spotted a little boy with straight black hair that stuck up awkwardly and a deck of cards in his hand, sitting alone and shuffling his feet and the cards. Leo decided that if he was going to make any friends or even have anybody ignore him, he would just have to go up and talk to that somebody first.

“Hey, what’s your name?” The boy was startled when he looked up, showing grey-black eyes as if there were only whites and the shadow of a pupil. It was the first time Leo had ever seen anybody’s eyes look like that. Usually they would be brown or blue or green...but never black.
“N-Nico. Nico di Angelo.” Nico’s voice was soft and shaky, like he wasn’t used to speaking and afraid to mess up. Leo wasn’t surprised, the kid almost oozed anxiety. He had a heavy accent, too, so he probably wasn’t used to English. Leo wasn’t used to accents, except for the few times his foster parents had one. He had only ever heard this kind of accent when a pair of foster parents had yelled at each other in what they had said was Italian. That must’ve been where the kid was from. Italy.

“I’m Leo. Can I sit?” The boy just looked down and nodded. Nico just shuffled his cards and swung his feet. He rarely looked up. Leo only just realized how skittish this kid really was.

“What game is that?”

“Mythomagic. I got the last pack on the shelf.” Nico’s words seemed to be sounded out, like a little kid. He was really trying to get English right, Leo was determined to teach him to be more confident, maybe even learn some Italian on the way.

“I’m, uh, waiting for my sister to get out of her class. They won’t let me start yet because I’m not in the grade I should be in but she always teaches me what she can when it’s over. Then we play cards.”

“When will she be back?” Leo asked, following Nico’s eyes as he scanned the room for what seemed like the fifth time.

Nico looked at the clock. It was noon.

“In another three hours.” Leo looked at this at that time and the other boy seemed to deflate at that thought.

“Wanna play until she gets back?” Leo asked. He was surprised at how long Nico would have to wait. Besides, it’s not like Leo had anything better to do.

The smaller boy shrugged. “Do you know how to play?” Nico always bested Bianca in their recent games, everyone else called him a nerd and the adults just didn't have time, so it would be good to have a new opponent, someone he could teach.

Leo grinned. “Nope.”
Nico suddenly looked up. He had been shuffling his cards in anticipation for a game.

“But you can teach me!” Leo quickly added on. His leg was bouncing up and down from a small burst of excitement.

The other boy shrugged again and started dealing out the cards.

Bianca caught up to her grade faster than the staff had ever seen, and Nico had already known everything she had until they got there, so she wasn’t worried about him being left behind. Thinking about the boy, she left her classroom to find her little brother. He was at the usual table, but there was another boy sitting across from him. A protective flare rose to the surface, a reaction born of the street thugs beating Nico up for cheap laughs. She was about to run over there and pull him away, try and fight for him, but then she saw the shyest kid in the whole building almost fall out of his chair laughing.

Bianca smiled, that was something that never really happened anymore. Ever since the craze of games all day and five star food had lost its appeal, they weren’t complaining, but their small room in Venice with their mother had always been more enjoyable, the little memories they each had of it.

She was glad Nico had found someone besides her to talk to, to play with. He had only sat there for the year they were at the school, never really doing much since they wouldn’t let him start his studies until the end of the year.

Leo looked at the time. He had a grasp on this game and was actually starting to be able to defeat the other boy, but he had been waiting for his sister in the beginning, and he should’ve been able to see her ASAP. It was now 3:05, so she should be back. That was when a black-haired girl was spotted leaning up against a wall with a smile on her face while looking at the two.

Leo leaned in to speak to Nico. “Hey, do you know her?”

The older boy looked confused for a second, then turned around to see who had been watching them, he then runs over to pull his sister over and deal her into their game. Over the next several months the three of them got to be good friends. Leo was in the same wing that Nico was, being
the same age, and they stayed out together long after they were supposed to, the older one seeming to blend into the shadows on his way back, therefore able to sneak more easily through the halls.

Before the boy from Texas had asked to play cards, Nico had no company after hours. He always felt the most energized at night, often staying up late and getting little sleep. The Italian kid never understood why everyone was such a stickler about sleeping at night, instead of during the day when the sun made him feel warm and drowsy.

Leo liked the night too. But for him, it was always like the day was too hot, then night was like going under the cold sheets in the middle of a hundred degree day (37.7° C) or a cool breeze on the same day. He did get cold, just not as fast. On a snow day he would probably have to wear a sweatshirt, but he could not stand the heat. Real heat, that is. He could stick his hand right into a fire-

*Fire. Fire burning down the whole shop. Mama was in there. I started that fire. I didn’t mean to. Mama don’t go. Mama! MAMA!* 

Leo shook himself out of his memories and found himself standing outside the tiny dorm-like room Nico slept in, along with a couple other kids. Leo felt like he was burning up, like he couldn’t touch anything, nevermind the rickety old wooden door. He calmed himself down. It was just some childhood nightmare. The fire in the shop was just some electrical thing, that was it. He opened the door.

As expected, Nico wasn’t in his bed. Leo had been told many stories about how the other boy had been scolded many times for not being in his bed, but how every night he would just take his bedding and place it on the ledge, more than big enough to hold the now ten year old.

Nico was there now, looking out into the darkness of the night and only turning his head when the door opened. He smiled for a second, then the look contorted to worry and confusion when he saw the fear on his friend’s face. Without any words, Leo nodded towards the door, and Nico understood. In the first two months of knowing each other, they had found comfort with each other in the middle of the night, often going to this little cemetery-like place.

It wasn’t super creepy, but it was where some kids and staff had been buried. A place that had been open for over fifty years was bound to have at least a few deaths, and sure enough, there was four or five little graves tucked away behind the ‘boys’ building, giving the two a little place nobody else really went to.

Before leaving the room, Nico grabbed a jacket from his few clothes. He might’ve liked the night,
but he wasn’t a fan of the cold that came with it. The italian boy would never understand how his mexican friend could leave without so much as a long sleeve, just a tee shirt and somehow that worked.

As soon as they stepped into the cooler night air, Leo seemed off. He had been a bit jumpy on the way, but Nico had summed it up to him not wanting to get caught, but now he could see that he was jumpy even in their own little haven. Nobody ever came out here, even during the day. So there was no reason for Leo to be so worried like he was.

“Leo? What’s wrong?” Nico asked, it seemed like those words broke the wall of nervousness, making the thoughts flood out of his mouth like a tsunami.

“I didn’t mean to. I never wanted to hurt her. She was inside and she asked me to wait but then an earth-lady appeared and oh god I sound crazy.”

“Hey, Valdez, deep breath and tell me. Who did you accidentally hurt and what do you mean earth-lady?”

“My….my mom. I killed my mom.” Leo had tears of regret, sadness and guilt running down his cheeks, yet he also relaxed against the cold, pale boy next to him.

“I thought you said she was killed in a fire. And how did you accidentally kill her?”

“I made the fire.”

“You were outside, how could you set the fire from-”

“No, Nico. I didn’t set the fire. I made the fire.”

“Leo, now you’re not making any sense.”

The curly-haired boy took another long, deep breath. Using all the control he had, which wasn’t much, he summoned a small flame to dance around his hand, trying to not drown in memories as he saw his flames for the first time in two years. “I did this. There was this lady, she was like an
imaginary friend from a nightmare and I thought she was standing in front of me and was saying that she’d hurt me and mama and I tried to burn her….but nobody was there, I was the reason the shop burned down.” He kept his eyes closed, not knowing what would happen if he saw the object of his life’s destruction. The flames sparked in retaliation.

“Leo..hey, Leo.” Nico softly slapped the side of his face, trying to get his attention. “You were eight years old. You had no idea what it would do. It was not on purpose and not your fault. Blame this earth-lady. She was the reason you did it. What was her name?”

“Gaea, I think. She would go on these, like, monologues on how she would take over the world and how ‘the seven’ would bring the world down.”

“It’s over. You haven’t seen her since, right?” Leo shook his head. “Good. Now, with this fire thing. We are going to come out here and practice that a lot. We can’t have you getting mad and flaming on. I will help you through it, Bianca too. She just can’t really help at night, you know, on the other side of campus and all, right? Unless one of us could, I don’t know, bring her through the shadows. That would be a sight, huh?”

“Yeah, it would be, Nico. Thanks.”

“Wanna head back now?”

“Sure.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so so so much for reading, please comment and tell me what you think. I’m planning for this to be a long one, so I might start working on a different story during this one. SEND ME YOUR PROMPTS. I also accept prompts from these ships: Sabriel, Destiel, Johnlock, Sebaciel and Frostiron. (Sam Winchester/Gabriel or Dean Winchester/Castiel from Supernatural, John Watson/Sherlock Holmes from Sherlock, Sebastian Michaelis/Ciel Phantomhive from Black Butler and Loki/Tony Stark from the Avengers)
Intermission

Chapter Notes

I'm just using song titles from my phone for the chapter titles, there should be enough for this story.....or else I got myself into way more than I thought. SEND ME YOUR PROMPTS! You can send them to me through my tumblr, which you can find here. Thank you

And yes, that is a song title

26/2/17 Edit, I got rid of a little bit to make the backstory flow more smoothly. Sorry, but hopefully it will make the story better ^_^

The next three years go by smoothly. Leo and Nico sharing classes, then hanging out and playing mythomagic with Bianca after. They were a little trio, happy where they stood and not planning on leaving.

Nico helped out Leo with his fire, controlling it when angry and how to cool down after. Bianca helped out as much as she could too, mainly by not freaking out about it and saying she had seen weirder in her lifetime. All in all, Leo was fairly confident about his abilities by the time they were twelve and Bianca was fourteen. The flame boy had an affinity for tinkering, too. He would find a whole bunch of little things lying around and use them to build almost anything he wanted.

Nico and Bianca became sneakier, in turn. As the years went on, it seemed like Leo was really the only one who could pick them out of a shadow or really notice them when they entered a room. It was alright, it seemed like everyone in this place had their own little groups, and they were fine with theirs.

At one point, Nico completely disappeared into one. It scared the hell out of the three of them, because suddenly he had disappeared walking with Bianca in the little cemetery and ended up with Leo in their shared dorm, something they pulled after their years living there. He just appeared on his bed, falling unconscious as soon as he arrived. Bianca had rushed in not long after, claiming he disappeared and that they needed to find him, until she saw him on the bed.

They carried him to the infirmary immediately, where they called an ambulance to take him to the hospital. Bianca, being his only living relative, was allowed to ride in the back with him, but Leo had to fight with the staff, sneaking a phone call for a taxi and using some of the money his mother left him to get to the hospital.
Nico was in a coma, but not on life support. His heart and brain were fine, beating regularly, if a bit slow, and responding to everything. It was like he was asleep, he could most likely hear everything, but it wasn’t clear when he would be waking up. Bianca was crying, worrying over her little brother no matter how much the doctor reassured her. Leo just hugged her and let her do what she needed to, including letting her use him as a punching bag when things got bad for her, literally and figuratively.

They exchanged stories while they were in there, about their lives growing up. Both of them felt like they knew everything about the other, but their time spent in the hospital watching over Nico paid tribute to what they had really been through. Bianca explained how she and Nico had learnt to talk in Venice, Italy, hence the accents, but had moved to D.C. right before their mother died. She didn’t remember exactly how, but she knew it was in their home and that they somehow didn’t get hit with whatever got their mom. She explained the wretched months on their own, the good that came out of it (the both of them learning the subway systems and exploring America), then the bad parts too (sleeping under a cardboard box in the rain, the stupid kids who thought they had money before they even knew they had it).

Apparently there was a trust. Their mom had set up a bank account for the two of them should something happen to her. There wasn’t much in it, but if they were ever in an emergency, they could probably get back on their feet with it. Leo’s mom had done the same thing with her will. She had had no reason to give it to his father, so she left it to her son, hoping he would do something useful with it.

Three days into being at the hospital, Leo and Bianca were best friends. Nico would always be the most important, in both their eyes, as a brother and a first friend, but now they better understood each other too. Leo understood the comatose kid more too. He never got the full story on why he was so jumpy on that first day, but now he knew that almost every other stranger that had tried to talk to him had wanted something, and that Leo was the first one that hadn’t.

The fourth day held some excitement to it. Some nurses and staff from Westover Hall showed up and said that since Nico was stable, he would reside in their infirmary unless something changed. They took him back to the school in an ambulance, this time they let Leo in the back, along with a couple machines to make sure Nico’s state didn’t change. At Westover Hall, the staff didn’t make Leo go to classes the day they got back, but did say he would need to make up his missing work.

Leo agreed easily enough. Bianca and him slept in shifts, so at least one of them would be awake when Nico woke up, so he went to classes while she was slept, slept while she was up and just hung out for the remaining time.

Bianca, on the other hand, was too caught up in worry over her brother to focus. He had just disappeared then fallen into a coma. She didn’t know how she would handle it if that was the last she would see of him...awake and alive. But Leo helped her through that, saying that his heart was
beating and he was responding to things, he just….needed to wake up.

Sometimes, she wouldn’t be able to sleep, despite the exhaustion that would ebb away at her brain, so Leo had taken to singing lullabies before going to class. It started as just a means to get Bianca to sleep, but pretty soon he found himself pulling a chair up next to Nico when he came back from class, taking his hand and singing the lullabies his mom used to, as if trying to lull him awake.

A week later, one and a half weeks since this started, Leo decided that Bianca needed to sleep in a bed, get some of the hot food in the mess hall, take a shower and change her clothes. He tried to do it jokingly, as was his usual way of going about things, but after a bit he had to drag her all the way to her room and hold the door closed until she retreated. All the while the other kids and staff were staring at them.

It was almost a surprise they didn’t try to stop him, but, thinking back, they were arguing the whole time about whether she needed proper sleep and food and showers, so it would’ve been clear that it was out of concern.

She came back the next day, telling him to do the same. He did. Taking a shower and getting food and sleeping felt like bliss, if it wasn’t for the unsettling feeling deep in his stomach. While he was grabbing stuff, he picked up a book for Bianca. The teachers weren’t very worried about the her classes, seeing as how quickly she caught up to her studies in the beginning of their stay, but she needed to do something to keep from going stir-crazy or have a mental breakdown or something.

It was another three days before anything else happened. Leo was sitting there, finishing up his math work and humming to himself when all the sudden Nico sat up with a gasp.

The fire wielder almost fell out of his seat, waking Bianca up in the process. She was confused until she opened her eyes, mouth gaping open and frozen, as if she was afraid to move and have it all be fake.

Nico had barely been awake for ten seconds before his eyes cleared and he smelled the disinfectant. “Why am I in the infirmary? What happened?”

That was all he could say before any other words would have been smothered by the two frantic loved ones at his sides hugging him to death. The nurse chose that moment to come in, to check the equipment and Nico’s vitals, and she had to practically peel the two healthy kids off the newly
awake one to make sure everything was going smoothly and get the wires and such detached.

It wasn’t until the nurse left that anyone talked again, it was Nico who spoke up. “So what happened? Because as far as I know, Bianca and me were just walking through the cemetery and then I woke up here.”

“As far as I know,” Bianca begins, “we were doing just that, then you decided to disappear into thin air and go into a coma for two weeks.” She said, stressing every other word as if it would make Nico remember.

“Two weeks? What? We…..we were heading to get Leo so we could do…..something and then I saw him, for like a second, and then I wake up here.”

“I was just getting ready to do the laundry when you, literally, fell out of a shadow in the corner of your bed. We have been worried. I had to fight Miss Ribeiro and Mr. Higgins to stay here. I mean, they understood, but weren’t too happy about it.”

“I’m….I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to do anything, I don’t know even know what I did.”

Bianca sat down next to him and held his hand, happy to look into the big black doe eyes again. “We don’t really know anything, but it might be something like Leo has, with the fire, and I might have it too, since you’re my little brother and all. Hey, we’ll figure it out soon…..yeah we will figure it out.”

It didn’t happen again. Nico started to try and stay away from shadows for a while, even though that didn’t happen very easily, especially at night. He would be sitting there, Leo having just gone to sleep, afraid he was going to melt into the shadows and get lost. Disappear and never return.

He got nightmares about it, sometimes he would wake up in a cold sweat, needing to prove to himself that he was still there, in the real world. He would need to look in a mirror, a few times Nico would even wake up Leo just to make sure another person could see him. The nightmares seemed so real. Like the ones where he would just…..fade. He would fade out of existence, on either a hospital bed in some camp or falling through the air with this random girl and half-goat person there too.
Leo took it in stride, he had weird dreams too, like dreams about…things…. attacking the school, of Nico and him and some other kids being held hostage so this guy could clean some horse stables or something. He was thankful when Nico woke him up, actually, because some of the nightmares he didn’t want to see the end of.

Leo saw the kid start to go crazy, the bags under his eyes grew almost tenfold, he was losing weight, he fell asleep in class and sat in direct sunlight whenever he could; he was breaking at the seams. Whenever Leo and Bianca were alone they would talk about what Nico was going through, the most recent nightmares and new behavior, and they would brainstorm about how to fix it.

There was a point where they had to throw out so many ideas that they had to think of new ways to think.

"What can we do to help him? It’s not like he’s sharing much. But I think it has to do with the nightmares and that whole coma thing a couple weeks ago, he’s jumping at every shadow and is in direct sunlight whenever he can be. I think he’s just…..scared. Like he thinks even getting close to a shadow will send him tumbling through into an empty abyss."

“Wait, what are the nightmares about again?” Bianca asks, quirking an eyebrow.

“The ones he tells me about are coming out of a shadow and falling through the air, or just disappearing altogether. He always says it feels real, like he knows it’s going to happen sooner or later, that he will just start to disappear into nothingness.” Both of them give a shudder at the thought.

“Where is he anyway? Usually he’s done with the chores by now, usually just after you, it’s almost five by now.”

“I don’t know.” Leo said, looking around as if the black haired boy could be spotted around the cemetery.

Bianca immediately drew a worried face. The two of them stood without another word. With Nico being as…off as he was, they had no idea what trouble he could get into.

They checked everywhere he might be doing his chores, the kitchen, the mess hall, the boys dorm halls, he wasn’t there. Only after they went through the list of where he might be cleaning or organizing or whatever, they checked his and Leo’s room. In hindsight, it should have been one of
the first places they looked, because right there, basking in the sunlight that had fallen atop Leo’s bed, was the little troubled boy who had almost gave the two a heart attack.

Bianca smiled at the sight of him sleeping peacefully. Creepy as it might be, she used to not be able to sleep until she saw Nico just like that, peaceful and innocent in his slumber.

Leo, on the other hand, was surprised and slightly worried. Nico must’ve been up for days to fall asleep like he had. He was positioned like he had no choice in the matter of sleeping, as if he had just sat down in the sun and fell back, feet still planted on the floor. And if he had had a nightmare, neither of them would be any the wiser.

“I think we found a solution, or maybe it was just Nico that did.”

“Huh?” Leo said, not catching on to whatever Bianca was suggesting.

“Light and your bed. You might be able to get away with just one of them.”

“Are you trying to tell me something?” Leo mock-glared, the oldest of the three just rolled her eyes.

“Whatever. You know what I mean. Although I wouldn’t be upset.” The dinner bell decides to ring right then, five-thirty on the dot, Bianca smirks triumphantly and turns on her heel, nodding towards her brother on the way.

Leo just rolled his eyes before training them on Nico. He looks content, but he won’t get any food if Leo doesn’t wake him up. They closed up the dinner area after six-thirty, the kitchen would close at eight, and it looked like Nico would be sleeping way past that. He walked over to shake his shoulder.

“What time is it?”

“It’s dinner time. Come on, get up.”

“How’d I fall asleep? I just came in here to get a towel for the shower….I don’t even remember
laying down.”

“You didn’t, apparently. From the looks of it, you just sat down on my bed and clocked out.”

“Your-. Uh, sorry. I didn’t mean to fall asle-."

“Hey, shut up. I’m happy you got some sleep outside of class, so don’t go apologizing. You could have just passed out in the hallway for all I care. I would’ve just dragged you here. Come on, Neeks, let’s go get some food. Your sister no doubt grabbed your favorites before they were all gone.”

The mention of food had Nico’s stomach growling, he clearly didn’t eat much at lunch. Rolling his eyes, again, Leo pulled the smaller kid towards the door and doesn’t stop until they both plop down across from Bianca, who brought two extra meals, as expected. Nico smiled. He felt better after just an hour and a half rest. As he ate, the Italian boy pondered about what he would do for that night.
Chapter Summary

A pretty picture but the scenery is so loud,
A face like heaven catching lightning in your nightgown,
But back away from the water, babe, you might drown
The party isn't over tonight (lighting in your nightgown)

Chapter Notes

Don't judge me, I have a lot of Panic! @ The Disco on my phone

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The rest of the night went smoothly. As it got darker, Nico got more skittish, but that was pretty much expected by now. He tried to hide it from his companions, but he could tell they saw the signs. He wasn’t doing the best job of hiding it, not when he was flinching just a tiny bit every time they passed under some shade.

Leo, for some reason, took them to bed early that night. He and Bianca had talked about something, because she was smiling a bit as they turned around. The curly-haired boy next to him wouldn’t answer any of his questions, so he shook them off and got ready for the long night this was bound to be.

That was until Leo climbed into Nico’s bed. Nico’s bed. It was obviously on purpose, but the flame wielder just shushed him and turned to the wall when he tried asking more questions. Looking over to the other bed, Nico just sighed and got in.

It was really warm, no wonder, the kid who usually slept there ran at a usual 103°F. It was really dark, well duh, it was night. He didn’t want to slip into the shadows and fall into an abyss where he would be fading out until- the sheets and pillow smelled like Leo. He let that ground him.
Memories of his best friend, only friend, started popping up, anchoring him to the spot. He shut his eyes, the dark wasn’t bad, just a lack of light. He wouldn’t slip through, not with the bed under him and Leo on the other side of the room.

Leo.
The word was thought over and over through Nico’s head, chasing away all memories of his previous nightmares and replacing them with memories of Leo. Leo in the cemetery, the light wind picking up in the middle of autumn and blowing across his face and hair, the moonlight highlighting his features. It continues like this, just Leo and Nico, sitting together in the dead of night and talking about nothing and everything. The black haired boy can’t even begin to enjoy the moments before reality comes back to him in the form of a friend shaking his shoulder.

Leo smiles down at him, the same smile Nico had just seen in the nice dream he had just a moment ago.

“Finally got some sleep, di Angelo?”

“Yeah. Thanks.”

“No nightmares either? Two for two. More than I expected.”

“Let’s just hope it stays that way.” Nico said with a sigh.

“We can, and are going to, do this arrangement for as long as it helps. I don’t want to see that ghost of my friend walking around anymore, it wasn’t a good look on you.” Leo gives him a wink, causing the other boy to roll his eyes and huff a laugh.

“Yeah, whatever. Let’s just get to breakfast.” Nico pushed Leo’s shoulder as they changed out of their pajamas and left the room.

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Nico didn’t have a whole bunch of trouble sleeping. There were nightmares, some of them Nico’s, some of them Leo’s, but most of the time it was a nice, peaceful tranquility.

They didn’t really have designated beds anymore. After a while of sleeping in each other’s beds, they had pretty much just switched sides of the room. So they just fell into whatever bed was closest to them and slept like that.
There were some rough nights, nights where neither of them could sleep and once one of them did, the nightmares showed up pretty quickly. On those nights, neither of them turned to be productive the next day. Nico had nightmares of a past he didn’t remember, his sister and him, clinging only to each other as some all-powerful force struck their mother down, the children somehow protected. While Leo had memories of the fire that burned down his mother and future….things. Things like being saved from being frozen to death by this random boy and girl….and Nico being stuck in some jar, starving to death and surrounded by poisonous air. That last one always had him jerking up and looking across the room.

They didn’t have a plan to combat these nights until a brave soul (Nico) decided that enough was enough and climbed into Leo’s bed like a little kid would. The fire wielder had no complaints, just sighed as he wrapped his arms around the cooler body, and the shadow traveler felt engulfed in heat, something he almost never got with his lower body temperature.

The temperature wasn’t too hot nor cold. It was like they were both extremes that balanced each other out. Very few nightmares came out of those nights once they started. The ones that did were violent, sometimes needing a third party to come out of them, and both boys were ready to do so whenever they needed.

It was a bit odd, though. Bianca didn’t get very many nightmares, or at least she kept them from her brother and friend. She would take one look at them at breakfast and know what kind of night it was: good, bad, bad, or worse; but she never came forth with nightmares of her own. When they asked her, she just shrugged and said there was a bit from their time in the subways, but not much else.

It was taken care of, though. Enough. It wasn’t a permanent solution, but since when was there a permanent solution for nightmares? It was crazy. Just some wild and oddly specific things their imaginations made up. And Bianca was fourteen, she probably just didn’t get nightmares anymore.

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It was one night that one of Leo’s nightmares came true….literally. The one where some monster-thing attacks the school and people get hurt. People he doesn’t even know, people he doesn’t even care about, but he is terrified all the same.

The night started out fine. It was the once in a while dance that the school set up when they had enough money for it. There had been three in the three years Leo had been going, so it was more like a once a year dance, but whatever. It wasn’t too different than what the school normally looked like, they just made it finger food and put out the drinks. There was music, the teachers using the piano or whatever other instrument they could get their hands on, and everyone would dance. The decorations stayed the same every year, and people were respectful, knowing that if
they weren’t then this would likely not happen again soon.

The thirties really came out of the di Angelo’s during the dance. If you knew what to look for, you could tell Nico and Bianca were fairly cultured and proper when they danced. Nico would do an exaggerated bow and offer his hand, which is when his sister would act like she was posh and dainty and place it in his, then they would continue to make a mockery of actual ballroom dancing, given they never really had lessons.

Every single time they let their shields down, they laughed and looked happy for the night, something that didn’t happen often enough, stress bearing down on them as if they could sense the storm coming. But this was the one time a year they had a good time, where they looked and probably felt like they were in their time.

Leo could imagine it, the big mess hall made of polished mahogany instead of plaster, the boys dressed in nice, tailored suits and the girls in the flowy dresses of the time, instead of the uniforms they all wore. He could see a whole band in the corner, keeping the party going, and Nico and Bianca in the center, dancing together and having as much fun as they were in real life.

Every single year the siblings went off on their own, dancing like everyone else was. It didn’t matter who you danced with at these, just that you had fun with it, grabbed somebody and started being a goof. But Leo never danced. He had been asked, sometimes, by girls who were just walking by, but he always declined. It was always about an hour into these when Nico and Bianca realized where Leo was, just watching with a smile on his face, and they just pulled him in. They had learned that technique after the first dance with him. Talking was useless. Nobody could ever talk Leo Valdez into dancing. You could, however, pull him into the crowd and block him from leaving until he gave in.

Something about this year was….off though. Maybe it was the new vice principal that made him uneasy. Someone that apparently invested a lot into the school on the condition that he was vice principal. Dr. Thorn stood in the corner watching. Most of the staff were too, but he was just….different. It was hard to explain, but it seemed like his shadow was three times bigger than him, and he wasn’t mingling with the other teachers and staff, he was just watching.

Leo was watching him, too. It took him a while to follow his eyeline with all the kids in the way, but when he realized what it was his blood ran cold. He was staring at Nico and Bianca. Something was definitely not right, most teachers didn’t notice them, not to be rude but what was there to notice? They were good students but they kept to themselves, not talkative with anybody but the three of them but not super closed off either. Yeah, he needed to get them out of this.

The mexican boy made his way through the crowd, trying to get to the siblings as fast as he could. After bumping into people for five minutes, he finally caught up with them and pulled them off to
“Leo, what’s up? You usually have a great time at the dances.” Nico was the first one to ask.

“I don’t know. I just have this bad feeling about Dr. Thorn. Something is off about him, I don’t know what, but he was staring at you.”

“Leo, he was probably just watching over the students and was looking at the middle.” Bianca told him.

“Probably’ is what they all say when something weird is going on. Just trust me.”

He could tell the two of them were starting to get worried, it wasn’t often Leo took on a tone that serious, only when something bad was happening to one of them. In fact, the only other times he used it was when Nico was having his really bad dreams, or explaining them to Bianca, or when they were sick.

The vice principal could be seen talking with four strangers, at least none of the trio had seen them before. They were out of place, one wearing black and leather and the three others wearing old orange shirts and jeans, one of the orange shirts had crutches, the same orange shirt and jean combo, nothing like the rest of the student body. The one dressed in black made her way off to the side with Dr. Thorn, leaving the other two looking around.

“Yeah, Leo.” Bianca said, she could see when things were about to go sideways. “Let’s go back to your room, yeah?”

Before they could even leave the mess hall, they run into the boy in the orange shirt, who was almost swaying on his feet, and Dr. Thorn, who has a wicked smile and orders them outside.

Leo can see Bianca start to panic, as well as he can see Nico begin to be truly frightened, like he would only look after a bad dream. The strange boy walks ahead of them, in a protective stance, a...pen?...in his hand. He is swaying, looking almost stunned, as they meet the girl in black outside, in the same state. Soon enough the other two make it out with them, the guy with crutches now without them.

That’s when things become truly horrifying. Dr. Thorn turns into the thing Leo had only seen in his
dreams, one dream to be precise, and starts to turn towards the three of them. Leo bursts into flames, startling the strangers, but hell if they think he’s gonna let his family get hurt. There were some things he learned before getting to Westover Hall, fighting that you had to learn in some of the foster homes, and Leo was going to use it.

The...beast whatever it was, had just turned back to the ones on the ground, unable to move, when a silver arrow shoots from the bushes and his the monster. Leo lets his flames die down as it shrieks in pain, turning his attention to the new-newcomers. Leo is all kinds of confused, wondering who these four are and where this volley of teenage girls with arrows are coming from. The monster goes back to the poisoned targets, only for the blonde girl to jump on his back as a fleet of arrows come down, the creature tumbling off the hill, taking the girl with him.

The only sound is the poisoned guy’s cry of ‘ANNABETH’ as everything goes quiet. Not one to like silence very much and definitely confused, Leo clears his throat and says, “Okay, what the fuck is going on here?”

He’s angry, and it comes out in his voice. The siblings behind him are surprised, never having seen him like this, and never hearing him cuss so blatantly before. He’s still in the defensive position, not trusting a single person there except the two behind him.

“Watch who you’re talking to, boy.” One of the girls speaks up, causing all the rest to bow, including the strangers.

“Can somebody please explain what’s going on here?” Bianca asks, stepping out from behind Leo, placing a hand on his shoulder. She knows she needs to tread carefully, this person obviously has a lot of respect from those around her, and so they need to at least act like they respect her too, for the time being.

It’s the girl in black that speaks up, having just stood. “Lady Artemis. Along with her hunters.”

“I’m sorry, but I still don’t understand.” Bianca says, still trying to get Leo to calm down.

It’s the boy who screamed that speaks up now. “I’m, uh, I’m Percy, Percy Jackson. This is Thalia,” he says, pointing to the girl in black, “that’s Grover.” The guy who had been on crutches waves. “And it seems like the goddess Artemis and the Hunters of Artemis have joined us.”

The so-called goddess speaks next. “Why don’t we set up camp before we delve into the hard
stuff?"

The girls, hunters, behind her started doing that, right behind the school, right next to the trio’s old cemetary sanctuary. In what seemed like five minutes they had a full camp set up, enough tents for the extra company and lanterns strewn about. The goddess, Artemis, calls the boy, Percy, over to do kind of sidebar thing, when she comes back she announces that she will be hunting something powerful and dangerous and that Zoë is in charge.

Percy sits them around the campfire like a couple of boy scouts about to be told ghost stories. “Well, let’s get started with names, shall we?”

Nico is just glaring at him, probably trying to assess the kind of person Percy is, like he had done to Leo in their first few weeks of becoming friends.

“I’m Bianca di Angelo, this is my little brother Nico and our friend Leo Valdez.”

“So. Short version? Yeah, we should probably do short version.” Percy rubs the back of his neck nervously and Nico’s lips twitch into a barely-there smile at making him uncomfortable. “Well, you guys are demigods. I’m a demigod. Pretty much everyone you’ve seen at this camp except Artemis is a demigod, though the hunters have a bit extra.”

“What the hell is a demigod?” Nico asks bluntly, like he usually is with questions.

“Well, direct. Cool. It means you’re half-human half-god. Greek god, that is. I’m the son of Poseidon, Thalia is the daughter of Zeus, the hunters are kind of a mix, and Annabeth, the blonde girl that went down the hill, she’s the daughter of Athena.”

“So who are our dads?” Leo asks.

“Well, it could be your mom.” Percy says. “But I don’t know. Your parent would have to claim you. They do it at random times, some don’t get claimed. I’m gonna make sure they start claiming their kids, all their kids.” He looks and sounds exhausted and worried, like he would much rather just sleep and find his friend.

Zoë passed by them, crouching next to Bianca as she did. “Could we talk in my tent, please?” She asked, innocently enough.
“Of course.” She smiled, ruffling Nico’s hair when she stood, her little brother grabbing her arm in the process.

“Essere sicuro.” He spoke, it was be safe in Italian, something the siblings had been teaching Leo.

“Io sarò solo un minuto.” I’ll be just a minute.

As the two of them began walking away, Leo pulled Nico in closer to him. Whatever had just happened, their lives were changed.

Chapter End Notes

Please tell me if you like this. I’m trying to make my chapters longer, but I don’t know if I’m doing a good job. This is also the start of the relationship, if you couldn’t tell. We all know what happens next, let’s just hope I don’t make myself cry writing it.

And we all know how protective Leo is. Remember, this is before Nico is even trained to handle a sword, he’s just a scared little kid. Leo, however, has some experience with fighting, if you think he grew up like I think he grew up.
Tear In My Heart

Chapter Summary

I made Nico a bit more needy in this one, just because (in my mind) he is really vulnerable right then with his sister leaving and stuff, so I made Leo kinda step up. Don’t worry, he should be growing with the story, so I hope I write well enough to get that through. Sorry if it's too OOC.

I don’t own The Titan’s Curse and I totally forgot how the hunters introduce new members, I use the Riordan Wikia for pretty much all of the specifics, I read the first series four years ago, little things are forgotten.

She’s the tear in my heart
I’m alive
She’s the tear in my heart
I’m on fire

Chapter Notes

I don't really know what to do with Leo in this part of the PJO series, mostly because he's supposed to be jumping between foster homes still and wasn't written in this, in canon at least. So I apologize if it seems like Nico is just pulling him around or it kinda glosses over the canon parts, but I want to stick to the storyline and I want Leo to still have a big part and get through like eight books before this is over so I have to rush some things, does that make sense?

Please tell me what I can do better or what I'm doing wrong after you read this, it's the only way anything can get done.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Hunters! Gather ‘round and meet our newest member.” Zoë announced once Percy was done explaining the ropes. “Bianca di Angelo has pledged her loyalty to Artemis and has agreed to give up romantic relations!”

The hunters gathered around Bianca, who was coming out of the tent in similar clothing as the others. The girls looked excited, showering her with attention, but Leo and Nico had frozen. The only other person they knew, really knew, had just gone off to join some elite club. She was the only one Nico had before coming to the school, and she was the one who helped Leo out with any problems, his own or for Nico.
Both of them would’ve been eager to do the same for her, even asking her about things that happened to them, like the nightmares, but she always brushed it off and said she didn’t need anything.

They were the only people able to get each other through this, this world outside of the school would’ve been hard enough to adjust to, but now they had all these monsters and things to think about, and Bianca was just leaving?

Leo looked over at the smaller body leaning into him, he looked so scared. The only person he had always, always been able to count on was his sister, before they met Leo and after that. And now she was just turning her back on them when they needed to figure this shit out?

Nico must’ve felt something off, or maybe it was Leo’s temperature rising again, but he looked over and they had a mini-conversation right then. Nico needed to talk to his sister, Leo needed to talk to her too, but both in separate conversations. The former needed to essentially say goodbye, while the latter would be a little more angry, yelling at her and probably getting yelled at back.

The wind blew sharply through their clothes, not bothering Leo but giving Nico an almost violent shiver. He just realized, they had come out without any other clothes than the ones they had now. Bianca had a whole new hunter’s wardrobe, so he wasn’t too worried, but Nico would freeze. Percy had given them two sleeping bags and a thin blanket to share, where he stored all of it, Leo didn’t question, but he needed to grab a few things.

He pulled out the blanket and wrapped it around Nico, tying it in place. There were times, like this one, where if Nico had no jacket, he would get cold to the point of...something like paralyzation. His muscles would just lock down, like the outside temperature mixed with Nico’s own body temperature to combine and chill him down to the bones, or at least that was how the kid described it.

“Where are you going?” Percy asked, looking up from where he was staring off the cliff.

“I’m gonna get some extra clothes for Nico and I. The crap we are wearing now is barely enough to keep the chill off me, and I run over a hundred degrees. My best is frozen down to his bones, it’s not good. I need to get him his sweater, and it’s not like I’ve never navigated the cemetery in the dark, or the halls for that matter, but he’ll turn to a popsicle if I don’t get back soon.”

Leo headed off after his little speech. He jumped the small picket fence surrounding the graves and
took their usual route to Nico’s and his beds. He brought Nico’s old suitcase out of the closet, deciding to pack lightly. He stuffed most of their combined money into the bottom, putting a little bit in the outside pocket, then packed Nico’s favorite sweats, some pants for the both of them, and some extra shirts. He also threw in every single thing with sentimental value, not wanting to let go. The case was pretty packed by the time he got out, but he still snuck across the buildings over to Bianca’s room, grabbing the money she kept there and a few of her sweaters. It seemed like she would be leaving them, but he couldn’t be completely cold to her, not to the only person he had when Nico was in that damned coma.

It took around ten minutes in all and he made it back out to his best friend less than three minutes after that (it wasn’t like the school was huge).

Leo first went to check on the bundle of shivers, opening the case as he sat next to him. Nico’s trembling hands shook off the blanket and put on a jacket before pulling the warm sheet back on him. With less than a thought Leo turned the fire bigger, freaking out Percy but getting a fond smile from the cold boy.

Deciding the boy in question was okay for the time being, Leo went to find his sister, the girl’s belongings in hand, with an added picture of the three of them. When he couldn’t see her outside the tents, he decided to ask Zoë if she had seen her.

“What business do you have with her?” The huntress asked, her voice dripping with disdain.

Leo had to take a breath before answering, their hatred of his gender was really annoying. “I was packing some things for Nico and I, and picked up some of Bianca’s stuff too. Clothes, a picture, and some money of hers.”

Almost caught off guard by the act, Zoë sputtered a bit, trying to find the right words. “Well, um, thank you, I guess. That was nice of you. I will get this stuff to her, but we have no use for human money, she will not need it, keep it.”

Leo was almost surprised by her tone, pleasant instead of condescending. “Actually, could I talk to her? I’d rather be able to give this to her in person.”

Zoë’s eyes narrowed suspiciously, cheerful attitude gone. “Fine. She should be back soon with some of the other hunters.”
Leo returned to Nico, who just leaned into him as they thought about what was going on. Nico didn’t really know what to feel, it was as if his life was turning upside down, he was torn between thinking it was cool to have abilities and wanting to cry because of his sister leaving them. She was the only one that had been there forever since before he was born and through all the hardships of their life, and now she was leaving them forever.

He really didn’t know what to make of it. He seemed to get cold all the time, while Bianca always had the forethought to wear sweaters all the time and pack one for him when they used to go out, before Westover Hall, before Leo.

Leo was now the only one Nico could truly rely on. He had been there as much as he could, helped him through his nightmares and now was the only one he could lean on for support. He knew this would be hard on his best friend, after three years together, how could they not grow attached?

But while he was going to go through his own inner turmoil, Nico knew Leo wouldn’t hold it against him to lean a bit more than absolutely necessary. He was going to be okay eventually.

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Leo walked up to Bianca as soon as she came out of a tent and asked to talk in private. Bianca looked a bit suspicious but agreed, feeling he was entitled to an explanation.

“Yeah, Leo?” Bianca asked, sounding almost uneasy as soon as they were out of earshot of the hunters.

“I only have one question. Why?”

The word hung in the air for a few tension-filled seconds. So much was packed in that one word. Not knowing how to respond, Bianca just said, “What do you mean?”

“I mean why would you leave Nico? You have protected him your entire life and now you are just going to put him in the hands of some people that you just met? Especially with all the dangers we are just learning about. A girl tumbled off that cliff on the back of a manticore! How could you do this to your little brother? You are all he has!”

Bianca’s face morphed into a self-deprecating smile when he was done. As if she had already gone
through the questions and accusations and still did it. “I’m not leaving him with only new people, I’m not all he has, I’m not leaving him to fend off a world full of monsters and beasts alone. Have you forgotten about how important you are to Nico? I’m asking you to protect each other, to stick together, to fend off the dangerous world together.”

Leo’s anger drained out of him, he deflated, seeing the reasoning but still wishing there was another way. “There is no way for you to get out of this, huh?”

“I don’t want to get out of this, Leo. As fun as it is to hang out with you and Nico, I never really had a friend of my own. Now there is a whole group of friends. You can’t blame me for finding that appealing, and even taking the opportunity.”

“I know, I want to, but I can’t. Just say goodbye to Nico before you go. It looks like the hunters don’t really cross paths with the others all that much, so say goodbye before you potentially leave forever. Promise me that.”

“Yeah. Of course, Leo. I promise to say bye to both of you. But for now, let’s just keep the time we have?”

“Yeah, sure. Oh, and here’s some of your stuff.” Leo said sheepishly, remembering the items in his hands. “I ran in to get Nico and I some things and dropped off by your room.”

“Thanks Leo.” She said with a smile as they started walking back together.

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Nico didn’t say much once Leo left. He was finally warm, with the new sweater being his favorite: thick enough to keep off the chill and the bite of the wind. Leo had left somewhere, probably to talk to Bianca, so Nico wouldn’t have to, not tonight.

In truth, Nico was tired. He just wanted to fall asleep and forget today, wake up in his room with Leo wrapped around him and leave Percy and Thalia and everything behind to continue living in ignorance. Nico was yawning by the time Percy turned in, but resolutely waited for his friend to come back.

Nico felt his sister hug him from behind, and stiffened just a bit.
“Aren’t you supposed to hate boys now?” He asked, but he didn’t have it in him to make it sound bitter, just resigned.

“Yeah, but that’s boys, not brothers. Don’t get the two confused, because I could never, ever, hate you. Buonanotte, Nico.” Goodnight.

Nico stood, letting the thin blanket fall from his shoulders as he turned and hugged his sister as tightly as he could. Clinging like they wouldn’t see each other in the morning. “Non andartene, per favore.” Don’t leave, please.

“Non ora. Io te amo. Buonanotte, piccolo fratello.” Not now. I love you. Goodnight, little brother. Nico let her go, and watched as she made her way to the hunter’s tents and slipped inside.

An arm wrapped around his shoulders, Leo having already picked up their stuff for the night. “Come on, let’s get you to bed.”

“Leo?”

“Whatcha need, jellybean?”

“I think it’s gonna be one of those nights, do you think…” Nico trailed off, not knowing how to ask, never needing to.

“Like you could get out of it if you tried.” Leo snorted, bringing a smile to Nico’s face as he remembered who would still stick with him.

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The night still had a few nightmares of giant mazes and the weird horse stable, but didn’t really have either of them waking up to search for comfort. Both of them were kind of disappointed to wake up in the tent, hoping to find themselves in Westover Hall and continue life as they were.
They left their tent in search of the others, and found the small group forming a little half-circle around two bickering gods, Artemis and a new one that looked a bit like her. Soon though, they stop arguing and the plans are explained to Nico and Leo while Percy was helping take down the makeshift camp. They were going to head back to camp with the new god, named Apollo, and make the plans to get Annabeth back.

The trip back to the camp, Camp Half-Blood, was terrifying, but not very eventful. Thalia was the one Apollo chose to let drive, but with her fear of heights it made for a very awfully ride, and they almost crashed into a river upon landing. Leo worried about Nico and Bianca as the flames of the sun chariot almost hit them, but couldn’t do anything about it since they were on the outside, so it was decidedly harmless.

At this mysterious camp, with children fighting with real swords and an armory to choose from, Percy lead Nico and Leo into something he called the Big House, which was a fairly suitable title for the three story building, in Leo’s opinion. In there they met two men- no wait, a god and a centaur -named Mr. D and Chiron, who told them they were not permitted to go on this quest. Nico and Leo were silent, not caring about some stupid trip when they had just (literally) landed to a place that was now going to be home….apparently.

Percy fought them though, he really wanted to save Annabeth, but Mr. D wouldn’t let him go on some trip he’d most likely die on (Percy seemed pretty important around here, was he needed for something?). They headed back to the main camp and settled in, put in the Hermes cabin and told to pick a spot on the floor.

The next day Zoë came out and told them that she, Bianca, Thalia, Grover and Phoebe would team up for the quest. Nico looked terrified as his sister’s name was called out, and pleaded with her not to go, but she just rested a hand on his cheek and made due with her promise to Leo, she said goodbye.

“I don’t know when I’ll see you again, but stay safe and know that I love you, little brother, no matter what. Goodbye.”

Nico watched with tears in his eyes as she marched off with the rest of the group, turning back to wave at the two of them before she was out of sight.

The italian boy was a mess after that. It took three days for him to do much other than eat, do his chores and sleep, when he even did those. And even after that phase he just wanted to train all day. They got lessons on how to use a sword, and Nico sparred constantly. He was angry, it seemed, or at least that was how he was burning off whatever was going through his head.
The nightmares seemed to really like Nico’s emotional state, because it was like they fled Leo to attack the other boy from all sides, almost every night had the italian curled into the mexican as he trembled. The fire wielder took to, once again, singing him the lullabies he had used during the coma thing, calming down his best friend, only friend, and getting them both to sleep.

Nico felt bad about the nightmares. He was waking Leo up every night, no matter what they tried, and his friend never complained. He didn’t know what he was doing, sparring and fighting and pretending to be angry. He was heartbroken, his sister was going on a “quest” that would most likely get her killed, he would never see him again. And it seemed like this Percy had gone on them before, so it was a common thing, and Leo might leave him on one and he might never see Leo again and he-

“Nico, what is going on.” Leo demanded.

They were in the arena, Nico had been walking or….something. He and Leo were going to spar again, but now he was on his knees and his hands were trembling.

“I’ve let you grieve and I’ve let you do whatever you needed to after your sister left, but something is wrong, will you finally tell me?” Leo was now kneeling in front of him. The rest of the arena was empty, it was pretty late and most of them were washing up for dinner.

“Bianca left, forever. This quest is going to kill her, I know it. Mr. D wouldn’t let Percy go on it but he let my sister, and now it’s going to kill her.”

“We don’t know that.”

“I do! It’s going to kill her, I can feel it. It was like something in my soul is just….broken. I don’t know how I know but I do. She might be gone already, but she isn’t coming back.”

“Nico, we won’t know until Zoë and Phoebe come back and tell us. And I think Percy snuck out anyway, so he’s got to know something.”

“There are going to be more quests too. It seems like this one is the second this year. These are kids, kids, risking their lives trying to suss out a source on whatever is going on multiple times a year! What if one of us goes on a quest and never sees the other again? I can’t handle not seeing you again!”
Leo was surprised by the outburst, but kept quiet as he just sat with Nico on the ground and held his shaking form. Not really sure as to what to do, Leo rest his nose in the older boy’s hair and breathed. There was even a point where he kissed the top of the black mop of hair, it was the right thing to do, seeing as how Nico relaxed more and only stayed for a few more moments before suggesting that they go to the mess hall and eat before sundown.

It took another one and a half weeks before Nico’s suspicions rang true, the boy in question had been angry. So angry in fact that he raised skeletons for the ground and made the earth swallow them up so they wouldn’t hurt anybody.

Nico was almost broken when he heard the news, about how his sister had given everything up just to get him the stupid figurine to a game they didn’t really play anymore. Plus it was revealed, not an hour after that encounter while they were at the campfire trying to act normal, that he was the son of Hades and Leo’s dad was Hephaestus, and everyone shied away from Nico after that, while still trying to swarm Leo.

Even people he had talked with, slept next to (well, they were all on the floor), scooted just the tiniest bit away. All except for two people, Leo and Percy. Percy: because he felt like an odd one out too, and Leo because he would never shy away from Nico.

It was no question, they wouldn’t let him sleep in the Hermes cabin anymore, and there was no Hades cabin, so Nico ran. He was gathering up his things, when Leo approached him with his stuff tucked under his arm and ready to fill the suitcase.

“No, Leo. You can’t come.”

“Like hell I won’t. If you think you’re getting rid of me now you are sorely mistaken.”

“Stay here, this is where you belong, not with an outcast.”

“Are you kidding me, di Angelo? Because it’s not funny. We’ve been going everywhere together for over three years now, so you are not just going to leave me behind. You can say whatever you want; that I’ll be safer here, that I’ll like it here, even that I have brothers and sisters here. But I’ve barely known them three weeks, if you think you are going to just up and go because you think I’d be happier here then you need your brain checked. Because, to quote Rihanna, when I am with you there is no place I’d rather be.”
Nico couldn’t stand it anymore. He wouldn’t be able to put up with it if Leo came along. He needed to make his stubborn ass see that it was a bad idea, that their friendship would spread thin for one main reason. Gathering up the courage to break the one thing he had held onto for the past few hours, few weeks. Nico held onto Leo’s face and pulled him in, pressing their lips together. Surely bringing his inappropriate feelings to light would push Leo away, no matter how much it was killing him.

They separated seconds, an eternity, later. Nico closed his eyes to focus on the feeling before he had to look at his best friend’s disgust. When he opened them, though, Leo was smirking at him, eyes filled with adoration and amusement and….something unfamiliar, but not disgust. Not something degrading or negative.

Leo opened his mouth with, for the first time in his life, only one thing to say, “Now was that so hard?”

Chapter End Notes

I'm really sorry for the delay in new chapters but I had some surgery and it had been a little bit painful.

Also: I edited some of the previous chapters a bit to make the character development go a bit smoother, thank you WatercoolerFreak for the constructive criticism. I am always open to criticism if there is something you think I can do better, so please tell me if you see anything. Hopefully the readers that join after the edit will understand it.

As always, I love comments and kudos and everything of the sort. Thank you!
Death Valley

Chapter Summary

But we are alive
Here in death valley
But don’t take love off the table yet
'Cause tonight it's just fire alarms and losing you
We love a lot
So we only lose a little
But we are alive, we are alive, we are alive

Chapter Notes

Warning- mentions of concentration camps and shit from WWII, not too descriptive, I just wanted to have some history in there. I use wikipedia so don't get mad if I get shit wrong.

Also: characters are a bit OOC because it's hard to write about things you haven't read in 4 years and don't have access to

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Leo opened his mouth with, for the first time in his life, only one thing to say, “Now was that so hard?”

Nico froze, stunned. “W-what?” He didn’t know what to do, this was frowned upon, right? Two boys could not be anything more than friends, that was what he grew up with. Bianca never had a problem with it, but for some reason the entire rest of the world did. Had that much changed since he was little?

“Nico, are you okay?”

“Isn’t that like against the law or something? And….and…” Nico was hyperventilating. He was getting snippets of things he recognized, but hadn’t remembered before. Like listening to the radio about news with his sister and their mom about people being sent to conversion camps for their religion or lover, or sleeping in their mom’s bed because there were planes with bombs flying over their head. People were being taken and sent to the same camps because of who they loved, Nico didn’t want that to happen to Leo. They were being slaughtered and being cast aside like moldy bread.
“NICO!” Leo was shaking him by the shoulders and shouting at him. The curly-haired boy brought his hands up to his face and wiped the moisture from under his eyes, he hadn’t even noticed the tears. “What just happened?”

“I….I don’t know. I remembered some things….things I never remembered before now. Horrible things.” The Italian let his eyes fall shut as he thought about what just happened. It was odd, he would have remembered these things before, should have remembered, but he didn’t. It should have haunted him like it would now. It should have come up anytime he’d talked with Leo about pasts. But it didn’t.

“What things? Do you need to go to the infirmary?”

Nico’s brow furrowed. “No, I’m fine.”

“Will you tell me what just happened, then?” Leo looked worried, really worried. But how could he not be? His best friend had just kissed him then freaked out and almost collapsed. Wait, were they boyfriends now? That didn’t matter right now, something was wrong with Nico.

“I….don’t know. It was like watching a movie that you’ve seen a million times, but if you felt all the emotions and heard the thoughts of the main character. They were memories, but I couldn’t remember them before now.”

“What did you see?”

“Bianca and me and our mom all sleeping in the same bed while planes flew over our head and bombs were dropped all over Italy. People being sent to camps because of what they believed and who they loved. It was….horrible. I-I don’t want that happening to you.” Nico had tears in his eyes as he finished, going through the images in his head again and hearing the horrible things on the radio, people having to break the law just to stay alive.

Leo’s eyes widened in horror and realization. He recognized what Nico was talking about, kind of, at least. He had heard about this, about World War II and about how people who were Jewish or gay or both were being sent to conversion camps and pretty much just being tortured and killed. It was obvious that Nico hadn’t been to one, but he had heard about them when he was little and hadn’t gotten to know much about that part of politics since.
The fire-wielder hugged the other boy close. “Nico. That is done now. There is no camp we will be
taken to if we are together, well, Percy might drag us back here if we run off, but I won’t be killed
because I love you.” Leo froze for a second, thinking about what he just let loose, but he smiled
instead, he stood behind it, it was the truth.

Nico had frozen too, his hold on Leo’s shoulders going slack for a moment, before he thought
about it and felt some of the tension bleed out of him.

Trying to be bold, the curly-haired boy pressed his lips to Nico’s in a chaste kiss. It lasted for a few
seconds before they separated and this time Nico’s eyes were wide open, half in shock and half in
realization. Leo was serious, he wanted this, he was going to come with him and not shove him
away and storm off.

“Are you sure? You want this?”

Leo just smiled, Nico was talking about both them and sneaking off. “As sure as I was when I
decided the shy kid sitting alone and shuffling cards was someone worth talking to.”

Nico smiled with him at the memory, “Good. Because I, um, I think I might l-love you too.”

Leo decided to laugh off the tension in the room. “Well that’s good, because that second kiss
might’ve been a bit awkward if you didn’t.”

They finally separated from their embrace and

finished up packing the few things they had. The two of them would need to leave before the
campfire ended, before Chiron and Mr. D would catch them.

Nico had the advantage, he could melt into the inky blackness of a shadow. Leo couldn’t, but after
countless times sneaking out of his room at Westover Hall, he knew how to stay quiet.

They made their way out of the Hermes cabin together, avoiding the singing campers around the
campfire and going around to the back of the cabins, that way they could use the buildings for
cover.

It was a little ways away and by the time they made it to the top of Half-Blood Hill the campers
were starting to go to bed. It took less than a minute for the shouting about two kids missing to start, but Leo and Nico were deep into the woods by then, intent on getting a cab and getting far away.

They didn’t really speak much about the memory thing again. It showed up in a few of Nico’s nightmares but for the most part they just went along normally. Where they were going, they didn’t know. Nico wanted to learn more about his mom and his apparently memory-locked past and Leo was content with just going along for the ride.

The first time Nico found an entrance to the underworld was interesting. They were just walking around, trying to avoid cops and doing whatever, by now the two had made their way to Los Angeles, California, walking most of the way and taking cabs here and there. It was odd, they didn’t run into any monsters, but they needed to get weapons before they did.

Nico couldn’t explain it when Leo asked, but he just knew where to go once he got close enough to a many-storied building called DOA Recording Studios. There was a person at the front desk who looked up at their arrival, he smiled at them and stood up straight.

“I suppose you two would like to see Hades?”

“Yes.” Nico’s eyes narrowed in suspicion, but they followed whatever creature was leading them into an elevator to go down…..and down…..and down.

Leo presses closer to Nico as the doors open and a sea of lost souls is revealed to them. He doesn’t say anything while they move through the crowd. He doesn’t know how, but the italian boy must have some kind of instinct on how to get through, seeing how well he leads the two of them past a three-headed growling dog and to the center of it all, a giant throne room with a giant Hades at the end.

On their way into the structure, a beautiful woman comes over to them and speaks to them, she’s the only one to do this and the only one who looks somewhat alive. “I know he’s your father, but take a knee once you get in there, okay? Just a piece of advice.” She leaves before they can respond.

The two of them get to the center of the room before kneeling down, waiting to be acknowledged and not having to wait long.
“Rise, demigods. Tell me, why are there two living souls in my domain?” He asks the question before they can fully rise, when they do, the god freezes. “Nico?”

“Yes, Lord Hades.”

Leo notices the woman from earlier come out of the shadows, smiling as Hades makes his way off the throne and over to them, shrinking down to their size. He walks up to his son and smiles, cradling his chin in his hand as he looks the boy up and down. “To you, it’s just dad or father, you needn’t be afraid of me.” The god looked at Leo for the first time. “And what is your name?”

“Leo Valdez, my lord.” He said, trying to be respectful.

“And what is your business with my son, let alone my realm?”

“I’m, uh, I’m his best friend, and a little more. He wanted to learn more about you and his mom, so I came with him. We don’t really go anywhere without each other, even new realms, um, sir.” He finished weakly, not knowing what to call the god and hoping for the best. This was kind of a meet the parents and he really didn’t want to mess up.

Hades just nodded his satisfaction and turned back to his son with a sad smile, hand still resting on his cheek. “I feared for you when your sister passed through here, I hoped you were not on the same mission.”

Nico had to close his eyes to hold back the flood of emotion that came with the mention of Bianca. Leo was there in an instant, grabbing a hold of his hand and squeezing, letting him know he was there and things were okay.

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That was the end of the official meeting, the rest was just the father and son talking about things. Nico had questions, like why his memory was scattered and what happened to his mom, but those kinds of heavy hitters Hades couldn’t answer. The god could say it would probably eventually come back, but that the information would overwhelm the mortal (even half-mortal) mind if all of it came back at once.
A lot of the questions Hades couldn’t answer, for either fear of his son’s mind breaking or because
he wasn’t allowed to by rules of the gods. A conversation like this wasn’t usually allowed, not
before death, but the children of the ruler of the underworld had always been different. They could
get through the underworld as they pleased, it was no doubt they would meet the king of the realm
at some point.

But Nico and Leo got their own room, two beds, even though they had shared one for years now,
and they learned about the other places to access the underworld. Hades took their relationship
well, especially after hearing how it came about, how it was years in the making and not just a spur
of the moment thing.

There was actually quite a bit for living souls to do in the underworld, at least for people like Leo
and Nico. The first few ‘days’ there (how did time pass here again?) were spent watching the trials
and judgements, and other times just exploring or talking with the resident gods. The two of them
made friends with Cerberus, the three-headed guard dog at the entrance, and he got used to the two
living souls and stopped trying to stop the two of them from passing.

They formally met that woman on their second day. She was standing next to Hades while they
waited for more lost souls to find their way. Her name was Persephone, and she was Hades’s wife,
Nico’s step mom. She was nice and motherly, teaching them what Leo wouldn’t be allowed to eat
if he ever wanted to leave.

They left, with the promise to come back, about two and a half weeks into their stay. They had
almost every entrance and exit into the underworld mapped out in their mind, and Nico was shown
how to get in and out without having to look for one. But the latter option could only have one
passenger without taking up too much energy, not that Nico was planning on taking anyone other
than Leo with him. The two of them found out that with all the tunnels, the only one with any
traffic was under DOA Recording Studios, making it the only one Nico could sense.

They chose a tunnel that let them out in Chicago, where it was snowing and Leo had to raise his
own body temperature to keep himself warm, keeping close to Nico help to share the warmth. At
one point Leo just gave in and bought an aviator jacket for the black-haired boy, one that kept him
warm and he never took off.

About two weeks of being on their own, they moved through Illinois and into Indiana, where they
found a subway station with a marking on the sign, Δ, something their minds translated to delta ,
one of the greek letters.

The two of them decided to see what it was about, besides being obviously magical, and followed
the steps down….and down…and down. However this time there wasn’t a stretch of lost souls to
greet them at the bottom, just a maze. One gigantic maze.
The stairs seemed to disappear as they stepped off, the wall changing and expanding, but they weren’t alone, there was a voice to greet them from somewhere in the shadows. “Hello demigods, oh a child of Hades, this should be fun.”

Chapter End Notes

I made Hades a bit more fatherly than it shows in the book, mostly because it doesn't show Nico with Hades all that much, which I think is a crime. I personally believe that Hades just wants to keep his respect, hence the kneeling, but truly loves and cares for his son.

I also am giving them a shitload of money, because it never says how much was put in the trust and Hades is also the god of riches so fight me.

This was a filler chapter, and I suck at fillers, so I apologize. I just wanted there to be a break between plot
Victorious

Chapter Summary

Tonight we are victorious
Champagne pouring over us
All my friends were glorious
Tonight we are victorious

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The stairs seemed to disappear as they stepped off, the wall changing and expanding, but they weren’t alone, there was a voice to greet them from somewhere in the shadows. “Hello demigods, oh a child of Hades, this should be fun.”

The best friends turned suddenly, hands instinctively going to weapons that weren’t there. A man stepped out from the shadows, well… a half man-half tentacle thing slithered out of the shadows.

“Who are you?” Nico asked, glaring at the monster.

“I thought you would know, I’m hurt, honest. How the legacy of King Minos has apparently died in the world outside this maze.”

Leo thought back through his (admittedly small) knowledge of greek kings and myths. Minos did ring a bell, the little bit the curly-haired boy knew about him was that he was cruel and ruthless.

“You were a tyrant. You were a heartless executor known for your cruel ways.”

“So you do know me.”

“Yeah, kind of. I know we’d be better off not knowing you. Come on Nico. Let’s find a way out of here.”

They started walking off, but stopped as Minos started talking more. “You don’t even know how
to control your powers? Well that’s unfortunate. You, son of Hades, you are powerful enough to, say, kill the creator of this place and escape."

“What?”

“Yeah, you could kill most any monster you encounter with but a few bursts of energy. Nevermind shadow traveling, you could get anywhere in the world or otherwise with but a thought.”

“So all I have to do it think of a place and arrive there?”

“That’s one way to sum it up. But you’ll need my help to really get a hold of your powers. It’s not that I think you can’t get a hold of it on your own, but do you really think it’ll just take a day to get comfortable with them? No. That will take training with someone who knows what they’re doing. So, what do you say? Will you let me help you?”

Leo rolled his eyes at the cliche speech, the kind that was said on every tv show. They always wanted something in return, usually something bad. And who was Leo if he didn’t treat life as a tv show? “And what would you want?” He asked in a bored tone.

Nico was a bit surprised by his...uh....friend’s response. It wasn’t anything special, but he was usually the cynical one, questioning things because he really didn’t know much about the world, but didn’t voice his thoughts this time.

“Nothing right now, you could call it a favor, just some revenge I need in order to help me move on into the afterlife and visit dear old dad. Really, you’d be helping me out by letting me teach you. So, again, what do you say?”

Nico looked at his counterpart, who held his gaze for a solid minute before they both looked back at the ghost, seemingly holding an entire conversation before nodding, effectively agreeing to the terms.

It took a little while and many trips around before Nico finally knew how to get almost anywhere in the world through the shadows. It took a little more energy than getting to the underworld, but Minos said that would start to lessen. The more he did it, the more he could do it, like working out a muscle. Then there was the condition of him actually needing a shadow to get through, instead of just being able to do it at anytime like he could into the underworld.
They didn’t work too much on summoning the skeletal warriors, but that was mostly because it took too much of his low resource of energy and it came as almost second nature on the rare instance they were attacked.

After the lessons were over and Nico was weak, weak enough to have to sway a bit when he stood still, so he definitely couldn’t get to the real world or the underworld, though he wasn’t sure if he’d be able to get there anyway. So the two of them parted with the dead king and tried to find their way out the hard way. With no weapons, it was a bit of a challenge to avoid monsters, and the ones they did encounter were small and susceptible to fire. It was almost as if the labyrinth itself was trying to keep them safe and save the hard stuff for future. Whatever it was, Nico and Leo were glad when it only took a day to find a sort of rock wall that led to a hole in the ceiling - a way out.

As it turned out, it let out into the middle of the Camp Half-Blood forest. Nico had almost collapsed into Leo’s arms when they found themselves in the middle of the cabins, in the middle of the day. Some people were staring at them, but it was Chiron who made his way over first. Seeing the older boy in such a state put him into action, he called over some Apollo kids to set him up in the infirmary.

The centaur questioned Leo about why they left, trying to be intimidating, but Leo wasn’t having it. They had a totally justified reasons for leaving, and they would most likely be leaving again when Nico was on his feet again.

“Why did you leave? It is not safe out there for two demigods, especially ones without weapons.”

“We were fine. Most of our time was spent in the underworld anyway.” Chiron looked confused and mildly alarmed. “Hey, it’s not like he would’ve done any better here. You guys would give me a place to sleep and I would get friends and siblings, but Nico would’ve been put on hold. Kicked out of the Hermes cabin and not having a Hades one because his dad is the god of the underworld. So not only something Nico can’t control, but the underworld is needed and Hades got the short end of the stick. As for friends, everyone shied away from him as soon as the skull showed above his head, as if he was just going to jump out and attack them all. They even tried to pull me away! It’s no wonder he didn’t want to stay somewhere that’d treat him like he was less than dirt.” At least Chiron had a bit of decency to look a bit guilty and ashamed.

“Fine, but why did you leave?” The centaur asked.

“Did you really think I was going to let Nico go off alone? You said it yourself, it’s dangerous out there, no way he is going without me. Even if Bianca were here to go with him, I still would’ve gone.”
Chiron huffed and left as some healers came over with some Ambrosia and Nectar to give the unconscious boy, no matter how hesitant they were about Hades, they were healers at heart.

“Ahh, I don’t think medical attention is needed, this has happened before. He’s just exhausted. He’ll wake up in a couple days or so.”

One of the healers, Will Solace, stepped forward and, without showing of the other’s hesitation, reached for Nico’s arm. “Then the Nectar will help him recover and be up and running soon.” The blonde kid said before pressing an iv needle into the hand he was holding up and hook up a small bag to a hook beside the bed.

Out of the corner of his eye, Leo saw Nico’s iv free hand give a small twitch, and grabbed it. The rest of the room fell away, but the fire wielder couldn’t tell if they actually left or not, it didn’t matter, not when the Nectar was letting the Italian boy smile like he was, likely feeding him good memories. Leo smiled too, it was not often he got to see that look anymore, Minos wasn’t exactly the most supportive coach, but the curly-haired boy was glad to see it now.

It took just under two days for Nico to wake up. It was a lot like the first time, and the ones with Minos, except Leo was expecting it and could calm down the confused kid.

After about five minutes, Nico was just laying back in the bed, trying to get the tape off his arm to take the iv out. “How long was I out this time?”

“Enh, just under 48 hours. Not too bad, you freaked out Chiron and the Apollo kids.”

“Why’d you let them do the whole iv thing?”

“Speedier recovery, faster ways into the underworld and all. You are my ride, you know.” Leo smirked.

“Yeah, like you could even pretend that’s all I am.” Nico smiled at Leo, not the one he did earlier, when he was passed out and dreaming of good things, but one reserved only for Leo, one that conveyed all the love he felt. “Come here.” He said as he scooted over on the bed.
Without any preamble, Leo slid into the small space between the other body and the edge of the bed. It was a tight fit, but they had done it before, almost every night these days.

Still smiling, Nico simply stated, “Hey.”

Leo chuckled at his boyfriend’s antics. “Hi. How was your nap?”

“It was okay. I don’t really want another one anytime soon though.”

“Me either. What happened? You seemed fine in the maze.”

“I didn’t know the next time I’d have to fight, it was all adrenaline, I think. As soon as it was safe I...well...you saw. I’m okay though. It’s like a muscle. The more I use it, the more I can use it, right?”

“Sure, just be careful.”

Nico smiled a bit wider and places a small, soft kiss on Leo’s lips, like he had done many times. He sat up when they broke apart, pulling on the aviator jacket hanging on the side of his bed. “How about a trip to down under?”

“You sure? We should wait a little bit. Just to eat and shower and stuff. You haven’t eaten anything in two days. Yeah, we are staying here for at least the rest of the day.”

“What time is it?”

Leo looked past the Italian’s head to the clock. “Around three.”

“Okay, fine. But we are leaving tonight. I don’t want to have to figure out where to sleep.”

“But of course, sweetheart. You didn’t think I was suggesting we stop our adventures, did you?”
Nico smiled at the nickname and pecked Leo’s lips again. “I would never.” There was a slight pause where they just sat there, thinking about things. “Hey, uh, even after these months we never really said anything. But, uh, you’re my boyfriend right?” The son of Hades blushed as he said it, looking at his hands.

“I was kinda hoping so. I mean, no assumptions and stuff but I was kinda thinking that. You know, with the I love you’s and all. And that’s still true, y’know.” Leo was rambling, he knew it. He didn’t do well with the whole honest feeling conversation thing, but there were a few things Nico should know.

“I know. I love you too, my boyfriend.”

Leo looked back at the other boy, and grabbed his hand to pull him up as they stood. They made their way out of the infirmary, and ran into Will, almost literally.

“Good, you’re up. Here is some ambrosia to take with you, since I’m pretty sure you guys aren’t staying again. Try to only take it in emergencies, because there isn’t much, and don’t eat more than two at a time, it’s the food of the gods, you don’t want to hurt yourself trying to get better.”

“Thank you, Will. It really means a lot.” Nico said.

Will smiled. “No problem. It’s my job to take care of my patients, and you’re one of them.” He brushed passed them, patting Leo on the shoulder as he did so, to check on some other campers.

The two of them went to the underworld the next day, the trip there wasn’t exciting, but they were immediately greeted by Persephone, then chastised for being gone too long. They mentioned the weird maze they stumbled upon and the subsequent nap, and the goddess looked confused.

“Where did you enter this maze?”

Nico answered. “We found this weird triangle-delta thing on a subway, and stepped into the maze at the bottom of the stairs.”

“And you didn’t run into any monsters?”
“Not really. There were a few, but skeleton warriors and Leo’s fire kinda just….put them down.”

“Okay. Well, I’m glad you’re here. You must’ve found an exit, huh? Because you can’t get here from there, not directly anyway.”

“Where were we?” Leo asked, a bit confused by the goddess’s reaction.

“From what I could gather? It sounds like Daedalus’s Labyrinth. Not a good place to be. They are marked with that symbol -the delta- and have many a trapped monster inside. It’s a bit of a miracle you two came out unharmed, or at all, it’s a maze that traps its inhabitants. Speaking of which….you need weapons. Come with me to the forge.”

They stepped into the room, it was hot and humid in the air. Nico looked around, various blocks of different metals lined some of the walls, as well as mallets and different fire pits. To the Italian, it looked almost boring. He would have to learn about every different metal and figure out how to forge and-

“Is that Stygian Iron? And Celestial Bronze? Oh I’ve never worked with those before!” Leo blurted out before Nico could finish his thought.

“You’ve forged before?” Nico asked, their pasts weren’t something they talked about much, but Nico thought he knew most of his friend’s.

“Yeah, my mom’s shop sold all sorts of stuff. A lot of it was wooden creations, but there was a place in the back where you could forge things like horseshoes and things. One time she let me make an arrowhead, but she had a rule against weapons.”

“She let you play with an open flame at seven years old?”

Leo glanced back at him as he rolled his eyes and summoned a flame to his hand, “Nico, babe, we noticed pretty early that fire didn’t hurt me, granted only after my baby sitter tried to kill me but yeah, I got to make things.”

Persephone spoke up from where she was watching the boys bicker. “So I’m assuming that you know what Stygian Iron is and not to touch it?”
“Yeah, I can’t, but if the legend holds, Nico can.”

“Huh?”

“Yeah, a child of Hades can touch it, and gods of the underworld, like Hades or Thanatos. It was never really clear to me if Persephone could, since you are the goddess of vegetation and such.” They both looked up to her for an answer, and she shook her head. “Anyway, yeah. We could make you a pretty badass sword with this stuff. I wouldn’t be able to touch anything but the handle, and, if memory serves, it would need to be cooled in the River Styx. Just don’t fall in.”

“Alright fine, I’ll listen to you, Mr. child of Hephaestus. Hey, wait! How do you know so much about this stuff. I mean, I get the whole ‘how to make it’ thing, but how do you know about the magical metals?”

“I had to do something yesterday when you were sleeping, and the Athena kids were kind enough to bring some books about forging from magical metals and stuff. Forgive me if I saw the name Hades and decided to pay attention. Also: it can hurt mortals too, unlike Celestial Bronze, if you’re ever in a bind. Greek are not the only kind of monsters, you know.” Leo said, going back to the supplies.

“So, your Highness,” Nico and Persephone both rolled their eyes at his wording, she had said many times to just call her by her name, yet welcomed the teasing. “I can just make whatever I want in here?”

“Just don’t waste the materials. I’ll go tell my husband you two are in here. Don’t touch the Stygian without gloves and Nico, don’t burn yourself.” The goddess ruffled her step-son’s head as she passed, chuckling as he rushed to fix it.

She left them in the forgery, and Leo went to work while Nico fetched water from the River Styx. When he got back, his boyfriend was hunched over a table, furiously drawing up designs and erasing and whatever else he needed to do.

Leo put his whole being into the making of this sword for Nico, something that made the latter blush a little when he thought about it. The fact that the mexican boy would do this much work and put himself at risk (not that Nico would ever let that happen, he didn’t even let Leo’s skin go near the iron), just made his insides melt a little.
They still needed to sleep and eat, so Nico (literally) pulled the working boy away from his work after about four hours, he had been up for almost twenty-four hours and Nico was starting to pass out, and there was no telling how long the forger had been up. Leo grumbled the whole way, talking about how he was almost done on this part or another, but scarfed down food like a starved man when it was put in front of him, and fell asleep as soon as his head hit the pillow. Nico just smiled when that happened and pulled the covers on them both.

Leo took the next three days of working like that to finally pour the water from the River Styx over the blade and finish it. As for the handle, it took a fourth day to make that, the designs having been completed along with the blade, and was made with Imperial Gold and welded together.

Nico had taken to spending that day with his father, as not many spirits were finding the palace that day, and since Leo wasn’t in danger working with the gold. But, as he was trying to find more about his past, the son of Hephaestus was adding a little bit extra to the weapon.

Once Leo finally entered the throne room, clothes burned to scraps and soot smudged everywhere except the shiny thing in his hand. Nico saw the burns and grit and rolled his eyes, starting to stand so he could push the other boy into the shower.

“You done playing in the fire?”

“Yeah, and I brought you something.” Leo, very melodramatically, got to one knee and held out an open palm, with nothing but a ring inside. Nico didn’t get the gesture, brows furrowing and head tilting as he stopped walking.

“A ring?” It was beautiful, inlaid with diamonds and obsidian in what would be hollow parts, it was the same skull shape that shone over Nico’s head when he was claimed. “It’s….it’s beautiful, don’t get me wrong, but I thought you were making a sword.”

“Give me your hand.” Leo said, standing as Nico get closer and held out his hand. “Now, I just slip this on, it should fit. I was the one that sized it.”

“And how would you know the size of my fingers?”

“Where do you think I stare, your face?” Leo answered with a smirk, turning it into a smile as he saw it fit perfectly, just like he suspected. “Well, it should fit anyway, seeing as it’s charmed. Now,
Leo backed up a bit as Nico did so. He let out a gasp when as soon as it had made 180° around his finger, it turned into a four-foot long Stygian Iron sword. Both side of the blade were sharpened to a deadly acute angle, as well as the point. The handle was beautifully designed too, with a pattern like a bonfire in the golden form, both to give tribute to the maker and for grip. Finally, at the very base of the the handle, was the same diamond/obsidian arrangement of the ring.

By virtue of the metal, the blade could not be broken or, since it was now melted to the gold, separated from the handle. The iron was a black color that seemed to suck in any and all light around it, but also emitting a soft yet dark purple glow. The gold was another thing. Much like the flames decorating it suggested, it gave off a glow too, a bright one only dimmed by the other metal absorbing it.

“Leo, I-I…..It’s beautiful.” Nico said, just realizing that he wasn’t the only one admiring the blade. He swung it around, feeling the balance it held. It was like it was made for Nico, which it kinda was, but it was perfect. “It’s perfect. Thank you.”

“Sure thing, sweet cheeks.” Leo smiled as Nico glared at him. “And then just stab the ground and twist to get it back in ring form.”

Nico tried it out, doing as Leo said and stabbed the floor, then twisted, making it turn back into a ring on his finger. The older boy threw his hands around his boyfriend’s neck, forgetting about the grime and kissing his lips.

When they separated, some of the soot had traveled to Nico’s face. “What about a weapon for you?” He asked, a bit worried about Leo’s protection.

“I am a weapon, baby. No need to worry about me.” Leo and Nico both looked back towards the latter’s father and found him smiling at them, just before a spirit came into the room looking for judgement, and Hades had to go back to his throne. The two kids made their way to shower and eat, hand in hand.

Chapter End Notes

I made Minos a bit like James Moriarty from Sherlock, mostly because I was going for 'classic almost-insane bad guy' and that was what came to mind
This will NOT end up being a Will/Nico/Leo thing. No. I just like the idea of him being Nico's main doctor because everyone else shys away. And I know he doesn't get the sword until between the 4th and 5th books, but I find it absolutely incredible that he travels everywhere alone, finds and escapes the Labyrinth and everything else not only on his own, but also without a weapon. He's one of the big three's sons, and I get that a shitload of monsters are at Kronos's pep rally, but we see how many decide to go after Percy, so how is he still alive. And we never get much information about how his sword works, we just see him either with or without it, but he has a ring. So I thought why not explain a little bit
Bâtard

Chapter Summary

So I usually put the lyrics here to explain how the title relates to the chapter but I feel like this one is pretty self explanatory.

Chapter Notes

Sorry it took me so long, I'm going back to school for the first time after a surgery and can't find the time

It didn’t take too long for things to go wrong for them. Word had reached them that Percy and his group of drifters had made it into the labyrinth, which had Leo and Nico worrying. It wasn’t as if that particular bunch had ever shown them any ill intent, and the Labyrinth was a very dangerous place. The only reason they had been left mostly alone while in there was because of Minos, and the four didn’t even have that.

They had been searching for a way in, without shadow traveling to save energy, when they came across a ranch. It was a large piece of land, with many different types of magical animals in their own sectioned off areas. Before they could get passed the large house, a farmer shouted at them from the porch.

“Demigods!”

At least they assumed him to be a farmer at first glance, looking only at the checkered shirt before staring ahead. They both froze and turned at the word though, and subsequently got a closer look. He wasn’t wearing a checkered shirt, he was wearing three, on three different chests. He looked like a pompous asshole, but they were on a mission, and if he had information, then they could use it.

“And who would you be?” Nico asked.

“Me? I’m the owner of Triple G. Ranch! My name is Geryon, and I raise these animals for higher beings that don’t have time. I also sell them to the people that could use them, could you use them?”
“No, thank you, but we’ll be on our way.” Leo answered for the both of them.

Geryon stood and bounded over to them, getting behind the two and placing a hand on each of their back. “Come on, at least *look* at the product.” He demanded in a lower voice, smiling darkly.

The monster pushed the two into the house. That was the exact moment things went bad.

--

Nico woke in the corner of a room. It was bright in there, light seemed to be coming from every direction, never making a dark enough shadow to travel through.

He had a massive headache, making his eyesight blurry when he actually opened them. Through the waves of pain and mix of colours, though, he could tell that Leo was not in this room with him. Nico didn’t know if that was a good or bad thing.

That was his last thought before the world went dark again.

--

Leo awoke to a cold sensation, a very cold sensation. With a core temperature like he had, it wasn’t often he felt more than a chill, but his hands were freezing. His head was pounding too, it was like someone was giving the blue man group permission to play drums on his brain. He couldn’t remember a thing after coming up on a house on a hill, and even then his memory was shot. Whenever he tried to focus on anything his skull went from pounding to straight pain shooting through his skull.

The latino boy tried to open his eyes, but the light was blinding. It seemed to be coming from everywhere. It was like being in the center of the sun, all the light surrounding him. But it was just so cold.

Leo tried to open his eyes once more, ignoring the stabs of pain that shot through him, and found a box surrounding him. It was clear, like glass, but thick. It would take some careful planning to get
First, he would need to stand up, but as the fire welder tried he realised he couldn't move his hands, at all. And that was where the arctic feeling was coming from. His hands were somewhat behind and to the sides of him, submerged in solid ice, and he either couldn't or didn't have the strength to move the whole bucket.

The pounding in his skull became too much for Leo, and the world went black.

--

The next time Nico woke, it was to someone yelling at him to do so. It was the same man from before, the one with three chests, and he looked annoyed.

"Finally, you're awake. I thought I would have to wait days."

“What do you want?” Nico spat out, voice layered with disgust.

“I have...what you might call polygenetic business I'm running. I'll get my products any way I can. And you, son of Hades, are going to get or for me.”

“And why would I help you?”

“Because I have something you want. Or, should I say, some one.”

Nico's blood froze. No wonder Leo wasn't right beside him, this thing, had put him somewhere, somewhere away from him.

“What did you do?”

“Oh I just stuck him in a box. You know, a very cold box with barely enough oxygen to breathe. If
“What do you want from me anyway?”

“Something that might just be hard for a child of Hades. You see, I’m in need of a certain soul, one long dead, but I’ll get near anything for a client that pays this much. I, however, cannot make the journey to the underworld. That’s why you’re going to get it for me, and when you come back I’ll let your friend go.”

“And what if I refuse?”

“I sell him, and eventually you, to the titans. Both deals would benefit me greatly, you pick which one I go with.”

“Fine. I’ll go to the underworld and look for this soul. Swear on the River Styx.”

Geryon gave a malicious smile. “Good. Some ground rules for this deal: no sending people to kill me, you come back alone, and I understand that it takes time to search for a specific soul out of the billions down there. So, you have the end of the week to bring it to me.”

“That’s only four days!”

“Well the titans aren’t very patient, now are they? You better get going.”

He felt helpless, but didn’t let it show on his face. Nico wouldn’t give this bastard the satisfaction of seeing him break. “What’s the soul’s name?” He asked, voice cold and steeled.

--

Nico ran into his father’s throne room just as a spirit wandered away.
“Ah, Nico. A pleasure. Where’s Leo?”

For all the control he showed in front of Geryon, it had run its course. The Italian boy’s dam broke and he fell to his knees, just as a sob tore out of his throat.

“Nico, what happened? Where’s Leo?” Persephone questioned, picking her stepson off the floor and holding him. Nico clutched at her, it was the only thing grounding him through the panic of what had happened.

It took a few minutes before the sobs subsided enough for him to speak, and even then the tears were streaming down his face. “Leo’s captured. He’s in this box that this monster, Geryon, put him in. And now Geryon wants me to get him a soul in order to exchange it for Leo. And if I don’t get in in four days, Leo’s going to be sold to the titans. And I can’t send people to kill him or come back with backup. I have to be alone on this.”

“Nico, you have to know, the spirits in the underworld rarely know who they are, were, it’s near impossible to find a spirit and bring it back to your world.”

“I have to try. I swore on the River Styx that I would look. I...I just. I’ll look.” Nico was resigned to the fact that he had to look. He pushed off his stepmom, wiped the tears off his face, and built up some walls around his heart. “What do you know about Nero?”

--

The next time Leo woke up, he didn’t panic. The memory troubles were still there, and it was still cold, but he knew where it was coming from. He was expecting the light, so it wasn’t as painful this time around, but it still hurt like a bitch.

The light was still surrounding him, and it wasn’t too hard to figure out why. Usually, you would hear about people being held in places dark so they couldn’t see what was going on around them, but even the floor was lit up here, so it wasn’t made to be traditionally frightening. This...uh...glass? box was made to keep Nico out, one of Leo’s biggest fears. The dark had become his friend, shadows ensured safe travel. Light like this made no shadows, no way to get out with his hands still frozen. Was it possible for him to get frostbite? Focus, Brain!
He would have to sit here and wait it out.....unless he could melt the ice, literally. His thing was fire, he could at least try.

Starting at his elbows, two small flames made their way down to the buckets, turning the top layer of ice to water quickly. If he could just keep this up for-

"I wouldn't do that if I were you...." A way too happy sing-song-like voice sounded around the room. Before Leo could even ask why he found it hard to breathe, then his flames went out. "There's very little oxygen flowing through there, just enough to let you breathe. You wasted all of it just now with that little stunt, and now you have to wait for it to fill back up. It should only take a minute or two."

Leo's vision started to go dark around the edges, he couldn't breathe. It was terrifying. It felt like he was going to die, right here right now. Nothing he could do. He felt so......helpless........ Leo slumped over a few seconds later, unconscious.

--

Nero was an old Roman tyrant. A Roman tyrant. He had to find a way to travel into the Roman afterlife. So, here he was. In San Francisco, trying to convince two roman demigods that he was one too. One of them looked familiar, a dark-skinned girl with curly brown hair, and the other not-so-much, he looked Chinese but had way too much of a baby face to be as intimidating as he could be with his build.

The memory slammed into him so hard he almost stumbled. He and Leo had been in the underworld, exploring, when they came across a spirit that was much more aware than the others. The spirit had had a female figure and an aura unlike any of the others around her. She wasn’t supposed to be dead, his brain had supplied, and she wasn’t supposed to be there if she had died. Nico and Leo had brought this to attention with the former’s father and he had given them permission to escort her out, giving her a second chance.

He straightened out as he recognized the girl in front of him as the spirit from the underworld. That was why she looked out of place, she was roman. He didn’t know how she had gotten there, but now Nico knew it was possible.

“I can prove to you that I’m a demigod, without use of my powers.” He stated calmly, though a bit impatiently. Nico leaned in next to the girl’s ear and whispered, “I’m the one that pulled you out of
Nico saw her eyes widen as he pulled back, recognition filling them.

“That was you?” She asked.

“Yeah.”

“What’s going on?” The boy-man beside them asked.

“I think she knows what’s going on, I never caught your name, by the way.”

“Hazel.”

“Nice to properly meet you, I’m Nico. Right, well. I’m on a time limit and I hate to be rude but I really need to speak to whoever is in charge of this camp.”

“How did you know about this camp?” The boy narrowed his eyes suspiciously.

“I asked my dad. Now, my boyfriend is captured and I really don’t have time to chit chat, I don’t want to but I will fight my way in. No one is more important to me.”

“Who’s your dad?”

Nico thought for a minute. They would probably let him in easier if they thought he was roman too. “Pluto.”

“I have a brother?”

Nico was getting really annoyed and stressed, it was the second day and he hadn’t even started
looking. “I really don’t mean to be rude but I really need to talk to whomever is in charge.”

“How do you know we aren’t?” The boy, still glaring at him, asked.

The Italian boy glared right back, pouring all of his anger and annoyance, the Chinese boy actually flinched away from it. “A king or queen never guards his or her own castle. It is what’s inside that needs protection, the ruler watches over that. Now, I am not above doing whatever I need to do in order to get through. Tell me, what do I need to do?”

“Frank, he’s a demigod. He’s helped me out, I owe him one. He’s safe.” Hazel said, opening the door and leading them down the corridor. She lead the three of them into a larger house with Latin engraved into the space above the door. “Reyna. This is a new demigod, Nico, son of Pluto. He needs help.”

A pale girl with wavy black hair turned around, she had two dogs at her side, one golden and the other silver. She was dressed in gold accented purple robes. She was the one he needed to talk to. “Thank you, Hazel, Frank, you may leave and continue your station at the door.” The two nodded at their leader and left the building.

“What can I help you with?”

“I’m on a time limit here, so I’m not going to beat around the bush. I’m not the son of Pluto, I’m Hades’ son. I need to get to your underworld, tell me how I do that.”

“Who are you, Graeca?” She asked furiously.

“I am Nico di Angelo. My boyfriend has been captured and I need to find a soul to get him back. I know it can be done, but I also know my chances. So I am willing to do whatever it takes, including either begging or fighting, to get into your underworld. What do I need to do?”

As if understanding the situation, Reyna glanced down at her dogs, who were snarling but otherwise calm, and then stood and got to work. “I’m assuming you know what an Iris message is?”

“Yes.”
“Well, our version is slightly different. You would use *denarii*, roman currency, and say Arcus instead of Iris. We never really used it all that much, only to speak with the gods or people we otherwise couldn’t get to.”

“Thank you.”

“Let me do it.” Reyna said, “That way I could speak with Pluto first.”

“Whichever way is best.”

It wasn’t long before a recognizable face shimmered into view. This version of Nico’s father was harder, he had features that created more shadows on his face than the greek version. The two of them kneeled.

“Why do you call me, demigods?”

“With all due respect, we only call you to ask you of something.” Reyna stated, standing.

“And what is that?”

“This is Nico di Angelo, son of Hades, and needs help.”

Nico stepped forward to be beside the leader. “Someone very dear to me has been captured. I request permission to enter your underworld so I can complete the requirement to get him back.”

“And what are you supposed to do in my realm?”

Nico sighed. “He wants a soul. Nero.”

Reyna sucked in a sharp breath.
“Do you know why?”

“I do not. He only said that a client was asking for it.”

“I cannot allow such a soul to cheat death and exit the underworld, especially not such a cruel one. I am sorry, though I commend you for your effort.”

“Please.” Nico said, voice cracking a bit as he lost just a bit of hope.

Pluto sighed. “I cannot allow such a thing to happen. I am sorry, Nico.” The god faded out.

Reyna looked at him with either sympathy or pity, Nico couldn’t decide which. “Nico I’m-”

“I have to speak with my father.” he said stiffly. Watching the world fade out and the familiar walls of the palace take place.

“Nico?” Persephone spoke up.

“I needed somewhere to sleep and eat before going back to Triple G. Ranch. I….I couldn’t get the soul. I have two days before he is expecting me back. That means I have a day to plan my act.”

“You’re going to get Leo back, Nico.”

“I know.”

Persephone could honestly say she pitied whoever was on the wrong side of her stepson’s sword, right then.
Leo hadn’t eaten for two days. He hadn’t seen Nico for two days. It was the worst two days of his life.

He had gone without food before, that was no problem. Some foster monsters had thought going without dinner was a good punishment for doing…...whatever it was he had done. They also had the tendency to forget he had gone without breakfast or lunch too.

So, it wasn’t the fact that he was hungry that made him so upset, no. It was that he had no idea where Nico was, or if he was alright. The man who had oh-so-kindly told him how to kill himself with his own fire hadn’t said a word about the italian.

Then there was the fact that it was cold in the room. Ice will melt if a room is at least semi-warm, so this box was kept at a solid 45°F. Leo couldn’t even see down to his hands to see if they had gotten frostbite, but he used the fire in his veins to try and heat his own body temperature, which really drained him.

His arms were cramping, his head still pounded, but he had gotten used to the light. That was the part that was going to stick with him, he knew. Nico was cold, colder than the normal person at least, so it was always associated with safety. But the light was what made sure he was unreachable. Nico couldn’t get to him like this.

“Leo?”

His head jerked up at the sound. There was his beloved, in their room in the underworld.

“Please tell me I’m not hallucinating.”

Nico smiled. “No, you’re not. Hey, I’m going to come back tomorrow, okay? Save your strength, you’re getting out of there.”

“Okay.”
Nico showed up at Triple G. Ranch the next day. He was only there long enough to exchange pleasantries before there was commotion in the back. Nico panicked when he saw Percy, this was not part of the plan he had laid out the night before. Time to improvise.

He took out his sword and pointed it at Percy’s throat, blaming him for his sister’s death. Geryon said some things about something and Percy said other things, but Nico didn’t really hear any of it until he was being pushed onto a tractor, too busy thinking about how to get Leo out now. He kept up appearances about being mad at Percy, not wanting to get caught lying.

They made their way back to the house and Geryon said he was going to sell them all to the titans, Nico’s hope rekindled, because then he could get them all out. Percy made a deal with the slimy bastard, and went to fulfill his end, while Nico was forming a new plan.

It took the better part of the day, but eventually the son of Poseidon came back in and that was when Nico realized Geryon wasn’t going to hold up his end of the bargain either way. Percy and him started fighting, and Nico’s rage built.

He wasn’t going to let this happen. He was not going to leave without Leo, and they were all going to walk free, that night.

While Sealegs was fighting, Nico glanced around, he could see a room down a hall with wires running out of it. Magical monster or not, that light box used up a lot of energy, and that was where Leo was. Percy was eyeing a bow hanging on the shelf, and Nico rolled his eyes. He was a terrible shot.

The Italian boy just walked up behind the dueling duo and brought out his sword. Jackson jumped back from an attack, giving Nico enough room to slide in sideways and stick the blade through all three chests, all three hearts.

“Never try to cheat a child of Hades, and never take what’s mine. I’m glad you’re the first blood on my sword, and that you will not return.” Nico said as he stared into the dying eyes of the monster.

When Geryon was nothing more than dust, Nico looked around the room to see slightly horrified faces. He didn’t give them more than a glance, though, before he was running to the room he saw earlier.
He didn’t bother trying to unplug the generator, he just slashed the wires with his sword before making it a right. When the light finally died down enough to make a shadow where Leo was, Nico shadow traveled in and out in record time, cradling the boy close.

“Nico?” The weak voice sounded.

“Yes?”

“Nothing. Just…..nothing.” Leo smiled for the first time in three days as he fell back asleep, finally not cold anymore.
I’m fairly local, I’ve been around
I’ve seen the streets you’re walking down
I’m fairly local, good people now

I’m so sorry it took so long to update. I had to get some more surgery done and then finals week started and I haven’t been at a computer without either working on school or going to sleep in a while. Plus I was getting really into this series called the Paladin Prophecy and I love it and I’m on the third book and I both hope it’s the end and more is coming. I don’t know. But I’m sorry anyway and I hate when other people do it. And yes I’m alive.

They just sat there for a while. I could’ve been seconds, hours, weeks, all time lost meaning while Nico and Leo held each other for the first time in three days. The others: Annabeth, Percy, Grover and a cyclops had formed a small crowd at the door.

“We should get out of here.” Percy pointed out, causing the newly reunited pair to return to the land of the living and look at him.

“He’s right. Geryon is dead but that farmer boy will be back any minute. Can you walk?” Annabeth asked.

“Probably. I think, at least. Didn’t really have much room to stretch my legs in there.” Leo said with a weak chuckle, holding tightly onto Nico as he was helped up. His legs gave out as soon as he tried to stand.

“Leo. You can’t walk and we need to go. Don’t push yourself. Come on.” Nico told him, waiting for Leo to put his arms around his neck then pushing up, effectively carrying the mechanic. Then whispered in his ear, “Andiamo a casa.” Let’s go home.

The others looked surprised, not being used to seeing Nico so caring or having enough strength to carry a person. He was a scrawny little kid who didn’t care, or at least that was what he showed people. Still, they didn’t expect him to walk into the closet and disappear into the only shadow in the room.

They arrived directly outside the throne room, Leo sighing at the familiar traveling and surroundings. Nico took them to the kitchen, where they kept all the food regular demigods could eat. The fire wielder was set down in a bar stool, then the son of Hades went to grab some
ingredients, mumbling them off until Leo could realize he was making the Minestrone that he loved.

Nico said nothing as he cooked. While he was waiting for the water to boil and cleaning as he went. Not one word. Nothing.

Leo was anxious, he didn’t know what was going on in his boyfriend’s head and didn’t want to say the wrong word and set him off. It was a sensitive moment, tension running high in the room. The younger boy got lost in his head when a heavenly scent arrived under his nose.

The soup was beautifully arranged, with basil neatly arranged barely sticking out of the top and a two pieces of bread on the side. Leo, having not eaten in nearly three days, grabbed the spoon and started to devour the soup with abandon. This only lasted about thirty seconds, though, as he started choking on a carrot because he hadn’t chewed.

It wasn’t long before the fire wielder was getting up for seconds, then thirds. He finally had to stop when there was no more left in the pot, and left his dishes in the sink.

Nico still hadn’t said a word. He was silent as he was Italian. It worried Leo, a bit. He had only ever been this silent is a few instances: when he was sleeping (and even then sometimes not), after Bianca died and when Leo had almost gotten badly hurt in the Labyrinth. It left the latter anxious, because the former always closed him off for a little bit before they talked, really talked.

The child of Hades’ mask was cracking as Leo washed the dishes, though. His eyes were watering even though his face showed a blank wall, aside from a small downward twitch in the corners of his mouth. As it was, the shield was cracking, breaking for the older boy with just a few words from the younger. “Babe, talk to me.”

Nico spoke, but his voice was only a whisper with a crack in the middle. “Sorry.”

“Pardon?” Leo asked.

Nico started rambling, mouth moving so much faster than his brain that he forgot to say it in English. “Mi dispiace per averci fatto che voi rimanere lì per così tanto tempo.” I’m sorry for letting you stay there for so long. “Sono riuscito a farti, non potevo rischiare.” I couldn’t get you out, I couldn’t risk it. “I can’t lose you.” Nico ended in English, wanting to make sure his boyfriend understood, even though they both knew he had caught every word.

“It wasn’t your fault.”

“I LEFT YOU THERE! YOU STARVED FOR THREE DAYS BECAUSE OF ME!” Nico practically shouted, causing his voice to echo off the walls.

“You got me out. And you know me, I’ve gone longer without food. I’m Leo Valdez, Bad Boy Supreme, I can take almost anything. As long as you’re safe.” Leo gathered his sobbing boyfriend into his arms, holding him tightly across his chest.

“Leo, lay with me. I need to make sure you’re okay.”

“Whatever you need, Princey.” Leo said, making Nico chuckle at the nickname.

They walked, practically glued to each other, to their room, where they just stayed and held each other and relished in the fact they could do it again, even though it had only been a few days.

The next morning, the pair walked out of their room and Leo was swooped into a mama bear hug
from Persephone, almost crushing him with her godly strength. As soon as he was let go, she grabbed his chin like a scolding mother. “Don’t you ever do that to me again. I will not see you wander to my husband’s before your good and proper time, do you hear me?”

“Hey! It’s not like it was my fault. If anything, blame Geryon, that three-chested jackass isn’t coming back for a little while.”

The goddess pulled her ‘adoptive’ son into another, gentler, hug. “I know your guy’s lives are hard, so please do your best and be careful?”

“That’s all I can promise.”

Persephone pulled back with a smile before hugging Nico and kissing them both on the top of the head before walking away.

“I take it I was missed?” Leo asks, earning hard kiss on the lips that ended with a glare from Nico.

“You shouldn’t act dumb, it’s not a good look.”

“You say that like I’ve ever really been smart.” He says, still inches away from Nico in the hall outside their room.

“You have.”

“When?”

“When you first went into the forgery. You spouted off facts about metals I’d never even heard of like you were born with the knowledge.”

“I actually think I might’ve been.”

“Oh well. Can’t fault you for that, now can I?” Nico asked with one more peck to the other boy’s lips, then pulled away from the wall they were crowded against.

Nico brought Leo to see Reyna, just to thank her for the help, even if it hadn’t been exactly what he had been hoping for, she had done all she could. Though they probably could’ve come in a bit better. Appearing out of the shadow next to a leader commended for her reflexes hadn’t been the best idea. Nico barely had time to duck before they were decapitated and she realized who they were.

“Nico? How did the impossible rescue mission go?”

“Very well, I came here to thank you. And I thought you should meet Leo, son of Hephaestus, or your Vulcan. He was the one I was trying to save, and I really wanted to say thank you.” Nico bent over to kiss her hand, making Leo laugh behind them.

“You are such an old soul, babe.”

“You love it.”

Reyna watched their exchange for a little bit. “I am happy for your success. No demigod, Greek or Roman, should be left in a bad place without someone like Nico. And I hope to learn that you are very much the same way, Leo.”

“Wait…..Isn’t it, like, forbidden or something for us to be here, y’know, being Greek and all?”
Reyna smiled warmly. “I’m sure we can make an exception. There is not a rule in the universe that has not been bent for some kind of leeway. Although I do have one requirement: don’t tell anybody you’re Greek. Tell them you’re the sons of Pluto and Vulcan. It’s not that I am upset with the fact, but there are some here that are, as I am sure there are some in your camp that would not like a Roman.”

“Yeah, we understand. Conflicting views and all that. Nothing against us, blah blah. We have pretty thick skin. While Nico here was still trying to tweak the shadow traveling, we ended up in Russia a couple times. You ever try being gay there? We had to jump back in so we wouldn’t get shot.” The two Greeks started giggling at the memory.

“There is something you should know. I don’t believe you have been spending much time in your camp, so I’m sure news travels slowly. But there seems to be a war coming. On your side, something I cannot help with but to tell you what I know. Something is coming. I do not know what exactly, but something big and secret, something I only know of because of the human news speaking of enormous storms making their way through the land. Your gods are fighting; either each other or something that takes all of them to defeat. Speak with your father, Nico, make peace with your camp, join the forces. Our ‘oracle’ predicts you to be important.”

“Thank you, Reyna. We should go, then, and confer with our side.”

“Stay safe, I’m beginning to like you two.” She said with her own smile.

They disappeared into the shadows.

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They couldn’t find Percy. Every time they tried Iris messaging, the drachma was thrown into and through the rainbow. Either Iris was upset with them or something was seriously wrong. Percy thought of Nico like a little brother, he wouldn't ignore him like this, especially if it seemed like it was urgent.

They needed to speak about the oncoming war. No doubt Percy would want to keep as many of his friends and family as far away as he could possibly make them. But it was coming and they had to do something about it instead of just sitting on their hands waiting for the world to be fixed. They could help, they were the only ones with a constant way to talk to a god, without any hostile feelings from him or the other gods.

They finally met up with the son of Poseidon after a little while. They almost literally ran into each other. Nico had been trying to summon Bianca over the past few weeks to see if she could see something he could not, and it seemed like this was her answer.

Percy told him a lot of things, including some painful shit neither Nico or Leo wanted to think about, but the main thing was he had been having weird demigod dreams about Nico summoning Bianca and thought he should help. He did find out a lot about the oncoming battle and essentially subscribed to the newsletter so he would be told when it was happening.

Then the conversation travelled to a much less desirable place, after Percy left, when Bianca brought up his past. Leo had been pretty quiet, letting Nico have the forefront on an emotional issue and backing him up when he could.

“Nico, there is something you should know about us, about mom, and don’t blame dad for what you learn, it was for the best.”
The black haired boy’s breath hitched, he knew almost nothing. “You already know that I don’t know anything. I was too young, you were the one who raised me.”

“But that’s just it, you should know, you still know Italian, right?”

“Certamente.” Of course.

“Then you should remember. Ask father about it, I don’t know everything, but you have the right.”

“Why? Why would I want to remember how my mother died? I don’t want to know all the details!”

“Please, for me. Trust me on this, I- I can’t do this forever, it’s draining the both of us and I don’t have enough energy to tell the whole story, ask dad about.” Bianca’s ghost seemed to faint then cut out.

Nico had tears running down his face. Fractured memories and foggy pictures emerged from somewhere deep in the back of his mind, and it hurt worse than he's ever felt to remember. But that was all he found out before he came back to himself.

He was on the ground, his knees having given out at the assault on his brain. Leo was the only thing separating his head and shoulders from the ground. He was speaking frantically, slipping between Spanish and English frequently.

Percy was standing off to the side, looking like he was trying to decide between being worried and scared for Nico. His fingers twitched as if he wanted to check for himself that he was okay, but would stay put out of respect.

Sitting up caused the world to flip, and Leo to scold him. “You just had…I don't even know what right now. But you just spent all your energy on whatever that was, so take it easy before I just pick you up.”

Nico smiled at Leo’s attempts to be demanding, and conceded. Though the latter was mostly because he didn’t want to look like a drunk fool.

Percy cleared his throat. “So, what did just happen? All I know is that, apparently, Bianca has been sending me dreams from down under and then you kinda passed out.”

“Memories.”

“Pardon?”

“Memories that have been locked away for years, probably a decade depending on how old I was in that. But memories I did not bury and that hurt like a gunshot sounded in my brain.”

“Of what?”

“Things I should remember. I….I don't really know. Not yet. I have to speak with my father but….I’m not sure I want to know. Still, I should.”

“You don't have to do anything you don't want to.” Leo said from behind him, helping him to stand as he gained back his strength. “Come on, you need to rest up and there's a portal around here somewhere. Let’s go.”

Percy was just standing there with a confused look on his face as Nico and Leo walked off, the latter making sure the former kept upright. They turned back once to tell the son of Poseidon not to
follow them, then turned and disappeared through one of the many hatches only open to demigods.

Chapter End Notes

And another shout out to WatercoolerFreak because they freaked out and that's fun to do. Thank you my lovelies.
The (real) Saga Begins

Chapter Summary

A long long time ago
In a galaxy far away
Naboo was under an attack
And I thought me and Qui-Gon Jinn
Could talk the Federation into
Maybe cutting them a little slack

Okay, this doesn't explain the chapter at all, I know. But I was kinda thinking that their world is under attack, what with the war going on, and them just hearing about it it kinda like it beginning for them? I dunno but there you go

Chapter Notes

Sooo I didn't edit this one because I'm tired and lazy and I wanted to get this out ASAP. This is it, this is what it is, and I hope you like it.

I have no excuse for why this is so late other than I'm busier than I thought I'd be and have just been having trouble getting into the right head space. Thank you all for reading and I love you all.

Also: towards the end I kinda get really mad at Zeus for no reason, and I love Hades soooo......There's that. HADES IS MY SWEET LIL GUMDROP WHO JUST WANTS HIS KIDS TO STAY ALIVE FOR THE AVERAGE DEMIGOD LIFESPAN IS THAT TOO MUCH TO ASK??????

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“What do you mean you can’t tell me?!” Nico was angry. After getting down to the underworld and sitting through a short and fitful sleep, only made bearable by Leo next to him, he had stormed into the throne room and demanded answers to the questions that had been floating around in his mind for the past nine hours. And now Hades was refusing him answers.

“I mean it would cause extraordinary pain for you maybe even cause you to slip into a coma and not wake up. You have to let the memories come on their own. And I don’t know every little detail of those first eight years before you went to the lotus casino and the pain would probably multiply with you actively trying to remember.”

“So what do I do? I deserve to know, that was not something you had the right to take away!”
“I did what I thought was best! I did not want you to have to grow up with nightmares and flashbacks to something that never should’ve happened! I don’t want any of my children to go through what always happens with them! My brothers don’t even see them as children, just spinoffs of me that they can do whatever they want with! So yes, I took away memories of your mother, and I wish I never would have done that. Maria was the best mother she could ever be, she was so joyful and positive it’s a wonder she didn’t go running when she heard my name. But I did what I needed to do so you could grow and not judge people on the worst they could possibly be, I did it so you could allow yourself to make friends like Leo, so Bianca could be a part of the Hunters of Artemis if she so chose, even if it was a bad idea, but so you could make your own decisions with friends by your side instead of being ready to defend yourself just because someone is in your blindspot. And…and at least when your memories come back now, you have people you trust to let your guard down in and who you trust to not let anything happen to you so you have someone. So yes, I took away what you knew of your mother, and I wanted to be able to cherry pick which memories stayed then and now, but it was either do nothing and have you grow up to be labeled and defensive and dangerous and a whole bunch of other things. And I would do it again, especially knowing the two boys I get out of it.” Hades had started out in a shout, but moved into a whisper as the speech went on, particularly when talking about Maria, and emotion poured into his words. Even as a god, his voice choked up and nobody could argue the dead honestly in his speech.

Nico couldn’t take it any longer. All his frustration had been bottled up for a little while and took the form of tears in the emotional moment. For the first time in his life, excluding the time Leo was held hostage, he cried into the neck of his father, able to be the child he had been before his memories were taken. Leo came to place hand on the small of his back, causing the older boy to look up and smile.

Hades was right. This, this was better than having memories. This, something that came from an entire childhood of cultivation and learning to have, was better than losing all of it for the sake of a few memories. Without the River Lethe, he would either be dead or an old man, the former being more likely. He would never have the strength to love another man so openly in that time period, he wouldn’t have Leo, and that made all the difference.

So out with some memories he’ll get back in time, he’s got what he never would’ve had if he kept them. A family.

“So let’s go over what we know.” Leo said as they were trying to figure out what to do next.

It had been about two months since Nico and Hades’ heart-to-heart, and not much had happened on
the memory front. He had gained a couple more, just simple things about his mother- how she let them both sleep in her bed while the war was going on, how she looked when the found out they could go to America. Sometimes he’d get a glimpse at how the world was, and those always made Nico a bit nervous to be with Leo in public. PDA wasn’t a big thing at any time, but after a memory like that would pop up, it wasn’t going to happen- Nico would be afraid of imprisonment or conversion camps or that anything would happen to Leo, and it would take days for Leo to convince him there was nothing.

It didn’t happen very often. The talk didn’t do anything magical and give everything back super quickly, but it definitely did happen more. Hades chopped it up to be now that he knew -and subconsciously wanted to know more (even if he didn’t try)- his brain was always looking for things to connect. Like if he saw someone at the park on a soap box shouting things about god and heckling homosexuality, it might connect to an earlier memory about Maria, Bianca and him shuffling past a dozen radios and protesters trying to do more to make people suffer.

It was painful for Nico. Hades was right in that it did cause a migraine so powerful that sometimes he would have to just sit down for a while, cuddling with Leo if they were in private and if they weren’t, the fire wielder would be powerless to do anything but put a hand on his boyfriend’s shoulder blade and hope it wouldn’t be a bad one.

They just hoped it was better soon.

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It took another unwanted trip to Camp Half Blood to figure out what was going on- in the form of a dryer-than-dry Percy Jackson walking out of the lake to stomp into the big house- seen from the top of the hill. Nico and Leo followed him into the conference room, or tried to before they were stopped by who other than Clarissa de la Rue, who said they had to be a cabin head counselor to join. Leo was about to go on a rant about how they didn’t even have a cabin for Hades, when Nico pulled him out of the house by the sleeve.

“Why’d you do that? I could’ve gotten us in there by sheer force of embarrassment.”

“Yes, but then their conversation would’ve been muted and we would walk out being confused as to what they are doing. Hiding in the shadows, however, will not even let them know I’m there.” Nico starts leading Leo by the hand behind a tree, casting a large shadow over both of them. “Don’t worry, they’ll never know I am there.” *kiss* “And I’ll tell you everything.” The shadow traveler pulled his boyfriend in for a toe-curling kiss before slipping through the shadows and into the conference room.
Nico caught the tail-end of a sentence as he appeared dizzily behind a cabinet in the corner of the room. He listened as best as he could with his blood pounding in his ears.

“-and Charles told be to run. I wasn’t going to leave him behind, but a dracanae spotted us and he was reaching for the trigger. He- he didn’t give me a choice. Any other way would’ve killed him and made his sacrifice moot. Put a point on the other team’s side.” Percy looked down as he spoke, clearly going through all the different scenarios in his head.

Silena- head of the Aphrodite cabin- spoke up with tears in her eyes. “You always have a choice. You should’ve taken him with you. Pulled him into the sea with you. You could’ve saved him!” She hissed.

“If I took him in the ocean he would’ve drowned! If I would’ve stayed, nobody would know what happened and you’d be down two players! If he hadn’t pulled the trigger we would’ve been captured or killed! He had no way off the boat and he knew it, I was knocked out from 50 feet underwater! I did what I could and I couldn’t do much other than come back to tell you!” Percy yelled back, obviously having hit a sore spot.

“ENOUGH!” Shouted Chiron from the head of the table. “We can’t change the past, all we can do now is plan for the upcoming war.”

“Well what are the gods doing? They should help us in the battle!” Silena said, crossing her arms and pouting.

“They’re trying to figure out the best way to go about fighting this war on their end-” Annabeth tried to say before getting cut off.

“Don’t you mean they’re just fighting with each other, like they always do!” Silena stated.

And thus started the argument across the table, where nothing intelligible could be heard as every head counselor wanted to make their statement right then. Nico couldn’t see anything else productive being done in that sitting so he decided to meet up with his boyfriend.

XXX
Meanwhile.....

“Leo!” The boy in question looks up to find a certain blonde running towards him with an amused smile on his face. “Man! I didn’t know you’d be back in town...err...camp. Where’s my favorite patient?”

Leo smiled at his friend’s antics. Will Solace was still the only camper who would unflinchingly take care of Nico. At least while they were at the camp, but otherwise they had the little bit of ambrosia and nectar Solace had advised them to carry if they couldn’t get back to either Camp Half-Blood or the underworld (the latter being their first choice, but sometimes the former was easier on Nico or Leo was the hurt one, and Leo wasn’t going to complain).

“Oh here and there. Lurking in the shadows and whatnot.”

“I don’t think I’ve ever seen you without him, unless you were grabbing him food and such or visa versa.”

Leo smiled to himself. “Yeah. Nothing’s perfect, what with the demigod nightmares and everything else going on, but we, uh, we have each other.”

“What’d you say last time? You guys have known each other for how many years?”

“Since I was nine....so almost six years now. It was nothing special, how we met. No sparks flying or love at first sight. He was just sitting there, waiting for his sister, looking lonely. I was across the room, watching people, being lonely. I saw him with his little game and asked if I could play.” Leo’s smile turned slightly bitter while his thoughts drifted around. They stuck on Bianca for a while, replaying good scenes from his memory, then to Nico and tidbits from the years...then somehow he ended up on the conversation they had with Hades recently. Fire ran through Leo’s veins, different from his usual one -though there was a tiny spark sent flying through the air- but this fire was uncontrollable, brought on by a single thought and not about to be put out. “Nico’s been through so much- too much. And most of it isn’t his fault- he gets shit just for being a child of Hades. People who have never even met the god judge him for the stories where he is the big bad wolf coming to blow your house down. Hercules made him into this thing with fire who uses people. But he has been there for Nico and I more than anybody else in either of our lives, save for Bianca and our mothers. Hades and Persephone have been there through everything, telling us about what’s going on and warning us not to do what. And people still give Nico too much shit for things that none of us can change and it fucking sucks.” Leo didn’t cuss much so it surprised Will when he said that.
Suddenly, the Hephaestus kid had an armful of boyfriend. Leo was used to it, so he just pulled Nico into a hug and kept him on his feet. Will, however startled and made to grab a weapon, but stopped as soon as he recognized the boy.

“Nico! Does this happen a lot?”

“Not too much, only really after he’s shadow travelled a lot. We’ve…..been around…..recently.”

Nico yawned on Leo’s shoulder, turning his face more towards the latter’s neck. “Maybe I just wanted to hug my boyfriend.” He said, voice muffled, but his point was undermined when his legs gave out.

“Okay, why don’t we sit down?” Leo said as he caught the smaller boy and lowered them both to the ground. Exhausted as he was, Nico passed out as soon as they hit the ground.

Will crouched down and looked over Nico worriedly. He pulled out a small flashlight out of his bag (because what healer Apollo kid doesn’t carry around a medical bag?), and leaned over to check the Italian boy’s pupils and pulse before Leo could stop him. The healer didn’t expect Nico’s eyes to fly open and to be kicked away just far enough to not be impaled by the stygian iron sword suddenly pointed at his chest.

Nico’s eyes cleared and he sighed, changing his sword back into a ring and slumped back into the tree. “Sorry.”

“It’s fine. You’d be surprised at how many demigods don’t like their sleep to be disturbed. Especially the ones who have been on quests and the Ares kids. They don’t care how much they are hurting, they will not stay down.”

“I’m just going to check your vitals. I don’t like the fact that you just passed out as soon as possible.” Will said, pulling a thermometer out of his bag and letting Nico stick it in his own mouth. The Apollo kid frowned at the low number that came out of it.

“What is it?” Leo asked.

“62°F. It’s three below the usual.”
“That’s a fever for him.”

“I’m fine. Just tired….and cold.” Nico closed his eyes again and snuggled closer to the warmth that is Leo.

Leo wrapped his arms around the older boy, letting Nico draw in his heat and making the perfect temperature for them both. “We should head back to the underworld. He’s gonna need to sleep this off and actually eat a full meal.”

“Okay, see you when I see you then. And try to get that temperature down….err…up.” Will waved and walked back towards his fellow campers.

The next moment, Leo and Nico were in their room in the underworld. The latter tried to explain what had happened in the conference room, but the former shushed and said they’d talk when he was feeling better.

“A war?” Hades repeated the next day in the throne room. After nine hours of sleep and a big meal, Nico’s fever had broken and he was explaining the conference to his family.

“I don’t know when, they just kinda dissolved into arguing after that and I left. Wasn’t feeling great either.”

“I’ll try to talk with my brothers. Hopefully they will be civil enough to get things done.”

“Yes, and you don’t go off on them either.” Persephone chimed up from Hades’ side.

“I don’t go out of my way to antagonize them, I defend myself and my family!”

“When was the last time you spoke to them?” Leo asked.
“1940? Something like that. It’s been a minute.”

Nico’s eyes went wide. “It’s been over half a century, dad. Have you even talked since you guys made that oath?”

“No. They pit their children against mine. That was all World War II was and it almost destroyed the world. Then he tried to kill you and your sister as if enough of our kids hadn’t died and I tried to protect you but then Maria died and all this shit happened.” Hades was rambling and he knew it, Persephone just placed her hand on his shoulder. He had loved her, of course, just like he loved his wife and his son and Leo.

“That’s why Nico’s mother died? That’s why World War II happened? Because of a little fight between the gods? And then they went and broke the oath themselves?” Leo hissed out.

“None of it was my choice and I’ve tried to stay out of everything since. I have enough going on down here on a good day, I don’t need to be caught up in their drama too.”

“I think we should fight. In the war, I mean. I can’t just sit by while this happens and I have a feeling the other gods might be a bit more accepting if we actually helped them make sure the earth wasn’t destroyed.” Nico spoke up.

“Of course. I want to help. But we’ll need to find out when. I need to talk to my brothers.” And with that, Hades walked over to the fountain to send an Iris message.

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“Persephone?”

“Hello, Nico. Where’s Leo?”

“He’s taking a shower right now. But I, I wanted to talk to you.”

“Of course, what about?”
“I don’t want Leo to fight in the war. It would worry me too much and I wouldn’t be able to concentrate and I really don’t want him getting hurt.”

“He won’t be happy that you’re going without him, or going at all. Why don’t you stay here too?”

“I can’t just stay here, I don’t know why but Percy has been trying to be nice to us since he met us and it’ll go faster if someone has some stygian iron. Just- will you try to keep him here when it comes?”

“I’ll try. But you know that he’ll be really upset, right?”

“I...I know. But I can live with it. I can live with him being mad if he’s safe.”

“I don’t think this is the way to go about it.” Persephone said, concern bright in her eyes.

Nico ran his fingers through his hair. “I just don’t have a better idea. He’s everything to me.”

“I’ve seen this, it doesn’t tend to go over well.”

“Well-”

“Hey guys.” Leo said as he walked into the kitchen.

Persephone smiled sweetly at Leo, “Hello. What are you two planning for today?”

“I don’t know. Walk through the gardens maybe. Explore more in the underworld. Maybe go topside for a bit.”

“That’s nice. You should try going to San Francisco for a while, you both really liked it there last time.” The goddess replied catching the pleading look Nico sent him and responded with a nod. She would try to keep Leo safe, as much as it would kill him.
The battle was raging on and Nico was fighting next to his father as they raced through the flurries of monsters and rebel demigods.

Leo was in the underworld, probably cussing him out. He had been locked in the palace. He was currently in their room, clutching Nico’s clothes out of worry. The anger had drained out of him about a half hour beforehand, but would probably come right back the minute he saw his boyfriend. Now he was just imagining all the possible horrible outcomes, some of them making tears stream down his face.

Nico joined the battle halfway through, and didn’t notice when the battle started to make it’s way towards Olympus. He was surprised when Hades grabbed him and they appeared at the top, along with an entire skeletal army behind them, along with Persephone and Demeter.

The italian boy panics for a second, worried over Leo and his safety. The younger goddess just shakes her head. In his moment of relief, Nico didn’t hear the battle around him, didn’t hear the magical barrier fall from around Manhattan and form around Olympus. He didn’t hear his father or the campers fighting the hoards of monsters on all sides. He didn’t see Euryale, the gorgon, coming straight at him. She slashed at him with her claws, tearing down his pants and making a gash in the leg underneath them. He cried out as his right leg gave out and he fell to the ground.

Hades saw him and killed Euryale, then pulled him out of the battle and teleported to Camp Half-Blood. “Will! Uhh...Solace!” He yelled into the infirmary.

There was nearly every Apollo kid in the infirmary, taking care of each camper as best as they could before the next one came in. The ones that weren’t there were either gathering more injured, along with some Hermes kids, or using their archery skills. Will Solace came out of the cluster, wearing slightly bloodied scrubs and gloves. He looked slightly surprised at Hades standing there, but quickly pulled a cot over when he saw the boy in the god’s arms.

“Set him right here, I’ll be right back with supplies. You should get back to the battle, or bring Leo, he’ll be worried.” Hades nodded and disappeared, only appearing again for a half second to drop off Leo then go back to fighting.

“Nico! You are in ss000 much trouble.”
“Yell at him later, help me cut off his pants right now.” Will told Leo. Together, and with Will’s healing abilities, the wound was cleaned and wrapped in half the speed as it might’ve been. Nico was also given one and a half squared of ambrosia, then Will left to tend to the other patients.

“I can’t believe you did that.” Leo scolded Nico.

The latter just looked at him, no guilt showing on his face. “It kept you safe.” Was all he said.

“But look at you! You have a two inch deep cut down your leg! You got hurt because you wanted me to keep safe! You’re not the only one who cares about you, Nico. As much as you don’t want to believe it, for some reason, you have people who would miss you. Hell, I miss you just taking a shower! You. Don’t. Get. To be hurt. Without me. That’s a new rule. Our only one. We do this kind of shit together, got it.”

Nico started playing what Leo said over and over in his head, then tried to think about how he would feel in the latter’s position. He looked over at the mexican boy, really looked, and saw the worry etched into his face and the semi-dried tear tracks cascading from his eyes, and he felt bad. He really did.

So Nico nodded. “Yes, Leo. Of course, I just- I don’t want you to be-”

“You don’t want me to get hurt, I get it. I hate seeing you in pain, too. It breaks my heart every time you’re hurt. Te amo, eres mi corazón y yo no podía soportar para estar sin hacia fuera. Realmente, realmente te quiero, Nico. ” I love you, you are my heart and I couldn't bear to be without you. I really, really love you, Nico.

Nico’s eyes filled with tears and he pulled Leo in for a kiss. “Tu sei il mio amore, mio cuore e mio tutto. Ti amo, Leo Valdez. Ti amo cosí tanto.” You are my love, my heart, and my everything. I love you, Leo Valdez. I love you so very much.

They kissed for long minutes, then just stayed in each other’s company. Nico even moved over as much as he could so Leo could climb on with him. They just sat there for the time being, until Nico fell asleep listening to Leo’s heartbeat.

Chapter End Notes
I'm also sorry for all the cuts in this one, I didn't really know what to do and I wanted to get the battle over with. I think I'll go more into detail in the second series, it should be more of them separated because shit happens and we will finally have Leo do things instead of just following Nico around. Yay!
Calm Before The Storm

Chapter Summary

Sat outside my front window
This story's going somewhere
He's well hung and I am hanging on
There's a song on the radio that says
"Let's get this party started"
So let's get this party started

Chapter Notes

Okay, it's a slow chapter, but I wanted to go into detail, because, though it's not a huge part of the story, I wanted to introduce Hephaestus and such. Also: Zeus seems like a dick because I have a GIANT bias towards Hades. Love you, my misrepresented gumdrop.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was three days later that Nico and Leo got their first taste of Mount Olympus. There was a meeting for everyone that had made a big part in the battle, where Hades was invited to come as part of the counsel. Percy was invited, and he got to choose some people to invite along with him. Obviously, the first people he invites are Annabeth, Tyson and Grover. The satyr, however, had to decline to have a meeting of his own with the counsel of Elders in the forest. So, he invited Nico and Leo.

They were surprised to be asked, but accepted. Who were they to turn down seeing Olympus? It might be their only chance.

The two of them tried to follow Percy’s example, him having been to Olympus before, and went kneel, but it was difficult, seeing as Nico’s leg still had stitches in it and Leo was the only thing keeping him upright, so they ended up doing an awkward kind of bow, but none of the gods seemed to be offended.

Most of their thrones had been at least partially destroyed, so they were just sitting on piles of rubble for the most part (which the boyfriends were definitely going to joke about later). The pair made their way to Hades, who smiled as they hobbled over. Percy and Annabeth seemed confused over why they just waltzed over to their parent, especially why Leo would, since Hephaestus was his actual father, but said nothing of it.
“Tyson.” Poseidon began, breaking the silence. “You have been a great asset in fighting alongside your demigod friends, we have spoken and decided to give you the title of General of the Cyclopes.”

“Really?”

“Yes.” Poseidon answered, smiling softly.

“Cool.” The cyclopes breathed.

“Annabeth.” Athena called. “You have shown interest in architecture. Olympus has been, frankly, destroyed in recent events. How would you like to be official architect for Olympus, in charge of design and construction?”

“It would be my honor, mother.” Annabeth said, stars in her eyes.

“Perseus Jackson.” You could practically feel Percy’s cringe at the sound of his first name. “You exceeded expectations and showed great bravery in this last battle, and the quests preceding it. We have agreed to grant you one wish, including immortality, which we swear on the River Styx to uphold.”

“Anything?” Percy asked, obviously thinking.

“Yes.”

The son of Poseidon thought hard for a good minute, then looked at Annabeth’s terrified yet supportive face, along with Tyson’s proud one. He finally looked towards Nico and Leo, sitting happily together at the foot of Hades’ rubble pile. They were leaning on one another, the former with his eyes closed but obviously paying attention. His decision was cemented then.

“I would like to decline the offer of immortality.” The gods and goddesses around them all sucked in a surprised breath, and Annabeth let out a sigh of relief. “Instead of that, I would like you, all of you, to make a promise. No more build up in the Hermes cabin. Claim your children as they come in, there’s no reason to let them think they’re unwanted or for them to wonder. And let’s get some
more cabins. There should be a Hades cabin,” Nico’s and Leo’s eyes sprung open at the last two words, not expecting that. “And an Iris cabin and so many more that I’m forgetting. And the oath is, forgive me, but it’s stupid. Just because people mucked up in the past doesn’t mean we are going to. Did I go on a murderous rampage? No. Did Nico take over the world with a skeleton army? No. Thalia even joined the Hunters Of Artemis! An entire group of girls that will not let her go off the rails, even though she’s one of the most level-headed people I know. With all due respect, the oath was a stupid way to avoid the inevitable, and here’s the important part -we didn’t destroy the world.” Percy was ranting, he knew it. In his past visits to Olympus, he had been scared to speak, fearing being smited at something he said. But now they were giving him the chance to ask for something, anything, and he was going to get what he wanted.

“Ha!” Hades barked out a laugh, making the gods turn their shocked expressions his way, while Nico and Leo just chuckled at their reactions. “What? It’s funny. You’ve got guts, kid.” All of the gods, save for Poseidon, scowled at him. “Don’t get all high and mighty on me. I’ve been living with two teens for nearly as many years now, it’s better to laugh along with them, cause they don’t stop.” Now Nico and Leo were giving them fake glares.

“So.” Zeus declared. “You wish for all demigods to be claimed as soon as they get to Camp Half-Blood, cabins for Hades and the minor gods, and for the oath to be cleared. Yes?”

“Yes.”

“Then we shall grant it.” Zeus sighed out, it was clear he would much rather prefer to grant immortality than to have a brat mouth off to him, but had sworn on the River Styx, and thus was forced to uphold it.

The meeting dissolved into a kind of party, almost. The gods morphed to human-sized (mostly so they wouldn’t step on the demigods), and they mingled. Nico was happy to see that Hades and the other gods were getting along well, with no arguments or fights breaking out -but he also saw his father and Zeus avoid each other like two negatively charged ions.

“You should go say hi to your dad.” Nico suggested, with his sore leg they had opted to stay where they were, instead of mingling with the gods.

“Why? It’s not like I don’t have yours.” Leo responded, trying to keep his tone light and conversational.

“But it would be nice for me to get the kind of ‘meet the parents’, wouldn’t you think?” the Italian kid shot back, noticing Leo tense up and trying not to unnerve him.
Leo looked at his boyfriend. “This is one of those things you’re not going to let go until I do it, isn’t it?” He spotted Hephaestus near Hestia, making polite conversation about the hearth.

“You know me so well.” Nico flirted, batting his eyelashes as the Mexican boy laughed beside him. “Now come on!” He stood up, pulling Leo up with him.

“Fine. But you’re coming with me.”

“Do we do things any other way?” They shared a chaste kiss before making their way over to the gods.

Silence had fallen over the two gods by the time Leo and Nico actually got to the hearth. Hestia was the first to notice the newcomers.

“Oh, hello, demigods. Nico and…..Leo? Right? Hades hasn’t stopped talking about you two. He’s proud.” She turned her attention to a small group of gods, who had called her over. “Oh, excuse me.”

Hephaestus looked up at Leo’s name. “Oh, hello. Get cold near the thrones?”

“Yeah, little bit. Nico forgot his jacket and it’s still Spring so he’d be cold everywhere.”

“You say that like you don’t prefer to spend the entire summer indoors.”

“And you say that like you wouldn’t get a sunburn after three minutes in the sun.” Leo laughed when Nico pouted.

“So we know you two haven’t been at Camp Half-Blood much, what have you been doing for the past two years?” Hephaestus asked.

“Exploring, mostly. Walking across America and staying alive. Saving Aquaman over there a couple times. Finding things we probably aren’t supposed to, having fun learning how not to go to
China, learning how to fight by fighting each other.” Leo said, holding Nico a little closer, nerves creeping into his body language.

“Yeah, that sounds about right.” Hades said, creeping up behind them.

“Hiya dad.” Nico said, turning towards his father.

“I came over to steal Nico, if that’s alright. We need to work on something.”

“I can’t really walk right now-”

“That’s fine.” Without warning, Hades picked up his son and threw him over his shoulder.

“Really ?!” Nico squealed, surrendering to the position, trying to not aggravate his stitches more than they already were. They walked past the shocked faces of gods and demigods alike, neither believing that the god of the underworld could act so…fatherly. Hades let his son down halfway across the room, still letting Nico lean on him. “What did you need me to work on?”

“Getting Leo to be less tense around his father. He wants to, you know that, I know that. I’m not his dad and he wants one.”

“Dad, he loves you.”

“Oh I know. And I love him too, and so does Persephone and you. But it’s still not the same. Think about it, if you hadn’t had a father all your life and neither had your best friend in the world, then he suddenly found his, wouldn’t you want to be able to find yours too?”

“Of course. I was the one to suggest going to talk to him, you know.”

“Yeah, I know. But you were also the thing stopping Hephaestus from striking up a good conversation. Us gods, we get nervous too, you know. Some of us are just better at covering it than others. Athena thinks logically and calms herself that way, Aphrodite is confident -or at least has a really good mask of one, Ares defaults to war with his children, and Hermes breaks the ice by stealing something from his kids and talking about it. We all have some kind of coping
“What about you? You seemed pretty relaxed when I first met you.”

“Well, you kneeled when you first came in, so I thought you might be a demigod looking for something in the underworld, like Percy was the first time I met him. Then you said your name and I was relieved, because not a couple weeks beforehand Bianca had come through, so I thought maybe you had died and when I saw you hadn’t….I cried. You have to remember me crying. It’s not something many people see.”

“I remember, but I was kinda busy crying myself.”

“Yeah I know. Hey look.” Hades pointed at Leo and Hephaestus, the latter was mussing up the former’s hair, much like Hades would do.

The ghostly pair smiled. “Should we join them again?” Nico asked.

“Let’s.” Hades just helped Nico through the crowd this time instead of picking him up, no need to draw more attention.

~~~Meanwhile With Leo~~~

Leo watched Hades’ retreating form, becoming more nervous by each silent second that passed.

“He seems like a good kid.”

“Yeah, he was my first friend. He’s my only friend. I love him more than anything.”

“I can tell. Being a child of Hades has got to be hard, people hear ‘god of the underworld’ and they imagine the grim reaper, then that gets transferred to his kids. I never wanted him to be kicked off Mount Olympus, I can’t even remember why he was, but I was one of the few that voted against it.

“I’m glad you have someone like him. I’m sorry I can’t be there, but I’m up here and it wouldn’t
be fair. I’ve got more kids at camp, and I have matters here. Hades is lucky, in that respect. He can be close to his kids; up here, the rest of us can’t.”

“You should have seen him when he first saw Nico. I’m pretty sure he thought he was a ghost or something, but you could see his relief. I think he actually cried.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. Ran up and hugged him, it wasn’t at all like I thought it’d be like. I definitely didn’t think I’d be allowed to stay down there, but, like you said, those were assumptions based off of rumors.”

Hephaestus chuckled and ruffled Leo’s hair, much like Hades would do, and the demigod relaxed. He saw Nico making his way over with his father, and smiled. They sat in a comfortable silence until they arrived, the Italian being handed over to lean on his boyfriend when they did get there. The fire wielder placed a kiss on the other’s forehead.

The makeshift party came to a close soon after. Percy and his group said some things about needing to check in with Chiron and Hades didn’t want to stay there, where his brothers would no doubt start a fight with him. Hephaestus said bye to Leo, and they went back the underworld.

The summer came and went. The pair travelled all throughout it. They did spend time in the Roman camp, Camp Jupiter, and made a kind of name for themselves. Nico found out about a half-sister of his, Hazel. Well, she was the daughter of Pluto, so kind of, but it was enough for her.

She was a bit odd, though. She was always looking at Leo with this really confused look, like she was trying to remember something but it wouldn’t quite come. Suffice to say, they never stayed for long.

A new prophecy was given. One about seven heroes, one that Leo was really worried about.

*To storm or fire the world must fall.*
Fire. That was Leo. Leo had fire in his veins, could walk through a wall of fire and only have his clothed singed. They were worried and looking out for any single sign that something was happening.

Then it happened. For the second time in his life, Nico was actually terrified, and the same thing had caused it.

Leo was gone.

Chapter End Notes

So...writing Hephaestus was SOOOO hard. At least with Hades I already have a personality for him, but I had to create this kinda-absent-dad-meeting-his-son-for-the-first-time and it was difficult. Mostly because he's also a god that's used to his kids being super reserved around him and then you have Leo. Please comment, I'll have the next chapter up as fast as I can! XD
Catch Me While I'm Sleeping

Chapter Summary

You can catch me while
I'm sleepin', darlin'
While I'm dreamin', too
It's a lonely, lonely, lonely place
for me baby
It must get lonely for you, too

Chapter Notes

This is a bit fast paced, mostly because I wanted things to be side by side with each other but also add some new things and figure out what to do with my boys....I just hope you like it

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Nico couldn’t believe this, the second time! This time it was straight out of Nico’s arms! They had been lying in bed, in the underworld, visiting Hades and Persephone during one of the last weeks of summer, before starting in a new high school, travel provided by the shadows, and studying the best their ADHD would allow and seeing how long it would take for Leo (and therefore Nico) to be kicked out for tinkering with school property and the small fires.

But he had been snatched from his hands in the middle of the underworld. This would take more power than a measly greedy monster had, Hades would be furious. Stealing from his own realm, and someone so important. Nico scrambled out of bed, putting on his sweats as he started to feel colder without Leo there.

The more he thought about it, the worse he felt. What were the odds of bringing Leo back if someone much bigger was at play? If someone had passed by Cyberius and brought Leo out, they had to get passed Hades too, if they even came in physically….Nico had tears streaming down his face by the time he reached Persephone.

She greeted him with a smile, turning around as she spoke, “Good mor - where’s Leo?” When that earned a sob, she hugged Nico close. “Again?” The demigod nodded. Persephone’s eyes started to well slightly with tears. “How? We have so many defences, how?”
“I don’t know....” Nico trailed off.

“Oh, baby, I don’t expect you to.”

Hades walked in from the throne room. “Where’s Leo.”

“Gone.” Nico choked out. “Stolen right from my hands while I was sleeping. Iris messages aren’t going through. Why does this keep happening?”

Hades went passed sad and went right to angry, going on about how they were going to find who took Leo and how he was going to make sure it didn’t happen again.

The difference this time was they had no idea where to look. He could be anywhere in the world, anywhere off the world….he could’ve been killed. They might’ve just come in and killed him, and they would search forever, not knowing whether to look for a boy or a body.

Nico- Nico couldn’t handle that thought. He steeled his nerves, broke away from Persephone’s embrace, told them he was going looking, and ran off into a shadow.

The first place he went was Camp Half-Blood. When he found them running around looking for Percy, he decided they were no help, but that this was definitely bigger than just Leo.

Nico was running around the world for nearly two months, just looking around in places they had been, places they had returned to, places Leo would try to meet up with Nico.

He had no such luck.

Two months of nonstop shadow travelling and the child of Hades was 100% he would get a lecture when he met up with Leo again. He hadn’t been sleeping all that well, being cold in the middle of
the night and having to travel through places where it was snowing and then be in the desert and then still being cold because somehow it was constantly night and night was cold. Bottom line- he couldn’t get warm, and he was panicking, just a bit.

He knew Leo was still alive, if he wasn’t his spirit would’ve passed through the palace doors and Nico would’ve been left to grieve. Plus he would’ve felt it. Like what happened with Bianca, and everyone close to him that had died. But he knew Leo was alive, he just had to find him.

It was the longest they’d ever been apart since the day they met. If Nico thought the three days when Geryon had taken him captive had been bad, now he was missing the fire wielder more than ever.

Eventually, though, he decided he couldn’t do it alone, so he went to Reyna.

The co-leader of Camp Jupiter seemed stressed out. She looked up as soon as he walked in and sat up once Leo didn’t trail behind him. She pulled out some a protein shake, one they would give the campers if they had gotten no sleep because of nightmares or whatever, and set it in front of Nico.

“You look like shit.” She said.

“Thanks, you don’t look too hot yourself.” He responded dryly.

“I’m not kidding. You look almost….unhealthy. Like…hollow. Almost as if I could pass my hand through you if I wasn’t careful.”

“I’ve…I’ve been traveling a lot.”

“Looking for boy wonder I assume?”

Nico nodded. “What’s gotten you running around?”
“One of ours went missing too. Jason Grace, son of Jupiter. He was the other leader, but nobody knows where he is.”

“Let me guess, disappeared in the middle of the night, no trace, nobody’s seen anything, not even your oracle?”

“Yeah, how’d you-” Reyna cut herself off at the glare Nico sent her way. “Right, boy wonder.”

“So, we think they’re in the same place?”

“Probably.” The Roman responded. “Same thing took them both, probably has another one from somewhere. Rule of three and all that.”

“Yeah, a son of Poseidon, uhh, your Neptune, by the name of Percy Jackson was taken from Camp Half-Blood around the same time.”

“Right around two months ago?”

“Yup.” Nico said, popping the ‘p’ and finishing his drink. “Thanks, Reyna. Message me if you see Leo. I have a feeling he’d come here if he were in California.”

They were interrupted by a loud crash outside, they ran to it, to see a teenager running with an old lady in his hands, along with two others fighting something coming straight for the camp. As soon as the first boy touched the river, though, something changed in his demeanor. He seemed to grow more confident as he made the water into the shape of a fist, using his abilities to kill the two monsters.

“I’m guessing that’s Percy?”

“Yup. Christmas came early this year, but I would doubt he knows anything.”

Sure enough, the old lady, who introduced herself as Juno (Hera- Nico’s mind cataloged), confirmed the boy to be Percy, and promptly disappeared. Hazel and Frank, the two demigods that had been behind Percy, walked the newcomer to Reyna, who nearly tripped over himself trying to
get a better look at Nico.

“Do I know you?” He asked, looking over the child of Hades as if trying to place him in his memory. It put fear in Nico’s heart, what if Leo didn’t remember him at all? Percy had obviously gotten his memory wiped, if Leo didn’t remember him......Nico didn’t want to think about it, didn’t want to cry in front of all the campers now staring at him.

“No.” He nearly snapped, then turned to Reyna. “Message me, please.” He waited for her ‘of course’ before running into the shadows to continue his search.

Over the course of the next four months, he got tips from Reyna. They were constantly monitoring for odd things, looking for Jason (and now Leo), and telling Nico so he could check it out.

He couldn’t find anything, though, he seemed to show up just hours after whoever was there left. He first shows up to Detroit, where it is clear a battle had just gone down, and Nico gets some hope, there is a chain that it clearly melted, and it was too cold for that to be done in an old warehouse, with no blowtorches, so Leo had to be close. But, knowing Leo’s skill with machines, he could be miles away in any direction, or very nearby, and Nico just couldn’t travel everywhere before going back to the underworld and passing out.

The next place was in the middle of nowhere. It was one of those houses with a lot of land and you can just tell the owners are rich, big security system, lots of expensive things. Nico couldn’t tell if Leo had been there, but there was a whole in the roof where it looked like a lightning bolt had come straight through, it seemed like it might be Jason, so he told Reyna.

Eventually, Nico makes it to a mountain on his own. It’s unassuming, just a snowy mountain with a faint trail marking the way to climb. The demigod sees footsteps and followed them for a good twenty minutes, leading him to a group of hikers, no wait….the Hunters!

“Thalia!”

Immediately, all the hunters had their weapons drawn and aimed to him, but they were put down as Nico marched up to one of his good friends and gave her a hug, then continued walking up the mountain.
“Hey Nico, what are you doing here? And without Leo?”

A couple girls made faces at the thought of more boys. “I’m looking for him, actually. See him.”

“Yeah, he was with another boy and a girl. Elch, boys.”

“Why are you looking for him? Now that I think about it, why are you separated? I don’t think I’ve ever seen you this long without him around.”

“It’s…..a long story. One that I don’t have time for. Do you know where he went?”

“Hey!” One of the girls piped up. “Show some respect, boy. You need help from us, remember?”

Nico had his sword out and pointed at her throat in less than two seconds. “Listen, lady, but I really don’t have time for this. I’ve been looking for my boyfriend for nearly five months now, and I’m not waiting for you to spontaneously like me to get him back. Thalia?” He called out, not looking away from the girl’s face. “Do you know where they went?”

“Mount Diablo.”

He only stayed for a second to say ‘thank you’, then Nico was gone.

“Why didn’t you stop him!?”

“You basically insulted Leo to his face and wasted his time. I would’ve done the same thing.”

“So what you like boys now?”

Thalia laughed, “There are some I prefer over most, yes, but I just know you don’t fuck with Leo while Nico’s there, and visa versa. So pretty much, don’t fuck with Nico or Leo. I thought you learned your lesson with Leo earlier.”
Nico showed up to Mount Diablo while it was still on fire. Leo had definitely been here. There was a perfect circle of fire and ash, with lightning marks here and there. The other two had been here too, the girl -Piper- and the boy, the roman boy -Jason. Nico thought back to when he had met up with Percy all those months ago, really it was three but it had been a long three months. Would Leo remember him? Would Leo still love him? Would Leo even know who Leo was?

The demigod steeled himself, there was only one way to find out, and that’s when Reyna called.

“Nico! There’s something big going down at the Wolf House. Yes, there were just a kind of attack there, yes that was handled, Nico! Let me give you the name of the mountain! How do you already know- You know what? I’m not going to even ask.”

That was how Nico travelled into the middle of a battle. He saw Leo out of the corner of his eye but was quickly attacked by an earthborn. He took out his sword and ended the battle by summoning a skeleton army and destroyed the creature.

He was drained of nearly all his energy, legs about to give out when familiar arms wrapped around him.

“Leo.” He whispered.

“You are a fucking idiot. I can see it.” Nico felt a hand rummage in his jacket pocket and pulled out a baggie. “You have been running yourself ragged, haven’t you? Eat.” Leo said as he pressed a square of ambrosia to his boyfriend’s lips. “I can tell you haven’t walked anywhere in a few months, so that means shadow travel, and knowing you, you haven’t stopped except when you had to.”
“Had to- had to find you.”

“Yeah yeah, well then you used up what would be all your energy on a good day.”

“Adrenaline.”

“Not a good enough excuse.”

“I’m tired.” Nico said through a yawn.

“Go to sleep, I’ve got you.” Leo stood, easily picking Nico up with him. “You haven’t been eating, have you? That’s it, I’m cooking when we get home.”

Nico only answered with a snore.

Chapter End Notes

There it is. The whole meet up with Reyna was supposed to explain why she knew a bit about him because that was a detail, and I wanted Nico to be on the right track, showing up to the big things just a second too late with no idea where they went, but also put a little humour....it’s a careful balance. I hope you guys like it!!!!!!
Another One Rides The Bus (part 1)

Chapter Summary

I picked this song for the literal interpretation of the title. It's a parody by Weird Al anyway so they usually don't have a serious meaning.

Chapter Notes

Leo's a bit OOC in this, a bit more emo than I wanted to write him, but then I don't know how he would be without Nico, and with all the shit done to him, I think he just wants to Nico ASAP.

And after I posted the last one, I realized I waited a month to update and didn't give a reason. It's kinda a shitty excuse, but I got together with someone and they broke up with me recently, so this is basically me ranting about it and me being all emo and shit. I hope you peoples like it XD

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Leo woke up on a bus. It was weird, he felt kinda dazed. He was alone on his bench, across from a girl- she was beautiful, by the way- and a boy- also pretty, but not his type. All he could remember were some broken memories about school with the two across from him. It seemed like they were together, and he was best friends with both of them (though the dude seemed pretty gay).

He didn’t know why, but he felt….unsafe. Unsafe like there was someone supposed to be next to him, someone that he trusted. Someone that would protect him, someone that he loved.

Leo scooted back to the corner of the seat, somehow feeling safer in the shadows, out of the light. There had to be a story to that feeling, a story he couldn’t remember.

Jason, the boy across from him, woke up at that moment, looking around, seeming more confused than Leo felt. When blondie started asking the girl next to him, Piper, who he was, Leo knew they were in the same boat, almost.

As Jason berated Piper with questions, she turned to Leo, trying to get him to confirm her stories, but he leaned against the window and faked a yawn, pretending to go back to sleep.
Half an hour later they had stopped and Leo made sure he was one of the first to get off the bus, the uneasy feeling making him suspicious. Something told him he had reason to feel like this, like the shadows would protect him, that the bright light of the Arizona sun would somehow hurt him, as if it had happened before.

They went on to explore the museum, Leo wanting to ask Jason a few things himself but didn’t want to be rude to Piper. Luckily, after an hour, the Cherokee girl had to go to the bathroom, giving the Mexican boy the perfect opportunity.

Looking faux interested at the sign before him, Leo asked. “You feel it too, huh?”

“Feel it, I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“You do, though. I know you do. Dude, are you even drawing the parallels? We were both napping, woke up and assessed the situation. I think you got it worse, though. Because when I woke up, I at least knew my name and had these…..memories. Memories of foster homes and the both of us, and Piper. Memories that feel wrong, like they didn’t happen. But I also have this….feeling. Like someone is supposed to be with me, like I don’t know what to do without them there, like I need to do what I need to do to stay alive and see them again, like they will break if I don’t.

“It’s like an itch under my skin. I’m trying to remember them, I think it’s a guy, but I can’t remember anything except what my body remembers. Odd things like take in your surroundings at all times, anything, anyone can be a monster in disguise, anybody can betray you, especially if they offer help. Things like shadows are your friends, light is dangerous, cold is home but ice is bad. You getting weird things like that?”

“Yeah, kinda. But...I’m not even getting the wrong memories. It’s just blank, like all I know is what’s happened since I woke up.”

“Maybe….maybe I’ve gone through some more shit than you, or maybe it’ll come out with stress. First things first though. I don’t know why, but I don’t- I can’t trust a lot of people right now. So, please, don’t tell Piper. That’ll probably change later, but, for now, keep it between us.” Leo saw Piper walking up to them in the reflection. “And not a second too soon.” He muttered.

“Wha- How did you?” He asked, looking past Leo to see Piper skipping toward them.
“I told you, I don’t know why I automatically do it, but I think I have skills not even I know about.”

“Oookkay.”

Things were going relatively normal. The class was just wandering around the museum, filling out the little questionnaire they had been given, that Leo had given up on once the letters started floating. He felt like he was being watched, and there was one kid that seemed to be staring at the three of them.

Jason is pulled away by Coach Hedge, the chaperone, to be asked about something. There was something going on, Leo knew it, even if he didn’t know why. Dylan, the kid that was watching them, was now staring adamantly out the window, watching as a storm came closing in. The museum staff were pulling visitors inside, seeing the storm and deciding it was too dangerous.

Dylan, however, went for the doors as the storm came closer, seemingly turning into the storm himself, until he was the shape of a large dust devil. Leo ran outside after him, though he was unsure what was going on, there was a familiar confidence, like he knew he could defeat this guy, even if he didn’t know how.

What Leo didn’t expect was Jason and Piper to run out after him, nor for his hands to burn. Literally burn, but it didn’t hurt, it was just hotter than normal, and the rain falling all over them just sizzled. Jason, for all he didn’t know, pulled out a coin, then somehow got a sword out of that, and attacked Dylan.

Leo had a hard time following the battle, but at one point Jason got hit with lightning, and survived, somehow losing his shoe along the way. Then Piper got thrown off the cliff, followed by Jason jumping to save her and the mini-tornado flying into the sky.

Jason and Piper, surprisingly, survived, blondie flying them up and landing safely. Almost on cue, an honest to god chariot with pegasi came down from the sky, holding a blonde girl and a buff guy with a rainbow tattoo.

Girl Naruto and Reg from Spongebob spoke with Jason for a while, making the latter seem like the chosen one, then boarded them all on the chariot. Leo hardly spoke on the trip, still having that little inkling in the back of his mind, like he should know something- someone- but he didn’t, and it was almost pissing him off.
He tried to tease Butch, the buff guy, but only succeeded in annoying him a bit. Annabeth, the girl, seemed like she knew him a bit, and was a bit awkward as soon as he said he didn’t remember anything. Needless to say, it was a long ride.

Immediately upon getting to camp, Leo was pretty much left alone. At some point he must’ve pissed everyone in the Hephaestus cabin off, because while he was positive he should be going there, he was lead to the dark Hades cabin.

As odd as it was, it felt as close to home as he could feel without that someone there. He layed down on the bed, the only one that seemed had ever been used. Leo sighed as he sunk down. It smelled like home. How did he know what home smelled like if he couldn’t even remember what home looked like?

There was a knock on the doorframe. Leo shot up, another fucking blonde.

“Yeah?”

“Wow, I always thought you would be more….carefree without your counterpart. Then again, Annabeth told me you couldn’t remember much, that might make me snappy, so I thought you might want to know somethings you two decided to share with me.”

“Well, obviously you know me, what can you tell me? Oh, and what’s your name, again?”

“Will, and the guy you’re missing? His name was Nico.”

Leo felt a tug in the back of his mind, like he was going to remember something. “And I’m guessing he was the son of Hades?”

“Yeah, cabin give it away?”

“Little bit….. I was…….close to Nico, huh?”

“Close? Ha! Understatement of the century. I’ve never seen you two apart for more than twenty minutes, except for about two or three days ago when he was looking for you. He’s worried, and
we tried to message him as soon as you showed up, but we can’t get through to him or Hades.”

“What was he to me?”

“Well, I can’t say too much, because I hear getting memories back can be incredibly painful, especially if they don’t want to come back yet, but I think he was everything to you, and you to him. There was no one either of you valued more, you would strike someone down for so much as saying a negative offhand comment about them. I think the only people both of you have ever loved and trusted as much as each other are dead.”

“Who’s dead?”

“Ahh...that’s not dire. Now I know something that might make you feel better.” Will walked over to the dresser closest to the bed. “Sometimes you two would show up and Nico would pass out or you would be hurt, and the underworld doesn’t have the best medical supplies, so you came here and I patched you up. I eventually had to throw away so many bloodied and/or torn shirts that you both started leaving some in here.” He pulled out a couple of shirts from opposite sides of the drawer. Some were black and others were bright. There was one that was a big rainbow, one he reached out for, pale skin and a bright smile coming to mind, making him smile himself.

“That one you two found at a pride parade. It’s Nico’s favorite, but he wouldn’t ever admit that in front of anybody, though. And one more thing,” He pulled out a sweatshirt. “This was what Nico always wore. And I know you never wear any warm clothes because fire and all that, but it might help you remember or just make you feel better.”

“Thanks, Will.”

“Anytime.”

Leo looked down at the clothes, Will was right, they smelled like home.

--

The fire wielder wandered around the forest. It felt like there was something back here, something sentient, something interesting. Then he saw it, a giant bronze dragon. It seemed friendly enough, barely singeing his clothes as it breathed fire. Oh yes, this was a keeper, he’d call it Festus.
On his way back to the camp for dinner, Leo found another cabin, one that was kinda run down and unused, where he found his new favorite thing, a magic tool belt.

--

Leo sat by himself at dinner, something he felt he would get used to. He didn’t feel right going to the Hephaestus table, and didn’t mind being by himself at the Hades able.

People were whispering around him, about where Nico was, about what might’ve happened, about what had happened to the other missing camper. Then they started to go on about what might’ve happened to Nico, and with instincts he couldn’t seem to turn off, Leo heard every comment said near him.

“Maybe he was looking around and ran into a monster.”

“You’re not supposed to go alone for a reason.”

“Always travel in groups of two, three if that’s possible.”

“I wonder if they broke up…..”

With that last one, Leo stood up from the table and left. He walked towards the Hades cabin without stopping. Not for anybody, no matter if Jason was running after him. He had to get his memories back, absolutely had to.

“You’re not leaving, are you?”

“Actually, I plan on it. I need to find a way to get to Nico, he’s not dead, I know that for a fact, and we definitely did not break up, so I’m going to find him, or visa versa. Anything to get out of this camp, where I don’t think we were ever fully welcome.”

“At least stay for the campfire.”

“I have memories to get back.” Leo said, trying to push past Jason, who pushed back.
“You think you’re the only one?” Jason asked, becoming visibly furious. “Remember that conversation we had? I couldn’t even remember my own name. I still don’t know anything about myself other than I really liked dinner. I don’t know if Piper is really my girlfriend or what, because those memories seem to only exist for her. I can’t tell you where home is, nobody here knows a thing about me so I can’t get information that way. Leo, I don’t know a thing about myself, so why don’t you think about someone else for a change?”

“Are you afraid of things and you don’t know why? Does your brain say things are fine but you still can’t help but tense when you step in the light. Did you almost have a panic attack because you had ice in your drink? Or that you might not ever see the one person you can remember might not ever see you alive again? That you might not ever see the one face you can put even partially together?

“Here’s the thing, Jason. Not knowing things sucks, especially when you should know but you don’t remember, but what you don’t know won’t hurt you.” As Leo tried to leave the cabin, he got the biggest migraine ever, he was remembering something. Will wasn’t lying when he said it hurt. But he could remember a room filled with light and ice, and how Nico had run himself ragged trying to save him.

As he came back to himself, he saw Jason bent over him, concern flooding his features. “Fine, I’ll go to the campfire. But I won’t promise anything more.”

--

And at that campfire told them all something very important.


Child of flight, beware the earth,
Through fire’s quest remembrance shall birth.
The moon’s hunter shall incite the rage,
And death return to Hera’s cage.

Chapter End Notes

So I didn't get it all in, and I changed the prophecy so that it included more of what I wanted it to be. There should be another chapter up soon, I don't know exactly when, but I'll get it to you guys ASAP
I might not update once a week like I've been trying to do, though I've been failing miserably. I post as I write, and I started a new one. But I hope you like this, the next chapter will have a lot more fluff, I promise.

Leo froze at the last line of the prophecy, his mind trying to connect something. Something from his past, something he couldn’t remember, but he had to go. Then people started talking.

“Well fire’s obviously Leo.”

“Yeah, and flight has to be Jason.”

“Maybe they came together for a reason.”

“Moon’s hunter? The hunters are coming in?”

“And death? Is one of them going to die?”

“This needs to be done by the solstice, then, for Hera to be released.”

“The summer one was last month, five months until the next.”

“We have plenty of time.”

Chiron got their attention by clearing his throat. “We might as well use the time we have been given, and not dilly dally. It’ll give them more time to find what they need, not be in a rush like we so often are on quests. Three go on quests, and I believe we all know the obvious choices. Jason, flight, Leo, fire, and Piper. Though she was not mentioned in the prophecy, she arrived with the rest, for a reason.”
Drew, the counselor for the Aphrodite cabin, spoke up. “I think I should go, since Ugly Duckling over there hasn’t been chosen yet.”

The girls around her were snickering. “Actually.” One of them said. “She did. Aphrodite. Piper was claimed while you were making out with Travis in the closet.”

The boy in question smirked and tossed back a necklace when Drew glared at him. “You do it to break hearts, I do it to take things. A right of passage, you could say.”

The entire camp erupted in laughter, except Jason and Leo, who had no idea what was going on.

The latter raised his hand. “Can I-”

“Yes, you can go back to your cabin, but be ready to leave around noon tomorrow.” Chiron answered, knowing what he wanted.

“Aye aye, cap’n.” He said as he practically ran back to the cabin.

He had nightmares of ice and light and isolation that night.

--

Leo woke up early the next morning, unable to go back to sleep with the nightmares. So he went back to the forest and started up his newest project of fixing up the old dragon in the woods. He worked until his stomach was growling and he couldn’t see an exhausted pale face, barely holding onto life, every time he closed his eyes.

--

Leo could barely eat before they took off. He didn’t think he could keep much down, so he just had a small bowl of minestrone soup. The dish familiar, though he couldn’t figure out why.
It took half the day to figure out where they needed to go, it took them three days to travel to Quebec, Canada to meet Boreas.

They arrived and were immediately almost attacked by two -literally icy- dudes. Piper saved the day, though, by using her charmspeak and getting them into the residence.

Leo immediately felt uneasy, the same thing that went with his apparent love of cold but fear of ice. He didn’t trust it, felt restrained, almost claustrophobic.

“You doing okay, sweetheart?” Some girl said off to the side of him, putting her chilling hand around his arm and making him freeze in his spot.

“Let go of me.” He said, danger creeping into his voice. Whoever this Nico person was, he needed him there. He didn’t feel safe, felt even less safe in the ice.

“I’m sorry?” She asked, holding on tighter.

“**Let go. Now.**” He said, trying to pull away, but only made her hold tighter, an evil gleam in her eyes.

Jason and Piper had stopped in front of him looking back with worry at the obvious panic in his eyes.

“Come on, I’ll help you.” The lady said. But all Leo was thinking was that he couldn’t use fire. His oxygen would run out if he used fire, that would be counterproductive to anything. He settled back on what he knew, stay calm and help your friend in any way you can. Friend? Friends….he had two friends here.

“Leo? You alright?” Piper asked, though it was obvious she could see the turmoil on his face.

“You two go ahead. I’ll, uh, I’ll stay here. Keep watch and all that.”
“You sure?”

“Yeah. Go ahead.” They left and he was alone with nothing but ice.

“Silly demigod.” The girl, her brothers called her Khione, said. “Did you know I’m always looking for new art? I just never seem to find things that suit my style. I prefer to make my own.”

Ice started to creep through his skin, into his bone, and he tried to think logically. No fire, but he could burn without flames.

Leo turned his body temperature much higher than the average human body could withstand, burning the ice goddess’s hand off of him. “You should know, sweetheart, that I’m taken.”

“Oh, Piper? Was that her name? Don’t worry, she’ll make a nice weeping statue next to you.”

“Actually. She won’t. And you won’t even get to know his name.” Leo had been planning on lighting up right there, just as she was getting ready to try and freeze him again, but he was transported out of there and landed in Chicago.

--

“Leo, you okay?” Piper asked as they landed. She had seen him panic in Quebec, and though he waved them off, it was clear he wasn’t doing okay.

He came back down to earth from somewhere in his panicked mind. His face and hands were red, an unnatural red, he was pretty sure if it rained he would sizzle like it had at the Grand Canyon. He closed his eyes, pulling up the only things he could think of to calm him down. A boarding school graveyard, a boyish pale face thrown back in laughter, a different face, more feminine but the same pale, a card game.

When he opened his eyes, his hands were back to their darkened brown, no longer that angry red.

“Yeah…..yeah I’m fine. I just….I don’t like ice.”
“Okay. Wanna talk about it? You looked a bit freaked out and we have time if you want to talk.” Piper and Jason sat down on a bus bench, both to wait for it and to wait for Leo to start talking.

“It’s just….I don’t know. I can’t remember.”

“What do you mean?” Piper asked, her voice genuinely curious and worried.

“I….uh….I told Jason, when we got off that bus. I didn’t feel like I could trust anybody else and I didn’t know why, and I still don’t, but I barely trusted myself. I couldn’t remember anything except my own name.”

“Like Jason had?”

“Almost…but he couldn’t remember anything, even those fake ones. I had those and I remembered things like my name and my age and where I was….but there were these….feelings. Instincts I didn’t know why I had, things like there was someone missing from right next to me, odd things like shadows and cold were safety, but ice was dangerous. Not to trust anyone, look out everywhere because I was on my own and anyone and everyone could hurt me without the other person there.

“When we got to camp, Will told me his name was Nico, and that we were closer than close, that nobody had seen one of us without the other except for when Nico apparently went there looking for me. He told me that he couldn’t help with my memories, because they’re really painful to get back, as Jason here was there to see before the campfire.

“I guess the logical thing would be to think that, even though my memories were gone, maybe since I was so dependant on Nico and visa versa, it was ground into my brain to protect him, and I would be protected with him there.

“I will readily admit that if I thought there was any way for me to find Nico by staying at the camp, or by going anywhere else, I would get up right now and do it, no matter how long it took, but it seems like nobody can reach him and he’s not going back to that camp for a while, that he’s more likely to just search in random places, run himself ragged looking everywhere I’m not instead of going back to Camp Half Blood.” Leo didn’t know how he felt towards the end of that. Obviously annoyed at the supposed love of his life was nearly killing himself trying to find Leo, but also a little bit humbled over the length Nico was willing to go for him.
“Why does he hate the camp, do you know?” Jason asked.

“I don’t. But judging by the way people acted around me, I wasn’t the biggest fan either.”

“Why are you telling us now, if you didn’t trust us before?” Piper asked, voice non judgemental, understanding, knowing that they were all going through almost the same thing.

“Well, I told Jason about the memory thing as soon as I could tell he didn’t know anything either. But now, knowing that all of our minds were toyed with….it’s easier to trust someone else who doesn’t know what’s going on, than it is to trust someone who thinks they do….if that makes any sense.”

“Well I see one major difference between each of us, and why maybe it was us that were chosen.” the daughter of Aphrodite said. “Jason, you have obvious fighting skills, something that will come in handy in what seems to be a much more dangerous world than most people perceive it. I have charmspeak, or persuasion as I’d like to think about it, which could get us in and out of things easier -places, situations- and get the things we need, bargaining. And Leo, you seem to have an unrelenting skepticism. It could keep us from trusting people who end up not being on your side, because I think you probably were lied to before, you and Nico, and that was why you didn’t trust us at first. You analyzed the situation, looked for the signs that someone might not be what they say, and if I’m not wrong, you haven’t stopped.”

Jason and Leo looked at each other, she was spot on, as far as they knew.

“What?” Piper said coyly. “I’m no child of Athena, but I pay attention.”

They sat in a comfortable silence, the boys on the sides with Piper in between them, until the bus came.

--

They went through the motions, going here and there and across America trying to complete the quest, taking their time and looking everywhere they could for everything that was there.

Before they knew it, it was December, they all knew about Leo’s fire, they were standing outside the wolf house, and Piper was a vegetarian.
There was a big battle between some Earthborn on a mountain right before this, and the entire time they left somewhere, Leo always felt they were leaving a bit too early, but could never find a reason to ask the others to stay.

So they stood in front of this house, in the middle of nowhere; Jason and Piper freezing their pants off in the snow, while to Leo it felt more like home than he had felt the entire time. The Hunters Of Artemis stood behind them, insisting that they couldn’t help with the battle, and Jason giving Thalia one more hug before voyaging inside.

Here awaited the end of an adventure, and so much more.

--

As the battle ended, the enemies slain with the help of someone none of them expected, nobody but one of them knew, Leo ran to the mystery figure. His memories returned with no pain whatsoever as he looked upon the face he loved.

The child of Hephaestus caught the Italian boy as he fell to his knees, the skeletal army dissolving around them as the energy left him, safe in the arms he had tried to hard to find.

“You are a fucking idiot.” was the first thing Leo said.

Chapter End Notes

There you go! I hope you enjoyed reading this, and I love to hear from you, so comment.
So maybe a little mention of suicidal thoughts in this one, but not as bad as you might be thinking.

And you should know. Everybody in my mind isn’t not gay. I believe with absolute certainty that everyone has at least looked, so….there’s that.

Leo clung to Nico as hard as he could the whole ride back to Camp Half Blood. He was still sleeping, but after five months of nearly nonstop shadow travel, it was highly likely that it would be like this for at least a week.

Piper and Jason looked happy for him now that he finally found his other half. They were shocked to see him run up and hug someone they didn’t know, considering he didn’t trust them for a while, but as soon as they saw the smile spreading throughout both faces, they knew who it was.

Together, the four of them were transported back to camp, relieved to have almost everything feel right again. Jason was slowly gaining back his memories, Piper had peace of mind now that her dad wasn’t going to go crazy, and Leo finally had Nico in his arms.

They were as happy as could be…..

For the split second the four were alone. As soon as they arrived at Camp Half Blood, chaos ensued. People surrounded Piper and Jason, while Leo just waved and carried his boyfriend to their bed in the Hades cabin.

What was odd, though, was people followed him. People he barely knew were asking after Nico, trying to see what had happened, like they had done with Percy and Annabeth after she had tumbled off that cliff and come back.

Leo didn’t know what to do. Nobody ever really came up to them like this, so he just told them he needed to take care of the other boy and closed the door on their face. Not the nicest thing, but he was going to take the first chance to be alone with his loverboy, and screw it if that meant he was bit rude. He wrapped Nico up in the sweatshirt he’d carried around, the one he clung to on the
nights he couldn’t sleep, the one that had started to stop smelling like Nico.

The weeks were spent in boredom for Leo. The first couple days Piper and Jason would come by and try to get him to leave, to not sit by Nico’s bedside and wait for him to wake up. They thought it was sad or something, that he would rather wait for someone not there to suddenly be instead of taking what was offered, but Leo didn’t think it was.

How was it sad to love someone so much that you would rather wait with them than have fun without them? It would be like if you left someone to wait in line at an amusement park and played the games. No, he would wait, because he needed to wait, he needed to see Nico awake for more than thirty seconds he needed the person he loved.

--

Nico waking up was a joyous celebration, for Leo at least. They spent the morning cuddling and kissing until they had to leave for fear of starvation. If the latter made the former pack in a little more food than normal, well, he had good reason to.

Nico got a lecture, many lectures, actually. He had never cared about what people told him to and not to do, aside from his sister, but he never wanted to hear this speech again. The first was from Chiron, telling him it was dangerous to go alone on excursions, especially ones where they didn’t know who the enemy was, both Nico and Leo rolled their eyes at that.

His next lecture was from Hades, once they finally made it to the underworld, telling him that so much shadow travelling was bad for him and he was grounded for at least a fortnight. He didn’t feel too bad when Leo got one for going missing.

The fourth was from Persephone, who told him he should eat and sleep more, even if he was stressed out. He felt bad, he hadn’t really spoken to either of his parents much while looking for Leo, even though he knew they were worrying too.

The last one he hated. It was done in the night, when they were about to go to sleep. Leo was cuddled up next to him like they had both longed to do in the past five months, but something was off. Leo was holding him a bit too tightly, a bit like he was afraid to let go.

“He, what’s wrong?”
“It happened again while you were sleeping.” Well, that could mean a number of things.

“What do you mean? You’re scaring m-”

“No. You’re scaring me. You hadn’t slept a full night or eaten a full meal until the other day. That’s five months, Nico. *Five months*. You can’t go on like that or else it’s going to happen more, I can’t take it if it happens more.”

“What happens, Leo? What?”

“You disappear. You disappear into the shadows and I asked Will about it and he said it wasn’t good. He said you were travelling too much, looking for me. *You can’t* do that Nico.”

Nico sat up, offended. “I can’t search for you when you go missing? Why the hell not?”

Leo stood up from the bed, turning to face Nico with a frustrated look. “Because I can’t take it if you kill yourself looking for me! You knew I wasn’t dead, but the only way I would ever find out for certain is if I find a way down here and Hades tells me!”

“I wouldn’t be that stupid!”

“No. You *are* that stupid! Want to know how I know? I watched as you faded away on the bed! You started slipping into the shadows as if you were a part of them! And you weren’t even awake to shadow travel! Want to know what happens if you die because of that?”

“What?”

“If you die from being so arrogant and reckless, then I die. Not just figuratively. I’ll become a husk of a person and barely be able to drag myself to the River Styx before I throw myself in!”

“Leo, no….You can’t do that. You can’t ever do that.”

“Why not, if you can go around and kill yourself doing it, why can’t I?”
“Because I don’t matter! You do! The difference between you and me is you have people to help you through it if I die. You have Piper and Jason and everybody at Camp Half-Blood to get you to move on. If you died, they’d probably assume I was the one that killed you.”

“You know that all of that is bullshit, right?”

“It’s really not.” As soon as he said it, Leo delivered a right hook aimed perfectly at his jaw.

“Don’t you dare say that. Don’t you dare think that. You have people. You have me. Don’t you say you don’t matter, because you matter to me. You’re all that matters to me.”

After everything had been laid on the table, they just stared at each other for about ten seconds before everything came crashing down. They just sat back down on the bed and laid there. They just breathed each other in while they thought over what just happened. They didn’t talk- they didn’t need to. No words were needed until the morning, when they could talk about this after having some time to think.

One thing, however, was said before either of them drifted off.

“You know I love you, right?” Said by both of them, at the same time.

---

Leo and Nico had a lot of work to do. On his adventures, Leo had seen a picture of a boat he’d drawn up when he was little, and now he was dead set on building it, so they spent more time at Camp Half-Blood than they otherwise might have.

Piper and Jason broke up. It wasn’t big like you might expect from a child of Aphrodite, but they both knew the relationship was fake and Jason calmly told Piper that he was gay (called it!), and that he loved her, just not the way she expected him to.

She took it all really well, saying how she didn’t blame him for looking at guys, and that she might be looking at girls the same way. All in all, they were still best friends by the end, and they both had to enlist Nico to help them drag Leo off his new project nearly every day so they could get at
Percy was still in Camp Jupiter. Even though they knew it wasn’t really him, not his memories or his personality, really, but they couldn’t get him back yet because he had been sent on a quest, and now it was the waiting game until he was back.

--

Leo was fairly quick in getting his newest toy up and running, considering how long it normally takes to build a warship. He accepted very minimal help from the other Hephaestus kids, but still put everything together in two months, perfect timing for Percy to get back.

The old quest was rehashed. Rachel said it again through the spirit of Delphi and Leo was once again freaked out by it. Prophecies never didn’t come true, but that didn’t mean that he had to fear himself, Nico told him, they just had to figure out a way to make the world okay after.

And so, the two of them, plus Piper and Jason and Annabeth, set forth to California, where they would pick up the last three of the prophecy and embark on their new journey to lands of old, where nothing was safe and none of them knew what they were doing.

It was going to be fun.

“Leo what the hell are you doing?”

*explosion noise*

Until Leo decided to try and blow up the roman camp.

Chapter End Notes

Also: I'm really sorry for not updating in two months. School just started up and I'm trying to catch up with my homework and I've been trying (and failing) to update my other one every week, so.....maybe don't hate me?

I LOVE YOU ALL AND ALL YOUR COMMENTS!!!!!
Can't Fight Against The Youth

Chapter Notes

So...I've been grounded, still am. I've just been using my limited free time to put together bits of different stories at a time. I actually wrote this in less than two days....so lemme know what you think

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Leo couldn’t stop himself from doing it. It wasn’t as if he was thinking ‘hey, wouldn’t it be funny if I blew up all my friends and started a war between the two camps because I attacked first, getting literally everybody to hate me?’ No, of course he wasn’t. But as everybody climbed the rope in a rush to get to him, the first one being Nico (obviously), they seemed to think that it was of his own free will.

Now, he was standing in front of at least twenty people, more looking up from the ground, and he couldn’t think of anything to say. There was no quip that could get him out of this, he knew the boat inside and out, and precisely how many levers and switches and buttons it took to aim and fire a cannon like he just had, because he had just done it.

He looked at his hands, stared at them, as if they were going to start moving on their own again. But they didn’t, not while everybody was watching him. He could only barely bring himself to look up, everybody looking at him with open shock on their face. Nobody had said a word, nobody had made one move towards him upon seeing him.

“Everybody off.” Said a voice the fire wielder could never forget.

“He just attacked us. If you think we are going to leave the two of you unsupervised and able to leave at a moment’s notice, you must think you’re funny.” Said an awkward child who was wearing beanie babies like battle scars.

Nico flashed his most dangerous glare at him, smirking when everybody but the boy took a step back, then shadow traveled to right behind him. “If you can’t tell, we can already do that before you could finish thinking a threat. We have no long-term affiliation with any camp, you could think we dropped off the face of the earth when we’d really be right under your nose. So I suggest you do as I say, or at least listen to your boss, before I get even more angry.” Nico said it all with a growling undertone, the coldness in his breath making the demigod shiver as it hit the back of his neck.
“Listen to him. Everyone off.” Reyna called, and that’s when people really started to move. “Even you, especially you, Octavian.”

“We can’t trust them!”

“Are you questioning my judgement, are you insinuating that I would purposefully lead this camp to its death just to show you up?”

Octavian gave an audible gulp and a whispered “No.” before hurrying down to the ground.

“Nico, you can talk with Leo, but keep in mind that if there is another attack, we will be forced to fight back.”

“I understand, Reyna.”

“Good.” She made her way back down to the floor as Nico pulled his boyfriend into his arms.

“Oh, Leo...what happened?”

“I… I don’t know. I remember reaching for the controls, my hand grabbing this and pressing that and firing it….but I also remember not being in control of my arms. It was like I was a passenger and my body was a car, I couldn’t control anything no matter how many things went wrong. Did…..did anybody get hurt?”

“No, baby, no. It was aimed for the middle of the camp, the common area. Everybody was in the dining hall.”

Leo broke. It was everything piled on at once. He hadn’t given himself the time to collect himself after his time without Nico, then said boy was in a near coma, then the son of Hephaestus worked himself like a dog trying to build a boat, and now everything came crashing down and Leo broke down in the only place he had found true comfort in the past few years: Nico’s arms.
Percy and Jason were doing crowd control. Many of the people were panicked, others were ready to fight everybody Greek, some of them were scared of another attack.

They all went back to their conversations from before, but there was a weight in the air now that hadn’t been there before. People were speaking quieter, trying to hear things from the ship.

As he was watching the crowd, Jason noticed many of the people were scared. Most of them were good at hiding it, but Jason had been the one to show them not to show any fear, that in a battle, if your enemy knew just how scared you were, they had the advantage. In training them, he had also picked up and cataloged their tells. They were wondering if they could trust the newcomers, if they could trust Jason after his time with the greeks. But most of that was broken at the first sign of life from the floating ship.

A heartbroken sob tore through the air, coming from above everybody’s heads. There were only two things that stood out about the noise: it was Leo’s, and it was genuine. You don’t fake a voice crack, you don’t fake the smothered backdrop of burying your face in someone’s shoulder, you don’t fake the hiccup that follows a sob. You certainly don’t fake all three at the same time.

The roman camp all went back to the animated way they were speaking after a single humbling moment. Somehow, someway, two sickeningly sweet and protective lovebirds had broken what was once one of the toughest armies in the world.

Jason smirked, these were the people he knew. Cautious to a fault, but willing to accept the evidence that was laid out for them. He just hoped Leo came out okay.

Back on the ship, the boys had moved into their room. They had gotten odd looks at first, been yelled at by Coach Hedge, but, in all honesty, neither of them were budging.

Percy and Annabeth were used to it, they had never seen the two of them sleep anywhere beside the other if they had a choice about it, and Bianca had told them about some pretty gnarly nightmares if they didn’t, so they didn’t think much of it when there was separate rooms for everybody and one for the two of them.

Jason and Piper were a bit more surprised, though not much more. They had both seen Leo without Nico there, and even without his memories, he still got the demigod nightmares and snippets of things that had happened in the past. He had once woken up in the middle of the night, not quite
fully aware and just mumbling about ‘diAngelo getting his damn leg slashed’ or ‘so fucking cold, and not the good kind’, eventually punching the wall or working himself to the bone. At the time, it had confused them, but after meeting Nico, it all made sense.

Hazel and Frank, however, were both kinda old fashioned. Hazel was understandable, mostly because she wasn’t from the time period, but Frank was more surprising, but he was more of the gentleman type who held the door open and paid for dinner, so that was to be expected. Nobody really expected their jaws to drop like they did, though. Leo and Nico had said they were heading to bed on the way over, then stood up at the exact same time, and they just looked like someone punched them both in the gut.

“Together?” Frank had said.

“Yeahhh…” Leo drawled.

“Like...In the same room?” Hazel asked.

“Yes.” Nico answered, yawning directly after.

“But isn’t that-” Frank started before getting cut off by Percy.

“Dude, neither of them have followed a single rule put in place since I’ve known them. Travel in three? Nope, they get by just fine on their own. Do your chores everyday? They are barely ever at camp, and don’t make messes when they’re there. Stay and train at camp? Somehow Nico became a better swordsman than me and Leo is making his way there, not to mention their respective ‘extras’. And that’s after nearly no time in the colosseum. Just let them do what they want and they won’t kill you is what I’ve learned. As long as you’re trying to keep yourself safe, or them in specific situations, they’ll probably listen to you.”

Leo and Nico had walked away in the middle of his sentence.

It took a little bit of time, most of which was spent silent, then the bustling noise from before returned in the dining hall. Leo relaxed a bit more, now that the sobs he was letting out weren’t the only thing he could hear. It was like things could go back to how they were, before the younger boy had lost control. Even to the point where Nico was scolded for using his shadow travel too much.
That night was a bad night, and so were the ones following that. The universe didn’t want to give either of them a break. Leo’s nightmares had gotten worse. Visions of a dark pit filled with everything he had ever encountered. The worst part about that one was he was only a spectator, unable to do anything as his boyfriend was attacked from every angle by leathery bat-ladies.

Unfortunately, Festus had a damage report by the time Leo woke up the next day. They needed some things that would be fairly difficult to find, especially in the middle of Salt Lake City. They were miles from anything remotely related to a demigod dollar tree. He could see getting lime, he could maybe see finding tar somewhere. But Celestial Bronze? Why did he get tasked with all the hard things to find?

So he went with Hazel, kinda like a bonding exercise, he guessed. There had been some tension between the two. It didn’t look like Hazel was the most comfortable with the ultra-gay thing he and Nico had going on, and she was born in the forties, so……old habits and all that.

The silence had been stretching on, and while Leo wasn’t worried about it, it seemed Hazel was. “Soooo…how’re things with out and Nico?”

He smiled, again wishing to be with him, but he had to go do some cryptic business in town. “We’re…we’re good. Always have been.”

“I thought he was from the thirties.”

“Yeah…..and?”

“And…not into that kind of stuff.”

That stopped Leo dead in his tracks, he could feel his blood literally start to boil. “Pardon?”

“Well, I grew up in a time where it was a big no-no to do that kind of stuff, I thought it was a bigger no-no in his time.”

“Are we going to have a problem?”
“Sorry?”

“Is this going to be a problem, between you and me and Nico? Because if it is, just know that I won’t let it be for long.”

“What?! No no no no no- look I wasn’t trying to put anyone down or anything. It’s just- well….When I was growing up, it was kind of ingrained in my head, everything had a right and wrong. And being gay was one of the wrongs.”

“And?”

“I’m guess, what I’m trying to say is….oh how do I say this….How did he get over it?”

Leo’s emotions went from boiling with anger to still with realization. How far was Hazel into this? “He never did.”

“Then how-”

“Look, I’m not going to go spilling all his secrets, but he never got over it. He still doesn’t remember everything, but sometimes he’ll get a little snippet and just….not be okay.”

“Oh…”

“Why are you asking?”

“Well, it’s just, the G..T..B...L community thingy includes, uh, gender, right?” Hazel said, obviously struggling with the name.

Leo chuckled. “Yes, the LGBT community encompasses gender. Why, wassup.”

She stopped walking. “Just- because well- oh gods is this even a thing?” She looked like she was
about to start crying.

“Hazel, if you something to tell me about yourself, you don’t have to tell me if you’re not ready.”

“No- I’m ready. I’m ready, I just…..want to wait until we’re back on the boat. Is...is that okay?”

“Of course.”

They kept walking through the town, not stopping for anything else that didn’t need their attention.

They ran into Nemesis, the goddess of revenge. She said some cryptic things and gave Leo a fortune cookie, telling him to open it when he needed help, but there was always a price to receiving.

They eventually found the bronze. Narcissus had been fawning over himself with it, surrounded by nymphs who fawned over him. Leo had to hand it to the guy, he was good looking, but the fact that he had been staring at his own reflection for a millenia was a huge turn-off.

There was bit of acting, bit of faking it, a bit of pissing off someone who used to be important, but they got the bronze.

Leo and Hazel were heading back to the ship, the former trying to wipe off the ‘tattoos’ and the ladder dreading the inbound conversation.

“So….what’s up, Jewel Thief?” He asked once they were inside the cabins.

Chapter End Notes

Let me know what you think about Hazel's upcoming confession. I didn't plan it beforehand, but when I was writing the scene, I got the idea of her being a part of it and couldn't resist. I get that it might deter some people from continuing, but other then this and the conversation, it won't be a big deal.

Unless maybe you want it to be....Let me know. Please, this is the kind of feedback I need. I'm also really nervous because of it so...
Okay, I know it might be getting repetitive, but I honestly did not realize how much kidnapping happens just between our two lovebugs, and how much I needed to add to get a different incentive for them to do the shit they do. I do realize that there is a lot of drama and I need to kinda pace myself, but to be fair, this is actually a lot more spread out than it was originally going to be.

“So….what’s up, Jewel Thief?” He asked once they were inside the cabins.

She chuckled, relaxing slightly, but still too stiff for his liking. “I…uh….why is this so hard?”

“I told you, if you’re not ready-”

“NO! No….I’m….I’m ready. I just- it was never a thing when I was growing up, and if it was a thing, well, it wasn’t for long. You either got sent to an insane asylum or beat into being normal.”

“Normal? Gross. That’s boring.”

“Well, good thing I’m the complete opposite from normal.”

“So what’s on your mind?” Leo asked, more earnest than she ever thought he could sound.

“I…..Idon’tthinkI’magirl.”

“One more time, slower.”

Hazel’s confidence both grew and lessened, somehow. It felt good to say it aloud, but she was still scared of what he’d say. She took a deep breath. “I don’t think….I don’t think I’m a girl. I am a boy. Wow, that’s weird to say. What do you call it? Switch-bender?”
It didn’t surprise him. After the questions about gender, he thought there might be something about that. It was more obvious than Hazel had thought. He still chuckled at ‘switch-bender’ though. “I think you mean transgender.”

“Oh, right. That. I’m that.”

“That’s cool.”

“Really?”

“Yeah.”

“You’re not going to laugh or call me crazy or tell me it’s just a phase or ask what’s on my birth certificate?”

“Honey, I’m pretty sure it says that you’re like a foot tall on that little piece of paper. Plus it’s from the forties, a lot’s changed since then.”

“I know, I know. It’s just. I’m a boy. I can say it without hyperventilating.”

“Well, it’s not perfect for trans people out there, might never be. But just ignore people, you’ll always be safe with me and Nico.”

“Thank you.” He leant in to hug the fire wielder.

Once they broke away, Leo had a question. “Is there a different name you’d like to go by? I mean, ‘Hazel’ can be both feminine and masculine, but a lot of people want to break away from that side of their life. Totally up to you.”

“I’ve been thinking about it, since before I even came back to life. I think I’d like Hayden.”
“Well, thanks for telling me. If there’s anything I can do, just tell me. That includes telling everyone else.”

“Would you?”

“Of course.”

“Thank you. I almost threw up just thinking about telling you, and you and Nico are the most open-minded people I know.”

“Well, that’s what I’m here for. Now run along, Jewel Thief, we’ve got a dinner to get to.”

[A/N: I never do this in the middle of a chapter, but I just wanted to clarify that ‘Hazel’ will now be called ‘Hayden’ and I’ll be referring to her as ‘he’. Just so we’re all on the same page]

Dinner was uneventful, everyone made polite small talk, talking about dreams and plans. Hayden was the most relaxed Leo’d ever seen him. More quiet, like he was afraid of how the others would react after dinner, but still much more relaxed.

It was after dinner, when Leo asked Hayden if he’d watch the deck for a half hour, calling them down if anything happened. He was happy to get out of the room when he knew what was coming.

The fire wielder asked everyone to stay in the mess hall, intent on doing it right then and there. They looked suspicious, especially when he closed the door, but they complied.

“Where’s Hazel?” Frank asked.

“That’s kind of what this is about.”

“You left her out there, all alone? Dude, there could be an attack and we wouldn’t know until she was already dead!”
“Hedge is out there too, they’ll be fine.”

“Nope, I’m going out there.” Frank tried to walk past him but Leo grabbed his arm.

“You can’t. I promised I’d do this.”

“Do what?”

“Tell you something, now sit down and shut up.” Leo growled. The others were stunned, they’d only ever seen this side of Leo with Nico and didn’t think Hazel and him were close enough for this to happen. Needless to say, Frank listened. “If any of you have any qualms with what I’m about to tell you, well, suck it up or get the hell off my ship, because I don’t care about the prophecy if you do.”

“Leo, what is this about, is something wrong with Hazel.” Piper asked, charming her voice a little to bring down tensions in the room.

“Nothing’s wrong. I just want to make sure we’re all on the same page about that, because I’m pretty sure it’ll break that little Jewel Thief if any of you think differently.”

“What’s up?” Jason asked.

“Hazel’s...not Hazel. She’s not a she.”

“Are you trying to say that she’s….a he?” Annabeth asked carefully, not sure about the situation.

“Yes.” The whole room let out a sigh of relief. Then Percy punched him.

“Don’t do that, you had us worried.”

Frank raised his hand. “What’s this mean?”
“It mean’s that Hazel would like to be called Hayden, and referred to as he.”

“No, I mean, does…Hayden….still want to be with me?”

“You gotta ask him that yourself, man. Hayden’s right upstairs. Probably bit his nails down to the nub by now.” That was all Frank needed, he ran upstairs to clarify his relationship.

As they filed out, Percy punched him one more time. “I’m serious.” He said with a stern look. “Don’t make us think someone needs an amputation or something, we were all really worried.”

“You shoulda seen Hayden when he came in my room earlier, when he told me. Almost pulling out his hair with nervousness.”

“As long as we’re on the same page.”

“That’s where I wanna be.”

“Good.” Percy walked out, leaving Leo alone to wonder where Nico was.

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“Hayden!” Frank called out.

Hayden rushed out of his cabin, having changed and washed his face. He’d been crying, that much was obvious, probably thinking up every situation that could go wrong.

“Hey.” He said in a small voice.

“Hi. How’s my main man?”

“I’m fine….I’m guessing you’re here to break up with me?”
“Why would you say that?”

“Because now you know I’m a guy and you like girls. You deserve to be happy, don’t force yourself to stay with me just because you think it’d be the polite thing to do, it’ll only make us both miserable.”

“Hayden, I love you for you. I never cared about what you looked like. If you want to go out and buy a binder tomorrow, I’ll happily go with you.”

“Really?”

“Of course.”

“Oh thank the gods.” He sighed as he went to hug his boyfriend.

“You never had any chance of me leaving you, babe.”

“Hey, uh...what’s a binder?”

“Oh yeah, I forget that it wasn’t a thing when you were growing up, sorry. It’s a thing, kinda like a sports bra or tank top depending on what you get, and it just…flattens out your chest. Some trans people use it to kinda….blend in with the people around them, I guess is how I would put it.”

“Oh.”

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Leo was beyond worried. Nico had left ten hours ago. He hadn’t said where he was going, when he’d be back, and now Leo couldn’t seem to Iris Message him. It was getting ridiculous, with how much this happened. It was the third time one of them had gone missing, it was getting old.
Leo knew that it hadn’t happened to him yet, that he’d always been the one to go missing, but he was scared then too, dammit!

Now, he was just lying in bed, holding out hope that Nico would burst out of a shadow, ready for bed. He felt like he was about to cry, every single bad thought was going through his head, things he knew wouldn’t happen, but he was still scared about. Out of nowhere, a thought occurred to him, he remembered a conversation they had, just because it was possible in their life.

Nico had told him that, since it was easier for him to get to the underworld than another place on earth, if they got separated, he might just go down there to recharge rather than go to Leo, for the sole reason of saving energy. The latter understood, of course, it was reasonable and he could always just check in with Hades.

As it was, Leo stood up, turned on his light, and used a prysm to make a rainbow on the wall. He said the chant, threw in the drachma, and waited for the image to appear.

The fatherly face appeared on the wall, smiling until he saw the tearstained face of the teenager.

“Leo? What’s wrong?”

“Is Nico there?”

“No, he’s on the quest with the rest of your bunch as far as I know. Persephone says someone came in to take a pomegranate and we assumed it was him.”

“He kinda just said he’d be going to town and hasn’t come back yet. I don’t…I don’t know what to do.”

Hades appeared in his room, right in front of him, and pulled him into a hug. “Usually it’s you who goes and gets himself kidnapped. I shouldn’t know how to do this so well.”

“What? Comfort one of us through finding the other one?”

“Yeah, you know, parents usually only worry about their child being kidnapped, and when it
happens it usually doesn’t happen more than once.”

“You know that usually their parents aren’t gods, right?”

“I know. And most kids can’t summon skeleton warriors or fire out of their palm.”

“I guess we’re just different.”

“I know, you both always were. Look at us right here, you both captured the heart of the ruthless god of death.”

“That’s just what people say, nothing like the real thing. It’s not true in the slightest, not even their facts are right. You’re the god of the underworld, not death. And I hear that Thanatos gets a bad rep too.”

“Oh, yes, he is seen as much worse than he is.”

“You know I’m never going to stop searching for Nico until he’s in my arms, right?”

“Yes, Leo. Of course, I would expect nothing less of you.”

“Thanks.”

Hades looked up as if he was listening to an earpiece. “Well, that’s Persephone telling me there are new spirits waiting to be judged.”

“Have at ‘em.”

“I will see you soon, Leo, let’s just hope it’s in this life.”

“Right.” With that, Hades disappeared.
Leo didn’t come out of his room that night, too busy trying to reach Nico via Iris Message, though they would never go through. Why was it always like this? Why did they get kidnapped by magical beings and not fucking regular people? Well, that wouldn’t be much better but at least Nico could shadow travel out or at least contact each other.

He could barely sleep, and when he did, they were filled with night terrors worse than what he used to get at the school. Back before Nico and him realized they were in love, back when Bianca was alive, back when their lives were semi-normal. Back when their worst problem was having nightmares, well, that and trying to sneak out of their dorm in the middle of the night.

As it was, he didn’t know what to do. The night terrors seemed so real, like they were really happening. Then he remembered something about demigod nightmares, they usually were real. Percy had had many that came to life, ones that woke him up in the middle of the night and he lived through.

It was this reason and this reason only that he told the others about his dream. They usually sat around the table in the mornings (or whatever counted as mornings with the people who took night shifts and whatnot), and told each other about what they dreamt about. Nico and Leo were usually pretty quiet, being lucky in the dreams they got, dreams about what happened in the past or what could happen to them, nothing really dangerous though. That was why everyone was surprised when he just walked into the mess hall with a blanket wrapped around him.

He probably looked like shit. His hair was messed up from tossing and turning all night, he had heavy bags under his eyes and they were bloodshot from lack of sleep, he had a blanket, which was usually only on his bed for Nico’s benefit. Not only all that, but he was wearing the same clothes as the day before and had tear tracks running down his face. Plus, this is the big one, a key person wasn’t there.

He could only say one sentence before the whole situation crashed down on him. “Nico’s missing and he’s barely alive.”

Chapter End Notes

I’m sorry, I was going to have at least one adamant straight couple, but the transgender angst and fluff held my ideas hostage until I finished this arc. So at first I wasn't going to have the whole Hazel/Hayden arc, but I wanted a little bit of drama between Hazel
and Leo without her coming off as a huge dick and therefore being voted off the
island, so I got carried away...a little bit.....fine a lotta bit. Oh whell

HAZEL IS TRANS AND IS NOW HAYDEN!!!! Hope y'all don't hate it, but if you
do, welp, can't change it now.

Also: The switch-bender thing? I just find it adorable for Hayden to not know
anything and have to ask about it until he has access to a computer. AH THE FLUFF

Aight so I just put a name on this thing. What I mean, if anyone's wondering, is the
'Lane' is like...society and Hayden is a boy so.....
The Haunting

Chapter Notes

Sorry I haven't posted in so long. I kinda fell out of the habit and started to just lazy around without doing much of anything during the day.

Keep in mind when you get...I'd say about halfway through, that I started writing that part after a fight with my mom, so I was feeling upset and went very heavy with the angst.

**WARNINGS** This chapter contains references suicidal tendencies and verbal abuse. Not in the way you might think, though. Read at your own risk. Also contains a certain f-word I despise. You can just say fuck it to this chapter if you want to, it just get's Nico further along the story and gives some background to their later behavior. But if that kinda stuff triggers you, be careful.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Nico had been, in all honesty, doing something really sweet. So the town didn’t have any pawn shops, he’d had to travel elsewhere to get what he wanted. He was very particular, and wouldn’t settle for the deals the salesmen laid down, but writing down the ones he liked. With Hayden on the boat with them, he knew how to tell if gems and metals were real or not.

He should really learn not to go off on his own, or to let Leo go off, because this kept happening to him. He had just been in the underworld, getting some fruit just in case he was out longer than expected, and somehow ended up near Tartarus. He should’ve seen it, but he was too focussed on what was right in front of him to look a couple yards ahead. By the time he realized where he was, it was too late, he was being pulled into Tartarus and not even he could hear his own screams.

He fell through the air, knowing he would die as soon as he hit any surface, if the physics in this part of the earth were anything alike to the outside world. He tried to direct his fall into the river he knew as the Phlegethon.

The image of falling into the arms of a million flames didn’t bother him, as he practically did that every day, with Leo. He didn’t hold out much hope for actually landing in it, seeing as he couldn’t control the speed or direction of his fall, like Jason, nor have the water meet him, like Percy, but it seemed that luck was on his side, because he did. And as the surface of the water broke many bones in his body, the water he swallowed mended them.
That didn’t make his worries fade, though. Tartarus was a place monsters feared, somewhere they never wanted to return, even though it was inevitable. There would be many more broken bones in the near future, amongst other things.

Nico was scared, honestly scared. He had no way to reach Leo, he wasn’t even sure if Iris could connect to him from down here, and there was little to no chance of him actually surviving this. He remembered a conversation he’d once had with Hades, and was glad he had his father draw him a map.

He sat while he could, while he had this small moment of peace, he rested and formed a plan. The only way out that he knew about were the Doors of Death, which would no doubt be surrounded by monsters. He also knew that there were ‘clear’ areas, vast spaces with no structures whatsoever, and that it might be the physically safest route, but it was the one you could get lost in easiest. The fastest route would be to follow the river up until the Delta of Despair, then run towards the first landmark: the Shrine to Hermes. From there, the easiest place to go to would be the Forest of Curses, but the safest would be the Drakon Swamp, where he could probably rest for a while.

From there he could either cross the river and possibly meet Akhlys, though he’d prefer not to, or get to the death point, so Nico was choosing the former. Then he’d just have to survive to the Doors of Death and he’d be in the clear.

He was refreshed from the water of the river, and decided to take out one of his two water bottles and chug the first one, then fill it with the river water. He would most likely need it, with how notorious this place was for y’know, dying and the such.

He started his journey over to the shrine, walking to conserve his energy and not draw attention to himself. All he could think about was Leo. Leo’s face, Leo’s smile, Leo’s laugh. It was what made him continue through the multitude of battles with the monsters, it was what made him kill each and every one of them, so they wouldn’t go back to tell their superiors. It was what made him look at his hands in disgust at the amount of blood on them, but continue doing it anyway.

At some point in his life, he would’ve been ashamed and horrified at what he was doing. At that point, he had been watching humans killing innocent humans just for the shits and giggles that motivated them. But this was different. He wasn’t going against a group of living things because of their race or religion or anything other than they were trying to kill him.

He was doing this to get back to Leo, and he wouldn’t stop until he was back in his arms.

He would have to eat when he got to the shrine. Nico had no way of knowing how time moved
here, without any sun or clock. He would have to rest while he could, and eat to keep up his energy. He could probably get away with starting a fire and sending a note with the pen and journal he still had. But there were two problems with that, he didn’t know how to make a fire and there was no wood around.

Now Nico was really missing Leo.

Nico had been running for what felt like days. He was tired, he was sore, he was being chased here and there and tried not to kill anything, just because they seemed to come back with a vengeance within five minutes.

He was running to the forest, he knew. The swamp would be found on the outskirts and it would just be easier to go along the trees than to bypass them entirely. None of this was easy, per say, but it was better than getting lost and killed by a random monster, Leo having to find out he had died from his father.

Lost in thought, Nico hadn’t been paying full attention to his surroundings. Something was chasing him. He just hoped he would be able to lose them in the forest and run through it before they caught up to him. It was wishful thinking.

The monster caught up to him as soon as he made it to the forest and pinned him against a tree made of smooth black glass, sharp and jagged where the new branches stuck out or old ones broke off.

His attacker was panting, just pressing him face-first into the tree, holding his ring hand tightly, as to not allow him to summon his weapon.

“Hello, little demigod. Funny how we ended up in the same place, isn’t it?” A disgusting waft of recognizable breath whispered in his ear.

Nico’s blood both ran cold in fear and boiled with rage. Geryon was the reason Leo still woke up crying and begging Nico to take him into the shadows, something he did whenever he could. Shadows were safe, shadows had been hiding him ever since he was a little boy sneaking out to a graveyard, ever since his sister was alive.
He was afraid because there were no shadows in Tartarus. There was no sun, no moon, no day or night, only monsters who could only be killed for a few hours at most.

But he didn’t let any of that show, just let that rage strengthen him, let the fear motivate him to lash out like a cornered animal, and Nico swung his head back with all the force he could manage, which was quite a bit, enough to send the three-chested heathen staggering back.

Immediately, Nico’s sword was between the two of them. He’d had a good four years to train since the last time they had gone up against each other, but the last time he’d had help, along with someone to protect and get back.

No, he was the one who needed to get back, he needed to protect himself, so he could see Leo in one piece again.

It was a brutal battle, and Nico didn’t remember half of it, he had just let instinct and rage take over, killing Geryon for the second time before running blindly into the forest, finding hope when a clearing started to form, he was close to the swamp.

It was only too late when he saw a chorus of spirits around him. Not the kind he was used to, not the ones in the human underworld. These were reeking of vengeance, anger and threat. They surrounded him.

He knew what they were, the arai were something to be feared, impossible to escape unless you killed all that were after you, managed to survive running through them, or died. And while there were not very many around him, he could tell just by their auras that those who had fallen dead at Nico’s hands had given him the worst things they could think of.

Nico would have to try to get through them only killing what was necessary to survive, otherwise he would surely die by their hand, ironically.

He had to think fast, they were closing in on him and he had to move. The ones with the weakest punishments were behind him, which would force him to run back the way he came. The worst were in front of him. He only had a few options; make a break for it and surely nearly bleed to death with the injuries he already had and the amount he would gain, go back to where he came from and perhaps have to meet with more monsters and maybe die from that, or he could kill the few with the worst and get to the swamp with the minimal amount of injuries.
That last one was the best option, though he wasn’t looking forward to getting cursed, but he ran anyway, as fast as his legs would take him, and killed the two in his way.

He had to clench his teeth as searing pain tore up his calf and his throat felt like he’d been gargling acid for the past hour. One more arai caught up to him and he killed it, trying to scream as all the ways Leo could be killed flashed behind his eyelids, only to find that the reason his throat was burning was because he could no longer speak, that his esophagus probably looked like a smoker’s lungs.

A different clearing started to emerge, one where he could see water and a man with a sword impaling a drakon. This was it. Only fifty feet away. Thirty. Fifteen. Ten.

At five feet, one last arai caught up to him, causing him to behead her on instinct. As he made it across the threshold, his voice came back, but all his injuries remained.

His heart clenched, he starting hyperventilating, he couldn’t get control of his body. He knew it was a hallucination but it felt so real. He believed every word that was shouted at him, at least for the time being.

Leo was there, telling how much of a disappointment he was, how he only felt sorry for him, how this was just out of pity. “You’re the child of Hades, how could anyone love you? You’re just a pity party, a circus clown. Crying out to the world until you don’t even have to paint the tears on your face, they’re just always there. Nobody ever loved you. Not your dad, not Persephone, not Bianca, and certainly not me. I hate you. You got your own mom killed, how could anybody love that? Honestly, you and your faggot ass was never good enough, because you can never be, you just aren’t worth it.” And he walked off, leaving Nico in the mud as that man with the sword walked over to help him up.

Nico was wailing, he was sobbing and heaving and couldn’t even get the proper oxygen to his brain. He looked up to the man, the sword. It was sharp, good.

He grabbed the sword by the blade and ignored the sting as his palms were sliced through. Nico placed the point directly over his heart. “Please, please just lean on it a little. Just a little push, just kill me. Please just kill me.”

The man dropped his sword to the ground and dragged Nico to his shack, all the while he was kicking and screaming and begging for him to leave him out to die.
Leo woke up in tears. He couldn’t stand these dreams of Nico being tortured. Watching it through Nico’s eyes, feeling the things he felt, hearing those words from his mouth. Leo couldn’t go through this much longer.

Unfortunately, they had no idea where to start on getting him out of Tartarus and they actually were on a quest. They couldn’t just stop to go searching the world for someone who they knew wasn’t on it. Nico would lecture him for days about responsibility.

But as soon as they knew he was back on Earth, Leo would go after him, with or without the rest of the crew.

He started to make a list of the things he needed to do for Nico, with each dream, he added things that he would need to reassure him about, scars he would have to kiss better, what he would need to do to make sure he could pull Nico back to sanity if need be.

Chapter End Notes

Yeah I went REALLY heavy on the angst. Kinda like a five year old uses glitter and sprinkles. Again, I'm sorry for the long wait for the update, I will have the next one out ASAP.

LOVE YOU ALL
Remind You (That you're not alone)

Chapter Notes

Okkaaayyyy, so finding time to edit while you're both on vacation and without Wi-Fi except at the hotel is very difficult. I meant to have this out yesterday but we were supposed to get up early.

I took a liberty with the title. It's supposed to be Remind You by Andy Grammer, but I didn't think it would make sense.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The whole ship was awake and ready to defend itself at the sound of a terrified scream. It was the kind of scream they’d heard before, it meant one of two things: someone was having a really bad dream or something was attacking the ship and had taken over the mind of one of them. And though they always hated to see one another go through the former, they desperately hoped that was what it was, because coming back from the latter was always worse.

They had their answer when all but one of them showed up on the top deck, weapons in hand. And they all knew the reason for the night terror, too. The one missing was Leo. Jason’s heart broke a little more at seeing what was his best friend going through that. People might not think it, but there was none he trusted more than the pyromaniac, not even Piper.

His nights were steadily getting worse. When Leo wasn’t dreaming about his lost love, he was usually having nightmares like the ones he used to. He’d told Jason a little bit about the boarding school they’d been at, how one of them used to wake up in either a cold sweat or yelling out loud enough to wake the other up, and how they learned to take care of one another. It seemed like those nightmares terrified him without the one person he trusted the most around to ground him.

Jason was more than happy to step up to the plate. He wanted to help out his friends, and while he knew that he couldn’t take away all their troubles, calming one of them down after a nightmare was the least he could do. He’d always wanted to take care of people, had always ran the people side of Camp Jupiter while Reyna ran politics. Caring was something he was good at, and he would do it until he couldn’t anymore.

He knocked on the door, Leo was still asleep, it sounded like he was whimpering in his sleep. Jason pushed the door open. “Leo, you’ve got to get up.”

Now he felt like he was intruding. They didn’t really go into each other’s rooms, ever, and now he was going to the place where Leo felt comfortable and it just felt...wrong.
But he steeled his nerves. His friend was still tossing and turning and nothing he could do from the other side of the room would help.

With that in mind, he made his way to the bed and started to shake the demigod awake. Jason didn’t have time to register his mistake when he suddenly found himself on the floor with a dagger pressed to his neck, but luckily Leo remembered where he was before anything bad would happen.

Leo realized where he was, and was immediately too hot. It was too hot in his room, even though they were in the middle of the sky at 5 in the morning, it was too hot and he had to cool down before he burned down the ship.

Muttering a quick apology to Jason, he hurriedly grabbed his towel and made off to take the coldest shower the pipes would allow. It had become his remedy to the times he woke up burning, a poor replacement of being curled around Nico as soon as they woke up. The room started to fill with steam as it hit Leo’s skin. He washed the sweat off his body then just stood there, calming himself down and willing the memories of the nightmare to go away, with no avail.

He should’ve known that he couldn’t escape his friend that easily. Jason was dead-set on caring for him, something Leo wasn’t used to. He was used to relying on someone, and having someone rely on him. He was used to someone knowing how to care for him without making it known that he needed caring for.

It had only been a few days, but Leo missed Nico so much.

Jason had been waiting outside the bathroom, having set a change of clothes on the counter, putting one of Nico’s shirts in there. He was going to talk with Leo, have a good talk, instead of letting him push it all down and let him crash alone.

“I don’t want to talk about it, Grace.” Leo said as soon as he saw Jason.

“Come on, whatever you say won’t make me think less of you. We all have nightmares around here.” Jason said as he followed the other boy to his room.

“I don’t want to talk, Jason.” Leo said, leaning against his dresser.
“You can’t hold it in forever. And it won’t send me running with my tail between my legs.”

“I’m not holding it in forever. Just until Nico gets back.”

“Leo….what if he doesn’t get back?”

“Then I will find who killed him and play out the worst things my darkest thoughts can come up with on them.” The coldness in his voice held no doubt that he was telling the truth, it made the other demigod shiver.

“You’re just going to burn yourself out going on like this. You went to bed around four, according to Hedge, you got less than an hour of sleep. What would Nico say if he saw you running around like this?” He was surprised when the other boy actually thought about it and gave a watery smile.

“He’d probably punch me, then cook some minestrone soup to eat together while we just stared at each other. He uses his mom’s old recipe, it’s the best.” Tears started streaming down Leo’s face, and Jason was there to catch him and lead him to his bed when his legs gave out. By the time they sat down properly, Leo was leaning on Jason and he was sobbing uncontrollably. “I can’t sleep half the time, the other half I’m dreaming either of things that are happening to him or just visuals that my brain likes to torture me with. What’s he’s going through makes me want to be able to appear next to him and go through it with him, that’s how we always do things, for a reason. The visuals are always worse. Sometimes it’s the different ways he can die, sometimes it’s the different ways he can be hurt. Sometimes it’s just him spitting in my face and walking away, leaving me there.”

“What was this last one about?”

“We were being chased by….I don’t even know what it was, we were being chased through a meadow, without any damn shadows big enough to travel through. Nico tripped, landing face first in the grass. I was already a few feet away when I realized, and when I turned back, he was reaching for me, before being ripped apart. That’s where you woke me up.”

“Oh Leo.”

“Hey! I don’t want your pity. It’s just something to make me find him faster.”
“Speaking of that. We’ve been talking and we think he’s in Tartarus.”

“What?!”

“You know that place-”

“Of course I know where Tartarus is. Oh god, I need to-” Leo shot out of his room, nearly running to the engine room, where he’d been holing up for most of his time since Nico disappeared. Jason followed him, and was only sort of surprised to see a whiteboard filled with where Nico could be in the middle of the room. He was surprised to find it being erased. “Hades, the wonderful man he is, told us about Tartarus once before. Even drew us a map.”

In less than five minutes, Leo had a replication of the map Hades drew on the whiteboard, albeit much less detailed. It held all the significant features, the rivers, the forest, the swamp and the mansion, the doors and the abyss, with extra emphasis on places to escape through.

“Now, with Nico being the son of Hades, he would’ve probably wanted to go into the underworld first, but he would’ve either been back by now or in the palace and gotten confirmation, so he most likely didn’t take that route.”

“Why wouldn’t he have chosen that way if it were easiest.”

“It’s just the easiest for him to get through, that offers no insight on how it is to get there. Tartarus is known for its cliffs and edges, so he probably didn’t go anywhere so far north. It’s easier to run across a downhill incline than an uphill. That means any of the tunnels are out.” Leo crossed out the two tunnels leading out. “He’s still alive, so he most likely fell into one of the rivers. The only one you can both survive and have a good chance of being able to leave is Phlegethon, without losing your memory or being caught up in the wailing of the dead. If he was being smart, he would grab some of the water.”

“Why grab the water, I mean, isn’t it on fire?”

“Yes, but it also heals you. It’s on fire like you can light alcohol on fire. There’s a flame on the surface, but still liquid underneath.”

“Okay, go on.”
“So, you don’t want to run straight across, because of the amount of monsters there, and it’s really easy to get lost. You want to get to as many landmarks as possible.” Leo drew a line to the shine, the forest, the swamp, the mansion, then the doors. “If at all possible, you don’t want to go into the forest, because the arai will make you kill them, and in doing so will unleash a curse set on you from something you killed. Then, hopefully, you can get to the swamp. The man there has been sent to kill a drakon everyday for the rest of eternity. Hopefully, you can at least go and steal some things in terms of food and such.”

“If he’s dead, then why would he have food?”

“Because he’s gotta do something with all the drakon carcasses.” And just like that, Leo had mapped out Nico’s most likely path through Tartarus.

“How do you know so much about this place?”

“I told you, Hades sat us down and told us. There’s always the possibility that you might fall into one of the entrances, and while he never wanted that, he wanted us to be prepared in case something did happen.”

“He sounds like a really good dad.” Jason said with a hint of longing.

“He is. But I think that’s mostly because of the reputation he usually gets. It’s really easy to go above expectations when the expectations are shit. That’s not to say he isn’t a good one by normal standards, but he is also given the freedom that none of the other gods are, since he’s the only one who’s not on olympus and his kids actually have a way to see him. He figured out a long time ago that the way he behaves dictates whether or not they do.”

Moving away from his melancholy mood, Jason turns back to the whiteboard. “How do we know where he is? Or if this is the way Nico will take?”

“Dreams, Jason, dreams.” Leo was torn between being ecstatic about knowing where Nico was and being upset over not being able to get to him. “I’ve been having dreams over the past few days, as you well know. And from those dreams, I believe he has already left the shrine and at least made it to the forest, if not farther.”

Suddenly, a crash rocked the ship and the two boys ran up the stairs to see more venti attacking the
hull. Jason went to attack while Leo went to stabilize the ship. Their conversation was pushed to the back of each of their minds in the midst of the battle, but not forgotten. Jason was going to help Leo find his lost love, only wishing that Leo didn’t have to go through such gruesome dreams in order to keep on the right track.

Chapter End Notes

Was this supposed to be a short conversation that got out of hand? Yes. Do I have another one lined up that I need to edit? Yes. Do I have another fic I need to get out before that one? Yes.

So positive today.
So I’ve has this written for nearly a month now, but I wanted to edit and post something else in between the last one and this one. But I got back into the swing of classes and had complications every time I went to edit, so I just posted this one because I decided it's been too long.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Nico was kicking and screaming the whole way to the house. He just wanted to die, please just let him die. His heart was already broken on the ground and stomped on, so might as well just die with it.

The man pulled him into his hut and laid him down on a cot, sitting down in front of him. “Hey, kid. Whatever you think happened out there, didn’t happen. Think for a second and process whatever it is you just saw.”

Nico heard him, and closed his eyes. The first image that came up was of Leo turning around and leaving, but he pushed past that. He moved to think about where he was, where he just came from, who was in front of him.

He was in the Drakon Swamp, in Tartarus, just coming from the forest of curses. Leo was still in the mortal world. That was not Leo, just then, that was an arai. Leo still loved him.

Nico opened his eyes. He was embarrassed, suddenly. He’d just begged someone to kill him because someone broke up with him. Was he really one of those people?

Yes, for Leo. Only for Leo.

The man in front of him was Damasen, twenty feet tall and the only peaceful giant in the batch, to counter the only actively hostile god in the batch. He was known for caring for people, and it was sad that he was punished for avenging his friends.

“Thank you.”
“No problem, kid. You wouldn’t believe what some people come out of there seeing. You look hungry, care for some drakon?”

“Uh sure. Thanks.”

“Don’t mention it. You wouldn’t believe how much of it I have. Nearly a millennia and every day a new one pops up. At some point, I built this house with the bones, and I take care of the unfortunate souls that happen to land themselves here. Letting them heal up and go on their way to get out.”

“Doesn’t it get lonely?”

“Kid, I’m a giant. Not only that but I’m the only one of my family that has a clear enough head not to try and hunt their counterpart down and try to destroy them. I’m the odd one out in every circle I join. I was always going to be lonely.”

“Didn’t you have friends, at one point?”

“Yeah, but some of them died, others were killed by the beast that landed me here. Honestly? I’d rather be here, helping out those who need it, rather than farming for countries that have an abundance of food and still have people who are starving.”

That made Nico smile. “I’m just trying to make sure my boyfriend doesn’t kill himself worrying about me.”

“How’d you end up here, anyhow?” Nico pulled out the small package he kept in his jacket and tossed it to the giant, who whistled. “I may not know much about the outside world, but people come through enough for me to know what it means. You were shopping when you…..what?”

“Yeah, I wasn’t paying enough attention. Some monsters got the jump on me and I don’t know what happened, but then I was falling through the air and trying to make sure I landed in the fire.”

“That’s a good river to fall in. Heal you right up.” Damasen said, putting a plate of drakon meat in front of him.
Nico suddenly started rummaging around his bag. Remembering that he’d taken a bottle of the water before leaving, for this instance. He drank a portion, wincing as the unnatural liquid heat went down his throat and spread throughout his body, then proceeded to scarf down the food like it would be taken away.

“Well, there’s a solution. I’d recommend resting up before going back out, don’t know when you’ll be able to next.”

“Alright. Again, thanks.”

“Quit thanking me, it’s in my blood.”

Nico didn’t sleep well. Whether it was because he was in Tartarus, or he was paranoid or if it was just because of the nightmares, he didn’t know. But he would sleep in small forty five minute spurts then take another ten before he could get the images out of his head and fall back asleep, each one filled with either real or fake nightmares about the ship being attacked, or Leo being injured, or everything just crashing altogether.

He gave up after about five hours. He was still tired, but his body stopped letting him get to any state of sleep by that point, so he was forced to just recover for a few hours.

Nico felt like it was rude to stay, and wanted to get back to his friends (Leo) sooner rather than later. Damasen put some dried drakon meat in his bag, refusing to take it back, claiming he already had too much of it. The son of Hades just shrugged and accepted it.

“I like you, kid. That being said, I don’t want to see you ever again. You don’t belong here, ever. Now get back to that boyfriend, and send him down if he ever breaks your heart.”

Nico left the swamp the opposite way he came, chuckling for a moment before fully leaving the property. He had to remain on alert, monsters would be back on his tail from here on out, he had to be prepared at all times.

Something was following him, he could feel it. The hair on the back of his neck stood up with every step, yet whenever Nico looked behind him, nothing was there. He knew, though, could feel
the souls, or lack thereof. That was what made him uneasy about this place.

On earth, there were living souls, in the underworld, they were dead, but it was filled with souls. Tartarus knew nothing of the sort. Monsters didn’t have souls, that’s why he could usually pick one out of a crowd, even if everyone else was fooled.

But monsters had a different feel. While souls were full of energy, beings without them just felt vacant. Like when you’re in someone else’s house and they’re not in the room, you don’t know what to do with it.

Nico didn’t know what was following him, but that vacant feeling was magnified tenfold. He knew that there were at least two, and they were massive, like Damasen had been, but far less friendly.

Nico got one glimpse of them. They were identical, but mirrored. They crested the hill, each footstep was a perfect reflection of one another. They were giants, the ones created for Dionysus, the twins that had trapped Ares. The son of Hades ran. He ran for his next landmark, wanting to get as much distance between the giants and him as he could.

Without thinking about it, Nico ran into the mansion of Nyx. He was too focussed on running, he didn’t think about the repercussions.

It was every nightmare Nico’d ever had and more. It was darker than the shadows he travelled through, which only further unnerved him because he still couldn’t travel through them. He ran and ran and ran and couldn’t shut his eyes.

At some point, he got lost and had to stop. The walls were reaching out to him, he could hear footsteps in every direction, like they were closing in on him. He wasn’t claustrophobic, but he was starting to panic.

Nico was afraid. He was well and truly afraid. He knew it was the mansion but he also knew that he was being followed and that he would be dead if he ran into either of the giants.

Every one of his hidden fears were calling out to him. Telling him he was a disappointment, that Leo was being ostracized for being in a relationship with him. That he was being sent places that would eventually kill him, all because Nico wasn’t normal, because he couldn’t just buck up and
try to be normal. Leo would die because of him.

No. That was the mansion. It played with your nightmares. It showed you the worst things possible. It unwound your sanity until you were a plyable pile of string and you never left.

He had to leave as soon as possible.

There it was, the exit. Nearly two days in this literal hell hole and he could finally leave. Stepping out of the land of night terrors and into the land of regular nightmares, Nico found the twin giants standing at the entrance starting to make their way over. He ran with all his might.

He was out of the mansion, but he was nowhere near done. He would never be, not unless his guard was up until he had someone he could trust to have it up for him. Until he had Leo there, holding him, being held, what a wonderful dream.

He had to remember his plan. By now, his brain was everywhere, he could barely form a coherent thought. He was swaying on the moving ground, and that made his head swim more. But the ground was moving, that he knew. It felt like he was drunk, but the ground was moving up and down, up and down, like a breathing chest. There was a part over to the right that was moving faster, bum bum, bum bum, like a heartbeat.

Tartarus was a man as well as a place. And both were where nightmares came from. Whoever escaped were almost immediately put into either a mental facility or the Elysium, whichever came first. But Nico wouldn’t let that happen. He would hold on, for Leo. Leo would help him back from the brink of insanity.

As much as it didn’t look like it, Nico did know what was real and what was not. He hadn’t rested in days, hadn’t slept since longer, and had run out of the water from Phlegethon, but he knew what was real. He knew that there were still the giants behind him, that they hadn’t followed him in, and that they weren’t that far off from catching him. He knew that there was about to be a crowd of monsters all coming at him if he ever made it near the doors. He also knew the chances of that happening.

Nico di Angelo was no fool. He knew that there was very little chance that he would escape in one piece, or at all. He knew that there was little he could actually fight off in his state, and how unlikely it was that he would ever leave unless it was without his body.

But he would not surrender. There was no such thing as a tactical retreat when you’re about to die either way. Might as well give it your best shot. And he did, he fought with all the energy the mansion had spared him, everything he had left in him from this horrible place was put into his fighting. But he was no match.
Eventually, he was enclosed in a poisonous darkness before he passed out.

Leo’s nerves were fraying. It had been nearly a week and his dreams weren’t getting him any closer to finding his boyfriend. Everybody seemed to be avoiding him, sensing his horrible mood.

It was no wonder, the dreams weren’t making anything easier on him. It had been days since he had had a real dream. He had no idea where Nico was, nor what might be happening to him. In that, he had no idea how long it might be until they would see each other again.

Jason was the only one who would talk to him. It was little things, like asking him, or forcing him, to eat. Asking if he wanted to go with them to on a side-quest into one city or another. He constantly said no, saying he’d rather man the ship in case something happened, even though there were other people on board.

On this particular day, Jason decided that he was going to go with him, Percy and Piper into Topeka, Kansas, something he was not happy about. Leo wanted to be high-tailing it all over the world until Nico was in his arms, but the others said it wasn’t ‘logical’.

Things had been going great, Bacchus was being great help with his limited information and disappearing, and Leo was left with the distinct feeling that this had all been for nothing. That was when he felt it, the same niggling in the back of his head, like he had felt in Camp Jupiter.

It was only minutes later that Percy and Jason were fighting each other in the air, and strangely, Leo was in control of his own body. It was only the ‘leaders’ that were trying to kill each other.

Distantly, Leo heard Gaea telling something to Piper, and her trying to talk them both down, but he didn’t see that going anywhere. There was only so far words could get you, and they wouldn’t be enough this time.

“ENOUGH!!!” He shouted, using a voice that even Nico had only heard a couple of times, one that said he was angry and fed up and somehow had come up with a plan to fix it. Leo had their attention for a second, but then they resumed fighting, but at least it was on the ground.

The pyrokineticist smiled, then asked Piper to stand back, which she did. He set his hands on fire, something he didn’t often do, then proceeded to throw some at the two teenagers. It narrowly
missed, just enough for them to start glaring at him. He walked straight up to them, hefting each of them up by an extinguished, though still very hot, hand on the shoulder.

“Piper, I think you know what to do.” With the confidence she always projected, the actor’s daughter forced the eidolons out of them, including the one Leo hadn’t known was still tied to him.

Jason and Percy didn’t talk the rest of the way, looking embarrassed at their behavior. Piper walked ahead of them with Leo, who was just glad to be heading back to the ship.

The two teenage boys went to med bay to patch themselves up, including the burns that Leo had no shame in admitting to. When they left, they were arguing in the middle of the deck. Of course they were.

Unfortunately for them, Leo had run out of patience.

“I’m just trying to apologize, I could’ve killed you back there!”

“Well, I could’ve just as easily done the same, so there is no reason to.”

“Why can’t you just accept an apology for once? Do you always have to be the bigger man?”

“Okay boys, you’re both strong. Now, it’s almost time for a meeting and I don’t want to hear you guys bickering all night.”

Seemingly understanding why he was so upset, when usually he would be grabbing popcorn and watching it unfold until Piper or Annabeth broke it up, Percy just nodded and left, while Jason made his way over to Leo.

“How are you doing?”

“How do you think, John Green? The only person living person I’ve ever loved is missing and I don’t even know if they’re still living. You have all your friends to help you through things, but he’s all I’ve ever really had. So I’m sorry if I’m a little pissy. I just want to get this over with as quick as possible and-” Leo cut himself off as Jason pulled him into a hug.
“Thank you for trusting me enough to rant. You have more than just Nico, now. You have people here who care about you. I care about you.”

Leo didn’t lean into the hug like he did with Nico, but he did relax somewhat. “I….I know. I think. It’s just…..It’s hard to rely on other people not to spit it back in your face.”

“I understand well enough not to judge you. Now come on, Annabeth wants to start the meeting.”

That night, Leo dreamed of a bronze jar, poisonous air, and pomegranate seeds.

Their destination had always been Rome, but now Leo was determined to get them there, as soon as possible.

Chapter End Notes

Well, no idea when the next one will be out. But let's all hope its soon
**Dance, Dance (Fall Out Boy)**

**Chapter Summary**

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I'm two quarters and a heart down
And I don't want to forget how your voice sounds
These words are all I have so I write them
I need them just to get by

Dance, dance
I'm falling apart to half time
Dance, dance
And these are the lives we love to lead
Dance, this is the way they'd love if they knew
How misery loved me
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**Chapter Notes**

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YEAH, TWO IN THE SAME MONTH! I'M ON A ROLL! I know that I kinda promised one per week, but in my defense, I am in school still and have shit to do on the weekends. Sorry, if it's still going on during the summer, it'll be more frequent.

Also: I always use a song title for the title of my chapters but I wanna start putting some lyrics to that song in the summary, that way people who don't know the song and are curious can see.
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Nico woke up in darkness. It wasn’t unusual for him, being where he had been for the time he had, but this is different. He was in a cylinder- a barrel-like jar most likely- and it was hard to breathe.

He’d been caught. The twin giants had captured him and put him in this jar, but why? Why did they need a little demigod to do their bidding? His friends were already on their way to defeat Gaea-

Oh shit.

It was a trap. He was a lure, and there was no way that Leo would just go to gank Queen Dirt Face and then come back for him. They would walk right in here and Leo would be killed right in front of him. He couldn’t let that happen. He would have to get a message back to them, tell them to forget about him, or bring extra backup.
It was a fruitless endeavor, Nico realized. There wasn’t enough space or light to create a rainbow and he wasn’t even sure if Iris would accept it, let alone the amount of water he would waste, and he didn’t know when he would be rescued.

After less than an hour, the air started to turn sour. Right before that, Nico had heard the giants return and start talking outside the jar, before the air changed. It seemed like he was being drugged, based on the way his eyes drooped with each passing breath.

It wasn’t long before he’d passed out.

“Why did you want to talk to me, Leo?” Jason asked as he was pulled into the engine room the next morning.

“I know where he is.”

“Nico?”

“Who else?”

“How did you find him? Is he close?”

“No, he’s in Rome. And I didn’t really find him. It was a dream….. He’s in trouble, Jay. I’m pretty sure he’s in a jar, and the air is poisoned or drugged or something. And he doesn’t have much food.”

“How do you know all this from a dream? I’m not trying to be a downer, but are you sure you have the correct information?”

“I am as sure as I am the son of Hephaestus. You know those impressions you get from dreams?” Jason nods. “It was like that. A flash of the colosseum, an overly-sweet smell, a look at Nico.”

“That was it?”
“What do you want, Jason? I’m not a prophet.”

“That’s a short dream. Did you like soundproof your room so I wouldn’t wake up when you had a nightmare?”

“That doesn’t matter—”

“Yes it does. If Nico isn’t here, then it’s my job to be on your ass about your well-being. That includes getting you to sleep.”

“What do you want me to do, huh? You know what I see when I close my eyes, it’s not exactly something to fall asleep to.”

There was a pregnant pause that followed Leo’s outburst.

“I’m going to Maine.” Jason said suddenly.

“What?”

“I’ll just, y’know, fly there, I think.”

“Because that’s realistic.” Leo said sarcastically. “It’s over fifteen hundred miles away, more than three hours by plane. Plus we’re going to Georgia anyway.”

“Good thing I’m faster than a plane.”

“What are you going to do in Maine?”

“Oh, you know. Things. There’s someone I want to visit.”
“We need you on this ship!”

“You guys can defend it on your own. Plus, I won’t be gone more than...say seven hours. You can time me. Or Iris message me, remember?”

“The gods all have split personality disorder right now, remember? Iris isn’t taking any messages.”

“I trust you, Leo.” Jason stated, standing up and making his way to the door.

“Yeah, but why are you doing this?”

“You’ll see. Tell Percy that I have unlimited bragging rights if I get back and all of you are in the infirmary. Bye bye!” And with that, Jason jumped off the side of the ship and was literally gone with the wind, much faster than a plane would be.

Nico woke again with a hazy mind, the air still tasting sickly sweet. He would surely be killed if he kept breathing as much air as he was, but he would also die if he made himself stop.

A death trance would solve his problems, but it was an unpleasant experience, one that the prince of the underworld wished he didn’t have to relive.

He would be shutting down almost all his organs, the only ones still running would be his heart, lungs and stomach, but that was to conserve energy. His brain would be online, but only to make sure those processes were still going. The actual part of his brain that was Nico would be shut off and put aside, letting him get an inside look at the way his body was healing and/or maintaining itself.

He’d only had to do it once before, and that was because he’d almost died and had Leo there to make sure that when he woke up to eat, that he would have a nutritional meal. Now all he had was some drakon jerky and some pomegranate seeds.

Nico did it, but it hurt. The easy part was meditating enough to get to a place that he could ‘see’ everything he needed to shut down. The hard part came to actually shutting everything down.
Metabolism was slowed to an almost complete stop, he went completely unresponsive, cell reproduction was slowed except in the areas it was needed, growth was stopped and the Italian boy sat completely motionless, save for the rising and falling of his chest. Every process he needed to stop was like another area that was starving.

The deep ache that spread throughout his body felt like a different cramp had arisen in each different area, until that was all he could feel. Like the muscles in each different area had been stretched taut and twisted.

Nico sat there for days, waking once everyday to eat some jerky, then took to eating one pomegranate seed every day once the jerky ran out.

He really hoped they came soon, because he only had six left.

It took Jason about three hours to reach Maine, then another ten minutes to find what he was looking for. Bar Harbor, the town that started it all. Jason asked for directions many times, and finally walked up to the building around lunchtime. He knocked on the door to Westover Hall.

It opened to reveal a sweet looking middle-aged woman with long brown hair and circle-lense glasses. She frowned as she looked at him. “You’re a bit old to stay with us, but feel free if you have nowhere else to go.” She stepped back to allow him inside, which he did.

“Actually, ma’am, I was hoping to find a Miss Ribeiro? She was my friend’s favorite teacher here.”

The woman’s eyebrows raised to her hairline. “And what’s your name?”

“Jason, Jason Grace.”

“And what’s your friend’s name?”

“Leo Valdez.”
Her eyes widened and she smiled. “So he finally made more friends than little Nico and his sister?”

“Yes, I mean, I hope he considers us friends.”

“Well isn’t that wonderful. He left in a hurry, all three of them did. Snuck out to that damned graveyard and left, I think. Some people think they saw one of the teachers turn into a monster, but a lot of these kids are troubled, you know. Do you know Nico?”

“Not nearly as well as I’d like to, but yes.”

“He always was the quiet type. Did they get together yet? Because they looked half in love by the time they left here.”

“Indeed they did, before I met them even.”

“Well, I’m glad they’re alright. I’m Miss Ribeiro, how may I help you?”

“I know that the three of them took most of their stuff when they left, but I was wondering if they left anything behind. See, Nico is…on a trip with the camp we’re in, and I’m hoping to give Leo a bit of comfort.”

“Of course. They took all their blankets and jackets, as well as a lot of the knick knacks on the shelves, but I found this when we were cleaning out their room.”

Jason followed her into her office and watched as she pulled out a small shoebox from under her desk.

“I usually don’t get attached to the students, but those three had so much going on that it was hard not to. Plus all that drama when Nico fell into that coma and then the earthquake during the dance, that’s when they left you know. A lot of people thought they were hanging out in the woods and got crushed, but I kept this just in case.” She opened it, it was filled with polaroids and journals, as well as the camera that took the pictures. “Each year we save some donor money to get the kids something small for their christmas. For the longest time, Nico just said he was happy to be there, and that he didn’t need anything, but the staff figured he might want something later, so they put the money aside. Lo and behold, one year he asked for a camera. I figured out old school was the best bet to get him to use it, and he did all this.”
“What are the journals?”

“Leo asked for them, for Christmas. I haven’t looked in them, but he always had one around. I thought he would draw in them to be able to do something with his hands, but I never saw one of his pieces.”

“Would you let me take these back to him?”

“Of course, on the condition that you ask him to write to us. The address hasn’t changed in over fifty years, I don’t see it happening any time soon.”

“I’ll tell him. Thank you so much.”

She followed Jason back to the front door, and handed him a backpack big enough to hold the box.

“This was Leo’s. We can’t really give it to other students because he added things and none of us know how to take out the Christmas lights without it catching on fire.”

“Thank you. For everything.”

“No problem, sweetie. Now go back and comfort your friend.”

“Yes, ma’am.” Jason said, slipping on the backpack and walking back up the path, waiting until he was a good distance from the buildings to build the wind around him, and eventually take to the air.

Jason got back to the ship just in time to eat dinner.

“Where in Hades have you been?” Percy asked as he walked into the dining hall, after he set down the bag in his room.
“I told you, he ‘wanted to see someone in Maine’. Which, I don’t even understand, man aren’t you from, like, Michigan or something.” Leo said with a bowlful of minestrone soup in his hands.

“I’m from California, Leo. It looks like you guys didn’t break the ship while I was gone.”

“No but a few *venti* attacked while you were gone. Really could’ve used you here, Grace.” Percy said, upset at the fact that he didn’t know where his friend was.

“Look, I just went to see an old friend. I wanted to grab some stuff while we were in town.” Jason said, moving to the table to get dinner.

“Jason,” Great now even Hayden was speaking up. “I know you think you’re making sense, but we are over *Missouri*, not Vermont.”

“Look, I’m fine, you’re fine. I won’t do it again, I have no reason to do it again. Not if it worries you guys that much.”

“Well, you also could’ve attracted a bunch of monsters, the Mist might hide a teenager flying above their heads, but monsters will see and follow you.”

“I’m fine, honestly. Let’s just get to Georgia.”

“I still don’t understand why we have to make a pit stop when we are supposed to be headed to Rome.”

“Because, Leo, Bacchus said that this Phorcys guy will probably have some information about ‘the small and pale one’, so if you wanna survive rescuing Nico, we gotta stop.”

“Fine.” Leo goes to get another bowl of soup and some bread before stalking off to his room.
“So what was that all about, Jason?” Leo asked. It was their turn for patrol, though the schedule for the fireboy was less timed and more ‘as needed’, that way he could try to sleep most nights.

As it was, they were the only two awake except for Hayden, who was on the other side of the ship, and had all the privacy they needed for this kind of conversation.

“What are you talking about?”

“You know damn well what I’m talking about. Why did you leave for hours on end without telling anyone where you’d be or taking anybody with you, for that matter. What if you’d been attacked, struck down in the air, or stabbed on the ground? You are a reckless SOB, but not reckless enough to do that unless you were doing it for someone. So why did you go?”

“Because you’re my friend. I wanted to do something for you, but I didn’t know what until I got the idea.”
“And you couldn’t tell anybody?”

“No, I couldn’t tell anybody. You can be scary when you wanna be, there is no way I’m going to let the others be grilled by you and expect them to hold their ground.”

“I take that as a complement.”

“You would.”

“But you never answered me. What were you doing?”

“I told you, visiting a friend….of a friend.”

“Why don’t you just tell me?”
“Because, it’s a surprise, one that I will show you once you finally head to bed for the night.”

Leo sighed as leaned over the control panel. “Is this another thing about my nightmares? Because I just want to get Nico back as soon as I can and we can get the rest over with.”

“I know you want Nico back. But we don’t know where he is and we can’t ask the gods for help, what with their warring personalities fighting constantly. But we need your head in the game, in the now, because if there’s a fight and you haven’t had sleep in a week and you get yourself killed, then you might not see Nico ever again, and if you do, he’s gonna be pissed.”

The demigod sighed. “Fine. What is it you think will help me sleep?”

“First, I’m going to make sure you’re taking care of yourself. So you are going to take a shower, brush your teeth, and change your clothes.”

“I don’t need a babysitter.”

“No, but you do need to be told how to take care of yourself. And that job falls to me when Nico isn’t here.” Jason grabbed a towel that was hanging off the doorknob. “I want you to be in there for
at least ten minutes, with the water running. And brush your teeth either before you go in or when you get out.”

“Are you going to smell my breath too, mom?”


While Leo was in the bathroom, hopefully taking a shower, Jason opened his drawers and pulled out underwear, a too-big shirt and some pajama shorts for his friend, and placed them on the sink counter, closing the main bathroom door behind him.

After nine minutes (but who was counting) he heard the shower turn off and a minute later the sink turn on, then off, then on again a couple minutes later. Leo came out looking like his normal self, except for the dark circles under his eyes and the seemingly permanent frown stuck on his face.

Having gone to his room to retrieve the backpack, Leo found Jason sitting on his bed with said backpack in his lap.

“Where did you get that?” Leo asked, recognizing the bag as his own.
“I told you I went to Maine.”

“You didn’t tell me you were going to a boarding school-like orphanage for people who aren’t wanted.”

“Leo—”

“Whatever, just tell me what you wanted to so I can try to get some sleep before we arrive in Georgia tomorrow.”

“Here, just take the whole thing.”

And he did. Jason moved over on the bed, allowing the other boy to sit next to him and see what was inside.

“What?” Leo whispered to himself, not believing his eyes.
“Do you know what it is?”

“Of course I know what it is. I couldn’t find it when we left and so I just…..left it there. I thought they might have thrown it out.”

“Miss Ribeiro said that they wanted to, but she kept it in her office. She also wanted me to tell you hi for her. And yell at you for not writing her. She told me that she always knew you and Nico would get together, and sends congratulations.”

“Of course she would. She was always the sweetest. When Nico first figured out he could shadow travel, she was the one that convinced the rest of the teachers to let me into the infirmary, when usually there’s a family and staff only policy.”

Leo opened the box. It brought back all the memories of Westover Hall, some little things that he’d forgotten about, or just events that shaped Nico’s and his early friendship.

The boy’s eyes landed on a picture from the graveyard. It was the time the Bianca had stolen the camera and taken pictures of them for the day, Leo had never seen these pictures, but he remembered living through them so vividly. Almost exactly a week before his boyfriend slipped into a coma, it was the day that he realized he loved the diAngelo’s, then Leo found out he was in
love with Nico when he appeared in their dorm, having shadowed travelled for the first time and scared the life out his sister and best friend.

Then his attention turned to the journals. He’d honestly forgotten about these, about the pictures, too caught up in their hectic lives to think about the time before. But here they were, filled cover-to-cover with drawings and entries detailing their adventures within the compound. Nobody had ever seen what was inside of them, as far as the author knew.

Thumbing through the pages, skimming over some of the words, Leo found that the language used in each entry sounded completely different from what he said and thought now. This boy was much more….joking. He had fun, didn’t worry as much, but was as much of a lovesick idiot he was now.

It made the demigod realize something; in all that they’d done, accomplished, fought for- they lost themselves along the way. Yes, Leo loved Nico as much as he ever had, and nothing would change that, and visa versa, but they weren’t the carefree preteens they used to be. They were battle and tragedy-hardened teens who breathed threats like they were greetings. It made Leo miss the way they used to be, the way he’d been so long ago.

No, they couldn’t go back to the ignorance of the past, but they didn’t have to brace for the possibility in the future. There had to be a middle ground, something they could work towards, and it started with Leo’s behavior. He would try to adopt that attitude again, even if he didn’t fully immerse back into it. The flamemarker would always look out for threats and defend against any wrong-doers, but he could try to have more fun.

The golden years only lasted so long, after all.
Leo pulled himself out of the memories that Jason brought him, and was surprised to find his friend still in the room with him. In an attempt to change his behavior, the son of Hephaestus set the box aside and wrapped his arms around the other boy’s neck, burying his face in the other’s neck.

“Thank you.”

“No prob-”

“No. Thank you. I’m sorry for brushing you off-”

“It’s really no big deal-”

Leo pulled away to look the other boy in the eye. “But it is, Jason. You didn’t know me then but... but see that kid?” He pulled out and pointed to a photo of the three of them smiling into the camera, still in their pajamas and sleep-mussed hair. “That used to be me on the weekends, us on the weekends.”
“I don’t think that I’ve ever seen you look at anything or anyone but Nico with that kind of smile on your face.”

“That’s my point. I want to be more like the person in this picture, less of a dick, so to speak. I’m always going to worry about Nico, especially if we keep getting kidnapped, but I don’t need to take it out on you guys.”

“Well, then I guess you’re welcome. I just hope this helps you sleep better, Leo.”

“This means more to me than you can tell.”

“I’m glad. Now get some sleep.”

“I’ll try.” They both knew that it was all he could really promise.

“Alright. G’night.”
Leo dreamed about Nico that night, but instead of seeing him being tortured, he saw the boy in what he knew was a death trance. It pained the son of Hephaestus to see the other demigod going through that, having been told just how uncomfortable it was and how it was only for emergencies. If there was anything Nico could do to avoid using it, he would, which only spoke to his situation.

The dream shifted, just then. It zoomed out to where the two giants were, within some sort of labyrinth, but not the Labyrinth. He saw Nico’s sword there, and knew he would be separated, but that someone would have to get it back. It would be a trap, and that someone would have to defeat the twins, but also that it would lead to finding Nico.

He would do what he had to.

Jason felt good about what he’d done. The look on Leo’s face meant more than anything he could’ve said. Once he’d received the box, the pyrokineticist lost all of the stress lines on his face. He’d looked years younger. He’d looked…..his age.

The son of Jupiter had never really noticed it before, but both Leo and Nico looked so much older
than they were. It was all due to stress and worry, he knew, and there was no way that anybody should go through what either of them had. They were growing in maturity faster than their body’s were, and that wasn’t fair.

Thinking about it, Jason doubted that they ever got the chance to be kids after the age of twelve. They were teenagers and barely knew how to have fun. They deserved to go to the mall when this was over, discover YouTube and XBox.

But Jason would give what he could. First it was the shoebox, now he was sitting at breakfast, trying to convince the people around him to let Leo sleep.

“I guess what I’m saying is- why does he get special treatment? He patrols when he feels like it, he sleeps in all the time, he basically makes his own rules and doesn’t listen to anybody but his little boytoy.” Piper argued.

“Piper, why is this so important to you?” Frank asked.

“He and Nico have never followed the rules. I heard stories that they would sneak around at night before they even got to camp. Nico’s sister, Bianca, told me all about it before she….yeah.” Percy said. Annabeth reached over and patted his knee, knowing that he still blamed himself for what he saw as an avoidable death.

“I remember that. Nico and I would try to meet up at night because that was where he felt more comfortable. He would bundle up in so many layers and I’d just go in a t-shirt and shorts. Towards the end of the visit, his hands would be like little ice cubes, and he would always think I was running a fever. Bianca sent me to the infirmary so many times when my temperature would spike a little bit. It always sent the nurses into a panic when they found out they had to take care of a kid running a 115°F temperature.” Leo had entered and walked across the room.

When he began his story, Percy of the half-bloods were convinced that he would be ready to fight anyone even mentioning Nico or Bianca, but when he actually looked at Leo’s face, he understood.
Leo’s eyes were red and puffy, he was sniffling every couple of seconds, and in the middle of his tale, his voice shook.

Jason and Percy both made the decision to check up on him, later. For now, they just watched as Leo gathered a plate of food and left.

After a stretch of silence, Piper spoke up. “Okay, yeah, he’s got special circumstances. You were right.”
Leo announced his plan to head to Rome to the rest of the crew later that day. They’d left him alone to sort out how he felt, and that was a blessing and a curse.

When he was with Nico, he told the Italian everything. How he was feeling, what he was thinking, anything that came to mind. When they were separated, Leo had nobody to talk to. Sure, pretty much everybody on the boat would be willing to listen and give advice, but none of them popped into his mind when the time came.

That was something he would need to work on, but right now, he was just focussed on getting to Rome in one piece.

It didn’t take as long as expected to arrive in Rome. There were a few times where the whole ship went into a panic trying to get monsters away from the boat and trying to help Leo with the repairs as much as possible, but it was a pretty smooth ride, for the most part. Of course, there were the monsters here and there who tried to make their trip as difficult as possible, but it wasn’t anything they were unprepared for.

Leo, Frank and Hayden went to look for Nico. Leo was sure that he would find him, and Hayden was sure that he would be able to sense his half-brother underground if they needed.

The entire trip was a blur for the firestarter. They somehow found their way to the Pantheon, where
his brain started working faster than it ever had before, finding and trying to solve puzzles as fast as possible. They made it from room to room, giving Leo a horrible feeling as they went further and further underground.

Eventually, they were being attacked by some Eidolons who thought they were smart by controlling some automatons, but they didn’t count on Leo using his fortune cookie to figure out the password to this weird sphere he found and being able to control them.

The three of them just stood there, not knowing what to do. The action was over, Nico wasn’t here, and none of them could figure out why they had been led there or what could have led them there from the beginning.

That’s when Leo sees it out of the corner of his eye. Something shining on the ground. He walked over to it and immediately recognized it. A ring on the floor. A ring he made was just sitting on the ground, one that Nico hadn’t taken off in over three years.

The skull ring. The one that turned into a sword.

Nico’s sword.

This was a trap.

“What is it, Leo?” Hayden asked, not being able to see what he was looking at.

He placed the ring on his own hand as he held it up.

“A ring?” Frank asked. “What’s so special about a ring?”

“It’s Nico’s ring.”

“Are you sure?” Hayden asked.

“Do you know where he got it?”
“Hades, I’m guessing.”

“I made it. I gave it to him because he always gets worn out from summoning things and he needed a weapon.”

“But it’s a ring.” Frank said, obliviously.

Leo pushed in the eyes and turned, the same way he had told Nico to do so long ago. The sword came into view, seeming to suck all the light from the room. “I made it in Hades’ forge, Stygian Iron is not something you want to touch, under any circumstances, unless you’re a child of the underworld.” Leo swung it around a few times, not letting the blade anywhere near his friends, but testing the weight yet again. “I’ll need to sharpen it soon.

“And yes, it’s a ring and a sword, but something isn’t right here.”

“What do you mean?”

“He’s right, Frank. Why was I sensing Nico, why did we come all this way just to find a sword? Or ring? Or whatever? There’s something wrong here.”

“That’s right, my little gold digger.” Said a voice from across the room. Gaea’s face was in view through a mirror.

“What-” Frank started before Hayden cut him off.

“She means it literally.”

“Looks like the three of you have found your way into my element. Just try digging your way out of this one.”

“You bitch-” Leo started to say, but was interrupted.
“Don’t worry, my little firecracker. I’m sure your little loverboy will visit you in the underworld. Though, maybe he won’t. You know what happens to souls, don’t you? They forget who they are, forget everybody they love, walk through the rest of time without ever finding the one thing that made them alive- an identity.”

Leo ran and stabbed the sword straight through the mirror, right as the room started to shake. He looked at Frank, who was looking at Hayden.

“I can do something about this, but Frank, you might want to be able to dig.”

He nodded and began to shrink as the room started to collapse.

Nico had been in the barrel for a long time, and he was down to his last pomegranate seed. If his friends didn’t get him out quickly, then there would be no hope for him.

Almost all of his body functions had been shut down, the only way he was still alive was because he was breathing. The poisonous gas he was breathing would eventually kill him, but he would die first of starvation or dehydration if his friends did not show soon.

Nico ate the last seed, quickly moving back into the trance to save as much energy as possible.

The only thing he regretted was leaving Leo behind.

Jason followed Percy and Piper, the daughter of Aphrodite using her dagger to show her the way they needed to go. It led them to the same staircase she had seen them all dead in earlier, but it had to lead them to Nico somehow, or else it wouldn’t have shown up at all.

They walked over, light conversation overtaking most of their trip. They all already knew what was going on, they didn’t need to talk about it more. The truth of the matter was that it was a war. If
they didn’t try to make it somehow enjoyable- even if it was just by being with your friends- then they would all go crazy or something near it.

It was a phrase that Jason thought a lot about- they were too young for this. Nico and Hayden might be more than fifty years old each, but even they got their pasts ripped from them. If anything, they hardly knew what was going on in the world, how to act with all the social changes that had occurred, they sometimes acted younger than the rest of them.

But most of them hadn’t even reached seventeen yet. It was too early in their lives to worry about fighting in a war, having to worry about beings older than all of them combined just deciding to fuck with their lives.

You couldn’t be a halfblood as well as have a completely safe childhood. With all the monsters of the world, you needed to know how to protect yourself or else you would be killed, which is a thought than should not have to pop into any of their lives.

Percy and Piper had been talking while Jason was having his inner monologue. They had made it to the spiral staircase, and the son of Jupiter finally snapped out of his thoughts.

“We don’t know if there’s some kind of underground water or something. I think it’s best if I go down first and make sure, just so I can breathe at least.”

Piper agreed easily enough, but Jason grabbed onto his shoulder and looked him in the eyes. “Stay safe.”

“Of course.” The waterboy nodded at him with honestly etched into his face.

Piper looked between them as Percy went down the steps.

“Wanna tell me something?” She asked.

“Huh? What?”

“I saw that. You can’t hide the hearts in your eyes from the daughter of Aphrodite, honey.”
Jason chuckled nervously. “I- I don’t know what you’re talking about, Pipes.” He stammered out.

She looked at him in disbelief but Percy called up to them before she could continue the conversation. She saw him smile in relief but smirked back. “Don’t think this is over, Sparky.”

A sense of dread filled him as he followed her down the stairs.

Percy trudged down the stairs, cautious for anything that could attack him, or any piece of the environment that could be dangerous. He couldn’t see anything except nine odd statues, so he called his friends down and went on to search the room.

“I wish Leo were here, he could give this place some light.” Piper said.

“Yeah, but he really needed to look for Nico. Have you seen him since he went missing? I’m pretty sure those two are too codependent to function without each other.”

“But it’s still kinda nice, huh?”

“What is?”

“The only thing they need is each other. They have known each other for most of their lives, and they don’t really fight, and they just seem to be really in love. They don’t hide anything from each other and can tell each other anything. It seems like they have what most people only dream of.”

“But you also have to look at what they’ve been through.” Jason pointed out.

“What do you mean?”

“I can confidently say that Nico and Leo are two of the toughest people I know. They have gone through more than most demigods, and that’s more than anyone should go through in a lifetime.
They’ve both been kidnapped multiple times. Once, Reyna told me about a time Nico came through the camp looking to talk to Pluto.”

“Why would he want to talk to the Roman version of his own dad? He’s probably one of two demigods who have such an open relationship with even one god. And the other one is Leo.”

“Well, he needed to get a soul out of the underworld in order to get some asshole to give Leo back. Pluto didn’t let him, and he had to figure out some other way. But- Nico can shadow travel. I don’t know why he didn’t just get him that way.”

“Because he couldn’t.” Percy said. He continued when the others looked at him in confusion. “I remember that, I remember the horrible room Leo was kept in. Barely big enough to be a prison cell, colder than a trip through the underworld, and bright light coming in at every angle. It was so bright in there that Leo’s own shadow wasn’t big or dark enough to get Nico through.

“A monster was holding him. Nico came out and acted like he was super mad at me to try and be able to get in and out as quickly as possible. But Geryon just took him and my other friends hostage as well and made me do some of his chores.

“I fought him eventually, but Nico got the final blow. He deserved it. The bastard had basically tortured Leo for days. He almost had hypothermia and it was the first time any of us had seen just how much Nico cares for Leo.”

Jason and Piper were shocked by the story. While they had both known Nico had gone through some shit, they didn’t think it really went that far. They had even stopped searching the room to listen.

They weren’t standing around for long, though, as nine nymphs appeared in the room and decided to fill the room with water and sap the demigods of whatever they wanted.

As the room filled, Percy noticed Jason flailing, not being able to get much oxygen in even though the room was still half air.

He was worried about Jason, he was trying to find a solution about the water, he was trying to breathe underwater even though he still couldn’t.
Eventually, Piper had the idea that the cornucopia could be used to fill the room with clean water instead of the polluted water. It worked well enough, the water draining out as the nymphs were happy with what they ended up getting in the exchange and left them alone. Luckily they told of the location of Otis and Ephialtes before they departed.

There was a moment of panic for Percy as Jason laid on his back, not breathing or moving. He quickly maneuvered himself over and concentrated. He waved Piper’s worried hands away and placed his own on his unconscious friend’s forehead. He focussed on the water in his lungs and tugged. It only took a moment for all of the water to come rushing out and to have Jason awake and coughing out any remaining drops in his windpipe.

Percy tried to help as much as he could with that too.

He was more than relieved that Jason was okay, and he couldn’t help but sit there and just hold him for a moment. In fact, he could’ve done it for a lot longer, but Piper cleared her throat.

“Come on, let’s go battle some giants and find the son of Hades.”

Piper led the way to the giants’ hideout, wanting to give the boys some space and time to get their bearings. She had freaked out when she saw Jason basically drowning on the floor, and had been ready to try her hand at CPR, but she also had a sneaking suspicion that Percy might be more equipped to deal with water than she was, and she was glad she had backed off.

Once they arrived at the lair, they found a jar that just had to hold Nico. If it didn’t, and they all came back empty-handed, then she just didn’t know what else to do. Before they could make it even near the jar, Ephialtes came into the room, and not too long after, Otis followed.

They were talking about their future plans, how they were going to bring Rome crumbling to the ground, how they were going to auction all of the demigods off- just your typical, run-of-the-mill villain monologue.

Then they lifted something off the top of the jar and knocked it over, sending Nico rolling across the floor without any signs that he tried to stop himself.

The giants soon noticed the half bloods and they had to think of a plan on the spot.
The battle was intense, with Percy taking on Ephialtes while Jason got Otis, leaving Piper to get to and protect Nico to the best of her abilities.

 Monsters were released, fireworks were exploded, and Piper was knocked out and woke back up before it was over. Nico seemed fine, he even seemed to be waking up, but she could see the battle was far from over. Fortunately, they got some help.

 Sooner rather than later, Bacchus joined the fight and raised them to fight in the Colosseum. With the help of the god on their side, it wasn’t too long before the giants were dead and the colosseum was just a ruin again.

 Leo knew that something was going on in the other side of town. He didn’t know how, but a feeling welled up inside him to get over as soon as possible. They’d just climbed out of the dirt, but Hazel humored him and whistled to call Arion, and they rode away as fast as possible.

 Still, as serious as the situation was, Leo couldn’t help comparing Frank’s weasel self to Rufus from “Kim Possible”.

 They arrived on the outside of the colosseum, climbing off Arion and finding Hedge running up towards them. Before they could figure out what was going on, Percy, Jason, and Piper walked out, looking a little worse for wear.

 In Percy’s arms was a figure Leo would recognize anywhere.

 That got him running faster than he ever had. He took his love from the son of Poseidon’s arms, whispering an unintelligible string of Italian and Spanish to him, roughly translating to; “I’ve got you, you’re not going anywhere, never do that again, I almost lost you, I love you” and so on.

 Leo held his boyfriend close to his chest and took some solace in the way Nico curled up and loosely gripped his shirt.

 It would still be a long road from there, and he would need to Iris message Hades as soon as he got to the ship.
But for now, he would relish in the fact that he had his love in his arms once again.
Annabeth was wondering if it was a bad idea after all, to do the quest alone. She realized quickly that there would be no way to go back and continue on the main quest. Not to mention she was pretty sure her mother didn’t like her on a good day, imagining what it would be like if she chickened out now because she was scared? Just the thought gave her the chills.

Nevertheless, she had already gone down about forty feet with nothing but some plastic swords and string. Then she had to convince a bunch of cultists that she knew everything about a god she’d never heard of, and that she could use his power, and now Annabeth, the oh-so-great strategist, was holding back tears at the sharp and sudden pain shooting from her ankle, though her leg and to her hip.

In moments like these, she couldn’t help but think of her best friend. How many times had he been injured and kept going? Percy had jumped into this life and seemed to love it, to have fun doing it.

At least that was what it looked like from the outside. Annabeth was there in the times in between, when he couldn’t sleep because he was too worried over what was going to happen. Or the nights they had to huddle up together because their sleeping bags got lost somewhere and it was cold enough to freeze your pee before it hit the ground.

They learned a lot about each other in nights like those, when neither of them could sleep. When they didn’t have the energy to do anything other than look for food. Not every night made it into the story books, after all. People heard about what they did and couldn’t wait to get a quest, they don’t realize how many people you can lose, how many gray hairs Annabeth has gotten before and after the boulder incident.

Nevertheless, Nico wasn’t the only one that had looked for his kidnapped best friend.

Coming out of her thoughts, Annabeth realized that the white-hot pain she had experienced had turned into a dull ache. One that she could ignore for now. It had been a long day, and the ache made her feel warm, even though that should have raised some warning bells.

Without her consent, Annabeth’s eyelids started to droop. She was injured and in an unfamiliar place, she should scope it out and make a splint for her ankle.

But the inky blackness of sleep was so inviting…. 
Once she woke up, the daughter of Athena had the forethought to take some ambrosia and use some broken crates and ripped cloth to hold her ankle in place. She had to get through this, if not for herself, then at least to stop Camp Jupiter from fighting Camp Half-Blood. Enough lives would be lost against Gaea, they didn’t need a stupid feud to raise the death count even more.

It wasn’t until she was face-to-face with Arachne that Annabeth let go of her arachnophobia. There was the chance that the goddess would kill her in a single pierce of her talon-like legs, but what monster that she’d faced couldn’t? At least this one was so hell-bent on revenge that she was blinded to the design she was being tricked into making until her giant ass was stuck.

Annabeth was starting to look for a way out, avoiding the legs sprouting through the webbing, when her favorite crew and ship blast a hole through the ceiling of the room, and subsequently the floor…. into Tartarus. And the parthenos was safe, but then she was falling, but Percy caught her. And then he let go.

Nobody was really surprised when Leo single-handedly carried Nico, barely even breaking a sweat.

The boy in his arms had lost a dangerous amount of weight, and even if he wasn’t, none of them would have even tried to get between them to help carry the weight. At this point, the six of them knew that asking would not get much of a response, if it got a response at all. Even Coach Hedge had backed off, having realised early on, much like the rest of the crew, that neither of them would listen to what he had to say.

Leo had led the group of worried friends onto the ship, finally accepting Jason’s help to avoid climbing the ladder with Nico in his arms. He kept silent, only nodding when Jason asked a question, then walked him and his love straight to their room.

All of his friends hovered at the door, afraid to pop the bubble Leo set up by laying Nico on his bed, then climbing onto the bed and placing the boy’s head in his lap.
Piper offered to set up a bed in the infirmary for Nico, a place where his vitals would be monitored and he would be able to get the medical attention he needed. She even tried to put some charm into her words, doing anything she could to get his attention and give Nico some real help.

“No, Piper. He doesn’t need to be hooked up to machines and be forced to wake up attached to wires and needles. He doesn’t need sterile white walls and a heart monitor.” Leo said softly, almost in a whisper, with his tone broken and aching.

“What does he need, Leo?” Jason asked, finally walking into the room and pulling a chair next to the bed to sit in.

Leo looked at Jason; for so long he was the only one he trusted enough to confide in. For so long he just broke down in silence, depressed and agonizing over the uncertain fate of the one person he truly loved.

The look in his eyes saddened Jason more than he thought possible. The eyes that he had known to be brown, bright and full of ideas were dull, heartbroken, and pleading.

“He needs to be with his family.”

Jason understood what Leo meant immediately. “How do you plan to do that?”

“I’ll call up Hades and he can summon us down. Nico would recover easier there, it’s his element.” Leo told him, same volume, same tone. It was like he was begging them to let him go, or at least to send Nico down to recover.

There were whispers across the four still at the door, Percy, Piper, Hayden and Frank were uncertain over what the best course of action would be. But Jason’s eyes remained on Leo’s. For once he looked like he didn’t know what to do. Like he was asking for permission, like he was unconfident in his ability to care for his boyfriend. It was the first time Jason had ever seen Leo like this.

He was always driven to do something. From what he’d seen, it was usually trying to get a quest done with as soon as possible so he could spend more time with Nico, or fixing something on the ship, or finding Nico in the recent weeks. But their time apart had changed him. He was no longer the person Jason had always known, he was more like the kid Percy described him as when they first met.
Uncertain, afraid of being alone, madly in love.

Jason broke his eye contact with Leo to look at Percy. They both knew what all this meant. Leo would be off the ship, with Nico, in the underworld for the foreseeable future. They came to an understanding without words. Jason looked back to Leo, who hadn’t moved his gaze.

“Do you know how long you will be?”

Leo shook his head.

“I want to have daily check-ins, maybe some tips if we need to fix the ship in some way, and don’t forget to take care of yourself.” Leo started to get some hope in his eyes. “I know I sound like an overbearing parent here, but you have more than just the boy in front of you. You have the rest of us, too. We just want to make sure you’re okay. And I’d like to see you back as soon as possible for Nico, okay?” Jason asked.

Leo nodded slowly, like he was afraid to be excited.

The other demigods trickled out, leaving the two on the bed to their plans. Jason was the last to leave, and before the door was fully closed, he heard a whispered “Did you hear that, babe? We’re going home.”

Jason felt emotionally exhausted by the time he got to the main deck. He felt like he needed a nap, or five.

Luckily, Percy was near the control panel, trying to figure out how to work it.

“Don’t worry about it. I had Leo show me all about it a while ago. It’s in auto-pilot now, we just need to put in coordinates.” Jason said.

“I know it’s the right thing to do, but there’s just something that doesn’t sit right about sending
someone away before the quest is done. I know that letting them have this is good, that they'll come back stronger if they get this rather than what will happen if they don't. But I- I still can't help questioning it. Like what if we get attacked? Does anybody but Leo actually know how to use the weapons? How are we going to find Annabeth? Everything is going downhill and I love Nico and Leo like brothers but we might need all hands on deck and-

“Percy! We cannot get caught up in hypotheticals. If we absolutely need Leo before Nico wakes up, I’m sure he can find a way up and back down. Other than that, we still have five kickass half-bloods and an insane goat-man. We are going to be fine, more than fine. This has been hard on everyone, we just need to keep a level head.” Jason had stepped closer to Percy to place a comforting hand on his shoulder, pulling him into a hug with the last sentence.

They separated sooner than Jason would’ve liked, but Percy quickly asked a question that switched his focus.

“How did you get Leo to open up like that?”

“Well, it took a long time and a lot of prying and even more backing off, but he really needed someone to talk to. Those two, they’ve seen more of the bad part of the world than I could ever wish on anybody, and somehow they’ve retained their innocence, in part.

“Some part of Leo still craves to be given direction, I think. Or at least he doesn’t know how to proceed with some things and has been too afraid to show anything but strength. He just needed someone to remind him that he could lean on more than one person.”

“You’re a really good person.” Percy said, making Jason blush. “And a very exhausted person. Go, get some rest, Grace. I’ll look over things for a while.”

Jason was about to protest, but decided against it. “Thanks, Percy. And for the record, you’re a really good person too.”
Leo reluctantly left Nico alone on the bed in order to grab the prism from across the room. He quickly made his offering to Iris and was connected to Hades.

The god was obviously not expecting it, being on his throne with a long line of souls waiting to be judged, but noticed them quickly and dismissed the line for the time being. He took in Leo’s failure to hold back his tears and the body laying on the bed in one glace, focussing all of his attention on his boys.

“Leo, what do you need?” Hades asked, gathering the attention of his wife, who was just entering the room. Persephone gasped and crossed the room as fast as she could.

“C-Can you bring us home, please?” Leo asked, stuttering.

Hades didn’t even respond, just left his place on his throne to stand next to the two teenagers. Without words, he picked up his son and placed a hand on Leo’s shoulder. Within the next ten seconds, they were all in the throne room together.

The three of them, now being joined by Persephone, made their way to the scarcely-used place that was the boys’ bedroom. It was exactly as it had been left, with touches of both of their personalities, a couple of scorch marks, and little trinkets they’d picked up while traveling.

Leo had barely registered how cold Nico’s skin was when he first picked him up, too caught up in shock and heartache to observe more than what was necessary. Yet, as he set the Italian on his bed, he realized just how icy his skin really was, almost as if he were already a corpse.

It seemed the gods in the room had noticed as well, bringing blankets into the room and covering their son with them.

Leo just climbed in with him, ignoring the way his body temperature rose even higher, he just wrapped himself around Nico and hoped that he’d wake up soon.
Leo didn’t leave his place around his boyfriend for three days. By then, Persephone dragged him out of his room to feed him and push him into a shower.

Once he came out, clean and fed, he took to just sitting next to his boyfriend and talking to him.

He talked about everything and nothing, about anything that popped into his mind. Leo told stories of trying to find him and of Jason helping him to deal with it.

At a point, Leo ended up reading to the sleeping boy, needing to do something to not focus on the point that, besides his temperature stabilizing, he really hadn’t gotten much better.

Leo didn’t give up, though. His boyfriend was still breathing, and his heart was still beating, and Leo would stay by his side until they could run again.

A week later, Leo woke up to somebody running their fingers through his hair. At first, he tensed, then he recognized the feel of the body next to him, the scent of the dead, the morbid thought that it was comforting.

He started to relax into his boyfriend, loving the feeling of holding each other in bed in the morning- or whenever they decided to get up.

Then he realised it.

Nico was awake.

After a week of torture and worrying and not knowing if he could recover from this one, his love returned to him.

Leo turned around in his boyfriend’s arms and kissed him.
On the ship, Jason and Percy were having trouble finding Annabeth. The coordinates that had been put in seemed incorrect and none of them wanted to leave the ship and get lost in the city of Rome.

Leo had been the only one to know an ounce of Italian, outside of Nico, and none of them could speak to the locals, so they were stuck there until they could get through to Leo about what to do.

It was then that the two of them realised that, while the two sons of the big three had been arguing over who was in charge, Leo just got stuff done.

He always went exactly where they needed to be, whether they got a tip to go there or not, he always fixed whatever had broken on the ship, he just did his job better than most of them did theirs, but he didn’t get any credit for it.

Percy was sitting in his room thinking about it. They expected the son of Hades to build and fix and keep them moving because that was the skillset he was born with. They expected either Jason or Percy to lead because they were the sons of leaders. They expected Annabeth to know what to do because she was supposed to be wise, and for Frank to fight and shapeshift just because of his parents. Hayden was expected to know where they were going on the ground because of Pluto.

And they all avoided Nico because of the stories of his father.

They judged each other based on their lineage, not who they were. That was how they were raised.

And yeah, Percy liked being in water, he sometimes enjoyed being in charge.

But he was just exhausted and tired of being turned to and being responsible if something went wrong.

He’d been there to witness Annabeth become stressed to the point of screaming when she didn’t know something.

There were expectations of everybody, and none of them were fair.
Percy looked up as Jason entered the room.

“How are you doing?” He asked, sitting in a chair Percy kept near his bed.

“I’m...alright, I guess. Better than Nico, definitely.”

“Don’t compare what is troubling you to the one who has been tortured. Nico needs immediate medical care, and is receiving it, I need glasses probably but I’m going to have to wait.

“You’re in here and something is upsetting you, so enlighten me.”

“It’s nothing, just- like I never thought about how much work it is to actually keep this ship running. Leo was always handling it, never complaining, so I thought it was an easy job for him.

“But I mostly expected that because of who his dad is. And even right now, I thought if anybody would want me to talk about feelings, it would be Piper, and that’s not fair to you or her.

“Because, like, what if she is actually really awkward around people and stuff, but people sign her up to be a relationship specialist because of her mom? And you’re really caring and yet if I didn’t know that I would kind of expect you to look down on people because of who your dad is.” Percy blushed, realising that he just basically insulted his best-except-for-Annabeth friend. “I- uh-haven’t had a ton of great experiences with Zues.”

Jason chuckled. “Trust me, I get it. But what’s this really about?”

“Huh?”

“I know that doing part of Leo’s job is what brought this on, but what has you so upset about it?”

Percy was hesitant to answer. He wanted to tell Jason, but at the same time, he didn’t want to sound like he was complaining and cause Jason to get worn out with more work than he needed.

At the same time, he could tell that Jason would pester him until he did answer.
“I just….ever since I was twelve and my life went from worrying about homework to worrying about saving my mom from Hades, I’ve kinda been going and going without stopping.

“First it was getting my mom back, then this huge great prophecy was on my shoulders and my little teenager brain was all excited. I mean, this is what heroes do, people consider me a hero—”

“You are one.” Jason interrupted him.

“Well, I was so excited to be one, and then my friends around me started dying. Thank the gods it was never Annabeth or you or someone I was really close with, but Selena and Charlie and countless others that I had to watch. People who gave their lives so I could do something.

“Why don’t they tell people that being a hero is fucking exhausting. They make it sound like the most honorable thing in the world, that being a hero means being thank you and know who you are and it’s such an amazing thing that why don’t more people make themselves a hero?”

Percy stood up and got a bottle of water from his cabinet. He drank a sip but continued to pace as he spoke.

“So yeah, I was excited. I got my mom back, got my stepdad out, got to go on cool adventures, but I quickly realised how bad it could get. My third quest, just getting Nico and his sister from the school they were at to Camp, Annabeth took down a manticore and tumbled down a mountain with it.

“I thought she was lost. The hunters told me it was best to move on and get to safety, but that was my best friend.

“I don’t know if you understand, Jason. I love her. Not like… like people expect me to, but she was the only person I could really count on at all times for a while. So yeah, I love her so fucking much that I would do anything for her and beat the shit out of anybody who hurt her, and she’s risking her life because her mom was a petty bitch.”

A hand on Percy’s shoulder had him stopping his rant, Jason just pulled his friend into a hug and let the emotion drain out of him.
Once he was calm again, Percy spoke up. “All I want is to keep my friends safe. I don’t care if I’m a hero, I don’t care if I’m in charge, I just want a break. I just want everybody to be safe long enough for me to get a good sleep.”

Jason just held him like that, moving to the bed after a while. A few minutes later, Percy was asleep and Jason did his best to tuck him in.

After that, he decided to initiate the Iris Message, considering they hadn’t had one in a couple of days.

Leo stopped kissing Nico for a moment, letting them both catch their breaths.

“Hello.” Nico said.

Leo chuckled. “Hello, handsome.”

They sat in silence for a few moments, using the time just breathing in the fact that they had each other again, just keeping each other in their lives for a while.

Leo, though, couldn’t sit still for long. He just mulled questions around in his head, wondering if his boyfriend was traumatized by his experience, which he probably was, and if his questions would send him into an episode like he used to get.

As far as he knew, Nico hadn’t had a flashback in at least a year, probably longer, and Leo didn’t want to set him off.

A hand pushing hair behind his ear brought him back to the present. Nico was smiling at him, but it looked….off. His eyes had lost some of their spirit. They held the same love as they had since before they knew they were demigods, but Leo didn’t know how much more heartbreak they could both take.

He decided to put that train of thought away and focus on the hand holding his cheek. “You know, if you keep playing with my hair like that, I’m going to have to show you Zombieland.”
Nico just looked at him in confusion.

“It’s a movie with Jesse Eisenburg and Woody Harrelson and Emma Stone and Abigail Breslin and it’s amazing and we are totally having a movie night when things calm down.”

Nico laughed. “I missed you so much. I kept wishing I could Iris message you, but I knew you were probably trying, so something wasn’t working. I love you more than anything in this world.

“I hate to say it, but dad and Persephone, I’ll be able to see them long after this life. But….souls out here don’t know who they are, nevermind who others are, and when we both eventually go, I’m going to spend eternity looking for you, but not knowing who you are.”

“I don’t think that’s really true.” A new voice said from the doorway. Persephone had heard talking and wanted to check up on her stepson. “What do the two of you know about Plato?”

“Um… It’s this salty clay stuff that kids play with and eventually get stuck in carpets?” Leo asked.

“No.” Nico said. “He was a Greek philosopher, one of the most well-known. He was taught by Socrates and taught Aristotle, he opened up a school for great minds to get higher education into questioning the world around them. It was kind of like the very first college in history.”

“Okay…. So what about him?”

Persephone answered, a devious smile playing at her painted lips. “Well, he had this theory. The theory that humans, long before the world was really set up to be functional, actually had four arms and legs instead of two, as well as two faces on one head. He thought that these humans had threatened to conquer the gods, and therefore had each been split in two and separated as a lesson.

“The real theory was this: these split humans lived in misery, desperate to find their other halves, instinctively knowing them as soon as they met. And, if they did meet, they would meet each other in the afterlife, and continue to live as one, like they had always been meant to.”

“How much of this is true?” Leo asked, feeling very skeptical, but also a little bit hopeful about what she was implying.
“Well, this would have happened long before I was created. It was only the twelve big ones for a while. This was before my husband even got booted out of Olympus.”

“So...what are you saying?” Nico asked.

“I’m saying not to worry about it. That you two are solid, and there is a lot to souls that even you don’t know, Nico. I know you know a lot, but just let yourself be a kid for a little while longer, okay?”

“I’m more than eighty years old.”

“And I’m a few millennia, so you’re still a kid to me. You’re my kid, and you’re never growing up. You too, Leo. You’re both my kids and I love you both and I love that you’re in love and there is so many good things about the world even as people are trying to destroy it.”

“Hey, Perseph?” Leo asked, “Why are you and Hades not affected by the whole ‘Roman and Greek gods and goddesses sharing a head’ thing?”

“Hades, well, his job as Pluto or himself is basically the same, the only thing is he has stress coming in from his other personality. And me, well, Proserpina knows what it is like to want to see her kids. The only thing is, with her, she doesn’t really have kids in the world right now. She agreed to let me have the floor to check up on you two and take care of you when I need to, just as I have agreed to do the same if she were in a similar situation.

“But, something about my husband and I, I’m pretty sure you’ve noticed, is we don’t really do what the other gods do. We have been trying to be responsible parents as much as possible, we ignore most of the rules that they have in Olympus, and we just do what we want, usually in our own domain. And since we are in our own domain, it’s not like they can criticize the things we are doing.

“Basically, while the other gods and goddesses are having wars in their heads to fight for dominance, our Roman sides don’t do things all that differently from us, and we have actual work to do, so by focussing on that instead of who has more power, we save ourselves the trouble.”

“Sounds like, even with all her wisdom, you guys might have this more figured out than Athena.” Nico said with a smile.
“Well, don’t let her hear you say that.” Persephone’s smile widened. “Now, I’m going to make you two boys some food. Because one of you hasn’t left this room in a week and the other has had some….dire circumstances for a long time.” She left after she said that.

Nico cuffed his boyfriend on the back of his head. “I thought we agreed to take care of ourselves even when the other person is hurt?”

“I know… I just… I didn’t want you to wake up alone again. I don’t know what you’ve been through, but I wanted you know for certain that you were safe, and that we found you.” Leo looked down, eyes watering. “You were on your last seed, and your skin was cold- a lot colder than usual. There were times where I didn’t know if you were still breathing unless I really focussed.

“I didn’t want to leave you… Just in case..” Leo trailed off, not looking at his boyfriend.

“Hey, I’m not actually upset, I’m just worried too. But it’s okay, we are both here and we can relax a bit.”

“Yeah, maybe not as long as you guys might like.” Came a sudden voice from across the room. It was Jason in an Iris message. “I can give you a little bit longer, but right now, we aren’t sure where to go or what to do, and time is of the essence. We are kinda just waiting for Annabeth to give us a sign or something about where she is.”

“Well, didn’t you go to the coordinates?”

“Yeah, but the problem is we are a hundred feet above the ground and I have no idea which building she’s in or if she’s underground or what. I know your job isn’t easy, Leo. Trust me, Percy and I just had a conversation about it, but it would be helpful to have both of you back.

“That being said, take the time you need. I don’t need you coming back before you’re ready and getting yourself or somebody else hurt.”

“Don’t worry, Jason, we will be back by tomorrow at the latest.” Nico said, smiling softly. He could tell how much Jason was trying to hold together the team, and he was really ready to get everything over with and get to have fun with Leo again.
“Okay, well, I’m very glad to hear that, and to see you awake and not shivering. I can’t wait to have you back on board, buddy.”

“Thanks. See you then.”

Jason just offered a smile before ending the call.

Nico looked at Leo and Leo looked at Nico. They had each other, and, as Bon Jovi once said, that’s a lot for love.

They’d have to give it a shot.
So, if you're like me and just see that I've updated and read the last chapter, go back to chapter 21, because I was re-writing them and just got them all done and did in one big mega post.

So go back and catch yourself up.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There was always a point in time where everything was calm. Once in a while, a long while sometimes, everything would seem to be winding down.

Leo and Nico went back topside the night of their talk with Jason, coming in during dinner, and the crew threw a small ‘welcome back’ thing for Nico.

The Italian boy was a little more on edge than he had been all day, the crowd making him tense more than it had before, more than he had predicted it would, but the crew seemed to notice when he needed his space, and they gave it to him.

Well, except Leo. Leo wouldn’t let him go all day or all night, but he was okay with that.

He noticed Annabeth missing, but the fire wielder had filled him in on where she was, so he wasn’t too worried about her. The seven- or six without the daughter of Athena- seemed tired and worried, yet happy for something good to come after so long.

The quest had only lasted a couple of months so far, as most quests did, but he supposed this one had a little more stress and constant combat than others did, what without there being a real safe way to travel and getting woken up every night because something or other was attacking their ship.

But they were okay, and they were counting the little things.

So, yeah. Things were winding down, Frank and Hayden (something Nico was surprised about and
didn’t really understand, but supported nonetheless) had gone to bed, Percy and Jason were talking on the couch, the former looking sleepier by the minute and progressively leaning further and further into the latter, Piper was crocheting something at the table, while Nico and Leo were sitting in front of the fire.

It was the best Nico had felt in a long time.

And then the calm broke with an explosion.

Or, well, *im* plosion.

The crew pulled themselves out of their peace to see what had made such a loud noise.

Where there had been an awkward mound of dirt and sidewalk, now held a huge hole with a certain blonde girl yelling towards them.

Percy, Jason, Piper, and Frank were the ones to run after her. Nico, Leo, Hayden saw the Parthenos and started gathering rope to pull the statue out.

When Nico arrived to where the others were standing, hands full of rope, the others were discussing how to get Annabeth out.

Out of nowhere, the air was filled with the sound of a canon going off. It shot directly past the daughter of Athena and a spider lady who was trapped in her own webs. It hit the ground and went straight through, the hole held a scene of which Nico had nightmares.

An open entrance to Tartarus, in the middle of Rome.

Percy was screaming, wanting to get Annabeth out of there, Jason was telling him to be careful. Leo and Hayden were dutifully tying up the statue, Piper was trying to get them all to calm down, Frank was shifting into something big that would be able to pull her out.

And Nico was frozen.
He wasn’t sure why, whether it was the fear of going back, fear for his friends, or the sudden shift from tranquility to craziness.

Annabeth almost made it out, caught Percy’s hand, even.

Then Arachne caught ahold of her.

Percy only just managed to grab a piece of hanging concrete before they fell. Jason was in the position Percy just left, stretching his hand as an offering to the son of Posiedon.

Nico forced himself to move, then. He ran up to the edge of the pit and peered over, ignoring Leo’s shout to be careful.

“You have to do it.” Nico said, cutting through whatever arguing was going on.

“What?” Jason asked. Everybody was looking at him, Frank stopped shifting and started to go back to his human shape.

“The Doors Of Death can only be closed if the chains are broken on the inside as well as closed from the outside.” Nico looked at Jason, then back at Percy. “I’m sorry. I would do it myself, but I’m not strong enough yet.”

“You can’t be serious. We just got you out of there, Nico. We can’t send somebody in there now.”

Nico ignored him and focussed on Annabeth. “Try to land in the river on fire, drink it and it’ll heal you. Move South East and find the Drakon Swamp and tell Damesen you know me. Tartarus is steep, and north is just the highest point. You will need to move through the Forest of Curses, try your best not to kill the Arai, but anything you suffer will be healed when you get to the swamp.

“Damesen will give you food and shelter for a time, but you will need to move west from there until you can break the chains on the Doors Of Death. Got it?”
Annabeth was studying his words like they were about to be on a test, committing them to memory. “Fire River, drinking it is good. South East to Drakon Swamp, Damesen is a good guy. Don’t kill things in the forest. West to Doors Of Death. Got it.”

“Travel safe.” He addressed to both of them, then started pulling Jason away. The blonde fought with everything he had, and Leo and Frank, who was back in human form, joined him to pull the son of Jupiter away.

The two best friends dropped, along with the spider lady, and the blonde boy cried.

Jason just wanted to get things done, he didn’t much care how. The lack of Percy and Annabeth was very apparent, especially when they didn’t know what something was or they moved through any body of water.

The demigods were melancholy as they went about what they needed to do, moving through Italy and Diocletian’s tomb, but most of them were just going through the motions for the sake of the world.

Leo and Nico were happy to have each other, but nothing really special happened to them in the time spent without Percy and Annabeth.

Jason and Nico went to meet up with Cupid, who forced the former to admit his love for a certain green-eyed ocean lover, but that was probably the most exciting.

Things happened, and eventually they get to the House Of Hades, Nico uses the scepter, and is very drained of any kind of power.

Jason gives his status as praetor to Frank, Frank commands the army, and they defeat whatever was attacking them.

Percy and Annabeth made it through the doors at the last second, looking like how Nico felt when he had been kidnapped by the twins. Suffice to say: malnourished, dehydrated, tired, scarred, and beat up, but alive.

Nico would’ve felt them die, he thought to himself with a morbid sense of humor.
Oh how that would bite him in the ass.

Nico had been the one chosen to take the Parthenos back to camp. He didn’t like leaving Leo, but they each had their stations and skill sets, so they had to for the time being.

It would be fine.

Nico was weak from shadow travelling so much, he knew that, but there was a battle raging around them even with the statue flat on the camp’s ground.

The last thing Nico saw was Leo creating a literal line of fire directed towards Gaea’s head.

Then there was the sound of an explosion and the inane laughter from the Earth goddess.

Then Nico felt it.

Or rather, felt the loss of it.

Leo had died in his attempt to kill the woman who’d killed his mother.

And Gaea had survived.

Not only that. She was laughing.

Nico felt a rage he had never felt before, multitudes bigger than he had felt when his sister had perished.

At least Leo had been there to bring him off the ledge.
There was no stopping Nico now that he was dead.

Everybody from either camp stopped what they were doing as Nico let out a scream and Gaea’s laughing stopped.

Nico, little Nico, the one who everybody was afraid of, the one who was so weak right now that a single shadow travel might kill him, sucked the life out of the evil immortal being.

He stalked up to the goddess, getting into her face, the sheer rage and imminent death promised in his stare was enough to make even her tremble a little.

“You have taken away the only thing I hold sacred.” Nico said. “Your whining has taken away something good in the world, and left something horrible in its wake. You gods and your pettiness have taken my mother, my sister, and now the only person who would’ve stopped me from doing what I am about to do.”

The full extent of his powers, Nico realised then, was to pull the energy, the *life force* out of someone or something.

Hades was the god of the underworld, not death, so it didn’t make much sense. But Nico didn’t question it as he trapped the goddess’s soul in the center of the earth, the molten center that she would hopefully never fully return from.

In her wake was a husk, able to be blown away by a strong wind, of one of the most powerful gods in the universe in pain.

A cheer arose around them, but was silenced by a glare from Nico. Death was still in his eyes, but he could feel himself fading. He had used too much energy, but he was content to die then. He could be with Leo again, at the least.

And, hopefully, what Persephone said was true, and they would find each other again.

Nico fell where he stood, a small smile on his face, shocked silence around him as he faded…
Nico woke up with a gasp. He could have sworn he had just died, faded away after basically killing Gaea.

After Leo had died.

Nico looked for that part of him that felt the deaths of those near him, if it was the only thing he had left of Leo, he would cherish it.

But he couldn’t find it.

Nico still felt the loss of Bianca, and he had so much more time with Leo, so it should be at least as strong as it had been when his sister had died so long ago.

All the variables, as they were, could only conclude one thing.

Leo was alive.

Chapter End Notes

See, I'm assuming most of y'all read the books, so I don't fully flesh them out. You don't need me to recount everything that happened, trust me on this.

Also: I know that Nico probably can't do that, but, hey, creative liberties

Also Also: I am an angst fiend and do not apologise.
How Far I'll Go

Chapter Summary

I've been staring at the edge of the water
'Long as I can remember, never really knowing why
I wish I could be the perfect daughter
But I come back to the water, no matter how hard I try
Every turn I take, every trail I track
Every path I make, every road leads back
To the place I know, where I can not go, where I long to be
See the line where the sky meets the sea? It calls me
And no one knows, how far it goes
If the wind in my sail on the sea stays behind me
One day I'll know, if I go there's just no telling how far I'll go

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Previously on Total Drama Island:

Basically just stuff I didn’t say because Nico didn’t know about it in the book.

In their travels, the eight of them had come across the Physician’s Cure. It was given to them with the knowledge that one of the four present; Leo, Percy, Hayden or Frank, would perish in battle with Gaea.

Later on, with the final ingredient in hand, Leo basically got it confirmed that it would be him, but Piper insisted on having it with her. Hayden helped Leo use the mist to make her believe she had the vial, when Leo really installed it in Festus.

God I love that dragon as much as I love JARVIS- but that’s a different fandom.

And now, this week on TOTAL. DRAMA. ISLAND!!

Leo, all his life, knew fire couldn’t hurt him. He had never truly been afraid of fire, just of the lack of control he had on his own when he was younger.
That being said, he didn’t think that the fireball he created would do much damage. Then again, how was he supposed to know that Octavian would catapult himself into it and make it explode, how was he supposed to know that an explosion would hurt him?

He never expected that the way he would die would be in an explosion.

Yet, he could feel his body flying through the air, could feel himself going cold, and saw as the world faded around him.

He knew that this was the underworld, but he also knew that this shouldn’t be what the afterlife was like. He had spent most of his life in the underworld, and knew that it would be a long line before he saw his pseudo-father, he knew that he shouldn’t have any autonomy, nor memories of what his life was before his death.

There was something off, and he couldn’t remember what, but he felt a blast of energy from above get thrown through the realm so fast it shook. Leo took off toward the kingdom, where he knew Hades would be, to ask him what was going on.

He reached the castle, the throne room, so very unlike his first visit. Instead of coming in respectfully and bowing to deity, Leo burst into his home and demanded to know what was going on.

Hades was surprised to see him, he was surprised to see him in an incorporeal form, let alone with all his memories.

Just as he was about to answer his questions, Leo felt himself getting pulled away. He wanted the answer, but he let himself get pulled, remembering the cure as he came to.

Leo woke up in a bed, which he was not expecting. Festus was curled up on a rug below him like a big metal dog, which he was also not expecting.

The fire wielder groaned as he sat up. He looked down and saw a pristine white shirt covering his grease-stained arms, and a matching pair of sweatpants. He felt...surprisingly okay. Sore, yes, but
not in any large amount of pain that he would expect after dying via explosion and being
resurrected via injection.

A girl cleared her throat from across the room, bringing Leo’s attention to her. He could readily
admit she was beautiful. Sharp blue-green eyes and caramel-blonde hair. The dirt on her hands and
knees told him that she had just been working in some sort of soil -a garden, probably- before she
had come to check on him.

She was wearing a white shirt and white shorts- both of which were covered in the same soil from
her hands and knees.

“You’re up.”

“Is that an observation or a reference to the continent?” He asked a bit dryly.

She thought for a moment, then cracked a smile as she got the joke. “You know, I always get the
heroic types, but never the funny ones.”

“Well, I don’t know if you’ll be ‘getting’ me anytime soon. I kinda just died and came back. So,
you seem nice and all, and I appreciate that you and your little town have accepted me here, but I
really need to get back.”

“This isn’t a town.”

“Village?”

“No. Look out the window, Sherlock, it’s an island.” Leo did look out, and saw what was probably
the most spectacular ocean view he had ever seen. Yet, instead of awe, he filled with panic.

“I need to borrow a boat or something because I really need to get back. Dammit Nico is going to
be worried sick.”

“Don’t worry, just eat something and then you’ll be able to leave, just trust me.”
Leo followed her as she walked out of the house and to a fire pit, where there were fruits and vegetables next to some dishes.

The girl went about preparing a meal in silence, and Leo was struck by how quiet it really was.

“So, uh, where’s the rest of your family.” He asked, trying to make conversation.

“Spread out.”

“You live here alone?”

“Yup.”

“For how long?”

“A couple millenia.”

Leo was surprised, and he knew that this girl had to be some sort of immortal, but to be stuck alone for a few thousand years, he couldn’t fathom it.

“Do you want to live here?”

The girl paused in her movements for a second, then continued. “Not particularly, but I’m stuck here.”

“Why’s that?”

“Because I’m cursed. I sided with my dad over the gods and they cursed us both. I’m not allowed to leave by boat, and I don’t have the resources to leave by air, so I’m stuck.”
“Well, I’m sure we can fix that.”

“Look, I’m not looking for another hero’s romance, just…. please leave before I get too attached.”

“Look, sweetheart, I’m in a very committed relationship of almost eight years now, and I’m not looking to jeopardize that in any way. But tell me, do you want off this island?”

“Only more than anything.”

“Great. Then I’ll make that happen.”

Calypso looked hopeful, but also skeptical, like she didn’t let herself believe him even if she really wanted to.

“One more thing.” Leo asked as she turned back to her garden. “Is there any way to send a message?”

________________________________________________________________________

Apparently, Iris messages didn’t work because Calypso was supposed to be on punishment, but to Leo, more than a Millenia was quite enough of one.

She was actually quite good with mechanics, and in a different world, he might be able to see himself liking her in a more…. Romantical rather than friendly sense.

But that would be on a different world, a very different world.

But Calypso helped a lot with repairing Festus. She took apart nearly everything in her house and around it to come up with pieces to fix the loyal dragon. And that alone was probably what made it start working at all.

With help, Leo had Festus up and running within the week, barely taking breaks to sleep or eat. He finished it as soon as possible, and triple-checked it to make sure he wouldn’t break down in the air, then burst into Calypso’s room in the middle of the night, waking her up.
“I fixed it!” He yelled.

“Huh?”

“I fixed Festus. Come on, let’s get out of here as soon as possible.”

“Not that I’m complaining, but… Shouldn’t you get some sleep before you drive?”

Leo waved her off. “Festus knows where he’s going much better than I do, and the longer we wait to leave, the longer it is before I can see the love of my life again.”

Calypso seemed to understand the point to be moot after a moment to process what he said. After that moment, she shrugged and pulled out the suitcase she’d had ready to go since before Leo got there.

“Alright.”

It didn’t actually take that long to get to some piece of mainland. It took much less time for Leo to recognize the place as France. He smiled when he noticed.

“What are you smiling about?” Calypso asked, hopping off their bronze dragon.

“I’m getting to see Nico faster than I thought.” He pat Festus’ head, who then flew on his own back to camp. The extra weight might have caused him to run out of steam, it was better he go alone.

“How?”

Leo walked to what looked like the entrance to a cave. “France has a series of tunnels underneath the beautiful city. They call them the catacombs, because they are lined with human bones used in lieu of bricks or wood.
“They go directly to the underworld.” Leo finished.

“I can’t go there!” Calypso said, surprised.

“What not?”

“Hades would kill me on sight, all of the gods hate me.”

“First off, anything you’ve heard about him probably isn’t true. Secondly, you are going to be fine.”

“How could you know that?”

“Because you’re with me.”

They followed the tunnels until it looked like they’d gotten lost. But eventually, Leo came across a dead end that opened like a door to the underworld.

It opened on the orchard, Persephone’s apple trees filling their field of vision.

Almost to himself, Leo whispered. “Don’t eat them.”

They walked through the trees and all the way up to the palace. Where Calypso paused, Leo walked right in.

“Wait-”

“Trust me.”
The two of them walked right into the throne room. Calypso waiting by the door while Leo ran into the center. Moments later his arms were around the god of the underworld, and Hades held his own similarly.

“I thought you died. My son and I felt you die.” The god said, choked up.

“I know, and I did. For a minute. But I’m okay. I mean, I wanna see Nico, but I’m fine.”

“He’s still at the camp, waiting for you, I believe. I can call him down, if you like.”

“Nah, I want to surprise him topside. But you can be there, if you want.”

“We will see.” Hades paused for a minute. “Who is your friend hiding in the shadows?”

Calypso stepped forward, head bowed, refusing to look him in the eye.

Hades leaned back in his chair, looking grim. “Leo, do you know why she was sent to be punished in the first place?”

“I do. Her dad was a titan, and she sided with him against you and the rest of the gods in the war for power.”

“Yes. So you know that.”

“That it was BS?”

“That it is out of my hands. I was not the one who dealt the punishment, so I cannot be the one to rescind it.”

“But, come on. It’s been millenia. Plural. She chose to side with her dad over people who had never thought of her as her equal. It wasn’t her thinking one side was more powerful or anything. But she
knew that she would be looked down upon if she chose you guys and her dad either won or lost.

“Plus, who cares if someone thinks their bigger and better? Ignore them. If someone is going around touting off about how they have can light a bigger fire than me, I’m not going to streak through a forest on fire to prove them wrong.” Leo looked at Calypso, who was looking at him in awe. She wasn’t used to people talking back to gods, let alone in order to stick up for her.

“The problem here is not whether I agree with you, it’s out of my hands.”

“What should I do?”

“Worry about that later. You, Nico and I will come up with a plan. But that’s later. Why don’t I take you and your friend to see my son?”

“I would really like that.”

Chapter End Notes

Only a chapter or two left!! I promise it won't be too long of a wait.
Without Question (Elton John from The Road To El Dorado soundtrack)

Chapter Summary

The more I learn, the more I see
The less the world impassions me
The hungry heart, the roving eye
Have come to rest, do not apply
The frantic chase, the crazy ride
The thrill has gone, I step aside

And I'd believe in anything were it not for you
Showing me by just existing only this is true
I love you, I love you without question, I love you

The more I want the more I steal
The more I hold the less is real
All worldly things I follow blind
In hope not faith was paid in kind
The line is drawn, the change is made
I come to you, I'm not afraid

And I'd believe in anything were it not for you
Showing me by just existing only this is true
I love you, I love you without question, I love you
I'd believe in anything were it not for you
Showing me by just existing only this is true
I love you, I love you without question, I love you

Chapter Notes

This is a short chapter, but I'm not sorry

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Nico was in his cabin, looking over the knick knacks that he and Leo had picked up throughout the years and hadn’t put in their room in the underworld.

He was waiting, waiting for Leo to come back like the son of Hades knew he always would.

He hadn’t been able to face his father, not in the last week. He couldn’t have beared to turn around and see Leo’s spirit there.
Nico heard the floorboards outside creak, and he sighed. Seconds later he heard footsteps that meant someone was in his cabin.

Without turning, he said. “Percy, I’m really alright. Just leave me alone, okay?”

“What if I told you I’m not Percy?”

Nico turned around, shocked, to see Leo standing there. Seconds later they were caught up in a long overdue kiss that conveyed how much they’d missed each other.

They held each other for a long time, side by side on the bed, while Leo introduced his boyfriend to Calypso.

After a long while, they left the safety of the cabin, and faced the reality that nobody else knew about Leo coming back to life. People flocked around, but those who really mattered to them agreed to catch up at dinner.

After ten minutes of people saying hi, Leo, Nico and Calypso talked to Chiron about the goddess’s situation. All he said was he was glad someone was able to pull her out, and that if anyone could be more stubborn than Zues, it was the two of them.

Calypso decided that she wanted to explore a bit of the modern world on her own for a while, but gave Nico and Leo a pendant that would let them call her any time.

Dinner was fun. The eight of them talked and laughed through it and annoyed the other tables. Not much had happened in the week while he was gone, but he did notice Jason and Percy finally holding hands under the table.

Nico excused himself to the bathroom at some point, but Leo didn’t think anything of it until the room grew quiet.

Leo looked around, and at his side, wouldn’t you know it, Nico was on one knee.
“Leo. You are the best person I could’ve asked to be by my side. I know that neither of us are people of tradition, and I know that we are both still young, but you have been by my side since we were eight, and we’ve been together since we were twelve. I want to be by your side for forever, well into the afterlife. So will you please do me the honor of marrying me?”

Leo, big bad Leo who would rip someone’s arm off and beat them up with it for so much as looking at Nico wrong, started crying.

He lifted Nico back onto the bench and kissed him, saying ‘yes’ when they finally broke apart.

The room cheered, and Nico slid a ring on Leo’s finger. When he looked down, he saw a silver band with a single gem in the middle, enchanted into changing color to make it look like a fire dancing.

They’d never been happier.

The gods hadn’t been happy when they’d found out about Calypso, but Nico and Leo calmed them down.

Leo just told them that she had picked her dad over some people she barely knew, and that it wasn’t a measure of power, but of who would treat her better if she sided correctly.

Then he asked if a being more powerful than them came along, what side they would expect us to choose, and they backed off a little after that.

After all, Leo learned, Nico had basically single-handedly put Gaea back in a time-out when he died, so the gods might have been a little afraid of him.

Anyway, it was smooth sailing from there.
Piper was put in charge of wedding planning, and they ended up going with a dark theme with candles and torches everywhere.

Let’s just say that everyone was lucky that the god of fire would be there and wouldn’t let things get out of hand.

It was a small wedding that ended up being held in a remote part of Italy. The only people who were invited were the six from the quest, Coach Hedge and his family, Grover and his girlfriend, Chiron, and nearly the whole of Olympus, plus Persephone and Hestia.

While Leo and Nico both knew that most weddings had hundreds of people, the small venue they were using was filled with their guests.

Finally, when it was time for the ceremony, with Hades walking Nico down the aisle, Leo couldn’t believe his luck.

When it was time for vows, Nico blew them all away. “Leo, I can still remember when you walked up to my table when I was waiting for my sister to get out of class. You wouldn’t leave until I showed you my mythomagic cards, and you've been the best friend I could ever ask for ever since. You were by my side the entire time I was in a coma after the first bout of shadow traveling.

“You got in trouble for sneaking out at night but kept doing it because I slept better afterwards. You've been by my side through nightmares, flashbacks, my sister dying, and the most horrible things have happened to the both of us, yet you always kept coming back to me.

“I don’t always understand how our paths crossed so perfectly as to meet each other, but I’m more than happy they did.”

Leo was crying by the time Nico was finished, but he sucked back his tears for his own vows. “Nico, you went through the worst place in the world and still came back in one piece. You give without ever expecting anything in return, and you are the most stubborn person I’ve ever met.

“My mom died when I was young, and nobody ever believed me about what happened before you. You helped me get through that, finally mourning her properly, and getting me comfortable with myself again. You chased after me when I could barely remember who you were, you have come back to me after hell and high water time and time again, and you’ve taken care of me long
“I love you, and I want to be able to love you for the rest of our lives and maybe for a little while after that.”

They said their “I do’s” and they kissed.

They were officially married.

And they couldn’t be happier.

Their lives were fairly mundane after that. No more wars set to destroy the world, no more havoc being spread that needed the two of them.

They did meet up with a pair of siblings along the way, and learned of the Egyptian gods and a school for magicians, but they kept out of that. Different gods, not their problem to butt into.

And when it was finally time to move on into the underworld, for the final time, they found that Persephone had been right all those years ago.

They died together, after a childhood of adventure and a safe and stable adult life, they both passed peacefully in their sleep, holding each other.

And, true to their vows, they remained together for the rest of time.

Chapter End Notes
That's it! I hope you enjoyed it as much as I did! Sorry it took so long in some parts, but I'm really happy with the way it turned out. I've had to go back and edit, that whole debacle that was like five chapters long I had to fix, but I'm glad I did.

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